



## Original Article

## Challenges Faced by Transgender Individuals in Accessing Higher Education in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*This research will explore that how Pakistani laws have been established to protect transgender rights, while they still face a significant disadvantage in higher education. The main obstacles that impede the complete integration of transgender individuals into higher education would be examined in this study. The rights of transgender individuals have been protected through legislation, but social discrimination and institutional biases, along with the lack of proper support mechanisms, continue to pose significant challenges. Peer and teacher stigmas often create an unwelcoming environment for transgender students, who may also feel excluded. Moreover, numerous higher education institutions lack the necessary policies and resources to accommodate transgender students, including gender-neutral facilities and mental health services. This research further elaborates on how the lack of specific educational policies addressing transgender inclusion contributes to their marginalization within academic settings. The research is based on an in-depth analysis of both governmental policies and the experiences of transgender individuals within Pakistani universities. Based on qualitative data such as interviews and surveys with transgender students, the study identifies some systemic issues within institutions, including the role of education in perpetuating or reducing social inequalities. The paper concludes by discussing the need for creating inclusive educational environments sensitive to the unique needs of transgender students. It provides policy recommendations aimed at improving access to higher education for transgender individuals, making higher education in Pakistan a space for equality and inclusion.*

## Introduction

The term "transgender" is a composite of two words, "trans" and "gender." The prefix "trans" implies a sense of moving across or beyond, suggesting a transition or transformation. Transgender is a general term that describes transgender expression and identity in the current sociocultural context. A person is identified as transgender if they exhibit strange behavior that deviates from the norms expected at birth, or a gender expression that does not match the gender assigned at birth. Transgender individuals can be categorized in various ways, including transgender males, transgender females, male-to-female (MTF), female-to-male (FTM) individuals, and those identifying as binary or non-binary transgender (people do not only identify as male or female or identify as a mixture of both genders). This categorization also encompasses cross-dressers, individuals who wear clothing typically associated with a gender different from their own (Kumar, 2021).

In Pakistan, terminology related to transgender has changed over time. The most commonly used terms to refer to them are Khusra, Murat, Hijra, or Khawaja sira. Transgender individuals have existed in diverse cultures, races, and social strata throughout human history. Only the term "transgender" and the medical technology available to transsexuals (who are undergoing gender-affirming surgery to transition to a different gender) are new. The transgender community in Pakistan has suffered prolonged marginalization and discrimination, encountering major obstacles when it comes to accessing fundamental rights like education, healthcare, and employment. Their lack of legal recognition and protection has enlarged their social exclusion and increased their vulnerability to violence and mistreatment (Arum, 2023). There are no denying how unequally transgender people are treated in Pakistan. Whether it's the cause of education or the never-ending fight for fundamental rights. Pakistan's religious community is not ready to accept the transgender world right away. Several provisions of Pakistan's constitution protect the rights of transgender people, but few are enforced. The stigma associated with Pakistan's transgender population causes significant harm to them. They are often physically and sexually abused and are rarely treated with the respect they desire. They are also denied basic rights, including the right to education. Transgender education is viewed critically in Pakistan and presented as an alien concept. Pakistan recorded its first transgender population in the 2017 census. The number is estimated to be over 10,000. According to these estimates, the proportion of transgender people in the total population is 0.005%. However, there are still many problems. (Correspondent, 2022b). Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that transgender people have the same rights as all Pakistani citizens under Pakistan's constitution. The court directed the federal and state governments to provide rights in all areas of life, including education, employment, and inheritance (Pakhtunkhwetal., 2021).

Another notable development is that the transgender community gained the right to vote in federal elections in 2011 (Baloch, 2018; Assad, 2012). In response to a court decision, Pakistan saw the establishment of its first school for transgender students in Lahore, located in the Punjab province. This innovative institution, known as the Gender Guardians School, received 25 enrolments on its opening day, earning praise from human rights advocates, legal professionals, educators, and students for its extraordinary efforts to integrate the marginalized transgender community into mainstream education (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 represents a significant development in advancing the rights of transgender individuals in Pakistan. This legislation, which recognizes the third gender

as a separate and equal identity, is designed to offer legal safeguards and ensure the social integration of transgender persons (Arum,2023).

Transgender persons in conservative Pakistan encounter numerous challenges, including societal harassment and exclusion (Baloch and Sheehan, 2018). A significant hindrance in addressing these issues is the lack of accurate data on the transgender population. Although official records are absent, estimates suggest that there are approximately 1.5 million transgender individuals in Pakistan (Jami, 2005; Assad, 2012). The government faces problems in formulating effective policies due to the absence of precise population figures. Social discrimination, economic hardships, and prejudice make it difficult for these persons to access education, with only a small minority receiving formal schooling.

Unfortunately, no specific literacy ratio is available for this demographic (Rahman, 2009). Siddique et al. (2017) shed light on the daily struggles faced by transgender individuals, emphasizing their substandard living conditions, limited literacy rates, and the impediments of humiliation and discrimination in accessing education and suitable employment opportunities in Pakistan.

Discussing the challenges related to transgender education, Tabasco and Jamil (2014) shared their research experiences, highlighting the desire of transgender individuals to access education, which educational institutions often deny. Additionally, there is a lack of government initiatives to promote transgender education. Their study recommended the development and implementation of education policies by both government and non-government organizations at the national and local levels. Nasir and Yaris (2016) argued that a significant portion of transgender persons remain uneducated and are engaged in professions that society does not consider honorable. They emphasized the importance of government support to enable transgender individuals to pursue careers of their choice. The present study will explore distinctive patterns in transgender identity within various subgroups of the transgender community (Beamy and Rankin, 2011).

Today, several NGOs and institutions, such as the Blue Veins Organization, Umeed Partnership, and Gender Interactive Alliance, have advocated for transgender education. These groups are making non-stop efforts to create possibilities for transgender schooling, even though their effect stays restricted in scale. Achieving significant desires for transgender schooling in Pakistan necessitates collective societal efforts to extrude perceptions and attitudes towards transgender individuals (Correspondent, 2022b).

This studies objectives to discover the demanding situations, strategies, and regulations associated with transgender schooling in better schooling establishments in Punjab. In conclusion, this study seeks to reinforce the voices of transgender college students and advocates, in the end contributing to a greater inclusive and supportive academic environment. The studies of transgender college students in better academic establishments are specific and complex. As a marginalized institution inside a gender-normative society, those college students frequently face enormous demanding situations in gaining access to academic possibilities and help services. Despite growing recognition and efforts to help numerous pupil bodies, transgender college students regularly stumble upon boundaries associated with identity, acceptance, and get right of entry to to resources. Current records at the wide variety of brazenly transgender college students attending better schooling establishments are unknown. However,

studies suggest that the wide variety of transgender-recognized and gender-non-conforming college students is growing (Beemyn, 2010; Butler, 2004; Kosciw, 2010).

College students are at a developmental stage where they may begin to question and explore their identity and ascribed gender. During this time, students with non-traditional gender expressions and identities may be particularly vulnerable to oppression and discrimination (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Beemyn, 2010). Even in the supposed safety of a college campus, transgender individuals are at high risk for discrimination in housing, medical care, employment, and education. Consequently, transgender students experience higher rates of nonattendance, bullying, and physical and sexual assault (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010).

## **Legal and Policy Framework for Transgender Rights in Pakistan**

Transgenders in Pakistan have faced extreme social, legal, and institutional obstacles since the beginning of their lives and have been marginalized in education, employment, and healthcare. Nevertheless, the legal framework for transgender rights in Pakistan has evolved drastically in the last few years. Legislative reforms, court decisions, and policies in place to protect the rights of transgender people have been taken as a step forward toward addressing discrimination against this group, though the implementation and effectiveness of such reforms vary. Constitutional and Legal Protections

The legal journey towards transgender rights in Pakistan earned a major milestone in the year 2011 as the Supreme Court of Pakistan presented a landmark ruling, insisting that transgender persons are equal beneficiaries of all the fundamental rights given by the Constitution of Pakistan. This judgment of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry recognized transgender people to be equal citizens under the law. The Supreme Court decision underlined that transgender people should not be deprived of any right that others enjoy, and this includes inheritance, employment, and education. The court decision was a significant point in the struggle for transgender rights, marking a turning point toward greater legal protection of this marginalized group (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021).

The Pakistan government made the advancement in this direction even more effective through providing transgender rights in a vote to cast their vote at federal level in 2012. Another landmark movement that declared the full-fledged citizens to cast votes with complete democracy (Baloch, 2018) but at practical implementation at day-to-day basis still was relatively slow and not much has been completed across various sections of society.

## **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018**

One of the monumental pieces of legislation that has drastically changed the legal landscape for transgender people in Pakistan is the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018. This Act is a landmark step forward in recognizing and affirming the legal rights of transgender people in Pakistan. According to this legislation, transgender persons are explicitly given the right to self-identify their gender. This was a revolutionary provision, as it allowed individuals to legally identify as male, female, or as a third gender, thereby aligning legal recognition with personal identity. The Act is particularly important as it acknowledges that gender identity is not confined to the binary framework of male and female, a recognition that is rare in many parts of the world (Arum, 2023). It requires the transgender persons to be granted equal opportunities in education, employment, and health care. To be precise, it includes

measures in educational institutions and employers that ensure the integration of transgender persons. Furthermore, it protects transgender individuals from all forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence, making the public as well as the private environment safer for transgender persons. This, besides that, sets forth establishing mechanisms under the auspices of the government for transgender people's integration into society, including the institution of welfare programs and health care systems suitable for their needs (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021).

The law protects transgender persons, but practical application has been inconsistent despite the legal protections offered. A critical issue in law is the lack of an overarching framework for its enforcement. There seems to be a lack of clarity on the implementation of specific provisions, and inadequate resources have been allocated towards its enforcement. Thus, transgender people continue to suffer from systematic discrimination and violence, and are not aware of their legal rights in several cases (Arum, 2023).

### **Barriers to Effective Legal Protection and Implementation**

While the criminal framework for transgender rights in Pakistan has advanced over the years, numerous limitations preclude the total implementation of those legal guidelines. One of the number one barrier is societal resistance to transgender rights, in particular in conservative, rural regions wherein conventional gender roles are deeply entrenched. The social stigma closer to transgender human beings is pervasive, and this cultural bias frequently influences how prison terms are enforced or overlooked in practice. Legal provisions meant to protect transgender human beings from discrimination in areas along with schooling and employment frequently fail to obtain the meant recipients due to the ones deeply held societal attitudes (Siddique et al., 2017).

Another main task to effective crook protection is the shortage of infrastructure and awareness. Although the Transgender Persons Act mandates unique protections and provisions, many transgender human beings are not aware of their rights or the crook mechanisms available to them. This loss of records is exacerbated through manner of method of a dearth of crook aid reasserts and advocacy channels that would guide transgender human beings in setting ahead their rights. Furthermore, governmental institutions are frequently poorly ready to deal with transgender troubles, as there may be a restrained information of the complexities worried in transgender identity (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). The enforcement of legal guidelines associated with transgender rights additionally stays problematic. Pakistan's regulation enforcement organizations aren't sufficiently skilled to address troubles associated with transgender people. Discrimination via way of means of police and public officers remains a enormous issue, with transgender humans regularly going through harassment and mistreatment once they try and document crimes or are seeking help (Siddique et al., 2017). In many cases, transgender people worry retaliation or humiliation in the event that they technique the government for assistance.

### **The Role of Education in Legal Inclusion**

Education is one of the key regions wherein the criminal framework for transgender rights has each stepped forward and faltered. The Gender Guardians School in Lahore, Punjab, is a incredible instance of the high-quality effect of criminal reforms on transgender training. Established in reaction to the 2011 Supreme Court ruling and the 2018 Transgender Persons Act, the Gender Guardians School ambitions to offer transgender college students with an inclusive and supportive academic environment. Despite this pioneering effort, the shortage of huge aid for transgender training stays a huge challenge. Most academic establishments do now no longer

have rules or infrastructure in vicinity to aid transgender college students, and societal attitudes closer to transgender humans in academic settings are nevertheless in large part negative. In this context, criminal reforms want to be followed with the aid of using more efforts to alternate societal attitudes and offer academic establishments with the important sources to enforce inclusive practices (Tabasco & Jamil, 2014).

## **Recent Developments**

In addition to prison advancements, Pakistan's authorities have taken numerous essential steps to beautify the inclusion of transgender people in society. In 2021, the authorities released a countrywide database for transgender people, aimed toward imparting them with prison identity files that replicate their gender identity. This is an important step in the direction of making sure that transgender human beings can get admission to services, such as healthcare, education, and employment, without being discriminated in opposition to because of a mismatch among their prison files and gender identity.

Moreover, numerous NGOs and civil society businesses preserve to suggest for the implementation of the prison protections assured below the Transgender Persons Act. These businesses are concerned in efforts to elevate consciousness approximately transgender rights, offer assist services, and push for the enforcement of present laws. However, those efforts want to be scaled as much as attain a broader target market and to impact systemic change (Rahman, 2009).

## **Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Promoting Transgender Education in Pakistan**

Transgenders in Pakistan have been subjected to social exclusion, limited opportunities, and systemic discrimination for quite a long time, especially in the educational field. Although legal frameworks like the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 have given transgender people the right to education, the path toward equality is not an easy one because of the prevalent stigmas, institutional biases, and infrastructure inadequacies. In such a setting, non-governmental organizations and civil society in Pakistan have worked significantly toward advocating for and promoting transgender education. They have increased awareness about the rights of the transgender community, and this has created real avenues that allow transgender individuals to gain access to education, among other means of bettering themselves in their own lives and professionally.

## **Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns by NGOs**

A key contribution of NGOs to the merchandising of transgender schooling in Pakistan has been their function in advocacy and recognition campaigns. Many companies, together with Blue Veins and the Umeed Partnership, have spearheaded public recognition efforts geared toward converting poor societal perceptions of transgender human beings, specifically in academic contexts. These companies have interaction in academic campaigns that intention to mission deep-rooted misconceptions, lessen stigma, and spotlight the rights of transgender people, which include their proper to schooling (Baloch & Sheehan, 2018). Blue Veins, an outstanding NGO operating on transgender rights, has labored drastically in elevating recognition approximately the significance of which include transgender people in formal schooling systems. Through seminars, public talks, and media campaigns, they've added interest to the obstacles transgender human beings face in schooling and feature recommended for

coverage adjustments that prioritize their inclusion (Jami, 2005). Similarly, companies just like the Gender Interactive Alliance recognition on bridging the space among transgender people and academic establishments via way of means of enticing without delay with faculties and universities, encouraging them to enforce inclusive guidelines and offer secure areas for transgender students (Baloch, 2018).

### **Direct Education Initiatives: Schools and Training Programs**

Beyond advocacy, many NGOs have taken direct motion through organizing instructional tasks that particularly cater to transgender college students. One of the maximum massive examples of such an initiative is the status quo of the Gender Guardians School in Lahore, Punjab. This organization became created in reaction to the 2011 Supreme Court ruling, which mandated identical instructional rights for transgender people. On its starting day, the faculty enrolled 25 transgender college students, which became a tremendous achievement, for the reason that transgender schooling had formerly been taken into consideration an alien idea in Pakistan (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). The Gender Guardians School gives transgender college students secure and supportive surroundings to pursue schooling without worry of discrimination or harassment. This initiative presents crucial instructional support, vocational schooling, and lifestyles capabilities packages geared toward empowering transgender people and improving their possibilities of getting into the workforce. Through those direct schooling tasks, NGOs aren't simplest selling literacy however also are addressing the social and emotional desires of transgender college students, permitting them to combine into society with dignity and respect (Tabasco & Jamil, 2014). Moreover, a few NGOs have advanced vocational schooling packages for transgender people who've confronted obstacles to gaining access to formal schooling. These packages consciousness on offering realistic capabilities, inclusive of tailoring, splendor services, and laptop capabilities, that could assist transgender human beings reap monetary independence and self-sufficiency. For example, the Umeed Partnership in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gives vocational schooling packages tailor-made to the transgender community, hence increasing their expert possibilities and fostering financial independence (Rahman, 2009).

### **Partnerships with Governmental and Educational Institutions**

Among its notable roles in promoting education for transgender individuals, the role played by civil society and NGOs is their co-work with governmental bodies and educational institutions. In many cases, NGOs have collaborated with government offices in pushing the government to start legal protections for transgendered people, especially in school settings. They have liaised with universities, colleges, and schools to initiate policies to allow transgendered students into schools and also ensure safety and inclusion among them. Such partnerships have also resulted in the existence of gender-neutral facilities at educational institutions, such as bathrooms and dormitories to cater to the needs of transgender students uniquely (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021).

In addition to advocating for policies, NGOs have helped schools create curricula and programs that address transgender problems, fostering an inclusive and conscious atmosphere. A wider cultural knowledge of gender variety has resulted from these partnerships, since certain Pakistani colleges now offer gender studies programs that highlight the difficulties faced by transgender individuals (Jami, 2005).

## Challenges Faced by NGOs in Promoting Transgender Education

Despite the positive impact the NGOs have had, much remains to be done because of the challenges they face to promote transgender education. Firstly, lack of resources greatly hinders their efforts at promoting transgender education. Whereas NGOs such as Blue Veins and the Gender Interactive Alliance are doing great work in transgender education advocacy, their capacities are often limited by resource constraints, which prevent their scaling up of initiatives nationally. The lack of funding also restricts them from accessing the marginalized transgender communities in rural or less accessible areas (Baloch, 2018). Besides, NGOs and civil society corporations are nonetheless up in opposition to conservative sectors of society, which includes political, religious, and conventional institutions. Despite having prison protection, transgender human beings in Pakistan are although socially ostracized, especially in academic institutions. NGOs' tries to sell inclusive guidelines in faculties and universities are often hampered with the aid of using this reluctance to change (Siddique et al., 2017). The loss of thorough records on Pakistan's transgender populace affords some other difficulty. The improvement of centered guidelines and projects that cater to the specific necessities of transgender human beings calls for correct records. However, many transgender human beings do now no longer overtly pick out themselves in surveys or census records due to the stigma and invisibility of the transgender community. This makes it difficult for NGOs to decide the scope of the problem and allocate assets efficiently (Arum, 2023).

### Limited Financial Resources and Funding

The major challenge to NGOs and civil society organizations promoting transgender education in Pakistan is the limited availability of finances and funding. Financial limitations significantly impact the scope, scale, and effectiveness of the educational programs conducted for the transgender individuals. Though organizations like Blue Veins, Umeed Partnership, and the Gender Interactive Alliance have done some great work for transgender rights and education, their work is hindered because of insufficient funding. The lack of funds has implications not only for the execution of running programs but also limits the number of people that NGOs could reach, especially in more rural and less developed parts of the country.

### Funding Shortages and Their Impact on Educational Initiatives

NGOs engaged in transgender education usually depend on external donors, governmental grants, and corporate sponsorships. These sources of funding are usually unreliable and inadequate to sustain long-term projects (Rahman, 2009). Many NGOs have to run on shoestring budgets, limiting their ability to provide adequate educational services or to expand outreach programs to marginalized transgender communities beyond urban centers. Thus, the support and resources to access education for transgender individuals in rural areas, where the intensity of social exclusion and discrimination is potentially greater, remain largely absent.

For instance, Blue Veins is one of the prominent bodies in transgender rights advocacy that has struggled to maintain adequate funding for its education projects. Such a limitation on funding means they cannot offer scholarships, train their members, or start a new educational facility. In this regard, it is limiting the scope of their reach since transgender students, most of whom come from poorer backgrounds, cannot afford any basic educational tools (Baloch & Sheehan, 2018).

## **Dependence on Short-Term Funding**

Another trouble exacerbating the economic demanding situations confronted via way of means of NGOs is their dependence on short-time period investment. Many NGOs depend on donor funds, which can be frequently allotted for unique initiatives with constrained duration. These presents usually do now no longer offer the economic balance required for long-time period applications which could sustainably combine transgender people into formal schooling systems. As a result, the NGOs may additionally face traumatic conditions in maintaining their responsibilities or scaling them up with in the absence of non-forestall monetary help (Siddique et al., 2017). For instance, the Gender Guardians School in Lahore, one of the first educational institutions for transgender students, faced issues in ensuring long-term sustainability due to restricted authorities' funding and reliance on donor contributions (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). The lack of confident monetary help similarly hampers the potential of NGOs to regular eternal positions for knowledgeable transgender employees or educator's interior their initiatives. These roles are crucial for the development of instructional content material fabric tailored to the dreams of transgender people. When funding isn't confident, NGOs may be forced to rent temporary or volunteer employees, which limits the splendid and consistency of the educational services offered (Jami, 2005).

## **Barriers to Expanding Programs in Rural Areas**

NGOs' capability to increase their academic applications into rural groups, in which transgender humans are regularly even extra ostracized than their city counterparts, is similarly hampered via way of means of a loss of good enough finance. Due to elevated discrimination, transgender humans in rural Pakistan have a tougher time having access to academic opportunities. Rural academic establishments are commonly much less receptive to transgender college students because of the social stigma connected to transgender identity, and NGOs locate it extra hard to fight this discrimination and provide offerings to those groups because of a loss of funding (Baloch, 2018). Additionally, NGOs' funding constraints limit their capacity to carry out awareness efforts in isolated and rural locations. In order to encourage parents and local communities to embrace transgender education and to change cultural views toward transgender people, these efforts are essential. NGOs cannot build the educational infrastructure required to help transgender kids in less urbanized areas or effectively interact with local communities without adequate financing (Tabasco & Jamil, 2014).

## **Governmental Support and the Need for Public Funding**

While the authorities of Pakistan has enacted prison reforms to shield transgender rights, which includes the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, monetary assist from the authorities for transgender training stays inadequate. This loss of governmental monetary dedication in addition complicates the efforts of NGOs. Despite the Supreme Court ruling in 2011 spotting transgender people's rights to training, there was inadequate public investment allotted to make sure that instructional establishments are ready with the vital sources to deal with transgender students (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021).

Additionally, authorities-funded tasks focused on transgender training tend to be sporadic and shortage continuity, as they're regularly challenge to adjustments in political management and

priorities. This inconsistency in governmental investment and assist undermines the effectiveness of long-time period packages that NGOs have evolved to assist transgender training (Arum, 2023).

### **Strategies for Overcoming Financial Constraints**

NGOs that assist transgender people in Pakistan must investigate alternate funding models that incorporate a variety of support sources in order to overcome these obstacles. These could involve business alliances, community-based fundraising campaigns, and partnerships with foreign organizations. Increasing collaborations with regional and global partners can broaden the range of resources available and lessen reliance on any one source of funding. NGOs could also push for the government to set aside particular funds for transgender education in national and provincial education plans. NGOs may ensure that adequate funding is provided to assist transgender education in both urban and rural areas by interacting with government officials and policymakers to advocate for its inclusion as a national priority.

### **Lack of Comprehensive Data on the Transgender Population**

The absence of thorough statistics on the transgender population in Pakistan is one of the biggest obstacles to meeting their educational demands. In addition to impeding the formation of well-informed policies, the lack of precise and trustworthy data also makes it more difficult to allocate resources efficiently and launch focused instructional programs. There is little knowledge about the population size, socioeconomic circumstances, and educational requirements of transgender individuals in Pakistan because they have long been neglected and excluded from official demographic data gathering. For NGOs, civil society organizations, and the government, this lack of data poses serious obstacles to promoting and carrying out successful initiatives that support transgender education.

### **Challenges in Census Data Collection**

One of the primary data sources regarding the population size of a country is its census. However, the Census in Pakistan never reflected an effective means of reporting the Transgenders in the mainstream society. Transgenders were identified in Pakistan 2017 census as another group, but the gathering process of data through a census was far from complete and accurate (Correspondent, 2022a). In 2017, there were close to 10,000 registered transgender people in Pakistan; however, these numbers have long been challenged on the ground of underreporting and misclassifications (Siddique et al., 2017). Since most of them fear mistreatment and violence, several transgender individuals remain reluctant to make public declarations about their genders, resulting in significant undercounts.

In addition, not all transgender people recognize their identity as "transgender" in official documents but claim to be "Khawaja Sira" or "Hijra"-concepts that are very common in the culture of transgender people but do not mirror the diversity of transgender's gender identities (Baloch & Sheehan, 2018). Consequently, the census data of 2017 is generally regarded as inadequate and inaccurate for the development of policies or programs that meet the specific needs of the transgender community, especially when it comes to education (Rahman, 2009).

## **Barriers to Conducting Accurate Surveys**

This problem is made worse by the paucity of reliable surveys and studies pertaining to the transgender community. The difficulties faced by transgender people in Pakistan are highlighted in a number of published academic studies and reports; however, there is a severe lack of government-sponsored research that would offer thorough information on the educational performance and access of transgender people. There are a number of barriers for transgender students in education, such as societal stigma, lack of institutional support, and limited family acceptance. These challenges remain understudied, though, due to the absence of any formal mechanisms for data collection, like student surveys or national databases focused specifically on the education of transgender students (Siddique et al., 2017).

In addition, most transgender individuals are not identified with classical educational categories and are not able to navigate bureaucratic processes that do not recognize their gender identities. If educational systems do not categorize or recognize the transgender individual, then these systems cannot accurately collect statistics about the education status and experience of the transgender individual. The lack of these numbers makes it difficult for nongovernmental organizations and the government to estimate the severity of exclusion in education so that they can design interventions appropriately (Jami, 2005).

## **Impact on Policy Formulation and Resource Allocation**

The creation of policies and the distribution of resources are directly impacted by the absence of thorough data. Policymakers cannot create policies that effectively support transgender children unless they have a precise grasp of the number, socioeconomic status, and educational needs of the transgender population (Beemyn, 2010). As demonstrated by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, which, despite its progressive nature, does not provide sufficient guidance on how to reform education for transgender individuals within the institution and cannot ensure that educational resources are used appropriately (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). It is nearly impossible to gauge their progress in improving transgender accessibility in schools in light of these realities.

Furthermore, the scarce availability of data leads to a situation where education for transgender individuals is not given due consideration in the overall national framework of education. Government budgets, institutional resources, and educational curricula are designed without due consideration of the specific needs of transgender students. This lack of understanding leads to educational programs that do not cater to the needs of transgender people, further marginalizing them and denying them equal access to education (Rahman, 2009).

## **Undocumented Transgender Individuals and Their Educational Exclusion**

Most transgender people are illegal, live outside of the formal economy, and lack access to educational credentials or national identity cards. Since the majority of educational institutions demand official identity for registration and attendance, this further excludes the transgender population from formal education systems (Baloch, 2018). One of the matters that maintains transgender men and women from having access to faculty is the lack of sincere records approximately their criminal and social status. Therefore, locating and achieving individuals who want guide the maximum is a chief problem for NGOs and civil society businesses that guide

transgender education (Siddique et al., 2017). In addition, the absence of information series at the socio-monetary situations of the transgender populace makes it not possible to create custom designed monetary help packages. Transgender human beings are significantly poverty-stricken, and this situation in addition restricts them from having access to education. As the monetary demanding situations amongst transgender college students aren't acknowledged clearly, NGOs and authorities' organizations can't distribute scholarships, monetary aid, or different guide packages efficiently to allow them to interact in education (Jami, 2005).

### **Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Filling the Data Gap**

NGOs and civil society businesses have taken at the important process of bridging the facts hole via their very own studies and network outreach tasks in mild of the shortage of dependable records from authorities' sources. For instance, research and surveys aimed toward figuring out the barriers transgender humans come upon in acquiring training were executed via way of means of businesses which includes Blue Veins and Umeed Partnership; however, those are closely resource-restrained and impacted via way of means of the bigger social context (Tabasco & Jamil, 2014). However, such research is frequently fragmented, has a limited reach, and isn't always shared or used by decision-makers to alter the system.

Furthermore, the growing reliance on community-based participatory research has empowered NGOs to involve transgender people themselves in the process of data collection. Thus, transgender people's needs and challenges regarding education are determined primarily by them. However, the scale of such efforts remains limited, and the entire societal and governmental machinery remains deprived of the adequate data for long-term planning (Siddique et al., 2017).

### **Social Stigma and Discrimination**

Social stigma and discrimination have been the most dominant factors against transgender people in Pakistan, especially regarding access to education. Transgender people have been perceived in society mostly through prejudice, exclusion, and negative stereotypes, causing them to be socially excluded and marginalized. Such a stigma, deeply embedded in culture, religion, and social norms, intensifies problems for transgender people both outside and inside the school environment.

### **Cultural and Religious Stigma**

In Pakistan, a largely orthodox and religious society, gender non-conformity is held to be an insult on the traditional beliefs of their gender roles and moral activities. The idea of the transgender individual, who can't fit into the binary form of gender, is incomprehensible and considered an anomaly. In Pakistan, many transgender people, including "Khawaja Sira," face harsh judgment by society, mainly because of the fact that their gender identity does not align with traditional gender norms (Baloch & Sheehan, 2018). Regarding education, this stigma manifests in different ways, including verbal abuse, bullying, and exclusion from classrooms and activities.

Religious interpretations, mainly from conservative groups, add to the exclusion of transgender persons. Although Islam does not ban the existence of transgender persons, some religious figures and scholars in Pakistan state that transgender persons violate divine intention, which

results in the exclusion of transgender persons (Rahman, 2009). Such a religious-based exclusion creates difficulties for transgender persons to enter educational institutions, as most students and staff members tend to be influenced by traditional religious beliefs.

### **Impact of Stigma on Education**

Education is frequently interrupted and equitable educational opportunities are denied to transgender individuals due to social stigma. In addition to being harassed, the majority of transgender children are compelled to leave school due to the hostile atmosphere. According to research by Tabasco and Jamil (2014), transgender kids frequently experience bullying from their classmates. Exclusion from group activities, physical assault, and verbal abuse are frequent occurrences. Their academic performance and personal development are further hampered by emotional discomfort, worry, and low self-esteem brought on by such events.

Moreover, schools often lack the policies and support structures required to prevent harassment and discrimination of transgender students. Transgender people face the risk of being maltreated in the classroom and at school in the absence of formal recognition and policies protecting against discrimination. Transgender students suffer from isolation and alienation when supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and gender-neutral facilities are lacking (Beemyn, 2010). Many transgender students, therefore, are forced to drop out or study at home as they are unable to pursue their academic path in such an environment that is hostile and unsafe for them.

### **Discrimination in Enrollment and Admissions**

Transphobia goes beyond bullying and harassment at the school level; transgendered individuals also experience problems with being admitted. The legal definition of a person's gender identity cannot recognize it. This makes many transgender people lack educational documents that can correctly indicate their gender identity. Educational institutions often demand identity documents such as national identity cards or birth certificates to enroll in a program. Therefore, the institutions may deny admission to transgender individuals whose documents do not align with their gender identity (Siddique et al., 2017). This institutional discrimination denies transgender students the opportunity to enter a classroom, making them another barrier to formal education.

Lack of gender-neutral options in official forms and documents compounds this issue. Most of the transgender individuals, especially in transition, may not possess identification that reflects their current gender status, and therefore face the possibility of being turned down by educational institutions altogether. It is more problematic for such students who wish to advance to higher education but find themselves unable to penetrate through the bureaucratic barriers erected by these institutions (Jami, 2005).

### **Psychological and Emotional Impact of Discrimination**

According to research, transgender college students have a appreciably better charge of depression, anxiety, and suicidal mind than their cisgender counterparts (Kosciw et al., 2010). The ongoing pressure of navigating an surroundings wherein they're now no longer generic can result in intense emotional distress, that may then have an effect on their educational

achievement and average well-being. Social stigma and discrimination have a profound mental effect on transgender college students.

In addition, social exclusion from instructional establishments reasons transgender college students to come to be isolated. When college students aren't supported with the aid of using their friends or teachers, they start to sense disconnected from the relaxation of the college community. Thus, they come to be alienated. Such alienation may be proven thru decrease involvement in college activities, lesser educational engagement, and average lessening of motivation to succeed (Beemyn, 2010).

### **Social Reinforcement of Discrimination**

Societal discrimination towards transgender people in schooling is frequently supported via way of means of own circle of relatives and network attitudes. In maximum cases, households might also additionally disown or barren region their transgender youngsters due to cultural beliefs, as a result leaving them without a assist. This loss of assist from their households provides to the demanding situations of transgender college students in schooling. They might also additionally ought to war on their very own in antagonistic and risky instructional environments (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). Moreover, transgender college students also are below stress to undertake conventional gender roles, which provides to their stigma. Media illustration additionally contributes to poor stereotypes approximately transgender human beings. The transgender human beings in Pakistan are portrayed in movies, serials, and information as derogatory or stereotypical. This similarly complements the false impression approximately transgender human beings and will increase societal discrimination towards them (Arum, 2023). Such media portrayal makes it even extra tough for transgender college students to settle into instructional settings wherein such stereotypes are common.

### **Government's Role in Addressing Stigma and Discrimination**

The authorities of Pakistan has taken a few measures concerning problems of transgender discrimination in schooling. The Transgender Persons Protection of Rights Act 2018 is a vital regulation that seeks to shield and shield transgender individuals from problems of discrimination in all places, which include schooling (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021). According to regulation, transgender individuals are required to have same get right of entry to rights to schooling, fitness facilities, and employment possibilities alongside different citizens. However, no matter this criminal shield, social stigma and discrimination were deeply instilled into society, subsequently they deny transgender humans of this advantage of criminal protection. Furthermore, academic establishments' coverage enforcement mechanisms that make sure transgender college students are protected against all varieties of harassment and discrimination are inadequate. Although the proper to schooling is assured via way of means of regulation, transgender college students' academic reviews aren't substantially modified due to the fact academic establishments have now no longer taken proactive steps to put in force anti-discrimination policies (Baloch, 2018). Therefore, with a purpose to offer a certainly inclusive studying surroundings for transgender kids, the authorities and civil society ought to paintings collectively to fight social stigma and discrimination.

## **Limited Awareness and Understanding within Educational Institutions**

One major obstacle to the inclusion and achievement of transgender students in Pakistan is the lack of knowledge and comprehension of transgender issues in educational institutions. Educational institutions frequently lack the infrastructure, resources, and expertise required to properly accommodate transgender students, even in the face of legal frameworks that guarantee equal rights for transgender people. This knowledge gap further impedes transgender students' academic and social integration by sustaining prejudice, isolation, and a hostile learning environment.

## **Lack of Inclusive Curriculum and Training for Educators**

The absence of an inclusive curriculum on gender diversity and transgender issues in educational institutions in Pakistan constitutes one of the primary challenges confronting transgender students. The education system of Pakistan remains, in most aspects, rather binary, without focusing too much on the experiences and needs of non-binary and transgender persons (Beemyn, 2010). Gender education is usually narrow and heteronormative, and rarely, if ever, do transgender identities come up in textbooks, lectures, or extracurricular activities. This is an environment that does not allow for the reflection of transgender students in the curriculum, causing them to feel alienated and invisible.

Furthermore, teachers are not trained to support transgender students. In Pakistan, most teachers are not prepared to deal with issues of gender identity, sexual orientation, and the specific challenges that transgender students face. Therefore, educators may inadvertently perpetuate negative stereotypes, encourage bullying, or fail to provide adequate support for transgender students (Tabasco & Jamil, 2014). Poor training would lead to the absence of sympathy and empathy towards the transgender children. Teachers, for instance may lack proper appreciation of the students' lives with a lens of ignorance or prejudices. This is coupled by the general unavailability of professional development concerning transgender matters in schools which makes misinformation as well as biased attitudes continue into the classrooms.

## **Resistance to Transgender Inclusion**

Transgender integration into educational institutions is facing some of the most significant forms of resistance. Many in the educational administration, teacher groups, and students have fixed beliefs that transgender identification is unnatural or immoral. It is often based on the cultural and religious dogmas, which are deeply steeped in traditional gender and roles. Therefore, school administrations and university administrations resist taking policies or practices aimed at supporting transgender students within educational institutions (Siddique et al., 2017). This resistance may appear in different forms, including the unwillingness to introduce anti-discrimination policies, the refusal to recognize transgender students' gender identities, and inadequate efforts to stop bullying and harassment.

Another factor influencing this hesitation to acknowledge and provide support to transgender students in school settings is societal norms, which often portray transgender individuals as outsiders or "other." This social rejection in the society translates into school institutions where, despite legal protection for transgender people afforded under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, actual changes in school culture take time to happen. Educational institutions tend to neglect the incorporation of transgender students

into their diversity and inclusion efforts, thus adding to the plight of these students (Beemyn, 2010).

### **Absence of Support Systems and Gender-Sensitive Policies**

The absence of transgender student support networks in educational institutions is the biggest problem. For transgender college students to sense secure and supported of their instructional setting, assist networks which includes counseling offerings, secure places, and gender-impartial centers are crucial. However, those vital offerings are absent from a huge variety of Pakistani instructional establishments. Transgender college students are consequently greater vulnerable to discrimination and intellectual fitness troubles in view that they often do now no longer obtain sufficient course or assist at some stage in their instructional careers. Moreover, maximum instructional establishments lack rules which might be gender-touchy sufficient to deal with the desires of a transgender student. For instance, transgender college students are commonly confronted with diverse demanding situations in gaining access to suitable centers like restrooms or converting rooms, which might be commonly divided alongside gender lines. Lack of gender-impartial centers pushes transgender college students to both get right of entry to centers that don't trust their gender identification or go through harassment from friends and staff (Baloch & Sheehan, 2018). Moreover, transgender college students can face limitations withinside the classroom, consisting of being mis gendered through instructors or friends, or excluded from institution sports due to their gender identification. Issues which includes instructional recognition, documentation, and admissions also are tormented by the absence of gender-inclusive regulations. In Pakistan, transgender college students often come upon confusion and rejection whilst their gender identity isn't diagnosed in reliable papers like examination registrations or admission forms (Jami, 2005). Schools commonly have inflexible rules that don't receive non-binary or transgender identities, which similarly alienate people and make it difficult for them to correctly navigate the system.

### **Impact on Mental Health and Academic Performance**

Transgender students' academic performance and mental health are directly impacted by educational institutions' ignorance and lack of understanding. Transgender students are more likely to have mental health problems like anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem if they are subjected to discrimination, harassment, and a lack of support. Stress from not receiving support in school can have long-term consequences, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, and, in the worst situations, school dropout (Kosciw et al., 2010).

Not to mention, this lack of affirmation and understanding within schools, transgender students end up ingesting negative messages about being transgender. These self-related stigmas lead not only to increased isolation, but also the inability of taking into total participation in academic life altogether. Moreover, shame, or guilt attached to trans identity when gender identity doesn't get proper acknowledgment will further affect academic success from their side (Beemyn, 2010).

### **Legal and Policy Gaps in Education**

To guarantee the legal recognition and protection of transgender people, the Pakistani government passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018. However, a major obstacle is the absence of enforcement at educational institutions. Legally required

regulations are frequently not implemented by educational institutions, depriving transgender students of the protection to which they are legally entitled. Consequently, transgender persons are still marginalized and prevented from receiving any education at all due to the discrepancy between institutional practice and legal provisions (Pakhtunkhwa et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

The issues facing transgender students in Pakistan's schools are systemic as well as cultural. Though recently, the country has reached some legal milestones with this regard, such as through the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, the support practices and policies in place have not been implemented effectively to create an enabling environment at school. Transgender kids will still encounter numerous obstacles, such as inadequate curricula, inadequate knowledge and training among educators in schools, and widespread negative social stigma that prevents pupils from receiving an education in a secure or encouraging setting. The rights of transgender students are generally not recognized by Pakistani educational institutions, which leaves them open to exclusion, harassment, and discrimination. Transgender pupils will be more marginalized in the educational system due to a lack of support networks and gender-sensitive regulations. Furthermore, a vicious cycle of prejudice is created when transgender students are not recognized and supported in leadership roles at school and among their classmates. This will negatively impact the students' academic performance, mental health, and self-esteem. In order to resolve those issues, NGOs and civil society corporations play an essential role. Even though those corporations have done development in selling transgender rights and academic inclusion, the institutional and broader cultural competition they come upon limits their influence. Improved transgender schooling in Pakistan necessitates a more potent collaboration among the government, instructional establishments, and civil society similarly to a decided try to dismantle ingrained societal and cultural perceptions approximately gender variance. If instructional establishments wish to look great change, they need to actively searching for to elevate attention and foster inclusive surroundings that contain transgender students' demands.

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