

- Vol. VII, No. I (Winter 2022) ▪ p- ISSN: 2708-2091 ▪ e-ISSN: 2708-3586 ▪ L-ISSN: 2708-2091
- Pages: 1 – 8 ▪ DOI: 10.31703/gsr.2020(VII-I).01 ▪ URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-I\).01](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-I).01)
- Citation: Ansari, A. M., & Yasmeen, B. (2022). An Opinion Survey about Public Perception Regarding Transgender People in Pakistan. *Global Sociological Review*, VII(I), 1-8. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022\(VII-I\).01](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2022(VII-I).01)

An Opinion Survey about Public Perception Regarding Transgender People in Pakistan

Abid Mehmood Ansari	PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: aabidswgmail.com
Bushra Yasmeen	School of Sociology, Minhaj University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract: *The present study strived to explore the existing beliefs and perceptions of public regarding transgender people in Pakistani society. The major objectives of this study were to explore the perception of the general public about transgender and how they differentiate among men, women, and transgender people. The present study was quantitative survey research. By using simple random, 50 respondents were interviewed, followed by an interview schedule. The gathered data were processed and analyzed in descriptive manners. The study revealed that (100%) of the respondents were familiar with transgender people as (82%) met transgender in the street/roadside while begging. The present study also revealed that (78%) of respondents perceived transgender as an in-between creature as they differentiated that transgender is male persons who adopted this disguise for attaining sexual attractions by other male persons/purposes (60%). It was also suggested that transgender should be given education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (100%).*

Key Words: Transgender, LGBT, Queer, Public Perception, Mental Illness, Pakistan

Introduction

Transgender is a rather new area of study in different social, behavioral and medical sciences especially in both popular culture and political debate in Pakistan" (Doan, et. al. 2019; Ansari et. al. 2017). The [International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission \(2008\)](#) discussed that there is a lack of organized activism among LGBT communities in Pakistan that causing complications to assessing adequately the current living conditions and human rights situation of such gender minorities expressed fear, secrecy, isolation, suicides, forced marriage, family and community pressure, etc. to conform to heterosexual norms. "Transgender is an umbrella term applied to a range of individuals who express their gender in non-traditional ways" (Burdge, 2007).

The term transgender is a general term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups involving tendencies to vary from the usual gender roles. Transgender is the state of one's gender identity, which does not match one "assigned sex".

Some of the types of transgender are transsexuals, transvestite, cross-dressers, tomboys, effeminate males, pan-gender, and agender (Ansari et. al. 2017). The term transgender was largely understood with varying ambiguous explanations of transgender people, including transsexuals, transvestites, and effeminate men (Bevan, 2014; Hausman, 1995). For Richard Jenkin (2003) "identity is our understanding of who we are and of whom other people are and reciprocally other person understands of themselves and of others." Non-binary individuals raised the question of gender variation as an integral phenomenon in each society for those people who privilege biological or social factors and invites the public to observe, to perceive and to think about transgender people (Schilt and Lagos, 2017).

The sexual identities which are deeply felt by individuals (such as masculinity/femininely Orheterosexuality, homosexuality/ bisexuality) are not privately or merely the product of biology but are created by social and psychological forces" (Ansari & Maqsood, 2018). Transgender identity is

considered one of the major concerns of maturity rather than childhood. Because it is perceived that the children are not much capable of recognizing their transgender identity during their childhood (Kuvallanka et al., 2014). The physical appearance of Public considered a transgender person; either conforms or not their gender identity yet it plays a determining factor for constructing public perceptions about transgender people in society (Schilt 2010; West and Zimmerman 1987).

Typically and traditionally, a trans women is considered the public image of transgender people even when you search for a Google image for "transgender," overwhelmingly it returns with the images of trans women (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016; Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015; Stone, 2019). This result of a global internet search (Google) might guide the researchers to constitute a hypothesis that the public at largely perceived transgender as the trans women only while trans men are less known.

Most of the time public took the sexuality and gender identity of individuals (especially of transgender) as the same and couldn't make any key difference(s) between sex and gender. However, they might often categorize three basic gender categories as male, female, and transgender. A recent study that focused on public perceptions regarding transgender, found that the public had a mixed understanding about transgender people; *a) either the public totally relied on biological explanations of transgender or b) totally relied on the appearance of transgender on the social fabric* in the study of Long Doan, Natasha Quadlin & Brian Powell (2019). The same study found that the perception of the American public was conditional and determined by the appearance of transgender people. The knowledge of transgender issues leads the public, the scholars, and the policy-makers towards theorizing transgender perspective and supporting for transgender favorable conditions and rights (Flores 2015).

Studying public attitudes and understandings about transgender people had been paid less attention with reference to research studies in the past. Furthermore, no known large-scale social scientific research has been approached public perceptions in this regard (Doan, et al., 2019; Norton & Herek, 2013; Stone, 2013; Stone, 2019; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014) except a few influential writings on

lived experiences of transgender and their partners (Dozier, 2005; Pfeffer, 2017; Schilt, 2010). Historically, public opinion has performed a key role in many sex and gender-related discussions, frequently supplicated in debates over same-sex relationships and marriages (Hart-Brinson, 2018; Lewis & Oh, 2008; Powell et al., 2010). In addition, Scholars examined that public attitudes toward sex and gender had been playing a parallel role in different discussions about transgender and their rights. Importantly, the discussions regarding transgender people have stepped up in recent years (Epps, 2018; Lambda, n.d.), and the scientific and scholarly literature is no exception. A proportionately small yet swiftly growing body of research in social sciences has commenced examining transgender issues more broadly (Doan, et al., 2019).

Significance of the Study

Studying transgender in Pakistan is a new topic in research communities of the country. Almost all previous research studies in this field focused on the socio-economic challenges and/or victimization of transgender people, highlighting different issues; only the transgender people were interviewed and investigated yet. But the current study is unique in its nature in this regard as the general public was asked for the first time about transgender in Pakistan. This research would support the researchers and public at large to view the other side of the coin. Before this study, we had little scholarly literature about transgender collected directly from transgender and had single-sided information. However, the current study initiated to put first stone to fill this research gap in the field of transgender studies in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the perception of the general public about the sex/sexuality of transgender.
2. To explore how they differentiate among men, women, and transgender.
3. To get recommendations from the public about their perception that should transgender be accepted as a separate gender category or not?

Limitations of the Study

The current study had the following limitations;

1. The respondents of the current study were comprised only on males.
2. The term transgender was taken as a broader term on the basis of public perception focusing on people's level of familiarity with any of non-binary gender from cis-gender to cross-dressers.

Research Methodology

For this exploratory study, survey method was used. The teaching/faculty members of Govt. Graduate College for Boys, Satellite Town, Gujranwala city, Pakistan, was the population. The sampling frame of the study was consisted of 165 faculty members of the college from which a sample of 30% was taken, keeping in mind the representativeness of the whole population of this research study. The sample size of 50 respondents was selected. A structured interview schedule was used as an instrument for the collection of data covering the objectives of this study. Field data were gathered through face-to-face interviews with the respondents. Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis.

Research Questions

Following close-ended research questions were constructed to cover the objectives of this research study:

1. Are you familiar with transgender people?
2. How do you perceive transgender people generally?
3. How do you differentiate transgender people from men & women?
4. What best you suggest regarding social acceptance/inclusion of transgender in our society?

Results

Table 1 is about the personal profile of the respondents. For the academic qualification, 70% of the respondents were master's degree holders, whereas 20% were M. Phil and the remaining 10% were Ph.D. As per the age group, 44% of them were of 30-40 years of age whereas 40% were of 40-above and the remaining 16% of the respondents were 20-30 years old. As per the marital status, 86% of the respondents were married, whereas 08% were widowed and 06% were single. About the no. of children, the above table showed that 64% of respondents had 2-4 children whereas 20% had 0-2 children and 16% of the respondents had 4-6 children.

Table 1. Personal Profile of the Respondents

Personal Profile		f	%
Qualification	Master	35	70.00
	M. Phil	10	20.00
	PhD	05	10.00
	Total	50	100.00
Age	20- 30	08	16.00
	30 -40	22	44.00
	40- above	20	40.00
	Total	50	100.00
Marital Status	Single	03	06.00
	Married	43	86.00
	Widowed	04	08.00
	Divorced	-	-
No. Of Children	Total	50	100.00
	0 – 2	10	20.00
	2-4	32	64.00
	4-6	08	16.00
	Total	50	100.00

All respondents (100%) were familiar with transgender people.

Table 2. Familiarity with Transgender

Familiar with transgender	f	%
Yes	50	100.00
No	-	-
Total	50	100.00

Regarding the source of familiarity of the respondents with transgender people, 82% met transgender in street/roadside while begging whereas 80% of the respondents met transgender in

some wedding ceremonies. 42% of the respondents met transgender on some childbirth(s) whereas 24% seen them on media and 12% had some personal transgender friends/relatives in the family.

Table 3. Source of Familiarity with Transgender

Source of familiarity	f	%
Met on some wedding(s)	40	80.00
Met on some childbirth(s)	21	42.00
Met in street/roadside while begging	41	82.00
have personal transgender friends/relatives in the family	06	12.00
Seen on media	12	24.00

About the perceptions of the respondents, table 4 expressed that 78% of the respondents' perceived transgender as in-between creature, whereas 64% perceived them as just cross-dressers. 46% of the respondents perceived transgender as homosexual

males who play passive roles whereas 36% didn't know much except that they are unique. 22% perceived transgender as Males with some physical/biological illness and 04% perceived them as some curse by God.

Table 4. Perception about Transgender

Perception about transgender	f	%
In-between creature	39	78.00
Homosexual males play passive roles	23	46.00
Males with some physical/biological illness	11	22.00
Some Curse by God	02	04.00
Cross-dressers	32	64.00
Don't know much except that they are unique	18	36.00

Table 5 showed that 60% of the respondents were of the view that transgender are male persons who adopted this disguise for attaining sexual attractions by other male persons/purposes, whereas 42% differentiated as transgender are male persons with

some mental illness. 40% of the respondents responded that all of them have physical differences, and 36% responded that both male & female are complete and perfect humans, but transgender are an incomplete creature.

Table 5. Differentiation of Transgender from Men & Women

Differentiation	f	%
All of them have physical differences	20	40.00
Male & female are complete and perfect humans but transgender is incomplete creature	18	36.00
Transgender are male persons with some mental illness	21	42.00

Differentiation	f	%
Transgender are male persons who adopted this disguise for attaining sexual attractions by other male persons/purposes	30	60.00

For having some suggestions for social acceptance/inclusion of transgender in society, 100% of the respondents suggested that they should be given education; healthcare, and employment opportunities, whereas 88% suggested that transgender should be protected from discrimination

by the Government. 56% suggested that they should strictly associate themselves with any one of the pre-existing binary sex systems and 12% of them suggested that transgender should be allowed to go through surgical interventions for building a perfect match between their body and gender identity.

Table 6. Suggestions Regarding Social Acceptance/Inclusion

Suggestions for Social Acceptance/ Inclusion	f	%
Transgender should be allowed to have surgery, so their body matches their identity	06	12.00
Transgender should strictly associate themselves with any one of the pre-existing binary sex systems	28	56.00
Transgender should be allowed to conceive or give birth to children (if biologically capable of doing so)	-	-
Transgender should be protected from discrimination by the Government	44	88.00
Transgender should be given education, healthcare, and employment opportunities	50	100.00

Discussion

This study is one of the very first glimpses to empirically studying public perceptions about transgender people as the study of Long Doan and colleagues (2019) pointed out in their study named *Americans Perceptions of Transgender Peoples Sex: Evidence from a National Survey Experiment*. The current research study was designed to have a public opinion about transgender people of Pakistan. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was applied. The survey method was selected among quantitative research methods. Through simple random sampling, a sample of 50 respondents was chosen among probability sampling techniques. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews followed by a structured interview schedule. The collected data were processed and analyzed within a descriptive manner.

About the personal profile of the respondents of this study, 70% of the respondents were master degree holders from the age group of 30-40 years (44%). As per the marital status, 86% of the respondents found married having (64% of the respondents) 2-4 children.

The results of the study showed that 100% of the respondents were familiar with transgender people. The findings of this research study were more encouraging as compared to a recent study of Long Doan, Natasha Quadlin & Brian Powell (2019), which found that only 31% of people knew about transgender. Regarding the source of familiarity of the respondents with transgender people, 82% of the respondents were familiar with transgender because they met with them in some street/roadside while begging. The second (80%) major source of public familiarity with transgender was meeting transgender in some wedding ceremonies.

Public opinion has played a leading role in many debates related to sex and gender. Public perceptions and attitudes toward gender minorities have frequently supplicated the debates onto homosexual relationships and/or same-sex marriage (Hart-Brinson, 2018; Lewis & Oh, 2008; Powell et al., 2010). The findings of this study had also expressed that 78% of the respondents perceived transgender people as some in-between creature. Further, 46% of the respondents perceived transgender as homosexual males who play passive roles mostly/usually. The findings of this study

strengthened the findings of previous studies, including *The Gay Marriage Generation: How the LGBTQ Movement Transformed American Culture* of [Hart-Brinson \(2018\)](#), *Public Opinion and State Action on Same-Sex Marriage* of [Lewis and Oh \(2008\)](#), and another study, *Counted Out: Same-Sex Marriage and Americans Definitions of Family* of [Powell et al. \(2010\)](#).

This study found that 60% of the respondents placed transgender in the male category of the binary gender system. The reason behind placing transgender in the male category was that the public considered trans-identity as a disguise for attaining sexual attractions by other male persons of their own gender. These research findings clearly placed transgender people in the male category rather than suggesting any category out/beyond binary. The findings of the present study strived to explain why the public giving the impression of being lazy to accept or even acknowledge those individuals who disobeyed the traditionally established categories of male and female ([Broockman & Kalla, 2016](#); [Powell et al., 2010](#); [Powell, Quadlin & Pizmony-Levy, 2015](#); [Schilt & Lajos, 2017](#); [Stone, 2019](#); [Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015](#)) in our society, in spite of increasing discussions about transgender people for some years ([Epps, 2018](#); [Lambda, n.d.](#)). Although a significant number of people, now identify as transgender in the United States, however, they have to face much resistance from the public. On the contrary, the positive aspect of continuously challenging pre-existing and well-established binary system of genders, the transgender population continues to grow whereas the traditional gender categories continue to blur ([Doan, et. al., 2019](#)).

For having some suggestions for social acceptance/inclusion of transgender in society, this present research study found that 100% of the respondents suggested that transgender people

should be given education, healthcare and employment opportunities just like members of binary genders. Moreover, 88% suggested that transgender should be protected from discrimination by the Government/state. The third (56%) major and uniquely important finding in this regard showed that the public strictly suggested transgender people to associate themselves with one of the pre-existing binary genders.

Conclusions

Public perception regarding transgender people in Pakistan is a unique research study across the country in the field of transgender/gender studies. The present research emphasized on the opinions and perceptions of the general public regarding transgender people. Studying gender in an Islamic ideological country is not an easy task. The history of gender minorities i.e. LGBT and Queers among others has been replete with the tremendous/disastrous resistance treated by the public at large for making them to choose one from the pre-existing binary genders. Gender studies had a tragic association with religion too that remained the non-binary genders silent. Studying transgender is not less than a blessed opportunity within these religious and socio-cultural conditions of our country. The study concluded that all of the respondents were familiar with transgender people as many of them mostly encountered with them on streets/roads while begging, on wedding and childbirth ceremonies in their routine life. It was further concluded that though the respondents had no in-depth/detailed perception about transgender however, a majority of them placed the transgender in male category. Because the respondents were of the view that transgender persons were male who impersonated female/opposite gender appearance to attract other male persons for some sexual purposes.

References

- Ansari, A. M., & Maqsood, F. (2018). Being an Effeminate in the Family: Family experiences of Transgender of Pakistan. *Oriental Research Journal of Social Science*, 3(1) 128-139.
- Ansari, A. M., Yasmeen, B., & Alvi, A. S. (2017). The Self-Concept: A transgender Perspective. *The Explorer. Islamabad*, 3(2), 59-65.
- Bevan, T. E. (2014). *The Psychobiology of Transsexualism and Transgenderism: A New View Based on Scientific Evidence*. ABC-CLIO.
- Broockman, D., & Kalla, J. (2016). Durably Reducing Transphobia: A Field Experiment on Door-to-Door Canvassing. *Science*, 352(6282), 220-24.
- Burdge, B. J. (2007). Bending Gender, Ending Gender: Theoretical Foundations for Social Work Practice with the Transgender Community. *Social Work*, 52(3), 243-250.
- Cauldwell, & Hausman, B. L. (1995). *Changing Sex: Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* Durham and London, Duke University Press. ISBN 0-8223-1692-7.
- Doan, L., Quadlin, N., & Powell, B. (2019). Americans Perceptions of Transgender People's Sex: Evidence from a National Survey Experiment, *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 5, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231190852>
- Dozier, R. (2005). Beards, Breasts, and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World. *Gender & Society* 19(3), 297-316.
- Epps, G. (2018). How Birth Certificates Are Being Weaponized against Trans People. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/how-birth-certificates-are-being-weaponized-once-again/562361/>.
- Flores, A. R. (2015). Attitudes toward Transgender Rights: Perceived Knowledge and Secondary Interpersonal Contact. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 3(3), 398-416.
- Hart-Brinson, P. (2018). *The Gay Marriage Generation: How the LGBTQ Movement Transformed American Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. (2008). Human Rights and Transgender People in Pakistan. Report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council for its 2008 Universal Periodic Review on February 6, 2008. www.iglhrc.org/
- Jenkin, R. (2003). *Social Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, P. E., Paul, R. B., Dannagal G. Y., Jennifer, L. L., & Hoffman, L. H. (2018). Explaining Public Opinion toward Transgender People, Rights, and Candidates. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(2), 252-278. <https://academic.oup.com/poq/article/82/2/252/4996117>
- Kuvalanka, K. A., Judith L. W., & Derek M. (2014). Child, Family, and Community Transformations: Findings from Interviews with Mothers of Transgender Girls. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 10(4), 354-79.
- Lambda, L. (n.d.). *Equal Access to Public Restrooms*. <https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/trans-restroom-access-rights>
- Lewis, G., & Oh, S. (2008). Public Opinion and State Action on Same-Sex Marriage. *State & Local Government Review*, 40, 42-53.
- National Center for Transgender Equality. (2016). Transgender People and Bathroom Access. <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/Trans-People-Bathroom-Access-July-2016.pdf>.
- Norton, A. T., & Herek, G. M. (2013). Heterosexuals Attitudes toward Transgender People: Findings from a National Probability Sample of Adults. *Sex Roles* 68(11-12), 738-53.
- Pfeffer, C. A. (2017). *Queering Families: The Postmodern Partnerships of Cisgender Women and Transgender Men*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Powell, B., Catherine, B., Claudia, G., & Lala C. S. (2010). *Counted Out: Same-Sex Marriage and Americans Definitions of Family*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Powell, B., Landon, S., & Lauren, A. (2017). Denial of Service to Same-Sex and Interracial Couples: Evidence from a National Survey Experiment. *Science Advances* 3(12), ea05834.
- Powell, B., Quadlin, N. Y., & Pizmony-Levy, O. (2015). Public Opinion, the Courts, and Same-

- Sex Marriage: Four Lessons Learned. *Social Currents* 2(1), 3–12.
- Schilt, K. (2010). *Just One of the Guys? Transgender Men and the Persistence of Gender Inequality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schilt, K., & Lagos, D. (2017). The Development of Transgender Studies in Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*. 43, 425–43.
- Stone, A. L. (2013). Flexible Queers, Serious Bodies: Transgender Inclusion in Queer Spaces. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 60(12), 1647–65.
- Stone, A. L. (2019). Frame Variation in Child Protectionist Claims: Constructions of Gay Men and Transgender Women as Strangers. *Social Forces*. 97(3), 1155–76.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society* 1(2), 125–51.
- Westbrook, L., & Saperstein, A. (2015). New Categories Are Not Enough: Rethinking the Measurement of Sex and Gender in Social Surveys. *Gender & Society*. 29(4), 534–60.
- Westbrook, L., & Schilt, K. (2014). Doing Gender, Determining Gender: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System. *Gender & Society* 28(1), 32–57.