



"We don't have any honor because we are khwaja sira": Police violence and discrimination against the khwaja sira community in Swat, Pakistan

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines police violence and discriminatory policing practices targeting the third gender community, known in Pakistan as khwaja sira. Employing a phenomenological analysis, we conducted a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with 45 khwaja sira in Mingora, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the interview transcripts: two distinct themes emerged regarding the lived experiences of khwaja sira in Swat, Pakistan: (1) experiencing multiple forms of violence by police; and (2) managing abuses of policing power. Findings shed light on the challenges khwaja sira face when confronted with police violence and misconduct, neglect from law enforcement officers to register their cases, biased practices within police precincts, and discrimination associated with their engagement in sex work or their gender nonconformity. Findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions aimed at addressing police violence experienced by the khwaja sira community.

Keywords: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; Police; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Pakistan; Gender nonconformity