

# Medical students and registrars' attitudes and beliefs towards transgender individuals using the transgender attitudes and beliefs scale

Dr D Naicker & Prof GP Grobler

Department of Psychiatry, Steve Biko Academic Hospital, University of Pretoria, South Africa

## Background

The transgender community continues to grow substantially, however paucity of data that address the transgender community exist, especially in South Africa. Members of the transgender community have specific health care needs that are not met due to the lack of training and knowledge by healthcare workers. There are a number of factors such as stigma, culture and the attitudes of general population as well as health care workers that affect the transgender community negatively.

## Aim and objectives

We aimed to determine if there was a difference between the attitudes and beliefs of postgraduate registrars (PGR) and undergraduate final year medical students (UGS) using the Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (TABS). Demographic variables were analysed to see if they correlated with the attitudes and beliefs of PGR and UGS.

## Methods

This study was a quantitative survey. This study was conducted at Weskoppies Psychiatric Hospital and at Steve Biko Academic Hospital, both of which are situated in Tshwane, Gauteng Province, South Africa. A total of 41 PGR and 200 UGS were included in the study, making the total sample size 241. Each participant voluntarily completed the TABS and a specifically designed demographic questionnaire after informed consent was obtained. The TABS consists of 29 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The highest possible score is 203 whereas the minimum a participant could score was 29. Continuous variables were described using means, standard deviations, medians and interquartile ranges. Frequencies and proportions were used to describe categorical variables. The two-sample t-test was used to compare means of continuous variables between two groups and one-way ANOVA to compare three or more groups. Where variables are unbalanced heavily or the outcome is non-normal, the non-parametric tests Mann-Whitney's U and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to compare two and three groups respectively. Associations between categorical variables were tested for using the chi-squared test and Fisher's exact test. Statistical significance is taken at 5%.

## Results

The majority of the study population were UGS (83.4%), under 25 years of age (61.4%), female (68.1%), heterosexual (88.8%), Christian (70.1%) and committed to their religion by self-report (80.9%). Amongst the participants, 21.1% would be uncomfortable if their boss was transgender, 19.6% would feel uncomfortable working closely with a transgender individual, 22% would be upset if someone they knew for a long time revealed that they used to be another gender and 24.5% would want to decline being housemates with a transgender individual (Table 1). The participants in this study were predominantly UGS (83.4%) hence it was difficult to compare the outcomes in terms of statistical significance. However, lower total TABS scores were seen in the UGS (median 162) than in the PGR (median 169.5) which indicates more negative attitudes and beliefs among UGS (Figure 1). More negative attitudes were seen in heterosexuals ( $p=0.0001$ ), those committed to their religion ( $p=0.0001$ ) and participated in religious activities more than once a week ( $p=0.0001$ ).

Table 1: Attitudes and beliefs towards transgender individuals: Distribution of answers (N= 241)

Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>FACTOR 1 (Interpersonal Comfort)</b>							
Q1.1 I would feel comfortable having a transgender person into my home for a meal. <sup>1</sup>	1.2%	2.1%	3.7%	7.5%	12%	26.1%	47.3%
Q1.2 I would be comfortable being in a group of transgender individuals. <sup>1</sup>	1.2%	4.1%	8.7%	10%	14.5%	23.2%	38.2%
Q1.3 I would be uncomfortable if my boss was transgender. <sup>2</sup>	6.2%	8.3%	6.6%	11.6%	6.6%	22%	38.6%
Q1.4 I would feel uncomfortable working closely with a transgender person in my workplace. <sup>2</sup>	7.1%	10%	2.5%	10%	6.2%	24.5%	39.8%
Q1.5 If I knew someone was transgender, I would still be open to forming a friendship with that person. <sup>1</sup>	2.5%	2.5%	1.7%	7.5%	12%	30.3%	43.6%
Q1.6 I would feel comfortable if my next-door neighbor was transgender. <sup>1</sup>	1.7%	1.7%	1.2%	6.6%	9.5%	29.5%	49.8%
Q1.7 If my child brought home a transgender friend, I would be comfortable having that person into my home. <sup>1</sup>	4.6%	4.1%	5%	10%	12.9%	27.8%	35.7%
Q1.8 I would be upset if someone I'd known for a long time revealed that they used to be another gender. <sup>2</sup>	3.7%	8.3%	10%	14.9%	10.4%	23.2%	29.5%
Q1.9 If I knew someone was transgender, I would tend to avoid that person. <sup>2</sup>	1.2%	2.1%	4.6%	8.7%	8.7%	30.3%	44.4%
Q1.10 If a transgender person asked to be my housemate, I would want to decline. <sup>1</sup>	24.9%	23.2%	8.7%	18.7%	7.5%	10.8%	6.2%
Q1.11 I would feel uncomfortable finding out that I was alone with a transgender person. <sup>2</sup>	3.7%	4.6%	3.3%	14.1%	8.3%	26.6%	39.4%
Q1.12 I would be comfortable working for a company that welcomes transgender individuals. <sup>1</sup>	7.5%	4.1%	2.5%	6.6%	5.4%	26.1%	47.7%
Q1.13 If someone I knew revealed to me that they were transgender, I would probably no longer be as close to that person. <sup>2</sup>	0.4%	2.5%	5%	14.5%	11.6%	28.2%	37.8%
Q1.14 If I found out my doctor was transgender, I would want to seek another doctor. <sup>2</sup>	3.7%	2.9%	4.6%	10.4%	8.7%	24.9%	44.8%
<b>FACTOR 2 (Sex/Gender Beliefs)</b>							
Q2.1 A person who is not sure about being male or female is mentally ill. <sup>2</sup>	2.1%	2.5%	9.5%	15.4%	5%	22.4%	43.2%
Q2.2 Whether a person is male or female depends upon whether they feel male or female. <sup>1</sup>	15.8%	13.7%	5.8%	18.3%	10.4%	16.6%	19.5%
Q2.3 If you are born male, nothing you do will change that. <sup>2</sup>	10%	12%	8.3%	17.4%	11.6%	19.5%	21.2%
Q2.4 Whether a person is male or female depends strictly on their external sex-parts. <sup>2</sup>	5%	6.2%	10%	17.8%	15.8%	21.2%	24.1%
Q2.5 Humanity is only male or female; there is nothing in between. <sup>2</sup>	10.8%	9.1%	10%	19.5%	7.9%	14.9%	27.8%
Q2.6 If a transgender person identifies as female, she should have the right to marry a man. <sup>1</sup>	4.6%	3.3%	2.9%	23.2%	9.5%	23.7%	32.8%
Q2.7 Although most of humanity is male or female, there are also identities in between. <sup>1</sup>	11.2%	9.1%	5%	18.3%	12.4%	19.9%	24.1%
Q2.8 All adults should identify as either male or female. <sup>2</sup>	10%	13.3%	10%	22.8%	8.3%	13.3%	22.4%
Q2.9 A child born with ambiguous sex-parts should be assigned to be either male or female. <sup>2</sup>	5%	8.7%	9.5%	26.1%	9.1%	16.6%	24.9%
Q2.10 A person does not have to be clearly male or female to be normal and healthy. <sup>1</sup>	2.5%	4.6%	3.3%	16.6%	12.4%	29.5%	31.1%
<b>FACTOR 3 (Human Value)</b>							
Q3.1 Transgender individuals are valuable human beings regardless of how I feel about transgenderism. <sup>1</sup>	0.4%	0%	0.4%	3.3%	1.7%	18.7%	75.5%
Q3.2 Transgender individuals should be treated with the same respect and dignity as any other person. <sup>1</sup>	0.4%	0%	0.8%	2.5%	1.7%	17.8%	76.8%
Q3.3 I would find it highly objectionable to see a transgender person being teased or mistreated. <sup>1</sup>	1.7%	0.8%	0.4%	4.1%	2.5%	20.3%	70.1%
Q3.4 Transgender individuals are human beings with their own struggles, just like the rest of us. <sup>1</sup>	0.8%	0%	0.8%	2.5%	1.2%	15.4%	79.3%
Q3.5 Transgender individuals should have the same access to housing as any other person. <sup>1</sup>	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	2.5%	1.2%	14.5%	80.5%

Note: <sup>1</sup> = Strongly disagree; <sup>2</sup> = Disagree; <sup>3</sup> = Somewhat disagree; <sup>4</sup> = Neither agree nor disagree; <sup>5</sup> = Somewhat agree; <sup>6</sup> = Agree; <sup>7</sup> = Strongly agree.  
<sup>2</sup> 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat agree; 4 = Neither agree nor disagree; 5 = Somewhat disagree; 6 = Disagree; 7 = Strongly disagree.

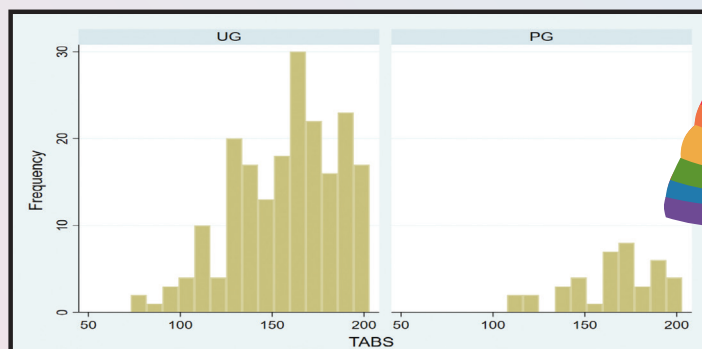


Figure 1: Frequency of the TABS scores in the UGS vs the PGR.

## Conclusion

This study highlights findings of previous studies that show that more negative attitudes and beliefs exist among males, married individuals, heterosexuals and those that hold strong religious beliefs and are actively involved in their religious services. The trend noted among PGR and UGS suggest that further studies with larger sample sizes are necessary to accurately determine if PGR have more positive attitudes than UGS which could be influenced by the lack of specialised training towards transgender individuals among UGS. These studies are important so that interventions that can eliminate discriminatory behaviours and negative interactions with transgender individuals are implemented, especially among healthcare workers.