

# Study on eunuchs/transgenders: An opinion

Sir,

This letter to the editor is our observation in response to the recent article "Saxena E, Chandrashekhar BR, Hongal S, Torwane N, Goel P, Mishra P. A study of the palatal rugae pattern among male female and transgender population of Bhopal city. J Forensic Dent Sci 0; 0:0." that was published online.

Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), the famous German sexologist, had coined the words transvestites and transsexuals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Virginia Prince coined the word transgenderism, which includes both transsexualism and transvestism.<sup>[1]</sup> Transgenders, in general, are genetically, biologically, and physiologically men who may or may not have undergone sex-change surgeries or self-inflicted castration.

They are also called eunuchs, transgenders, transsexuals, and transvestites in English and colloquially hijras, alis, kothis, double deckers, and panthis in India.<sup>[2,3]</sup> In India, hijras are seen as the "third gender," who is neither male nor female. As quoted by Saxena *et al.*, in their article, eunuchs are physiological males who have a feminine gender identity, adopt feminine gender roles, and wear women's clothing.<sup>[4]</sup> Hence, a eunuch (noun/Greek: *Eunoukhos*) is defined as a man who has been castrated (especially in the past), and is employed to guard the women's living areas at an oriental court.<sup>[5]</sup> A transgender (adjective) relates to people who have a sexual identity that is neither clearly male nor clearly female or relating to or being a person (as a transsexual or transvestite) who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that differs from the one that corresponds to the person's sex at birth.<sup>[6]</sup>

Palatal rugae, also called plicae palatinae transversae and rugae palatina, refer to the ridges on the anterior part of the palatal mucosa, each side of the median palatine raphe, and behind the incisive papilla. These rugae develop in embryonic life and are well-pronounced at 550 mm stage of embryonic development. They become pronounced at the end of the intrauterine life. The rugae patterns have been studied for various fields including forensic odontology.<sup>[7,8]</sup>

Being a eunuch is a dispositionally acquired characteristic behavioral pattern seen uncommonly in biologically born

men much later in their lives. To the best of our knowledge, no true transgender survives. Hence, the comparison of genetic characteristics such as rugae patterns, finger prints, or lip prints among men and eunuchs-castrated men or men who behave in a feminine way does not have a scientific rationale, as both are physiologically men in nature.

Eunuchs are largely marginalized; they live as beggars or sex workers by oral or anal sex. They are abused regularly and form the lower socioeconomic strata of the general population. The effects of their lifestyle on various dental diseases such as dental caries and periodontal disease can be studied. Such studies would provide baseline data on which the government can implement future plans to improve their oral health in particular and the general well-being.

In forensic odontology, the effect of their sexual behavior on oral tissues, their past violent experiences, trauma, and injuries in relation to their face and oral cavity can be investigated.

This letter is a sincere attempt to assist naive researchers by giving them necessary leads for investigation of the transgender population and we hope that it will prompt them to walk in the right direction.

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