

Barriers to Social Inclusion and Gender Equality for Transgenders in Pakistan



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Abstract: *This research aims to examine the barriers to social inclusion and gender equality for transgenders in Pakistan. This qualitative exploratory study utilized interpretivism as its research paradigm, used a phenomenological approach and thematic analysis. Eighteen semi-structured interviews were performed to collect data. The research revealed that the difficulties faced by transgender individuals in Pakistan are complex and diverse, notwithstanding recent legal advancements like the 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. Societal stigma and prejudice continually hinder their full participation in several aspects of life, including economic marginalization, limited access to education and healthcare, and pervasive social ostracism. These impediments are ingrained in cultural conventions and systemic biases that perpetuate discrimination and violence against transgender individuals. Thorough advocacy and customized actions are crucial to addressing these challenges.*

Pakistan must promote gender equality and social justice for transgender communities through legislation, policies, diversity advocacy, healthcare access, and support services, requiring policy reforms, education, and awareness from stakeholders. The results of this study are significant for governmental institutions, policymakers, NGOs, international organizations, and social and transgender communities. The findings of this research can be used to develop policies for transgender individuals to mitigate gender inequalities and social exclusion.

Keywords: Barriers, Gender Equality, Hijras, Khawaja Saras, Khusras, LGBT, Pakistan, Social Inclusion, Transgenders

1. Introduction

Social inclusion and gender equality are fundamental human rights applicable to all genders (Divan et al., 2016). Genders may be categorized as male, female, and transgender (Newfield et al., 2006). Among all genders, transgender individuals face societal discrimination due to their distinctive traits. This phenomenon is more prevalent in developing countries than developed ones (Turner et al.,

2007; Vujadinovi et al., 2023). Cultural, legal, and socioeconomic factors have a significant impact on the numerous barriers that transgender people in Pakistan face in their efforts to achieve social integration and gender equality. In 2018, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights Act) was enacted. While the Pakistani government has formulated rules in this matter, their execution is still in temporary halt (Arqum, 2023). Many legal rights, particularly those related to the right to

fair treatment and protection against discrimination, are either little comprehended or not fully implemented. Revising the gender markers on official documents may be challenging for transgender individuals, potentially restricting their access to services and employment opportunities. Deeply rooted cultural and religious norms often lead to the widespread stigmatization of transgender individuals, resulting in violence, harassment, and social marginalization. Persons who self-identify as transgender can encounter discrimination in professional and educational environments, therefore limiting their opportunities for career progression and financial stability (Restar et al., 2020).

Transgenders (Khawaja Saras, Khusras, Hijras, Khunsa, Transgender Man, Transgender Woman, Khawajasira) are a broad category including anyone whose gender identification deviates from the sex they were given at birth. Gender identity pertains to an individual's internal perception of their gender, which might be male, female, a combination of both, neither, or a completely other gender. Transgender individuals may encounter a discrepancy between their designated sex and gender identity, prompting them to strive for a lifestyle that corresponds with their authentic selves. Transgender persons may engage in several mechanisms of transition to manifest their gender identification, including alterations in name, pronouns, attire, and, in some instances, medical procedures such as hormone treatment or surgery. It is noteworthy that every transgender individual actively chooses or has the opportunity to avail themselves of medical or social transition strategies (Bhatt et al., 2022). "Transgender" in Pakistan often refers to someone whose gender identification deviates from the sex they were assigned at birth. A significant number of transgender individuals depend on sex work or begging as their primary means of financial support due to their limited economic opportunities. This situation contributes to the ongoing cycle of poverty and discrimination. For transgender persons, accessing healthcare facilities, including routine medical care and other treatments that prioritize

gender equality, can be a formidable obstacle. Some healthcare practitioners may lack awareness of their lack of empathy towards matters concerning transgender health (A. Foundation, 2016). The hijra community in Pakistan is recognized as an independent group of transgender individuals and has a significant historical presence in South Asia. Hijras, including intersex, transgender, and eunuch individuals, often assume distinct social and cultural responsibilities within society. They are traditionally invited to wedding ceremonies to provide entertainment. The Pakistani government officially recognizes hijras as a third gender in its legislative papers and laws, therefore acknowledging their distinct identity and social role. Individuals who were designated female at birth exhibit masculine identity and live as males. Individuals who freely identify as feminine despite being assigned male at birth (Pervaiz, 2024). Although somewhat assimilated into Pakistani culture, the Hijra population often experiences marginalization. Substantial societal stigma is experienced by other transgender identities, including transgender men and women. Transgender individuals in Pakistan may encounter damaging misconceptions and cultural misinterpretations. Traditional conceptions and disinformation about gender diversity may have an impact on public opinion. While some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy organizations are implementing vocational training and employment programs to enhance economic prospects for transgender persons, these efforts are not yet omnipresent. (Pirzada et al., 2022). Violent crimes against transgender persons, including physical and sexual assault, are notably widespread in Pakistan. Individuals who identify as transgender may hesitate to seek assistance from relevant authorities due to concerns about potential prejudice or further neglect. The 2018 Act offers essential protections; nevertheless, more enhancements are required to bolster the execution and effectiveness of this legislation, therefore assuring strong safeguards against verbal abuse and violence for transgender individuals. Pakistan is seeing an escalating transgender rights movement, with several corporations

leading initiatives to foster knowledge of equality and social inclusion for transgender individuals. (Q. Arslan et al., 2023). Transgender individuals in Pakistan have substantial barriers that hinder their social integration and quest for gender equality, needing focused assistance and inclusive policies to address this disparity.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) released a Briefing Paper about Pakistan's Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018. The ICJ states that the passing of this Act represents significant progress and was executed in accordance with Pakistan's international law commitments. This article contends, notwithstanding disagreement with the observation, that this statute has been enacted based on a misleading view of international law as outlined in the ICJ Briefing article. Furthermore, it subverts the rights of indigenous gender-variant individuals in Pakistan, along with the nation's legal and social structure. The legislation is more congruent with the worldwide movement of the lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) populations; however, it has significant definitional and conceptual deficiencies. This research proposes the development of a framework for the integration of gender-variant individuals, based on the Constitution of Pakistan, directives from the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and established principles of international law. This necessitates a comprehensive examination of the existing legislation with an altered methodology and perspective (Nadeem et al., 2020).

While Pakistan's Transgender Act 2018 signifies a significant advancement, its implementation encounters challenges. Transgender individuals continue to confront deep-seated cultural prejudices, systemic prejudice, structural obstacles, institutional impediments, and widespread discrimination. The transgender population encounters systemic obstacles in employment, education, and social inclusion. Driven by enduring prejudice and stigma. This effect restricts professional progression, creates adverse working conditions, and contributes to an excessively

high unemployment rate, further undermining economic security in the nation. The school environment may provide significant obstacles for transgender adolescents. Transgender individuals encounter bullying, marginalization, and inadequate assistance from institutional structures. This may undermine their academic potential, elevate the probability of premature school leave, and perpetuate inequities in educational outcomes. (Gizem Guney, David Davies, 2022). The transgender community often encounters harassment and violence driven by deep-seated cultural biases and social stigma, which intensify their marginalization and impede social integration, despite existing legal protections. Additionally, they frequently lack sufficient institutional support and effective legal recourse, leaving them susceptible to abuse, discrimination, and systemic injustices. Confronting the obstacles encountered by transgender persons in Pakistan requires a comprehensive strategy, including improved legal safeguards, and increased access to jobs, education, and healthcare, with the promotion of societal acceptability. So far, efforts have resulted in significant advancements in social involvement and gender equality. (Coleman et al., 2022). Transgender individuals in Pakistan continue to face substantial obstacles to social integration and gender equality, hindering their full involvement in the nation's economic, social, and political domains. Transgender persons encounter elevated levels of violence and harassment, including physical assaults and verbal abuse, from their communities. Societal beliefs and entrenched cultural prejudices perpetuate this violence, intensifying isolation and obstructing their capacity to lead secure, meaningful lives. Familial rejection often renders transgender individuals financially precarious, bereft of familial support, and devoid of critical resources and safety measures. Furthermore, discriminatory housing policies limit access to safe and pleasant homes, exacerbating economic difficulties. The threat of abuse and exploitation further jeopardizes the stability of transgender people. Harassment in public areas and workplaces diminishes financial liberty, complicating self-sufficiency (Abbas et al., 2021). Hence, it is important to

comprehend the obstacles that impede transgender individuals from integrating into society and achieving gender equality for economic development, poverty alleviation, the pursuit of sustainable development objectives, and the establishment of an inclusive society. The objective of the study is as under:

How do key challenges hinder social inclusion and gender equality for transgender individuals in Pakistan?

2. Literature Review:

Despite the implementation of many laws and social initiatives, transgender individuals in Pakistan have significant challenges in achieving basic socioeconomic status and seeking social integration and gender equality. Consequently, it is imperative to do research to tackle this problem (Arqum, 2023). The social integration of transgender persons is subject to hardship and they encounter prejudice in society, which impedes the advancement of any country and impacts the achievement of sustainable development objectives, therefore undermining the overall success of developing nations (Mohua, 2022). Many barriers hinder the social inclusion and equitable treatment of transgender individuals in Pakistan. Ongoing systemic issues originating from institutional legal, cultural, and economic settings persistently hinder efforts to achieve integration and fair treatment, notwithstanding legislative advancements and heightened awareness. The primary finding derived from a contemporary study on the challenges encountered by transgender individuals (A. Foundation, 2016). Given the limited amount of prior study on the legal rights of transgender individuals in Pakistan, both social and equity studies have not previously addressed this problem due to the scarcity of literature on the subject. This article elucidates the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan on behalf of the transgender community. This paper asserts that although tiny non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and some government organizations assist Pakistan's transgender minority, the rights and facilities provided are insufficient to sustain their livelihood. Given the significant number of transgender individuals in

Pakistan, the rights granted to them are inadequate. Within Pakistani culture, they lack dignity since their existence is subject to the whims of society. It is both a legal and societal entitlement that they should be acknowledged as human beings and afforded a regular life (M. Arslan, 2018)

Considering the obligations that states must adhere to, it is imperative and should be evident that measures of this kind are essential to eliminate the barriers to human rights encountered by transgender persons. Under international law, every individual is entitled to protection. Ensuring a payment to adequately tackle the systemic problems is crucial in addressing the marginalization experienced by transgender individuals. The implementation of such a decision may provide many benefits, including the full inclusion of transgender individuals in the process of human progress. Concerning transgender persons, the fundamental aspect that has to be altered is first the acceptance of their gender identity and the pursuit of equality (Divan et al., 2016). Understanding the survival of transgender individuals in Pakistani society is a crucial inquiry. The transgender community in Pakistan mostly focuses on activities such as dance and street strolling. These individuals lack any significant means of generating revenue. They are compelled to live outside of mainstream societal structures and establish their colonies. If they encounter violent assaults, they lack social respect and personal protection. They experience instances of criminal victimization or sexual harassment. The 2009 Supreme Court of Pakistan affirmed the recognition of third-gender individuals and granted them the right to a national ID card, free education, equal rights, and health. However, those belonging to the transgender community face hindered access to improved living conditions, education, and healthcare facilities. The primary cause of this discrimination is the failure to enforce the current laws specifically designed for them (Arqum, 2023). Within Pakistani society, those who self-identify as transgender, gay, or bisexual are considered a source of shame and degradation. Moreover, these individuals suffer

from inferior social standing if they display any of these traits. This group of transgenders in Pakistan is marginalized and subjected to widespread discouragement. Transgender individuals coexist with the general population in traditional culture, who see them as unconventional. Transgender individuals are not considered part of the mainstream population, as shown by the aforementioned research. Therefore, it is imperative to proactively tackle the challenges faced by transgender individuals, such as social integration, unemployment, low income, inequality, and healthcare. The visual obstacles hinder access to equality rights and social respect (Warraich et al., 2023)

Transgenders encounter dual challenges: economic exploitation as informal workers and cultural vulnerability due to their gender identity; consequently, they frequently endure unfair treatment and prejudice. (Hansen, 2011) They encounter several hurdles in securing jobs in both the public and commercial sectors due to their restricted access to education. They frequently have difficulties in obtaining satisfactory employment and suffer further obstacles, such as inadequate educational resources. These hurdles sustain a cycle of disadvantage, impeding their capacity to escape economic and social marginalization. (Armas, 2007) Workplace discrimination inflicts considerable distress on transgender employees. (Waqar et al., 2022). The transgender minority in Pakistan has endured persistent socioeconomic marginalization coupled with prejudice and exclusion. The 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Right) Act provided legislative safeguards for transgender rights, yet, there are still ongoing barriers hindering full social integration and gender parity. This literature study examines the many problems encountered by transgender individuals in Pakistan. Considering socioeconomic and legal factors. Transgender individuals, known as hijra in their culture, have maintained a consistently unique yet marginalized status in Pakistani society. Throughout, they have assumed a variety of functions, including that of ceremonial hosts (Arslan & Rasool, 2023). Social acceptability is a challenge. One of the

primary challenges for transgender individuals is the frequent encounter with prejudice and societal disapproval in many aspects of life. It is not unusual to endure harassment in public spaces, social isolation, and rejection from family members and relatives. Conventional norms and misunderstandings about gender identity contribute to the further marginalization of transgender persons in the hostile environment they face. Considerable stigma and prejudice exist in Pakistani society against transgender individuals (Muntasir Mahmud, 2024) . Societal exclusion and social isolation often result from the rejection experienced by transgender individuals within their families and communities. Social barriers are reinforced when transgender individuals are seen as aberrant or unsuitable by culture prevailing views and traditional beliefs. The lived experiences of transgender individuals are greatly influenced by the intersection of cultural and religious ideologies. Both conventional and religious frameworks sometimes strengthen negative perceptions and intensify societal resistance to the recognition of transgender individuals. The cultural context significantly complicates efforts to advance equality and inclusion. According to Sehgal Apoorva., (2018), Discrimination in recruiting procedures and organizational settings restricts career prospects for transgender individuals, leading many to engage in informal and unstable jobs, which presents significant challenges. The economic fragility of transgender persons is worsened by obstacles to achieving financial autonomy and stability. Transgender individuals may resort to sex work or other informal activities owing to hurdles in securing well-paying employment, which are exacerbated by educational obstacles, resulting in persistent socioeconomic challenges. Elucidate by (Arqum, 2023) The absence of institutional resources and learning competencies adversely affects work performance and economic stability, resulting in prolonged periods of deficit and insight. Prior research demonstrated a complete and improved analysis of the challenges faced by transgender persons in Pakistan. Governance advances the foundation for their rights and safeguards; yet, the

implementation of these rights remains challenging owing to institutional obstacles such as economic decline and societal stigma. Addressing these ways, including creative approaches, necessitates societal transformation and judicial reform to manage these complexities and enhance inclusion and equality for transgender individuals in Pakistan; efficient execution of current laws is crucial. This guarantees equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of daily life, aligning with cisgender persons, therefore narrowing disparities and promoting a more egalitarian society.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs an inductive approach (Azungah, 2018), has an exploratory dimension, and conforms to the interpretivist paradigm. The research is qualitative, representing an expanding field of study (Barsoum, 2022), utilizing phenomenology (Manen, 2017) to investigate the phenomena. A phenomenological research technique seeks to get a thorough comprehension and examination of phenomena (Creswell et al., 2017). Transgender individuals participated in semi-structured interviews to express their unique experiences (Miller, 2022). This interview method enables the recording of the societal reality encountered by transgender individuals, together with their perspectives on social exclusion and prejudice. Eighteen interviews (see Table 1) to obtain saturation in the qualitative study, were carried out in sufficient numbers (Fugard & Potts, 2015; Bra & Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 2000). The

study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method (Aldaihani & Data, 2021). The sample includes transgender men, transgender women, Khawajasira, and Khunsa who are employed in various occupations. A pilot study, consisting of five interviews, was conducted to evaluate the clarity and understanding of the questions by the participants. The pilot study's results demonstrated that it met the criteria set by the researcher for the current examination. The interviews were conducted from May 2024 to June 2024 throughout Pakistan, lasting around 30 to 45 minutes apiece. The interviews were arranged according to the respondents' convenience and their comfort levels. The interviewer further documented observations and transcribed concepts throughout each session. The interviews were transcribed, and significant statements, formulated meanings and themes were derived (Moustakas, 1994).

4. Results

The preliminary segment of the interview focusses on collecting data on the respondents' demographics, including inquiries about their name, age, occupation, and years of employment experience, as shown in Table 1. Eighteen interviews were conducted across Pakistan. The transgender participants are employed in various sectors.

Table 2 presents data on the aspects and themes associated with impediments to social inclusion and gender equality for transgender individuals in Pakistan.

Table 1. Respondents profile

S. No	Respondents	Age	Nature of Job	Experience of job in years
1	R1	25	Fashion designer	5
2	R2	27	Chowkidar in School	3
3	R3	40	Dancer	12
4	R4	34	Street performer	10
5	R5	30	Office boy	8
6	R6	18	Janitorial staff	4
7	R7	30	Nursing	11
8	R8	29	NGO worker	9
9	R9	19	Make-up artist	5
10	R10	42	Beauty parlor	17

11	R11	31	Cleark in Government office	8
12	R12	33	Caretaker	7
13	R13	28	Media industry	6
14	R14	27	Helper	5
15	R15	39	Tailor	13
16	R16	20	Packer	3
17	R17	21	Rider	2
18	R18	23	Lift operator	1

Table 2. Major Themes generated from the interviews

S. No	Dimensions	Themes
1.	Social Inclusion and Gender Equality for Transgender	Fundamental Rights
2.		Social exclusion and marginalization
3.		Public perception and attitudes towards transgenders
4.		Impact of family and community rejections
5.		Discrimination in education and employment
6.		Implementation and enforcement of laws related to transgenders
7.		Challenges faced in political participation
8.		Gender-based violence and harassment
9.		Economic marginalization and poverty
10.		Identity visibility and social movement

1. Fundamental Rights

All research participants said that *"we do not possess fundamental rights in Pakistan. We encounter substantial obstacles to social participation and gender equality. Despite the presence of several laws about us, we encounter social prejudice. We encounter several obstacles in acquiring official documentation. We lose the freedom to act. We lack freedom of speech. The prevailing atmosphere is unfavorable for us. All these circumstances weaken our core human rights"*.

2. Social exclusion and marginalization

Eighty percent of participants said that *"we are consistently socially alienated from society. All people exhibit bias and prejudice. They deride us, use disparaging words and exhibiting inappropriate behavior. We struggle with poverty, harassment, assault, and homelessness. We lack equitable chances in comparison to men*

and women. There are entrenched societal biases and cultural taboos. Our community is significantly poor, lacking amenities comparable to those available to other genders in Pakistan. These societal constraints hinder our access to equal opportunities and restrict our engagement in public life". One interviewee further reported that *"I am accepted by society solely through the transgender community. Approximately 60% of my support derives from a few close friends or coworkers. I was fortunate to have supportive individuals in my vicinity"* (R7). One more transgender added *"No government policies exist for transgender individuals. All actions are undertaken by the community since they have exerted much effort for enhancements in this area. Both the education sector and police stations exhibit a deficiency in adequate infrastructure for schools designed for transgender individuals. In the evening, a building is available for rent; but*

what if the owner declines to accommodate them at some point? We lack adequate educational institutions for transgender education; it primarily consists of basic skill-based or vocational centers. Consequently, our community has started engaging with the government over these measures. We require improved and more efficacious governmental programs, including educational institutions for the Khawajasara community for social inclusion. Appropriate educational institutions should be established for Khawajasaras to enroll in. Should that occur, an increased number of Khawajasaras will be able to register. Despite the establishment of a school in Multan for the transgender population, it remains deficient in adequate infrastructure that impact for social inclusion of transgenders in the society” (R1).

3. Public perception and attitudes towards transgenders

All participants of the study delineated that “The cultural norms, behaviors, and attitudes of individuals towards us are absurd. Their animosity for us is immeasurable. We are stigmatized, regarded as outcasts, and encounter absurd behavior and discrimination in public spaces. The detrimental behavior of individuals adversely affects us, and a hostile public disposition restricts our access to various aspects of life. Without altering these attitudes and behaviors, we cannot attain societal inclusion” one respondent added “Our society is categorized. Divisions have been established. A person who possesses no food at home yet owns an iPhone is someone we desire to befriend. We perceive matters from a shared perspective. Ultimately, it results in loss. I am fortunate due to my privilege and familial backing, which discourages others from challenging me. Conversely, the situation is distinct for a Khawajasara; individuals do not accord them respect. The notion of rejection and acceptance is categorized. As we state, a beggar at a traffic signal is deemed okay, however a Khawajasara is not, due to their marginalized status. Will they allocate resources for sustenance or medical treatment? Holding a leadership position does not necessarily signify that I am a genuine

Khawaja Sara” (R15).

4. Impact of family and community rejections

Ninety percent of participants of the study divulged that “We face rejection from our family and community, which is a significant obstacle to social inclusion and gender equality. We are devoid of emotional, financial, or social assistance. This carelessness and isolation engender a vulnerable position characterized by poverty, exploitation, and homelessness. The absence of community acceptance impedes participation in society and the attainment of equal rights” One respondent added “I grappled with the necessity of clinical intervention or surgical procedures. I opted for surgery, resulting in a significant reaction from my family, particularly my mother. Upon conveying my decision to my mother and sister, they made no effort to comprehend. My sister, a psychotherapist, failed to recognize my difficulties and instead characterized them as contrary to Islamic values. Indeed, my transition period was somewhat challenging; yet, I found fulfillment in identifying as male. I was entirely solitary, without familial support. I have endured two operations for my transition without familial support, and in the absence of such backing, encountering societal discrimination becomes unavoidable” (R11). One participant in the study shared “I have to obtain a CNIC from NADRA, which necessitates parental consent; however, my parents are unsupportive and unwilling to accompany me. I am still encountering difficulties in updating my ID card” (R2).

5. Discrimination in education and employment

The majority of interviewees in the survey revealed that “We are denied access to education due to stigma and bullying, some who attend school have to drop out because of the teasing environment. All students’ mock transgenders and teachers’ behavior is also unwelcoming. This circumstance hinders our ability to learn and receive an education. The job market offers limited prospects, workplace harassment is prevalent, and there is insufficient

protection for our rights. Exclusion from both sectors fosters poverty and inequality, hindering our attainment of economic independence and full societal engagement” One responded and further added “At my initial employment, I was terminated owing to office politics, primarily related to my gender. Subsequently, I sought many positions, but I was not chosen due to discrimination and stayed unemployed for an extended period” (R9). one respondent further added that “I began encountering educational difficulties in approximately fifth or sixth grade. I recall my female classmates and my initial attraction to girls, but I subsequently recognized the distinction in my emotions. College life was distinct due of my aversion to the feminine clothing. I recall disliking the wearing of a dupatta or sash, and my teachers frequently mocked me for it. I was never inclined towards conventional “feminine” discussions and did not receive substantial backing from my educators” (R15). One transgender further added “This is a persistent problem, with numerous occurrences reported. Individuals express impolite remarks and exhibit peculiar gazes. I recall a guy instructor ridiculing me during my presentation as I began to introduce myself due to the quality of my voice. Subsequently, the entire class commenced laughing in unison with him. I shall neither forget nor forgive that educator.” (R13). One more transgender added “I have had minimal experience with corporate and public organizations; nonetheless, I am lucky to have commenced work with community-based organizations. I contend that community-based organizations provide the most secure work environment for transgender individuals. Our organization, together with partner entities including UN agencies and worldwide donors, enforces stringent regulations against harassment and discrimination, maintaining a zero-tolerance stance towards such behaviors. This fosters a sense of security in our workplace, as we actively advocate for inclusiveness. Transgender individuals, as well as men and women, are collaborating with us according to their availability. To safeguard individual rights, we have implemented a sexual harassment policy and are incorporating United Nations policies. Due to restricted vacancies, we

are unable to accommodate everyone; yet, we frequently encounter numerous instances of discrimination and harassment inside the private sector, including obstacles to promotion. In a patriarchal environment, male employees frequently obstruct the progress of transgender individuals in the workplace. Numerous individuals have been dismissed due to a lack of willingness to work alongside transgender women. Consequently, transgender individuals favor employment in community-based organizations. To establish a secure atmosphere for community mobilization, we have executed MOUs with Elan, the Lahore police, and other entities to ensure they are not subjected to harassment. We also guarantee accountability via our policies” (R6). One more respondent shared his experience that “Indeed, transwomen encounter greater problems due to their heightened visibility and vocality. Consequently, they face greater challenges. Five to seven years ago, when I completed my studies, the school sector lacked a Transgender Act. No one was aware of who Khawajasara was, nor the distinction between trans men and trans women. The admission forms contained only two categories: male and female. You could select the female column because “you had to study,” but in the male area, it was mandatory to select it. I possessed a university identification card indicating my gender as male, which I concealed to prevent others from discovering its contents. I appreciate my parents for bestowing upon me the androgynous name Jaan E Alam. Upon the calling of my name for attendance, I would courteously reply with a succinct “yes.” Consequently, I did not endure a severe degree of bullying. Our community experiences significant challenges due to the primary trauma associated with being designated male. This is one rationale for their retention of chosen names. Secondly, my father or brother would transport me to university or college, which led others to perceive that I had familial support and refrain from addressing me directly. I am not asserting that bullying did not occur—it did—but perhaps the severity was not as pronounced. I also had packages hurled at me containing water throughout the winters. However, individuals recognized that excessive actions

could result in repercussions affecting my family. Individuals perceive that a Khawajasara attending school, university, or college without familial support encounters significant harassment and bullying. I was also engaged in an internal struggle. I aspired to attire myself like the other girls in shalwar kameez, although I needed to exercise caution. I had to wear unisex attire to pursue my studies without disturbance. The period was challenging due to the internal conflict of questioning, "Am I correct, or are those around me accurate?" At that time, we had limited exposure to such circumstances, resulting in a perpetual mental struggle. In my school years, I was a sensitive child, prompting my teachers to seat me with my female classmates. The females were amiable, which made me feel at ease in their presence. However, in sixth grade, I attended a boys' school. I recognized my lack of compatibility and inability to maintain equilibrium. The boys frequently mocked me. Upon expressing my grievances to the educators, they would respond, "Simply remain on the sidelines." However, remaining on the sidelines was not a viable choice. I was instructed to occupy the corner seat, observing my students and contemplating why I could not join them, why I was not akin to them. During my undergraduate education, I acquired an understanding of harassment. It was an all-boys institution, and my peers would mock me, referring to me with pejorative terms such as "cake," "chakka," "khusra," and commenting on my perceived effeminacy. They ridiculed my gait, inscribed derogatory notes and affixed them to my back, among other actions. During my time at university, I sought methods to evade students who ridiculed or taunted me" (R5).

6. Implementation and enforcement of laws related to transgenders

Eighty percent of the study's respondents claimed that "The Government of Pakistan has enacted laws for us, including the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. These laws should be enforced in both letter and spirit. These statutes confer some safeguards and rights. The enforcement of these rules is significantly weakened by societal stigma,

insufficient awareness, and deficiencies in enforcement methods". One participant stated "I have not observed any legal safeguards for transsexual individuals. Transgender individuals frequently must advocate for themselves. The culture of "Jis ki Laathi us ki Bheens" predominates in Pakistan. We are encountering difficulties with our NIC paperwork. Trans men may have difficulties to a certain degree; however, trans women confront greater hurdles due to their heightened visibility. I have not personally experienced insecurity as a trans man; nonetheless, trans women frequently encounter sexual harassment, and law enforcement remains inadequate in tackling this issue" (R11). One more interviewee revealed "I like to recount an incident: I accompanied my transgender woman buddy for breakfast, during which the shopkeeper made unpleasant remarks towards her. Trans women often experience harassment from men in society, but trans men occasionally face harassment from women. I have not observed any instances of law enforcement organizations responding to such occurrences. The legal protections for us are now inadequate and are unlikely to improve until transgender individuals occupy roles in law and policy-making" (R18). one more transgender informed that "All my endeavors to amend my NIC at NADRA should be acknowledged. I am still encountering difficulties with altering the gender on my NIC. I have initiated legal proceedings and am encountering obstacles in obtaining legal assistance" (R13). One transgender revealed that "Following the enactment of the Transgender Act in 2018, a significant advancement was achieved for the transgender population. It was the culmination of the relentless efforts of everybody involved, both day and night. It was not adopted in certain European countries, yet it was enacted in Pakistan. Legislation and its implementation began to exhibit alterations. Nonetheless, owing to pressure from certain religious factions and extremist forces, the bill was contested in the Sharia court. This legal document enabled you to engage in discussions, assert your rights, and advocate for property rights. This fostered awareness within the community. Furthermore,

the Tahfooz Centre has been established, and we have executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Punjab police, indicating a shift in circumstances. We guarantee that transgender-related matters be addressed with complete transparency. Previously, circumstances were dissimilar; they showed hesitance in approaching the police station to assert their legal rights. Nonetheless, legal matters are gradually improving. Misunderstandings exist with the Transgender Protection Act. Merely 2,000 transgender individuals have altered their National Identity Cards, while others still lack the requisite confidence. This incited backlash, resulting in renewed suffering for the trans community. The hearings for the case are still in progress” (R17).

7. Challenges faced in political participation

Fifty percent of participants of the study disclosed that *“We are restricted from participating in political parties. Participation grants us minimal roles. We encounter harassment, discrimination, and exclusion from the political process. The lack of political representation marginalizes our voice. Consequently, we should be allocated a quota for seats in the national legislatures of Pakistan, encompassing all provinces”*. One respondent added that *“Empowered transgender individuals possess knowledge of their political rights, whilst those lacking such awareness often have difficulties. As an individual of privilege, I do not face such obstacles; nevertheless, many in my community certainly do. It is essential to increase awareness of particular political issues” (R2).*

8. Gender-based violence and harassment

Eighty percent of the study's respondents responded *“We encounter pervasive prejudice, physical and emotional maltreatment, and exclusion from vital commodities and services. These obstacles not only impede our progress but also sustain inequality and restrict access to personal and economic advancement”*. One participant added *“I encountered difficulties in determining whether to queue in the male or female queue. Females expressed discomfort, necessitating my transition to the male line.*

These issues persisted. I secured a position as a student counselor while studying overseas; nonetheless, discrimination persisted in that environment. My supervisor mocked me by proclaiming to everyone, “I have shaped him into what he is today.” He was once like this. My supervisor manipulated me in multiple ways. I also worked for Mahnush, an organization in Islamabad that supports transgender individuals through employment opportunities. During this moment, my landlady requested that I vacate the premises, which was also a challenging time for me” (R3).

9. Economic marginalization and poverty

All participants in the study revealed that *“We live hand to mouth. We possess no savings. Economic marginalization and poverty constitute significant obstacles to social inclusion and gender equality for us. Widespread discrimination deprives us of economic development. We are denied formal employment prospects and coerced into accepting lower wages. This economic deprivation restricts our access to fundamental resources and opportunities, hence exacerbating social inequality”*. One transgender added *“I note an absence of significant state assistance for gender inclusivity and economic development for our community. Private organizations may contribute, although their participation is restricted to a maximum of around 2%. (R13)*

10. Identity visibility and social movement

Seventy percent of the study participants indicated that *“Our societal acceptance is significantly low, resulting in animosity, violence, social ostracism, and discrimination. Our lack of social acceptance and visibility hinders our progress towards attaining full inclusion and equal rights relative to other genders”*. One respondent added *“Discrimination is a pervasive issue encountered universally. It commences in early life, inside the home, and persists through societal influences, peers, and educational institutions. Initially, it commenced with my family; nevertheless, society perceives a girl transitioning into a transman as less difficult*

than a son changing into a transwoman. This engendered discord between my family and me, particularly during familial gatherings where I was anticipated to don feminine attire and cosmetics. Upon experiencing a shift in my feelings towards masculine attire and pursuits, my attempts to discuss this with my family were met with hostility rather than comprehension. Trans guys encounter distinct problems in society compared to trans women. In my early life, I was unaware that I was experiencing gender dysphoria. It was only upon connecting with a fellow transgender individual from Canada that I realized I was experiencing gender dysphoria. I was attracted to masculine attire and pursuits, rather than feminine ones. Familial pressure to marry resulted in numerous confrontations” (R14).

5. Discussion

The participant said that fundamental rights for transgender individuals are deficient in Pakistan, where they encounter considerable obstacles to social involvement and gender equality. They are marginalized, discriminated against, and possess limited autonomy to pursue their fundamental rights within society. Previous studies have also indicated that transgender individuals do not possess major fundamental rights within society (Ali et al., 2022). This study thoroughly examined the situation of fundamental rights for transgender individuals in Pakistani society, which had not been previously analyzed in detail. The research additionally disclosed that transgender individuals encounter harassment, societal prejudices, and cultural taboos inside Pakistani communities. Transgender individuals encounter challenges in accessing education due to discriminatory policies, societal rejection, and the absence of a distinct educational system established by the government. Previous studies have underscored fundamental difficulties in health and education for transgender individuals, although the comprehensive educational system for transgender people across the entire country has not been extensively analyzed (Gilmer & Buccieri, 2020). This study thoroughly examined the cultural norms, attitudes, and behaviors of transgender

individuals in Pakistani society. Transgender individuals are subjected to targeting in public spaces by others, lacking the respect shown to regular citizens, which contravenes the laws of Pakistan. This was similarly emphasized by (Alamgir, 2024) Participants in the study reported that they were initially rejected by their relatives, who did not accept them and then transferred them to other transgender individuals. The community also expresses disdain and does not support them at every point. This is a very challenging period for transgender individuals. Previous studies indicated that individuals experienced familial and relational issues, resulting in diminished self-esteem and animosity towards their communities and family members (Squire, 2009)

Khan and Mailk (2019) emphasized the vital importance of familial support in the educational achievements of transgender individuals, especially in addressing societal rejection and loneliness. The prevalent challenges faced by transgender individuals include educational obstacles and career difficulties. In society, they are not afforded a separate educational system, resulting in a lack of education and limited employment opportunities in both public and private sectors. Even when they secure employment, office politics sometimes impede their ability to maintain it for an extended period. The collegiate and university experiences of transgender individuals are further complicated by their choice of feminine attire. They are encountering challenges at every phase of life. Previous studies also identified educational hurdles as a significant issue for them. (Sanwal et al., 2023). This study also revealed that transgender individuals encounter legal challenges and identified avenues for seeking legal remedies. The government enacted the law; nevertheless, its implementation was not fully realized. The initial inquiry pertains to their self-identification. Any national-level documentation is required for identity verification while applying for employment in any location. There are no protections for transgender individuals within communities. NADRA centers operate 24/7 but do not consistently address transgender issues.

Previous research also emphasizes issues related to legal rights for transgender individuals. (M. Q. Arslan & Rasool, 2023). This paper does a thorough investigation of the legal issues about transgender individuals within a specific framework. Transgender individuals encounter political challenges within their communities owing to harassment, discrimination, and exclusion from the political process. They advocate for a quota system in both the National and Provincial Assemblies. Previous studies have also addressed these subjects in their research (Shah et al., 2018). In this study, we thoroughly examined this issue by the Law of the Pakistan Constitution of 1973, which guarantees equal rights to every citizen of Pakistan. Transgender individuals encounter gender-based violence and harassment in society, universities, retail malls, and public spaces. They are uncertain about whether to stand in the male or female queue, and in the bus, they are perplexed about whether to sit in the male or female seat. What were the challenges they faced? Prior research identified similar concerns (Divan et al., 2016). We noted that the challenges faced by transgender individuals hinder their work opportunities in both public and commercial sectors, which adversely affects the country's economic growth and exacerbates the poverty rate, a detrimental indicator for the nation's economy. Previous studies have indicated that the absence of transgender contributions will hinder consistent economic growth and hence exacerbate poverty levels (A. Foundation, 2016). The harassment trans people encounter, together with a lack of societal acceptance and visibility, impedes their progress toward achieving full inclusion and equal rights for other genders. Previous studies have indicated that social degradation within communities is attributable to harassment and discriminatory policies established by society (Sherazi et al., 2023).

6. Recommendations

Transgender individuals are integral to society and possess the same rights to development as other genders. Consequently, it is imperative to implement initiatives in educational institutions by hiring counselors who can forge early ties

with children to assist, thereby averting discrimination. Educational institutions should offer therapy and counselling sessions, and educators must be trained on issues related to gender identification. Promote employment opportunities for the third-gender community and ensure access to quality education. Equal rights must be granted in all areas, and individuals seeking to educate should be given the opportunity. Employment must be accessible in both the commercial and public sectors. Furthermore, modifications are necessary for NADRA services, particularly with staff training and the already convoluted documentation process. It is the primary obligation of every citizen to assist transgender individuals without harassment, discrimination, or gender-based violence. The community should establish an independent schooling system and create a dedicated window in NADRA offices to address their concerns. Dedicated seating should be designated for them in transit, along with awareness seminars for youth to foster respect for these individuals. Islam maintains that all individuals possess equal rights, hence they merit respect. The government must guarantee the enforcement of existing laws and policies. The civil society promotes inclusive behaviors and challenges prejudiced perspectives. Internal community support for transgender rights initiatives is provided both financially and technically.

The transgender community should receive governmental financial assistance, with designated funds for education, healthcare, and other essential services, therefore reducing reliance on foreign donations. Implement gender sensitivity education through the use of banners. Distribute invitations for podcast involvement. Appoint transgender individuals to leadership roles in various professions to foster normalization and enhance acceptance. Society must acknowledge that the concept of Khawajasaras has developed to include a broader spectrum of variety. The Khawajasaras, once exploited for activities such as performing at male births or soliciting at traffic intersections, now aspire to have a respectable life. They aim to become physicians and

participate in prestigious institutions, progressing in their careers. The transgender community has started making significant contributions to numerous organizations; it is imperative to highlight their effect on society.

7. Conclusion

Numerous entrenched cultural, legal, and economic barriers impede the growth of transgender individuals in Pakistan. Consequently, they do not experience social inclusion and gender equality. The marginalization of transgender individuals is intensified by discrimination, insufficient legal recognition, and limited access to educational opportunities. The educational environment is inhospitable and unsupportive, obstructing the personal development of transgender individuals. They need a supportive environment. Cultural barriers and familial rejection are significant impediments; however, institutional barriers such as poor policies, insufficient training programs, and a lack of support services aggravate these issues, resulting in uneven treatment, harassment, and a hostile work environment. The study produced several valuable themes that can be employed for future research, serving as a basis for quantitative studies on transgender individuals in Pakistan. The exclusion of transgender individuals from society can result in numerous disadvantages, including economic decline, heightened poverty levels, class conflict, increased crime rates, and a rise in sex work. Consequently, In Pakistan, it is imperative to cultivate an inclusive atmosphere that advances gender equality and social justice for transgender populations. Implementing legislation and developing governmental policies by international human rights standards is essential. Promoting diversity and inclusion in educational and professional institutions is vital, and access to healthcare and social services must be ensured. Stakeholders must facilitate significant transformation via policy reforms, education and awareness initiatives, and support services.

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