

Media as a Catalyst for Change: Addressing Transgender Violence and Healthcare Inequality in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of media in addressing violence and medical inequality experienced by transgender individuals within Pakistan. It tends on to analyse major cases and the power of media advocacy in rising responsiveness and inducing public perception and policy deviations. The study is based on qualitative content analysis of news reports, and discussions with activists, journalists, and healthcare specialists. Results demonstrates that media coverage has been central in the mobilizing support for the trans community but highlights gaps in depiction and the need for more constant and empathetic attention. The paper finds recommendations for improving media strategies to improve media strategies to care the trans-genders through ethical reporting, comprehensive narratives, and continued support efforts.

Keywords: Gender Violence, Transgender, Healthcare Rights, Media Reporting, Media Advocacy.

1. Introduction

Transgender people in Pakistan are subjected to violence, discrimination, and restricted access to health care services. While there have been attempts at the legislative front such as the Transgender

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Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, there is still a lack of change in social perception and cases of institutional support. Media outlets have the ability to influence the public opinion and fight for the rights of oppressed and vulnerable populations. This paper explores how media has shaped the discourse on transgender violence and healthcare inequity in Pakistan and how this in turn has affected the public perception and policies.

Considering a vivid example of Alisha's case; she was a trans woman from Peshawar, and she died from lack of optimal care after she was shot several times. When she was admitted at the Lady Reading Hospital, the hospital staff got into arguments on what ward's best for her. Unfortunately, Alisha was succumbed to death due these problems. Her death raises several questions on system and highlighted the need for medical-care for the transpeople. Correspondingly, in 2017, another trans woman Amna, who was found dead in Karachi and the incident was widely covered by the national media. Consequently, it provoked public concerns regarding the security and well-being of trans community; hence it led to the major change in the legal policies.

In 2018, Sania, who was a transgender woman as well, was shot dead in Sahiwal; her murder came out in the light as essential role in the general discourse related to violence against trans individuals. It has emphasized the fact that trans individuals' lives are at risk in Pakistan; which led to most high-profile victim "Gul Panra", who was a well-reputed dancer/performer and an activist, was killed in Peshawar in 2020. Her murder led to several protests and calls for the transgender rights and protection. And the count of such issues did not stop her.

All these cases depict high levels of violence and healthcare neglect that is faced by transgender community in Pakistan. The media has documented all these violent events and has played a vital role in promotion of transgender rights along with conversation regarding legal and social changes that need to be made. However, there is still a lack of accurate and sensitive portrayal of transgender community in media. Ultimately, the need for better media advocacy is still apparent regarding the trans community.

2. Problem Statement

The problem statement depicts the general plight of transgender persons in Pakistan; this includes suffering from social stigma and having a lack of access to health care. This underlines the importance of tackling the root causes of these inequalities and of developing appropriate measures to protect the rights and welfare of trans people. In this case, the problem is defined to provide context and direction for the study by identifying the particular questions and concerns that the research aims to explore and respond to.

3. Significance

This study has importance of its ability to inform the role of social justice, health care equality, and policy in Pakistan. Analysing the difficulties that transgender people experience, especially the problems with accessing healthcare, the study can contribute to the identification of systemic issues and call for their elimination. It is important to know these matters in order to support the changes that will bring the society to become tolerant for all people with gender identity issues, when they are in need of healthcare services and deserve to be treated with respect. Consequently, the study's implication could be useful for policy changes, healthcare, and advocacy for the enhancement of the quality of life of trans-genders and the promotion of human rights in Pakistan.

4. Objectives of study

This study aims to inspect the lived experiences of transgender individuals within Pakistan and evaluate the role of media in spreading awareness and promoting social inclusion.

5. Research Questions

RQ1: How does media representation influence the lived experiences and social inclusion of transgender individuals in Pakistan's society?

6. Literature Review

The limitation of existing literature on transgender subject within Pakistan' is on the study of social insight, healthcare impartialities, legal setting, and

involvement. There are several scholarships that disclose the living conditions of transgender community in the country.

The acceptance of trans community and Public perception in Pakistan remained another important aspect of the literature. Fatima et al. (2015), and Rasheed (2016) found in their study that the social coercion of stigma and acumen that transgenders are subjected to. It is purely based on cultural, religious, and economic whys and wherefores. Their studies revealed the significance of socially sensitive policies that can be used for addressing such issues and, eventually, preventing preconception. Likewise, the legal framework and policies for trans community, which govern their rights take-up several other research subjects. Another study about the inclusion of trans community by Abbas (2012) discussed the major effect of legal shifts that impact transgender identity documents, healthcare, and employment.

The inequalities in healthcare rights for trans individuals are well-documented. Manzoor et al. (2022) argued about the health problems & barriers to healthcare services for the transgender community and discovered the general barriers that hinder active healthcare distribution to the trans community. And their findings specify that partiality from healthcare workers and an absence of ethnically sensitive facilities is substantial problems (Abdullah et al., 2012).

Both health care disparities and limitations of the transgender population in Pakistan are widely discussed in the literature. Prejudice from healthcare providers and lack of culturally sensitive services are the challenges that halt effective healthcare for trans community in Pakistan (Shaikh, 2015, & Saeed, et, al, 2018). Therefore, the literature highlights a high need for healthcare improvements and social awareness campaigns regarding transgender individuals.

Furthermore, advocacy and community engagement works are also. Included in the literature. After all, these aim to respond to the issues that concern transgender rights and healthy in Pakistan (Khan, 2014). There are non-government organizations that hold credit for the policy changes, support services, and awareness campaigns for the trans community of Pakistan – namely, TransAction Pakistan. There are numerous studies conducted by

activists and practitioners that showcase information on the grassroots activism and community-based approaches towards the implementation of transgender rights and social justice (Younus et al., 2022).

Overall, it is safe to conclude that the studies about transgender issues in Pakistan show that transgender people face a diverse set of problems and barriers within the country. These studies underline a need to combat transphobia, enhance legal protection, and improve access to health care and support for transgender people.

7. Theoretical Framework

This research study is rooted in the theory of intersectionality, which intend to observe how different systems of social stratification (for example, gender, race, standards, sexual diversity, intersect to form exclusive methods of discernment as well as privileges. In context of present study, intersectionality offers a lens to comprehend how their exposures of violence and healthcare disparity are designed; not just by their gender identity but also by the broader socio-cultural, legal, and economic contexts. Moreover, media representation theory is used to examine how the media stories and representations effect public insight and the social inclusion.

This context hypothesizes that media is a very powerful tool in creating social realities, framing public discourse, and swaying policy variations. Hence, by merging intersectionality with the media representation theory, this research tends to explore the complex landscape of transgender subjects in Pakistan as well as the role of ‘media as a catalyst for social change’, highlighting the need for moral and inclusive media doe’s to substitute a more inclusive society.

8. Research Methodology

The present study is based on qualitative design; to evaluate the media’s role in combating the violence and disparity in medical experienced by the trans community in Pakistan. The data was collected in form of news stories and interviews led with campaigners, journalists, and health care specialists. These news articles were retrieved from the various Pakistani sites and news-channels of last five years (2019-2024) and were linked to the human rights

of transgenders, health, and ferocity. Moreover, the members were selected solely based on their immersion and assignation in the transgender right drives and healthcare.

Additionally, the data has been collected through two main sources; first, a search was led to retrieve news from the online records and archives of Pakistani newspapers, and news transcripts. Second, interviews were held with the activists, journalists, and specialists in the field of healthcare. These discussions were intended to explore their opinions on media portrayal of trans/issues and how media advocacy affects change in perception and laws. The interviews were semi-structured, which enabled the researchers to ask questions and receive detailed answers.

All the ethical issues were carefully adhered to in this study. All the participants in the interviews provided written informed consent, and all the participants' information was kept confidential and anonymous. All the ethical considerations on conducting research on vulnerable populations were followed, and approvals from the relevant institutional review boards were obtained.

9. Results

The news articles and interviews with the stakeholders were analysed qualitatively, and the following findings were made. From the analysis of news reports, it was clear that the media has played a significant role in garnering public support for the transgender persons in Pakistan. The high-profile cases of violence and the denial of healthcare services were well-reported, resulting in heightened public awareness and campaigning. Though, there were some restrictions recognized vis-à-vis the media illustration of transgender subjects as it was intermittent and often dramatized, which does not include the whole representation or shows responsiveness towards the cause.

Moreover, the conversations with the experts like journalists, activists and healthcare staffs reinforced these annotations. It was also detected that media plays a key part in the construction of public view and generating waves for transformation. They pointed out that awareness has been formed by the media outlets, but the data is usually general, irregular and more

weightage is given to the sensational facets of the issue. Moreover, the Activists has also informed that the media must pay closer consideration and be subtler to the subjects of transgender rights and healthcare, including need for improved and ethical coverage, and giving diverse and detailed information of the lives of trans community.

Derived from the results; it can be inferred that media has been significantly playing its role in spreading awareness about the violence and healthcare inequality for transgenders in Pakistan, but still there is a lot to be done.

1. **Policy and Legal Reforms:** First things first, the findings highlight the immediate need for the robust policy as well as the legal reforms to guard transgenders rights in Pakistan. And in this regard; media's role of advocacy may play a crucial role in sustaining the public compression on policymakers to contrivance and enforce laws; similar to the Transgender Persons Act 2018 (Protection of Rights).
2. **Media Training and Ethical Reporting:** Media outlets shall spend time or invest on their resources to timely training to bring-out the ethical practices for reporting; especially concerning the transgender issues as this community remained unexplored and undefended for decades. The journalists must be given the essential training and skills-set to report such issues concurrently, sensitively and above all, accurately. Media should not be biased, and avoid the sensationalism and stereotypes. There needs to have developed guidelines and best practices for covering trans-community topics professionally.
3. **Collaboration with NGOs and Activists:** It is essential to dig-out the root cause of issues and for that reasons Media personals should be on the collaborative mode with NGOs the official advocacy groups of transgenders to ensure informed and authentic reporting. Due to the absence of legal rights, or law and orders, trans community first inform about their issues to NGOs, share their medical problems with them and report harassment to NGOs spokespersons. Such collaborations can effectively offer journalists with insightful and meaningful subjects to cover issues more professionally.

4. **Public Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Nevertheless, media can be and media is being one of the powerful tools for the awareness of public educations. There shall be consistent documentaries, features as well as in-depth reports on the transgender issues just as any other subject; this will help to shape a more well-versed and empathetic public. By highlighting constructive issues and advocates or spokesperson from the transgenders community can challenge typecasts and endorse social inclusion which is essential.
5. **Healthcare System Reforms:** It's never too late to fix the fragile edge; hence the study identifies the pressing need for improvements in healthcare system in Pakistan for trans community to make it more all-encompassing as well as responsive. The coverage of healthcare section by media for trans community would help to advocate for the training of healthcare professionals needs on transgender issues (often they are labelled or refused treatment for having HIV, STIs or other related issues which gets worsen if not being treated timely); hence improving healthcare system and making it easily accessible is essential with the help of media but highlighting grassroots of such incidents.
6. **Sustained Advocacy and Engagement:** To have a meaningful transition to happen, there has to have a sustained yet robust advocacy and stay active with trans related issues in the media. As, the constant and well-grounded coverage of notable subjects can uphold the interest of public and simultaneously pressure for the reforms.

10. Discussion

The transgender population in Pakistan is subjected to violence and unequal access to healthcare, and the media has been crucial in bringing attention to these issues. But a lot of the coverage is sensationalized and inconsistent, which means it doesn't accurately reflect the community or draw continuous attention to the issue.

Public awareness and advocacy have increased as a result of the media's exposure of high-profile incidents of violence and medical negligence. This underlines how important it is to implement strong

legislative and policy changes in Pakistan in order to safeguard transgender rights.

In order to make the healthcare system more inclusive and sensitive to the demands of the transgender community, this article highlights how urgently improvements need to be done. The media's portrayal of these concerns can promote accessibility changes and the education of medical practitioners on transgender issues.

Media participation and advocating around transgender issues must continue if significant change is to take place. Maintaining public attention and pressure for reforms can be achieved by regular, objective coverage of relevant problems.

Pakistani media organizations need to follow moral reporting guidelines that uphold the transgender community's dignity, avoid sensationalism, and ensure accuracy. To prevent misinformation, journalists should receive training on covering transgender matters. Informed reporting can be ensured by working with non-governmental organisations that support transgender rights.

11. Conclusion

The paper included an in-depth investigation of how the media could contribute to reduce the violence and unequal access to healthcare that the transgender community in Pakistan has to deal with. The statement points out the significant impact of media in shaping public opinion and influencing policy modifications. Still, it highlights the problems in media portrayal and the requirement for more reliable and empathetic reporting.

This paper places a strong emphasis on the value of ethical reporting and media training, public education and awareness campaigns, legislative and policy changes, cooperation with NGOs and activists, and persistent campaigning and involvement. The suggestion is that media organizations in Pakistan ought to embrace moral reporting techniques that honor the worth of the transgender population, keep away from sensationalism, and ensure precision.

The article does, however, also recognise the difficulties the transgender minority experiences getting healthcare treatments as well as the prejudice that they endure in society. In order to remove these obstacles and safeguard the rights and welfare of transgender individuals, it demands structural changes.

In conclusion, there is still a long way to go even though the media has been helpful in drawing attention to the problems that the transgender community in Pakistan faces. Persistent efforts are essential to guarantee a sympathetic and truthful representation of the transgender community, promote societal integration, and support legislative modifications. The media could become a key player in implementing this change by working with NGOs, activists, and medical professionals.

11. Recommendations

Media outlets must in Pakistan must employ practices of ethical reporting that respect the self-esteem of trans community, evading sensationalism and confirming compassion and precision. Moreover, the Journalists should be trained on highlighting transgender subjects to avoid misrepresentation. The media coverage should be inclusive, exploring main reasons of violence and discernment, such as social attitudes and permissible blockades. They must highlight the constructive stories within the transgender community; that can provide a composed perception and endorse role models.

Additionally, media outlets should maintain continued engagement with transgender matters, confirming constant public dissertation and pressure on policymakers. Corporations with transgender based NGOs who does advocacy for their rights; can confirm informed reporting. Also, they must share reality-based stories of transgender individuals; because it can build public compassion and responsiveness, and using diverse voices confirms broader representation. Media must avoid stereotypes and bestowing transgender individuals in numerous societal roles that may highlight their involvement. Lastly, they must collaborate with paramedic professionals can improve the accurateness and profundity of media attention,

contributing to positive variation for the transgender community within Pakistan.

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