



RESEARCH PAPER

Stigmatization and Social Exclusion of Transgender Individuals in Sargodha: A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore how language, body language, and social behavior in Sargodha reflect transphobic attitudes and contribute to the social exclusion of transgender. People who are identified as transgender frequently face major obstacles, such as limited access to healthcare and employment possibilities, illiteracy, and domestic violence among many others. Due to their long absence from legal recognition for a long time, it has been increasingly difficult to comprehend their issues and evaluate the success of initiatives aimed at enhancing their socioeconomic circumstances. The study was qualitative in nature, and data were gathered using the case study approach. Data was collected through brief interviews of Transgender individuals from Sargodha. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis. The study's findings reveal that transgender individuals frequently face early rejection from their biological family, with fathers usually being more aggressive than mothers. Such rejection encourages peers and extended family to humiliate them, which often leads to school dropout. Due to stigmatization and shame, many are sent off to the transgender community, separating them from their homes. Another finding highlights that in public places, they are rarely treated with respect and women in particular are often unwilling to interact with them, even in official settings. This study suggested creating separate forums or designated space for transgender individuals to provide them with safe social environment.

KEYWORDS Transgender Individuals, Social Exclusion, Stigmatization, Discrimination, School Dropout

Introduction

The transgender individuals are one of Pakistan's most marginalized groups. Among the factors that contribute to their separation from mainstream society from the early age are fear, revulsion, and curiosity because they fall outside gender conforming categories. Resultantly, they are abandoned by their families and friends. The trans persons typically acquire very little formal education, which prevents them from utilizing employment prospects (Meyer, 2010). This exclusion aligns with global understanding of social exclusion. The European Union offers a variety of definitions of social exclusion, all of which highlight inability of individuals to engage in social, cultural and political life alongside income deprivation (Dwyer, 2014).

Similarly, in 2004, the European Social Exclusion, a phrase coined by the United Nations in 2003, was defined by the Commission and European Council as something that encompasses much more than just inadequate income including inadequate work-life balance, health, education, and service accessibility (Stryker, 2017). Social exclusion disproportionately harms people as well as social groupings who are already experiencing significant setbacks, in both rural and urban regions, and have been fiercely discriminated against, isolated and weakened in established social relations (Mos, 2013). Being a citizen

means having the freedom to practice all of your civil rights without interference and the recognition as a citizen requires that one is to be recognized not because of their distinguishing features, but alongside them (Phelan, 2005). Within this framework, the intimate citizenship model defines the fourth category of citizenship rights extending the rights, obligations, recognition, and respect deeply personal aspects of life such as relationships, family, bodily autonomy and gender expressions (Plummer, 2001). However, despite that significant global progress has been made on the issue, yet the hetero-normative mainstream ideas and practices remain deeply embedded in many societies due to which full gender equality and regularity have not yet been achieved (Richardson, 2019).

In Pakistan an important step toward reaffirming the rights of the trans persons community was the Supreme Court's commemorative ruling in November 2009. The court's decision mainly aimed to address the transgender community's harassment, unlawful police detention denial of health care and inheritance (Hekma, 2016). Provincial governments were directed to submit progress reports on the actions taken to improve the current state of affairs for the transgender population yet there has been very little progress on the order since the top court's ruling a year ago, and despite the transgender community's persistent objections (Beemyn, 2015). Another important milestone was Transgender Persons (Protections of Rights) Act, 2018 with the aim to safeguard basic rights of transgender persons such as education, employment and healthcare. Yet, any visible improvement has not been seen on the ground. Further, the responsibility of transgender registration was given to Punjab's Social Welfare Department (Haider-Markel et.al.,2019), however the lack of political will, bureaucratic incompetence and sluggishness has caused the surveys and registration process to be delayed.

Anthropologists and historians claim that transgender people have existed throughout history. According to Ranjit (2023), they were somewhat venerated and revered by the ruling class in a variety of customs and cultures, including mythical, Japanese Samurai, Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and even Mughal era. Even though Pakistani society is traditional and patriarchal, there are numerous noteworthy transgender individuals and cases in the current context that broke stereotypes and attained their name, became renowned, and earned honor in their respective industries. One example of this is Aisha Mughal, a professor in the Gender Studies department at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad who also serves as a UNDP Expert Consultant for the Ministry of Human Rights. Furthermore, she was a member of the official delegation and created history by representing Pakistan at the United Nations, setting a good example for other members of the community which earned her the title of one of the most accomplished transgender people in the world. (Li, 2019). Her story indicates the potential for transgender individuals to earn recognition and respect when provided with enabling circumstances with right opportunities.

Literature Review

Nonetheless, majority of transgender persons continue to face rejection by their family, friends and peers as they are perceived as either incomplete men or incomplete women resulting in stigmatization based on their gender difference (Berg & Millbank, 2013; Cuccolo et.al, 2019). Regardless, the transgender are a prominent social group that extends a warm invitation to these rejected trans individuals. This Hijra community offers a "structure of care" (Almeida, et.al, 2022) where people go for a safer place in the community after being let down by their relatives. Such community structure and network build resilience in the face of social exclusion. With no pressure from anyone except from those who want to safeguard those who want to join, the transgender group works like an umbrella for transgender individuals that welcome them with strength and transparency. They don't give any consideration about the new members' varied backgrounds. Each new member gets the chance to locate a transgender with whom they can share their tale and form social bond (Budek, 2012).

Davidson, (2007) pointed out that the disciplinary power of family, neighbors, and peer groups play a critical role in the lives of marginalized individuals. According to Thompson & King, (2015), family and pressure groups have the final say as disciplinary authority and they fear the damage to family's reputation resulting in suppressing disciplinary procedures, false misrecognition, systemic pressures and social exclusion for non-conforming people in formal and informal ways. According to Papantonopoulou, (2014), while looking into the situation of marginalized people in important social institutions, such as the family, peer group, and neighborhood, one must take into account the various administrative gaps and interactions that actively contribute to social exclusion. Furthermore, as Nisar, (2016) points out, marginalized groups have their own internal discourses that aid in the evaluation of social policies and initiatives resulting in development of interventions based on the lived experiences of transgender individuals regarding social exclusion and hence leads to effective administrative measures.

This study places these broader debates around the topic within the local context of Sargodha. Despite growing interest in the area, most of the existing research on the topic addresses transgender issues at national or global level and very little is known about how stigmatization and social exclusion manifest in mid-sized cities of Pakistan. According to 2017 census, Pakistan recorded 10,418 transgender persons nationwide, though community estimates suggests that number is far higher in reality. Punjab province recorded the largest share and Sargodha district with a population of around 4 million serves as a representing area where transgender communities remain particularly marginalized. By examining language, body language and social behaviors, this study aims to explore how trans phobic beliefs are expressed and translated into behavior in Sargodha city and what are the challenges that transgender individuals encounter in daily life.

Material and Methods

A methodology is a collection of systematic steps used in a particular field of study to achieve research objectives. In this study the researcher employed qualitative research techniques to explore the experiences of transgenders and the social myths associated with them. A research design provides the strategy for integrating various components of the study in a systematic and logical way (Trochim, et al. 2008). The researcher chose qualitative research because it allows an in-depth exploration of the lives of trans people and myths of society constructed around them. The most common approach of qualitative research is exploratory inquiry which is useful to understand underlying ideas, logic, and motivations that clarifies the subject and helps to establish concepts or theories for subsequent quantitative research. Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of a population to represent the whole. According to Neuman, and Fawcett, (2011), the respondents are selected from a larger population and results can be generalized to the population to estimate the characteristics of an entire population. Trochim, W. M., et al. (2008) further define the sample as the actual units selected to participate in the study. The researcher used purposive sampling in this study. A purposeful sample is a non-probability sample chosen based on the study's objectives and the population's characteristics. A sample of 15 transgender individuals was selected from Sargodha city for this study. The case study method was employed for data collection, and an Interview Guide was used to gather information from the respondents. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis which enabled identification of recurring themes and patterns in participant's experiences.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study bring forth multiple layers of family and societal dynamics giving evidence for exclusion faced by transgender individuals in Sargodha. The themes that emerged, are presented below supported with narrations of the participants.

Theme No.1 Family Perception and Early Socialization

Many participants reported that their families tried to rationalize and determine the reason their preferences for feminine things. The parents typically associated this tendency to being around more women and engaging in feminine chores at house. One participant shared her experience, which is detailed below:

Kaaf claimed that a female teacher used to teach her Quran. And her family believed that having male teacher might help him develop a better sense of self and behave accordingly. *"People were always saying that because I am the only brother among five sisters, so I have more feminine preferences"*.

Another respondent, Shahida, shared that the reason behind her joining the Hijra community is related to the concept of performing domestic chores due to absence of sister or any other female at home. Shahida stated that she has always been inclined towards this kind of personality. She had no sister and three brothers. Since her mother was ill, Shahida used to assist with household duties such as cooking, cleaning, and dishwashing. She became accustomed to playing and acting like a girl and never allowed her mother to do such tasks. She independently learned all the traditional feminine responsibilities.

Theme No.2 Stigma and Identity in Society:

It emerged as a common theme that the transgender community is stigmatized, and its members often face harassment and bullying in both educational institutions and workplace. In Sargodha, individuals identified as transgender are commonly seen dancing or begging in public, showing limited opportunities available to them. One of my research participants argued that:

"We don't receive any recognition or noteworthy responses from the government that would help us to improve or expand our social services. There are no laws in the country that protect the rights of transgender people. And if any exist, they are not implemented sincerely". The government ought to consider the key issues faced by transgender people in Pakistan, particularly in the context of getting access to education. There should be more organizations advocating for transgender education so that members of this community can participate in the progress of society.

Another research participant Meera, expressed:

"We are unable to stay at home in any way".

She further added: *"We cannot get married because of the fear of ruining the life of someone's daughter, just to please our parents"*. According to her, people become part of the transgender community to gain identity, recognition and authenticity. Things that are not possible within their own home. She emphasized that only those, who identify as transgender are accepted into this community.

Theme No.3 Abuse and Violence within Families:

Physical and emotional violence was another recurring theme in the accounts of trans people who were interviewed. Naghma, shared her personal experience. She stated that as a child, she never danced by choice but was forced to do so by her father's brother (her Chacha). Her Chacha used to make her dance for him to different tunes, and if she refused, he would threaten to tell her father that she was dancing like a girl, which would definitely lead to her being beaten by her father. One day, while she was dancing as her Chacha had instructed, her father arrived unexpectedly and became so enraged that he hung her upside down from the ceiling of the room until her eyes were bloodshot. Fortunately,

her mother interrupted along with one of her father's cousins and told him that Naghma was being forced to dance by Chacha. However, her father did not believe them. She also mentioned that transgender frequently visited their town, and she gradually became drawn to them. Eventually she chose to join their community.

Theme No.4 Community and Alternative Kinship:

For many participants, the Hijra community offered safety, belonging and family. During this research, we had the opportunity to meet a Hijra Guru who had a three-month-old baby with her. She explained that the child had been legally given to her with the consent of her biological parents, and she would be raising the child as her own daughter. Grue further shared that she had been sold by her parents at a very young age. She informed the researchers that transgender individuals value the children in their care and make every effort to ensure their prosperity and well-being. And these children eventually adopt the style of transgender community after leaving their biological family.

This illustrates how these transgender communities compensate for rejection of transgender individuals by their biological families by providing alternative kinship systems.

Theme No.5 Educational Exclusion:

Two of the research participants reported experiencing discriminatory behavior from their parents. Their siblings were sent to schools and colleges, but they were refused access to education. Those who attended the school often faced both physical and emotional abuse from teachers as well as classmates. As a result, they chose to leave the education due to constant abuse and harassment.

According to Nargis, another participant stated that she and her brother attended the same school. Her brother would often get upset when his classmates teased her for her feminine gait and overall appearance. He accused her of deliberately acting differently and asked her to behave normally. However, Nargis explained that her behavior was not intentional, it was simply who she was in actual. She recalled with stress that during halftime, boys would yell at her, "*Khusrah! Khusrah!*". "*I lived a horrible life, so they transferred me*". When I lost interest in attending school, my father crushed my vocal cords and stepped on my neck. I quit in the eighth grade because I felt so ashamed.

Theme No.6 Discrimination in Public Spaces

Participants reported that Hijras face exclusion in banks, markets and public transport.. One explained that *whenever we go to the bank, women feel insecure around us and we feel insecure around men. We face the same issues in public transport as well.*

One of the research respondents Jeem visited her sister's house, where the son of her sister insulted her by asking why she was there and referring to her as a *badawa* ("small ghost"). She no longer visits her home, as she is neither welcomed nor appreciated, so she feels no reason to visit again.

Theme No.7 Extreme Rejection and Social Death

A significant portion of Hijras still have troubled lives in the home of their biological parents, where they are frequently humiliated and mistreated by family members. Sushmita, one of our research participants, shared that when people hear the term "*khadṛa*," they often associated it with rejection from one's own family. They later used derogatory labels against them, forcing them to abandon their homes. Tahseen shared and even more severe case of rejection. Shortly after Tahseen fled home and refused to live as a man, her

father declared in newspapers that his son had passed away and thus erasing her existence from the family record.

Conclusion

In the socio-cultural context of Sargodha, Punjab, this study aimed to investigate how transphobia manifests itself in everyday interactions. Using qualitative methods to investigate, it explored how families perceive and respond to children who display ambiguous gender identities. This study sought to understand the personal experiences of transgender individuals in Sargodha city in the context of discrimination, and stigmatization which often lead to social exclusion within homes and societies. Findings indicate that transphobia is ingrained in larger institutional and cultural frameworks rather than being the product of personal prejudice.

Myths and prejudices, such as the idea that transgender people are immoral, mentally ill, or socially deviant, remain pervasive in daily interactions. These assumptions often lead to discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization in public places, healthcare, education and workplaces. Many participants disclosed that the impressions about them were influenced by false information, and inherited cultural biases. These biases are reinforced by social institutions such as media depictions, and family structures.

Significantly, the study emphasizes that although legal recognition and transgender rights have improved nationally, through laws such as Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, however social acceptance still lags, especially in more traditional and rural areas like Sargodha. The persistent gap between legal frameworks and public perceptions keeps creating a hostile environment for transgender individuals, who often face verbal and physical abuse and social rejection. Social acceptance must accompany legal reform to ensure full inclusion of transgender individuals in society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study suggests several measures to reduce stigmatization and social exclusion of transgender individuals in Sargodha city. The first step can be to improve family awareness through counseling programs to reduce early rejection of transgender child. Secondly, access to education must be ensured through anti bullying policies and teacher training. Thirdly, their occupational roles should be shifted from dancing and begging to respectable vocational work opportunities. Lastly, they should be provided discrimination free health care facilities and legal protection under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018. Media outlets and community outreach programs should focus on promoting positive representation of transgender individuals to create safe spaces for them.

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