



Department of Development Studies
Discussion Paper 2

*Community at Risk: An ethnographic study of at-risk
behaviours among khusras/zenanas of Rawalpindi and
Mansehra City*

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INTRODUCTION

Despite considerable efforts undertaken by National and Provincial AIDS programmes to target at-risk populations and to run awareness campaigns to control rising epidemics among men who have sex with men (MSM) in East, South and South East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, still nothing significant has materialised to root out stigmatisation and discrimination against MSM. With strict religious, customary and constitutional laws against sodomy and overt sex work, many decentralised, underground and informal forms of male sex work have emerged in these areas, and such forms are not adequately addressed by HIV prevention interventions. The institutionalisation of sodomy laws, the verbal, physical, and sexual violence against MSM, the societal misperception of HIV/AIDS as a 'gay disease', the societal and familial rejection to gender non-conformists, and 'bringing shame to families' if openly asserted about 'same-sex preferences' are some of the features resulting from stigma against these populations. For MSM in general, and male-female transgender people and third-gender people in particular, sex work becomes one of the plausible ways to meet both ends from where acquisition and transmission of HIV/AIDS, through multiple sex-partners, condomless anal intercourse, needle sharing with Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) for drug injection, increases significantly. Poverty is well documented structural correlate of sexual risk, although personal/individual preferences (practice of unsafe intercourse because of emotional attachment to their steady partners or generally love between cohabitating partners) play an important role as well.

In many places in the specified regions, same-sex preferences are penalised by religious, customary and constitutional laws, and male homosexuality is kept secret due to familial and societal resistance to sexual diversity. In such instances, transgender people often constitute a secluded group with unrecognised rights as individuals, face physical and sexual violence from society, and survive through sex work. In those places, risky sexual and non-sexual practises have been significantly contributing to a mounting HIV/AIDS epidemic among male-female transgender persons.

In Pakistan most of the cross-sectional, bio-medical studies have highlighted the importance of conducting research on Men who have Sex with Men (MSM - popular

term in HIV/AIDS context used to neutralise the debate on sexual identity vs. sexual behaviour) because the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and high-risk sexual behaviours - multiple sexual partners and unsafe sexual intercourse - is high among MSM (*hijra/khusra/zenana*) than Female Sex Workers (FSWs) and Injecting Drug Users (IDUs).

The biomedical literature on FSWs of Pakistan has indicated that among steady partners and regular customers the condom use is low due to trust, emotional attachment or love that to some extent is covered in MSM literature (Bibi et al., 2010). But to what levels stigmatisation and discrimination results in making MSM emotionally vulnerable to search for lovers (through sexual exchange or from formal or informal networking) and practice unsafe sexual intercourse for the sake of love, are yet to be explored. Also, under what circumstances *hijra/khusra/zenana* internalises the violent sexual behaviours of their lovers need research introspection. The positioning of monetary transactions in this framework is also an important research area in which the main focus was to introspect whether lives are risked for material benefits while feigning romance or not.

Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this study was:

To indigenise the framework of transactional sexual relationships for the *khusra/zenana* communities of Rawalpindi and Mansehra City.

The framework of transactional sexual relationships is broad and there are different dimensions to this framework which include emotional, economic, social or structural, and epidemiological ones. For this reason and to narrow scope of the study, the main objective was divided into two sub-objectives:

- 1) To explore the socio-economic organisation of *zenana/khusra* community in the selected locales.
- 2) To explore need for money (in love based relationships) in increasing vulnerabilities regarding HIV/AIDS related high risk behaviours among *zenana/khusra*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The impact of inconsistent condom use on HIV prevalence is causing rise in epidemic than no condom use. Among male-female transgender persons the low condom use is considered to be the sign of commitment and love especially among those who are in emotional relationships with other men (Hearst and Chen 2004). Among cohabitating *tongzhi* MSM one partner's intention to use condoms is often regarded as a sign of distrust and less affection by the other partner (Zhou 2006).

Condom use becomes more implausible in love-based relationships with steady partners than with casual partners (Bengtsson et al., 2013). Despite the provision of free HIV/AIDS related information, accessibility to condoms, and acquisition of HIV/AIDS knowledge, MSM students practised unprotected receptive intercourse with their 'regular' (steady or non-casual) partners (Xu et al., 2011). Elements of faithfulness and love were recorded among Vietnamese feminised men (Bengtsson et al., 2013). It is not always the stigma against them that limit their access to HIV/AIDS control programmes or their willingness to seek preventive information and use condoms, rather it could be their personal choice to increase their emotional proximity to their partners (Bengtsson et al., 2013).

Discrimination is referred to as the direct outcome of stigmatisation as a result of which the individuals who are perceived as different are socially and economically marginalised. For male-female transgender people, living at the peripheries of socio-economic organisation and victimised by economic discrimination, prostitution is left out to be the only option for survival. Loneliness, powerlessness, fear and other emotional turmoil make them vulnerable to be accepted, wanted, and loved by a male partner. Affirmation to one's femininity (through sex reassignment surgeries) and performing feminine gender roles (of looking after their male partners like their wives) make them more physically and emotionally dependent on their lover husbands. Under these situations, male-female transgender people choose not to use condoms because they want to sustain their relationships in any possible way they can.

The study on Bangladeshi *kothis*, *hijras* and *panthi* attributes to features such as poverty and widespread inequality that constricts them to undergrounds and exposing to

HIV/AIDS risky behaviours (Chan and Khan 2013). The transmission mechanism of HIV/AIDS initiated from the injecting drug users (IDUs) first, from IDUs to Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) and finally to the general population. Experiences of sexual violence were reported in a study on Nepali transgender persons (Wilson et al., 2011). Despite the fact that same-sex relationships are not criminalised in Nepal but still there exists widespread prevalence of physical and sexual violence by policemen against *metis*. They were maltreated by the policemen, sometimes arrested under false accusations of having sexual intercourse with multiple partners in public places and releasing only when they (*metis*) provided free sexual services or paid certain amounts. Also, incidents of rape or sexual abuse were reported by a number of respondents. Inside police stations *metis* were forced to coerced intercourse. Under such conditions the use of condoms as a harm reduction strategy to HIV/AIDS is not only non-negotiable but also out of question (Wilson et al., 2011). In India, *kothi* faced extortion, informal taxation, arrests under falsified charges, and excessive beatings from policemen without strong reasons (Chakrapani et al., 2007). The incidents of unprotected forced intercourse by policemen were also reported and in most of the cases the requests from *kothi* for condom use were punished with physical beatings. In doing so, both involved in unprotected intercourse were in danger of contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS. The strong alliances between policemen and road-side rowdies further worsened the situation as both parties were actively involved in practising sexual and physical abuse against *kothi*. Forced/coerced sexual intercourse at nimbler ages when reproductive organs are not fully developed shows maximum likelihood of anal rupture and excessive bleeding that without medical help and repeated abuse can develop into STDs later on in the lives of *hijra/zenana/khusra*. All the respondents in a study on feminised young men of Lahore and Karachi were physically abused or raped repeatedly (de Lind van Wijngaarden et al., 2013). Out of 10 case studies, 6 indicated experiences of rape as first time sexual encounters of victims.

Khusras reported being sexually abused or active at younger ages and raped by policemen (S Hawkes et al., 2013). Violence from police, customers and family members was a common factor reported by both *hijra* and female sex workers. In comparison to

previously conducted studies in Pakistan, this study is important for these two highly stigmatised groups because it emphasises on drawing strong links between sexual violence and higher-risk sexual behaviours (S Hawkes et al., 2013). In comparison to other provinces of Pakistan, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among *hijra* sex workers (HSWs) of Larkana was higher (Altaf et al., 2013). Among other reasons attributable to HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment are two important factors resorting HSWs to decentralised modes of prostitution in Larkana. Due to sexual domination of male clients, the HSWs in Larkana were not in a position to negotiate on condom use with their clientele. Abdullah et al., (2013), in a qualitative study on *hijra/zenana* of Pakistan, bridges a link between social exclusion which is pulling *hijras/zenana* to essentially earn through prostitution. The occupational trends have shown that *hijras/zenanas* have been actively involved in earning through performing arts including music and dance, but in Pakistan the rising costs of living due to inflation have adversely affected the already-poor segments of the society, and that has significantly caused *hijras/zenanas* to be earning through ‘easy money’ ways such as prostitution. Prostitution is the result of social exclusion and further socially excludes the *hijras/zenanas* who live in and operate through rented dingy rooms in commercial areas of Pakistan. Contrived by economic and social marginalisation, the feelings of loneliness and depression intensify the need to be loved and embraced.

LOCALES

Two geographical locales of Rawalpindi and Mansehra were selected for this research. Rawalpindi is an urban centre which has gone through the most rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, commercialisation, and economic development, although, this development has occurred spatially and has not trickled down indiscriminately or equally. With booming foreign and local monetary influx into the construction and commercial sectors of the city, increasing consumptive nature of the society, and rising proclivities towards the post modern commodities, this urban centre is becoming more monetised. The impact of this development at the cost of equality innately provides strong locale settings for the study on *zenana/khusra* communities for two important reasons. Rawalpindi is the most thickly populated with the transgender communities

residing mostly in the dungeon dark, one or two room settlements of incomplete or under constructed buildings. Second, in the context of political economy and transactional sexual conceptualisations of love, the impact of economic and social structures on the *zenana/khusra* social organisations, economic adaptations, sex-for-money exchanges, and decisions on whether to (or not to) commoditise love will be more comprehensively researched in the contextual social settings of Rawalpindi as the city has gone through speedy social and economic transitions.

Mansehra city is the part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. The focus of this research was on Mansehra city which is the administrative capital of Mansehra district. The city has undergone a rapid socio-economic progress through the influx of indigenous gemstones, flourishing tourism industry, and a number of primary and secondary schools/colleges and Hazara University. Tourism and cultural miscellany had also contributed towards the socio-economic uplift of the city. Mansehra city was selected to bring in a different corpus of perspectives of *zenana/khusra* communes from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa part of Pakistan.

In selected locales, social institutions in the form of economic¹, social control², health³ and communication⁴ tend to discriminate, and taboo certain residing communities. Transgender community being one of these is perhaps the most deprived, and circumscribed of the functions and utilities which these institutions promise to deliver. Given these constraints, the deprived community has to live, has to develop a social organisation, has to adapt ways for livelihood, and has to fill in their emotional spaces. Doing field work, and exploring the lives of transgender communities at the backdrop of varying socio-economic contexts of these locales, led to easier comparative analysis.

¹ Commercial enterprises, labor unions, and construction authorities.

² Governmental and social agencies of social and economic development.

³ Hospitals and clinics.

⁴ Transportation agencies, postal services, and utilities of telephone, television, newspapers, and periodicals.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Exploratory research design was used for this study. Pilot studies were conducted to gain access to the *zenana/khusra* communities and to set social contexts. The lives in-depth analysed and research areas examined are tabooed, intriguing, and unconventional that the degree of participation had to be more for that unstructured participant observation in a non-controlled environment was employed. Other data elicitation techniques included in-depth narrative style of interviewing and group interviewing through focus group discussions.

Snowball or chain sampling was used as a sampling method to construct sample frame as no secondary data base sources had included community's places of origin. Sample size was kept smaller to capture the in-depth element, and to do justice to the detailed transcriptions according to the transcription conventions/stylistic notes of the conversational analysis. A total of 4 group discussions (two in each) and 19 in-depth interviews (12 from Rawalpindi and 7 from Mansehra City) were conducted. The interviews and discussions were recorded with a digital recorder to be transcribed in the later stage followed by generating a coding frame, categories and doing a thematic analysis.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

The Dera

Dera, essentially, comes from a Persian language meaning circle and symbolising nucleus of power centralised by a leader (*guru*) and his/her disciples (*chela*). There are towns and districts in Pakistan and India with *deras* in their names. In Pakistan *dera* is used as a pre-fix to towns and districts indicating the occupants of those particular areas. *Dera* means settlement not necessarily meaning a permanent place for living. In Punjabi villages *dera* is referred to as meeting points usually for men to socialise. The *dera* settlements can be permanent, covering larger geographical areas to small informal temporary settlements. For *zenana/khusra* communities *deras* are living places, socialising or meeting points and business centres.

Apart from providing social security, *dera* functions as a centre for most of the economic activities of *zenana/khusra* communities. Their ways to economic uplift are halted by social discrimination and marginalisation; resultantly, they opt for a combination and permutation of very few meagerly rewarding survival options including dance functions, beggary, and prostitution. Few amongst the respondents can afford to print their personal cards for advertising their dance skills. They can distribute these cards among their peers and to their *tamashbeen*. The interested parties can call them on their printed contact numbers and visit their *deras* for advance payment. Of those who cannot afford printing cards, give their contact numbers to seemingly interested men while at functions. For one respondent *dera* becomes an office during business hours starting from 12 in the noon till late evening and a socialising place after hours. Business hours activities include receiving invitations for functions, negotiating with the clients on payments, getting ready for *dhinga* and *bidhaee*, serving men who visit for sexual satisfaction, and finally receiving money in exchange of sex. Another respondent lives on a rented single room upper storey flat located at *Handaal Chowk*. She had written her mobile number on the entrance door as her advertisement. She earns majorly through prostitution, and *dera* is the place where she functions most of her dealings including sexual acts. Few others, too, described the importance of *dera* as a business unit. Hence *dera* is essential as a starting point of economic organisations for *zenana/khusra* communes.

Guru and Chela

Guru is a term meaning a teacher and *chela* a disciple. To almost most of the respondents *Guru/chela* relationship is like a father/son relationship. *Guru* is considered in the community as a fatherly figure who deserves respect for providing name, identity, recognition, and social security to a *chela*. *Gurus* don't tolerate their *chelas* disrespecting them. *Guru* is a teacher, when a *chela* has taken an oath to be working under her then respect is essential. Many a time, during fieldwork, I heard *chelas* discussing importance of respect to a *guru*. Many aspire to becoming a *guru* latter on in their lives. They think they will be respected by their *chelas* tomorrow if they are respectful towards their *gurus* today. Also, it is essential for their long run survival in the community as *gurus* are rich

in contacts with the most desired *chaamkay*. A *zenana*, without a *guru*, is not even allowed to sit in a *dera* gathering. Nobody will ever accept her, nobody will want to talk to her or exchange pleasantries with her because she has no *guru*. If she scraps over something then nobody from the community can defend her. Without *guru* a *zenana* has no identity and guardian; he will be considered a vagabond who is available for quick sex.

The things most distasteful to *gurus* resulting in displeasure and hence can temper include not listening to them, not cleaning *dera*, not washing utensils, not earning enough, not meeting people of interest to them, not handing over monthly rents, and disrespecting in front of their peers. One *zenana* from Mansehra said that she was outcast for six months from the community when she once abused her *guru* in a verbal fight. Purchase and sale of *chelas* by their *gurus* is a common practice in *zenana/khusra* communes. A *guru* who wants to sell her *chela* circulates in the community the news of selling for amounts decided by the seller *guru*. The interested *gurus* will contact the seller-*guru* to negotiate on price. Price bargains are very common. A seller *guru* can double the amount, if *chela* had cost her ten thousand, she will ask for more than twenty thousand so that after bargaining she can get twenty thousand. The *chela* who wants to leave her *guru* will have to pay the exact amount her *guru* paid on her purchase. Her *guru* cannot claim of higher price from her. But when her *guru* wants to sell her, she can claim what she wants. The interested buyers will apply tactics to allure a potential *chela* to join their communes. Usually, the more beautiful and talented *chelas* are in the wish lists of potential buyers due to greater opportunities of huge profits through beautiful *chelas*.

Then *jalsa* happens. It is a ceremony where in the presence of *jaddi pushti* male-female transgender persons (*kanchara*) a new recruit enters a new *dera*. A new recruit has to pay *chittai* to her new *guru*. It is a customary practice in the community according to which a *chela* has to pay two fifty or five fifty rupees to her *guru* to take her under new *guru*'s kinship and inheritance. When a *chela* joins a new *gharana* she has to be obliged towards the head of the family, the head who paid for her, and who accepted her to be part of a new household. Like a good student, *chela* shows respect by paying some *gurudakshana* which include *mithaee*, *haldi*, *doodh*, *pataashay*, a new unstitched suit, a

ring, and two hundred and fifty rupees. In return *guru* formally accepts her new *chela* and takes responsibility of her *chelas*'s well being and security. Sometimes *guru*, in return, hands over to new *chela* jewellery as a token of love and acceptance. Saba told how happy she was when she first paid *paisha* for her very first *chela*; it was a new thing for her. She had arranged a huge function, gifted five hundred rupees to her *guru*, *maa* (mother), *shoorma* (brother), *shoormi* (sister), *guru chacha* (*guru*'s brother) and *maa khala* (mother's sister). As a return to this large heartedness a *chela* has to do the allocated household tasks on time, earn well, look after clients, show respect towards *guru*, take care of her *guru*, and pay her.

A *rasam* (custom) very common in Mansehra during *jalsa* ceremony is passing a black thread through a nose piercing of a *chela*. A black thread with one end tied to a needle pin is passed through inner side of a nose piercing and released from the outer side. After untying pin, a knot is tied to a thread. This *rasam* takes place in front of all the invitees. They are the witnesses of the *chela* going under the supervision of a particular *guru*. The invitees give new recruit some money (the closer to the *chela* would usually give more than the other invitees). The amounts received belong to *chela* with nobody to claim over her earnings. This *rasam* is called *chooriyan*, as the money is meant to be spent on buying bangles and *mehndi*. This *rasam* is an expression of acceptance and generosity towards a new *chela* from the community.

Price bargains can lead to prolonged arguments. Since it is a closed community, information of purchase and sale prices get leaked very easily. Nomi, during my fieldwork, claimed of one lac rupees of a *chela* who she purchased for ten thousand rupees years ago. When this information leaked within the community, it created quite a stir amongst the buyers. But she didn't agree to decrease a single rupee. She was right in saying that she had spent a lot on her *chela*'s training, so she deserved getting a higher price. She had sold in one lac because the *chela* was (and is still) high on demand at the functions.

Saalgirah

Saalgirah is an Urdu term for birthday. *Saalgirah*, in the lives of *zenana/khusra*, carries huge importance. It doesn't mean celebrating on the days they were born.

Saalgirah, for them, is happiness, one of the reasons to be joyous for who they are, to feel confident being in their skin. The celebrations, mostly, occur at marriage halls which they book beforehand. Pre-*saalgirah* preparations are customary practices which are required to be followed, starting from *chela* asking permission for the function from her *guru*. If *guru* agrees then a date is decided and *chela's guru maa, chacha guru, shoorma* and *shoormi* are informed about decided date. The specific date, day, and time get locked and cannot be claimed by others. Some birthday functions are celebrated at a massive scale. The *zenanas/khusras* may get their invitation cards printed and those who cannot afford take packets of cardamom and *mehwa* (dry fruits) to visit invitees and hand them over a packet of each as a *nundra* (invitation). The guests will come to be part of her celebration. Somebody will gift her a thousand rupee, somebody five hundred rupees: whatever a *zenana* receives from invitees will be returned in double at their celebrations. As a part of preparation, each *zenana* wants to look most beautiful by purchasing the most expensive dress they can afford. Money is given to the *zenana* celebrating birthday as a token or gift. If a guest has gifted her five hundred rupees then she will gift thousand or two thousand rupees at her guest's birthday. It is a sign of respect for a *zenana* to return atleast double the amount she was gifted. The money gifted may not necessarily be handed to the *zenana* host at the start of function. In most cases that money is earned through dance performances by *zenana* guests. The money that spectators throw over the *zenana* guests will be collected to give to the *zenana* hosts. Among the spectators are *chaamkay, tamashbeen, giriyay*, and their friends who abundantly throw money notes over their beloved *zenanas*. The guests inform their *giriyay* and rich *chaamkay* beforehand to throw money lavishly so that the *zenana* host gets huge amounts.

In many a ways *saalgirah* functions are similar to marriage functions. The function, I attended, was in Green Hall Marriage at People Colony in Rawalpindi. The preparations including sitting arrangements, food catering, audio/video settings, and floral decorations observed were no less than a marriage function. The *zenana* host with her *girya* standing at the reception welcoming guests and sprinkling red rose petals seems quite similar to the man-woman couple welcoming guests at a marriage reception (*walima*). *Saalrigah* is essential for the distribution of resources within the community as

well. With limited occupational options and social disenfranchisement *saalgirah* works as an effective way out for circulating money within the community as an expression of mutual sharing and reciprocity. *Saalgirah* is primarily a social organisation turning into an effective economic organisation as *khusra/zenana* economic activities are hugely impacted by their social interactions of reciprocity and socially structured marginality, hence most of their social interactions and economic organisations overlap.

LOVE, MONEY AND AT-RISK BEHAVIOURS

This part explains at-risk behaviours through two focus groups with one focussing on the risky sexual practices/sexual behaviours in the context of love-based *zenana* and *giryra* relationship and another focussing on the risky sexual behaviours due to prostitution.

Focus group in Rawalpindi⁵

Moderator: What about protection [*ehitiyaat*]? Condom?

Queen: We are watchful regarding that, for example we clean ourselves specially after getting laid so that nothing is left inside and we don't catch a disease.

Sassi: Madam Shama⁶ handed over a packet of condoms to us.

Moderator: What with *giryra*? Do you use condoms with him?

Queen: Not with him. How can we? With love no protection [*ehitiyaat*].

Moderator: Are you sure that he won't be having relations with others?

Queen: We are very watchful [*assi dhayaan rakhdi aan*]. We prefer untouched men [*koray mard dai kol jaani aan*]. The one who is always with us not with anyone else.

Moderator: How do you get to know this?

Seemi: Listen to me, I will tell you dear when I know that my *saheli* is in love with a man, that man is a brother to us. He is our *laala*, if we find her man with anyone else we will let her know. We get to know about our men, our network is very strong. All of us the *zenanay khusray moortay* are very well connected.

Queen: I judge through his whereabouts like if you are my *giryra*, you live in my city. I know very well where are you, where aren't you. We check by ringing missed calls on his number time and again through which we get to know whether he is married or unmarried. . . . [We] keep an eye on his mobile during his stayovers with us, check a list of saved mobile numbers, check the dialed and missed call numbers, the duration of calls just to know that whether is there any other *zenana* or a girl in his life or not? Meanwhile, if he stays true to us, gives us monthly expenditure, then we stay with them. We won't criticise if they continue giving monthly ten thousand [rupees]. My man used to give me a lot before now he doesn't, then I

⁵ October 2014, Dhoke Chaudhry

⁶ A transgender activist

get laid for money. It's the truth I don't tell a lie. We rarely get a chance to meet up; I manage to get monthly expenditure from him whenever he comes over. He knows all my secrets, I know his all. Our relationship is getting older; it is no more what it once used to be.

Seemi: What else can we do? We are helpless; helplessness propels us to do many undesirable things in life. We will quit it if [we] have enough money, till that *giryas* and *pann* are my options for survival.

This focus group comprehensively covers important research domains of risky sexual practices among *zenanas/khusras*, their proclivities towards at-risk sexual behaviours due to emotional proximities, helplessness as an explanation of unprotected intercourse, and the highly contextualised explanations of getting assured that *giryas* is(are) not promiscuous. The inclusion of this excerpt from one of focus groups conducted at Rawalpindi is due to overarching themes covered in this focus group and the active participation of group members. Queen claims of using (not always though) condoms with clients. But as mentioned in the excerpt, that usage of protection with *giryas* is 'out of question'. '... With love no protection.' shows that with a *giryas* the trust, emotional attachment, and sexual intimacy increases the maximum likelihood of condomless intercourse which is not the case with clients. Most of the group members were amazed (and few offended) when I attempted to raise discussion on sex for money exchange with a *giryas* the reason being that such exchanges are with *chaamkay* and *tamashbeen* not with a *giryas*. If intercourse with a *giryas* is unprotected then important issue to address is the sexual practices of their *giryas*. Seemi claims to have never shown romantic or sexual penchant towards the *giryas* of other *zenanas/khusras* as she considers them her *laala* (brother). She further explains that the community's social grouping is very strong which enables them to stay well connected and informed about each other. Similar details were shared by the respondents from Mansehra city that they will get to know about their *giryas*'s whereabouts even when they are out of station. A *zenana/khusra* friend in Karachi, or in Peshawar or in any part of the country will give information to another *zenana/khusra* about her *giryas*. Queen, too, elaborates some strategies she applies to keep an eye on her *giryas* through monitoring a record and duration of dialed numbers from *giryas*'s cell phone. If she finds no such evidence of long calls, she is satisfied that her *giryas* is not romantically and sexually involved with any other *zenana* or a woman. But she doesn't 'criticise' on his one-off sexual links with

other female and male/transgender prostitutes as long as he provides her with money to meet monthly expenditures. Towards the end of her part she shows sign of distress and fear of losing him on account of her relationship with her *giryas* becoming 'old', which brings Seemi, again, to take part in the discussion. She finds herself helpless in not quitting on *pann* and hence getting into multiple sexual links not just with multiple *chaamkay* but with multiple *giryas* also. With *chaamkay* she extracts more using her sexuality and with *giryas* faking romance. *Zenanay/khusray* being in unsafe sexual links with *giryas* and *chaamkay* and then *giryas* being in unsafe sexual links not just with their *zenanay* wives but also with other female and male-to-female prostitutes create a highly susceptible socio-sexual environment from where carrying and passing on STIs or HIV/AIDS can be high. Most of the *giryas* are married, unburdening compulsive sexual urges from various sexual outlets and then practising unsafe intercourse with their wives brings the families of *giryas* into the at-risk groups of acquiring and transmitting infection.

Focus group in Mansehra⁷

Moderator: So, you don't work as street prostitutes?

Resham: No, no, no [*na, na, na*], We have these *deras*, we live here, pay rents, and we use condoms too.

Moderator: Okay so NGOs distribute condoms here, right?

Resham: Yes, the NGO people come with packets for us to use as protection. When we get in physical contact with anyone they instruct us to use condoms and use lotions.

Moderator: So clients agree to using condoms?

Resham: We try to, but it up to their wish.

Shamshad: Mostly visit us for intercourse without it [condom]. We can't do anything except accepting their demands. I know if I disagree he will go to her *dera* ((*pointing towards Nadira*)) at a one or two minute walking distance. He will offer to pay her more for condomless sex and she will agree. My loss will be her gain.

Moderator: But there is a risk in condomless intercourse.

Resham: I don't think there is any harm in it.

Moderator: There is, don't you know?

Resham: I know there is, no surety to how many people he has been in contact before coming to us/

⁷ November 2014, Kohistanabad Mohallah near Butt Pull

Shamshad:

/and he

is unsure to how many men we get laid to for money.

Resham: These are just talks, heavy talks. I have been here since my childhood doing *pann* for more than ten years. I have not seen anyone acquiring AIDS. Nothing happens to anyone.

Moderator: Till date?

Resham: I understand you are saying that a lot can happen to us. It should be understood [*samjahan ali gal hai*] that nothing had happened does not mean that it will never happen. A lot can happen; we can catch hundreds of diseases but we don't understand, don't want to understand it. We deny it.

Sunny: What should we care more for? An empty stomach or the fear of death by AIDS! What worse can happen to us? [We have] gone through so much that if caught with AIDS will fight it back. If not, then atleast will endure it.

Resham: And what we do is to get money, get the work done. Despite knowing we don't want to think of getting infected with disease or anything like that.

Moderator: Has anything happened to any one like bleeding, itching, rash?

Resham: We don't do it regularly that it bleeds but these issues are known to us because I think each one of us has faced it, at least I have=

Moderator: =What exactly?

Resham: Bleeding for the first time. [I] was 13 then followed by rash and red scars around rectum, even today when I do it simultaneously three or four times it gets hurt and swollen.

Moderator: You understand how dangerous it can be?

Resham: Yes we know but nothing had happened, don't worry.

Moderator: You know all about it but nothing happens, right?

Resham: We take care na. It will not harm us.

Moderator: Don't entertain too many men?

Resham: Try not to, at least not one after the other, with some gap.

This excerpt elaborates a different set of issues including knowledge about at-risk sexual practices, health repercussions of such practices, and prostitution as a survival strategy. Shamshad, during this discussion, applies a more pragmatic approach to the issue of unsafe intercourse; she explains that unsafe intercourse is preferred over safe intercourse by the clients. She, also, elucidates that since in a community *deras* are closely located, therefore if she disagrees to unsafe intercourse, other *zenanay/khusray* will agree to it at a higher price. She calls herself losing out on a potential client as her 'loss' and her friend's 'gain' if her friend agrees to the same client's demand of unprotected intercourse. Sunny, despite being equipped with the knowledge and importance of health-related risks of unsafe intercourse, chooses 'filling her empty

stomach' over 'dying with AIDS'. Sunny's major source of income is prostitution which is not always rewarding. She thinks that she will lose most of her regular and irregular clients if she demands the necessary condition of condom usage. Losing out on clients is synonymous to the loss of already-low earnings. She prefers to risk her life over safe intercourse. Resham, the most vocal in this discussion, does not lack important information of HIV/AIDS related risky behaviours. Still, she wants to ignore what worse can possibly happen as a result of practising unprotected anal and oral intercourse. In another part of the discussion she informs that most within the community prefer oral over anal intercourse especially with clients and with *giryas* anal over oral intercourse.

Most of the respondents in Rawalpindi and Mansehra were observed consuming *charas* before entertaining multiple clients one after the other. Low quality charas called *garda* is smoked by filling inside *chuski* (cigarettes) within the community. Excessive consumption of *garda* (*warma*: charas) coupled with alcohol makes *zenanas/khusras* losing control over their senses and eventually on the decision of having safe intercourse with clients. The reason for consuming *garda* in abundance before concurrent sexual contacts with clients is to minimise the physical pain and in few cases to 'have more fun'. With *giryas*, on the other hand, alcohol is consumed only. One of the important themes generated through interviews and discussions was the extent of command or independent say of *zenanas/khusras* in their relationship with *giryas*. Few of the responses (from In-depth interviews and focus groups) are as follows:

Hina: Yes, we share equal relationship. I convince him on a couple of things. I have made him sell two of his cars [*charkhe*] and eaten all the money he got.⁸

Seemi: OBVIOUSLY, he must listen to us. I recently convinced him to buy me a gold set for my *saalgirah*. What is his use if he cannot buy [*zenana*] wife a good set!⁹

Reema: I try not to persuade him when he doesn't agree with me on things. I treat him with respect and love just like a devoted wife. I cook food for him, wash his clothes [*kotki*], massage his feet, sometimes helps him out on expenses, and then he is convinced.¹⁰

⁸ Rawalpindi, October 2014, Raja Sultan Market

⁹ Rawalpindi, October 2014, Raja Sultan Market

¹⁰ Rawalpindi, October 2014, Raja Sultan Market

Hina, proudly, shows off command over her *giryas*, others might not be as commanding as she is nevertheless most *zenanas/khusras* share equal status in relationship with their *giryas* husbands. Seemi finds it as her husband's responsibility to buy his wife a jewellery set for a coming function and she feels confident to get one from him. Reema, too, convinces her man on matters he doesn't agree to at first but agrees later on seeing his wife's devotion and care towards him. They convince their *giryas* to buy them expensive items, to give them monthly expenditures, to send their families money, to stay faithful with them, to accompany them to the functions, and to do domestic chores, then a question that remains unanswered is: Why they cannot convince their men to having safe intercourse? Literature on African female and feminised men and Latin American male-female transgender persons has raised similar issues. The existing scholarship highlights challenging the models of agency and empowerment by recognising highly contextualised case-driven approach to the ways sexual minority groups create agency despite most living below poverty line and despite most being socially secluded and economically discriminated against. For *zenana/khusra* communities resource extraction from *giryas* is liberating and empowering. They can channel their ways to secure them emotionally and materially still jeopardising themselves into health risks through unsafe intercourse with *giryas*. It is observed through this research that *zenanas/khusras* don't want to be in safe sexual links with their men the reasons being emotional connection, sexual fulfillment, financial security, and unsafe intercourse as an expression of commitment. Existing programmatic strategies to control the risk of STIs and HIV/AIDS must include human subjectivities and love into the discourse of HIV/AIDS in the context of Pakistan. *Zenanas/khusras* being the most HIV/AIDS vulnerable group and bridging channel of infection carrier from sexual outlets to general population in Pakistan requires more research input. Current control programmes must target the vulnerable group in convincing *zenana/khusra* on using condoms with their *giryas* and in channeling their agency towards convincing their *giryas* husbands on safe intercourse.

CONCLUSION

In the context of HIV/AIDS related risky behaviours, all the respondents who took part in focus groups were aware of the diseases they can catch but barring only one respondent from Mansehra, nobody else has ever tested for HIV/AIDS test. Also, the use of protection (condoms) with their clients was reported low despite knowing the importance of safe intercourse. And the use of condoms with *giryas* was ‘out of question’ with the minimum assurance of their *giryas* being ‘sincere’ and ‘monogamous’. With their clients, the decision on having a safer intercourse is sacrificed for extra cash because unsafe intercourse is priced high than safe intercourse. With their *giryas* the choice of unsafe intercourse is emotional and consented. However, for few of the respondents/participants unsafe intercourse is a strategy to draw more material advantages from their *giryas*. In doing so, neither *zenanas/khusras* nor their *giryas* realize of both (target groups) being promiscuous and sexually active.

The risk of carrying and passing the sexually transmissible infections in the context of *giryas/zenana* relationship requires more research introspection. More specifically, the love and money dimensions which work as a framework to generate discussion on the issue under consideration requires more research efforts.

LIMITATIONS

Inclusion of *giryas* into interviews and discussions would have added more depth to the data and analysis. Also, few data rich potential respondents did not agree to take part in the research, the inclusion of those could have helped to elicit data more layered and textural. A study like this requires a long-term ethnography which could not materialise due to time and resource constraints.

ETHICS

Original names are changed into fictional names. Respondents’ willingness to take part in research was respected and only after their willingness they were interviewed or grouped into discussions. The attempt is not to vulgarise or sensationalise their lives rather to confirm to existing literature and to respect their survival in an environment plagued by threat and violence.

GLOSSARY

Chamkay: regular clients/customers

Chango (bhang): a concoction made of marijuana leaves

Dhandha: prostitution

Ehtiyat: protection

Girya(s): lover(s)

Haldi: turmeric

Khusray/khusras: plural of *khusra*

Mithaee: combination(s) of traditional hand-made sweet(s)

Nafs: self control (in this research used in the context of undergoing castration)

Pan/panpaisha: prostitution

Rasam: a cultural practice

Saheliyan: female (*zenanay/khusray*) friends

Shoorma: brother

Shoormi: sister

Tamshbeen: spectators/ clients (may not be regular, mostly new)

Vatal/watar: buttocks

Warmas: charas

Zenanas/zenanay: plural of *zenana*

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