

HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES OF TRANSGENDER (KHAWAJA- SIRAS) IN PAKISTAN

Saher Sultan¹, Benish Mehmood¹, Zubair Ahmed², Khadija Tahira³, Majida Rahim⁴, Farah Farhan⁵

¹Department of Community Dentistry, Army Medical College, National University of Medical Sciences, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

²Technical Support Officer, FELTP, Quetta, Pakistan

³Rahman & Rahman Dental Surgeons, Jhelum, Pakistan

⁴Department of Oral Medicine, Foundation University College of Dentistry, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁵Department of Oral Pathology, Foundation University College of Dentistry, Islamabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study was to determine the health and educational issues of Khawaja-siras in Pakistan.

Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional, non-probability sampling technique was used. A sample size of 150 respondents (Khawaja-siras) were interviewed for collection of data. Questionnaire comprised of different sections. Section I contained questions about demographics while Section II comprised of both open and close ended questions related to their education & health. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20.

Results: Out of 150, the respondents were 140. The mean age of respondents was 29 years. Among the respondents, 45% (n = 63) were literate out of which 63% (n=40) were below matriculation, 23% (n = 14) were matric & intermediate while 14% (n = 9) were graduate. Employed transgender were only 7%. In current study, Khawaja-siras were when asked about their health issues reporting, 39% reported that they go to doctor, whereas 35% informed their guru. 7% reported self-medication and similar percent do nothing about their health issues.

Conclusion: Less than half of the study population was literate majority of them were unable to find professional work & only 40% of them attend hospitals.

Keywords: Transgender, Khawaja-siras, healthcare, education

INTRODUCTION

Transgender is the term used to describe people whose gender role, behavior or identity differs from those characteristically linked with their assigned sex at the time of birth. In South Asia, transgender are referred as khawaja-siras, khusras or hijras. They are males biologically, ugly and large with big feet and hands, who take on identities of females like use of heavy makeup and wearing sharp colored clothes and

Correspondence:

Dr. Saher Sultan

Head of Department, Assistant Professor, Department of Community Dentistry, Army Medical College, National University of Medical Sciences, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Email: sehr.sultan@hotmail.com

Contact: +923005166967

with particular emphasis on certain parts of body. In Pakistan, mostly members of khawaja-siras or hijras subculture are identified as “third gender”, who do not consider themselves as homosexuals, as they are attracted to men. These people have lowest degree of honor or right. Their general concerns are dancing, begging, whoring, street walking. They play an important role in Pakistani culture including birthdays and marriage functions, festivals etc. As more novel means of celebrations are outgrowing, the only remain occupations for them are begging and sex work.¹ These people remained under privileged in social and cultural participation as well. There access to healthcare, education and public places is also restricted.

There are numbers of transgender in Pakistan, but no official statistics are available yet. In 2009, Supreme court of Pakistan recognized their gender identity as “third-gender”, which was to be appeared on their official documents. They were also given rights to cast vote as Khawaja-siras and also to contest elections.² Government of Pakistan was assigned a task by Supreme Court of Pakistan to conduct survey about the transgender and to provide them equal human rights. In 2013, not only transgender got equal rights as other citizens of Pakistan, but federal and provincial governments also provided them basic rights of education, employments, and health during the comparable period of time.²

Although they were given subsequent rights and identity, still they are the most disadvantaged and marginalized group in Pakistan.

A study on transgender in 2016 reported that about one-third of 50 children had chronic tendencies or in another words nearly 2% population of Pakistan get affected by transgenderism.³ Results of a study on their acceptability in society, revealed that only 14% of Pakistani population wanted to be their friends.⁴ Most of them are school dropouts. They get stigmatized or discriminated after disclosure of their sexuality in schools as well as at work places.⁵ Due to lack of education and employment opportunities, they ended up into sex work and beggary.^{6,7,8}

Transgender or Khawaja-siras are likely to suffer violence or discrimination in their lives. A study conducted in United states showed that around 60% of transgender experienced violence or harassment and nearly 37% faced economic discrimination.⁹ Focus group study in San Francisco revealed that lack of education, lower self-esteem, street lifestyle and unemployment contributed to alcohol and drug abuse among transgender.¹⁰ It has been shown by research that transgender, due to their risky sexual behaviors, are at greater risk of HIV/ AIDS.^{10,11} Research studies have shown somewhat negative opinion of doctors towards transsexual women. Due to lack of sensitivity or respect on part of health service providers, the health seeking behavior of transgender gets adversely affected.^{12,13} Limited information is available regarding health and educational issues faced by transgender or Khawaja-siras in Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to identify and evaluate the health and educational issues of Khawaja-siras

in Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional, non-probability snowball sampling technique was employed, in which researcher was helped by participants to identify other similar participants. Data was collected from urban & sub urban areas of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The researcher informed all the participants about the purpose of the study and they were assured that the collected information will be used only for research purpose. A sample size of 150 respondents (Khawaja-siras) was drawn. Interview was scheduled for collection of data for this study. Questionnaire comprised of different sections. Section I contained questions about demographics (age, no. of siblings, parental occupation, residence, source of income, daily earning, care taker, diet). Section II comprised of both open and close ended questions related to their education & health. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20.

RESULTS

Out of 150, the respondents were 140. The mean age of respondents was 29 years mostly in age bracket of 18-30 years (n = 100, 71%). The above 30 years were (n = 40, 29%).

Among the respondents, 45% (n = 63) were literate out of which 63% (n=40) were below matriculation, 23% (n = 14) were matric & intermediate while 14% (n = 9) were graduate.

Table 1 shows the preference of school admission by transgender, that if they want to take admissions, which schools they would prefer.

Regarding profession of transgender, 86% (n = 120) of the respondents were unemployed, 7% (n = 10) were doing jobs like clerking, waiter at some restaurant etc. 7% (n = 10) were self-employed like running small business and small khoka or some electronic shop.

Figure 2 shows their preference of seeking health care facilities. Figure no. 3 indicates the admission in wards during their stay in hospitals. Majority of transgender get admitted to male wards while their stay in hospital. Just one respondent reported that he had a separate ward in the hospital.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to identify

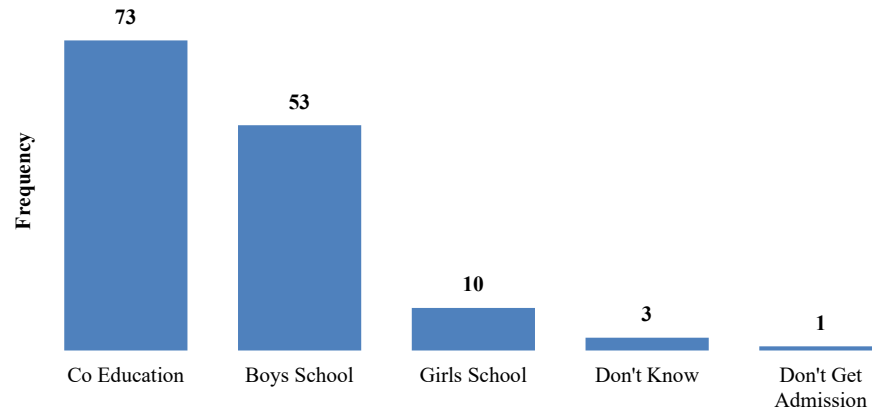


Fig 1: School Preference for Young Khawajasiras

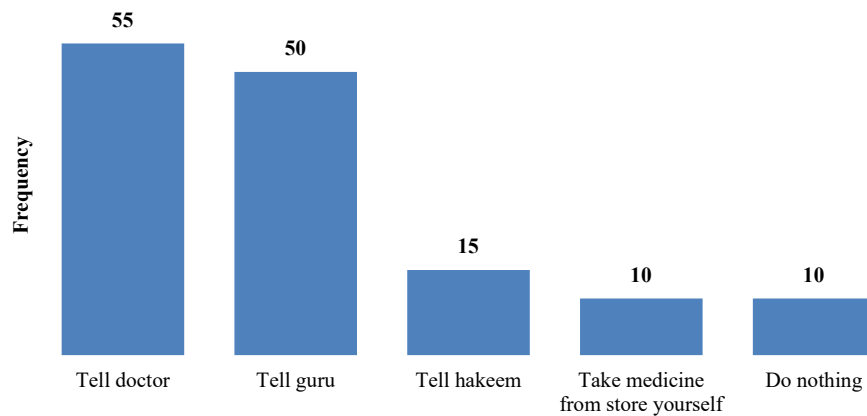


Fig 2: Health Seeking Preference Of Khawaja Siras

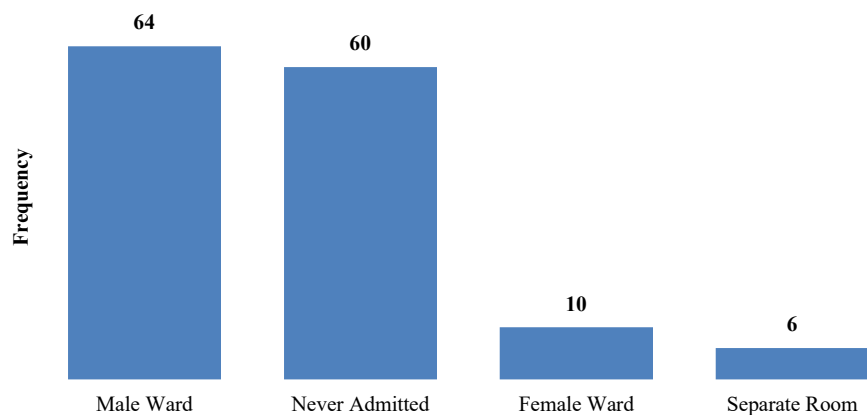


Fig 3: Admission in Wards While Seeking Health Facility

and evaluate the health and educational issues of Khawaja-siras in Pakistan. Regarding education, 45% had access to educational opportunities. Among these 45% literate Khawaja-siraas, 63% were below matric while 23% completed education to matric and

intermediate level. Only 14% reported that they were graduates. A study in India on 120 transgender found that 56% of them attended primary & middle school, where they faced avoidance by teachers and classmates. This behaviour and recognition of abnormal

changes in them, led to school dropout.¹⁴ A Research study on educational status of transgender found that nearly 79% of them were uneducated.¹⁵ Another study found the higher rate of school dropout, where reasons behind are verbal & sexual harassment, gender discrimination, physical abuse by teachers and financial limitations.^{16,17}

Education of a transgender child is as important as other children. Here a question arises that is there an adequate environment available in schools to cater a transgender child? Soon the time of their sexual identification starts, they face stigma and get marginalized. The responsibility lies on administration of school to ensure adequate resources and learning environment for children with special care need. It is also found in different researches that due to victimization, transgender face problems in their work places as well, where their talent and work are never accepted.¹⁴ Study in district Peshawar & Abbottabad, Pakistan showed only 23% education rate of transgender whereas 77% were uneducated.¹⁸ A survey was conducted in urban & rural areas of four provinces in Pakistan. The results showed that 55% Pakistani population was in a favor of giving separate quota in offices and educational institutes, whereas 25% opposed the idea.¹⁹

In current study, employed transgender were only 7% whereas rate of unemployment was very much higher i.e 86% when compare to 44% in USA.²⁰ Due to lack of education, unemployment and social issues, these Khawaja-siras opt for unacceptable means of sustenance like dancing, beggary and commercial sex work.^{6,21,22}

In current study, Khawaja-siras were when asked about their health issues reporting, 39% reported that they go to doctor, whereas 35% informed their guru. 7% reported self-medication and similar percent do nothing about their health issues. They feel scared of being not taken seriously by doctors like everyone else does. A Study on transgender reported that 62% of them were satisfied who visited doctors.²³

Study conducted in USA regrading health issues of transgender found that multiple chronic condition odds were very high, due to lack of supportive & medical care.²⁴

We a civilized nation, still as a society create challenges in existences and survival of transgender

in society. There is a need to identify and understand the problems faced by transgender related to different aspects of their life.

CONCLUSION

Less than half of the study population was literate, suggesting significant question about a shortage of resources for them to enroll academic institutes, majority of them were unable to find professional work & only 40% of them attend hospitals.

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