

# Educational and Socioeconomic Challenges Faced by Transgender Persons in India: A Narrative Review

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## Abstract

Transgender persons in India encounter barriers that connect family relationships, schooling, employment, documentation, health care, and public services. This narrative review examines these linked barriers and the gap between legal recognition and everyday inclusion. It draws on selected Indian empirical studies, peer-reviewed analyses, census and government materials, international guidance, and the relevant legal and policy framework. The 2011 census recorded 487,803 people in its “other” sex category, but that category is not a complete measure of transgender identity. Qualitative studies document bullying and institutional exclusion, constrained access to education and formal work, and discriminatory experiences in health care; their samples should not be taken as nationally representative. The National Legal Services Authority judgment, the 2019 transgender rights legislation and its 2026 amendment, and the National Education Policy 2020 provide an evolving policy context. The review argues for coordinated action in educational institutions: confidential and consistent records, safe reporting and response to harassment, trained staff, inclusive facilities, and pathways to continued study and livelihood. Better disaggregated research and evaluation of implementation are needed to assess whether these measures improve participation and well-being.

**Keywords:** Transgender persons; India; educational inclusion; employment; social exclusion; gender identity; policy implementation

## Introduction

Education is both a right and a route to economic participation. For transgender persons, however, entry to school, continued attendance, completion, and the transition into work can be affected by discrimination across institutions. The experiences of hijra and kinnar communities, trans women, trans men, and nonbinary people are neither identical nor adequately captured by a single account of disadvantage (Goel, 2016; Raghuram et al., 2024). This paper therefore uses “transgender persons” as a broad descriptive expression while acknowledging that people may use other names for their identities.

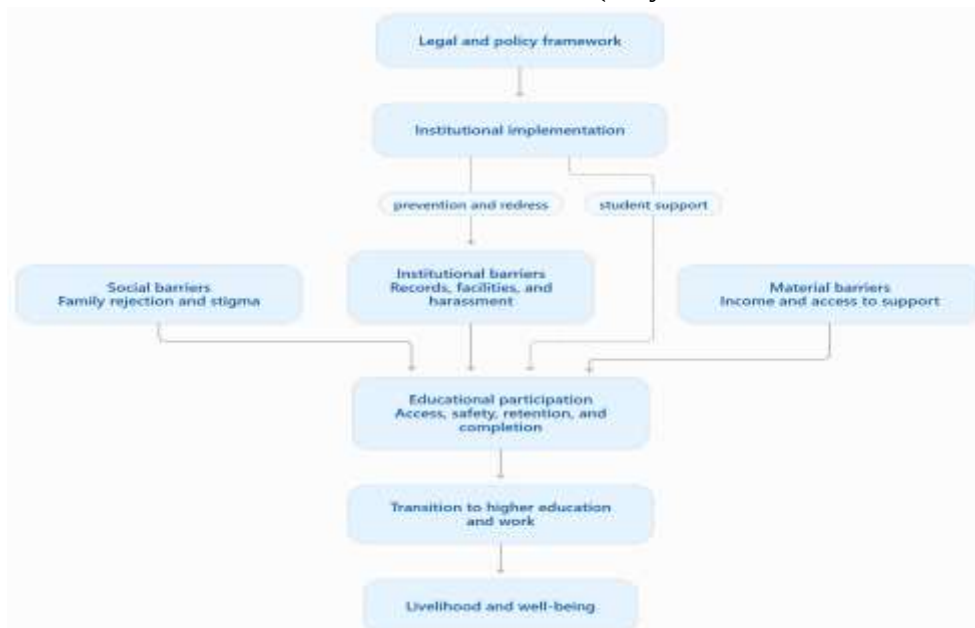
The literature frequently describes a sequence: rejection or insecurity at home can disrupt education; hostile school environments can narrow qualifications; limited credentials and discriminatory recruitment can restrict employment; and lower income can affect housing and health care (Balabantaray & Singh, 2022; Kumar et al., 2022; Raghuram et al., 2024). These links are plausible but should not be read as a universal life course or as causal effects established by the studies reviewed here. Transgender people also organize communities, pursue varied occupations, and create supportive networks; a deficit-only account obscures that agency (Goel, 2016).

The aim of this narrative review is to synthesize selected evidence on educational and socioeconomic barriers in India, relate it to the legal and policy framework, and identify practical responses for educational institutions. It is a critical narrative synthesis, not a systematic review or a new survey. No new participants were recruited, and no pooled prevalence or effect estimates are reported.

The concept of inclusion requires more than permitting entry to an institution. A learner must also be able to participate without harassment, use ordinary facilities, receive correct documentation, and progress into subsequent study or work. This distinction matters when policy achievements are described through admissions alone. It also keeps attention on the daily decisions of teachers, administrators, exam boards, and employers. The paper consequently treats inclusion as a continuing institutional practice whose quality can be investigated through student experience and administrative outcomes (UNESCO, 2016).

## Approach and Scope

The discussion draws on peer-reviewed Indian qualitative studies and legal analyses, official Indian legal and policy documents, the 2011 census reporting on the “other” category, and international guidance on discrimination in educational settings. Sources were selected for direct relevance to education, employment, social inclusion, health access, and legal recognition. Because this is a narrative selection rather than a documented exhaustive search, the review cannot establish how frequently a barrier occurs across India or assess the effectiveness of every programme. International work is used to frame institutional processes, not to substitute for Indian evidence (Meyer, 2003; UNESCO, 2016).



**Figure 1. Conceptual pathways linking social, institutional, and material barriers to educational and socioeconomic participation among transgender persons in India.**

### **Population data and limits of measurement**

During the 2011 census, 487,803 people were recorded in the sex category “other.” The government has clarified that this category could include people who wished to record their sex as “other” and should not be interpreted as a direct census of all transgender persons (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2017). People recorded under male or female are not visible as transgender in that tabulation. The original manuscript’s 46% literacy figure and its five percentages for educational attainment lack a traceable denominator and source; they are therefore omitted here. Even where a rate is correctly calculated for the 2011 category, it cannot automatically be generalized to all transgender persons in 2026.

Measurement is an equity issue. Administrative systems that offer only binary fields can misclassify people or require repeated disclosure, while a single broad category conceals differences in age, schooling, region, caste, disability, and socioeconomic position (Crenshaw, 1989; Raghuram et al., 2024). Future research should report precisely how identity was asked, who participated, when the data were collected, and which groups were not reached. Confidentiality and participant control over disclosure are essential when collecting such information.

A useful education dataset would distinguish enrolment, attendance, grade progression, completion, examination participation, and transition to employment or higher education. It should state whether a student's recorded category reflects self-description, a document field, or an administrator's classification. Numerators and denominators need to be reported for every percentage. Small cell sizes may permit identification, especially in a single school or district, so public reporting should aggregate or suppress sensitive cells. These precautions permit more meaningful analysis while avoiding the false precision of a single national estimate drawn from a narrow administrative category.

### **Legal and policy framework**

In *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), the Supreme Court recognized the constitutional significance of gender identity and directed governments to address discrimination and access to education and public services. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 prohibits discrimination in education, employment, health care, and other settings and establishes duties for institutions. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020 set out administrative provisions, including matters connected with certificates and institutional measures (Government of India, 2019, 2020). Legal commentators have examined tensions between formal recognition and practical access, particularly around documentation and the relationship between identity and administrative certification (Bhattacharya et al., 2022; Jain, 2022).

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026 changes the statutory definition and identity-certificate process, including a medical-board role. Accordingly, descriptions of the 2019 Act as though its original text were the complete current law would mislead readers. The amended framework requires careful, current legal analysis; this review does not infer its eventual effects on education from the text alone (Government of India, 2026). Constitutional principles articulated in NALSA and the details of subsequent statutes should be identified separately rather than treated as interchangeable.

For education administrators, the immediate issue is how statutory requirements interact with a person's existing school and university records. A certificate procedure and an admission procedure serve different administrative purposes; rules about one should not be casually projected onto the other. Institutions need legally reviewed, written guidance on applications, correction of names and markers, privacy, and appeals. They should record when a student encounters a documentation barrier and whether it was resolved,

without publishing identifying case details. Because the 2026 amendment is recent, claims about its actual effect on enrolment or retention would be premature in the absence of follow-up data.

The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes transgender students within its discussion of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and proposes a Gender Inclusion Fund to support equitable quality education (Ministry of Education, 2020). A policy commitment does not itself demonstrate uptake or improved outcomes. The National Portal for Transgender Persons and the SMILE programme describe administrative and welfare routes, but their reach and accessibility should be evaluated with people who use them (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, n.d.).

### **Educational exclusion and institutional climate**

Schooling can be interrupted by bullying, gender policing, misgendering, isolation, and a lack of trusted adults. UNESCO's education-sector review shows why prevention requires institutional rules, staff capacity, reporting processes, and responses to violence rather than awareness messages alone (UNESCO, 2016). Indian policy analysis likewise identifies the need to translate formal commitments into routine school practice (Balabantaray & Singh, 2022). Because much Indian scholarship is qualitative or localized, it is more defensible to describe documented forms of exclusion than to claim a national dropout rate from these studies.

Routine school systems can create barriers even without an explicitly exclusionary rule. Admission forms, examination registration, identity documents, attendance records, uniforms, and hostel assignments may assume only two gender categories or demand disclosure in settings where privacy is weak. A student's name or gender marker may differ across school and civil records. Institutions need a clear process for correcting records, protecting confidentiality, and avoiding repeated public explanations. In higher education, the same concerns extend to accommodation, placement, certificates, and campus services (Ministry of Education, 2020; UNESCO, 2016).

An inclusive curriculum should make gender diversity visible without treating one student as a classroom example. Teacher preparation can cover respectful language, handling harassment, referral pathways, and the distinction between supportive conversation and compelled disclosure. Administrators should monitor complaints and their resolution while protecting student privacy. These are recommendations inferred from the institutional barriers in the literature and policy framework; their outcomes require evaluation in Indian school and university settings.

The period between secondary school and higher education warrants particular attention. An adolescent may need school records, board examination certificates, admission forms, scholarship applications, and hostel arrangements to work together. A mismatch between these records can generate delays even if an institution claims to admit students without discrimination. A designated staff contact and a written correction procedure could reduce repeated referrals from one office to another. Institutions should also permit confidential consultation before a student supplies sensitive documents. These measures are administratively concrete, but their feasibility and effect should be studied rather than assumed.

Educational support should avoid a single model of student need. Some learners will want help responding to bullying; others may ask only for corrected records or access to a facility. Family involvement can be valuable when the student wants it, but automatically contacting family can expose someone to unwanted disclosure. Policies should specify who may see a student's information, how an incident is recorded, how decisions are appealed, and what support is offered while a complaint is resolved. The relevant test is whether a student can continue learning safely and with dignity.

**Family, social relationships, and safety**

Social acceptance and safety affect educational continuity. Research among transgender women and other participants in India describes familial rejection, stigma, violence, and the work of navigating public spaces (Dutta et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2022; Yatirajula et al., 2024). These studies illuminate mechanisms of exclusion but do not imply that all families reject transgender members or that all communities experience the same risks. Goel (2016) also cautions against reducing hijra communities to stereotypes or presenting them only as sites of deprivation.

Stigma can operate at interpersonal and institutional levels. Minority-stress theory proposes that prejudice, anticipated rejection, and concealment can create chronic pressures beyond ordinary stressors (Meyer, 2003). Its application to a particular Indian population needs contextual evidence; it should not replace accounts from participants themselves. Educational institutions can help by providing confidential support, responding consistently to harassment, and identifying external services when a learner faces housing insecurity or violence. Staff should ask what support the individual wants instead of presuming a single pathway.

Intersectionality offers a further caution. A person's opportunities may be shaped by class, caste, location, age, disability, and family resources alongside gender identity. A privately funded urban college and a rural government school have different facilities and decision structures. Neither a single interview study nor one institutional policy can represent every context (Crenshaw, 1989; Raghuram et al., 2024). Researchers should therefore describe the setting and recruitment process with enough precision for readers to judge transferability. Policy design should leave room for local barriers to be identified with participants rather than assuming that one prescribed package will work equally everywhere.

**Employment and economic participation**

A qualification does not guarantee access to formal work. Discriminatory recruitment, mismatched documents, unsafe workplaces, and limited professional networks can impede entry and retention. Kumar et al. (2022) reported stigma in education and employment among participants in Chennai, while Dutta et al. (2019) analyzed structural violence in a specific South Indian community. Ganju and Saggurti (2017) showed how economic insecurity and violence intersected among transgender persons in sex work in Maharashtra. Findings from these particular groups cannot be used to describe the occupations of all transgender persons.

Education and employment policies should be linked. Career guidance, internships, skill development, fair recruitment, usable grievance mechanisms, and accurate identity records can support transitions into work. Institutions and employers should test whether stated policies are accessible in practice, including whether applicants can submit records without unwanted disclosure. The review does not claim that any one training or loan scheme has been proven to improve national employment rates; programme evaluation and disaggregated outcome data are needed.

Evaluation should look beyond the number of training certificates issued. Indicators could include completion of training, placement into work chosen by participants, retention, earnings, workplace safety, and satisfaction with complaint handling. The circumstances of informal workers and self-employed people must also be considered. A programme that only counts formal placements may miss valuable activity, while one that records enrolment alone may hide barriers to completion. Transgender community participation in defining successful outcomes would improve the relevance of these measures.

**Health access and its relation to participation**

Health access influences continued study and work, but health needs differ across individuals. In a participatory qualitative study involving 63 transgender persons across regions of India, Raghuram et al. (2024) documented obstacles to routine care inside and outside health facilities, including binary systems, interactions with staff, and economic constraints. Research on transition-related care among transmasculine people identifies further barriers involving cost, provider capacity, and service availability; such care is wanted by some, not all, transgender persons (Chakrapani et al., 2024). Jain (2022) distinguishes legal entitlements from practical access to health services.

Education and health institutions can coordinate referrals and staff training without assuming that a learner's gender identity is a medical problem. A student who seeks help should be able to access ordinary care, mental-health support when wanted, and accurate information about available services. The aim is safe, respectful access and autonomy, not a presumption that every transgender student requires the same intervention (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019; Raghuram et al., 2024).

Health research also illustrates why a narrow policy lens is inadequate. A service may formally accept a person but remain difficult to use because an appointment system, waiting area, staff interaction, or payment requirement creates an obstacle. The participatory approach used by Raghuram et al. (2024) offers a way to identify these linked barriers with community members rather than defining needs exclusively through administrative categories. Educational institutions can apply a similar principle when designing support: ask students about the points at which access fails and verify that a change improves their actual experience. Such consultation should be voluntary and should include safeguards against identifying participants.

**Implications for education and policy**

Five connected actions follow from the review. First, schools and universities should audit forms, records, examination processes, accommodation rules, and grievance channels for avoidable barriers. Second, they should train teaching and administrative staff in privacy, respectful communication, and timely responses to harassment. Third, they should make support available for disrupted schooling and transitions into higher education or work. Fourth, implementation monitoring should include feedback from transgender people of different identities and social locations. Fifth, researchers should distinguish commitments, service uptake, and measured outcomes when assessing policies (Bhattacharya et al., 2022; Ministry of Education, 2020; UNESCO, 2016).

These recommendations operate at different levels. An individual teacher can address a harmful incident, but a school must also establish a safe reporting route; a ministry may fund an initiative, but local institutions must make it usable. Consultation with transgender students and community organizations is necessary to prevent well-intentioned procedures from imposing new disclosure burdens. No single measure will substitute for accountable implementation.

A practical review cycle would begin with confidential consultation and an audit of forms, facilities, teaching materials, and complaint records. The institution could then set a small number of measurable goals, assign responsibility, provide staff development, and revisit student experiences after implementation. Monitoring should include adverse effects: for example, whether a new registration field improves record accuracy but increases unwanted disclosure. Student participation must be voluntary and

should not make any individual responsible for educating the institution. The evidence base supports these as reasonable implementation steps, while their comparative effectiveness remains an empirical question. Future Indian studies could follow cohorts across educational transitions, compare institutions with different support arrangements, and document how complaints are resolved. Mixed methods would allow outcome trends to be interpreted alongside lived experience. Researchers should report ethical safeguards, recruitment limits, and the precise population to which a finding applies. Such work would make the discussion less dependent on broad claims of marginalization and more capable of guiding targeted improvement.

### Limitations and conclusion

This review is selective and does not claim exhaustive coverage. The cited Indian studies vary in population, place, design, and date; several focus on trans women or particular communities, leaving other experiences underrepresented. Census categories and administrative records do not provide a current, comprehensive national picture. The legal framework has changed in 2026, so implementation and any judicial developments should be checked again before journal submission.

The available evidence supports a coherent concern: barriers in education, employment, documentation, safety, and health care can reinforce one another. Formal recognition and policy commitments matter, but participation depends on how institutions respond in everyday practice. The next research priority is to evaluate concrete, community-informed changes in schools, universities, workplaces, and services, with clear measures of access, retention, safety, and well-being.

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