

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Life of Eunuch's (Hijras) in Hyderabad, Sindh Province of Pakistan

Darya Khan Sanjrani¹, Abdul Rasool Khoso²✉,
Sajjad Ali Mallah¹, Farhan Akhtar², Shahnaz Bhutto³,
Nasir Ali Narejo¹, & Kainat Vighio³

¹ Institute of Gender Studies, Sindh University Jamshoro, Pakistan

² School of Public Administration, Hohai University Nanjing, PR China

³ Department of Rural Sociology, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam,
Pakistan

✉ sociologist.ab.95@gmail.com

Article history:

Submitted: 18 May 2022

Accepted: 2 Jun 2022

Published: 14 Jun 2022

Abstract: *This study aims to describe the impacts of covid-19 on the life of eunuchs (hijra) in district Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. To investigate the effects of covid-19 on the life of a eunuch, in-depth interviews were performed on the eunuch by birth. They included Guru, usually the leader of that particular group. Three Chelas who are the followers of the sample were collected through the snowball sampling technique qualitatively and were analyzed manually. Based on the interviews, the results revealed that eunuchs were facing a lot of predicament during COVID-19 because eunuchs were dependent on begging, dancing, and involved on the different local meetings, which were totaled due to COVID-19. Conversely, in that situation, the eunuchs were being ignored by the people, and no funding was provided to support them. Though, internationally they need to be given all those rights as the locally met. The study findings are supportive and can potentially guide the intervention plans for enhancing the life of eunuch community people. Since the study concludes that 'Eunuchs' are not enjoying their actual rights as met. Finally, the study recommends that there must be active policies for eunuchs, which should highlight the same enjoyments for eunuchs as completed by the local people.*

Keywords: *Coronavirus (COVID-19); Eunuchs; Pakistan; Sindh; Socio-economic conditions.*

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) related lockdowns have disrupted the light sources of income of many transgender all over the world, especially in Pakistan,¹ including those in the *eunuch's* subculture, which primarily rely on money from providing blessings, begging, and sex work.² Eunuchs, generally known as the third gender/transgender, have always been considered unwanted citizens of society in underdeveloped nations like Pakistan,³ which have the right to live freely and enjoy the same as an ordinary person.⁴ So far, those people in Pakistan are generally identified by the various names' Hijra' 'Khusra' 'Khuwajasira, 'Chakka' 'Zanana, etc., who are true hermaphrodites.⁵

Many have expended savings and taken high-interest loans, contributing to psychological distress. For eunuchs engaged in sex work, challenges to negotiating condom use and adhering to COVID-19 protective measures increase the risks of contracting HIV and COVID-19 amid decreased access to HIV services.⁶ Many transgender women face challenges accessing COVID-19-related government welfare programs as they lack legal gender identity documents. Multispectral and transgender-competent approaches are needed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

In January 2021, many Indian states continued to apply lockdowns of varying degrees.⁷ Amid the pandemic, eunuchs receive meager donations from shopkeepers and the general public (pre COVID ~INR 500 to 1000 [\$7 to 13] per day to < INR 150 [\$2] per day); they are also seen as potential vectors of disease, with public posters in Hyderabad indicating, "If you talk to transgender, you will get Corona."⁸ Public attitudes toward transgender people have worsened in some regions. Formal employment is rare among transgender women, most of whom are forced to leave their families at a young age without education; many have now lost their jobs that largely require physical contact (masseuses, hairstylists, dancers) and are at heightened risk for psychological distress due to financial stressors.⁹

Most eunuchs in sex work meet clients in public spaces and cannot readily switch to virtual spaces due to low literacy and lack of smartphone access. Trans community leaders report that some transgender women in sex work tried using "gay" dating apps, such as Grinder and Blued, with profiles indicating "she-male" or "bottom," but they are unable to find clients who prefer transgender women.¹⁰ Many profiles of potential clients state "meet only after lockdown" with

¹ Asif Mehmood, "Transgender Community Boycotts Elections," *The express tribune*, 2018.

² K. S Afridi, "Societal Acceptance for the Transgender Community," 2018.

³ AR Khoso, "Transgender- Blessing or Curse in Sindh: A General Perspective," *Daily Kawish* (Hyderabad Sindh, 2017).

⁴ Mehmood, "Transgender Community Boycotts Elections."

⁵ et al S, Reza-Paul & Lazarus L & Haldar P, "Community Action for People with HIV and Sex Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India," *WHOSoutheastt Asia J Public Health* 9 (2020): 104–6.

⁶ Z. T Ebrahim, "Don't We Count? Transgender Pakistanis Feel Sidelined by the Census," 2017, www.reuters.com.

⁷ NDTV, "Maharashtra Lockdown Restrictions: Maharashtra Extends COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions till January 31, 2020," 2020.

⁸ K. Rosario, "Covid-19 Lockdown: Transgender Community Pushed Further to the Margin.," *The Hindu*, 2020.

⁹ Chakrapani & Newman PA & Noronha E V, *Hijras/Transgender Women and Sex Work in India: From Marginalization to Social Protection. In: Transgender Sex Work & Society* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2018).

¹⁰ S. Sharma, "Multi-Month Prescription, Home Delivery for Uninterrupted AIDS Drugs in Times of Covid-19," *The Hindustan Times*, 2020.

some warning "money seekers" to "stay away." Furthermore, those transgender women who engage in sex work often do so without personal protection (face masks) and sometimes without condoms, increasing their vulnerability to HIV and coronavirus infection.

So far, the life of eunuchs is interrelated with begging, dancing, and asking for money as the reward of child blessings. "Bound to this profession" is also a much-highlighted theme depicted in the study. Dancing and singing are considered the fixed and traditional roles of Hijras in the society. They went to weddings, birth ceremonies, and fairs to dance, perform, and seek prayer. They thought there was another suitable profession because they had to face problems due to the covid-19 lockdown in any of their professions, so they were primarily involved in singing, dancing, and sex business.¹¹

Continuity to meet needs is a necessity that cannot be avoided,¹² especially when the world is experiencing an economic downturn due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Financial needs referred to as primary needs, are the needs for human survival. So it is not surprising that the eunuch's life depended on begging, dancing, and asking for money in return for the blessings of the child when he had to lose his regular job. In the context of cultural anthropology, dancing and singing are a series of events and community creations that refer to social identity.¹³ Demonstrating social identity in cultural treasures can be a financial route. This means that the dancing and singing performed by eunuchs in certain traditional events and ceremonies can attract sympathizers to give money. This is not a form of illegal commercialization of culture. Indirectly the eunuch is introducing his culture to the viewers.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population, disturbing people's socio-economic conditions and general meetings. With the advent of COVID-19 and the rise in its case, most nations imposed a nationwide lockdown. However, the situation remained the same in Pakistan as well. Given the dangerous leap of COVID-19 in Sindh, the state government appealed to the general public not to visit crowded places and gatherings. Several decisions were made, and the total number of wedding gatherings was restricted. At the same time, the gatherings of all cultural and religious festivals (religious and cultural gatherings) were also restricted to a certain extent. Therefore, during this time, the eunuch community suffered a huge financial loss because the common people either postponed the wedding dates or the eunuchs were not entertained on such occasions. The community could not go outside to collect *badhai* (money collected from dance performances) from the families where a male child was born.

For this purpose, this proposed study seeks to review the opinions of eunuchs about the current issues of (social, economic, and health) due to COVID-19, either the government involved in facilitating the eunuchs or they were left behind in the current situation. Thus, on behalf of the consequences, the researcher would be further involved by recommending some basic policies to support the eunuchs in general. It is essential to do this research from two perspectives; a theoretical perspective and a pragmatic perspective. Theoretically, this research is critical for developing cultural anthropological studies closely related to societal change and

¹¹ R Zafar, "Hijroon Ki Pursarar Duniya: Dukhon Ki Chakki Mein Pisnaywalay Aik Tabkay Kidaroon-En Khana Dilchasp Kahani," *Jang: Sunday Magazine*, September 2004, www.jang.com.pk.

¹² Abraham Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (Generally Press, 2019).

¹³ John Monaghan, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020).

economic growth. The performances performed by the eunuchs are cultural relations and community behavior due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in elements to meet the needs of life. Then pragmatically, this research can be an entity on culture in Hyderabad District, Sindh Province of Pakistan.

Method

This qualitative research uses an ethnographic approach that examines cultural anthropological phenomena in the structure of society.¹⁴ Researchers describe the impact of covid-19 on the lives of eunuchs (hijra) in the Hyderabad district, Sindh, Pakistan, which brought changes to the behavior of the eunuch community to meet the needs of life. In-depth interviews were conducted with five eunuchs, including one Guru and four Chelas with an age range of 25-50 years who were born hijra. Sampling was done by snowball sampling technique. Interviews were conducted in a structured manner. This means that researchers interviewed respondents regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their lives. The researcher also conducted some supporting documentation to strengthen the research. Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques with ethnographic relations. This means that after the researcher reduces the various research data, then analyzes and interprets contextually-empirically according to what happened to the life of eunuchs (hijra) in the Hyderabad district, Sindh, Pakistan.

Results and Discussion

Health impacts of COVID-19 on the life of eunuchs

This theme explains the impacts of covid-19 on the health of eunuchs. According to analysis and statement by Shabnam:

“In government hospitals, most of us were treated nothing just as the sinners, even the lower staff were not ready to treat us well. Doctors did not diagnose us like men and women with emerging themes like facing many mentally and physically problems and bullied behaviors, facing hooting, disrespectful as reported. We suffered a lot of health problems due to the Coronavirus because people in our community did not go to the hospital for treatment of common ailments like cough, high blood pressure, diabetes because of the fear of Coronavirus. Even if they did go, the attitude of the hospital staff was not right with us. Everyone was saying, *"Get away from us. You guys don't know where you came from, so we had to get our treatment in private hospitals."* We did not get any benefit in government hospitals. Doctors do not treat like way men and women. We are ignored. That is why we face many difficulties due to the Coronavirus.”

While Saba reported:

“We were mentally and physically disturbed during the lockdown. We did not even go to the hospital to treat our illnesses due to fear of Coronavirus. Once, our community member had to go to the hospital due to ill health. Still, unfortunately, the attitude of the hospital

¹⁴ John Murchison, *Ethnography Essentials Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research* (United States: Wiley Press, 2010).

government staff was also bad with us, due to which we had to undergo treatment in a private hospital which was very difficult to afford. Still, then we took our community contribution and treated it.”

Social impacts

According to the data analysis, another super ordinate theme is social impacts. Most of them reported that they live happily with their communities as they respect each other. The main subordinate themes are boring sitting together all the time at home, social distancing with other people, ordinary people's behavior not good, stopped seeing ordinary people, and social life was completely bound here as reported:

“During the Coronavirus, we stopped seeing ordinary people. Whenever we went out or went to someone's house to ask for alms, people kept us away for fear of the Coronavirus. The attitude of ordinary people is not good for us. Yes, some people interacted with us, but because of our corona, social life was no less than a penitentiary. The situation destroyed us not only economically but also socially. “

Economical impacts

According to the Sana (hijra):

“We were very depressed economically due to the coronavirus situation because there was no means of financial support provided to us by the government bodies as other citizens. “

The analysis reveals this fact by these subordinate themes, unsatisfactory government policies, no financial support from government and specific NGO, themes are desire to get an education, respect for our profession, we should be given to live better, want right of respectful employment as reported by Reshma:

“We were very upset because of Coronavirus economically. When there was nothing left to eat, we sold our household utensils and made our way. We have eaten dry bread soaked, the rent has gone up, we have not been able to pay the rent yet, and we have not received any financial help from any government agency or any special NGO, but we are grateful. I heard the head of our community who asked the Pakistan Army and some other people for help because we got rations for a few days, but our house rent could not get our other food items; we are sad, why Allah Almighty created those who have no respect in the society and no recognition, because, when the city came under curfew due to Coronavirus, our livelihood was also lost. We do not have any bank balance, while other family members also have government jobs. Besides, many people help them. The government also provides financial support to the people under the Ehsas Kifalat program, ignoring our Hijra community. Although no one is poorer than us, we have nothing in this world except Allah. That is why we are human beings; we should be given opportunities to live, we should be given government jobs, we should be given separate schools to get a good education so that we can do our job well, and people should think about us. Run awareness programs to change so that our society can accept. Internationally, we have so many rights if we go

through the other nations; they survive in a well-mannered way. This reflects us asking for our rights but unfortunately, we are ignored to a greater extent.”

Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to find out the impacts of covid-19 on the life of eunuchs in district Hyderabad. The study provides an in-depth understanding of the knowledge and experience of Eunuchs, which leads to the development of eight super-coordinated themes through content analysis. These topics include Socio-Economically depression, facing mental and physical disturbance due to Coronavirus, ignore, rejection from society, no health facilities, change of thinking of people, dissatisfactory government policies, and no government programs to financially support. These important topics are the attitude toward society, attitude towards family, commitment to this profession, attitude towards life, stereotypes about them, dissatisfied government Policies, Character Religion, Family Financial Support, Child Restrictions, and Self-Care,¹⁵ So far, the transgender mostly were deemed as the consequences of the prostitution, since the perception of local people were also contagious towards the eunuchs.

According to Hogg and Vaughan, transgender who is considered the third gender in our society, having both male and female characteristics face many difficulties in our society. In our first theme, health impacts, it was discovered that they were highly offended by teasing as they faced disrespect from society; they were bullied, accused, cursed, and insulted in the streets and bazaars, as the participant reported. In addition, the residents' sights were noticed towards bad manners as a whole.¹⁶

According to Rankin, there are many misconceptions about the transgender population because of the lack of empirical and scientific studies. People have a lot of false beliefs about them that they are the outcome of their sin or their parent's sin. They showed biased and discriminated behaviors towards them, holding stereotypes about them. Especially their close relatives made their lives complicated by taunting them and giving very harsh comments to their parents as they stated: “*Relatives taunt our parents tortured them they make our parents worried about us. They gave disrespectful and unbearable remarks about us*”. Thus, they have been ignored in our society, especially in Hyderabad in COVID-19 situations.¹⁷

Conclusion

On behalf of the consequences and responses of the eunuchs, the researcher concluded that the COVID situation was the worst for the eunuchs. It was also concluded that the eunuchs were not considered an ingredient of the society. Since the local people were generally treated as the prostitute involved bodies, resembling the hate for the transgender in our society. Secondly, the available literature also reviewed that the eunuchs enjoyed the same interests as the others in developed nations. On behalf of the conclusions, the study recommends that the eunuchs (hijras)

¹⁵ N. Ghafoor, c. Chaudhry, a., Allahi khan, s., Ahmed, a., & khan, “The Begging Hijras of Islamabad in the Age of Urbanization: An Anthropological Perspective.,” *Science Internationall* 26, no. 5 (2014).

¹⁶ g. M Hogg, m. A & Vaughan, *Social Psychology (4thed.)* (Pearson prentice hall, 2005).

¹⁷ s. R In m. V. L. Badgett & j. Frank (eds.) Rankin, *Campus Climate for Sexual Minorities, Sexual Orientation Discrimination: An International Perspective*, 2007.

must be given the same respect in our society as they are internationally provided. So far, the rights must be aware on a local level for them. Lastly, they need to provide the same education, employment, and other rights as a whole. Finally, the study recommends that there must be active policies for gender which could provide the initial level of interest for the gender. Finally, the Eunuchs would be further cared for in future epidemics.

References

- Afridi, K. S. "Societal Acceptance for the Transgender Community," 2018.
- Ebrahim, Z. T. "Don't We Count? Transgender Pakistanis Feel Sidelined by the Census," 2017. www.reuters.com .
- England, Public health. "Covid-19: Epidemiology, Virology, and Clinical Features," 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information/Wuhan-novel-coronavirus-epidemiology-virology-and-clinical>.
- Ghafoor, c. Chaudhry, a., Allahi khan, s., Ahmed, a., & khan, N. "The Begging Hijras of Islamabad in the Age of Urbanization: An Anthropological Perspective." *Science Internationall* 26, no. 5 (2014).
- Hogg, m. A & Vaughan, g. M. *Social Psychology (4thed.)*. Pearson prentice hall, 2005.
- Khoso, AR. "Transgender- Blessing or Curse in Sindh: A General Perspective." *Daily Kawish*. Hyderabad Sindh, 2017.
- Maslow, Abraham. *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Generally Press, 2019.
- Mehmood, Asif. "Transgender Community Boycotts Elections." *The express tribune*, 2018.
- Monaghan, John. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Murchison, John. *Ethnography Essentials Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research*. United States: Wiley Press, 2010.
- NDTV. "Maharashtra Lockdown Restrictions: Maharashtra Extends COVID-19 Lockdown Restrictions till January 31, 2020," 2020.
- Rankin, s. R In m. V. L. Badgett & j. Frank (eds.). *Campus Climate for Sexual Minorities, Sexual Orientation Discrimination: An International Perspective*, 2007.
- Rosario, K. "Covid-19 Lockdown: Transgender Community Pushed Further to the Margin." *The Hindu*, 2020.
- S, Reza-Paul & Lazarus L & Haldar P, et al. "Community Action for People with HIV and Sex Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India." *WHOSoutheastt Asia J Public Health* 9 (2020): 104–6.
- Sharma, S. "Multi-Month Prescription, Home Delivery for Uninterrupted AIDS Drugs in Times of Covid-19." *The Hindustan Times*, 2020.
- V, Chakrapani & Newman PA & Noronha E. *Hijras/Transgender Women and Sex Work in India: From Marginalization to Social Protection*. In: *Transgender Sex Work & Society*. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2018.
- Wikipedia. "Corona Pandemic in November 2020." Wikipedia, 2019.
- Zafar, R. "Hijroon Ki Pursasar Duniya: Dukhon Ki Chakki Mein Pisnaywalay Aik Tabkay

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Life of Eunuch's (Hijras) in Hyderabad, Sindh Province of Pakistan
Darya Khan Sanjrani, Abdul Rasool Khoso, Sajjad Ali Mallah, et al

Kidaroon-En Khana Dilchasp Kahani.” *Jang: Sunday Magazine*, September 2004.
www.jang.com.pk.

Zhang, Z & Leo, J. “Transgender and the COVID-19. A General Perspective of Transgender in China.” *Journal of Gender Studies, Wuhan* 17, no. 14 (2020): 321–41.