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## From Exclusion to Inclusion: Understanding Barriers to Transgender Inclusion in Pakistani Schools

Kinza Kanwal<sup>1</sup>, Huma Rasheed<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Ummar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer Department of Government and Public Policy, National Defence University Islamabad.

Email: [kinza@ndu.edu.pk](mailto:kinza@ndu.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup> M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Public Policy, Riphah International University, Islamabad.

<sup>3</sup> M.Phil. Scholar, Department of International Relations, Riphah International University, Islamabad.

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to emphasize the value of inclusive education for transgender individuals in Islamabad city. The main objectives of the current study are to identify the barriers for transgender students in receiving inclusive education to phase out the prospects necessary for improving trans-inclusivity in public schools. Data has been collected through a survey questionnaire from 144 school Principals to get feedback as critical stakeholders. Responses were then tested with the help of t-tests and descriptive statistics to draw statistical inferences regarding the targeted samples. The findings suggested that training teaching faculty and the school administration through awareness campaigns regarding behavioural improvements with transgender students can be an integral tool to enhance the opportunities for inclusive education for transgender people.

**Keywords:** Transgender Education, Inclusive Education, School Principals, Barriers, Trans-Inclusivity.

### 1. Introduction

Education has been acknowledged as a fundamental right for all children since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Education for All movement and its follow-up texts emphasize that certain groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities, are more prone to exclusion. However, inclusion is not always necessary for the right to education. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action were the first publications to expressly state the right to inclusive education, emphasizing schools' need to reform and adapt inclusive education is a new concept that is gaining traction across the world. It's about removing the bottlenecks that keep disadvantaged people out of the educational system. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took a comprehensive approach to preserving fundamental rights, eliminating discrimination based on language, sex, religion, and other factors and stressing the need to introduce inclusive education.

While global research, especially from the US, UK, and Australia, has explored challenges related to transgender-inclusive education, there are few studies from Pakistan. The existing research mainly points out issues like social alienation, gaps in policy, and emotional struggles faced by transgender individuals. However, we know very little about how school-level factors influence their education. In Pakistan, school principals play an important role in applying inclusive policies, managing school environments, and shaping teacher attitudes. Understanding their views is essential for recognizing real barriers and developing effective strategies for transgender inclusion.

This study aims to fill this gap by looking at how school heads in Islamabad perceive the obstacles to inclusive

education for transgender students. By examining challenges related to attitudes, culture, policy, and resources, the study offers insights that can help guide policymakers, educators, and civil society in strengthening Pakistan's commitment to SDG-4 and creating a more inclusive education system.

## 2. Literature Review

Every society has a long history of transgender people, but the South Asian subcontinent has one of the most vital histories of transgender visibility. There is evidence that since the Vedic era, different genders and gender expressions have been socially acceptable throughout the subcontinent (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000; Michel raj, 2015). However, transsexual people in Pakistan were restricted to stigmatized professions by the country's prevailing caste patriarchy system under British control, and systemic discrimination against transgender people took the form of punishment and restrictions on their movement among the transgender communities that existed in India at the time. Transgender people were criminalized by British colonization, which was furthered by the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which designated transgender people as a criminal tribe. Under British rule, transgender people experienced mistreatment and brutal treatment and were mocked for being who they were (Chakrapani, 2010; Subramanian et al., 2015; Elischberger et al., 2018).

Despite the transgender movement's significant advancements over the past decade, which increased public awareness and resulted in significant legal victories. Similar problems were discovered after such a long time of efforts to improve society's attitude toward the transgender for their fundamental rights, but all in vain because the same conditions, such as hate and inappropriate behavior in the form of discrimination in educational institutions and professional settings, and intolerable violence, still exist (U.S. transgender survey, 2015).

Pakistan has committed to providing inclusive education and equal learning opportunities as a signatory to SDG 2030. (ITA, 2020). According to Article 38(d) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the state is responsible for ensuring everyone has access to food, clothes, education, and medical care. One of the most important and central aims of Pakistan's education policy and the country's commitment to the SDGs and the UNCRPD is inclusive education (Hina, 2020).

Today, 263 million children and youth between the ages of 6 and 17 are not enrolled in school, and many vulnerable kids face difficulties studying even when they are enrolled. Children with disabilities have a 2.5 times greater likelihood of never attending school than their peers. There should be general education systems available to all students. Suppose the learning crisis and learning poverty are to be addressed. In that case, systemic constraints must be removed, and the various educational needs of all learners, particularly those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, and vulnerable, must be met (UNESCO, 2017). Transgender people are currently the most ignored group in society.

The Pakistani Parliament enacted a law on May 18, 2018, to protect their fundamental rights (Ahsen, 2019). However, the issue of transgender people's exploits in many ways continues to exist in society. Since the establishment of the Transgender School, society's perspectives have changed as the neighborhood has come to understand its members' legal entitlement to education (WHO, 2019). However, the private sector created the school; as a result, Pakistan's leadership and policymakers failed.

After the United States, the United Kingdom is a significant player in inclusive education for transgender students. In England, the responsibility for education is decentralized. Therefore, all educational institutions must uphold students' rights and put anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies in place, especially for transgender individuals. In this regard, several municipal administrations have made recommendations. According to estimates, there were 200,000 and 500,000 transgender people in England (World Bank Report, 2019).

The Pakistani Parliament passed legislation to safeguard transgender people's fundamental rights. Ayesha Mughal, the country's first transgender person, has joined the National Task Force working on the Defense Gender Persons of Rights Bill 2018. (Liaquat, Nusrat, 2022). Various laws and policies have been enacted to implement the notion of Education for All, with the 2017 National Education Policy emphasizing Inclusive

## Education.

According to the Punjab Social Protection Authority's Transgender Social Welfare Policy (2018, pp.29-30), the government would give free and obligatory education to transgender persons. According to the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, a 3% quota has been set aside for transgender children in public and private institutions; they are eligible to attend mainstream schools and colleges. It also recommended educators guarantee that transgender kids are treated equally and fairly in academic and co-curricular activities (ITA, 2020).

The Punjab Social Protection Authority's Transgender Social Welfare Policy (2018) said that the government would provide free and obligatory education to transgender persons. Still, no progress or implementation has been made since the Act was passed (Sadia, 2022). Despite passing the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act in 2018, Pakistan can still not develop an inclusive Education system for transgender people. It has failed by denying them equal access to education and social acceptance.

In the cross-sectional study, Ullah, Ali, Khan., et al. (2020) addressed the negligence of education in the transgender community. This study concluded that the illiteracy rate among transgender people is low, and policies should be made at national and provincial levels. The programs should be conducted to raise awareness via electronic and print media to raise awareness regarding education of transgender.

After studying literature, the researcher identifies the current and earlier studies' gaps. It has been noted that most of the work in this area has been done in wealthy nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, etc.; the relatively little study is done in developing countries like Pakistan. A few research studies have been published in this area, although their scope is very narrow (Mahmud and Idris, 2019; Atta Ullah et al., 2020; Rakhshanda, 2021). The inaccessibility, alienation from education, possibilities, and issues in the education system for the transgender community in various parts of KPK were all underlined in this research. According to studies (Khan et al., 2021), only a few criteria have proven crucial for transgender students' access to educational opportunities and psychological problems. There is only one study about inclusive education for transgender students in Pakistan, and Fazil and Hashmi conducted it.

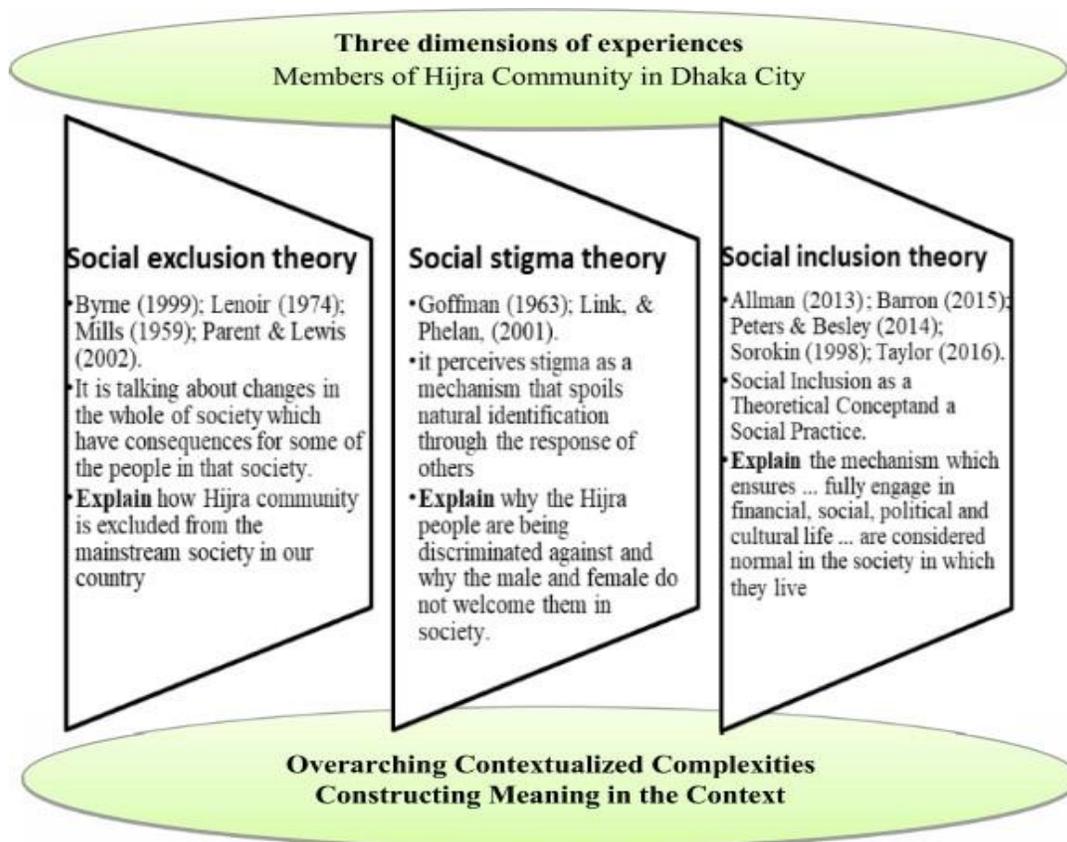
The theory of social exclusion suggests that transgender in the community is always sidelined and denied during the distribution of resources, as the resources are available to ordinary people, either male or female. This attitude by society is against the fundamental right of getting goods such as goods and services from civil society is assumed as a crime. They face a situation of having normal relationships and inability to participate in daily life events as ordinary people are used to doing. Transgender people also face restricted economic activities and are not preferred in jobs available to ordinary people. Transgender is not even accounted for in social, cultural, or political activities as focal persons, and they are always exploited due to this abnormality of gender (Levitas, 1996).

The second theory, titled "Social Stigma Theory" focuses on Goffman's framework (Goffman, 1963). This framework highlighted social evil, like exploitations related to the natural identity through the behavioral response of all the social players as participants of exploitation. The respondents are only transgender in this regard. The specific sect or group is assumed to be undesirable to live everyday life like ordinary people have the right to live everyday life. This is entirely unnatural and unethical, as everyone has this fundamental right. Transgender people are classified as the rejected stereotype of society, which is why they are treated with hatred and are not welcomed in the community; likewise, a boy or girl is prioritized. It means people are judgmental and decisive about transgender which creates an environment of making fun with them and disrespecting them due to their disability (Mizanur Rahmand, Arpeeta Shams Mizan, 2018).

"Social Inclusion Theory" focuses on the fight and retaliation against exclusion because exclusion refers to the state of stratification and unethical practice of division in society. This theory of social inclusion encourages the implementation of improved conditions related to the active participation of transgender in the social activities of the organization through equal opportunities to transgender and unrestricted access to utilize the

available resources and raising their voice against any exploitation and giving them the respect they deserve in the society as an average person (Taylor, 2016).

Figure 1 - Results of Survey Questionnaires | Source: Lubna Jabin Research Paper



### 3. Methodology

In the current study, descriptive ways to interpret the results by presenting frequencies in frequency tables are made. In addition, a pie chart was also used to express the percentage of respondents who responded to the questions in the questionnaire. 146 school heads of urban unit of Islamabad city were used as the study's population in the current investigation. A crucial stage in performing a research study is sample selection. In our study, we chose the method of purposive sampling technique. Since the population was small, all the school heads were included from local schools based on a specific purpose, but we received response of 144 school heads out of 146.

The choice of school principals as the main focus of this study has solid reasons. As the top administrators in schools, principals are key in carrying out policies, managing resources, overseeing teachers, and shaping the school environment. Their views and decisions directly affect whether transgender students are welcomed, supported, and able to stay in regular education settings. Therefore, examining their perspectives offers valuable insights into the challenges that hinder inclusive education.

Primary data collection is used to collect descriptive information from the principals of public schools of urban units in Islamabad. The study data is collected through the survey sampling where the Principals were sent with a questionnaire, and they filled and returned it. n. School heads were the respondents in the current study

from the supply side or policy implementation side regarding provision of inclusive education to transgender students, and we used their responses to gather information. For data collection, chosen schools in Islamabad were visited in personal capacity. At first, the participants were contacted in order to establish a connection for data collection. Data regarding the information and difficulties to transgender students in getting inclusive education and enrolment of transgender students in schools and colleges after facing such adverse behavior of society has been compiled using a questionnaire. It took about 60 days to collect data from 144 school heads in Islamabad.

The data analysis is conducted through Microsoft Excel and the SPSS to calculate the t-test. Primary data collection is the most critical step to every form of a research project especially when the respondents are very scarce in numbers and relevant research samples are not easily accessible. As limited information could be extracted through primary data as it is done in this study. Primary data collection is used to collect descriptive information from the principals of public schools of urban units in Islamabad.

A good questionnaire requires a lot of time and effort to frame. The Questionnaire is adopted from Fazil (2020) on Inclusive Education of Transgender. The investigator created the questionnaire to ensure the study's validity and breadth. The questionnaire with the school heads was created and used in the current investigation. The questionnaire included 16 items about corrective actions for transgender students' access to education issues.

The current study is only limited to the school heads of the Islamabad region. The Problem, which was encountered during the data collection, was that the responses from transgender could not be elucidated due to their absence in traditional schools. Therefore, the reactions, which were collected from different schools, are merely depending upon the mindset. The actual results could only be achieved if the enrolment of transgender in schools and colleges were encouraged and they were found in the educational institutes of Islamabad. The policies extracted from this study could not be generalized at the country level. However, in the future, it could be extended to Pakistan's other states and provinces.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Frequency Distribution of respondents**

The results below show the viewpoint of people who are the key stakeholders in the case of transgender-inclusive education. The interviewees agreed that transgender people are different from usual, so they behave differently. Since their behaviour is contingent upon societal attitudes and many other factors. The first question was strongly agreed by 95 people who said that transgender people are different and need to be treated differently. Almost insignificant numbers of respondents disagreed with the statement, and only 24 people remained neutral about the information. Here staying neutral is not of the notion that they are in disagreement or any other reason. These people did not want to disclose their opinion on this. In the second statement, the respondents were asked to answer whether people who belong to the transgender community can get an education or not. In this context, most responded in agreement, while 25 people responded with a strong understanding. Here for the rest of all options, the respondents showed insignificant viewpoints. In a question on the equal opportunity of education, the respondents disclosed that they must be given an equal opportunity to pursue their education as ordinary people do. Similar to the last response, some insignificant people disagreed with this statement or gave negative consent. The mental capability of transgender was questioned in the following information. The principals of schools agreed that they are one hundred per cent capable of getting an education like ordinary people, and an insignificant number of people expressed disagreement or a neutral viewpoint.

*Do you think that transgender is different from other human beings?*

In response to the above question of what the audience thinks about transgender, are they different from other human beings? The answers that we received were mostly strongly agreed. From 100%, 65% of the population

strongly decided that transgender people are different from other humans due to biological differences. 14% agreed, while 16% remained neutral in response to this question. 0.2% strongly disagreed, and 0.1% disagreed that there is no difference between transgender and other human beings.

*Do you think that having a gender disorder is a hurdle in leading everyday life for transgender?*

In response to the above question of what the audience thinks about transgender, are they different from other human beings? The answers that we received were most strongly agreed. From 100%, 65% of the population strongly decided that transgender people have gender disorders, which is the biggest hurdle in everyday life. 17%? agreed, while 17% remained neutral in response to this question. 1% strongly disagreed, and 1% disagreed that there is no difference between transgender and other human beings.

*Do you think persons with gender disorders cannot get an education?*

In response to this question that persons with gender disorders cannot get an education, 17% of respondents strongly agreed with the above statement, and 62% agreed. In comparison, the percentage of respondents who remained neutral was 12% of the respondents who strongly disagreed with this statement, 6.9%, whereas 1%, in response to the above question, disagreed that they could not get an education.

*Do you think individuals with gender disorders should be given equal opportunity for education?*

The respondents who responded to the above-mentioned statement that individuals with gender disorder should be given equal opportunities mostly agreed with the abovementioned information. The population who strongly agreed were 20.8%, 69.4% agreed, 0.6% strongly disagreed, 1,38% disagreed with the above statement, while the percentage of people who remained neutral was 4.8%.

*Do you think they are mentally capable of getting an education?*

The respondents who responded that they are transition mentally capable of getting an education strongly agreed with this statement. From 100%, 69.4% of the population strongly agreed that people with gender disorders could get an education. 18.50% agreed, while 6.94% remained neutral in response to this question. 2.80 %agree with this statement and 2.08% strongly disagree that they cannot get an education.

*Do you think other children will accept them in the classroom if they get admission to regular schools?*

In response to the above question that children will accept transgender in the classroom if they get admission to regular schools, the answers received in response to this statement mainly have disagreed. From the total of 100%, 41.6% of the population disagreed with the above statement, 2.7% strongly disagreed, 13.8% respondents strongly agreed, 34.7% agreed, and 6.9% remained neutral.

*Do you think parents will accept the education of transgender with their children in regular schools?*

38.8% disagreed in response to the above question of whether parents will accept the education of persons with K.S with their children in regular schools, and 13.80 % strongly disagreed. The respondents who strongly agreed were 6.90 %, whereas 20.80 % of people decided in response to the abovementioned statement. At the same time, the respondents who remained neutral were 19.40 %.

*Do you think transgender individuals should go to special schools?*

In response to the above question about whether individuals should go to special schools, 48.60% of respondents agreed with this question. In comparison, 13.80 % strongly agreed that individuals with transgender should go to special schools. The respondents strongly disagreed with the above statement, 9.70 %, whereas 24.30 % opposed it. The number of people who remained neutral on whether they should attend special schools was 3.40 %.

*Do you think school teachers will accept them in the classroom?*

61% of respondents agreed that school teachers would accept transgender in the classroom, and 11.80% strongly agreed with the above information. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with the above question was 15.20%, while 8.30% strongly disagreed that the teachers would accept them in the classroom. 3.40% of people were neutral in response to the statement mentioned above.

*Do you think there should be separate schools for transgender individuals?*

Respondents agreed in response to the above question that there should be separate schools for K.S. individuals. The percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement mentioned above was 53.40% respondents, and 15.20% strongly agreed. 18.70% of individuals disagreed, and 4.80% strongly disagreed with the idea that there should be separate schools for transgender individuals. The percentage of neutral respondents responding to this question was 7.60%. You think they lack the resources to get admission to schools.

*Do your school has the resources to include transgender children?*

1% of individuals strongly agreed that their schools have the resources to include transgender children, while 4% respondents agreed with the above statement. Most disagreed with the above information, and the percentage of people who disagreed was 68%, whereas 25% of respondents strongly disagreed that their schools have resources to include children with gender disorders. 2% of respondents were neutral in response to this question.

*Do you think these children do not have access to education due to a lack of policy or policy implementation?*

5% of individuals strongly agreed that they do not have access to education due to a lack of policy or policy performance, while 20% of respondents agreed with the above statement. Most disagreed with the above information, and the percentage of people who disagreed was 55%, whereas 14% of respondents strongly disagreed that their schools have resources to include children with K.S. 3% were neutral in response to this question.

*Do you think transgender children can be admitted to school after training school staff and teachers?*

In response to the above question that transgender children can be admitted to school after training school staff and teachers, 68% of individuals agreed, whereas 20% strongly agreed that they can be admitted after given proper training to school staff and teachers. 6% respondents disagreed while 2% strongly disagreed with the above statement. The respondents who remained neutral in response to this question were 1% respondents.

*Do you think schools are following the policies of inclusive education?*

Most people disagreed with the statement that the schools are following inclusive education policies. The percentage of individuals opposed was 68%, whereas 13% strongly disagreed. Of the respondents who strongly agreed with the above statement, 6% and 8% decided, while 2% were among those who remained neutral in response to the question that the schools are following inclusive education policies.

*Do you think there is a need for a new policy to adjust transgender children in regular schools?*

The people who responded to this question of whether there's a need for a new policy to adjust K.S. children in regular school mostly agreed; 69% population agreed, while the strongly agreed were 25%. Of the respondents who strongly disagreed with the above statement, 2%, while 2.7% disagreed. In addition, the respondents who were neutral in response to the need for new policies to adjust K.S. children in regular schools were 0.6%.

*Table 6: Barriers Identified by School Principals*

| No. | Type of Barriers                 | Average in Percentage |
|-----|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 01  | <b>Policies Related Barriers</b> | 45%                   |
| 02  | <b>Resources Constraints</b>     | 12%                   |
| 03  | <b>Cultural Barriers</b>         | 11%                   |
| 04  | <b>Social Barriers</b>           | 25%                   |
| 05  | <b>Attitudinal Barriers</b>      | 7%                    |

Note: percentages are based on the author's calculations from the questionnaire

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's key findings suggest that the main impediment to transgender students' access to education is parents' attitudes and societal norms rather than a lack of money or other resources preventing these children from attending conventional schools. Although every school principal agrees that these students should not participate in special schools but instead can receive a traditional education, however, they thought the teachers would reject them. According to the study, these kids can attend ordinary schools with staff and teacher training.

It should be mentioned, nevertheless, that many school administrators felt that schools were not providing inclusive education for students with gender dysphoria following government policies. The study's findings also revealed that school administrators believe policy revision and execution are essential for bringing about social change and enabling classroom participation. Based on the study's findings, it was also established that transgender people believe that one of the significant obstacles to obtaining a degree is their gender identity. The majority of people claim that an attitude problem is hampering their knowledge. They feel that the government has set policies for their inclusion in schools, but the schools do not practice these rules. According to them, schools have the resources to educate them, but discrimination occurs because of a stigmatizing attitude and prejudicial views toward their disorder.

This study also sought to determine whether there were gender-related differences in school principals' opinions. The findings demonstrated that there is no gender-based difference in the views of school principals on the inclusion of students with Klinefelter in schooling. Regardless of gender, all principals share a similar perspective on students' inclusion and access to education. The study concludes that without including these people in conventional schools from a young age, making them valuable and active, members of society is

impossible. Therefore, interventions are urgently needed to modify society's perception of this Community. The transgender Community is one of Pakistan's most maligned and persecuted population segments. They have been officially recognized as the 'Third gender'; however, they still suffer from socio-cultural, economic, and political marginalization. The government has also granted transgender fundamental civil rights, i.e., equal education, employment, and healthcare opportunities. Despite these laws, they are not adequately enforced, and the prevailing discrimination and prejudice present in the society as a whole for these people has resulted in this Community being shrouded in poverty and denied access to necessities like housing, health services, higher-level education and employment. Due to this, the transgender Community is quite sceptical of what the government can do to improve their lives (Tabassum & Jamil, 2014) (Farah, Afzal, Khan, Naeem, & Luqman, 2021). The government needs to develop solid policies and action plans to help integrate the transgender Community into mainstream society to make them a productive part of the public. The first step needs to be to develop an inclusive education system that caters to the needs of all kinds of students within a healthy and progressive environment. Some recommendations are as follows:

Firstly, a nationwide media campaign for the awareness of transgender rights and the need for their inclusion in society has to be carried out.

Secondly, the government needs to compile a complete record of the born transgender population from the town level to the national level so that Government institutions can have a better idea of how to help them; and save them from being preyed upon and exploited. This will help government institutions better understand the transgender Community, i.e., their socioeconomic conditions, and develop new ways to implement existing human rights and welfare policies and create new ones to fill the gaps.

Thirdly, the literacy rate in the transgender Community is a significant concern. This is primarily because of societal intolerance, the absence of a supportive family structure, and financial limitations. Growth of their literacy level will not be possible unless the government: 1) fixes quotas to accommodate the third gender in all public and private educational institutions, 2) provides financial assistance or scholarships to them where necessary, and 3) creates a healthy and positive learning environment in these institutions and 4) enforces laws which forbid and discipline those who bully them at educational and professional institutes.

Fourthly, The present social and education systems prevailing in Pakistan do not support transgender children because they lack positive attitudes and social acceptance of the third gender. The teachers, community members, and students must be sensitized to their inclusion to develop a new inclusive and cohesive educational system. This includes modifying subject content and teaching techniques, enhancing the learning environment, and changing the mindset of schools/ colleges/ or other relevant organizations.

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