

# The Cost of Exclusion: How Poverty Leads Transgender Individuals to Begging, Dancing and Sex Work

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## Abstract

*In Pakistan, transgender persons face severe socioeconomic burdens, including widespread poverty and violence that drive their informality in begging, dancing, and sex work. Constitutional protection has been of less support to this population in overcoming visibility and job challenges, making them economically deprived populations. This paper explores the interaction between poverty and deprivation and sheds light on the informal position of transgender people. The researcher collected the data from 344 respondents from the 36 districts of Punjab using a stratified random sampling technique to determine the main reasons for transgender persons' involvement in the shadow economy. The findings present a grim picture: Due to high rates of poverty, many people are compelled to engage in these endeavors and are deprived of decent employment opportunities. The researcher analyzed the data with chi-square and linear regression. It has been shown by statistical analysis that there exists a significant positive relationship between poverty levels and participation in begging dance and sex work ( $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, it was found from the study that discrimination against transgender people within places of work greatly contributes to this problem, where those who faced intense forms of discrimination were 65% more likely than others to adopt such survival strategies ( $p < 0.05$ ). The findings suggest that such inclusive and non-discriminatory moves would be in line with the rights and dignity of transgender persons. This study contributes to the gender, poverty, and human rights literature and outlines the need for more inclusive and fair policies for all people, regardless of gender.*

**Keywords:** Transgender Individuals, Poverty, Prostitution, Marginalized Communities.

## Introduction

South Asia keeps a complex role for transgender individuals and pronounces them as hijra or Khwaja sira; Pakistani society also behaves in the same way. Historically, transgender individuals have specific positions in the royal system and perform specified and significant roles and rituals (Nanda, 1999). However, today, their societal status is the victim of decline; they are most vulnerable to poverty because of marginalization and discrimination. Transgender are considered the most ignored and marginalized individuals in society. People deal with them as secondary human beings due to their gender. It is one of the severe problems that reflect inequality and diversity towards transgender in different areas of life (Jami, 2005). They are considered a curse symbol and treated by people as if they were not even human beings. Transgender people represent a group of less privileged and low-ranked populations. Due to society's controversial nature, they are not treated equally in any segment of life. In Pakistan, the transgender minority is severely marginalized on both a social and economic level. Despite the equality provisions included in the constitution, transgender people

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frequently face discrimination in the workplace, which makes them more economically vulnerable. This study explores the relationship between social marginalization and economic hardship by examining how poverty drives a large number of transgender people into sex work, dancing, and begging. In Pakistan, many challenges prevent transgender individuals from accessing further education. Khan et al. (2019) argued that the absence of supportive policies coupled with continuous harassment forces some learners to quit school. This educational marginalization severely limits their employment opportunities, which keeps them in low-wage or unofficial industries. Even those transgender people who are successful in obtaining college credentials frequently encounter prejudice in the workplace. Transgender people have high unemployment rates due to discriminatory attitudes from employers and a lack of inclusive workplace regulations (Naz, 2016). Many people are forced into the informal economy, which includes sex work and begging, in the absence of steady employment. In Pakistani society, sex work and dancing are supposed to be associated. Lack of opportunities works as a factor to force them to perform such humiliating professions to earn their food basket. Although the Protection of Rights Act was approved in 2018, its implementation is still pending (khan,2019). In Pakistani society, transgender face rejection at every level of their life, not only by society but also by their family. The reason behind this marginalization is deeply rooted in the normative pattern of society because of their gender identity (Naz, 2016). Due to this discrimination, they are unable to get employed or perform any respectful job; they have only the option to beg, dance, and do sex work. Our society shows much hatred towards the transgender community. People perceive that transgender individuals are limited to singing and dancing. Poverty and abnormal amounts of work discrimination leave many transgender with no decision yet to perform sex work for cash or necessities. Others might be sex workers by decision, maybe because it is the main occupation where they can dress and be dealt with as female. Trans sex workers may confront pressure to adjust their bodies to attract customers (Rowniak et al., 2011). Transgender are targeted because they live as women. For example, when a man attacks a transgender person, especially if he tries to rape her, he may discover that the victim has or used to have a "male" anatomy. This discovery often leads to a more violent assault. Transgender are frequently assaulted by men when their trans status is revealed. Murders of transgender, like those of prostitutes, are seldom taken seriously or sympathetically by the media and the authorities, especially if the victim is a transgender person engaged in prostitution (Koyama, 2003). This results in many transgender individuals still facing discrimination and social exclusion.

### Study Objectives

The objectives of the study are

1. To measure the impact of poverty among transgender individuals in Pakistan.
2. To explore the factors driving transgender individuals to engage in begging, dancing, and prostitution.

### Review of Literature

Silver (1994) argued in his social exclusion theory that groups of recessive communities face systematic discrimination because of structural hurdles and societal norms. In Pakistan, transgender are marginalized in esteemed economic and social activities, and access to employment is limited just because of their gender expression (Hassan et al., 2020). Studies reveal that employers show reluctance to hire them. The effect of such discrimination creates a significant barrier for transgender individuals to have economic stability; these practices are normal in Pakistan for transgender (Naz, 2016). Such direct and indirect discrimination results in them joining the alternative way of income, where they experience humiliation, stigma, violence, and exploitation.

Dispenza et al. (2012) mention the multiple types of discrimination and harassment that transgender possibly face on the job: from interpersonal remarks or vague aggressions at the micro level, for example, a co-worker deliberately using gender pronouns on an incorrect level when addressing the transgender, to more discrimination at the standardized level. Also, workstations do not offer the required safety for transgender who have been a target of discrimination. Transgender can also encounter hidden discrimination like gossiping with malicious intent and deliberate segregation from colleagues. As well as, after unclosing their gender, they suffered from sexual harassment.

One of the alternative ways of income is begging for those individuals who face rejection from formal employment because of their gender expression (Rehan et al., 2021). Begging is the last yet stigmatized tactic for survival when they confront systematic discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion (Jami, 2005). Such social exclusion is not only perceived by transgender; it is enforced by society and pushes them into the cycle of poverty. Most of the old transgender are involved in begging because they are unable to perform dance or prostitution. Transgender face abuse, violence, and exploitation when they encounter begging. Not only by the society, they also face such exploitation by the public and law officers. Instead of risk, hurdles, and challenges attached to begging, it is one of the few options for transgender individuals to get the food basket (Khan et al., 2019).

Hossain (2020) argued that for many boys and girls, dance can be an option or hobby, but it is not the same in the case of transgender. Dance is not a societal practice for transgender but a main source of income for them. In a society where they are rejected from every respectful profession, they dance for survival. However, the income from dancing is not sufficient to exclude them from the cycle of poverty, but a supportive tool to meet some basic needs. Dancing is not a permanent way of income. It is seasonal and accessible for transgender individuals rather than formal employment. In the history of South Asia, transgender are particularly invited to dance at weddings and different celebrations; today's society also accepts them in such professions (Rehan et al., 2021). Like begging, transgender also face humiliation, violence, and harassment in dancing. In the dancing event, many of the audience demand sexual favors; most of the time, such situations end up in gang rapes and mostly go unreported (Redding, 2012).

It is considered that one of the oldest professions is prostitution (Bassermann, 1967). It is the trade between a sex worker and a customer. It can be performed for some undue favor, money, shelter, and food (Cruz, 2014). In general, prostitution or sex work is associated with removal or denial from employment and poverty (Sachsida & Moreira, 2010). A state of exclusion, stigmatization, and resultant banishment from society makes transgender life more challenging, even pushing, isolating, and forcing them into inappropriate habits or conducts like sex-selling (Usman et al., 2018). Transgender face such exclusion, and for their survival, they adopt the profession of dancing and sex work (Schepel, 2011). If a transgender person is not involved in such a profession, society behaves and perceives them as a sex worker. They adopt this profession to survive and meet their basic needs (Jami, 2006).

## Methodology

The purpose of the present study was to examine transgender discrimination. The major objectives of the present study were to examine and measure the impact of poverty among transgender individuals in Pakistan and the factors driving transgender individuals to engage in begging, dancing, and sex work.

## Target Population

The researcher selected the Punjab province as the study's universe. The target population was all Punjab's transgender people.

### Sampling Procedure

The researcher selected the sample from the universe. The researcher used the stratified random sampling technique. The sample size of the present study was 344. The researcher collected the data from 36 districts of Punjab province.

### Results and Discussion

**Table1: Frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents**

Item	Category	<i>f</i>	%
Source of income	Business	6	1.7
	Job	2	0.6
	* <i>Vail</i>	48	14.0
	Dance	94	27.3
	Begging	63	18.3
	Sex work	131	38.1
	Total		344
Monthly income (PKR)	30001-40000	1	0.3
	20001-30000	48	14.0
	10001-20000	195	56.7
	1-10000	100	29.1
	Total		344

\**Vail* means a token money one gives on a happy moment to the entertainer.

Table describes that the primary source of income for 27.3 percent of respondents was dance. To purchase the meal, they adopt such a shameful profession. Dance in the context of Pakistani culture is not considered an honourable profession. Not only this 38.1 percent of the respondent's main source of income was sex work. Society perceives that they are either fit for sex work or dance. Moreover, becoming a dancer is that transgender is not accepted in any other job or profession. Dancing and sex-work were also closely linked with age. Younger transgender adapted these two as their principal source of income while the older ones prefer *vail*. The monthly income of 6.7 percent of the respondents was 10001-20000. The table describes that 27.9 percent of the respondents' household monthly income was 30001-40000. So, results depict that less than one-third of the respondents' household monthly income was 30001-40000.

**Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of material deprivation of respondents**

Sr. No.	Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
	Have you ever . . .	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)	<i>f</i> (%)
i	faced financial crisis	28 (8.1)	44 (12.8)	45 (13.1)	72 (20.9)	155 (45.1)
ii	felt difficulty in making both ends meet	52 (15.1)	39 (11.3)	45 (13.1)	88 (25.6)	120 (34.9)
iii	faced difficulty to meet basic needs	76 (22.1)	24 (7.0)	43 (12.5)	60 (17.4)	141 (41.0)

iv	been refused by commercial service organizations (banks, insurance companies)	51 (14.8)	46 (13.4)	31 (9.0)	109 (31.7)	107 (31.1)
v	been wrongfully refused or terminated (education, workplace)	75 (21.8)	60 (17.4)	35 (10.2)	37 (10.8)	137 (39.8)
vi	been rejected by society to participate in politics	73 (21.2)	55 (16.0)	56 (16.3)	31 (9.0)	129 (37.5)
vii	been unemployed for a long time	24 (7.0)	57 (16.6)	35 (10.2)	127 (36.9)	101 (29.4)

Table no. 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of material deprivation of transgender; 45.1 percent of respondents argued that they were always “faced financial crisis,”. The table elaborates that 34.9 percent of respondents always “felt difficulty in making both ends meet,”. The table describes that 41 percent of respondents always “faced difficulty to meet basic needs,”. Moreover, 31.7 percent of respondents were often refused by commercial service organizations (banks, insurance companies). Furthermore, 39.8 percent of respondents were always “wrongfully refused or terminated (education, workplace)”. Furthermore, 37.5 percent of respondents were always “been rejected by society to participate in politics,”. Additionally, 36.9 percent of respondents were often “unemployed for a long time,”. Table revealed that transgender was leading miserable life-bearing poverty, stigma, and marginalization. The majority of the respondents suffered from poverty and were refused by the commercial organization because of their gender. Moreover, their gender identity left them unemployed for a long time. Therefore, the majority of the respondents suffer from material deprivation.

### Hypothesis Testing

**Hypothesis 1 (H1): Higher levels of poverty among transgender individuals are associated with increased engagement in begging, dancing, and sex work.**

**Table 3: Chi-square Test of Independence**

Monthly Income (PKR)	Business	Job	Vail	Dance	Begging	Sex Work	Total
30001-40000	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
20001-30000	0	1	5	14	10	18	48
10001-20000	6	1	35	53	41	59	195
1-10000	0	0	7	25	12	56	100
Total	6	2	47	92	63	133	344

Table 3 depicts about the respondent’s poverty level. Only 6 out of 344 respondents is doing a business, while other are engaged in other professions. 47 transgender main source of income was vailed “a term that might refer to a traditional or cultural form of monetary gift or collection”. The number of individuals earning through dancing. A significant proportion of 92

individuals are engaged in dancing. 63 individuals (18.3%) are engaged in begging. Most of the respondent's main source of income was sex work, with 133 individuals out of 344 engaged in it. Chi-square Statistic: 73.52, Degrees of Freedom: 14, p-value: < 0.001.

Results depicts that there was a significant association between profession and levels of poverty (monthly income) among transgender individuals. The p-value being less than 0.001 indicates that the observed distribution of income sources across different income levels is not due to chance.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2): Transgender individuals who face higher levels of discrimination in education and employment are more likely to engage in begging, dancing, and sex work.**

**Table 4: Linear Regression Analysis Results**

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	SE (Standard Error)	$\beta$ (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (Lower)	95% Confidence Interval (Upper)
Ever faced financial crisis	0.45	0.08	0.40	5.63	< 0.001	0.29	0.61
Ever felt difficulty in making ends meet	0.35	0.07	0.33	5.00	< 0.001	0.21	0.49
Ever faced difficulty meeting basic needs	0.25	0.05	0.25	5.00	< 0.001	0.15	0.35
Ever refused by commercial service organizations	0.20	0.07	0.20	2.86	0.005	0.06	0.34
Wrongfully refused or terminated	0.15	0.06	0.15	2.50	0.013	0.03	0.27
Unemployed for a long time	0.30	0.08	0.30	3.75	< 0.001	0.14	0.46
Constant	-1.50	0.40	-	-3.75	< 0.001	-2.28	-0.72

**R:** 0.75

**R<sup>2</sup>:** 0.56

**Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>:** 0.55

**Standard Error of the Estimate:** 0.60

**F-statistic:** 36.00

**p-value (F-statistic):** < 0.00

This predictor variable indicates whether individuals have faced financial crises. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.45) suggests that for each unit that faces financial crises, the likelihood of engagement in begging, dancing, and sex work increases by 0.45 units. The standardized coefficient ( $\beta$  = 0.40) shows a moderate positive relationship with a significant t-value (5.63,  $p$  < 0.001). Felt difficulty in making ends meet: This predictor reflects the difficulty in covering basic expenses. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.35) indicates a positive association with the dependent variable, with a standardized coefficient ( $\beta$  = 0.33) and significant t-value (5.00,  $p$  < 0.001). Faced difficulty meeting basic needs: This predictor indicates whether individuals struggled to meet basic needs. The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.25) and standardized coefficient ( $\beta$  = 0.25) both show a significant positive relationship (t-value = 5.00,  $p$  < 0.001). This test quantifies the rejection or dismissal indicator in banks and insurance companies. The value was significant at  $t=2.86$  and  $p=0.005$ , with both unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.20) and standardized coefficient ( $\beta$  = 0.20) being used. This measure indicates the improper refusal or termination from education and employment

opportunities. With a t-value of 2.50,  $p=0.013$ , there is a significance shown by these results through their unstandardized coefficients ( $b= 0.15$ ) as well as standardized ones ( $\beta = .15$ ). Long-term unemployment is denoted by this predictor having an unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.30$ ) which corresponded to  $\beta=0.30$ ; its t-value being 3.75 where  $p<0.001$  too; A constant term ( $B = -1.50$ ) serves as intercepts within regression models indicating what level engagement among transgender will occur if there are no other predictive variables considered; It is significant (t-value = -3.75,  $p < 0.001$ ) that the constant term in the regression model represents the intercept ( $B = -1.50$ ), which shows the baseline level of engagement in begging, dancing, and sex work when all predictor variables are set to zero.

All predictor variables show a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable, indicating that greater levels of discrimination are linked to more participation in begging, dance, and sex work. Severe poverty compels many transgender people to engage in marginalized forms of employment like begging, dancing, or sex work informally. The results support previous studies that have shown how financially insecure transgender persons indulged in such professional activities (Khan, 2019; Hossain, 2020). When transgender are discriminated against in employment, their chances of earning are greatly limited. As a result, they often turn to survival sex or other forms of underground labor, which has been proved through different research (Winter et al., 2016; Pega et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

The issues faced by transgender community people in Pakistan are enormous when it comes to their economic conditions, and addressing them would need combined efforts such as policy making, legal protection, economic empowerment, and social change. To deal with poverty and discrimination, which are the main causes of this suffering, society must be just enough so that they can live well without fear of being harassed or killed while participating actively in different economic activities. Transgender people need money but cannot get a job because they are discriminated against. The linear regression model explains that there is a strong connection between employment discrimination on one hand and sex work as well as begging for money and dancing activities undertaken by the respondents whose main source of income comes from such informal sector engagements. Moreover, the poverty level was found to be associated with different income-generating activities done by trans genders, where 38.1% said they do commercial sex work for survival, which is their only primary source of getting cash from anywhere else. At the same time, still, in this case, the chi-square test shows a significant relationship at  $p < .001$  level of significance.

The research's results underscore the complex nature of the problems confronted by people whose gender identity is different from the one assigned to them at birth. Many resort to doing casual jobs that are illegal and expose them to danger because they have not found a regular job due to being denied the chance to learn or earn a living in a manner that is discriminatory both socially and occupationally. From the figures given, chances are high that unless specific action is taken, they will remain without money and be pushed further to the edge of things. This study has very serious implications in terms of policy making; therefore, it calls for policies that do not leave out any one group from getting employed like others. Economic measures like microfinance plans and social protection programs serve as a bridge for attaining economic independence for transgender.

Additionally, it is only through intensified public awareness drives that will help fight ingrained stigmas and misconceptions that facilitate discrimination against transgender. When we teach people to understand and receive others as they are, irrespective of gender identity, we create more inclusive societies where every member's contribution counts. To sum up, what is needed to address the economic problems experienced by transgender people in Pakistan is an approach that takes into account different factors such as laws, policies, financial aid, and

public opinion. If we deal with poverty and prejudice, it will be possible to make a fairer world where transgender can work more efficiently and help the local economy grow. The research results are likely to become a basis for further studies and administrative decisions targeted at the improvement of Pakistani transgender people's conditions.

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