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Economic Conditions of Transgender Community in Pakistan: A Case for Establishing their Business Networks

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Abstract

Transgender persons are often stigmatized and suffer discrimination in our society. They are subjected to harassment and violence at large. This study aims to highlight the challenges being faced by the trans-community and how they can be empowered economically so that they might earn a respectable livelihood and pursue their own businesses. It further aims to bridge the knowledge gap as to what is required and how does the community perceive in depth the challenges in their struggle to demand their right to identity, and how they can be accepted by the state and society as equal citizens. For this purpose, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with potential entrepreneurs from the transgender community. The views expressed in this study indicate the ignorance of the society towards the trans-community in the provision of employment, business opportunities, education, and health benefits, resulting in limited means of livelihood. There is a need to implement Transgender Persons Act, 2018 in letter and spirit at the provincial and federal level.

Keywords: Transgender persons, gender identity, trans-community livelihood, societal discrimination

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1. Introduction

Transgender people are the individuals whose gender identity is different from the sex allocated to them at the time of their birth. The notion of being male and female differ for them and is incorporated to their identities as transgenders (Denny, Green & Cole 2007). In the subcontinent, transgender people are generally called by different titles, viz. khawaja sara¹, hijra², khusra³, or murat⁴ (Spagna 2013). A person may be labelled as transgender if he or she is quirky, womanly, impotent, or unproductive. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2007) reads:

“Every single human being is entitled to enjoy his/her human rights without distinction as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, or another status.⁵”

However, a respectable status is not given to the transgender people in the society. Also, no legal rights are given to them as per the Constitution. Till the year 2013, they were not even permissible to get registered for a National Identity Card thus restricting their freedom to get a nationality as well (Redding 2012).

The transgender community in Pakistan is also considered a marginalized segment of the society. The sixth census carried out by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) and presented to the Council of Common Interests (CCI) in 2017 claimed that there are just 10,418 khawaja saras in Pakistan with 73.4% concentration in urban centres. According to the census, The Punjab had nearly 65% of the total (6,709) transgender people, followed by Sindh, i.e. 24% (2,527), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (913) and Balochistan (109)⁶.

Transgender people face social, economic and legal complexities. Socially, they have to experience mistreatment, particularly from their own families, law-enforcement personnel, local communities and also from religious authorities. They are deprived of social entitlements and social protection because of the improper social support and safety from their families. They are taken as an easy prey to verbal and physical abuse due to which they suffer from psycho-social trauma, causing among them the feelings of isolation and rejection (Stewart et al. 2018; Pantell et al. 2013; Foundation 2016). Similarly, transgender people suffer discrimination at workplace that is the main cause of their unemployment, financial sufferings, and homelessness (Reback et al. 2012).

Their low economic status is not only because of lack of sustainable sources of income but also because of their little access to education, hence failing to get respectable jobs. They are to experience hatred, bullying and discrimination in schools, which prompt huge drop-out rates while very few can get advanced education. Another reason for not to pursue education is that they fail to provide a legitimate birth certificate at the time of admission because their parents do not obtain a birth certificate. For those whose birth certificates are obtained, the family, upon realization of the actual gender of their child, tries to suppress it as far as possible and thus, these transgender children do not get the approach to this certificate (Tabassum & Jamil 2014).

Only a few transgender people can get formal education, and a very few have employment opportunities, but find it hard to continue because of the harassment and discrimination at workplace. The economic productivity is further restricted because of the absence of job quota in public and private organizations. Resultantly, there are lack of training facilities and employment opportunity for them to earn respectfully in any profession (Redding 2012). So, eventually, they opt for typical Khawaja Sara practices of singing, dancing, begging, and sex work.

¹Khawaja sara are transgender people and are also known as eunuchs or castrates.

²Hijra is a person whose birth sex is male but who identifies as female or as neither male nor female.

³The transgender community is also known as khusra, which Pakistanis translate as ‘eunuch’ in English, though the meaning is broader than a castrated man, the common definition in the west. Besides trans-sexual, it also includes hermaphrodites, people with both male and female sexual organs.

⁴Within the trans-community, Murat are transgenders, who objectify their beauty.

⁵Stamatopoulou-Robbins, E., 2007. Cultural rights in international law: Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and beyond.

⁶Statistics, P.B.O., 2017. Provisional summary results of 6th population and housing census–2017. Government of Pakistan Islamabad.

For livelihood, they are usually found at childbirth or marriage ceremonies to fetch money by performing dance and singing. Literature highlights that generally transgender people opt for begging, singing, and dancing. Hossain (2017) highlights the other ways of their earning money such as sex workers, which is also referred by the study of Osama (2017). Despite their desire to work in the services market, people are hesitant to offer them job for household chores or other services. This may be due to the tabooed livelihood choices the transgender community members are left to make in a conservative society like Pakistan. It may be mentioned that no skill development programmes are available for transgender people (Foundation 2016). Sadly, no standards are involved in saving the transgender community from this discrimination. Their inclusion in the public or private sector is also very restricted. Pakistan's Public Service Commission does not refer transgender people to its qualification criteria. In sex box forms, only male and female are mentioned. Such a behaviour at government level is the by-product of myths about them.

From a legal perspective, several frameworks also add to this exclusion by feeding contrast and perpetrating violence against the trans community. In reality, the countries are bound by law to accommodate the fundamental rights of their citizens belonging to the third gender, incorporating the certifications of non-segregation and the freedom of wellbeing. The experience of serious disgrace, criticism, and violence by families, networks, and state entertainers lead to harm for trans individuals' well-being, including increased hazard for HIV, emotional well-being discrepancies, and use of illegal drugs (Stroumsa 2014).

Provision of equal access to inheritance accommodation, trainings, opportunities, and actualizing against discrimination present in laws, with a focus on ensuring transgender community's wellbeing and security is what which is desired. On 24 May 2018, Pakistani parliament formally etched the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 into the lawbook.

The study mainly aims to identify the challenges experienced by the transgender community in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Pakistan. It further identifies the technical and managerial skills requirement with a focus on the creation of a trans-incubation cohort, and to understand their demands from the state. This study will help bridge the gap by studying the challenges and grasping the demands of transgender community. Section 2 briefly explains the methodology, section 3 discusses the challenges as informed by the respondents, section 4 concludes the results, and section 5 sets forth the policy recommendations.

2. Methodology

The qualitative data collection technique has been carried out by holding four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)⁷ conducted with 'Saro' from Pink Skill & Training Centre and 23 current and potential entrepreneurs, who are proposedly set up to be part of a trans-incubation cohort at the Pink Skill & Training Centre⁸. The study uses the purposive sampling⁹ technique to select the number of respondents for FGDs. The respondents/participants were divided into four groups of a maximum of six each so that everyone of them may be consulted. The time taken for each FGD was around one hour in an online session (due to COVID restrictions). Linking with the objectives of this study, the questions asked are provided as annexure A and list of participants along with their professions and geographical location is attached as annexure B.

3. Discussion and Findings

Because of the ignorance by the society and the state on the issue, research is not evident on the challenges and problems experienced by the transgender community (Ming, Hadi & Khan 2016). Their inclusion towards benefits associated with employment, education, and health services is very limited. This ends up in a situation where the trans-community fails to earn a respectable livelihood. COVID-19 further deteriorated the situation, as all their income generating activities came to a halt, and they ultimately sought help from the local communities (Mirabella et al. 2021).

⁷FGDs were organized jointly by SEED Ventures and SDPI Centre for Private Sector Engagement.

⁸A platform to boost entrepreneurship among marginalized communities like transgender persons for their economic empowerment.

⁹Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which researchers focus on their own judgement (or filters provided) when choosing members of the population to take part in their surveys.

Protecting the human rights and preventing the social exclusion is essential for sustainable development. This principle applies to trans people as well. At least three of the targets of SDGs provide support to the trans community.

SDGs	Target(s)
SDG 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
SDG 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
SDG 16	Promote peaceful & inclusive societies for sustainable development

The above-mentioned targets facilitate all communities, including trans-community, and establish the effective and accountable institutions at all levels (Khan et al. 2022).

The preamble of the 2018 Act is indicative of the intention to cater for the protection transgender persons' needs, including their economic rights and economic empowerment. Regardless of the protections set out for transgenders on paper, the implementation of the Act is still lacking. The actual impact of the legislation is yet to materialize.

Listed below are the challenges transgender people have to face as pointed out by the participants during FGDs.

3.1 Lack of Resources (Economic Constraints)

This study underlines the basic challenges faced by the trans-community's 'access to finances and infrastructure'. The lack of finances is because of the restriction imposed by the society to work for the desired profession. Along with that, lack of infrastructure results in a condition where most of the transgender people are living in miserable conditions, and this has increased their vulnerability to a greater extent.

Although, a significant majority of the respondents (90 %) informed that they are residing in rented houses, they asserted that hiring of these houses is a difficult task, especially in developed areas. They usually reside in areas, which are not suitable for socio-economic development. Another aspect that was observed was the lack of financial strength to purchase a house of their own. The trans-community terms their house a dera or adda. They confine themselves to single room or small houses which often lack the basic amenities of life.

3.2 Gender and Wage based discriminations

Gender discrimination against trans-community is seen not only in public but also in the government offices. This study highlights discriminatory wages paid to transgender people that undermine and underutilize their skills. Respondents said that on average a transgender working as a tailor is paid 30% of the salary as compared to the male counterparts. Their wages and works are undervalued because of their gender and positioning in society in comparison to male and female members in the same profession. The job-related activities that are associated with the household like cooking or home-based cosmetic services, trans-workers are being discouraged in this regard and remain underpaid. Consequently, they are unable to meet their daily expenses. This further highlights the employment opportunities available to their community, which are limited only to tailoring, make-up artist, stitching, and a few associated with livestock businesses. The lack of opportunities leads to unsustainable and disrupted business activity for them. It is necessary to regulate their low wages as it compels the trans-community to shift to easy money-making ways such as begging, dancing, and sex-related jobs. At the same time, gender sensitization at societal level is required to normalize the existence of all genders, particularly the transgenders.

3.3 Lack of Education (Tech-savvy Illiteracy and Social Media Illiteracy)

For transgenders, there is also a lack of educational and formal skills training opportunities. This further leads to lowering of opportunities, especially in alternate working sectors. The discrimination prevails here as well in terms of the provision of facilities for transgender people that include access to educational institutions, and quality education as is prevalent across the globe (Tabassum & Jamil 2014; Chakrapani et al. 2018). This study sheds light on the substandard education available to them, as only a few can read, write, and communicate, who can get early education.

The lack of education and skills further closes doors for them to seek professional jobs. Covering the side from a technical education perspective, respondents said that a great majority of them is kept uninformed from business skills, which are upgraded over time. They are trained as per the traditional methods, which confine them to limited professions. On the contrary, traditions are changing along with the subsequent platforms that can be used to help businesses. Within a country, the technical education centres for transgender people are scarce and are spread far. Other than technical education, social media education is also necessary to upgrade business models. It was also learnt that most of them are not tech-savvy.

Owing to the serious lack of awareness and education in the community especially in the older generation, a huge gap exists between the old and new generation of trans-community, which acts as an upheaval of business sustainability. Therefore, most of the respondents suggested that, in addition to basic education, basic digital literacy, especially pertaining to the basic usage of social media, can help uplift the community. The traditions are changing alongside the subsequent platforms that can be used to help businesses.

3.4 Psychological Aid

Discrimination and neglect in terms of rights, opportunities, education, etc. for the trans-community to live a better life result in mental illness. Grossman et al. (2005) noted that improper access to facilities effects many psychological ailments such as anxiety and mental stress amongst transgender people. The study finds that most of the poor transgender people suffer from both the physical and mental illnesses. Pointing out internal politics, respondents said hierarchy among the transgender people plays a negative role in the socio-economic development at the community level.

3.5 Lack of Networks

Another challenge observed is the lack of awareness, networking, communication skills, and mobility limitations among trans-workers. This study argues that the poor business conditions are not favourable for the transgender community to have networking at marketplaces. Trans-workers are generally denied access to markets, which limits their integration into market supply chain. On the contrary, they cannot get material relevant to their business at a competitive price. It has also been identified that the issue of access is not limited to the market supply chain only, as transgender people are not entertained by real estate agents for hiring a space in the market.

3.6 Livelihood: Risk and Opportunity

Along with all the challenges mentioned above, COVID-19 has had a deep impact on the life and livelihood of trans-gender community in Pakistan. The financial stability of the trans-community members is at risk as they were not included and/or aware of any COVID-19 recovery schemes. They are not only unaware of the social protection schemes, loans, and financial aids provided by the governmental and non-governmental bodies but also show their reluctance towards getting benefits of these support mechanisms. The opportunity comes in with the sound implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 (Annexure B).

4 Analysis of Transgender Act, 2018

The passage of the Act signalled a key attempt to alleviate the difficulties faced by the transgender community in Pakistan.

4.1 Rights of Transgenders

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 does not discriminate between genders with its mandate of guaranteeing human rights. It seeks to reinforce the principle of equality as a fundamental principle of Rule of Law under Article 25 of the Constitution. According to clause (1) of Article 25, 'all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law.' Clause (2) further adds that 'There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex.' These protections manifestly affirm that the citizens of Pakistan are entitled to the law protection for men, women, and transgender persons alike.

The Constitution further mandates the state to abide by the Principles of Policy relating to public welfare. Articles 37 and 38 of the Constitution epitomize the importance of the promotion of social justice, the social

and economic well-being of people, and the eradication of social evils. Resultantly, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure the protection of weaker classes/sections of the society. Transgenders are, therefore, entitled to all such facilitation.

4.2 Review of the Transgender Persons (Protection of rights) Act, 2018

The preamble of the legislation sets out, at the outset, that the purpose of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 is the protection, relief, and rehabilitation of the transgender persons and their welfare and related matters. While the Act does not specify the type of rehabilitation or relief to be afforded to transgenders, it necessarily includes all basic rights of a citizen of Pakistan as guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973.

The preamble of the 2018 Act is most indicative of the intention of the legislature to cater for the protection needs of transgender persons, including their economic rights and economic empowerment.

Primarily, the 2018 Act purports to prohibit discrimination. Section 4 of the Act lists the protections where discrimination against transgenders is forbidden. Some pertinent safeguards on socio-economic empowerment are as follows:

4. Prohibition against Discrimination. — No person shall discriminate against a transgender person on any of the following grounds, namely:

- the denial or discontinuation of or unfair treatment in, educational institutions and services thereof.
- the unfair treatment in, or in relation to, employment. trade or occupation.
- the denial of, or termination from, employment or occupation; provision or enjoyment of use of any goods, accommodation, service, facility, benefit, privilege, or opportunity dedicated to the use of general public or customarily available to the public.
- the denial or discontinuation of or unfair treatment in, the opportunity to stand for or hold public or private office; or
- the denial of access to, removal from, or unfair treatment in, government or private establishment, organizations, institutions, departments, centers in whose care, custody, or employment a transgender person may be.

While mandating the above rights to individuals, the legislature also imposed significant obligations on the Government to ensure the attainment of the fundamental rights of transgender community. Section 6 prescribes a set of obligations to binding the Government:

6. Obligations of the Government. — The Government shall take the following steps to secure full and effective participation of transgender persons and their inclusion in society, namely:

- institute mechanisms for the periodic sensitization and awareness of the public servants, in particular, but not limited to, law enforcement agencies and medical institutions, relating to the issues involving the transgender persons and the requirement of protection and relief of such persons;
- formulate special vocational training programmes to facilitate, promote and support livelihood for transgender persons:
- encourage transgender persons to start a small business by providing incentives, easy loan schemes, and grants; and
- take any other necessary measures to accomplish the objective of this Act.

Otherwise, it has also been stipulated vide section 9 that:

‘The Government must ensure the right to enter into any lawful profession or occupation and to conduct any lawful trade or business for the transgender persons as guaranteed under Article 18 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.’

It follows from the statutory protection that transgender people retain the right to profession. As a natural

consequence, transgenders have the right to start a lawful business(es) or ventures or projects for their economic empowerment. The necessary right to acquire property for those financial endeavours is similarly ensured by the legislation [section 15]. In their endeavour to attain socio-economic sustainability, they are entitled to the Government's assistance and protection.

5. Policy Recommendations

Based on the study findings, some of the key policy recommendations are as follows:

1. Special National Incubation Centres should be set up for transgender persons with an arrangement of special curriculum design following SMEDA, IGNITE, etc.
2. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 need to be implemented with letter and spirit at federal and provincial level. The acquisition of rights concerning rental property should also be considered. These implementations will act as a cushion with focused actions for their inclusion in every walk of life.
3. There is a need to ensure respect, no harassment and discrimination towards transgender community at all levels by providing them equal accessibility to resources and facilities in a fair and free environment.
4. Inclusion of transgender community in the e-commerce cycle of the country by providing them access to technical skill development is the need of hour. Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) or related authority can play a vital role in the creation of a transgender technical institute. In such a way, , they will enable themselves to integrate into the business supply chain cycle.
5. Laws and policies on sexual assault and maltreatment of transgender people by the police should be reviewed and made them an integral part of legislation to inculcate among them the sense of equal citizens of Pakistan.
6. The transgender community needs an economic stimulus empowerment package so that they might be able to access equality education, technical/ vocational training. This step would empower them economically through micro-financing and loans to run and sustain their own businesses.

6. Conclusion

This study determines and links several substantial factors to a marginalized and vulnerable community of the society in the perspective of their livelihood. Lack of opportunities ranging from education to employment is evident that has pushed the trans-community to live below the poverty-line. The general societal behaviours towards the trans-community are very alarming, especially at marketplaces where they are denied access to integrate themselves into the market supply chain. That's why they cannot get material at competitive prices. Secondly, they are confined to traditional methods and skills which are old and create hurdles to excel in their professions and businesses. The most evident need of the trans-community is access to basic education, a tech-savvy environment with a focus on social media marketing skills, technical institutes for transgender, and last but not the least, an equal wage in their jobs. The discrimination should be monitored by the law-enforcement agencies to save them from harassment as is their constitutional right. By increasing their technical literacy and knowledge of sustainable business models, an emphasis on trans-incubation centre can truly help the transgender community by providing them respectable means of livelihood. In this way, they will be able to contribution to the economic cycle as an integral part of the society.

7.Data Limitations

Some limitations are linked with this research study. These include the difficulty to reach out to the trans-community because of the cultural traits and lack of trust of the third gender towards the society. For some of the participants, the online setup was not appropriate, and it is recommended to hold a face-to-face meeting as well.

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Annexure A

Questionnaire

1	What is the business they want to pursue?
2	What challenges prevail in their jobs/businesses?
3	Where do they lack in reference to skills?
4	What other skills training can be provided?
5	What facilities do they require to upgrade their business?
6	What challenges do they face in the business community, especially in the marketplace?



Annexure B

List of participants with their sectors and cities.

Sr. No	Name	Profession	Locale
1	Saima Butt	Boutique	Lahore
2	Bijli	Cloth seller	Lahore
3	Chanda	Chef	Lahore
4	Mishi	Make-up Artist	Lahore
5	Honey	Make-up Artist	Lahore
6	Strawberry	Livestock business	Lahore
7	Shabo	Tailor	Multan
8	Shabo Rani	Livestock business	Faisalabad
9	Khalida	Tailor	Jhang
10	Taj Kausar	Tailor	Jhang
11	Kajal	Tailor	Sialkot
12	Siyani	Tailor	Lahore
13	Juggni	Tailor	Lahore
14	Kashish	Tailor	Sheikhupura
15	Sohni Mahiwal	Make-up Artist	Rawalpindi
16	Heer Alvi	Fashion Designer	Lahore
17	Mohsin Saima	Tailor	Layyah
18	Nisho	Tailor	Shorkot
19	Nirmal	Make-up Artist	Faisalabad
20	Voki	Tailor	Lahore
21	Cham Cham	Tailor	Lahore
22	Mehak	Make-up Artist	Jhelum
23	Saima Abbasi	Make-up Artist	Rawalpindi