

'Improving Healthcare Access for the Transgender Community in Lahore'
Hussain Abbas Zaidi • Swarthmore College • Summer 2019 • Location: *Lahore, Pakistan*

Goals and Objectives: Increase the availability of safe, discrimination-free, health-care spaces for the trans gender community in Lahore; develop and implement a preventative healthcare curriculum to educate trans-people about common health problems within their community; and work towards inclusion of health policies in the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 that can support and empower the trans gender community in Pakistan. **This project aims to address the inequitable access to healthcare experienced by trans gender people in Pakistan through 4 objectives: the creation of designated trans health-care spaces, health camps, educational seminars and the initiation of government policy implementation and intervention.**

Background: The LGBTQ+ communities in Pakistan have been at the receiving end of structural violence for decades as a result of discrimination and social stigma, stemming from religious beliefs about LGBTQ+ people. This has resulted in an effective isolation of those openly identifying as members of such communities from participation in public affairs and provision of basic necessities. The trans-community has a predicted population of around 300,000, with this population mainly concentrated in two of the biggest cities in Pakistan, Karachi and Lahore. These cities are seen as an escape from the extremist, backwards mindset that characterizes Pakistan's rural areas. Instead, trans-migrants are met with the aforementioned discrimination, with the bulk of harassment reported in health-care settings. With cases coming to light of trans-people seeking treatment at prominent hospitals being denied treatment on the basis of their gender orientation, which has on multiple occasions resulted in death from untreated conditions and illnesses, many trans-people feel uncomfortable seeking treatment from public clinics and hospitals. Policies that emphasize non-discrimination were drafted by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan but never implemented as a result of the change in government that occurred over the summer of 2018. Furthermore, the trans-community is overwhelmingly under-educated and poor, with many resorting to begging and prostitution and living in collective, run-down housing schemes. As a result of this, sickness and disease remains prevalent in trans gender communities with inaccurate self-diagnosis and unsafe surgery/health practices becoming commonplace to find immediate relief to health issues.

I grew up in Lahore where I founded Project Pehchaan in December 2016 with the support of Next Generation Pakistan (<http://www.ngp.org.pk/>), which is a project focused on trans-rights advocacy and economic/social uplifting of trans communities within Lahore. It consists of a team of around 50 individuals, who will serve as the volunteers and logistical support for this project. Our work has been recognized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan; we are actively involved in the legislative procedures related to the Trans Rights Bill passed in 2018 (http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1526547582_234.pdf) which is in the process of being redrafted. This has allowed us to meet and connect with multiple policy-makers and government officers who are invested in supporting our project work and providing resources for the change we want to create, such as the internship mentioned in the strategy. Furthermore, we have acquired a number of stakeholders from within and outside the trans community who will provide access to trained health care professionals and physical space to carry out health and awareness camps. Next Generation Pakistan has organized health camps for its woman empowerment project and **we aim to use our resources and experience from these health camps, which will be tailored according to the needs of the trans community, and the assistance of our stakeholders, along with the grant funds from Davis Projects for Peace, to implement the first attempt at addressing health inequities faced by trans communities within Lahore.**

Implementation Strategy: The Gender Guardian is a school in Pakistan that serves as the first and only school catering to improving the literacy of the trans population within the city of Lahore. Khwaja Sira Society (KSS) is another organization working towards the alleviation of the conditions of under-privileged trans people in Pakistan with a head office located within Kot Lakhpat, Lahore, an area that has a high concentration of trans gender people living in collective housing schemes, that also serves as an HIV diagnosis center. For the purpose of this project, the school and the head office will serve as the sites for our medical 'safe-spaces' and health camps. I have spoken with the executive board of KSS as well as the creator of Gender Guardian both of whom have agreed to lend their space and extend all available support to the project, thus making them the main stakeholders in our project. The space for a medical center is available within the Gender Guardian since a medical dispensary was planned to be set up within the space, but never was as a result of the low amount of funds that were allocated to its development and sustainability. The medical center will be set up within this existing

area of the Gender Guardian with the grant funds being used to fund and stock the center with essential medicines and supplies. A certified health professional that has been identified by the community will work at the medical center we create. Students already enrolled within the school will be able to access the center free of cost with additional members of the community being able to access the center by appointment with the school office. I am in contact with numerous medical personnel and doctors who volunteered at and assisted me in implementing a two-day health camp for residents of Gohawa Village, a semi-rural settlement on the outskirts of Lahore, in the summer of 2018. Each doctor specializes within a different medical discipline and has agreed to volunteer at the medical center, if set up, for an established number of hours each week so that a wide array of specialties will be available for the trans community to access and get medical advice and assistance from, in addition to the trained health professional already present within the center. We also aim to re-stock, develop and update the HIV diagnosis center present within KSS.

In addition to the medical center, we will carry out health camps that will be 6-hours in length, held on Saturdays and Sundays at both the Gender Guardian and KSS, with a 3-week period between each successive camp to provide ample time to re-stock medical supplies and manage logistics. Medicines will be bought beforehand and volunteer health specialists, who have worked with the trans-organization KSS, trained in diagnosing health-issues specific to trans individuals will be invited to the aforementioned spaces and will provide medical care. Each camp will also include a half-hour seminar on each day where attendees of the camp will be informed about the existence of the medical center within the Gender Guardian and available health services within the center. The sessions will also serve to educate individuals on the prevalence of HIV/AIDs within the trans community and how to prevent and decrease these problems through presentations led by HIV specialists who operate the HIV diagnosis center within KSS.

From December 2018 to January 2019 I will be working in the office of the Chief Minister of Punjab under the Strategic Reforms Unit responsible for implementing the 5-year plan of the new government appointed in August 2018. I will continue this work in the summer of 2019 in the form of a 2-week program at the Unit to learn why specific policies relating to health-care for minority communities like the transgender community are not being implemented and then preparing a report and article (to be published) based on statistical evidence and experience from working with those solely responsible for putting policy into practice.

Expected Outcomes/Future Work: Once the summer has ended we will have implemented at least 3 health camps and be finished with the development of Lahore's first discrimination-free health care space for trans individuals. The work of the project is going to be continued by the team members of Pehchaan who will start fundraising when the school term begins, and then use these funds to continue work. I plan on using feedback from attendees of the camp and visitors of the center to assess the deficiencies in our camps to see further improvements and changes that can be made. I will also apply for a series of grants from Swarthmore to develop and implement more strategies to create a sustainable, continuous change that allows more trans-people to safely access health care.