

A Phenomenological Study to Understand the Religious Belief and Socio-Cultural Practices of Transgender in Urban Lahore

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Abstract

The purpose of this small scale phenomenological study was to explore the religious beliefs, socio-cultural practices and perceptions of transgender regarding opportunities in the context of recent government actions taken for transgender in urban Lahore. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify the participants. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect the data from 10 participants. Miles and Huberman (2004) framework was used to analyze participants' responses. It is concluded from the findings and discussion that transgender have firm religious beliefs and their socio-cultural practices are not much different than the majority of the community members. Most of the transgender are baggers, living hand to mouth and they dislike their current occupation. Majority blamed government for not taking any practical actions for their survival as they are living a miserable life. They believed that the government has announced actions are only phony claims with political purposes. Finding a respectful job with the support of other community members and having their acceptance is their only hope to live a better and peaceful life.

Keywords: Transgender, Religious Beliefs, Socio-cultural Practice, Miles and Huberman Framework

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Introduction

A person needs all types of support, i.e. emotional, financial, and moral to live and survive in a diverse society (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014). However, unfortunately Transgender (Kusra) is not getting any type of support within the community, despite that their issues and problems are continuously highlighted by the Government and other social work organizations at the national and international level. In recent years, transgender is striving hard toward achieving legal recognition around the globe. Legal gender recognition is an essential element of having fundamental rights, including the right to privacy, freedom of expression, employment, education, health, security, access to justice, and the ability to move freely without any fear. According to the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) Project, that collects and analyzes reports of transgender homicides worldwide, recorded 1,731 murders of transgender people globally between 2007 and 2014. In fact, the situation in certain places is alarming that police have to take steps regarding their protection and safety.

UN delegation declared that transgender will achieve gender equality till 2015 both at the national and international level, but still the crises of their identity remain unfocused and unsolved in many countries. Akhtar (2016) said about 25% of the population in Pakistan is effected by transgenderism. In December, 2009 Chief Justice of Pakistan has ordered to provide the transgender community with national identity as citizens of Pakistan and also suggested to use their services for debt recovery across but still their community is neglected by the society and authorities.

Literature Review

Historical Background

Third-sex or Kusra has a long history since 9th century B.C. They were believed to guard imperial harems in China and were considered very loyal over the guards. The golden era for the Kusra was the time of Mughal Emperors from 1526-1857 where they oversaw the harem and work as advisor to many emperors. They have seen a fall in their social status in the British colonial period as British restricted their activities under British ethics laws. Since then khawajasara are treated inhumanly in this region and facing social and economic exclusion (Abbas et al., 2014).

Religious Perspective

Bund (2017) stated that existence of transgender are explicitly discussed in the Quran. These people are termed “Makhannathun” (effeminate) in Arabic. Allah has described the creation of a Human in Surat al-Hujurat (49:13). Quran respects the diversity in the human creation with respect to gender, physical strength, color, and race and address these variations positively (Surat al-Rum 30:22). Sexual deformity (intersex, hermaphrodite traits) is like other physical handicap and it does not affect the mental and physical ability of the individuals. Hence it is still necessary to assign sex after the examination of dominating sexual organs as man or woman and recorded on the birth certificate. However, In Pakistani religion or even in law, no legal cover/ assistance is provided to transgender who wants to change identity/ legal documents in the light of reassigned sex. The identity registration at the age of 18 is based on sex written on the birth certificate and cannot be changed.

Family and Education

Victimization of transgender starts from the home and mostly the male members are responsible for it. A transgender who played with dolls, uses make-up and wore girls clothes were frequently beaten by their brothers and fathers. For many hijra school is the first stage in the public arena where personal insecurity is experienced resulting in mental disturbance. They experienced verbal harassment, physical and sexual abuse at school by their teachers, school fellows for being different than others. This personal insecurity at school was overcome by avoiding school and finding an older hijra near locality to which they relate. These insecurities led them to avoid normal community members, and they left school ultimately (Akhtar, 2016).

In Pakistani context Transgender has been known by different terms in the local community. They referred as a third sex, hijras, kusras and khawaajasara in Urdu and in English translate as “eunuch”. People used bad words or phrases for them on a daily basis. Transgender faces a lot of physical, psychological, social and cultural harms. They are hermaphrodite, have confused sexual orientation, hence not capable to lead a normal life, unable for marriage and carry offspring. Gender is the most common element of a human personality, but most transgender are confused about their gender orientation. They are close to men according to their physical appearance, but they prefer to be recognized as female

name and adorn themselves with kajal, lipstick makeup and a fake smile. They mostly described transgender as “man minus maleness” and “man plus woman” as they roam in the streets or stand on the signals for their income (Abbas et al., 2014). Transgender are considered align in the society and the situation of the transgender community is worse because they are left ignored, isolated without the survival facilities of health, education, employment opportunities and even social acceptance from the dominant community of the society (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014).

Pakistan Census (2017) has under reported the number of transgender which is only 10, 418. However, studies reported that one out of every 50 children has identified to have transgender potential (Akhtar, 2016). Family as living structure plays an important role in the marginalization of transgender. Socially, they are divided into clan living together and managed by a leader or guru who is commonly known as the eldest member of the family. These communities are generally known as Chellas and one guru can have many chellas at a time and manages their affairs like a father or mother. Transgender earn their livelihood by dancing at local festivals, carnivals, weddings and births of children. The other major income sources are begging and sex-work. Moreover, the situation has become more alarming when it has been found that many of transgender members are not real khawajasara but are the freer youth of the local community who have been adopting this lifestyle because of being jobless and their personal sexual orientation. This situation increased the severity of their problems in a number of ways for the employment, equality and their social status.

Government of Punjab (2018) reported that Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) for transgender has three categories; trans-woman, trans-man and inter-sex. Only transgender holding CNIC of trans-male can apply for Punjab Public Service Commission jobs if they are eligible as per educational criteria. The situation from getting job is worse as these transgender did not meet the educational and eligibility criteria set by the government for the majority of the community.

Apart from their social status and employment conditions, their religious beliefs and social, cultural practices are suspicious for other community members. They termed as homosexuals, sex-workers, slaves and consider disbelievers by the local mass on encountering with them. The purpose of this small scale study is to explore the religious beliefs, practices and opportunities in the context of recent government actions taken for transgender in Lahore.

Significance of the Study

Transgender and their issues are considered taboo in the Pakistani community. This study will help to understand the real socio-cultural practices of the transgender community and how the government actions are fruitful in providing the rights and opportunities to solve transgender problems. Moreover, this study will also help young researchers to highlight the plight of transgender community at a larger scale and will act as a continuous reminder for government and other NGOs to work for the transgender community.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Explore the religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices of transgender;
2. Investigate their educational beliefs and opportunities;
3. Find the role of Government in providing opportunities regarding education and occupation;
4. Explore the problems faced by transgender that hinder in their peaceful living in the society.

Methodology

The study was exploratory in nature and the researcher used phenomenological research method to analyze the responses of the participants regarding their religious beliefs and social, cultural practices.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study was all the transgender residing in the area of Khayaban-e-Jinnah and Raiwind Road, Lahore. The sample size was taken by non-probability snowball sampling technique, in which first participants (after informal interaction) helped the researcher to identify similar other participants. The sample size for the study was 10 participants. However, two participants were not agreed for interview and researcher used informal conversation and recorded memos.

Instrument and Validation of Instrument

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to explore the understanding of transgender and this instrument was also validated from the three experts as well. The interview was formatted in English language, but it was conducted in Urdu and Punjabi to get maximum responses from the participants. Responses of interview, then transcribed/translated very carefully so that actual meaning of the question might not lost. Out of ten interviews, eight were recorded by the researcher herself and two of them was noted as memos (informal conversation) as interviewees weren't comfortable with recording and feeling shy. The questions of the interview were dealing with the possible indicators of transgender beliefs and practices regarding different aspects of their life (App.A).

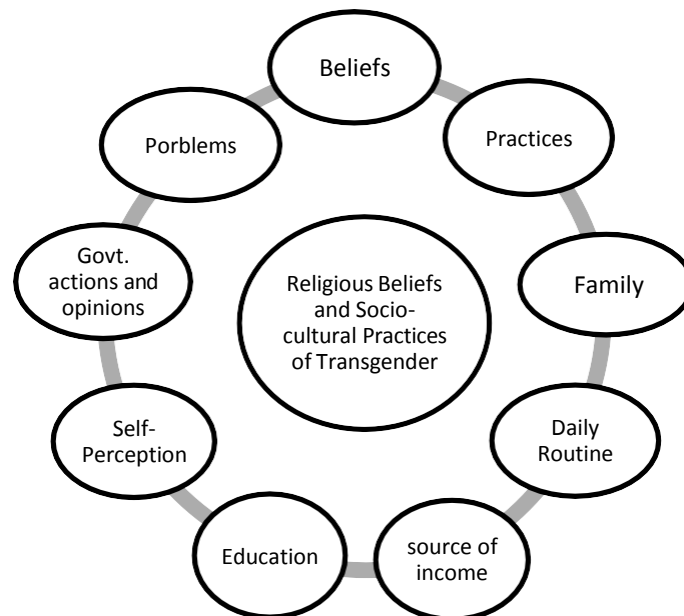


Figure 1. Indicators to develop Research question

Access to the Study Site

In this present research, first informant played a vital role in identifying the study site. Informant identified the area of Khayaban-e-Jinnah as all the gurus and chellas gather there to earn their livelihood.

Ethical Consideration

The purpose of the study was clearly communicated to the respondents to make them comfortable. Consent was taken from the “Guru” of these transgender not to harm and use the information against them and also by providing a little bit of incentive. Guru made it clear that it’s their “Dhanda time” (begging or earning time) and they can’t lose it.

Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews, were analyzed through Miles & Huberman’s (2004) framework for the qualitative data analysis. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) data analysis technique consisted of three interlinked processes as data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. The following procedure was followed to draw the conclusion by discussion.

Table 1

Data Analysis Framework

Interview Questions	Respondent Responses	Coding	Categories	Findings and Conclusion
1.	Putting the data	Bulk of Data is	Codes are	Categories are
2.	against each	reduced into	further	discussed and
3.	question in a grid	words, phrases	extracted into	then, conclusion
		terms as codes	Categories	is drawn
Data reduction		Data Display & Conclusion		

Findings

Data Reduction

The first part of the analysis is data reduction; it involves collecting, transcribing and coding the raw data. At first the respondents’ identities were removed to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were given a symbol and a number as P1, P2....P8 depending on their interview sequence. Interviews of the participants were then transcribed and coding process was started by arranging the bulk of data in the grid against the questions of the interviews. Transcribed data, then read again and again to reduce it into meaningful units. After careful reading the data, then reduced into words/phrases termed as codes. The findings of this data are as follows.

Table 2
Data reduction and extraction of Code

Main Research Questions	Extracted Codes
What is your name?	Personal name preferences
How you join these Khawaja Sara?	Family& Society pressure
Which religion you follow?	Teaching of Islam
How do you perceive it?	Firm Believers
What activities you perform according to religion?	Celebrations of festivals Practices of Islamic teachings
What is your family structure?	Adaptability to reconsider family Useless family link; Behavior of family
How do you spend your day?	Daily routine
How do you live your life?	Residing in one place; Living together
What is your education?	Education as mean of the good
What are your means of getting an education?	job Importance of education Education can't change my reality Education as solution to all problems
What are your means of earning?	Begging as only mean of income
What do you do as a professional?	Support from other community Fear of abuse and life
How do you perceive about yourself?	Satisfied as being Transgender Life is miserable; Hate for this profession
What are your opinions on Government current initiatives about your community? (Education/Schooling, Election, Govt. Jobs)	CNIC important for job False statements of Govt.
What are your basic problems as being different from other communities?	No practicality of announcing actions Lack of open-mindedness
What is your opinion about Govt. Actions to solve your problems?	Ban on festivals by Govt.

Description: The above table shows the questions/statements and it also explains the extracted codes against each question.

Data Display

The next stage is data display which is carried out by extracting these codes further into categories. These categories are discussed in the discussion sections to draw a conclusion out of it.

Table 3
Codes with its abstract categories

Extracted Codes	Extracted Categories
Personal name preferences	Flexible identity
Family& Society pressure	
Teaching of Islam	Religious Beliefs
Firm Believers	
Celebrations of festivals	Religious and Socio-cultural Practices
Practices of Islamic teachings	
Adaptability to reconsider family	Need based Relationships
Useless family link	
Behavior of family	
Daily routine	Living style
Residing in one place	
Living together	
Education as mean of good job	Opportunities for Education
Importance of education	
Education can't change my reality	
Education as solution to all problem	
Begging as only mean of income	Occupation and Means of support
Support from other community	
Fear of abuse and life	
Hate for this profession	
Satisfied as being Transgender	Self-Perception
Life is miserable	
Shame and helplessness	
CNIC important for job	Opinions about Govt. Actions
False statements of Govt.	
No practicality of announced actions	Acceptance in society
Lack of open-mindedness	Phony claims of Govt.
Ban on festivals by Govt.	

Description: The above table shows the codes and it also explains the extracted abstract categories against each group of codes.

Discussion

Flexible Identity

Personal identity or name is the first link between people and the society and transgender are unable to establish this association due to being different from the majority without their own fault. Transgender has flexible identity, and they do not have any associations with their names like non-transgenders. Moreover, they easily change their names multiple times in their life. When participants were inquired about their names, four out of eight participants (P2, P3, P6, and P7) said that either their guru has given their names or they (P1, p7) have chosen their name for themselves. It is interesting that transgender has preferences to use a female name over male names as all the participants were told they preferred to be called with girl's names. According to the one participant (P7), said that "my last guru gave me Anum name and when I moved to Lahore my new guru changes my name again and I don't have any issue with the name changing". On inquiring about their inclusion in the transgender community, respondents told that their guru came and their parents' handover those as one participant said that "My parents didn't like me as they thought, I am responsible for their false image in the society" (P.2). Their family considers them as a source of shame in the society (Abbas et al., 2014) and they are violating the laws imposed by society and religion and such parents should be considered criminals (Ghamdi, 2016).

Religious Beliefs

It is depicted from the above discussions that the transgender community has firm religious beliefs as not only they are aware of all the pillars of Islam, but also, consider it their obligation to communicate this information to their community members or Chellas. All the participants told that they are true Muslims and Islam is their only religion. According to participants "I am happy and thanks to Allah that my last guru teaches me everything about Islam. I have read Quran thrice (P.7); I offer prayers and read the Quran and do all things which a Muslim Performs (P5). All participants said that their guru taught them different concepts of Islam as one participant told "My Guru taught me to read the Quran and Namaz and all the lifestyle according to Islam and now we are teaching to our chellas to live life like a Muslim (P5)". But unfortunately, these beliefs are still not enough for them to go to Mecca to perform UMRAH as government of Saudi Arabia banned transgender to get Visa for this purpose (Saddique, Gang, Mirbehar, Batool, & Ahmad, 2017).

Religious and Socio-cultural Practices

It is depicted that although some of their activities and practices are specific to their own community, but, in general transgender are not much different in their religious and cultural practices as being Muslims, from the majority of the community members. The majority of respondents said that they celebrate all the festivals and events according to Islam. It is worth noticing that they claim to wear men's clothes (contrary to their daily routine) and go to Masjid to offer Eid prayers as men. Apart from religious practices, participants were asked to respond to socio-cultural practices which they follow as being different from other community members. Few participants responded as "Sometimes our wadde Kusray (Eldest member or Guru) gave Nayaz when there is some problem and all other kusras went to attend (p3). Another told that "We celebrate birthday, the day we came to guru to join our community and celebrate that day as our birthday" (P8). One major difference in social practice is regarding their death rituals. One respondent (p5) told that they had to offer Namaz-Janaza of their community members by themselves as no Molvi came for this activity. One participant responded that "They (Guru) also teach us everything to spend life as khawjasara like how to clap and speak in a certain way to earn their livelihood (p6). Khanzada (2016) also highlighted that transgender must not be considered a stigma in society as it's a medical disorder and should be considered on sympathetic bases.

Need based Relationships

Transgender is adapted to make a need based relationship with their own and new family. When questions were asked about their family structure, seven responded that they consider Khawaja Sara as their family and they are like brother, sisters and their elder Kusras are called as Uncle Guru, Aunt Guru, and Grandfather Guru like normal family members. One participant said that "My parents, who gave me birth are our first family and second family is our guru (P7)". One remarkable aspect of transgender family structure is that all transgender aspire to be a guru one day as becoming a guru earns them respect within their own community (P3)". However, many of the transgender is supporting their family members despite of their unsympathetic attitude and non-accepting behavior towards them (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014).

Living Style

Living the style of transgender is not much different from other community members. Majority participant responded that they got up early to perform religious rituals. After taking breakfast and some rest, they put on makeup came to their fixed point or signals (already specified by their guru) for earning their livelihood till 12pm. Many respondents shared this experience as tiring, full of harassments and insults (p4 &5). According to Nazir & Yasir (2016) overall, 83.5% transgender is involved in professions which cause of hatred towards them (dancing 31%, begging 15% and prostitution 37.5%) and they are forced to live in this lifestyle.

Opportunities for Education

On inquiring about educational opportunities, few responded positively. All educated participants told that they had acquired an education privately with the help of their guru and their friends. Two participants have passed the Primary examinations and one has completed Matriculation with science subjects. All participants reflected that they understand the importance of education and showed their desire for learning. Others said “I never saw school in my life (P4); I should be educated as with the education, my life would be different (P3). Participants also told “If I am educated then my life would be different and I can do some other work like designing etc. (P2)”. Another proudly told that “people who speak English I can understand them and help my other khawaja Sara to translate for them (P7)”. On inquiring to pursue their education one respondent reflected that “I want to give exams of next level, but there are some rules of khawaja Sara and we have to follow. It is observed that education is the solution for all problems and source of pride among other illiterate transgender. Since social hatred and discrimination keep them away from educational institutions, therefore, very few attain a good education (Nazir & Yasir, 2016). Lack of educational opportunities has pushed them into entering the risky opportunities (Abdullah et al, 2012).

Occupation and Means of Support

Transgender is living a miserable life without any moral, social and financial support from other community members and are forced to tolerate provoked behaviors of so-called sophisticated and cultured members of the society (Ashraf, 2010). All participants responded that they have one source of earning and that is begging. Nazir & Yasir (2016) also reported that people do not hire them for household work, for daycare services or for any other job in the home for which they can learn different skills easily. Participants reflected that they earn 200-300 rupees per day and apart from giving rent, they had to make clothes, buy makeup and food for themselves and it's very difficult to survive in these rupees (P3). Respondents also said that they are living their life helplessly and miserably as there is no other means of income. "People inquired us about the job, but they don't offer us a job. Once a man promised to give his office cards, but after he never returned and it's been 4 months I am still waiting for him as I don't like this begging (P7)" but people refused to keep khawaja Sara at home (P6). On inquiring about any other source of income; participants reflected that "we used to perform in the festivals, carnivals or fairs arranged at a local or district level but now Govt. has banned these fairs". Few participants said that their fellows are being abused and getting killed "We are living in fear that at any time we may be victimized of sexual, physical abuse and get killed" (P1).

Self-Perception

Almost all the participants showed hate towards their profession as transgender that leads them towards begging. One said "we do not have any value, respect and treated as Trash (Kachra). Furthermore, one said that even Trash has a specific point, but we are roaming here and there (p5) and it's better to die from this miserable life (P8)". It is noted that all the participants were not hateful towards themselves as being transgender, but they are upset towards their miserable situation.

Opinion about Government' Actions

The Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2013 has redefined the rights of transgender in all fields, including employment, education, inheritance and casting the vote (Nazir & Yair). Some participants showed satisfaction towards government actions. Few responded that the Government has not taken any practical steps to provide them with CNIC and other relevant documents i.e. medical certificate, birth certificate required for jobs, education and other purposes. One participant reflected that “The only benefit, I have got of this CNIC card is that it’s been written that we are Khawajasaras (P3)”. It is inferred that Transgender is well aware of the difficulties not having their identity in a country and wish that with the national identity card and their life might get better. Having their own identity cards (CNIC) is like hope for them to be placed in jobs and other sectors.

Acceptance in Society

Transgender has the continuous urge for their acceptance from their families and society as being different from others. It’s the high time, to understand that Allah has created them and they are mentally and physically are of strange behaviors, but they need social acceptance to live their life peacefully. The majority responded that major problem as they are facing is the acceptability and open mindedness of the society. Participants said “When our own family is hesitant to accept us then how this society and world will accept us (P7); “Govt. should announce that we are not part of Pakistan and send us to another place or country” (P5). It may be due to the involvement of some groups of the transgender community whose sex business has made them not trust worthy. (Nazir & Yasir).

Phony Claims of Government

Participants reflected that Government should take solid actions to support and protect them as one of them said “Our basic problem is not having our own place to live and no one considers us. A sparrow has a nest and keep children in that. The Govt. should specify or give land/place for us so that we knew that this is our place” (p5). This notion also supported by Tabassum and Jamil (2014) in their study that transgender are not fully satisfied with what’s going on for their betterment from the state side. It’s the need of the hour that Government must take practical steps to secure the lives and occupation of transgender and device flexible policies and strategies to equip and support them. It’s also been inferred that at the administrative level monitoring is required in different departments of Government regarding transgender rights.

Conclusion

Most of the past researches were carried out to explore the identity crises and psychological issues of transgender and very little has been investigated about their religious and social-cultural practices which made them taboo in the Pakistani context. It is concluded from this research that mostly we are driven by certain myths related to Khawajasara and blindly follow the footsteps of hate, intolerance and prejudice against transgender. Such attitudes and behaviors are produced with perceptions due to Groupthinking (Whyte, 1952). “We hate some people, but we do not know them and we do not want to know them because we hate them”. This cliché stands valid in our attitude towards khwajasara. Transgender may be suffering from any psychological problem or genuine handicap that may be beyond their control. It’s our obligation, as educated community members that we should understand them and try to bridge the gap of the prevailing state of doubt and mistrust towards them. This study is an eye opener for all communities that they are very much like us and must facilitate transgender in every possible way so that their life may become comfortable and productive for society at large.

Recommendation

The basic constraint of this present research is that a minimum number of participants were involved over a small period of time. This research could provide more substantial data if it’s been conducted across different cities of Pakistan to explore a larger sample. However, the researchers tried to explore the in-depth meanings of the respondent’s responses and following recommendations might be considered for the social adjustment of transgender.

1. There is need to develop awareness among prospective teachers regarding transgender and their issues. Teachers may also discuss these issues in their class to create acceptance to bring positive attitudinal changes towards these marginalized members of society.
2. An interesting challenge is to create acceptance for this group in the society. Educational material content, pictures must be developed and included at all levels in formal textbook to address the gender and equality issues.
3. Media is another important tool to create awareness. The digital medium, videos, talk shows and informal networks may be used to highlight in achieving the rights of the transgender community.

4. Community cooperation can be instrumental to minimize the tension between distinct members and minimize conflicts. The mosque has a central place in a community as it is considered as a source of sharing information and sermons. Community leaders can use this source to encourage people to reach out khwajasars and helped them in education and respectable income opportunities.
5. There should be separate schools established at district level for their education at the primary and the secondary level to increase the literacy rate of the transgender community. Moreover, Government can fix quota in all public and private institutions to facilitate third gender education.
6. Strict laws should be implemented by the administration for humiliating transgender. This can be achieved with family and social support at the individual and state level.
7. Government should also take initiative for the education of transgender through adult learning programs to make them literate citizen.
8. At each district level, government must plan vocational, technical and computer courses, designing education to solve their problems regarding jobs and occupation. This also helped them to play their roles in Pakistan's economy.
9. Lastly, other community members should support transgender by accepting them and providing them support as their acceptance is crucial for their peaceful survival. This can be done by incorporating special topics in books on transgender and their issues.

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