

Gender-Based Violence and the Pakistani Transgender Community in COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the UNDP brief (2020) on Gender-based Violence (GBV) and COVID-19, ‘Gender-based violence (GBV) increases during every type of emergency – whether economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks. Pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities, economic and social stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV.’

The UNDP has documented 243 million women and girls as having been subjected to sexual and /or physical violence in the last 12 months. The COVID-19 pandemic, enforcing lockdown throughout the world, gave rise to increasing incidence of GBV and many studies are documenting this fact. What has not been focused on is the impact it has had on the marginalised communities.

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Preparedness and Response - UNFPA Technical Briefs V states that ‘Different groups of women and men, particularly those most excluded such as those living in poverty, homeless persons, ... LGBTIQ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex individuals, and others who face intersecting and multiple forms of discrimination will face a higher risk of being left behind in access to outbreak response including testing, treatment, social protection, care, and within the quarantine experience.’

Pakistan, like other countries of the world, has been impacted severely by the COVID-19 pandemic and the socioeconomic structure has received a set-back, which is not going away any time soon. Out of all the communities impacted by the pandemic, perhaps the most seriously impacted is the transgender community. Living on the periphery of mainstream society, this community earns its living mainly through singing and dancing on private occasions and celebrations. With the lockdown being imposed, they had to resort to begging and consequently face harassment at the hands of the law -enforcement agencies as well as the general public.

Key questions to be addressed during the panel discussion will be:

1. What constitutes violence for the trans-persons?
2. How is the transgender community responding to the violence perpetrated by mainstream society?
3. What role do the representative organisations of transgenders play in mitigating violence?
4. What role do government organisations play in mitigating the suffering of the community?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 and how does it affect the transgender community?

This panel discussion aims to bring together experts in the field along with members of the transgender community in order to deliberate upon the issues faced by them in the time of COVID-19, and how this impact can be mitigated if not resolved.

References

UNDP 2020, 'Gender-based Violence and COVID-19', 11 May, United Nations Development Program, <<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-based-violence-and-covid-19.html>>.

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