



## Trans-cending time: lived experiences and well-being of older Filipino transgenders

### Melampaui Waktu: Pengalaman Hidup dan Kesejahteraan Transgender Lansia di Filipina

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Maria Celeste Borja Sagarbarria<sup>1</sup>, Maita Doliente Ignacio<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, Xavier University, Philippines

#### ABSTRACT

This study, utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), delves into the experiences of three Filipino transgenders in their 50s, focusing on how they perceive aging and its effects on well-being. The findings reveal a mix of negative encounters, such as prejudice and financial difficulties, alongside positive experiences, including supportive relationships and community involvement. Participants emphasize the importance of helping others and assert that being transgender is an integral aspect of their humanity. They advocate for transgender empowerment based on their learned experiences, viewing aging as a period necessitating financial, physical, and relational preparations, while also embracing growth. Aging is seen as conducive to happiness and gratitude. The study discusses implications for both individual and societal levels, including family dynamics, legal rights, and the need for safe spaces. Recommendations for community action and further research are provided.

#### KEY WORDS:

Filipino transgenders; aging; well-being; lived experiences

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<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Maria Celeste Borja Sagarbarria, email: [msagarbarria@xu.edu.ph](mailto:msagarbarria@xu.edu.ph),  
Department of Psychology, Xavier University, Ateneo de Cagayan, Corrales Avenue, Cagayan de Oro  
City, Philippines

## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggunakan Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif (IPA), menggali pengalaman tiga transgender Filipina berusia 50an tahun, dengan fokus pada bagaimana mereka memandang penuaan dan pengaruhnya terhadap kesejahteraan. Temuan ini mengungkap berbagai pengalaman negatif, seperti prasangka dan kesulitan keuangan, di samping pengalaman positif, termasuk hubungan yang mendukung dan keterlibatan dalam komunitas. Para peserta menekankan pentingnya membantu orang lain dan menegaskan bahwa menjadi transgender adalah aspek integral dari kemanusiaan mereka. Mereka mengadvokasi pemberdayaan transgender berdasarkan pengalaman yang telah mereka pelajari, dengan memandang penuaan sebagai periode yang membutuhkan persiapan finansial, fisik, dan relasional, sekaligus merangkul pertumbuhan. Penuaan dipandang sebagai masa yang kondusif untuk kebahagiaan dan rasa syukur. Penelitian ini membahas implikasi pada tingkat individu dan masyarakat, termasuk dinamika keluarga, hak-hak hukum, dan kebutuhan akan ruang yang aman. Rekomendasi untuk aksi komunitas dan penelitian lebih lanjut juga diberikan.

## KATA KUNCI

transgender Filipina; penuaan; kesejahteraan; pengalaman hidup

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## Introduction

Transgender individuals have lived in indigenous, Western, and Eastern cultures and represent many racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Interest in the queer perspective have increased in popularity, driven by a quest for inclusivity. However, queer people have consistently faced prejudice and marginalization. Understanding their experiences is pivotal for fostering societal inclusivity. Gender, sexual orientation, and cultural diversity in the queer community are becoming more visible; and acknowledging, understanding, and embracing this diversity is imperative for a more equitable society (Lefebvre & Domene, 2023). Transgender individuals, comprising less than 1% of the global population are massively understudied but there is growing interest in understanding their experiences (Ipsos, 2023). While the most accepting nations have seen increased acceptance, the least accepting nations have experienced a decline (Flores, 2021). Overall, there is more support than opposition for queer equality and visibility, with acceptance levels

showing an upward trend since the early 2000s. Yet despite the increased societal acceptance, queer individuals encounter stigma, exclusion, and discrimination in education, employment, communities, and even within their own households (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022); and compounding these challenges is the bi-invisibility and trans-erasure that persist within the queer community (Casey et al., 2019; Snelgrove et al., 2012; Su et al., 2016).

Though research on the health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals has grown, studies on the health of older transgender and gender non-conforming (Singh & Bajorek, 2014) individuals lag (Willis et al., 2021), with the National Academy of Medicine identifying transgenders as an “understudied population in critical need of health research” (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Kim, 2017). In this study, older transgenders are those aged 50 years or older. Singh and Bajorek (2014) suggests that the onset of aging varies across cultures, challenging the current literature and the conventional notion that it begins at age 65 or older. However previous systematic reviews on queer aging have established that the age range of 50-64, known as the 'young-old' subgroup, is extensively examined in the literature (Kumble et al., 2020).

Despite progress in acceptance of the queer community, there are members who continue to struggle with inequality, particularly those who are older and transgendered. This inequality greatly impacts their perceptions of themselves and their lives. While aging poses concerns and challenges for many individuals, transgender people encounter unique obstacles, particularly if they undergo physical, social, or surgical transition later in adulthood. Moreover, individuals may experience social isolation and discrimination based on their gender identity, which may be aggravated by ageism - the discriminatory treatment, attitudes, or actions towards individuals based on their chronological age (Levy & Banaji, 2002; as cited in Fung, 2013). Key ingredients in successful aging include social connections, well-being, and economic security; unfortunately, older queer adults and specifically older transgenders have concerns with healthcare and are forced to rely on family members. Likewise, they may also struggle with discrimination and are not as recognized socially (Movement Advancement Project & SAGE, 2017).

Considering these observations, this research seeks to explore the lived experiences of transgender minority members, with a focus on elderly persons, and how these experiences affect their sense of well-being.

## Empirical Studies

**Queer Experiences.** The queer community has faced discrimination across developmental stages and across sectors. Workplace discrimination is common for queer individuals worldwide. A meta-analysis found that queer employees have reported workplace harassment or discrimination based on their gender identity or sexual orientation, and transgender employees have reported hiring, promotion, or job retention discrimination (Webster et al., 2018). A poll on workplace discrimination in Asian countries found that many employees were refused job prospects based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, with over two-thirds observing job postings that expressly excluded queer workers (United Nations Development Programme, 2018)).

Queer individuals are two to three times as likely than the overall population to report long-term physical and mental health issues. Due to stigma, a lack of healthcare practitioners' awareness, and a lack of compassion, the queer community receives substandard care, and most queer individuals only seek health care in cases of severe sickness (Alencar Albuquerque et al., 2016; Hafeez et al., 2017). Compared to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, queer individuals typically have worse physical and mental health, and these disparities are made worse by barriers to healthcare (Daniel et al., 2015; Safer et al., 2016). A systematic review of health inequities in queer individuals revealed that trans women were most likely to encounter discrimination and violence and had the poorest health outcomes (Giblon & Bauer, 2017; Medina-Martínez et al., 2021)).

**Transgender Experiences.** Both groups may face discrimination and prejudice based on sexual orientation or gender identity, but transgender individuals often encounter additional challenges not experienced by LGB individuals.

Transgender and other queer individuals report high levels of work discrimination (Brower, 2016). Inadequate support and inclusion in the workplace have been associated with hostility, discrimination, depression, and anxiety among transgender employees. Their concerns encompass navigating gendered workplaces and addressing the absence of organizational and governmental policies to protect queer employees, alongside cultural climate issues (Lefebvre & Domene, 2023). Brower (2016) highlights challenges transgender individuals face accessing workplace restrooms, a key source of discrimination. Many resort to misrepresenting their gender to avoid mistreatment, with about three-quarters concealing their identity daily to

protect their jobs, and 30% lying about their gender to maintain employment.

Additionally, transgender individuals report the most negative experiences with healthcare providers, including being misgendered or deadnamed, often leading to avoidance of healthcare (Medina-Martínez et al., 2021). They are more likely to be uninsured, face higher out-of-pocket costs for trans-specific healthcare, and transgender youth are at increased risk of using illicit means to access medical treatments (Giblon & Bauer, 2017; Safer et al., 2016).

Despite being considered as a queer friendly country, the Philippines lacks significant protections for transgender individuals (Abesamis, 2022). Sparse data indicates that since 2010, at least 50 transgender or gender-nonconforming individuals have been murdered in the country, though the actual number is likely higher. The lack of national laws safeguarding queer people from discrimination worsens inequalities in areas like work, healthcare, education, and daily tasks such as using public transport (Abesamis, 2022; Alejandro Silan Mary Anne F Rivera Loraine T Chulipa, 2016). The proposed SOGIE Equality (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression) Bill protects the rights of all people regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity and addresses queer discrimination, although it has yet to be passed (Redfern, n.d., 2022).

**Older Queer and Transgender Experiences.** Older queer adults face distinct challenges relative to heterosexual, cisgender peers, including higher rates of living alone, dependence on chosen families, financial inequalities, heightened discrimination due to intersecting identities, and increased risks of mental and physical health issues, as well as engaging in risky health behaviors (Choi I.H., 2016; Pereira & Banerjee, 2021). Transgender individuals encounter prejudice, social isolation, and discrimination across various domains such as employment, healthcare, and education, leading to increased vulnerability to violence and mental health challenges. Aging exacerbates these issues, forming a distinct subgroup within the transgender community. Despite being resilient, transgender aging experiences remain understudied (Finkenauer et al., 2012; White Hughto & Reisner, 2018), warranting further investigation.

Older transgenders face more victimization and stigma than non-transgender queer elderly individuals (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014). Trans people often come out later in life when social pressures ease due to historical discrimination while some transition later after personal challenges (Siverskog, 2014; V.D. Fabbre, 2015). Willis (2021) highlighted older transgender individuals' uncertainty about transition trajectories and a lack of post-

transition planning. Additionally, an Indian study indicated increased ageism during the pandemic among older transgender individuals (Banerjee & Rao, 2021).

A systematic review of qualitative research on older queer people's experiences defines quality of life (QOL) as older adults' dignity, well-being, autonomy, engagement, and safety. While the same research argues that coming out and being accepted for one's identity improves QOL, participants also faced discrimination and stigmatization, which caused loneliness and isolation (Bratt et al., 2023)

Despite substantial queer studies, older transgender people's unique experiences are often neglected and classed with non-trans individuals. However, data suggests that transgender people experience unique obstacles compared to the rest of the queer community. This study, then, examined how older Filipino transgender individuals viewed aging and its effects on their well-being.

## Method

This qualitative descriptive study examined elder Filipino transgender individuals' lived experiences and perspectives. Specifically, the researchers employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA studies people's lived experiences and their interpretations and was chosen because older transgender people's experiences are subjective and varied (Miller & Barrio Minton, 2016).

This study, conducted in Cagayan de Oro Philippines, included as participants three self-identified transgender women over 50 who were recruited through snowball sampling. An open-ended interview guide was translated into the local vernacular, and the interview method and timeline were refined during a dry run. Bracketing sessions were utilized to reduce bias throughout the study (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Participant orientations covered consent, rights and responsibilities, and criteria for termination/withdrawal, emphasizing voluntary involvement. Each interview, lasting 40-60 minutes, included the administration of the Mental Status Exam online by a Registered Psychologist using the Mini-Online MSE by Kurlowicz & Wallace (1999). Transcriptions removed personal information and replaced it with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Data analysis entailed a six-step interpretative phenomenological analysis method proposed by Smith (2010). Step 1 involved reading the transcript while

listening to the audio recording for immersion in the data. Comments and memos were suspended during this stage to facilitate familiarity with the information. In step 2, the transcript was re-read, and initial codes were generated through commenting on its content. A third reading involved noting descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments to explore participant responses. Step 3 focused on identifying emergent themes and reorganizing data accordingly. Step 4 involved listing themes and determining clusters. For Step 5, steps 1 to 4 were repeated for two additional transcripts. The final step involved cross-case analysis to identify patterns and unique observations. In addition, rigor was established through auditing.

## Result

### Participant Profiles

*Marin.* Marin, 53, a transwoman, runs a hair salon and is a community leader. While she identified as female from childhood, Marin delayed hormone therapy until adulthood owing to health concerns. She studied cosmetology after high school to support her family. Marin returned to hairdressing after working in Japan from 1991 until 2006. Her daily routine includes client visits, activities within the scope of her work as a community leader, and family leisure time.

*Shandy.* Shandy, 50, a transwoman, acknowledged her trans identity in high school and began her transition through feminine expression. Health and financial difficulties disrupted hormone therapy at age 40. She worked in factories and freelanced as a makeup artist after dropping out of college due to financial issues. She lives with her sister and family and uses her talents to empower other younger transgenders in the beauty industry.

*Sam.* Sam, a 54-year-old self-identified transwoman, resides with her legally adopted daughter. She acknowledged her trans identity in the fourth grade and began transitioning in her late 30s. She is a lawyer but now views her work more as volunteerism. Sam holds a bachelor's degree in communication and has worked as a researcher and as a teacher. She enjoys preparing healthy meals and spending time with her daughter.

### Emergent Themes

The study examined older transgender individuals' views on aging and its effect on well-being. Initially probing two research questions, four themes emerged. While not directly addressing the research questions, the first two themes are included for their contextual significance in participants' perceptions

of aging and its well-being implications. The first theme includes participants' diverse experiences shaping their views on aging, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. The second theme involves participants' insights on their experiences, offering context to their views on aging. The third and fourth themes directly address the research questions, focusing on participants' perceptions of aging and its effects on well-being.

**Table 1**  
*Master Table of Themes*

Area	Theme	Category	Frequency
Participants' experiences	Encountering Prejudice/Discrimination	SOGIE leads to microaggression	3
		SOGIE is a sin	3
	Being in good relationships	SOGIE limits opportunities	2
			3
		Civic and Community Engagements	3
Participants' insights into their experiences	Helping others is a necessity Being Trans means looking the part Being Trans is Being Human Transgender empowerment is imperative		3
			3
			3
			3
RQ#1: Participants' perspectives on aging	Aging necessitates	Financial Planning	3
		Good Physical Health	3
		Relationship Stability	2
		Aging is a Time for Growth	2
RQ#2: Impact of aging on	Aging brings about Happiness		3



## Participants' Experiences

***SOGIE leads to microaggression.*** Participants acknowledged that they frequently encounter microaggressions due to their SOGIE, in this case, their being transgender. Marin faced public mockery solely due to her gender identity. Shandy encountered ridicule in women-only restrooms, male-dominated workplaces, and public transportation. Sam endured false rumors and derogatory remarks from peers and even a former law professor. Sam emphasized that transgender individuals face unique challenges beyond heterosexual understanding.

***SOGIE is a sin.*** Misunderstandings and limited awareness of diversity issues contribute to challenges faced by transgender individuals. Marin, Shandy, and Sam have encountered derogatory remarks labeling them as sinners because of their queer identity, same-sex relationships, or gender transition.

***SOGIE limits opportunities.*** SOGIE-related discrimination hampers opportunities for transgender individuals like Shandy and Sam. Shandy faced ridicule and pressure to conform to heteronormative fashion standards at her factory job, while her limited qualifications restricted her employment prospects. Sam foresees ongoing marginalization and unequal treatment. She credited a SOGIE ordinance in her area for potentially protecting her from being held in contempt, expressing that not all transgenders are able to express their authentic selves.

***Being in good relationships.*** Participants stressed the importance of healthy family relationships. Marin prioritizes her family and is content with her long-term partner, who respects and supports her dedication to them. Shandy initially faced family opposition to her transgender identity but eventually gained acceptance. She reciprocates her family's support by caring for her parents. Sam takes pride in legally adopting her daughter, a rare privilege in the Philippines. Their close relationship resembles that of two open friends.

***Civic and Community Engagements.*** Participants highlighted the importance of meaningful engagements. Marin leads community efforts, addressing government shortcomings within her community, Sam volunteers for NGOs, and Shandy manages household chores for her family alongside freelance work.

## Insights about Experiences

*Helping others is a necessity.* Participants exhibited a dedication to helping others: Marin understands and shares in others' struggles, using her own experiences to help them, which brings her deep satisfaction; Shandy endeavors to inspire younger transgender individuals by sharing her experiences and guiding them through difficulties; and Sam is driven to influence and motivate others, confronting stereotypes about the intelligence and education of transgender individuals. Their civic engagement and personal experiences likely serve as catalysts for their altruism.

*Being Transgender means Looking the Part.* Participants shared insights reflecting their transgender experiences, notably regarding microaggressions. Marin highlighted the effort she invests in her appearance to avoid being bullied, while Shandy feels compelled to maintain her beauty to mitigate criticism. Similarly, Sam sees presenting as a woman as a form of resistance against societal norms. These responses suggest a common theme of using physical transition to counteract experiences of microaggression.

*Being Transgender is to be Human.* Transgender individuals are deserving of dignity and respect. Marin perceives her identity and lifestyle as not sinful, viewing herself as a creation of God, akin to others. Shandy similarly believes transgender individuals are ordinary people with emotions like everyone else. Sam compared transgender experiences to a rainbow, emphasizing shared humanity over differences. Despite discrimination, participants viewed being transgender as integral to humanity, likely influenced by personal experiences of prejudice.

*Transgender empowerment is imperative.* Participants advocated for transgender empowerment to address challenges and injustices. Marin emphasized resilience against prejudice, while Shandy uses platforms like beauty pageants for social justice. Sam promotes awareness and education for queer individuals. Rooted in their transgender identity and altruism, they seek recognition, respect, and a voice for all transgender individuals.

## Perceptions of Aging

*Aging necessitates Financial Preparations.* Transgender individuals, grappling with their gender identities, face aging-related challenges, including financial concerns. Marin stressed the importance of early financial planning to avoid future hardships. Shandy's savings decreased during the pandemic due to

reduced freelance opportunities, raising concerns about future expenses. Sam acknowledged her parents' financial privilege and empathizes with those less fortunate. These insights reflect their altruistic tendencies and past financial struggles, driving the need for financial preparedness.

***Aging necessitates Good Physical Health.*** Participants recognized the vital importance of good health within the context of aging. Both Marin and Shandy have recently been diagnosed with high blood pressure and Sam has just recently controlled her blood sugar. Shandy viewed aging as a process of surrender, where the body weakens and beauty fades. This may come from their insight that being transgender means looking the part - in this case, being more feminine.

***Aging necessitates Relationship Stability.*** Cultivating and maintaining stable and supportive relationships becomes increasingly important as transgenders age. Marin and Shandy shared concerns about their future care and support; Marin has a persistent fear that her family may neglect her in her later years, and despite experiencing emotional stability in her romantic relationship, she also harbors an underlying fear that they might eventually break up. Shandy worries about who will care for her in the future. This has led to looking for a companion who can provide care and support as she ages.

***Aging is a Time for Growth.*** Participants viewed aging as a period of personal growth and ongoing development. Shandy sees it as a reflection of life achievements, while Sam regards it as an opportunity for continued learning and pursuit of new goals, emphasizing the importance of passion and curiosity throughout the aging process.

## **Impact of Aging on Well-being**

***Aging brings about Happiness.*** Despite their experiences, Marin, Shandy, and Sam all viewed aging as a source of happiness even amidst challenges. Shandy and Sam expressed happiness regarding their physical transition and witnessing younger transgenders making strides. This perspective may stem from their belief in the transgender identity as a facet of humanity, the significance of transgender empowerment, the importance of financial, physical, and relational well-being, and their perception of aging as a period of development and transformation.

***Aging brings about Gratitude.*** For Marin and Shandy, they felt that they have a lot to thank for now that they are older. They mentioned being thankful for

graces that have been given to them by their God and they are also generally thankful for being able to meet their daily needs and for being with their families.

## Discussion

This study identified four significant themes which revolved around how the participants' life experiences have influenced their views on aging, their insights concerning their overall well-being, their perceptions of the aging process, and the effects of aging on their well-being.

### Participants' Experiences and Influence on Aging

Participants' views on aging reflect a spectrum of experiences, encompassing negative encounters like prejudice and discrimination, as well as positive ones such as supportive relationships, self-acceptance, and community involvement.

*Encountering Prejudice/Discrimination.* Transgender individuals' experiences of prejudice and discrimination is confirmed in Su et al. (2016) on the mental health disparities of transgender and non-transgender individuals. Transgender individuals encounter significantly higher levels of prejudice and stigma than other minorities. This was further confirmed in a meta-analysis on lived experiences of transgender individuals where transgenders face discrimination in a variety of settings, including personal relationships, public settings, and facilities, and even within the queer community (Moolchaem et al., 2015). A 2016 study involving Filipino transgender women's experiences on the Metropolitan Railway System revealed that they encounter various forms of discrimination, including overt staring and verbal harassment (Alejandro Silan Mary Anne F Rivera Loraine T Chulipa, 2016).

The position of religious organizations can influence trans-prejudice, as evidenced by participants who were labeled as sinners due to their transgender identity. This aligns with prior findings suggesting that religions often correlate with various prejudices. The connection between religious affiliation and trans-prejudice may stem from the perception that the transgender identity contradicts their religion's teachings (Kumble et al., 2020). Despite many religions espousing values of love and acceptance, prejudice against transgenders persist due to adherence to doctrines opposing gender variant behavior.

Transgenders may face prejudice and marginalization due to a lack of SOGIE diversity awareness and acceptance. Two participants said that their SOGIE limits their career options or expression. This is consistent with studies highlighting the experiences of transgender women who had been advised by recruiters that they would only be hired if they presented as men by cutting their hair short, wearing men's clothing, and acting in stereotypically masculine ways (Moolchaem et al., 2015). Sam sees the transgender community as one of the most creative and employable groups, a statement congruent with the studies of Finkenauer et al., (2012) and White Hughto & Reisner (2018) that transgender individuals exhibit tremendous creativity and resiliency.

***Good Relationships and Acceptance.*** Studies have found that while transgender individuals report being stigmatized by society, their relational partners (e.g., family members, romantic partners) served as sources of comfort and boosted identity in social roles (Lewis et al., 2021); while Moolchaem et al. (2015) contend that both individual learned behaviors and a connection to community influence their ability to cope with adversity. The findings of this study align with the positive social relationships reported by the participants. Marin's family is accepting of her, and she is in a stable relationship with a partner who is supportive of her and her family, Shandy was eventually accepted by her family despite her parents' initial reservations, and Sam and her daughter have a positive and open relationship.

***Civic and Community Engagement.*** Existing literature indicates that older transgender individuals exhibit higher levels of civic engagement, with increased political self-efficacy correlating with greater political involvement (Billard, 2021). This aligns with the current study's findings, wherein participants are active in community or political spheres: Marin serves as a community leader, Shandy mentors young transgender in the beauty industry, and Sam volunteers in non-governmental organizations. Billard (2021) states that higher education correlates with increased civic and political engagement among transgender individuals. Although only one participant in this study has a university degree, the others remain engaged in community service, possibly influenced by past experiences of discrimination and adversity, alongside a commitment to prevent similar challenges for others.

## **Participants' Insights in Relation to Their well-being**

Participants' insights regarding their well-being can be categorized into three key aspects: the importance of helping others, the belief that being transgender

is an inherent part of being human, and the need to empower both the transgender individual and the transgender community.

**Helping Others.** Although literature is sparse on prosocial behaviors of older transgenders, a study on early trauma and its associations with altruistic attitudes and behaviors on young adults revealed that transgender and gender-diverse individuals' early experiences of trauma may be negatively associated with altruism (Prior et al., 2021). Literature is limited at best, but this appears to be incongruous with the findings of this study, wherein all participants frequently engage in acts of support and advocacy by assisting others in the queer community and beyond to make society more inclusive and accepting. The participants' motivation to help others appears to be associated with their previous encounters with difficult situations and their desire for meaningful experiences; helping others makes Marin happy, Shandy wants to inspire transgender teens, and Sam wants to influence and touch the lives of other transgenders.

**What it means to be Transgender.** Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping human identity, with the assertion that non-stereotypical gender expressions are diverse and should not be seen as negative (Moolchaem et al., 2015 as cited in Safer et al., 2016). The belief that being transgender is fundamentally human was echoed by all participants, emphasizing their equal entitlement to rights, aspirations, and intrinsic value. Despite this, transgender individuals often encounter negative treatment and societal marginalization due to their non-conformity to binary gender norms, leading to complex social oppressions (Moolchaem et al., 2015).

Being transgender involves not only identifying as such but also striving to physically resemble the characteristics typically associated with one's preferred gender. Participants emphasized the importance of physical transformation in their transitions, including wearing dresses, using makeup, and adopting feminine mannerisms. Shandy embraces a more feminine appearance and behavior as part of her transition but also challenges conventional beauty standards in the Philippines. While she doesn't conform to the idealized image of fair skin, straight hair, and a slim body, she does desire admiration from others. A study on the impact of cis-normative beauty standards on transwomen revealed that these societal standards may not significantly affect the personal views of beauty. However, they may exert a strong influence on how transgender women expressed themselves in terms of

beauty (Monteiro & Poulakis, 2019). For the participants, they may have felt compelled to present themselves as more feminine to pass as their identified gender or to prevent being misgendered.

***Transgender Empowerment.*** Empowerment increases a person's options, opportunities, and action. A study by M.S. & John (2020) on the empowerment of successful transwomen in Kerala highlighted empowerment as a process of identifying and accepting of transgender identities, overcoming issues with identity as well as challenges experienced, and achieving goals and dreams - and having become empowered, they become inspirations for other transgenders. For the participants, prioritizing the empowerment of themselves and other transgender individuals is paramount, whether it involves combating transprejudice, advocating for transgender rights, or striving for respect and recognition. The desire for self-empowerment and the empowerment of other transgenders is evident in their responses. The importance of empowerment may be linked to the participants' prior experiences with prejudice and discrimination, such as their responses on how their gender identity has at one time or another limited authentic self-expression. Empowering others may also be connected to their desire for purposeful and meaningful civic and community engagements.

## **Participants' Perceptions of Aging**

Like cisgender older adults, those who are transgender face challenges and opportunities. Many of the challenges participants experienced revolved around financial, health, and relational concerns. Aging is also seen as a time for growth.

***Financial, Health, and Relational Concerns.*** Participants' emphasis on financial security aligns with research indicating that aging transgender individuals are increasingly vulnerable to financial challenges due to health issues (Adan et al., 2021). Common health concerns among older transgender individuals, which diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular problems, and osteoarthritis, further exacerbate these financial worries (Adan et al., 2021). Marin and Shandy, disclosed diagnosis of hypertension, while Sam managed her glucose levels. Shandy's concern about maintaining a youthful appearance through cosmetics reflects broader societal pressures, potentially influenced by cultural norms emphasizing Western beauty standards (Singson, 2017). This concern parallels findings suggesting that transgender women who conform more closely to feminine standards are more readily accepted in gendered environments (White

& Jenkins, 2017). While the referenced study focused on young transgender individuals, similar dynamics likely affect older transgender women.

Additionally, one participant mentioned the need to financially prepare for the future - a belief shared by 61.1% of 1,963 transgender research participants who stated having retirement plans (Witten, 2015). The percentage of participants who hold this belief was higher for those who were older than 30 years old.

Relationship stability is vital for the participants. As with concerns on looking more feminine, concerns about family relationships and who among members of the family can care for them when they are older, illustrate the Filipino culture. Filial piety and the obligation to care are ingrained among Filipinos and this is seen in caregiving practices (Cabalquinto, 2018). Thus, like cisgender family members, it is expected for participants to think about needing good relationships to facilitate being cared for in the future. It is possibly highlighted by two of the participants more because both do not have children of their own, and one of them also do not have a long-term partner as of writing. One participant, proud of caring for her elderly parents, stressed the significance of caregiving. The results of this study on how aging necessitates financial and relational stability aligns with a report by the Movement Advancement Project & SAGE (2017) that identifies economic security, positive social connections, and wellness as crucial components for successful aging.

*Time for Growth.* Congruent with their recognition that aging requires financial preparations, good health, and stable relationships, participants made changes in their socializations, such as mentoring the younger queer community, advocating for transgender empowerment, and generally helping other individuals.

Existing literature explains participants' shift in behavior as a form of generativity (Bower et al., 2021), which to the current researchers' surprise, is possibly a response to their past experiences of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Literature shows that older queer use their experiences of micro and macro aggressions to respond in a manner that allows them to contribute to society and leave a footprint on others' lives (Bower et al., 2021). This process begins with early experiences of unfavorable treatment or external oppression, e.g., microaggressions from the community (Chazan & Baldwin, 2021). It proceeds to internalizing the external oppression, then to working through and unlearning this internalization, accepting themselves, and finally engaging in generativity. Chazan & Baldwin (2021) results describe the older queer people



who used their own experience of aggressions to inspire them to help younger generations. Although unexplored in the current study, because it is outside its scope, when themes under participants' experiences, insights, and perceptions of aging as a time for growth, are thread together, this process is visible among them. It speaks of a type of redemption, where participants turn past oppressive experiences into something good, allowing them to rise above.

### **Impact of Aging on Well-being**

Participants' experiences, insights, and perceptions of aging coalesce to contribute to their perceived impact of aging on their well-being.

*Happiness.* Contrary to previous studies suggesting higher psychological risks and stress among transgender individuals compared to non-transgender counterparts (de Vries et al., 2020; J.W. & C.A., 2017), recent findings reveal that older transgender individuals generally report satisfaction with their lives. This echoes the results of a recent study indicating elevated levels of life satisfaction among older transgender individuals (Grupp et al., 2023), as well as the positive outlook observed in Witten (2015) research on transgender participants. Various factors contribute to participants' happiness, including physical transition and witnessing younger queer individuals achieving educational milestones. For some, the process of physical transition is viewed as a rewarding experience leading to an enhanced quality of life (Drydakis, 2021; JASMINE, 2014). Additionally, research indicates that clarity in one's self-concept correlates with happiness (de Vries et al., 2020), and participants express clarity regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity, viewing being transgender as an integral aspect of their humanity.

Happiness brought about by seeing how younger queer individuals are achieving more is likely connected to participants' insight regarding transgender empowerment as imperative, and their perspective that aging is a time for growth. Self-empowerment can facilitate personal mastery, or a belief that one has personal control over their life circumstances, is crucial to the happiness of queer people (Greene & Britton, 2015). While the participants believed that empowerment among transgender is essential, one participant, i.e., Sam is especially happy that this empowerment is evident among the younger queer community. To boot, personal mastery is present in all participants as illustrated by their engagement in community and civic responsibilities, whether these activities are work related, family related, or volunteerism. Self-empowerment can also point to growth, as more and more people become

aware of who the queer are, what they are pushing for, and what they can contribute to society.

**Gratitude.** Older transgenders are grateful to a higher being for graces for themselves and their families and support in overcoming problems. This thankfulness is expected given the participants' cultural background. Filipinos are religious, and two of this study's participants express this gratitude.

Gratitude for family and overcoming problems is linked to participants' views of aging as requiring financial preparation, good health, and relationship stability. Participants know that financial preparation is essential for health and retirement. In the same way, one participant needs a long-term partner to care for her in old age and assist her financially as she fully transitions. This is aligned with research stating that aside from healthcare needs common to both transgender and cisgender individuals, one healthcare need of older transgender is access to gender-affirming hormone treatment (Catlett et al., 2023).

Interestingly, despite microaggression, participants were grateful to a higher power. This may be due to being currently financially secure as well having an accepting and supportive family, since research shows that families of queer individuals who provide warmth and safety can bring about positive outcomes (Greene & Britton, 2015).

## Conclusion

This study identifies four main themes: participants' experiences shaping views on aging, insights gained, perceptions of aging, and its impact on well-being. Transgender individuals' diverse experiences influence their perspectives on aging and well-being. Recommendations are provided for both macro and micro levels.

This study shows that transgender people face widespread prejudice and discrimination, resulting in social isolation, economic inequality, and limited opportunities. To prevent discrimination and promote fairness, legal safeguards and education and awareness programs are needed. Transgender people need culturally sensitive physical and mental health care. Employment discrimination and poor retirement savings sometimes leave older transgender people financially vulnerable. Insufficient legal protections can impede access to necessary care and support as they age, while preserving their gender identity and dignity poses challenges in long-term care settings. While the Philippines is recognized as one of Southeast Asia's queer-friendlier nations,

comprehensive policies promoting and safeguarding the rights of queer individuals are limited in scope and awareness. Urgent legislative action is needed to address discriminatory laws, but the SOGIE bill has languished in Congress for over two decades. Queer people are vulnerable in some places due to the rejection of anti-discrimination measures, therefore more inclusive policies are needed to ensure equitable treatment and a diverse and tolerant community. This study found that transgender people's health and well-being are greatly affected by social relationships and support. While this may not ring true for the entire transgender community; family, peers, and community are crucial for supporting transgenders to deal with the unique problems in their lives. Positive familial, relationship, and community support for older transgenders have numerous advantages, including improved mental and emotional health, mitigating financial challenges, enhancing overall quality of life, and aiding in late-in-life and end-of-life decision-making. Such support is essential for promoting dignity, and well-being in older transgenders. Transgender empowerment improves mental health, reduces discrimination, raises awareness and acceptance, builds supportive communities, promotes self-acceptance and self-esteem, and inspires positive role models. Promoting the well-being of older transgender individuals is crucial for their overall health and happiness. Encouraging the creation of support groups and communities for this demographic is essential. These spaces offer emotional support, foster a sense of belonging, and provide opportunities for social interaction, contributing to their well-being.

The study of older transgenders has shown their experiences and problems and highlighted the importance of social community support and legal protection to maintain their well-being and dignity. Future research and education on transgender experiences are needed to shape macro and micro policies and practices that protect the health and rights of this community. The researchers acknowledge that the unique positive experiences of participants do not automatically translate to experiences of other transgenders because people have layers of contexts surrounding their lives and respond to these in varied manners. As such, future research can explore maladaptive functioning and lifestyle as a response to challenging life circumstances, particularly because even in the current research, challenges were also experienced by participants. But the way these challenges shaped their lives was more in a positive direction.

At an individual level, queer individuals who share the same characteristics as the participants of the study, either in terms of developmental stage or in terms of experiences, can learn from the results of this study how to

live authentic and empowered lives.

Older transgender people face unique obstacles, further complicated by the typical issues of getting older. Despite these adversities, they exhibit remarkable resilience, appreciation, and a determination to support the next generation of transgender individuals.

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