



Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Toward Hijras Among Residents in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

Hijras, recognized as a third gender in South Asia, are a marginalized community in Pakistan facing significant social stigma and exclusion. This study examined the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of people in Punjab, Pakistan, towards Hijras. Using a cross-sectional design and convenience sampling, data were collected from 1,546 participants by using a self-designed scale. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Results indicated that 43.72% of respondents were knowledgeable about Hijras, 41.24% had a positive attitude towards them, and 41.04% showed positive practices regarding their rights. Chi-Square analysis revealed that males generally had higher KAP levels than females, possibly due to greater social mobility and interaction with diverse groups. Older individuals displayed more positive attitudes and practices, likely influenced by increased life experience. Higher education levels were associated with greater understanding and acceptance of the Hijras. Professionally, government employees showed the highest KAP levels, suggesting that diversity training enhances empathy. Regional differences highlighted the influence of cultural norms and visibility of Hijras. These findings emphasized the need for targeted educational and policy initiatives to foster inclusivity and reduce discrimination against the Hijra community in Pakistan.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Practices, Hijra, Transgender, Punjab, Pakistan.

Introduction

Transgender is a broad term encompassing individuals whose gender identity and expression differ from the societal norms associated with their assigned sex at birth (Davidson, 2007; Valentine, 2007). In Pakistan, transgender people are commonly referred to as Hijra, Murat, Khawaja Sara, or Khusra, with this paper using "Hijras" for consistency. From a young age, Hijras often face discrimination and mistreatment, experiencing bias in various environments such as schools and families (Nazir & Yasir, 2016). While many people in Pakistan are aware of the Hijra community, a lack of understanding and recognition persists. Approximately 2% of Pakistan's population identifies as Hijra (transgender), with some studies suggesting that one in fifty children is born Hijra (Sarfraz, 2017). Knowledge about the Hijra community among the general population varies.

Many are aware of the historical and cultural significance of Hijras in South Asian society, where they have long been recognized as a distinct gender category (Nanda, 1999). However, misconceptions are widespread. For example, a study by Khan et al. (2009) found that while most respondents could identify Hijras, many held erroneous beliefs about their lifestyle and social roles, often shaped by stereotypes and media portrayals. Attitudes towards Hijras in Punjab are generally negative, deeply rooted in cultural and religious norms. Hijras are often viewed with a mixture of fear, curiosity, and disdain, seen as socially deviant and morally ambiguous (Jami, 2015). These negative attitudes are more pronounced among those with lower education levels and limited direct interaction with Hijras. However, increased awareness and education can lead to more positive attitudes. For instance, a public awareness campaign in Lahore significantly improved perceptions of Hijras, showing the potential for attitude change (Baig, 2018). Similarly, studies in the U.S. indicate that negative attitudes toward transgender individuals are influenced by factors such as gender, education, and religion, with education and visibility playing key roles in improving these attitudes (Norton & Herek, 2011). The general population's practices towards Hijras are often discriminatory. Hijras face significant barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment, leading to their social and economic marginalization (Riaz & Jami, 2012). Although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights and the Supreme Court has granted voting rights to the transgender community, resulting in five individuals contesting elections in 2013, discrimination remains pervasive (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2011). Since 2015, over 91 transgender individuals have been murdered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with more than 2,000 reported cases of violence against the community. From January 2021 to August 2023, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan documented 72 cases of violence against transgender individuals across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh, including incidents of sexual violence (UNDP, 2023). Many cases go unreported due to insufficient legal protections, indicating that the actual number of hate crimes may be higher. This violence and discrimination force many Hijras to conceal their identities, hindering their full participation in society. Hijras often change residences to escape negative associations with their families and communities. Their professions, often involving dancing or begging, are stigmatized, prompting further relocations. Families of Hijras often feel ashamed and discourage contact, perpetuating significant stigma, especially within Pakistani society. Low literacy rates compel many parents to send their Hijra children to the eunuch community, severely limiting their access to education and economic opportunities; approximately 79% of the eunuch population in Pakistan is uneducated. Common barriers to education include abuse, financial constraints, and gender discrimination (Nazir & Yasir, 2016). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to raise awareness, promote acceptance, and ensure the protection of Hijras' rights and well-being in Punjab and across Pakistan (Batool et al. 2024). The literature review reveals a lack of comprehensive KAP studies on the general population's knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards Hijras in Punjab. This research aims to fill that gap by exploring the correlation of gender, age, education, area, profession and residential place with the Knowledge, attitude and practices of the general population towards Hijras of Pakistan. The findings can guide education, awareness campaigns, and inform policymakers on the challenges faced by Hijras. Additionally, the study will provide baseline data for future assessments, contributing to a more inclusive society where Hijras are recognized and valued as equal members.

Method

Participants

The study involved participants from the Punjab province of Pakistan, with a sample size of 1,546 individuals, comprising 741 males and 805 females. Data was collected using convenient sampling.

Study Design and Data Collection

A cross-sectional research design was employed to assess the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) of the general population towards Hijras in Pakistan. Data collection took place from June 10 to August 10, 2024, using web-based surveys. Participants from six divisions of Punjab—Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, Lahore, Sargodha, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi—were included in the study.

Instruments

A structured, self-designed scale with 15 items was used to gather information on participants' knowledge (awareness of the Hijra community and their legal status), attitudes (interest in learning more about Hijras and their interactions with them), and practices (actions taken to engage with Hijras and address discrimination). The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with the following results: Knowledge ($\alpha=0.85$), Attitudes ($\alpha=0.81$), and Practices ($\alpha=0.72$).

Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring that they were fully aware of the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all data, and no personally identifiable information was recorded or disclosed. The study was conducted with sensitivity towards the Hijra community and special attention was given to the cultural context of Pakistan, ensuring that the research design, data collection, and analysis were culturally appropriate and respectful.

Data Analysis

SPSS was utilized for the statistical analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the frequencies and percentages of demographic variables. Chi-Square tests were used to examine the relationships between participants' gender, age, education, area, profession, and residential location with their Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices towards Hijras.

Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants (n=1546)

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Female	741	47.9
	Male	805	52.1
Age	18-25	76	4.9
	26-35	592	38.3
	36-45	618	40.0
	Above 45	260	16.8
Education	Bachelor	78	5.0

	Masters	260	16.8
	M.Phil.	840	54.3
	Ph.D.	368	23.8
Area	Urban	1004	64.9
	Rural	542	35.1
Profession	Student	98	6.3
	Domestic Worker	494	32.0
	Govt. Employee	756	48.9
	Private Employee	198	12.8
Residential Division	Dera Ghazi Khan	438	28.3
	Multan	374	24.2
	Lahore	274	17.7
	Sargodha	244	15.8
	Rawalpindi	106	6.9
	Faisalabad	110	7.1
	Total	1546	100

Questionnaire Items

The questionnaire included questions designed to assess the general population's knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) towards the Hijra community. Knowledge items (1-5) focused on respondents' awareness of the Hijras community, their secret language, legal status, and policies protecting them. Attitude items (6-10) explored personal beliefs, biases, and emotional responses towards Hijras, examining both positive and negative perceptions. Practice Items (11-15) investigated the interaction with Hijras in everyday situations, including behaviors in trying to learn about Hijra community, service provision, and willingness to support their rights and inclusion.

Table 2: Items on knowledge of Hijras (n=1546)

Knowledge Statements	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Are you aware of the term Hijra?	96.4	3.6
2. Do you have any knowledge about Hijra Farsi?	6.3	93.7
3. Do you think Hijras are legally recognized in Pakistan?	50.3	49.7

4. Are you aware of any laws or policies that protect the rights of Hijras in Pakistan?	33.0	67.0
5. Do you know of any organization or initiative that works for the rights of Hijras in Pakistan?	32.6	67.4

Table 2 showed responses to the knowledge questions. Although 96.4% of participants were aware of Hijras, yet 93.7% lacked familiarity with their secret language. Only 50.3% knew that Hijras were legally recognized in Pakistan, and just 33% were aware of any specific laws or policies protecting their rights. Additionally, 67.4% of people were unaware of any organizations or initiatives supporting Hijra rights in Pakistan. Overall, 43.72% people have good knowledge about Hijras and their social status.

Table 3: Attitude towards Hijras (n=1546)

Attitude Statements	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
1. I feel comfortable around a Hijra.	48.9	51.1
2. I feel scared if I see a Hijra around me.	22.1	77.9
3. I feel comfortable having a Hijra friend.	26.0	74.0
4. I feel happy to know about the government initiatives to improve the lives of Hijras.	80.9	19.1
5. I think Hijras are a bad influence on society.	28.3	71.7

Table 3 showed 51.1% of participants reported feeling uncomfortable around Hijras, and 22.1% felt scared in their presence. Only 26.0% felt comfortable having a Hijra friend. Despite these attitudes, 80.9% were supportive of government efforts to improve Hijra lives and combat stigma, and 71.7% believed Hijras do not negatively influence society. Overall, 41.24% people feel comfortable to interact with Hijras and show happiness over government initiatives for the wellbeing of Hijras.

Table 4: Practice towards Hijras (n=1546)

Practice Statements	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. Do you interact with a Hijra person in your personal or professional life?	49.7	50.3
2. Do you try to learn more about the lifestyle and experiences of Hijras?	44.8	55.2
3. Do you participate in any organization or program that advocates the rights of Hijras?	25.7	74.3

4. Do you speak against the discrimination or challenges faced by Hijras?	40.5	59.5
5. Do you treat a Hijra person the same way you treat anyone else around you?	44.5	55.5

Table 4 showed only 49.7% of participants interact with Hijras in their personal or professional lives, and 44.8% seek to learn more about Hijra lifestyles and experiences. Participation in organizations advocating for Hijra rights is low, with only 25.7% involved, and only 40.5% actively speak out against the discrimination faced by Hijras. Lastly, 44.5% reported treating Hijras equally to others around them. Overall, 41.04% positive practices towards Hijras with respect to interaction, having a friend or talking about their rights. This shows that people have a high acceptance level towards Hijras.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of gender, age, education, profession and residential area, KAP

Demography	Low KAP	Med KAP	High KAP	Total	Pearson Chi-Square	Significance
Gender						
Female	301	284	156	741	$\chi^2=6.969^a$	0.006*
Male	313	286	206	805		
Total	614	570	362	1546		
Age						
18-25	46	26	4	76	$\chi^2=44.818^a$.000*
26-35	186	244	162	592		
36-45	278	200	140	618		
Above 45	104	100	56	260		
Total	614	570	362	1546		
Education						
Bachelor	40	24	14	78	$\chi^2=16.054^a$.013*
Master	112	92	56	260		
M.Phil.	342	294	204	840		
Ph.D.	120	160	88	368		
Total	614	570	362	1546		
Profession						

Student	46	30	22	98	$\chi^2=49.163^a$.000*
Domestic Worker	204	166	124	494		
Govt. Employee	254	302	200	756		
Private Employee	110	72	16	198		
Total	614	570	362	1546		
Residential Area						
D. G. Khan	184	158	96	438	$\chi^2=89.013^a$.000*
Multan	128	138	108	374		
Lahore	120	86	68	274		
Sargodha	116	64	64	244		
Rawalpindi	22	78	6	106		
Faisalabad	44	46	20	110		
Total	614	570	362	1546		

P<0.05*

Table 05 indicates significant associations between demographic factors and KAP scores. Gender analysis reveals males have higher KAP scores than females, with a significant difference ($\chi^2=6.969$, $p=0.006$). Age shows a strong impact on KAP, particularly in the 26-45 age range ($\chi^2=44.818$, $p=0.000$). Higher education levels correlate with increased KAP scores ($\chi^2=16.054$, $p=0.013$). Profession also influences KAP, with government employees having the highest scores ($\chi^2=49.163$, $p=0.000$). Lastly, residential areas significantly affect KAP, with Multan showing higher scores compared to other regions ($\chi^2=89.013$, $p=0.000$).

Discussion of Results

The data regarding Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) towards Hijras in Pakistan shows marked differences based on several demographic factors. These include gender, age, education, profession, and residential area. Such findings reveal the complex nature and variety of public views and interactions with the Hijra community reflecting larger socio-cultural dynamics present in society (Fatima et al., 2022). The results indicate a notable gender difference in KAP concerning Hijras. A Pearson Chi-Square value of 6.969, with a significance level of 0.006, emphasizes this disparity. Generally, females display lower KAP levels compared to males. Specifically, 301 females fall into the low KAP category while 313 males do. On the flip side, in the high KAP category, we see that more males (206) are included than females (156). This may point toward the patriarchal norms prevalent in Pakistan. Men often experience greater social mobility and have more opportunities to engage with marginalized people like Hijras. Further influencing these

perceptions are gendered socialization frameworks within Asian cultures (Reddy, 2005). The Pearson Chi-Square value of 44.818 and significance level of 0.000 indicate that age significantly impacts KAP. Younger individuals (18-25 years) have lower KAP levels compared to those aged 26-45, likely due to limited life experiences and exposure to diverse groups. In contrast, older age groups, who are more established in their careers and personal lives, exhibit higher KAP levels, possibly due to greater interaction with diverse communities and access to information. This is because empathy evolves from infancy to old age and as people age, their capacity for empathy becomes more complex and nuanced, which enhances their ability to understand and relate to the experiences of marginalized groups (Hoffman, 2000). Similarly, Blasi (2004) argues that moral reasoning and empathy, which develop through diverse life experiences, typically increase with age, leading to greater understanding and empathy toward others, including marginalized communities. The results show that education has a significant association with how people feel about Hijras as we can see a Pearson Chi-Square value of 16.054, plus a significance level of 0.013. It turns out that people with more education, especially those who have an M.Phil. or Ph.D., tend to have a better understanding and perspective regarding Hijras. Education helps people think in new ways and opens their minds. This leads to more kindness and acceptance for groups that sometimes get left out. Research tells us that when people go further in their education, they often have better attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities. Higher education helps challenge old biases & promotes acceptance (Nanda, 1999; Herek, 2000; Norton & Herek, 2011). Professionally, KAP levels towards Hijras vary significantly, with government employees showing the highest levels ($\chi^2 = 49.163$, $p = 0.000$), followed by private employees and domestic workers. This may be due to diversity and inclusion training in government sectors, which enhances understanding and empathy towards Hijras. Government employees, particularly in urban areas, are more likely to interact with Hijras, leading to higher KAP. These findings support Sharma's (2012) assertion that professional exposure and training shape attitudes towards gender minorities. Similarly, Kulik and Roberson (2008) note that effective diversity training programs can positively impact employees' attitudes and behaviors towards gender and sexual minorities by increasing awareness and reducing biases. The study reveals significant regional variations in Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) towards Hijras, with a Pearson Chi-Square value of 89.013 and a significance level of 0.000. D.G. Khan shows the highest KAP levels, while Rawalpindi exhibits notably lower levels. These differences are likely due to varying cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and exposure to Hijra communities. Regions with a more visible presence of Hijras or more discussion on gender issues tend to have higher KAP. Glick and Fiske (2001) and Herek and McLemore (2013) support this, noting that regional cultural norms and visibility of marginalized groups significantly influence public attitudes and treatment. The findings from this study emphasize the importance of demographic factors in shaping knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards the Hijra community in Pakistan. Gender, age, education, profession, and residential area all play significant roles in influencing public perceptions and interactions with Hijras. These insights can inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at promoting acceptance and inclusion of the Hijra community across different segments of Pakistani society.

Limitations

The use of convenience sampling in this study may limit the representativeness of the findings, as the sample might not fully reflect the diversity of the Punjab population, thereby affecting the generalizability of the results to other regions or the entire province. Additionally, relying on self-reported data through surveys can introduce response biases, such as social desirability bias, where participants may report more favorable attitudes or practices than they actually hold. The sensitivity of the topic could also lead to underreporting or reluctance to provide honest responses about attitudes and practices toward Hijras, potentially skewing the data. Moreover, the study's

focus on only six divisions in Punjab may not adequately capture regional variations in attitudes and practices throughout the entire province.

Recommendations

Future research should consider using random sampling methods and include a more diverse range of participants from different regions and socio-economic backgrounds to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights into the reasons behind certain attitudes and practices, complementing the quantitative data collected. Conducting longitudinal studies could also help track changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices over time, especially in response to educational and policy interventions. Furthermore, based on the findings, targeted awareness campaigns and educational programs should be developed to address misconceptions and foster more positive attitudes towards Hijras, particularly in regions with lower levels of knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP).

Conclusion

The study reveals significant association between people's knowledge, attitude and practices toward Hijras and their gender, age, education, profession and residential area. The results emphasize the need for educational awareness and holistic policies regarding supportive behavior and inclusive practices to increase the social inclusion of Hijras in Pakistan. Society can move towards acceptance and integration of the Hijra community if we address the loopholes in our strategies to educate people regarding Hijras and foster positive attitudes among people toward Hijras by introducing targeted interventions and policies. Government and private organizations should create more work opportunities for Hijras so that they have more chances to interact with the general population. This will not only reform their lifestyle but also create mutual harmony and acceptance between Hijras and Non-Hijra persons.

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