

Understanding Transgender Marginalization: An Ecological Systems Approach to Social and Educational Challenges in Pakistan

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Abstract: This research critically examines the educational and social marginalization of the transgender community in Pakistan. Despite legal protections under domestic law and international treaties, transgender individuals continue to face substantial barriers to educational and economic progress. The study explores the colonial legacy that contributed to the stigmatization of the transgender community, analysing its post-colonial consequences and the persistence of systemic discrimination in contemporary Pakistan. Using Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model as a theoretical framework, this research evaluates the interconnected social, educational, and economic factors that reinforce their exclusion. By identifying gaps within this framework, the study aims to inform the development of inclusive policies that uphold transgender rights and promote equitable access to education in alignment with the principle of "education for all."

Keyword: Transgender rights, education, colonialism, post-colonialism, inclusivity, Bronfenbrenner's model.

I. INTRODUCTION

Inequality is a pervasive issue worldwide, impacting various sectors such as the economy, education, and social justice. In Pakistan, the transgender community faces systemic exclusion, discrimination, and harassment, all of which violate their fundamental rights, including access to education and economic opportunities. Key barriers preventing transgender individuals from receiving an education include gender stereotyping, exclusion within schools, limited awareness of transgender issues, rigid school policies, enrolment difficulties, and social isolation both at home and within their communities (Burns et al., 2016). This study utilises Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model to offer a comprehensive analysis of the educational, social, and economic marginalization of transgenders. By using this framework, the study seeks to uncover the interconnected factors that sustain orthodox discourses, which have persisted as a legacy of British colonial rule in India.

II. AIMS & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aims to encapsulate the intersectionality of individual, relational, community, and societal factors that contribute to the marginalization of transgender community in Pakistan. Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model serves as the theoretical framework, highlighting the interplay between education, economic marginalization, and systemic oppression. Furthermore, the study examines the role of schools and structural norms in perpetuating exclusionary social practices through this analytical lens. By critically analysing the historical context and in-depth review of literature, following research questions would be answered:

1. How do personal, familial, and institutional factors affect transgender individuals' access to education and economic opportunities in Pakistan?
2. What structural and policy barriers hinder transgender inclusion in education and socio-economic inclusion in South Asia?
3. How do cultural narratives and historical contexts shape access to education, social position, and employment for transgender individuals in contemporary Pakistan?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a prelude, this study seeks to clarify the somewhat ambiguous definition of transgender identity. It then explores the status of transgender individuals in the pre-colonial era, followed by an analysis of how British colonial notions of sexuality negatively impacted the community. Subsequently, the research examines domestic laws and international treaties related to basic human rights. These findings will be analysed through a socio-ecological lens to highlight the interconnected factors shaping their stigmatizing in contemporary Pakistan.

Transgender is an umbrella term that encompasses individuals whose gender identity, expression, or behaviour does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender identity refers to an individual's internal sense of being male, female, or another gender, while gender expression involves the outward presentation of this identity through behaviour, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or physical characteristics (Coleman et al., 2012). In India and Pakistan, the transgender community is traditionally referred to as *Hijra* and *Khwaja Sira*, respectively. These terms represent a third-gender identity that includes transgender individuals, eunuchs, transvestites, hermaphrodites, intersex persons, bisexuals, and homosexuals (Brettell & Sargent, 1997; Sharma, 2000).

During the Mughal era in India, the name *Khawaja Sira* referred to eunuch officers of the royal and noble courts. They maintained high status in society while serving as imperial officials, army generals, harem guards, and powerful administration positions (F. A. Khan, 2014b; Reddy, 2008). Beyond these formal roles, the term *Hijra* was commonly used to describe individuals with gender-fluid identities, encompassing transgender people, transsexuals, intersex individuals, cross-dressers, eunuchs, and transvestites (Limaye, 2014). They were an acceptable section of Indian society, living either as individuals or in social groups centred on *guru-chela* (master-disciple) relations (S. Khan, 2016; Nanda, 1990). In many places in India, *Hijras* played an important role in celebrations, especially as dance performers. They were believed to have spiritual powers and the ability to bestow blessings, hence they were frequently called to perform at major occasions, especially weddings and births (Azhar, 2017; F. A. Khan, 2014a; Nanda, 1986; Toppa, 2018; Zahra-Malik, 2017).

However, the status and perception of the *Hijra* community began to decline under British colonial rule, as Victorian-era moral values reshaped societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality (T. Abbas et al., 2014). The British, with their views on sexuality and gender norms, were immensely uncomfortable with *Hijra* bodies and their way of life because they did not conform of the binary of male and female sexes as conceived by them (S. Khan, 2016; Loos, 2009). Colonial officials openly condemned them with derogatory language and labelling them as "immoral," "shameless," and "abominable." They were frequently accused of engaging in unethical acts for the police to extort money from them. This institutional hostility severely impacted the *Hijra* community, diminishing their social status and pushing them to the margins of society (Guney et al., 2021).

Colonial discourse during the 1850s and 1860s portrayed members of the *Hijra* community as inherently disruptive and lawless, associating them with criminal activities, sexual deviance, and prostitution (Hinchy, 2014). Traditional practices such as street performances, participation in celebratory events, were deemed threats to public order and moral standards, prompting the enactment of restrictive laws to suppress these customs. This marginalization was further institutionalized through medical regulation and criminal laws, reinforcing the British effort to control gender and sexual identities. By the 1840s, discussions about the *Hijra* community had become common in imperial medical literature, where British doctors pathologized their existence, primarily depicting them as male-born castrates and symbols of Indian sexual degeneracy (Hinchy, 2019; S. Khan, 2016).

The Cantonment Act of 1864 and the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 imposed severe restrictions on *Hijras* suspected of engaging in prostitution, subjecting them to forced registration, compulsory medical examinations, and confinement (Hinchy, 2014). Their interactions with state officials were often marked by violence and intimidation, reinforcing the

systematic persecution of the community. The criminalization of *Hijras* formally began with the enactment of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1860. Section 290, which penalized public nuisance, and Section 294, which criminalized singing and dancing in public, were frequently used by colonial authorities to target *Hijras*, particularly for wearing feminine attire (Hinchy, 2019, pp. 64–65). Additionally, Victorian sexual morality influenced the introduction of Section 377, which criminalized “unnatural offences” (since homosexuality was considered unnatural) and was systematically deployed to prosecute and marginalize *Hijras* (Hinchy, 2019, pp. 52–53).

In colonial India, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code criminalized “unnatural” acts, including homosexuality. *Hijras* were particularly vulnerable under this law, as British officials viewed them as men desiring other men. This led to further legislation targeting *Hijras*, notably the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 and the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 (Guney et al., 2021). The Criminal Tribes Act subjected the entire community to mandatory registration, surveillance, and movement restrictions. The Act empowered local governments to maintain records of *Hijras* and their property, based on mere suspicion of activities under Section 377. Authorities could confine *Hijras* to specific areas and regulate their movements without adhering to standard criminal procedures, thereby facilitating their marginalization. Additionally, the Act authorized the arrest of any *Hijra* found publicly dressed in women's clothing or participating in public performances, effectively criminalizing their traditional means of livelihood. Further, stripping them of various legal rights, including adopting children, acting as guardians, making gifts, and drafting wills. Moreover, government officials were also granted powers to demand detailed information about the property details of people from the *Hijra community* (ibid).

The Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 further impacted *Hijras* by allowing local governments to prohibit performances deemed “scandalous” or “obscene”. Given the colonial perception of *Hijra* activities as depraved, this law jeopardized their performance-based livelihoods. These colonial laws and the prevailing disdain from authorities severely diminished the social standing of individuals with non-conforming gender identities. Society began to label them as “deviant” and “criminal,” leading to entrenched stereotypes of immorality. Consequently, transgender individuals in India, and later in post-independence Pakistan, suffered profound social marginalization and exclusion. Although the Criminal Tribes Act and the Dramatic Performances Act were eventually repealed, the colonial-era legal treatment of *Hijras* left a legacy that continues to affect their legal rights and societal status post-independence (ibid).

In present-day Pakistan, the terms *Khawaja Sira* and transgender refer to individuals whose gender identity does not align with traditional societal norms based on their assigned sex at birth (F. A. Khan, 2014a, p. 71; Nanda, 1990, p. 9). In 2009, the Supreme Court of Pakistan formally recognized transgender individuals as a third gender and granted them the right to obtain a Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) and get a citizen status. This ruling marked a significant milestone in the legal recognition of transgender rights in the country. Possessing a CNIC is essential for accessing fundamental services such as education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare programs (Guney et al., 2021). Earlier they were not granted citizen status, hence these rights were a far cry from.

In 2018, Pakistan passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, a comprehensive law aimed at protecting and promoting transgender rights. This long-awaited legislation was viewed as a positive step towards the formal recognition and integration of the transgender population. The Transgender Persons Act of 2018 provides legal recognition to transgender people, allowing them to identify as male, female, or nonbinary. Furthermore, it prohibits discrimination in critical areas including education, work, and healthcare, ensuring equal chances and safeguards. The law also criminalises forced labour, sexual assault, and denial of inheritance rights, with the goal of protecting transgender people from exploitation and abuse (Transgender Persons Act, 2018, p. 3).

Despite this legislation, the transgender community continues to face marginalization due to inadequate enforcement mechanisms. To address this, the government must develop comprehensive strategies to improve public perceptions of transgender individuals by advocacy and ensure the effective implementation of the 2018 Act (International Commission of Jurists, 2020a).

IV. EDUCATIONAL & SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

Considering postcolonial marginalisation, the transgender minority is stigmatised on both social and economic levels. Despite the equality provisions included in the constitution, transgender people frequently face discrimination in the workplace, which makes them more economically vulnerable (N. Khan, 2019)

Despite legal recognition and protective laws, transgender individuals in India and Pakistan continue to experience social marginalization and economic exclusion due to the failure of effective law enforcement. Their gender identity and expression are often met with ridicule, discrimination, and violence, both from private individuals and government officials (F. A. Khan, 2014b, p. 117127, 2019; Reddy, 2008, p. 1216)

Within the education system, transgender students frequently endure bullying, harassment, and a lack of teacher training to address their specific needs. This hostile environment results in high dropout rates, particularly among those from impoverished backgrounds (F. A. Khan, 2014a, p. 185194). Therefore, many transgender individuals are left with limited employment opportunities, forcing them to rely on begging, performing at celebrations, and sex work to survive. The vicious cycle of poverty and lack of education keeps generations trapped in economic hardship.

Legal barriers further exacerbate their struggles. In Pakistan, transgender individuals remain vulnerable to prosecution under Section 377 of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), which criminalizes homosexuality, reinforcing systemic discrimination and legal uncertainty. Many transgender children face family rejection due to stigma and are abandoned or forced to seek refuge within Khawaja Sira communities—structured groups led by gurus (masters) who provide protection, mentorship, and a sense of belonging (F. A. Khan, 2014b, 2019; Rabbi & Habib, n.d.; Reddy, 2008; Wijngaarden et al., 2013).

Discrimination extends to the workplace, where transgender employees face overt and covert marginalization. On an individual level, they encounter misgendering, intentional exclusion, and workplace harassment, while institutional biases prevent them from advancing professionally. Workplaces often fail to create inclusive and safe environments, leading to higher unemployment rates and economic insecurity among transgender individuals (Dispenza et al., 2012).

In Pakistan, many challenges prevent transgender individuals from accessing education. Khan(2019) suggested that the lack of supportive policies, along with ongoing harassment, pushes some students to drop out of school. This educational marginalisation significantly limits their employment possibilities, keeping them in low-wage or unregulated sectors. Even transgender people who successfully attain academic degrees frequently face hostility in the workplace. Transgender people have high unemployment rates due to employers' discriminatory attitudes and a lack of inclusive workplace policies (Davidson, 2016). Consequently, they resort to the informal economy, which includes sex work and begging (Ali Khan & Ali, 2024). However, being employed in such a vulnerable position exploit and humiliates them at the hands of the owners of the workplace.

Begging is a common means of income for people who are denied official employment due to their gender expression (Rehan et al., 2009). Begging is the last yet stigmatized tactic for survival when they confront systematic discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion (Jami, 2005). Such social exclusion is not only perceived by transgender; it is enforced by society and pushes them into the cycle of poverty. Most of the old transgender are involved in begging because they are unable to perform dance or prostitution. Transgender face abuse, violence, and exploitation when they encounter begging. Not only by society, they also face such exploitation by the public and law officers.

To curb begging, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act creates a new criminal offence. Section 17 of the Act states: “Whoever employs, compels or uses any transgender person for begging shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to fifty thousand rupees or with both.” (International Commission of Jurists, 2020b)

Classifying begging by transgender individuals as a distinct offense under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act is highly questionable, given that begging remains one of the few livelihood options available to many in Pakistan. Existing beggary laws, such as the Punjab Vagrancy Ordinance, have been widely misused against the transgender community, enabling law enforcement to harass, extort, imprison, and even subject them to sexual violence. (Ali Khan & Ali, 2024).

In the history of South Asia, transgenders are particularly invited to dance at weddings and different celebrations; today's society also accepts them in such professions (Rehan et al., 2009). Like begging, transgender also face humiliation, violence, and harassment in dancing. In the dancing event, many of the audience demand sexual favours; most of the time, such situations end up in gang rapes and mostly go unreported (Redding, 2012). Murders of transgender, like those of prostitutes,

are seldom taken seriously or sympathetically by the media and the authorities, especially if the victim is a transgender person engaged in prostitution (ibid).

V. EDUCATION AS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT IN INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

The right to education, recognized as a fundamental human right, is firmly established in international law. Pakistan ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (Ministry of Human Rights, 2022). Article 1 affirms the universality of human rights, stating that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UDHR, 1948a). However, in Pakistan, these rights are often not extended to transgender individuals, who face continuous struggles in accessing education and defending their basic rights (Dicklitch-Nelson & Rahman, 2022).

Pakistan became a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on April 17, 2008 (Amnesty.org, 2018). Article 13 of the ICESCR, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and enforced in 1976, explicitly recognizes education as a fundamental human right (OHCHR, 1976). This article is one of the most comprehensive provisions on the right to education in international human rights law (ICESCR, 1999). Article 13(1) emphasizes that education should foster democratic values, respect for human rights, and the holistic development of individuals. It also stresses the role of education in promoting tolerance, understanding, friendship, and peace among different nations, ethnicities, and religious groups (OHCHR, 1976). These principles are further reinforced by other human rights frameworks, including Article 26(2) of the UDHR (UDHR, 1948b) and Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR, 1989, p. 9)

Moreover, Article 13(2) of the ICESCR outlines four key interdependent aspects of the right to education. In her preliminary report, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katerina Tomasevski, introduced the "4As" framework to assess and address these educational rights (ICESCR, 1999), which are to be implied across the board including marginalized populations. The 4A framework guarantees the education to be accessible, available, adaptive, and available, underpinning the spirit of “Education for All (EFA)”.

VI. BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

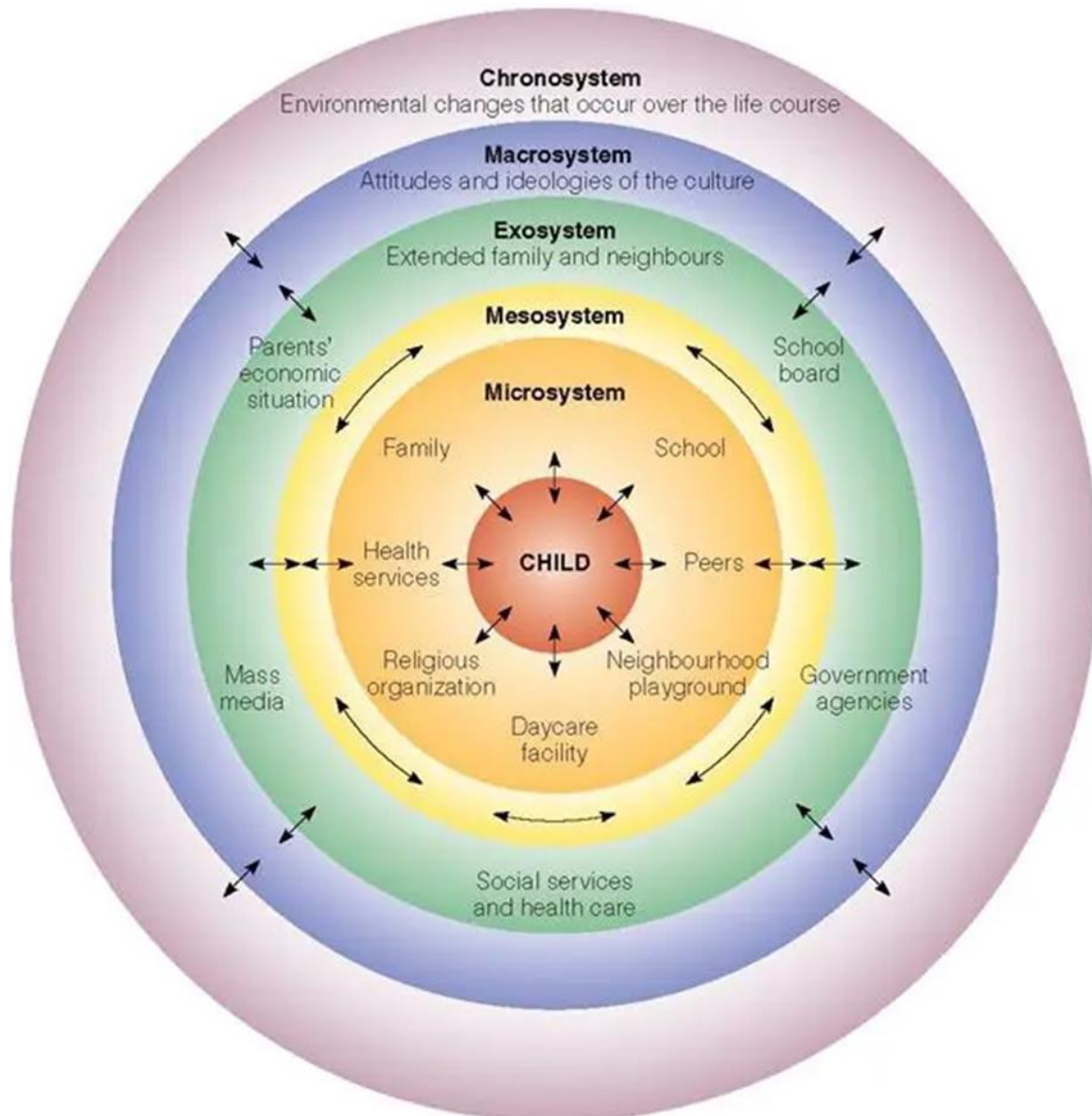
Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005), an American-Russian psychologist, developed the bioecological systems theory to explain how human development is influenced by the interactions between individuals and their environment (Crawford, 2020). While this model acknowledges the biological and genetic factors shaping personality, it places greater emphasis on social interactions and personal characteristics within an individual’s surroundings (Rise, 2022)

For transgender people, these attributes also include psychological factors like gender dysphoria, which refers to the distress experienced when one’s gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth (Haley et al., 2019). This distress manifests in various ways, including discomfort with one’s body, social isolation, discrimination, anxiety, or depression (ibid). Additionally, emotional challenges such as feelings of sadness, rejection, and suicidal thoughts are more prevalent among transgender individuals compared to their cisgender counterparts (Anderson & Ford, 2022a).

The bioecological model outlines four interconnected systems that influence one’s development: the Microsystem, which includes immediate relationships such as family and peers; the Mesosystem, which represents interactions between different microsystems; the Exosystem, which consists of external influences like policies and media; and the Macrosystem, which encompasses societal norms and cultural values (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1986).

A key concept in Bronfenbrenner’s theory is proximal processes, referring to two-way interactions between an individual and their immediate environment (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020)). When these interactions are frequent and supportive, they contribute to positive cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, low-quality, or infrequent interactions can result in poor academic outcomes, social exclusion, and emotional struggles (ibid).

This model serves as a valuable tool for examining how individual, familial, communal, and societal factors interact to shape the mental health, social support, education, and overall well-being of transgender individuals in Pakistan.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Source: (Guy-Evans, 2020)

Fig 1

Microsystem

Micro-system consists of a person's immediate surroundings and relationships, including family, peers, school, and religious communities. Bronfenbrenner's model emphasizes the importance of parent-child, sibling-child, peer-child, and teacher-child interactions in shaping an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1986). For transgender individuals, coming out to an unsupportive family, friend group, school, or workplace can lead to significant psychological distress (Anderson & Ford, 2022b). While peer relationships play a role in emotional well-being, parental support is crucial for their mental health and stability. Familial rejection has been linked to higher rates of suicide and depression among transgender individuals (Klein & Golub, 2016). Many transgender children, after expressing gender nonconformity, experience physical and psychological abuse from their families, leading to exclusion and social isolation (Abdullah et al., 2012a). Bullying by cisgender peers in schools often results in long-term psychological trauma, ultimately causing many transgender students to drop out (Rise, 2022).

Transgender children who are disowned by their families often end up homeless or living under the care of Gurus (Karijo, 2021). Homelessness exposes them to sexual violence, substance abuse, and forced sex work for survival (Noor, 2022; Tunåker, 2015). To seek refuge, many of them rely on *gurus*. The guru-disciple system has historically provided a sense of community, protection, and social structure, with transgender individuals forming familial bonds based on shared experiences rather than biological kinship (Yousafzai, 2020).

To address homelessness, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 mandates the government to establish protection centres and safe houses for transgender individuals. However, the use of the term "rehabilitation" in Section 6(a) implies a paternalistic, control-based approach, which echoes outdated disability discourses rather than empowering transgender individuals (International Commission of Jurists, 2020b). A more effective approach would involve providing secure housing, medical care, and psychological support, in alignment with international human rights standards.

The school environment plays a significant role in the development of transgender youth. Research indicates that non-binary and transgender students face higher risks of verbal and physical abuse, as well as sexual coercion and dating violence, compared to their cisgender peers (Anderson & Ford, 2022a). School-based victimization can have severe long-term psychological effects, particularly as adolescence is a critical period for identity formation and social development. Due to discrimination, harassment, and social stigma, many transgender children are reluctant to enrol in mainstream schools. Furthermore, they are often pathologized, with their gender identity being framed as a medical or psychological disorder, a practice that the United Nations has identified as a core factor in human rights violations against transgender individuals (United Nations free and Equal, n.d.).

To address educational exclusion, the government of Pakistan has established four transgender-exclusive schools in Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan (Dawn, 2022). While intended as an inclusive initiative, separate schools may reinforce discrimination and segregation, preventing transgender students from accessing mainstream educational spaces (Farhan, 2022). Instead of isolating transgender students, policies should focus on inclusive education, ensuring that all students, regardless of gender identity, receive equal opportunities, resources, and protections within the broader educational system.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the connections and interactions between different microsystems in an individual's life and how these relationships influence their development (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1986). This typically includes interactions between family and school, relationships between a child's parents and their friends, or communal spaces like playgrounds where children engage with peers (Guy-Evans, 2020). However, in the case of transgender individuals, the traditional structure of the mesosystem is disrupted due to family rejection and social exclusion.

For many transgender adolescents, coming out often results in expulsion from the family unit, leaving them homeless or seeking refuge in the *guru* system. This disrupts the expected mesosystem interactions, as there is little to no connection between their biological families and their *gurus* (Abdullah et al., 2012b). Once separated from their families, it is highly unlikely that their relatives will maintain any contact or offer support.

Similarly, harassment and discrimination in schools often force transgender individuals to drop out, leading to a lack of interaction between the education system and their new social environment. Unlike in a conventional mesosystem, where schools and families collaborate to support a child's development, transgender individuals experience isolation, as there is no interaction between their *gurus* and educational institutions. Instead, their social connections primarily exist within the transgender community, with *gurus* interacting with peers in the form of other transgenders rather than engaging with traditional societal structures.

Exosystem

The exosystem refers to larger social structures that individuals do not directly participate in, yet these systems influence their lives and development (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1986). These include government policies, media, workplaces, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), healthcare, and social services, all of which shape the experiences and opportunities available to transgender individuals.

For transgender community in Pakistan, the exosystem plays a critical role in determining access to education, healthcare, and legal protections. Although laws such as the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2018), the Anti-Bullying Act (2020), and Article 25A of the Constitution of Pakistan affirm transgender rights (2018), their poor implementation prevents meaningful change. As a result, transgender individuals continue to face social exclusion, economic marginalization, and limited access to essential services.

Educational barriers remain a significant issue, with a United Nations AIDS survey reporting that 42% of transgender individuals in Pakistan are illiterate. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, while some transgender individuals have attained primary and secondary education, access to higher education remains extremely limited, with only 7% having attended college (Yousafzai, 2020). Often, upon joining a Guru-led transgender community, formal education ends, highlighting cultural and social challenges that impact educational attainment.

Healthcare access is equally limited, with 70% of transgender individuals in Lahore receiving inadequate medical care due to social stigma, lack of legal identification (CNIC), financial barriers, and discrimination (Manzoor et al., 2022). Transgender individuals account for 17.5% of Pakistan's HIV population and 20% of the global HIV population, yet medical training in Pakistan remains gender-binary focused, leading to insufficient transgender-inclusive healthcare services (Baral et al., 2013; Martins et al., 2020).

While NGOs advocating for transgender rights are present, their impact remains limited. Sustainable solutions require government intervention to ensure the provision of education, healthcare, and social security for transgender individuals (Pakistan Observer, 2022). The failure to implement existing policies keeps transgender individuals trapped in poverty and marginalization, often forcing them into sex work as a last resort for survival (Abdullah et al., 2012b). Addressing these systemic issues requires targeted policy interventions and inclusive reforms to promote equity and social integration for transgender individuals.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner, consists of broader societal structures, cultural values, laws, and political systems that influence an individual's development (Anderson & Ford, 2022a). This level of the model considers historical, economic, and social forces that shape attitudes, policies, and systemic barriers affecting transgender individuals.

A significant aspect of the macrosystem is the legacy of colonialism, which continues to shape gender norms and social stigmas. The marginalization of transgender individuals in South Asia is deeply rooted in colonial-era policies that criminalized and delegitimized their identities. Over time, these prejudices became institutionalized, leading to widespread discrimination, exclusion from education and economic opportunities. As a result, many transgender individuals are barred from exercising their basic rights.

The macrosystem plays a significant role in shaping negative attitudes toward transgender education. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal norms contribute to the lack of acceptance and recognition of transgender individuals in mainstream education. Instead of being included in regular educational institutions, they are often placed in specialized schools, which further reinforces their exclusion from the broader cisgender student population and prevents their full integration into society.

Beyond the cultural norms, the macrosystem extends to global and political influences, international treaties, and covenants. The right to education as a fundamental human right is deeply entrenched in international law. As mentioned in the literature review section, Pakistan has signed multiple international human rights treaties. However, the dualistic nature of the Pakistani legal system does not automatically make international laws to become part of domestic law. International treaties and covenants must first be formally incorporated into national legislation (Coomans, 2007; Hassnain Raza, 2020). Since these treaties are not legally binding, they are classified as soft law and do not always translate into enforceable domestic laws (Verdier & Versteeg, 2015).

Another critical factor within the macrosystem is Pakistan's economic standing. As a low-middle-income country, Pakistan allocates limited public funds to essential sectors such as education and healthcare, resulting in poor human development indicators (HDI) and inadequate resources for marginalized communities, including transgender individuals (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2021). This lack of investment in social welfare programs exacerbates disparities, leaving transgender individuals without access to quality education, medical care, or economic opportunities.

In conclusion, the macrosystem plays a central role in illustrating experiences of transgender individuals and how historical discrimination, socio-economic inequalities, and systemic barriers are reproduced. Addressing these challenges requires structural reforms, increased political commitment, and societal shifts toward greater inclusivity and equity.

Chronosystem

It analyses how a situation changes over time. It may include historical events or how individual experiences change over time (Guy-Evans, 2020). This analysis examines how access to education for transgender individuals has evolved over time, considering both historical shifts and individual experiences (ibid). As previously discussed, transgender individuals once held respected social positions, but colonial rule led to their marginalization and exclusion, including from educational institutions. While 2009 marked the legal recognition of transgender self-determination, and the 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act aimed to ensure their right to education, the gap between policy and implementation remains significant.

From an individual perspective, transgender students often struggle with gender dysphoria, particularly during adolescence, when educational access becomes even more challenging. Many face bullying, harassment, and discrimination in schools, leading to high dropout rates and limited opportunities for higher education. Once isolated from their families, they frequently lose access to formal education altogether. In extreme cases, their exclusion from education contributes to lifelong marginalization, and some members of society perceive their death as a tragic yet inevitable end to their suffering (Abdullah et al., 2012b). Addressing these challenges requires not only legal protections but also active enforcement to ensure inclusive and equitable education for transgender individuals.

VII. LIMITATIONS

Bronfenbrenner's model, developed in the Global North, does not fully account for the cultural and economic complexities of the Global South. One major limitation is that it places excessive emphasis on how systemic inequalities at various levels shape an individual's success or failure. While structural barriers undoubtedly exist, many individuals from the transgender community have defied these challenges, demonstrated resilience, and achieved success. This perspective risks undermining personal agency by implying that inequality alone determines one's outcomes. Although we acknowledge the impact of systemic disadvantages, their mere presence does not inevitably lead to failure. Framing it this way may discourage individuals from striving for progress, fostering a sense of helplessness rather than empowerment. There are a few success stories from the transgender community who have managed to overcome poverty and pursue education. In 2019, Alisha Shah was appointed as a consultant by UNDP (Qadir & Shah, 2019). Nisha Rao, Pakistan's first transgender lawyer, faced significant challenges while supporting herself through law school. Meanwhile, Arzoo has been actively empowering the transgender community by advocating for their educational rights through her activism (ibid).

Another limitation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is that the mesosystem may be non-existent for marginalized groups, such as transgender individuals. For cisgender individuals, these microsystems are often interconnected, influencing one another in meaningful ways. However, for transgender individuals, particularly those who are homeless or lack close familial or community support, these connections may be severely limited or absent. This absence of a functional mesosystem can lead to a fragmented and isolating experience for transgender individuals, highlighting a gap in the applicability of Bronfenbrenner's model for marginalized populations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The transgender community has long been part of society, yet systematic marginalization continues to hinder its full inclusion. Ensuring equal access to education is not just a fundamental right but also a critical step toward social transformation. Since the colonial era, the exclusion of transgender individuals from educational opportunities has reinforced cycles of poverty and social isolation, limiting their economic and social mobility. This has been critically analysed using Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model. To break this cycle, it is essential to create safe and inclusive learning environments where transgender students can thrive. While legal frameworks exist to protect transgender rights, their impact depends on effective enforcement and implementation. A truly inclusive education system, one that embraces all gender identities, is vital for fostering a more equitable and pluralistic society. "Education for all" must genuinely include everyone; otherwise, it fails to fulfil its purpose.

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