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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**The Paradox of Transgender: A Case Study of District Faisalabad****Dr. Sidra Akram**

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2023-bs-en070@tuf.edu.pk**Abstract**

Gender refers to the many ways we describe human sex traits. It helps us distinguish between men and women. Transgender describes people whose gender identity differs from their birth sex. They do not fit into male or female categories. Some individuals choose to live as transgender, modifying their lives accordingly. This paper explores the challenges faced by this group in Pakistan. The study highlights how the government fails to implement laws passed for this marginalised section of society. There is a need to provide health, education, and financial opportunities for this community. The primary focus of this study is to analyze the socio-economic challenges faced by transgender individuals and their living patterns in the Faisalabad district. The research employs a mixed-method approach. Both qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted, involving semi-structured in-depth interviews. The researchers successfully conducted interviews with 15 transgender individuals. The results indicate that their marginalised status is mainly due to a lack of governmental support.

Keywords: Gender, Paradoxes, Transgender, Marginalised Community

1. Introduction

Transgender people are a marginalised community in our society. They are facing several hurdles that the common person faces. The stories of transgender and gender non-conforming people, especially within the Khawaja Sira community, remain complex and often harsh in Pakistani society (Arslan & Bhatti, 2018). It is a culture where traditional values and modern ideas sometimes clash. Despite some progress, these individuals still face many struggles and misunderstandings. Their lives highlight an ongoing challenge to change deep-rooted customs and beliefs. In Pakistan, their experiences reflect a broader struggle to gain respect and acceptance. Even though laws are in place to protect the transgender community in Pakistan, such as the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act passed in 2018 with much fanfare,

many obstacles have prevented its full implementation. Institutions stalled, politics opposed it, and deep societal norms stood in the way (Jabeen, Mahmood, Mahmood, Ghaffari, & Bhuttah, 2021). As a result, real experiences reveal a harsh truth: discrimination remains widespread. Systemic barriers persist, and many transgender individuals continue to fight daily for basic respect and dignity. It is crucial to challenge the ingrained social, political, economic, and cultural practices that have kept this group marginalised for centuries. Historically, this community has played a unique but often misunderstood role in society. Recognizing their place in our national identity is vital as we address these issues (Hina, Khan, & Shabbir, 2021). The Khawaja Sira community in Pakistan was once regarded as spiritual leaders and custodians of cultural traditions. They held significant roles in religious ceremonies and celebrations that shaped community life for generations. During British colonial rule, strict binary gender roles were enforced, and non-conforming identities were made illegal (Khatak, 2021). This dismantled a social system that had long existed. Today, transgender people in Pakistan still live with the legacy of these policies. Many face ongoing violence, discrimination, and exclusion (Paceley, Ananda, Thomas, Sanders, & Hiebert, 2021). They often endure stigma and social rejection that date back to colonial times. Many are compelled to leave their homes to find safety within traditional guru-chela networks due to family rejection. These family groups often provide emotional support and a sense of belonging but generally operate on society's margins (Stoica, Scarlat, & Trifu, 2021). Many individuals within these networks remain caught in cycles of poverty, loneliness, and limited access to healthcare, employment, and education. The social environment faces significant challenges that demand urgent attention. Transgender people frequently encounter violence, harassment, and abuse in public spaces, at work, and within their communities. Although laws prohibit discrimination, such acts still often occur. Without societal acceptance, transgender individuals endure profound emotional pain. This lack of support increases their vulnerability to exploitation and heightens the risk of mental health issues. Securing safe shelter remains a persistent challenge, forcing many to live in hazardous areas like urban slums (Berberick, 2018). These conditions further jeopardise their well-being. Many transgender children experience severe bullying or are denied access to education despite legislation against discrimination. This results in high illiteracy rates and limited prospects for their future.

The economy is in a dire state. Due to family rejection and social discrimination, job opportunities for transgender people are very limited. Many are forced into illegal and often hazardous work, such as begging, dance performances, or sex work (Kinmore, 2021). These jobs carry significant risks and leave them on the fringes of society. The 2023 digital census found that approximately 20,331 transgender individuals live in Pakistan. A study by UNDP called "Transcending Binaries for Gender Justice in Pakistan" revealed that over 80% of transgender people face rejection when seeking employment because of their gender identity. It also indicates that only 7% of transgender individuals are employed in the formal sector, which is alarming, as the majority work in the informal sector or engage in unlawful activities. Almost 90% of transgender people face discrimination at work (Jain & DasGupta, 2020). This often leads to unemployment, financial

difficulties, and even homelessness. A study by USAID and the Aurat Foundation, cited in LUM's Friday Economist (May 2024), shows that about 70% of transgender individuals rely on dancing, sex work, or begging to survive. The study "Employment Status of Transgender in the Study Area of KP" found that 57% of eunuchs are unemployed. More than 80% rely on begging, dancing, or sex work because they cannot find jobs in regular businesses. Research shows that including transgender workers in the regular job market could boost the country's GDP by about 30% each year. However, many people are hesitant to hire transgender individuals even when they are qualified (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). This fear prevents some from finding stable jobs, trapping them in poverty and dependence. When society refuses to give equal opportunities, it harms everyone by missing out on potential talent and growth.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To find out the paradoxes that transgender people face within society.
- This research aims to investigate socio-economic and residential problems faced by transgender individuals in Faisalabad.
- To suggest recommendations for refining their situation/condition and making them become productive members of society.

1.2 Research Methodology

The proposed research was conducted in Faisalabad District. The target population of the proposed study included different areas of Faisalabad, particularly Nishatabad, Aminpur Bangla, Satiyanaroad, and Marzipura, because these areas reported their 'deras' led by their gurus. The proposed research conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with them to gather their experiences and views related to their living standards and socio-economic barriers. By using a snowball sampling technique, a total of 20 respondents were interviewed. Hence, several questions were asked to investigate the facts across different subjects. The researcher posed questions across different subjects. Written notes captured the answers. This method was used due to the conservative rural location and the sensitive nature of the topic discussed during the interviews. Taking notes was a better choice than recording responses. Each interview concluded within twenty to twenty-five minutes.

2. Worldwide Prevalence of Transgender Individuals

A considerable number of transgender people exist globally. However, the precise worldwide figures remain unconfirmed. The UN High Commissioner stated that transgender individuals require better rights (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). Systemic, economic, and social rights must be enhanced. He highlighted widespread bias against the third gender. Protecting transgender people also involves laws concerning gender identity. Argentina's senate passed the world's first gender identity law in 2012 (Jahangir & Das, 2025).

2.1 Transgender in Pakistan

Transgender individuals play important roles in Pakistani culture. They participate in various celebrations, including wedding ceremonies and birthday parties. They are also present during Eid festivals and other major events (Chowhan, 2023). In Pakistan, transgender people are known by several names, such as Murat, Hijra, Khawaja Sara, and Khusra. These terms refer to the

country's third gender. However, in Pakistan, this group often faces denial of rights and respect. Ignorant and hostile attitudes hinder many from being accepted, even though they are recognized as human beings within Pakistani society. Transgender individuals across the country face significant ignorance and rejection. A recent survey revealed that one-third of transgender children exhibit signs of chronic health issues. Around two per cent of Pakistan's population identify as transgender, which is roughly one in fifty people (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). The first child in a family often determines their third gender. Families tend to react harshly, sometimes attempting to harm or reject the child due to feelings of shame. The child remains part of the family, yet their sex at birth is often unknown. Despite this, Hijra individuals encounter prejudice, with discrimination present within families, communities, schools, and society at large. This discrimination impacts every aspect of their lives (Dayani, Minaz, Soomar, Rashid, & Dossa, 2019).

2.3 The Transgender Persons Act of 2018

Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, Article 25, promotes fairness. This article aims to ensure both superficial and genuine equality for citizens. It recognises all "citizens" as equal under the law. It also opposes gender bias. Additionally, Article 25(3) allows for special provisions. These are intended for the benefit of women and children. Pakistan's parliament enacted the Transgender Persons Act in May 2018 (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). This law supports gender diversity. It defines transgender individuals broadly. This includes transsexuals and intersex persons. It also covers Khawaja-Saras. The act includes anyone differing from their birth-assigned sex. This difference is in gender identity or sexual preference. Their appearance may also differ from social norms. Transgender people could register with any state office, like NADRA. This choice was based on their gender identity. This approach tackled discrimination based on sex. It gave transgender people ways to identify themselves (Dayani, Minaz, Soomar, Rashid, & Dossa, 2019). The 2018 Transgender Persons Act marks a significant political advance. Implementation, however, remains incomplete. Recent court battles at the Federal Shariat Court expose the fragility of these gains, as they are rooted in religious doctrine. Resistance from certain social groups also persists. Many transgender individuals show bravery by seeking elected office and advocating for their rights, yet their political representation remains inadequate, leaving their community vulnerable. Lawmaking and policy decisions often overlook their input. The primary causes are weak institutions and a lack of political will to enforce laws. Societal conversations about gender should shift away from pity or mockery towards respect and understanding. Deeply ingrained patriarchal structures make it difficult to accept new ideas about gender. Traditionally, gender roles are closely linked to cultural customs. Misconceptions about gender identity often result from misinformation and inflexible viewpoints, leading to widespread prejudice against those who fall outside expected norms.

3. Paradoxes about Transgender

Pakistani society, like many around the world, harbours deep prejudice against transgender people. Discrimination is widespread. Many parents reject their transgender children. They might accept children with disabilities or those who have committed crimes (Khan & Khan, 2020).

However, they refuse to accept transgender children. Some suggest children with sex differences join the transgender community. Family beliefs strongly hinder the 2018 Transgender Persons Act. This law is crucial for preventing the denial of property and education. It also protects health and basic dignity. The Act largely reflects Articles 8 to 27 of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, known as Fundamental Rights. Most rights in this law are identical to those granted to all Pakistani citizens, including transgender people. Family acceptance of transgender individuals is vital. Current laws do not specifically safeguard transgender rights, leaving a critical issue unresolved. Respect and acceptance of transgender people as a third gender are essential for their basic rights, which remain unfulfilled without societal recognition (Dayani, Minaz, Soomar, Rashid, & Dossa, 2019). The Act should address this issue. Families must face penalties for neglecting their unaccompanied transgender children. Rights for transgender individuals are often violated, starting within families and extending into broader society. Addressing the root cause of this problem is logical. However, current laws do not consider family structures or transgender identities. Secure family units protect fundamental rights. Dignity and equality are upheld when families are stable, negating the need for alternative family systems, which often stem from self-harm and outdated ideas (Sultana & Kalyani, 2012). The eunuch community expressed their opinions privately due to perceived societal threats. This code can secure rights to property, education, jobs, and healthcare. It also ensures protection under Article 290, which states, "Any person causing public disturbance faces penalties" (Hossain, 2017). There has been little progress regarding employment opportunities for the transgender community in Lahore. The Punjab government has yet to implement effective policies for this population. Educational institutions generally do not offer dedicated seating for transgender students. When transgender individuals do attend, both students and faculty may display unwelcoming behaviour.

Transgender people face barriers to healthcare and mental health services. Some may self-treat with hormones or steroids. Others attempt dangerous procedures without help. Many transgender adults work in dancing or sex work. Some also face poverty and beg in their later years (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). Societal and familial pressures prevent open discussion of transgender rights. Transgender individuals lack social acceptance. Families often reject the idea of a transgender person as a servant. Accusations of homosexuality or sex work are common. Transgender individuals face physical violence. They also endure sexual harassment and assault. Some believe transgender people only perform for sexual purposes. They are not seen as equal citizens (Jahangir & Das, 2025). Many do not even consider them human. They live in deep poverty, separated from others. People avoid interaction with them. They do not speak to them or acknowledge their troubles. Communication is avoided; they are shunned in public spaces. Transgender individuals face exclusion and are most often denied their social participation in Pakistani society.

3.1 Socio-Cultural Factors Influence

Societies can be understood through a socio-cultural lens. This perspective aids in comprehending human behavior. It shows how societal traits influence individual actions and characteristics. Understanding social traits helps one grasp others' actions and their self-

perception. The socio-cultural perspective of this research showed that media, friends, and family significantly shape how well an individual fits into society. (Jahangir & Das, 2025). Sociological influences contributed to eunuchs deviating from Pakistani society's established customs and values. The research showed most of this group faced separation. They were separated in social, political, physical and financial aspects. This group was largely isolated in many ways. Society subjected this community to physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Survival and continued existence compelled eunuchs into sex work (Akram, Munir, & Baig, 2023). Many individuals lacked formal employment. Instead, they survived by begging. Some earned income by dancing and singing at events, while others worked as domestic help. Prostitution was also a means of survival for some. (Dayani, Minaz, Soomar, Rashid, & Dossa, 2019).

4. Data Analysis

Interviews revealed transgender people's societal and economic challenges. They also shared details about their lifestyles. Key findings are as follows:

4.1 Demographic Information: Out of the 20 participants, most were male transgender individuals, accounting for 18 individuals or 80%. This reflects a broader global trend of more male than female transgender people. A significant portion of the transgender population falls within the 20 to 30 age range. Many in this group face societal challenges. These issues contribute to illiteracy among approximately 60% of transgender individuals. Many transgender people experience social exclusion, which affects their monthly earnings, typically between 10,000 and 20,000 Pakistani Rupees. Transgender individuals often face isolation within their communities. Many survey participants stated that society treats them very harshly, and their experiences are marked by cruelty. Discrimination greatly restricts their job opportunities, and their income often depends on begging, dancing, or sex work.

4.2 Family Rejection: Family serves as the bedrock of a person's life. Tragically, transgender individuals encounter varied prejudice throughout their existence (Jahangir & Das, 2025).

A transgender person shared her experience and said:

"My family never owned me, that was heartfelt. They kicked me out when I was quite young and handed me over to a guru with some money. They just want to get rid of me. Because they were ashamed to keep me in their family. I was a stigma for them, that's why they never introduced me to our relatives".

Another said:

"When I was too young. I never get attention from my parents. I was neglected by my parents and siblings ever. That was I decided to leave my family and join a transgender community. One day I visit my family, and wear a feminine dress, and my family gets worried about what other people will think about them. They never welcomed me".

Another respondent said:

"My parents always get angry with me. They always shout at me. They never accept me as I am". However, this community face several issues within the family, including denial of family property, rejection, isolation, and physical and verbal abuses.

4.3 Shelter or Housing: After the rejection by his family, another major challenge for them is getting Shelter or Housing, which is a very difficult task for them to find rent or accommodation. Because no one wants to become the neighbour of transgender people.

When interviewed, a respondent stated,

"Nobody wants to rent out their houses or apartments to transgender people. That's why it's too difficult for us to find a house to live in".

Another stated:

"Whenever we tried to obtain a house on rent. No one wants to give their house to us to rent. Then we offer them a double payment in the form of rent for getting the shelter for our living. If we attain that house, then the people of that community and our neighbours will dislike our presence. They always complained and blamed us".

4.4 Education: Education is vital for societal success. However, transgender people face hurdles in choosing their schooling. Schools accept them less than others in society. Many parents and children hesitate to accept transgender children in schools.

One transgender individual expressed:

"Their schooling was never a priority for their society and parents as well".

One stated that:

"Our earnings are much important than our education. Our Guru always taught us that at the end of the day, we should earn something for our survival. In case of attending school, we never get immediate income. That's why we never wished to attend the school".

Another respondent said:

"No scholarships or financial aid are available from the government to our community. Our education receives no investment from the state".

Another stated:

"Education is a basic right for all citizens, and we are also citizens of this state. We also want to become active citizens of this state. We also deserve equal opportunities. At least society should consider us a humans, we also live like common people. Governments must take steps to provide appropriate education for us. New laws, similar to those in other nations, are needed".

4.5 Healthcare: Transgender people face exclusion from the mainstream. They are also kept away from health services. Healthcare providers need to accept transgender individuals. Society as a whole must also be more welcoming.

One respondent noted:

"There is no space for us in Hospitals for the treatment of our health issues. Whenever we visit hospitals, Patients dislike our presence in the wards. They avoid us as we have a communal disease which is injurious to them, or we are inferior to them".

A person said:

"There is no space available for us in the hospital wards. We were never allowed to be admitted to the women's wards by the hospital authorities because they thought their female patients would remain uncomfortable with our presence. Hence, if we are admitted to the men's wards,

there is always a risk of sexual abuse for us. Additionally, no separate toilets exist for transgender people nationwide”.

Another said:

“In case of a health emergency, we always faced difficulty deciding whether we should be admitted to the hospital wards for females or males”.

One remarked:

“When we visit hospitals, nurses and doctors change their behaviour. They may not offer suitable care. This occurs when they learn a patient is transgender”.

Discrimination and stigma significantly affect how transgender people get healthcare. This is true for those living in both urban and rural areas. Healthcare staff were reported to treat transgender individuals poorly.

4.6 Lack of Job Opportunities: Transgender people always have a lack of access to decent work. They are often beggars, dancers at events, or engage in sex work for money. Access to proper jobs matters greatly for this group. Better work improves their lives significantly.

One respondent said:

“They do not participate in decent work practices, because society has never welcomed us into valued careers. The government ought to consider their work in decent and fair conditions”.

Another stated,

“Mental health struggles forced me to leave my studies. I have not been able to hold down a job. I remain jobless. The thought of job searching fills me with worry. I fear facing unfair treatment once more. Despite my capabilities, skills and intelligence, hiring decisions may exclude me. This is due to bias against transgender individuals”.

4.7 Social Stigma: The study asked people about facing bias due to their gender.

One stated:

“Many people fail to recognise our shared humanity. We frequently face disrespect and noticeable changes in their expressions when they encounter us”.

Many people unfairly judge transgender individuals. This judgment often targets their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such bias creates significant barriers for transgender people. Societal disapproval involves negative views, labelling, and common negative beliefs. These might link people to soliciting sex or sex work.

One said:

“During every dance event, some attendees directed verbal abuse at me. One day, a man attacked me as I walked by the road. She suffered minor injuries from the fight”.

Social exclusion from the main group leads to unfair treatment.

Another noted that:

“Some people accept our presence and behave well with us, and they never harass us”.

The study finds that transgender people felt degraded and humiliated. This experience reshaped how they view unfair treatment. They now define discrimination solely as verbal, physical, or sexual harm. They do not view being belittled as exclusion. Public insults are familiar; they accept

them as destiny. This treatment feels deserved. They feel they were not meant for respect and affection.

Conclusion

In our Pakistani community, eunuchs have limited roles in Pakistani society. They face restricted participation in cultural, political, and economic life. Isolated and rigid social structures prevent them from accessing benefits and opportunities. They are also denied basic rights of citizenship. This exclusion affects their lives in many settings, even they cannot use public services, which impacts their homes and communities. They lived on the edges of society. That's why they faced several difficulties in fulfilling their basic needs. Basic needs like food, shelter and clothing are the foremost priority for them. Because they are already in a condition of hand-to-mouth. In those circumstances, investing in education and human skills is not a priority. At every stage, transgender people face exclusion and discrimination from childhood to old age. The family should understand the gender identity and should not make them separate from the other family members. Parents should treat them like other normal children. Community leaders, religious experts, and local leaders should promote inclusivity. They must oppose harmful prejudices that exclude transgender people from society. A varied strategy is needed going forward. Firstly, the state must strongly work to implement the Transgender Persons Act of 2018 into full effect. All provisions of this law must truly facilitate the transgender community. The Act provides clear remedies and penalties for noncompliance, as well as rehabilitation centres and safe houses for them. Secondly, ongoing public awareness drives, using media, schools, and community groups, are vital. These efforts can help to eliminate stereotypes and will promote wider social acceptance. Thirdly, Economic empowerment-related initiatives should ensure for them. These programs include vocational training, skill development, and job placement. These kinds of initiatives can help transgender people to join the regular decent workplace. Finally, in order to overcome the cultural gap, it is vital to work with religious and cultural leaders to advance narratives of human dignity and inclusion that are based on Islamic values of compassion and justice. Fourthly, to bridge cultural divides, collaborating with cultural and religious leaders should promote stories of inclusion and human dignity. These should stem from Islamic principles of justice and compassion.

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