

## **Navigating Adversity: A Comparative Study of Resilience and Coping Strategies among Transgender and Cisgender**

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The needs and experiences of marginalised groups like the transgender individuals are often disregarded in psychological research. Resilience and Coping Strategies play pivotal roles in an individual's life. These are essential human abilities that help people deal with stressful situations. These abilities allow people to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity. The objective of this study was to compare the resilience and coping styles between transgender and cisgender individuals. This research comprises 30 participants, 15 transgender and 15 cisgender individuals from various sections of society. The sample was selected through a convenient sampling technique. Resilience of the sample was assessed with the help of Psychological Resilience Scale (PRS-KYAC) developed by Chandra Kumari and Akriti Yadav and Coping strategies of the sample were assessed with the help of Coping Strategies Scale developed by Shrivastav. The statistical method of median test was employed to compute results for deriving the conclusions regarding the significance of the difference between the variables undertaken for analysis.

**Keywords:** Transgender, Cisgender, Resilience, Coping Strategies, Adversity

Resilience and Coping Strategies are crucial for individuals to help in handling stressful situations, ability to cope with change and adapt under difficult situations. Resilience refers to the capacity of an individual for being able to recover and uphold competently, normally after some failing or adversity (Grotberg, 2003). Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural strategies used to manage stressful events from both internal and external sources, as opposed to defence mechanisms which refers to adaptive unconscious or subconscious responses that are meant to reduce the effects of stress, coping is a term strictly used for mobilising conscious and reflective behaviours (Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Coping is divided into two main categories: Approach and Avoidance.

Approach coping is referred to the process of actively moving towards a stressor

for the purpose of seeking information & social support and to plan in an attempt to solve the problems (Finset et al., 2002). Approach coping can also involve vigilance (Krohne, 1993) in that person deals with stress by increased attention and processing of aversive information. There are further three categories of Approach Coping, namely, Behavioral Approach Coping, Cognitive Approach Coping and Cognitive-Behavioral Approach Coping. Behavioural approach coping involves actively engaging in behaviours aimed at addressing stressors. This includes seeking social support, gathering information, or implementing problem-solving strategies. This approach emphasises taking concrete actions to confront and manage stressful situations effectively. On the other hand, cognitive approach coping focuses on managing stress through cognitive processes, such as

reframing thoughts seeking meaning, or focusing on positive aspects of a situation. By changing thought patterns and perceptions, individuals can alter their emotional responses. This can reduce the impact of stressors on their well-being.

Cognitive-behavioural approach coping integrates both cognitive and behavioural strategies to address stressors comprehensively. It combines the act of changing thought patterns with engaging in adaptive behaviours. This combination creates an effective way to cope with stress. It emphasises holistic management of stressful situations (Finset et al., 2002; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Krohne, 1993). Avoidance coping is referred to passive strategies to avoid stress in which the individual resigns him/herself from a stressor as a coping strategy in which the individual tries to escape the stressor (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Avoidance coping is further divided into two types, first is Behavioural avoidance and second is Cognitive avoidance. In Behavioural avoidance coping, the individual tries to evade or withdraw from stressors behaviorally. This method of coping reduces contact with the stressor by keeping us away from it and may buy a little time free from feeling poorly. Similarly, cognitive avoidance coping involves efforts to avoid or suppress thoughts and emotions associated with the stressor through distraction or denial, brushing off the stressor as unimportant and pretending it isn't happening. By redirecting attention away from the stressor, cognitive avoidance coping seeks to mitigate the emotional distress associated with confronting the stressor directly (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

It is important to understand coping strategies and resilience in order to support mental health and well-being among a variety of demographics. It has been observed that

the needs and experiences of marginalised groups—like transgender people—are frequently disregarded in psychological research. An individual whose gender identity, expression, or conduct deviates from society norms due to their transition from their assigned sex at birth is referred to as transgender (Kumar, 2022). When someone says they identify as man, woman, or something else internally, they are expressing their gender identification. This can be done through behaviour, appearance, or other traits. Although the term “trans” is frequently used to refer to “transgender,” not all people who identify as gender nonconforming are transgender. As awareness and knowledge grow, so do the language and perceptions surrounding transgender people. Stressors specific to transgender people include gender dysphoria, prejudice, societal rejection, and access to healthcare that is gender affirming.

(“Understanding Transgender People, Gender Identity and Gender Expression,” 2023).

Research on transgender people's coping strategies and resilience is still scarce, despite the increasing acknowledgement of transgender rights and visibility in society. The extant body of literature predominantly concentrates on the obstacles and inequalities encountered by transgender persons, with scant empirical investigation on their resilience elements and coping techniques. The majority of this research has either not distinguished between binary and nonbinary individuals or has concentrated on binary transgender people; very little study has looked at the health or minority stress experiences of those who identify as nonbinary (Lefevor et al., 2019). Examination of the resilience and coping strategies used by transgender people to manage the complexity of their circumstances is critically

important, especially in light of the growing awareness of and respect for transgender rights. By being aware of these variables, culturally competent therapies and support systems that enhance transgender people's mental health and wellbeing can be developed. The discrimination, bigotry, and societal stigma that transgender people frequently experience because of their gender identity can have a very negative impact on their mental health and general wellbeing. These stressors are different from those that cisgender people usually experience. Examples of these include feelings of gender dysphoria, rejection from friends and family, and trouble in accessing healthcare services.

There is a noticeable lack of studies comparing resilience and coping strategies across transgender and cisgender people, despite the rising body of literature on these topics. Studies that currently exist frequently, concentrate on either the transgender or cisgender populations separately. A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth, conforming to societal expectations of behaviour and roles associated with that sex (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Furthermore, evidence-based practices and policies targeted at minimising inequities and enhancing the well-being of transgender people depend on empirical research in this field. Thus, identifying and analysing resilience capabilities and coping strategies among transgenders and cisgenders is the main objective of this research. This research is significant in terms of shedding light on the particular strengths and weaknesses of transgender people, aiding in the creation of focused interventions to promote their wellbeing and expanding knowledge of coping and resilience across a range of gender identities.

It is coping strategies and resilience of transgender and gender diverse individuals that transcend venturing across gender-related stressors. Participants in a study conducted in year 2022 demonstrated excellent self-compassion and coping efficacy, which further underpinned the need for appropriate support and tailored inclusive practices toward their productive well-being (Gorman et al., 2022)

The experiences of social exclusion related to more distal stressors such as discrimination and prejudice from school were reported by the transgender youth. The feeling of being isolated was even further enhanced by proximal stressors such as concealing and fear of rejection. Their main coping strategies were to promote their own inclusion through direct action with teachers and seek out connection with trusted staff and peers (Johns et al., 2021).

The TRIM, or Transgender Resilience Intervention Model, identifies several coping-resilience promoting factors: social support, belonging, self-esteem, self-worth, and hope. It proposes interventions targeting group and individual levels to enhance resilience for transgender individuals (Matsuno & Israel, 2018). Abuses consistent with gender nonconformity are also inflicted on transgender youth. A study assessed resilience factors such as personal mastery, self-esteem, perceived social support, and emotion-oriented coping. Emotion-oriented coping was found to be a significant predictor of negative mental health outcomes, thus underlining its importance with respect to wellbeing among transgender youth (Grossman et al., 2011)

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference in the resilience level between transgender and cisgender individuals.

- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant difference in the cognitive approach coping strategies between transgender and cisgender individuals.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant difference in the behavioural approach coping strategies between transgender and cisgender individuals.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant difference in the cognitive-behavioural approach coping strategies between transgender and cisgender individuals.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a significant difference in the cognitive avoidance coping strategies between transgender and cisgender individuals.
- H<sub>6</sub>: There is a significant difference in the behavioural avoidance coping strategies between transgender and cisgender individuals.

## Method

### Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 30 participants, 15 individuals from the transgender community and 15 cisgender individuals, who were all young adults from Jaipur city. The sampling had been done on a convenient basis. The inclusion criteria of the transgender sub-strata of the sample is that the participant should be an adult belonging to the transgender community irrespective of their sexual orientation, but if the participant is a cisgender they stand excluded from this strata of the sample. The inclusive criteria for the cisgender sub strata of the sample is that the participant must be an adult cisgender individual irrespective of their sexual orientation; however, they are excluded if they are a transgender or they altered their gender which was assigned at birth.

### Tools

The following measures were used in this study:

*Psychological Resilience Scale (PRS-KYAC)* (Kumari & Yadav, 2019): This scale is composed of a total of 34 questions which are only to be answered as yes or no. The split-half reliability of this scale is 0.90 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance and the convergent validity is also 0.90 significant at 0.01 level of significance.

*Coping Strategies Scale (Shrivastava, 2001)*: This scale consisted of 50 items with five response options. There were two subscales namely approach & avoidance, the approach sub scale is composed of 3 parts behavioural, cognitive & cognitive-behavioural and the avoidance subscale is composed of 2 parts behavioural & cognitive. The test-retest reliability of this scale is 0.92, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance, the split half reliability of approach & avoidance sub scale is 0.39 & 0.34 respectively which are both significant at 0.01 level of significance.

### Procedure

The sample was selected from Jaipur city for both transgender & cisgender stratas. Once the tools for the research were selected, the investigation proceeded. Individuals were selected through convenient sampling. The responses of the sample for the measures were collected through online & offline forms, after transparently informing them about the purpose and nature of the study. Offline forms responses were collected from an NGO visit (Nai Bhor Sansthan) that works for transgender community in Jaipur city.

## Results

Table 1. Mean scores and Standard deviation of transgender individuals on resilience scale and subscales of coping strategy scale (N=15)

SNo.	Measure	Mean	Std. deviation
1.	Resilience	118.8	14.93
2.	Behavioural approach coping	44.4	10.02
3.	Cognitive approach coping	17.2	3.85
4.	Cognitive Behavioural approach coping	25.06	6.5
5.	Behavioural avoidance coping	38.2	11.25
6.	Cognitive avoidance coping	20.93	5.88

The mean score of transgender individuals for resilience scale came out to be 118.8 and its standard deviation was 14.93, the mean scores for coping strategy subscales came out to be 44.4, 17.2, 25.06, 38.2 and 20.93 and standard deviation for the same came out to be 10.02, 3.85, 6.5, 11.25 and 5.88 respectively for behavioural approach coping, cognitive approach coping, cognitive behavioural approach coping, behavioural avoidance coping & cognitive avoidance coping strategies.

Table 2. Mean scores and Standard deviation of cisgender individuals on resilience scale and subscales of coping strategy scale (N=15)

SNo.	Measure	Mean	Std. deviation
1.	Resilience	127.13	18.05
2.	Behavioural approach coping	29.53	4.1
3.	Cognitive approach coping	14.4	4.44
4.	Cognitive Behavioural approach coping	20.4	5.33
5.	Behavioural avoidance coping	24	5.93
6.	Cognitive avoidance coping	11.86	4.44

The mean score of cisgender individuals for resilience scale came out to be 127.13 and its standard deviation was 18.05, the mean scores for coping strategy subscales came out to be 29.53, 14.4, 20.4, 24 & 11.86 and standard deviation for the same came out to be 4.1, 4.44, 5.33, 5.93 & 4.44 respectively for behavioural approach coping, cognitive approach coping, cognitive behavioural approach coping, behavioural avoidance coping & cognitive avoidance coping strategies.

Table 3. Median test values between Transgender and Cisgender sample

S.No.	Measure	Value
1.	Resilience	0.13
2.	Behavioural approach coping	10.99**
3.	Cognitive approach coping	6.65**
4.	Cognitive Behavioural approach coping	8.35**
5.	Behavioural avoidance coping	10.8**
6.	Cognitive avoidance coping	5.00*

(\*p>0.05 \*\*p>0.01)

The score sets of resilience in transgender and cisgender individuals was analysed by median test for resilience and each of the subscale of coping strategies. The value of the median test for resilience came out to be 0.13 which is insignificant.

However, the median test value for behavioural approach, cognitive approach, cognitive-behavioural approach, behavioural avoidance, coping came out to be 10.99, 6.65, 8.35, 10.8 respectively which are significant at 0.01 level.

The value for cognitive avoidance coping was found to be 5.00 which is significant at 0.05 level. This indicates that there is a clearly apparent significant difference

between the coping strategies employed by transgender and cisgender individuals but no significant difference in the resilience level between the two.

### **Discussion**

Resilience is the capacity to adapt to and recover from stress, trauma, or adversity. It is the ability to maintain one's mental health while under difficult conditions and to make choices in overwhelming situations. Resilience may be viewed as a dynamic process that can be strengthened and cultivated over time but is not provided as an attribute.

On the other hand, coping strategies refer to methods people use to cope with stressors, emotions, and tough situations. Coping strategies could further be divided into approach coping and avoidance coping.

The findings of this study focussed mainly on the parameters of resilience and coping strategies between transgender and cisgender populations. On the basis of the obtained results, it can be stated that  $H_1$ , pertaining to resilience is rejected and the hypothesis  $H_2$  to  $H_6$  related to coping strategies have been accepted. Hence, the study revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of resilience between cisgender and transgender individuals, despite the fact that transgender individuals may face unique challenges and stressors that impact their ability to bounce back from adversity. The challenges commonly articulated by transgender communities in India may stem from experiences of discrimination, heightened stress associated with belonging to a marginalised group, or inadequate social backing. The lacking amount of difference in resilience levels can potentially be explained through higher utilisation of coping strategies by transgender individuals.

This study has contributed to a unique nuanced understanding that has significant implications for the support of well-being and resilience in transgender individuals. Interventions can, therefore, be tailored to meet the requirements of transgender people by taking into consideration the fact that between transgender and cisgender populations, there exist major differences in resilience and coping strategies.

It is, therefore, important to further investigate the underlying mechanisms of these differences at a fundamental level by considering orienting factors of legislative safeguards, communal support, and access to professional healthcare. By attending to these structural obstacles and working towards more inclusive legislation, society sets the conditions for resilience and wellbeing of all genders.

Future directions in the improvement of this research would involve utilising longitudinal methods of research to trace resilience and coping strategies over time in transgender populations and expanding the sample size including participants from various cultural backgrounds. Mixed-methods approaches—including qualitative interviews with quantitative measures—will go a long way in forming a more nuanced view of the experiences. Community-based participatory research is instrumental in maximising engagement and ensuring cultural relevance, and intersectional analysis will help understand multiple identities in their impact on resilience. Tailored intervention development and appraisal targeted specifically on the needs of transgender individuals will do much more toward ensuring mental health and well-being.

## Limitations

There were limitations as well which include the difficulty of accessing a representative sample of transgender populations due to their marginalised status, which resulted into small sample sizes with less diversity. Stigma alluded to mental health issues further added to underreporting or reluctance to participate in the study.

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