

# Exploring the Psychological Effects of Non-Binary and Third-Gender Identities: A Comprehensive Review of Gender Diversity, Societal Challenges, and Inclusive Practices

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## Abstract

*The concept of a tertiary gender, encompassing non-binary, transgender, and gender-nonconforming identities, has attracted increased scholarly attention and public discourse. This systematic review seeks to synthesise the existing body of knowledge regarding the socio-economic, psychological, and healthcare challenges faced by individuals who identify as tertiary gender. The review evaluates 33 academic articles across diverse cultural settings, including India, Pakistan, and the United States, illuminating persistent issues such as stigma, discrimination, legal disenfranchisement, and inadequate healthcare provisions. Mental health concerns, such as heightened instances of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, are prevalent among individuals of the third gender, primarily due to social alienation and marginalisation. The review underscores the critical necessity for inclusive methodologies, encompassing gender-affirming healthcare, mental health support, and legal acknowledgement, to foster social inclusion and improve the overall quality of life for individuals identifying as third gender. The thematic analysis reveals enduring socio-economic disadvantages, including limited employment opportunities and barriers to educational access, compounded by cultural and religious marginalization. The Social Support Systems Model (SSSM) articulated in the study emphasizes the importance of familial, communal, peer, and religious support in enhancing the well-being of individuals within the third gender category. This research highlights gaps in the current literature and proposes new directions for future inquiries, providing a comprehensive framework for developing strategies to mitigate the socio-cultural and psychological challenges faced by this marginalized demographic.*

**Keywords:** Gender Diversity, LGBTQ Rights, Non-Binary, Societal Concerns, Third-Gender Issues, Transgender Healthcare.

## Introduction

The concept of a third gender has increasingly captured the attention of academic and public discourse alike [1]. This comprehensive review is dedicated to synthesizing the current body of research concerning the various socio-economic, psychological, and healthcare challenges faced by individuals who identify with a third-gender identity [2]. Moreover, it endeavours to explore the level of recognition and integration of these individuals within the societal framework [3].

The primary objective of this investigation is to provide a deep understanding of the issues at hand through a meticulous analysis of numerous studies that delve into the complexities of third-gender identities across a wide spectrum of cultural contexts [4].

The concept of the third gender, encompassing a spectrum of non-binary [5], transgender, and gender-nonconforming identities [6], has been increasingly acknowledged within the realms of social, medical, and psychological research [7]. The

primary goal of this research is to synthesize the current understanding surrounding the lived experiences [8], challenges, and integration into society of individuals who identify with the third-gender category, with a specific focus on identifying gaps in existing literature and proposing potential directions for future scholarly inquiry [9].

Mental health issues among non-binary and third-gender individuals are a growing area of study in gender studies and psychology [10]. These groups, who challenge traditional binary classifications, face unique societal pressures and discrimination that significantly impact their mental health [11]. They often experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation due to stigma, social isolation, and inadequate legal and healthcare recognition. Sociocultural factors, such as discrimination, limited access to gender-affirming healthcare, and legal exclusion, contribute to these disparities. Inclusive practices, such as promoting mental health interventions and policies that acknowledge gender diversity, are crucial for mitigating these effects [12]. The study highlights limitations in this research, including limited sample sizes, self-reported data, geographical limitations, lack of longitudinal studies, publication bias, inadequate empirical evidence on healthcare requirements, and cultural acceptance issues. It also highlights terminology inconsistencies and research methodology bias, with some studies displaying flaws in research designs or control of confounding variables, potentially affecting the credibility of their findings. These limitations could limit the generalizability of third-gender research to diverse cultural contexts.

The study's objective is to explore the mental health impacts of non-binary and third-gender identities and identify societal factors like stigma and discrimination. It evaluates inclusive practices, including gender-affirming healthcare, and seeks to improve mental health support systems and foster inclusivity.

It is important to examine the strategies to enhance mental-health support for transgender individuals, focusing on issues such as stigma, prejudice, and the necessity for improved mental-health services [7, 13] endeavoured to comprehend the gender identification and social integration of Khawaja Saras in Pakistan, proposing initiatives for public acknowledgement, legal safeguards, and the dissolution of socio-cultural barriers. [14] delved into the challenges encountered by LGBT students in the Philippines, highlighting the significance of support, organization, and effective programs akin to those offered by UP Babaylan. [15] examined societal perceptions towards third-gender individuals in Nepal, accentuating the necessity for legal revisions, social integration, and educational efforts to influence cultural norms. [4] scrutinized the influence of culture, community, and religion on transgender identities in Punjab, advocating for enhanced support mechanisms and policies. [16] scrutinized the obstacles and resilience of Indonesian LGBT youth activists, accentuating the importance of strategic advocacy and the integration of LGBT rights in youth activism. [17] probed into challenges related to pathology and laboratory medicine in transgender healthcare, stressing the importance of standardized methodologies and enhanced training for healthcare practitioners. [18] emphasized mental health and stress in nonbinary individuals, advocating for culturally sensitive interventions and inclusive approaches in medical care. [19] analysed the social exclusion and limited opportunities encountered by transgender individuals in India and Pakistan, proposing legal protections and enhancements in societal inclusiveness. [20] directed attention towards linguistic, supportive, and social interactions impacting LGBT students on American university campuses, highlighting the necessity for inclusive policies and continuous support. [21] conducted an ethnographic examination of ethical quandaries faced by transgender

healthcare providers, proposing interdisciplinary dialogues and enhanced training in transgender healthcare ethics. The psychological challenges experienced by the third gender during the KUMBH festival, stress the significance of societal acceptance and familial support in alleviating stress [2, 22] delved into the intersection of LGBT activism and mental health.

## Method

The study's selection criteria were concentrated on individuals identifying as a third gender in scholarly English articles that encompassed qualitative research methods [23]. The collection of information was sourced from a credible scholarly outlet, such as Google Scholar, with academic resources being

acquired through targeted searches for articles to compile relevant data [24].

The search methodology encompassed the utilization of specific keywords like "third gender", "non-binary", "transgender healthcare" [17], "gender identity", and "socio-economic challenges". Emphasis was placed on research carried out from the year 2015 onwards. The initial phase of screening involved an evaluation of titles and abstracts, followed by a comprehensive scrutiny of the entire content to ascertain its relevance to the study's objectives. The process of data collection involved the consolidation of significant findings, methodologies, and conclusions from each research endeavour, employing a standardized form to ensure consistency across all data points [25].



**Figure 1.** The Closest and Most Relevant Literature on Third-Gender Issues

The map (figure 1) categorizes a variety of academic articles into six main themes that were utilized in the study. Each theme explores different aspects of the third-gender phenomenon, including cultural and psychological dimensions, socio-economic conditions, societal integration, education, and legal frameworks. This organized structure enhances understanding of the many obstacles and elements that are significant to the third-gender group.

The data components encompassed in the study encompassed aspects such as study design, sample characteristics, research findings, and any constraints encountered

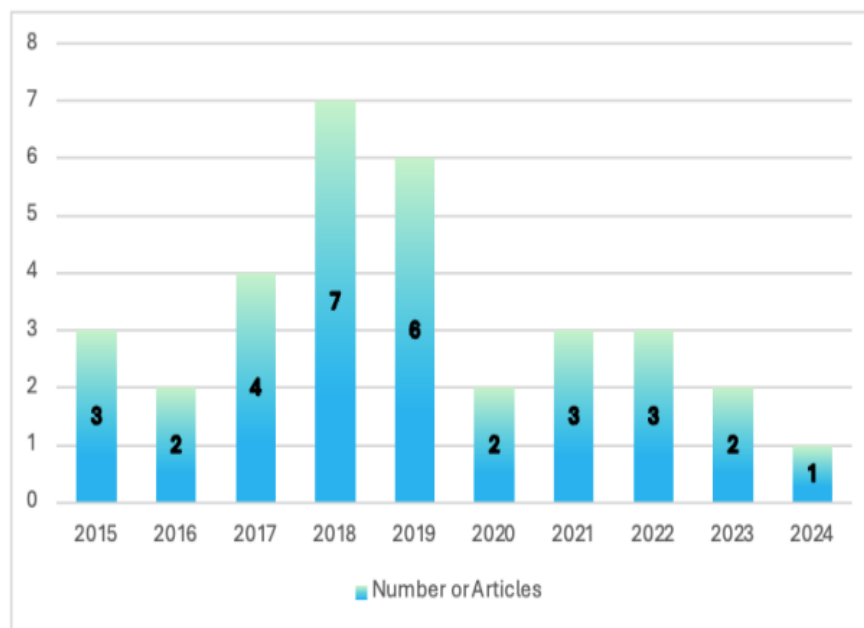
during the research process. The evaluation of bias within the studies was executed through the utilization of the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool [26]. Qualitative thematic impact sizes were employed to assess the influences within the study. The synthesis of themes was conducted to evaluate the qualitative data, while the assessment of publication bias was carried out by utilizing funnel plots and Egger's test to detect any reporting biases present [27]. The confidence level of the evidence derived from the various studies was determined using the GRADE approach, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the quality and reliability of the data collected.

Thematic analysis was used as the main approach in this systematic review to analyse data from various research on third-gender individuals. The process of theme analysis was facilitated by employing NVivo, a widely used qualitative data analysis program in the social sciences. In this review, NVivo was used to manage and analyse the qualitative data. The application of NVivo was used to conduct a thematic analysis of the 33 papers included in this evaluation. The main themes revealed by NVivo include socio-economic challenges, psychological challenges, healthcare barriers, recognition, and integration. NVivo was crucial in the handling and examination of the qualitative data for this systematic review [14]. The strong coding, querying, and visualization

capabilities of the software allowed for a comprehensive thematic analysis, providing deep insights into the challenges faced by persons who identify as third-gender. The results obtained from this investigation are crucial in formulating policies and procedures aimed at assisting third-gender groups.

## Results

Upon completion of a thorough search process, a total of 42 publications were successfully identified and located. Nevertheless, it was discovered that only 33 out of this initial pool of papers were deemed eligible for inclusion following an extensive and meticulous examination of the entire text.

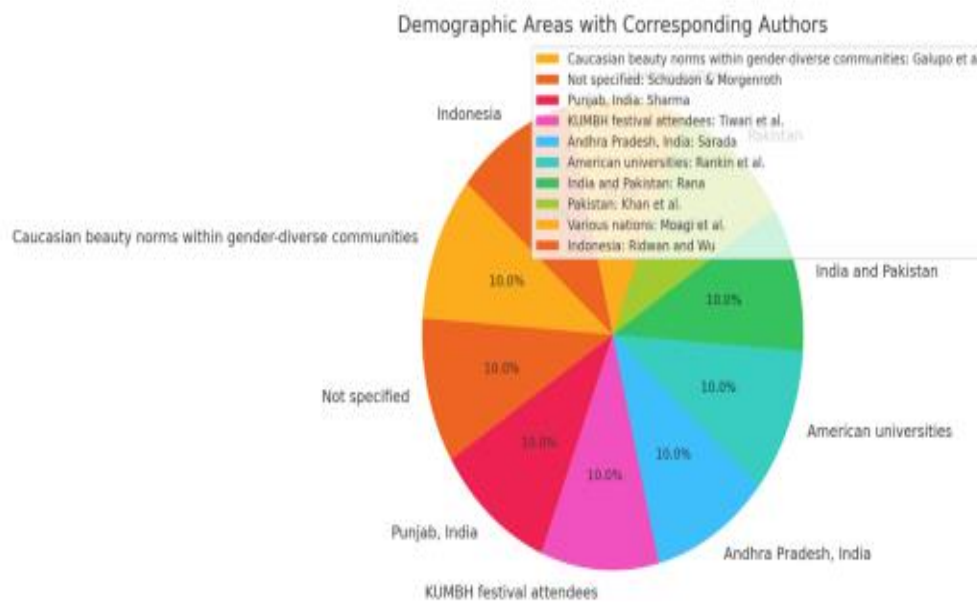


**Figure 2.** Distribution of Articles Published on the Third Gender Over the Years from 2015 To 2024

Figure 2 shows the distribution of articles published between 2015 and 2024. The bar chart reveals a maximum in 2018, with 7 articles published. This is followed by a slight decrease to 6 articles in 2019 and a consistent output of 2 to 3 articles in the ensuing years. The data indicates an increased interest between

2018–2019, succeeded by a more stable production thereafter.

The study in question was comprehensive in nature and scope, encompassing a wide array of diverse geographic regions that were subjected to examination and analysis. These regions included but were not limited to India, Pakistan, Germany, as well as the United States.



**Figure 3.** The Demographic Distribution of Corresponding Authors in Third-Gender-Related Studies

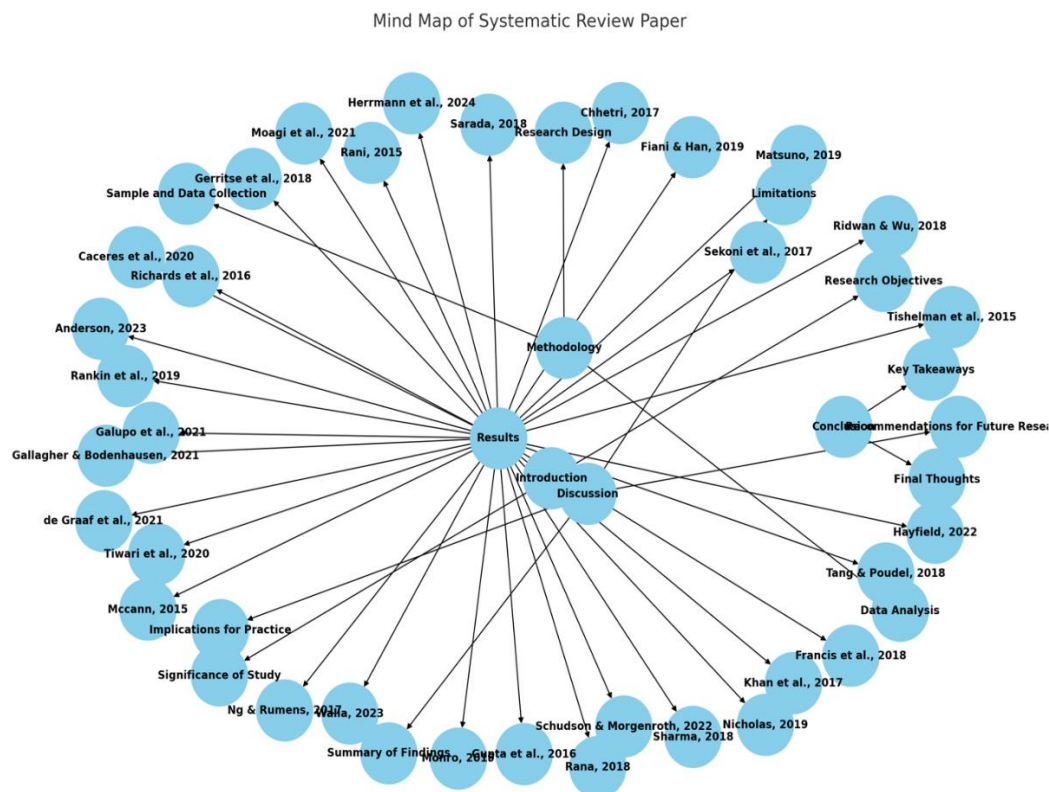
Figure 3 shows the pie chart depicting the demographic composition of authors in third-gender studies. The table illustrates contributions from regions including India and Pakistan (18.0%), American institutions (10.0%), and Andhra Pradesh, India (10.0%). Notable sectors encompass Caucasian beauty standards among gender-diverse groups and KUMBH festival attendees, both representing 10.0%. Regions such as Indonesia, Punjab, India, and unnamed areas provide smaller, yet significant, contributions. This visualisation highlights the geographical diversity of research related to gender-diverse individuals across different cultural contexts.

A significant portion of the studies scrutinized exhibited a level of quality that fell within the spectrum ranging from moderate to high. The prevailing typical constraints observed across these studies were primarily related to issues such as limited sample sizes and a heavy reliance on self-reported data for their findings. Various studies that were reviewed shed light on the presence of high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, significant mental-health challenges, as well as

notable obstacles hindering access to healthcare services among individuals who identify as third-gender. A particular investigation that took place in Andhra Pradesh served to underscore the socio-economic hurdles faced by this demographic and also highlighted an increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS among individuals identifying as third-gender. These unfortunate circumstances were attributed to the pervasive prejudice and the lack of adequate support systems in place. Furthermore, a specialized study focusing specifically on non-binary individuals emphasized the critical importance of healthcare practices that are all-encompassing and tailored to meet the unique and specific needs of this particular group, while also shedding light on the shortcomings of the existing healthcare frameworks. Another research endeavour conducted in Punjab delved into the cultural and socioeconomic determinants that influence third-gender identities, thus emphasizing the imperative need to gain a deeper understanding of the unique conditions prevalent in that specific region.

The syntheses of the various studies uncovered recurring challenges that were consistently highlighted through thematic analysis, with issues such as societal stigma, the absence of legal recognition, and insufficient healthcare provisions standing out prominently.

Individuals identifying as third-gender were found to be susceptible to various psychological struggles, including anxiety and pessimism, which were exacerbated by the prevalent societal marginalization and hostility they faced daily.



**Figure 4.** The Mind Map Provides an Organized Representation of Various Elements and Literature Contribute to this Paper

Figure 4 shows the mind map delineating the framework of a systematic review article. The central node represents the Results section, which branches into Methodology, Research Design, Data Analysis, Research Objectives, Discussion, and Implications for Practice. Each subtopic references relevant studies, such as [21] for Sample and Data Collection, [2] for Implications for Practice, and [16] for Research Objectives. This visual depiction arranges components and literature within the systematic review, highlighting the interrelation of research outcomes throughout the paper's sections.

It is worth noting that certain studies included in the analysis may have exhibited

biases stemming from the selective presentation of results and the absence of longitudinal data. Multiple research efforts have pointed out the potential biases that can arise due to selective reporting practices and the lack of longitudinal data in the studies conducted. This observation underscores the pressing need for additional and sustained research endeavours in this field to address these limitations and gaps in the current body of knowledge. While the overall confidence in the data provided was primarily situated at an intermediate level, there were instances where high-certainty evidence was presented, particularly concerning the detrimental effects of stigma and prejudice on mental health outcomes.



## Discussion

Third-gender individuals encounter complex and varied challenges, as indicated by recent studies conducted in this field. The well-being of individuals in this group remains under threat due to both legal frameworks and societal norms that often lead to rejection and exclusion. Moreover, it is common for third-gender individuals to experience suboptimal health conditions as healthcare systems frequently fail to cater to their unique needs adequately. This health disparity is further compounded by the limited access to educational and professional opportunities, resulting in a significant socioeconomic imbalance within this population. The challenges faced by third-gender individuals on a socio-economic level are profound and multifaceted, encompassing heightened levels of unemployment, poverty, and a lack of access to educational resources. In a study [4] focusing on transgender communities in Punjab, the interconnected influences of caste, religion, and socio-economic standing were underscored as factors that exacerbate these challenges significantly.

Additionally, third-gender individuals commonly confront notable psychological hurdles, with mental health disorders being prevalent among this demographic. Research findings suggest that stigma and discrimination play pivotal roles in the development of mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies among those who self-identify as third-gender. A study carried out in India revealed that individuals identifying as third-gender and participating in the KUMBH Mela experienced considerable psychological distress due to societal marginalization and the lack of familial support. When it comes to accessing healthcare services, third-gender individuals encounter a myriad of obstacles. A substantial portion of healthcare providers lack the necessary expertise and understanding to

effectively address the specific needs of this demographic. Consequently, there is a notable deficiency in suitable healthcare services, exacerbating existing health disparities. Research focusing on healthcare provision in various nations, including the United States, consistently highlights the persistent lack of culturally sensitive care for individuals identifying as non-binary or third-gender.

The legal recognition of individuals identifying as a third gender varies significantly across different cultural contexts. While some regions have established legal frameworks to acknowledge and safeguard the rights of third-gender individuals, others continue to marginalize this group with a lack of official recognition. Studies conducted in Pakistan and India emphasize that mere legal acknowledgement is insufficient without concurrent societal acceptance and integration. In light of these challenges, various recommendations are proposed to enhance the conditions for individuals self-identifying as third-gender. Governments are advised to enact and uphold laws that recognize and safeguard the rights of third-gender individuals, ensuring their access to essential services and privileges. Healthcare systems should implement training programs for professionals on third-gender issues and establish protocols to ensure inclusive and respectful care. Initiatives in public education are deemed essential for reducing stigma and fostering acceptance of third-gender individuals. Furthermore, targeted support programs focusing on education and employment opportunities tailored specifically for third-gender individuals can effectively mitigate socio-economic disparities. This research underscores the critical need for comprehensive and inclusive policies aimed at supporting individuals who identify as third-gender, stressing the importance of empirical research to inform and shape these efforts.



**Figure 5.** Social Support System Model (SSSM) for Transgender and Non-Binary (TG/NB) Individual

### Social Support System Model (SSSM)

Figure 5 shows the Social Support Systems Model (SSSM) emphasises the types of support available for Transgender and Non-Binary (TG/NB) individuals. It delineates essential domains including Peer Support, Family and Community Engagement, Parental Support, Community Acceptance, and Cultural and Religious Support. The model emphasises the need for a comprehensive support framework to improve the well-being of TG/NB individuals. The SSSM seeks to methodically develop and enhance social support systems for transgender and non-binary individuals. This framework underscores the importance of various forms of social support for the well-being and self-affirmation of transgender and non-binary individuals.

### Family and Community Engagement

#### Parental Support

Promoting the facilitation by parents of emotional, psychological, and practical support to transgender/non-binary children is crucial in fostering a positive environment for their

growth and well-being. It is imperative to underscore the significance of parental acceptance as a fundamental element for the ideal progression and cultivation of transgender/non-binary identities, ensuring a supportive and affirming foundation for their identity formation and self-realization.

#### Sibling and Extended Family Support

The engagement of siblings and other extended family members is crucial in the creation and maintenance of a supportive familial environment. This process entails the dissemination of knowledge and information to relatives beyond the immediate family circle regarding issues pertinent to individuals identifying as transgender or non-binary. Furthermore, it involves the active promotion of an all-encompassing, tolerant, and accommodating family setting that embraces diversity and fosters understanding.

#### Community Acceptance

The concept of fostering the embrace and comprehension of diverse perspectives and individuals within the wider community is



paramount in promoting social cohesion and harmony. It is through the provision of community support that the detrimental effects of stigma and prejudice can be effectively mitigated, thereby creating a conducive environment that is not only safer but also more inclusive for individuals who identify as transgender or non-binary.

## **Peer Support Groups**

### **Facilitated Support Groups**

Facilitated Support Groups serve as organized and structured assemblies overseen by proficient facilitators with the specific aim of providing a safe and secure setting for individuals identifying as transgender/non-binary to engage in the sharing of personal experiences, receive emotional support, and acquire information on available resources. The primary goal of these organized gatherings is to mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation experienced by participants, while simultaneously fostering a heightened sense of belonging and connection within the community.

### **Online Communities**

Online communities, which are commonly defined as digital platforms existing in the virtual realm, serve as intricate networks that offer a designated space for individuals identifying as transgender or non-binary to engage in various forms of communication, such as dialogue, sharing of knowledge, and provision of emotional reinforcement. Within these online communities, participants have the opportunity to interact with one another, exchange valuable information about their unique experiences and challenges, as well as obtain much-needed support from their peers. The utilization of online communities can yield a multitude of advantages for individuals who may confront barriers in accessing physical support groups within their local communities, thereby serving as a vital resource for fostering

a sense of community and facilitating personal growth and well-being.

## **Cultural and Religious Support**

### **Inclusive Cultural Practices**

Advocating for the promotion of cultural practices that actively endorse and integrate the unique identities and experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals within societal frameworks, demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and diversity. This multifaceted approach involves the critical examination, challenging, and reshaping of entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion towards marginalized groups, thereby fostering a more equitable and accepting society.

### **Religious Inclusivity**

Promoting religious inclusivity necessitates the establishment of a conducive and welcoming atmosphere within religious organisations and events that embraces and supports individuals identifying as transgender or non-binary. This process entails the dissemination of knowledge and information to religious authorities and assemblies regarding transgender/non-binary issues, as well as the proactive endorsement of religious customs and regulations that are designed to accommodate and accept diverse gender identities.

In summary, the Social Support System Model (SSSM) framework will present a comprehensive and well-defined system designed specifically for professionals in the fields of social work, education, healthcare, and community leadership who are dedicated to supporting individuals who identify as transgender (TG) and non-binary (NB). This innovative approach will focus on creating a holistic and supportive environment that aims to enhance the overall well-being and sense of self of TG/NB individuals through prioritizing the involvement of both families and communities, establishing peer support

networks, and fostering inclusivity about cultural and religious practices.

## Conclusion

The systematic review suggests that the SSSM framework can significantly improve mental health for non-binary and third-gender individuals. It emphasizes the importance of family involvement, parental education on gender diversity, and open dialogues for emotional support. Promoting parental acceptance can alleviate mental health issues related to social rejection or stigma. Knowledge dissemination should extend to siblings and extended families to create a supportive environment. Community awareness initiatives can reduce stigma and promote an inclusive atmosphere. Support groups are crucial for sharing experiences and accessing resources, enhancing emotional well-being. Digital platforms should facilitate peer discussions,

while cultural practices should be reassessed to incorporate non-binary and third-gender identities. Religious institutions should cultivate inclusive environments by educating leaders on gender diversity and fostering supportive religious practices. This comprehensive approach helps alleviate mental health issues related to social exclusion and fosters resilience, empowerment, and self-affirmation among these groups.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they don't have any conflicts of interest in this paper.

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