

## Workplace Challenges and Expectation of Transgenders in Pakistani Society

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an insight view of a unique segment of the society, which remained a victim of marginalization in Pakistani society. This unique segment is known as Transgender. It was strived in this research to describe the themes that are associated with the workplace challenges of transgender. A qualitative research design was used and data was collected through case studies. Main themes were drawn from the collected information of the respondents. The results of this study indicated that majority of the participants (transgenders) faced ridiculous behaviour and harassment (physical and sexual) at their workplace. In addition, others described social isolation and lack of confidence as challenges at workplace. As per the expectations of transgender from the society, an overwhelming majority expected stop laughing at them, demand for self-respect, social inclusion and acceptance. Almost one third of respondents were desirous to become a teacher, doctors and banker. In response of that behaviour at workplace, a fraction of transgender reported that they had no concern with whatever their colleagues and/or employer speak about them because if they think about all these, they cannot work anywhere in the society.

### Keywords

transgender, effeminate, LGBT, workplace challenges, expectations

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### Introduction

Gender is a ubiquitous social construct that wields power over every individual in our society. Transgender is an umbrella term applicable to a range of individuals who express their gender in non-traditional ways (Burdge, 2007). The term transgender was then popularized with varying definitions by various transgender, transsexual and transvestite people and effeminate men (Bevan, 2014; Hausman, 1995). Leelavathy (2014) found some of the problems faced by transgender at workplaces including verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, lack of adequate knowledge about sexual minorities, lack of freedom of expression, not providing importance to ideas, experiences and expertise of sexual minorities, lack of meaningful involvement of communities, stress, depression and other mental health issues. Society often stigmatizes and discriminates transgender based upon their sexuality or gender identity. Except engaging transgender as sex workers for their survival they often have no other choice. She further suggested that there is need for social acceptance of transgender groups.

According to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC, 2008), “*there is no known grassroots activism among lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals and transgender (zenana) communities in Pakistan. This lack of activism, the silences around sexuality(is), and deeply closeted status of most gays and lesbians in Pakistan (many of whom live double lives to avoid revealing their sexual orientation) makes it difficult to accurately assess their living conditions and human rights situation. Anecdotal information from Pakistani gay people who have left the country describes fear, secrecy, isolation, suicides, forced marriage, family and community pressure to conform to heterosexual norms*”.

Stephen Whittle, Lewis Turner and Maryam Al-Alami (2007) found that despite the over-representation of transgender in the senior occupation classes compared to the UK National average, the workplace affords a poor experience for many transgenders. It is a very difficult situation for transgender to carry out their employment while their transition processes. It is much disappointing thing that 42% of the people who are not living in their preferred gender role permanently were saved from doing so because

they consider and realize that it might be a threat for their current employment status. On the other hand, more than 10% of the transgenders have experienced verbal abuse whereas 6% experienced physical violation at their workplaces. As a consequence of these types of bitter experiences at workplaces, some of them preferred to change their current jobs.

The National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NCTE & NGLTF, 2009) released a report based on discrimination against transgenders that disclosed some almost universal challenges faced by transgenders at workplace. The report showed that an overwhelming majority (90%) of transgender people have experienced some form of harassment and/or mistreatment at workplace whereas less than half of transgender employees have experienced hostile and negative job outcomes because of their different gender. Moreover, disregard for a job, disallowance and rejection to promotion and fire them from job are also attention seeking workplace challenges.

Sheff (2015) concluded while LGBTQIA employees may potentially experience some specific issues at work, thoughtful employers can use those issues as a basis to develop more inclusive policies. This creates an environment that can bring unparalleled creativity to the workplace. Because LGBTQIA employees have often been forced to create their own alternatives when social norms proved insufficient for their lives or experiences, they can bring innovation, creativity, and fresh perspectives to the workplace. These alternative perspectives provide new ways to think about a host of professional and workplace issues.

Swann (2002) recommended that if the employers adopt the policies based on equal opportunities for transgender as compared to other genders, it would be the next step for providing transgender a more favorable working environment. The public sector was comparatively remained on the leading edge in the past, for providing and improving the equal opportunities to transgender with agencies including local government, the civil service, educational institutions and the voluntary sector.

### **Transgender Panorama in Pakistan**

Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA) is a non-governmental organization which is working for

the equality and civil rights of transgender people in Pakistan. According to the statement of the organization, *“Transgender persons do not have the same level of rights as other Pakistanis. They are also routinely harassed, face discrimination and in some cases are subjected to violence simply for being transgender”*. Moreover, most of the projects are launched with the core objective to lobby the government of Pakistan for the attainment of recognition of transgender people as equal citizens of Pakistan; providing free medical care to transgender people who are routinely denied public healthcare; and enabling entrepreneurship by providing economic opportunities for transgender people who are, by and large, left out of the mainstream economy. We also aim to provide a safe space for these people online so that their stories and experiences are not erased from our collective cultural experience (Gender Interactive Alliance, 2016).

As a result of increasing liberalisation trends, increasing globalization and social tolerance, private gay parties in Pakistan have been thriving for a number of years (Walsh, 2006). Under the Pakistani law, as it is a combination of British colonial and Islamic aspects, LGBT (is an initialism that stands for lesbian, and bisexual and transgender) relationships and same sex sexual acts are considered as a crime and are punishable by imprisonment (Osborn, 2003). No legal provisions are available to the LGBT people that neither can protect these gender minorities from the victimization nor can protect their civil human rights.

There are number of incidents that showed the miserable conditions of these gender minorities in Pakistan regarding the mistreatment at governmental level (in Public institutions) and at private (among general public/ society) including rape, kidnapping, beating among others. Moreover, the socio-cultural ethos of Pakistan also hinders in the provision or protection of LGBT favorable conditions. In recent years, with the support of civil society, NGOs, mass media and no doubt with the involvement and participation of transgender community itself, there is a start of constructive changes in the recognition of one of the gender minorities (transgender) in some legal context with the orders of Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2009, in

which the civil rights of transgender people were acknowledged.

The National Database and Registration Authority provided three gender options rather than two on computerized National Identity Card's registration Form. That will further entitle them to cast their vote in the elections. Though this is a much positive start towards the journey of emancipation for transgenders and other gender minorities in the country, yet the education, healthcare and social security issues are in the way. According to BBC report, the first lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pride celebration in the history of Pakistan which is hosted by the US embassy, Islamabad to support LGBT rights in the country. This act of US embassy was taken as the social and cultural terrorism against Pakistan, by Jamaat-e-Islami, on behalf of all other religious groups. Another statement about transgenders and LGBs was given that *such people are the curse of society and social garbage*.

Pakistan is a country that is witness to transgender violence, as many incidents were reported in the current year against the community (The Express Tribune, 2016). The murder of 23 years old transgender named Alisha who was gunned down and denied treatment at the hospital which later led to her death. And the hospital management could not decide whether she would be admitted in male ward or female ward. This idiotic thing caused her death. This is an example and a recent incident. It is also an attention driving situation that only in Khyber Pakhtunkhawa, 45 transgenders were killed in 2015.

Farman Nawaz (2016) depicted in his report that *"defending traditional values ingrained in the society versus accepting new trends and norms is a hidden war in Pakistan and the main stream media of the country is not ready to take part in this debate openly due to threats of social uproar from the society"*.

There is a growing number of individuals usually university graduates have some sort of understanding about evolution and sexuality, are coming out to their friends and introducing them to their same-sex partner (Ladly,2012)and a confidence was shown for the LGBT community as" it is able to socialize, organize, date and even live together as couples, but usually discreetly" (The New York Times, 2012) but the rejection

and criticism regarding LGBT lifestyle emerged from the religious and patriarchal belief systems" (Azhar, 2013).

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Although sexuality has biological base, yet it is also social construction. Society obviously affects this intensely private form of intimacy to shape our ideas about what is erotic. It is also society which defines what taboo is, and determines who appropriate sexualities are. The social context of parents, peers, school, community, media and government impose limitations and socially defines sexual behavior. The researcher felt the need to investigate the transgender phenomena as it is a growing issue of not only Pakistani society but of the western world too. With the advancement of technology in almost all fields of life like mass media and internet, the transgender communities took privilege of these advancements and challenged the prefixed binary systems of sexes. They started to raise their voices for the recognition in the society.

This debate opened a new chapter of human sexuality before the scholars, thinkers, theorists and researchers of different fields whether they belong to biology and psychology or from sociology, gender studies or any other branch of human sexuality and human behaviors. Like any other country, the relevant empirical information about these gender minorities is either not available or is not sufficient to have a detailed account of these particular groups in Pakistan. The current research study strived to fill the research gaps in the field with reference to our society. This research study will provide empirical information to the upcoming researches in the field of sexuality studies and gender studies.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Followings were the objectives of this study:

- To know about the challenges the transgenders have to face at workplace.
- To find out the expectations the transgenders have from the society.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study Qualitative research method was used to get in-depth insights of different aspects

regarding workplace challenges of transgenders. Case studies were conducted for gathering detailed information as it is profitably used for gathering detailed information and enables the researcher to take stock of the existing situations holistically. Non-probability sampling technique was used. Target population was the transgenders from 25-70 age people both married and unmarried from Gujranwala and Sialkot districts.

### **Selection Criteria and Sampling Procedure**

In this study, non-random snow ball sampling method was used to collect the information AND THE Following criteria was adopted in the selection of the respondents:

1. Not engaged in dancing and sex selling as their profession.
2. Not cross-dressers.
3. Living with their blood relations, real families or in conjugal settings.
4. Self-employed or doing jobs in public/private sectors.

Total fifteen participants recorded their interviews voluntarily for contributing to the research study. Interviewing guide was used for data collection. Data collection was done by employing the research ethics; prior intimation, ensuring the consent and agreement of the respondents for their voluntary participation in the research study, assuring them confidentiality regarding their identity and information they provided for the research purposes. The interviews were conducted on one-to-one meeting atmosphere using audio recording method for information gathering. The time and venue were also decided with the consensus of the respondents. The collected audio form information was translated in text form verbatim. Major Themes were drawn from the case studies. Frequency of occurrence was noted. Thematic analysis from the qualitative data analysis techniques was further used to analyze the gathered information. In the last stage, the interpretation and explanations of the themes were done for gaining major findings of the study.

## **RESULTS OF STUDY**

### **Thematic Analysis**

#### **Theme 1: Challenges at Workplace**

As per the challenges faced at workplace by the transgenders, almost all of the participants pointed out ridiculous behavior of the employer/

colleagues, whereas majority of the participants were facing physical/sexual harassment and intimation problems with colleagues and some of them reported physical/sexual victimization at workplace.

Like, *Meera* narrated his job experience in a way that “customers and colleagues behave and treat him non-serious as he is there for the enjoyment and fun of the colleagues, not as a competent/skillful colleague.”

Whereas *Juli* said that “doing job with the transgender identity is much difficult in our society. People around us are always in the search of taking an opportunity to laugh at you and want to have some romantic talks to you and sexual harassment is the most common and dominant feature of life of transgender at workplaces.”

Majority of the participants narrated about the level and indication of satisfaction at workplace in the way that they have no concern with others whatever they say, whereas some of them indicated mostly good behavior of colleagues, mostly good behavior of employer/owner and conducive-environment at workplace as the indicator of the satisfaction level at workplace.

As *Mansha* described his job experiences that “doing some job is compulsory for meeting the basic needs of life and the behavior of the people everywhere in the society is same as you know. To what extent, we can run away from the problems we are facing. So, the only way to doing job is having no concern with whatever your colleagues say. You just concentrate on your job, earn money and go home.”

When it was asked from the participants that how their challenges at workplace are different from their male colleagues, all of the them denoted being laughing stock for others, while majority of them differentiated hiding/denying their sexuality from others, and loneliness/social isolation challenges as compare to their male colleagues whereas some of the participants differentiated Lack of confidence as compare to male colleagues.

*Meera* vividly distinguish the challenges of transgender at workplace different from their male colleagues describing that “whatever your education status is, and whatever your competence level is, no matter in how much

*organized and educated atmosphere you are working, everything is useless if you are a transgender. Half of your image disgraced just because of your transgender personality and you became laughing staff for your colleagues as it happened with me. Therefore, escaping from this embarrassment, most of the time we are trying to hide our body language, talking style and so on from our colleagues.”*

### **Theme 2: Expectations from Society**

As per the expectations of transgender from the society, all of them expected stop laughing at them and demand self-respect, an overwhelming majority of the participants expected from society to take them seriously, whereas some of them expected social inclusion and acceptance of fourth gender from society.

*Shuja* elaborated the societal behavior with him for being a transgender as *“throughout my life, I observed one thing that even a little child in the street will not leave you until he hoots and laughs at you as you are a transgender ... people of my locality tease me and laughs at me with a slogan which is “Shabana! ZraThumka to Lagana” which means Shabana! Show us some dance and I feel very disgraced myself then but it’s the reality of our society and of ourselves that no respect is given to us through some serious perspective.”*

He expected self-respect from the society at least whereas, *Anjo* had some expectations from the society which he explained as *“We are not patients, we are physically and mentally healthy persons as other three genders are. And society has to accept us as fourth gender of it.”*

As per the ambition of transgender to be in life, almost half of the participants had never thought about their future in terms of profession selection. Whereas most of the participants from the other half wanted to be an educationist (school or college teacher), to join medical profession as doctor and/or dispenser and some of them wanted to bankers. For example, *Juli* said that he wanted to be a doctor as he was a brilliant student in his school but due to the economic constraints he could not continue his studies after intermediate whereas *Mahi* was satisfied that *“I am satisfied with my teaching profession as I always wanted to be a teacher.”*

## DISCUSSION

About the challenges faced at workplace by the transgender, almost all of the participants pointed out ridiculous behavior of the employer/colleagues. Majority were facing physical/sexual harassment and intimation problems with colleagues whereas some of them reported physical/sexual victimization at workplace. For how challenges of the transgender at workplace are different from their male colleagues, all of them denoted being laughing stock for others, while majority of them differentiated hiding/denying their sexuality from others, and loneliness/social isolation challenges as compare to their male colleagues. Some of the participants differentiated Lack of confidence as compare to male colleagues.

The study also found that majority of the participants narrated about the level and indication of satisfaction at workplace in the way that they have no concern with others whatever they say, whereas some of them indicated mostly good behavior of colleagues, mostly good behavior of employer/owner and conducive-environment at workplace as the indicator of the satisfaction level at workplace.

Moreover, the findings of this study confirmed the results of International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC, 2008) as it was reported that *“there is no known grassroots activism among lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals and transgender (zenana) communities in Pakistan. This lack of activism, the silences around sexuality(ies), and deeply closeted status of most gays and lesbians in Pakistan (many of whom live double lives to avoid revealing their sexual orientation) makes it difficult to accurately assess their living conditions and human rights situation”*.

According to informal information from Pakistani gay people who had left the country marked out fear, secrecy, isolation, suicides, forced marriage, family and community pressure to conform to heterosexual norms. As per the expectations of transgender from the society, it was found that all of them expected stop laughing at them and demand self-respect, with an overwhelming majority of the participants expected from society to take them seriously, whereas some of them expected social inclusion and acceptance as fourth

gender in society. These findings are also in line with the findings of the study of Sustainable Development Policy Institute (2014) in which words of Almas Boby of the *Transgender Foundation* were entered that the biggest issue of transgenders is "Social Acceptance". She said she wanted to study beyond metric but couldn't go ahead due to social pressure. She was against separate schools for transgenders as she felt it would isolate them further.

## CONCLUSION

The present study concluded that almost all of the participants had to face ridiculous behavior from the employer and/ or colleagues whereas majority of them pointed out physical and sexual harassment and intimation challenges at workplace. The participants differentiated their workplace challenges from other colleagues as they had to face the above said challenges. About the expectations of transgenders from society, it was concluded that all of them expected a serious behavioral response rather than taking them as a laughing stock and demand self-respect from society whereas some of them expected social inclusion and acceptance in society.

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