

Influence of Gender Identity Stigma and COVID-19 Economic Stressors on Mental Health and HIV Risk of Transgender Women in South India: Findings from Mediation Analyses

Ruban Nelson¹, Aleena Sebastian^{2*}, Jasvir Kaur³, Murali Shunmugam¹, M. Thilothama⁴, Kavya⁴, Venkatesan Chakrapani¹

¹ Centre for Sexuality and Health Research and Policy (C-SHaRP), Chennai, India; ² National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bengaluru, India; ³ Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, India; ⁴ Thozhi, Chennai, India AIDS2024: 5913

Introduction

- Transgender women (TGW) globally bear a disproportionate HIV burden.
- Harmful social conditions such as gender identity-related stigma faced by TGW, and COVID-19 economic stressors may contribute to syndemic psychosocial conditions and elevate their HIV risk.

Aim

- We aimed to examine whether the effects of transgender identity stigma, sex work stigma and COVID-19 economic stressors on condomless anal sex (CAS) are mediated through mental health and transprejudice among TGW.

Study Location

- Chennai city, South India

Results & Analysis

- Mean age: 29±5.7 years
- Education (Completed a college degree): 47%
- Engagement in sex work: 90%
- Condomless Anal Sex (CAS): 86%
- Prevalence of psychosocial syndemics: 70%.
- Transgender identity stigma and COVID-19 economic stressors had significant direct effects on syndemics and CAS with non-regular partners (Figure 1).
- Total effects of identity stigma ($\beta=.45$; 95% CI .26, .64; $p<.001$) and COVID-19 economic stressors ($\beta=.16$; 95% CI .01, .31; $p=.04$) on CAS were significant.
- Identity stigma had similar effects on CAS with regular and 'any type' of partners.
- Further, mediation effects were non-significant in all the models.

Methods

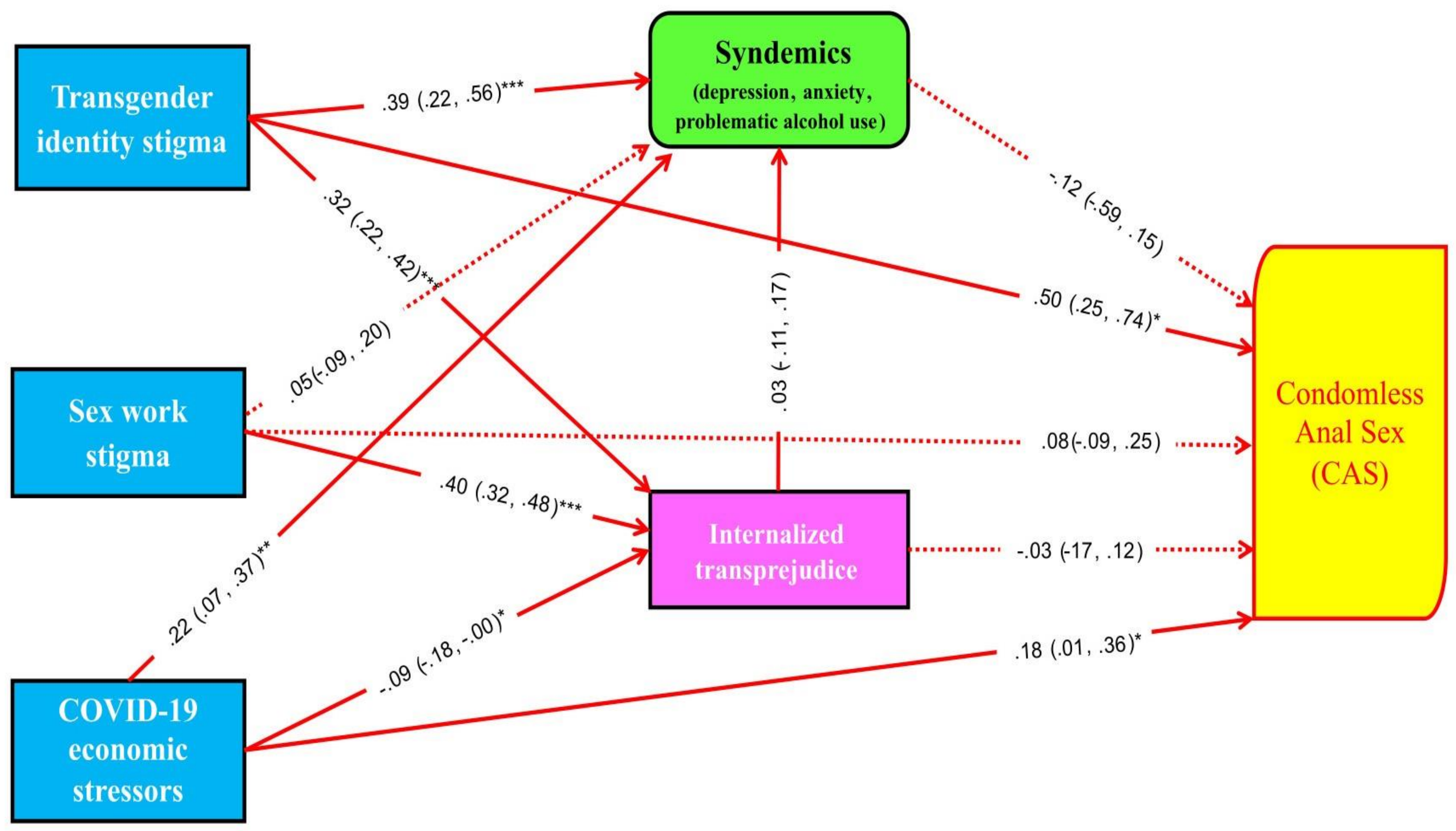
- Cross-sectional study (September-December 2022)
- Survey: Online (self-administered); Offline (in-person; interviewer-administered)
- N = 250 TGW
- Data analysis:** Path analyses in Mplus8
- Standardized scales were used to measure stigmas and psychosocial health conditions: past 2-week depression: PHQ-2; past 2-week anxiety: GAD-2; past 3-month problematic alcohol use: AUDIT-C.
- We created a binary syndemic variable, as presence or absence of syndemics (co-occurrence of two or more psychosocial conditions, as a mediator).
- The binary outcome measure was past 2-month CAS with male partners ('any type', regular and non-regular).
- The analyses were adjusted for educational status, social support and gender affirmation. Standardized coefficients (β) are presented for effect estimates.

Conclusion

- Experiences of stigma and COVID-19 stressors play a pivotal role in increasing HIV risk and psychosocial syndemics among TGW.
- Trans-specific HIV-prevention interventions, therefore, need to take steps to reduce transgender identity stigma and economic vulnerabilities, and promote mental health.

Figure 1. Associations between multiple stigmas, psychosocial syndemic conditions, and condomless anal sex (with male non-regular partners) among TGW

Effects are standardized estimates (95% CI). Bold red arrows indicate significant effects; * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.



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