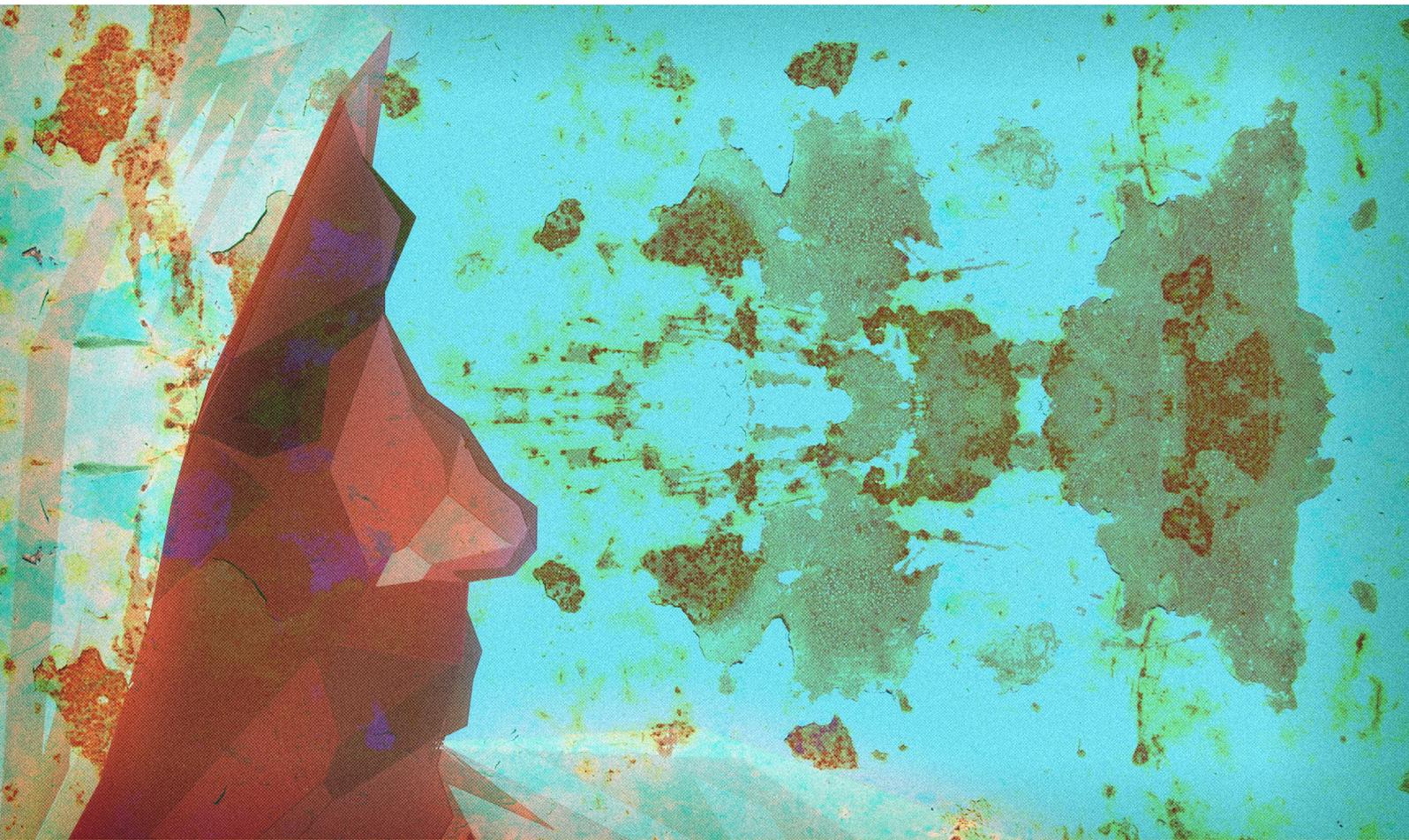


CREID INTERSECTIONS SERIES
Religious Inequalities and Gender

**Violence and Discrimination
against Women of Religious
Minority Backgrounds
in Pakistan**

November 2020



About CREID

The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) provides research evidence and delivers practical programmes which aim to redress poverty, hardship, and exclusion resulting from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. CREID is an international consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and funded by UK aid from the UK Government. Key partners include Al-Khoei Foundation, Minority Rights Group (MRG), and Refcemi.

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ISBN: 978-1-78118-728-9

DOI: [10.19088/CREID.2020.003](https://doi.org/10.19088/CREID.2020.003)



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IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England

Charity Registration Number 306371

Charitable Company Number 877338

Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Pakistan

Issue Editor **Mariz Tadros**

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the authors for their incredible commitment and courage in undertaking this research enquiry, and for their laborious and comprehensive work, which has been undertaken in exceptional circumstances: the spread of Covid-19, a multitude of encroachments from state and non-state actors, and much more.

On their behalf I would like to thank all the Pakistani women and men who have shared their lives with us through participating in this research.

A very sincere and heartfelt thank you to Amy Quinn-Graham for the many, many days she has spent editing this volume and her dedication to supporting all our partners to no end. Many thanks to Kathryn Cheeseman for her liaising with partners, copyediting and proofing work and indispensable role in the production of this collection.

We are also grateful to Barbara Cheney and Dee Scholey for their exceptional magnanimity in accommodating last minute submissions for copyediting all four papers in an astronomically short time. Thank you also to Emilie Wilson for her communications support. This collection is funded by UK aid from the UK government. All disqualifiers apply.

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Introduction

Mariz Tadros

The theme of this special collection of papers, the lived experiences of women who belong to religious minorities, has been a blind spot both in international development policy engagement and in much of the international scholarship on women, security and peace.

Women who belong to religious minorities, who are socio-economically excluded and are vulnerable to multiple sources of gender-based violence in Pakistan seem to have fallen through the cracks of the 'leave no one behind' agenda. The aim of this volume is to shed light on the day-to-day experiences of women and their families who belong to the Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu and Hazara Shia religious minorities in Pakistan. Each of the following papers exposes the complexity of the intersections of gender, class and religious marginality in shaping the realities for women from these religious minorities. For example, there are different ideological perceptions on the positions of Ahmadiyya, Christians, Hindus, and Shias in a Muslim-majority context as interpreted by theologians, Islamist political party leaders and politicians.

Moreover, caste significantly influences the situation of a large number of Hindu and Christian women, while class more generally affects all religious minorities. Geographic location is a significant factor in shaping the experience of Hazara Shias women living on the borders with Iran, whereby their ethnicity, in its interplay with religious minority status, leads to the state treating them like a security threat. All of these factors significantly influence the position and situation of women from religious minority backgrounds in the context at hand.

However, these factors, as influential as they are, should not obfuscate from the fact that the power inequality these women experience is in essence because they happen to be women who belong to religious minorities. In other words, while individual papers point to different configurations of power shaping women's realities in distinct ways, collectively, these papers shed light on different manifestations of religious marginality as experienced by women from religious minority backgrounds in Pakistan.

While all women who live in poverty in Pakistan and other settings experience marginalisation, deprivation, and socio-economic exclusion in particular ways, this special collection of papers draws attention to how belonging to a religious minority

shapes and informs experiences of socio-economic exclusion. Conversely, while members of religious minority communities often experience forms of religious discrimination from state and non-state actors who aspire for a religiously homogenous society, being a woman shapes the kinds of religious discrimination to which they are exposed.

The intention here is not to create a hierarchy of those who suffer the most. In other words, there is no implicit suggestion that poor, religiously marginalised women suffer more than all other women living in poverty in Pakistan, nor that their suffering always exceeds that experienced by all men who belong to religious minorities. Rather, it is to establish the case for the recognition of their specific targeting, which cannot be explained exclusively in terms of ethnicity, or poverty, or other identifiers. We need to understand intersecting inequalities, including religious inequalities, and if we do not, then the concept does not wield sufficient power to explain the experiences of women of religious minorities living in poverty.

The two key questions informing this inquiry are first, how are the experiences of poor women from religiously marginalised backgrounds different from other poor women from the same context? Second, how are the experiences of poor women from religiously marginalised backgrounds different from poor men from the same background? For these two questions, the goal is to understand scale (how big the problem is, i.e. in terms of frequency of occurrence) and depth (how deeply it affects individuals).

These questions inform a stream of work advanced by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) across five countries; Egypt, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria and Pakistan. Despite the diversity of the religious composition of these contexts, their very different historical trajectories, the variations in scale and intensity of religious targeting, and the distinct and dynamic power configurations within each country, there were some recurring patterns of inequalities experienced by women who belong to religious minorities across these country contexts.

These patterns were captured in the CREID Working Paper *Invisible Targets of Hate*, which briefly indicated that:

1. The intersection of religious marginality, gender and class amplifies exposure to particular vulnerabilities that makes circumventing or avoiding them particularly difficult.

2. Women who belong to religious minorities are tied to broader ideological and political wars beyond even national borders, making them unwilling political pawns in these struggles.
3. Women and girls from religious minorities become the targets of ideologically motivated sexual grooming, and as it is more difficult to detect it is overlooked.
4. Responses from within a religious community to all forms of sexual violence and communities' engagement with issues of gender equality influence minority women's coping strategies in fundamental ways, and
5. The legal arena is a site of direct and indirect disproportionate harm to women who belong to religious minorities, representing one of the most overt expressions of state discrimination.

Despite some common patterns underpinning the different case studies presented in this collection, our comparative approach in this stream of work recognises the differentiation in experiences within and across religious minorities. Hence, there is no single study undertaken by a single author on all of the religious minorities in any given context. A nuanced approach is needed to understand how geographic locality, caste, class, and the doctrinal position of the mainstream religion lead to differentiated realities on the ground. This allows us not to assume that the realities of all women who belong to religious minorities within a given context are shaped by the same dynamics, nor that all women who belong to religious minorities experience the same set of inequalities. The sites of discrimination, both physical and emotional, sometimes means they can be targeted in different ways. This has huge implications on our interpretive frameworks, methodologies, and our mobilisational strategies.

Conceptual framework and methodology

The conceptual framework informing this study is informed by the idea that in contexts of religious otherisation, women and men experience intersecting vulnerabilities in particular ways which manifest themselves, not only overtly, through extreme forms of violence, but also in terms of day-to-day encroachments in education, health, transport, leisure and so forth. Many forms of targeting are so insidious that they are easy to miss in conventional human rights or legal frameworks, such as ideologically motivated forms of grooming (see Tadros 2020).

In order to understand the common and distinct ways in which religious otherisation occurs, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), under the banner of CREID, invited partners to a workshop in Brighton between Tuesday 21st - Friday 24th January 2020, bringing together participants from Egypt, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria and Pakistan who either had experience of the women's movement in their country or experience of living as a member of a religious minority group. The purpose of the workshop was to gain a greater understanding of the intersectionality of inequalities, specifically of being a woman and a member of a marginalised religious group in one of CREID's five programme countries, and to develop a collective and comparative understanding across these country contexts of the implications of this for women's positions and roles in relation to the state, social justice, and development policy and practice more broadly.

In the workshop we collectively visited the propositions which resonated widely with participants' own analysis of their contexts. Participants detailed examples and specific case studies, many of which are shared in this paper. We also sought to analyse patterns of inequality, exploring whether the nature of the vulnerability experienced can be explained with respect to religious marginality, gender, class, or the intersections of all of these factors. This analysis was extremely important in order to distinguish between experiences of vulnerability that all poor women face, regardless of their religious affiliation, those that are specific to women of a particular religious group, and those that affect both women and men of a religious minority.

In the process of gauging the divergences and convergences across the different contexts, we merged some of the propositions so that they would encompass a wide array of experiences (see Tadros 2020). The author also reworded some of the propositions for greater clarity on what exactly distinguishes those patterns characterising the nexus between gender, religious marginality and economic exclusion. We also interrogated some of the drivers behind these patterns of inequality, drawing both on historical *longue durée* readings of power configurations in these contexts, as well as on the role of dynamic, new exacerbating factors.

Positionality

Sensitivity to positionality was at the heart of the selection of participants for the workshop. Positionality is not only about how people perceive themselves and their role and position in society, but also how those around them 'read' them in terms of their

gender, class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, political orientation, etc. In order to undertake research with people who are marginalised, researchers need to have the right mindset, attitude and behaviours (Chambers 2007). This includes a mindset of appreciating the knowledge of research participants as valid and legitimate, an attitude of humility, and behaviour that is mindful of power dynamics. However, to engage with the poor who also happen to belong to despised religious minorities, researchers with these qualities is a prerequisite but not sufficient. There are additional considerations to take into account when engaging with members of despised communities, including those who belong to religious minority groups. These considerations, highlighted below, are related to the position of the researcher/facilitator as well as that of the subjects of the study.

With respect to the position of the community, belonging to a religious minority means that anything you say may be used against you to incriminate you on blasphemy charges, particularly in the Pakistani context. Belonging to a religious minority has necessitated being on guard; internalised fear and mistrust are compounded when subjects are also marginalised on account of their everyday experiences of socio-economic exclusion from the wider society. When engaging with religious minorities, there are also issues around legitimacy: is the researcher 'one of us' or 'one of them' in a context of extreme religious otherisation and personal bias?

Moreover, in contexts where people have sought to engage in non-confrontational resistance by creating their own narratives that are shared among members of the same community, there are also concerns of disconnects in understanding with the researcher. In other words, will the researcher understand the "hidden script"¹ of the religious minority? Moreover, the intersection of religious and socio-economic exclusion with religious marginality and gender also has its own sensitivities for both women and men in the communities, especially when discussing issues to do with gender-based violence, femininities and masculinities.

On account of these considerations associated with positionality, *who* was engaged in the collection of data was of paramount importance to the design of the research inquiry. Through the CREID programme, we identified lay women and men from within the communities whose positionalities grant them legitimacy and trust. This is on account of not only being affiliated to the same faith, but also having a long pre-existing relationship with these particular communities and being reputed amongst them as a person to be trusted. In all cases, the authors who were involved in the collection of the data are

¹ For meaning of "hidden scripts" see James Scott domination and acts of resistance, 1990.

considered as leaders in the eyes of the communities in which they undertook the research (whether such leadership was formal or informal).

Positionality was not only important for ensuring that participants feel they can interact openly and freely in a safe space, but also to entrust the person gathering the data on processes of security and ethics. CREID upholds a commitment to duty of care towards all its partners, and the programme took the cue from those on the ground who are able to do an on-the-spot pulse check on political, social and security risks, ethics and safety considerations that need to be factored into conducting research in highly unpredictable and fragile settings (Tadros 2020). However, we are aware that sometimes when individuals from within the same communities are undertaking research, there is a concern that subjects may exaggerate the scale or intensity of their predicament. There are also concerns around the use of leading questions, which would undermine the validity of the data collection process. In order to mitigate against these potential risks to the research process, data-gatherers were trained in data collection processes during the workshop in Brighton in January 2020, and we used corroboration and triangulation to ensure the robustness of the data gathering process.

Participatory methods for defining and understanding realities: opportunities, processes and limitations

We are aware that there are various initiatives applying different methods of collecting data to understand acts of, susceptibility to, and public perceptions of violence against religious minorities. A forthcoming CREID paper by Professor Katherine Marshall on methodologies of gathering and monitoring freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) highlights that the selection of methods is necessarily a process that involves trade-offs (Marshall, unpublished). In order to address the two research questions informing our inquiry in all five countries, we chose to use participatory research methodologies. The rationale for this is as follows:

1. First and foremost, we wanted a method that would enable the subjects of the study to shape the selection of the issues, their framing and their weighting in terms of the relative influence on their lives.

2. We wanted methodologies that would enable women and men from within these communities to tell their stories in their own words, without the extended timeframe of anthropological enquiries.
3. We wanted methodologies that have been tested and tried in uncovering and understanding intersecting inequalities with individuals and communities who are on the margins (Howard, Lopez Franco and Shaw 2020).
4. We wanted a set of methods that would be accessible to data gatherers with the right positionalities (see section above) without a conspicuous presence.

Robert Chambers succinctly articulates the strengths of participatory methodologies when dealing with sensitive topics and people in sensitive positions:

Well thought out and facilitated participatory processes have shown a remarkable capacity for opening up and giving numbers and proportions to subjects so sensitive that they are usually hidden. The limitations of verbal responses to sensitive subjects are well known. We now know that, contrary to some professional belief, approaches which involve groups as well as individuals, and elements which are visual and tangible, can encourage and enable people to express and analyse aspects of life and conditions which they most likely would not otherwise reveal (Chambers 2007: 27).

We believed that neither surveys using questionnaires nor individual interviews would allow for the capture of issues of a highly sensitive nature in a truthful, accurate and insightful manner. We also wanted to undertake the research in group settings where people may be comforted by the presence of others and enabled to discuss and share perceptions and experiences in a meaningful manner. From within the wide spectrum of participatory research methods available, we choose two: focus groups that would be convened in the form of a dialogic, interactive inquiry and participatory ranking.

The authors who collected the data were those primarily involved in the selection of the members of the groups, however, the selection criteria were standardised across the different groups and contexts in order to allow for cross-country comparisons. Groups were sized between 8-12 persons with variations depending on context. In order to understand the experiences of women and men of different age groups, in every site where the research was undertaken there were at least four groups: one with young women (aged up to 25), one with older women (aged 25 and above) and where possible either two groups across the two age cohorts or mixed. The authors were the facilitators of the groups and were especially mindful of the sensitivities associated with the topic. It was left to each facilitator to adapt the research methods in ways that she/he would find

appropriate, however, across all contexts, the set of issues that were the subject of enquiry remained the same.

Participants in the research were asked to identify the issues which they perceive as representing the greatest threats to their wellbeing. The sequence of the methods varied from one facilitator to another. Some facilitators chose to then follow with participatory ranking, followed by an in-depth discussion, while others preferred to start with discussion then participatory ranking. Participants were able to, through participatory ranking, also determine what threats affected them most in terms of both frequency and intensity. There were, however, a number of topics that were put forward for discussion if participants did not raise them, such as access to housing and relations with neighbours, local transport, work, purchase and preparation of food, education, health, leisure, access to governmental services and dealings with officials, ability to exercise and express one's faith without harassment, dress and attire, media and public stereotypes. As expected, the specific issues under these generic headings varied across and within groups. In order to generate numbers, all groups engaged in participatory ranking.

Participatory ranking methodology involves three steps: piling the answers, ranking them, and accounting for how they have been ranked or where they have been placed (Ager, Stark and Potts 2020: 18). Facilitators of the focus groups followed through the compilation and documentation of the answers for each of the issues that were ranked by asking participants to share more about their answers through examples and stories. The sharing of stories was centrally important to understanding the day-to-day experiences of women (and men) because it gave those involved the opportunity to not only describe the details, but also to share their narratives of their trajectories.

The discussion built on the scope and frequency of how individuals were affected by an issue through follow-up questions to clarify how experiences are different for women/men who are from the majority religion but from the same socio-economic background and gender. Discussions of participatory ranking included follow-up questions on incidence, situations and examples that allowed for sharing of examples of lived experiences. These were not examples of one-off anecdotal evidence as recurring patterns were established as similar experiences were shared within and across groups.

Group discussions also allowed participants to share perceptions of how their position and role differs from those belonging to the majority religion and how this is affected by other identifiers on account of caste, class, gender, etc. This captured perceptions of relative deprivation and inequality, and also allowed for a discussion of how participants themselves felt people perceive them, and the words that are used to describe them as

members of their religious communities. These varied from one group to another and uncovered the differentiated expressions of bias and prejudice towards different groups. The process of synthesising the findings necessarily entailed validating findings with group participants. The process of deciding what to share and what to withhold was informed by both ethics and security concerns, as weighed and appraised by the authors who facilitated the group activities. This meant, for example, that in all cases participants were anonymised and the specific details of locations were withheld. In presenting the data, all authors were very mindful of the subtleties in meanings that needed to be considered in translation from local languages to English, and the importance of situating stories and examples within their broader political and socio-economic contexts. Authors' presentation of the data (qualitative and quantitative) followed the same structure, thereby allowing for cross-context comparisons within and across countries.

As with any methodology, there are strengths and limitations. The strengths have been previously highlighted, and the limitations are two-fold. First, in focusing on specific community contexts, there is the possibility that engaging with women and men from the same religious minority but living in different locations may incur changes in issues and their ranking. This is inevitable given that location is a significant factor in shaping individuals' experiences of access to resources, relations with neighbours, and formal and informal security factors, amongst many. However, replication of the same exercises across contexts may be illuminating in this sense. The second limitation is numbers. As will be shown below, for example, in the case of Pakistan, the group size is relatively small and numbers do not exceed 50 in total. While this means that the representation of the sample is limited, the corroboration of evidence across groups suggests that these are not just singular, anecdotal stories. There are in fact recurring patterns that cumulatively highlight the nature of power configurations on the ground.

Finally, in view of the weight given to the role of the facilitator in choosing participants, convening the sessions and narrating the findings, there is a question around whether the substitution of one facilitator with another would incur different results. Once again, the corroboration of the findings with others' points to the robustness of the process, in particular as participants are more than just data providers: they play a central role in agenda-setting for identifying and interpreting issues. Moreover, the robustness of the participatory process can be measured by its relevance to the group itself, and the extent to which the process is meaningful to them, and the researchers' relationship with the group (Bradbury and Reason 2006).

Participatory methodologies in practice in the Pakistan context

In Pakistan, 80-85 per cent of the population is Muslim, of which 'Shia, including Hazara, Ismaili, and Bohra (a branch of Ismaili), are generally believed to make up 15-20 percent' (US State Department 2019). Unofficial estimates vary widely with regard to the size of minority religious groups. Religious community representatives estimate religious groups not identifying as Sunni, Shia, or Ahmadi Muslim constitute 3 to 5 per cent of the population and include Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, while community sources put the number of Ahmadi Muslims at approximately 500,000-600,000 (US State Department 2019). While this study presents findings from two denominations who identify themselves as non-Muslims (Hindus and Christians), and two denominations who identify themselves as Muslims (Shia and Ahmadiyya), we are fully aware that there are other religious denominations in Pakistan who experience intersecting vulnerabilities, such as the Sikhs, and it is hoped that they will be included in future studies.

The authors of the papers, who were also facilitating the focus groups, were more than just members of the religious denominations which they covered - they were all considered in their communities' eyes as having a mediational role as advocates for their rights. This was perhaps the most important factor, since there was variance in the exposure and experience amongst the authors of undertaking research (participatory or otherwise). However, participatory methodologies' effectiveness lies in its relevance and usability by actors who are not necessarily scholars or professionally engaged in the collection of data, but who are able to make the process of engagement meaningful and relevant for the participants taking part in the process.

In three of the four cases, women initiated the research, sometimes building the capacity of a male researcher to undertake the facilitation of sessions with men. In one case, that of pursuing the research with the Ahmadiyya community, it was led by a man on account of mobility and accessibility issues. All authors have found themselves experiencing a sense of vulnerability through being on the radar of the Pakistani authorities on account of their commitment to championing human rights. This has varied from one person to another, and from one point in time to the next, however, in one case, that of the author of the Ahmadiyya paper, it is so acute that he has had to withhold his name.

The detailed description of the methodologies that each author pursued is described in each paper, however, here we present the cumulative data collected:

	Ahmadiyya	Christian	Hindu	Shia Hazara
FGDs with women	Two (one with AM women aged 18 - 34 years and one with AM women aged 35 and above	Six (divided into three age groups; 15 - 20 years, 21 - 30 years, and 31 - 50 years - two FGDs were organised for each age group)	Three focus groups	Four FGDs (two with girls up to 19 years, two with women under the age of 50). Additionally, eight women over the age of 50 were interviewed separately - see below on Covid-19 risks.
FGDs with men	One with AM men of various ages	Two with 12 men of all age groups	One with 12 men of all age groups	Two with 12 men
Total number of participants	30	48	46	36

Risks

The risks associated with undertaking this work are exceptional to both authors and participants on account of the Pakistani government's engagement with non-Sunni religious groups. The greatest risks for undertaking this research was for the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Since it proved to be very difficult to ensure that our participants and facilitator could feel safe enough to openly discuss such sensitive issues (see M.K. on Ahmadis for further description), undertaking this work with women and men from the Ahmadiyya community who have recently fled to Thailand was deemed to be the only way in which to undertake the research without putting people's lives at risk. The research took place with a group of Ahmadi Muslims who are registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Thailand, who fled to escape the extreme persecution facing them in their home country.

There were also risks to be taken into account when engaging with the Hazara Shias with whom the researchers worked with in Balochistan. The dangers that they experience on account of living on the border with Iran and being regarded by the Pakistani government as a security risk are distinctly different from the experiences of Shias living in the capital city or main towns. While all Shias share some common experiences of prejudice in Pakistan, Hazara Shias are in a highly vulnerable position on account of the Pakistani government's despol of their ethnicity, religion and location.

Whereas the threats to undertaking research in the case of the Ahmadiyya were on account of political/ideological drivers, and with the Hazara Shias on account of security, the threats facing the facilitators and participants of the Hindu and Christian communities were also socio-economic. The research with Hindus was undertaken with members of the Hindu Scheduled Castes in the Sindh province of Pakistan, which represents the most economically marginalised communities of the Hindu population in the country. The intersection of caste and religious marginality means that the subjects of the research are in a very precarious state of wellbeing. They have been living on high alert, wary of the possibility that they may be misinterpreted or seen to provoke the religious majority. The Christians in this study also live in socio-economically marginalised communities. Participants were residents of Yuhannabad, said to be the largest Christian community settlement in Pakistan. The majority of residents of Yuhannabad work as domestic, factory and sanitation workers. Residents have also learned to be very wary of researchers on account of the information being misused, or equally, of being of no practical use to improve their situation. Hence, on account of the threats associated with the localities and the nature of vulnerabilities in relation to the research participants, facilitators had to take several risk mitigation strategies.

The timing of the research also accentuated risks. The authors of the papers initiated their research between March and September 2020, after the outset of Covid-19. In view of the economically deprived settings characterising all of the communities above, undertaking research in a manner that upholds the do no harm principle presented immense challenges. Lockdowns meant severe delays in the commencement of the work. As the authors of the papers show, different measures were pursued in relation to different groups. Among some groups (i.e. Christians) the authors chose to meet in very small numbers, in others, there were one-to-one meetings with senior citizens, and in other settings, the meetings were spaced out across several weeks to work to adjust to people's new realities. In some of the focus groups, the impact of Covid-19 on people's

everyday experiences of marginalisation featured in the discussions about the amplification of pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Beyond evidence extraction: next steps

The evidence presented in these papers suggest sites of targeted discrimination across all religiously marginalised groups, be they a Muslim or a non-Muslim minority. These include the freedom to dress in accordance with one's beliefs without fear of harassment or hate speech; equal access to and treatment in education and health; and freedom to be able to practice religious faith.

However, the studies also show clear distinctive ways in which religious-based targeting is differentiated because of its interplay with specific factors, such as ideological standpoint, location, class and caste. We will continue to explore these dynamics, at times overlapping and at times distinct, through coalitional work at different levels. With the publication of other country reports, we endeavour to identify those entry points of change that recognise the intersections of inequalities which lead to subordination, but also the repertoires of strength that enable coping, resistance and solidarity. We hope that the very process of engaging in these processes of understanding and reflecting on these everyday struggles that have conventionally gone unnoticed will open new doors for actively redressing these inequalities.

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The Multi-Layered Minority: Exploring the Intersection of Gender, Class, and Religious-Ethnic Affiliation in the Marginalisation of Hazara Women

Sadiqa Sultan, Maryam Kanwer and Jaffer Abbas Mirza

Summary

The literature on the Shia Hazara persecution mostly focuses on the killings of Hazara men and little attention has been paid to the impact of religious persecution of Shias on Shia Hazara women. Therefore, this paper explores the experience and marginalisation faced by Shia Hazara women since 2001 in Quetta. It contributes to understanding the unique vulnerability of Shia Hazara women within the larger Shia community by: (a) comparing Shia Hazara men with non-Hazara Shia; and (b) through a participatory ranking exercise to gauge the frequency and occurrence of the issues faced by Shia Hazara women belonging to different age groups. The paper concludes that the intersection of gender, religious-ethnic affiliation and class aggravates the marginalisation of poor Shia Hazara women, making them more vulnerable within the Shia Hazara community and having to deal with layers of discrimination in comparison with Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia. As a result, they face limited opportunities for education and jobs, restrictions on mobility, mental and psychological health issues, and gender-based discrimination.

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Acknowledgements

We dedicate this study to the families of Shia Hazaras who lost their loved ones, for no crime other than being Shia Hazara. We are extremely thankful to all the participants who shared their insightful input. We express our gratitude to community contacts who helped in identifying and reaching out to the specific segments of the community. We are grateful to Professor Mariz Tadros who guided us throughout all the phases of this research. We are indebted to Amy Quinn-Graham who shared her valuable feedback and helped to shape the final draft. We would like to express special thanks to Tayyaba Sehar who assisted in logistics and translation.

Abbreviations

FC	Frontier Corps
FGD	focus group discussion
FoRB	freedom of religion or belief
IED	improvised explosive device
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
NGO	non-governmental organisation
SBK	Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University
TTP	Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan

1 Introduction

The Shia Hazaras in Pakistan are one of the most persecuted religious minorities. According to a 2019 report produced by the National Commission for Human Rights, a government-formed commission, at least 509 Hazaras have been killed since 2013 (NCHR 2018: 2). According to one of the Vice-Chairs of the Human Rights Commission Pakistan, the country's leading human rights watchdog, between 2009 and 2014, nearly 1,000 Hazaras were killed in sectarian violence (Butt 2014). The present population of Shia Hazaras is the result of three historical migrations from Afghanistan (Hashmi 2016: 2). The first phase of migration occurred in 1880–1901 when Abd-al-Rahman Khan came to power in 1880 in Afghanistan and declared war against the Hazaras as a result of a series of revolts they made against the regime. The Hazaras fled to Pakistan and Iran as both countries border Afghanistan (*ibid.*: 10). Most of the Hazara refugees fled from Malistan, a district located in Ghazni province of southwest Afghanistan, to Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, which is roughly 595km from Malistan. The second influx of Hazaras into Pakistan occurred during the Saur Revolution (1978) led by the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (*ibid.*: 11). The final migration happened in the 1990s, particularly when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996. As the Taliban were openly against Hazaras, mainly due to their Shia faith, many Hazaras fled to different parts of the world including Pakistan (*ibid.*: 12).

The Taliban declared jihad against Shias. During one of the searches in Afghanistan, the Taliban instruction was to 'kill them [Hazaras] as soon as they opened the door' (Sheridan 1998). In Pakistan, anti-Shia violence dates back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution when the Pakistani military, with the help of Saudi funding, formed Sipah-e-Sahaba (literally

translated to ‘Soldiers of the Companions of the Prophet’) to contain the influence of the revolution (Rieck 2016; Fuchs 2019). However, violence against Shias intensified as soon Pakistan became an ally of the US in its ‘war on terror’. Many religious militant groups saw Pakistan’s support to the US, particularly the crackdown against al-Qaeda in northern parts of the country, as a reason to wage war against Pakistan and its people. This was the beginning of a series of attacks against Shias (including Hazaras) across Pakistan.

The first major attack² occurred in July 2003 when militants belonging to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), an anti-Shia terror group affiliated with al-Qaeda, attacked a Shia Hazara congregation on Mehangji Road in Quetta and killed 53 Hazaras, leaving 65 injured ([Hazara.Net 2003](#)). In September 2010, a Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, a Pakistan-focused religious militant group) suicide bomber attacked an al-Quds rally (pro-Palestine rally organised on the last Friday of Islamic Ramadan), killing 73 Shias, of whom 53 were Hazaras (CNN 2010). In September 2011, LeJ militants killed 29 Hazaras in Mastung, Balochistan, singling them out from a bus carrying them to Taftan (Baloch 2011). One of the deadliest events was the twin blast in January 2013 on Alamdar Road in Quetta, which killed at least 100 Hazaras and injured more than 120 (Boone 2013). The following month (February), another blast occurred on Kirani Road, near to Hazara Town, killing at least 84 people, mainly Hazaras (Dawn 2013). The last major attack was in 2019 when an improvised explosive device (IED) planted in a vegetable box killed at least 20 Hazaras and injured more than 40 people (Shah 2019).

For LeJ and the TTP, the killing of Shias is necessary to make Pakistan ‘pure’ from ‘heretics’; therefore, they consider that the extermination of Shias ‘from every city, every village, and every nook and corner of Pakistan’ is necessary (Adams 2014: 14). A letter sent by LeJ to Hazaras in 2011 stated: ‘All Shias are worthy of killing. We will rid Pakistan of [this] unclean people’ (Peer 2013). The period between 2003 and 2014 was the deadliest for the Hazara community as most of the attacks occurred during this time. Hazaras were an easy target for terrorists as they are more recognisable due to their Mongolian physiognomy compared to non-Hazara Shia who share common racial and ethnic origins with Sunnis. As a result, the Hazaras were left with no option but to leave Quetta and they migrated to other parts of the country. According to one estimate, between 2009 and 2014 around 30,000 Hazaras migrated from Balochistan (Butt 2014). Those who did not migrate ghettoised themselves in two areas of Quetta, i.e. Hazara Town and Mari Abad; and since the provincial government could not protect them, to

² Though Hazaras have continuously been facing violence since 1999, i.e. periodic targeted killings (gunning down Shias) and suicide bombings, we are considering ‘major’ attacks as those in which at least 20 Hazaras were killed. However, due to space constraints, even presenting all the attacks resulting in over 20 casualties is not possible; therefore, we highlight only a few of them.

leave these two areas meant inviting death (Kermani 2017). However, this self-ghettoisation was not enough and the community was targeted inside Hazara Town in February 2013.

There is also a view, shared by some members of the community, that Hazara killings are a shield to hide and divert the focus from the Baloch insurgency which has been going on in the province since the 1950s. According to this account, the Pakistani military use LeJ and pretend (to show the world) that the only issue in Balochistan is religious extremism (*Balochistan Post* 2019a, 2019b) and also suggest that groups such as LeJ are used as 'death squads' against Baloch insurgents (Hourelid 2013). For example, Ramzan Mengal, the leader of LeJ and the key figure in the persecution of Hazaras, who confessed to the killing of 'tens of Hazaras' (UK Home Office 2019: 26), was freed and allowed to contest elections in Balochistan (Hashim 2018). Members of the Hazara community often raise the question of how militants easily manage to attack Quetta, which is an army cantonment, while the residents are stopped and harassed at checkpoints. Checkpoints are mostly military or paramilitary check posts/entry points which were deployed after 2003 when the law and order situation worsened. Although they were meant to 'protect' Hazaras, these checkpoints have become a source of daily harassment and humiliation for the community. Hazaras are routinely searched and asked to show their identity cards and to state the purpose of their visit, despite knowing that they are returning to their homes (NCHR 2018: 6). Particularly for the checkpoints that lead to Hazara localities, entry will not be permitted if a local Hazara does not come to receive the visitor. Living in the secluded space is suffocating for the community as the restrictions on their mobility limits their options. One Hazara stated: 'Violence here has come down, but we can't go anywhere else in the city. We can't do business anymore. We're living in a cage' (Kermani 2017).

A significant amount of the literature on Shia Hazaras in Pakistan and Afghanistan focuses on migration and diaspora studies (Monsutti 2004; Changezi and Biseth 2011; Ibrahimi 2012; Hashmi 2016) and on the formation and evolution of Hazara religious and political identity (Radford and Hetz 2020; Olszewska 2013). Recent studies also cover the impact of sectarian violence on the community in Quetta (Adams 2014; Azhar 2013; NCHR 2018; Dedalus 2009; Ahmad Wani 2019). However, most studies on sectarian violence, particularly against Hazaras, have paid little attention to the impact of violence on Hazara women and the subsequent effect on their vulnerability. Therefore, this study begins by addressing the following question: How does Shia persecution particularly affect poor Hazara women in Quetta? This key question is asked to determine the specific consequences of the sectarian violence against the community that may shape and influence the everyday lives of Hazara women.

This further leads to exploring the internal nuances and complexities within the Hazara community by juxtaposing Hazara men and women. For example, is there a different level of suffering between Hazara men and Hazara women? Hazara men, being the main target of militants, have suffered the most. However, the challenges that women have faced – such as being widowed, restriction on mobility, and the issue of ‘honour’ for young Hazara girls – have largely remained unaddressed. While some level of gender-based discrimination is no surprise for a semi-tribal and disadvantaged region of Pakistan, it is vital to understand how Hazara women also face gender-based discrimination by Hazara men. A lot of this discrimination is security induced, where cultural norms that regard women and girls as the honour of families intersect with increased insecurity in the wake of terrorist attacks on the community and the consequent threat of physical and emotional harm to females. This cross-comparison helps to demystify the intricacies within the persecution of the Hazara community where both men and women, particularly the latter, face specific gender-related challenges which the previous feminist, gender-based violence and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) scholarships have not covered.

The research questions informing this critical enquiry are:

- How does Shia persecution particularly affect poor Hazara women in Quetta?
- Is there a different level of suffering between Hazara women and non-Hazara Shia women?
- Is there a different level of discrimination based on different financial backgrounds?
- How does the ghettoisation of the Hazara community affect Hazara women from socioeconomically excluded backgrounds?
- Does the securitisation of the Hazara locality create further challenges for the Hazara community, specifically women?

Therefore, this research investigates the effect of securitisation, or policing, on Hazara women; for example, how it has limited the prospect of job opportunities and restricted mobility for Hazara women, and how it has affected their intra-mobility between Hazara Town and Mari Abad, the two main Hazara localities in Quetta.

This paper also examines the distinctiveness of Hazara women’s vulnerability by comparing it with non-Hazara Shia in general and women in particular. This helps to explore some of the key enquiries such as: (a) would Hazara women face the same challenges had they been living in big numbers in some other cities, i.e. Karachi and Lahore? or (b) do non-Hazara Shia women face similar ordeals that Hazara women undergo? By addressing these two questions, this study elucidates the significance of spatial belongings and distinctive facial features in the marginalisation of Hazara women

from non-Hazara Shia. The overall purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the marginalisation of religious groups by looking into the intersection of gender, religious identity/affiliation, and class. The questions which this study put forward will help to highlight the layers of marginalisation that Hazara women face and inform about the nuances within the persecution of the Hazara community.

Four main sections follow this introduction. Section 2 elaborates the methodological approach, context, and dynamics of the Shia Hazara community and selected neighbourhoods, i.e. Hazara Town and Mari Abad. Section 3 presents the quantitative data that illustrates overall findings collected through participatory ranking exercises. It highlights the main issues spotted and ranked by Hazara women and their frequency. Section 4 deals with the qualitative findings which analyses the context in which the participants categorise the issues/challenges and reflects on their responses and explains the distinctiveness of Hazara women from Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia. Section 5 concludes.

2 Methodology

According to one estimate, there are 0.6–1 million Hazaras in Pakistan (UK Home Office 2019: 7). Hazara populations are scattered in Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore. Around half a million Hazaras live in Quetta, Balochistan (*ibid.*). The majority of the Hazara population adhere to Shia Islam and there is a small section of Sunni Hazaras as well. Sunni Hazara women and girls have not been included in this research for the following reasons: (a) they have assimilated into Sunni populations, live in their neighbourhoods (as opposed to the Shia Hazara who live in distinct enclaves of their own), and are considered a part of the Sunni majority population because of their shared sectarian identity; (b) they do not face additional discrimination for their ethnic or sectarian identity, though they constitute the lower middle class and have huge economic challenges; and (c) though they have the same Mongolian facial features and can be identified physically as Hazaras, they have not been a target of terrorist attacks in Balochistan.

In Balochistan, located in the southwest region of Pakistan, Hazaras lived in both Baloch and Pashtun-populated districts of Khuzdar, Harnai, Zhob, Loralai, Dukki, and others. But due to continued violence and targeted attacks, most Hazaras from the Baloch belt shifted to Quetta.

They have been chosen for the purpose of this study because they comprise the biggest concentration of Hazaras in Pakistan. Historically and gradually, Quetta is the cultural, political, and anthropological hub of the Hazaras in Pakistan. Nearly half a million Hazaras are concentrated in Hazara Town and Mari Abad, the two Hazara enclaves located in the eastern and western areas of the city. The population size has allowed the Hazaras to practice their culture and organise themselves politically. The biggest Hazara religious congregations and rallies take place in Quetta. The only political representatives of Hazaras in the provincial and national assemblies come from the Hazara neighbourhoods of Quetta. Additionally, they make a valued contribution in the civil service and to sports in the province. Hazaras in other regions and cities of Pakistan are low in numbers and have not been as visible culturally, politically, and religiously as in Quetta.

Mari Abad is the oldest Hazara locality in Pakistan while Hazara Town started developing in the 1990s as a result of population growth. Mari Abad is surrounded with rugged tall mountain ranges on two sides, an army cantonment on the third side and is connected to the main city on its fourth dimension. Hazara Town is located along the western bypass and is surrounded by Pashtun and Baloch populations. There is a 12–12.5km route connecting the two neighbourhoods.

Hazaras commute to both enclaves on a daily basis for work or to meet their extended family. Hazaras in Quetta do not own agricultural, industrial or commercial lands, and a vast majority of them rely on government/private sector jobs while the remaining bulk are either unskilled labour or they have small businesses. Most of the population comprises middle-class or lower middle-class families with the exception of a very small number of families who are either pre-partition migrants or have more than two family members working abroad.

Prior to the wave of violence against Hazaras that started in 1999 by sectarian terrorist outlets backed by the state, Hazaras had a fair share in the local city markets. They owned shops and businesses, and were making advances in socioeconomic indicators (FGD 3). As the Hazara businesses were attacked, the majority of them winded up and either left the city altogether or shifted the business within Hazara enclaves. It is for the same reasons that tens of thousands of Hazara fled the violence and migrated to Europe, Australia, and other parts of the world. This diaspora is important for the financial survival of the community in the form of remittances.

Hazaras have cordial relationships with the non-Hazara population of the city that are mainly either Bloch or Pashtun, and have social, business and work ties with them. However, there is an exceptionally low (almost zero) trend of intermarriage between

Hazara and non-Hazara ethnic groups. Even if someone chooses to do so, it is disapproved of by the community. One of the main reasons for this is sectarian identity as the non-Hazara ethnic groups hail mainly from the Sunni sect.

Mari Abad and Hazara Town are not the wealthiest enclaves in Quetta but are (particularly Mari Abad) one of the most advanced and highly organised localities in Balochistan in terms of education levels, urban administrative mechanisms and cleanliness.

2.1 Research method

The research study used a participatory ranking methodology called Pile, Rank and Analyse (PRA). The PRA participatory research technique explores and identifies problems/challenges with the participants. Once participants have identified all the challenges (piling stage), each is either written on a piece of chart paper or associated with an object present in the surroundings, depending on the nature of the participants. These items and/or pieces of paper are then placed in the centre without any order. Then each participant is invited to put the items and/or pieces of paper in an order of high preference (ranking stage). The ranking is then analysed for trends, frequency, and preferences of each individual and groups, and all the nuances evoked (analysis stage).

The ground researcher (one of the authors) hails from the Shia Hazara community, was born and raised in Quetta, and is part of the generation of Hazara in Quetta that has experienced and witnessed terrorism since her teenage years. She has a Peace and Conflict Studies background with majors in Critical Terrorism Studies and Peace Education. Her very choice of peacebuilding as a career and mission is driven by the violence against Hazaras and other secluded communities. She has a personal journey of surviving the emotional and mental trauma of terrorism. She was transformed from someone who loved nature as a child to a hardcore nationalist during her teenage years and early twenties in response to violence, and then back to a humanist in her late twenties through undertaking peace trainings. The researcher is critical of the status of religious freedom in Pakistan and reads the violence against Hazara as sheer oppression.

The involvement of a such a researcher, who is not only trustworthy but also shares similar experiences in life, empowered the participants with ease of communication as they felt they were being heard by someone who understands the entire context and has strong feelings about it. From the participants' deep insights and breadth of sharing in this study one can tell that they did not have to make an extra effort to convince themselves or the researcher that their experiences were important.

The researcher is cognisant of her biases. She knows that belonging to the community being researched is likely to instill trust in the participants and it opens the window for exploring nuances and analysis of matters. At the same time, she is also aware of the natural instinct to push one's own views onto participants or the research findings. Knowing the whole bias complex and making a conscious effort to minimise this, therefore, has been helpful to keep the entire process as objective as possible.

The other two authors of this report, based in London, were also aware about reflexivity and how their own positionality shapes this research. Since they both belong to the Shia community and have had first-hand experience of witnessing Shia persecution in Pakistan, they felt a connection (politically and emotionally) with the research participants. Having a history of political activism, they are also cognisant of their political biases and interpretation of events and history. While writing this report, all three authors of this paper have remained mindful of their religious identity and presented the data and findings in the best possible objective manner.

Following PRA, the researcher engaged participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews through guided questions, where they explored the challenges experienced by the Shia Hazara – particularly Shia Hazara women – in the thematic areas of education and health, economic conditions/livelihood, safety and security, and religious freedom. Once the participants had identified and discussed these themes at length, the researcher piled all the challenges written on separate sheets of paper. Then each participant was invited to rank these challenges as per their experiences. The researcher found that ranking done individually by each participant, rather than in groups, gives the participants more independence of choice and they are less influenced by others' preferences. As part of the ranking, each participant mentioned the reasons why he/she placed a particular challenge at a certain rank. The ranking was recorded separately for each individual involved in the FGDs and interviews.

Later, aggregate ranking was calculated for each group (teenage girls, young women, women, and men only) to better analyse preferences in terms of what challenge(s) affected their lives and wellbeing the most. Most of the participants were from the lower end of the socioeconomic strata of the Hazara community in Quetta, for economic hardship constitutes additional layers of vulnerability within the already persecuted community.

A total of 44 Shia Hazara participants, male and female, were engaged in this research study. Female participants were divided into three different age groups; namely, teenage girls (below 16 years, the youngest being around 14 years old), young women (age 16–35), and women (aged 35+). This grouping is aimed at helping identify the specific

challenges of different sections/age groups of Shia Hazara females and analysing the preferences of ranking these challenges. The fourth group was Hazara men only. Age-wise, this group was made inclusive of teenage boys, young men, and men aged 35+ to make it representative with respect to the three female age groups. The aim was to identify the challenges of Shia Hazara males in the aforementioned themes and compare them with those identified by the women.

Table 1: Number of participants and their age groups

Groups	Female	Male	Grand total
Teenage girls (FGD 4 and FGD 6)	11		11
Young women (FGD 1 and FGD 2)	13		13
Women	8		8
Men: mixed age group – teenage, youth, and adults (FGD 3 and FGD 5)		12	12
Total	32	12	44

Source: Author's own.

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the operational structure of the study was modified to better adhere to physical distancing to reduce the risk of virus infection. The number of FGDs was increased from four to six and participants were divided into groups of six, instead of 12 as originally proposed: two each with teenage girls, young women, and men only. Eight women aged 35+ were interviewed instead of being engaged in FGDs as originally planned, because this category had women above the age of 50, who were more at risk of contracting the virus than others due to their age. This particular change proved to be a clever design decision. All of the eight women interviewees were from families of martyrs and, except for one, they were either 'illiterate' or had a basic education. They were more comfortable and forthcoming when interviewed individually as they had more sensitive and personal stories to share. Had they been engaged in a

FGD, it would have affected their level of sharing or they may have been influenced by what other women in the group shared.

Geographically, Hazaras are located in two neighbourhoods: Mari Abad and Hazara Town. The researcher made sure to equally engage people from both neighbourhoods, and thus three FGDs were conducted in Hazara Town and the other three in Mari Abad. Five interview participants were residents of Mari Abad and three belonged to Hazara Town.

2.2 Challenges

The research study aimed at engaging the lower strata of the Hazara community including families of the martyred, women-headed families, people with special needs, families with a current or prior drug addict member, women who work outside the confines of the Hazara neighbourhoods, women who are engaged in either business or sports (both are still a heavily male-dominated realm), and poor families who do not have their own house or survive on minimum daily wages. The reason for focusing on this specific strata is that these community members are more vulnerable than the rest of the community, and are less represented in other investigations/studies.

Once they had been identified, the challenge was to convince them to participate in the research. The more vulnerable they were, the more reluctant they were to participate. One of the main reasons for their unwillingness was fear of their personal details and pictures being made public. Some of the participants put it straight: 'I can be part of this study only if I am not photographed nor my name used'. Therefore, any names used in this document are pseudonyms. They were oriented in detail over the phone or in some cases one-to-one visits were made, and assured that no photographs would be taken if they were not willing and their personal details would also not be made public. However, the researcher's identity, both her gender and ethnicity, was vital throughout this study. Because she belongs to the same community and speaks their language, she was not considered as an 'outsider', and therefore was welcomed by the participants. Also, as a woman, she managed to mobilise the Hazara women and was able to bring them to venues to take part in the FGDs, which otherwise would have been a difficult task in a male-dominated religiously conservative society where women are usually not allowed to participate in such activities, i.e. interviews.

There is a sense in the Hazara community that their voices are unheard. Therefore, whenever Hazaras are given a safe space and a chance to talk about their challenges,

they tend to share nonstop. With five to seven participants, FGDs went on for as long as three hours.

The computational aspect of ranking was a challenge. Since individual ranking is comprehensive and involves free will to choose and rank, it was applied both in FGDs and interviews. But when it came to show the collective trends thematically and by age group, it got complicated, and more time and effort was necessitated to figure out the best way to get the job done. The researcher decided to keep the same gender and age groups for analysis, and also to keep intact the 15 thematic areas that came up in the study. Eventually, computational formulas were sought to best represent this data.

Managing social distancing to lower the risk of Covid-19 contraction was challenging. Standard operating procedures were followed, including physical distancing, use of masks and sanitisers, and providing takeaway refreshments. Women older than 35 years were interviewed so that they did not join a gathering of even six people.

In addition to the computation of the individual rankings for group and aggregate ranking development, the number of participants in each FGD was different, i.e. five at the least and there were eight one-to-one women interviewees. It made a difference when drawing comparisons between same age group FGDs conducted in different localities or between two gender groups. This was taken into consideration when looking at other reasons for the ranking differences.

3 Quantitative data

A total of 44 participants – 32 females and 12 males – were engaged in the study, 43 of whom participated in the ranking. The ranking was done using disposable plates and chart papers for the teenage girls, young women, and men's groups while objects present in the surroundings, such as a glass, notepad, and jug, etc. were used for the women's group. All 43 participants did the ranking individually. Their rankings were processed in Excel through ranking scale and aggregate ranking was produced for analyses in respective groups of teenage girls, young women, women, and men (see Appendix 1).

In the ranking scale for each variable, every ranking entry was multiplied with the number of preferences out of 15 variables and totalled at the end. For instance, Table 2 shows how education has been ranked (out of 15) by participants of the teenage group.

Table 2: Ranking formula example

Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5... Rank 13	Rank 14	Rank 15
2	4	1	3	0... 0	1	0

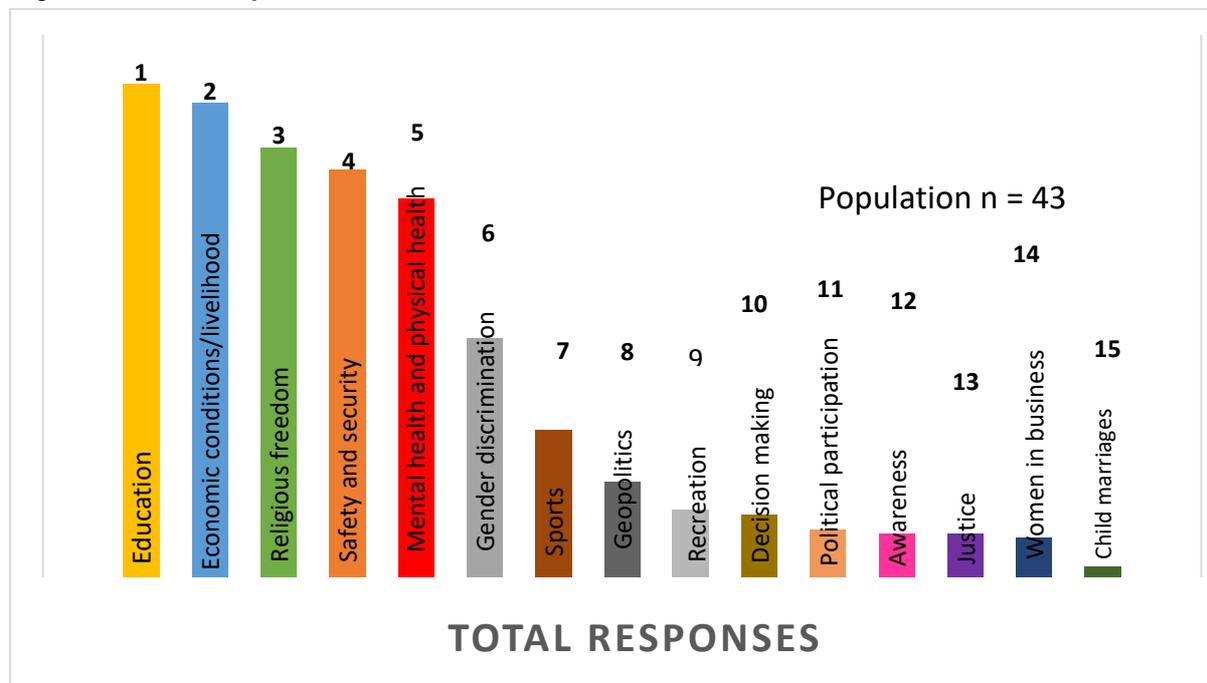
Source: Author's own.

The aggregate ranking value through ranking scale for education for this group would be calculated as, $2 \times 15 + 4 \times 14 + 1 \times 13 + 3 \times 12 + 0 \times 11 + \dots + 0 \times 3 + 1 \times 2 + 0 \times 1 = AB$. The same formula was repeated for all variables and thus, as per the final score, the aggregate ranking was generated. The graphs that follow have been generated using the ranking scale formula.

3.1 Aggregate ranking

Figure 1 shows the 15 challenges or themes identified by participants in discussions and interviews. These thematic areas are aggregate of all six FGDs and eight interviews, and not all FGD or interview participants identify all 15 of them. Instead, they identified and ranked up to seven themes deemed most important to them.

Figure 1: Total responses



Source: Author's own.

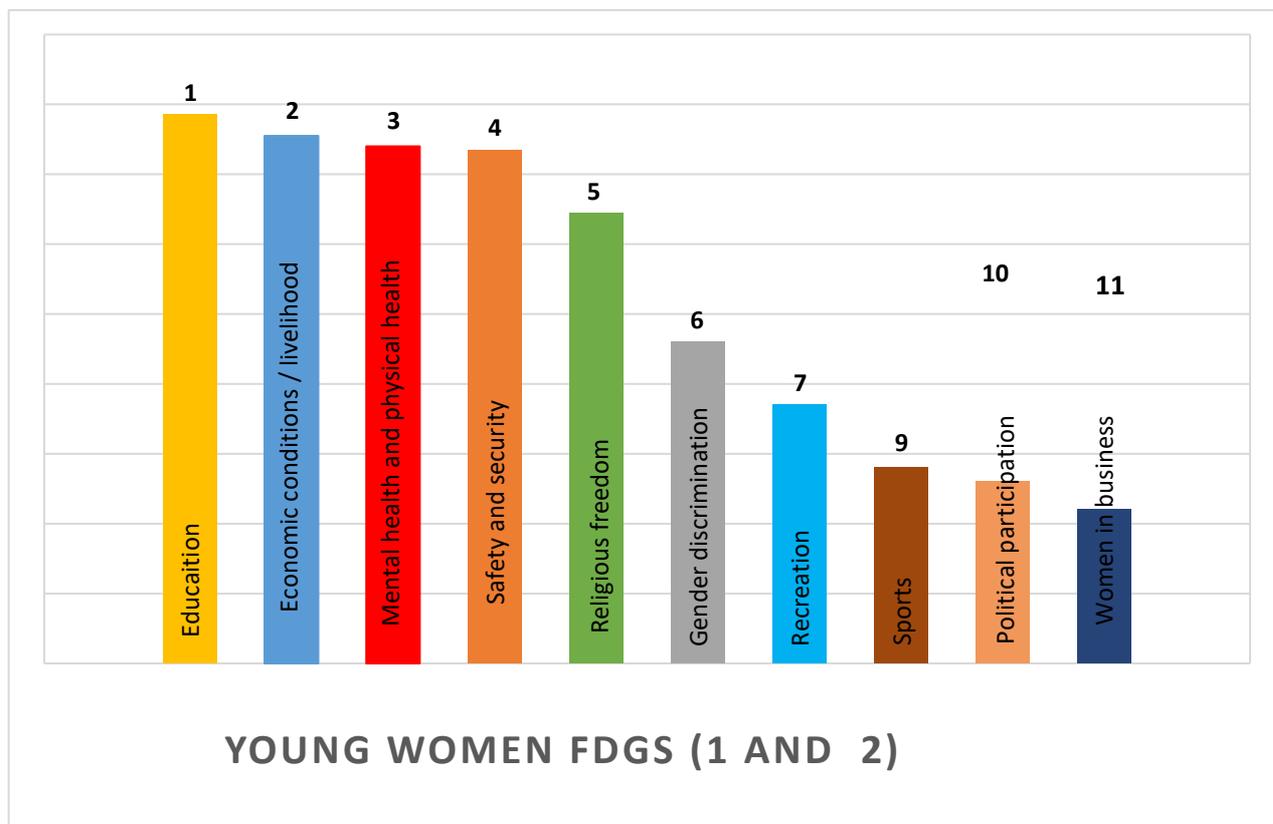
Education stands at the top in the aggregate ranking of all 43 participants. Challenges related to economic conditions and livelihood have been placed second while religious freedom takes third rank. It is interesting to note that safety and security is fourth while it was at the top for both men's FGDs. Fifth position in the order is occupied by mental and physical health while gender discrimination is ranked sixth. The theme of sports was raised by young women and girls and is ranked seventh. Geopolitics was termed and identified by the men in FGD 1 conducted in Hazara Town. Since all seven participants (all men of different ages) ranked it top, in aggregate it stands at eighth. Recreation, decision making, political participation, awareness about the causes of persecution, demand for justice, women in business, and child marriage are ranked at ninth, tenth, and fifteenth, respectively. Child marriage was brought up only twice, surprisingly once in a men's FGD and the other time in an interview with a woman who was an early marriage victim.

4 Qualitative findings

The top six of the 15 themes in the aggregate ranking have been more thoroughly analysed and represented through separate graphs. It is important to note that these average frequencies in every group are based on the total number of participants and whether they have identified the theme as a main challenge or not. There were seven participants in FGD 1 (young women), six in FGD 2 (young women), seven in FGD 3 (men), six in FGD 4 (teenage girls), and five each in FGD 5 (men) and FGD 6 (teenage girls), while eight women were interviewed. This slight difference of attendance may appear as a variation in addition to the choices/ranking made by the participants. In some cases, a group has not identified a theme as a main challenge for reasons to be discussed later in this paper and therefore, the graph appears flat.

4.1 Education

Figure 2: Aggregated responses of FGD 1 and FGD 2



Source: Author's own.

Education remained at the top in aggregate ranking and was ranked highest by the young women in Hazara Town (FGD 1 and FGD 2) and teenagers in Mari Abad (FGD 4 and FGD 6) and women aged 35+ (see Figure 2). Quality of and access to education both physically and financially, and security issues are some of the main challenges related to education mentioned by the participants for Shia Hazaras, particularly for women in Quetta. Teenage participants who were students complained of discriminatory attitudes in educational institutes both by non-Hazara and non-Shia teachers and students.

While Hazaras are proponents of girls' education, they are also faced with extreme forms of violence and terrorism that have influenced their priority of education for females. In a tribal context where a female is considered as the 'honour' of the family, it is difficult to allow them to go to faraway places – either in or out of the city – for education amid the fear of violence and harassment. A sharp dropout rate was noted for students in the tertiary level after the university buses were attacked. This is because not many parents are mentally ready to send their daughters out of Quetta for their education and nor can every family afford the finances of such an arrangement. The option for girls is either to study in a nearby institute or simply drop out.

Participants also shared that cultural and family pressure exacerbate their miseries. Most of this pressure stems from security issues. Parents and male members of the family, including brother, uncle, husband or sometimes even a son, worried for the safety and security of their female family members and would go to the extent of restricting their mobility where they deemed necessary. People other than the immediate and extended families also play a role in creating such pressures in the form of moral policing. Such a regime expects a good woman or girl to avoid all activities or going to places that can create any sort of security threat for her.

Besides security, one of the reasons behind the significant presence of Hazaras in urban centres such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad is the unavailability of quality education in Quetta. Balochistan has one of the lowest indicators for education in Pakistan. According to one report, there are 25.02 million children out of school across Pakistan and Balochistan has the highest proportion, i.e. 66.1 per cent (Alif Ailaan 2014: 16). Another report reveals that, on average, primary schools are 30km apart; there is a middle school every 260km, and there is a distance of 360km between high schools (Maqsood 2020). As the provincial capital, Quetta is considered to be in a better position than the rest of the province. Yet there are only three main universities in Quetta. All three of them have been made inaccessible for Hazaras as the student buses for the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIITEMS) and Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University (SBK) were attacked, and the University of Balochistan is considered a no-go zone for them as many people from their community have been attacked and killed there by terrorists. One young woman participant succinctly explained the underlying issues in the education system:

My educational career was ruined since I didn't experience the same quality education here in Quetta as Karachi. Now, if I talk about education in private institutes, there is no educational atmosphere here nor quality education; teaching staff is inexperienced, teachers must be experts and well trained in their respective fields so they can deliver something worthy to students. Students' future depends on teachers and teachers are responsible for their success. Private schools in our area – with no offence – hire teachers with no professional degree, pay them the minimum wage so, how come we expect them to teach well or educate well? (FGD 1)

A teenage girl recalled her days when she was studying and the lack of modern education facilities:

Those two years of college were very tough for me. Secondly, talking about Quetta's educational circumstances, we girls can barely pursue our field education here due to less quality education [than other provincial capitals in Pakistan] in our respective fields. Quetta for MBBS/BDS [medical and dentistry] studies is not recommended due to fewer facilities. And it is hard for our parents to let us plan to pursue studies out of Quetta as they cannot trust the people out of home for their daughters.
(FGD 6)

The effect of violence is ubiquitous in almost all aspects of Hazaras' lives, particularly regarding access to education for girls. Historically, the education ratio was once considered to be much higher for Hazara girls than Hazara men (Changezi and Biseth 2011: 83). In fact, the Hazara community is considered by many as one of the most progressive in Balochistan because it has made girls' education a priority. However, security threats in the past two decades have restricted educational opportunities for Shia Hazara, particularly for girls and women. During the discussion some of the participants estimated that around 80–90 per cent of higher education students dropped out of universities after university buses carrying mostly Hazara students were bombed in 2012 and 2013 (IBTimes UK 2012; *Al Jazeera* 2013). The abysmal law and order situation made it extremely difficult for Hazara girls to get an education outside of their Hazara-populated towns. One participant informed that:

Due to [the] unfavourable security situation, mobility is restricted for both men and women equally. Hazara women working or getting education out of our areas face the same problems as Hazara men. Many of the families don't allow their younger male members to go out of the area. If they go out by chance, everybody starts making phone calls to ask if they are well. (FGD 2)

And those who travelled outside Hazara areas shared that they had to face an extra layer of policing. Initially, when these check posts were installed around all the major gateways to Mari Abad and Hazara Town, the Frontier Corps (FC) guards (a paramilitary force) on duty were non-locals and were noted for inappropriate behaviour with people in general and women in particular. All Hazaras – male and female – need to pass through one of these check posts either to enter the city areas or to go home. With vehicles carrying women, the guards often take the opportunity to intimidate them by looking at them steadily and intently. Sometimes the women would be asked irrelevant questions just for the purpose of buying time to look at them. Most of the women would not talk about it owing to power imagery attached to the FC and some internalised it as if

it is normal and acceptable to be harassed at check posts. Only a few would share their check post ordeals; for example, a teenage participant said:

While travelling to the Cantt [military cantonment] area where our college was situated, we used to face issues to get through the check post on the way to college daily. Even though everyone in our vehicle including the driver held a Cantt pass and we students had student cards, they checked us individually on a daily basis. We had to get checked on both the checkpoints. Therefore, we would be late for college daily. If the college starts at 8.30am, we must leave home at 7am to arrive there as soon as possible. If we forget to bring our Cantt passes, they will not let us enter. And we had to miss our classes that day. This behaviour was seen and experienced by [the] Hazara community only; I could not see another vehicle to be checked strictly or ill-behaved or teased on check posts. (FGD 6)

One of the alarming trends we noted among the teenage FGDs is the presence of discriminatory attitudes towards Hazara girls in educational institutes. For example, a girl in FGD 6 shared:

As a student if I talk about my experience, I have seen much discrimination towards Hazara students in all institutes both in and out of our area. Whether it is curriculum or extra-curriculum activity, Hazara students face huge discrimination by teachers and management. We are not given equal opportunities of growth and development in all institutes. Our talent, hardworking nature and being Shia (our sectarian identity) are some reasons behind why we face discrimination and majority would not let us get success. Because we are Shia, how would a majority tolerate a minority's success?

Sham-e-Ghariban is the evening of 10th Muharram when the surviving family and companions of Husayn ibn Ali were held hostage by the forces of Yazid. The day of 10th Muharram is called Ashura and the evening is called 'the evening of strangers', named after those who were helpless on the plains of Karbala. Shias turn off lights on Sham-e-Ghariban to aesthetically create a sense of mourning or sorrow. However, among Sunnis, there is a widespread stereotype that Shias hold orgies on Sham-e-Ghariban. One girl shared her experience of Sham-Ghariban:

One day I came face to face with my Islamiyat [Islamic studies]

teacher. She was herself Sunni and asked who is Shia [in the class]? I responded that I am Shia. She then asked me a strange question that at the night of Sham-e-Ghariban, why do you guys turn off the lights? Then there was another friend in the class who said that 'we have heard that Shias are very intelligent and educated'. Our teacher then replied, 'If they were educated, they would not have been Shia. (FGD 4)

Hazaras are discriminated against by non-Hazara teachers and staff even in their own areas, which were supposed to be safe spaces for them:

As a student if I talk about my experience, I have seen much discrimination towards Hazara students in all institutes both in and out of our area. Whether it is curriculum or extra-curriculum activity, Hazara students face huge discrimination by teachers and management. We are not given equal opportunities of growth and development in all institutes. If we particularly talk about the college in our own area, Mari Abad, we again see the same situation. The atmosphere is no better for Hazara students even though they are the majority, but they are discriminated against.

Some participants, including teenage girls, mentioned open discrimination on sectarian grounds by both teachers and fellow students. 'There were a lot of misconceptions and misinformation about us. We had to undergo the burden of defending our sectarian identity', shared Rizvia. Some would hide their identity knowing that revealing it would only increase their hardship. One of the Hazara men in FGD 3 also asserted that even the educated segment of society holds a discriminatory attitude towards his community:

I will give you some examples of the time when we used to go to university. When we were in schools, we had never heard slogans like 'Hazaras Kafir' or 'Shia Kafir' [infidels]. We used to go and play with the Pashtuns. But when we went to university, even their educated class, even on the walls of their mosque, it is written: 'Kafir Kafir, Shia Kafir'. We expected that we would not be tortured at least among the highly educated people by the slogans like 'Hazara Kafir' or 'Shir Kafir'.

Persons with disabilities within the community undergo another layer of discrimination and therefore have even less access to education and health facilities. One young woman claimed that people with disabilities face more challenges compared with people without special needs:

Differently abled persons had more difficulties as compared to normal³ people with no visible disabilities during the pandemic. Families too wanted to cure them at home instead of taking them to hospitals as hospitals are not well equipped with all facilities for persons with disabilities. I too preferred to stay at home and get treatment because of unavailability of facilities at hospitals. On the top of being a person with disability if you are a Hazara and Shia, it restricts everything from mobility, to access to education, health and other facilities. (FGD 1)

As evident from Hafisa's testimonial, people with special needs suffer because of the system's negligence of their needs. Consequently, any activity or engagement involving people with special needs costs more in terms of resources and time. Being a Hazara person with a disability in Quetta means that they are not only neglected by the system for basic needs, but are also targeted for their sectarian identity and facial features. If the disabled person is Hazara *and* female, then honour issues arise as well. For example, mobility in Quetta is restricted and difficult for all Shia Hazara, but for a Shia Hazara disabled woman it is a dream to go to an educational institute or to a hospital for treatment without going through extreme mental pressure as their slowness makes them even easier prey.

4.1.1 Comparison with Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia

Security is a buzzword for Hazaras no matter what aspect of their life is under study. Education and mobility, of course, are no exceptions. The violence against the Hazara community in general has created various obstacles for it. Although the number of Hazara casualties is way higher for men than for women, we have noted an unexpected trend where parents have put more restrictions on girls' mobility in comparison to that of men and boys as there is more pressure on girls and women to be morally upright. Mobility remains one of the key challenges, as discussed during the FGDs and interviews by almost all the participants. The reason it is not part of the ranking is because it traverses across all the themes. As discussed above, people feel insecure if they leave the Hazara areas even for daily chores or religious rituals. Gul Jahan, an elderly Hazara woman whose young son was killed by terrorists a few years ago, described her suffering:

³ This was the language used by the participant; however, the authors acknowledge that this is a harmful term as it positions disabled people as 'other'.

I always feel insecure while leaving the community, I pray to God before leaving. Also, I do not travel in a transport owned by someone I am not acquainted to. My son go for religious rituals and I have never stopped him in month of Muharram, I feel much fear of losing my other sons but I keep a little amount of money to give it to a needy and recite some holy verses before he leaves home for Ashura Procession and Majalis [gathering]. I think that we are not superior to Imam Husayn [ibn Ali abi Talib] to fear our death and stay home on the day he got martyred. I have no idea of other cities; I even have never been to Mari Abad or Bazar in Quetta. I do not go to the bazaar as I do not have an identity card, I cannot speak their language, so I have no exposure.

One participant said that parents are overprotective of their daughters as they are concerned about their security. Another participant shared about how an incident of a photograph on social media restricted her educational aspirations: 'If the situation didn't get that worse those days, I would have gone for higher education'. Posting photographs of young women on Facebook is a trend amongst teenagers and young adults in the community: usually it is a boyfriend/male friend who posts the photograph as an act of revenge or punishment after a breakup. Sometimes, female friends post photographs over small disagreements with the aim of shaming and punishment. Although this trend prevails in all urban and semi-urban regions of Pakistan, it is taken more seriously in areas where elements of ethnicity, sect and related in-out group dynamics add to the complex, such as Quetta.

One teenage girl explained this trend in more detail:

We face discrimination in our educational institutions, both girls and boys. But talking about families, the situation is different for boys. Boys are supported and trusted more than girls to pursue their education or career in any city, but girls are not supported. Not because they do not trust girls; in fact, they don't trust the outer environment to be safe for their girls. Parents think that any environment is friendly and adjustable for boys but not for girls.

(FGD 6)

It is considered normal for boys to be raised rough and tough to prepare them for interacting in a world full of injustice and pain, while girls are expected to deal with emotional and mental hardships; girls are not meant to confront what men are already fighting for and with. This is the paradigm that informs parenting in the Hazara

community, particularly after the worsening security and violence against them. Though men face harassment and abuse too, for women it is a matter of their honour and cannot be tolerated at all.

A similar proposition shared by another participant in the same discussion group:

Perhaps it is threat, threat of life, honour, and respect that restrict most of the parents to support the idea of going out of the city for education or job purposes for their daughters. Parents think of their safety and security; therefore, they cannot trust other cities as they are bigger and more populated than ours, security measures are more considerable and vulnerable in bigger cities. Parents believe that being a girl, they may face threats in other cities more than our city. In a male-dominated society like ours, women are not safe. (FGD 6)

However, some responses inform that there is something beyond parents' overprotectiveness of their daughters. Girls are restricted from getting an education because externally, Shia Hazara women have to face persecution by terrorists and internally, they are confronted with protective and restrictive norms by family and community. While girls' education is not opposed in the community, still girls do not receive equal treatment with regard to getting an education outside the Hazara community schools and colleges as parents feel it is less safe to send girls out in comparison with boys. One of the Hazara teenagers shared:

The main reason is the family; most of the parents do not allow their daughters to go out of Quetta for higher education or job purposes. Education till college level is somehow manageable for females here in Quetta, if they want to pursue higher education or any job, they have less opportunities here. (FGD 6)

Another Hazara teenager explained that:

Even if the girl wants to get further education or pursue a career, she continuously faces pressure from her family to get married as soon as possible. If a girl is supported for higher education, she is never supported for making her career as they are considered to have household responsibilities only. Making a career or earning is considered as a male's job not a female's. Families degrade girls to be responsible for family finances. (FGD 6)

One male participant also admitted and corroborated the teenage girls' testimonies on

the unequal treatment of girls within the community, and other men in the same FGD strongly agreed with him.

Females have issues of even severe nature, coupled with security threats. As people tend to send their boys to the best schools and institutions, but when it comes to their girls, they are simply made to graduate from an ordinary institution, and parents think their duties end when their daughter gets married. In our family, all my three sisters were not sent to school, but only me. This tendency comes because of the tribal system we used to have where there were fixed roles for members of a group. (FGD 5)

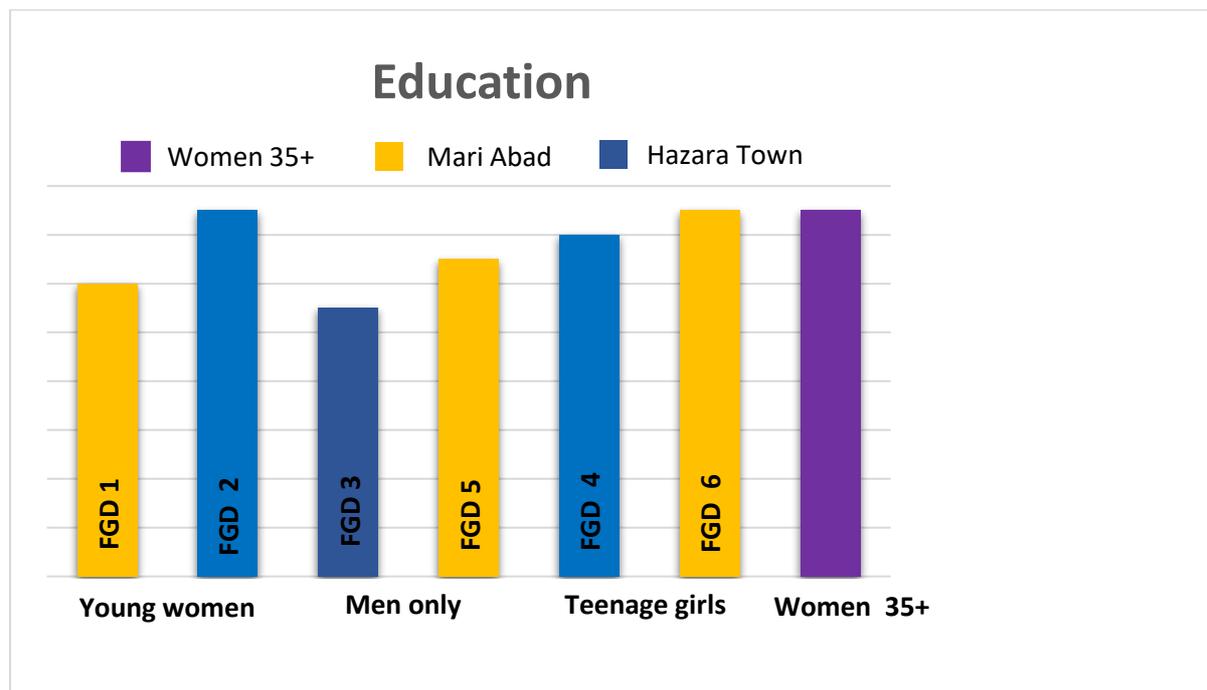
While Hazaras are advocates of girls' education, it is important to understand some nuances when extreme lack of financial resources or fear of dishonour to the family come into play. In such a situation, the limited available resources are allocated to a boy's education, which is considered to cost less both emotionally and financially. For instance, a boy can take public transport, can stay at a cheaper less safe place, and if harmed, he would not bring shame to the family. Whereas the same scenario is unsafe for females, particularly young girls. That is why parents feel more comfortable sending their daughters to the institutions located inside Hazara Town and Mari Abad. Therefore, girls from extremely disadvantaged Hazara families have to study in a local university that bears no comparison with those in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. Parents who cannot afford the financial and emotional toll of this process tend to persuade their daughters towards marriage so that they can at least accomplish some of their parenting duties, if not education.

There were mixed views among the community on comparing vulnerabilities of Hazara and non-Hazara Shia. Interestingly, many women who were interviewed separately and some of the teenagers and young women in the FGDs offered no information or view about the persecution and discrimination of Shias outside the Hazara localities. This was mainly because either they had had less exposure to this behaviour or had not been exposed to it at all. Exceptionally, some women opined that non-Hazara Shia are facing more persecution and are being killed in Karachi and Parachinar, two cities with dominant vocal non-Hazara Shia populations in the South West and North West of Pakistan, respectively. The Shia population in these two cities have also experienced extreme forms of violence. However, there seems to be a consensus among teenage girls, young women, and men that non-Hazara Shia are not as vulnerable as them in terms of access to education for two reasons. First, the law and order dynamics are comparatively better in other cities and therefore, accessing higher education is more

feasible. Shia Hazara who have migrated to Lahore or Islamabad, for instance, experience fewer security issues as the rule of law there is better in general, and also persecution of Hazaras outside of Balochistan would not be as beneficial politically to the terrorist outfits backed by the state. Second, there are more colleges and universities in these cities than in Quetta, where there are only three public universities.

4.1.2 Reflection

Figure 3: Aggregated ranking of all participants on education



Source: Author's own.

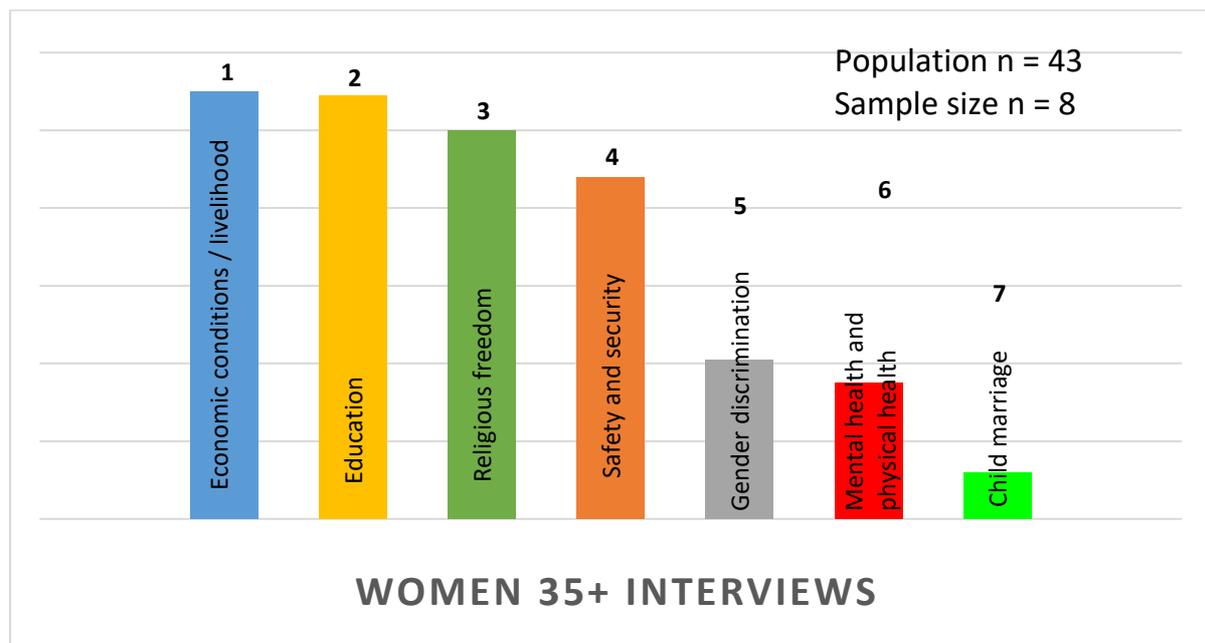
As is evident from the testimonies above and illustrated in Figure 1, education has been ranked at the top or the top three. The reason is that Hazaras not only understand the importance of education but also consider it as the sole defining factor for their socioeconomic development. In the context of the Hazaras in Quetta, it needs to be understood that they do not own large chunks of agricultural or commercial lands, nor do they have big businesses in the province. Education, therefore, provides a hope to be recruited in government or private sector jobs. Restricting educational opportunities already means even more hardship for the community as the people would have meagre subsistence options left. This is exactly why most of the women participants who have lost their breadwinner to terrorism, ranked education at the top. A single mother whose husband was killed in sectarian violence shared:

I will choose education, because if I were an educated single mother, things would be different maybe not this much challenges as it is now. Now I fear if my children would bear my fate, if they also remain uneducated. I think education is very important. I really like to send my children to get education.

Comparatively, Mari Abad shows better development indicators including education facilities (at least up to high school level) than Hazara Town. Therefore, young women from Hazara Town ranked it at the top. For other FGDs such as men in both enclaves, teenagers in Hazara Town and young women in Mari Abad, the slight decrease in ranking can, for instance, be explained by there being a smaller number of participants in the FGD or that safety and security is regarded as more important for men.

4.2 Economic conditions/livelihood

Figure 4: Aggregated responses of women aged 35+ in the interviews



Source: Author's own.

Economic conditions and livelihood are ranked second in aggregate ranking by all 43 participants. Women groups have placed it at the top, all the participants being women-headed families – either the husband or son had been martyred in terrorist attacks or they were victims of early child marriage. This group was the most vulnerable in terms of finance and the women depend solely on aid provided by charities and individuals. Their only hope was education (ranked second) for their children. They acknowledged that access to higher education – both financially and physically – was a major challenge for them.

The overall security situation has severely affected the economic conditions of the community permanently. Although both men and women experience lack of job opportunities due to restriction on mobility, security risk, stereotypes against the community, and because the presence of Hazaras places non-Hazaras at risk of violence. Private sector organisations either released or denied hiring Hazaras as they believed that their office or vehicles could be targeted if a Hazara was there. Students who used to ride in university buses together with Hazara students refused to travel with them after the buses were attacked and demanded a separate bus.

For Hazara women, the challenges are double as they also face discrimination at the hands of the community in the form of moral policing and tribal honour that prevents them from exploring job and work opportunities. This also encompasses searching for jobs, going to work, and interaction with the non-Hazara population. A woman who defies this norm has to either create strong support at home or bear the brunt of being followed to work, harassed on online platforms, or sometimes face physical harm. Gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms create hurdles for those women and girls who choose to work on premises in the Hazara areas. One young woman in FGD 1 mentioned some of the key reasons why females are not visible in the public sector:

Females cannot avail more opportunities in the public sector. And females are restricted by family members as well to avail opportunities outside the community. Females have more harassment threats. If they are late for coming home, there is not any issue but coming home late for females is a great issue and problem since they are responsible for family name. Males have more job opportunities as well because they are not bound to go for jobs somewhere far away from our own area, they are free and permitted.

One interviewee, Bajjia, a widow and mother of three children who now is the head of the family, explained how the community reacts towards those women who choose to work: 'Within the community it is difficult, as people would create rumours about us being at the workplace'. She shared how difficult it is for a widow to raise children:

Earlier on it was fine, as people would assist us, but with the passage of time such assistance gets less in number. His [my husband] presence is being missed, as life is exceedingly difficult to live, and to raise children. We are thankful to the Shaheed Foundation that looks after us; they pay school fees and monthly expenses for us. But, because of inflation, it is way too difficult to manage the affairs. When you do not have a defender [man in this

case] *then one has to hear people talk, if someone, especially a male, pays a visit for help, people then start talking [questioning the woman's character] but we have to live with such attitudes.*

In addition to Bajjia's comment about rumours associated with working women, the challenge seems even bigger for Shia Hazara women. One teenager in FGD 6 shared a similar testimony that explains the dilemma Hazara women face in this regard:

Some parents might support and show some appreciation for daughters to work but majority of them don't, they believe that people will start gossiping about their family if they allow their daughters to earn and support the family financially. It is a big question mark on their dignity and pride when daughters earn a living for them.

The idea of shame and honour associated with women and the stereotype that a working woman brings shame to the family's name is also something quite common in the community that restricts women from becoming financially independent and pushes them towards further marginalisation. A young woman in FGD 2 shared her experience of when she decided to work due to her family's financial situation:

In 2004 my father passed away after an accident. I was a kid then, a schoolgoing kid, so I had to continue my studies and part-time job side by side to support my family financially. I used to work with the polio vaccination team and other small social groups working on different projects. And eventually years later, I started working with an NGO, so people said so many things to my mother to compel her to make me leave. They said because I was working in an NGO with non-Hazara, I will be a big shame for my family and community one day. Therefore, my mother used to advise me to take care of family name and respect. From 2004 to 2009, I had to go through the same things on a daily basis, an NGO's van used to come at home for pick and drop. That too was not acceptable for people living in our neighbourhood. They started gossiping about my character as I worked with a non-Hazara organisation. Against all these talks and gossip, my mother and brothers supported me, and I never cared about people much even though we lived in a joint [extended] family system.

4.2.1 Comparison with Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia

Women and girls suffer more due to the patriarchal norms and defined gender roles. They are dependent on the male family members for their financial needs. Even in households without any male members, women continue to be dependent on society and bound to adhere to the cultural norms that have restricted their freedom. Women are heavily discouraged by the security situation and social norms, and they face heavy criticism if they work – even within the confines of the Hazara areas. Men and boys suffer too but differently as these same culture norms put more pressure on them to be the breadwinner of the family, and due to there being no or limited jobs available, they suffer too. However, should women want to help or share the burden, there are still challenges for them, as one teenage girl in FGD 6 pointed out:

As I see, there are complications for both boys and girls when it comes to finding a job with their educational degrees in hands because, here the job market is not too vast to produce many job opportunities for university graduates. When we see the situation of finding a job without degrees, boys don't face many problems, they can be a shopkeeper, they can be a cobbler, a mason or work in a workshop, but girls cannot perform these jobs in our society. Girls are restricted and bound in this regard; therefore, they face much more economic problems.

Participants across gender and age groups thought that non-Hazara Shia have better economic prospects than Shia Hazaras. The main challenge remains the restrictions on mobility due to the security situation for Hazaras. It becomes almost impossible for Hazaras to go outside the Hazara area as they are easily pointed out due to their distinct features. Many Hazara government employees in high positions have resigned from jobs when the Hazara target killing was at its peak from 2011 to 2015. Most of the Hazara businessmen also closed down their businesses, and youth stopped applying for jobs owing to fear of being killed. Meanwhile, the rest of the city was normal for people hailing from non-Hazara ethnic and non-Shia sects. One male participant informed how the deteriorating security situation resulted in the loss of jobs:

Economically, if I talk of myself, I cannot afford to go everywhere in Quetta city, my brother has forbidden me from going outside Hazara Town, no matter what salary you are offered. I want to do MPhil; I cannot take the risk of going to Balochistan University. Hazaras working at the University have left their jobs.

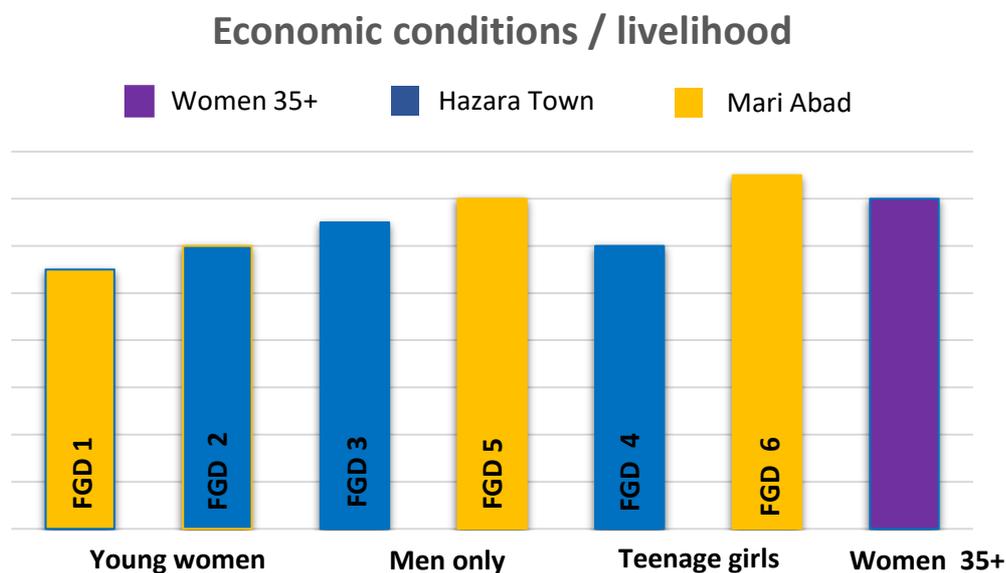
As noted earlier, there are cultural and societal barriers for Hazara women, and Hazara men have different kinds of obstacles. One young woman in FGD 2 shared her view on

how the financial pressure faced by men as the sole breadwinner is leading them to develop psychological issues:

We all have multiple layers of pressure and stress in this situation; business and economy are severely affected as well. A Hazara man has more pressure than a woman as they are the supporter, guardian and earner of the family. They are responsible for family's financial matters; when they cannot do anything to support the family financially, they suffer from a lot of psychological issues. Every family on average has minimum six to seven members dependent on one male member, they are grown up with the same mindset that they must feed their families as they are the only support system of the family. They are pressurised much more than females.

4.2.2 Reflection

Figure 5: Aggregated ranking of all groups and women aged 35+ interviewees on economic condition/livelihood



Source: Author's own.

Though livelihood is important for all the groups under study to survive, men and women groups have ranked it high. What is most interesting here is that the teenagers in Mari Abad have given the highest scores to economic conditions in comparison with the teenagers in Hazara Town, even though none were engaged in full-time jobs or business. Coming from the lower middle class of the community (Mari Abad), they realise the importance of getting a job whereas the teenagers in the other group have relatively less economic hardship.

Although the whole community suffers from poverty, stress, and fear, the sequence of discrimination against poor Hazara women and what they go through on a daily basis is disturbing. For the eight women we interviewed who have lost their husbands/support because of targeted attacks, shelter and higher house rents remain a key challenge. These women placed it at the top and attached most of the challenges they face to financial and economic dependency. Women-headed families in such situations are at the worst risk of extreme poverty. Gul Jahan, a bakery owner shared: 'I have seen so much. I am burnt from within and yet have to continue to provide for my children and two grandchildren whose father was killed a few years ago'.

Having spent most of the income/aid money on house rent, there remains little to cater for basic needs. As Gul Zehra described:

Shelter is the biggest challenge for our survival. Home and rent is a big problem particularly in this period of lockdown, I have to pay 20,000 PKR [£93] each month to the owner of the house. Rent is the harshest challenge. With the handful earnings of my work I fail to keep saving for children's education, health, and leisure.

Most of these women who have lost their main breadwinner and depend on aid money, have little access to health, maternity, and self-care facilities. As one female participant said:

I can recall the day after my husband had been killed, I was nine months pregnant. I felt a severe pain in my belly, so I visited a doctor, and she asked me to go to the labour room for delivery as my baby was going to give birth. I did not have any money to pay the bill and other expenses, so I came home with a heavy heart. My daughter was born at home a few hours later when I got home from hospital.

She further shared how low-income/meagre resources affected their interaction and socialisation within the community. She was full of emotion while sharing:

There are many problems and issues in going to market if the situation gets adverse anytime. For me, as a single parent, it gets harder to fulfil my kids' expenses. Whenever there is any family function, my children like others demand for new clothes, shoes, and other stuff. I avoid going to market for shopping, but I cannot afford the prices of stuffs available in neighbouring shops as well. Sometimes I wish the relatives would not invite us to their functions to avoid the tension of not having new clothes or shoes.

Another elderly woman, Hosna from Hazara Town, who lost a son to violence and has two sons who are daily wage earners, informed us how difficult it is to access higher/tertiary education for her youngest son:

Recently, I dropped my son out of private school as they demanded Rs. 6,000 for his online classes and I was not able to pay his fee as during the pandemic, both my sons were at home and jobless in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak.

Rizvia, widow of a martyr, compared different classes within Hazaras on economic hardship, and explained how violence and consequent restrictions have adversely impacted the poorest of the poor in the Hazara community:

Those who are rich and belong to upper class or have their own businesses, are in good conditions, but lower middle class and labourers experience more difficulties in terms of social and financial status. Interaction with other ethnic groups, especially Pashtun, has some negative consequences.

In general, there are fewer job opportunities in Quetta. But for poor Shia Hazara men and women it is even more difficult as they cannot commute freely to all parts of the city nor will people hire them due to security risks, leading to economic havoc for the community. One of the women, Hosna, explained that 'there are fewer opportunities for labourers; they are compelled to work in coal mines when they know it requires hard labour there'.

The irony is that the widows of martyrs, despite their dire financial condition, cannot go out for work in most cases. Some have young children to take care of while others fear moral policing or risk of harassment. Thus, their difficulties are increasing manifold with each price hike. As Zohra shared:

People like me have a lot of problems because we are alone, and I am the head of my family, we have lots of problems regarding education of my children, just one thing that the school does not charge us fee, as we do not have an earner in the family, and we do not have enough income, I keep on reminding Aid Foundation [the foundation that provides financial assistance to her] that I cannot afford the cost of living, as the cost of living is going higher and we live in a rented house. It is way too difficult, as we have to pay bills, rents, and we do not have enough income. Our expenses exceed our income, only God knows how we run our affairs.

Another aspect of discrimination against poor Hazaras, in addition to security risk, is the harassment from officials on the pretext of checking legal documents, namely computerised national identity cards (CNICs). This is more common for the dwellers of Hazara Town as they are considered to be mostly Afghan refugees and therefore, as Aneela shared in the discussion: 'People living in Hazara Town face the issue of CNIC⁴ on a daily basis and due to this same reason, they are discriminated against and exploited'.

Young women, however, although they realise the significance of economic challenges, have given relatively lower scores to livelihood. This is not because they do not face any

⁴ There are episodes of Afghan refugee influx to Pakistan in 1979, 1996, and 2001 due to wars and civil wars. These refugees include Afghan Hazaras as well as Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and others. The vast majority of Hazaras living in Pakistan (including Balochistan, Quetta) are those who migrated before Pakistan was created or soon after. But there is a political and administrative campaign (structural discrimination) trying to prove that all Hazaras are refugees. Doing so decreases the legitimacy of Hazaras and hinders their access to legal documents, and they are looked at with suspicion and asked to prove that they are pre-1979 migrants.

difficulty associated with the theme of livelihood but rather, they have come up with coping mechanisms, or, even if they have not, as some mentioned, they are so compelled that they would carry on their jobs anyway. These young women were mostly single and worked in non-profit organisations in basic to medium-level positions, cosmetics shops, and teaching in schools. An additional reason was that these young women are very well connected to people both in the community and outside of it, and are profoundly aware of other issues and advocate vocally about them. Therefore, they weigh up and relate to other things; for instance, gender discrimination, safety and security, mental health, and good education with increased chances for better livelihood.

Prices are comparatively high, and women face discrimination. Gul Zehra, a participant, said that shelter is the biggest challenge for survival: 'Of course, the prices are different, because I have no male support, I have to pay twice higher price even higher sometimes from wholesales in town'. Her case is unique as she is a Hazara Afghan refugee, the only one in 44 participants. She has to accept the difference in prices because she does not have any legal identity documents and, therefore, cannot access the main market nor can she complain in the case of grievances. And given that she happens to be a woman, it makes her case even weaker as dealers and contractors will not take her seriously. Furthermore, in comparison with non-Hazara women, they (non-Hazara poor females) might be different as at least they have the option to bargain the price (or to go to different shops) whereas poor Hazara women cannot go out due to the security and mobility issues. Hence, they are forced to buy at high prices.

Another female participant, Ghausia, shared:

I think check posts have restricted us so much with no benefit. We are compelled to buy vegetables, clothes, and other daily use materials at double prices in our area. We cannot go out of our area to buy things with reasonable prices. Due to these check posts and adverse situations, vendors from other communities cannot come to our area. These check posts have been the reason behind price hike in public transportation, business restriction, and financial problems. Isolation has brought us no benefit. We do not have refreshment opportunities even if we have vehicles. We are restricted to go to faraway places for refreshment.

A woman with no education whose life is challenged after her husband was killed describes the complexities and difficulties of how the level of persecution varies according to different financial backgrounds:

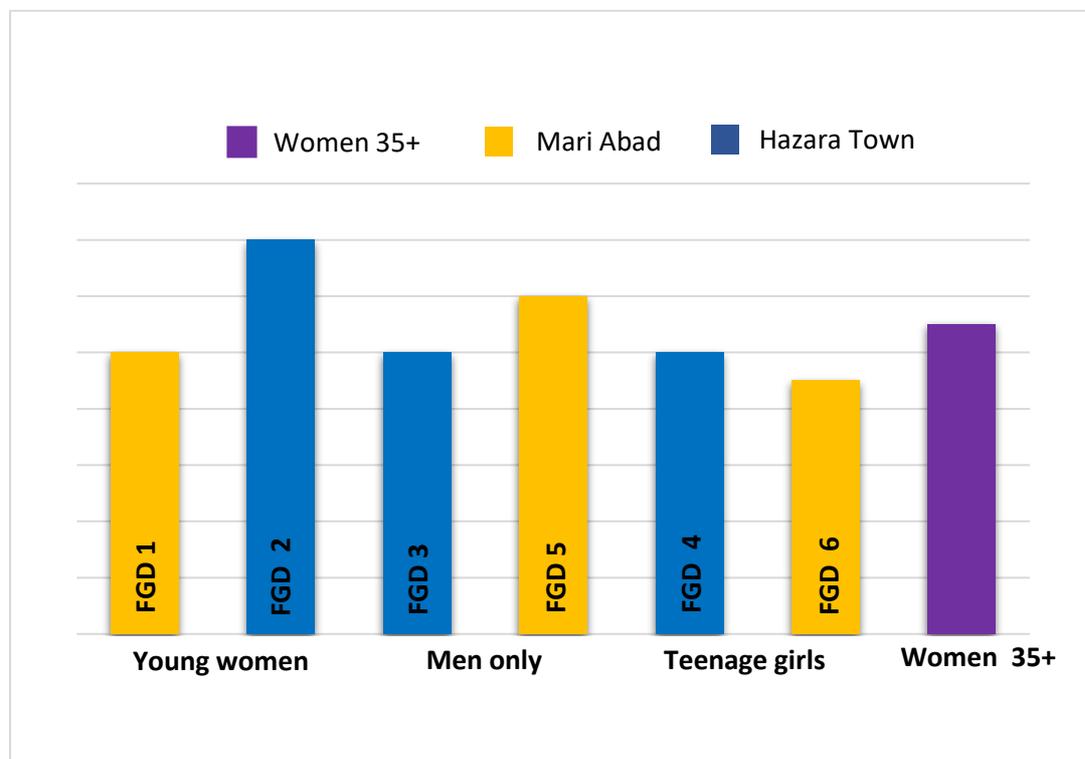
My husband had been killed on the way to the vegetable market on 18 May 2011 in the morning. He was the only earner of our family and a great support for me as a husband and for our children as a father. When he was killed, my children were all below 18 and schoolgoing students. At that time, I was nine months pregnant and the news of his murder shocked me to the next level that I can never express in words. You are also a female [addressing the researcher], so you can know about my condition at that time with double vulnerability that I was a wife and pregnant mother. My grief, pain, and vulnerability cannot be described in words. Security situation was not favourable for the whole community but those who were directly affected, they faced more difficulties than others. Due to unfavourable situations and the burden of my children and family have turned me older than my age, my friends are still young and fresh. I had and have so many responsibilities since I am a mother and a father at the same time. After my husband, we did not have any money to feed us and fulfil other expenses. The time was so crucial and cruel after him. You can imagine that with what difficulties, I raised my children and my priority was to manage to let my children continue their education. Since I am not educated, I always wanted my children to get education and find good jobs for financial support. It was so hard to manage but I did it anyhow so that my children wouldn't blame me for their failures or misfortune. Education is a great support and hope for me, and I have never differentiated between son and daughter, I have given them equal importance and opportunities for growth and development. And I consider them both to get education and pursue their dreams and passion. People assume that I and my children have blessed and happy life with no issues or difficulties, but they never know the reality that how hard life is for us without my husband. My son is a student of Balochistan University, and I feel so much distress because he goes to university daily. All my children are in inferiority complex since they don't have their father with them. When they see other young boys and girls of their age, they feel they are unfortunate, and others are fortunate enough to have all facilities of life available for them.

Her husband was a driver who would bring vegetables and fruits from the vegetable wholesale market in Hazar Ganji (a market at the outskirts of Quetta) for Hazara

vegetable vendors. This spot and the route to it became a soft target for terrorists. The interviewee's husband was shot dead by an anti-Shia terrorist along with other Hazara vegetable vendors that day just because of their sectarian and ethnic identity. The interviewee told the researcher that even though there had been many attacks on that route and many Hazara vegetable vendors had been killed, her husband could not abandon this work as there was nothing else for him to do. Had he left that work, they would have starved.

4.3 Religious freedom

Figure 6: Aggregated ranking of all groups and women aged 35+ interviewees on religious freedom



Source: Author's own.

Religious freedom is ranked third in the aggregate ranking. A good majority of the participants opined that religious freedom and participation have declined due to fear of targeted killing, terrorism, and attacks. Though it was not ranked first in any of the FGDs, the participants in all groups and individual interviews shared several instances where they were discriminated against on the basis of being Shia Hazara. The reason for not placing it at the crown is that Hazaras are facing existential threats and are barely surviving as a community. For them, in this situation, the right to life and the right to have access to education and livelihood are more urgent. It is a question of day-to-day

survival. As important as religious identity and freedom is, it cannot provide a means of subsistence.

Participants of the study mentioned many instances of discrimination based on sectarian identity, which include refusal to share rides or space with Hazaras, stereotyping, refusal to recruit Hazaras for jobs, and constant fear of persecution.

One natural outcome of the persecution of Hazaras is that people in the community are afraid of practising or displaying their religious beliefs. While travelling, therefore, Hazaras do not feel safe to offer prayers as they can be easily identified by the (Shia) way they do the prayer even if their faces are covered:

When we used to go to Lahore on the train, we did not say our prayers in Sibi [city in Balochistan province]. Though some of our religious friends would say their prayers secretly. Our ulema had even advised us to say our prayers with tied hands [the Sunni way] so that we would not be identified.

Similarly, a few participants also talked about how, despite their facial features (fair complexion, small nose and eyes, and high cheek bones), Hazara still make sure that they do not display anything that conveys their religious identity:

Quetta City is being restricted for expression of religious or sectarian identity. My grandfather had a shop in the market, he used to share that it is hard to express our identity in the market area. For us as a Shia being identified is so dangerous, people have lost their lives after being identified in marketplaces.

One important point made by a teenager in FGD 6 is that women's participation in religious activities is mainly within the confines of Hazara neighbourhoods. One of the young women in FGD 2 said:

As compared to the past, religious rituals have become more difficult for Hazara community. In the past, Hazara women, from Hazara Town, used to visit Mari Abad for Haftakiya [a religious ritual in which people visit seven imambargahs [congregation centres] before Ashura] but now the situation is not favourable for women and mobility is restricted.

Apart from the security lens, there are cultural barriers to women's engagement in mainstream religious rituals. Two of the teenage participants used to join the Muharram procession every year until they turned 13. Then they were reminded that they were growing up and restricted from attending the *Jaloos* (procession) and Ashura rally. The

reasons are: (a) representing religious identity is mainly considered to be the responsibility of men; and (b) non-Shia people propagate a lot of inappropriate commentary about men–women interactions during mourning rituals. As a result, Shia Hazaras feel pressured to segregate men and women during rituals. Women do take part, but at mosques within the Hazara vicinity, where they can mourn and pray without any disruption, the participants shared. As one teenage participant confirmed:

I used to attend the Ashura Procession regularly with my friends and nobody bothered us. But gradually when I grew up, I faced resistance to continuing this ritual. By the time I was 14, I did not attend anymore.

When girls reach adolescence, they are expected to not join all gatherings and Muharram-related main congregations with men and are strictly asked to either visit the women’s section of the mosque/*imambargah* or to pray and mourn at home. This is the case even for non-Hazara Shia. There is segregation during the prayers and religious gatherings.

4.3.1 Comparison with Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia

Within Hazaras, men are at the most vulnerable position because of their day-to-day interactions with the wider society. One young woman in FGD 1 explained the precarious position of Hazara men within the community:

Boys and men have more restrictions in practising religious rituals as well. If they go for practice, they can be shot dead, and attacked and targeted. If they avoid going to religious rituals, they are labelled to be communist, coward and so on and so forth. They are bound to have the responsibility of family name and honour to be maintained well.

As mentioned earlier, men are considered to carry the legacy of religious identity and are at the forefront of any religious gathering and public display of sectarian identity. They are therefore the prime target as women worship mostly within the vicinity of a mosque and are less exposed to the public eye.

Several Hazara participants across all FGDs were of the view that non-Hazara Shia who are living in other parts of the country are relatively better off in terms of security and religious freedom. The foremost reason is their numbers. In Karachi and Lahore, though official data are unavailable, Shias are in such significant numbers that their presence is quite visible, i.e. there are Shia-dominated neighbourhoods and hundreds of congregation centres. For example, in Karachi, there are huge localities which are

dominated by Shias such as Ancholi, Jaffer-e-Tayyar, Rizvia, etc. or in Lahore, Mochi Gate. Therefore, due to their numbers, they can resist Sunni majorities unlike the Hazaras in Quetta who are confined to two areas. One woman added that, 'Shias living in other cities have fewer sectarian issues as they live in big cities and they are in majority as well'. Socioeconomic factors play a part as well, but Sunni and Shia populations are more interdependent and live in mixed communities compared to Shia Hazaras in Quetta. They also share the same ethnic background.

One of the clear differences between the condition of Hazaras and non-Hazara Shia is the political and security environment they share. Balochistan, particularly Quetta, has the worst law and order situation, which makes people of Balochistan in general and Hazaras in particular, more vulnerable. In FGD 3, the role of geopolitics was ranked at the top a number of times, and men questioned that if Hazaras lived in different cities, they would not have to face the issues which they are facing now:

I think it was neither a religious issue nor an ethnic issue. Friends here may differ from my views. I think it is because of our geopolitical location. If we were in a different location, we would not be targeted. Sectarian conflicts have been in other parts of the country as well, like in KPK and in Punjab but the way that only a particular group is targeted, I think it is neither because of our narrow eyes, nor because of your religious identity or ethnic group. It is not a sectarian or ethnic issue, I think it is our geopolitical location that is the reason. Our locality, like Mari Abad and Hazara Town, if they were somewhere else, like in Mall Road, Lahore, there would not be any such issue.

Of the female participants, young women and teenagers who had exposure to other cities through either work or education, or young women who had access to information, thought that if Hazaras lived out of Balochistan, they would face fewer challenges. Women from the 35+ group did not have much idea about it.

However, one participant countered this assertion, arguing that Hazaras' facial features will kill him; it does not matter where he is. 'Our identity that we are Hazara, and we are also identified as Shia. Now, even if I write on my forehead that I am a Jew, again I would be identified as a Shia and targeted', he contested.

Shia Hazaras are, what one male participant labelled, a 'double minority', meaning a minority within a minority, two minorities at the same time: sectarian and ethnic. Particularly because of their facial features, they stand out among Shias of different ethnicities.

They [non-Hazara Shia] are not in the minority like us Hazaras. In Quetta, if a Hazara gives in written that he has left Shi'ism, even then Pashtuns and others would think of him to be a Shia. I am a double minority. Sindhi Shia and Sunni cannot be differentiated.

These male participants mentioned gender as a cross-cutting theme but not particularly when coining the term double minority.

4.3.2 Reflection

We noted that the 16–35 age groups complained that violence against the community restricted their mobility, particularly for religious activities. However, widows of martyrs and some participants thought that violence against the community has deepened their sense of identity and, therefore, they express it even more explicitly despite security threats. The main show/display of sectarian identity for Shia Hazara are the Ashura, Chehlum, and Yom-e-Ali processions that are escorted by heavy security arranged by the state. Even if they do not get the escort, Hazaras would organise these processions any way (Sultan 2020). The deepening of sectarian identity and the consequent pressure to ensure women adhere to the religio-political context of the identity have adverse impacts on women.

Interestingly, religious freedom is ranked third by the men in FGD 3 compared to young women (fifth) and teenagers (fourth). It is evident that families who have lost their dear ones to violence and terrorism have a deeper sense of religious/sectarian identity and want to continue to express it at any cost. One of the women aged 35+ interviewees said:

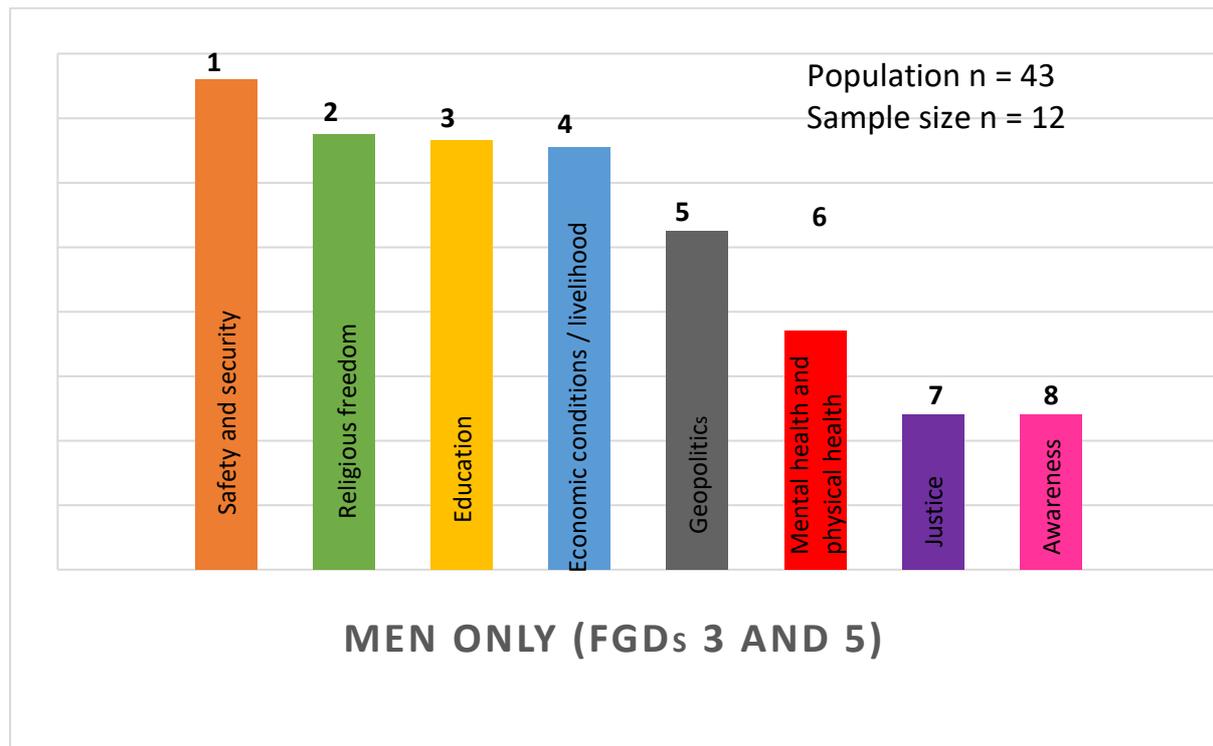
As per my observation the attendance has increased as we witness during the lockdown Covid-19 pandemic, government had banned gathering/procession be religious or otherwise yet again Hazara community organised and attended the procession for Imam Ali [ibn abi Talib] martyrdom in large numbers. And nothing happened to these attendees of procession [no coronavirus contraction, she believes]. This enthusiasm is out of great respect and love for Imam Husayn [Husayn ibn Ali abi Talib].

Another way of looking at this is that religious attendance within the vicinity of the Hazara locality has increased while it declined outside the neighbourhoods owing to the risk of attack by sectarian militants. A participant from Hazara Town, an activist, confirms that religious gatherings such as Friday Prayers and other congregations within Hazara Town and Mari Abad have increased attendance:

The Friday Prayers in Hazara Town has the largest attendance as I recall from the past. One can also see how people participate in Muharram and other religious gatherings in large numbers. They think that their identity is being attacked, therefore, they express it even more robustly now.

4.4 Safety and security

Figure 7: Aggregated ranking of men’s FGD 3 and FGD 5



Source: Author’s own.

The men ranked safety and security at the top. All women and these men emphasised the harsh reality of the risks of being attacked. Physical security was frequently mentioned throughout the research. It has affected mobility, access to education, and livelihood opportunities. There was not a lot of discussion and sharing on sexual violence explicitly from either the male or female participants. The reason is people are not comfortable talking about it. Since 2010–11, Hazaras have been contained mainly in two neighbourhoods and their everyday movement is restricted, subject to over-policing through check posts. For Hazaras, leaving these two areas and going to different parts of the city can be a matter of life and death. Though the men’s group has ranked it as first, one of the women provides an apt introduction to the situation which summarises the lived experience of the community:

People, who go out of the community for education or job purposes on a daily basis, face the hardest feeling of fear and insecurity, their families wait for their safe return with fear of getting killed by the way. Quetta to Karachi or Islamabad and Quetta to Iran 2D car services [rented cars] and buses have been targeted. Nobody knows how a son is raised for 20 to 25 years: he's the last hope of life for his mother. All these incidents with their long-lasting impact have traumatised Hazara community and they suffer from psychological problems.

Studies have well documented the experiences (trauma and fear) of the Hazara community and how the insecurity heightened the sense of fear among the community (Saeed 2018; NCHR 2018). One particularly important point that we observed in the men's FGDs is the stark effect of violence on the community and how non-Hazaras view Hazaras as a potential threat for their security. There were several anecdotes and personal experiences in which Hazaras were either directly told not to come, i.e. to work or to study, or discouraged to show their presence in certain public places. For example, one male participant shared:

During the target killing how the students go to the universities, how our seniors used to go to their universities, we know it very well. There were days when the buses refused to take us. They declined to take Hazara passengers, as there were risks of attacks on them.

Several participants also shared that when the violence against the community was at its peak during 2007–15, some non-Hazaras in Quetta started to assume that since Hazaras were facing violence, they either will not show up or should not be invited to work-related meetings. One male participant in FGD 5 shared a story of someone named Najeeb who was an active member of the Private Schools Association:

He leads the meetings, but recently he was not called for a meeting because it was being held in Pashtunabad [Pashtun neighbourhood] and Najeeb was disappointed to know that he was not summoned for the meeting. Other participants told him that since the meeting was in a Pashtun area so they assumed that Najeeb would not attend. This is yet another example of how Hazaras get sidelined in leadership positions in the pretext of a security threat. Same happens in NGOs, if they know you are a Hazara, one is not hired, as they cite security threats, Hazara lady health workers lost their jobs because of the same reasons.

Neither Hazaras dare to apply for any job, nor are employers willing to hire them.

One young woman in FGD 2 also corroborated this:

Since the situation is adverse, I am not invited to meetings, gatherings, or events of chamber as I am a member of chamber as well. They directly exclaimed that they feared from inviting us, they explained that if I were invited to their events, that would create problems for them to be attacked or targeted.

Discrimination in obtaining legal documents is a big agony. The authorities together with non-Hazara residents are pushing hard to prove that all Hazaras residing in Quetta are refugees.

There were Afghan refugee influxes into Pakistan in 1979, 1996, and 2001 due to wars and civil wars. These refugees include Afghan Hazaras as well Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, and others. The vast majority of Hazaras living in Pakistan (including Balochistan, Quetta) are those who migrated even before the creation of Pakistan or soon after. But there is a political and administrative campaign (structural discrimination) trying to prove that all Hazaras are refugees. Doing so decreases the legitimacy of Hazaras and hinders their access to legal documents, as they are looked at with suspicion and asked to prove that they are pre-1979 migrants.

In this connection, verification of refugees has been used a tool for discrimination against Hazaras. It is extremely difficult to get CNICs for adolescents aged 18 years. Those who have already obtained an CNIC but want to renew it after its expiry also go through unnecessary delays and suspicion. The authorities know that if Hazaras do not possess CNICs they can be harassed or compelled to pay bribes for no reason. It also has political impacts: fewer CNICs issued means less votes are cast in the local general election and this consequently affects the chances of Hazara candidates winning.

When asked whether security check posts have improved the sense of security, with the exception of a few participants, most thought otherwise. A teenage participant, widow of a *shaheed*'martyr' (a person who is killed for his/her religious or other beliefs without any guilt/sin/crime), believed the security apparatus played a role in violent incidents: 'I believe that they themselves are involved in such incidents, these many incidents couldn't occur without security apparatus' help and support'. Since all the Shia Hazara – male and female – who have been killed did not commit any crime and were not guilty, the only reasons for being targeted were their sectarian and ethnic identities. Therefore, they are referred to as *shaheed* (martyrs).

4.4.1 Comparison between Hazara men and non-Hazara Shia men and women

The vast majority of participants believed that Shia Hazaras were less safe and had more security challenges in comparison with non-Hazara Shia for several reasons. However, two main reasons were frequently mentioned by the participants. First, most importantly, their Mongolian facial features make them easily identifiable among other people (Changezi and Biseth 2011: 80). Second is the law and order situation, which has been worsening for decades. Therefore, life for Shia Hazaras in Balochistan is full of risks. One teenage girl made the point that:

Our challenges are greater than other Shia communities as we face more hate speeches because we are easily recognised/distinguishable due to our facial features. Shia communities living in Karachi or Lahore face no difficulty in mobility. They can easily move around their city with safety, but our mobility is restricted as a Shia Hazara community. They have more and better opportunities as well.

A young woman in FGD 1 presented a similar argument:

I think if we were not Hazaras and did not have specific facial features, our identification as a Shia would not be easy. Shias belonging to other ethnicity are safer in terms of identification. Being Hazara has brought more harm than being Shia. Other ethnic Shia or Sunni have almost similar complexion and features, so they aren't easily identified as Shia until they say it by themselves.

When vulnerabilities were compared between Hazara men and Hazara women, there seemed to be a consensus among all participants that Hazara men are more vulnerable for reasons such as more exposure, mobility, and interaction. This stems from cultural, religious, political and financial responsibilities that Hazara men are assumed to fulfil. This acknowledgement came particularly from the 16–35 and 35+ age groups as participants in these two groups have lost their sons, brothers, or fathers. One woman in FGD 2 explained:

When we ladies go out to the market area, we do not fear ourselves much but our brothers. When my brothers go out to market, we fear and suffer from anxiety till the time they come back home safely. Hazara sisters and mothers suffer from mental distress while the male members are out of home they pray for

their safe return. This mental distress keeps them suffering from mental and psychological disorders. Hazara men have less job opportunities as compared to Hazara women due to mobility issues.

A woman in FGD 1 acknowledged that Hazara men face more security issues than Hazara women:

In my view, Shia Hazara boys/males have more problems than girls/females; they face more issues, more discrimination and danger. They have difficulties both at home and in community. They have greater responsibilities and therefore, greater expectations are set against their responsibilities. They have to find a job for themselves to support their family and finding a job here is also a matter of risk and threat to life.

One young woman shared that sometimes, a man or boy has to witness unnecessary questions from the family when they go out:

Due to adverse security situations Hazara women themselves have restricted mobility of male members, while leaving home male members have to answer so many irrelevant questions. I have two brothers here and the third one is out of Pakistan, whenever they go out to the market area, I insist to take me with them since I think, being with ladies is far more secure and they wouldn't face any difficulty or any incident wouldn't happen to them. They are fed up with our restriction and weird behaviour, but we are compelled to behave weird due to the prevailing security situation. (FGD 2)

One woman compared the situation of Hazaras with the rest of Pakistani (patriarchal) society where men view women as an object of honour, and therefore 'protect' them from other people. The woman's response shows that the community has lost so many young men and now they are overprotective of their male members:

In this unfavourable security situation, if we compare ourselves with other communities, we will realise that they have issues and difficulties in protecting their females whereas we fear our males' protection. I have the only brother here in Quetta, so my mother calls on his number several times when he is out of home. He cries out that he is not let free even in the premises of Hazara Town. (FGD 2)

The participants' responses overwhelmingly establish that Hazara men are more vulnerable than Hazara women. However, one male Hazara in FGD 5 countered this assertion and argued:

In terms of death toll, there may not be big figures from Hazara females getting killed, the percentage for Hazara male killed is higher. We will not only talk of physical harm, but also economic one. Emotional toll for a female is higher than that for a male. Talking of mobility, when it is difficult for Hazara males to move around, it is even more difficult for Hazara females. As the Hazara lady health workers had to restrict their movements, they would even go for duties outside Quetta district.

Non-Hazara Shia have certain advantages that somehow lessen their vulnerabilities and make them more resilient. Mixed settlements, no distinguishable facial features that make them identifiable from others and being native and having more resources are some factors that are worthy of mention. Basically, being woven in the economic and social fabric of society together with the Sunni makes the non-Hazara Shia less vulnerable. Though sectarian identity is also an important marker for non-Hazara Shia, their shared ethnic identity with that of the Sunni majority is a defining factor of integration. Therefore, non-Hazara Shia inter-sect marriages are comparatively common.

Security was ranked top in the men's FGDs as they have day-to-day interactions and more direct engagement with non-Hazara people and towns. But our interviews with women aged 35+ also apprise that this segment of women have a somewhat similar experience to Hazara men: as women-headed families, these widows are responsible for all the needs of their dependents. For example, Ghausia, a widowed mother of two children whose husband was shot dead on his auto rickshaw in Karachi, shared that:

The security situation is adverse, so I fear mobility. If I have to go to the market area or Hazara Town, I don't take my children along with me. To me Benazir Flyover [a flyover connecting two Hazara neighbourhoods in Quetta] seems like a border between this world and the other. People don't feel safe while crossing the flyover, compulsions are real, so I prefer to go without children.

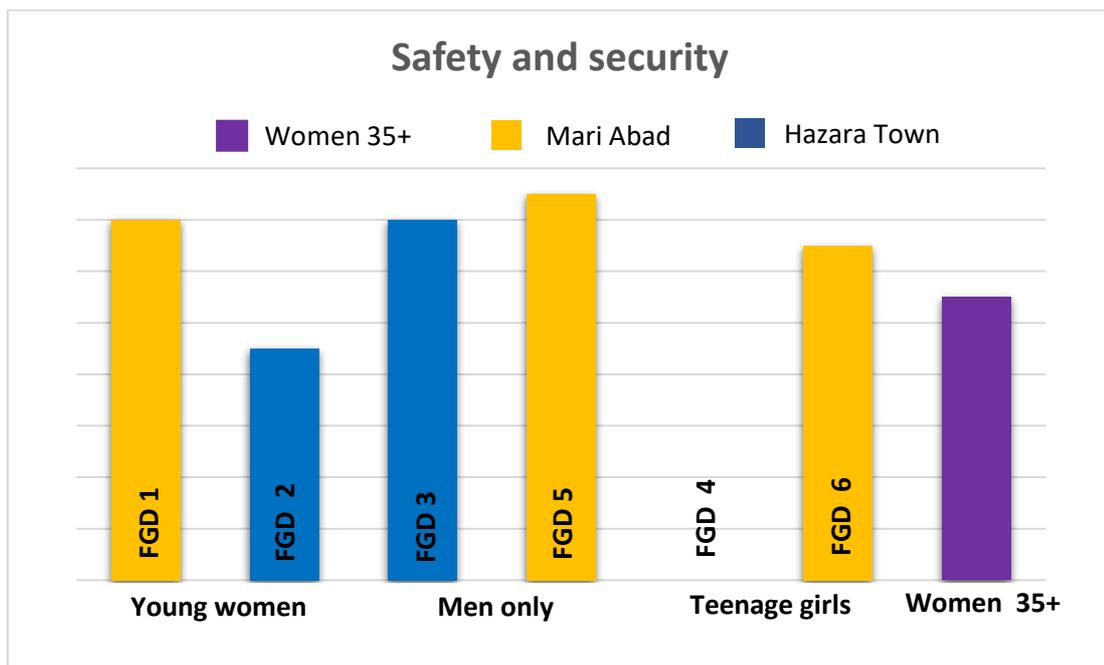
A similar experience was shared by Gul Jahan, a mother of five children who lost her husband in a target killing:

I avoid going to marketplaces when the situation is not good or favourable. I do not even go to Hazara Town. Mobility is fully

restricted, and I face difficulties to make my children feel safe and my children too ask me not to go out as a matter of fear. They fear not to lose me, and I also don't want to leave them without a mother when they already don't have a father. When I get ill, my children cannot afford, and they weep so much.

4.4.2 Reflection

Figure 8: Aggregated responses on participants on safety and security



Source: Author's own.

Safety and security remain a major challenge for Hazaras in Quetta. As depicted in Figure 8, men are subject to more physical threats and thus have ranked it at one, while for the other participants it is still a huge hurdle to overcome in aspiring or accomplishing anything in life. It is interesting to note the flat graph representing teenage girls of Hazara Town. Not ranking safety and security as a theme does not mean that they do not consider it a major problem; rather, these teenagers discussed and revealed it to be a cross-cutting theme. Therefore, they did not identify it as a separate challenge but an overarching one. For instance, safety and security is a major issue when deciding which educational institute to attend, shopping in the main malls within the vicinity or visiting relatives who live in the other Hazara neighbourhood.

For the women, lack of safety and security hugely hallmark their lives. Having lost their dear ones to violence, their lives have totally altered and restricted their mobility and socialisation so that their children remain safe. They hardly visit the bazar area and try to avoid going to Hazara localities whenever possible because of the security situation.

It is interesting to note that this safety and security dilemma shapes the heightened notion of protecting and policing women and silently reinforces any patriarchal tendencies that are already in place. Families that are overprotective of their female members have increased social and moral policing. 'Our brothers, who are younger than us, teach us lessons of honour and respect', shared a young woman who is a football coach. The male family members remind women of the grave security situation and thus there is no need to go out or work.

In late May 2020, the lynching of a Pashtun teenager, Bilal Noorzai, in Hazara Town by a Hazara mob (Sultan, Changezi and Habib 2020) came as surprise to both Hazaras and non-Hazaras in Quetta. 'I stayed home for many days after the incident as I was scared', said a woman named Saba.

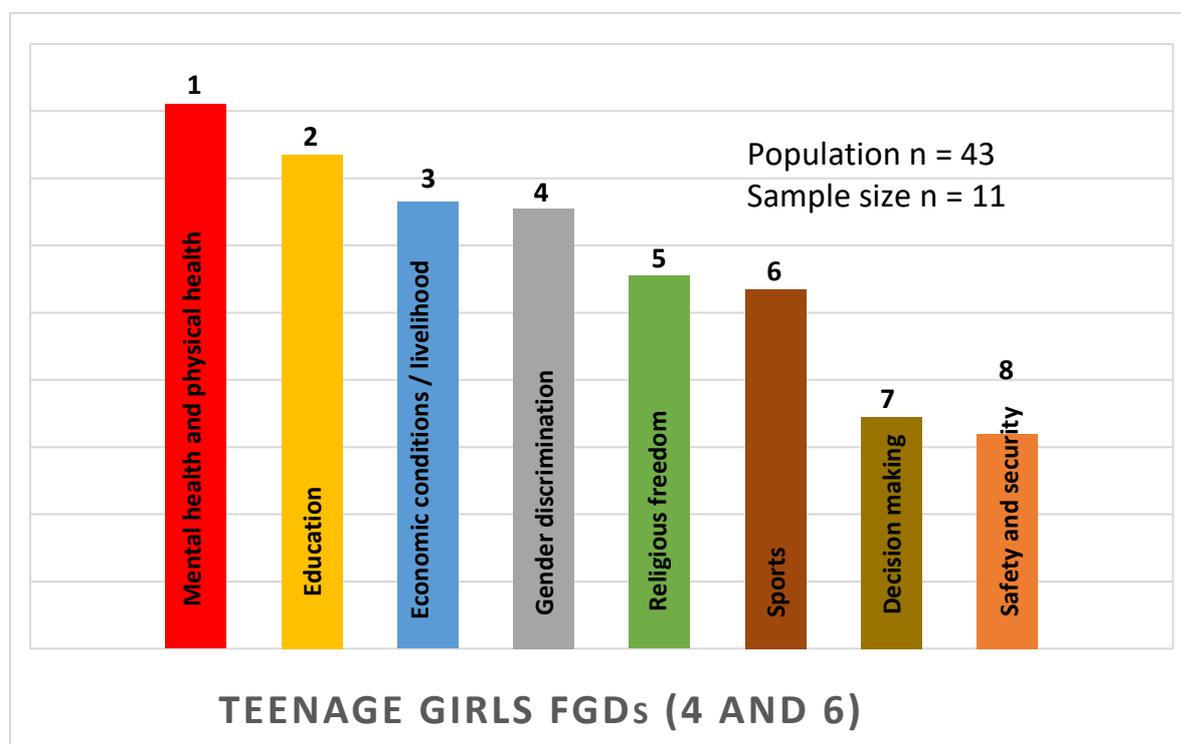
Interestingly, one of the reasons identified by the young women for being harassed by non-Hazara men is their fairer complexion. While non-Hazara communities in Balochistan have either a darker complexion or a range of skin colors, Hazaras stand out as a fair complexion community with very little variation. Light skin is considered a beauty standard in South Asia, including Pakistan. Women with lighter skin are seen as more beautiful and can be subject to more staring and harassment, as in the case of Hazara women. Additionally, Hazara girls and women who do not study or work outside the community have no or minimal interaction with other communities and perceive non-Hazara men's behaviour as unpredictable. They are basically afraid of coming across these men in the town or Bazar areas. This also has to do with out-group aversion or dislike, particularly in the context of targeted killing of Hazaras. Consequently, these Hazara young women or teenagers with little exposure feel less safe when around non-Hazara men.

The hate talk against Shia Hazara includes derogatory terms using animal names (culturally it is derogatory to call someone a dog or pig) and abusive words. Whenever there is mention of a woman, it has abusive sexual connotations. There is a huge trend of *takfir*, a practice of calling another sect heretic, in which Sunni extremist groups raise slogans against Shias and called them Kafir (infidel). Hazaras are also referred to as Kafir, which was recently visible in the anti-Hazara protest led by Pashtuns against the lynching of Noor, where they were also called 'the most cursed creature'.⁵

⁵ See videos (in Urdu) at: <https://bit.ly/2Na4wuE>

4.5 Mental and physical health

Figure 9: Aggregated responses of all groups, including women aged 35+ interviewees, on mental and physical health



Source: Author's own.

The teenage girls' top ranking is mental and physical health, while it stands at fifth for the entire population of the study. It is not a surprise as in both FGDs, teenage girls shared about the pressures and mental agony they go through in all aspects of life. The ranking is similar for the young women participants, with slightly lower scores, while it declines for women in the 35+ group – these participants are in most cases single mothers and their own physical being and mental health challenges are overlooked. In comparison to the teenagers and young women, there is less recognition of mental health issues in the older generation of women within the Hazara community. It highlights the dire situation of these women-headed families whose prime challenge is to feed their children and keep them safe. Their own health and wellbeing are either ignored or compromised for they have to show themselves to be strong.

It must be noted that the participating teenage girls are of the generation born into the violence and raised in isolation and ghettos. They have had much less exposure to the world outside the Hazara community. They were born in a community that has been forced to constantly live in fear of violence against them for almost two decades. Though living in a ghettoised environment has become a practice, the challenges that this ghettoisation brings remain unaddressed. One of the unspoken challenges is the trauma

that every Hazara male and female – including children – face on a daily basis when any member of the family goes out of the Hazara areas even for routine chores. This has serious psychological consequences for the community, particularly the younger generation.

One young woman in FGD 2 shared the trauma that she and the female members of her family routinely experience and how they suffer from anxiety and fear when the male family members are out, even if they have only gone to a local market:

My brothers are done with studies and stay at home, doing nothing. When we ladies go out to the market area, we don't fear ourselves much but our brothers. When my brothers go out to the marketplace, we fear and suffer from anxiety till the time they come back home safely. Hazara sisters and mothers suffer from mental distress while the male members are out of home they pray for their safe return. This mental distress keeps them suffering from mental and psychological disorders. Hazara men have less job opportunities as compared to Hazara women due to mobility issues. If a family has any financial support from out of the country or within the country, or any lady of the family goes out for work, it is again good for them, but if the two of these supports aren't available, the family has to suffer a lot. Males cannot go out for jobs or they don't find any with ease.

Also in FGD 2, Mehroma pointed out the same phenomenon: 'Females have developed mental disorders due to the pressure they have of their males' safety and security'. Women not only have to take care of themselves but also their families, particularly the adolescent and adult males as Hazara males are the prime target of physical harm in the wake of terrorism. Women constantly check up on them when they are out of the home for work or other reasons, and remain anxious and worried. A participant in FGD 1 spoke about the perplexities of the city: it was once known as the 'fruit garden of Pakistan' and a beautiful tourist spot but has become a place of trauma for its residents. She continued, 'In comparison to other cities, Quetta City has more severe effects of mental stress and trauma. Other cities have different atmospheres, even doctors recommend people to visit other cities to get refreshed'.

Another important and sensitive issue was highlighted in FGD 2 when a woman shared how she was living a comparatively carefree life as she never had to face any financial difficulties, being from a financially stable family, but when she was exposed to the bombing in 2012 it had a huge impact on her mental health. The impact of the violence

and bombings on those who are not physically harmed is much less talked about and no practical measures had been taken to address this.

I am a lucky child as I am the youngest at home and my family is financially stable so I did not face any difficulty except 2012 bomb blast on SBK point, it left a great impact on my mental and psychological health. We were distant about a ten yards from the point which was targeted, we fell on the ground with no serious injuries, when I reached home that day my father who lives abroad made a phone call and asked me if I got any serious injury, he also encouraged me not to leave my studies and university from the next day. (FGD 2)

A horrific and alarming trend, particularly among youth, is the increasing number of suicides:

Despite all the facilities provided to young boys and girls, we hear about suicide attempts, one of our relatives' daughters hanged herself with the fan, hardly 14 years old. Her mother and sister-in-law were not home, when they came back home and saw the girl hanging, they fell off the ground unconscious. She was the only daughter of her mother therefore, she had access to all facilities of life. Unfavourable security situations, psychological and mental issues lead to this way. (FGD 2)

Kazimiya (FGD 4), who has studied psychology, explained that although the city faces so many issues and the people are badly affected by traumatic experiences, there is no scope for psychological studies and no jobs are available. One of the main issues is the stereotyping of mental health and the associated shame and taboos. Privacy and trust are another major challenge: patients lack trust in the doctors as in a tight-knit society there is no surety that what is shared with the doctors will remain confidential. Kazimiya further elaborates:

Everyone is affected due to trauma and terrorism. There was this mentally ill educated woman. When I asked her why she does not visit a psychologist. She said would you give 100 per cent surety that what I share, it would be kept as a secret? There is no confidentiality and privacy concept. No trust. Two girls I know that have mental conditions and their only support is their elder sister but even then, their family does not allow them to visit a proper psychologist. There was another girl who visited a psychologist

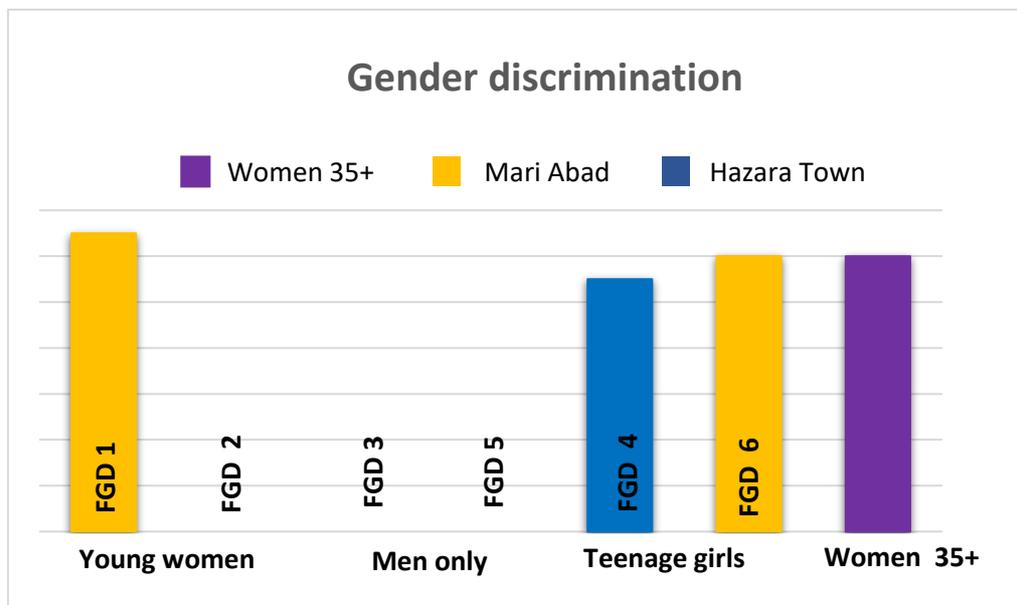
here. The psychologist asked her if she wanted to discuss in the presence of her mother. She told me who she would be able to discuss her problems within presence of her mother. So, decided to share a problem which her mother knows and nothing else. She said if I said that I prefer to share alone, my mother would think that my daughter does not trust me. If I say ok. How can I discuss my problem in the presence of my mother?

Kazimiya highlights the important issue of heavy drugs being prescribed to children. She said that doctors prescribe lots of drugs to children, including an 11-year-old who was given a heavy dose of antidepressants. ‘How can an 11-year-old use that heavy drug? There is no research-based solution’, she regretted.

Less talked about is the lack of any playgrounds and entertainment facilities for the children. Zehra said, ‘They are working all day with me, they have no access to parks or joy lands; however, my son, he is sometimes managing to play football in an open free ground. Girls have no entertainment but to be with me either working in a bakery or doing household chores.’

4.6 Internal misogyny/gender discrimination

Figure 10: Aggregated ranking of all groups and women aged 35+ interviewees on gender discrimination



Source: Author’s own.

Another factor contributing to the traumatic experiences of Hazara women, we have noted, is the prejudice against women within the community that causes further

suppression, and this affects the advancement of young women. In the FGDs, both males and females discussed how it has affected their lives. One young woman in FGD 1 shared:

We are throughout face mental distress due to the pathetic social norm that females in our societies are considered to be responsible for family name and honour; therefore, they are more restricted than males to follow their dreams and do what they are interested in to do in order not to defame family.

Kazimiya (FGD 4), summed up the discriminatory attitude of society against women: 'Parents would feel proud that I have a martyred son, but I have not seen a single parent that is proud of her martyred daughter'.

It has been observed and discussed during our research that women face discrimination in multiple forms. As family honour is associated with the female members, there have been a few incidents where females have been harassed and shamed by photographs of them being posted on social media. This has instilled fear in every female to the extent that women – particularly young girls – avoid partaking in social events and gatherings. One young woman in FGD 1 shared:

These things have severely affected us; we have turned so ill of such matters. Leaking of pictures had made life hard. I do not even make snaps with cousins in family gatherings as a mental pressure restricts me that anyone anytime can misuse my snaps with editing or else. I have friends who are close, living abroad, whenever they ask to share photos with them, I directly say no to them because the cost of respect and honour is much more than we can pay. They say I don't trust them, but I say it's not about trust, I don't feel comfortable therefore, I avoid it. Many girls and women restricted their attendance from events and other activities. Even females used to fear from attending wedding ceremonies and other events to secure themselves, that made them suffer from mental distress and tension. This is a huge burden no doubt. Mental distress and pressure create so many problems for females as a young woman said that they cannot attend events for the fear of getting pictures leaked or trusting our friends these days. And as she shared her comfort level for sharing pictures with friends that one cannot really trust.

Since the status of women in Balochistan is bleak, if development indicators

of Hazara women are compared with those of the rest of the province, it shows a very promising picture. But one needs to understand that it is not because the indicators are extremely good (except for education) for Hazara women but because the provincial standards fall so low. The literacy rate for Hazara women is high and they are considered progressive compared to women from other non-Hazara ethnic groups within Quetta. There are many examples of how the patriarchal and discriminatory culture within the Hazara community has stopped women from participating in sports and business. One young woman in FGD 2 said:

No doubt as a female, being part of a football team itself is not acceptable for males. I was part of the football team and played from 2005 to 2011. During that time, we [she and her sister] and my cousin faced so many problems, people used to talk rubbish about us even my cousin's proposal was rejected because of the same issue. People claimed that we were dangerous girls.

Another female participant argued that the issues of honour and ego arise for males when they see their women progressing:

Responsibilities of family are at one hand and on the other hand our brothers, who are younger than us, teach us lessons of honour and respect, look at us with an unpleasant gaze. They cannot afford it when their friends and other people talk about their sisters playing football or running restaurants. It hurts their ego when they are accused of wrongdoings due to their sisters.

4.6.1 Comparison between Hazara men and women

There are many examples where women are discriminated against based on gender, which has affected their education and ability to partake in sports social events; hence, it has added to the oppression they face distinct to that of Hazara males. Although both Hazara men and women face violence and oppression, the women also face oppression from the male members of the family and the patriarchal society. One teenage girl in FGD 4 asserted:

Hazaras claim that they do not discriminate between boys and girls, but they do. I have two brothers who do not study, they get low marks in their studies, still my father says if you want to study, I will send both of you even outside Pakistan. But his daughters are not allowed even though they study hard. A boy who is still

very young, he is given mobile, but his daughter who is even in college does not have mobile. Mobiles of girls are checked but no one cares about boys.

Like any other patriarchal society, men impose their decisions on women. Some Hazara women are forced to give up their ambition, particularly athletes, as one participant in FGD 2 explained:

No doubt, there is many girls in sports but many of them do not have permission from home to play and represent any club on a national level. Because of their huge interest and enthusiasm, they come for practice, but their families do not allow them to be part of any league or championship.

There was a clear sense of agitation and protest among teenage girls over the double standards they witness within their own community. One teenage girl in FGD 4 protested:

In our community everyone has an opinion and wants to impose it. Like if a girl wants to do singing. They have got problems with that too. They harass and say aren't you Shia? They watch Katrina Kaif [Bollywood actress] but harass Zahra Elham [woman Hazara singer]. I believe we are educated but ignorant.

Another teenager pointed out how women are blackmailed in the name of honour and piety:

People poke their nose in other people's social media accounts so that your hair can be seen in photos. They say where is your honour that your wife is seen in social media with her hair visible. Moral policing is so rampant in our society. If we marry a non-Hazara they say that our generation will go to hell.

The moral policing regime on social media applies to non-Hazara women as well. But it is important to understand that this issue is highlighted by Hazara men more because they need to protect their honour at any cost.

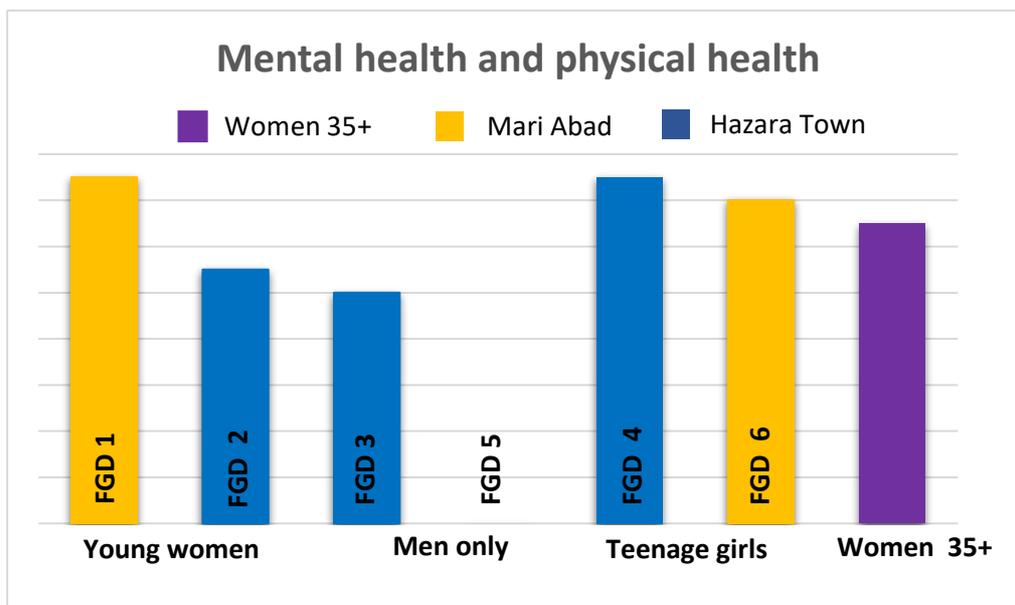
The pressure for girls to get married by a certain age also limits their occupational aspirations. Besides, it is still considered a taboo to financially depend on a female. This is evident from the trend of early marriage owing to the adverse security situation and cultural norms. In essence, it has made an emotional and social environment where getting married is the prime goal for girls and women. The ground researcher observed that women and girls were weary of this and wanted to get an education and be independent. In effect, when girls could not carry on their higher education studies due to

the violence against Hazaras, and their parents could not afford to arrange education in other cities of Pakistan, the only viable option left for girls is marriage.

Sports are still seen as the man’s domain. Despite Hazara women sports persons being celebrated and owned by the community, people are reluctant to allow their daughters to pursue a career in sports or even as a leisure activity. A young woman who is the manager of the female football team in Hazara Town opined that people regarded her as a dangerous girl only because she was active and played sports: ‘My sister was selected for the national club to play and represent it but owing to social pressures she preferred to get married instead’.

4.6.2 Reflection

Figure 11: Aggregated responses of all groups including women aged 35+ interviewees on mental and physical health



Source: Author’s own.

In the oppressive environment where there are no or fewer job opportunities for both males and females, men are still expected to support their families while women face extra moral policing. This has added to the mental stress leading to the suicidal trend in young boys and girls.

Women and girls suffer more than men and boys at the hands of patriarchal and cultural norms. Women have fewer opportunities and their mobility and freedom are more restricted. They are dependent on male members for their decisions and face discrimination. This can result in developing mental health issues. But men and boys, as was discussed in FGDs, have more financial pressure on them: they have fewer job

opportunities but more financial responsibilities. Due to cultural norms, females are not expected to contribute financially to the family and men mostly limit their freedom; but this leads to the men's own suffering. Unknowingly, men also suffer due to the patriarchal norms, but they do not realise it.

It is unfortunate that as a community under siege, there is little realisation of how critical the issue of mental health is. The exceptions are teenagers and young women, who are beyond the notion of mental health issues being taboo; and a lot of younger males recognise it as an issue, but they do not give it due weight. The older women participants, on the other hand, place it last on the list because there is already too much for them to cope with and resolve.

There is a slow collective realisation of the issue. Many attributed the lynching of Bilal Noorzai to the long unreconciled mental and psychological trauma that the community is going through. Another fissure is the teenage suicide trend that speaks loudly of serious unaddressed mental challenges.

5 Conclusion

During the research we heard horrific stories of persecution and marginalisation of the Hazara community. Amidst the media coverage of violence against Hazaras, the marginalisation of Shia Hazara women became invisible in the news and academic scholarships covering the community. A closer examination reveals that the Shia Hazara women have experienced parallel suffering, either as a result of losing the family breadwinner, or through restrictions on mobility due to societal or patriarchal norms that exacerbate their financial condition and social isolation. This research closely examined the intersection of gender, class, and religious affiliation in the marginalisation of Hazara women and attempted to answer the underlying questions posed at the beginning.

Based on the responses of the participants in the FGDs and interviews, it is evident that there is a serious and distinctive impact on Hazara women regarding the issue of Shia persecution. The Shia Hazara women are affected in different ways. For example, in education, young women and girls were either discouraged or prevented from pursuing further studies by their family due to concerns about security or, if they somehow convinced them that they should continue, they endure acute commuting challenges. In addition, they also face harassment and discrimination based on their ethnic and sectarian identities.

The day-to-day mobility of the Shia Hazara women is restricted. Generally, Hazaras are confined to two areas of Quetta. However, with the addition of the gender element, Hazara women are further confined, as raised by a male participant in FGD 5 and corroborated by Ghausia, who avoids crossing the Benazir Flyover to avoid any mishap. Some female participants confirmed that movement between the Hazara Town and Mari Abad neighbourhoods is also restricted. Based on the responses, our research validates that the securitisation and over-policing of the community creates more challenges for Hazara women than for men.

There seems to be a consensus among all participants that non-Hazara Shia are in a better position to get education, practice freedom of religion, and to move around the neighbourhoods in the city. Our participants gave two main reasons:

- The Mongolian facial features of Hazaras make them vulnerable both within and outside of Quetta. During one FGD, one man aptly explained the importance of facial features in the Hazara persecution by saying that ‘even if I write on my forehead that I am a Jew, I would be identified as a Shia and targeted’.
- The geopolitical position as Quetta is a particular hotspot of sectarian and regional proxies. This was ranked high by the men’s FGDs. Though Karachi is also among the cities where Shias have been the target of militants, the Shias in that city still enjoy a level of freedom in aspects such as mobility and job opportunities, and – most importantly – they are not as easily identifiable as the Hazaras.

We also noticed a subtle variation within the Shia Hazara women of low-income backgrounds and women-headed families. It was brought up many times by the interviewees, and supported by the participants of the FGDs, that the experiences and suffering of poor women are double those of Hazara women who do not struggle financially or have male members to support them. One of the key issues they referred to is paying the house rent, as their only source of income is the aid money they receive monthly, which is not enough to meet their basic needs, including their children’s school fees, rent, and food. Price hikes remain a challenge for them as due to the security check posts and with no male support, they are forced to pay double the price when they shop, making their financial problems even worse.

In addition, the residents of Hazara Town – including women – are harassed by security officials on the pretext of checking CNICs more often than the inhabitants of Mari Abad. This is because Hazara Town is relatively newly developed and is home to some Afghan Hazara refugees.

One of the male participants identified Hazaras as a ‘double minority’ (i.e. sectarian and ethnic) within Shias. We therefore conclude that Shia Hazara women are a ‘multi-layered

minority' within Shias who are subject to further marginalisation due to their gender, class, and religious-ethnic affiliation. In comparison to Hazara men, these three signifiers or identities increase the challenges faced by Hazara women in areas such as education, mobility, gender-based discrimination, mental health, and economic/livelihood issues.

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Annexe 1 – Focus Group Discussion and Age Brackets

FGDs	Age group
FGD 1	16–35 women
FGD 2	16–35 women
FGD 3	Men (mixed age group)
FGD 4	Teenage girls
FGD 5	Men (mixed age group)
FGD 6	Teenage girls

Annexe 2 – FGDs and Interview Ranking Themes

There were four broad guiding themes around which researchers started conversations: Education and Health, Economic Conditions/Livelihood, Religious Freedom, and Safety and Security. The participants would then move to other main themes or sub-themes as per their experiences and knowledge. On average, each FGD came up with five to seven themes that they later ranked. The researcher used her expertise and knowledge of the context to combine similar themes for which participants used slightly different wording. The 15 overall themes are:

- **Safety and Security:** Both physical and psychological;
- **Gender Discrimination:** As a cross-cutting theme;
- **Education:** Opportunities, challenges and impact;
- **Mental and Physical Health:** Violence-induced trauma and related health challenges;
- **Economic Conditions/Livelihood:** Jobs, poverty, and how they have been affected by terrorism;
- **Religious Freedom:** To practice and express freely their sectarian identity;
- **Geopolitics:** Influence of regional politics on Hazaras;
- **Sports:** Indoor and outdoor sports;
- **Recreation:** Leisure facilities such as parks, family picnic points, etc.;
- **Decision Making:** Individual capacity and at family level; also collectively at communal level;
- **Political Participation:** Participation of women in political activities such as elections and rallies, etc.;
- **Child Marriage:** Marriage of a person below 18 years old;
- **Justice:** Demand to bring terrorists who claim to have killed Hazaras to justice;
- **Awareness:** Of causes and implications of Hazara targeted killing; and
- **Women in Business:** Challenges of women who initiate their own business.

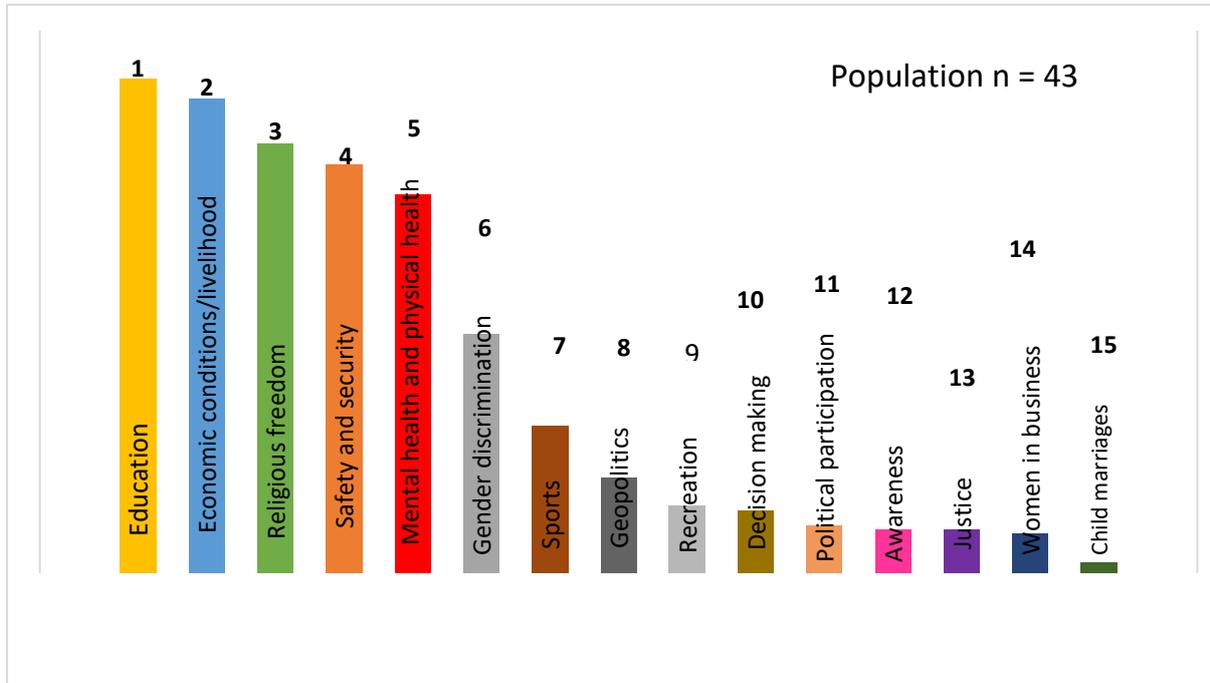
Annexe 3 – Hazara Population in Pakistan

Year	Estimated population
1971	40,000
1975	50,000–60,000
1995	100,000–120,000
2015	650,000–15,000,000

Source: (Hashmi 2016: 12).

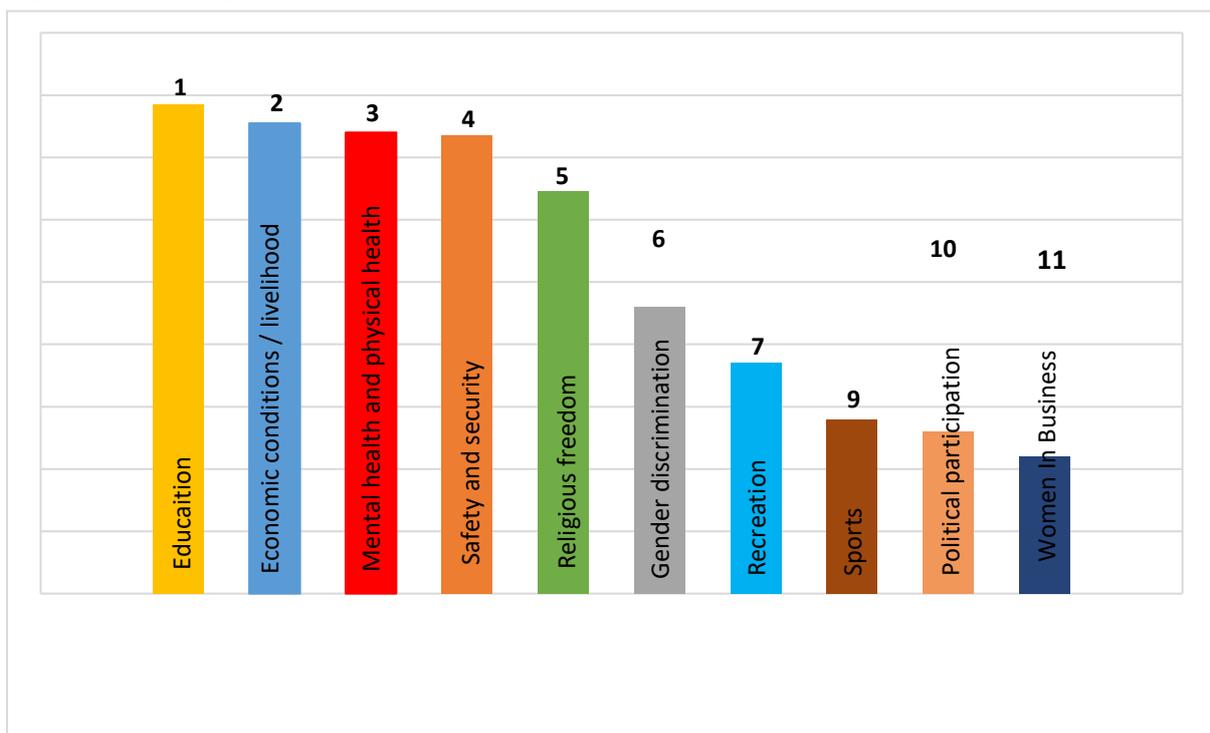
Appendix 1 – Participatory Ranking by FGDs

Figure A1: Overall ranking



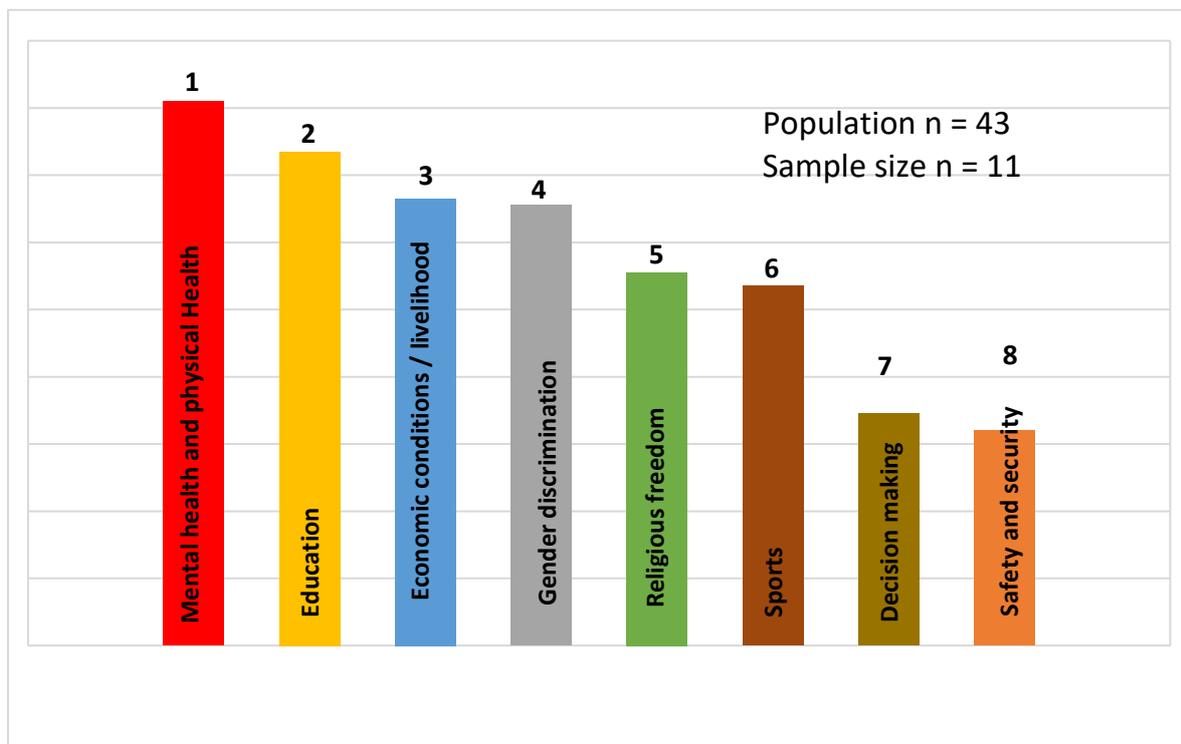
Source: Author's own.

Figure A2: Young women (FGD 1 and FGD 2)



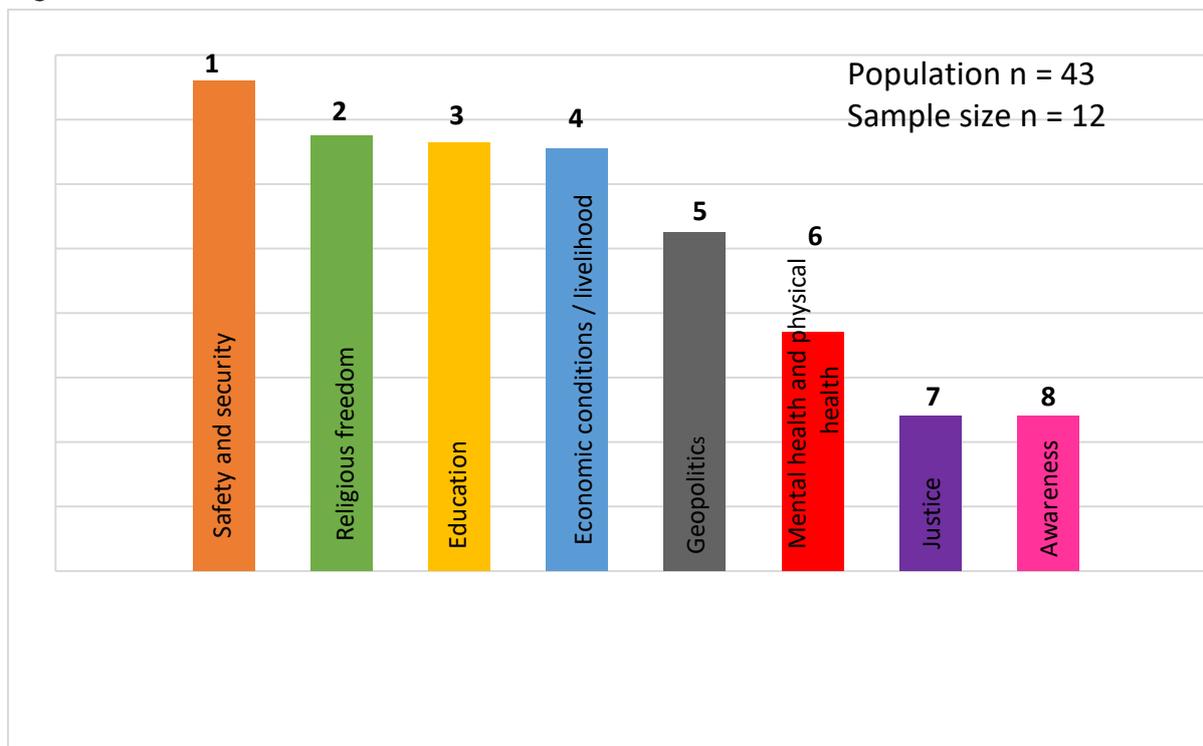
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Figure A3: Teenage girls (FGD 4 and FGD 6)



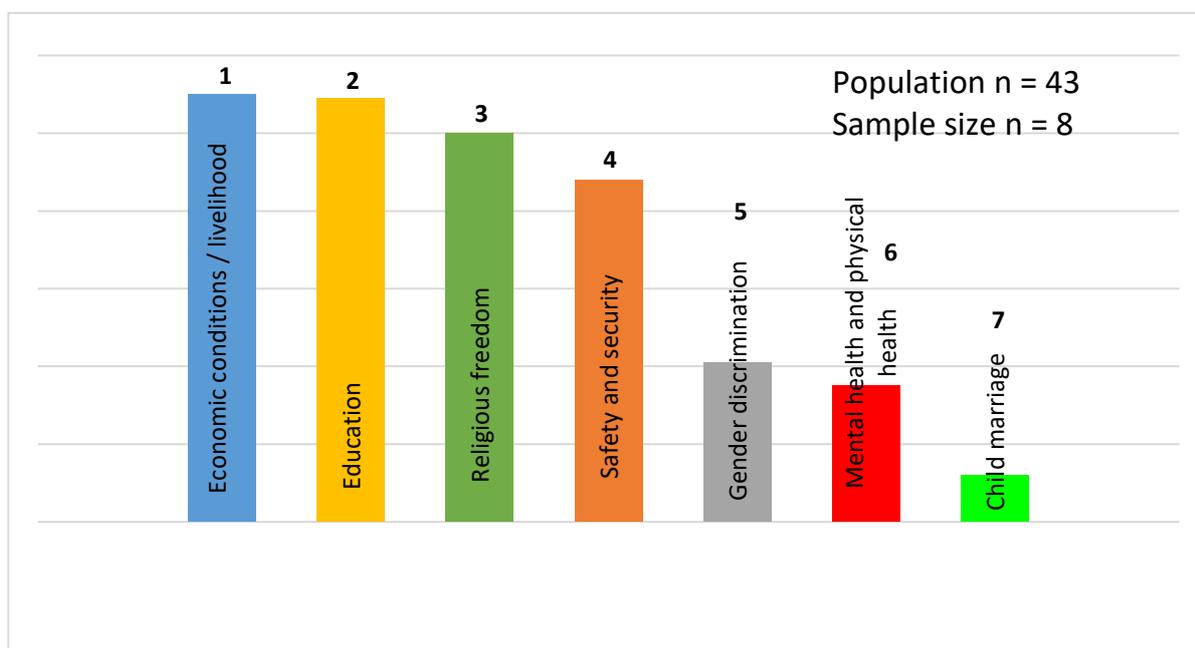
Source: Author's own.

Figure A4: Men (FGD 3 and FGD 5)



Source: Author's own.

Figure A5: Interviews with women aged 35+



Source: Author's own.

Poor Marginalised Hindu Women in Pakistan

Seema Rana Maheshwary

Abstract

The role of women is vital in the development of family, community, and society. Hindu women in Pakistan are facing multiple obstacles in their daily life. This study analyses the attitudes towards poor Hindu women living in Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, many of whom do manual labour as members of the lower classes. This study not only analyses the religious discrimination experienced by these women, through their own words, but also looks at how this intersects with gender discrimination and economic exclusion.

Keywords: Hindu women, marginalisation, discrimination, gender, religion-identity, violence, culture and traditions, community, society.

Acknowledgements

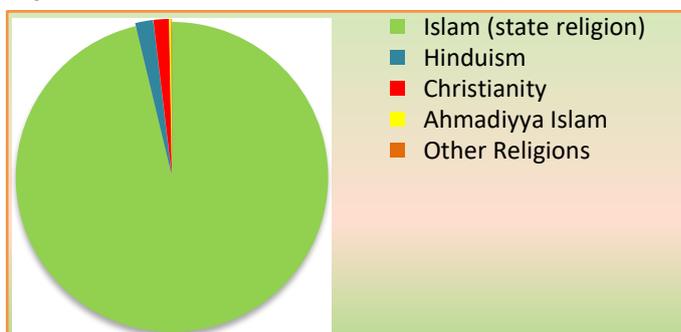
My gratitude extends to Amy Quinn-Graham for her important support in integrating the quantitative data and analysis into this paper and for carrying out substantial language revisions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Pakistan's constitution promises fundamental rights, correspondence of equal opportunity, law, social, economic, and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to the law and public morality of its citizens. Pakistan is a country of various cultures, ethnicities, languages, religions, sects and sub-sects. The state religion in Pakistan is Islam, which is practised by 96.28 per cent of the population. Freedom of religion is assured by the constitution, which established equal rights to all Pakistani citizens, irrespective of their religion. The remaining 4 per cent practise Hinduism (1.6 per cent), Christianity (1.59 per cent), Ahmadiyya Islam (0.22 per cent), and Sikhism, the Bahai faith, and other religions (0.07 per cent), according to the 1998 Census (Minority Rights 2018). Though, as with other minority groups, these figures are regarded by community organisations as unreliable and out of date. The Pakistan Hindu Council, for instance, has estimated that the total Hindu population in Pakistan now exceeds eight million, which would be 4 per cent of the total population (Pakistan Hindu Council 2018).

Figure 1: A breakdown of Pakistan's population by religious affiliation.



Source: Author's own, based on data in Minority Rights (2018).

Religious minorities in Pakistan often face significant discrimination, subject to issues such as violence and misuse of the blasphemy law. It is claimed that since 1947, religious minorities went from 23 per cent to 3.7 per cent of the population, due to the violence and discrimination they faced. However, arguably the reason for this decline has more to do with the mass migration of nearly five million Hindus and Sikhs to India in 1947 and the separation of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in 1971. At the time, East Pakistan contained nearly 22 per cent of the minorities in Pakistan, with West Pakistan being home to only 1.6 per cent of the minorities (BBC News 2019).

Hinduism is the second largest religion in Pakistan after Islam. Ninety per cent of the Hindu population in Pakistan are the poor and marginalised and they live in communities called 'Scheduled Castes', of which there are around 40. The majority are Meghwar, Kohli, Bheel, Walmikis, Wagri, Oadh, and Bagris; these communities are the poorest of the poor and are mostly neglected in Pakistani society (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies 2008).

Pakistan's Sindh province is more diverse in terms of religion, ethnic, and cultural aspects. A religious minority, Hindus live in high-density communities in Sindh, compared to other parts of the country. In certain districts of the province, Hindu residential areas are almost equal in number to the Muslim majority, such as Tharparkar, Umer-Kot, and Mir-Pur-Khas Districts.

1.2 Poor marginalised women

There are multiple segregations in Pakistani society and this paper shows how women from religious minorities suffer disadvantage and inequality. They carry one of the heaviest burdens of all the marginalised groups in Pakistan as they face violence, discrimination and exclusion, lack of access to education, transportation, and health care, along with occupational discrimination and a high threat of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage. Women from religious minorities suffer from living in both a male-dominated society and a Muslim-dominated country. They experience poverty and misery differently to the men of the same class, and this amplifies their vulnerability even more and makes their life more challenging. In other words, poverty is a gendered experience; it requires a gender analysis of norms and values, division of work and responsibility, and the force of power and control endured by the poor marginalised women within the community and society.

There is overwhelming evidence to show that girls and women are more disadvantaged than boys and men in Pakistan. There is also profuse evidence of the responsibilities and challenges that women face within both their own community and within wider society that is dissimilar from men. Persistent gender inequality and differences in women's and men's roles greatly influence the causes, experiences, and consequences of women's poverty. Policies and programmes to moderate poverty must take into account gender disparity and gender difference to effectively address the needs and constraints of the poor, both women and men.

The majority of marginalised Hindus live in rural Sindh, where girls and women in households bear a disproportionate share of the work of, and responsibility for, feeding

and caring for family members through unpaid household work, alongside collecting firewood, water, and fodder, and caring for the livestock. Women living in urban areas of Karachi city are almost always engaged in working indoors, alongside outside jobs like being domestic workers (housekeeping), labourers, sanitary workers, sweepers, and selling dried fruits and bangles. Hindu women with an education are rarely allowed to work as a teacher, never mind other professional roles.

1.3 Research aims and methodology

The role of women is vital in the development of family, community, and society. Hindu women in Pakistan are facing multiple obstacles in their daily lives. This study looks at poor Hindu women living in Karachi, the capital of the Pakistani province of Sindh; it analyses the attitudes towards them, many of whom work in manual labour as members of the lowest classes. The main intent of the study is to develop learning about the experiences of poor Hindu women and how they are different from both other non-Hindu poor women and poor Hindu men. Therefore, the research aims include:

1. Understanding how poor Hindu women experience threefold marginalisation from the perspective of:
 - Gender discrimination within the wider society;
 - Discrimination due to religious identity; and
 - Gender discrimination within their own Hindu community.

2. Understanding how poor Hindu women experience life in Pakistan differently to men of the same religious background, including discrimination from wider society and cultural and socioeconomic vulnerability.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) aspired to elicit qualitative and quantitative information regarding challenges and threats faced by Hindu women with respect to their experiences of community and society, culture and traditions, and socioeconomic vulnerability. The threats that were identified as facing these women due to their gender and their religious identity included employment, education, mobility, worship, health, transportation, faith abandonment, conversions, harassment and other violence, as well as the role of the media and the state in exacerbating the negative experiences of poor Hindu women.

Table 1: Participants in the FGDs by gender, age, and number

Group	Gender	Age	Total number
Group-W-1	Women	18–35	12
Group-W-2	Women	36–60	12
Group-H-G	Girls	14–17	10
Group-H-M	Men	18–60	12

Source: Author's own.

The FGDs included females and males from the Hindu Scheduled Caste communities (the most poor and marginalised) in urban Karachi. Three FGDs were carried out with Hindu females of different age groups to learn about their experiences with gender and religious discrimination, as well as economic exclusion. Alongside these, a parallel FGD was carried out with Hindu males in order to learn about their perceptions of poor Hindu women's vulnerabilities within their community. Table 1 shows the gender, age, and number of participants in each FGD.

This learning follows a qualitative study design, starting with participatory ranking of the key threats to poor Hindu women and then a facilitated discussion around the different themes that emerged. Through the FGDs, the researcher spoke to 46 participants. Two FGDs were carried out with adult women aged 18–35 and 36–60, one FGD with ten adolescent girls (aged 14–17) and one FGD with men (aged 18–60). The researcher and author of this paper was in a good position to connect with these marginalised Hindu women as she is also a Hindu woman living in Pakistan who has experienced similar discrimination and exclusion. This enabled her to connect well with the participants and explain the research questions in a way that she knew they would understand. She was also able to put them at ease by sharing examples of her own marginalisation as a Hindu woman in Pakistan.

Participants were selected with the help of social and human rights activists from the different Hindu sub-communities, including factory labour workers, housemaids, teachers, nurses, sanitary workers, housewives, dried fruit and bangle sellers, and students. The males of the same communities were also from a range of professions

including a women and youth rights activist, social workers, political activists, a lawyer, and a student. Meetings were held to build trust and ensure safe participation and confidentiality.

The FGDs were conducted in the period of March to May 2020, in a human rights office, a community welfare hall, and a training centre in the Karachi region. These locations were chosen to ensure privacy and to avoid any other interference and involvement from those outside of the study. The FGDs were conducted in the local language and lasted between 100 and 120 minutes. All FGDs were undertaken with the participants' approval through a consent form which was described to them as part of the research. They were assured that their identities would be kept private and they would not be asked for any specifics that would take them out of their comfort zone. The FGDs were tape recorded with the permission of participants in order to crosscheck quotes and content when writing up the report. The research topic and its aims and objectives were explained to all participants at the commencement of the FGDs.

These focus groups were designed to provide both qualitative and quantitative data through the use of participatory ranking and closed follow-up questions. The findings presented here can be used to inform and strengthen existing laws and policies that deal with the violence and discrimination faced by poor Hindu women, and challenge harmful attitudes towards religious minorities. Specific recommendations are made in Section 5.

This study concludes that poor Hindu women are experiencing discrimination due to the attitudes and customs of both their own community and wider society because of their gender, their religious identity, and their economic status. Poor Hindu women are facing problems in both their domestic and professional lives. The researcher suggests that implementation of laws should be strictly monitored. Men should review their behaviour towards women at different phases of life and the education system should be used as a tool to bring improvements to the lives of these poor Hindu women.

1.4 Limitations, strengths and challenges

The focus groups form significant learning about the experiences of poor Hindu women; however, they only included 46 people. Therefore, the information gathered does not reflect a comprehensive situational analysis, as the groups do not reflect a large, representative sample from the community. Rather, they provide insight into the experiences and perspectives of commonly overlooked Hindu women and girls living in Sindh province. The women and girls in the first three FGDs seemed quite comfortable and these participants were interested in sharing their experiences regarding the range of

issues presented to them. Meanwhile, the men within the male focus group showed and expressed discomfort when speaking about the experiences of the women in their communities. The researcher perceived that various men appeared unwilling to acknowledge the extent of the negative experiences facing poor Hindu women, particularly when it came to questions about the responses of the Hindu community. The FGD with the girls was complicated by the fact that they arrived accompanied by a male family member. Having a male chaperone come to the FGD is a demonstration of the fear within the Hindu community which leads to young women and girls being restricted in their movements and ability to be out in public spaces alone. This is primarily a fear that these young women and girls will be abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. Therefore, this was an unavoidable element of the FGD that may have impacted the answers the young women and girls gave.

2. Research findings – the challenges and the greatest threats to poor Hindu women

The main findings from the data generated by the FGDs are summarised below. The consultation brought about valuable information in terms of the current challenges and daily concerns of the poor Hindu women in Karachi.

Section 2.1 outlines the challenges and greatest threats to poor women. This data was gained through participatory ranking. The subsections that follow in Section 2.1 and in Section 2.2 are thematic and paint a picture of what life is like for poor Hindu women in Pakistan, based on dialogue with the participants in the different FGDs. Many of these thematic sections are complemented by closed questions that were presented to the FGDs. The data gathered from these questions are analysed within the appropriate thematic sections, helping to demonstrate trends as well as similarities and differences between the views of the women and men.

2.1 Participatory ranking

Minorities such as Hindus face challenges in Pakistani society. The situation facing Hindu women and girls is continuously getting worse. There are multiple threats of violence against women because of both their gender and their religion, and Hindu women are mostly targeted by the dominating majority in order to weaken minorities living in Pakistan. These marginalised women are particularly helpless as no mechanism is

designed to protect them. There are a number of challenges and threats against Hindu women and girls which were rated by the four FGDs, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Threats facing Hindu women and girls, ranked from most severe and widespread to least

No.	Threats	Group-H-G (14-17)	Group-W-1 (18-35)	Group-W-2 (36-60)	Group-H-M (18-60)	Total
1	Discrimination based on religious identity	09	12	10	11	42
2	Sexual harassment and bullying	09	11	10	10	40
3	Abductions of young girls and women	08	10	11	11	40
4	Forced conversions and forced marriages	09	10	10	11	40
5	Gender discrimination within community and society	10	11	12	05	38
6	Lack of access to education for girls	08	12	09	08	37
7	Restricted dress and mobility	08	10	11	06	35

Source: Author's own.

Participants across all four groups were prompted to describe the greatest threats facing poor Hindu women and then encouraged to rank these threats. The numbers in Table 2 reflect how many members of each FGD ranked each threat as number one. Some participants ranked more than one issue as the greatest threat. The numbers of participants from each FGD for each threat were then added up, revealing these seven threats in the order presented. As shown, discrimination based on religious identity came out as the number one threat for 42 participants (91 per cent), followed by three threats all ranked number one by 40 participants (87 per cent). These were sexual harassment and bullying, abduction of young women and girls, and forced conversions and forced marriages. Interestingly, if the men's votes are removed from this table, gender discrimination within their community and society would be ranked number one overall,

by 33 out of 34 women and girls (97 per cent). It is perhaps unsurprising that less than 50 per cent of the men voted for this as being the main threat given that it would have reflected their own role in maintaining gender discrimination within the Hindu community.

These themes are presented briefly below and are then expanded on throughout the thematic sections that follow, alongside other threats that were identified.

2.2 Discrimination based on religious identity

Religious identity is very challenging for Hindu women compared to women from the majority Islam. They are bullied and sexually harassed due to their dress and appearance when they go out in public, as well as at their workplace. Married Hindu women are restricted to wearing traditional Hindu clothing such as the Saari and Ghagra-Choli, along with Sindoor, Mangal-Sootar, and Bindiya.⁶ Both Sindoor and Bindiya are worn by married women on their heads, to symbolise their marital status. Mangal-Sootar also indicates marital status and is a necklace of black beads worn around the neck. This makes these women identifiable as Hindu in public. This theme intersects with almost all of the other threats identified in the following sections, including women's freedom of mobility, their job and employment opportunities, and their ability to worship freely, to name just a few.

A participant (woman aged 18–35) who works in a factory shared:

My male colleagues told me, 'Don't you feel unethical, wearing such a dress? Shame on you and your males who don't stop you wearing naked clothes. It's better to either change your way of dressing or leave this job.'

When using the phrase 'naked clothes', the men were referring to the fact that traditional Hindu women's clothing exposes the stomach and neck.

Their religious identity even comes into question when they want to rent a home in a decent locality. If the owners become aware of their religious identity they will almost certainly flatly refuse to rent the premises; and if any landlord is willing to rent their premises to them, they increase the rent.

Participant (man aged 18–60) said:

⁶ Saari – a garment worn by Hindu women, consisting of a long piece of cotton or silk wrapped around the body with one end draped over the head or over one shoulder; Ghagra-Choli – a form of skirt which is long, embroidered and pleated, and is secured at the waist or hips and leaves the lower back and midriff bare; Sindoor – a traditional vermilion red or orange-red coloured cosmetic powder usually worn by married Hindu women along the parting of their hair; Mangal-Sootar – a necklace made of black beads that a Hindu woman wears to indicate that she is married; Bindiya – a red spot worn on the forehead of a married Hindu woman.

Hindus also have to face trouble to find houses on rent, we have to search areas where Hindus are living in thick population. Others are denied to rent a house. Me and my sons were looking to rent a house in Kharadar area, where we were refused by at least three owners when they came to know that we are Hindus. They said we can't allow any Hindu to be a resident here. When I asked, 'Are we not human beings?', one of them said, 'You are human being but not a Muslim and we do not want to adjust to any non-Muslim here'.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) who works in a factory shared:

We are living in a very small two rooms house. I have six children and one of them is disabled, and my sister-in-law lives in another small room with her three kids. We decided to try to rent a home where at least we may settle better than this one, but when we visited places for rent many estate agents were looking at our dresses and said it is very hard to rent houses for us in this area. In another place one man suggested to me that me and my husband better search for houses near other Hindu community because 'here Hindus are not allowed to be residents'.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

We were looking for a rental house. When we visited a house to finalise everything and hand over token money to the relevant person, suddenly the owner asked, 'What is your caste?' We said: 'Actually we are Hindus.' The owner's facial expression changed and she gave back our token money with a excuse, saying, 'This flat is available only for Muslims, not for any of Hindus and Christians'.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

After the days when the incident at Babri Mosque took place in 1992, our community got highly afraid when few extremists started to attack temples in Karachi and other parts of the country. Most of us Hindus, who lived in colony of Hindu-Para compound surrounded by temples and other Hindus, were asked to shift our females to the homes of relatives who lived far away from the thick Hindu population, or where they may be safe from any attacks. We moved and stayed a few days at relatives' homes and villages. That period was very fearful for all Hindus living in Pakistan. We were safe and secure but were very afraid. Our men tried their level best to shift women and children to safe places until the situation improved. Well no such attacks were made towards our community's women, but that was a really dangerous time of living in fear. Even many years later we all were in fear and depression that any incident or negativity may take place with us.

2.3 Sexual harassment and bullying

Poor Hindu women experience harassment and violence in many different areas of their lives. One particularly prominent aspect is travelling on public transport: they face harassment from males sitting in the back portion of buses through offensive gestures, staring, and asking for their number in sign language. Even bus drivers and conductors harass Hindu women. Several women said they actively warn them and ask them to stop their behaviour and stop harassing them; however, many keep silent and do not react as this is routine and they regularly have to travel.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) said:

Usually we working women try to avoid the harassment that comes on a daily basis in vehicles and while walking on the roads. Even now we Hindu women carry additional chaddar [a big scarf] to cover our dresses. Once on the bus I was sitting very close to the driver's seat. When I was about to get off at my destination the driver squeezed my waist. When I angrily looked at him he pushed the bus brake really hard which made me fall over. I stood up and got down off the bus. From that day I always look at the bus driver to see if he is the same or another one, as I never want to face that driver again. I need to travel in the similar bus but I am afraid that he can get me in trouble and hit me.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) said:

As I was passing out to get down from the bus, the conductor pressed my stomach deliberately. When I countered, he said: 'Don't lie, otherwise I will beat you. You Hindu women are Beshram and Begarat [ashamed and dishonoured] by wearing exposing clothes showing tummy and neck.' He then threw my shopping bag onto the road.

Hindu women and girls, mostly in Sindh, are abducted, tortured, and threatened with forced conversion into Islam through forced marriage with Muslim men. When aggrieved families register the forced conversion, the kidnappers usually counter on behalf of the woman or girl, claiming that she had converted to Islam and married happily according to her own will. This is explored in much more detail in Section 2.2, particularly in the subsection 'Forced conversions of Hindu women and girls'.

2.4 Gender discrimination within community and society

Gender discrimination, just like discrimination on the basis of religious identity, is present in many of the following themes. Quotes from the women participants suggest that Hindu women are restricted in their mobility, dress, and ability to work by their communities, often with the justification that it is for their own protection. Gender discrimination also plays into the violence that Hindu women and girls face, including forced conversion through kidnapping and forced marriage, as this tactic is applied almost exclusively to young women and girls, not to Hindu boys.

2.5 Lack of access to education for girls

The author notes that, as an educated Hindu woman herself, education acts as a barrier of sorts for Hindu women and girls, protecting them from some of the discrimination they face in public. This is particularly because educated Hindu women who work in an office or public place are often able to negotiate wearing different clothing that is more like the clothing worn by women from the Muslim majority. Therefore, when girls are denied education within the Hindu community – which is often the case – it is not only their future job prospects and economic status that are affected, but their ability to ‘hide’ their religious markings, if they so desired, is also reduced.

2.6 Restricted dress and mobility

As discussed above, the traditional Hindu dress that the Hindu community expects their women and girls to wear increases the discrimination that these women face, as they become more identifiable in public. Their mobility is also restricted by members of their community. The interlinkages between threats facing poor Hindu women are a feature in the thematic subsections of Section 2.2, painting a complex picture of the interconnected inequalities facing poor Hindu women from all directions.

2.7 Discussion questions

Following the participatory ranking exercise, closed questions were asked to the FGDs on the different themes that had emerged. These themes are explored in more detail in the following subsections.

2.8 Dress and appearance of Hindu women

The participants in all the FGDs were asked three closed questions relating to the dress and appearance of Hindu women. Tables A, B, and C show the breakdown of answers across the FGDs for each question:

A. Does your community limit you/women in your community to wear only traditional Hindu clothing?

Table A				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	09	01	00	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	12	00	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	10	02	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	09	03	00	00

Hindu women face more disadvantages than Hindu men of the same class and women of the majority religion. Hindu women are expected to dress in a typically feminine way, carrying with them all the religious and cultural markers that symbolise both their religion and their marital status. This is shown in Table B, where there is general agreement across the FGDs that Hindu women are expected to wear traditional dress by their community compared to the men from the same community and women of the majority religion who are not required to show their marital status.

As mentioned in the Section 2.1, Hindu women, particularly those who are married, are restricted to wearing traditional clothing, which is symbolic and considered to be important by their communities. The women may or may not want to wear this traditional clothing. However, the elders, who are mostly men, compel the women to do so: because the traditional dress code represents their ancestors' customs and culture they believe people within the community would make fun of them and shame them if the women do not conform. Young Hindu women and girls also cannot wear modern clothes that young women and girls from the majority religion wear; if they ask their families to buy modern clothing, they are refused.

B. Do you/the Hindu women in your community wear traditional clothing out in public without any stress, like women from the majority religion?

Table B				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	08	02	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	00	12	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	01	11	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	04	00	00

C. Do you/the Hindu women in your community face any hurdles or objections from the wider society and culture of other faiths for dressing in a way that marks them out as Hindu women?

Table C				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	08	01	01	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	12	00	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	11	01	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	04	07	01	00

As Tables B and C show, the majority of Hindu men expressed that they felt women from their community could wear traditional clothing in public without experiencing any stress, hurdles, or objections from people of other faiths. This view was contrary to that of almost all of the women participating. This implies that Hindu men are not aware of the struggles that Hindu women face when it comes to wearing traditional clothing in public. Additionally, the fact that women and girls across all of the FGDs almost unanimously expressed that they experience stress, hurdles, and objections suggests that this is a serious issue that is a regular part of a Hindu woman's existence in Pakistan.

Women said that their dress is pointed out by the majority of people in a way that highlights their religious identity compared to the majority women in the society. The people from the majority religion make them feel uncomfortable by bullying and teasing their dress, mainly because certain body parts (neck and stomach) are visible in

traditional Hindu dress, which is not acceptable in traditional Muslim dress. Sometimes these Hindu women are taunted by suggestions that they should wear Shalwar-Qamez like Muslim women in the majority. This is particularly difficult for the Hindu women who do not wish to wear their traditional cultural clothing, as they will usually be disliked or considered to be of bad character by their own community. Whether they like their traditional clothing or not, Hindu women suffer in the wider society and their own community when it comes to their dress and appearance.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

My male colleagues told me, 'Don't you feel immoral and shameful wearing such a dress that shows your tummy and neck? Why do Hindu women wear abaya [veil] but your community and men don't stop you wearing this Besharmi [shameful] clothing? Dhoob-Maroo [go and die in water].'

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

My father-in-law came home and shared with my husband that people sitting outside called me and asked why the women of our family wear dresses like 'Gaghra Choli' and 'Saari' and was asking if we wear undergarments under the skirts or if we are Nagi [naked] inside. These words made all family members shocked and my husband told me, 'From now wear only Shalwar-Qamez as majority women used to wear'.

As shown above, the issue of discrimination based on dress and appearance intersects with that of violence and harassment, as well as that of restrictions to women's freedom. Consequently, more quotes describing the horrific violence and harassment facing poor Hindu women can be found in the subsections that follow.

The men who stated that Hindu women do not experience any stress, hurdles, or objections when wearing traditional dress in public said that dressing in a traditional way is a cultural practice of daily routine which must be followed. However, a small number of the men did agree that their women faced hurdles and harassment due to cultural dress. Both viewpoints are demonstrated in the following quotes.

Participant (man aged 18–60) said:

Nowadays females have much freedom. They are not restricted from going outside, they may go shopping, on outings and for other needs, but we prefer our women and girls to go with older women or with male family members which is only for their safety.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

I also allow my wife to wear general dress, 'Shalwar-Qamez', as majority women wear, but only for visiting where I feel it's necessary, like travelling out of the city or going to the hospital, where I feel people judge us by Hindu women's outfits that may create some harassing incident. To avoid those I prefer for my wife to wear the mainstream clothing.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

Hindu females are not forced to wear traditional dresses; however that is Hinduism's cultural practices from over the centuries. We follow our ancestors' ways, so we do not think our females are getting harassed due to our cultural dress. In our society males usually tease and bully all women and this is the reason that we Hindu men ask our females to not go out alone. They must be accompanied by male family members if there is an emergency that requires them to go outside.

2.9 Customs

Participants were asked about religious customs, and if there were ever situations where poor Hindu women had to adopt or observe customs that were not part of their own religion. As Table D shows, there was almost complete agreement that poor Hindu women do have to observe religious customs when out in public that are not part of their own religion. This is explored in more detail below.

D. When out in public, are there any religious customs that poor Hindu women have to observe that are not a part of their religion?

Table D				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	09	01	00	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	10	02	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	12	00	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	12	00	00	00

There are many customs practised among majority people, like Namaz, Azan, Ramadan, Ashoora, women dressing in abayas, veils, etc., which are very common. However, it is the Ramadan activities that mostly affect religious minorities living in Pakistan.

Throughout this month of fasting, people belonging to religious minorities also cannot eat meals and drink water in public during the daytime. People from religious minorities, including children in school, have to follow the same customs. The people from the religious majority get angry and make objections if anyone is caught eating or drinking in public. They sometimes angrily call ‘*Kafar*’ – a highly derogatory term used against non-Muslims – if they see minority people hiding their eating and drinking.

During prayer calls (*Azan*) from mosques, Hindus keep silent in respect, turn off music, and turn down their TV volume, but Hindus are not reciprocated in the same way for their religious customs and festivals. For example, during Hindu festivals like Diwali, the majority people raise objections against celebrations with firecrackers, and a few people make offensive gestures upon seeing Hindus wearing the customary *Tilak* and *Malaa* (Paternoster). *Tilak* is a religious sign or small tattoo painted on the foreheads of men and women during prayers in the temple and *Malaa* is a string of beads used to count during the recitation of prayers.

One participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

During travelling in public bus with family my younger sister drank water in the bus. The driver got angry and made her ashamed for doing so in the month of Ramadan while majority are fasting.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

My cousin was asked by her classmate in school to change her seat [where she used to sit regularly] saying, ‘please, I fast and do not want to sit with a Hindu girl during the holy Month of Ramadan’. Even the teacher supported the classmate and ignored my cousin’s complaint.

2.10 Women’s freedom of mobility

Participants were asked four questions related to Hindu women’s freedom of mobility.

E. Do your family or community members restrict your/the women in your community’s mobility?

Table E				
Groups	Yes	No	Don’t know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	08	02	00	00

Group-W-1 (18–35)	07	05	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	10	02	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	06	06	00	00

F. Do the community do this for reasons of your/the women in your community's protection?

Table F				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	05	02	02	01
Group-W-1 (18–35)	06	04	02	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	04	07	00	01
Group-H-M (18–60)	10	02	00	00

G. Does your community want you/the women in your community to associate with other religious groups?

Table G				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	08	02	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	00	12	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	01	10	00	01
Group-H-M (18–60)	03	07	02	00

E. Do you think stopping women's mobility is fine?

Table H				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	10	00	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	02	10	00	00

Group-W-2 (36–60)	00	12	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	02	00	02

Table E shows that 74 per cent of women and girls felt their mobility was restricted, compared to 50 per cent of men. However, Table F shows us that despite less men believing that they or others in their community restrict the women in their community, 83 per cent of men agreed that were this restriction to happen it would be to protect women. Additionally, Table H shows that 67 per cent of men felt that restricting women’s mobility is acceptable.

These views are not shared by Hindu women. While Table F shows us that the majority of women and girls aged 14–35 felt that the restriction on their mobility was for their protection, 58 per cent of women aged 36–60 did not agree. Women also felt more strongly than men that their community did not want them associating with other religious groups (see Table G). Additionally, 94 per cent of women felt that restricting women’s mobility was not OK. Clearly, women’s mobility is an immense issue that affects poor Hindu women in a way that the men in their community either do not want to accept (or discuss) or are simply not aware of.

Social movement of poor Hindu women living in the urban and rural areas of Sindh province is mostly restricted to the domestic boundaries of the home. The dominance of sociocultural traditions has badly affected the freedom of women’s mobility. Hindu women are allowed to visit relatives in surrounding areas, but cannot go outside without permission from the men in their community or travel out of the city without a man. This is considered to be for the security and protection of the women.

Even working Hindu women face harassment on a daily basis. Family members do not pay heed to the women’s complaints about their experiences, instead instructing females to cover their heads to protect themselves. Females are considered to hold the community’s honour and if something happened to them it would make the men in their community ashamed. Communities do not want females to associate with other religious groups in fear of women and girls being exposed to exploitation, abduction and forced conversion, of which there have been frequent cases for decades in Sindh province. Parents also feel bound to the communities’ beliefs and attitudes, including the community gossip if girls go out alone. However, restricting women and girls’ mobility is not fine; it just restricts their abilities and mental growth.

More interestingly, the female participants assumed that life would be more easy and free if they were born as boys instead of girls. They felt that at least they would be able to enjoy freedom and a comfortable life as boys in their communities appear to.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

My sister was willing to get education four or five years ago. But suddenly few kidnapping incidents of Hindu girls took place that made my parents apprehensive. My sister had her studies discontinued after her 8th standard and I am only studying in college under my parents' supervision. They pick me up from college and drop me off.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

There is a temple very close to my home, within walking distance, where I and my family go for Puja and Arti [worship] occasionally. I am very devoted to Lord Krishana and wish to go regularly, but whenever they cannot take me I asked if they could let me go with my brother. My parents refused strictly, saying community will mind and gossip about my character. Well, being a girl, I cannot even go to Manidir [temple] on my own.

All of the female participants believe that freedom of mobility is their right but tradition makes it taboo for them. They wish to live the freedom that men have; the freedom to easily go out and celebrate with friends, colleagues, and other members of communities. In fact, because of restrictions on their mobility, many females cannot work outside the home after marriage, no matter how skilled and well educated they are.

Two participants (women aged 36–60), named Savita (ex-nurse) and Banu (ex-schoolteacher), gave examples to demonstrate their inability to work. They were both used to working after marriage; however, their husbands and in-laws were unhappy with their jobs and therefore, they had to stop working. Generally, Hindu women's in-laws and husbands do not like them to work outside of the house, no matter how skilled they are or how much the family is suffering financially, as it would bring dishonour onto the family and bring shame onto the husband in particular.

However, Savita said:

I have started job again to meet the needs and education of my children, as economically we are very broken. But my husband taunts and keeps making conflict which really disturbs my domestic life.

Banu said:

I had to stop teaching and was asked to utilise my skills as tuition teacher at home, then at school, and then going out. However, my miscarriage was claimed to be because I had an outdoor job.

As explored above, men overwhelmingly responded that women's mobility is not restricted. Instead they said that women over the age of 18 in their communities can go out easily, while young women can go out with family members. The men claimed that there are some traditions that the entire community should follow for women's own safety, and out of respect. Women are restricted due to communities' norms. They seek permission from husbands and elders even when they go out to meet their parents along with their husband or any other family member. Working women can only go to work with other females from the community (who also work there), but only for work and any other market activity. For general travelling, especially far from the surrounding area, all Hindu women have to move around with men. The community, and men particularly, claim they are conscious to protect females as many violent cases take place against women in the society in which they live.

Participant (man aged 18–60) expressed:

Yes, mobility is an issue for our community's women. It's all about traditions and the mentality of the men, even many educated males, liberal males, and others who work for community service and speak out about the rights of minorities. All of these men control women's freedom, and do not support owning women's mobility as they practise themselves.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

Hindu women and especially Hindu girls now are getting education. They are allowed to go outside, but we prefer them to go with older women or with the male of the family. This is because we hear about abduction, conversion of religion and about many other incidents with females. So due to our women's and girls' protection we restrict them to not go alone.

Participant (man aged 18–60) stated:

Our Hindu community is very backwards in education and awareness, especially for girls' education. Our community elders either they are men or women who think women should only stay at home, look after their family and do home chores. These elders do not like women to go out, even in marriage ceremony, except with the closest relatives. Our community fears that women's mobility can cause trouble within the family and affect men's honour in the society. If our women will be going out, they will be communicating with unknown people and other activities that will bring disrespect (Badnami) onto the family.

2.11 Job and employment

In urban areas, poor Hindu women are mainly employed in manual jobs as sanitary workers, housemaids, home-based workers, and labour workers in factories. In rural areas, Hindu women handle small agricultural tasks including harvesting and picking cotton and other crops. However, Hindu women face many difficulties to get a job, even when looking for odd jobs. There is a divergence between the opportunities offered to women of minority communities and Muslim women. For example, when women apply for odd jobs such as a guard who checks females' bags in shopping malls and in offices, they are often instead assigned cleaning jobs in offices and washrooms. Even those qualified to Primary or up to 7th/8th standard are engaged in similar jobs. They are not considered for the jobs they are qualified for. Social and religious factors have further restricted women from entering the job market, even though with increased economic pressures women from all classes are trying to enter the workforce.

Women chose good jobs, as their identity and appearance create hurdles. They face discrimination when they apply for jobs and are mostly offered menial work of cleaning or washing the bathroom. The same happens with poor Hindu men. Some believe that educated Hindu people face even more trouble than those who are uneducated, as most of them cannot get the jobs they are qualified to do in the private sector or in government departments. Despite there being a 5 per cent quota for minorities, 'for the religious minorities' members lucky enough to land government jobs, the only positions available at dozens of departments for them are of sanitation workers' (Ali 2012). Even with a strong education, Hindu men and women are relegated to menial work while 'uneducated Muslim are appointed as clerks' (*ibid.*).

Working women are often denied annual leave for religious festivals. They are discriminated against due to their religious identity by colleagues, with some co-workers making degrading comments about their religion and refusing to eat with them. Their religion is always looked down upon and females are often encouraged to convert to Islam by their workmates. People often make jokes about their religious practices and this depresses them.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

Usually people in our surrounding area where we sell our goods, they ask us, 'Why you do not convert to Islam? Your men send you to do such odd jobs on the roadside, but if you were Muslim and would marry a Muslim man, he would meet every need you have and would not let you do labour work. You would be safe and secure with a good life, even we can support you.'

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

My female colleague at school where I was a teacher asked me to convert. She told me, 'Your religion has no respect of women and in our religion women has much respect. Our people would admire you and support you if you take such a step.'

Participant (girl aged 14–17) stated:

My schoolteacher refused me for half day off, and said, 'If you have occasion then why did you come to school? I think you should be Muslim, at least then you would get whole holidays off, not partially. You are a very good student, you must think about it.'

Participant (girl aged 14–17) stated:

Usually Muslim boys pass comments and make fun of our religion, as we follow idols and many Gods and Goddesses, as well as animal-faced Gods. They hurt us and make us depressed through bullying and teasing, saying these words about our religion. Sometimes they ask Hindu girls to convert and propose marriage. My cousin discontinued her education when a person daily started to chase her after college. One day he stopped her on the way and asked, 'I daily follow you which you know. Well I like you a lot and I know that you are Hindu, I want to marry you. Let's get you converted. If you reject me I will kidnap you.' My cousin asked to think about it and from the next day she left college due to fear.

Hindu women of different sub-communities (Scheduled Castes) mostly work as housemaids in houses, as sweepers, sanitary workers in government and the private sector, in factories as labourers, as bangle (an ornament/wristlet) makers and dried fruit sellers. Many work at home, cutting leather gloves, sewing clothes, etc. and the educated Hindu women are employed as teachers. Other skilled women work either in beauty parlours or at home as beauticians. These are the only jobs available to them.

The Hindu men are also discriminated against in the workplace: they do not get promotions, they are refused leave for their festivals, and both uneducated males and females are usually the ones hired for odd jobs such as cleaning and sweeping. However, at work Hindu women face more harassment than men, especially about their clothing, and are paid less compared to men for the same jobs.

Participant Mr Mohan (man aged 18–60) said:

The Constitution of Pakistan has a job quota of 5 per cent for religious minorities, to empower us within the society. Unfortunately, only the Sindh Health Department has followed it, which is admirable, but other

departments are failing to fulfill the constitutional implementation. It is the government's responsibility to secure minorities rights.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

One of my friends was working as a travelling agent. He went on leave for two weeks, for his sister's wedding ceremony, and when he got back to his job he was informed to be terminated for taking two additional days off.

Participant (woman aged 36–60), who works as a housemaid, shared:

Due to my husband's sudden sickness, I could not manage to go to work for a week, and was not able to inform my begum-sahiba [female-employer] as we have no cell phone. When I go back I was paid half salary due to my time off, and after one week I was terminated for taking one more day off.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) stated:

Here in our country women who go for jobs do not get paid an equal salary for the same jobs as men do. Even Hindu men get good salaries and wages while women are paid 10 to 20 per cent less than men. I am working as sweeper where I am paid less wages than my husband, even though he is also doing same work. I asked my female relative who are working similarly and they also shared the same situation, even though women work harder and with dedication.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) said:

I sew clothes for which I am paid 400 to 500 rupees for one dress while my male cousin earns 700 to 1,000 rupees as he works from shop and I work from home. People take advantage of females' compulsion and needs, as females cannot open shops in markets. That's why people find females who sew clothes from home and charge less even though I work harder, look after the home, do home chores and sew clothes late into the night when I get free from my house chores.

2.12 Access to education for Hindu girls and women

Education is a right for women; it can develop their capabilities to bring social change and competitive socioeconomic empowerment. Hindu women and girls are extremely restricted in education, especially Scheduled Caste Hindu women who are often illiterate compared to the males in their community and women of other groups. They face discriminatory attitudes within their communities and in educational institutions due to both gender and religious identity. An Asian Human Rights Commission report indicated that 87 per cent of Scheduled Caste Hindu women are illiterate compared to 63.5 per

cent of males in their community. The average national illiteracy rate among Pakistani women is 58 per cent (Thibaud 2010).

Poor marginalised Hindu communities prefer not to support education for their women and girls. As already explored, Hindu girls are restricted in so many ways and are hardly allowed to access education, as their culture and traditions believe that girls and women only have to be concerned with marriage and looking after the home and children. Therefore, education has no use for them. This is a clear demonstration of the gender discrimination that takes place within the Hindu community, favouring boys for education over girls and placing girls' value purely in the domestic realm. While this happens to all Hindu women, it is more likely to take place with the poor Hindu communities.

Religious discrimination is very common with schoolgoing children as they are often asked to convert to Islam. This experience happens to both male and female students, and many of the participants themselves had experienced it. A few of the participants explained how they do not send their teenage girls to school as they fear incidents of harassment, kidnapping, and conversion. Children are also harmed physically and bullied, experiencing nasty chants from other children such as, 'Hindu, Hindu'. The Hindu children have to study Islamiyat (a subject related to the majority religion) as a compulsory subject, even though Hindu children cannot understand the Arabic language. The subject of ethics would be a more appropriate alternative to them; however, it is optional and only available to those in 10th standard for which no teacher is available. Muslim students receive bonus grade points for memorising the Holy Qur'an, but there are no opportunities for extra academic credit available for religious minority students.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

My children were not allowed to sit on the stage during school functions, therefore I changed their school. Yet religious discrimination in government school is more common than in private schools.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

In my school different groups were selected for a class activity and the best performers were selected to lead the groups in the task. I was selected as group leader, meeting the criteria, but the very next day my teacher excused me saying the group leader is supposed to be Muslim. My teacher said that my identity could raise some objections and risk the progress of all group members. They said that I should either change my name so I could keep the leading position or withdraw. I denied to change my name and I had to withdraw.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared her experience of harsh behaviour by her teacher during an Islamic subject class:

The teacher said to me, 'wearing burqa and abaya [veil] is not only for Muslim women but it's also necessary for you Hindu girls as well.' When I explained that we Hindus do not wear veil, and it is not mentioned in holy book of Geeta, the teacher got angry. Later I was marked very low in exams even though I am good at my studies and always make A-grade, even in Islamiat subject. I have been studying since the nursery class and I always get good marks. How could I get very low marks after that incident?

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared how her relative's son went for coaching classes. The teacher started to teach him the 'Holy Book, Qur'an'. Knowing this, his parents stopped sending him for classes rather than making a complaint to the tutor.

2.13 Leisure time

Women cannot have their own special leisure time or free time for themselves. After marriage, life becomes what is called a 'twenty hours' job. During holidays and often the weekend this increases even more, as their household tasks are doubled. For example, after routine duties, women have to cook the food, sweep, wash dishes and clothes, along with many other home chores. She has to look after children and other family members, and on holidays and special occasions women's work increases still more as almost all male members stay at home. The men being at home puts more pressure on the women as the men need food and tea served from time to time, and occasionally there are very busy periods of cooking, cleaning, and attending to guests. Children also need more attention during the holidays. Aside from these household tasks, women are only occasionally allowed to visit temples, or meet relatives or attend marriage ceremonies. Sometimes the women get to relax for a couple of hours in the evening, but it is very rare. Young women and girls are allowed to spend their time studying, watching TV, and on holidays occasionally they can visit temples or relatives' homes, as per their parents' planning, whereas their brothers are allowed to go out with their friends, play football, cricket, and other sports, and sometimes picnic with their friends.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

We women have to get up very early on important Hindu days. We must get everything prepared for prayers, clean everything, get the children ready, iron clothes, and cook multiples dishes in large quantities. We have to attend to guests, serve them, wash pots again and again until late at night, after which we have to again clean the house. We get to bed late and have only short

hours of sleeping. After the end of the holidays or occasion we have to go back to our routine with managing our outdoor job. These holiday activities make us more tired than our daily routine.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

We women enjoy the changes to our routine work that events like Holi, Dewali, and other traditional events bring, but I personally wish that I may go outside to picnic or travel or visit parents or other relatives. That looks like only a dream to me as during these occasions and celebrations women are burdened with more and more tasks. I consider it a triple job to do home chores, outdoor job, and additional activities with lots of work cooking, cleaning, washing, serving, and looking after the guests. Only elders, males and children enjoy events and occasions, we women just work, work, and work.

2.14 Transportation

While travelling in rickshaws and buses, women face sexual harassment and religious discrimination. Hindu women waiting at bus stops are approached by men asking for their mobile phone numbers or for them to go with them. They are touched as they leave the bus and sometimes women from the majority religion refuse to share a seat beside them. People also make objections if Hindu women are seen to be reciting the Hindu prayer, Krishana-Mala (Paternoster), which is often noticeable because prayer beads are used.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

I and my two neighbours were going to the temple in the evening. One of my neighbours is very dedicated to God Shree Krishana so she was continuously reciting a prayer while holding a Malaa (Paternoster) in her hand. A lady from the majority sitting beside us asked my neighbour, 'What are you doing, you Hindu woman, getting me Napaak [Untidy]? I am in ablution. Go away, sit on another seat, and do whatever you are doing, but leave this seat.' She spoke harshly and when we objected to the lady the bus conductor also instructed us, 'If she has a problem better change the seat and keep calm.'

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

I was travelling in the bus to my home. One seat was empty beside me. One lady from the mainstream religion got on the bus, she saw me and kept on

standing. I asked her to sit and she ignored me. I thought she could not hear me so I touched her to grab her attention toward me, so I may ask her to sit. She got angry that I touched her and said: 'What's your problem why did you touch me? I don't have to sit with you. I am not blind, I can see the empty seat.' And she went away whispering in an angry mood. I felt very embarrassed and could not say anything.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

During travelling in auto-rickshaw with my kids to the Sawami-Narain temple, wearing cultural dress along with Sindoor, Bindiya, etc., the driver started gazing at me in his mirrors again and again. When I angrily reacted and asked him to stop gazing at me, he started harassing me verbally, saying, 'It's unbelievable, Hindu women can be so beautiful. Will you marry me? I already have three wives and all are living very happily, you can be my fourth wife and I will keep you more happy than the others.' This made me more insecure and I shouted to stop Rickshaw and got off it.

When Hindu women travel far out of the city towards other districts and stop at a *dabba* (small restaurant), they are often asked to use their own cups/glasses for buying tea. While this is a problem experienced by Hindus of all classes, it is more commonly experienced by poor Hindus who are more distinguishable by their clothing. Educated Hindu women often wear clothing closer to that of the women from the Muslim majority, and therefore it is not always obvious that they are Hindu. However, this is a vulnerability that poor Hindu women cannot avoid.

2.15 Women expected to conform to particular roles, including within employment

Participants were asked if there were particular roles, including in employment, to which Hindu women were expected to conform. Table I shows that the majority of participants felt that there were.

I. Are there particular roles within your context that women from your religious background are expected to conform to, including certain forms of employment?

Table I				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	08	00	02	00

Group-W-1 (18–35)	11	01	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	10	02	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	03	01	00

Women are frequently targeted for their gender, whether they belong to the majority or minority. However, women from religious minorities have it even harder; their expected roles are constructed as a combination of traditional expectations and social values. Both working women and those who are housewives are expected to perform perfectly, meeting all traditional and cultural norms. They must be soft and polite, emotional, accommodating, nurturing towards men, look after children, cook, carry out home chores, and be responsible for maintaining the family and community honour. Outside the home, communal life generally rotates around the activities of men. Working women are responsible for all household work alongside their jobs. Many do piecework for very low wages in their homes, or are engaged in some form of salaried work in the labour force. Their earnings are generally recorded as part of the family income.

Hindu women of different sub-communities are expected to fulfil certain jobs which traditionally their communities have been following from elders for decades, like women in the Hindu Marwari Community. Various Hindu communities are found in Pakistan. They speak a variety of languages such as Sindhi, Aer, Dhatki, Gera, Goaria, Jandavra, Kabutra, Loarki, Marwari, and Gujrati. There are many castes of Hinduism living in Pakistan – for instance, Bheel, Kohli, and Meghwar – and each community has their own language, culture, and tradition which are distinct from the other Hindu communities. They also have different professional backgrounds as per their demographical and geographical ways of living. In Pakistan, Hindu Scheduled Castes number around 40. The Marwari Community who participated in this study belong to a very poor class. They speak the Marwari language and most of their ancestors made their living by selling dried fruits, which they understand well. They know how to work buying and selling the dried fruit, and that is why most of the women from this community do this job.

Selling dried fruits on the roadsides of different public and market areas is therefore an ancestral occupation and the women cannot choose other jobs. A benefit of this work is that many of the women from the community work together and are therefore less restricted in their mobility when they are in groups. A negative aspect of following the work of their ancestors is that women are not allowed to change jobs or gain an education. If they try to change jobs they are accused of disturbing domestic and married life throughout the community.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) expressed:

I wanted to study but there was no system of girls' education. My mother sent me to school up to third standard, then discontinued my school and got me married when I was 17. Now I am thinking if I was educated maybe I would be able to do a job of teaching or any other, but I know if I tried I would be blamed as disobedient by my family, community, and community's elders. They would accuse me of disturbing domestic and married life of our community's women. We women cannot even go for any other odd job.

The participants who were not part of the Marwari Community also had specific roles to conform to as they belonged to different sub-communities. They shared that their working women mostly work as maids for cleaning, washing, and sweeping houses in different areas of Karachi city. In other sub-communities, almost all the men and women are employed as sweepers in government and private sectors, while some women mostly labour in factories, carrying out the tasks of packing and cutting. Some work from home cutting leather pieces, sewing gloves, packing, and other odd jobs.

Young Hindu women are allowed to work as a beautician or a tutor, for example; jobs that require no need to go outdoors and can be done from home. In the case of girls who are highly educated, they can work only as a teacher in schools within the surrounding residential area.

2.16 Worship and religious practices

Participants were asked three questions about the extent to which poor Hindu women are able to access religious worship and perform religious practices.

J. Can you/women from your community easily go to places of worship?

Table J				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	07	05	00	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	10	02	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	09	03	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	10	02	00	00

K. Can you/women from your community easily perform prayer activities compared to men of your community?

Table K				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	05	03	02	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	06	06	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	04	07	00	01
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	03	00	01

L. Can you/the women in your community easily perform prayer activities compared to women of the majority religion?

Table L				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	03	06	01	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	03	09	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	01	10	00	01
Group-H-M (18–60)	04	08	00	00

As shown in Table J, the majority of women aged 18–60 and the men felt that Hindu women can freely perform their religious rituals in their homes and visit the temples of their compounds to worship. Women worship more than men; however, a woman cannot go to any of the main temples outside of their area without being accompanied by a man or a family member. Some older women are permitted to go by themselves. However, 42 per cent of girls felt that they were not able to worship freely, which reflects the fact that young women and girls are restricted. These young women and girls are restricted by their own community due to fears of abduction and forced conversion. Young women and girls can only visit temples and worship if they are accompanied by a Hindu adult, usually a man.

In Hindu communities, people live in compounds with other Hindus. Each house has a very small *thapna* (temple), and often there is also a small temple for combined prayers in the locality. However, this communal temple can make them vulnerable to attacks. Sometimes ancient Hindu residential areas are attacked and their temples are

destroyed. These attacks may be carried out by religious extremists, although sometimes they are the work of builders. For example, in August 2020, 'a pre-Partition Hindu temple was allegedly demolished by a builder' despite the fact that the builder had guaranteed that he would not destroy it. Residents believe he took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic when people were not visiting the temple (Mandhro 2020).

As shown in Table L, 72 per cent of participants across all FGDs felt that poor Hindu women did not have the same freedom to perform prayer activities as Muslim women. The majority of Muslim women can freely celebrate their own religious activities, like Ramadan (Saheri, Iftari), Majlis, Naat-Khuawani, preaching, and Holy-Book recitation in public places. However, Hindu women can perform the equivalent only in their homes and within the compound temple premises. Muslim women are able to access prayer spaces within various public areas – such as shopping malls, hospitals, and their workplaces – whereas these spaces are not provided for Hindu women. On specific religious occasions and prayers when Hindu females wear more customary dress than they would in their day-to-day lives – for example, by applying *Tilak* and *Teeka* (religious symbols on forehead) – they are mocked even more by the majority people.

Table K shows a split in views about the extent to which poor Hindu women can perform prayer activities as easily as Hindu men. Generally, the younger the women, the more they felt they were as able as Hindu men to freely practise prayers. This is interesting as girls and young women tend to be more restricted in their ability to access worship places. However, more men may have agreed that women can practise as easily as them because they also face restrictions. Hindu men also face troubles throughout religious activities, like being stopped from bathing before sunset in the sea or river, while the majority males offer their prayers in mosques safely before sunset.

Participant (woman aged 36–60), shared that Hindu males also face trouble when, during festivals, they go to offer religious rituals:

I live in compound where there is a small Hanuman temple. A Hindu man went there to worship, and he was teased by men from the religious majority living in the surrounding area. When he countered their teasing he was beaten and forced to leave.

2.17 Forced conversions of Hindu women and girls

Participants were asked three questions related to the forced conversion of Hindu women. The first of these was simply to better understand if the Hindu community has experienced

cases of forced conversion. As shown in Table M, the answer across all FGDs was overwhelmingly 'yes'.

M. Have there been cases of forced conversion?

Table M				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14-17)	10	00	00	00
Group-W-1 (18-35)	09	01	02	00
Group-W-2 (36-60)	11	01	00	00
Group-H-M (18-60)	12	00	00	00

While Pakistan is a democratic state, Hindu women face inequality on the basis of both gender and religion. Pakistan's constitution acknowledges equality between males and females: Article 25 states that 'There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex'. Despite all women in Pakistan being vulnerable to gender-based discrimination, the violence that women from minorities face is gender and religious discrimination combined. The Hindu women and girls in Sindh are harassed physically and mentally, largely abused domestically, mistreated generally, and many have been kidnapped, raped, and pushed to forcibly convert to Islam, often through forced marriages. The Pakistani constitution is itself very discriminating. It states that if a person converts to another religion from Islam, he or she is considered a blasphemer; however, minorities are permitted to be converted into Islam. The state does not support that women vulnerable to abduction do not remain without protection, and that police officers who refuse to file a First Information Report (FIR, which should be filed as soon as a crime is alleged to have been committed) in cases of rape and abduction involving religious minorities be sanctioned, for the protection of Hindu women.

In 2016, the Government of Sindh passed 'The Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill' in order to overcome forced religious conversions. The Bill was proposed in 2015 by Mr Nand Kumar Goklani, the parliamentarian of Sindh from the political party Pakistan Muslim League, and would have set the precedent of a five-year punishment for perpetrators and three years for the facilitators of such conversions (Mugheri 2016). Mr Goklani presented the Bill in response to the high rate of forced conversions of young Hindu women living in Sindh province; however, soon after it was passed:

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Sirajul Haq held a meeting with PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari and conveyed the grievances of religious parties and the Council of Islamic Ideology. Soon after, the PPP leadership conveyed a message through the chief minister (CM) to the then Sindh Governor Justice (Retd) Saeeduzaman Siddiqui, asking him not to ratify the bill (*Global Village Space* 2019).

Consequently, Governor Saeeduzaman Siddiqui challenged various clauses within the Bill, including the idea that non-Muslim girls were too young to make a decision about converting to Islam. The Bill was presented to parliament again in 2019, having had all of the clauses that raised objections in 2016 eliminated; however, the Bill was dismissed after it was put to the vote (*ibid.*). Consequently, there is no law in place to protect women and girls from religious minorities against forced conversions.

Being a minority within a minority puts Hindu women in a very vulnerable position. Hindu females have always been targeted by dominating men from the religious majority. Hindus live in high-density communities in Sindh province and the greatest issue of concern to them is forced conversions and marriages of Hindu women and young girls to Muslim men. It is common for Hindu females to be abducted from their homes, tortured, threatened, and forced to convert to Islam. They are then married off to Muslim men who declare that the conversion and marriage were carried out with the girl's own willingness. Hindu men are not forcibly converted; this is a threat that only Hindu women are confronted with, and it leads to further victimisation. Ackerman (2018) wrote an extensive report on behalf of the Commonwealth Institute for Freedom of Religion and Belief (CIFoRB), outlining the forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu girls in Sindh province. He describes how 'in most cases the victim is abducted and is then subjugated to sustained emotional and physical abuse often involving threats of violence towards their loved ones' (*ibid.*: 1). Ackerman also explains how perpetrators can carry out the abductions and subsequent forced conversions with relative impunity, as the police tend to turn a blind eye. Poor Hindu girls are at particular risk of abduction and forced conversion because of the vulnerable position their jobs put them in. Many poor Hindus are members of the Dalit caste and work as bonded labourers, leaving their daughters open to the whims of the landlord their parents are bonded to (*ibid.*).

During the FGD, the men seemed helpless to the harsh reality of forced conversion, which has been going on for decades. In recent years, forced conversions of minority girls and women to Islam has risen to an unprecedented level. The Hindu women and girls are no longer safe: these threats keep the community worried, and therefore the men restrict girls from interacting with people from the majority. The men refuse to allow the young

women in their community to access higher education. Sometimes men are asked for their teenage daughter to be converted as Muslim men believe this will earn them a place in Heaven; therefore, cases of the abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of Hindu girls have become common in Sindh.

The cases that get highlighted in the media and on social media become a rallying cry for activists and civil society, who raise their voices for justice. However, many cases go unheard and unreported, especially in rural areas and villages in districts like Mirpurkhas, Tharparkar, and Umerkot in Sindh. These areas are densely populated by the Hindu population and many villages have no access to electricity, phones, and the internet. They are not connected to the city areas. Here, violence against women goes unreported, including forced conversions of young Hindu women and girls. Usually the conversions are misrepresented as love and affection of the girls towards Muslim men, but of course the communities challenge this by asking why a girl would convert if she was in love, and why would she get married when she is only 13 or 14 years old? Families of victims keep shouting, crying, begging for justice, and asking the government to get their daughters back, but nothing happens. Even many activists raise their voices in support of victims' families and the media highlights this issue, but after a few weeks or months there is silence and the matter remains unresolved.

Mr Lal, 50-year-old father of Reena and Raveena, who were converted and then married to Muslim men in the Ghotki district of Sindh, asked for mercy and kept crying for his daughters. His video went viral on every channel in Sindh, in which he was helplessly slapping himself while crying outside the Ghotki police station, asking the police to do something to recover his daughters (*OpIndia* 2019). Reportedly over 2,000 Hindu men and women from nearby villages and towns joined him in demanding justice for Reena and Raveena, blocking the highway for three consecutive days to bring it to the attention of the Prime Minister of Pakistan. But finally, the girls appeared and stated they had converted themselves. This happens in almost all cases.

In most cases, it has been observed that the victim's family files a FIR against the abduction of their young woman or girl, at the local police station. This usually takes time, and meanwhile, police face pressure from a source close to the kidnappers. They then file a counter FIR on behalf of the girl, condemning the girl's family for harassing an intentional marriage and conversion and going against the girl's will. In most cases the girl remains in the custody of the kidnapper while the judicial proceeding is carried out, based on the girl's statement that she knowingly converted and willingly married. Once the girl is in the custody of the abductor she may be subjected to rape and sexual violence. Later on, the girl's family may find out that they have been forced into

prostitution, sold to another man, and/or become a victim of human trafficking. The parents cannot communicate with their daughter before or during the court proceedings, so it is no surprise that the families always seem helpless. Men just ask for mercy from the people and institutions for justice to get their females back to them.

N. Do men and women both face the same issue of forced conversion and forced marriage?

Table N				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	03	05	02	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	06	05	00	01
Group-W-2 (36–60)	05	07	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	06	06	00	00

Despite the anecdotal evidence given in the discussions (see quotes below) that Hindu women experience more trouble than their men when it comes to forced conversion, only 50 per cent of participants across the FGDs felt that Hindu men do not face the same issues around forced conversion as Hindu women. Despite this, anecdotes tell us that Muslim men pursue Hindu females through bullying, harassment, and marriage proposals, sometimes offering money to women working outside the home. If a woman denies friendship to the man, he will often get angry and become threatening. Women have to ignore these men's intolerable behaviour in order to continue their everyday tasks. Muslim men also try to bribe Hindu females to convert to their religion by offering them a luxurious life. It is also observed that the majority of Muslim men who marry Hindu girls leave them within a few months or sell them to other people.

When Hindu females suddenly go missing, the other community members tend to pass judgement on the family, suggesting that the girl or young woman chose to run away with the Muslim man. They accuse her of being of 'bad character'. Participants shared that after months of a female being missing, sometimes the community came to know about the dead bodies of missing females in hospitals. The communities mostly refused to accept the bodies belonged to them in order to try and preserve the community's honour. In earlier decades, such cases were not discussed openly by Hindu people, or reported to the police, as the family (and consequently, the wider community) dreaded any clash with the majority people.

Participant Aami (woman aged 36–60) sobbingly expressed:

I am also a mother of victim girl, my 15 years old daughter Vidya, studied in grade seven, has been missing since May 20th 2019. She went to school and never came back. It's going to be a year but police and government could not recover her. We don't know where is she, whether she is alive or not. Life has become hell, nobody can feel mine and my family's sadness.

Aami's situation was reported in the Pakistani media (*The International News* 2019). The Hindu community believes that Vidya has been kidnapped, and in response held a protest in July 2019 against forced conversions, calling on the government to protect their women and girls. The protests also included members of the Christian and Sikh communities in a moment of solidarity against the abductions of minority women and girls (*ibid.*). Law enforcement agencies were accused of failing to take the necessary action to find Vidya in the month and a half since she went missing.

O. In such cases, how does your community react towards women?

Table O				
Groups	Harshly	By restricting them	With more care	By being more protective
Group-H-G (14–17)	02	06	00	02
Group-W-1 (18–35)	01	08	00	03
Group-W-2 (36–60)	02	08	00	02
Group-H-M (18–60)	00	03	04	05

As a result of the occurrence of forced conversions, participants were asked how the community acts towards poor Hindu women and girls – whether the community reaction is generally harsh, comes in the form of restrictions, is caring, and the interest it has in the protection of girls and women. The answers are not necessarily mutually exclusive (for example, the community could act harshly with the intention of protecting the girls and women); however, this data helps to give a general sense of how the community has been changed by the occurrence of forced conversions. Sadly, only 9 per cent of participants (all men) felt that the community acted with more care. Instead, 54 per cent of participants felt the community acted by restricting women and girls. This was the majority answer for women of all ages.

An example of the situations that have led to this community response is the fact that Hindu female students have been solicited to convert to Islam by their Muslim teachers, colleagues, and classmates, as converting a non-Muslim to Islam is seen as a good deed. Due to such incidents, parents and community members behave more strictly towards their girls and keep an eye on them during every outdoor activity. Hindu parents trust their daughters, but their fear makes their girls depressed and sad.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

Recently, in my community, two cases occurred in rural area of Sindh. The girls were kidnapped, converted forcibly and then married with Muslim men. Their parents were threatened to keep silent, and later on it was declared that the girls had been willingly converted into Muslims and married to Muslim men. Even a few Hindu boys had converted themselves willingly into Islamic religion, afterward they wanted to be back but could not be.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

One Hindu couple in my community left home due to a disagreement of families for their love marriage. They were caught by some strangers who misguided them into conversion to Islam and offered all the benefits. Later on, they wanted to come back into their community, but due to their new religion they were unable to do so.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) said:

One girl named Payal, who used to visit the temple often, was kidnapped and converted to Islam. Soon after her conversion was announced willingly, even I found her very devoted towards worship and practising religious activities at the temple.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

I have studied at Christian school and was asked by my teacher to convert into Christianity.

She explained that it was a private Christian school where the management and most of the staff belonged to the Christian faith. At the time, she was in 7th standard and she would fast according to her religion. Once she was late to school three times, and when she expressed the reason for being late (i.e. fasting) the teacher said: 'Why don't you convert to Christianity?' The girl just gave a smile and said nothing.

2.18 Faith abandonment

Participants were asked if they ever felt it might be necessary to convert to another religion in order to feel safe. Table P shows that the majority of girls did not know the answer to this; however, the majority of women aged 18–60 stated that they have never felt it might be necessary. This is interesting given the severe and tragic nature of the issues the women have raised and discussed throughout this study. It is unlikely, as captured in the quotes throughout, that these women believe that their religion does not have a role in their discrimination. Consequently, this suggests that either religion and/or faith is not something these women are willing to give up in exchange for safety, perhaps seeing it as integral to their identity, or they feel they would still be marked out for discrimination in some way even if they changed religion (perhaps because people would always know they were born into a different faith). Conversely, only 42 per cent of men felt that that abandoning their faith would ever be necessary.

P. Have you ever felt it might be necessary for you/members of your Hindu community to abandon your faith and convert to another religion, in order to feel safe?

Table P				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	02	00	07	01
Group-W-1 (18–35)	00	07	04	01
Group-W-2 (36–60)	03	06	03	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	04	05	02	01

Participants said that they had heard news of a few areas where Hindus had abandoned their faith and converted to Islam in order to gain benefits for their families and move themselves out of extreme poverty. However, the participants had never observed such cases within their own sub-communities.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

Sometimes people convert for their own and their families' benefits. I heard of an incident from my community members in Umerkot Sindh District where a man who was very poor and in search of a job was asked to leave his religious faith and convert him and his family to Islam. So the whole family converted and no longer had to worry about trying to survive without a job.

Participant Vishal (man aged 18–60) shared:

Recently in District Ghotki Dharki, a family from Bheel community has been converted into Islam religion due to poverty and no resources of income in Covid-19.

There have been reports of other instances of conversions prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic, similar to that described in the quote above. In August, Abi-Habib and ur-Rehman (2020) reported in the *New York Times* that in June dozens of Hindu families had converted to Islam on the promise of jobs or land. Covid-19 has ravaged Pakistan's economy and Hindu community leaders say that newfound economic pressures are to blame for the sudden increase in conversions. Subsequently, this suggests that poor Hindu women and their families are now more vulnerable to forced conversion and abandonment of their faith than ever before. Muhammad Aslam Sheikh, whose name was Sawan Bheel until June when he converted to Islam with his family, stated that 'what we are seeking is social status, nothing else' (*ibid.*). This also intersects with another theme that is explored later in this paper – the fact that poor Hindu people in Pakistan are not able to access financial support from Islamic charities, even during Ramadan, when Muslims make donations known as Zakat to those worse off than themselves. Hindus are not seen as worthy beneficiaries, although families like Mr Sheikh's will now have the opportunity to claim financial support from Islamic charities, as Muslims. This rise in the conversion of families for financial reasons is weakening an already very small Hindu population.

2.19 Threats within family and community

This research shows that the life of poor women from religious minorities in different sociocultural environments is very hard. Women have not been given equal rights to men. Being a woman is a challenge, symbolised by her care-taking responsibilities, being subordinate to the men and family elders, the sacrificing of her feelings and needs, and compromising for others. The norms assigned to women by men and the traditional (male) religious authorities mean that poor Hindu women face multi-marginalisation. Women are expected to uphold the traditional and cultural practices and values within the community and society. It is women who suffer the most injustice *within* their communities, because the men have the monopoly on defining the norms and boundaries for them; women's lives are governed by men's interpretations of the community's norms.

Hindu women expressed that when they see women from other religious groups, particularly from the majority, they feel even more marginalised. They feel like the men in their community discriminate against them based on their gender, and this is mirrored by

the behaviour of the men from the majority religion who discriminate against them based on both gender and religion. As already explored, poor Hindu men restrict poor Hindu women in their mobility, how they spend their time, and determine the clothes they wear, and all these factors can lead them to suffer periods of depression. Even where it appears that women have freedom, this is still only to a certain degree. For example, where women are allowed by their community to be mobile and go out to work, if they are even slightly late returning, they are highly likely to experience aggression from the men in their communities. The men do not experience this if they come home late from work.

All the young Hindu girl participants articulated that they have no freedom to get an education or for choosing their occupations. Their clothes are selected by their parents, based on the attitudes of their community, especially the male elders. They expressed how they are not allowed to 'live freely'. As already explored, they cannot go out alone, even to the local temple. They felt they are always judged and not treated equally or fairly.

2.20 Forced changes as a marginalised group

The marginalised groups face a number of challenges within Pakistani society. Sometimes this marginalisation is a result of state policy and sometimes it is due to influential individuals pushing traditional and cultural Islamic practices which the minority groups are expected to follow as much as the majority. This makes the communities that are marginalised by their religion feel vulnerable and hopeless: in a democracy, people are supposed to be treated as equal citizens and be given equal opportunities. In some cases, this is achieved for the minorities through quotas, to make up for the shortcomings they face and to lift them to the same level as those in the mainstream, so they can enjoy the fruits of the economy and peace of mind. However, they still face extensive discriminatory attitudes and actions which lead to misery, deprivation, and disconnection from wider society. This discrimination takes place across all areas of society: within the justice system, within the workplace, in educational institutions, and through the social attitudes and biases of those in the majority faith. Discrimination is faced by Hindu communities whether they live in urban or rural areas. Hindus face attacks on their places of worship, and threats of kidnapping, rape, forced conversion, forced marriage, harassment, and murder, and young Hindu people are discriminated against in educational and employment opportunities.

Participant Ravi (man aged 18–60) stated:

Every democratic state has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure the protection of marginalised communities from individuals or organisations that are trying to harm us. Article 36, which details the Protection of Minorities, says that the State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial Services.

The following are some of the changes that the Hindu communities in Pakistan have made in an attempt to avoid this extensive discrimination, to the detriment of the communities themselves and particularly to the detriment of Hindu women and girls who hold so much of the community's 'honour':

- Hindus are the oldest inhabitants of Sindh province. Many Hindus did not migrate to India during Partition because they wanted to live on the land where their roots are. However, many Hindu families have recently travelled away from Pakistan in order to escape religious persecution, particularly the challenges in educating their children and the threats to their women of forced conversion.
- Recently, a few Hindu communities have allowed their women to change their cultural dress to follow that of the majority. They have allowed the discontinuation of clothes that are worn for symbolic purposes – such as Sindoor, Mangal-Sootar, and Bindiya – in routine life when they go out in public. This is in order to avoid negative experiences, as the stress experienced by Hindu women because of their religious identity is increasing.
- Hindu communities avoid worshipping with loud chanting (*Arti*), reciting verses, and large celebrations if their festivals fall during Ramadan and Ashoora (Muslim Holy Festival), in respect of the majority faith.
- Because Hindus are denied renting homes in many areas of Karachi, they have had to accept being restricted to only living in areas where there is a dense Hindu population.
- Hindu communities heavily restrict the mobility of their young women and girls because of the threat of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage.

2.21 Financial crises and poor women's responsibilities

Respondents were questioned about how poor Hindu women access support in times of financial crisis. They were also asked how they access support when they face day-to-day issues that squeeze their finances and in any times of exceptional conflict. They explained that the marginalised Hindu communities suffer poverty, and even when women do work to cope with financial crises, the jobs they do mean that they mostly

have to rely on daily wages. Occasionally they earn enough to plan ahead, but mostly they have to survive hand to mouth.

Women from religious minorities do not receive any *Wazifa* (stipends) from the Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM, the treasury). The PBM is an autonomous body that significantly contributes towards poverty alleviation through its various services focused on meeting the needs of the poorest of the poor. It provides assistance to those who are destitute: widows, orphans, the infirm, and other people in need, as per eligibly criteria approved by the Bait-ul-Mal Board. However, religious minorities are not covered by it. If a Hindu woman asks their manager/owner for *Zakwat* or *Sadqa* money (funds by Muslims) to help, they are refused on the grounds that it is not available for Hindus.

Islam has a system called Zakat (funds for the needy). During the month of Ramadan, in particular, Muslims donate Zakat to needy Muslims. During this research, poor Hindu women shared that they are also very poor, to the point where they can hardly meet the basic needs of their families, but during Ramadan when they ask Muslims to help them through Zakat they are usually refused, as many Muslims consider it to be only for poor and needy Muslims.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) said:

Last year in the month of Holy Ramadan I was badly in need of some money. I requested to Muslim fellows who work in the surrounding area of my work to donate me some Zakat. One of them said: 'Zakat stands only for Muslims not for Hindus. Why do you not ask to your Hindu people to help you instead of asking to Muslims?'

Participant (woman aged 36–60) said:

We are very poor people, sometimes it's very hard to manage routine expenses. Due to that I could not pay three months' school fees for my children and their exams were about to start. I was pressurised by school management to clear the dues, otherwise my children will not be allowed to be part of the examinations. I asked the school's management if there is any Zakat money to help the poor students and the management replied, 'No', saying there is no such system and we also cannot ask anyone for Zakat money because Zakat is only to help the needy Muslims.

Economic insecurity and having no savings to fall back on lead to negative experiences for Hindu women. Having an insufficient income makes their survival very difficult, as they cannot meet the needs of rent, food, children's school fees, and other necessities. This creates pressure on a daily basis. Sometimes women have to borrow money from other people to cope with their situations. Their poverty influences everything in their life, especially because the required nutrition and education for children cannot be afforded.

Participants stated that the government is responsible for their vulnerability in times of soaring inflation. Their income is limited and expenses have been increased day in, day out. Daily wages and salaries in the private sector are very low. Participants believed that if the government owned its responsibility towards meeting the needs of all of its citizens, they might be able to run their lives much better.

Men contribute only a set amount to the family without realising the actual required needs. They place the responsibility for managing the home, jobs, children’s responsibilities, and household tasks onto their women’s shoulders. From childhood, Hindu girls are expected to be subordinate to their elders, especially men, and are instructed to follow their mothers and other women in the community who carry out all of the hard, menial tasks. Therefore, women have to manage all of these responsibilities alongside all the other pressures coming from both the community and outside society that are discussed throughout this paper.

2.22 Celebrations and important occasions

Participants were asked if poor Hindu women felt able to mark important religious occasions freely in comparison to Muslims.

Q. Are poor Hindu women able to mark important occasions freely within their religious calendar compared to those of the majority religion?

Table Q				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	02	01	07	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	03	08	00	01
Group-W-2 (36–60)	02	07	03	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	00	04	00

As Table Q shows, the majority of women aged 18–60 feel they cannot celebrate religious occasions as freely as members of the majority religion, Islam. There are potentially two aspects to this. Firstly, the important occasions like Holi and Diwali are not celebrated in the way poor Hindu women would desire because of poverty. Their economic circumstances never allow them to carry out the full celebration they would like. Women said they wished to make these occasions special for their children and

family, but they are never able to afford to do so. Even if they were able to, they themselves could not enjoy the shopping, preparation, decoration, etc. compared to how they see women of the majority religion celebrating, due to their extensive responsibilities. Sometimes Hindu women work extra time over the celebration period, even with all their additional responsibilities, so they may buy clothes and shoes for their children.

Secondly, minority people cannot enjoy festivities because of religious discrimination. Muslims get three or more holidays on their Eid days, given by the government, but on Hindu occasions their communities have to work. Taking time off makes them vulnerable to being terminated from their jobs, and daily wage workers have to survive without earnings if they take leave. Regardless of whether the reason for being restricted in celebrating is due to economic exclusion or religious discrimination – or an intersection of the two – it is clear that women felt they did not have the same freedoms as Muslim women from the majority. Conversely, the majority of men felt poor Hindu women could celebrate religious occasions in the same way as Muslims.

Hindu celebrations can become gloomy when Muslims make objections to the occasions. For example, when children play with colours during Holi festival and with *patakhy* (firecrackers) as part of the Diwali festival they are restricted to their houses and within temple premises. Usually schools and board exams are conducted on dates that fall within these Hindu festivals, so most Hindu students are busy preparing for their exams and therefore cannot be part of the celebrations or enjoy the occasions.

Participant (woman aged 18–36) shared:

When I asked my school's headmistress for a day leave for Shiv Ratri [fasting for a whole day and night and worship festival], she denied me, and taunted me by saying, 'You are not fasting for us. If you feel difficulties to manage your fasting occasion then you should change your religion or leave this job'.

2.23 Hiding and acceptance

Participants were asked three questions about the extent to which poor Hindu women hide markers of their religion when they are out in public and to what extent this benefits them.

R. Do poor Hindu women feel they are more likely to be accepted when they hide public manifestations of their faith?

Table R				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14-17)	04	06	00	00
Group-W-1 (18-35)	05	06	01	00
Group-W-2 (36-60)	07	05	00	00
Group-H-M (18-60)	06	03	03	00

S. Do you/women from your community hide their religious identities and appearance?

Table S				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14-17)	05	03	02	00
Group-W-1 (18-35)	08	03	00	01
Group-W-2 (36-60)	11	01	00	00
Group-H-M (18-60)	05	07	00	00

T. If you/they do, does this benefit you/them publicly?

Table T				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14-17)	05	04	00	01
Group-W-1 (18-35)	08	04	00	00
Group-W-2 (36-60)	12	00	00	00
Group-H-M (18-60)	05	07	00	00

Despite only 47 per cent of women and girls expressing that they would more likely be accepted if they hid manifestations of their faith when out in public (Table R), 71 per cent of these same women and girls stated that women in their community hide their religious identities and appearance when they are out in public (Table S). Additionally, 74 per cent of them felt it benefits them publicly to do so (Table T). This suggests that even if it is not

acceptance that is gained, women and girls recognise that there is some benefit to them by hiding their religious identities when out in public.

As already discussed, Hindu women are expected to wear traditional clothing, a symbol of their religious faith. Being thus identified as Hindu, the women experience harassment and threats to their safety when they are in public. Despite wearing traditional clothing being an important part of females expressing their religion, a few Hindu girls have started wearing an abaya and scarf (the casual clothing of Muslim women and girls) for safety purposes and to make mobility more comfortable while going to school. This prevents them from being recognised as Hindu and being bothered by others.

A small number of women from the Hindu community have stopped wearing their cultural clothing as part of their everyday routine, especially working women. They do not wear Sindoor, Bindiya, or Mangal-Sootar, and even remove *Tilak* (symbol on forehead) before leaving the temple to go back home.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) explained that if anyone was suspicious and asked about her religion:

We avoid sharing and sometimes we tell a lie, denying our belonging of Hinduism.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

I went to the Bazaar [market] with my mother. After shopping we stopped at 'Sharbat Wala' [juice cart] and asked for two glasses of Sharbat. The dealer stared at my mother's dress and refused to share glasses with Hindus.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

We have started wearing abaya and scarf [casual clothing that Muslim women wear outdoors], because this makes our mobility comfortable and acceptable while we are going to school, markets, and other places. We avoid judgmental comments and bullying.

Conversely, just over 50 per cent of men did not think that women in their community hide their religious identities (Table S) and the same number did not think it would benefit them in public to do so (Table T). This, as with data for previous questions, suggests that Hindu men are not as aware of the situations Hindu women face when out in public.

2.24 Health-care services

When asked about access to health-care services, almost none of the participants reported experiencing discrimination because of being Hindu.

U. Do you/women in your community face any discrimination due to religion when trying to access health care?

Table U				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	00	07	03
Group-W-1 (18–35)	00	10	02	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	02	09	01	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	00	05	07	00

As Table U shows, the majority of women aged 18–35 denied facing any discrimination due to their religion when accessing health care. The majority of girls and men did not know the answer to this. Instead, they all said that they had experienced discrimination and lack of access as other poor people do. They added that sometimes lower-class staff working in the hospital harassed them. This is an interesting observation, and further research comparing their experiences with those of poor Muslim women would be helpful. Conclusions could then be drawn about whether or not their religion plays a part in their discrimination, rather than solely attributing it only to their economic exclusion.

Pakistan is a developing country and the lack of access to basic health-care services reflects this. Its health-care system comprises both a private and public sector. The general state and quality of public services is very poor compared to private hospitals, which provide much better services. However, private hospitals are not affordable to the lower middle class and poor people, who instead rely on government health-care services. In urban areas access to health-care clinics and facilities is not a problem, but Hindu women still find it difficult for their basic health needs to be met because of religious discrimination. Religious minorities have difficulty in accessing proper health-care services because if their ID card⁷ states their religion as something other than 'Muslim', the individual is not eligible to receive government aid. Although it is not mentioned in any policy or law, usually people discriminate when a person's ID card shows they are not Muslim. Due to this, people working in hospitals or involved in funding

⁷ Everyone in Pakistan has to carry a national identity card, which signifies their religion.

or aid distribution who do not want to help non-Muslims will use the ID card as the reason for not doing so (Church in Chains 2012).

Two participants (women aged 36–60), Savita and Banu, both experienced similar incidents on different days and at different times. When they visited the public hospital they were denied free medicines at the medicine counter, while people of the religious majority were provided with them. Banu was stopped filling in the form for the issuance of free medicine when she showed her national identity card at the counter. When they both asked why they were refused, they were informed, ‘These are not for you people, it’s only for Muslims’.

Women also suffer a lack of nutrition and insufficient sustenance, especially during pregnancy, as no special attention or care is provided to them. Working women also have to continue their labouring work during pregnancy as there is no alternative or safety net for them

2.25 Hindu women’s engagement with local and national authorities

Table V				
Groups	Yes	No	Don’t know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	04	06	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	00	10	02	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	03	05	04	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	04	00	00

Table V shows that 56 per cent of women and girls stated that women in their community had never engaged with local or national authorities. The high number of girls who did not know the answer to this is unsurprising, given the lack of opportunities for young women to engage in politics. However, three women aged 36–60 said that women in their community had engaged with local or national authorities, although what form that engagement took or who it was with is not known. Conversely, 67 per cent of men stated that women in their community had engaged with local or national authorities.

Pakistan has small religious minorities compared to many other marginalised groups which comprise a more significant proportion of the population. The present local government system has struggled to accommodate the subdivisions of marginalised

groups in the society, so quota-based appointments have been created and now all provincial local government laws allocate reserved seats for religious minorities, including women.

Reserved seats are contested directly at the lowest level of local government. In Sindh province, there is an abundance of political parties vying for the reserved seats. The reserved seats for religious minorities in Sindh are always filled with Hindu males. The Hindu women are never selected in the provincial assembly, nor in the national. Poor Hindu women of Scheduled Castes, in particular, have never been part of the provincial assembly. History was made in the Government of Sindh in 2018 when one Hindu women from the elite Hindu class (Mangla Sharma) became a Sindh assembly member. Moreover, Hindu women were even more excited when a poor Hindu woman (Kirshna Kumari Kolhi) was elected Senator, also in 2018. Although there are reserved seats for women in the Pakistan National Assembly, not a single seat was allotted to a Hindu woman. The allocation of reserved seats to selected candidates from religious minorities is only strengthening the hold of dominant political parties over the local government system, as only certain members of religious minorities are selected.

This study found that female participants have never had any experiences with local and national authorities, and had less political awareness than male participants, while some Hindu men have experienced local government as minority councillors. However, the community felt that these opportunities were only made available to the Hindu men in order to fulfil the minority quota. They had no authority even to deal with any minority issues at the lowest local level.

2.26 Harassment and violence

Participants were asked three questions about the extent to which poor Hindu women face violence and harassment.

W. Do you/the women from your community face violence or harassment?

Table W				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14-17)	09	01	00	00
Group-W-1 (18-35)	10	02	00	00

Group-W-2 (36–60)	12	00	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	11	01	00	00

X. When this violence is due to religion, do you/the women in your community experience this differently from poor women from the mainstream?

Table X				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	06	03	00	01
Group-W-1 (18–35)	10	02	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	11	01	00	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	08	04	00	00

Y. Are there particular forms of violence that women from your religious group are typically subjected to?

Table Y				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	05	02	03	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	05	04	03	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	09	02	01	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	10	01	01	00

Tables W and X show that the majority of participants (91 per cent) not only believe that poor Hindu women experience violence and harassment, but also perceive this to be different to the way women from the majority religious group experience violence (76 per cent). Additionally, Table Y shows that the majority of participants (63 per cent) felt there are particular forms of violence that poor Hindu women face. These questions do not differentiate between violence that poor Hindu women experience at the hands of others in their community (such as domestic violence) and violence perpetrated against them because of their religious identity (or religious identity intersecting with their gender and socioeconomic status). This is discussed in more detail below.

Violence against women and girls is shrouded in silence. Hindu women are affected by gender-based violence within communities and society; women are at high risk of manifold forms of interpersonal violence committed against them by family members, classmates, intimate partners, neighbours, and strangers. Women are stopped from highlighting this violence and speaking out in their communities through fear and a real threat of further discrimination. This prevents access to justice, particularly because minorities are denied equal access to essential resources, services, and opportunities for education, employment, and legal redress. Beyond being a violation of their fundamental rights, this deprivation has significant impacts on development outcomes at the individual and community levels.

Many Hindu women and girls are being harassed physically and mentally within their family and community, and are abused, mistreated, kidnapped, and raped. As already discussed, they face threats of forced conversion to Islam and forced marriages. As is clear from the threats identified by the FGDs at the beginning of the research, Hindu women suffer from living in both a male-dominated society and a Muslim-dominated country. Significantly, Hindu women are frightened to speak out in wider society about the violence they experience within their communities as they do not want to draw attention to their already marginalised communities, thereby giving the majority any more excuses to discriminate against them.

Outside of their families and communities, poor Hindu women experience public physical and mental torture in their workplaces due to their religious identity and appearances. They face sexual and verbal harassment and offensive comments from those in the majority religion who often hoot, pass comments, and make jokes about their religious practices. When women try to counter this harassment, they are often threatened. It is worth noting that Muslim women also experience harassment and violence on account of their gender; however, they do not face the double marginality of both their gender and their religious identity.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

My co-workers made fun that I worship many gods and goddesses saying, 'You Hindus have so many gods and goddesses, many of them carry animals faces of elephant, monkey, etc. You Hindus worship animals, even you do not know who is your god. God can be only one, not thousands!' That man kept laughing on with other fellows. He also said, 'You Hindu women "ap na jisam dikhati ho" [expose your body parts], your stomach and neck, and then accuse innocent males of gazing and sexual harassment, when you do not

feel ashamed. Why do you expect others to show respect and not look at your exposed parts?’

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

A policeman snatched my dry fruit bag. When I pleaded with him to give it back, I was pushed and hurled abuses. He was saying, ‘Beshram [shameless], Begarat Aurat [bad character woman]’ and that a good character woman stays at home rather than working on the footpath.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

I was beaten by Muslim women and teenagers of their families living in the same compound premise because I asked for some money for their share of the maintenance of the corridor’s gutter line. They refused. When I said that their homes are also the part of this premises, a lady slapped me and when I pushed her they all started to beat me and covered my face with dupatta [scarf]. There were 12 women and a few children. They tore up my clothes and also slapped my children. This wasn’t the first conflict with them. During an earlier conflict aroused over slaughtering of animals beside our temple in the compound, their males pointed knives at my husband. Policeman was not willing to register my complaint and they even threatened to claim blasphemy if I go again to the police station. They wanted to stop me and my husband from raising our voices against their violence, as they often use violence on other Hindu families living in same compound.

The slaughtering of animals within Hindu compounds has been a disturbing issue for Hindus in the past. Cows are considered to be sacred in Hinduism and Hindus have reported butchers slaughtering animals, including cows, in their compounds. When asked not to do this, like in the case described here, this is often met with violence from the butchers (*The International News* 2006).

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

Hindus get anxious. If the situation in India becomes perilous, like Kashmir and the current problem with CAB-Anti-Muslim Law in India, we Hindus living in Pakistan become afraid of the reactions of the majority people. When Babari Mosque was attacked in India, the situation in our surrounding area became much worse. The majority people got angry and attacked our temples in Pakistan. We Hindus are living in fear and pray for the safety of Muslims living in India, and we curse the Indian extremists who commit such activities which create trouble for all Muslims living in India and Hindus living in Pakistan.

Young Hindu girls also experience sexual harassment and discrimination due to their faith. They face offensive questions in schools and colleges and their Muslim classmates choose to distance themselves from them by not sharing seats and avoiding eating with them.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

During celebration of Diwali festival in my area, kids were exploding firecrackers. This made the neighbours angry and they punished all the kids. Later on, the community men went to ask for forgiveness and assured the neighbours that they would stop the children from celebrating.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

During a wedding ceremony of my friend's neighbour, one of my friends was abducted by gangsters while travelling to attend the wedding. She was converted into Islam at gunpoint, and they were saying that a beautiful girl cannot be Hindu and one of them she should get to marry her. Her friend's parents were threatened to keep silent.

This participant also talked about the case of Dr Namarta Chandani, who was in her final year of dental college in District Larkana when she was sexually assaulted and murdered (BR Web Desk 2019). Despite clear evidence that she was sexually assaulted, police declared her death to be by suicide. However, her parents claim she was killed because she was a Hindu.

2.27 Community response to violence against women

Participants were asked if Hindu men typically respond to the violence perpetrated against Hindu women.

Z. Do men from the same religiously marginalised group typically respond to violence perpetrated against women?

Table Z				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	02	06	03	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	02	10	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	04	08	00	00

Group-H-M (18–60)	07	05	00	00
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Table Z shows a difference between the views of the women and the views of the men. The majority of women and girls (71 per cent) stated that men from their community do not respond to the violence they experience; however, 58 per cent of men stated that they do. This would probably not have been an easy question for the men to answer, so shame may have influenced the answer they gave. In reality, the quotes suggest that the Hindu community avoid countering those from the majority religion. In instances of violence and harassment against them or other community females, Hindu men become afraid and stop community members from raising their voices, bringing the violence to light, and speaking out. This, as already discussed, prevents Hindu women from accessing justice. The Hindu community itself is very insecure about responding to perpetrators, as they fear that this may cause more trouble for their families. If the perpetrators belong to Hinduism, the community will take strict action against the assailants; but in cases of domestic violence, women are suppressed.

When women raise issues of harassment against Muslim people, the reaction from their community is very harsh towards them: men yell at them and warn them to be more vigilant, or sometimes they restrict their mobility.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

When I shared the incident with my husband against auto-rickshaw driver who harassed and proposed marriage to me, my husband got aggressive to me, and warned and instructed me not to wear make-up.

2.28 State response to violence against women

Participants were asked if the state typically responds to violence perpetrated against Hindu women.

AA. Does the state typically respond to violence perpetrated against women from this religiously marginalised group?

Table AA				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	03	05	04	00

Group-W-1 (18–35)	04	08	00	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	02	08	02	00
Group-H-M (18–60)	05	06	01	00

Table AA shows that 57 per cent of participants felt that the state does not respond to this violence. However, there was an even stronger sense from women aged 18–60 that this was the case, with 64 per cent stating that the state does not respond. Conversely, 42 per cent of men felt that the state does respond to violence against Hindu women.

Violence is not the only element of life as a Hindu in Pakistan that the state does not respond to. Religion turns out to be a dangerous weapon when the majority religious communities attempt to shape culture, social institutions, and the state itself according to their specific belief system. In Pakistan, the role of religion is not a settled issue, which greatly impacts the wisdom, the status, and rights of minorities for internal peace and security. Complex historical and social factors have shaped the communication between religion and politics in Pakistan. The state-building includes fundamental principles such as institutions and systems, citizenship, equality, fundamental rights, and empowerment of all individuals without any discrimination.

In Pakistan, the voice of minorities against violence has been shunned and ignored and the majority's nationalism has muted the voice of minorities. In a fixed religious society, the minority can only narrowly enjoy equality of social or religious status.

It is obvious that whenever any issue occurs, people belonging to the majority or minority look towards the government and law departments for the enforcement of justice, expecting protection for women and religious minorities from violence. However, the Government of Pakistan does not take proper action, even in serious cases of extreme violence, abduction, or forced conversion. Moreover, the police are normally reluctant to register cases and they ignore the victims' families. Even as cases of violence, forced conversion and abductions of Hindu females increase, the state turns a blind eye and does not take the plight of the poor marginalised communities seriously. The criminal justice system is unable to deliver justice for those seeking punishment and this has led to religious minorities not being able to trust their government and its institutions.

Policemen make intermittent visits to market areas and take away goods that are being sold, or they may ask all hawkers to remove their carts from the roadsides. Hawking is a common occupation for poor Hindu women who cannot access properties to set up

shops due to religious discrimination and their economic status. Instead, they have to set up illegally on bridges and walkways. One woman who had been working as a dried fruit seller said policemen took away some of their dried fruits and strictly asked them not to work without shops. She said she was treated harshly and faced trouble which affected her ability to continue working the next day. She was afraid, but hawking is only the profession and source of income available to poor Hindu women in that sub-community. Officials use their power against poor and marginalised people. While this can happen to any poor people, including poor Muslim women, the probability that it will happen to poor Hindu women is greater as they are more likely to be restricted to working as a hawker than poor Muslim women.

Participant (woman aged 36–60), the mother of the abducted girl Vidya expressed:

Since May 2019, my family had registered FIR at police station but yet my daughter has not been recovered. My community elders and family members have stepped up efforts for my daughter's recovery, approaching District and Sindh Minorities Affairs Minister. Even many protests were held to break the government silence, yet no result appeared. While Sindh CM took notice and directed the police to take immediate action to recover my daughter Vidya, the police came and harassed my family members. They have not made any satisfactory progress in a whole year. My family is going through a mental trauma and feel unsafe.

Participants were asked about responses to violence perpetrated against Hindu women, this time from the media.

BB. Do the media typically respond to violence perpetrated against women from this religiously marginalised group?

Table BB				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	06	02	02	00
Group-W-1 (18–35)	05	03	04	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	04	07	00	01
Group-H-M (18–60)	07	05	00	00

Just under of 50 per cent of participants felt the media responds to violence against Hindu women, compared to 40 per cent who felt it does not. The question does not

specify the forms of media, but English print media has a high rate of reporting news on religious minorities compared to the Urdu print media, in which religious minority issues are not covered. The English print media reports forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu women and girls to Islam, particularly in Sindh.

The media is a central pillar that can support the promotion of minority rights, as well as be responsible enough to maintain harmony among different religious groups. While the media judiciously reports conversions of non-Muslims to Islam, often portrayed as positive stories, it remains silent on the 'organised conversions' that take place, particularly in Sindh. These 'organised conversions' are where a number of madrassas (college for Islamic instruction) have forcibly converted abducted Hindu girls and women in a coordinated manner.

Stereotypes of Hindu people also exist in the media. They portray negative images of the Hindu community where Hindus are projected as agents of India, and Hindu characters in TV programmes and films are depicted as 'opportunist', 'users', and 'unpatriotic' to Pakistan.

Participant (man aged 18–60) expressed:

The mainstream media does not support and cover Hindus' issues, but it plays a role against minority people, as it is owned by majority group persons. Social media also plays a huge role, more so than print media and TV channels. Most of the incidents related to religious minorities, Hindu women, and other minorities appeared on social media. For example, the provincial media are the only ones to cover instances of forced conversions of Hindu girls, whereas the mainstream media tends to ignore these stories, or present them as a positive, consensual conversion to Islam.

2.29 Threats to Hindus' property and assets

Land grabbing and forcing Hindu communities off their property is also a significant threat facing Hindus. When the country of Pakistan was created, many Hindus left their homes and properties and departed to India, leaving behind temples, places of worship, and land that is religiously significant. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) was established after autonomy of Pakistan to manage the property, notably the places of worship, that were left by Hindu communities. Even though the ETPB is entrusted with the responsibilities of maintenance and protection of such properties, having no right to sell them, it has been noticed that many of these Hindu properties are now either occupied or have been sold to those who are not Hindu. In Sindh province, most of the burial places

that belonged to the Scheduled Castes have been taken over by Muslims. Hindus belonging to lower castes are now not allowed to bury their dead there.

The powerful people easily target Hindu properties: they grab them and change the land's documents by using their influence. Many properties and graveyard lands have been grabbed, and recently many encroachment cases have been reported. Hindu citizens are bothered about not being able to carry out their practices and traditions as per their religion. For example, Veengas (2019) reported that in October 2013 the dead body of a Hindu individual called Bhoro Bheel was dug out of his grave and then dragged through the streets by majority religious parties in Pangrio, Sindh. Another case was in Matiari District in Hala City, Sindh, where a girl's parents were looking for land to bury her dead body because people from the majority were not allowing them to bury her in their traditional graveyard.

In September 2019, three temples, a school, and houses of the Hindu community in Ghotki, Sindh were attacked by an aggressive mob after the principal of the local public school had been accused of blasphemy by a student (*Pakistan Today* 2019). The blasphemy laws consist of a group of laws, the centerpiece of which is section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), which provides penalties for blasphemy and other 'offences against religion'. These range from a fine to the death sentence. The majority of blasphemy cases are based on false allegations stemming from property issues or other personal or family quarrels. Due to anger or a desire for revenge, a member of the majority religion makes an unauthentic claim of blasphemy which then leads to mob violence against the victim.

These laws have been repeatedly condemned by national and international observers as severely contradicting freedom of expression, of religion, and of opinion, and recognised as likely to be used as tools of religious persecution against minorities. In 2009, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted that Pakistan's 'blasphemy laws may be used in a discriminatory manner against religious minority groups' (Human Rights Council 2012: 11).

Other examples include a Hindu temple in Kunbh town, Khairpur, Sindh being attacked by Islamic extremists in February 2019, also setting fire to 'Holy Books' and the idols of gods inside. Additionally, the old residents of Hindu families and community members living in Karachi had some assets belonging to their forefathers (and some of which they had earned) that were forcefully purchased from them. They were paid a very minor amount, as state dealers wanted to build there. Even community members who have

small assets or only a little agricultural land in rural areas feel insecure and fear land grabbing by influential people.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) said:

My family and a few other families in our Hindu community live in a compound where around 25 to 30 families have been dwelling for decades. One of the families sold their house to a Muslim family who were professional butchers. Later on, this family had started harassing Hindu people of the compound on an extreme level. Due to this stress a few other Hindu families also sold their houses at very low prices to be able to move away from the stress. The butcher families still bother us and keep irritating us through verbal and physical mistreatment. They deliberately bother Hindus of our compound because they intend to buy the rest of the houses from Hindus at a very low price. We do not want to leave or sell our homes because this is Hindu property and belongs to our ancestors.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

An old inactive temple, which had been locked for decades, near to my home, was suddenly demolished, and now residential construction is under process there. That temple belonged to Hindus, and Muslims are not supposed to claim it. Instead they grabbed it, but the Hindu community living in the surrounding area didn't make any objection due to fear.

2.30 Role of Hindu institutions in their women's lives

Finally, participants were asked about Hindu institutions, and to what extent they play a positive role in their lives (or the lives of Hindu women, in the case of the men that were asked).

CC. Do the religious Hindu institutions play a positive role in the lives of poor Hindu women?

Table CC				
Groups	Yes	No	Don't know	No answer
Group-H-G (14–17)	00	00	08	02
Group-W-1 (18–35)	02	06	04	00
Group-W-2 (36–60)	04	08	00	00

Group-H-M (18–60)	05	07	00	00
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Table CC shows quite a mixed response across the different FGDs to this question. The majority of girls did not know whether Hindu institutions play a positive role or not, whereas the majority of the women aged 18–60 felt they do not (58 per cent). The men were split in their answers, with just over 50 per cent agreeing with the women that Hindu institutions do not play a positive role in Hindu women’s lives. This suggests that poor Hindu women not only have to contend with discrimination and exclusion from those outside of their religion, but also have to contend with their own institutions not being as supportive as they perhaps should be.

Hindu women from marginalised groups experience misery due to cultural and traditional trends in their communities. Hindu women are defenceless compared to women from the majority religion: Muslim women can claim their given religious rights, like divorce (*khulā*), and property rights. Hindu women cannot claim any of these, and are often ignorant of their legal, social, and human rights as they remain within the narrow confines of their home. They become victims of domestic violence, experience extreme mental and emotional torture, and sexual crimes which they cannot defend themselves against. The heads of their community are men and they do not take much interest in issues related to women. Community elders expect women to cope and adjust to everything.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

We women face some harsh and negligent behaviour of men. I am earning to support my family as well as looking after children, doing the household work and other family responsibilities. But nobody cares about me. If anything happens to me my husband gets angry at me. If I get home late due to traffic or any other reason, he starts to fight and beats me. When I make a complaint to the elders, they tell me to just ignore his harsh behaviour and just do whatever he says. They said this would help me to maintain my relationship and family. Nobody asks my husband to not behave like he does.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

Community and family elders always push women to bear everything and not make complaints against any family member if in-laws or my husband abuse me or misbehave. This is our tradition and it's expected that women have to bear whatever their in-laws and husband instruct them to do. Females should be obedient to them. Even during my pregnancy I was feeling not well and it

was tough to do all the home chores. When I asked my husband to let me rest at my parents' home for a few days, he and my in-laws got angry and asked me, 'Who would look after the home? If you want rest you better leave our home forever.' I got more depressed and complained to my family and community's elders. They all told me to keep patient for the sake of good relations and kids.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

It is right that a community's matters and decisions are made only by community's eldest ones and they have always been male persons. Women have never been decision makers. I personally believe that only woman can understand woman problems, but our community thinks that women should only deal with the family work. This is the reason that women are always asked to keep patient and tolerant, no matter what is happening with her or to her by her family members, as they are usually either torturing her mentally, emotionally or physically. I am against this behaviour. I think females should be part of decision making and have some rights to make her life's decision making.

Participant (man aged 18–60) shared:

Following the community's elders is our tradition, and it's the responsibility of all of us. It is called respect. We believe that elders are experienced and they can choose better options for our community's females, and males as well. In our society males always deal with things angrily and are harsh. That has become part of our culture and females are expected to be cool, obedient, and adjust to everything. That's why females are asked to be tolerant and asked to ignore males' behaviours. Doing so helps to maintain family relations. If elders do not instruct women in this way then all couples will get separations. I think it is good to follow elders of our community and respect their decisions.

When marginalised females are appreciated for any good reasons, like success in exams or in a school programme, that makes them happy and they feel they are given honour and respect. They feel happy and proud.

Participant (woman aged 18–35) shared:

Due to our encroachment issue, we working women were forced to stop work in Impress Market, Saddar, where we had been working for many years. Now police and government asked us not to work from there, due to this I raised my

voice with the support of civil society on behalf of all working women who work from the same location. My voice went vocal and we were allowed to work there again. Due to this success these women, and my community as well, including my male family members, appreciated me for my boldness. That really made me very happy and I was feeling very proud and strong.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

I am better at studying than my brothers. I always make rank and participate in school debates and in programmes held at the temple, where I usually get first and second position. My parents, and especially my Papa, appreciate me and ask my brothers to learn from me. Whenever I hear those words from my Papa I feel so proud. It doubles my confidence and then community people also admire me in front of my family. My father feels more proud. I really cannot express my feelings of happiness.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

Yes, we women feel very happy and energetic whenever we are encouraged and supported by our families. When I started to support my daughter to study in college she completed her intermediate and started tuition from home, people loved to send their children to my daughter for good home tuition. People also started to admire my daughter's hard work and the male members of my family now encourage my daughter. These encouraging words make me very proud and comfortable that I took this step for my daughter, and now my husband also supports me for my daughter's education.

2.31 Public perceptions of Hindu women and girls

Participants shared various experiences of public perceptions about Hindu women and girls in their communities:

- Those from the majority religion make fun by hooting and using words for Hindus about their castes, such as 'Meghwar' and 'Bagris', and sometimes they hoot 'Hindu' and aggressively call 'Kafar' (an offensive term for non-Muslims) which makes them feel sad and panicky.
- Often men from the majority religion harass Hindu women by hooting at them about the way they dress, saying things like, 'Choli k Pichy Kiya hai' (what's inside your blouse?), 'Oh Gagraiywalli' (Ms Skirt), and use other slang words.
- Participants expressed that the media does not cover much about Hindu women, as Hindu communities limit their women. They were also unaware about elite

Hindu women's representation. Young women said that during the Diwali and Holi festivals, the media cover their celebrations but only use photos of Hindu women in order to make offensive comments in their news stories.

- When women go out in public wearing the traditional dress that makes them identifiable as Hindus, a few people show interest in a non-offensive way by asking questions about Hindu culture.
- Girls narrated that the first time they were introduced to people from the majority religion they experienced some strange gestures that showed shock and surprise. Some are happy to meet Hindus, but many look at the Hindu girls as if they are aliens and keep staring at them. Many of those from the majority religion like to keep their distance, especially Muslim women, and do not like to eat with the Hindu women. However, there are a few in the majority to whom religious identity does not matter.
- Religious minorities are often portrayed as inferior or second-class citizens in public textbooks because of beliefs about Partition being based on religion. These textbooks promote hatred against Hindus, meaning that children from the very beginning are exposed to hateful literature where Hindus are repeatedly described as extremists and eternal enemies of Islam. Textbooks claim that Hindu culture and society is based on injustice and cruelty, while Islam delivers a message of peace and brotherhood.
- Participants said that the school subjects related to religious history or to Pakistan's history outline that Hindus violated Muslims during Partition. Social studies textbooks teach that India attacked Muslims in 1948 and 1965 (in class five). They claim that Bengali separatism was a result of Hindu teachers and traders; and after the 1965 war, India conspired with the Hindus of Bengal and succeeded in spreading hate among the Bengalis about West Pakistan, finally attacking East Pakistan in December 1971, thus causing the breakup of East and West Pakistan. In fact, some textbooks say that Pakistan had almost won the 1971 war. Hindus are represented as enemies and mocked for worshipping many gods and goddess made of stone. Such teaching is still present and leads to Hindu students being mocked by Muslim classmates and teachers. Muslim classmates make fun of Hindus when the teacher leaves the room and try to make them feel ashamed. Consequently, these schoolchildren feel embarrassed and hurt and avoid eye contact with their fellow classmates.

Participant (girl aged 14–17) shared:

I was feeling very bad when my teacher was briefing the chapter of Social Studies which teaches how Hindus behaved with Muslims at the time of the partition of India and Pakistan. When my teacher left the room two class

fellows asked questions to me, 'Why were you Hindus like that in the past? Do you still misbehave with Muslims? Why do you Hindus not go back to India?'

Participant (man aged 18–60) said:

In our school time, fellow boys used to make fun of me in break time, calling me 'Hindu, Hindu', and when I tried to counter they usually abused me with names such as, 'Hindu ka Bacha, Kafar Ki Olad'[child of non-Muslim).

Sometimes I used to make questions to my mother, 'Why we are not Muslims? Why we are Hindus?' Those words really hurt me when I used to hear them in my schooldays.

Participant (woman aged 36–60) shared:

In 7th standard during Islamiyat [Islamic] period, the oral exam was going on. In my class there were students reciting Islamiyat Ayaat [holy verses] with Urdu translation. I also tried and pronounced the verse wrong. My teacher got angry and asked me, 'Why did you try to recite Holy Verses, you are Hindu and Kafar [non-Muslim]. You cannot recite.' As she left the class a few of my classmates started laughing at me and teasing me by calling 'Kafar Oye Kafar'[bullied].

3. Conclusion

- Scheduled Caste marginalised Hindu women face cultural, social, and security obstacles, plus their religious identity makes their lives even harder and more challenging. They face multiple and intersectional discrimination, sexual harassment, violence, and threats of forced conversions and forced marriages. They find themselves in a particularly dire situation because of the customs and culture of both their community and wider society, and this affects their lives, creating gaps between men and women in mobility, education, health, economics, and politics. They become discouraged and unable to contribute to life socially or economically. They are bound by their communities to follow cultural and traditional practices, including wearing typical feminine Hindu clothing that carries symbols of both their marital status and their religious identity. This is not something men from the same communities or women from the majority religion face.
- Violence against women and girls is shrouded in silence. Hindu women are affected by gender-based violence within both their communities and wider society. This includes assorted forms of interpersonal violence committed against them by their community and the norms the community upholds, by classmates, intimate partners, neighbours, and strangers. Fear of further marginalisation within their

communities stops women from speaking out against the violence they experience and therefore prevents them from being able to access justice.

- Hindu women experience more difficulties in the workplace compared to men of the same class as they are frequently targeted with gender-based harassment while being discriminated against in various ways related to their religious identity. For example, they are refused leave for holiday, even on religious occasions, and are paid low wages and smaller salaries, as well as being denied other facilities.
- The prevalence of extremist religious elements has adversely affected Hindu women's empowerment and mobility. The dominance of sociocultural traditions badly affect the freedom of marginalised women living in both urban and rural areas, as they are mostly restricted to the domestic boundaries of their homes and deprived access to education. This is especially the case with Scheduled Caste Hindu women who are illiterate compared to the males of their community and women of the elite Hindu class. Where Hindu women are able to access educational institutions, they experience discrimination because of their religious identity and are often asked to convert to Islam. This is experienced by both males and females.
- Hindu and other minority women are not given ample representation in local and national authorities. Even where there are quotas for minorities, only the men are selected. Hindu women are not educated or sensitised for political participation and social change, or for knowing their rights.
- It is clear that laws and regulations alone will not prevent violence against religious minority women in Pakistan. Instead, a much deeper process is needed to transform the entire mindset of society, both toward reversing the acceptance of violence against women and toward respect for different creeds and beliefs. The implementation of laws and regulations also needs to be strictly monitored. Education systems and awareness-raising ought to be used as tools to bring improvements in the lives of marginalised women.
- There were many areas throughout this study where the answers given by men in their FGDs were different to the answers given by women and girls in their FGDs. This suggests that generally men are not aware of the extent of the issues facing the poor women in their community.

4. Recommendations

1. Forced conversion of minority Hindu girls and women to Islam in Pakistan should be a concern for everybody who believes in equality, justice, religious freedom, and human rights. There is an urgent need to restore minorities' faith in the government and the courts.
2. Strict action should be taken against the various religious elements that are known to support atrocities against Hindu women and girls, such as the unlawful actors of madrassas (colleges for Islamic instruction).
3. There must be effective complaints mechanisms in place to allow Hindu students in educational institutions who experience discrimination on the basis of their religion to report this discrimination and for action to be taken.
4. All textbooks and curriculum resources from primary school to college must be modified to ensure the removal of hate speech and discriminatory attitudes towards Hindus, especially where this is related to the history of the Partition of India.
5. Religious minority women should be integrated into mainstream society, both socially and politically. There must be reserved seats for minority women in local, provincial, and national assemblies in order to encourage their political participation and to ensure representation in decision making. They must be included in programmes for their socioeconomic empowerment at governmental and non-governmental levels.
6. The government should show more concern for the protection of minority rights, understanding that the current constitutional guarantees, religious injunctions, and international covenants signed by Pakistan are not being effectively implemented for the benefit of religious minorities in the country.
7. The Government of Pakistan must ensure the full protection of women from religious minorities, and particularly vulnerable Hindu teenage girls, under the children's rights and freedom of religion acts, as entrenched in international conventions. Specifically, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 30 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for both of which Pakistan is a signatory.
8. Ensure that all national laws and policies comply with Pakistan's obligations under international human rights law, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (ratified in 1996) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified in 2008).

9. The Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill must be passed and ratified in order to overcome the forcible religious conversions and forced marriages of persons under the age of 18.
10. Data must be recorded on acts of violence against minorities, and Hindu women in Sindh specifically, including forced conversion, abductions, and harassment in both rural and urban areas. There is a need to conduct a gender-based census in the country at both national and provincial levels in order to collect relevant and accurate data.
11. Job quotas for minorities must be implemented correctly, with jobs other than sanitary work and sweeping made accessible to minority women.
12. Independent commissions for religious and gender equality, or similar institutions, should be set up to receive and investigate complaints related to minority women. They should also offer advice to victims of discrimination and undertake awareness-raising activities to promote the principles of non-discrimination and promote understanding between different communities.

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Annexe 1: Case Studies

Woman abducted and raped up to three months: (by Group-H-M)

A Hindu lady, aged 35 years, resided with her husband in slum house in Behran Mori, Garibabad, district Hyderabad Sindh, she had five children, four daughters and one son. She had been working in a recycling plastic factory at Hyderabad as daily wages for sorting recyclable plastic. On 17 March 2019, three persons kidnapped her forcefully from her house in the presence of her family members on gun point, three men sudden entered in her house, holding guns, she was dragged, when her family members yelled and tried to stop, they were pointed pistol upon and were instructed for remaining calm, due to dread and fear of pistols family members went helpless and remained calm, accused pulled out into a car of white colour with the intention of zina [rape].

Culprits raped her continues three months and converted her religion into Islam, forcefully and managed a false paper of free will marriage, she was kept at Matli city in District Thatta near railway station, one she saw some community women nearby her, she cried loudly for help, women helped, they all reached at Matli thana [police station], where she got recorded her statement, some journalists also approached on the spot, her family

members also arrived there. Even FIR was lodged on 20 March 2019 in Hyderabad, locality but no justice and proceeding held.

Vidya went missing for a year: (by Group-W-2)

Vidya Rajesh: A missing girl, daughter of Ami and Rajesh, living in Maripur, Karachi. Ami has been running from here to there for almost one year for the recovery of her daughter Vidya Rajesh.

16 years old Vidya studied in grade seven. One day, she went to school and never came back to her home: she went missing. Since then her parents had searched every nook and corner of the city, but she is nowhere in the sight. No one could be able to tell about her whereabouts, even the police.

Vidya's mother, Ami started telling the incident but could not continue because of crying. Later on, she spoke that people blamed her for not taking care of daughter properly, she had been claimed for the disappearance of her own daughter. She said whenever a girl is kidnapped or goes missing, her family women especially sisters and mother are blamed for incidents and honour of the families by community and society. She further said her daughter was studying in seventh grade, who did not even know about the streets of the colony where they live. Police also stated annoying about her whereabouts. Vidya was allegedly kidnapped or went missing on 20 May 2019. A year has passed but police had failed to recover her. Police sometimes become active when there a huge pressure from community members and activists is developed but after a few raids, they again become inactive. Even they made all efforts from police to other government institutes for the recovery of Vidya, people assure them for revival but no outcome yet there. According to Ami, girls and women of her family face more restrictions after Vidya's disappearance, because family's men have become more conscious and worried about their safety.

The girl deceived and converted against her will: (by Group-H-G)

There was a kidnapping case, reported in Lyari Karachi, two years ago: a 15 years old girl named Poonam was invited to an adjunct home of her friend's family for applying henna [tattoo] on the bride's hands she was requested, as she was expert of henna designing. She went to them and could not return,

for several hours, her family visited the family where she went, those people refused to accept that she had come to their home.

Finally, few neighbourhoods told them that a girl was brought there, she was intoxicated, head and face was covered with a veil and when girl's parents re-inquired with the help of community and neighbours' influential persons the accused family informed her parents that she had been converted to Islam and was given a new name 'Saira'. When they saw her, she was in stupor. Parents asked her questions, whether she was converted to Islam on her own will? Or she wanted to go with her parents? She just gave a positive and a negative nod respectively. She was unable to respond because of the intoxication.

Parents told that police was reluctant to support them, saying that the girl had been converted and they had documents with her thumb impression to prove her willingness. But Poonam's family objected, saying that she was an educated girl and why had she been taken thumb impressions instead of signature? She had to sign, if she had been converted on her free will.

Police asked them to take her statement in thana [police station] and to wait for two days until she would be under custody of them and will be appeared in the court. The girl was threatened by the kidnappers, saying that they will also kidnap her other sisters and kill her brother, due to she was extremely afraid and worried, she agreed to give her statement in the accuser's favour, but parents and community people assured her that nothing is going to happen with her.

Her parents registered case and decided to handle legally in court rather than only arguing in police station, when she was appeared in court, her parents asked her just do what she liked instead of fear, she recorded her statement that she was deceived on the name of henna applying to a bride, then was threaten there. She never embraced Islam and she wanted to go with her parents. She cried and asked for mercy to her and her parents, finally case was proceed with girl's statement, her offenders were taken under investigation and she was backed with her parents.

Annexe 2: Participants of the Focus Group Discussions

<i>FGD #</i>	<i>Place of FGD</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>FGD</i>	<i>Gender/ Age</i>	<i>Participant s (No.)</i>	<i>Area of participants' work</i>
<i>1st</i>	<i>Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Office Saddar, Karachi</i>	<i>Friday, 6 March 2020</i>	<i>FGD-01 (Group-W-1)</i>	<i>Women (18 to 35)</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Hindu women labourers, factory workers, dried fruit sellers, bangle-seller, housemaids, sanitary workers, and housewives</i>
<i>2nd</i>	<i>Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Office Saddar, Karachi</i>	<i>Friday, 13 March 2020</i>	<i>FGD-02 (Group-W-2)</i>	<i>Women (36-60)</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Hindu women ex-nurses, ex-teacher, labourers, factory workers, dried fruit sellers, home-based workers/labourers, housemaids, tailor, sanitary workers, and housewives</i>
<i>3rd</i>	<i>Minority Welfare Movement Liyari, Karachi</i>	<i>Friday, 20 March 2020</i>	<i>FGD-03 (Group-H-G)</i>	<i>Girls (14-17)</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Students of schools and colleges, beautician, tutor</i>

4th	<i>Professionals and Trainers Training Hall, Karachi</i>	<i>Friday, 5 June 2020</i>	<i>FGD-04 (Group-H-1)</i>	<i>Men (18-60)</i>	12	<i>Social workers, human rights activists, women and youth rights worker, political activist, lawyer, teacher, sanitary worker, students, journalist, and labourer</i>
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Annexe 3: Template Informed Participants Consent Form

Willingness to participate in research

Your participation in today's activity is completely voluntary. If you do not want to be included, please do not join. Because the information and the experiences you provide will be included in our research.

In today's activity, the information you provide will be protected; if you permit, your identity will be displayed otherwise, this research will be used to document anonymous or other temporary names.

This activity will be recorded audio. The purpose of recording is that the researcher does not miss any important details; the audio recording will be deleted after completion of the research study.

1. I am fully aware of the purposes of today's research study. I understand that even if I am willing to participate right now, I can refrain from responding to discussions at any time, where I am not satisfied.
2. I understand that I will not have any benefit directly from participating in this research.
3. I agree to my discussion being audio-recorded only for a time period.
4. I understand that any information I provide for this study will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed without my permission, its only for research work.
5. In this research study my name is allowed to reveal my identity.

Yes_____ No_____

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____ Sign: _____

Researcher Name: _____ Date: _____ Sign: _____

A Case of Several Jeopardies: A Study on the Intersecting Inequalities in the Everyday Lives of Poor Minority Christian Women and Girls

Naumana Suleman

Summary

The research paper endeavours to understand the situation of poor minority (Christian) women and girls in Pakistan vis-à-vis intersecting inequalities in their everyday life. The paper draws attention to poor minority Christian women and girls who are a neglected, vulnerable, and marginalised section of society. The paper attempts to highlight their experiences of social exclusion, economic marginalisation, religious discrimination, and gender inequality. The paper finds the case of several jeopardies where poor minority Christian women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in addition to those faced by an average Pakistani woman and/or girl.

Keywords: minority women and girls; intersecting inequalities; faith-based discrimination; social exclusion; marginalisation; stigmatisations; violence against minority women and girls; gender-based discrimination; freedom of religion or belief.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to all the participants who shared their experiences during the focus group discussions and organisers of the FGDs. Their names are not mentioned for reasons of anonymity. I am thankful to Huma Patrick for their research assistance and to Amy Quinn-Graham for editing. I am also grateful to Mariz Tadros for her invaluable peer review of this paper.

Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
FGD	focus group discussion
FIR	First Information Report
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
HRD	human rights defender
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PPE	personal protective equipment
SHC	Sindh High Court

1 Background

Pakistan represents a diverse society with regards to religion, culture, ethnicity, and linguistics. However, it lags behind in accepting the diversity that exists within the country. It is Pakistan's *de jure* obligation to ensure non-discrimination and equality among its citizens, as enshrined in Articles 20 and 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan,⁸ which respectively guarantee freedom of religion and equality among citizens. Pakistan is also party to several international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These treaties prohibit any form of discrimination, including on the basis of gender and religion or belief. Nonetheless, discrimination against religious minorities is prevalent in the country and ranges from discriminatory laws and policies to a biased mindset at societal level. As a result of all these provisions, the social fabric of Pakistani society has been badly damaged and space for the acceptance of existing religious pluralism has been squeezed. Consequently, Pakistani religious minorities are faced with discrimination and faith-based violence.

⁸ See www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf.

With regards to the population of religious minorities in Pakistan, the most recently available official figures are from the national census held in 1998, as data on religious minorities from the national census carried out in 2017 has not yet been published. Based on the national census of 1998, Pakistan's religious demography is assessed as 96.28 per cent Muslims and 3.72 per cent religious minorities, including Christians (1.59 per cent), Hindus (1.6 per cent), Ahmadis (0.22 per cent), Scheduled Castes (0.25 per cent), and others (0.07 per cent – Sikhs, Parsis, Bhais, and so forth) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics n.d.).

The population of minority women in Pakistan is estimated to be around 3 million,⁹ of which approximately 90 per cent reside in Sindh and Punjab and 92 per cent belong to Hindu, Christian, and Scheduled Caste communities. The majority of these women work in both the formal and informal labour sectors, such as in agriculture, sanitation, the brick-kiln industry, and as domestic workers. Around 2 per cent of minority women work as teachers, doctors, nurses, professors, or do office work.

In general, gender-based discrimination is rampant in Pakistan. However, women and girls belonging to religious minority or belief communities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in addition to those faced by an average Pakistani woman and/or girl. Minority women face discrimination on several counts: being a woman in a patriarchal society, coming from religious minority communities in a religiously biased society, and socioeconomic marginalisation. Besides this, the agony of discriminatory laws and policies adds to the vulnerability of minority women and girls. Gender-based discrimination against religious minority women and girls ranges from social exclusion in daily life and different forms of harassment to abduction, rape, forced conversion, and forced marriage (Suleman 2014). However, they have been neglected by the state and their long-standing grievances have neither been given proper attention nor addressed. This study therefore focuses on the plight of religious minority women in Pakistan and specifically Christian women.

A recent study from the Center for Law and Justice, *The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan* (Aqeel 2020), noted that in public spaces, Hindu Scheduled Caste women can easily be identified by their attire (*ghagra*) and *choora* (bangle), sari, and bindi. Christian women are also sometimes identified from their attire as they do not wear a hijab/burqa or scarf, nor cover their head with a *dupatta*. Besides this, they are from a marginalised segment of society which is not associated with having a powerful identity, and this therefore makes them more vulnerable and susceptible to harassment.

In another survey conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP 2020), in the chapter on Sindh, several minority women and girls, particularly from the Hindu

⁹ On the basis of the previous national population census (1998).

community, reported discrimination in their workplaces due to their religious beliefs. Sixty-seven per cent of the women reported that they had been persuaded by their fellow workers or business owners to convert to Sunni Islam. While these Sunni Muslims were not successful in converting these women, it is a constant form of harassment that they have to live with. Forty per cent of respondents reported that they have often had to put up with offensive comments and misbehaviour. Muslims often joke about their religious practices and it really hurts them, but they have to endure it. In response to the question of being bullied at their workplace, 59 per cent replied in the affirmative, out of which 91 per cent said they were abused verbally and 8 per cent faced physical abuse.

In 2016, as a progressive move to address the issue of forced conversions in Sindh, the Provincial Assembly passed a bill against this practice. However, before the governor's signature made it a law, religious and religio-political organisations (*Dawn* 2019) threatened to carry out country-wide protests. This resulted in the government withdrawing the bill. Relatedly, though the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 years, nevertheless, for girls from a religious minority, this law is totally disregarded on the pretext of so-called religious conversion. In the rest of the provinces, the legal minimum age of marriage is 16 years for a girl.

Besides the absence of any law to govern matters related to religious conversions, the absence of rules of business for the existing personal laws of Hindu and Sikh communities as well as outdated personal laws (the Christian Divorce Act 1869¹⁰ and the Christian Marriage Act 1872¹¹) of the Christian community are among the major challenges for religious minorities, especially for minority women. The impetus for a change in the law started in late 2016, when a Christian man named Ameen Masih sought to divorce his wife, and approached the Lahore High Court when he realised it was impossible under the current Acts without accusing his wife of adultery (Bangash 2019a). The Hindu marriage bill was first passed by the Sindh Assembly and later by the National Assembly, but no rules of business (procedures about how it would be implemented) have been introduced so far.

This has made it hard for the communities, especially women, to regulate their marriages, as rules of business are necessary for the operationalisation of the law. The Christian marriage and divorce amendment bill was being redrafted in 2016 by the Ministry of Human Rights in consultation with a whole range of Christian leaders, churches, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, it has not been turned into an act of the Parliament so far, on the pretext of disagreement among different denominations and members of the Christian community (Bangash 2019b).

¹⁰ See <https://hrma.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/THE%20DIVORCE%20ACT%2C1869.pdf>.

¹¹ See https://hrma.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/CHRISTIAN_MARRIAGE_ACT%2C_1872.doc_.pdf.

Nevertheless, this disagreement should not stop the Pakistani government from fulfilling its obligations to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women as a party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The government could have moved forward with the legislation by incorporating the valid suggestions and addressing the concerns. The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriages Act 2017, passed by the Punjab Assembly in 2018, regulate marriages of the minority Sikh community living in the said province only; therefore, such legislation followed by rules of business is required at the provincial and federal levels. Without these laws and their rules of business, the Sikh community would not be able to legally regulate matters related to marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, and so forth. Thus, an absence of these laws has particular implications for the women of the community.

Several human rights and minority rights activists have noted that in a number of cases, religious minority women (particularly Christians and Hindus), including minors, were abducted and converted to Islam through a Muslim marriage. Contact with their families becomes impossible on account of their conversion. Threatened and intimidated by their abductors, they state that they converted out of free will. It has been noted that the police and the administrative machinery usually side with the offenders who happen to be from the majority community, and socially and economically influential. The lower courts have generally ignored the circumstances, i.e. abductees' estrangement from their families, the crime involved (abduction and rape), the age of the so-called converted, the time difference between the issuance of conversion and marriage certificates, and so forth (Suleman 2014). However, recently two judgements have been passed. The first one, by the Lahore High Court in the case of Pummy Muskan, declared that minor children do not have the legal capacity to change religion on their own (George 2020). The second was passed by the Sindh High Court in the case of Mehak Kumari. The said verdict declared that an under-age convert could continue to stay with their non-Muslim parents (Khurshid 2020).

Maira Shahbaz's escape (*UCA News* 2020, unpaginated) from her abductor and her statement that 'I am 14 years old from Madina Town, Faisalabad. I was abducted and later forced to sign on plain documents, and later I was told that I have accepted Islam and had become a Muslim', further validates the aforementioned concerns of the religious minority communities.

In 2012, *Life on the Margins*, a study conceptualised by the researcher and author of this paper, was carried out by the National (Catholic) Commission for Justice and Peace on the situation of minority women (Jivan and Jacob 2012). The study included Hindu and Christian women from Sindh and Punjab, where 96 per cent of all minorities in Pakistan live. Five hundred women from each community were interviewed, representing different

levels of economic exclusion. The study noted that a high proportion of the women interviewed (42.5 per cent) shared that they stopped short of replying to specific questions on faith-based discrimination, for fear of undesirable consequences if the issue was discussed. Nevertheless, 43 per cent of the respondents said that they or a member of their family had faced religious discrimination. The highest level of discrimination (40 per cent) took place in the workplace. Educational institutes rated the second highest at 24 per cent, and in their own localities, it was 18 per cent. Only 14.3 per cent said they had never faced such discrimination. The study further noted that hate speech is the most rampant form of discrimination faced by the minority women, with 32 per cent of them saying they had suffered such instances. While 27 per cent said they had faced difficult and derogatory questions, for instance making jokes about their gods and goddesses, and asking them questions such as: 'Why do you worship idols? How they can listen to your prayers? How many heads do your gods have? Do you worship cows? Do you drink cow's urine?' (Mirza 2020a, unpaginated), 19 per cent said that Muslim majority members had disallowed them from eating with them.

2 Methodology

This study is an effort to understand the situation of Christian poor women and girls in Pakistan, to bring poor Christian minority women's issues to the attention of decision-makers, and to utilise its findings for awareness raising and advocacy for the rights and freedoms of minority women. The key research questions focused on exploring the daily life experiences of poor Christian women and girls to examine how these are different from other poor women from the same context, as well as inspecting whether the religious discrimination faced by poor Christian women differs from that faced by affluent Christian women. This will help to ascertain what the relationship is between religious discrimination and the social class system, and particularly how the intersection of religious affiliation and class affects the position of poor Christian women.

The research also looks at the differences between the experiences of men and women who belong to the same religious group in order to understand the intersection of gender with class and religious affiliation. Keeping this in mind, some questions were not asked to the male participants, due to a lack of relevance. Consequently, in some of the findings, their responses are not mentioned. Refer to Annexe A for the list of research questions.

This research paper uses qualitative and quantitative methods, including primary and secondary data. It uses a non-probability sampling method because it best suited the

purpose of the study in seeking a quick appraisal, and considering the timeline and resources available.

The research paper focuses on Christian women and girls; however, the same exercise was carried out by a colleague with Hindu women and girls. This resulted in a separate paper and it would be of interest to further investigate the convergences and contrasts between the two papers. The reasons for selecting these two communities were that: a) women from the Christian and Hindu communities make up a major part of religious minority women and, b) these women usually face more challenges in their personal and professional lives due to their day-to-day engagement with the majority community. The women, girls and men that participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen as per the following criterion. Firstly, we used different age groups and occupations so as to represent a variety of experiences. We interviewed domestic, sanitation, and factory workers, one beautician and one nurse. Secondly, the participants were from socially, economically, and politically marginalised sections of society.

Eight FGDs were held in July 2020, six with poor Christian women and girls and two with poor Christian men. Altogether, 36 women and girls and 12 men participated in the FGDs. The age group of women and girls ranged from 15 to 50, further divided into three age groups, that is, 15 to 20, 21 to 30, and 31 to 50 years, and the men ranged from 20 to 50 years. Two FGDs were organised for each age group to ensure a reasonable number of participants in one group, and so that all of the protocols in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic could be followed properly. Participants of the FGDs were residents of Yuhannabad, which is said to be the largest Christian community settlement in Pakistan. They belonged to the poor section of society, working as domestic, factory, and sanitation workers. Most of them have been living in the vicinity for more than two decades and some have been living there for longer. They are socially, economically, and politically marginalised. Separate FGDs were organised with males and females so that they could share their experiences comfortably. While responding to the questions, a few respondents shared the specific incidents of discrimination they had faced, and their statements.

The following tables show the breakdown of participants who took part in the FGDs:

Table 2.1 Age group 31–50 years, discussion held on 1 July 2020, in two FGDs

Sr. #	Age	Occupation
	31	Domestic worker
	28	Patient care

	34	Domestic worker
	26	Teacher
	30	Day care (in school)
	30	Domestic worker
	39	Baby care
	34	Domestic worker
	36	Day care (in school)
	48	Patient care
	40	Day care (in school)
	30	Domestic worker

Source: Author's own.

Table 2.2 Age group 20–50 years, (male group) discussion held on 2 July 2020, in two FGDs

Sr. #	Age	Occupation
	48	House painter/labourer
	28	Private security guard
	39	Factory worker
	48	Mason/labourer
	43	Labourer
	40	Factory worker

	20	Factory worker
	26	Sweeper
	37	Sweeper
	38	Gardener
	37	Factory worker
	40	Sweeper

Source: Author's own.

Table 2.3 Age group 21–30 years, discussion held on 4 July 2020, in two FGDs

Sr. #	Age	Occupation
	26	Factory worker
	23	Domestic worker
	24	Factory worker
	30	Factory worker
	27	Sweeper (in Hospital)
	30	Beautician
	28	Baby Care
	27	Domestic worker
	29	Domestic worker
	27	Domestic worker
	22	Domestic worker

	30	Medical Nurse
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Source: Author's own.

Table 2.4 Age group 15–20 years, discussion held on 5 July 2020, in two FGDs

Sr. #	Age	Occupation
	15	Domestic worker (works with mother)
	16	Domestic worker (works with mother)
	20	Sales girl
	19	Domestic worker
	14	Domestic worker (works with mother)
	15	Baby Care (domestic worker)
	17	Teacher
	20	Factory worker
	19	Domestic worker
	19	Factory worker
	19	Factory worker
	17	Baby care (domestic worker)

Source: Author's own.

A total of seven interviews were carried out with well-to-do Christian women that included parliamentarians, professors, bankers, and human (minority) rights activists in leading positions within their respective organisations. The objective was to compare the experiences of poor women with affluent ones from the same religious communities. These Christian women included representation from a few districts in Punjab and

Islamabad. The key research questions were posed using different angles during the FGDs and interviews, in order to ascertain the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Furthermore, the interviewers have significant experience of working throughout the country and therefore the findings have a general applicability in the country regarding the situation of minority women, which provides strong external validity of the research. In addition, though the research is primarily carried out with Christian women, due to the same socio-political context regarding minority rights and the situation of the major religious minorities in Pakistan, the research findings are relevant to the situation of minority women and girls from religious communities other than Christians, and it is particularly applicable to Hindu minority women.

The method of participatory ranking was utilised to generate the quantitative data. Transcripts were prepared of each participant, data was tabulated for each FGD, and analysis was carried out. They were approached by the lead researcher and her team and were selected after a brief interview and in accordance with the aforementioned criteria.

The researcher has been living in this vicinity since 1980 and therefore understands the community dynamics very well. She has observed the issues and sufferings of the community in general and of the residents of this settlement in particular. The researcher has been working on human rights issues, particularly focusing on minorities, for more than 20 years. Her positionality gives her an edge in understanding the realities on the ground up close. Subsequently, the respondents were more open to her due to her positionality, and were able to trust her to share their experiences without any pressure and fear. The researcher herself has faced religious discrimination, has a few times received offers to embrace Islam, and witnessed closely the consequence of religious hatred when her mother survived twin suicide attacks on two churches in Yuhannabad.

Lastly, using a small sample, this action research is a qualitative assessment based on the social and professional life experiences of the respondents and is not an extensive exercise. However, the study will be useful for minority women's rights advocacy and can be utilised by decision-makers to resolve the issues impeding the full enjoyment of rights and freedoms of minority women.

3 Findings

3.1 Greatest threats in scale and depth facing poor Christian women and girls

The female and male groups ranked religious discrimination at 34 per cent and 32 per cent respectively as the greatest threat faced by Christian women and girls. They ranked sexual harassment second with 24 per cent women and 22 per cent men responding affirmatively. Women prioritised lack of education over unemployment and ranked these issues third and fourth with 21 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. However, the male group graded these issues vice versa, allocating a 21 per cent score to unemployment and 14 per cent to lack of education. The women's group ranked domestic violence in fifth place at 4 per cent whereas men ranked the problem of receiving salary in a timely manner in fifth place with 11 per cent of the votes.

Table 3.1 Categorisation of threats in scale and depth facing poor Christian women and girls

Ranking	Prioritisation of issues	Women's responses
01	Religious discrimination	34%
02	Sexual harassment	24%
03	Lack of education	21%
04	Unemployment	17%
05	Domestic violence	4%

Source: Author's own.

Table 3.2 Categorisation of threats in scale and depth facing poor Christian women and girls

Ranking	Prioritisation of issues	Men's responses
01	Religious discrimination	32%

02	Sexual harassment	22%
03	Unemployment	14%
04	Lack of education	21%
05	Salary (timely)	11%

Source: Author's own.

With the exception of three or four respondents who have been working in a church or community-run school or institution, every participant faced religious discrimination in one form or another. The respondents reported having to keep their utensils separate as ordered by the manager, business owner or household owner, or being asked to bring their own utensils as the most prevalent discriminatory practice. One female respondent shared:

I have cooking skills, but I have been asked either to leave the job or do house cleaning once the owner came to know that I am Christian. It happened with me several times; therefore, I learned cloth sewing/stitching and now work at home to earn money for my children in a respectable manner.

Another female interviewee shared:

Though I was doing cleaning job at a household but was allowed to use kitchen to make tea for myself but using my own/separate cup. One day, I made tea for the office driver of the same household, also a Christian and served him in a cup from regularly used utensils. Later, the owner of the house scolded me for using the cup from regularly used utensils to serve him the tea. She later forbidden me strictly to do so in future.

A male sanitation worker stated:

It was comparatively easy to have a meal at road side eateries/small hotels before we were given uniform from our office, but now during lunch-time when we go to eat at any stall they recognise us from our sanitary worker's uniform and ask us to bring our own plate and glass or they allocate glasses and plates for us from their own utensils and keep them separate.

3.2 Ability to dress the way they like

On the question of being able to dress the way women and girls like, the majority of female respondents (97 per cent) replied in the negative and only 3 per cent responded affirmatively.

A girl shared:

I want to wear kurta/shirt with jeans but not allowed to do so due to the conservative atmosphere around, within our own community and the society in general.

Another female interviewee reported:

I am allowed to wear pants (jeans) and shirt but, in my home only, not when I go outside of my home. It is due to the traditional mindset prevailing in the major part of the society that if a girl wears modern clothing, she does not have a good character or inviting boys and men for friendships, etc.

As described in this quote, there is a belief that if a woman or girl from any community in Pakistan wears clothing that is considered to be modern or Western, they are inviting harassment. Consequently, the participants thought that it is comparatively easy for the wealthy members of both the majority and minority communities to dress the way they like to because they have their own vehicles to commute and do not travel on public transport where harassment incidents happen. Of course, women wearing the burqa or hijab are also harassed, as the clothing is just an excuse for harassment. This suggests that clothing choices for poor Christian women are closely tied to mobility. Where their options for moving around in public are limited, they are more likely to experience harassment due to their presence within the public sphere.

The contributions of the respondents reveal that they have imposed censorship on themselves regarding their choice of clothing due to cultural stereotypes and the commonly held interpretation of religious beliefs and influence of the majority community. These responses also revealed how gender-based stereotypes have further marginalised women from minority communities with regards to their personal and independent choices.

3.3 Religious customs in public life

All the female participants responded in the affirmative to the question as to whether there are any religious customs that poor Christian women have to observe that are not part of their religion. For instance, 92 per cent of them wear a *dupatta* (long scarf) over

their heads; however, 8 per cent don't. In another example, they shared that they are expected to cover their heads while Azan (the Muslim call for prayer) is said. A female interviewee shared that 'my owners ask me to do so, and if I don't obey then I have to face their anger and might have to lose my job as well'. Other respondents (except the ones working in community or church-run set-ups) also endorsed that they have faced these kinds of attitudes.

The respondents believe that these are the religious obligations of the majority community, but yet they have to follow them unwillingly. Besides losing their jobs, they also fear that they wouldn't be accepted or would be less accepted in society if they didn't follow certain religious customs, for instance, saying greetings and goodbyes in the same manner as the majority community does.

3.4 Freedom of mobility

Both the female and male groups responded affirmatively that mostly freedom of mobility is restricted for poor Christian women and girls by their own family members. This is to protect them and prevent them from associating with members of other religious groups, particularly with the Muslim community. According to them, the reason behind this circumscription is the fear of being falsely accused of insulting the religion (because of blasphemy laws) and fear of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage for minority women. However, 11 per cent of the female respondents shared that they were allowed to go out with their friends (from the same faith), relatives, and cousins, although 89 per cent of the females responded in the negative. Nevertheless, the male group responded with 100 per cent affirmation that females' freedom of mobility is restricted even with their friends (from the same faith), relatives, and cousins.

A female respondent shared:

I am not allowed by my family members, particularly by male members, to go out of my home alone.

Another girl stated:

I am not allowed to have friendship with the girls from any other religious community. However, occasionally, my family allows me to go to my aunts' and uncles' places with my cousins.

A women respondent reported:

I am sometimes allowed to go out from home with my friends from the same faith community I belong to.

3.5 Experience of public and social life

On the question of female respondents' experiences at a social level and in public life, the majority of them (81 per cent) shared that they face religious discrimination at their workplace, while 19 per cent said that they never faced discrimination. However, interestingly, the ones who did not face discrimination were those who worked in the set-ups run by the church or by members of their own community. This was also the case in their educational settings. Most of the respondents had attained primary level (5th grade). The 61 per cent who did not face religious discrimination attended church or community-run schools, whereas the 39 per cent who faced religious discrimination were students in government or other private schools (not run by the church or their community). The majority of respondents use local transport and 89 per cent of them did not face discrimination while commuting. However, 11 per cent did.

While citing the examples of religious discrimination in the workplace, in school and while travelling, the respondents shared that at their workplace, they are not allowed to use the same utensils for eating or drinking as the owners or their Muslim colleagues used.

A female respondent reported:

When I was a student at a government school I was asked to use a separate glass to drink water or bring my own bottle.

Other interviewees who happened to study at a government school shared that they also faced the same behaviour, either from their teachers or class fellows.

Besides this, another female respondent reported:

I faced visible discrimination regarding my teachers' behaviour giving me less attention in the classroom and scolding me bitterly on minor things. However, they never behaved in the same way with Muslim students.

A few more interviewees more faced the same challenges while studying at a government school.

A female participant shared:

In school, my class fellows and teachers used to insist me to recite Kalam [Islamic recitation] as part of the studies and when I do so, they keep on claiming that I have converted to Islam.

Another female respondent shared:

I studied at a government school and one day got injured as a result of corporal punishment by my teacher. Resultantly, bleeding started from a

pimple at my back, but the teacher did not provide me with any medicine or medical care, rather asked me to sit on the desk at the end of classroom and join the class later when the bleeding stops. However, the same teacher gave medicine to a Muslim student who was suffering from backache and asked her to lay down on the bench.

Furthermore, a female participant stated:

My school teacher forcibly made me to read Arabic, and gave me corporal punishment when I read it incorrectly.

With regards to experiences of discrimination while using local transport, a woman respondent shared that:

The local rickshaw drivers usually do not take it into consideration even if I ask them that an unknown male passenger should not sit with me. However, when women in abaya/burqa or chadar [a very long veil] predominantly from the nearby Muslim community settlement sit in the rickshaw, they take care of the fact that no unknown male passenger should sit with them and if already sitting with the previous (Christian woman) passenger they would ask them to change the seat.

Furthermore, a girl shared:

Sometimes even female passengers (from Muslim community) will try hard to not get touched with them, when they come to know that they are from the Christian community.

The respondents commute from and to Yuhannabad, which is a Christian community settlement, and it is thus easily to identify which faith group they belong to. This situation also highlights the intersection of caste-based and religious discrimination.

As with other provinces, the majority of the population in Punjab is Muslim. However, the majority of the Christian community in the country resides in Punjab, and a major proportion of the community members work as sanitary workers. Thus, Christians are associated with sanitation work (in the sub-continent in the past, sanitation work was carried out by Dalits who later converted to Christianity and Islam) which is unfortunately considered menial and dirty work by the majority of Pakistani society. Since most of the Christians in Punjab and most of the Hindus in Sindh Province are associated with the sanitation profession, there is therefore a mix of both caste-based and religious discrimination.

The respondents shared that household chores besides their job make it difficult for them to have regular leisure time. Occasionally, their leisure time is used to visit relatives or to go to the park, but only during religious festivals. A total of 97 per cent of respondents said that they hadn't faced discrimination during their free time in a public place (a park, etc.). However, 3 per cent said they had. However, when asked whether people in public places or places of leisure knew their faith and how they would therefore treat them, 72 per cent responded that their behaviour would be normal, particularly at eateries/stalls, but 28 per cent stated that it would not be normal, and rather, it would include religious bias. For instance, staff would keep them waiting to be served, ignore their order, use separate utensils for them, and their body language would be different, as if they were serving someone who did not deserve to be served by them. Among those who responded affirmatively, one female participant shared the following view:

I think that particularly at the stalls in parks, if they would not serve us, it would damage their own business, as on the religious occasions a lot of people from the community go out for leisure. Therefore, if we will not face religious discrimination, it would be due to sellers' own business interest, not necessarily that they themselves are unbiased.

This phenomenon of religious discrimination in the public domain results in the exclusion of religious minorities from social life and mainstream society, and also creates an environment of fear among minority communities. This is especially with regards to their acceptance in society and being safe from false allegations of theft, insult of religious feelings or religion of the majority community. This non-conducive social atmosphere for religious minorities hampers the ability of minority community members to engage with the majority community as equal citizens of the country.

3.6 Certain forms of employment

The majority of respondents from the female and male groups in the ratio of 94 per cent and 100 per cent respectively stated that poor Christian women are primarily only considered for sanitation work, whether at the domestic level or in any institution. For instance, cleaning the home or office, mopping floors, washing bathrooms, dusting furniture and so forth.

A female respondent shared that:

My owners hired me for the cleaning of their house, though I told them that I can do cooking as well, but they were reluctant to do so.

A total of 6 per cent of the women responded that they thought that other than sanitation work, poor Christian women are expected to work as domestic helpers, whereas middle class women are expected to work at beauty parlours or as medical nurses or teachers. However, as per the respondents, it does not matter what profession they are in, they will face religious discrimination. The majority of the respondents think that the reason behind this mindset is that mostly members of the Muslim community are being brought up in such a way that it is normal and common for them to discriminate against religious minorities.

One male interviewee stated that:

They think that the Christian community only do sanitation work, therefore, they look down upon us.

These biased norms are reinforced through discriminatory advertisements in newspapers from different government departments that state that a Christian or a person from religious minority communities (non-Muslim) would be preferred for the job of sanitation worker. Time and again, several civil society organisations and activists have highlighted this visible religious discrimination, but the pattern has not changed. The advertisers sometimes publish an apology or a corrigendum. However, the same kind of advertisements are repeatedly published from various departments (Hussain 2020). A study by the Centre for Law and Justice, *Shame and Stigma in Sanitation*, explores the issue of associating minority communities with sanitation work:

The Indian caste stigma attached to sanitation labour still survives in Pakistan and is recast as work for 'non-Muslims', particularly Christians in the Punjab region. There are various menial work categories, but it is only the janitorial work where Christians are overwhelmingly represented and 'locked'.
(Aqeel and Gill 2019: 4)

In 2015, the government of Punjab amended the policy of recruiting only non-Muslims (religious minorities) for sanitation jobs. Nonetheless, the practice of religious discrimination has continued by advertising sweeper jobs for religious minorities (non-Muslims)/Christians only (Bajwa 2015).

One male respondent stated that:

I sometimes feel very discouraged due to the biased attitudes of the society towards me and the work I do.

Another male participant shared that:

It was easy to do my job as sanitation worker before the uniforms were introduced for us, as afterward everyone recognised us from our uniform. Therefore, it added into the discrimination we face.

These first-hand experiences further add to the evidence as to how biased laws, policies, and approaches have contributed negatively to increase caste-based and religious discrimination and have affected the very social fabric of harmony and acceptance of religious diversity existing in society.

3.7 Access to places of worship and religious celebrations

Both the male and female groups responded 100 per cent affirmatively that it is easy for Christian women and girls to access their places of worship, due to the fact that they live in a community settlement and can go to church on foot. However, as to the question of whether they can carry out their religious activities peacefully, though the response was affirmative, after the twin suicide attacks at two churches in Yuhannabad and the aftermath, they believe that their safety and security could be compromised at any time, which sometimes imposes limitations on their peaceful enjoyment of religious activities. However, in other localities, especially urban ones, people can easily access places of worship as compared to the churches located in rural or remote areas. The main reason is the availability of public transport in rural areas.

3.8 Holidays on religious occasions

One hundred per cent of the respondents said that they could easily celebrate their own special religious days as they live in community settlements. Eighty-three per cent said they could get one leave day on Christmas Day only, and 17 per cent could easily take two leaves. However, most of these 17 per cent are those who have been working in community-run institutions. As Easter falls on a Sunday, which is already a holiday, the aforementioned 83 per cent are not allowed to take leave on Easter Monday.

One female respondent shared:

If I take one extra leave on Christmas or on Easter Monday then owners deduct my two days' salary.

Another female respondent shared the same experience:

My owners do not allow me to take extra leave for religious occasions – in case I do, they deduct my salary.

Adding to the conversation, a female respondent shared that:

My colleagues from the Muslim community get more holidays on their religious occasions and in case they take an extra leave their salary isn't deducted.

Another female interviewee added that:

Sometimes our owners give our Muslim colleagues extra money as gift on Eid.

A female respondent shared that:

During Eid holidays, Christian household workers are asked to work in lieu of their Muslim colleagues, besides our own regular work and we are not paid with extra money for that extra work.

These disparities in the workplace have contributed to further segregation among the members of different communities and this shows that even poor members of different communities suffer from the same phenomenon of poverty. However, the aforementioned biases further marginalise poor members from religious minorities. This unequal treatment inculcates a sense of superiority among household helpers from the majority community such that, although they belong to the same strata of society, they feel they have an edge regarding their religious identity.

3.9 Level of acceptance in society if they hide their religion

Interestingly, 100 per cent of respondents from the female group replied affirmatively that they will be more accepted if they hide public manifestations of their faith. The same percentage of respondents think that they would be more accepted at (government) school if they hid their religious identity. Moreover, 25 per cent of respondents replied affirmatively that they are allowed to practise their faith in their workplace; however, they were all the respondents who happen to be working in a community-run set-up. Nevertheless, 75 per cent of the respondents replied that they are not allowed to practise their faith in their workplace, but their colleagues from the Muslim community can do so.

One female respondent shared:

I wanted to say prayers at the household I work in, but my owner stopped me to do so and asked me that I should not offer my prayers in their home. I felt so bad, but of course I could not argue with them.

Another female respondent shared:

When I asked from my owner if I can offer prayer in one corner of the house she forbidden me to do so, and said that I can offer my prayer when I am back at my place.

Different approaches with regards to permission being granted to the household staff to practise their faith in their workplaces increases the feeling of otherness, disassociation, and unacceptability that further pushes marginalised community members to live in silos.

3.10 Access to health services

On the question of easy access to health services, 94 per cent responded in the negative, as private services are nearby but the government hospital is a little too far away, and 58 per cent of respondents stated that if their faith is known then they are discriminated against on the basis of their religion while receiving health care. Sixty-four per cent of respondents stated that the male members of their community also face the same situation when their faith is known. For instance, as per the observation of a few respondents, if their faith is known to the medical staff then most of them will not conduct their medical examination properly, especially physical check-ups. However, their behaviour will not be the same in the case of a patient happening to be from the poor section of the Muslim community. For example, they may ignore them, or be unprofessional in doing their medical check-up as they mostly do with patients at government hospitals, but they will not be hesitant or actually avoid doing a physical check-up of the said patient.

One female respondent shared that:

Once a doctor came to know that I am a Christian, the doctor further made distance between them and I was not checked properly and thoroughly as the doctor seemed reluctant to touch me.

3.11 Experience of engagement with local or national authorities

Although most of the respondents do not get a chance to engage with the authorities, based on their observation and indirect experience, all of them were of the view that generally administrative authorities, and specifically the police, do not behave respectfully towards poor people. However, if they come to know that the poor person is from a religious minority community then most of the time their behaviour becomes biased, and they do not easily register their complaint and expedite investigation

procedures. A total of 13 per cent of respondents stated that they were able to get a chance to speak with their owner in case of any complaint or grievance, but the remaining 87 per cent were never allowed to do so.

One male respondent shared that:

I have come to know that persons faced torture who were arrested on the allegation of the lynching of two suspected supporters of the terrorists after the twin bomb blasts at two churches in Yuhannabad in 2015 [see Khokhar 2020]. Though torture by the police is reported by the marginalised members of the majority community as well, these young persons from the minority/Christian community faced humiliation as well on the basis of their religious affiliation, including derogatory remarks about their religion, besides the torture.

3.12 Particular forms of violence and harassment

All female and male respondents highlighted forced conversion as a particular form of violence that minority women face, other than the violence faced by the poor women (from minority or majority communities) in general.

Theoretically, there is no restriction on changing one's religion in Pakistan. However, right to conversion in a Pakistani context means conversion to Islam only. The environment does not allow conversion to another religion from Islam, which is treated as apostasy, punishable by death according to common interpretation of Islamic Sharia. In a number of cases, minority women (Christian, Hindu, and Sikh), including minors, were abducted and converted to Islam through a Muslim marriage. Their contact with families becomes impossible on account of their conversion. Scared by the abductors, they make statements before the judge that they changed their religion out of free will. The police and the administrative machinery usually side with the culprits who happen to be from the majority community, and socially and economically influential. The lower courts have generally ignored the circumstances, i.e. isolation from family, the crime of abduction and rape, the age of the so-called converted, and so on.

Furthermore, 97 per cent of respondents from the female group reported that invitations/offers to convert to Islam have become part and parcel of their life. Besides this, 3 per cent of respondents categorised the false allegation of theft as a form of harassment. In addition, both groups of respondents categorised sexual harassment of the female members from minority communities as one of the major issues, with the ratio of 100 per cent (the male group), and 67 per cent answering affirmatively, 33 per cent dissenting (female group). Thirty-three per cent of respondents from the female group

further shared that sometimes they are being harassed by the male members of their own community, although none of the respondents detailed specific instances.

On the question of domestic violence, a total of 17 per cent of respondents from the female group answered affirmatively and 83 per cent said that it does not happen. Interestingly, all the male respondents denied the presence of domestic violence.

The denial of the issue of domestic violence by male respondents shows the deep-rooted gender-biased mindset that exists in the patriarchal society of Pakistan. This has also affected the male members from the minority communities as well as a part of the same society. Denial of the issue of domestic violence by 83 per cent of the female participants can be interpreted in a few ways. They might not want to speak about bad events within their community or they may not want to speak against their community members. Some might not have experienced it at all. This also shows the effects of the general phenomenon prevailing in society whereby reporting domestic violence is perceived as giving your family a bad name, as domestic violence is considered to be an issue of that specific household or family.

3.13 Response from men if violence occurs against women from the same community

The responses to this question were similar from both groups (males and females). However, ranking varies as per the following tables:

Table 3.3 Women’s group

Ranking	Prioritisation of issues	Women’s responses
01	Keep quiet/let it go	45%
02	Quarrel/fight	33%
03	Take legal action	19%
04	Solve through dialogue	3%

Source: Author’s own.

Table 3.4 Men's group

Ranking	Prioritisation of issues	Men's responses
01	Solve through dialogue	58%
02	Quarrel/ fight	17%
03	Take legal action	17%
04	Keep quiet/ let it go	8%

Source: Author's own.

The most noticeable factor emphasised by both groups was that men from the community prefer to resolve the matter through dialogue or keep quiet in case the alleged offender is from the Muslim community. Legal action is a last resort. They don't quarrel as they think that the majority community has socioeconomic and political power and they cannot compete with them. Therefore, fights mostly happen if the alleged offender is from their own community. The type of violence includes a false allegation of theft, a false allegation of insulting religion, sexual harassment of women and girls, physical violence by the owners towards domestic workers, and so forth.

A female respondent shared that:

My mother work as domestic worker and I accompany her and take care of a baby of that family. One day our owner, that baby's mother slapped me and said that I have not added the right amount of milk while preparing the feeder for the baby.

The drastic differences in the responses of males and females regarding the options of solving the matter through dialogue and keeping quiet depicts the general mindset. It also reflects the so-called notions of masculinity associated with men and honour being associated with women which prevail in society. This doesn't allow male members to accept that they will keep quiet rather than trying to solve the issue through dialogue, at least as it is a matter of a woman or girl from their community, and thus, associated with their owner.

3.14 Response by the state/government if violence occurs against minority/Christian women

Both groups of males and females believed that the state/government authorities or police will not be supportive in cases where violence occurs against Christian women and girls.

One male respondent stated:

It has been observed in the case of abduction coupled with forced conversion and forced marriage of a minority girl, the police will use delaying tactics to register the complaint, and even if registered they usually do not do it in a way that could make the case strong.

A female respondent shared:

if a complaint is registered in the case of harassment of a woman, at first instance the police usually blame the woman that she must have called for attention due to her modern cloths, not wearing duppata/scarf or not wearing an over head scarf. However, in the case of minority woman or girl, usually police gives a sense that besides the so-called clothing issues, Christian girls and woman are very open-minded/open to have relationship, thus they must have called for attention of the person.

3.15 Response by media if violence occurs against minority/Christian women

With regard to the response from the media, in the case of violence against Christian women, the men's group rated 50 per cent of the media being supportive and 50 per cent as not being supportive. However, 14 per cent of the women's group rated the media as supportive and 86 per cent as non-supportive.

One female respondent said that:

We have never seen reporting of incidents of abduction, followed by forced conversion and marriage being reported in the media.

Another female interviewee stated:

Due to the negligence of the traditional media not reporting of violence against minority women, people in general do not have the understanding on the issues we face.

The reason regarding the difference in responses of male and female participants might be that some male respondents were more sensitive towards minority women's issues and some might have not been so keen to engage with their specific issues. However, the issues that minority communities face in general are being reported through social media rather through the traditional media.

3.16 Threats to personal property

A total of 17 per cent from the female group and 25 per cent from the male group responded affirmatively with regards to threats to personal property. However, 83 per cent from the female group and 75 per cent from the male group responded in the negative. The ones who responded affirmatively further explained that most of the threats are from relatives and those can be resolved through dialogue or legal recourse. However, a general norm is that a share of the parents' property is not given to daughters.

The threats to personal property from relatives usually divide families; for instance, one group supports party A and one group supports party B. This segregation and division impacts on the strength of the community as a whole. Since there is division into different groups, sometimes one group will not support the other even for a just matter/good cause in case some issue/violence occurs against the community.

In addition, if a girl or woman asks for a share of her property, as a general norm in society, she would be seen as someone who is bringing shame on the family, and, by taking matters into the court, bringing shame on the community. In this case, minority women and girls are usually faced with a double pressure. On the one hand, they face pressure from society in general and on the other hand, they face pressure from their community. For instance, their stance to have a share in the property specifically through litigation could bring a bad name on the community which is already vulnerable and marginalised in society.

3.17 Forced conversions

Fifty-three per cent of female respondents and 100 per cent of male respondents were aware of the issue of forced conversions. However, 47 per cent of female respondents were not familiar with the issue. Both groups stated that sometimes it happened through abduction and sometimes poor Christian girls are trapped through the promise of a better and more comfortable life. They are being targeted in a specific manner or through a specific approach to convert them as it is the general perception among a major

proportion of the Muslim community in Pakistan that converting someone to Islam is a good deed. Minority women and girls, specifically young girls who are discriminated against and from the poor, marginalised, and socially excluded section of a patriarchal society happen to be an easy target for them. Both the male and female groups also had the impression that mostly Christian poor girls are targeted by Muslim boys and men in an ideologically motivated way with an intention to convert them to Islam.

One participant shared that she had witnessed an instance where ‘a Christian female domestic worker was converted to Islam by her owners on the promise that they will give her some property/piece of land as a reward’. Unfortunately, the participant didn’t know what had happened to the girl beyond the initial pressure to convert.

In the opinion of some of the participants, after the forced conversions and total disconnection from their parents and families, these girls are being trafficked as sex workers. The perpetrators can do this because these girls are totally disconnected from their families and no one would come after them to find out their whereabouts. Though there is a lack of evidence in this regard, in June 2020, the statement of Shirimati Meghwar in court upon her recovery after 18 months of abduction validates the aforementioned opinion. It was stated that ‘after her abduction, she was converted forcefully and was pushed to work as sex worker’ (Sohail 2020, unpaginated). After this statement, the court handed over custody to her parents.

Maira Shahbaz, a young girl from the Christian community who managed to escape from her abductor (International Christian Concern 2020) stated that:

I was abducted and later forced to sign on plain documents, and later I was told that I have accepted Islam and had become a Muslim. They pressurised me and made my video [being raped] and said they will upload it if I will not do what they say. They also told me that I had married Nakash [the abductor] and there is no way to go back.

(UCA News 2020, unpaginated)

A recent case of the abduction, forced conversion, and underage/child marriage of a young Christian girl, Arzoo Raja, in Sindh Province has also been in the limelight (*News International 2020*).

A female respondent shared that:

I was an employee at a beauty parlour and the owner of that parlour insisted me several times to embrace Islam and also offered that afterward she will ask her son to marry me and would also give me charge of the beauty parlour as its owner. Resultantly, I left that job in order to save myself from the forced religious conversion. As after resisting her offer to embrace Islam she could

have pressurised me to do so or she can get me charged under the false allegation of theft or insult of religion (Islam).

The same respondent further shared another horrific experience of hers:

Due to professional jealousy, one of my Muslim colleagues mixed rat poison in my meal. When my condition got worse, I was taken to the hospital and my stomach was washed. Meanwhile, the owner of that parlour came at the hospital and requested me not to disclose the real situation to anyone as it is the matter of repute of her parlour. She took hold of all my medical documents on the pretext that she will be affording all my treatment, which she did. However, after recovery, when I went to the parlour, I was told that they do not need my services anymore, and the same girl that mixed poison in my meal was allowed to continue job at that parlour.

The offers to embrace Islam are commonly made to members of the religious minority communities, as in society it is commonly perceived as a good act. These kinds of offers are so rife that even a prosecutor has reportedly told members of the Christian community facing trial in an anti-terrorism court over the lynching of two men after the Yuhannabad church bombings, that he 'can guarantee their acquittal' if they renounce their faith and embrace Islam (Tanveer 2017, unpaginated).

This phenomenon of abduction, forced conversion, forced marriage, child marriage, and the rape of girls belonging to religious minorities has pushed minority community members to either refrain from or have minimal interactions with majority community members in their daily lives. These incidents have created a trust deficit among the minority communities towards the majority community, and resultantly the fabric of social harmony and co-existence has been immensely damaged. Due to this situation, fear has permeated minority communities which has resulted in further restrictions for minority women and girls by members of their own community, particularly as mostly these girls are vulnerable and have been targeted for these crimes.

One female respondent shared that:

My family does not allow me to travel alone due to the fear of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage.

Another girl stated:

I go to work with my mother and only allowed to travel with her to and from the household we work in, as my family fear for any mishappening, in case I work independently at that household or anywhere else.

As it has been observed, several girls from minority communities have been seized when trying to get to higher educational institutions and travel freely. They therefore have a fear of all the above-mentioned crimes. Thus, these crimes have not only resulted in further drift among the majority and minority communities, but have also enhanced the marginalisation of minority women and girls who are already vulnerable in a patriarchal society.

Besides this, deep-rooted gender-based discrimination in a patriarchal society has made minority women and girls an easy target for abduction and rape, and for child sexual abuse, as due to the social context, these crimes can be easily covered up under the guise of so-called conversion. This is happening in the same manner as when women are being killed by their close family members due to some personal dispute, property issues, and so forth. Those family members gain the sympathy of the general public and receive a pardon from another family member for the crime of murder as it is being covered up under the name of so-called 'honour killing' (Deutsche Welle 2018). Legislation introduced in 2016 means that killers will get a mandatory life sentence. Previously, killers could be pardoned by a victim's family to avoid a jail term. Now forgiveness will only spare them the death penalty (BBC News 2016).

3.18 If religious minorities abandon their faith, are they safe?

The majority of female participants (53 per cent) think that Christian women can be safer if they convert; specifically, there will be no chances of being discriminated against on the basis of their faith. However, 47 per cent of them responded that even changing their religion will not make them safe, especially from religious biases, as they have heard of a case where a Christian girl married a Muslim boy and converted to Islam, but her in-laws still humiliate her by calling her *churi* (a derogatory term used specifically for female sanitation workers and for Christian women and girls). She had been kept as a domestic worker and the boy married again on the insistence of his family to one of his female relatives. The male group responded to the same question with 75 per cent in agreement and 25 per cent not in agreement.

3.19 Which groups of people within society are seen as the biggest threat for minority women?

Table 3.5 Women's group

Ranking	Groups	Women's responses
01	Drug sellers	63%
02	Sexual harassers	17%
03	Forced conversions	14%
04	Cyber criminals	6%

Source: Author's own.

Table 3.6 Men's group

Ranking	Groups	Men's responses
01	Drug sellers	42%
02	Sexual harassers	33%
03	Forced conversions	25%

Source: Author's own.

The majority of the participants categorised the drug seller group as the topmost threat as per the situation in their area. They think that being in a vulnerable section of society and happening to be from a minority community makes them an easy target for criminal groups who know that they can do the crime and can get away with impunity. Drug sellers target men and boys of the community and some community members are also involved in it for monetary gain. If a male member of the family becomes a drug addict, this brings an extra economic, emotional, and psychological burden on the female members of that family, which later badly affects their health and quality of life due to the extra work and extreme stress. This situation makes them further vulnerable to tolerating discrimination in their workplace as they need to earn to support their

households. These responses indicate an increase in drug addiction in this community settlement.

Sexual harassers also pose a threat to women as their wrong-doings create more challenges for women who need to go out from the home to earn money. In the case of their family members coming to know about incidents of harassment against them, extra restrictions are then being imposed on women and girls, and their freedom of mobility is compromised.

A female respondent shared:

The issue of harassment and sexual harassment has created more challenges for the girls and women, as we do not do any wrong thing, and we are not responsible for the harassment we face. However, we have to face the consequences by being restricting our freedom of mobility, putting time limitation on us, for instance, not allowed to go out alone in the evening, etc.

3.20 Changes in society that affect religious minority women

Women respondents ranked as prevalent religious discrimination being faced by the Christian community at 86 per cent, and lack of protection policies or mechanisms by the government at 14 per cent. According to them, all this contributes to the day-to-day difficulties of their community which ultimately affects the minority women as well. Male respondents ranked as prevalent religious discrimination in society at 100 per cent. They think that the discrimination they face in society on a regular basis has damaged their self-respect, resulting in frustration and affecting their family life. Besides this, the phenomenon has also placed limitations on interaction among minority and majority communities on an equal level.

Both groups (male and female) pointed out the increase in blasphemy allegations and quoted it as being one of the social-level issues that can affect the whole family, including female members of the family. The majority of both groups held the government responsible for all these changes. Both groups stated that poor men and women face almost the same challenges in their daily lives, ranging from religious discrimination, stigmatisation, to social exclusion. However, minority women are faced with some extra challenges, for example, sexual harassment, resulting in limitations on their mobility and most importantly the challenges of abduction, forced conversion, and marriage, resulting in total estrangement from their families.

3.21 Where do you seek support from in time of need?

Among the female respondents, in times of financial crisis, 67 per cent of women seek support from their workplace. They request salary in advance or take small loans from their owners that they return in instalments through monthly deductions from their salary. However, 33 per cent seek and receive support from their family.

A female respondent shared that:

Sometimes I can get advance salary or loan easily and sometimes it is difficult to receive this support from the household I work in.

The respondents did not answer about other forms of support. In order to manage day-to-day pressures, 92 per cent take support from their family members and 8 per cent from their friends or relatives. In the case of exceptional conflict, or to take any kind of advice, they seek support from their parents and siblings/family.

3.22 Role of religious institutes in the life of Christian women

A total of 86 per cent of women respondents found the role of religious institutions helpful for the Christian community and for women and girls of the same community. They referred in particular to the church and community-run schools in their locality, and a technical training institute which has helped them to receive education and training at a low cost. However, 14 per cent of respondents termed the institutions not useful as they think they should be totally non-fee paying.

3.23 What makes you happy and contented and what do you feel proud of?

The majority of respondents stated that they feel happy and contented when they support their parents, family, and others and when they wear new clothes. Moreover, they feel proud when they help others.

3.24 Representation of Christian women and girls

3.24.1 Words used to describe the Christian community, women and girls

At a ratio of 100 per cent, both groups categorised the following two derogatory terms as being used for the Christian community on a massive scale in Pakistani society: 'choora' and 'sai'.

Both groups ranked the following two terms at a ratio of 100 per cent, which are used as derogatory terms for Christian women and girls: 'choori' and 'sain'. The terms *choora*, *choori*, *sai*, and *sain* are derogatory ones used for persons associated with sanitation work, e.g. sweepers, sanitary workers, and so forth, and are particularly used towards the Christian community as an expression of hate, discrimination, and to look down upon them, as a large number of sanitation workers belong to the Christian community.

Female respondents described that if they and a woman from the Muslim community work as a domestic help or sanitation worker, the derogatory word *choori* is never used for the Muslim woman and they are always being called *Bibi*, *Buwa* or *Apa G* (all of these are respectful terms to refer to women).

A male respondent shared that:

I feel very bad when people call us choora, there is no respect for our profession in the society, I face discriminatory behaviours due to my work as sanitation worker.

A female interviewee shared that:

I feel a second class citizen when being called choori, it feels disgusting, but I have to tolerate in order to earn for my family.

3.24.2 How Christian women are represented in school and educational curricula

As per both groups (males and females), they never came across any mention of minority or Christian women in school and educational curricula.

3.24.3 When decision-makers talk about women from minority communities, what do they usually say?

While speaking in public, decision-makers speak respectfully and assure the audience that they will address the issues faced by minority women. However, both groups responded that these words are rarely transformed into action.

3.25 Effects of Covid-19 on the Christian community, and how these are different as compared to the majority community

According to the respondents, unemployment and financial constraints are the biggest effects of Covid-19 on the Christian community. Though the majority community has suffered in the same manner, in most cases, as per the respondents' experiences,

Christian staff were laid off first and without any support, but Muslim workers were laid off at a later stage and in some cases, owners monetarily helped their Muslim staff members.

One male respondent, a factory worker, stated that:

Christian workers were laid off first by the factory owners when lockdown started due to Covid-19. After a couple of months, Muslim workers were also laid off.

Another female respondent, a domestic worker stated:

My owner asked me to not come for work due to Covid-19 spread, but kept the Muslim domestic worker. Later, when I went to seek some help, they responded that they couldn't help me as their business is also going down and they will allow me to work once the Covid situation is settled. Meanwhile, I came to know from some co-worker that they have also laid off the Muslim domestic worker, but have been paying half salary to the person.

3.26 Access to health knowledge and care

All the respondents gained knowledge about Covid-19 and precautions in this regard from the television. There has not been any specific camp set up by the responsible authorities in the locality to disseminate information. Being a densely populated area where social distancing is not practised, special monitoring should have been done to ensure the safety of the residents.

3.27 Do people say that you are Christian and thus you will be saved from Covid-19?

Forty-two per cent of females were exposed to such persons who said that they would not get infected from Covid-19 because they are Christians. However, 58 per cent did not come across such people. From the male group, 58 per cent were exposed to such people, and 42 per cent were not.

3.28 Are people treating you differently due to the Covid-19 outbreak?

Ninety-seven per cent of the female respondents did not receive different treatment due to the outbreak of Covid-19; however, 3 per cent did. One female respondent shared that:

Someone said to me that America is responsible for the Covid-19 outbreak. As the majority of Americans are Christian, therefore, Christians are responsible for spreading the virus.

In the case of the male respondents, 8 per cent received different treatment due to Covid-19. However, 92 per cent did not receive any different treatment.

One male respondent, a factory worker, shared that:

I faced discrimination at my workplace on the pretext of spreading Covid-19, as my colleagues and manager thought that since I am a Christian and does not keep myself neat and clean, therefore, I can spread the virus. However, other workers cannot spread the virus as they happen to be Muslim and at least clean themselves five times a day in order to offer prayer.

A female respondent (medical nurse) shared that:

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, I have witnessed that almost all of the Christian staff members, whether nurses, sweepers, ward boy/helper, etc. are deployed on priority in the Covid section of the hospital and usually these staff members are not provided with personal protection equipment, particularly in the case of sweepers.

3.29 Responses of affluent Christian women

This section of the report details the responses given by affluent Christian women, providing an opportunity to compare their responses to those of the poor Christian women already detailed in the previous section. The interviewees highlight religious discrimination, forced conversion, harassment, weak financial and social protection in the existing Christian family and inheritance laws, false allegations of theft and blasphemy, a religiously-biased education syllabus, and policy, lack of education and resources, and poverty as among the greatest threats for Christian women and girls.

They also described that when in public wearing a head scarf or long scarf, *abaya* (in some places the official dress code), and covering their head with a scarf when Azan is called, are among the customs that Christian women observe which are not part of their religion. One interviewee shared that in some schools, colleges, and universities, especially the public ones, minority students are also compelled to follow the dress code of the Muslim faith such as wearing a headscarf, veil, and long scarf. In cases where the minority students do not follow this, they are mocked and criticised for their faith. In the same manner, most of the time during visits to the local bazaars and markets, if a

woman is found to not have a *dupatta* (long scarf) on her head, someone will stop her and ask her to wear the *dupatta* properly.

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents have faced discrimination in public life. Forty-three per cent of the respondents, however, have not faced this, although they have observed it happening to other members of the community. One interviewee shared that:

I have suffered derogatory remarks from my class fellows and teachers on account of being a Christian. As a part of my job, I conduct sessions with female youth and community groups (from majority and minority communities). When I discuss the issues of gender equality and sexual and other forms of harassment, I and my team are criticised for being religious minority and for carrying out the foreign agenda to spread vulgarity in Pakistan.

It has been a common allegation towards NGOs that since they receive funding from foreign donors, particularly from the West, they therefore advance their agenda in the country. Advancing human rights, particularly women's rights, is commonly perceived as a threat by sections of society with a patriarchal mindset. Once they are not able to dominate women, women will demand their rights. Women will be free in their decision-making, choices, and so forth, as they perceive Western women to be, and they equate it with vulgarity. For instance, getting divorced, dressing in a Western style, asking for a share of inheritance, getting married to a person of their own choice. In addition, if the human rights activist is from a Christian community, then they are labelled as an agent of America, Europe, the West, and so forth. If the human rights defender (HRD) is from the Hindu community, then they are labelled as an agent of India on the pretext that people practising/belonging to the same faith (Christianity, Hinduism) reside in those countries.

One interviewee reported that:

I used to work in an office and during the month of Ramadan, staff members from religious minorities were not allowed to eat in the office.

A parliamentarian shared a traumatising experience:

I was part of a training with my several colleagues including male and female parliamentarians. My little girl was also accompanying me who I was supposed to drop at her boarding school in the morning. The female group was also composed of my closest colleagues from different political parties. The night we reached and gathered in one room after dinner, they somehow brought the issue of religion and started teasing me that I should convert to

Islam because I was too good of their friend and they would be so unhappy if at the end I would rot in hell because I am not Muslim. First, I took it lightly and laughed about it but they didn't stop and kept forcing me to respond. That was probably the most helpless moment I had ever felt because I had never experienced anything like that ever. This is why I had no idea how to react. Of course, I did my best to respond and even in return said things I should never have under normal circumstances but it made them realise that they had done some serious damage. I literally busted into tears and left for my room. It was almost midnight but I immediately arranged a cab with the help of a colleague, picked up my stuff, and left with my little girl. They kept calling me but I didn't respond until I reached home. Although they apologised later but one of them who was among the closest mentioned at least thrice in a polite way that I should convert but until then I had learnt to ignore her with a smile.

One respondent shared that:

I was part of an inter-faith harmony group and visited a Gurdawara and Badshahi Mosque. The group took a basket of sweets for the Gurdawara as well as for the Mosque as a token of harmony. Sikhs in Gurdawara warmly welcomed them and shared the sweets among all who were present at the Gurdawara, but when the group tried to follow the same practice in the Mosque, the Imams did not eat the sweets offered to them. This made me to realise that their mindset is religiously biased and rigid to accept anything from the minority faith group. This gesture of them was quite discouraging for me and the whole group.

This shows the prevalence of a religiously biased mindset in society that perceives dining with religious minorities, eating from the things offered by them, and using their utensils as a sin.

Another parliamentarian shared that most of the people from the Muslim community call Christian women *churi* or *bhangan* (derogatory terms used for Christian and Hindu women, specifically for those who are associated with sanitation work). This reflects religious prejudices prevailing at different levels of society. Even affluent Christian women are not safe from religious discrimination, which shows that religious bias is not a class system issue only.

Twenty-nine per cent of respondents experienced in some places that if the serving staff know that the client is from a religious minority, they will serve them late, after serving the rest of the customers. According to 43 per cent of the interviewees, religious discrimination at eateries mostly happens in rural areas, and clients from minority communities are not treated in an equal manner as compared to the majority

community. However, 28 per cent of respondents think that religious affiliation does not matter as the eateries are concerned with their business and earning money. A respondent shared that:

Sometimes, if by chance in some restaurant or market the dealing person (from another religion) gets to know that I am Christian, they just stare like I am from another planet, offers the eatables after serving all the others, considering it obligatory.

While responding to the question of certain forms of employment that Christian women are expected to conform with, the majority of respondents categorised nursing and teaching professions for women who are educated. Otherwise, they should go into menial jobs such as being a domestic worker, sweeper, agricultural labourer, brick-kiln worker, and so on.

Eighty-six per cent of the respondents replied affirmatively that if they hide their religion they are more accepted. However, 14 per cent did not respond. None of the respondents have faced discrimination while accessing health services. However, they think there might be this kind of discrimination specifically at government hospitals in general towards people from the poor section of the society. If they happen to be poor and from a minority as well then this discrimination will be enhanced further and would be coupled with religious bias. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents experienced religious discrimination while engaging with government departments and officials. This form of religious discrimination includes delaying the work of the person belonging to the minority community, using lame excuses for the delay, and asking for a bribe to get the task done swiftly. Though these circumstances are faced by members of the majority community as well, if the religious identity of the persons belonging to the minority communities is revealed, it sometimes adds further challenges for them to get their work done. Seventeen per cent did not experience discrimination and 17 per cent did not engage with such officials. Thus, they don't have any experience in this regard.

A respondent stated that:

There is no problem to get medical treatment from private hospitals but in government hospitals due to religious identity, it is difficult to get same standard of treatment as the majority does.

One interviewee shared her experience regarding engaging with government departments:

Most often, the trend of religious discrimination is quite vibrant when it comes to governmental officials. In my experience, they are least bothered to listen

first and then if you negotiate with them firmly and logically they listen, otherwise they are not interested in responding to any of the queries even.

The aforementioned experience shows that if a well-off member of the minority community can face such bias, then poor minority women and girls who are not well educated and cannot argue with the officials can face more challenges and difficulties in getting their work done.

Another respondent shared that:

In my experience, law enforcement personnel, prison staff, and public defenders do not seem to be sensitised in treating suspects/inmates/clients from religious minorities without any bias. Furthermore, police stations across the country do not follow strict orders and deal poorly with minorities.

An interviewee shared that:

I have worked in an organisation where they gave me lower ranked job just because of my faith and gave upper ranked position to a girl who wasn't eligible for that.

Regarding the question of particular forms of violence and harassment that Christian women and girls face being different from the forms of violence faced by Muslim women, the respondents reported the following; they all emphasised forced conversion and marriage, sexual harassment on the basis of their faith, false allegations of blasphemy, invitations to embrace Islam, and the perception of some Muslim men that Christian women and girls are an entity to easily have an extra-marital affair with. The respondents further added that in the case of Christian women and girls working as domestic or factory workers or doing menial jobs, they face the challenge of receiving offers to embrace Islam on a regular basis. Their co-workers, supervisors, bus drivers (who provide a pick-up and drop-off facility), and owners are usual examples of those who ask them to convert. It is a very common understanding among the Muslim community that converting people to their religion is a noble act and they will be rewarded with paradise in return. Moreover, by converting people, they are saving their souls from hell. Respondents further added that as opposed to Muslim women or men, threats of false accusations of theft or insulting religion (Islam) are among the common challenges faced by Christian women, girls and men, in the case of any petty argument over any issue or not accepting the offer to embrace Islam.

Along with domestic violence, all the aforementioned challenges were described as the particular form of violence Christian women are subjected to. One interviewee stated that in her experience:

The majority of women employed as domestic workers are accused of theft and are later maltreated by the police. Sometimes they might be wrongly implicated but they are forced to return the money which they often arrange by lending money at a high interest rate from some Pathan. In some cases, young domestic workers are forced to fast during Ramadan and are taught to offer prayer as well. They are continuously asked to convert which of course comes with some financial prospects for the family. Factory workers and good-looking girls working in offices at reception or at admin positions share similar issues with some variations.

According to the respondents' experience, in some households' men are supportive of their female family members, in the case of any violence occurring against them, or being supportive of their education, doing a job, or gaining a professional career. However, in most of the cases, they have observed that Christian men prefer to keep silent, considering themselves as a weaker segment of society in comparison to the majority community. However, sometimes they protest or seek legal recourse as well.

A respondent shared that:

My parents have been supportive for my higher education and professional career building.

Another respondent reported that:

I have been supported by my family to live independently and work in a different city.

Another respondent stated:

My parents, specially father, supported me in my political career.

And one respondent stated:

I am a self-made person, specifically my father did not play a supportive role in my career building. I feel bad when I recall all the challenges I have faced not only from a patriarchal society outside but from inside the house as well.

On the question of the state's response on violence against Christian/minority women, all the interviewees were of the view that usually there is not much attention given to matters related to minority women, specifically of abduction, forced conversion, and marriage. It is very rare that these kinds of matters are decided in favour of Christian girls and women. As a first step, it is very difficult to register the FIR (first information report) against such matters.

The police are usually proactive against the forced marriages of minor girls but in the case of forced marriages of Christian minor girls precluded by forced conversion, the investigative officer tries his best to prove the maturity of the girl rather than invoking the child marriage restraint laws.¹² In Sindh Province, the Act does not allow the marriage of girls under 18 years of age, and in the rest of Pakistan, the Act does not allow the marriage of girls under 16. However, if a minor girl from a religious minority community is abducted, converted, and married off, on the pretext of conversion, the judiciary usually interprets her age in accordance with Islamic Sharia law which says that a girl is mature at the age of puberty. In contrast, in the early age or forced marriage cases of Muslim under-age girls, the police act quickly and count it as an offence against the Child Marriage Restraint Act that criminalises under-age marriages. The case of Arzoo Raja is a recent example of this trend.¹³ However, after further intervention was made by the lawyer of Arzoo's parents under the Child Marriage Restraint Act and a strong advocacy from different rights groups to uphold the rights of minority children and implement the provisions of the Act without any discrimination¹⁴, Arzoo was rescued from her abductor and sent to a shelter home on the Court's orders.¹⁵ The case is set for the next hearing.

According to the interviewees, the electronic media barely highlight the violence perpetrated against minority women and girls unless it is a high-profile case. Print media (mostly English ones) sometimes publish columns written on such issues; however, social media has played a vital role in highlighting such cases. For instance, it is rare that the cases of forced conversion and marriage of a religious minority girl would get attention or be covered by the electronic media, though social media is vital in highlighting such cases and some print media as well. The reason, it could be argued, may be the specific religiously biased mindset or extremist outfits that can later create problems or threaten the said outlet due to highlighting forced conversion as it is commonly seen as a good deed to get someone converted to Islam.

All the respondents replied affirmatively to the question of threats to Christian women and/or their families for their property. One reason has been the absence of proper inheritance law. Within the community, it usually happens when the property is transferred to the children. As per common practice, it is mostly sons who are considered to be the heirs of the parents' property. Girls are primed so as they revoke their share of property in favour of their brother, and the money is spent by the parents on their

¹² For Punjab see <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/147a.html> and for Sindh see <http://sindhlaws.gov.pk/setup/publications/PUB-13-000734.pdf>.

¹³ [www.asianews.it/news-en/Karachi:-Court-approves-the-conversion-and-marriage-of-13-year-old-Arzoo-Raja,-The-mother's-desperation-\(VIDEO\)-51455.html](http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Karachi:-Court-approves-the-conversion-and-marriage-of-13-year-old-Arzoo-Raja,-The-mother's-desperation-(VIDEO)-51455.html).

¹⁴ www.asianews.it/news-en/The-Minority-Women-Forum-calls-for-respect-for-minority-children-51470.html.

¹⁵ www.dawn.com/news/1588201/underage-marriage-13-year-old-arzoo-recovered-after-shc-orders-says-wahab.

daughter's marriage. The dowry is therefore considered as their share of their parents' property.

Matters related to inheritance for Pakistanis, including the Christian community, are governed under the Succession Act 1925,¹⁶ introduced during the British Raj into the sub-continent and which is open to interpretation. However, in a judgment by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1992,¹⁷ the judge decided to share a property equally among Christian litigants, and since then, this judgment has been used to support equal shares when any inheritance matter arises among Christians in Pakistan. Sometimes Christian families living in small towns or villages experience threats from the Muslim community to vacate their homes. According to one respondent, in most blasphemy cases, the bone of contention has been the property of Christian families. Or if some other issue has arisen, illegally dispossessing and illegally occupying the properties have been the norm.

As per the respondents, cases of forced conversion and marriage happen in two ways. One way is to abduct, harass, and rape the woman or girl to get it done and then the offenders hide their crime of abduction, rape, and forced marriage through forced conversion (Shahid 2020). The other reason forced conversion and marriage happen is economic disparity and poverty which forces minority girls/women to do bonded labour, become slaves to the landlords, and do all types of menial jobs in society. Knowing their condition, Muslim men promise them a better future and life, and thus, to escape poverty, slavery, bonded labour, and the stigma of untouchability, minority girls elope with them (Sahoutara and Ousat 2019). However, afterwards, discriminatory behaviour towards these girls is reported; for example, using the derogatory term '*chori*' for them, which is used for Christian women, on the pretext that though they have converted to Islam they are not Muslim by birth. They are thus referred to using derogatory remarks used for their community (Christian or Hindu), may suffer domestic violence, and are not accepted by the family or relatives of the boy, and so forth.

Most of the respondents identified the following issues faced by the minority community, which also affects the position and situation of Christian women. They cited religious extremism, a patriarchal society/mindset, religio-political parties, and religious leaders as the biggest threats to Christian women and girls wanting to live freely and openly. The biased mindset and increased intolerance in society towards religious minorities considers women as a commodity, a view which is backed by a more than 150-year-old legal framework to address the matrimonial issues of the Christian community, which has not been amended despite demands. The increased intolerance is evidenced by several blasphemy cases having been registered in recent months (Noorzai and Momand

¹⁶ See <http://pja.gov.pk/system/files/Succession%20Act%201925.pdf>.

¹⁷ See http://www.ljcp.gov.pk/Menu%20Items/Reports_of_LJCP/10/96.pdf.

2020). Abduction, forced conversion, and marriage cases have also been reported (Shahid 2020).

Regarding matrimonial issues, the absence of or outdated personal laws of the religious minority communities is one of the challenges for them, especially for minority women and girls. In 2016, Hindu marriage bills were passed by the Sindh and National Assemblies, respectively.¹⁸ However, as yet, no rules of business have been introduced with regard to the implementation of the said legislation. The Christian marriage and divorce amendment bill has been presented several times but did not transform into legislation, on the pretext of disagreement among some sections of the said community. The Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act 2017,¹⁹ passed by the Punjab Assembly in 2018, is only applicable in the said province. So far, no such legislation has been drawn up in other provinces. In addition, family laws are not in place for the other minority communities that provide for a marriage registration/certificate and other important safeguards and arrangements for the fulfilment of human rights.

Section 7 of the Christian Divorce Act 1869²⁰ provides that courts (in Pakistan) can act on principles and rules which are conformable with divorce law in the UK. This section was omitted through an Ordinance in 1981, by the-then dictator General Ziaul-Haq. A repeal of Section 7 left the Pakistani Christian community with the only option of Section 10, for divorce or dissolution of marriage on the basis of adultery. However, if a Christian woman is the petitioner, she has to submit the petition on the grounds of her husband's conversion and marriage with another woman; or on the basis of adultery coupled with other cruel charges, for instance, rape, sodomy, or bestiality. However, if she files the petition under the charges other than adultery, she would be entitled to a divorce *a mensa et thoro*, which means that the spouses may legally live apart, but they are still legally married. This hampers the possibility of both persons starting a new life, and, conversely, binds them forcefully to continue a relationship that no longer exists in any practical sense.

Since the repeal of Section 7, Christian couples seeking to dissolve their marriage on 'no-fault' grounds, without harming the modesty and dignity of each other, have started facing a number of complications. An increase in conversions has also been observed

¹⁸ See the National Assembly www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1491458181_468.pdf and the Sindh Assembly www.pas.gov.pk/uploads/acts/Sindh%20Act%20No.IX%20of%202016.pdf.

¹⁹ See <http://punjablaws.gov.pk/laws/2698.html>.

²⁰ See <https://hrma.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/THE%20DIVORCE%20ACT%2C1869.pdf>.

after this amendment, as the couples are forced to convert to another religion just to end the bondage of an irretrievably broken-down marriage.

Christian women suffer more than men after divorce under Section 10, as they face discriminatory behaviours and social taboos on the pretext of adultery, and this undermines their human dignity. Besides jeopardising their dignity, this phenomenon also hampers the probability of the woman restarting her life in a dignified manner because of the stigma of adultery. The woman and her family suffer enormous psychological and emotional pressure and trauma, which is sometimes not reversible. Thus, divorce under Section 10 enhances the social marginalisation of a Christian woman, who is already marginalised by being a woman in a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the Christian personal laws (the Divorce Act 1869 and the Christian Marriage Act 1872) need reform to make them compatible with contemporary social needs and realities. For instance, the more than 150-year-old law that allows the marriage of 13- and 16-year-old girls and boys, respectively, does not conform to existing state law and the international obligations of Pakistan. In addition, nowadays, most marriages are solemnised after sunset, which is contrary to the Christian marriage law in its current form.

With regard to the role of religious institutions in Christian women's lives, the majority of the participants stated that these institutions play an important role. For instance, there are several schools, technical colleges, vocational training centres, and mother-and-child health centres for women that serve in their respective field but are not sufficient as per the population of the community. They are also engaged in the civic education of minority women and conduct frequent career guidance sessions for minority girls, in which they are guided to opt for good subjects and professional fields. This skill development helps them to earn a livelihood through respectable means.

Nonetheless, some of the interviewees categorised the role of religious institutions both positively and negatively. From a positive point of view, these institutions teach them moral values, give them knowledge of their faith, and provide employment opportunities to them. However, on the negative side, politics is part of these institutions. One participant explained that in her view, harassment, including sexual harassment, happens in these organisations. The organisations are usually run by one person in a personality-centric manner.

One interviewee mentioned that 'Ahl-e-Kitab' (people of the book) is the only term which is used by some members of the Muslim community for Christians as a gesture of

respect. On the contrary, all the respondents mentioned that several derogatory and hateful terms such as *choray*, *sai* (the deliberate and wrong pronunciation of the word Isai, the followers of Isa, derived from Isa, the Arabic translation of Jesus, used by the Muslim community), *kalay* (dark-skinned), untouchable people, and *kafir* (infidel) are the terms used by the majority of the Muslim community for Christians. This creates and reinforces religious otherisation in the public perception. Furthermore, *choray* and *sai* are the common derogatory terms that Muslim community members use for Christians. Also, *kaali* and *choori* are the common derogatory terms specifically used for Christian women.

While answering the question of how the media presents Christian women, the respondents shared that they are usually shown as being the poor deprived people of the nation, doing nominal jobs, having extra-marital affairs, and habitually using alcohol and smoking. They are also depicted as sometimes having a dark complexion, a Western or modern attire, and always having an open and bold attitude, especially towards men. One drama was broadcast in which a Christian family was shown as comprising sanitary workers and domestic workers. In another drama, a Christian girl is attracted to the Muslim teachings and converts to Islam. One respondent categorised two TV serials, *Maria Bint e Abdullah* (Chaudhry 2018) and *Baji Irshaad* (UCA News 2017) as notorious with regard to Christian women.

As per the respondents, most parliamentarians do not want to discuss the issues of Christian or minority women, but if some parliamentarians dare to talk about these issues, they are usually asked not to do so by other parliamentarians. Often, the decision-makers including parliamentarians are in a position of denial and pretend that they are treating all citizens equally in terms of providing opportunities and facilitation. However, the reality is totally in contrast to this.

The interviewees stated that unemployment has been the major effect of Covid-19 on the Christian community. Besides this, they also suffer the stigma of doing nominal jobs and being the perceived carriers of infection, which is associated with them as the majority live in slums. Since the majority of Christians live in impoverished settlements where sanitation and hygiene services are already non-existent, it is impossible to maintain social distancing. Therefore, many such settlements have been sealed after being declared red zones.

In identifying the risk of coronavirus affecting members of the Christian community in comparison to others from the mainstream religious community, most of the respondents shared that sewerage tasks are continuing and mostly this job is for the

people of the Christian community. For quite a long time, no proper personal protective equipment (PPE) was provided to them, and so they are at higher risk. In addition to this, Christian medical staff are also put on the frontline to treat Covid patients. Moreover, the majority of religious minorities are living in slums and congested houses and thus there is a higher probability of infection.

During this pandemic, minorities are being affected by religious discrimination more than ever before. For instance, discrimination has been reported during distributions of food relief packages. Furthermore, there have been alleged complaints about discrimination during ration distribution or offers of conversion to Islam. In some areas of Punjab, some organisations have refused to give rations to the Christian community because of their faith and they were asked to embrace Islam in order to receive ration packages (Mirza 2020b).

4 Conclusion

Investigating the situation of the rights and freedoms of Pakistani religious minority women and girls is an uphill task. A major obstacle is the absence of official data relating to their population, their social and economic conditions, their education and employment, and so forth. In contrast, information regarding majority women exists in this regard (UN Women n.d.). The Pakistan National Census Report of 1998²¹ does not show separate data on religious minority women and the results of 2017's national census regarding the minority population have not yet been published.

The most striking finding of the research is that a substantial number of respondents ranked religious discrimination as the major challenge and threat for minority women. This percentage reveals salient religious prejudice towards religious minorities in Pakistan. The phenomenon of sexual harassment has further posed serious challenges to their freedom of mobility and has made them impose self-censorship in terms of their personal choices to dress the way they like to, for instance, not wearing jeans, shirts, or wearing a *duppata* (long head scarf), an over head scarf, and so on. The level of religious discrimination they face in their workplaces, in social life, and during public interactions (when their faith is known) further strengthens the fact that compared to previous years, religious discrimination has become more prevalent in Pakistani society. Furthermore, the offers of specific forms of employment, certain forms of discrimination in their workplaces, and the use of hate speech and derogatory terms for the Christian community reveals deeply entrenched biases against religious minorities.

²¹ See www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/POPULATION%20BY%20RELIGION.pdf.

A noticeable number of respondents highlighted the phenomenon of forced conversion accompanied by the crimes of abduction, rape, and under-age forced marriage, which once again challenges the claim by some segments of society that this issue does not exist.

In addition, the continued offers to embrace Islam made to religious minorities, and particularly to minority women, signifies the shrinking space for freedom of religion or belief and further adds to the evidence that minorities are being excluded from the mainstream. This shows that forced conversions and pressures to convert are a very significant issue facing the Christian community.

A lack of any protection mechanism, and the absence of any law and policy to address discrimination and violence against religious minority women further adds to their vulnerabilities. Moreover, it depicts a reluctance at state and government level to address the issues and threats faced by women and girls of religious minority communities. Covid-19 has further revealed the biased mindset prevailing at several levels in large parts of Pakistani society towards religious minorities, including minority women.

The research results also show that affluent minority women also suffer from religious prejudice that is prevalent in Pakistani society. Thus, religious discrimination is not the phenomenon of poor members or women of minority communities only. Affluent Christian women also suffer from inequalities in some instances, but this might not be with the same level of intensity as that faced by poor minority women. Therefore, this finding strongly challenges the common perception and argument that religious discrimination happens due to poverty or against poor people only and is a phenomenon of the social class system. As in this research paper, Christian women from both the well-off and poor sections of society have reported religious discrimination. For instance, women from both sections have been repeatedly asked/offered to embrace Islam, have been asked to use separate utensils, have been harassed due to their religious identity, and so forth.

All these issues undermine the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms of Pakistani religious minority women and girls. The elimination of inequality from laws, policies, and society, and an assurance of non-discrimination among all citizens is a legal obligation of the Government of Pakistan under the country's Constitution, and as a party to several international human rights treaties, including CEDAW.

Hence, Pakistan needs several interventions at multiple levels in order to expand the space for religious freedom and to become a society based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

5 Recommendations

1. Governmental and non-governmental sections should initiate programmes for the socioeconomic empowerment of minority women. For instance, loans for business, capacity building, and skill-based trainings. Moreover, programmes and campaigns on gender equality and awareness should be undertaken, with a special focus on minority women.
2. The government and private sector should involve minority women in decision-making through their inclusion as staff members in key positions and as beneficiaries of different programmes.
3. Robust safeguards should be introduced and promulgated in all workplaces for minority women to be protected from every kind of exploitation. Moreover, the implementation of the Protection against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act 2010²² should be ensured.
4. The services of minority women in different professions, especially in health and education, should be recognised at government level.
5. Robust legal and judicial safeguards should be enforced against forced conversions, marriages, and the related crimes of abduction and rape.
6. Independent, autonomous, and permanent Commissions for Minorities (the one established by the government is not a statutory body) should be provided with adequate human and financial resources and constituted at federal and provincial level, with the powers of a tribunal, to examine complaints and with timely redress.
7. A common Civil Code should be enacted, to enable marriage without conversions, and with equal rights in all matters concerning marriage and divorce.
8. Current family or personal laws for religious minorities in Pakistan should be reviewed by a competent body to check injustices against minority citizens, particularly minority women, and to ensure that these laws comply with human rights standards to prevent the overriding effect of the personal law of the majority community. Moreover, family laws should be enacted for Sikh,²³ Kalash, and other minority communities that provide for a marriage registration/certificate and other important safeguards and arrangements for the fulfilment of human rights.

²² See www.qau.edu.pk/pdfs/ha.pdf.

²³ At the moment, the personal law of the Sikh community is only legislated in Punjab.

9. The curriculum for schools, colleges, and universities should be revised to eliminate existing hate speech against religious minorities and must include their role in the progress of Pakistan.
10. The federal and provincial governments should ensure comprehensive implementation of the 5 per cent job quota for minorities and an equivalent quota (5 per cent) should be introduced at all government educational and technical training institutions.

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Annexe A

Research Questionnaire

1. What are the greatest threats in scale and depth facing poor women in context x from their perspectives? After identifying them all, ask them to list them in order of impact and explain why.
2. On a day-to-day basis, how are poor women from religiously marginalised backgrounds able to dress in the way they like without being harassed more than other women from other backgrounds?
3. When out in public, are there any religious customs that poor women from a religiously marginal group have to observe that are not a part of their religion?
4. To what extent is the freedom of mobility of women who belong to religiously marginalised groups circumscribed by being members of their own community, so as to 'protect' them or 'prevent' them from associating with members of other religious groups?
5. Describe experiences of poor women from the religious group being out in public *in comparison to other poor women* from the mainstream religions, for example:

Work

Study/education

Leisure

Transport

Community service

6. Are there particular roles within your context that women from your religious background are expected to conform to, including certain forms of employment? If so, what are they?
7. To what extent are poor women able to access their place of worship and carry out peaceful religious activities, such as prayer and worship, in comparison with other women of mainstream faiths?
8. To what extent are poor women able to mark important occasions *freely* within their religious calendar compared to those of the mainstream religion?
9. To what extent do poor women feel they are more likely to be accepted when they hide public manifestations of their faith?
10. Describe poor women of religiously marginalised backgrounds' experiences of accessing health-care services. Are there differences with the experiences of poor women or poor men more broadly? What accounts for this?
11. What are the experiences of women from poor religiously marginalised backgrounds in engaging with local/national authorities? How are they different from others?
12. Are there particular forms of violence or harassment that poor women from religiously marginalised backgrounds experience more or differently from other poor women? Who are the perpetrators? And what are their drivers for such violence? Do we have examples?
13. Are there *particular* forms of violence that women from your religious group are *typically subjected to*?
14. How do men from the same religiously marginalised group typically respond to violence perpetrated against women?
15. How does the state typically respond to violence perpetrated against women from this religiously marginalised group?
16. How does the media typically respond to violence perpetrated against women from this religiously marginalised group?
17. Do women or their families experience threats to their property *in any way* or their land from groups of the same religious background or different? a) If so, who was the threat from? b) How is it dealt with?

18. Are poor women from religiously marginalised backgrounds targeted in ideologically motivated grooming processes? How does that happen? Why? What are the outcomes? What redress mechanisms exist? What are the longer-term outcomes for the women and the community?
19. Have there been cases of forced conversion? How do they happen? What are their outcomes?
20. Have you ever felt it might be necessary for members of a religiously marginalised group to abandon their faith, or convert to another religion, in order for them to feel safe?
21. Which group(s) are the biggest threat to poor women from religiously marginalised groups to live openly?
22. What changes facing the religiously marginalised community at the level of
- a) the religious community itself
 - b) the broader society
 - c) state policy
 - d) non-state powerful actors
- affected the position and situation of poor women of the same religiously marginalised background? What, or who, do you think is responsible for these changes?
23. Very broadly, are these experiences of religious targeting that women face that men from the same religious group don't face?
24. How do poor women resort to for support in times of
- a) financial crisis
 - b) day-to-day pressures
 - c) exceptional conflict
 - d) advice of any kind?
25. What role do religious institutions of the same faith play in the lives of poor women from their perspective? What makes you feel happy? When do you feel fulfilled? Tell us about a situation/time in which you felt proud of yourself

Experiences of religious otherisation – public perceptions

1. What words do you hear used to describe your religious group within your context, and by whom?
2. What words do you hear used to describe women from your religious group within your context, and by whom?
3. How are the words used to describe women from your religious group different from the words used to describe women from other religious groups within your context?
4. If relevant, how does ethnic and religious identity affect how people interact with you?
5. Describe the images the media uses to represent women from your religious background.
6. Do women from your religious group feature in television or radio programmes? If so, what roles do they typically play?
7. How are women from your religious group represented in school and educational curricula in your country?
8. When decision-makers in your country, such as the state, talk about women from your religious group, what do they typically say about you?

Questions specific to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Christian community

1. How has the emergence of the risk of Covid-19 affected them as a community?
2. Is there a difference between how the risk of Covid-19 has affected them in comparison to others from the mainstream community?
3. Access to health knowledge and care: against the background of the current Covid-19 pandemic, do they feel their access to information and treatment is more/less/the same as members of the mainstream religion?
4. Have they ever been exposed to people linking what religion you belong to and protection from Covid-19? i.e. those that follow a particular religion are not as likely as the others to get infected with Covid-19?
5. Are people treating you differently because of Covid-19, i.e. in terms of employment, in terms of interactions, in terms of name calling?

Gender-Based Perspectives on Key Issues Facing Poor Ahmadi Women in Pakistan

M.K.

Abstract

Different researchers have separately investigated the effects of faith-based persecution and poverty on women. However, it seems that the research on intersecting inequalities in the context of poverty and the religious marginalisation of women is lacking due attention. This study is an effort to highlight the experiences and issues faced by poor women from the religiously marginalised Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (AMC) in Pakistan. It attempts to examine how the issues are perceived by poor Ahmadi Muslims (AMs) in Pakistan.

Participative ranking methodology (PRM) was principally employed for the data collection. Findings are based upon the semi-structured interviews of three focus groups: poor women aged more than 35 years; poor women aged less than 35 years and above 18 years; and Ahmadi men related to poor AM women. Initially, a questionnaire was devised by conducting a pilot study to prepare a list of as many issues as possible that are faced by poor AM women together with different supplementary questions for clarification from the focus groups. Later, 25 of the identified issues were ranked by the focus group participants. Findings show that the issues that directly related to state-sanctioned persecution were of top concern for both genders, and were the root cause of all the other issues. Only one issue (i.e. difficulty in finding a marriage partner) was generated within the AMC.

Overall comparison between the priorities indicated that generally the men ranked the issues higher than the women. It was also found that poor AM women try to hide their religious identity as far as possible and remain silent to any kind of oppression, mainly due to their defenceless position to the anti-Ahmadiyya laws. Their other reactions to the persecution were either to migrate to Rabwah (a city in Pakistan with 98 per cent AM population) or to seek asylum in other countries. However, many of them cannot leave Pakistan due to their weak financial position and so continue living in a very hostile environment.

This study finds that poverty and faith-based persecution generate synergic effects on the lives of Ahmadi women in Pakistan. Poverty increases their vulnerability to persecution due to the very limited options of keeping themselves away from the dense population of the

majority religion. In general, they are marginalised, targeted, and discriminated against in all aspects of their lives, including religious, cultural, social, economic, legal, constitutional, and judicial contexts. Perhaps the most significant contribution of this study is to highlight the fact that intersectional studies can find the details that are often missed in investigations on general faith-based persecution.

Future research may focus on comparing results of the current study through feedback from focus groups comprising rich AM women and women from other religious minorities in Pakistan. This kind of comparative study could generate new insights to understand the sensitivity of different aspects of faith-based persecution.

Abbreviations

AM	Ahmadi Muslim
AMC	Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
CNIC	computerised national identity card
FIR	First Investigation Report
IHC	Islamabad High Court
NCM	National Commission for Minorities
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PRM	Participative ranking methodology

1. Introduction to the AMC

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (AMC, or Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at) believe themselves to be Muslims. The AMC was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889 as a revival movement within Islam. Unlike all other sects of Islam, they believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908) of Qadian (a small town in Gurdaspur district of Punjab, India) is the same promised Messiah who was prophesied by the prophet Muhammad. Other sects believe that the promised Messiah is yet to come and, therefore, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a false prophet and his followers are non-Muslims. Another major criticism of the AMC by other sects is that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad abandoned jihad in Islam. However, Mirza Ghulam Ahma categorically declared that Islam did not encourage 'jihad by the sword'. Instead, he emphasised that Muslims should adhere to the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad's model to defend Islam with a non-violent, intellectual 'jihad of the pen' (Qadiyani 1900).

Five Khalifas have succeeded Mirza Ghulam Ahmad since his demise under the khilafat (the spiritual institution of successorship to prophethood) system, which is also believed by majority sects as a God's promise to safeguard Islam. A *Khalifa* is the community's spiritual and administrative head. Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the current *Khalifa*, is originally from Pakistan and resides in the UK.

According to the AMC official website, membership exceeds tens of millions, with followers in more than 200 countries. The *Khalifa* appoints an *Ameer* (administrative leader of the community) for each country. The *Ameer* heads the national executive body of his country, which consists of different national secretaries. The AMC has built over 16,000 mosques, 600 schools, and 30 hospitals. It has translated the Holy Qur'an into over 70 languages. In

addition to regular printed publications, the community owns a 24-hour satellite television channel (MTA International). The AMC also runs the non-profit charity, Humanity First, which mainly works for disaster relief worldwide.

Rabwah, a small city in the Punjab province of Pakistan, was the headquarters of the AMC from 1948 to 1984 when it relocated from Qadian, India after Pakistan came into existence in 1947. The community holds great sacredness for Rabwah due to its history related to its second *Khalifa* Mirza Bashir Uddin Ahmad. He had a holy dream in which he saw the community settling in a land of mountains and agriculture (Qasmi 2015). He preached the content of his dream to his followers in Qadian and directed them to Pakistan. The *Khalifa* saw a land about 170km away from Lahore which looked similar to the land in his dream. He ordered his people to settle there. The AMC purchased 2,500 acres from the government of Pakistan to establish their community and named it Rabwah.

Rabwah remains the only city of Pakistan where the majority population (i.e. 98 per cent) is Ahmadi (Rashid 2018). The *Khalifa* used to lead the AMC all over the world from Rabwah until the establishment of anti-Ahmadiyya laws in 1984. The fourth *Khalifa*, Mirza Tahir Ahmed, migrated to the UK and the AMC's headquarters was moved first to London and then in 2019 to Islamabad in Tilford, Surrey. Rabwah is now officially known as Chenab Nagar after its name was changed in 1998 through a resolution passed by the Punjab Assembly which was moved by clerics.

2. Background to the persecution of the AMC in Pakistan

Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, the AMC has faced severe persecution. Around 200 Ahmadi Muslims (AMs) were killed in the famous anti-Ahmadiyya Lahore riots of 1953, which ended by martial law being imposed in Punjab (Imtiaz *et al.* 2015). 'Engineering' of the riots started in 1949 by different religious parties with the support of some political leaders who opposed the Pakistan movement and felt disgraced and powerless after Pakistan came into existence (Khan 2018). They manoeuvred the religious sentiments of the general public by targeting a sect of Muslims whose beliefs had been criticised in the past by other

sects of Islam. Their first demand from the Government of Pakistan was to declare Ahmadis as 'non-Muslim'. The said riots were a trend setter for future violence against the AMC.

In 1974, anti-Ahmadiyya groups successfully pushed the government, under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslim. In 1984, President Zia ul Haq issued the Ordinance XX, which provides for imprisonment extending to three years and unlimited fines to any AM who, in any way, behaves like a Muslim or refers to him/herself as a Muslim. The law further says that any act of an AM which seems relevant to Islam will be considered as blasphemy. In 1986, through another constitutional amendment, it was announced that the punishment for blasphemy is either the death penalty or life imprisonment. However, in 1990, the Federal Shariat Court of Pakistan declared that the only punishment for blasphemy could be death. In 1993, in response to a series of appeals by the AMC, who argued among other things that the constitutional provisions violated the religious freedom guaranteed in Article 20 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Supreme Court upheld all anti-Ahmadi provisions.

In 2018, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) directed the state and its institutions to formulate a faith affidavit to be signed by any Pakistani citizen who joins the judiciary, the armed forces, or the civil service. Furthermore, the same affidavit was declared mandatory for all citizens who apply for a computerised national identity card (CNIC), a passport, a birth certificate, or to enter their name on the voters' list. The key purpose of introducing such an affidavit was to uncover the religious identity of those AMs who were living in disguise (Shehzad 2018). The decision of the IHC also stated that Ahmadis were not rightful of being recognised as Ahmadis because 'Ahmad' was also a name of the prophet Muhammad. The decision further directed Ahmadis to add 'Mirzai' or 'Ghulam-i-Mirza' (derogatory religious slurs used to refer to AMs) to their names to differentiate them from orthodox Muslims and to stop using names like those of orthodox Muslims, such as Mohamed and Hussein.

The state-sanctioned and state-sponsored persecution has resulted in relentless societal persecution of the AMC. Therefore, the AMC in Pakistan is also a prime victim of serious violations of human and fundamental political rights. Statistics from 1984 to 2019 reported by the AMC in its annual report (TPA 2019) confirm an upward trend of AM persecution during the current Government of Pakistan. The report indicates that 265 Ahmadis were killed, 393 were assaulted for their faith, there were 70 instances of Ahmadis denied burial in a common cemetery, 39 Ahmadi bodies were exhumed, and there were 44 incidents of removing *Kalima* (the formal content of declaration of the Islamic faith) from Ahmadi homes and shops and on 103 occasions *Kalima* were removed from Ahmadi mosques. Statistics of police cases registered against Ahmadis on religious grounds show that 765 Ahmadis were

booked for displaying *Kalima*, 38 Ahmadis were arrested for making the Islamic call to prayer (*azan*), 453 Ahmadis were arrested for 'posing' as Muslims, 161 Ahmadis were booked for using Islamic epithets, 93 Ahmadis were charged for saying *namaz* (a mandatory prayer which Muslims offer five times a day), 825 Ahmadis were booked for preaching, 49 Ahmadis were booked for allegedly defiling the Holy Qur'an, 1,222 Ahmadis were charged in other religious cases, and 315 Ahmadis were charged under the 'blasphemy law', i.e. PPC 295-C.

The AMC is discriminated against and persecuted in all Muslim-majority countries (Connley 2016). However, oppressive behaviour against AMs from the Muslim majority populations in South Asia such as those of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Africa seems at the highest end. Cases of AM harassment by orthodox Muslims have also been reported in western countries such as the UK, Canada, and Germany.

Orthodox Muslims in Pakistan use the word *Qadianism* to refer to the AMC. They also use different religious slurs such as *Qadiani* and *Mirzai* to refer to AM. The term *Qadiani* originates from Qadian, the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the term *Mirzai* comes from the surname of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the AMC.

3. Methodology

Participative ranking methodology (PRM) is a recommended approach to address the issues of human rights and humanitarian emergencies (Mayoux 2001). It can uncover the reasons behind complex issues through identifying what is most important to focus on, who is affected by the issue, what the key reasons are for the development of the issue, and how different policies can be formulated to resolve the issue. It can also be effectively used for micro-level situations (Rao 2019). For these reasons, PRM has been frequently used by various international organisations, including Minority Rights Group International and UNHCR and researchers focusing on social issues such as community development through dialogue (Vallely *et al.* 2007; Flanagan 2015), vulnerabilities for social ecological systems (Sebesvari *et al.* 2015), reintegration for girls formerly associated with armed groups (Stark *et al.* 2009), assessing refugee perceptions of health services (Nelson *et al.* 2010), building knowledge of refugee mental health (Weine *et al.* 2014), and humanitarian emergencies (Ager *et al.* 2011).

The respondents in PRM report on common patterns in their community (Ager *et al.* 2011). Therefore, PRM is appropriate to reflect on the issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan by analysing the data collected from three focus groups comprising AM women and men.

PRM is an 'open' method in the sense that a focus group expresses their understanding of the issues faced by their community. This kind of method promotes an interactive process of drawing upon 'soft' data and perceptions. It is a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Data triangulation increases the knowledge credibility by refining internal consistency and generalisability in the same study (Hussein 2009). In the current study, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews in which some questions were predetermined through a pilot study and using secondary data. However, many questions were formulated during the interviews. Quantitative data can be obtained from different ranking techniques such as ranking by voting, preference ranking, and scoring and matrix ranking. This study prioritised the issues based on average ranking as explained in Section 4.1.

3.1 Respondents in the study

It is a criminal offence in Pakistan for an AM to express their views and to talk about their religious beliefs in public. Therefore, studies that focus on faith-based and state-sponsored persecution have the potential to have serious implications for respondents. For similar reasons, previous studies have reported that AMs were not freely willing to participate in any study that focuses on religion-based persecution (Haron 2018). Thus, safety and willingness of the respondents to freely and openly express themselves were two important factors for gaining real data.

Although all respondents in this study are originally members of the AMC in Pakistan, they have fled their homes in Pakistan due to faith-based persecution. They are currently waiting for their resettlement in third countries. There are several reasons for selecting the members of focus groups from UNHCR-registered refugees in Thailand: the researcher is from Thailand; resources (i.e. finance and time) were limited; the safety of respondents could be better ensured in Thailand than in Pakistan; the willingness of respondents to participate in the study; and recognised refugees can be considered as highly affected people and, therefore, are a source of rich real data. Hence, the sampling was appropriate for PRM

because of access to all sensitive issues through the availability of the most vulnerable (Mayoux 2001).

3.2 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out to prepare for the main study. The main purpose of conducting the pilot study was to identify any potential risks or early warning signs to indicate the main research could fail, where research protocols might not be followed, or whether anticipated methodology or instruments were unfitting or excessively complex (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001).

The AMC is well established in more than 200 countries. The leader of the worldwide AMC (known as Khalifa-tul-Masih) appoints an '*Ameer*' for each country. The *Ameer* acts as an administrative leader of the AMC in his country and heads the national executive body, which consists of the national secretaries of various departments. Five members – three men and two women – from the national executive body of AMC Thailand participated in the pilot study. Due to their focal positions in the AMC, these five individuals interact regularly with members of the AMC in Thailand and therefore can be expected to be well informed of the different issues faced by their community.

Principally, the pilot study was intended to identify the maximum number of issues which face poor AM women. The participants in the pilot study were asked the following questions:

- a. What are the issues being faced by poor AM women in Pakistan?
- b. What are the biggest risks and dangers to poor AM women?
- c. How are poor AM women coping with these issues?

The pilot study resulted in a list of issues without any ranking. It was further used to prepare a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire for the main study. Some questions were difficult to phrase for the focus groups. Therefore, they were explained by providing supplementary questions. Supplementary questions were clarifying statements which were used for framing different questions in the main study.

3.3 Main study and the focus groups

There is no single definition of 'poverty'. It can be defined in multiple dimensions of measurement, differences in societies, the nature of basic needs, etc. (Kotler and Lee 2009). The World Bank considers a poor person as someone whose income is inadequate to achieve the minimum level of their basic needs. However, in the context of the current study, which is focused on the intersection of poverty and faith-based persecution, the definition of 'poverty' by the United Nations seems a better fit and, hence, was used for selecting the focus group members. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states:

a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2001).

The selected participants of the three focus groups were all unable to live a seamless life in Pakistan to their level of satisfaction. Generally, Ahmadi women are jobless in Pakistan and they are financially dependent on the males in their families. So, it was also confirmed that the male heads of families in the focus groups fitted well in the aforementioned definition of 'poverty'. It was supposed that converted AMs could have different kinds of experiences. Therefore, those included in the focus groups were all Ahmadis by birth. Furthermore, participants of the pilot study were excluded from the focus groups. Not more than one member of a family was selected for data collection. The respondents were selected from all cross-sections of society – such as farmers, shopkeepers, students, daily wage workers, and housewives – and from different cities in Pakistan, ranging from urban to semi-urban areas. It helped to get the AMC point of view from geographic, demographic, social, and political perspectives. Although all information in this study is real, participants' names have been changed in this paper for security reasons.

Thirty members of the AMC were interviewed in three focus groups. The composition of each focus group is briefly given below.

- **Focus group 1** – AM women, aged more than 35 years (ten participants): This group had the advantage that all respondents had closely observed the implications of the anti-Ahmadiyya laws of 1974 and 1984.
- **Focus group 2** – AM women, aged less than 35 years and more than 18 years (ten participants): The participants in this group were expected to provide important

perspectives on the issues that are experienced by the younger generation at important places, such as educational institutes and public areas, and at different kinds of social gatherings.

- **Focus group 3** – AM men (ten participants): Men are the head of the family in Pakistan. They are supposed to act as a shield between their families and problems encountered by them. Therefore, they were expected to provide a unique opinion on the issues that are faced by the women in their community, such as their spouses, mothers, daughters, and other female relatives. While they brought a unique perspective, men do not have the lived experience of being an Ahmadi woman to draw on and this should be borne in mind, especially where there were differences between the male and female participants in the ranking of the different issues faced by Ahmadi women.

3.4 Data collection

All focus groups were asked to reply to the following questions:

- What are the issues being faced by poor AM women in Pakistan?
- What are the biggest risks and dangers to poor AM women?
- How are poor AM women coping with these issues?

All participants in the focus groups were asked to answer the above questions in the context of the following scenarios:

- How their issues are different from those faced by other AM women in Pakistan;
- How their issues are different from those faced by poor women of mainstream Muslims and from women of other religious minorities in Pakistan; and
- How their issues are different from those faced by the Ahmadi men in Pakistan.

3.5 PRM exercises

Data was collected during face-to-face interviews and focus groups. Repeating the exercise with different groups produced rich data and ensured a diversity of responses within the community (Ager *et al.* 2011). Interviews were mainly open-ended focus group discussions. However, the starting point of the discussion was a semi-structured questionnaire based on the list of issues and the supplementary questions which had been developed in the pilot study. Each respondent was handed the questionnaire. Two PRM exercises on different days

were performed with each focus group. The duration of each exercise was not more than five hours. The first exercise was primarily to identify the issues facing poor AM women. The second exercise, which took place on another day, was mainly focused on identifying responses to the issues. There were two reasons for doing two PRM exercises with each focus group: one was to avoid overly time-consuming discussions, and the second was related to safety measures for the respondents. Thailand is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and, therefore, does not host asylum-seekers, even to those who are recognised as refugees by UNHCR. Therefore, Thai authorities consider asylum-seekers as illegal migrants and often arrest them. Due to the risk of police raids, each PRM exercise was carried out at different locations and the time of each exercise was kept relatively short.

3.6 Confirming the willingness of the participants to respond

The AMC is well organised. Its members obey the decisions taken by their top representatives. Therefore, before conducting the pilot study and focus group discussions, the national *Ameer* of AMC Thailand was informed about the study purpose and his permission to conduct interviews was successfully sought. The lead researcher of this study acted as a facilitator and was well supported by a female assistant. A female assistant was preferred to communicate easily with the women respondents. The focus groups were informed about the permission granted by their national *Ameer*. The facilitator then explained the background, purpose, and scope of the study. It was explicitly clarified to all participants that their safety and security were of primary concern, that data will be used purely for research purposes, and that their responses will not be labelled with their real names. Enquiries from all participants were replied to their level of satisfaction so that they could feel free from any kind of fear during the focus group discussions. Before the questionnaire was distributed, key expectations of the participants were explained, i.e. editing the list of issues, providing real examples, and the ranking of issues.

3.7. Positionality

The lead researcher/facilitator who undertook the data collection is a follower of the Ahmadiyya faith who occupies a leadership position within the Ahmadiyya religious community. He had to leave Pakistan on account of the day-to-day encroachments experienced there. He also sought the assistance of Ahmadiyya women in outreach and in undertaking the focus groups.

4. Qualitative data

One issue at a time was discussed with the respondents in a focus group. Each question in the semi-structured questionnaire was read aloud by the facilitator in Urdu (the national language of Pakistan) and Punjabi (a provincial language which most respondents understood) to elicit responses from the participants. All participants responded in either Urdu or Punjabi. To improve the quality of responses, each respondent was also requested to justify their response to questions. Based on tendencies of the focus group and sensitivity of the question, the facilitator prompted participants to elicit responses on specific issues. Notes were taken by the facilitator and his assistant. Instead of relying on the notes to capture key points in the discussions, the participants were asked if they wanted to reply to the questions in writing. All participants of focus group 2 and focus group 3 provided their responses in writing, mainly in Urdu. One member of focus group 2 and two members of focus group 3 replied to the questionnaire in English. No participants from focus group 1 opted to respond in writing. Therefore, only notes of the responses from focus group 1 were taken by the facilitator and his assistant. It is worth noting that responses may have differed in their depth, content, and/or detail between those who submitted answers in writing and those whose answers were only captured in facilitator notes, as these are separate data collection methods.

4.1 Ranking and process of data analysis

Each participant was given ten toothpicks for each issue. Every participant individually quantified the importance of each issue by assigning it a specific number of toothpicks. To get a realistic ordering, the facilitator and his assistant worked closely with each participant and prompted participants to justify the number of toothpicks they assigned to an issue. It provided a rich insight into real circumstances and challenges. Once all group members were satisfied with their response and quantification, all toothpicks assigned to an issue were accumulated to rank the issue. The rank of each issue was then divided by ten (the size of the focus group) to get the average rank of each issue. Issues were ordered based on the average rank. The ranks, average ranks, and ordering were discussed with the group. Adjustments in the ranking continued until a final ordering was agreed among the focus groups. Details of the ranking process are available in Annexe 1.

The data was translated into English and organised from the individual responses and notes taken by the facilitator and his assistant. Later, the organised responses were shared with the participants to ensure that all key information was captured.

5. Findings

Twenty-five key issues were identified and prioritised, as shown in Table 1. A closer look at the issues reveals that the lives of poor AM women were greatly affected by several factors, including their economic power, political inclusion, state policies, societal treatment, and their faith's challenge to the authority of the clerics of the majority religion. Opinions from both genders on the issues indicate that sensitivity and severity of an issue were different for men and women. Each issue is explained in more detail in subsections A to Y following this presentation of the overall findings.

Table 1: Key issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan

Serial No.	Issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan	Priority by	
		Women	Men
A	They can be trapped and put behind bars due to Ordinance XX of the Pakistan constitution.	1	1
B	They have no access to their mosques and cannot carry out peaceful religious activities, such as prayer and worship, in comparison to other poor women of the majority religion.	1	1
C	They are unable to freely mark important occasions within their religious calendar compared to those of the majority religion.	1	1
D	Decision makers say bad words against them and use the 'Ahmadiyya card' for political gain.	2	1
E	They are fearful of being killed due to fake accusations.	3	2
F	They are forced to hide public manifestations of their faith to be accepted by society.	4	3

Serial No.	Issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan	Priority by	
		Women	Men
G	Poor AM women experience more violence and harassment than other poor women.	4	4
H	They have many difficulties with admission acceptance to educational institutes. They are ignored by the instructors and isolated at the institutes in comparison to other poor women.	5	7
I	No jobs are offered.	6	6
J	They are openly asked to abandon their faith, or convert to another sect, for them to feel safe.	7	5
K	It is almost impossible for them to approach local/national authorities in comparison to other poor women.	8	4
L	Violence against them is never highlighted by the Pakistani media.	9	10
M	They are unable to wear a hijab without being harassed more than other women.	10	11
N	They face social boycott.	11	11
O	It is very difficult for them to acquire national documents, such as a national identity card and passport.	12	9
P	It is not possible for them to shop in local areas.	13	18
Q	They are misrepresented by the instructors in educational institutes.	14	13
R	They and their families experience threats to their property and land.	15	12
S	They cannot enjoy leisure activities in comparison to other poor women.	16	16
T	It is very hard for them to find a home to rent.	17	8
U	Sometimes they observe religious customs that are not a part of their religion.	18	19

Serial No.	Issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan	Priority by	
		Women	Men
V	They cannot vote in elections.	19	17
W	It is hard to find a marriage partner.	20	14
X	They experience barriers to accessing adequate health-care services.	21	15
Y	They face mobility/transportation issues in comparison to other poor women.	22	20

Although the two women’s focus groups and the men’s focus group were found to have similar perspectives about the issues (as discussed in the following section), they prioritised them differently. A comparison of how the different issues were assigned by the participating men and women indicates that in general the men’s perceived severity of the issues is more than that perceived by the women (Figure 1).

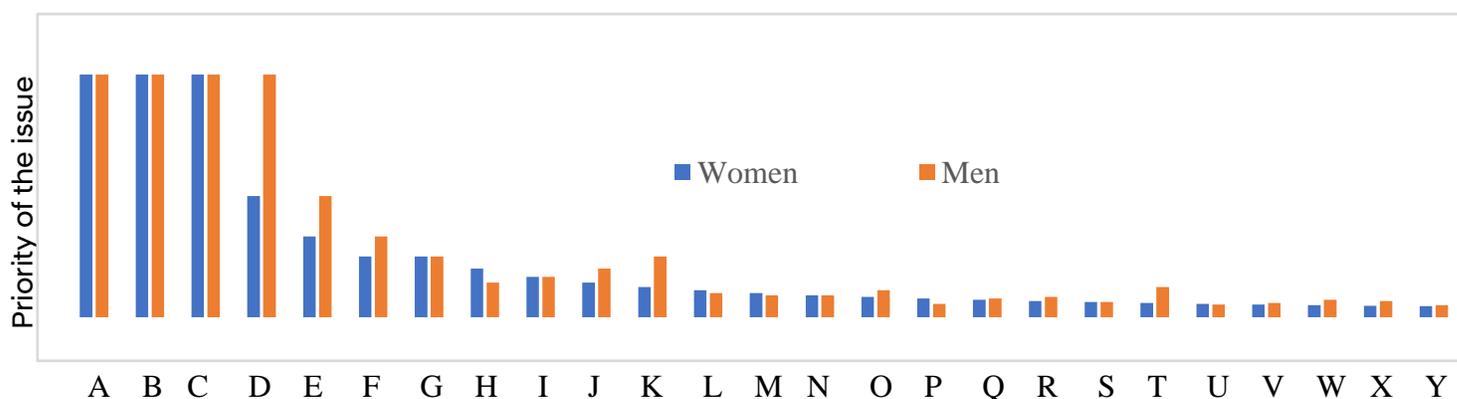


Figure 1: Comparison between gender-based ranking of the issues (Serial number of the issues as shown in Table 1)

Three issues – restrictions imposed by Ordinance XX, not having access to their mosques, being forbidden peaceful religious activities, and the prohibition of freely marking important occasions within their religious calendar – were all ranked by both the men and the women as the highest priorities (see Table 1). Such issues are directly related to the state policies that cause their marginalisation. A critical analysis of the issues shows that the ripple effects of the above-mentioned three issues were the root cause of all the other issues listed in

Table 1. It is aligned with the findings of Wolf (2019) that state-sponsored persecution is the most dangerous form of marginalisation of religious minorities. Four other issues – experiencing more violence and harassment than other poor women (priority 4), no jobs (priority 6), social boycott (priority 11), and it not being possible to enjoy leisure activities (priority 16) – each got the same priority by both genders.

Interestingly, 52 per cent of the issues (13 out of the 25) were ranked higher by the men than the women. For instance, the issue of difficulty in approaching authorities was ranked fourth by the men, while the same issue was ranked eighth by the women. The key reason for difference in perceptions related to the ranking is, perhaps, the men's sense of helplessness towards their women when in need. It is also evident from the invariable responses given by all the interviewees to the supplementary question about men's responses to violence against poor AM women. Everyone affirmed the failure of poor AM men to defend against any unfair treatment towards their women due to state-sponsored persecution. The men's only reaction to oppression against their women was either to seek asylum abroad or to migrate to Rabwah with their families.

Five issues – discrimination in educational institutes, the media overlooking their problems, harassment due to wearing a hijab (a form of veil that covers the face, head, and body in full with the exception of the hands), not being able to shop in local areas, observing religious customs that are not a part of their religion – were given higher priority by the women than by the men. It makes sense: discrimination due to their faith and fear of persecution force most poor AM men to find jobs far away from their homes where their religious identity is not exposed; while back at home, their women, especially married women, take care of their households, children, and property; and young women go to educational institutes (it is important to note that only 40.5 per cent of Pakistani women have formal education (Gallup 2014)) that are near to their homes. Therefore, because people are familiar with their family background, they directly and very frequently face discrimination due to their known religious faith during grocery shopping and attending educational institutes in their vicinities. The women from Ahmadi families, who can hide their religious identities, unwillingly participate in some religious customs being observed in their neighbourhoods so that others will believe them to be of that faith.

The Pakistani media may raise its voice for human rights and women's rights; however, mention of poor AM women is virtually non-existent in the print and broadcast media. According to a Gallup (2014) survey, 78.4 per cent of women in Pakistan take a keen interest in media coverage of religious issues. The same survey also found that at least 60 per cent of Pakistanis follow the media due to their interest in three topics that are directly related to

their daily lives: health and health care (64.6 per cent), education (60.7 per cent), and human rights (59.8 per cent). Unfortunately, the AMC is explicitly excluded from all kinds of debates. On the other hand, Ahmadiyya beliefs are distorted by clerics and people in the media who are highly influenced by clerics' open propagation of hate against them. Inaccurate and biased information about the AMC and baseless allegations against them are aired through different national TV channels, YouTube channels, and on other social media platforms. Ahmadi are frequently portrayed as infidels and traitors. No authority has ever objected the negative role of the media against the AMC, but they have banned official and unofficial websites of the AMC: MTA (the TV channel owned by the AMC), YouTube channels that are run by different Ahmadi individuals, and its online and published literature. Such circumstances have put extra pressure on poor AM women and men by creating an increased fear of violence and a heightened sense of isolation. However, women are more stressed, and feel greater strain, burden, and distress than men (Sharma *et al.* 2016).

Three issues – barriers to accessing adequate health-care services, renting homes, and finding a marriage partner – were prioritised significantly higher by men than women.

Different gender-based perspectives related to the identified issues of poor AM women highlighted some important underlying facts which are key to gauging the level of their marginalisation. Further, it is important to consider circumstances to understand the real structure and building process of the issues. Below are the details of experiences and opinions shared by the focus groups to clarify the nature of the key issues faced by poor AM women in Pakistan. A critical review of the issues reveals that they are not mutually exclusive.

A. They can be trapped and put behind bars due to Ordinance XX of the Pakistan constitution

Fear of Ordinance XX was univocally ranked the highest priority by all the respondents. The key reason is that, in practice, it is almost impossible for the AM to avoid the customs that are common between Islam and the culture of Pakistan – an Islamic republic of 97 per cent Muslim population – such as using words *Mashallah* (an Arabic word to express appreciation), and citing Koranic verses in different pieces of writing and invitation cards, etc.

Ordinance XX of the 1984 Pakistan Penal Code (PPC)²⁴ forbids AMs from publicly practising their religion. It prohibits AMs from referring to themselves as Muslims, from saying *azan* (call to prayers), from reciting *Kalima* (the formal content of declaration of the Islamic faith), from reciting the Koran, and from speaking, writing, or visibly representing, or in any manner whatsoever posing themselves as Muslims and outraging the religious feelings of Muslims. Otherwise, they shall be punished by three years' imprisonment and shall also be liable to paying a fine. Since the implementation of the 'draconian Ordinance XX', Ahmadis have been arrested for minor things, such as saying *Assalam-u-Alaikum* (a way of greeting in Islamic culture), keeping a copy of the Koran in their bags, using words from the Koran during a discussion, etc. Ispahani (2015) mentioned that on 12 January 1990, the District Magistrate in Abbottabad charged 55 AMs for holding 'a prayer meeting in a private household'.

I am a man of strong emotions. However, I cannot concentrate on my job due to fear that my wife at home and children in school may be attacked and arrested anytime if somebody complained. (Amir)

My mother never allowed me to pray in the backyard of my home. She was afraid that somebody might call police if he peeps into our home or notices from the nearby roof top. (Hafsa)

*We are not spared after our deaths and in our graves in Pakistan. We are not allowed to say *namaz-e-janaza* [a kind of prayer Muslims offer before burial of a dead body]. Our graves are disinterred even in the graveyards which are the property of AMC. Our dead bodies are exhumed. (Asim)*

*How can we avoid saying *Assalam-u-Alaikum*, stop reciting Koran, saying prayer, reading Islamic books, celebrating Eid? These things are basics of our faith. It is simply irrational to avoid 'posing directly or indirectly like Muslims', when actually we are Muslims. (Kulsoom)*

AM practise their religion secretly. However, a little carelessness can be the cause of their arrest. It is very hard to find a lawyer to fight their cases. The lawyers who fight cases for Ahmadis face many dangers and sometimes are murdered. In this environment, Pakistani poor AM women remain under stress and in fear of persecution of themselves and their families.

²⁴ See [Ordinance XX](#) and [Pakistan Penal Code](#). f

My father was in jail for six months before his bail. His crime was to put on a badge with Kalima on his shirt. (Arifa)

Mainstream Muslims misuse these oppressive laws to satisfy their hate and even for personal gain in any disputed matter with an AM.

A Sunni Muslim called my cousin with a book which had some references from Koran. My cousin went on a bicycle with the book in a shopping bag. The caller was already at the meeting spot with police who arrested him just because of carrying a book which included Koranic verses. (Sofiya) Later on, it was found that her cousin's younger brother had some argument with the caller while playing cricket together in school.

B. They have no access to their mosques and cannot carry out peaceful religious activities, such as prayer and worship, in comparison to other poor women of the majority religion

Both the men and the women also ranked this issue the highest priority. AMs are banned from calling for prayer (*azan*), referring to their worship places as *masjid* (mosque), and saying prayers in public. Mosques and Muslim prayer rooms are everywhere in Pakistan, such as at bus stations, railway stations, airports, and supermarkets. However, it is a criminal act for Ahmadi to say prayer openly. They can only pray at home. Before the terroristic attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques in Lahore in 2010, Ahmadi women used to say Friday prayers in Ahmadiyya mosques, but since then, for security reasons, AM women have been asked by the AMC leader (Khalifa-tul-Masih) to pray at home.

Ashraf said, 'We cannot safely celebrate Eid and say prayer inside our *namaz* centres [Ahmadi mosques] without fear'. He was speaking in context of the incident of a mob attack on an Ahmadi mosque on the second day of Eid-ul-Adha in 2019 in Ghaseetpura, Faisalabad.

Since we are barred by law to call our worship places as mosques, we call them as namaz centre. Unfortunately, due to security reasons our Jama'at has asked women not to come to namaz centres. We pray at home and remain concerned for the safety of our men and children in the namaz centres. (Samina)

Our mosques are also our learning centres. We can watch Friday sermon by Hazoor [Khalifa] and other religious programmes at MTA through dish antenna at

our mosques. However, our women cannot go to mosques. MTA [TV channel owned by the AMC] is banned in Pakistan and cannot be accessed at home without dish antenna. I cannot afford to buy a dish antenna. (Hamid)

In Pakistan it is very risky when we go to the mosque. Anyone can attack on us. Therefore, our Jama'at issues directions such as everyone should not come from same direction, every day we should try to take a different way to the mosque, and we should not wear the caps outside the mosques to hide our identity. (Arsalan)

Since I have no car or motorcycle, I walked off my home to say Friday prayer well before time to avoid interaction with Muslims of mainstream sects. However, I forgot to take off my cap. Some boys identified me and shouted 'qadiani Kafir [Ahmadis are non-believers]' 'Gustakhay Rasool ki aik he saza, sar tan se juda [one who insults the prophet Muhammad, must be beheaded]'. They started approaching me. I felt the goosebumps and started running towards a bus on the road. Fortunately, bus speed was slow enough to jump me in and survived any serious accident. After that I never went to mosque from that road and always put on cap only in the mosque. (Majid)

Blasphemy allegations will put me in a lengthy incarceration. I cannot afford bribe money or heavy fee of the lawyers to fight my case. There are several pending cases in courts against AM, in which even women and children have been charged with blasphemy law. (Hafsa)

Ahmadis were doing some repair work and renovation of our mosque in 2008. Someone complained that we were doing blasphemy. Hence, the case of blasphemy was registered against the entire Ahmadi population including women and children in Kotli. (Irum from Kotli)

Aliya from Rabwah said that a First Investigation Report (FIR) of blasphemy is still active against the whole Ahmadi population of Rabwah because of their religious celebrations. The complainants said that their Islamic sentiments were hurt because Ahmadis were serving food, distributing sweets, and displaying bunting.

In schools, colleges, universities, and private educational institutes, either mosque or prayer rooms are necessarily available. However, Pakistani law forbids AMs to say prayers, while all their fellow students not only get break time for praying but also freely say prayers.

At my academy, teachers always took break at the prayer time. All of my class fellows used to say prayer except me. (Rubaab)

I did not disclose my Ahmadiyya faith at my school. Yet, I never said prayer at school because my parents had warned me of possible consequences. It is very unfortunate for us that law stops us from saying prayer which is one of the essential elements of our religion. (Kulsoom)

C. They are unable to freely mark important occasions within their religious calendar compared to those of the majority religion

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, this was ranked as one of the most sensitive issues for all the men and women in the focus groups. There are many important occasions in their religious calendar: the annual congregation, the day of Musl-e-Maud, the Khilafat day, the Masih-e-Maud day, Seerat-un-Nabi, and others. However, the Government of Pakistan has banned AMs from celebrating any kind of occasion in their religious calendar. They cannot even organise sports tournaments and community celebrations. The government issued such orders in 1989 at the occasion of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Centenary, and since then restrictions have never been lifted. Therefore, AMs celebrate religious events inside the big homes of rich Ahmadis who live in expensive housing schemes, which are relatively safer than those of poor Ahmadis, and without letting anyone outside of the Ahmadi community know. They must be very careful in maintaining confidentiality of any kind of meeting otherwise they will risk being charged for criminal offences. Many times, such events are cancelled due to fear of attacks on the homes.

I feel sense of belongingness when participate in different events arranged by the Jama'at. I feel happy. However, travelling is expensive and, therefore, I cannot afford to attend all meetings which are held in big homes far away from my home. (Afia)

I am declared best speaker many times at different events arranged by the Jama'at. I feel so much proud and wish to perform in every event. However, due to safety reasons and financial problems I cannot attend all such meetings since those are organised far away from my home. One day when I left home with my younger brother to attend one meeting, two boys from my neighbourhood started chasing us. They were staring at us. I was terrified and returned back to

my home. Therefore, Jama'at asked me to stay at home for some time because lives of many other Ahmadi women could be at risk. (Arifia)

Our Jama'at has different organisational units such as Lajna Imaullah, Khuddam-ul- Ahmadiyya and Ansaarullah. Throughout the world, these units regularly organise different events and their annual gatherings. However, Pakistan have criminalised any kind of celebrations of the AMC. I am 41 years old but never attended any annual gathering. (Zubair)

The AMC celebrates all important events in the Islamic calendar all over the world, with the exception of Pakistan, such as Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Adha, and slaughtering animals at Eid-ul-Adha. Unlike the AMC, other religious minorities are fortunate to have the legal right to celebrate their different religious and community activities. The Government of Pakistan announces official holidays for other minorities on their important religious events, their salaries are disbursed early, and some government representatives participate in their activities.

Pakistani laws are against us. We are not even safe inside our homes. We are attacked by mob even if we arrange any event at our homes. Clerics and their followers take police to our homes on Eid-ul-Adha and snatch our animals to be slaughtered. (Amir)

D. Decision makers say bad words against them and use the 'Ahmadiyya card' for political gain

This issue was ranked second by the women. However, second ranking for the men was their women being abused and mistreated. When the government is trying to foster public support, they may bring up an issue related to the Ahmadi people as a way to detract from other issues concerning the public. This is using the 'Ahmadiyya card' for political gain.

There are many religious political parties in Pakistan that have been very active in Pakistani politics since its inception. They have strong street power, mainly due to their leading role at thousands of madrassas (religious schools) where millions of families have their children enrolled (Andrabi *et al.* n.d.). Therefore, different parties have their representation in the provincial as well as national assembly. Although they have never been ruling parties, they hold an important position in national decision making and in establishing the Government of Pakistan through their alliance with the most appropriate democratic party. Decision

making by such alliances is highly influenced by clerics. Declaring AMs as non-Muslims in 1974, followed by legislations at different times that have deprived Ahmadis from their human and religious rights, are clear evidence of the clerics' power in decision making at national level (Haqqani 2006).

Since alone religious parties cannot introduce laws, clerics always become a part of the ruling party to gain power in law making against us. (Amna)

All major sects of Islam in Pakistan – such as Sunnis and Shiites (75–85 per cent and 15–25 per cent, respectively, of the country's Muslim population) – have common differences from the religious beliefs of the AMC (Haqqani 2006). They criticise each other and have declared each other as Kafir at various times. Therefore, both sects have been engaged in a sectarian war in Pakistan for a long time (Bhattacharya 2019). However, they target their common 'enemy' to maintain their public support in times of common stakes; for example, showing solidarity to the Government of Pakistan under pressure from international agencies and to get their representation in different religious platforms, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As a result, the general public in Pakistan believes that the AMC is a major risk to Islam. The hate campaign against Ahmadis is intensified by slogans of religion-based politics of the different groups, including religious parties and secular civilian and military leaders who use it for their own interests (Haqqani 2006).

We are eight Ahmadi families living near a very big and famous mosque associated with a madrassa. Almost on every Friday, a guest from different political-religious parties is invited to speak at the mosque. Different representatives from local government also participate in Friday prayer in the same mosque. Their speeches are abusive and contain bad words such as infidels, Kafirs [non-believers], dogs, pigs, rapists, prostitutes, traitors of Islam and Pakistan, agents of Jews, and many more. (Osama)

Foul language against us by our leader make us feel aliens in Pakistan. We live in a constant state of fear that people who are supposed to protect us seems wishing to kill us. I always wished I would leave Pakistan as soon as I got money to get visa and ticket. (Sakina)

AMs are not sympathised with and do not get support from the political leaders in Pakistan, even when they face the highest level of injustice, such as the murder of around a hundred AMs in a single day in brutal attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques in Lahore, Punjab in 2010 (Rahman 2016). Neither the President, the Prime Minister, nor any member of the national or

provincial assembly visited the Ahmadiyya centre in Lahore, the targeted mosques, or the injured in hospitals. However, Governor Punjab Salman Taseer visited Ahmadiyya centres, and the Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, visited the injured in a hospital.

My cousin was martyred in the Lahore massacre. It was a horrible day. I saw blood and flesh all over the places. I could not sleep for many nights. Although AM did not demand, government announced financial compensation to the families of the deceases but did not pay them. (Osama)

On the day of the attack, hate banners against AMs were hanging on almost all the main roads of Lahore. One of the banners stating 'Jews, Christians, Ahmadis are enemies of Islam' was fixed outside the Lahore High Court. On another was written, 'Friendship with Ahmadis is rebellion against the prophet Muhammad'. One banner was inviting people to kill Ahmadis through a message 'Ahmadis deserve death only'. These banners remained in place even after the attack.

There are special minority seats in each provincial and national assembly. However, unlike other religious minorities, such as Christians and Hindus, AMs have no representation in the assemblies. Neither are they included on any government committee. Even the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), whose members include all the other minorities, is not represented by an AM. For the Ahmadi people to access these special minority seats they would have to accept their 'minority' status, which would mean stating they are non-Muslim. However, it is worth noting that even where many Ahmadis in Pakistan disclose their religious identity in documentation such as identity cards, passports, and job application forms, which automatically puts them in the religious minority quota, not a single Ahmadi has been offered a job under the 5 per cent quota reserved for minorities in government jobs. In the same way, decision makers openly express their hate views at all forums – such as electronic and print media, social media, and in public gatherings – that Ahmadis will not be provided with any kind of minority rights and membership in the NCM unless they accept themselves as non-Muslims.

Ahmad said that Pakistani leaders have the right to declare us non-Muslims, but they cannot force us to behave like non-Muslims: 'They call us dogs, but they cannot ask us to bark.'

They used their majority to declare us non-Muslim. We never protested this decision. However, how can they force us to behave like non-Muslims? We are proudly true Muslims, but they ask us not to follow Islam. They force us to make

new Kalima, new book and another God. It is unjust. As a human being, we have the right to believe us whatever we want. (Hamza)

Most recently, a visa-free border crossing for the Sikh community, the Kartarpur Corridor, was developed by the government to connect the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan to the Indian border so that Sikh devotees can visit the gurdwara in Kartarpur. Immediately after its completion in November 2019, clerics started to spread propaganda that the Government of Pakistan has developed this corridor to facilitate Ahmadis to visit their sacred places in Qadian, India where they will conspire against Pakistan (IHRC 2019). This campaign was full of hate speeches. Key politicians such as Fazal-u-Rahman and different state ministers were asked questions on TV and for the print media. They explicitly stated their disassociation with the AM, reaffirmed their anti-Ahmadiyya beliefs, and strongly denied any kind of relaxation to the AM (Stanca 2020). This incident created a hostile situation for the Ahmadis in Pakistan. They were afraid of possible attacks on them and on their assets.

We never demanded any kind of facilitation from the government to allow us to visit Qadian. They have banned us to perform hajj which is an important part of our religion. How can we expect from the government that they will assist our access to Qadian?(Ahsan)

Different state ministers, including the Minister of Religious Affairs, regularly participate in anti-Ahmadiyya conferences and seminars, which are organised almost every month. The print and electronic media give coverage to their hate speeches. Therefore, using the 'Ahmadi card' for gaining public support is common in Pakistani politics, especially when the government is in any kind of crisis. All politicians, including those in ruling party, opposition parties, and religious parties abuse AMs on a daily basis. The general public is extensively violent against Ahmadis. Ahmadi women do not leave their homes and keep their children at home too. Ahmadi families in high-risk areas travel to Rabwah to avoid any violence against them.

I am from Faisalabad which one of those cities where anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment is maximum. Government of Pakistan declared us non-Muslims in September 1974. Therefore, a large number of anti-Ahmadiyya rallies are conference are held by the orthodox Muslims in September of each year. People look crazy against us. My husband asks me every year to take children to my parents' home in Rabwah. (Hira)

Humaira expressed her grief describing how she was terrified on seeing 'infidel' written on the wall of her house when she came out to drop her children at school one morning. The label 'infidel' in Pakistan is like a licence for the general public to kill Ahmadis. 'It was my last morning at my home in Sialkot. I immediately took my children to Rabwah and asked my husband to sell the home as soon as possible.'

According to a report of the US Department of State, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, participated in a conference called by Hafiz Saeed, a UN-designated terrorist, and said, 'Government and the Prime Minister of Pakistan will always stand against Ahmadis' (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2008). The same report mentioned Sardar Muhammad Yousuf, the then Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, who announced 2018 as the year of 'Khatm-e-Nabuwat' (Finality of the Prophethood), a religious assertion commonly used to target AMC. The minister asked religious institutes and public universities to set up Khatm-e-Nabuwat 'chairs' and to promote the topic in their syllabuses. Consequently, a large number of Khatm-e-Nabuwat conferences (i.e. with the purpose to criticise the Ahmadiyya faith) were held all over Pakistan. Key politicians including the Prime Minister of Pakistan and government officials participated in these conferences and hate speeches were delivered in their presence. It created a fearful environment, especially for the Ahmadi women who feared losing their husbands and families.

Humaira started crying while stating her survival from anti-Ahmadiyya violence:

After a Khatam-e-Nabuwat conference, clerics with a large mob marched towards my home. They shouted slogans that Qadianis should be beheaded. They threw stones at my home. I was terrified and my children were scared. They put their heads in my lap. I called the police to protect us. Police remained standing for hours in front of my house until the rally went away from our street.

Tahir Ahmad, 68 years old, told that he had witnessed similar trends of using the 'Ahmadiyya card' by both the democratic governments of the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League and the marshal law regimes of Zia-ul-Haq and Pervaiz Musharraf.

Whenever some government in Pakistan is in crisis and need rescue; to hide their inabilities and failures; they all use a trump card of Ahmadiyya issue to divert the attention of common public. First, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto used it by declaring us non-Muslims to gain support of religious parties to strengthen his government which

was slipping out of his hands. He was followed by Zia-ul-Haq who banned us from even saying prayers just for the sake of stretching his marshal law which finished on his death after 11 years. Same trends continued during the following governments. Current government of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf has many times used the same tactics to retain their popularity by targeting Ahmadis. Their ministers ignite the public sentiments against Ahmadis. For instance, the minister of parliamentary affairs Ali Muhammad Khan frequently said that Ahmadis should be killed. Most recently Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Religious and Inter-faith Harmony Affairs, stated that any form of 'soft-heartedness' toward the Ahmadis was both un-Islamic and un-patriotic. (Tahir Ahmad)

General Asif Bajwa was said to be an AM at the time of his appointment as Chief of Army Staff (Fair 2017). A spokesperson of the Pakistan Army explained in the media that General Bajwa believed in the finality of prophethood and was a Muslim. Later, General Bajwa invited anti-Ahmadi clerics to his son's wedding, arranged a religious gathering at his house where anti-Ahmadi clerics were invited, and posted his photos taken around Kaaba (a building at the centre of Islam's most important mosque, the Masjid al-Haram in Saudi Arabia) on social media to prove that he had no association with the Ahmadiyya faith.

In a country whose army chief is afraid of anti-Ahmadiyya clerics and their followers, how can an Ahmadi like me can protect his family?(Adnan)

The current Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, participates in anti-Ahmadiyya conferences. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan avoids questions related to Ahmadiyya persecution from the international media. The last government also showed similar behaviour towards AMs. Captain Safdar, son-in-law of the then Prime Minister, stated on the assembly floor that all Qadianis (a pejorative term for AMs) must be thrown out of the country because they are traitors and enemies of Islam and Pakistan (Dawn 2017). The third largest party, the Pakistan People's Party, declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims in 1974.

I was forced to leave my teaching job within three months of joining a private academy after captain Safdar's speech against AM. It was my sole source of earning. Academy principal asked me to resign because he could not afford any problem due to my Ahmadiyya faith. (Amna)

Prime Minister Imran Khan removed Atif Mian, a world-renowned Ahmadi economist, from his economic advisory board after huge opposition from clerics and their like-minded

politicians (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2008). The Federal Minister for Narcotics Control of the current ruling party, Azam Swati, said on a TV show, 'I and Prime Minister Imran Khan both send a "curse" to the Ahmadiyya community' (Office of International Religious Freedom 2019). Neither his party nor Imran Khan himself have disassociated from Swati's statement. Amir Liaquat Hussain, member of the current National Assembly of Pakistan, used posters in his election campaign in which he was stating himself as the 'Savior of the End of Prophethood' (non-Ahmadis claim that Ahmadis do not believe in the end of prophethood and, therefore, are said to be infidel) (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2008). While addressing a rally in Peshawar, the current Minister for Defence, Pervez Khattak, proudly announced that he introduced a compulsory chapter on the finality of prophethood in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa textbooks (*ibid.*).

Pakistan's only Nobel Prize winner, Dr Abdus Salam, was not acknowledged by the Government of Pakistan as Muslim. The government has never highlighted his achievements because it will cause an angry response from the general public. The tombstone of Dr Abdus Salam in Rabwah had been defaced to erase the word 'Muslim'.

E. They are fearful of being killed due to fake accusations

The women ranked this issue third, while the men ranked it second.

AMs are accused of blasphemous faith. Therefore, implications of the Pakistani blasphemy laws are unavoidable for them without committing any offence. The Federal Shariat Court has ordered the death penalty and nothing else for contempt of the prophet Muhammad (Section 295-C of the blasphemy laws). Most of the religious leaders and many politicians openly demand the hanging of AMs. In cases where complaints against AMs are registered, the courts take a long time to decide the outcome. It is important to mention that murderers of AMs, almost in every case, relate delaying the death penalty by the courts as the main reason for them taking the law into their own hands. There are a large number of cases against Ahmadi women and children pending under the blasphemy laws. Most recently in 2020, an Ahmadi woman was charged with insulting the prophet Muhammad after people objected to her donating money to a local mosque (Kermani 2020). Renowned personalities such as Governor Salman Taseer have been assassinated because of their opposition to wrong use of the blasphemy laws. Merely accusing someone of blasphemy exposes the accused to harassment, threats, and attacks.

All of us were forced to leave Pakistan after my uncle was sentenced to death in 2017. He was accused of tearing down a religious poster and, therefore, was facing charges of blasphemy since 2014. (Munazza from Punjab)

Imran elaborated on the incident told by Munazza:

Actually, that was a matter of hate against Ahmadis in our village. Villagers were forcing Ahmadi families to leave the village. Finally, they filed a blasphemy case against four Ahmadis. One was killed in police custody immediately after their arrest. Other three were sentenced to death. Our families left everything behind including their lands and animals and moved to safer places.

Fear of losing our lives have made us very concerned about our children. My husband took a huge debt money from his well-wishers and we left Pakistan to Thailand in 2012 after paying almost all amount to the agents who managed our travel. However, we are stuck in Thailand since then. My husband is in the detention centre and I am surviving with my children on only little financial help from the Jama'at. If we had more money, we could migrate to a country which allows immigrants. (Aleena)

Respecting Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) to the highest level is a part of our faith. Allegations of blasphemy and infidelity against us are only lies. Clerics fear losing their power if people accepted true Islam. (Arfa)

Poor AM women are very vulnerable to the opportunistic use of blasphemy laws, and are often used to settle personal grudges. They live in places where everyone is aware of their religious faith and consequently, they feel alienated. They have no money to hire expensive lawyers to defend their cases. Instead of protecting them, the police arrest them.

A big angry mob in Gulshan-e-Ravi Lahore gathered in front of our mosque and started shouting that we were conspiring against Islam. We were afraid that they would burn our homes and kill us. Soon police arrived. Instead of acting against the very aggressive protesters, police arrested my [female] friend with her ten-year-old son and seven other Ahmadi men. Only female police can arrest a woman in Pakistan. However, in this incident no female police were there. (Arifa)

Schoemaker (2016) reported that some non-Ahmadi boys in Gujranwala (a city in Punjab province) had conflicts with an Ahmadi boy. They accused him of blasphemy over his post

on Facebook. Soon, an angry mob attacked Ahmadi families and burnt their houses. They looted valuables and dragged furniture and other stuff out of their homes and set them on fire. One old lady along with her two grandchildren (both less than ten years old) were burnt to death, and a pregnant Ahmadi woman lost her baby.

Non-Ahmadis believe that the killing of Ahmadis is a noble cause. An Ahmadi woman cannot go outside her home alone, even in daytime: they may be harassed and attacked anytime. Arooba expressed her agony by saying that 'in Pakistan we feel like in death cell where we are waiting for our hanging'.

Clerics in Pakistan have distorted the teachings of Islam. They have corrupted many minds in Pakistan through their concept of violent 'jihad'. Therefore, people feel pride in killing us. (Ahmad)

Unlike Ahmadis, other minorities can raise their voices. They have their representatives in the parliament. They have their rights at least in the documents. However, AM are helpless in Pakistan. (Usama)

Hamid from Kasur district in Punjab province told how, in 2013, clerics led a mob to attack an AM family of five in their home due to their Ahmadi faith. The family locked themselves in a room, but the mob broke down the door and then brutally physically tortured the wife, the husband and their 70-year-old uncle. The police were just spectators of this injustice and cruelty (Tanveer 2013).

Amir told that Tahira Parveen Malik, an active member of the AMC, was shot dead in a busy market of Lahore. The murderers shouted anti-Ahmadiyya slogans while fleeing.

Poor AM women are afraid of sending their children outside their homes, even for schooling. Due to their poor financial situation, they cannot afford to send them to private schools and provide a pick and drop service for them. Their children walk to government-owned schools and parents fret until their children return home. Most schoolteachers, even in Rabwah, are non-Ahmadis. Sometimes irresponsible behaviour from the teachers can create severe anxiety.

Nuzhat, a mother of two, said, 'I cannot afford a van service for pick and drop of my children at school. At the same time, I cannot send them alone. Therefore, I every day I go with my children to school and bring them back after school is finished.'

I was walking back to my home from the market after grocery. Some boys were standing at the street corner. Once they saw me, they started shouting 'gustakhay Rasool ki aik se saza, sir tan se juda [one and only punishment to a blasphemer is to behead]'. I was terrified. I fell down in panic when started walking faster towards my home. I could not go out of my home for many days due to fear. (Afifa)

Ammara said that her daughter was always afraid of attending Islamic studies lectures at her school. 'I was also worried that attending the lecture and writing examination of Islamic studies can put her in trouble.'

I graduated from engineering university Lahore where my senior Ahmadi student from Taxila was murdered when he was sitting in the lawn of university hostel. His death was celebrated by Islami Jamiat students [a student union of Jam'at-e-Islami] at engineering university Taxila on arrival his dead body in Taxila, his hometown. (Zeeshan)

F. They are forced to hide public manifestations of their faith to be accepted by society

Hiding religious identity was ranked fourth by the women. However, the men believe that the issue of hiding identity can be more dangerous once the identity is revealed later. Therefore, they placed it at a higher level, i.e. third position.

The Pakistani law prohibits AM to express their belief in any way in public. To avoid harassment, persecution, rejection from jobs and admission to educational institutions, and many other hardships, Ahmadi women try to hide their religious identity. For instance, they change the style of their hijab and burqa, and if they live in Rabwah they would not reveal that address. Ahmadi women dress modestly and do not reveal their body shape: traditionally, they wear a loose coat or jilbab over their dress and a veil covers their head and the lower half of the face up to the bridge of the nose, leaving the eyes and forehead clear. Many Ahmadi women wear a brown coat and black veil, and they are easily recognised as Ahmadi through their unique style of dressing. Ahmadi women who wish to hide their identity modify their traditional outfit by, for example, wearing a black burqa similar to those used by orthodox Muslim women, using a big shawl to cover their heads.

Rubab said, 'There is no other way of our survival in the society'.

In 2008, my younger sister was granted admission at Punjab Medical College, Faisalabad. She did not disclose her religious identity and continued her studies without any problem. However, her identity was disclosed when she was showing photos of my marriage ceremony to her friends at the college hostel. In the photos Ahmadi women were visibly wearing burqas. Therefore, her fellow students found that she was Ahmadi. Suddenly everyone became her enemy. Her roommate refused to share room with her. Students from all the hostels in the medical college called her in a hall room. They argued with her for not disclosing her religious and scolded for sharing her utensils with her roommate. Later, protests started against all Ahmadi students. Along with other Ahmadi students, she was physically attacked, case was registered against her in the police station, she was rusticated from the college and one year was wasted appealing against the decision. After more than one year she was transferred to another college in a different city. (Arifa)

I have asked my daughters not to disclose their religious beliefs anywhere. Even our best friends disconnect with us when they know about our religious faith. (Sana)

G. The poor AM women experience more violence and harassment than other poor women

Both the women and the men ranked this issue fourth.

Violence, fear, harassment, and insecurity faced by poor AM women is different from that faced by other women. Poor AM women are not protected by the authorities. Any injustice against them goes unnoticed and oppressors remain unpunished. Unlike other women, poor AM women are socially isolated. They can easily be trapped and blackmailed by oppressive anti-Ahmadiyya laws.

I had a small argument with my neighbour over a minor issue of kitchen smoke from my home. She started cursing me. She started calling me qadiani [a religious slur used to refer to AMs], infidel, and impious. My husband immediately intervened, apologised from her and we locked ourselves in a room. Fortunately, her husband wisely cooled down her to avoid any big trouble. (Umaiza)

Poor AM women in Pakistan face sexual harassment, mob violence, and violence by the police and personnel in authority. People of all ages including uneducated and highly educated young and old men and women harass vulnerable poor AM women. People often settle their revenges by misusing blasphemy laws. They snatch lands and forcibly displace the helpless poor AM women. Poor AM women are mentally tortured, abused, and taunted, bad names are called at them, and they are chased and harassed.

I was sitting alongside my husband who was driving a motorbike. Two boys on another motorbike chased us in our street and pulled my headcover. I was nearly to fall off my motorbike. The boys brought their bike in front of ours and gestured us to cut throat. We complained in the police station. They told us that they will look into the matter. However, they did not register our complaint. (Nadira)

Violence against our women is considered normal and justified by the orthodox Muslims in Pakistan. Since anti-Ahmadiyya laws are very oppressive, we instead of perpetrators are blamed and stigmatised. (Bashir)

My home was situated in a street through which hardly two persons can walk together. Whenever I walked back to my home from the college, boys already sitting in front of their homes started walking alongside me. I felt so bad. My father complained to their parents with no effect. (Amna)

Clerics are propagating against us that Ahmadis offer their women and money to attract people towards Ahmadiyya faith. It is disgusting. (Ummama)

In my academy, nobody wanted to sit with me. I had my own glass to drink water because I was not allowed to use the glass at water dispenser. I felt isolated and of no value. Even my good performance in exams was not appreciated by teachers as others were admired. (Eshal)

Currently, Khadim Hussain Rizwi – the founder of Tehrik-e-Labiak – is inciting people to kill us to become a beloved of God. He insists if anybody cannot kill Ahmadis, he/she should openly humiliate and show hatred in any possible way. Many people got inspired by his teachings and killed many Ahmadis. The authorities are failed to stop him. (Ahmad)

I am from Rabwah. I saw that non-Ahmadis from nearby cities used to come to Rabwah [98 per cent AM population] only to tease AM women. They call bad words to AM women. They shout 'hoor'[a derogatory phrase used against Ahmadi women to objectify them]. (Saad)

Nadira recalled an incident that took place in a graveyard belonging to the AMC. She said that people had complained at the police station against Islamic inscriptions engraved on tombstones. The police pressurised the AMC to remove the text; however, the Ahmadis replied that it was a violation of their faith to erase Koranic verses themselves.

Unlike other minorities, we are not even safe after death in our graves. We were terrified when one morning we heard the news that in the last night some unidentified people desecrated the graves of Ahmadis and disinterred their remains in Model Town Lahore. (Nadira)

Unjust persecution, harassment, and violation of human rights of other minorities are highlighted by electronic media, print media, and social media in Pakistan. Their representatives in the national and provincial assemblies act as their safeguards. Civil society also protests against any human rights violation against other minorities such as Christians and Hindus. However, unfortunately, nobody owns us. A large part of society is against us. There are some sympathisers who remain silent due to fear of reprisal. (Sajid)

Can you imagine that the High Court of Pakistan has ordered us even not to use the names 'Muhammad' or 'Ahmad'. Serving judges like Justice Shaukat Siddiquee of Islamabad High Court and retired judges like justice Nazir Ahmed Ghazi and Justice Khalid Mahmud of Supreme Court of Pakistan deliver hate speeches against us. Where we can go for justice? We have no way out. (Rubab)

Dr Khalid Mahmud served as Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. He was a Sunni scholar well known for his works related to Khatam-e-Nabuwat (literal meaning is 'Finality of the Prophethood' and it is a campaign against AMs). He lived in Manchester, UK after his retirement where he continued his hate speeches against Ahmadis until his death in May 2020. His anti-Ahmadiyya speeches can be found on social media channels (see Kamran 2012a, 2012b; and Islamnorway 2012). Justice Nazir Ahmed Ghazi is also a retired judge from the high court of Pakistan and is an active leader of the anti-Ahmadiyya campaign in Pakistan. His lectures can be found on electronic and in print media (see Ashgar 2011 and Nagina TV 2016), and he is also a famous religious anchor on a TV channel in Pakistan.

Various religious organisations regularly arrange Khatam-e-Nabuwat rallies and openly spread hate against AMs. The AMC is the only sect of Islam which is opposed by all the other sects of Islam. Therefore, anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment in Pakistani society is significantly high. Some religious groups are so violent that they search for and harass AMs who are performing any Islamic norm, and often they are accompanied by the police to take legal action.

On Eid-ul-Adha, an announcement was aired through the mosque's loudspeaker in our street that sacrificing animals was an Islamic act and, therefore, was a criminal offence by qadiyanis [a religious slur used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims]. Then, a group of clerics along with two police officers visited our homes to check if we had animals to sacrifice. They took our lamb and threatened us to register a case of blasphemy against us. (Hamima)

Sundus, a mother of two young children, is afraid of Pakistani people:

I live constantly under severe pressure. I feel that me and my kids are very unsafe. We do not call our relatives and friends at home so that nobody notices anything about our home. Anytime anything can happen against us by our enemies.

Since AM women cannot go to their mosques, they hold meetings in different homes. Such meetings are intended to serve as a learning and training platform and a source of healthy group activities. The host invites her female friends and relatives, including children. Although many Ahmadi women wish to host the meetings, it is not possible in high-risk localities. The visiting women's unique outfits can expose the religious identity of the host family if they have kept it secret. Also, mass gatherings can cause violence from the opponents.

I was living very near to Mansoori – the head office of Jam'at-e-Islami [a large religious political party] in Lahore – after my marriage. My husband asked me and my children not to disclose our religious identity. On few occasions I also accepted invitation to the rituals arranged by my neighbours to give them impression that we were not different from them. Therefore, I could not invite Ahmadi women to keep our identity secret. (Sundus)

Nadira's daughter was harassed at her college in Lahore by students from her class. During a group discussion in the classroom, they said her arguments were against Islamic teachings. They turned angry, called the founder of the AMC an imposter prophet and said Kafir to his followers. It created tension in the classroom environment. Nadira's son made a

complaint to the administration against the misbehaviour of the students in her sister's class. Later, he was threatened by male students from the same college. At one evening, the offenders marched towards her home with a mob, shouting that they had defamed Islam. They were inciting others to burn her home. Her neighbour was a kind police officer who immediately called the police, stopped the attackers, and persuaded them to go back by making a promise to look into the matter with urgency. The police officer kept his police force deputed at the home for one week to prevent any further attack.

The Ahmadi women's monthly Misbah [magazine] has been banned by Pakistan since 2012. Misbah was a good source of our learning and entertainment. Our writings were also get published which made us happy and important. But sadly, it is gone. (Ummama)

Christian have crosses on their churches and homes, Hindus freely keep different sacred objects in their temples and homes, and Sikh gurdwaras such as in Nankana Singh get financial and management support from the government during their annual functions. They can carry and read their books. They wear crosses and rings of their own choice. Sadly, we have three years imprisonment and fine, and even death penalty if we read Koran. We are penalised for wearing rings engraved with Koranic words, writing Koranic verses inside our homes and worship places. For this reason, our worship places and homes are attacked with police to erase Koranic verses and we are arrested. (Usman)

Since carrying Jama'at books and Koran is prohibited in Pakistan, I wrapped couple of my favourite books of Hazrat Khalifat-ul-Masih [title used for founder of the AMC], and a copy of Koran in my luggage to hide their titles from airport immigration when I was travelling to Thailand. (Imran)

Ummama shared an incident where two Ahmadi women in Karachi were attacked and seriously injured. They were accused of carrying a piece of cloth with Koranic verses which they intended to frame and hang on the wall of their home. The police, under severe pressure by Sunni Tehrik (an anti-Ahmadiyya Pakistani Barelvi organisation), filed the blasphemy charges against both women. Ummama stated that later, due to no evidence, both women were released on bail by the court.

When a non-Muslim woman says Assalam-u-Alaikum to a person from the Muslim majority, they are overjoyed as if someone had accepted Islam. They share videos on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. However,

the same words uttered by an Ahmadi woman can put her in jail for three years.
(Saad)

Ahmadis are even unsafe in their own city, Rabwah. Due to the immensely hostile situation for them in Pakistan, many poor Ahmadi families migrate to Rabwah for their safety and for basic facilities such as medical services, schooling, and small jobs which are provided by the AMC. The Government of Pakistan does not provide any funds for schools, hospitals, libraries, or postal system in Rabwah. The AMC funds its own non-profit institutions.

Unfortunately, orthodox Muslims try to disrupt the life of AMs in Rabwah. They arrange congregations of Khatam-e-Nabuwat (Finality of the Prophethood) and Seerat-un-Nabi (Life of Prophet Muhammad) more than twice a year in Rabwah, to which clerics guide large mobs of people. Hate speeches full of abusive language against Ahmadis continue for days. AM women are bounded to their homes with their children during these events. The AMC arranges 24-hour security using volunteers. Most children do not attend their schools for the duration of these gatherings.

Adnan said that at one time in 2017, a systematic killing of AMs was started in Korangi, Karachi.

My husband was extremely worried during a series of murders of AM in Karachi. One day he asked me to pack up the luggage and take children to my parents who lived in Hyderabad [a city in Pakistan] as a safety measure. We had no personal car. Therefore, he went out to look for a taxi which could drop us on the bus stand [Arifa started crying]. Enemies were ambushed. I heard bullet firing just after few minutes of his departure. My heart went down. I started prayer God and took my children in a room which was farthest from the main door of my home. I was telling myself that target would not be my husband. But my phone rang and my husband's friend told me that my husband was no more. My world was finished and earth slipped away from my feet. I fell down. My elder daughter (16 years old) holded me. We all were crying. Suddenly, I realised that the lives of my children were in danger. I contained myself with my five children in that room for five days to avoid bullets being fired from outside. By then everything in my kitchen was finished. I used my phone to call grocery shop in the street, but they refused to sell anything to me. Someone cut electricity connection to my home. I called the nearby electrician shop who also denied to fix. In one night, leaving everything behind, I took my children to bus stand in a car sent by the Jama'at and went to my parents' home in Hyderabad. I sold my jewellery and home to arrange money for my and my children's passports, visas, and air travel tickets. I

got passports on urgent basis. I was afraid that our passports might be denied or delayed due to my Ahmadiyya faith which was compulsory to mention on the passport. Therefore, I hired an agent who charged me extra money to help me. Although life is not easy for me in abroad, our lives are safe [she continued crying]. (Arifa)

H. They have many difficulties with admission acceptance to educational institutes. They are ignored by the instructors and isolated at the institutes in comparison to other poor women

The women placed this issue at fifth position, while the men ranked it seventh.

Poor AM women face many problems while seeking admission to government schools, colleges, and universities in Pakistan, and problems continue after they have been admitted. Local schools deny admission due to pressures from local clerics. Some schools offer admission but do not take any responsibility for the safety and rights of Ahmadi students at their institutes. Ahmadi students face hatred, insults, and torture from teachers and fellow students. Teachers discriminate them from non-Ahmadi students.

Asif explained how difficult it is for Ahmadi to apply for admission via an online registration form, which was introduced in 2009. This form requires applicants to mention their religious identity by choosing between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim'. This is a complicated situation for Ahmadi applicants as they believe themselves to be Muslims. Contrarily, the Pakistan constitution declares Ahmadi as non-Muslims. In cases where an Ahmadi selects the option 'Islam', he/she can be charged for a criminal offence under the blasphemy laws. This kind of form is designed to force Ahmadi to declare themselves as non-Muslims. In the past, educational institutes in Rabwah placed Ahmadi in the 'Muslim' category. Since the introduction of the oppressive online registration system, institutes in Rabwah affiliated with the Agha Khan University Board, which does not require applicants to state their religious identity. However, institutes outside of Rabwah that are not affiliated with the Agha Khan University Board create serious problems for thousands of AMs just due to their faith. Their refusal to sign the declaration leads to their automatic disqualification for not fulfilling the admission requirements.

Ali described how her sister was forced to leave the academy where she was studying by the administration, under pressure from teachers and students:

Her fellow students refused to sit with her, and teachers denied facing pressure if any student accuses them of favouring an Ahmadi student. Since teachers in different private academies know each other, my sister was denied admission in nearby academies too. Therefore, she moved to another academy out of her town where nobody was aware of her religious identity. (Ali)

I always advised my children not to disclose their religious belief and avoid reacting to any kind of offensive comments from non-Ahmadis. I was very careful after the daughters of my Ahmadi friend faced so much opposition from fellow students and mistreatment from the teachers that she left her education incomplete. Her father had to consult the doctor for her treatment and after two years she was able to resume her studies in another institute. (Anwar)

Ahmadi students face unfair punishment, harassment, and discrimination at the educational institutes they attend. Therefore, Ahmadi women are afraid of sending their children to educational institutes. Ahmadi students are not allowed to sit in Islamic studies lectures. Touching the Islamic book can cause serious trouble for them. At the canteens, AM children are not allowed to eat with mainstream Muslim children. Similarly, AM children are not allowed to share or use the same glasses or crockery. This is because Ahmadis are said to be the worst creatures: dogs, pigs, and a sign of God's anger. Therefore, people do not share utensils with them anywhere – in offices, schools, or public spaces.

There are Ahmadi-owned schools in Rabwah so Ahmadi women living in that city face no problem until they continue studies. The participants' perception was that there is no preferential treatment given to boys in comparison to girls within the AMC as the supreme leader, Hazrat Khalifa-tul-Masih, regularly preaches the equal treatment of boys and girls in accordance with Islam. However, Ahmadis live in every city of Pakistan and they all face problems regarding educational institutes.

My daughter was admitted to a private academy. We did not disclose our religious identity and said ourselves Muslims in the admission form. Since it was a private academy, they did not ask to sign any declaration to denounce Ahmadi faith. However, she spent entire period of her studies in fear and faced mental torture when most of her teachers were often spending part of their lecture time on spreading hate against Ahmadis. (Sumaira)

Ahmadis experience a more oppressive atmosphere in government schools. Most government schoolteachers are typically under the influence of clerics. Some of them openly

express their association with extremist groups such as Jamaat-u-Dawa and Jamaat-e-Islami and have joined their Facebook pages. Many share the anti-Ahmadiyya slogans such as ‘Qadianis are Kafir and it is a part of our faith to expose them’.

Ammara shared the reasons for leaving her education incomplete:

After completing my intermediate, I took admission in BSc. at government T.I. College Rabwah. Taj Din was my physics teacher. He had beard and his attitude was like a Mullah. He was a science teacher. However, his almost every lecture finished at the topic of finality of prophethood. He insulted our beloved great promised Messiah. It was a great torture for me. Finally, I left the college without completing my Bachelor degree. (Ammara)

Our lives are greatly affected by the hatred and mistreatment at educational institutions. Therefore, poor AM women are not well educated. Many of them are intelligent but avoid going to school because of the abusive behaviour from non-Ahmadis. Consequently, we cannot provide quality education to our children. (Arifa)

My first preference is always not letting my teachers and class fellows know that I am Ahmadi. Otherwise, same is expected like discussion on our faith, facing the Kafir mantra, reminding that Pakistani law bounds us to perform Islamic rituals, Ahmadis should be killed, Ahmadis must change their religion. Educational matters are very difficult for the poor AM women. Many class fellows ended their friendship with me just because of my Ahmadi faith. Teachers also ignore us in class activities. (Amna)

Until secondary school level (12th grade, age 16–17), poor AM women cannot afford to attend the big institutes, and instead go to small tuition centres, local small private schools, or government schools where most of the students are familiar with each other’s family backgrounds. Parents of other children ask them to stay away from the Ahmadi students. Teachers treat Ahmadi students differently and often ignore them in order to avoid any objection from their colleagues or from other students, or their parents, of favouring an AM. Some teachers also have extremist mindsets and they intentionally misbehave.

Ummama’s daughter was in Al-Noor Academy, a very famous private education institute in Shahdara, Lahore. She became so terrified by the situation that she and three other Ahmadi girls left the academy:

Mr Ali was my daughter's English subject teacher, but his every lecture ended with the topic of Khatam-e-Nabooat and hate speech against Ahmadis. Nobody knew that we were Ahmadis. We sent couple of common friends to the academy principal to ask Mr Ali to avoid religious discussion in the class. However, the academy principal said that it was the duty of every Muslim to defend Khatam-e-Nabooat and condemn Ahmadis at every level.

Above 12th grade in colleges and universities, admissions are offered on merit scholarships. The campuses are in big cities so students normally do not know each other's family background. Many AM women hide their identity: they change their hijab and sometimes follow customs which are not part of their faith in order to be socially accepted. As already mentioned, Ahmadi women wear a loose coat or jilbab over their dress and a veil that covers their head and the lower half of the face up to the bridge of the nose. Many Ahmadi women wear a brown coat and a black veil. When Ahmadi women wish to hide their identity, they modify their traditional outfit by wearing a black burqa similar to those used by mainstream Muslim women. They also use a big shawl to cover their heads. In cases where their identity is revealed, it is not uncommon for AM women to suffer severely violent actions including mental and physical harassment. Therefore, only a small number of poor AM women go to colleges and universities, and those who do live in a constant state of fear.

Asifa did not complete her engineering degree:

I was second year student at the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore when my Islamic studies teacher came to know that I was an Ahmadi. His first reaction was furious. He called me in his office and told me that I was a Kafir [infidel] and consequences of false declaration by me of being Muslim can be very serious. I was terrified. I immediately informed my father. He complained to the university but instead of taking some safety measure my identity was revealed to other teachers and students. Male students from Islami Jamiyat Tulba [student wing of Jam'at-e-Islami, a religious political party] started a campaign against me. They displayed messages on notice boards that 'Qadianis are the worst enemies of Islam', 'Sympathisers of Qadianis are also Kafir'. I was not allowed to attend the lecture of Islamic studies. Some other teachers also started ignoring me. All my female friends started avoiding me. One of my best friends messaged me that she could not afford to face opposition due to her association with me. Nobody was willing to keep me in their study groups and

projects. Finally, I terminated my studies at the university as I could no longer face the continued hostility.

Samayya reported that ten poor Ahmadi students, including seven girls and a female teacher, were expelled from Chenab Public School and Muslim Public School in Hafizabad in 2011 due to their faith. Apparently, the school principal said that he took this action to save his school and was forced to do so under severe pressure from the villagers.

I. No jobs are offered

This issue was ranked at sixth position by both the women and the men.

Job application form asks about the religion. If we mention Ahmadiyya, then no test/interview call is received. In case we say Muslim, later we can face the worst charges of blasphemy and others under the Ordinance XX. (Shabbir)

The Islamabad High Court has ordered all Pakistani citizens to disclose their religious identity. Otherwise, they will be guilty of betraying the state. People applying for government jobs must declare their faith, and most private jobs require employees to do so. Jobs in the private sector are not offered to AMs mainly to avoid a potential backlash from other employees. Although the government has a 5 per cent quota reserved for minorities in government jobs, no Ahmadi has been offered a job as part of it. As previously explained, for Ahmadi people to be included in the quota for minorities, they would have to accept a 'non-Muslim' status; and even when Ahmadi people have disclosed their status on identity documents, automatically placing themselves in the 'minority' category, none of them have been offered a job under this quota.

Ahmadi women who are employed generally decide not to reveal their faith for fear of reprisals or employment termination. Afifa stated Islam as her religion in the paperwork when she got hired as a teacher in a private academy. Other teachers and her students followed her on her social media accounts. Through her 'friends' list and list of liked 'pages' on Facebook, soon her religious identity became known. She was accused of 'posing as Muslim', which is prohibited by the Pakistan constitution. She was asked to leave the job with immediate effect because the academy staff and students did not tolerate Ahmadis.

Arifa had no job in Pakistan because her identity card and passport stated 'Ahmadi'; however, she has been working in Thailand for the last four years:

My father was working as a shopkeeper. He tried his level best to give me good education. I always wanted to help my father through earning some money by using my education and skill. After I graduated, I was very disappointed that I was unable to get a job due to my Ahmadiyya faith. Most of companies rejected me because my address was of Rabwah and religion was mentioned as Ahmadiyya on application forms. One company called me for interview. They asked me that I would be needed to change my traditional hijab which reveals my Ahmadiyya faith. I declined their offer. In Thailand, I live with my husband. I am working as a schoolteacher without any problem related to my religious faith. School is owned by Sikh, mostly staff is Hindu and students are from different religious backgrounds including from other sects of Islam such as Brelvi, Deobandi, and Shia. Since Thailand does not recognise refugees, life is not easy here. I need a very big amount to continue with my visa which is arranged by agents. So financial pressure is excessive but life is safe.

Poor women of mainstream Muslims earn money by various means to feed their children. They work from their homes in jobs for which no education or money is needed. Some run their own small shops, such as eateries, while others sell groceries from home, provide sewing and stitching services, or manually pack dry tea leaves in sachets or pack nuts. None of these works is possible for poor AM women because Pakistani people consider it haram ('an act that is forbidden by God') to interact with AMs.

Shezan International Limited is a Lahore-based beverage brand whose owners have Ahmadiyya faith. Many clerics and some social media groups have a continuous campaign to boycott Shezan products. They have declared it 'haram' to use Shezan products. Therefore, there are many areas in Pakistan where the supply and sale of Shezan products is banned. (Hassan)

Shezan has hired many non-Ahmadis. However, there have been several systematic anti-Ahmadiyya campaigns to boycott Shezan products. Shezan factories have been attacked many times: in June 2010, terrorists attacked a Shezan factory in Lahore using high-explosive bombs, injuring four people (Tanveer 2010). In 2012, 100 lawyers voted to ban Shezan products and later, the Lahore Bar Association banned the sale and purchase of Shezan products from court complexes. The lawyers threatened strict action would be taken against anyone who buys or drinks Shezan juices (Yasif 2012).

I am very good at stitching. I informed my neighbourhoods through small pamphlets that I was available for stitching services. I knew many people look for

tailors near Eid [main religious celebrations in Islam]. I could not get order even from my immediate neighbours. Few Ahmadi families near my house gave me stitching orders. They told me that people did not wish to get my services because I was an Ahmadi. (Rubab)

Many females with the help of their children in my street started earning some money by manual packing of dry leaves of black tea in small sachets. It was sold in the local market then. I approached to the owner of this business and offered my services. He asked me to come back on next day. Next day he told me that other people had resisted my hiring, and that his customers could boycott his product too. Therefore, he apologised to hire me. (Aima)

Poor AM women are therefore overly dependent on their male family members, who go to other towns and cities to earn money and, without them around, are at more risk of violence and harassment. In addition to their ongoing financial crisis, they are also deeply concerned about the safety of their children:

We were the only Ahmadi family in our small village. Our survival in that village was due to my husband's good relations with some influential villagers. However, many others were jealous and wanted to break that friendship bond. Our village is about 40km from Lahore city where my husband worked. He cannot come to home daily because we cannot afford bus fare and me and my children cannot live with him in Lahore because living is expensive in Lahore. My husband had asked me and my children not to go out of the home in his absence due to fear of non-Ahmadi villagers who were forcing us for a long time to leave the village. However, sometimes it was necessary for me to visit doctor or for some other matter. I could feel the hatred and anger in the villagers against me. I always feared that someone might attack me and my children until that happened one day in real. One woman falsely accused my son (12 years old) of stealing money from her home. My husband was not at home. She called her husband to my home and started shouting. When her husband realised that I was alone with my children, he forcefully entered into my home. He started thrashing everything. When I resisted, both of them started beating me. Then they started shouting that I had anti-Islamic books [these were actually Ahmadiyya books] at home. People started gathering in front of my home. Since I was aware of the consequences, I was trembling and was requesting them to spare me and my children. One of the villagers was kind-hearted. He asked others to wait until my

husband comes back next morning. In midnight, same man helped me to leave the village and I travelled to Rabwah where my husband joined us.

In Pakistan, Christian, Hindus, and Sikhs have shops in different markets and hire people from their communities. Rabwah is a very small city and, therefore, provides few employment opportunities. Ahmadis from Rabwah are not offered jobs in neighbouring towns because their address exposes their religious identity. Many uneducated and less-educated Christian women do small jobs in almost every government department, many others work as maids in different homes. Some Christians have high-ranking jobs such as in the judiciary and in the army. Mainstream Muslims highlight them on social media to show how much religious minorities are enjoying life in Pakistan, with their quota in government jobs and admissions at the universities. Meanwhile, AM businesses are destroyed as it is considered haram to do business with Ahmadis. They are not even employed for small jobs such as a cook or a maid in people's homes.

Even if somebody wishes to offer a job to an AM, they do not; not only for fear of criticism and anger from others, but because the same fatwas issued against Ahmadis will likely be announced against them too. The research and publications desk of Jamia Qadria Rizwiyya, Faisalabad (a Sunni-run organisation) issued a printed fatwa against an AM, extracts of which are given below.

Qadianis are hypocrites and apostates - Meat slaughtered by them is not licit and lies in the forbidden degree - If a Muslim sympathizes with Qadianis and considers them persecuted as a result of their boycott, he himself is outside the fold of Islam, and one who does not call an infidel, infidel, he himself is an infidel.

Thus, all Muslims should boycott Qadianis from all interactions of life and death. If a Qadiani is sick, do not visit him; if he dies, do not offer his funeral prayer; do not allow his burial in a Muslim graveyard – it is forbidden to visit his grave (TPA 2001).

Tens of anti-Ahmadiyya printable stickers and fatwa quotes of clerics are available on the official website of Khatam-e-Nabuwat. Some examples translated into English are:

'The smallest cooperation with any Ahmadiyya in your common lives is one of the biggest sins.'

‘Never help any Ahmadi. Any sympathy to an Ahmadi is haram and cannot be forgiven.’

‘A person who has friendship with any Ahmadi is errant, cruel, and rightful to the greatest anger of God.’

‘Friendship with Ahmadis is a rebellion against the prophet Muhammad.’

Although owner of the [garment] shop was a non-Ahmadi, some of his relatives were Ahmadi. Therefore, he hired me on the request of one of them. He asked me to sit in the basement where public dealing was the least. I was hired to monitor the stock inventory. The owner was concerned about the anger faced by his visitors including suppliers. Some suppliers were also very religious. Therefore, he strictly advised me not to talk too much with anybody. (Afifa)

We are not offered jobs because they consider us dirty and reason of bad fortune. Ahmadis are called ‘the worst creature’. They are called dogs and pigs and it is believed that offering jobs to Ahmadis is the reason for God’s anger, therefore ‘bad fortune’. (Saniya)

J. They are openly asked to abandon their faith, or convert to another sect, for them to feel safe

The women ranked this issue seventh and the men ranked it fifth.

Ahmadis are openly offered the choice between their faith and death. This narrative has become more intense with the passage of time. Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP, a religious political party) has gained incredible popularity in recent times, based on their extremist stance on AMs. Khadim Hussain Rizwi, chairman of TLP, has repeated many times that AMs should either ‘recite the Kalima [Islamic statement of faith] or accept death’ (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2008). In 1985, General Zia ul Haq – then president of Pakistan – said that the Ahmadis in Pakistan have only two options: either leave the country or abandon their faith to be accepted by the Pakistani nation.

Clerics and their followers, understanding the vulnerability of poor AM, often ask them to abandon their faith to earn respect and to save their lives and valuables. Sometimes they are offered money.

Almost all religious minorities are offered to abandon their faith and accept Islam which has been redefined by the clerics. However, unlike any other minority, we are considered as infidels. Therefore, we have only choice either to accept clerics' Islam or die at their hands. (Rubab)

It happened many times with me in the college. I was asked to abandon my faith and accept Islam for the sake of my safety. For them, it was a kind piece of advice to me. (Salma)

K. It is almost impossible for them to approach local/national authorities in comparison to other poor women

The women placed this issue at eighth position, while the men consider it more serious and ranked it fourth.

Poor AM women have various issues in relation to the local authorities, such as patwari for matters related to land, local councillors for conflicts and utilities/facilities issues, the police station (SHO, SP, DSP, DPO)²⁵ for legal issues, ministers (MPA/MNA)²⁶ for major issues, elders of the neighbourhood for family and neighbourhood issues, and public offices (for example, the education office, and for identity documents such as birth certificates, national identity cards, passports, family registration, and marriage certificates). However, the authorities are wary that other people can blame them for showing sympathy to AMs.

Some boys in our street were often shouted anti-Ahmadiyya slogans in a loud noise when passed by my home. First, I complained to their families with no effect. Then I went to police station and told them that my children were scared of their behaviour. The head moharrar [a clerk in-charge and custodian of a police station] listened me briefly but did not allow me to see station house master [SHO]. He said that I should remain quiet and not to highlight the issue otherwise it will become a big religious issue. Instead of writing my complaint, he verbally promised me to talk with their elders to stop their harassment. (Areeba)

²⁵ SHO – Station House Master; SP – Superintendent of Police; DSP – Deputy Superintendent of Police; DPO – District Police Officer.

²⁶ Elected members of the Pakistani parliament: MPA – Member of the Provincial Assembly; MNA – Member of the National Assembly.

Our wheat field on two acres Narowal [a city in Punjab province] was ready to cut and sell in the market. Some unknown people set our ready-to-cut field on fire. Our whole crop burnt to ashes. We took the matter in panchayat [a local court of elders of the village] but nobody seemed interested mainly due to the head of panchayat who was a known figure of a religious political party and had anti-Ahmadiyya sentiments. (Zeeshan)

Patwaris are responsible for land transfer. They are skeptical when a poor AM woman approaches them to buy or sell a piece of land. They never facilitate Ahmadis. Instead, they use various tactics such as demanding bribe money, unnecessary documents, or witnesses in order to torture her.

Without bribe money it is impossible for us to get any kind of legal work done by the authorities. Even amount of bribe money which is demanded is more than our capacity. However, we are helpless. We often borrow money from others for making basic national documents such as passport. (Ummama)

Our ancestors' land was to be divided in the family. All beneficiaries from our family were agreed on their parts. Some of our family members had mentioned Islam and other had Ahmadiyya in their identity documents. Difference in religion was nothing to do with land transfer. However, patwari and his assistant asked us to get statements of no objection by mentioning the religious identity of everyone on legal papers. It could put us in big problem of announcing our religious identities on legal papers. They asked us for extra money to 'manage' that so-called requirement. We could not complaint to land department because the matter could get more complicated. (Nadira)

Ministers and councillors are elected by the general public. Most people are against AMs, and many are violent due to their blind faith in clerics who opportunistically use religion to maintain their high status. Various ministers and councillors include famous clerics in their election campaigns. In their processions, they openly declare AMs to be the biggest enemies of Islam and Pakistan and announce that they do not need the votes of Ahmadis. Although most ministers and councillors seem to share the sentiments of the clerics, others become part of such hate campaigns to maintain their public support. Hence, Ahmadi women are afraid of contacting them to request help with solving their issues.

The authorities in Pakistan maintain a distance from us. They do not want to face criticism from extremist clerics due to any kind of association with AM. Jama'at-

e-Ahmadiyya Pakistan has sent repeated requests to Federal Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari for a meeting ever since the current government was formed in 2018. So far, she has not replied once. (Arifa)

The police are aware of all the hate, mistreatment, and other illegal acts against AMs. However, they have never tried to stop these heinous activities: they have orders from their seniors and political leaders not to interfere in matters involving Ahmadis to avoid any outrage from the general public. Pakistani courts of justice are also biased against Ahmadis.

Our complains in the police station are useless. Police always promise us to act, but practically they do nothing. Perhaps everyone is afraid of facing same treatment for supporting Ahmadis which AM face. (Amna)

Clerics started construction on a part of Rabwah which is the property of Ahmadis. Ahmadiyya Muslim Jam'at approached the High Court. The court ordered to stop the illegal construction on Ahmadi-owned property. However, clerics did not stop construction. Ahmadiyya Muslim Jam'at went again to the High Court with the claim of contempt of court by the Mullahs. Judge asked whose contempt is it? Representative of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jam'at replied that it was contempt of the court. Judge replied that if it was contempt of the court and not contempt of the Ahmadis then what was the case Ahmadis had approached to the court for?(Ummama)

Sundus narrated how Punjab Medical College in Faisalabad rusticated 15 Ahmadi female students and eight male students not only from the college but also their hostels in 2008. Four of the female students were in the final year of their studies. Orthodox Muslims (all sects of Islam, including Shia but excluding Ahmadis) were running an extensive hate campaign against AMs in the college. They pasted the posters on the room doors of Ahmadi students in hostels, depicting insulting photos and derogatory remarks against the founder of Jama'at Ahmadiyya. One student took the poster off her door and complained to the hostel warden. The protesters named it an act of blasphemy and they demanded the Ahmadi students to be punished as such. Protests spread all over Faisalabad. Ahmadi students were dragged out of their rooms at midnight and were so badly beaten that two male students nearly died. Male Ahmadi students kept the attackers busy so that female students could escape via the rear gate. People from the local Jama'at Ahmadiyya Faisalabad helped the female Ahmadi students to jump over the college gates transferred them to Rabwah. The next day, the police registered FIRs against all Ahmadi students and the college principal issued orders to

rusticate them all. Ahmadi parents approached all the national authorities, including ministers, MPAs and MNAs, but nobody supported them. However, Governor Punjab Salmaan Taseer cursed the college principal for allowing the protests. He was later threatened and assassinated when he objected to the misuse of the blasphemy laws. The health minister asked the Ahmadis to remain quiet for their own safety. Some students left their studies incomplete and went abroad and the remainder were sent to other institutes in different cities. It wasted more than one precious year of the medical students' lives.

L. Violence against them is never highlighted by the Pakistani media

The women put this issue at ninth position and the men ranked it tenth.

Issues such as human rights, forced conversions, abduction, murders, discrimination, and harassment are sometimes highlighted by the media when poor women from other religious minorities, such as Hindus and Christians, are concerned. However, the cause of Ahmadi women has never been a topic in the media. The media has never highlighted their miseries. Contrarily, both male and female anchors openly speak against Ahmadis on TV. They call clerics or their followers, who first falsely explain the Ahmadiyya faith, and then embark on a one-sided debate between the anchors and guests to always reach the same conclusion, i.e. that AM beliefs are contradictory to Islam. They never invite an Ahmadi spokesperson to explain their point of view and to reply to their allegations. It leads to hate against AMs in society.

It seems very funny when TV anchors call only anti-Ahmadiyya clerics to tell what Ahmadiyya beliefs are. Why they don't call any Ahmadi to tell about Ahmadiyya faith? We are responsible what we say, we are not responsible what they understand. (Uzma)

The International Human Rights Committee (IHRC) has reported several cases of murder, as well as harassment, threats, and violence against Ahmadi women. Such unfortunate incidents are happening regularly in Pakistan. However, the Pakistani media – including digital and print – has never highlighted the violation of Ahmadi women's human rights.

The IHRC reported that on 30 April 2020, in a village in Nankana district, a 55-year-old Ahmadi woman named Ramzan Bibi was falsely booked under Section 295-C, which calls for the death penalty. Her only 'sin' was to donate some money for an event being held in the mosque of the non-Ahmadis. Her donation was declined and, being surprised, she asked

why the man had turned it down. The man assaulted and abused her. One passerby asked the man not to use abusive language to a woman. Instead, he started shouting and a quarrel broke out, which caused some physical injuries to Ramzan Bibi. The clerics from the village manipulated the situation and registered a case of blasphemy (295-C) against the innocent Ahmadi woman on the basis of a false and baseless testimony of a non-Ahmadi man against her. She was immediately arrested and put behind bars in Sheikhpura Jail. Now she is in Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore, where she awaits trial. This incident was not reported in the Pakistani media (IHRC 2020).

The Government of Pakistan has banned all of our websites. They also banned our TV channel – MTA International. There are dozens of TV channels almost speaking on daily basis against AM. What is then fear of orthodox Muslims from our single TV channel? If they believe that we are wrong, let people see our beliefs on Ahmadiyya websites and MTA International. (Babar)

TV channels in Pakistan do not show any images which relate to the AMC. In May 2020, the programme *Sehri se Pehlay* on Geo TV aired a short video showing how the Mayor of Houston in the USA participated in a virtual Ramzan (a holy month of the Islamic calendar) activity arranged by Muslims. The video contained some graphics of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Youth Association. The public in Pakistan became furious and Geo TV was heavily criticized and said to be sympathisers of Ahmadis. On the same day, Geo TV apologised for their 'mistake' and announced their 'true association with Islam'.

Usman smiled and said:

Pakistani media do not highlight the achievements of its only Nobel laureate Dr Abdul Salam who was an AM. His work or personality has not been included in the books. So, we don't expect that media will talk about any common Ahmadi.

Similarly, some newspapers have dedicated spaces for publishing hate material against Ahmadis on an almost daily basis. Paid advertisements such as anti-Ahmadiyya slogans, announcements of anti-Ahmadiyya conferences, curses against Ahmadis, and fund-raising campaigns to publish material against Ahmadis are printed by various newspapers. Sayeed (2018a) cited a report on the Pakistani media which listed 3,936 news items and 532 editorial pieces from Pakistan's Urdu-language media in 2017 that contained 'hate propaganda' against the AMC.

There are many YouTube channels whose only purpose is to spread hate against Ahmadis. For 'subscriptions' and 'likes', extreme hate and violence is injected into society through

social media. Stickers, pamphlets, and handouts that are full of anti-Ahmadi content are published in the name of Khatam-e-Nabuwat (Finality of the Prophethood) and openly distributed to the general public. Neither PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) nor the Federal Investigation Agency have stopped the propaganda against Ahmadis. Some decision makers in media regulatory authorities and law enforcement agencies are either reluctant to speak up or are under the influence of their set religious belief systems, so they remain silent.

The Ahmadiyya daily newspaper, *Al-Fazl*, has been banned from being published in Pakistan. Many Ahmadi journalists working for *Al-Fazl* and other Ahmadi publications have been charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws and anti-terrorism act.

On 28 May 2010, AMs were attacked while saying Friday prayers in their mosques. Ninety-four Ahmadis were martyred and more than a hundred were injured. In response, Ahmadiyya women were in deep sorrow and prayed for their children and husbands. Media reporting was biased by some commentators and anchors.

I was unable to stop my tears. I saw live reporting of bloodshed for more than three hours on TV. I was praying for the safety of our children and men who were in those mosques. However, media was reporting 'religious minority sect' instead of calling us Ahmadis. Attack was on Friday prayers, by media was saying that a congregation was under attack. Later, many TV channels attended the press conference of our Ameer, but none of them aired the programme. (Hassam)

Pakistani law does not allow the AMC to build a mosque. However, Ahmadiyya mosques that were built before the inception of Pakistan are being demolished just because of the religious-based persecution of AMs. In 2018, a 100-year-old Ahmadiyya mosque in Sialkot was demolished by a mob led by politicians and religious clerics (Sayeed 2018b). Not a single mainstream TV channel covered the news of the attack. Karim from Sialkot shared his affection for the historical Ahmadi mosque:

I visited the mosque many times. It was small and very simple building. I always felt something amazing about my ancestors who had prayed here and spread the message of Islam. It had also some memories for Pakistan history related to Allama Iqbal [a Muslim poet and philosopher] who once attended this mosque. Sadly, we are losing all of our Ahmadi monuments one by one under the nose of Pakistani authorities.

M. They are unable to wear hijab without being harassed more than other women

The women ranked this issue tenth, and the men ranked it eleventh.

AM women can be easily identified due to their distinct burqa, which features unique stitching. The hijab is worn in such a way that the veil covers the lower half of the face up to the bridge of the nose, leaving the eyes and forehead clear. Women from other minorities and mainstream Muslim women either do not use a burqa or they wear their hijab differently.

Ahmadi women face more harassment than Ahmadi men. Ahmadi men have more similarities to non-Ahmadi in their appearance, names, and language. Therefore, they may hide their religious identity to avoid the harassment and persecution. However, AM women are unable to hide their identity mainly due to their unique attire.

Women in Pakistan are commonly harassed by licentious youngsters standing in the streets and in shopping markets. They are often punished by the general public and are also handed over to the police. Unfortunately, poor AM women who walk along the streets to go shopping face harassment which nobody criticises. People criticise the hijab of Ahmadi women. Some have made nonsense stories as part of propaganda against Ahmadi women, such as clerics and their followers telling people that AMs will try to trap you by offering you money and their women.

I was walking back to my home in the afternoon after attending a meeting at my friend's home. Some boys in the street whistled at me. One of them said that let's follow 'hoor'[a derogatory term to refer to an Ahmadi woman] to paradise. Other said, 'She is qadiani. Convert her to Muslim and go to paradise.' Then everyone started laughing. There were other people in the street. No body objected their actions. (Salma)

Nobody knew at my college that I was an Ahmadi. One day, my class fellows were cursing the founder of the AMC. One of them said, 'I tell you to be aware of qadiani girls. They trap Muslim boys by keeping their veil under their nose. We must avoid them to keep our faith safe.' (Arshad)

Someone sent me a video on social media which was criticising our burqa. I was shocked when I heard, 'Qadiani girls use skin-tight burqa with a belt on back side to expose their body'. (Amna)

I was buying clothes from a market. I was wearing my burqa. Someone from the neighbouring shop said, as if he was advising to the cloth seller, 'bik na jaana' [don't sell yourself]. I immediately left the shop. (Uzma)

People of all ages and gender take pride in teasing Ahmadi women in any possible way. Nobody stops them; and even if someone wishes to, they remain silent due to the fear of facing criticism over supporting Ahmadis and perhaps being accused of blasphemy. The minimum that Ahmadi women endure is an expression of displeasure. Orthodox Muslim women mistreat and abuse them.

One of my female class fellows said to others that I was dressed up in unique hijab to look prominent in the class. (Asma)

Taunting and mockery start by the non-Ahmadis as soon as we step out of our homes. (Rashida)

*People call us with different derogative names which are not used for other minorities such as *gustakh* [insolent] *Ahmadis*, *Mirzayen* [a religious slur used to refer to Ahmadi women], *Qadiani Hoor*, *infidel*, *Kafir* and *Randi* [prostitutes]. These words are very insulting not only for us but also for our faith. (Rubab)*

To harass us they shout slogans 'Khatam-e-Naboovat zindabaad' [long live anti-Ahmadiyya movement of Kahatam-e-Naboovat, i.e. Finality of the Prophethood]. Pakistani orthodox Muslims consider this slogan a so-called compulsory ingredient of their belief. This slogan means that they are inviting others to torture us to satisfy their hate against us. (Amna)

N. They face social boycott

Both the women and the men ranked this issue eleventh.

Unlike other minorities, AMs face social as well as economic boycott. Nobody shares their happiness or consoles them in their miseries. Nobody attends AM marriages and funerals. AM are forbidden to be buried in common graveyards. On the one hand, AMs are isolated from the non-Ahmadi community, and on the other, they cannot enjoy the company of their own community because the Government of Pakistan has banned them from their religious

obligations and ordered the AMC not to arrange their annual games, *jalsas/ijtimas* (gatherings/conferences), or educational and sports competitions.

After knowing about my Ahmadi belief, my friends in the college who used to eat and drink with me stopped talking to me. I could not say prayer alone or with my class fellows in my college because Pakistani law has said it a punishable blasphemy act of an Ahmadi and many people under the influence of Mullahs believe it noble to immediately kill a blasphemous. (Rubab)

My office colleagues used to have lunch together in the office. After my religious identity became known at my office, I was conveyed the message through office peon that I should not eat my lunch sitting with my colleagues. Office peon asked to get my own plates and glass from my house. The behaviours at my office were changed so quickly and severely that I had to contact with the doctor due to my mental stress. Soon, I left the job. (Afia)

Non-Ahmadis do not do any business with Ahmadis. Very often they are denied help when in need. During the disastrous floods of 2010 in Pakistan, the local governments of Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, and Rajanpur districts denied food and shelter to approximately 500 internally displaced AM families (Malik 2011).

O. It is very difficult for them to acquire national documents such as a national identity card and passport

The women ranked this issue twelfth, and the men ranked it ninth.

Documents such as national identity cards, passports, and family registration certificates are hard to obtain. In the registration centres, poor AM women are treated badly due to their religious faith, which is obvious from their burqa. People who have money hire agents to help get their documents to save them from the troubles which face the poor at document centres.

Mixed-religion families are subject to unnecessary enquiries by the officers and become a source of fear and harassment for the Ahmadi women. Very often, poor AM women are put in a dangerous situation where the administrative staff at the registration centres ask them questions of a religious nature in the presence of many people. Sometimes male family members mention Islam instead of Ahmadiyya so that they can get jobs and avoid many

other problems. In the case of new converts, as it is illegal in Pakistan to convert out of Islam newly converted Ahmadiyya also carry their old religious identity with them. In such cases, people mostly change their religion to Ahmadiyya on their identity documents after they have migrated to other countries.

At the passport office I told my religion as Ahmadiyya to the officer. The officer expresses his displeasure and murmured 'Pakistan se bahir Janay ka acha tareeka he' [you have devised a good excuse to move abroad]. (Asma)

I was applying for passport of mine and for my two years old son named Ataa Muhammd. I told my religion as Ahmadiyya to the officer. Officer looked at me and said, do you know qadianis are not allowed to use name Muhammad? I was scared. However, that officer was kind. He asked me to be careful about my religion and son's name. If that officer were of extremist mind, me and my two years old son could face blasphemy charges. Thank God, I left Pakistan. (Iqra)

There are various reasons for family members having different religions written in their identity documents. For instance, some members of the AMC, usually males, have 'Islam' stated as their religion. This is mainly due to their fear of not finding a job due to their Ahmadiyya faith and, therefore, not getting enough food to survive. Once 'Islam' is written on an identity document, it is a very difficult and dangerous task to change the religion, say, Islam to Ahmadiyya. Doing so will be considered as an act of infidelity, and the penalty for infidels under Pakistani law is death. Pakistani law is framed in such a way that one can embrace Islam but cannot leave Islam.

My father was a schoolteacher by profession. When I became 18 years old in 1997, he asked one of his old students in the registration office to make my national identity card. It was the time when there was no computerised data and digital identity documents in Pakistan. He just needed my photo and basic information. No physical presence was needed. He typed my name, put my father's name and home address and mentioned Islam as my religion. I did not know until I got my identity card. Once I tried to change the religion from Islam to Ahmadiyya, I was told by the authorities to go to the court first. I am afraid that someone can kill me in the court accusing of infidelity. (Zubair)

I closed my eyes and signed the declaration of disassociation with Ahmadiyya faith. I feel really bad that I told a lie. I had no other option to survive in Pakistan. I

was the only bread-earner in my family. It seemed impossible to find a job in Pakistan with my identity as Ahmadiyya Muslim. (Imran)

Another reason of mixing religions in a family is when – although it is not preferable – an Ahmadi man marries a non-Ahmadi woman. Therefore, some parents have different religions (i.e. one parent has 'Ahmadiyya' and other has 'Islam' stated in their identity documents).

I filled the form to make my identity card and mentioned my religion as Ahmadiyya. The officer first showed her displeasure. Then she checked the family tree and noticed that my father was Muslim and my mother was Ahmadiyya. She asked me to clarify. My father had asked me not to speak or explain anything related to religion. I told her that I don't know. The officer replied that a Kafir married to a Muslim is not allowed in Islam, do you know this? I was scared. However, I politely requested her to make my document and then ask such questions from my parents (they were intentionally standing outside the office). She looked at me with anger and typed my data. (Tooba)

Mixed religions in a family is also possible when a born Ahmadi decides to leave Ahmadiyyat and become Muslim. Similarly, in many cases, some members of a non-Ahmadi family embrace Islam Ahmadiyya.

Being unaware of the rules, and under pressure of faith-based persecution, poor AM women are vulnerable to oppression. They are asked for bribe money which is more than their paying capacity. They cannot complain to higher authorities against this corruption as it could create more problems for them. They face discrimination, harsh behaviour, and demands for irrelevant information. Officers in these departments frequently demonstrate their displeasure, hate, and non-cooperation.

I applied renewal for my passport after paying processing fee at the Pakistani consulate in Bangkok. However, the officer in Pakistan who was supposed to check my record visited my home and asked my brother to give him under table money rupees 3,000 to get clearance. My brother had no money to pay bribe. The passport which I should have got in three weeks was not received even after two months of my application. I asked my brother to pay bribe money to the officer. My brother paid him rupees 3,000 but he asked that now he needed rupees 5,000 because passport was stuck in the security-related issues. Since I

am a refugee, I became worried that without passport Thai authorities will put me in jail and the bail amount is significantly higher than the bribe money which was asked by the officer in Pakistan. Therefore, I asked my brother to pay rupees 5,000 to the officer. Finally, I got my passport after five months. (Asifa)

Asifa further said that most Pakistani refugees in Thailand have been waiting for their resettlement for many years. Therefore, everyone has similar stories related to passport renewals.

Legally, I am not allowed to work in Thailand due to my refugee status. I borrow money from our relatives. Sometimes I take risk and do carpentry work on daily wages. My monthly earning is hardly 7,000 Thai bhat. I have three children. Last year I paid almost three months earnings just for the renewal of passports of my family. Application fee is OK but paying bribe money is a big burden on me. (Latif)

All Pakistani Muslim citizens applying for passports are obliged to sign a statement explicitly stating that they consider the founder of the Ahmadi community an 'imposter' and consider Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. The application for a national identity card requires a similar declaration. This legal requirement has forced every AM to state that they are non-Muslims. Since their passport does not recognise them as Muslim, Ahmadis cannot travel to Saudi Arabia to perform hajj, which is a basic element of Islamic belief.

I was there holding my one-year old daughter to make our passports. I had no money for agents to offer who could help me in reducing the process time. Therefore, I travelled through different counters in queue for more than two hours. The officer at the second last counter asked my religion to enter data. As soon as I told that both of us were AM, he showed displeasure and asked to go back to the first counter without giving any reason. (Rubab)

I cannot go for hajj in my life. My passport does not allow me to get visa. I am a devout Muslim. However, Pakistani law forces me to accept myself as a non-Muslim who is not allowed to perform hajj. (Ummat ul Mahdi, 54 years old)

The authorities at the passport office sometimes don't even ask the religion and simply enter Muslim. This happened to my daughter. If she would have not changed to 'Ahmadi', somebody could have made an accusation of apostasy on her. (Arifa)

My national identification card had 'Islam' as my religion for the past many years, and I tried to fix the error. The official declined and said that I should go the court first. He further said that I could cause him accusation of apostasy. He shouted at me. On another day at a different branch of national identity card office, I finally had it changed after paying bribe money. (Amna)

Ahmadi marriage certificates are legal as per Pakistani law. However, a person with an Ahmadi marriage certificate who is registered as Muslim on their national identity card can be accused of apostasy. Mariya said that her husband had 'Islam' written on his national identity card so that he could get job. Therefore, she had two marriage certificates: one is the original issued by the AMC and the other states both bride and groom as Muslim, obtained by paying bribe money.

Ammara, 22 years old, shared an event when she was investigated at the airport:

My passport mentions me 'Ahmadi'. Leaving for Thailand in 2015, I was called to a room at Lahore airport. I do not remember name of the room. There were two persons in the room. They examined my passport for a while. Then they asked me some questions such as do you believe that Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet? I replied 'yes'. Further, they asked who addresses on Ahmadiyya TV, then? I tried and failed to convince them that we believed promised Masih as a Ummati Nabi [follower prophet]. I was frightened being alone in the room. I did not want to discuss more to avoid any trouble. I spent that time in confusion and praying. Due to many prayers, they returned my passport. (Ammara)

P. It is not possible for them to shop in local areas

The women ranked this issue thirteenth, while men considered it of lower priority and ranked it eighteenth. This is likely because men are more mobile than women within the Ahmadiyya community, so perceive this to be less of an issue for Ahmadi women.

All women in the focus groups said that non-Ahmadi shopkeepers did not serve them. Selling and buying from AMs are both considered haram. When Asma went to Lahore Urdu Bazar, local merchants refused to ship supplies to her small bookstore due to the address of Rabwah.

Anti-Ahmadiyya stickers, posters, banners, and wall chalking can be seen everywhere in Pakistan. Hate slogans are displayed in all public places, including bus terminals, railway stations, small and big markets, grocery shops, cloth shops, and restaurants. Sadly, anti-Ahmadiyya stickers are also sold and displayed in various bookstores. Some anti-Ahmadiyya slogans are 'Qadiani [a derogatory term for AM] are not allowed to enter', 'No business with Qadianis', 'First enter Islam then enter the shop', 'A smile to a Qadiani hurts Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) in heavens'.

Salma said that 'a grocery shop near my home displays "dogs and qadianis are not served here"'.

The one and only action against a shopkeeper was tried by the Government of Pakistan in 2017 regarding the hateful stickers in Hafeez Center – an IT market in Lahore – stating 'Qadianis are not allowed', but later the government surrendered to the protests by hundreds of shopkeepers.

Ahmadi women fear that shopkeepers who have put up notices to ban AMs from entering their shops will file a blasphemy case should their identity be revealed while buying something in such a shop. Hence, Ahmadi women are forced to shop in areas far away from their homes where people do not know them. They cannot afford to spend large amounts of money on transportation so they travel very long distances on foot carrying heavy groceries and risking their lives and honour. Consequently, young Ahmadi women avoid going out for shopping.

Areeba went shopping for some clothing with her friends. At the payment counter, she was asked about her religious identity because of her burqa. The shopkeeper would not take payment and asked them to put the stuff back because the shop does not serve Ahmadis. On their way home, two men on motorbikes attacked them, physically harassed them, snatched their jewellery at gunpoint, and said: 'Mirzai [a derogatory word used to refer to AMs] should be killed or thrown out of this country'.

I started living near Mansoorah [headquarters of Jama'at-e-Islami, a religious political party, in Lahore] after my marriage. First time, I went to a local grocery shop. The shopkeeper was rude and said to me, 'do not enter my shop, get out. This shop does not serve Mirzayen [a derogatory term for Ahmadi women]'. (Asia)

Q. They are misrepresented by the instructors in educational institutes

The women ranked this issue at fourteenth, and the men ranked it thirteenth.

Uzma said, 'Not all teachers, but some do this in educational institutes'. Teachers at educational institutes passionately tell their students that AMs do not believe in finality of the prophethood. Teachers of Islamic studies, in particular, frequently express their extremist thinking towards the Ahmadiyya faith. The chapters related to Khatam-e-Nabuwat (Finality of the Prophethood) have been integrated into textbooks at all levels in the Pakistani educational system explicitly to target AM (Ballard 2012).

I have not disclosed my religious identity at my college due to fear of persecution. The teachers, especially of Islamiyyat, which is a compulsory subject, twist the meanings of Quranic verses and Hadiths in textbooks to criticise founder of the AMC. It is very painful when they insult Hazrat Ghulam Ahmad. Their hate intensity against Ahmadis is horrible. I always feel insecure at my college. However, I cannot object their arguments because of violent Pakistani society. Therefore, I hardly managed 40 per cent attendance in my Islamiyyat lecture.
(Asia)

Many teachers in government schools are inspired by clerics. They openly advocate that Ahmadis use money and their women to attract people to their religion. They advise their students to keep their distance from AMs.

Ahmadi girls in educational institutes in Pakistan also face violence and harassment due to student unions that have support from various religious and political parties: Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (associated with Jamat-e-Islami), Muslim Student Federation (associated with Pakistan Muslim League), People's Student Federation (associated with Pakistan People's Party), Insaaf Student Federation (associated with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf), and many others.

Aiza related an incident from her student life at the Punjab University, Lahore:

Everyone in my university knew that I was an Ahmadi. Therefore, not many students were my friends. Once a male class fellow came to me and asked for a copy of my assignment which was awarded very good grade. He was appreciating my work. Suddenly, four boys from Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba attacked. My class fellow fell down, they dragged him away and started beating

him with wooden sticks, punches, and glass bottles. I tried to interrupt and asked why they were doing so. They kept on beating and abusing him. They shouted at me 'Get off you infidel girl. Do you want to make others Kafir too? How dared you?' My class fellow's head was bleeding and he was asking for help. I was in a shock. A big crowd gathered but nobody helped. Teachers who were passing by did not interfere too. One teacher was passing by in his car. He came near to me and asked to go back as soon as possible. Then I realised the sensitivity of the situation. I passed through the crowd and immediately went back to home in taxi.

Clerics in Pakistan are very clever: they know how to keep themselves prominent and convince people that they are defending their interpretation of Islam. Using an anti-Ahmadiyya narrative through electronic, print, and social media is their most effective tool. They have used their legitimacy to become a key part of Pakistani politics and have dangerously influenced the state policies with their interpretation of Islam (Mehmood and Seror 2020). Many TV anchors have also found that this topic boosts the ratings of their programmes. Therefore, the overall environment in Pakistan is very corrosive to AMs. It has also influenced the educational institutes:

Anti-Ahmadiyya narrative by different political and religious parties has caused harassment of AM in the Punjab University. Noticeboards display many anti-Ahmadiyya slogans, such as 'friend of a qadiani is a traitor of Islam and Pakistan', 'qadiani are British agents' 'qadiani are infidel', 'qadiani cannot be tolerated at key position in Pakistan'. It is not easy to survive in such cruel atmosphere. Therefore, I never enjoyed my university time. (Rubab)

Bigot teachers are easily found on social media: on their Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups they express their anti-Ahmadiyya views and post videos in which Ahmadi women are presented as prostitutes and of immoral character. They destroy the innocent minds of the students who follow them.

I was student at a college in Lahore, which was a branch of the largest network of private institutes in Pakistan. CEO of the college is a chemical engineer and was our chemistry teacher. Now he has joined Jamat ud Dawah [a banned extremist religious group of Ahle Hadith sect which is headed by Hafiz Saeed – a UN-designated terrorist]. His social media pages are followed by thousands of students. He posts violent videos and statements which are threatening to AMs.

In one of his videos he was himself firing in the air with a revolver. He has invited different extremist clerics as key speakers at his institute including Hafiz Saeed. Thank God, I left the college in good times. There are many Ahmadi students in the Stars College who are scared and fearful. (Nimra)

R. They and their families experience threats to their property and land

The women ranked this issue fifteenth, and the men ranked it twelfth.

Orthodox Muslims in Pakistan often misuse the blasphemy laws against AMs to get revenge, snatching land and thereby forcibly displacing them to satisfy their hate (Rajak 2018). Therefore, many Ahmadi families have migrated at different times to take refuge in Rabwah.

In 2016, the authorities auctioned off the land in Rabwah for developing a housing scheme for Muslims with low income. This land is originally our property which was in the possession of the government under pressure from some clerics and Ahmadiyya Muslim Jam'aat is fighting for their right in the court of law. We were hoping to get this land back so that the Jamaat could build homes for the poor Ahmadis. The sad thing is that AM were not allowed to participate in the auction. Advertisement in the newspaper explicitly mentioned that AM cannot participate in that area development scheme. Every applicant was also required to provide a duly certified affidavit stating his/her disaffiliation with the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jam'aat. (Sonia)

Huma said with heavy tears in her eyes:

If anybody wants to see what we face and how we are treated in Pakistan, see the videos of Gujranwala incident [2014] in which our homes were set on fire and our sisters and children were burnt alive. No one can believe that those were human who did this. All offenders are clearly visible in every video clip which they made themselves as a record of their 'victory'. Sadly, but expectedly not even a single person has been brought to justice. They just wanted to displace us from our homes. (Huma)

Ummat-ul-Batool remembered how during the rule of General Pervaiz Musharaf all AM shops and homes – including her home – in a village near city Daska were burnt by a mob:

We saved our lives by fleeing our homes leaving behind everything. The police arrived at the scene but did not take any action. The authorities charged seven Ahmadis under the blasphemy law.

S. They cannot enjoy any leisure activities in comparison to other poor women

Both the women and the men ranked this issue sixteenth.

As soon as Ahmadi women step out of their homes, they are exposed to harassment, violence, and persecution. People in their surroundings stare at them, express their displeasure, and hurl abuse. No complaint can be made since offenders know the women's vulnerability to state laws, and they harass them without any restriction or fear. Consequently, AM women avoid leaving their homes and are always scared of non-Ahmadis.

We feel alien in our society. Nobody cares about us. No one welcomes us in their company. Sadly, Government of Pakistan has banned our own gatherings too. I feel lonely sometimes but then I have learned to enjoy at home and spend time with the families. (Salma)

My wife is taking medicine of hyperventilation and antidepressant after she was detected with high level of anxiety disorder four years ago. Once she attempted suicide. The problem is social isolation and constantly thinking about the safety of her children. After leaving Pakistan, she is recovering well in Thailand. (Babar)

Lajna sadar of our halqa [sector] was murdered when she was doing Eid shopping in a busy market of Lahore. (Sajda)

The Government of Pakistan announces holidays for other minorities and some government representatives participate in their activities. Salaries to the minorities are disbursed early. On the other hand, AMs cannot have any kind of freedom and luxury. Celebrating Eid is among the best occasions in Islam: everyone in Pakistan enjoys going on outings, visiting parks, eating at restaurants, playing in playgrounds, visiting relatives and friends, slaughtering animals, shopping, etc. Eid should be the happiest occasion for any AM; however, the law does not allow them to celebrate it. Therefore, AM women and their families cannot fully enjoy the leisure aspects of Eid.

On Eid day I took my family to Iqbal Park, a public park in Lahore. My younger daughter's ball rolled to a group of females who were playing with their kids. My wife went to pick up the ball for my daughter. The females from that big group stared at my wife, threw the ball back to her and murmured 'Mirzai Kafirs [a way of referring to Ahmadis as infidels] ' are here. We were frightened by this reaction and felt better to go out of the park for the safety of our kids. (Azhar)

We went to eat our dinner at a small restaurant in a nearby street. My wife was wearing burqa. Generally, customers are free to choose the table in a restaurant. However, the restaurant staff asked us to sit at a corner table. We understood their behaviour. We had our dinner quietly and went back home. On religious occasions we are never accepted as a part of celebration. So, in these situations how we poor people in Pakistan enjoy outside home. It is better to stay at home where we are relatively safe. (Sultan)

People recognise us from our burqa. When we go out to any restaurant or park with our kids, people's behaviour is directly or indirectly unpleasant towards us. It is easy to understand that we are causing discomfort for them. Therefore, outing is not enjoyable for poor AM women. (Sajda)

T. It is very hard for them to find a home to rent

The women placed this issue seventeenth. However, the men considered it a significantly bigger issue for their women and ranked it eighth. This is probably because, living in a patriarchal society, Ahmadi men are more likely to look for housing than the women, and therefore would be more acutely aware of the difficulties facing the Ahmadiyya community in finding a home to rent.

Non-Ahmadis do not rent their houses to Ahmadis. They consider AMs as '*achhut*' (word used for the lowest class in India) and infidel. The participants' perception was that other non-Muslim communities also avoid AMs because of the fear of violence from Muslim communities.

Many poor AM women do not own their home and they cannot afford to rent homes in areas of the rich. Therefore, they live in small rented houses in densely populated communities where people know each other. Such small communities hold strong social bonds among their members and they never allow AMs to enter their area.

The rich live in societies that are barricaded and have security. They are relatively more educated. The families living in the rich housing schemes/societies are not very socially linked with each other. They travel in their own cars and can shop anywhere. Therefore, it is relatively much easier for the rich Ahmadi women to hide their religious faith.

It seems there is no problem in renting a house in Rabwah, because the majority population (98 per cent) is AM. However, outside Rabwah it is a significant problem. Any prospective tenant is required to give the landlord a copy of their national identity card, which exposes her religious identity. If an Ahmadi manages to rent a house in another way, they will be thrown out when their identity is exposed. This results in psychological problems for the poor AM women, who remain concerned for the safety of their families. Additionally, they may well have legal issues and murder threats to cope with.

I was looking for a house on rent in Shaad Bagh, Lahore. My husband worked in a nearby fruit market. I was visiting different homes myself and had requested different property agents. I saw boards on the houses available on rent and talked with the owners, they denied that their house was available on rent. Property agents told me that it was very difficult for me to get a rented house because of my Ahmadiyya belief. One agent asked me to come after one week. I contacted him in time. He replied that nobody wanted to accept Ahmadi tenants because of the fear of clerics and neighbours. Finally, I was accepted by an Ahmadi family who was living bit far away from Shaad Bagh. It is extra burden on us to spend more money on the transportation to the place of my husband's work. (Hajra)

I understand that it is not safe to live alone with my children in a rented house anywhere other than Rabwah. Therefore, I live in Rabwah. However, my husband works in Lahore which is far away from Rabwah. It is not possible for my husband to come daily or weekly basis mainly due to expensive transportation. It is very hard for me to live most of time alone, my children miss their father, I also sometimes become aggressive being under pressure of my responsibilities. Therefore, sometimes I shout on my children. I know it is bad for them, bad for me. But sometimes I lose control. (Muneeba)

U. Sometimes they observe religious customs that are not a part of their religion

The women ranked this issue eighteenth, and the men ranked it nineteenth.

There are different customs that other sects of Islam believe as part of their faith, but the Ahmadiyya faith does not own. However, a few of the Ahmadis who have kept their religious identity a secret observe some religious customs that are not part of the Ahmadiyya faith. It does not happen often.

My physics teacher's father passed away. Academy administration arranged Fateha Khawani [a custom observed by non-Ahmadis after someone's death: people sit together and raise their hands to recite Surah Fateha, the first chapter of the Koran]. I also participated to look like them so that nobody can know I had a different faith. (Asia)

Nabeela explained that she and her younger sister and parents had lived on the rented ground floor of a house for four years, with the house owner living on the first floor. The family had not disclosed their religious identity, otherwise they would be asked to leave with immediate effect. The owner would observe religious customs that are not a part of their religion, to which her younger sister and parents were invited. Sometimes they made their excuses and sometimes they attended to help keep their identity hidden.

V. They cannot vote in elections

The women ranked this issue nineteenth, and the men ranked it seventeenth.

Pakistan would have declared AMs as not eligible to vote but for the criticism the government would receive from other countries and the United Nations. In the media and on different international platforms, the Government of Pakistan portrays that the AMC 'boycotts' elections. However, the reality is different. The electoral law in Pakistan effectively eliminates AM on the grounds of their beliefs.

There are two electoral lists in Pakistan: the main list is for Muslims and 'non-Muslims' and the other is a separate list for Ahmadis. To register as voters, AMs are required to either deny or hide their faith or agree to be placed on the separate AM electoral list. As the basis of AM belief is to identify as Muslim, AMs are thus unable to vote. The national identity card must be shown to cast a vote and those Ahmadis who have 'Islam' stated on it also never go to

polling stations due to fear that someone might complain or even shout that he/she is Ahmadi and registered as Muslim.

We wish to vote, but not at the cost of renouncing our belief. (Rubab)

More than 90 per cent residents in Rabwah have Ahmadiyya Islam faith. Although, total population of Rabwah is not less than 70,000, I have never seen a single poster of election campaign from any political or religious party. They do not involve us in the political process so that we could not ask for our right to vote. (Samiyya)

W. It is hard to find a marriage partner

The women ranked this issue twentieth, and the men considered it a higher priority and ranked it fourteenth. The difference in priority seems to be because in Pakistani culture, men (such as fathers and brothers) are traditionally the caretakers of unmarried women (single, divorced, and widows). Generally, they are supposed to be responsible for marriage-related matters, including the arrangement of financial resources for their related women. Therefore, they wish to fulfill their responsibility in good time.

The AMC has a databank of eligible men and women. Ahmadi men and women can request their *Ameer* to process their applications for placement of their names in the databank. Information about any eligible Ahmadi is made available by the marriage secretary (an official rank in the AMC) on request.

According to the AMC, Islam allows a Muslim man to marry a Muslim woman. Although a Muslim man can also choose a woman of Jewish or Christian faith, it is not preferable. However, an Ahmadi woman is prohibited from marrying a non-Ahmadi man. The AMC believe that if a woman marries outside her faith, she and her children will be exposed to non-Muslim and non-Ahmadi culture and practices, which can make it very difficult for her to remain steadfast in her own faith and bring up her children as Muslims. It is believed that a man, on the other hand, can more easily influence his wife and bring her into the Islamic way of life (Lajna Imaillah 1996).

Poor Ahmadi women face an additional challenge in finding a marriage partner: a large number of Pakistani AMs have already migrated to other countries, and many are planning to do so. Therefore, Pakistani Ahmadi men and their families prefer either a resourceful

Ahmadi woman in Pakistan who could help her husband to move abroad, or an Ahmadi woman who is already out of Pakistan. It has created a mismatch ratio between Ahmadi men and Ahmadi women in Pakistan.

Due to above-mentioned limitations, many poor AM women fear being too old for marriage and consequently experience different kinds of social pressure, which can lead to physical and psychological issues. Parents of such women also worry about their daughter's future.

Poverty is a big issue for us. It is a key reason of our low education. If an Ahmadi woman is rich, she can have good education, can arrange visa and resources to move abroad, and can earn if needed. Therefore, it is easy for the rich women to get approached by the interested families of Ahmadi men for marriage.

(Shabana)

The poor women of other sects such as Shia, Ahl-e-Hadith, Sunni do intersect marriages. However, an Ahmadi woman only marries an Ahmadi man.

Therefore, we have issues of late marriages. (Osama)

X. They experience barriers to accessing adequate health-care services

The women ranked this issue twenty-first, and the men ranked it fifteenth. There are two predominant reasons for the higher priority given by men. First, due to security issues, fear of discrimination, and the meagre health-care system in public hospitals, poor AM women are often accompanied by men from their families who look after matters such as: taking care of them during long waiting times, buying medicines (on many occasions doctors prescribe medicines and ask the patient's caretaker to buy them from private drug stores outside the hospital), and moving the patient from one station to another in the hospital. Second, as mentioned earlier, generally men are the breadwinners in poor Ahmadiyya families, but they can neither bear the cost of expensive medical services at private hospitals nor they can frequently take their women to Ahmadiyya-owned hospitals in Rabwah due to travelling expenses and getting time off from their jobs.

Rich Ahmadi women can go abroad or attend big private hospitals in different cities. However, poor AM women normally visit inexpensive local dispensaries and government hospitals. The respondents in the focus groups said that sometimes the medical staff showed their displeasure while treating AMs. Another issue with public hospitals is the

unsatisfactory service they deliver to their patients (Hussain *et. al.* 2019). The respondents also expressed their concern related to the harassment of Ahmadi women by the general public in congested government-owned hospitals. Whenever possible, Ahmadis visit hospitals in Rabwah, which are funded by the AMC. These include the Fazle Omar Hospital Complex, Begum Zubaida Bani Gynecology and Obstetrics Wing, Tahir Heart Institute, Blood and Eye Donor Center, and Tahir Homeopathic Research and Training Institute. They provide free treatment to all Ahmadis as well as to non-Ahmadis.

Once I went to Mayo Hospital in Lahore for my checkup. I felt some people kept on staring at me. I was in line to pay for my ticket at the registration desk. I heard someone behind me tried to pull my overcoat. I was scared. Later I decided to always go to Rabwah for my treatment. I cannot face staring people at me and harassment in the public hospitals. I also know that any kind of response from my side can create more trouble in the name of blasphemy. (Ayesha)

I was scared of carrying the doctor's prescription [Hoowa Al-shaafi is a Koranic verse meaning Allah cures and is written on registration tickets and prescriptions by the doctors in hospitals]. Blasphemy laws are so cruel that such prescription is sufficient to register a case against me. (Tooba)

Begging or supplicating are sometimes necessary to convince the health-care workers to admit Ahmadi women to government hospitals. Recently, a government hospital in Karachi asked Ahmadis to sign a religious declaration form before any kind of treatment (Raza 2020).

I must travel to Rabwah every month so that my wife can receive treatment for her ailing heart. Frequent travelling to Rabwah is very expensive for us. Sometimes, I have to take leave without pay. However, we feel safe and best treated at hospitals in Rabwah. (Hassan)

Y. They face mobility/transportation issues in comparison to other poor women

This issue was least prioritised by both the women and the men.

In Pakistani culture, rich people do not use public transportation (they drive their personal cars), while the poor use buses, trains, rickshaws, and taxis. There are serious safety concerns for poor AM women commuters using public transport, especially buses and trains, since that is the way that the masses travel.

The women reported five issues for poor AM women that are significantly different from those of other poor women in Pakistan: (1) anti-Ahmadiyya stickers in buses, trains, and rickshaws; (2) anti-Ahmadiyya stickers, banners, posters, and wall chalking at bus stations and railway stations; (3) fellow passengers not wishing to travel with them; (4) denial of services by drivers and conductors; and (5) they are not offered seats if they are in need.

Anti-Ahmadiyya stickers are commonly found in buses, trains, and rickshaws. Similar stickers, banners, posters, and wall chalking are normally seen at bus stations and railway stations. It causes a high level of psychological harassment to poor AM women. Tariq, an Ahmadi who allegedly tore off an anti-Ahmadiyya sticker in a bus, was arrested and charged under blasphemy laws in October 2006 (US Department of State 2008).

Referring to her experience of going to college in buses with anti-Ahmadiyya stickers, Samiyya said, 'I feel trapped in a small place with fear of no escape until I reach my home.'

I was travelling by bus. When bus stopped near Narang Mandi stop to get more passengers, one boy started throwing stickers in passengers' laps through the bus windows. I also got the stickers. I was frightened after looking at the sticker. It read 'Ahmadis are conspiring against Islam. Give us donation to stop their anti-Islam activities'. I did not throw that sticker away because it could cause serious trouble for me. I put that in my bag. (Afifa)

A fellow passenger started shouting that he will not travel in the bus in which I was travelling with my wife. The bus staff changed our seats far away from that man and convinced him to travel by the same bus. (Amir)

Respondents said that sometimes transportation staff denied their services to them:

I asked a rickshaw driver to take my kid by sharing with another child from same school. Rickshaw driver denied his services to my kid due to our Ahmadiyya faith. (Sana)

In some cities of Pakistan, such as Chiniot and Faisalabad, the transporters often deny letting Ahmadi women ride in their buses, especially when anti-Ahmadiyya conferences are held. Therefore, poor AM women are forced to use expensive private taxis, which are owned by the Ahmadis.

In Pakistani culture, generally men offer seats to women. However, Ahmadi women are not offered seats.

Poor AM women also face sexual harassment during their journey. The main types of sexual harassment at bus stops and railway stations are staring, stalking, indecent gestures, whistling, passing sexual remarks, and inappropriate touching. The most common forms of sexual harassment in buses and trains include passing sexual remarks, staring, pushing, inappropriate touching, and playing loud vulgar songs by the bus staff.

I was in burqa when I rode a bus. Couple of molvies [clerics] were very near to me. They showed displeasure and murmured. I was afraid of them. (Ummama)

The participants perceived that women from other persecuted communities such as Shia, Sikh, and Hindu can travel to Iran, Saudi Arabia, and India to visit important religious places and attend events. However, Ahmadis are not allowed to go to Saudi Arabia for hajj and Ummrah.

In Pakistan it is common to introduce each other during travelling. Hatred is expressed when non-Ahmadis come to know that the fellow passenger is from Rabwah. Therefore, mostly Ahmadis tell their province name instead of city name. Even then, non-Ahmadis start discussing that there is a city named Rabwah in your province which is the city of 'Mirzayee' who are the worst Kafir and have their own paradise and hell, etc. etc. (Usman)

Due to the aforementioned mobility issues poor AM women feel a sense of anxiety, insecurity, and agitation. For this reason, many of them are not interested in getting jobs or pursuing higher education. This is a direct waste of human resources which could be of benefit to economic activity, educating the next generation, and other aspects of a contented life.

6. Discussion and analysis

Although many researchers have focused on the persecution of AMs (e.g. Raja 2020; Ahmed *et al.* 2019; Wolf 2019; Rashid 2018; Uddin 2017), only a small number of studies (e.g. Gualtieri 2004) have highlighted the problems of AM women, and there is hardly any such study in the Pakistani context. Men and women can have different perspectives on issues faced by religious minorities, but women's perspectives have been rarely investigated (Noor *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, no study was found which examined the intersectionality of poverty and religious persecution of Ahmadi women. Hence, poor AM women are invisible

and unheard in the literature of social sciences. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the gender perspectives on unique modes of discrimination of Ahmadi women in Pakistan, which are generated due to the combined effect of their faith-based persecution and poverty.

Women from any marginalised religious community are the easiest target for violence and persecution in Pakistani society. However, issues of poor AM women in Pakistan are unique in nature due to their complexity, generated by the synergic effects of state-sponsored persecution and poverty. Lack of financial resources, limited education, vulnerability to the state's oppressive laws, and hate against them in the Pakistani society have caused them to be excessively dependent on their male family members. Nevertheless, efforts from their men have not been effective in reducing their troubles, mainly due to the extremist mindset of orthodox Muslims in Pakistan which has been developed by state policies over a long period of time. Unfortunately, the state's anti-Ahmadiyya policies continue to tighten, with regular additions through parliamentary legislations and the court of law. Therefore, faith-based violence, harassment, and discrimination against poor Ahmadi women continue to grow. Consequently, they are unable to perform any productive role in society.

The role of religious clerics in Pakistani politics has done the real damage to the society. There are different sects in Islam, each of which has its own interpretation of Islam, which has confused people about the true teachings of Islam. This confusion has led to the emergence of a large part of society that seems to be looking for 'religious guidance' to become 'better Muslims'. Therefore, the religious clerics have gained a leading position in society since they are believed to provide the 'correct' interpretation of Islam. A religious leader's strength is in his arguments that prove his sect 'right'. Unfortunately, the clerics exploited the situation and started criticising other sects to prove them contradictory to Islam (Haqqani 2006). It has resulted in hate speeches and brutal sectarian violence all over Pakistan. After 9/11, the Government of Pakistan tried to control sectarian violence, but this led to all sects identifying the AMC as their common 'enemy' and a 'threat to Islam'.

6.1. The ripple effects of state-sanctioned persecution

Overall findings from the current study suggest that systematic faith-based persecution of poor AM women in Pakistan continues to grow, particularly since the implementation of the blasphemy laws and the anti-Ahmadiyya ordinance (Ordinance XX) in 1984. Wolf (2019) also observed that state-sponsored suppression is the key thrust to the growing physical and

non-physical violence in all aspects of the lives of the AMC in Pakistan. Poor AM women are an easy target for the perpetrators.

Findings show that the issues directly related to state-sanctioned persecution were the top concern and were also the root cause of all the other issues. The Pakistan constitution has criminalised the religious practices of the AMC. Consequently, orthodox Muslims have achieved a monopoly and hold excessive power and privileges of the state, which enable them to freely persecute AMs (Grim and Finke 2007). In doing so, they have found poor AM women as soft targets to spread fear in the AMC.

Although Ahmadi women do not publicly talk about their religious identity, people recognise them through their attire. Religious and political parties are responsible for religious extremism in Pakistani society. They accuse Ahmadis of working against the interests of Pakistan with the support of countries that are trying to weaken Pakistan. They have effectively used hate against Ahmadis to distract people from their negligence in running government affairs. Consequently, people believe Ahmadis are traitors and a threat to Islam. Pakistani law declares them as infidels and liable to the death penalty. Poor AM women remain worried about the safety of their lives and that of their families. People take advantage of their fear and offer them money to abandon their faith; however, rarely does an Ahmadi woman abandon her faith. There are many cases of murdered Ahmadis after they refused to fulfill the demands of religious extremists. Failure in forced conversion has resulted in various teasing tactics, including physical and non-physical harassment and violence. People call AM women by derogatory terms, such as *marzyain*, *marzai hoor*, prostitute, infidel, *Kafir*, etc.

The blasphemy laws are often misused against poor AM women to displace them. They are forced to sell their property and their valuables are snatched. Any contradiction or argument by poor AM women can cause their homes and other valuables to be burned. The media, police, local administration, and politicians such as members of national and provincial assemblies are well aware of unjust actions against poor AM women, but they remain silent and the preparators go unpunished.

Discrimination of poor AM women continues in their daily livelihoods, jobs, and in educational institutes due to the requirement that forces them to state themselves as 'non-Muslim'. Similar kinds of requirements have effectively excluded them from the electoral process.

Hate against them is also expressed in public places, such as parks, restaurants, and markets. They are forbidden from entering shops and using public transport – either verbally

or by exhibiting stickers with discriminatory notices to deter them. People will not rent their houses to them and mistreatment of AM women at some healthcare centres has also been reported.

To avoid persecution, poor AM women prefer to stay at home. Some try to hide their religious identity outside of the home, sometimes observing customs that are not part of their religion, in order to be accepted by society. Many Ahmadi women migrate to Rabwah where they can feel relatively safe. However, growing violence against them is now making it difficult for them to survive in Rabwah too. Consequently, many AMs are selling their properties and taking loans so they can migrate to other countries.

Only one of the issues identified was not directly related to the state and societal persecution: respondents reported that poor AM women can face difficulty in finding marriage partners. Delayed marriages put them under severe social pressure and, consequently, can lead to various mental health issues such as depression.

6.2. Types of harassment against poor AM women and the perpetrators

Poor AM women face physical and psychological harassment from both males and females, and from both state and non-state actors. Religious political parties such as Tehrik-e-Khatam-e-Naboovat, Jam'at-e-Islami, Jamiyat-e-Ulema Islam, Tehrik-e-Labiak, Sunni Tehrik, Jam'at-ud-Dava, Lashkar-e-Jhangwi, Al-Qaida, and Lashkar-e-Taiba are primary preparators.

Harassment is delivered via different channels, including: internet platforms such as websites, blogs, Vlogs, and YouTube channels; social media; print media such as newspapers, magazines, and books; TV; and announcements and sermons through loudspeakers used in mosques and conferences that are held outside mosques.

The main types of sexual harassment are: staring, stalking, indecent gestures, whistling, passing sexual remarks, calling derogatory names/terms, chasing, pushing, and inappropriate touching. Psychological harassment is caused by fear created by anti-Ahmadiyya speeches. The level of psychological harassment is very high when anti-Ahmadiyya speeches are delivered by politicians and religious clerics. They often result in threats of police action, kidnapping, physical torture, killing, job termination, expulsion from educational institutes, blackmailing, and snatching belongings and attacks on AM properties; and physically violent actions such as target killings, mob attacks on AM houses and worship places, burning down AM properties thereby forcing migration, and arrests by

police. The perpetrators also create fear among potential sympathisers of Ahmadis so that they feel themselves completely helpless.

The most dangerous form of violence are hate-campaigns, which are exercised regularly in an organised way. Many anti-Ahmadiyya conferences and other events, such as public rallies, are arranged in almost every city of Pakistan throughout the year, especially on days that are important in the AMC religious calendar. For instance, at the anniversary of the death of the AMC founder, excessively hateful speeches are delivered and pamphlets are distributed everywhere. Different hate pamphlets are thrown into the houses of Ahmadis.

All rallies and conferences are arranged with the permission of local administration and law enforcement agencies. They know the purpose of these activities. However, instead of taking any action against the perpetrators, different state officials and politicians become a part of their rallies and conferences.

6.3. Poor AM women's basic needs are not met

Although there is no authentic population record of Ahmadi women, many sources suggest that they number several million. Their exclusion from the mainstream is causing a huge negative impact on social and economic conditions in Pakistan.

Due to their extraordinary persecution, poor AM women in Pakistan are deprived of even their basic needs and, therefore, they are unable to become a 'fully functioning person' or as Abraham Maslow says, 'self-actualising' (Maslow 2013). Maslow presented five levels of basic needs (*ibid.*). Without satisfying the lower levels of basic needs (i.e. physiological needs, safety needs, needs of love, affection, and belongingness), a human cannot demand higher levels of needs (i.e. needs for esteem, and needs for self-actualisation). The current study focused on 25 issues identified as facing poor AM women in Pakistan. A deep analysis indicates that all said issues are related to the lower levels of basic needs. For instance, poor AM women in Pakistan face physical and psychological harassment, and live in a hostile environment full of hate and, consequently, feel alienated.

A person can be valuable to society only when all their basic needs are satisfied. However, needs satisfaction depends on the environment:

If the environment is right, people will grow straight and beautiful, actualizing the potentials they have inherited. If the environment is not 'right' (and mostly it is not) they will not grow tall and straight and beautiful (Abraham Maslow, cited in Cartwright 1979: 7).

Due to the oppressive environment of Pakistan, poor AM women have not reached the level of needs for esteem, which would make them feel of value to society. Instead, they experience frustration and an inferiority complex, believing themselves as weak, helpless, and worthless (*ibid.*). Therefore, poor AM women are facing many psychological issues, which ultimately affect their families. Without satisfying the basic needs of poor AM women, there is no point in them having a desire for self-actualisation – a drive to be and do that which they were ‘born to do’.

6.4. The persecution of poor AM women in different contexts

This study found that poor AM women are persecuted in all dimensions as defined by Wolf (2019): (1) political dimension, (2) constitutional-legal and judicial dimension, (3) social and economic dimension, and (4) cultural and religious dimensions. However, Wolf (*ibid.*) focused on the AMC in general and did not distinguish between gender-based perspectives on the issues of persecution. Therefore, problems that are faced by poor AM women, in particular, remain unhighlighted. Findings of this study have provided new insights and broader perspectives in all four dimensions of persecution. The study also highlights the need for cross-sectional studies by disintegrating religious minorities based on different characteristics, such as gender, age, financial situation, etc.

This study explicitly finds that the persecution of poor AM women is significantly more than that of other women and poor Ahmadi men in Pakistan. Poor AM women are very vulnerable to violence and harassment, and this situation is exacerbated by limitations caused by poverty. For instance, poor AM women live in densely populated localities among lower-class and middle-class people. People of such localities have poor knowledge of religion and are relatively more influenced by local clerics (Van der Veer 1994). Local clerics spread hate and harassment against vulnerable people by using not only loudspeakers but also roaming in the streets (Hoodbhoy 2017). Sadly, different religious parties use the mosques and madrassas to defend and boost their own status. Therefore, the Government of Pakistan seems to have no intention to control their activities due to their ‘capitulation’ (Wolf 2019). ‘Discriminatory contestation – the phenomenon of religious-political outbidding’ by the politicians has conferred great power to the above-mentioned extremists who are strategically told by the decision makers that the AMC is a threat to their beliefs (*ibid.*). Consequently, poor AM women feel surrounded by people who consider them as their biggest enemy. These circumstances have a deep negative effect on poor AM women and they suffer the most as a result of the social and economic boycott of the AMC.

6.5. Pakistan's violation of international covenants

Religion is a personal matter for anyone. The state has no right to interfere. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 states, 'member states have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms'. Article 2 of the declaration gives freedom 'without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion' to all citizens of the member states. Unfortunately, Pakistani parliament has misused its powers to politically declare AMs as 'non-Muslims' and to ban them from practising their religion.

Similarly, the state-sponsored violence, the country's legislation, and the state policies which allow persecution of the AMC all clearly violate a long list of international covenants that it has signed, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment (CAT) (Wolf 2019).

7. Conclusion

The key purpose of this study was to investigate how poverty and religion-based persecution interact with each other to affect Ahmadi women in Pakistan. Secondly, it was intended to find gender-based perspectives on the issues that were identified as being the combined effects of poverty and the religious persecution of Ahmadi women in Pakistan.

Many researchers have confirmed that participative ranking methodology (PRM) is well suited to assessments in humanitarian issues due to its capability of combining qualitative and quantitative data, and it was therefore implemented for this study. It has been found that the dimension of poverty has greatly added to the sufferings of Ahmadi women in Pakistan due to persecution by both the state and society. Twenty-five key issues were identified as being critical to poor AM women. The top-ranked issues were found to be directly related to state-sanctioned persecution, followed by the issues that were considered to be directly related to societal persecution. It has been noted that societal persecution

becomes more intense when the persecution is initiated by the state. Only one issue (i.e. difficulty in finding a marriage partner) was generated within the AMC, and therefore was not directly related to either state-sanctioned or societal persecution.

The study explicitly finds that the persecution of poor AM women is significantly more than that of other women and poor Ahmadi men in Pakistan. AM men have more similarities to non-Ahmadis in their appearance, names, and language. Therefore, they may hide their religious identity to avoid harassment and persecution. However, AM women are unable to hide their identity, mainly due to their unique attire, and hence they are exposed to violence and harassment. Some take their families to other countries to seek asylum. Many AMs who cannot flee the country, mostly due to financial and visa problems, take refuge within Pakistan in Rabwah.

The AMC is the most persecuted religious minority in Pakistan (Human Rights Council 2019; Human Rights Watch 2020; Wolf 2019). Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, persecution of the AMC is still endemic. The decision makers, judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and the media turn a blind eye to violations, harassment, and discrimination against poor AM women. This study confirms that the situation is worsening steeply since the discriminatory legislation of 1974 and 1984, and that poor AM women are the principal victims of the oppressive state policies.

8. Recommendations

1. The Government of Pakistan should end institutionalised violence and discrimination against the AMC, by (a) revoking unjust laws, (b) countering extremism, and (c) giving the AMC their due human and religious rights. Pakistan needs to revisit the ideology of its founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah:
 - a. You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state.²⁷

²⁷ Quote from Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 11 August 1947.

2. Persecution of the AMC and the hate campaign against them are long-standing issues. Repealing the anti-Ahmadiyya laws alone will provide little protection to poor AM women so long as societal attitudes toward AM remain biased. As per the proverb 'a fish rots from the head down', change must come from the top. First, all political parties must discourage the policy of appeasement of apartheid proponents to avoid capitulation and never use discriminatory contestation (Wolf 2019). Second, the decision makers must educate all citizens of Pakistan – especially children and youth, who are nearly 63 per cent of the population (Imtiaz *et al.* 2015) – and religious clerics that intolerance is the biggest enemy of a progressive society and nobody is above law. They should engage in constructive social activism, at educational institutes and at all other forums.
3. Hate speeches by political and religious leaders have been used as weapons against religious minorities. There should be strict laws against these acts and other hate material, and they must be enforced at any cost.
4. The media in Pakistan is very biased and has never been adequately penalised for spreading rumours and hate. There should be a strict check and balance on all forms of media, especially digital media, print media, and social media.
5. It is time to act on what is written in the Pakistan constitution: that all citizens of Pakistan have equal rights in all sectors of society. Furthermore, the safety and security of the lives and property of all religious minorities are the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan. Poor AM women must be considered as a part of these declarations.
6. The Government of Pakistan should devise capacity-building programmes for poor AM women. Financial support should be provided either by making jobs available to AM women or by including them in support programmes. Educating and training AM women on the procedures and documentation that have to be dealt with at different public offices, such as local administration and police stations, should be implemented to empower them.
7. Finally, Grim and Finke (2007) suggest that religious persecution can be significantly reduced when governments guarantee religious freedoms for all.

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Annexe 1: Key issues and their ranking

Overall priority ^a	Issue	No. of respondents ^b					Rank of the issue ^c (No. of sticks)				Average rank ^d (no. of sticks/group size)			
		A : Group 1	B : Group 2	C : Group 3	Total : A+B+C	Percent (%)	D : Group 1	E : Group 2	F : Group 3	Total = D+E+F	G : Group 1	H : Group 2	I : Group 3	Overall Average Rank
1	They can be trapped and put behind bars due to Ordinance XX of the Pakistan constitution.	10	10	10	30	100	100	100	100	300	10	10	10	10
	They have no access to their mosques and cannot carry out peaceful religious activities, such as prayer and worship, in comparison to other poor women of the majority religion.	10	10	10	30	100	100	100	100	300	10	10	10	10

	They are unable to freely mark important occasions within their religious calendar compared to those of the majority religion.	10	10	10	30	100	100	100	100	300	10	10	10	10
2	Decision makers say bad words against them and use the 'Ahmadiyya card' for political gain.	10	10	10	30	100	100	99	100	299	10	9.9	10	9.97
3	They are fearful of being killed due to fake accusations.	10	10	10	30	100	93	97	95	285	9.3	9.7	9.5	9.5
4	They are forced to hide public manifestations of their faith to be accepted by society.	10	10	10	30	100	90	93	94	277	9	9.3	9.4	9.23
5	Poor AM women experience more violence and harassment than other poor women.	10	10	10	30	100	91	92	87	270	9.1	9.2	8.7	9
6	No jobs are offered.	10	10	10	30	100	88	84	84	256	8.8	8.4	8.4	8.53

	They have many difficulties with admission acceptance to educational institutes. They are ignored by the instructors and isolated at the institutes in comparison to other poor women.	10	10	10	30	100	85	95	76	256	8.5	9.5	7.6	8.53
7	They are openly asked to abandon their faith, or convert to another sect, for them to feel safe.	10	10	10	30	100	82	84	86	252	8.2	8.4	8.6	8.4
8	It is almost impossible for them to approach local/national authorities in comparison to other poor women.	10	10	10	30	100	82	78	87	247	8.2	7.8	8.7	8.23
9	Violence against them is never highlighted by the Pakistani media.	10	10	10	30	100	75	81	73	229	7.5	8.1	7.3	7.63
10	They are unable to wear hijab without being harassed more than other women.	8	9	10	27	90	60	73	63	196	6	7.3	6.3	6.53
11	It is very difficult for them to acquire national documents such as a national identity card and passport.	9	8	10	27	90	65	55	74	194	6.5	5.5	7.4	6.47

12	They face social boycott.	8	9	10	27	90	56	74	63	193	5.6	7.4	6.3	6.43
13	It is very hard for them to find a home to rent.	5	6	10	21	70	33	43	75	151	3.3	4.3	7.5	5.03
14	They and their families experience threats to their property and land.	7	6	8	21	70	46	38	53	137	4.6	3.8	5.3	4.57
	It is not possible for them to shop in local areas.	7	8	6	21	70	44	58	35	137	4.4	5.8	3.5	4.57
15	They are misrepresented by the instructors in educational institutes.	6	6	7	19	63	41	44	51	136	4.1	4.4	5.1	4.53
16	They cannot enjoy any leisure activities in comparison to other poor women.	6	7	8	21	70	39	42	43	124	3.9	4.2	4.3	4.13
17	It is hard to find a marriage partner.	7	5	7	19	63	41	29	45	115	4.1	2.9	4.5	3.83
18	They experience barriers to accessing adequate health-care services.	6	4	6	16	53	40	29	44	113	4	2.9	4.4	3.77

19	They cannot vote in elections.	10	10	10	30	100	32	40	39	111	3.2	4	3.9	3.7
20	Sometimes they observe religious customs that are not a part of their religion.	4	6	5	15	50	28	45	32	105	2.8	4.5	3.2	3.5
21	They face mobility/transportation issues in comparison to other poor women.	6	6	6	18	60	34	33	31	98	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.27

a: The impact of the issue of priority 1 maximum.

b: Number of respondents who reported it an issue.

c: Rank of the issue is total number of toothpicks assigned by the number of respondents.

d: Average rank = [Rank of the issue/Group size] is used to get the overall priority of the issue.



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