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Resilience And Flourishing Amidst Minority Stress: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Of Transgender Women In Yogyakarta

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Abstract

***Background**: Transgender women constitute a marginalized group highly susceptible to minority stress, stemming from both internalized social stigma and external societal pressure. In Yogyakarta, these pressures manifest through exclusion from both public and domestic spheres, triggering chronic psychological vulnerability. **Objective**: This study aims to explore the subjective meaning of resilience among transgender women as they negotiate environmental stressors, and to examine how they cultivate flourishing despite systemic limitations. **Methods**: This qualitative study employs an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The participants consist of three transgender women affiliated with Shelter KEBAYA and the Waria Crisis Center (WCC) in Yogyakarta. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation. **Results**: The IPA analysis identified seven superordinate themes: (1) Negotiation of Space and Identity Shields; (2) The Spiritual Paradox between Rejection and Surrender; (3) Intergenerational Stigma and Hypervigilance; (4) WCC and KEBAYA Shelters as Psychological Oases; (5) Transitional Efficacy from Marginality to Professionalism; (6) Collective Memory of Trauma and Anticipatory Vigilance; and (7) Community Resilience as a Collective Womb. **Conclusion**: Resilience among transgender women is not merely passive endurance, but an active form of existential resistance. The presence of community (shelters) and the reinforcement of self-efficacy serve as crucial protective factors that transform trauma into resilience, enabling the achievement of positive mental health despite a discriminatory environment.*

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Keywords: Resilience, Transgender Women, Minority Stress, Flourishing, Waria Crisis Center.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of transgender women in Indonesia often exists in tension between the desire for authentic self-expression and the demands of rigid social conformity. Ideally, every human possesses the capacity to achieve flourishing—a state in which individuals can embrace the complexity of their identities and discover meaningful life purposes (Diener et al., 2010; Ryff, 2014; Seligman, 2011). However, for transgender women, the journey toward such flourishing must be navigated through a social landscape fraught with chronic stigma. As outlined in Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), positive mental health for marginalized groups is not merely about subjective happiness, but rather the subject's resilience in remaining intact amidst environments that seek to degrade their human dignity.

A sharp discrepancy emerges when psychological well-being theories are contrasted with the reality of the minority stress experienced by transgender women in Yogyakarta. They face not only barriers to accessing public services but also "distal stressors" that manifest in systematic spatial exclusion (American Psychological Association, 2015; Meyer, 2003). Preliminary observations indicate that even in public spaces deemed modern, transgender women are still positioned as "frightening" figures—a stigma inherited intergenerationally from parents to children through narratives of identity devaluation (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Singh et al., 2011). Even in sacred spaces such as houses of worship, their physical presence is often met with palpable "social avoidance." This pressure creates a double burden: the demand to fulfill spiritual needs alongside the necessity of bearing the emotional wounds of social rejection in the "house of God" (Hendricks & Testa, 2012; Pargament, 2011).

The enduring impact of these environmental pressures triggers "proximal stressors" in the form of hypervigilance. In-depth observations reveal how transgender women must engage in exhausting identity negotiations; for instance, allocating significant time to modify their appearance simply to be "accepted," or at the very least, to minimize the potential for harassment when leaving their homes (Brooks, 1981; Grant et al., 2011). This behavior is not merely a matter of aesthetics, but a self-protective mechanism against the potential for recurring trauma, such as histories of verbal and physical violence, or institutional searches that remain etched in their collective memory (Bockting et al., 2013; Lombardi et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2017). It is this fear of social judgment that gradually restricts their sphere of movement and social participation

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within the broader community.

Nevertheless, there exists a profound paradox of resilience amidst this vulnerability. Behind the masks and makeup used as shields, many transgender women are able to transform into autonomous, productive subjects with significant spiritual depth (Mizock & Lewis, 2008; Walsh, 2016). The urgency of this study lies not merely in capturing their suffering or marginalization, but in uncovering how meaning in life is rediscovered after being deconstructed by stigma (Park, 2010; Steger, 2012).

This study is situated at the KEBAYA Foundation and the Waria Crisis Center (WCC) Shelter in Yogyakarta, an area that sociologically represents complex dynamics of identity negotiation. The presence of KEBAYA within the community serves as a unique phenomenon regarding how a mental health "oasis" is constructed in the midst of a "desert of stigma." By employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study aims to transcend the physical boundaries of the shelters to understand the "inner world" of transgender women in transforming minority stress into existential resilience. This research is essential to validate that, behind systemic vulnerability, there exists a power of human agency capable of keeping one's flourishing intact (Smith et al., 2009; Subandi, 2013; Widiantoro, 2026).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative paradigm utilizing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. This methodological choice is grounded in the need to deeply explore how individuals make sense of their personal and unique life experiences regarding gender identity and social pressure (Smith et al., 2009; Eatough & Smith, 2017). The focus of this research lies in the subjects' interpretations of their encounters with minority stress and how they construct resilience amidst limitations on their social mobility.

The participants in this study consist of three transgender women selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for participants are as follows: (1) transgender individuals affiliated with the KEBAYA Foundation and the Waria Crisis Center (WCC) in Yogyakarta; (2) residents or those who maintain routine activities in the Yogyakarta area; and (3) individuals who voluntarily consent to share their life experiences regarding discrimination and survival mechanisms. Data were collected using two primary techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews designed to explore the participants' "inner world," and descriptive-participatory observation to capture the dynamics of social interaction in both public spaces and the private spheres of the shelters (Prawitasari, 2012).

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The data analysis procedure follows the standard IPA protocol, consisting of six systematic stages: (1) reading and re-reading transcripts to achieve a holistic understanding; (2) initial noting to capture semantic and conceptual aspects; (3) development of emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across themes to form a thematic structure; (5) cross-case analysis to identify patterns of similarity and uniqueness among participants; and (6) the determination of superordinate themes that represent the essence of the phenomenon as a whole (Smith et al., 2009). To maintain the integrity and credibility of the research, member checking and data triangulation were conducted between field observation findings and interview narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Thematic Matrix of Transgender Women's Resilience against Minority Stress in Kampung Badran

No	Superordinate Theme	Keyword/Essential Verbatim	Psychological Analysis & Coping Mechanisms	Primary Theoretical References
1	**Negotiation of Space & Identity Shields**	"1 hour of dressing up," "building a shield," "removing flashy features."	**Hypervigilance & Impression Management:** Managing appearance as a strategy for safe spatial navigation.	Meyer (2003); Lombardi et al. (2001); Widiantoro (2026).
2	**Spiritual Paradox**	"Heavy feet," "congregants pulling away," "God, I come for You."	**Positive Religious Coping:** Transforming the pain of exclusion into self-surrender (transcendence).	Pargament (2011); Subandi (2013); Steger (2012).
3	**Intergenerational Stigma**	"Don't get close, you'll be kidnapped," "turning around," "heartbroken."	**Dehumanization & Anticipatory Avoidance**: The impact of inherited stigma on the restriction of social movement.	Hatzenbuehler (2009); Singh et al. (2011).

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4	**Shelter as a Psychological Oasis**	"Able to breathe," "not perceived as strange," "without a mask."	**Psychological Safety:** The shelter as a space for restoring emotional resources from minority stress.	Mizock & Lewis (2008)
5	**Transitional Efficacy**	"Holding a laptop," "feeling a sense of self-worth," "I am useful."	**Psychological Capital & Flourishing:** Self-actualization through professional work as an antidote to stigma.	Luthans et al. (2007); Diener et al. (2010); Seligman (2011).
6	**Collective Memory of Trauma**	"Clothing," "heart racing," "choosing small alleys."	**Complex Trauma & Environmental Scanning**: Past trauma dictating present-day vigilance.	Bockting et al. (2013); Clements-Nolle et al. (2006).
7	Community Resilience	"Collective womb," "covering for one another," "standing strong again."	Collective Resistance & Social Relatedness: Peer solidarity as a buffer against social isolation.	Miller et al. (2017); Jetten et al. (2020); Walsh (2016).

THEME 1: NEGOTIATION OF SPACE AND IDENTITY SHIELDS

This theme reveals that physical mobility for transgender women in Yogyakarta is an emotionally exhausting process of negotiation. Appearance is no longer viewed merely as an aesthetic expression; it has transformed into a crucial survival tool designed to minimize negative attention from the surrounding environment.

"Before leaving the house, I ensure my appearance follows the norms prevailing in society so it is seen as polite. I have to spend a long time getting ready—up to an hour—and looking in the mirror, because for me, dressing modestly is a way of creating a shield so that I remain accepted by the community. By focusing on neatness and modesty, I am actually striving to erase the conspicuous parts of myself so that I can blend in peacefully without attracting unnecessary

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attention." (P1/Dinda).

Analysis: Dinda's testimony demonstrates a mechanism of hypervigilance, which is a core component of Minority Stress (Meyer, 2003). Dinda's effort to spend 60 minutes modifying her appearance is a form of proximal stressor management; she cognitively anticipates potential environmental rejection before social interactions even occur. In Yogyakarta, public spaces become a battleground of identity where transgender women feel they must constantly "turn down the volume" of their existence to be socially accepted, or at the very least, not perceived as a threat.

This strategy aligns with the findings of Lombardi et al. (2001) regarding how the threat of gender-based violence compels transgender individuals to exercise strict control over their self-presentation. This reinforces the argument by Hendricks & Testa (2012) that marginalized individuals often internalize expectations of rejection, which gradually depletes their mental energy (cognitive load) and hinders their psychological comfort, even within domestic settings. As explained in Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), the mental burden resulting from constant vigilance prevents individuals from achieving self-authenticity, as their psychological energy is exhausted simply by negotiating with environmental prejudice (American Psychological Association, 2015; Grant et al., 2011).

THEME 2: THE SPIRITUAL PARADOX: BETWEEN REJECTION AND SURRENDER

` This theme unveils the profound inner dynamics that transgender women experience when attempting to fulfill their spiritual needs within public religious spaces. An existential paradox emerges where houses of worship—ideally places of refuge and peace—transform into sources of tangible external stressors that threaten psychological well-being.

"*I still practice my faith according to the rules of that place. If others stare at me, I do not dwell on it because my purpose there is purely to worship. I do not care about human judgment as long as I feel I am on the right path. Even though my steps feel heavy when I have to pass through a crowd and see some congregants distance themselves because of their prejudices, I continue to walk with a steady heart, whispering, 'God, I come for You.*'" (P2/Rani).

Analysis: Rani's experience at the house of worship is an objective manifestation of felt stigma and enacted stigma (Meyer, 2003). The phenomenon of "physical avoidance" by other congregants demonstrates a non-verbal yet highly destructive identity devaluation that undermines the participant's self-esteem. At this point, a sharp conflict arises between spiritual

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identity and gender identity within the public sphere. Nevertheless, Rani's resilience emerges through a mechanism of meaning-making that is inherently transcendent (Park, 2010; Steger, 2012). She employs positive religious coping by transforming the pain of social exclusion into a form of pure "self-surrender" to God.

This analysis is strongly aligned with the concepts in Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), which asserts that spiritual resilience is achieved when an individual is capable of self-transcendence, rising above human judgment in pursuit of a higher connection with the Creator. Rani's strategy confirms the theoretical framework of Hendricks & Testa (2012) regarding adaptation to Minority Stress, in which marginalized individuals often rely on internal spiritual values as a bastion of defense when external social support systems fail to provide validation. As described by Pargament (2011), such spiritual integration allows the individual to discover a "sacred space" within themselves, even when the physical space around them is rejecting. The strategy of "swallowing the hurt" for the sake of worship demonstrates that, for Rani, spirituality is not merely a mechanistic ritual, but a form of existential resistance and a path of devotion to maintain the dignity of her soul before God (Subandi, 2013).

THEME 3: INTERGENERATIONAL STIGMA AND HYPERVIGILANCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

This theme unveils the bitter reality that prejudice against transgender women is not merely incidental discriminatory behavior by adults, but rather a narrative of fear that is actively passed down to the next generation. The early internalization of this stigma creates an atmosphere of "subtle hostility" in modern public spaces, which, in turn, triggers chronic vigilance in transgender women.

"*If a child or an adult reacts excessively or stares cynically, I choose to understand because they may not yet understand. Sometimes, I hear whispers from parents to their children, 'Don't get close, you'll be kidnapped,' which forces me to turn around immediately so as not to escalate the situation. Although hearing such things often breaks my heart, I choose to focus on my own composure rather than draining my energy just to respond to their stigma.*" (P3/Sinta).

Analysis: This phenomenon is a tangible form of public stigma transmitted intergenerationally. The use of threat-based metaphors, such as being "kidnapped" or "bitten," indicates a systematic process of dehumanization that positions transgender women as dangerous or "wild" figures (Meyer, 2003; Hatzenbuehler, 2009). The psychological impact of this interaction

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triggers hypervigilance in Sinta, wherein she feels compelled to constantly conduct environmental scanning to detect potential threats or psychological rejection before they manifest.

Aligned with the theory of Hendricks & Testa (2012), these distal stressors—in the form of negative labeling—compel individuals to adopt mechanisms of anticipatory avoidance as a coping strategy to maintain emotional stability. Sinta's fear of visiting certain public spaces reveals that minority stress possesses a destructive power that transcends economic barriers; it infringes upon an individual's fundamental right to feel safe and valued in inclusive public spaces (Singh et al., 2011). As emphasized in Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), an environment that sows the seeds of fear in the younger generation indirectly closes off access for transgender women to achieve meaningful social connection, which is a primary requirement for attaining positive mental health.

THEME 4: SHELTER AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL OASIS (THE LOCUS OF KEBAYA FOUNDATION, YOGYAKARTA)

In contrast to the high-pressure dynamics of the streets in Kampung Badran, the KEBAYA Foundation is perceived by the participants as a "sacred space"—a zone where the burden of minority stress can be shed, if only for a moment. This shelter serves as an oasis that offers restoration for the emotional resources drained by discriminatory social interactions in the outside world.

"*This shelter is extremely meaningful because, without this assistance, I would not know where else to live. Here, we embrace one another, giving and receiving support. KEBAYA/WCC serves as a support system that provides a safe space for my mental health; when I am here, I can finally breathe easily because I feel that no one considers me strange. In this accepting environment, I can be myself without a mask, making the shelter an effective place for emotional recovery from the stress that has been pressing down on me*." (P2/Rani).

Analysis: The presence of the KEBAYA Foundation in the heart of Yogyakarta plays a vital role in constructing community resilience. For Rani, the shelter is not merely a physical building, but a psychological space that provides the "psychological safety" absent in public spheres. From the perspective of Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), human flourishing absolutely requires a supportive environment to grow authentically. KEBAYA acts as a catalyst for emotional recovery after participants experience identity devaluation in the outside world (Mizock & Lewis, 2008).

Peer support within the shelter creates a powerful sense of social relatedness. According

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to Subandi (2013), this connection serves as the spiritual and psychological foundation that enables individuals to endure systemic discrimination. This phenomenon is also consistent with findings by Miller et al. (2017) and Singh et al. (2011), which indicate that resilience among transgender groups is highly dependent on the existence of safe spaces that allow for collective identity validation. Through a sense of shared fate, KEBAYA builds what Walsh (2016) terms relational resilience, where identity transparency becomes possible and social "masks" are no longer required as tools for protection. It is at this point that resilience is no longer merely individual; it becomes an organic collective strength (Jetten et al., 2020).

THEME 5: TRANSITIONAL EFFICACY: FROM MARGINALITY TO PROFESSIONAL MEANING

In contrast to the previous themes dominated by external pressures, this theme highlights the participants' agency and resilience in achieving vertical social mobility through professional accomplishments. This professional transition serves as a crucial momentum for reclaiming the self-worth previously degraded by stigma.

"In the past, the world closed its doors tightly, as if my life had no value. However, now that I hold a laptop to complete my work and contribute to the community, I finally feel a sense of self-worth that had long been stolen. Through this work, I prove to myself and the world that I am useful, far beyond the stigma they have attached to me. Many ask how I can fulfill my needs and even share with others, even though my salary is the same as everyone else's. According to human mathematics, that is impossible, but according to God's mathematics, it is very possible. I believe that when we intend to help others, God has a way to provide everything." (P3/Sinta).

Analysis: Sinta's professional transition from the informal street sector to a career as a community manager is empirical evidence of achieving flourishing. Within the framework of Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), individuals attain positive mental health not merely through the absence of psychological disorders, but when they are capable of finding purpose in life and environmental mastery. Sinta's success demonstrates that high self-efficacy can function as an antidote to the destructive impacts of minority stress (Luthans et al., 2007; Diener et al., 2010).

This resilience is also consistent with the views of Subandi (2013), in which professional productivity is interpreted as a form of devotion and existential actualization that transcends economic motives. Through her work and professional skills, Sinta successfully redefines her identity—from a subject who was "feared" or "avoided" in public spaces to one who is "needed" and "respected" by her community. This transitional success offers a powerful message to

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psychological literature: that professional validation and meaningful work are keys to building permanent resilience for marginalized groups amidst a discriminatory social structure (Hofmann et al., 2020; Steger, 2012). This achievement underscores that flourishing remains attainable provided that individuals have access to inclusive spaces for self-actualization.

THEME 6: COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF TRAUMA AND ANTICIPATORY VIGILANCE

This theme examines how past traumatic experiences—such as institutional rejection, systemic discrimination, and forced searches—are not merely passive memories but psychological "ghosts" that actively dictate their decisions and social navigation behaviors in the present.

"*I have experienced severe physical violence in the past, having been chased by radical groups to the point of deep trauma. To this day, my vigilance remains extremely high; every time I see people wearing their specific attire pass by, my heart races and my instincts take over immediately. To avoid potential threats, I am accustomed to choosing small alleys as my route just to feel safe.*" (P1/Dinda).

Analysis: Dinda's testimony reveals the existence of Complex Trauma that is strongly tied to spatial memory and auditory stimuli (such as sirens). In the theory of Minority Stress (Meyer, 2003), this phenomenon illustrates how distal stressors (objective past discriminatory events) transform into proximal stressors in the form of chronic anticipatory vigilance. This traumatic memory compels participants to constantly conduct "safe route mapping" to avoid spaces perceived as high-risk. This aligns with the perspectives of Hendricks & Testa (2012) and Clements-Nolle et al. (2006) that such avoidance strategies are automatic self-defense mechanisms aimed at preventing revictimization.

On the other hand, these findings demonstrate how public spaces for transgender women often transform into "surveilled spaces," where their presence is positioned as an object that needs to be "disciplined." This condition suggests that the resilience they build is often anchored in a vigilance that never truly rests (Bockting et al., 2013; Institute of Medicine, 2011). As emphasized in Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), these traumatic memories become obstacles for individuals to experience complete psychological freedom. However, Dinda's ability to remain active despite carrying such a burden of trauma is a manifestation of remarkable existential resilience (Mizock & Lewis, 2008).

THEME 7: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: WCC & KEBAYA YOGYAKARTA AS A COLLECTIVE WOMB

This concluding theme summarizes that the greatest strength of transgender women in

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Yogyakarta lies not merely in individual fortitude, but in the peer support ecosystem that is created organically within the WCC & KEBAYA shelters. This collectivity serves as the primary antidote to the impacts of systemic social isolation.

"*The KEBAYA Foundation serves as a collective womb that acts as a savior for all of us, a place of refuge where we stand up for one another under the commitment of the Safeguarding Task Force, which consistently maintains our safety and integrity. Remember that the prayers of the friends we help here are far more valuable than any material possession. Every time we feel down, it is the love and shelter within this foundation that make us strong enough to stand up again. Let us remain upright, continue to create, and prove that we are empowered entities.*" (P2/Rani & P3/Sinta).

Analysis: This community resilience is a direct antithesis to the social isolation enforced by the stigma of the wider society. The existence of the Waria Crisis Center and the KEBAYA Foundation in Yogyakarta is a tangible manifestation of collective care, which transforms individual suffering into group strength (Jetten et al., 2020). Within the framework of Psikologi Flourishing: Dinamika Kesehatan Mental Positif (Widiantoro, 2026), human flourishing reaches its peak when individuals possess authentic social relatedness, where security and acceptance become the foundation for healthy psychological growth.

This analysis confirms Subandi's (2013) view that a spirituality of service often emerges in the form of peer solidarity among marginalized groups. WCC and KEBAYA function as a psychological buffer that neutralizes the destructive impacts of minority stress. Through this community, transgender women reclaim the dignity that was stripped away by public stigma, proving that resilience is a form of collective resistance that enables them to remain existent, empowered, and meaningful (Smith et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2017). As explained by Walsh (2016), such relational resilience allows marginalized individuals to transform shared vulnerability into a transformative force that keeps their collective mental health intact amidst an oppressive social structure.

CONCLUSION

Based on the phenomenological analysis of the experiences of transgender women in Yogyakarta, this study concludes that the resilience formed is an Existential Resilience that is both dynamic and dialectical. Amidst layered Minority Stress—ranging from intergenerational stigma and dehumanization in public spaces to exclusion in sacred spheres—transgender women are not passive; rather, they develop defense mechanisms through highly tactical identity negotiations.

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This research finds that their flourishing is not found in the absence of suffering, but in the capacity to transform pain into resilience through two primary pillars: (1) Self-Efficacy, which manifests in professional productivity and creative output; and (2) Transcendent Spirituality, which allows them to transcend human judgment in favor of a higher connection with the Creator. Furthermore, the WCC and KEBAYA shelters are proven to play a vital role as a "collective womb" that provides psychological safety, neutralizes the impacts of trauma, and serves as an oasis for the recovery of authentic mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **For Psychology Practitioners and Counselors:** It is expected that practitioners adopt affirmative and community-based approaches when assisting marginalized groups. Intervention strategies should focus not only on trauma reduction but also on strengthening "psychological capital" and facilitating inclusive spaces for self-actualization.
2. **For Government and Policy Makers**: It is critical to recognize the role of community shelters, such as WCC and KEBAYA, as strategic partners in safeguarding the mental health of marginalized citizens. Public policies should be pushed toward greater inclusivity in the use of public spaces, including houses of worship and public facilities, to break the chain of intergenerational stigma.

3. **For the General Public**: Society should begin to deconstruct the narratives of fear that are passed down to younger generations. Empathy education from an early age is essential to prevent the dehumanization of individuals with diverse gender identities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on a specific locus in Yogyakarta with a limited number of participants (three individuals); therefore, any generalization of the results to the broader transgender population must be made with great caution. Furthermore, this study primarily captures resilience during the transition into adulthood; thus, the dynamics of resilience among elderly transgender women or transgender adolescents may exhibit different patterns and require further exploration in future studies.

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