

Muhammad Wasim Ahmad *

Hussain Ali Hashmi †

Highlighting Socio-Economic Problems of Eunuchs and Community Perception: A Case Study of Eunuchs in Peshawar

Vol. IV, No. II (Fall 2021)

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2021\(IV-II\).01](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2021(IV-II).01)

Pages: 1 – 9

Headings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Research Methodology](#)
- [Results and Discussion](#)
- [Economic Issues Faced by Eunuch](#)
- [Case Study](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [Suggestions](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract: *This anthropological research aims at finding out the problems faced by the eunuchs of Peshawar. This research aimed at targeting such eunuchs who are not involved in singing and dancing but are involved or trying to get involved in society by working just like anybody else to survive. This research is qualitative by using a descriptive research methodology. Primary data is collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews and case studies. Fifteen respondents are selected through the snowball sampling technique. The research explained how they get taunted or discriminated against by the general public. A few respondents expressed their views about how they are treated in their working area and how they get paid less than other workers at the same place. The findings highlight their problems and suggest a few recommendations so that a change can be brought in the people's attitude towards eunuchs.*

Key Words: Hijra, TGPs, Eunuch, Transgender

Introduction

A eunuch is a person known by many names in society. Names like Hijra, Khusra, Zanana, Murat, Khawaja Sara etc are used while addressing them. This addressing term is not so simple to understand. The general public uses these terms or phrases mentioned above to taunt them, thus openly showing hate and non-

acceptance towards them or are used to discriminate against them.

This research is conducted to highlight the problems of Eunuchs, Keeping in mind the importance of this problem nowadays and its response from all over the world, this anthropological research was carried out. This

* Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: anthroscholar1981@outlook.com

† Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

research is aimed mainly at the social and economic treatment of the Eunuchs.

The number of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender)/Eunuchs has significantly increased. On the other hand, their needs and rights could not be managed simultaneously. United Nations has set up some specific goals known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are aimed to be achieved from 2016 to 2030. In these goals, the United Nations has mainly focused on gender equality around the globe. The main principle of this plan is that no one should be left behind. But sadly, there is no goal or target set explicitly for Eunuchs and Transgender Persons (TGPs). Pakistan is among those countries that show plodding progress in recognizing and delivering on the gender-based needs of the Eunuchs/TGPs. The transgender/Eunuch community could get a little acceptance throughout the country but received massive discrimination, hate, and violence. Ordinary people don't consider the transgender equal to them and do not want to mix up with them openly. The people are reluctant to accept them as third gender/Eunuch persons. All the policies in the out country are mainly focused on keeping in mind male and female only. In 2012, Supreme Court ruled that trans persons/Eunuchs should have the same rights as other Pakistanis, including inheritance and job opportunities. However, another long debate that whether the government could succeed in implementing these orders of the court.

A eunuch shared views that s/he used to play with dolls and wear girl clothes and liked to play with girls as well. His immediate family members, friends, and other relatives disapproved of this behaviour and were often beaten. For the family members, it was a matter of shame and disgrace. The male members were ashamed of their brother, who was called different names by the people outside. According to this Eunuch, s/he was considered as humiliating their family.

Several interviewees and shame told similar stories that seem to be significant. Another *transgender person* explained how although s/he was accepted at home, s/he felt s/he had disgraced the family ([Jami, 2011](#)).

This kind of behaviour is often exercised by the male members of the family who feel greatly ashamed of the presence of such people. The Eunuch reported no sexual assault on any transgender by family members, and it was also not directly asked about. There was no regional difference in family receiving of children with gender dysphoria. Families' reaction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was harsh and severe toward transgender people in the family and even resulted in honour killings ([Khan, Rehan, Qayyum, & Khan, 2008](#)).

It is a problem for some born "like that," and babies with DSD may be denied access to health treatment. A study was conducted in Karachi where it was found that parents are relying on male children in old age, some are reluctant to seek medical attention for babies with DSD, and many are dying ([Warne & Raza, 2008](#)). In some cultures, they are considered neither men nor women and not necessarily regarded as deviant as they occupy reasonable social adjustment ([Nanda, 1986](#)).

Literature Review

People known as the third gender who are generally castrated males can be traced back to the 9th century B.C. they were appointed to the highest positions, like guarding the royal harems. Entrusting them with essential duties can be traced back to China, where they were made responsible for taking care of royal harems and other necessary and sacred places. It was mainly done keeping in mind that their weak characteristics were preferred over other male

members. The most valuable time for eunuchs can be traced back to the *Mughal* era from around 1526 to 1857. During this period, they guarded harems and even were special advisors to the king. They were the people to whom other people looked for guidance in important decisions. Their prestigious position was lost when the prince became the king and ultimately was forced to become beggars. The British laws of ethics after 1870, such as the Criminal Tribes Act and the Dramatic Performance Act, pronounced them as people with evil moral character, making their lives more miserable and depriving them of their high position previously held. In the colonial era, the British rulers derived the laws that were followed under Muslim rulers and regarded Eunuch as a danger to society. ([Abbas, Hussain, & Nawaz, 2014](#))

Haider and Bano have identified the different kinds of *hijra* to spread awareness that there are many types of unhappy people in Pakistan. In research conducted later by Haider, it was pointed out that the university teachers were not up to date on the information regarding transgender ([Haider, 2008](#)).

Almost all over the world and in Pakistan, people's attitudes towards transgender is questionable. Parents in Pakistan will accept blind, rapists, deaf, dumb, a murderer but not transgender. Most people believe that children born with sexual abnormalities should be handed over to transgender people. The family culture of our country is the main hurdle in the implementation of many laws in favour of transgender, re'B'ations such as property, education, dignity, health, and many other fundamental rights. Research suggested that most transgender people are involved in singing, dancing, and sex work at young and beggary old age. The family and society both are reluctant to talk openly about transgender rights. Transgender has very limited or no social space in the community. People are even against having transgender as servants at home because

they are straightaway thought of homosexual or thought to be involved in sex work. Transgender faces many kinds of abuse involving physical, verbal, and or sexual abuse. The people in society believe that transgender can only sing and dance and are not considered equal citizens of Pakistan. Often these people are forced to live in isolation. People don't want to shake hands with them or talk to them. People avoid transgender in places where they live, so in a way, transgender is socially unacceptable in Pakistan ([Alam, Rehman, & Warraich, 2019](#))

In the culture of Pakistan, transgender shows a vital role in ceremonies like birth, wedding, birthday, Eid, etc. Yet, they are called demeaning names such as Hijra, Khwaja Sara, Morat, Zanana. It is not wrong to say that these people occupy the lowest decree of rights and honour in this country and face rejection from the whole country. According to a recent survey, about 2% of children are affected by sexual diseases in one form or another. If a third gender is born in the family, that child's fate is determined by the family's elders. They are either thrown away or, in some cases, killed because the family thinks that such children will bring shame to the family. The supreme court of Pakistan has issued many laws through which transgender people can be made equal citizens of Pakistan. Under such laws, the federal and provincial governments are bound to give equal rights to all transgender in their respective localities. The requests might be treating them as equal citizens or providing them with job opportunities just like any other citizen of the country ([Saddique & Ahmad, 2017](#))

Gender, in a general sense, is a widely accepted concept that is used to describe males and females. A Transgender person is considered to have some abnormalities in their sexual characteristics and hence can neither be regarded as a male nor female and are placed under the third gender. It is a fact that some people are so much fond of becoming transgender, and they change their whole lifestyle just to become

transgender. It is a hard reality to accept, but in Pakistan, such people are known as misfits in society and are called different demeaning names and are only thought of as someone who sings and dances at some wedding. According to a recent survey, one-third of children out of fifty are related to sexual disorders ([Arsalan, Bhatti, & Mustafa, 2018](#)).

'Eunuch' is an English word from the Greek words '*Eune*,' which means bed, and '*Ekhein*,' which means to keep, i.e., "bed keeper." The traditional meaning of gender is binary and is limited to only the sexual classification of male and female, the umbrella terms used worldwide. Those who did not fall into these two categories were placed under the third gender and are called transgender. The transgender word can further be elaborated as Male to Female (MTF), Female to Male (FTM), crossdressers, transsexuals, etc. They are known in society under different names such as Hijra, Morat, Zanana, Khusra, etc. From their very early childhood, such children are considered misfits of society and are treated in a way as to make a point that they are not equal to others. Transgender in a community faces discrimination at every level. They are not given employment even if there are places where they can be adjusted. All this forces them to adopt such economic measures that are not liked by society and are considered derogatory ([Islam, 2020](#)).

A eunuch shared views that s/he used to play with dolls and wear girl clothes and liked to play with girls as well. His immediate family members, friends, and other relatives disapproved of this behaviour and were often beaten. For the family members, it was a matter of shame and disgrace. The male members were ashamed of their brother, who was called different names by the people outside. According to this Eunuch, s/he was considered disgracing their family. Several interviewees and shame told similar stories that seem to be significant. Another *transgender person* explained how although s/he

was accepted at home, s/he felt s/he had disgraced the family ([Jami, 2011](#)).

This kind of behaviour is often exercised by the male members of the family who feel greatly ashamed of the presence of such people. The Eunuch reported no sexual assault on any transgender by family members, and it was also not directly asked about. There was no regional difference in family receiving of children with gender dysphoria. Families' reaction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was harsher and more severe toward transgender people in the family and even resulted in honour killings ([Khan, Rehan, Qayyum, & Khan, 2008](#)). It is a problem for some born "like that," and babies with DSD may be denied access to health treatment. A study was conducted in Karachi where it was found that parents are relying on male children in old age, some are reluctant to seek medical attention for babies with DSD, and many are dying ([Warne & Raza, 2008](#)). In some cultures, they are considered neither men nor women and not necessarily regarded as deviant as they occupy reasonable social adjustment ([Nanda, 1986](#)).

Research Methodology

This qualitative anthropological research highlights the socio-economic problems Eunuch faces in society while trying to live everyday life. This pursuit on their part is a fundamental human right, sadly denied to most of the Eunuch. The locale selected for the study is an area in Peshawar, and the name of that area and respondents are kept hidden for anonymity. Snowball Sampling is adopted as a technique for selecting a sample of twenty for conducting the research. Out of these twenty respondents, fifteen agreed that the interview was recorded correctly. For this anthropological research, the tools used for data collection are face-to-face in-depth interviews and case studies.

Results and Discussion

Social Issues Faced by Eunuch

The research has brought some severe violations of human rights that the eunuch face in society. The primary and essential issue is the social acceptance from the community, whether it is the family unit or anyone else other than the family. It is hard for society to treat them as normal human beings trying to adjust to society's existing structure. The factor of non-acceptance from the community also points toward the public pressure that may be faced while giving Eunuch equal importance. Taunting and discrimination are other grave violations of fundamental human rights. This factor forces eunuchs not to try to blend in because there is a lot of hostile or unfriendly behaviour in return. Public places can sometimes prove to be very unpleasant places because of the discrimination from society. Public places like parks, hospitals, banks, restaurants, and markets sometimes offer an adamant time to Eunuch. The way the people look and laugh at Eunuch is excruciating for them. According to the respondents, they feel the hate and discrimination they hold towards them in people's eyes. The schools, colleges, and universities prove to be a challenging phase for Eunuch again because of the non-acceptance from society.

Case Study

Mr. A is a salesperson in a furniture showroom in Peshawar. While talking to him, several interesting facts were found. According to A, he enjoys working in the gallery. He believes that ultimately society and people accept persons like him for who they are. Upon asking the respondent, it was found out that A joined this profession by choice. Before that, he has been working at different places and finally for the last six years he has been working in this showroom. A is married having three children. When asked from A, he said that his co-workers were okay with him, although at first, they were taunting

him for who he was. Later on, with time, the behaviour of their co-workers became usual with him. Regarding friends' behaviour, Mr A said that he doesn't have many friends, or it will be more appropriate to say that not many people want to be friends with him because whoever will be a friend of him will face resistance from society. The family's behaviour towards Mr A was also found not to be very supportive. At first, when my family found out about me being transgender, they beat him so many times. "I was not allowed to play with other boys," said A. I watched other boys from home playing together, having a great time, but I was not allowed to play. The reason for this behaviour given by his parents and family members was that if he plays with other boys, they will make fun of him, bringing shame to the whole family.

A says that taunting is something they have to deal with every day. Going to school, going to market to get something or any other such visits was the hardest. People enjoyed taunting me on my way, and I would feel embarrassed and sometimes afraid. According to A, later on, his family accepted him for who he was, and their behaviour started to get usual with him, but still, he was not allowed to go outside and play. I was not taken to family gatherings that included marriages, funerals, dinners, or other social gatherings. My family would prefer not to take me with them because they feel embraced most of the time. According to A, all this was painful for him at first, but gradually, he accepted this. According to A, nobody wants to be left at home while all others are going to functions, which hurts a lot. A said that slowly, his other family members started to accept him for who he was and how he was with time. It was a slow and painful process of acceptance from my family members. A said that this acceptance was a big sigh of relief for him. When asked about his social circle, including friends, A smiled and said we people are very hard to be truly accepted by society. A said all his close friends are transgender, some of them are still singing and

dancing, but most of them, like A, have left this singing and dancing profession and are engaged in some other jobs.

Yes, we sit once or twice during the week and have fun together. We even sing and dance sometimes but only among our close friends and not in front of anyone else. We know each other, learn about each other's problems and other similar things, so we get along very well. According to A, his friends mean a lot to him because they understand him very well, mainly because they are from the same background. When asked about treatment from the general public, co-workers, or other members, A said that we people are hard to accept and be friends with, to be quite honest. Yes, people show reluctant behaviour said A, and they are not to be blamed for this because that's the way it has always been. He said that the conduct of his co-workers is quite normal towards him. They sometimes taunt him and call him different names, but they are primarily in peace with him. A said that for people like us the age between fifteen to twenty-two years is a tough time, but once you pass this, things start to look a little bit better and as more time passes things become more and more every day. That is because we adjust ourselves to society and society accepts and adjusts itself with us. A was asked whether he is discriminated against at any level at his workplace, and he said no, I don't think so. I get a salary equal to other staff members, we also get bonuses or pay raises. It is not an ideal environment A said about his workplace, but it is still a perfect place to work. It is better for me than singing and dancing. He said that he has to go out sometimes to do different tasks like going to the bank to pay utility bills, going to the hospital, parks, markets, etc. The behaviour of the people is a mixture, said A. Sometimes he gets treated equally and severely, but it does not bother him anymore. A said he had to go to hospitals a few times, and over there, he was treated very respectfully by the staff members, and no sign of any discrimination was shown.

According to this anthropological research, the social hurdles that transgender face in society are pretty obvious. Culture is not ready to accept transgender as normal human beings. Their sexual characteristics are made the basis for their evaluation, and these sexual characteristics are already rejected by society. People need to go to different places, including parks and restaurants, hospitals and other health care facilities, banks and offices, shops and markets, etc. The behaviour of people towards transgender is quite questionable. Making these respondents participate in the research was a very challenging task and was quite tricky. It required a lot of convincing from the researcher's side. Respondents shared their concerns regarding the interviews that these interviews might bring some harm or disgrace to them and their families and that their real names must not be used during the interviews and anywhere else. They were convinced again and again about the confidentiality their data would have.

Economic Issues Faced by Eunuch

The economic issues faced by Eunuch in society are worth mentioning. Some of the respondents pointed out the problem of being paid less than the average income. A respondent noted that the employer offered him a reasonable salary at the time of employment. Still, at the time of payment, some amount was deducted from it intentionally by the end of the month. Not getting employed by employers is another serious economic issue eunuch faces. Most of the respondents shared that they have been rejected or not used because of their appearance because of the way they walk or talk. Most of the respondents pointed out that even they feel uncomfortable or unhappy and sometimes under pressure, they have to stick to their jobs because there are not many job opportunities.

Case Study

Mr. 'B' is a gents tailor in Peshawar. 'B' said he

enjoys his work and is satisfied without thinking about what others think of him. He said it's a nice and clean job for me and I can support my family very well. 'B' is a married person having two children. 'B' said it is exciting to see and judge how people treat people like us. One is forced to change the profession he once was a part of because society does not approve of this, and social approval is very important for society's survival. How a person gets treated in society by his friends, family, co-workers, and others matters most. When asked from 'B,' he said that his staff is friendly with him, although they were initially showing reluctant behaviours towards him and working with him. Later on, with time, the team's behaviour became usual with him, and now we all have fun together. I do get discriminated against by people sometimes, but I will have to deal with it for the rest of my life.

'B' said that he doesn't have many friends about friends' behaviour. The behaviour of 'B' family members was also very unsupportive, a mixture of acceptance and rejection. According to 'B,' he was very young when he realized and felt society's reluctant behaviour, including his parents, friends, family, neighbours, and other people outside. First, when my family found out about me being transgender, they were not so pleased and encouraging. A few of his family members also punished him from time to time to get me back on track. I was told not to go outside to play with other kids. Most of the kids used to taunt me and call me different names said 'B.' I used to watch other boys from home, from windows, from the rooftop playing together having a great time, but I was not allowed to play, and this was kind of strange and very painful sometimes.

'B' said that he had to deal with taunting every day while going to school, to market, and such visits were the hardest ones in the beginning. 'B' said that he had to leave school because the students made fun of him, and so did some of the teachers. I was never comfortable at school, so I discontinued my studies. People

enjoyed taunting me on my way, and I would feel embarrassed and sometimes afraid and sometimes furious. According to 'B,' I used to think about what was wrong with me or what was wrong with the people so that he was treated like this. 'B' said that as I grew older, my family accepted me for who I was, and their behaviour started to get regular with me, but still, I was not allowed to go outside and play with other kids. I was not taken to family gatherings that included marriages, funerals, dinners, or other social groups, said 'B.' Most of the time, my family has preferred not to take me with them because they would feel embraced. According to 'B,' all this was painful at first, but slowly and gradually, he accepted all this because there was no other choice. 'B' said that slowly, his other family members started to get him for who he was and how he was, but it took a long time for them to come to this point. It was a slow and painful acceptance process among my family members, especially in society.

When asked about his social circle, which includes friends, 'B' explained that we people are different from others and so we get treated accordingly. Most of the boys used to make fun of him, call him different names, and taunt him. When asked about treatment from the general public, co-workers, or other members, 'B' said yes, people show reluctance. 'B' said that when he opened his shop, he was taunted and discriminated against by people. 'B' said that he accepted this behaviour as a challenge and showed commitment towards my work, and ultimately people's behaviour started to change. 'B' was asked whether he is discriminated against at any level at his workplace or outside, and 'B' said that he is happy with his work and the people. I get an equal amount of work compared to other tailors in the locality.

It is extraordinary to see that out there in society, many people who have done some horrible things in their life can get a job, but a transgender person whose sexual orientation is

not accepted in society is unable to find a job. It is excruciating for them not to be accepted by society. The discrimination they face while finding jobs for themselves needs to be resolved. While some transgender people are looking for jobs, those who already have a job are not working in ideal conditions. They face discrimination from society involving different economic aspects.

Conclusion

The facts and problems highlighted through this anthropological research are not new ones. We are all living among these problems in society. Gender biases or gender discrimination is a serious issue, and it needs to be dealt with accordingly. Eunuchs are no different than anyone else in the community, and they need to be given equal rights. Society needs to show more acceptance towards them and treat Eunuch with equal respect. The rejection or strict behaviour from the family and relatives forces most of Eunuch into isolation. A eunuch needs special care and protection because they face such issues that might cause them to move back to the lifestyle they have left behind. Another fascinating fact that must be mentioned is that joining professions other than dancing and singing can also be by force or by fear of discrimination from society, family, friends, relatives, neighbours, etc. One is forced to change the profession he is currently in because society does not approve of this and social approval is very important for society's survival. How a person gets treated in society by his friends, family, co-workers, and others matters most.

Suggestions

Following are some of the suggestions that can be considered to tackle the prevailing situation much better:

- Schools and colleges should adopt policies that should be neutral.
- No discrimination needs to be shown at the school and college levels.
- Students at schools must be taught not to taunt Eunuchs and should treat them with respect.
- Parents need to show extra care towards such children.
- Psychological consultancy can be used as an option.
- The general public needs to be made aware of such sensitive issues.
- Eunuchs, if they are correctly treated, can become a valuable part of society.
- Available awareness campaigns should be launched to promote equality.
- Civil societies can play their role by launching campaigns to promote the rights of Eunuchs.
- Family as an informal institution can play its role effectively by teaching its children to treat Eunuchs politely.
- Teachers need to highlight the importance of treating people with different natures to show no hatred or discrimination towards them.
- In the workplace, Eunuchs should be treated with respect.
- Their dignity must be maintained at all levels.
- They must be considered just like normal human beings and treated with respect.

References

- Abbas, T., Nawaz, Y., Ali, M., Hussain, N., & Nawaz, R. (2014). Social adjustment of transgender: A study of District Chiniot, Punjab (Pakistan). *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(1), 61-70.
- Alam, I., Rehman, N. U., & Warraich, S. K. (2019). Issues and Management of Transgender Community in Pakistan: A Case Study of Lahore. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 3(2), 761-770.
- Arsalan, M., Bhatti, M. N., & Mustafa, G. (2018). Legal Rights of Transgenders in Pakistan: Theory and Practice (Case Study of Faisalabad Division). *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 2(2), 106-116.
- Haider, M. (2008). Beliefs About the Origins of Homosexuality and Support For Gay Rights An Empirical Test of Attribution Theory. *Public opinion quarterly*, 72(2), 291-310.
- Islam, S. (2020). The Transgender Community and the Right to Equality in Pakistan: Review of the Transgender Persons Act. *LUMS Law Journal*, 7(3), 208-217.
- Jami, H. (2011). *Condition and status of hijras (transgender, transvestites etc.) in Pakistan: Country report*. Islamabad: National Institute of Psychology QAU.
- Khan, A. A., Rehan, N., Qayyum, K., & Khan, A. (2008). Correlates and prevalence of HIV and sexually transmitted infections among Hijras (male transgenders) in Pakistan. *International Journal of STD & AIDS*, 19(12), 817-820.
- Nanda, S. (1986). The Hijras of India: Cultural and individual dimensions of an institutionalized third gender role. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 11(3-4), 35-54.
- Saddique, K., & Ahmad, I. (2017). Transgender issues in Pakistani community. *European Academic Research*, 4(10), 9048-9057.
- Warne, G. L., & Raza, J. (2008). Disorders of sex development (DSDs), their presentation and management in different cultures. *Reviews in Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders*, 9(3), 227-236.