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Priawan in Indonesia: A Study of Transmasculine Female-to-Male Individuals

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Abstract

Topics surrounding transmasculinity, especially in Indonesia, are still overlooked, degraded, and understudied. This paper aims to explore the experience of *priawan* in Indonesia. Differentiating from the globally-renowned term ‘trans men’, a *priawan* identifies as a female-to-male transmasculine individual. We conducted in-depth interviews with eleven qualified informants. These interviews shed light on gender dysphoria or fluidity, gender-affirming processes, and discriminations they have faced, with hopes of proving and validating their existence. Eight of the informants express themselves as masculine and identify as lesbians. The most common gender-affirming process that they chose is name updating, followed by chest binding and hormone therapy. Five out of eleven reported having faced discrimination in various forms, such as verbal abuse, misgendering, stereotyping, and physical abuse. This study adds a new perspective on regional variability in transmasculine identities. Further research on chosen family dynamics and generational differences are encouraged to accentuate the visibility of transgender individuals in existing queer studies.

Keywords

Female-to-male, Gender fluidity, Gender-based violence, LGBT rights, Trans men, Transmasculine.

Introduction

Historically and culturally speaking, several indigenous societies in Indonesia recognized the existence of gender diversity (Vincent & Manzano, 2017). Buginese society in South Sulawesi recognizes five genders, one of which is *calalai*, a local term used to identify female-to-male transmasculine individuals (similar to *priawan*) (Davies, 2001, 2010). In its neighboring society, Torajan people also recognize a third gender named *to' burake*, a trans feminine male-to-female. Both *to' burake* and *calalai* were respected due to their social and gender roles in their respective society (Dalidjo, 2020). Interestingly, in ancient Javanese society, trans women were given the role of the royals' servants. Believed to possess spiritual and magical powers, they gained quite significant political powers in this society. However, the general public of ancient Javanese society often labeled them as disabled, even equating them with albinos, dwarfs, hunchbacks, and many more (Alnoza & Sulistyowati, 2021).

As previously mentioned, the terms that were used to describe trans identities and individuals have continuously evolved. It is important to note that existing literature is heavily drawn on trans women. The term *banci* was quite popular in postcolonial Indonesia, until the term *wadam* (a portmanteau of *Hawa* or Eve and Adam) became popularized in the 1950s-1960s. Later, the term *waria* as a portmanteau of *wanita* or female/women and *pria* or male/men became more commonly used. Now, the terms *banci*, *wadam*, and *waria* are often considered derogatory by the Indonesian trans and queer community due to their negative use by society. The terms insinuate that trans people are not whole but rather considered half-men or half-women while the spectrum of gender and sexual fluidity actually appears to be endless. Therefore, the preferred term to describe trans women is *transpuan* as a portmanteau of *trans(gender)* and *perempuan* or female/women (Boellstorff, 2004; Hegarty, 2019, 2021, 2022).

Meanwhile, the term *transpria* is commonly used to describe trans men, which is a portmanteau of *trans(gender)* and *pria* (Rahmawati, 2021). However, the term *priawan* is preferred by some Indonesian trans men to reflect a gender identity that is distinct from the global term *trans men*. *Priawan* is derived from the words *pria* and a shortened version of *wanita* and stands for female-to-male transmasculine individuals. Transmasculine itself is an umbrella term coined to define individuals who were assigned females at birth but identify with masculinity (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2022; Anzani, et al., 2023). A previous study showed that *priawan* individuals often do not undergo any medical or physical change to alter their female anatomy. The authors drew three conclusions regarding *priawan*'s gender fluidity. First, a *priawan* might identify themselves as a man, trans man, nonbinary, or other gender identities. Second, a *priawan* might have a feminine, masculine, androgynous, and fluid gender expression. Finally, a *priawan* might label their sexual orientation as gay, lesbian, straight, pansexual, bisexual, or unlabeled. In other words, just like any other 'Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics' (SOGIESC) aspect, the *priawan* identity is very diverse and fluid (Prasetyo, et al., 2019).

In modern-day Indonesia, the cisheteronormative and gender binary system is still commanding the social perception of trans individuals and other gender variations in society. Cisheteronormativity can be defined as a societal assumption that cisgender (i.e. those whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth) and heterosexual (i.e. those who are attracted to individuals of the opposite sex) individuals represent the norm and that other forms of gender identity and sexual orientation are abnormal or deviant (Franco-Rocha, et al., 2023; Jones, et al., 2023). They are often labeled as sinners and heathens from a religious perspective since they do not follow the gendered social construct. Based on this religiosity, a majority of Indonesian people oppose the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals, thus rendering them a target for hate crimes, discrimination, stigmatization, and persecution (Arbani, 2012; Jasruddin & Daud, 2017; Maharani & Zafi, 2020; Sailana, 2020; Widiastuti, et al., 2016).

Structural discrimination based on gender identity is a common experience for many trans individuals. Many trans men and trans women are rejected or fired from their jobs due

to their gender identity. A study conducted by Wahyu, et al. (2023) also showed that trans persons were more severely impacted than cisgender individuals by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Integrated Social Welfare Data (DTKS) that was provided by the government did not include trans persons, hence the increased difficulty for them to access Covid-19-related social welfare. The study showed that trans persons faced reduced income, slimmer job opportunities, and proneness to gender-based discrimination in healthcare assistance (Wahyu, et al., 2023). On a personal scale, being misgendered and deadnamed is also an enormous challenge for trans individuals, often causing them to feel invisible and insignificant (Bolger, et al., 2014; Truszczynski, et al., 2022). Similar to English, the Indonesian language has pronouns that are associated with the state of whether an individual is a man/masculine or woman/feminine. For example, being referred to as *mbak* (a feminine pronoun) instead of *mas* (a masculine pronoun) or *kak* (a gender-neutral pronoun) can be triggering for trans men and transmasculine individuals (Alaydrus, et al., 2023). The patriarchal nature of society plays a part in forming toxic masculinity as we know it today, causing trans men to feel like they are not ‘man enough’ just because they were born female and have relatively more feminine biological features compared to cis men (Rahmawati, 2021; Saeidzadeh, 2020).

Previous studies have mentioned that discrimination and invalidation experienced by LGBTQ+ people, including transmasculine individuals, might damage their mental and physical health. The increased rate of depression, gender dysphoria, anxiety, and body dissatisfaction might affect their day-to-day life—sleeping patterns, for example, might cause their physical health to slowly deteriorate (Harry-Hernandez, et al., 2020; Kamody, et al., 2020; Pfeffer, 2008; Tabaac, et al., 2018). Yet, when they attempt to access health care, they face discrimination which leads them to avoid proper health care and neglect their well-being. Consequently, they develop various coping mechanisms to deal with their issues, such as talking to their friends, self-acceptance, and using substances to calm their nerves (Chakrapani, et al., 2021; Puckett, et al., 2020; Reisner, et al., 2015; Truszczynski, et al., 2022; Westmoreland, et al., 2021).

Trans issues, especially trans men and transmasculine ones, are often neglected within the LGBTQ+ community itself. In Indonesia, the term *trans* is overwhelmingly understood as describing trans women. According to Jansen's study (2023), the cisheteronormative and patriarchal structure disproportionately excludes individuals who were assigned female at birth—such as trans men and queer women—from both queer and cisheteronormative space and discourses. Overall, studies focusing on transmasculinity and trans men are thus scarce in comparison to trans women and femininity (Chakrapani, et al., 2021; Reisner, et al., 2013, 2015). In Puerto Rico, for instance, HIV/AIDS research on trans men remains largely underdeveloped compared to research on trans women (Ramos-Pibernus, et al., 2020). Their perceived lack of acceptance in society durably hinders trans men voices (Prasetyo, et al., 2019; Rahmawati, 2021). Given that trans men receive less attention, it is not unexpected that trans men groups are smaller and less numerous than those of trans women. However, their societal invisibility allows trans men and queer women to have increased anonymity compared to trans women and queer men. Anonymity in a cisheteronormative environment might benefit queer people since it allows them to focus on their self-expression, to form deeper and wider connections, and to feel safer in public (Blackwood, 2009).

The objective of this study is to understand the informants' experience before, during, and after their process of self-identification as *priawan*. This paper aims to discuss the informants' life experience, their gender-affirming process, gender fluidity, the discrimination they faced, and their gender dysphoria. This study depicts the social realities of Indonesia's transmasculine and *priawan* groups, which tend to receive less attention in gender studies.

Methodology

We adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze and understand the experience of the informants. The information was acquired through and in-depth interviews with individuals who provided informed consent. The informants were selected using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a strategy frequently employed in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases to maximize the use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This entails finding and choosing individuals or organizations with specialized expertise or experience in a topic of interest (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) emphasized the importance of the informant's availability, willingness to engage, and the capacity to share experiences and viewpoints articulately, expressively, and reflectively.

Based on these criteria, eleven informants were selected to participate in this study. The informants lived in several provinces in Indonesia: East Java, Central Java, West Java, West Kalimantan, and Jakarta. Some of the interviews were conducted online via video calls due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, several interviews were conducted in-person in Jakarta and Surabaya. The interviews investigated the informants' construction of their gender identity, more specifically their life history, body, expression, social relations, experiences of discrimination, and survival mechanism, including their 'coming out' journey and gender-affirming process. All eleven informants who participated in this study are members of local or national LGBTQ+ organizations, namely Yayasan GAYa Nusantara, *Priawan* Indonesia, Transmen Indonesia, Arus Pelangi, and Persatuan Tomboy Pontianak (Pertopan). All of them identify as *priawan* or transmasculine and are between 22 to 47 years old. Regarding their sexual orientation, eight of them identify as lesbian, EV chose not to disclose their sexual orientation, MM identifies as heterosexual, and ST does not see the importance of a label (Table 1). Since Indonesia is diverse in ethnicity, our informants' ethnicities include Javanese, Malay, Banjar, Chinese, and Mixed. Six informants are currently employed during the time of the interview, and five informants chose not to disclose their employment statuses.

An in-depth thematic analysis of the data was conducted following the transcription of the interviews. We sorted and divided the data into several subchapters to allow for more detailed analyses. We then interpreted, discussed, and compared our data with regard to the existing literature. During this study, some limitations were encountered. First, some of the interviews were conducted by video calls due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This poses a limitation due to technical issues faced during online interviews, which hindered the rapport-building between informants and researchers. The uncontrolled environment of the informants during the video calls could also raise distractions, affecting the quality of answers from the informants (e.g., unfocused discussion resulting in shallow answers). As opposed to online interviews, in-person meetings were held only when circumstances deemed safe. The second limitation of this study is the challenge of locating potential informants who are receptive to interviewing given the conservative society they were raised in and the widespread concern over data leakage. Four potential informants withdrew from our study for such reasons during the investigation process.

Table 1. Personal characteristics and experience of the informants.

Informant	Personal characteristics					Gender-affirmation process			Experience of discrimination	
	Age	Occupation	Gender Identity	Gender Expression	Sexual Orientation	Name updating	Chest binding	Hormone therapy	Faced discrimination	Type of discrimination
SS	24	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Androgynous	Lesbian	✓			✓	Misgendering, cisheteronormative stereotyping
TT	27	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian		✓		✓	Physical abuse, cisheteronormative stereotyping
ST	30	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Fluid	Unlabelled					
MM	29	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Heterosexual				✓	Misgendering, cisheteronormative stereotyping
EV	25	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Undisclosed		✓	✓		
KN	22	Employee	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian		✓			
UC	46	Undisclosed	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian	✓				
AZ	30	Undisclosed	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian	✓			✓	Verbal abuse
DI	39	Undisclosed	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian	✓			✓	Verbal abuse
FE	47	Undisclosed	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian	✓				
OJ	44	Undisclosed	<i>Priawan</i> , transmasculine	Masculine	Lesbian	✓				

Results

The Priawan identity

As seen in Table 1, all informants identify themselves as *priawan* or transmasculine. During the interview, however, we learnt that several informants also accepted the identity of trans men and tomboy men. In the portmanteau term *priawan* (defined earlier in this article), the usage of *pria* first instead of *wanita* was chosen to antonym the already established term *waria* which refers to trans women or transfeminine individuals. The informants further explained that the term was preferred because it sounded simpler and more familiar to the general Indonesian public.

I told them [my family] that I am a trans man. I want everyone to know me, accept me, and appreciate me for my choice to live as a trans man, and my identity is *priawan*. (EV)

During the interview, many of our informants, such as SS, TT, ST, MM, and EV, used the terms *priawan*, trans man, and transmasculine interchangeably. This is indicative of the fluidity of the informants' gender identity. Though *priawan* is perhaps a commonly used term within their community, they are comfortable being referred to as trans men or transmasculine as well. This suggests that the term *priawan* is not too different from transmasculine or trans men. Interestingly, it is a product of their gender identity and expression intermixing with their national (Indonesian) identity.

Table 1 also displays the fluidity of our informants' SOGIESC. Gender expression-wise, nine informants identified themselves as masculine, while the other two mentioned that their expressions are fluid and androgynous. Though ten of them enjoyed having a romantic and sexual relationship with women, one informant viewed himself as heterosexual, while the other eight considered themselves lesbian. Based on the interviews and observations, we inferred that MM identify as heterosexual because they consider themselves as a masculine man and they associate their sexual orientation with their gender identity (*priawan*). The other eight rather viewed their sexual orientation as something that relates to their assigned sex at birth.

Regarding the informants' self-acceptance toward their gender identity, we identified four recurring themes throughout the interviews: angry; disappointed; accepting; and self-blaming. Those who felt disappointed and angry perceived themselves as unhelped individuals in their family and society. TT viewed their identity as a gift from God, but they fully acknowledged that discriminative values in society certainly do not help fellow *priawan* individuals to conceptualize their identity more positively.

In regard to disappointment... I don't think I experienced that. Well... Everything happens according to God's will, right? There is nothing to regret, and all of us just have to live our lives accordingly. (TT)

The informants' age is also displayed in Table 1. It is important to note that there is a relatively significant age gap between the youngest (22 years old) and the eldest informant (47 years old). Even though this study did not explore the generational gap within the *priawan* individuals, we acknowledge the importance of addressing this issue since there might be a difference in life history, experience, and other sociocultural contexts that shape our informants. Therefore, we recommend further studies on *priawan* to emphasize the various experiences of a certain age group that might differ from another age group.

Gender dysphoria and gender-affirming process

All informants are familiar with gender dysphoria, and they have their own mechanisms for lowering its levels. The description of the gender-affirmation process experienced by

informants is shown in Table 1. At least six informants indicated that they had changed their names. Their new names are masculine-leaning and/or gender-neutral. One informant mentioned receiving hormone therapy to naturally inhibit their menstrual cycle and shrink their breasts. None of the informants had undergone top (chest) or bottom (genital) surgery, nor did they desire to. Their reasons for not engaging in a gender-affirming surgery vary. However, several informants, such as EV and TT, said that their body had been ‘created in God’s image’. They intend to ‘respect’ their God by not radically altering their body. EV, as the only *priawan* who has undergone hormone therapy, further explained that the only thing that matters to them is the bodily discomfort felt by trans individuals regardless of their chosen gender-affirming care.

It is fine that I am a man living in a female’s body. In fact, many of us feel this way, too. And it is okay if there is a woman that feels trapped in a male’s body. We don’t have to vulgarly and radically change our body. (EV)

Experience of discrimination

Five informants disclosed that they had experienced discrimination because of their gender identity (see Table 1). The types of discrimination include misgendering, stereotyping, verbal abuse, and physical abuse. It is possible that the other six participants did not want to or were unable to discuss their own experiences due to the sensitivity of the subject. It is also important to note that not all informants have disclosed their affirmed gender identity to their relatives and home environment.

Based on the interviews, all informants considered themselves lucky for having a relatively supportive social environment. Even though most of them do not find comfort in their respective family or neighborhood, they are involved and accepted by a ‘chosen community’. Some also seek comfort in their romantic partner, namely SS, TT, ST, MM, EV, and KN. This finding highlights the importance of communities in responding to and reducing the discrimination and hatred experienced by the LGBTQ+ community, especially in Indonesia. For TT, being a part of a *priawan* community also helps their self-acceptance and gender-affirming process, while at the same time, providing a ‘safe haven’ to not overthink about the hatred that they routinely receive.

Discussion

Transmasculine is an umbrella term referring to individuals who were assigned female at birth based on their external genitalia but who later identify or conform with masculinity. Transmasculine individuals may not necessarily identify as men but may feel a connection with masculinity in terms of their personal identity, expression, and societal roles. Hence, transmasculine individuals might identify as a man, woman, nonbinary, genderfluid, genderqueer, and/or other identities while identifying or conforming to their masculine side (Anzani, et al., 2023; Hansbury, 2005). Based on the definition, the *priawan* identity can fall under the larger umbrella term of transmasculine or trans men, although some might simply identify themselves as having other identities. Aside from its categorization, this study explores variations within the *priawan* identity.

This study also identifies an interesting relationship between the fluidity of sexual orientation and gender identity. MM, who identifies as straight, explained that they are ‘just like other men’ and that they are attracted to women. Eight other informants are also attracted to women but chose to identify as lesbians. This shows the sexual orientation diversity in the trans spectrum, specifically in the transmasculine community, where they are not bound to only one self-identification (Hansbury, 2005; Milton, 2021; Prasetyo, et al., 2019).

Nine informants recognized that they are masculine-presenting. When asked about their gender expressions, the informants described that they primarily wear ‘men’s’ clothing,

such as trousers and shirts, they cut their hair short and style them in a relatively masculine manner, such as mohawk and slicked-back hairstyles. Conversely, other do not necessarily present themselves as masculine individuals. SS for instance confirmed during the interview that they are androgynous-presenting, while similarly, ST mentioned that their gender expression is fluid. ST noted that their presentation depends on their partner, where they could be feminine with one partner and masculine with another. Our findings reveal that gender expression is not a one-size-fits-all system. Consequently, it is neither rigid nor compatible with a binary system. Instead, it is a wide spectrum of expressions, and the individual has every right to change from one spot of the spectrum to another due to the fluid nature of gender expressions (Bornstein, 1994; Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Monro, 2019). Fluidity in gender expression manifest in a variety of ways. People who identify as trans, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming have been expressing themselves outside of the socially prescribed gender binary, typically through wardrobe choices (Diamond, 2020; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Fluid clothing styles can also be seen in cisgender and/or heterosexual individuals, who tend to alter between masculine, feminine, and androgynous expressions (Akdemir, 2018; Bennett, 2018). The forced rigidity and non-fluidity can be seen as a result of cisheteronormativity, where products of everyday life are attached to certain genders, such as clothing, makeup, beauty products, and many more (Ben-Zeev & Dennehy, 2014; Gansen & Martin, 2018; Ulasewicz, 2007). The unnecessary gender boxes of products, especially in clothing, have faded in the recent flood of refusal to conform to traditional gender roles (Jordan, 2017; Reddy-Best & Pedersen, 2015; Zaslow, 2018).

We have previously stated that our informants' expressions diverge. Yet, this does not determine who they are as a *priawan* and/or transmasculine person. This demonstrates that one's gender identification and gender expression do not always correspond to one another. For instance, AA and ST identify as transmasculine even though their gender expressions are not constantly masculine. Their gender expression might rather be an attempt to lessen their gender dysphoria. Hence, the term 'gender-affirming process' or 'gender-affirming care' is more appropriate to describe the method of overcoming gender dysphoria (D'Angelo, et al., 2021).

The gender-affirming process consists of one or several interventions done to support and affirm one's gender identity. Such intervention could be in the form of psychological, social, behavioral, and medical acts (Boyle, 2022; Wagner, et al., 2019). Common interventions used by transgender and nonbinary (TGNB) individuals include, but are not limited to, chest binding, genital tucking, hormone therapy, top surgery, and bottom surgery. Name updating and using the correct pronouns are also parts of gender-affirming care. These procedures are used by TGNB individuals to reduce their gender dysphoria and improve their overall well-being (Clark, et al., 2018; Galupo, et al., 2021; Johnson, et al., 2020; Pulice-Farrow, et al., 2020; Richards, et al., 2016).

It is important to remember that the transition process differs from one individual to another and that every TGNB individual's transition journey is unique (Parker, 2016; Pfeffer, 2008). In our study, none of the informants felt the need to affirm their gender identity with surgery at the time of the interviews. This is interesting since surgery is a relatively possible and popular option in Indonesia, since there is no specific regulation that prohibits top and bottom surgeries for various reasons, including gender-affirmation (Agustin & Ahmad, 2023). This finding can be explained by Loos's review (2020) of Judith Butler's infamous book, *Gender Trouble*, within the context of Southeast Asia. She argued that despite the dysphoria, bodily acceptance is often still achieved by most Southeast Asians, including Indonesians. She further explained that in Southeast Asian cultures, there is a nonparallel relationship between one's physical body and their gender identity, meaning that one's assigned sex at birth does not dictate one's gender. Davies's ethnographic study (2010a) of the Bugis society unveiled that neither *calalai* (masculine female), *calabai* (feminine male), nor *bissu* (nonbinary/metagender) denied their assigned sex at birth despite their current gender identity, thus they had no interest in altering them through surgical procedures.

Religion plays a part in shaping society's cultural mindset of gender and sex (Blackwood, 2010). Both Islam and Christianity, the two major religions in Indonesia, consider the human body as God's perfect creation and recognize that everyone serves a sacred purpose on Earth (Awijaya, 2021; Ichwan, 2014; Maharani & Zafi, 2020). This argument is notably echoed by TT, who stated that their body and identity are God's creation and that they have to accept His will.

As shown in Table 1, the informants' ways of affirming their gender varied. However, not all of them were willing to discuss this issue. On the one hand, hormone therapy was not a popular option among our informants, as only one of them opted for this form of gender-affirming care. On the other hand, all of them agreed that altering their name is the main way to affirm one's gender identification. They notably request others to use their preferred pronouns and give them names that had a male slant or were gender-neutral. Several studies have shown that using correct names and pronouns for TGNB individuals is life-saving (Barnes, et al., 2020; Boyle, 2022; DeChants, et al., 2022; Knutson, et al., 2019; Loeppky, 2022; Markovic, et al., 2021; Matouk & Wald, 2022). Finally, our study shows that none of our informants were willing to modify or transform their body.

'For me, if I change my body, it'd be for someone else, not for myself. A body that is compatible with its supposed gender identity... is not what I want.' (ST)

'I feel grateful about my female body... I am grateful with the card that I was dealt.' (AZ)

Nonetheless, there were at least five informants who admitted discomfort of having breasts. Having breasts acts as a 'visual reminder' of their gender assigned at birth, which causes their gender dysphoria (Galupo, et al., 2021; Harry-Hernandez, et al., 2020; Pulice-Farrow, et al., 2020). This discomfort results in chest binding, which is a method that is commonly used in the transmasculine, nonbinary communities to give the appearance of a flat chest (Bell & Telfer, 2019; Jarrett, et al., 2018; Lee, et al., 2019; Peitzmeier, et al., 2022). Although chest binding is critical for TGNB individuals' mental well-being and safety, risks such as physical discomfort or frequent rib fractures have been reported (Jarrett, et al., 2018; Julian, et al., 2021; Lee, et al., 2019; Peitzmeier, et al., 2017, 2021, 2022). This highlights the urgency of providing accessible clinical care and to educate transmasculine and nonbinary individuals on gender-affirming care to allow them to make informed decisions regarding their choices.

Furthermore, the dissemination of information on gender-affirming care can lead to a reduction in the incidence of discrimination. At least five of the eleven informants reported having experienced forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, from verbal to physical abuse. They face discrimination in various private, public and professional places, notably at home, on campus, or in their neighborhood. Mental and physical health issues might result from discrimination and violence (Başar, et al., 2016; Harry-Hernandez, et al., 2020; Richards, et al., 2016).

One informant (MM) experienced discrimination on campus and mentioned how other students often call lesbians 'weird and taboo'. Yet, higher institutions should be safe and open places for every gender variant to just be their authentic selves without facing prejudice and discrimination. Studies have indeed shown that higher education institutions and their campus cultures are not as open and safe for gender and sexual minorities (Goldberg, et al., 2019; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Hoxmeier & Madlem, 2018; White & Jenkins, 2017). Altering these cultures is challenging in Indonesia because the nation's values and religiosity contradict non-normative gender identities and sexualities (Garcia Rodriguez, 2024). Indonesian LGBTQ+ individuals' rights are still argued over on many platforms, and there was talk of the criminalization of "LGBT behavior" on RUU (the national bills) in 2022 (Amindoni, 2022). The cause is presumably the lack of gender and sexuality education, thus prolonging the existing cycle of ignorance and close-mindedness (Bolger, et al., 2014; Budge, et al., 2020; McFarland, et al., 2017). Several studies showed that indigenous

Indonesian cultures, such as Toraja and Bugis, were once queer-friendly societies until the Dutch colonization (Dalidjo, 2020; Davies, 2010). Colonists notably forced the Indonesian people to convert to Christianity. Along the process, the Dutch cisheteronormativity slowly percolated in Indonesian society (Blackwood, 2005; Hegarty, 2022; Thajib, 2022; Vincent & Manzano, 2017). A similar transformation also occurred in other nations colonized by the British Empire, such as Senegal and Namibia. Aside from forced evangelization by the missionaries, the growth of cisheteronormativity in the British colonies was reinforced through a legal act that criminalized homosexuality within the colonies (Currier, 2010; Han & O'Mahoney, 2014; M'Baye, 2013).

Two of our informants mentioned that they had been verbally abused, without providing more details on their experience. SS reported having been discriminated against by medical professionals. Studies indeed suggest that the healthcare system tends to be less accommodating to trans and nonbinary individuals (Clark, et al., 2018; Hughto, et al., 2018; Mujugira, et al., 2021; Reisner, et al., 2015; Seelman & Poteat, 2020). In a societal context, informants SS and TT reported experiencing discrimination and transphobia. TT's neighbors often mocked them, saying that they did not act like a traditional woman. In Indonesia, women who go out all night and get home in the morning are considered 'naughty', 'wild', and 'not woman enough' (Aldilla, 2020; Humaeni, 2016; Muttaqin, 2020; Tilotama, 2017). Considering TT's gender identity, being perceived as a woman and being publicly mocked for it might affect the severity of their gender dysphoria (Harry-Hernandez, et al., 2020; James, et al., 2016). Similarly, SS was stigmatized and stereotyped due to their gender identity and sexual orientation. Indonesian society's perspective on individuals who adhere to the 'childfree lifestyle' is generally discriminative, which is why SS was called out for being a lesbian and shamed for not being able to conceive a child on their own (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Alyssa, 2022; Basten, 2009; Koropecykj-Cox, et al., 2018; Marfia, 2022; Pelton & Hertlein, 2011).

Because of their gender identity, TT also endured physical abuse that was perpetrated by a member of their own family. They recalled having been slapped by their sister as an attempt to 'preserve their family's dignity' as TT suspects that having a trans person in the family goes against 'traditional Indonesian family values'. The violence experienced by the informants and its physical and psychological consequences highlight the need for gender and sexuality education in conservative societies like Indonesia (Clark, et al., 2018; Dimant, et al., 2019; Haverkamp, 2018; Paechter, et al., 2021).

Although Garcia Rodriguez (2024) found that queer Muslims in Indonesia still place biological ties at the center of their idea of 'home', which directly ties to their feelings of belonging, our study, on the other hand, reflects on the significance of the 'chosen family' for these *priawan* individuals in Indonesia. Due to the reluctance of several families and blood relatives in accepting queer family members, the LGBTQ+ community is also known for providing a 'chosen family' to their members. A 'chosen family' within the context of LGBTQ+ studies refers to close relationships and support networks that LGBTQ+ individuals form with people who are not necessarily related by blood and marriage. These relationships can be lifesaving since they might help LGBTQ+ individuals to cope and develop a sense of resilience from societal rejection, discrimination, hate speech, among others. In Indonesia, there is still much to be explored regarding the queer chosen family. As mentioned by some of our informants, they have not disclosed their *priawan* identity to their family yet, but they have opened up to their chosen family (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Hailey, et al., 2020; Hull & Ortyl, 2019). It is also important to note that all of our informants are part of a regional or national LGBTQ+ organization in Indonesia, which allows them to form connections and develop a safety net in order to feel affirmed and validated. We would like to highlight the significance of community development in Indonesia, especially for the marginalized, to ensure that marginalized identities can feel and advocate to increase their sense of freedom, safety, and equity within the community and society in general (Alaydrus, et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The existence of individuals who identify as *priawan* highlights the extent of gender diversity in Indonesia. Their gender identities, gender expression, and sexual orientation are fluid, thus further departing from the deeply rooted cisheteronormative ideal in Indonesian society. The results of this study show that *priawan* experience a variety of difficulties, most notably discrimination and gender dysphoria, both within and outside their immediate environments. They change their names, bind their chests, and undergo hormone therapy as coping mechanisms. In addition, informants reported experiencing various types of discrimination, both verbally and physically. They further report being the target of cisheteronormative stereotypes as well as gender invalidation. Such experiences of discrimination and violence constitute human right issues faced by *priawan* in Indonesia. We recommend inclusive gender and sexuality education, whether it be formal or nonformal education, to tackle systemic gender-based discrimination and abuse to ensure *priawan* individuals a safe space to exist and express themselves.

Declaration of Conflict Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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