

# Out-on-their-luck teens turn to prostitution

Society & Social problems

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By Shahnawaz Khan

**LAHORE** Muhammad Naveed sits in a dingy room at the Malik Hotel looking out the steel-barred window at the throngs peopling the area around the Lahore Railway Station. Dragging on his Gold Flake cigarette, he begins describing his first time.

"It was a few years ago," he says, "I had just come to the city and had made the acquaintance of Muhammad Asad, who was five years older and promised to help me out financially. He got me into hashish and opium, which we would smoke every night." On one such drug-addled night, Naveed's friend took him to a motel in the Old City. "We started smoking again," he says. "We ran out of conversation and then he just pinned me down," he recalls, taking another drag off his cigarette, "and he raped me."

It happened again a few days later. This time it wasn't just Naveed's friend but also another, much older man. "I told them I didn't want to do anything, that I didn't want the drugs," he says. "They wouldn't listen, they put forced me down and raped me one after the other. Afterwards, they gave me Rs 200 and said, 'wipe your tears with this'."

Unable to find work or trust friends, Naveed, now 15, decided two months ago to adopt prostitution as his fulltime profession. He says he has already made regular clients and earns an average of Rs 500 each night. He is not alone. A whole slew of out-on-their-luck boys, many from broken homes, have become sex workers in the city.

Many of these male prostitutes are in league with small motels, which take up to 50 percent of their earnings. Motels around the Railway Station have a large concentration of such sex workers, most not old enough to get a driver's licence.

Another category of sex workers are masseurs who are to be seen everywhere from The Mall to McLeod Road to Liberty Market from early evening late into the night. These boys and young men walk around clinking bottles of massage oil. Their massage services can be sampled on the side streets of the city or in the privacy of a motel room, where the right price will get you more than a simple massage.

Some of these masseurs hire out their services for drugs or cigarettes. A large number of them come from working-class families, says 20-year-old Mohammad Siddique, who works as a masseur on McLeod Road. He says most of his customers are out-of-towners and include women as well as men of all ages.

Siblings Tahir and Naheed Khilji run the civil society organisation Visions. The Khiljis work to raise awareness of sexually transmitted diseases like AIDS and on rehabilitating sex workers. Some of the sex workers they have come across have been runaways as young as seven-years-old forced into prostitution by adults. "Sexual abuse of children exists in this country in overt and covert forms," said Ms Khilji. "Three kids are sexually abused each day and most of this goes unreported. In most of the cases, the offender is an outsider. Children forced to work as street vendors or news hawkers are especially vulnerable to this sort of preying."

Young boys are brought into prostitution by promises of economic benefit or through emotional blackmail, drugs or rape, according to the Khiljis. It is these boys that grow into the

profession and by the age of 16 or 18 know little else. Many of these men, previously victims, assume the role of the victimiser, they said. Eunuchs (Hijras) have a long history in the subcontinent. Now, most people make fun of them and call them perverts. These eunuchs and transvestites lead private lives.

On the bottom rung of the social ladder, a large number of Hijras scrape out a tough existence. They are the cultural descendants of the court eunuchs of the Mughal Empire, but now they have to earn their livelihood out of begging, dancing and prostitution.

Most of the Pakistani cities have sizeable eunuch communities, divided into clan groups living in slums headed by their Gurus. Some of them had undergone crude-sex change surgeries. Majority of them leave or forced to leave their families in adolescence to join eunuch community for their remaining life.

Daily Times, through this exclusive report, has peeped into their lifestyle. It is a story of people, who resorted to their own peculiar 'world' after being neglected by society.



This 'world' has relationships, castes, marriages, funerals, crude sex surgeries and even a dialect of its own. In Lahore, there are more than 10,000 eunuchs operating in various areas, large number of whom live in Heera Mandi (the Red Light Area) while several also live near Shahnoor film studios, Samanbad, Mozang and other areas. The eunuchs have mainly three categories, the Moorats, the Zinays and Shaitans or Dhanda Geers. The Moorats are the impotent ones.

According to the philosophy of Moorat caste, they had a special spirit that makes them behave like women and they adopt a feminine way of life. The Zinays are transvestites, most of them potent but passive and fond of wearing ladies clothes and applying make up.

The Shaitans are self-converted Moorats, not impotent initially, but undergo crude-sex surgery. They undergo surgical castration (called Nurban in the local dialect). The Dhanda Geers are considered the dregs among eunuchs. They are both potent and impotent and are only involved in prostitution.

The Shaitans have spots in the city where they go for a sex-change operation, somewhat like an illegal abortion. This has always been a highly secret affair and a potentially fatal one, with a mere 20 percent survival rate. Eunuch gurus or quacks carry out all such operations. Eunuchs told Daily Times that such operations

are carried out inside Lohari Gate, Mozang, Qainchi-Chungi Amer Sidhu, Shahdra and Kamoki. They said an operation cost Rs 15,000 to 20,000 and another Rs 5,000 for medicine. The medicines include high dosage painkillers and sedatives.

Some eunuchs take hormone injections to increase the size of their breasts. Others simply don't want to go through the hassle and stuff clothes or water balls in bras.

Eunuchs also have castes, known as dairas. There are two dairas - Mirzaie and Chandni. The Mirzaie eunuchs have lived in Heera Mandi for generations while the Chandni are considered outsiders. The Mirzaie are considered the sacred descendants of Khawaja Sara and domestic servants who had seen glory in Mughal times. The top eunuchs of Lahore are Hashim, Saima, Gogi, Komal, Ashi, Saleem, Ghora, Reema Jaan and Mehwish. Eunuchs also marry. A wedding has great significance in the lifestyle of a eunuch. In fact, men often eye eunuchs for marriage at mujras. If a man wants to keep a eunuch like he keeps a female prostitute, he needs to consult the eunuch's guru.

The ceremony takes place at the eunuch's house and friends of the eunuch participate. The most important ritual of this marriage is the distribution of sweets. The guru picks up a sweet and offers it to the bride and the groom. Other eunuchs dance, an integral part of the wedding. The dancers are showered with red roses and money. The eunuch-bride wears a red gharara and gold jewellery which the groom brings with him.

The guru gives the bride's hand to the groom and says the magic words, Huqay Tay Huqa, Banda Thujhay Qabool.

The bride and groom both say Qabool Hai thrice, and the wedding is solemnised. Huqay Tay Huqa is an ancient phrase derived from the saying 'Huqa karay gur gur thay chilam cit-raye', a saying attributed to sexual union. The wedding train then goes to the groom's house, where he puts a gold ring to his wife.

When a eunuch dies, others do not accompany the funeral procession. On such occasions they consider themselves women.

Some eunuchs pray regularly, but don't go to mosques. Eunuchs have their own secret language as well that they use in their business. The language is close to Persian and is also spoken in Bangladesh and India. For example, they say 'Karay karo bela hai ga' or 'Don't look at him, the man is rude'.

Eunuchs are also known to pay poor boys for sexual favours and to run their households.

The eunuch community is an important part of local spiritual folk culture. It is common for them to appear at weddings or birth celebrations to sing songs. Some believe eunuchs have the power to bless or curse others. The argument goes that because a eunuch is denied a normal family life as a woman, her faithful prayers will be fulfilled.

Both in India and Pakistan, shrines at the graves of Sufi saints are common places for eunuchs to hang out. The urs of Khwaja Moeenuddin Chishti in Ajmer is attended by hundreds of eunuchs from India and Pakistan.

"Eunuch are innocent, brave people because they own their identity in a society that does not accept them. Every eunuch has a reaction against society because society, even their own families, usually try to suppress their feelings and ultimately discard them," say the Khiljis.

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**15-year-old sex worker Muhammed Naveed (top centre) and a eunuch on The Mall (top)** DAILY TIMES