
Narratives of Inclusion and Exclusion: Experiences of Intersex

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ABSTRACT

The current study focuses on the opportunities and challenges faced by intersex in the social inclusion. Due to biological, psychological and social differences, intersex (Hijra) forms their different gender identity and take on different gender roles. Society treats them with conventional and stereotypical beliefs. In order to analyze the issues faced by intersex population; the importance is given to some vital factors including social support, economic opportunities, social and political rights, religious affairs and access to health care system. By applying qualitative research approach, case study research design has been used to investigate the research objectives. Keeping in view the importance of rural-urban difference in the study, data is collected from district Sialkot and Chawinda, Pakistan. A non-probability purposive sampling has been utilized to collect data. A total of 20 respondents includes 10 respondents from each locale were selected which were determined by saturation point. Interview guide has been used as data collection tool. Thematic analysis has been done to analyze data covering core issues faced by intersex. It has been found that intersex population is still a socially excluded group in their social settings and they are away from socio-economic activities practiced by general population in the study area. The major factor of such exclusion is that they are hampered in social participation and left behind in economic, political and educational opportunities. Moreover, intersex (Hijra) sub-culture persuades them to remain at distance and also prevents them from social inclusion.

Keywords: Inclusion; Exclusion; Intersex.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is a social concept that disseminates many social expectations of being a member of a particular gender (Spence, 1993). Although most people are identified as either male or female, yet another gender exists that may be called intersex. The word intersex usually refers to those entities whose gender expression is different from the sex assigned to them at birth (NTDS Report, 2011). But they can be further

divided into many categories depending on their physical, social and biological attributes (APA, 2011). In local language a term *Hijra* is used that covers different categories of bisexual, transsexual, bi-gender, intersex, transverse, transvestite, gender queer, androgyny and eunuch (Jami, 2010).

Pakistan is home for almost one million and half intersex who are living at the margins (Bobby, 2014). Most of them are living in suburban areas of major cities (Donnelly, 2013; Baig, 2012). Intersex are usually destitute people and they have formed their subculture in the society. They are engaged in deviant actions like selling sex, sex surgery, silicon implantation, begging, use of obscene language and gestures, cross dressing, dancing, and cheap make-up (Jami, 2010; Abbas, Y. Nawaz, Ali, Hussain, & R. Nawaz, 2014).

Social Inclusion of Intersex and Cultural Barriers

Hijra communities provide space to those people who do not have the capacity of adaptability with societal set patterns, therefore, they constitute families under the supervision of *Guru* consisting of five to six members (Ahmad, 2010). The *Hijras* community consists of people with low socioeconomic status (Jami, 2005). Adaptation to the societal norms and problems in adjustment with the society is yet to be addressed for the *Hijras*. The central role of *guru* (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) and entry of the new ones in the *Hijras* community is a very complicated process (Sharma, 2012).

Jha (2011) studied the rights of intersex of India. Researcher found that the intersex are important for social organization in India as they perform some important traditions like blessing the marriage, new born baby and house warming. Researcher studied the report of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and found out that the tradition of intersex (*Hijras*) date back to 4000 years. The researcher found that the intersex cannot find employment opportunities due to illiteracy and stigmatization. The researcher compared the living condition of intersex in west and India and found that intersex population of India can express their gender ambiguity more freely than the western intersex people.

The *Hijras* and *Kothi* emerged in India as a sub-cultural process. *Hijras* still are mysterious while *Kothi* is considered artificial *Hijras*. Identity and kinship system of *Hijras* is formulated in the *Gharanas*. *Hijras* normalize its boundaries as the intersex while *Kothi* with reference to male sex behavior (Dutta, n.d). However, the responsibility of the protection of social organization or the *Hijras* community is done by the pimps (Mohyuddin & Ali, 2013).

Social Exclusion, Social Isolation and Psycho-social Well being

Intersexes are living under miserable plight and adversely ignored in every sphere of life. Important social contributory factors like social support, health, education, employment, political and social rights are inaccessible to them. As a result of this social rejection and inequality they have formulated their own way of life (Abdullah et al., 2012; Abbas et al., 2014). This kind of societal behavior pushes intersexes toward social exclusion. They experience psychological trauma and the urge to commit suicide (Clements, Marx & Katz, 2006). Until 2011, Intersexes couldn't

have any legal identity of their particular gender. They had to choose either category of male or female to get any identity. In 2011, the Supreme Court of Pakistan gave a verdict allowing transgender/intersexes to get national identity cards (NIC) and also confirmed their right to vote. Although, it was a nice effort to eliminate social injustice yet the social acceptance of intersexes is a big question mark (The Moose, 2013, June 5).

Individuals who are excluded from mainstream society express aggressive behavior. Those persons who have less quality of social skillfulness are found to be biased. Excluded people are disappointed in their social relationships and they have no expectations from their relations. In addition to this hostility are both the cause and the result of the exclusion. To get away from the exclusion and loneliness, tendency to use of drugs have been (Check et al., 1985). People with low self-esteem have feelings of anxiety; they are shy and have low satisfaction levels (Gierveld et al., 2006). Loneliness is generated as the product of perceived social isolation or the social pain (Laursen & Hart, 2013). Loneliness also affects the mental powers of the individual, so they become more possessive from the social threats. As a result their needs are not fulfilled sufficiently (Bekhet et al., 2008).

Intersexes face social exclusion and isolation, they are prone to physical and psychological issues. Lombardi (2001) is of the view that acknowledging the marginalized health care status of the intersex cannot help the intersex population much. The researcher identified some barriers that the intersex individuals face while accessing health care facilities. Health care professionals treat them differently and some intersex reported that they do not visit the health facilities due to the prior discriminatory experience of their fellows. Abdullah, Basharat, Kamal, Sattar, Hassan, Jan, & Shafqat (2012) explained the nature of social exclusion pushing the Pakistani *Hijras* towards commercial sex work they concluded that intersexes are an excluded group of society and due to a restricted access to economic and educational opportunities they indulge themselves in selling sex.

Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Intersex

Transvestites, transsexuals and eunuchs which are commonly recognized as *Hijras* and are involved in precarious sexual behavior despite of regular or irregular, paying or nonpaying sexual partners or customers (Rehan, 2007). Paid sex work is prevailing in Pakistani society day by day blending *Hijras* into professional sex work. This is adding to the population being infected by HIV (Abdullah et al., 2012). *Hijras* engagement in commercial sex is increasing but awareness level of sexual transmitted infections among them is very low and majority of the eunuchs are not sentient with the safe sex and its importance (Chaudhary et al., 2013). HIV positive cases have been recorded in Bangladesh (Khan et al., 2009). Taking a mere look globally we can see that the government's response is not satisfactory toward HIV (Lombardi, 2001). It is founded that during the development stage of identity intersex youth are more inclined to risk factors (Van Goozen et al., 1995).

Akhtar et al (2012) conducted a cross sectional research on HIV prevalence in male sex workers in Rawalpindi. They found that illiteracy, low income, and

ignorance were the social factors that also contributed to the high rate of HIV among intersex.

Subculture of Intersex

Subculture holds little distinction from the dominant culture and this differentiation is expressed by the virtue of some traditions and values. Sometimes the traditions are similar to dominant culture but are carried out in a different way,

Individuals dressed in a vulgar fashion which clap hands in a peculiar manner make other obscene gestured and some pass rude comments, which have actually become part of the intersex tradition. The cause of the strength and visibility of the intersex culture may be attributed to the mistreatment they receive from society.

Mohyuddin & Ali (2013) focused on hierarchal setup, cultural rituals and different roles performed by intersex in their subgroups. They found that there were two sociological divisions of male sex workers based on their age and physical attributes. Everybody had his/her defined role in the structure. Moreover, they performed particular rituals to become a *Guru*, *Chela* and *Yaar*.¹

Challenges and Opportunities for Intersex

Despite some opportunities, intersex are facing several social problems. They are living under miserable plight and adversely ignored in every sphere of life. Important social contributory factors like social support, health, education, employment, political and social rights are inaccessible to them. As a result of this social rejection and social inequality intersex have formulated their own way of life (Abdullah et al., 2012; Abbas et al., 2014). This kind of societal behavior pushes intersex toward social exclusion. They experience psychological trauma and the urge to commit suicide (Clements, Marx & Katz, 2006).

The expression of intersex is used both in singular and plural meanings. Intersex are treated with discrimination and neglected in almost all sphere of life almost in every country of the world. In America the intersex are treated with injustice and bigotry. They are most likely to become victims of physical and sexual violence (Majd, Marksamer & Reyes, 2009; Stotzer, 2009). Similarly in Europe intersex are also a socially excluded and marginalized population (Takács, 2006). In Asia, China, an important country with world's largest population, also excludes the intersex and does not admit many of their due social and legal rights (Mountford, 2010).

The history is not much clear about social status and roles of intersex in the subcontinent. However, in ancient Indian Vedic texts and later on in famous erotic book "*Kama Sutra*" there is an explicit detail of intersex, their existence and their roles (Wilhelm, n.d.). In Muslim Mughal era intersex were given prestige because they served in royal parties and had direct access to "*Harems*" (Sayyani, 2012; The Times of India, April 27, 2008).

¹ *Guru*: the mother / master of intersex family that governs household and run external and internal affair
Chela: the child or disciple of the mother (*Guru*)
Yaar: the intimate sexual partner of young intersex

Today intersex are a highly precluded group in South Asian countries. Major South Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh share almost same social and economic conditions. Intersex are very vulnerable among these countries and are treated with oppression, inequality, harassment and injustice (UNDP India, 2010; Miller, 2002; Khan et al., 2009).

Statement of Problem

Intersex is a marginalized group of society and facing discrimination upon gender identity. The purpose of this study is to identify the socio-cultural barriers faced by the intersex that threaten them from social inclusion. The study also took into account the stigmatization and actual experience of social inclusion and exclusion experienced by the intersex.

Research objective

- I. To explore what is the social behavior toward intersex and how they are pushed into social inclusion/exclusion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The use of qualitative research is appropriate for the study because we are trying to find out the experiences of intersex towards social inclusion and exclusion. Keeping in view the nature and purpose of this research, available material resources, time frame and feasibility of this research, the study was conducted in district Sialkot along with Chawinda. The target population was intersex who lived in district Sialkot and in Chawinda. The researcher selected data by using purposive sampling in which 20 individuals were selected for interview 10 individuals from district Sialkot and 10 individuals from Chawinda. In-depth interviews were conducted for data collection along with non-participant observation and un-structured interview guide was used for this purpose. Field notes were taken and after the consent of respondents interview was recorded.

Researchers informed the respondents about this study and its objectives, and told that their experiences and views are very important for this study. Researchers conducted interviews when respondents were willing to share their experiences with them. Interviews were recorded with the permission of respondents. It was said to interviewees that they could leave at any stage of interview without explaining any reason to interviewer.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A complex system of division can be found within a society. People are segregated by their race, gender, religion, economy, political ideology and social status. However, in general a society most likely can be divided into two groups: the majority group and the minority group. The majority group always supersedes minority group in the wake of creating its hegemony. On the basis of some biological and social attributes, intersex are also considered one of the minority groups found in our population. It was found by study that intersex was disadvantaged and exploited group of the society. Intersex are pushed to remain distant and neglected in social contribution. They are ignored in core social

inclusion factors like, social support, economy, health, education, religion and politics.

Social Support: A Dream for Intersex

Social support is an integral part of human society. Social support has positive effects on physical and mental health of an individual. Social networks give emotional wellbeing, a sense of belongingness and act as a guard in times of distress. It was found that there was extreme level of disbanding relationships with intersex by the society. People don't like to build relations with intersex community. Most of intersex are rejected by their families, friends and other social groups. Researches indicate that in the same social setup intersex are discriminated and rebuked by their parents as compared to their non-intersex siblings (Factor & Rothblum, 2008).

This kind of social rejection throws intersex in depression and despair. One of the respondents said, *"We are not accepted by our families. We cannot reach them. We seek refuge in temporary relationships with our yaars (sex partners) knowing it is just an illusion."*

Most of the respondents said that they did not have any close or emotional relationships with any other. Some of them were only close to their mothers as compared to their fathers and siblings. They had only contact with their mothers and not with other family members. A respondent reported:

"When I am unable to suppress the strong desire of meeting with my mother, I set off on my journey before evening. My hometown is on a four-hour drive from Sialkot. I reach there at night. My mother opens the door for me and I meet my mother. My other family members usually don't meet me but sometimes one of my elder brothers inquires about my health and daily life. My mother and I weep and talk to each other. We don't sleep the whole night and I leave home early before dawn."

It was noted that some of the respondents believed that their association with their families was not appropriate and it would cause disgrace to their families. But an eagerness of family and social ties was found in almost every respondent. An intersex said with a deep sigh, *"We belong to everyone but no one belongs to us."* In response to a question regarding their care in illness or any other social need, most respondents replied that no such support was available to them.

Abdullah, M. A. et al (2012) found similar results in their study. They concluded that intersex had left their original families. They have very rare interaction with their parents, siblings and friends. Their families don't want to contact them because they are considered a mark of disgrace for them.

Financial Instability: A Calamity for Intersex

Economy is an important variable that affects the groups and individuals in terms of fulfilling their needs and defining their living standard. Intersex population face challenges every day economic that make their lives a real dilemma. There is palpable income gap found in intersex as compared to other social groups. The doors of employment remain closed for them. Eight respondents said that they did

not have any kind of employment; one respondent said that he/she had his/her own small business and one responded that he/she had a part time job. However, he/she said that earnings from that job were not enough to support his/her living.

One of the respondents answered;

“We cannot find any jobs. We maintain our living by begging from people and bearing the things which are unbearable otherwise. It is our destiny to always remain in makeup. We change ourselves daily. We have even forgotten our original identity.”

Most of the intersexes said that they often ran short of money and that their income was not enough to fulfill their daily needs. Another interviewee said, *“I have been begging here for the last two hours. I reach every person and vehicle and ask for help. However, I have just collected around 100 rupees despite asking for support from hundreds of people.”*

Financial crisis not only adversely impacts their living standard but is also harmful for their physical and psychological health. They don't have access to meals with proper nutrition. They live in congested and stifled rooms under unhygienic conditions. They become a soft target for malaria and different kinds of skin diseases.

Financial issues are also one of the push factors to engage intersexes in commercial sex industry. Without having proper knowledge of and resources to safe sex they are at high risk of getting infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (UN Pakistan, 2012; Nasir, 2013).

Khan et al (2009) also concluded that being a *Hijra* means you would remain unemployed. They found that intersexes wanted to get some job or work but they were rejected by employers because they considered them a sex symbol that could pollute other employees with their sexuality. Such labels force intersexes to become a beggar or a sex worker.

Police: Protector or Oppressor?

Police perform a crucial role in the protection of citizens and stability of a society. The intersexes experience with police is dismal and dejecting. The frequency of police violence is much higher as compared to the violence by the rest of the society that is faced by intersexes. Their interaction with police is a routine matter and they are victimized by police because they are an easy target.

A respondent reported:

“Police, my God! They are cruelest and inhumane than anyone else. We go through our lives begging and flattering other people so that other people could give us some charity. We collect each and every pie with difficulty. But whenever the policemen of the area want, they approach us, snatch all our day's income forcibly and walk away. We can't stop them, there is no one who can stop them.”

It was noted while conducting these interviews that intersex were frightened of the police. They could be summoned to police stations anytime regardless of whether

they did anything wrong or not. They also face discrimination and sexual harassment in police stations. One respondent said:

“Once we were robbed by some dacoits at our Dera (intersex residence). They took away all our belongings. We went to the area's police station to file an F.I.R. The station in-charge refused to register our complaint by saying that the police were not for Hijras. When we began to beat our chests (a form of lamenting), he, with the intention of keeping us quiet, said that the complaint had been registered. When we found no redressal of our grievances from the local station, we went to the District Police Officer. He listened to us and called up the relevant SHO to a quick action. But in the following days we were threatened and forced by local political leaders to withdraw our complaint against the local SHO.”

Another respondent also shared his story and said:

“I make my living by begging on the signals. I am often threatened by the mobile police teams. They tell me that I cannot beg there without their consent. They ask me for their share from the amount I gather by begging. When I resist they misbehave with me and not only snatch all of my income but also slap me. I went to the area in-charge of the police and told him that I was very poor, that I didn't have enough income to give him a share from. Your subordinates keep pressuring and terrorizing me. Please ask them not to bother me. The officer promised me to take action but still my problem has not been resolved”.

Erausquin, Reed & Blankenship (2011) in their study of police related experience of female sex workers discussed that there was strong association between police related experience and HIV prevalence and violence. Sex workers give gifts, money and sexual favors to police to avoid any imposition by them.

Either Social or Legal Rights: Discrimination Everywhere For Intersexes

Intersex are excluded and expelled from any kind of legal rights. Except for a few none of the respondents knew about his/her political rights. Most of the respondents did not have their identity cards marked with their actual gender (intersex) and they never cast a vote.

Citizenship rights of intersex are another dilemma for them. They feel they have no importance as citizens of the state. The respondents said that they were frequently discriminated against and society treated them differently. They did not play any kind of game or any other recreational activity because they believed that they were not welcome for such activities.

Intersexes face discriminatory behavior at every step. They are pushed back by social institutes and social organizations. Their due rights of education, vote and employment are ignored.

Abuse and Harassment: A Continued Ordeal for Intersexes

In every walk of life, intersex population face different kind of abuse and harassment. They are considered sex symbols and labeled as sex workers. They are forced to accept sexual interactions when they do not want to, touch inappropriately and sex without consent. Sexual harassment, vulgar gestures, winks and sensational

touch by everyday common people are very common for intersex. A respondent said:

“My parents considered me male and I was admitted to a boys’ school. I wanted to play with dolls and make dresses for them instead of going to school. I didn’t want to go to school. My teacher used to ask me to massage his hands, legs and body. He would take my hand into his and ask me to press harder. “Don’t you have physical force?” he would say. I now realize he might have gotten some form of sexual pleasure out of it. My classmate used to call me “Lady”. I hardly completed my eighth grade and quit the school.”

Psychological abuse is too frequent with intersex to separate from their daily life. They feel that they are different, laughing stock, inferior and incomplete. A sense of detachment from society puts them in stress and depression. The frequency of suicide attempts is much higher among intersex (Seidl, pp. 101,102, 239, 252). A respondent said in the words:

“I have been rejected by my family. My mother passed away last year but I was not even informed of her death. When I came to know, I was shocked. I cried bitterly. In my seclusion I say to God, ‘Oh Allah, why have you made me like this? Why am I not like others?’ I often lose my heart. I cannot enjoy deep sleep. I am often disturbed by nightmares and begin to cry and curse myself. Why don’t I die in some way and get rid of it all?”

Physical abuse is also faced by intersexes because they are considered weak. People also think it normal to express their aggression over their demands for begging. A respondent shared his experience, with tears in his eyes:

“I have been begging here for one hour. I reached a car about half an hour ago. A young man was in the driving seat and listening to music. I asked him for help but he ignored my voice. When I repeated my question he suddenly slapped me in the face. I am still feeling its sting.”

Such incidents reflect that intersex are susceptible to violence and aggression. They are thought of only as a source of amusement by the society and not treated as human beings. They are limited by society to live in a circle of their own.

Religious Rituals: Where to Practice?

Islam is the dominant religion of Pakistani society. All of the intersex that were interviewed were Muslims and they showed strong affiliation with religious beliefs and practices. However, diversity was found in their opinion related to social behavior based on religious ideology. Four respondents said that religion was a source of income for them. Almsgivers donate them *Sadaqah* and *Khairat* (donations and alms) with the sacred belief that it will please God. Six respondents believed that religion was a major cause of social antagonism. Religion has defined rights for men and women but not for intersexes. Moreover, religion prohibits cross dressing and disguising one’s identity (Jami, 2010). One of the respondents said:

“I offer prayer at home. I don’t go to mosque. Once I went to a mosque for offering prayer but the imam (prayer leader) forbade me to enter the mosque by saying that I was not paak (clean). I am an intersex and intersexes are not allowed in mosque.”

Another respondent said:

“I offer prayer five times a day but I offer them in solitude. However, I always offer Juma (Friday) prayer in the mosque. That particular day I wiped up all my makeup, took a bath, wore a male dress, hid my long hair in a cap and went to the mosque. Most of the men cannot recognize me as intersex in this way.”

The findings show that intersex are not accepted in religious gatherings. They perform their rituals in seclusion. Another respondent reported:

“We are anguished especially when we are segregated by religious leaders. Islam emphasizes on love but they hate us. When an intersex dies, we go to them and ask for Namaz-e-Janaza (funeral prayer). Sometimes, someone accepts our request and performs the prayer and sometimes we are refused by them. They say that there are no clear instructions in Islam about intersexes. We feel ourselves helpless over such occasions.”

Such statements give a view of how intersexes are excluded in religious rituals and gatherings. They are not accepted as normal religious follower rather they are considered outcasts.

CONCLUSION

Intersex population is a discriminated and stigmatized group of the society. The overall social behavior toward intersex is based on stereotypical beliefs. The study proves social rejection of intersex. The efforts made by Chief Justice of Supreme Court did not bring notable changes in the life of a common intersex. With the exception of only few intersex that have already been belongs to well to do families and have access to education and other social institutes; rest of the intersex still living same life. Many of them are even unaware of their political and social rights. Majority of the respondents were illiterate or below their high school certificate because they faced gender issues in educational institutes. The overall economic condition of the group is miserable and most of the intersex making their livelihood by begging and selling sex. They live in narrow and dark places under unhygienic conditions and are prone to different diseases. They perform their religious rituals within their close circle as they are not welcomed in religious gatherings. They do not have any social support to satisfy their emotional needs. They live under stress, depression and anxiety. They frequently face physical, psychological and sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1- The State has made the policy but still implementation is required.
- 2- For the education of intersex informal community schools might be established to eradicate this issue.
- 3- Social security is essential for good health among intersex
- 4- Media can play an important role to make a good image and kill stereotypical believes about intersex.

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