

**Condition and Status of Hijras (Transgender,
Transvestites etc.)
in Pakistan
(Country Report)**

By

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Introduction

“Gender is an anchor and once people decide what you are they interpret everything you do in light of that” (Kessler and McKenna, 1978, p. 6). While, sex is the biological component, gender is the psychological and social component. However, there are certain conditions in which the biological aspects are in contradiction with the social and psychological aspects of gender. These conditions override the biology in determining gender identity and influencing gender role (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

Anybody who deviates from any of the normative beliefs about sex/gender is considered to be a deviant (Sharma, 2000; see Winter, 2002). A person who is labelled as deviant starts finding outlets for expressing deviant behaviour, desires or impulses as family, friends and society try to find the ways to forcibly culminate that. This may lead in forming small organized support groups where he/she find acceptance and appreciation for deviant behaviours/ identities. Such groups exist all over the world under different titles (See Coway, 2002; Winter, 2002; Kessler & McKenna, 1978). In some cultures they are considered as neither men nor women and not necessarily be considered as deviant as they occupy respectable social position (Herdt; Nanda; Williams, as cited in Bartlett, Vasey & Bukowski, 2000). While, in some cultures people believe that they are blessed with some divine power (see Winter, 2002).

In Indo-Pak Sub-Continent *hijras* are unique and closely knit such group (Ali, July 2003; Zafar, Sep 2004). *Hijra* is an umbrella term used for those men who are transgender, eunuch, transvestites, hermaphrodites or intersexed, bisexuals or homosexuals (Nanda, as cited in Brettell & Sargent, 1997; Sharma, 2000). According to Nanda, “He (*hijra*) is a third gender role, who is neither man nor woman but contains the element of both. He is an intersexed impotent man, who undergoes emasculation in which all parts of the genitals are removed”. Sinha defines as, “Normal male, physically hale and hearty, born with normal genitals and testicles, which may or may not be castrated later and attire in female garbs”. (as cited in, Sharma, 2000, p. 2). Most importantly, they are all men, including hermaphrodite or intersexed, who wear female clothes and behave like women or try to attain female identity (MtF). Women who wear men clothes or try to attain male identity (FtM) do not fall in the category of *hijra*.

Hijra is considered physically and psychologically ambivalent and because of ambivalence people consider them freaks (hiding their sexual identity). Therefore, they are a marginalized/ stigmatized community. Coway (2002) tried to trace the prevalence of *hijras* in India and gave rough estimates around 1,000,000 among over a billion people. While, much is known and written about *hijras* in India; very little is documented about them in Pakistan.

Hijras in Pakistan

Hijra is a unique form of gender role expression in Pakistan where man behaves like woman; people refer to such an individual as behaving like *hijra*, but not as a woman. Term *hijra* is often attributed as an abuse to a man who is whimsical, womanly, effeminate, impotent or ineffective (Talwar, 1999 p. 23). Large and ugly looking person, with big hands and feet, wearing high tone colours and makeup (beard is noticeable), emphasis on certain body parts (breasts, hips etc.), exaggerated movements and non verbal gestures including clapping, cracking obscene jokes, vulgar in talk and gestures etc; indeed these stereotype impressions developed about *hijras* over the ages. *Hijra* in Pakistan can be categorized as under:

Individuals who are born with sexual deformity (**hermaphrodite or intersexed**) are known as *Khusra* (a genuine *Hijra*). This is the identity which *hijra* strongly portray (Nanda, as cited in Sharma, 2000; Ali, July 2003; Riaz, 1996; Zafar, Sep 2004). *Hijra* community claims the custody of child born with sexual deformity (Also see Talwar, 1999; Sharma, 2000). According to *Hijras* (participants of my research), they go for asking *Wadhai* (alms) on child birth actually to confirm child's sexual identity. In case of sexual deformity, they claim the custody by declaring that the child belongs to them. However, the possibility of their taking away the child forcibly is remote.

The myth widely believed is “born *hijra* (*Khusra*) develops akin mannerism (dancing, singing) acceptable in *hijra* community only. These born with sexual deformity ultimately join *hijra* community”. It may not be true that all are born *hijras*, only about 1% of the whole *hijra* community is hermaphrodite or intersexed, remaining are transgender, cross-dressers, homosexuals or bisexuals.

Cross-dresser or transgender also fall under the category of *hijra*. Cross-dressers are called *Zananay* and those castrated are called *Narban* (Persian word meaning ‘sacrificing man’) who are also taken equivalent to *Khusra*, after attaining asexuality through castration (Ali, July 2003; Riaz, 1996; Zafar, Sep 2004). They claim that female soul is enclosed in their bodies since birth (Jami & Anila, in progress) which prompts them to behave like women.

Homosexuals and **bisexuals** (only men) who wear female clothes are also known as *hijras*. All *hijras* are not homosexuals and vice versa. Although, as per the past researches the outcome of gender identity disorder is homosexuality in adolescence and adulthood (Bartlett, Vasey & Bukowski, 2000), but men involved in sex business and homosexuals have also joined *hijra* community (Ali, July 2003; Zafar, Sep 2004) providing cover for their sexual acts and remain disguised in the society. They cross dress hence are categorised as *Zananay* too, but they are of course different from transvestites (see DSM IV) who cross-dress for pleasure but not for satisfying homosexual desires.

Khusray are more respectable class than *Zannanay* within *Hijra* community. Conceptually, *Khusra* class rear/ gear *hijras*' community, while *Zananay* might leave the community when they feel that being in *hijra* community is no more a gratifying experience. Therefore, very few *Zannanay* go for the castration. *Khusra*'s earning is mostly based on taking *Wadhai* (alms) or dancing/ singing at the birth of sons and their weddings. *Zannany* perform in functions, theatre, or indulge in sex business.

Portrayal of Hijra's Identity

Hijras do not disclose their identity. Their identity is shrouded in myths and false portrayal. At one point, portraying the identity of hermaphrodite/ intersexed and claiming that they are third gender. Then, being man they portray womanhood by assuming woman's role. Large majority believe that *hijras* are those individuals who are born with sexual deformities. My preliminary findings on the data of 295 participants collected from 9 cities of Pakistan show that 50% of people believe that *hijras* are born with sexual deformity, 46 % believe that they are both hermaphrodite/ intersexed and males behaving like female, 4% believe that they are only men who behave like women. The number of those born with sexual deformity in *Hijra* community is as low as 1% (Zafar, Sep 2004).

Although, they portray womanhood, still most of them are not ready to mention female sex in their identity documents. Pakistan is a patriarchal society.

The birth of the male child is an occasion of honour and esteem for the family as against the female child. *Hijras* participate in celebrations at the male child's birth and sons' weddings only. Consequently, in male dominated society, they prefer to identify themselves with men in identity documents.

Muslims, well placed financially, are required to perform *Haj* (pilgrimage) in the holy city of Makkah. As a religious compulsion, women must be accompanied by male relative (*mahram*) for performing *Haj*. Therefore, *Hijras* prefer the male sex to be written in their documents for the ease of performing *Haj*. They acquire respectful status after performing *Haj*; called the *Hajis*. *Hijras* identify with the group of *Mukhanath* in the *Haram Sharifain* (Makkah and Madina) employed for keeping men and women apart while offering prayers, a status of piety and holiness. People believe that due to this grave handicap, Allah has granted them special feature of effective blessings and curses. People are apprehensive that some heavenly wrath may befall if they did not oblige the *hijra*'s demands. Quite often, if refused alms *hijras* abuse and show their private parts and curse them that may Allah make their child a *hijra*.

Reason for Becoming Hijra

My preliminary analysis of 33 *hijras*' interviews revealed varied reasons behind becoming *hijra*/ joining *hijra* community. A large number contented that their interest in dancing, make up like women or sexual interests in men roped them

in. Their deviant interests were acceptable, appreciated and groomed in *hijra* community. Besides this, poor and unemployed youth joined the community when seeing *hijras* earning easy money, apparently. It is leading towards increased incidence of AIDS/ STDs (also see Zafar, Sep 2004) and tarnishing *hijras* repute.

Some thought that their inclination towards acting and dressing like woman brought them in. In some cases, they got much encouragement in childhood. In some cases, unduly harsh treatment of the families prompted them to join *hijra* community, indeed a safe haven. Some contended that they experienced psychological problems. Sexual abuse in childhood also leads towards undo interest and curiosity in homosexual activities. The boys womanish in their movements, having soft skin and girlish features get exaggerated attention of men in schools, family or place of employment, ultimately leading towards sexual abuse or reinforcing their womanish inclinations. These attributes are welcome in *hijra* community.

Some individuals got influenced and fell prey by watching *hijras* activities too frequently. *Hijras* are considered to be mysterious and secretive generating curiosity among boys to get involved more willingly, seeking pleasures and falling in love with any *hijra*, thus encouraging them to join *hijra* community. Few of them claimed that they were born *hijras* and parents handed them over to *hijras* out of shame and embarrassment in society. Some said that their families sold them off because of poverty. Some *hijra* reasoned out that monetary compulsions compel

children to accrue required financial resources through ignoble means by indulging in *hijra* outlet.

Cultural Perspective

Our *Hijras* draw their cultural heritage from the *Khawjasara* of Mughal era. *Khawjasaras* were eunuchs or hermaphrodites who were employed by Mughal rulers as care takers of their harems (Gwinn, Peter & Goetz, 1990, p. 598; see The Encyclopedia Americana, 2000, p. 661; Nanda, as cited in Brettell & Sargent, 1997; Sharma, 2000; Talwar, 1999). *Khawjasara* played potent roles in the courts, held effective sway in the affairs of the state, and also acted as confidants of their masters. With no more princely rulers their condition and status deteriorated that broke them financially turning into beggars.

Religious Perspective

Islam affords equal rights and opportunities for all. However, certain restrictions are imposed on those who transgress and violate the conjunctions defined in *Quran/ Hadith*.

In Islam, the sex/ gender is recognized as male and female only. A child born with the sexual deformity called *Khunsa* or *Mukhanath* (hermaphrodite) is brought up as male or female depending upon their dominant physical

characteristics. Sometimes, sexual deformity is marked enough that it is difficult to assign any sex to the child called as *Khunsa-e-Mushkil* (intersexed). Still, the requirement is to assign sex on the examination of sexual organs and urination system, viz-a-viz man and woman. Otherwise, better to assign female sex to maintain the respect and privacy of the individual (Badae Sanae, 1995, pp. 751-752).

Sexual deformity is like other physical handicap, not affecting other mental and physical faculties of the individual. Hermaphrodite/ intersexed are accorded equal rights and social in Islam like other beings (see Badae Sanae, 1995). However, marriage is sanctified through lawful consummation (sexual intercourse); not possible in case of hermaphrodite/ intersexed. Thus, the individual proposing to marry must inform the other about his/her impotency. Otherwise, being a deliberate cheat will be penalized under Islamic law (apkar pk, 1997).

Women are required to observe Pardah (veil) from male hermaphrodite. In Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad, SAW), effeminate men are forbidden to enter upon women as they may have interest in women, notwithstanding without natural sexual prowess. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) forbade the entry of an effeminate man in his household, since He (SAW) had heard him relishing the description of physical features of a woman. The narration exhibited amply the effeminate man's interest in the women (Sahi Bukhari, 1986, p. 119; Mauta Imam Malik, 1979, p.557; Sunnan-e-Ibne Maja, 1983, p. 533).

Rules are clearly set regarding the dressing/ roles of men and women in Islam. The Prophet (SAW) has cursed those men who are in similitude of women and vice versa. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) not only cursed them but also ordered their dismissal from the houses. The Prophet (SAW) personally did so and Caliph Umar (RAA) also did the same (Sahi Bukhari, 1986, pp. 513-514, Sunnan-e-Ibne Maja, 1983, p. 533).

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has strongly prohibited the castration and forbade abstaining from marrying (Sahi Bukhari, 1986, p. 8). Certain companions sought permission from the Prophet (SAW) for getting them castrated to guard themselves against possible indulgence in sexual wrongs since they could not afford marriage. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) strictly forbade them by saying that it (sex) has been written in the fate of an individual and one cannot change the destined fate by getting castration, so there was no benefit in doing so (Sahi Bukhari, 1986, p. 9). Such operations can be recommended by a medical authority if deemed necessary for curing the disease the individual suffers from, as also help in checking further deterioration of his health (apkar pk, 1996, p. 111).

Islam does not suppress any natural human feeling or desire. Allah commands, “O you who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful for you, but commit no transgression” (5:87). The heterosexual relationship (by making pairs) is for the progression of human life as also the fulfilment of sexual desires which Islam grants provided that is practiced in lawful

manner. Islam does not allow promiscuity and perverse practices and forbids what is harmful to individuals/ society.

Homosexuality is considered to be a great sin in Islam. Allah has condemned Prophet Lot's people who indulged in homosexuality warning them of dire consequences against transgressing the limits Allah has defined limits for sound human values (see *AlQuran*; apkar pk, 1997, p. 75). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has strongly condemned those women who look/ touch each other in nudity and describe her to as her husband (Sahi Bukhari, 1986, p. 121-122). This *Hadith* holds good for the men also.

Although various Indian researchers (Nanda, as cited in Brettle & Sargent, 1997; Sharma, 2000; Talwar, 1999) have traced the religious connotation of *hijras* in Hinduism, but *Hijras* in Pakistan do not associate them with that concept.

Legal Perspective

Hijras are granted equal legal rights and obligations in the society. They have right to vote/ contest in elections. Aslam *Hijra* contested in the National Assembly elections against a renowned political figure and got over seven thousand votes. There is no legal restriction on *hijra* in enjoying their rights as also fulfilling their normal obligations. Only hindrances are cultural, social and attitudinal barriers in the society towards this community.

Under Islamic Jurisprudence and the Constitution sex/ gender is recognized as male and female (Major Acts, 1987). No separate category is laid down for hermaphrodite/ intersexed. Hence, no figures are available regarding the number of hermaphrodite/ intersexed in the country. Those who are born with sexual deformity (hermaphrodite/intersexed) are assigned sex according to their dominant sex characteristics and are recorded in birth certificate. In Pakistani 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 birth certificate and cannot be changed.

There are the evidences against *hijra* (transgender) who indulge in carrying out auto-castration or castration with the help of any other *hijra* or doctor. *Hijra* who go for the castration voluntarily or cause this forcibly to any other *Hijra* indulge in causing “grievous hurt” punishable under Pakistani law, as it might cause grievous pain and might endanger the life of an individual (PPC, section 322/ 335) (Major Acts, 1987). There is no scope of same sex marriages in Pakistan. Homosexuality in men involves carnal intercourse, which comes under the category of unnatural offences (PPC, section 377, The Major Acts, 1987) punishable under the law.

General Attitude towards Hijra Community

Like other part of the world (see Sharma, 2000; Talwar, 1999; Winter, 2002), the attitude towards *hijra* in Pakistan is also very discriminatory and biased

in general. *Hijras* are denied any quota in employment on the basis of their handicap (if it is there) and also deprived of opportunities to take education because of people's attitude towards them. More so they are also denied health and psychological/ psychotherapeutic assistance. Victims of gender identity problem carry out castrations without any medical and psychological aid. They indulge in self-remedy including hormone taking without prescription, using silicon injections and at extreme auto-castrations. No one is there to understand them and find solution to their problems.

People give away alms, it is only because of the fear to avoid their curse and get good wishes. Asexuality and also certain behavioural patterns such as cracking vulgar jokes, using obscene language and throwing vulgar gestures, induce annoyance resulting in people harbouring negative attitude towards them. By and large people do not like to interact with them. Preliminary results of my research ($N= 295$) show that 50% of individual meet/ see them once in a year, 28% meet/see them once in a month, 12% meet/see once in a week while 6% related seeing/meeting every day, while 2% did not see/meet them in their life (contact author). Talking about them in the family is not taken in good stead. People detest the idea of having any *hijra* in the family. Some even believe that children born with sexual deformity should be given away to the *hijra* community.

In bigger cities, since the number of *Zananas* is ever increasing, people are apprehensive and reluctant in interacting with all type of *hijras*. People blame them

for homosexuality or sex business. Especially men are well aware of *Zananas'* whereabouts living in their locality. Attitude of people towards *hijra*, on the basis of preliminary results of my research, show that people who believe that they are born *hijras* have more positive attitude towards *hijra* community than the people who believe that they are men behaving like women or both. Findings also show that women have more positive attitude than men. 58% of women believe that they are *hijras* by birth while only 40% of men believe in so. 53% men believe that they are both *hijras* by birth and men behaving like women, while only 39% of women believe so.

People, who know about the cross-dressers within *hijra* community, refer to the *Hadith* that those who cross-dress are cursed down upon; therefore *hijra* community is a cursed one. A large number of *hijra* community come from the low- socioeconomic class where their behaviours cannot be concealed. While, in upper socio-economic class they remain in their household and pursue their careers along their deviant behaviours as people in this class do not much bother such oddities. They can afford to have hormonal therapy and sex reassignment surgeries from abroad, but those who belong to low- socioeconomic class rely on self remedy/ auto-castrations and remain embedded in the quagmire for the rest of their lives.

Recommendations and Suggestions

1. Hijras are humans; should be treated at par accordingly.
2. The affected family should understand and have the knowledge and information regarding psychological problems of the child behaving in a socially deviant way. If child is showing gender identity problem he/ she should be taken to the psychiatrist/ psychologist for necessary treatment.
3. Parents should take due cognizance of their child getting undue affection from others without any apparent reason. They should check the company their child keeps.
4. Government/ local administration should arrange stipends and monetary assistance to the poor and provide employment to the effected sections of people.
5. Those who are born with the sexual deformity should be provided either handsome financial help so that they could become acceptable in their own families and they should be given share/ quota in employment for the handicaps, enabling them to lead normal life.
6. Government should devise ways to disseminate information regarding psychological problems related to sexual minorities and develop public awareness programs to handle the issue.
7. Government should also develop programs to enhance and build up knowledge regarding AIDS/ STDs to the masses and *hijras* as well.
8. Government should arrange the medical assistance for affected individuals and enforce strict law on auto-castration.

Conclusion

“We hate some people but we do not know them and we do not want to know them because we hate them”. This dictum stands valid in our attitude towards *hijras*. We are driven by certain myths related to *hijras* but very few have tried to know them. *Hijras* may be suffering from any psychological problem or genuine handicap, beyond their control. We should understand them and abridge the prevailing state of doubt and mistrust. This will help in solving their psychological and financial problems of *hijras* and make their life comfortable and productive for society at large.

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