

## TRANSGENDER EDUCATIONAL DEFY: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES IN PAKISTAN

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## Original Article

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**Abstract**

*Human rights exploitations based on gender identity are still a major challenge for Pakistani society. Transgender face discrimination, humiliation and violence from various systems of society i.e. family, education, health care, employment and other institutions. This study aimed to explore the educational and socialization based problems faced by the transgender community in district Rawalpindi. Objectives of the study included to identify the educational problems faced by transgender in seeking admissions in formal schools and to explore their problems in socializing with male and female students. This study followed qualitative research design with a purposive sampling technique. For the data collection, structured interview guide was developed and detailed interviews were conducted from eight respondents in order to explore their experiences pertaining to educational and socialization based problems. The analysis resulted to the emergence of these major themes: socialization with family, socialization with class/school mates and teachers, admission in school, separate schools for transgender, motivation to get further education and fulfillment of aim in life. Results indicated that majority of the respondents have not experienced any difficulty to seek admission in public schools, however, they have faced severe socialization related problems and quit home in early ages due to the harsh attitude of their family members especially brothers and father. Most of the respondents were seemed motivated to get further education and intended to have a separate system of education for transgender community.*

**Keywords:** Transgender, Educational problems, Social problems, Socializations, discrimination

**1. Introduction**

The word "Transgender" or Trans is a broader term for the individuals whose gender identity is different from the gender allocated to them at time of birth (Adams, 2017 as cited in Malik & Farooqi, 2019). An enormous population of the transgender people resides in various parts of Pakistan, but they are facing various challenges due to the socio-cultural barricades. Different derogatory names like Khawaja Sara, Hijra, Khusra, Murat and Zanana etc. are used for the Transgenders. Transgenders are

deprived of space in society and social recognition. They are renounced even by their own families as this is considered a social stigma to have them in a family (Alam, 2019).

Transgender community has attained little visibility in Pakistani society as people are taught to believe in strict binaries of male and female genders. Society considers them taboo, isolating and humiliating them without trying to apprehend their problems (Shah et al., 2018 as cited in Abdullah, Basharat, Kamal, Sattar, Hassan & Shafqat, 2012). It is generally presumed that transgender people cannot

mingle or socialize with other members of society. They are thus deprived of fundamental human rights such as a family, shelter and schooling. All through their lives, they are subjected to corporal, psychological and sexual abuse. As a consequence, the doors to formal education and a noble livelihood remain closed to them (Transgender schools: road to education for all). Transgender community faces violence and abuse from society through the education system, health care system, employment and other government institutions. They face a diversity of abuses, from rejection to cruel assassination. They are imperiled to trafficking, blackmailing and forced prostitution (Alam, 2019).

In May 2018, the Supreme Court issued a ruling to ensure that transgender students are not discriminated against, harassed or victimized in schools to endorse equality. At the start of 2019, a public-sector transgender school was opened in Lodhran and a trans-education initiative was launched in Multan. The aim was to gradually assimilate these transgender students into conventional, age-appropriate classrooms and schools in the future. It is indisputably a great initiative, however it is still prejudiced. Introducing a parallel school system is correspondent to acting against policies and SDGs since it eliminates these students from the rest of society (Transgender schools: road to education for all). According to Transgender person welfare policy (2018), only one percent of Trans-people have attended school. The potential reason to this smaller percentage could be the less number of reforms done for the education of transgender persons in Pakistan.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to identify the educational problems faced by transgender in seeking admission in formal schools in district Rawalpindi, Pakistan and to explore the problems faced by transgender in socializing

with male and female students in formal schools of district Rawalpindi Pakistan.

## 3. Research Questions:

This study was guided by following research questions:

RQ1: Which types of problems are faced by transgender in district Rawalpindi to seek admissions in formal elementary and secondary level schools?

RQ2: Which types of problems are being faced by transgender to socialize with male and female students while studying at elementary and secondary schools?

RQ3: How transgender perceive the community behaviour with them and how their families behave with them after identification of their gender?

## 4. Literature Review

Numerous educational organizations are working on the education of transgender as getting education is the fundamental human right. In urban and rural communities of Pakistan educating transgender is a big challenge. State institutions, community organizations, provincial institutions are required to work together to ensure the rights of transgender community particularly the right of getting education. Although people with transgender are enrolled in schools, yet they face social humiliation associated with their gender in the society (Butt, Irfan & Mehnaz, 2021). Various organizations e.g National Centre for Transgender Equality (NCFTE), Transgender Legal Defense in Education and Fund (TLDEF) Transgender Law Centre (TLC), Gender Spectrum, National Task Force (NTF) are working in different communities to promote education among the transgender (Cortez et al., 2016). Primary purpose of all the organizations working for the rights of transgender is to provide educational facilities and skills based education to the transgender. Formal and informal educational facilities

available to transgender in Pakistan are insufficient (Sultana, 2017). According to Rani and Kamal 2017 only ten percent of the people with transgender in Pakistan are educated. There is a need to enhance the capability to educate the students with transgender e.g by issuing precautionary measures about gender discrimination in educational institutions.

Although education is basic need of all the individuals in any society, yet people with transgender cannot make a free choice about their education, because usually they are enrolled in normal schools. Students, parents and community is reluctant to acceptance the admittance of transgender in schools. Social biasness demonstrated by the community works as an obstacle to educate the transgender, although people with transgender desire to continue their education. The results of the qualitative study conducted by Jabeen et al about challenges and living styles of transgender revealed that there is lack of suitable educational opportunities, lack of awareness among the masses about the significance of transgender and lack of state support causes drought of education among transgender. As a result transgender rarely qualify for higher level jobs (Jabeen, et al, 2021).

According to (Malik & Farooqi, 2019) transgender community was worried about their education and career. Majority of people with transgender acquired education from nursery to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and say good by to educational institutions to join professional communities meant for transgender (*Hijras*). Usually school fellows or class mates teased them and criticize their walking and talking styles. Results of this study further illustrates that majority of people with transgender avoid to use school toilets and looked annoyed with the way of dealing at schools (Malik & Farooqi, 2009). According to Mehmud, Abdullah and Idris (2019), the transgenders in the Pakhtunkhwa region of District Mardan, Pakistan have encountered severe problems

and challenges in their life span. These challenges prevent them from smooth living in the society. Results of study showed that Education had been at the topmost challenge which hinders them to complete their education. The chief cause behind this dilemma is the absence of awareness among the common people about the status and privileges of transgenders in the Islamic state of Pakistan.

Butt, Irfan and Mehnaz (2021) concluded that there were insufficient nominated institutes for transgender students where they might pursue education in a situation free from humiliation and discrimination, nevertheless as these institutes were not imparting degree level education consequently, this cannot help them enough to find a respectable work or pursue a suitable occupation. Governmental initiatives to fulfill the societal, financial and educational necessities of transgenders were also seen unsuccessful as these were not implemented in true spirit.

Khan and Imad (2021) conducted a study on educational problems and experiences of the transgender people within Swat region of KP. Results showed that inside school environment, transgender students confronted austere inequality and harassment from their class fellows although teachers were also found involved in such discriminative conduct against the transgender. Likewise, parental behaviors and their non-supportive conduct were also accountable for termination of their education.

Findings of many studies have indicated that societal discrimination is the root cause of educational scarcity which in turn leads to the educational obstacles like admission related problems, shortage of resources, parental oppositions, lack of safety and security, immoral behavior, family dissuasion, unlawful blames, limitations in involvement in the additional activities and dropouts. Social discrimination is the principal cause of educational deficiency which in turn causes financial deficiency of transgenders. The

societal problems arise from the transgenders' own home; when their family renounces the transgender-child.

Usually people with Transgender are marginalized in the community and have poor level self esteem, they perceive that they are unwanted, uniqueness, experience lack of support from the community and face injustice (Lev, 2013). Transgender is totally indecipherable in the society, they are neglected by the society, they lose their identity, face injustice and experience lack of confidence, and they feel stressed. There is a need to study the sociological view point of the people with transgender (MacDonnell & Grigorovich, 2012). All developing countries need to focus to educate all the individuals including transgender to make progress (Rellis, 2007). Mostly people with transgender leave their homes and they are forced start living with the group of transgender. This group is lead by a teacher called *Guru* and young transgender join this group as a learner (chela). After spending some time they start singing, dancing or begging (Rehan et al., 2009). Results of many studies conducted in the subcontinent contain common findings about the community of transgender.

## 5. Research Methodology

Phenomenological research approach was followed in this research. This approach particularly deemed suitable as it allow researchers to understand the spirit o essence of the responses related to living experiences. Crawford (2016) has described that phenomenological approach allow researchers figure out the human experiences to have a diverse understanding of the viewpoints of the respondents.

### 5.1. Population and Sample

Transgender living in three Union Councils of district Rawalpindi constituted the population of the study. More specifically, one hundred transgender belonging to 20 to 70 years were

considered as population in the study. Data about population of transgender were taken from municipal cooperation offices and Union Council (UC) offices. Proper consent was taken to ensure the willingness of the participants for interview. Eight participants who were willing to participate in the research were selected as sample by following convenient sampling technique. Prior consent of the respondents was taken and their names and identities have not been mentioned throughout the research paper.

### 5.2. Instrumentation

Structured interview guide was used to collect data from the respondents. Structured interviews are best matched to the qualitative research as this approach provides the researchers freedom of exploring details about diverse facets of the phenomenon. Interview guide of this study covered questions such as experiences about socialization with family members during childhood, attitude of teachers and class mates during school days, experiences and nature of problems in seeking admission in educational institutions, level of motivation to get further education, need to develop a separate system of education for transgender, aims of life and hurdles in achieving desired goals.

### 5.3. Data Collection

All research related ethical considerations were followed during the process of data collection. Researchers ensured to have the willingness/consent of the respondents. Respondents were assured the all the provided information will be kept confidential, their names will not mentioned in the research report and likewise, their identity will not be disclosed to anyone. Almost all respondents expressed happiness that researchers will expose their problems to the higher ups. Interestingly it was difficult for the respondents to stay at one place for a long duration therefore, researchers interviewed with them by walking on foot in the markets. Only few respondents asked to the

researchers to take proper permission from their *Guruz*. Consequently *Guruz* were contacted to seek their permissions. It happened particularly in the case of respondents belonging to the age group of 20 years. Researchers noted the responses in written format because the interviews were conducted at the places with congested background. Duration for each interview was from 30 to 40 minutes.

## 6. Results

Data collected through interviews was thoroughly checked and transcribed into different themes. Thematic analysis approach was used to conceive findings and conclusions from the qualitative data. Different themes were emerged from the responses. Comprehensive themes ricochet with the objectives and research questions of the study were analyzed. Responses were checked again and again to make sure that all provided responses are categorized into themes. Emotion related sympathies were controlled by focusing on implementation of research ethics.

### a) Admission in Schools

Majority of the respondents stated that they have not experienced any difficulty to seek admission in public schools. Perhaps they were enrolled in school by their family or parents. However, no respondent opined that they have faced any problem related to admission in public schools.

When asked about problems in getting admission informal school, one of the transgender (P2 was 28 years old and dancer/beggar by profession) narrated in following words;

*“My family put efforts to educate me during my childhood. I have studied up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a government (girls’) school. My mother was more interested in my education, as compared to my father and brothers. I never faced any problem to get admission in school”.*

Another respondent, P7 (40 years old and working at a tailor shop), shared views as follows;

*“I belong to very poor family; my family enrolled me at school. My father was a tailor and it was difficult for my family to meet the expenditures of my study. I faced a lot of problems as a child of poor parents and due to transgender during my childhood. I said good bye to my school during class 5<sup>th</sup>”.*

According to P8 (36 years old and beggar by profession) expressed as follows;

*“I have acquired education up to secondary level in a public high school; I never faced any problem to get admission up till secondary level”.*

P8 further added that;

*“I was 10-12 year old when I had left my home and joined a Khusra Guru. During my childhood, I attended a private school with co-education system. My family was keen in my education, even home tutor was managed by my father, but I was not too much motivated to get education”.*

### b) Socialization with Family

During childhood, majority of transgender faced socialization related problems with their families. Majority of respondents desired to have good relationship with their family and want to support their families. Male members (father and brother) adopt harsh attitude with transgender to realize transgender to have proper getup. Families of transgender dislike their involvement in dancing and begging activities. Transgender leave out their homes due to the attitude of their families. Almost 90% respondents left their homes at the age of 10 expressed the desire to live with their family.

According to P3 (42 years old and dancer by profession) narrated as follows;

*“During my childhood, my mother supported me a lot, even she stood against my father in my favour. At the age of 12 to 15, I was only a single source of conflict among my family. Due the family clashes I decided to join Hijra”.*

community. Almost for a period of 10 years I was not having any relationship with my family. My mother always called me son during my childhood, I am living with transgender community, but my mother still comes to see me off and on. I have only one brother. He dislikes seeing me at my home, especially in the Hijra getup”.

Another respondent, P6 (29 years old and beggar by profession) narrated in following words:

“My parents willingly handed me over to the Guru. Perhaps they were waiting for the right time to hand me over the Khusra Guru. After passing 7<sup>th</sup> class examination, I am living with my Guru. My Guru taught me a lot, when I left my home, my Guru take me to my home after 15 days. I love to live with my family, but my Guru told me that I will face a lot of problems while living with my family”.

#### c) Socialization with Class & School Mates

Almost 80% respondents were of the view that their class/school mates did not feel comfortable to have friendship with them. Socialization with class/school mates becomes more severe after primary level.

When asked about the socialization based problems, P1 (30 years old and dancer by profession) expressed in following words;

“Very odd attitude was adopted by my class mates as many of them started to call me “Khusra”. I faced a variety of problems at during my studies particularly at grade 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. My parents preferred to enroll me in a boy’s primary school”.

Another transgendered, P4 (38 years old and dancer by profession) answered as follows;

“My parents were literate and they enrolled me in a girls’ school. My class mates identified my body gestures and teased me by saying “Khusra”. I faced a lot of problems to socialize with my class fellows. I wanted to have friendship with girls and to play with them but mostly they did not like to include me in games. Hence, I discontinued my studies in class 6<sup>th</sup>”.

Majority of respondents opined that their classmates criticized their behaviours. During education, class fellows used to make fun of transgender by clapping and mocking. Almost 40% transgender had quit education due to the attitude of their class/school mates.

According to P5 (30 years old a house girl);

“I left my school at 4<sup>th</sup> grade, because my class mates teased me very much. The most difficult task for a transgender is to acknowledge this fact that she is not a male or female but transgender”.

According to P7

“I studied in a government school and faced a lot of criticism during my school time. I have studied in a boy’s school and identify myself as male. When I was in class 4<sup>th</sup> my class mates were very much interested to know about my gender. Many times they asked me critical questions about my gender. I reported to my family, but my father asked me why I give them a chance to speak with them”.

#### d) Socialization with Teachers

Transgender is supported by primary or secondary school teachers. Respondents were of the view that their teachers supported them, proper attention was paid to them by their teachers and teachers motivated them during their stay at public schools. Teachers never realized students (transgender) about their gender related disabilities. All respondents were satisfied with the attitude of their teachers.

When asked about socialization problem with teachers, P8 shared as follows;

“I rarely faced any problem to socialize with my teachers during school days. I have passed class 7<sup>th</sup> examination. All of my teachers were very kind and supportive to me”.

#### e) Separate Schools for Transgender

All respondents opined that there is a dire need of separate schools for transgender. Moreover, they desired to acquire professional skills e.g. stitching, cooking etc. 95% respondents demanded for separate system of education with proper facilities. Respondents were

passionate to anticipate a separate system of education where they can enjoy their studies, where no one will force them to behave like a girl or boy. 40% respondents desired to get education with female students, 40% desired to get education with males while 20% responded that getting education with male or female does not matter.

According to P2;

*"I think there is a dire need to start school and launch variety of skills development programmes for transgender in our country".*

P8 further shared as follows;

*"I want to see separate educational institutions for transgender. There must be disciplined environment along with Islamic education. We cannot study with girls or boys. We feel more comfortable with our community. If we sit with boys in the classroom, they tease us and if we sit with girls they make a fun of transgender"*

According to P4;

*"There should be a separate system of education for transgender so they can get education in comfortable environment without facing social problems. Our major problem is criticism, we face all the times. Male and female can never understand the problems we are facing in our lives".*

According to P1;

*"I honestly believe that transgender in Pakistan ought to get higher level education. Transgender having physical resemblance to male should pursue their studies in male school and transgender having resemblance to female should be enrolled in female schools".*

#### **f) Motivation to get Further Education**

Almost 90% respondents expressed regretful feelings that they were not able to continue their studies up till higher level of education. Family circumstances, conflict with family, attitude of peers, criticism by community and socio economic status of family becomes a hurdle for transgender to continue education after primary level.

P8 narrated in following words;

*"I have passed my 8<sup>th</sup> class exam and left my school during class 9<sup>th</sup>. I was average in my studies, because I waste most of my time out of school. I was a regular student up till class 6<sup>th</sup>, but during class 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> I became a spoiled student. It was a good secondary public school. Now I am not satisfied with my life, as I have not aim of life".*

#### **g) Fulfillment of Aims of Life**

Respondents were almost disappointed about their aims related to career, proper socialization with family and socialization with the community. It was observed that they only desired to have proper food, residence and medical facilities. Respondents were also aware that transgender in foreign countries are enjoying better living conditions and facing less problems.

P5 further added in following word;

*"I have come to know that transgender in foreign countries are living standard life, they are doing business and they enjoying all human rights. In our culture, people hate transgender. Their services are hired as dancers on marriage and mehndi functions.*

According to P7;

*"I have no aim of life. Transgender can rarely pursue their dreams of life in our culture. I feel regrets that I have not carried out my education, but not satisfied with my life. At the age of 20 I desired to have a government job, but no need to do any job".*

#### **7) Discussion & Conclusions**

Findings of the study indicated that transgender people have not experienced any difficulty to seek admission in public schools as they were enrolled in school by their family or parents. During childhood, majority of transgender faced socialization related problems with their families as a result they left their homes almost at the age of ten years and expressed the desire to live with their families. Finding of the study

conducted by Alam (2019) also corresponds transgendered are usually rejected even by their blood relations due to the fear of social humiliation.

Corporal abuse and harassment are mutual glitches which trans-people have to face (Shah et al., 2018). This study also provides evidences that transgender faced similar challenges. Majority of respondents shared that majority of their class mates criticized their behaviours and teased them rudely during school age. Majority of transgender had quit school after primary education or before completion of primary level education due to the harsh attitude of their class/school mates. Findings of the studies conducted by Malik & Farooqi, 2019; Butt, Irfan & Mehnaz, 2021; and Khan & Imad, 2021 also support the findings of this study.

The practice of adopting differentiated behaviour with the transgender was reported by the majority of the respondents of this study. Likewise study conducted by (Shah et al., 2018) mentioned that social discrimination is the root cause of educational deficits among transgender which causes educational obstacles like, admission related problems, shortage of resources, parental oppositions, lack of safety and security, immoral behaviors, family dissuasion, unlawful blames, limitations in involvement in the additional activities and dropouts. This study also provides evidences that support the findings of the study conducted by (Shah, et al, 2018).

Respondents deemed satisfied with the teachers' behaviour as they were given proper attention by their teachers and they motivated them during their stay at public schools. This aspect of finding of study does not correspond to the research study conducted by Khan and Imad (2021). People with transgender are discriminated by the teachers; instead elementary level public sector school teachers put best efforts to extend full cooperation and sometime extra coaching to avoid the drop out possibility.

All respondents shared that there is a dire need of separate schools with proper facilities for

transgender. Majority of the respondents expressed regretful feelings that they were not able to continue their studies up till higher level of education due to conflict with family, attitude of peers, criticism by community and socio-economic status of family. Respondents were almost dissatisfied about their aims related to career, proper socialization with family and socialization with the community. Respondents of this study were belonging to the poor, average and lower middle class families. There is a need to conduct the study with the transgender people belonging to upper middle class and rich families. Likewise, state policies are supportive for the transgender and they are provided job opportunities to stop the malpractices associated with transgender. Perceptions of the transgender working in different fields can be studied to compare the perceptions of the transgender belonging to poor and lower middle class and transgender belonging to upper middle and rich families. Research totally based on qualitative data, respondents belonging to upper middle class or upper class are not included in this research.

## 8) Recommendations

Keeping in view findings of the study and discussion section following recommendations can be made for implementation in the society and educational institutions:

- There is a need to educate the parents that if baby is born with transgender, it's not fault of their fault. They need to accept it with wholeheartedness. In this regard family hospitals Mothers' Child Care Centers (*zacha bacah*) centers can play a significant role.
- Likewise, state can manage to provide the counseling and guidance services for the parents having babies with transgender. In this regard Local Non Governmental Organizations (LGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can join hands with the medial centers, mother child health care centers to provide counseling and guidance to the parents having babies with transgender.

- Likewise, at elementary level there should be separate educational institutions for the transgender. State can take measure to open one elementary level school for transgender in all big cities. Second shift can be started in the big boys and girls schools situated at locations convenient to access for the masses.
- There is a dire need of proper legislation on the concerns of transgender community in all the institutions particularly within the institutions of family, as family as an institution is backbone of the society. Sisters and brother with normal gender need to be educated to deal normally with the siblings having transgender.
- Reference to the rights of transgenders, government should evoke awareness campaigns to create awareness among common people through print and electronic media. Furthermore, government should ensure quota in employment in every field of life so that trans-people can lead a normal lifestyle.
- Like government should provide scholarships to transgender people so that they could continue their studies. In this regard specific scholarship quota can be fixed. Moreover, stipends and financial support can be provided to the families who are upbringing children with transgender.

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