# Exploring the Contemporary Societal experiences & their Impact on the Mental Health of Hijra Community: A Qualitative Study in Jasshore City, Bangladesh

**Author(s):** Md. Reza- A- Rabby[1,2], Antara Das Antu[1,3], Priyanka Sarkar [4,5]

## Affiliation.

[1] Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh[2] BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh [3] Psychological Health and Wellness Care Ltd., Dhaka, Bangladesh[4] Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh[5] Life and Light Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh

# Introduction

➢ Hijra people do not fit into the binary gender identity concept [1]

➢ Constantly troubled by living in a holistic unsupportive environment [2]

➢ Often develop a new way of living and customs [3]

➢ Face numerous societal pressures as a marginalized community [3]

# Introduction(research questions)

➤ What are the current sociocultural experiences of hijra people in Jasshore city?

➤ What are the impacts of the sociocultural experiences on the mental health of Hijra individuals?

# Method

➢ Design: Qualitative approach

➢ Tool: In-depth interviewing

➢ Participants: 20 participants of the Hijra community aged 18 to 29 (mean age of 19.85years).

➢ Sampling: Purposive sampling.

➢ Interpretation: Inductive reflective thematic analysis through manual coding.

➢ Ethical standards of Helsinki Declaration was followed.

# Results

| Theme | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| 1: Encountering bullying, exclusion & violence in the society | Negative labeling based on gender identity, exclusion and violence from family and society, psychological impact of bullying  and exclusion, mental health deterioration |
| 2: Disparities in education, employment and health settings | Educational disparities and discrimination, lack of job security, workplace bullying, exclusion from proper medical treatment, psychological impact of discrimination |

# Results (cont…)

| Theme | Subthemes |
|---|---|
| 3: Enduring neglect in relationships | Familial rejection and abuse, romantic relationship exploitation, psychological impact of neglect and abuse |

# Results(cont…)

Our participants mentioned, encountering bullying, exclusion & violence in the society led them to experience emotional distress, isolation, low self-esteem, fear of public places.

➢ One participant (IDI- 11; Age:23) mentioned, *"Since my childhood, I loved to play with girls' toys, be friends with girls, and dress like a girl that my parents did not like. I used to have more female friends at my living area so one day one of my uncle called me and told me to play with boys as he thinks I am a boy. My playmates often taunted me by calling me names like "girlish", "half-ladies", "and hijra."*

➢ One participant (IDI- 20; Age:22) mentioned,*"All kind bullies by nearby people make me feel very low, I often avoid meeting people and stayed alone in the corner of the room. I always feel isolated and scared while coming out in public."*

# Results(cont…)

According to our participants, they face disparities in the education, employment and health settings which led them to the severe mental health crisis like the feelings of hopelessness, guilt, isolation and suicidal ideation .

➢ A participant (IDI-15; Age:27) *"When I am ready to accept my gender identity as a hijra my real struggle begins. I have started studying economics. My dreams of being an economist are fading way day by day. My friends and classmates make fun of me as I start dressing like a woman. My teachers are also not supportive at all."*

➢ Another participant (IDI- 12; Age:26) "*I have applied to an even lower grade job than my qualification but the manager told me they don't want clowns at the office and they have got a reputation to protect. I badly needed a job to support my family but I was unable to get it.*"

➢ Another participant (IDI- 10; Age:27) also mentioned, *"I feel sad most of the time by encantering the adverse experiences in hospitals. I am hopeless about my medical support as I am not sure where I can get proper information. Mocking by the hospital staff makes me feel so stressed out that I tried to commit suicide multiple times."*

# Results( cont..)

Participants mentioned, they experience neglect in relationship which lead them to develop low self-esteem, feeling of loneliness, guilt, isolation and negative coping mechanism, like - substance abuse as a result of avoidance.

➢ A participant (IDI- 16; Age:19) said,"*Our family members try to avoid us and humiliate us. My parents shut the door on my face and my younger brother often beats me up. I don't receive any respect or love from family, friends, or romantic partners. Everybody abandons and insults me whenever they can. Sometimes it feels like being born this way is a curse.*"

➢ *One participant (IDI- 06; Age:24) said, "I feel like I'm living in hell because none of my family members support me. I don't understand why they treat me this way, especially since I'm their own flesh and blood. I feel incredibly lonely, as if I don't belong in this harsh world. I have started taking marijuana and other drugs to be happy.*"

# Conclusion

➢ Our findings highlight the pervasive impact of the contemporary societal exposure on the mental health of Hijra individuals of Bangladesh.

➢ Being vulnerable to bullying and violence from both their family and community, Hijra individuals experience low self-esteem, loneliness.

➢ Development of the feelings of hopelessness, guilt, isolation and suicidal ideation as a mental health consequences of educational, employment and health care disparities.

➢ Enduring avoidance in relationships by family members and romantic partners lead to the low self-esteem, feeling of loneliness, guilt and negative coping mechanism, like - substance abuse as a result of avoidance.

# Conclusion (cont…)

Limitations:

➢ Limited generalizability
➢ Lack of substantial statistical support
➢ Possibility of social desirability bias
➢ Lack of funding to conduct mixed method large study

# Conclusion(cont…)

Recommendations(based on researcher's perspective):

➢ To provide mental health support, a national psychosocial support team specialized for helping the hijra individuals can be created.

➢ Peer support group meetings, virtual emergency emotional support sessions can be arranged.

➢ Mental health awareness, human rights and personal development related group sessions can be offered within the Hijra community.

➢ Emotional literacy can be integrated into the mainstream education curriculum

# Acknowledgements

➢ All study participants

➢ Mr. Safayet Khan (BRAC University)

➢ Rahnuma E Jannat (University of Dhaka)

# References

1. Khan, S. I., S. Islam, M. I. Hussain, S. Parveen, M. I. Bhuiyan, G. Gourab, G. F. Sarker, S. M.Arafat, & J. Sikder. (2009). Living on the Extreme Margin: Social Exclusion of the Transgender Population (Hijra) in Bangladesh. *Journal of Healtha, Population, and Nutrition, 27* (4), 441–451.

2. Kalra, G. & Shah, N. (2014). The Cultural, Psychiatric, and Sexuality Aspects of Hijras in India, *International Journal of Transgenderism, 14* (4), 171-181.

3. Sarker, B. K. & Pervin, M. T. (2020). Socio-economic Status of Hijra Community: A Study on Dhaka City. *International Journal of Science and Business, 4* (1), 276 - 284.