

A Qualitative Study of Hiring Manager Perceptions Toward Trans-Inclusive Recruitment

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i6/28447>

Published Date: 20 June 2026

Abstract

Background: Despite global focus on diversity, transgender inclusivity in Malaysian healthcare organizations is limited due to cultural, religious, and legal barriers. This study examines hiring managers' willingness to hire transgender individuals and investigates organizational readiness, current inclusion practices, and challenges in establishing transgender-inclusive policies. **Methods:** A qualitative research design involved semi-structured interviews with seven hiring managers engaged in recruitment and talent management. Data were collected through purposive sampling and analyzed via thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and managerial perspectives. **Results:** The findings reveal inadequate organizational readiness for transgender inclusion, attributed to a lack of formal policies, insufficient awareness and training, cultural resistance, and ambiguity regarding legal protections. Although many participants personally support inclusive employment, they doubt their organizations' ability to implement such changes and cite societal reluctance as a major obstacle. **Conclusion:** The study provides empirical insights into transgender inclusion in Malaysia's healthcare sector, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive inclusion policies, targeted awareness initiatives, and proactive leadership engagement to foster sustainable workplace practices.

Keywords: Hiring Manager Perspectives, Transgender Inclusion, Transgender-Inclusive Employment Policies, Healthcare Distribution Sector

Introduction

Cultural norms and legal constraints in Malaysia's healthcare distribution industry hinder transgender-inclusive employment policies, with 62% of transgender respondents facing employment discrimination, according to SUHAKAM. Comparatively, protective legislation in Western countries illustrates the benefits of inclusive labor markets, highlighting the necessity for Malaysia to enhance legal protections and workplace policies.

Byrne et al. (2024) emphasize the necessity of collaboration between government agencies and transgender communities for effective reform to bridge policy gaps, increase participation, and mitigate discrimination. While inclusive policies and diversity training are acknowledged as essential for organizational development, Malaysian firms remain behind their Western peers in these practices (Luhur et al., 2020). This shortfall in Malaysia is evident in its low Global Acceptance Index ranking, which is linked to limited societal acceptance of LGBTQIA+ communities (Luhur et al., 2020). Additionally, inadequate institutional protection and social exclusion contribute to increased employment vulnerability and marginalization of transgender individuals (Abdul Hadi Said et al. (2021). Limited awareness and education about transgender-related challenges among the Malaysian workforce are influenced by national health guidelines and religious discourses (Abdul Hadi Said et al., 2021). This context leads to systemic discrimination with serious socioeconomic impacts, as around 80% of transgender women are involved in high-risk jobs, notably sex work (Abdul Hadi Said et al., 2021). Transgender individuals in Malaysia face significant challenges regarding access to healthcare benefits, contrasting with Western countries where multinational corporations offer extensive gender-affirming healthcare. The lack of inclusive medical insurance from Malaysian employers intensifies these barriers to essential healthcare access (Barmania & Aljunid, 2017; Abdul Hadi Said et al., 2021). Existing Malaysian labour and legal frameworks provide insufficient protection for transgender individuals, leading to ongoing workplace mistreatment and exclusion due to vague legislation (Haniff et al., 2021). Scholars note that entrenched religious and cultural norms in South Asian societies in Malaysia contribute to the marginalization of transgender communities (Suleman et al., 2023). Traditional workplace cultures often overlook diverse gender identities, perpetuating stigma and discrimination against transgender employees.

Discriminatory organizational climates harm recruitment, career advancement, and retention of transgender workers, according to empirical evidence (Ramalingam et al., 2024). Malaysia's diversity and inclusion policy for transgender employees is limited, facing persistent discrimination under both Shariah and secular laws. Current policies are seen as ineffective due to a lack of clear implementation strategies and failure to tackle the underlying causes of discrimination (Byrne et al., 2024). Transgender women encounter barriers to formal employment, including discriminatory state practices, unsafe working environments, and societal prejudice, as noted by Liaw and Tharumaraj (2023). Organizations also face difficulties in creating inclusive workplace practices for transgender employees, largely due to a lack of empirical research on the outcomes of transgender-inclusive employment policies.

The exclusion of transgender individuals from formal labor markets highlights significant issues in social sciences, particularly concerning social stratification, organizational equity, and human rights. While Western studentship often assumes a progressive legal context, marginalized groups in non-Western settings face entrenched institutional dualism. This study examines the effectiveness of decentralized corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives within states with conflicting legal systems, like Malaysia's dual civil and Shariah law framework. This research explores the healthcare distribution sector, examining how multinational corporations, despite being guided by global human rights standards, navigate strict local cultural, religious, and legal constraints. This issue impacts broader labor dynamics and offers insights into state bias that marginalizes groups, pushing many into

precarious informal economies like sex work. By analyzing hiring managers as "institutional gatekeepers," the study reveals how societal prejudices at a macro level translate into workplace discrimination, connecting structural sociology with organizational behavior.

To address existing gaps in the literature, this study pursues the following objectives:

- (1) to examine how transgender employees perceive the influence of clearly articulated transgender-inclusive policies on their job satisfaction and overall workplace experience;
- (2) to explore the role of organizational inclusivity in shaping the support mechanisms and lived experiences of transgender employees in the workplace; and
- (3) to investigate the workplace challenges encountered by transgender employees and the extent to which managerial support influences their job satisfaction.

In 2024, a study was conducted to achieve objectives within the healthcare distribution sector of Malaysian multinational corporations (MNCs).

Literature Review

Transgender rights in Malaysia are influenced by both civil law and Islamic (Shariah) legal systems. Although civil law provides some protections for transgender individuals, actual enforcement of these rights is often weak, especially in scenarios needing strong institutional support (Ramli et al., 2024). Shariah law may impose additional restrictions, complicating workforce participation for transgender individuals and hindering their social and occupational integration without clear legal protections (Wei et al., 2012). Legal constraints affect both structure and symbolism, hindering the effectiveness of progressive employment policies and shaping managerial attitudes. This study examines the legal, organizational, and managerial factors influencing transgender inclusion in the workplace.

Influence of Organizational Inclusivity on Transgender Employees' Workplace Experiences

Organizational inclusivity is vital for the support systems and experiences of transgender employees, influencing workplace culture. Inclusive practices and policies indicate a commitment to diversity and enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment among LGBTQ+ individuals, including transgender workers (Bozani et al., 2020; Hur, 2020). Diversity initiatives lacking genuine integration into organizational norms and practices tend to be ineffective. Merely acknowledging diversity without reinforcing inclusion through operational structures fails to recognize employees as valued members. On the other hand, implementing inclusive practices like structured diversity training and formal policies enhances employee engagement and satisfaction (Shaari et al., 2020). Collectively, the findings emphasize the critical role of fostering inclusivity in organizational culture for the support of transgender employees. Research from Malaysian businesses shows that effective diversity practices enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Madhavedi et al., 2024). Creating inclusive workplaces helps mitigate gender-based inequalities, supporting transgender employees and allowing them to achieve their professional potential, ultimately benefiting both employee well-being and organizational performance.

RQ1: How does the level of organizational inclusivity influence the support and experiences of transgender employees in the workplace?

Perceived Impact of Transgender-Inclusive Policies on Job Satisfaction and Workplace Experience

Anti-discrimination policies are essential for promoting affirmative action, increasing workforce diversity, and supporting inclusive employment for transgender individuals. Organizations need clear and enforceable policies to ensure inclusion, which, when effectively communicated, can prevent workplace conflicts and improve overall organizational satisfaction (Davis & Yeung, 2022). Inclusive policy frameworks for transgender employees should include non-sexist workplace practices, access to gender-affirming healthcare, and strong anti-discrimination measures. In Malaysia, legal complexities limit protections for transgender workers, highlighting the necessity for proactive organizational policies to address these institutional gaps. Empirical research indicates that gender-sensitive non-discrimination policies correlate with increased job satisfaction and lower turnover risk for transgender employees (Elias et al., 2018). Nonetheless, in Malaysia, enduring cultural and legal obstacles hinder employment opportunities for transgender individuals, underscoring challenges to inclusive labor market participation.

RQ2: How do transgender employees perceive the impact of clear transgender-inclusive policies on their job satisfaction and overall workplace experience?

Transgender employees navigate workplace challenges related to their gender identity, and the impact of managerial support on their job satisfaction.

Managerial support significantly enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment for marginalized groups, particularly transgender employees. Research shows that positive supervisor-employee relationships and inclusive diversity policies improve workplace experiences for transgender workers (Hur, 2020; Jones, 2023). In Malaysia, cultural and social norms heavily influence managerial attitudes towards transgender employees, impacting workplace climate and inclusion. Managers' support for these employees is often tied to their understanding of gender diversity, affecting inclusive practices. Research indicates that transgender workers experience greater job satisfaction when management promotes equality and fairness (Kleintop, 2019). The implementation of inclusive policies and recognition of diverse gender identities can improve workplace dynamics and employee well-being. For example, Syed and Tariq (2017) highlighted a Malaysian healthcare organization that adopted transgender-inclusive management training to promote a more inclusive culture through leadership development initiatives. The programme enhanced managerial understanding of transgender employees' needs, leading to increased job satisfaction and a more positive organizational culture characterized by supportive management. The relationship between job satisfaction and sustained supervisory support is critical, especially from managers who appreciate diversity in the Malaysian context. Empirical evidence underscores the significance of supervisory support in creating inclusive work environments for transgender employees, marking it as essential for workplace well-being (Wahab et al., 2024).

RQ3: How do transgender employees navigate workplace challenges related to their gender identity, and the impact of managerial support on their job satisfaction?

Critical Research Gaps and Framework

Recent research in organizational sociology reveals that gender-diverse individuals, particularly transgender employees, face significant workplace barriers including minority stress from hostile environments, leading to healthcare avoidance and professional

withdrawal. Cancela, Stutterheim, and Uitdewilligen (2025) highlight these issues globally, while Ladwig (2023) points out that without active support from mid-level managers, formal diversity initiatives remain ineffective and merely performative.

Sharma (2025) identifies a gap in understanding how hiring managers operate in culturally conservative and legally restrictive emerging economies. The study reveals that "managerial hesitancy" arises from fears of societal backlash and a lack of culturally sensitive guidance. It builds on global research by Ladwig (2023) and Cancela et al. (2025), focusing on Southeast Asia, and contests the notion that corporate policy solely influences workplace behavior. It shows that even empathetic Malaysian hiring managers face paralysis due to legal ambiguities and societal taboos.

Malaysia's dual legal framework of civil and Shariah law significantly affects transgender individuals, offering broader civil protections while Shariah law may allow gender-based discrimination. This coexistence creates legal ambiguity that complicates their understanding of rights and access to protection, impacting sociocultural acceptance and limiting their participation in the global workforce. Wei et al. (2012) highlight Malaysia as a significant case for exploring transgender issues in countries with secular and religious legal frameworks. They emphasize the need for more empirical research to deepen understanding and develop culturally responsive strategies for workplace inclusion. Specifically, additional studies on transgender workers in Malaysia's healthcare distribution sector are necessary to pinpoint sector-specific challenges and guide evidence-based policy interventions for inclusive work environments. Figure 1 depicts the navigation of workplace challenges by transgender employees through applicable theoretical frameworks.



Fig.1: Diagram illustrates the experiences of transgender employees in addressing workplace challenges.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model depicting how transgender employees navigate workplace challenges by integrating various theoretical perspectives within the Malaysian healthcare context. This multimodal approach combines Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Strategic Choice Theory, and Organizational Culture Theory to address the complexities of transgender representation and inclusion, ultimately guiding effective diversity and equality practices. The model emphasizes that social categorization among employees and managers can lead to prejudice and discrimination against marginalized groups. This perspective highlights the role of organizational culture and social norms in shaping how managers perceive and respond to transgender employees (Krithi & Pai, 2021). In Malaysia, managers following traditional gender norms may inadvertently perpetuate workplace bias by favoring employees who conform to dominant expectations (Syed & Tariq, 2017). Incorporating Intersectionality Theory alongside Social Identity Theory enhances the understanding of bias in recruitment, training, and promotion, particularly for transgender individuals from low-income backgrounds who face compounded discrimination

based on gender identity and socioeconomic status (Fehrenbacher & Patel, 2020). This theoretical framework enhances understanding of biases and constraints affecting transgender inclusion in Malaysia. Intersectionality theory builds on Social Identity Theory (SIT), highlighting how overlapping disadvantages impact transgender employees' experiences. Organizational policies for gender diversity may inadequately address the challenges that transgender individuals face, especially those in marginalized groups. Effective policy implementation must consider these intersecting identities to develop inclusive measures that reflect the diverse realities of transgender employees.

Strategic Choice Theory (SCT) highlights the importance of managerial agency in promoting gender-inclusive practices in Malaysia's healthcare distribution sector, facilitating the implementation of gender-neutral facilities and non-discrimination policies (Syed & Tariq, 2017). SCT suggests that organizations with supportive management are more inclined to implement diversity initiatives and inclusive policies for effective leadership retention. However, its limitation is the insufficient attention to contextual constraints and societal influences on decision-making. Thus, combining SCT with theories that consider legal, cultural, and institutional pressures offers a deeper insight into strategic decisions affecting transgender inclusion in organizations.

Organizational culture theory highlights the importance of inclusive environments in improving job-related well-being and overall welfare for transgender employees (Sakhrekar Associate et al., 2021). Kleintop (2019) highlights the important role of organizational commitment to equality and diversity policies in tackling gender dysphoria issues at work. Organizations that promote equality are urged to adopt concrete inclusion measures, like gender-neutral restrooms and diversity sensitivity training, to create a supportive environment (Syed & Tariq, 2017). Organizational culture theory may not sufficiently address the evolving nature of workplace cultures, especially when cultural norms are changing. This highlights the necessity for ongoing assessment and regular reviews to ensure that practices meet the needs of transgender employees and that inclusion efforts result in meaningful change. This study explores transgender inclusion in Malaysia's healthcare sector using an integrated theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality Theory, Strategic Choice Theory, and Organizational Culture Theory. These perspectives provide insights into organizational processes such as managerial decision-making, cultural norms, and the effects of personal bias related to gender and race discrimination.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative constructivist research paradigm, positing that reality is socially constructed through individuals lived experiences and interactions (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). Knowledge is understood as relativistic and context-dependent, arising from the social and personal realities of participants. A qualitative research design was utilized to investigate managerial perspectives on transgender inclusion in a Malaysian healthcare distribution organization. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews, providing participants the opportunity to express detailed views and reflect on biases and decision-making processes concerning workplace inclusion. An inductive approach shaped the analysis, allowing insights to develop from participants' experiences rather than using predefined categories. This study explored hiring managers' perspectives on transgender employment practices, utilizing purposive sampling to engage participants involved in

recruitment and diversity management. Focusing on the managers' roles in shaping policies and workplace culture, the study included seven managers, sufficient for data saturation as subsequent interviews provided limited new information (Guest et al., 2020). In line with qualitative research standards, the sample size was kept flexible, expecting between seven and twelve participants until saturation was reached (Sarfo et al., 2021). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and interpreting recurring patterns. The process included familiarization with the data, coding, and theme development, aligned with research objectives and theoretical frameworks. This approach was suitable for examining complex social processes, such as transgender inclusion in the workplace, enabling rich interpretations of participants' experiences collected through semi-structured interviews that addressed sensitive issues flexibly. The interview guide addressed key topics such as the organization's transgender diversity policies, hiring managers' views on transgender candidates, and assessments of current diversity and non-discrimination practices. The questions were designed to be broad to foster open, reflective answers while staying aligned with the study's goals. Sample interview questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Semi-structured interview

Question No.	Theme	Interview Question
Q1	Organizational Approach to Transgender Inclusion	How would you describe your organization's overall approach to diversity and inclusion, particularly with regard to transgender employees?
Q2	Hiring Attitudes and Perceptions Managers' and	How do you personally perceive transgender candidates applying for positions in your organization? Do you perceive any specific challenges or opportunities associated with hiring transgender individuals?
Q3	Effectiveness of Diversity and Non-Discrimination Policies	In your view, how effective are the current diversity and non-discrimination policies in fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment for transgender employees?
Q4	Recruitment and Workplace Challenges Integration	What challenges, if any, have you encountered in recruiting or integrating transgender employees into the organization?
Q5	Role of Managerial Support	Based on your experience, how important is managerial support in creating and sustaining an inclusive environment for transgender employees?
Q6	Socio-Cultural and Legal Influences	In your opinion, are there social, cultural, or legal factors in Malaysia that influence your ability to recruit talent or provide appropriate workplace accommodations for transgender employees?
Q7	Future Directions for Inclusion	How can hiring managers play a more active role in promoting and sustaining positive cultural change to support transgender inclusion in the workplace?

Ethical considerations

The study requires approval from the university's ethics review board for compliance with academic standards, and it will not utilize any unpublished data from any else. All information is sourced from public sources to ensure the protection of the intellectual property and proprietary secrets. The study ensures protection for participants and the institution by

adhering to institutional and regulatory requirements while maintaining credibility with both regulators and academic peers.

Results and Discussion

The respondent profile shows a gender distribution of 57% male and 43% female, with 86% having over 15 years of industry experience. All participants were based in Malaysia, enhancing the relevance of the findings to the Malaysian organizational context.

Table 3

Profile of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)		
< 30	0	0
31–34	0	0
35–40	0	0
> 41	6	100
Gender		
Male	3	43
Female	4	57
Working Experience		
< 5 years	0	0
6–10 years	0	0
11–14 years	0	0
> 15 years	7	100
Residence		
Malaysian	7	100
Non-Malaysian	0	0

* Compiled by authors.

Thematic Analysis

The interview findings highlight four interconnected themes regarding transgender inclusion in the workplace: (1) the impact of organizational culture and policy, (2) support from management for transgender employees, (3) societal and cultural constraints, and (4) the role of training and education initiatives. These themes emphasize the importance of organizational and managerial practices in fostering inclusive work environments and reveal shortcomings in institutional preparedness. The findings highlight the necessity for coordinated policy development, leadership involvement, and capacity-building initiatives to effectively support transgender employees. A summary of the thematic analysis and discussion is presented below, focusing on four themes.

Table 4

Organizational Culture and Policy Impact

Sub-Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Organizational Culture Change	Meaningful transgender inclusion requires a fundamental cultural shift supported by both leadership and teams.	Participant 4: "True inclusion requires both team member perspectives along with managerial and team lead support."	Organizational culture change must be driven collaboratively by senior leadership and employees; isolated efforts are insufficient to achieve sustained inclusion.
Policy Clarity and Transparency	Ambiguity in policy content and implementation undermines effective inclusion.	Participant 3: "The specifics of how these policies should be implemented often remain unclear."	Clearly articulated and well-communicated policies are essential for consistent implementation; lack of clarity leads to confusion and weak enforcement.
Managerial Support for Policy Implementation	Active managerial involvement is critical to translating policy into practice and improving team dynamics.	Participant 5: "Better team harmony would arise from improved communication of non-discrimination policies."	Managerial leadership and communication play a central role in reducing bias, fostering cohesion, and ensuring effective policy execution.
Visibility and Organizational Structure	Limited visibility of transgender employees within organizational systems weakens inclusion efforts.	Participant 1: "Employee visibility remains unclear at the organization because the implementation process seems open but undefined."	When organizational structures do not clearly support transgender employees, inclusion becomes symbolic rather than operational.
Sector-Specific Challenges	Industry context shapes the feasibility of transgender inclusion practices.	–	Conservative sectors, such as healthcare, face greater implementation challenges, whereas appearance-oriented sectors may demonstrate higher acceptance due to cultural norms.
Challenges in Conservative Environments	Cultural conservatism generates resistance to gender transition in the workplace.	Participant 2: "Workplace problems arise when transgender people transition and work alongside female staff."	Gender norms in conservative environments complicate inclusion, particularly in gender-segregated or sensitive work settings.
Need for Cultural–Policy Alignment	Policies are ineffective when they are misaligned with organizational culture.	–	Inclusion policies must be embedded within organizational values and everyday practices to produce meaningful outcomes.
Skillset and Competence Recognition	Recognition of professional competence strengthens inclusion and psychological safety.	Participant 2: "Individuals need their skillset and competence recognized to build securely and share knowledge."	Valuing transgender employees for their skills and expertise promotes trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging in the workplace.

Prior research shows that supportive management and strong legal protections are essential for creating inclusive work environments, resulting in increased employee satisfaction and improved perceptions of workplace safety (Ladwig, 2023). Effective diversity policies require inclusive leadership to transform formal commitments into practical organizational practices (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). The findings emphasize the need to go beyond superficial responses to transgender and gender diversity, advocating for inclusion as a collective responsibility at all organizational levels.

Interview data reveals that genuine inclusion necessitates active participation from both employees and leadership, moving beyond mere top-down mandates. Participants indicated that anti-discrimination laws may be ineffective due to vague implementation guidelines, leading to uncertainty in practice. Furthermore, clear and consistent communication of non-discrimination policies is crucial for fostering team cohesion and harmonious relationships. Organizations need to establish clear policies that are consistently reinforced through regular training and management practices. Chikwe et al. (2024) support this by highlighting that effective transgender inclusion requires alignment of organizational policies with cultural practices and ongoing commitment from all members.

Table 5

Managerial support in transgender inclusion

Sub-Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Manager Education and Awareness	Managers require targeted education and self-awareness training to effectively support transgender inclusion.	Participant 4: "As managers, they must foster transgender inclusion by carrying out team education as well as keeping transgender awareness."	Managerial education is foundational to inclusion; training and self-awareness enable managers to create informed and supportive workplace contexts.
Managerial Role in Policy Implementation	Managers are central to translating inclusion policies into everyday practices.	Participant 3: "Management ought to use its influence to establish a smooth flow of organizational practices and policies that accommodate transgender workers."	Managers function as policy translators, ensuring that formal inclusion policies are operationalized and embedded in routine practices.
Managerial Influence on Workplace Culture	Managers act as primary agents of cultural change through role modelling and enforcement of inclusive norms.	–	By setting expectations and demonstrating inclusive behaviour, managers shape organizational culture and normalize transgender inclusion.
Unbiased Hiring and Integration	Bias-free hiring practices and structured onboarding are critical for	Participant 1: "The hiring manager needs to maintain unbiased behaviour while providing support for	Hiring managers must be trained to recognize and mitigate bias while facilitating smooth integration for

	transgender inclusion.	transgender individuals entering the workplace.”	transgender employees and teams.
Managerial Support for Team Integration	Managerial support eases team integration and reduces exclusionary behaviours.	Participant 1: “Employees must know the value of transgender colleagues and get rid of unfavorable attitudes.”	Managers are pivotal in reinforcing inclusive norms, communicating policies, and fostering team cohesion during integration processes.
Creating Inclusive Workspaces	Managers are responsible for creating environments that value competence over gender identity.	Participant 2: “Organizations should recognize individual skills and competence, as this facilitates teamwork in safe conditions.”	Inclusive workplaces emphasize skills and contributions rather than gender expression, promoting collaborator.

Participants highlighted the importance of manager-supported training and team-based educational initiatives in promoting transgender inclusion, emphasizing that embedding awareness initiatives in daily team practices is crucial. This emphasis aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, suggesting that managerial intentions and decisions influence actions that affect organizational behaviours, such as inclusive practices and reduced discrimination (Ajzen, 1991). Managers serve as crucial intermediaries in converting formal policies into significant workplace results. By fostering diversity and inclusion, managers enhance productivity, innovation, and talent management. They play a crucial role in transitioning policies to practice, particularly for transgender employees, demonstrating that managerial engagement is vital for the success of inclusion initiatives. Through training and policy enforcement, managers connect organizational goals with daily operations, promoting sustainable, inclusive work environments.

Table 6
Cultural sensitivity and societal challenges

Sub-Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Societal and Cultural Barriers	Transgender employees experience pronounced societal prejudice, particularly in conservative environments, which constrains workplace integration.	Participant 1: “Social and governmental opinion in Malaysia upholds significant prejudice which targets transgender people together with other members of the LGBTQ+ community.”	Prevailing societal attitudes, reinforced by conservative norms, create structural and interpersonal barriers that hinder transgender employees’ acceptance, especially in public-facing roles.
Generational Differences in Acceptance	Younger employees demonstrate higher levels of acceptance toward transgender colleagues compared to older employees.	Participant 1: “Younger employees display significant acceptance for transgender inclusion compared to their older counterparts.”	Generational shifts in social exposure and values contribute to differing levels of acceptance, indicating a need for targeted education among older employee groups.

Progressiveness in Specific Sectors	Industry context influences the degree of transgender acceptance, with some sectors demonstrating greater openness.	Participant 1: "Progressive sectors such as consumer goods and beauty accept self-presentation and authenticity."	1: Sectors that value self-expression and authenticity are more likely to foster inclusive environments for transgender employees.
Cultural Sensitivity and Education	Cultural sensitivity training is essential to reduce bias and improve understanding of transgender issues.	Participant 2: "Achieving proper cultural sensitivity and bias reduction requires all members of the organization to collaborate."	Organization-wide training initiatives promote empathy and awareness, supporting more inclusive workplace interactions.
Unconscious Bias	Hidden biases continue to undermine transgender inclusion and must be actively addressed.	Participant 1: "Societal issues stem from hidden biases which hinder transition processes for transgender employees."	Unconscious bias complicates inclusion efforts; structured bias-awareness training is necessary to surface and mitigate these underlying attitudes.

This study emphasizes the significant social and cultural obstacles faced by transgender employees in conservative settings, hindering their complete integration into organizations. A participant noted that Malaysian society and governmental institutions exhibit longstanding biases against transgender individuals and the wider LGBTQ+ community. These perceptions align with Cancela et al. (2025), indicating that governmental roles and prevailing cultural beliefs may validate discriminatory practices against transgender individuals, particularly in conservative organizational settings that challenge transgender women's transitions to female identities. Research by Goryunova et al. (2022) emphasizes the impact of organizational climate on the inclusion of marginalized groups, revealing ongoing issues with workplace infrastructure and accessibility for transgender employees. Participants noted cultural conservatism in Malaysia, although opinions varied on its extent and effect on organizational policy execution. One participant indicated that transgender-inclusive policies may not be limited by social barriers, suggesting that proactive organizational practices can lead societal acceptance. (Onyeador et al., 2021). Participants noted conflicting workplace conditions for transgender employees in conservative environments, highlighting the necessity for ongoing organizational commitment, focused training programs, and enduring structural reforms. While educational initiatives are crucial, their impact may be hindered by generational and cultural biases, suggesting the need for flexible and context-aware inclusion strategies in various organizational contexts.

Table 7

Training and Awareness Programs

Sub-Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Participant Quotes	Interpretation
Importance of Personal Narratives	Personal stories from transgender individuals enhance understanding and reduce prejudice by making challenges visible and relatable.	Participant 4: "Understanding would improve by showing personal videos of transgender persons telling their own stories to reduce prejudice."	Personal narratives humanize transgender experiences, transforming abstract concepts into lived realities that foster empathy and attitudinal change.
Experiential Learning	Direct engagement with transgender experiences promotes deeper insight and stronger interpersonal connections.	Participant 4: "Direct contact helps people develop deeper relationships while turning theory into reality."	Experiential learning enables employees to internalize inclusion principles by linking theoretical knowledge with practical understanding.
Inclusion Experts Training	Specialist involvement in transgender employees during transition and workplace integration.	Participant 2: "Including experts would guarantee necessary support throughout the transition process."	The presence of counsellors and mental health professionals strengthens training effectiveness by offering informed guidance and sustained support.
Concerns About Excessive Focus on Personal Narratives	Overemphasis on gender identity may create discomfort or disrupt performance-driven environments.	Participant 6: "When gender identity is emphasized too much, workplace efficiency and harmony are slightly reduced."	While narratives are valuable, training must balance inclusion with organizational performance to avoid unintended tension.
Integrating Transgender Inclusion into Broader Diversity Training	Transgender inclusion is most effective when embedded within general diversity and		

Workplace acceptance of transgender employees is fostered through structured training and awareness initiatives, prominently featuring personal testimonies. Video narratives of transgender individuals sharing their experiences can improve understanding and reduce prejudice, supported by Shih et al. (2009), who found that personal narratives enhance empathy, strengthen relationships, and change discriminatory attitudes. Participants emphasized that incorporating real-life transgender individuals into training sessions can enhance workplace culture and foster inclusive attitudes. Effective training programs should center transgender voices in diversity initiatives instead of approaching inclusion solely as a policy requirement. The findings highlight the necessity for organizations to formalize initiatives that support personal narratives and expert contributions related to transgender inclusion, thus enhancing awareness and legitimizing it as a vital element of diversity strategies.

Conclusion

Malaysia is experiencing a significant shortage of medical professionals able to provide holistic healthcare for transgender individuals. While psychiatric and psychological services exist in urban areas, accessibility is hindered by high costs, uneven distribution, and low awareness within the transgender community. Additionally, psychiatric care is just one aspect of the broader, multidisciplinary approach necessary for transgender health needs. Comprehensive care for transgender individuals in Malaysia requires coordinated efforts from various specialties, including gynecology, urology, and gender-affirming surgical services. This integration is crucial for effective hormone therapy management, treatment monitoring, and preventive screenings. The lack of these care pathways negatively impacts healthcare quality and continuity. Leadership execution, supportive organizational policies, and the use of lived-experience narratives in training are vital for successful policy implementation. The study provides recommendations for managerial training and educational efforts to promote awareness, ultimately leading to transgender-inclusive healthcare practices. Organizations should implement thorough policies and training programs to enhance workforce diversity and support transgender employees, as societal attitudes in Malaysia remain largely unsupportive. Transgender identities are often viewed negatively, despite an acknowledgment of their validity. There is a call for stronger institutional measures to protect transgender rights, although some individuals show discomfort with transgender topics in training, indicating lingering moral judgments and misconceptions. Malaysian laws against "cross-dressing" raise significant legal issues regarding non-discrimination, privacy, and freedom of expression under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Employers must protect transgender employees from harassment and unsafe conditions. This study explores employer attitudes towards transgender rights in Malaysia, offering insights into changing perceptions of inclusion and protection for transgender individuals in the workplace.

Author Contributions

J. Sankar Pillay was responsible for the literature review, research design, data analysis, and interpretation of findings. H. Vasudevan, H. Madon and M.Y. Cheok contributed to manuscript preparation, editing, and final revision. All authors jointly conducted the literature review, compiled and analyzed the data, and contributed to the overall development and finalization of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Competing interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability

Data will be made available by the corresponding author on request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use

Not applicable.

Acknowledgement

Authors express gratitude for the opportunity to publish their manuscript and appreciate the committee members' efforts in the peer-review process.

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