



## **Transgender Learners' Perspectives on their Well-being and Wellness after Vocational Training in South Punjab**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the perspectives of transgender learners in South Punjab on their well-being after completing vocational training. To study the key domains of well-being, 100 transgender people were asked to complete open-ended surveys addressing mental, social, physical, community, financial, and work issues. The results highlight the difficulties and support for well-being within this group, focusing on events after their training. By studying how transgender individuals manage, connect, handle their finances, and remain motivated at work, this study hopes to suggest ways to boost the quality of life of transgender people. The study helps explain how vocational training affects a person's overall well-being, providing ideas for action for leaders, teachers, and community supporters.

**Keywords:** Transgender learners, vocational training, well-being, South Punjab, mental health, social support, community integration

### **Introduction**

Those who identify as transgender in Pakistan are often excluded from education, work opportunities, and access to healthcare (Khan et al., 2021). Although the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 ensures that their rights are recognized, widespread discrimination and lack of employment for transgender people continue (Butt & Jawed, 2020). For this reason, many transgender people only have the option of working as beggars, at ceremonies, or through sex work, with little potential to progress. Special training courses have become an option for transgender people to build skills and find jobs that help them achieve financial stability and fit into their communities (UNDP, 2020). However, the overall results of these programs on people's well-being, including their mental, social, physical, financial, and community aspects, as well as in conservative regions where people already face more difficulties, are significantly understudied in Pakistan (Ahmad & Nawaz, 2022). Beyond economic strength, well-being also covers emotional toughness, being connected to others, good health, and having reasons to keep going (Keyes 2002). Well-being among trans people can be threatened by biased policies at work, rejection by their families, and the inability to receive proper healthcare (Winter



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et al., 2016). Although vocational programs try to help people find jobs (Haq & Khan, 2019), their success should be measured by checking if they truly uphold and improve living standards over time. In South Punjab, where poverty is widespread and strict social boundaries exist, transgender people struggle to find decent and stable work using their technical skills. Understanding the impact of training on their working lives is important for developing beneficial interventions.

This study examines the views of 100 transgender learners in South Punjab who participated in vocational programs and uses survey data to study how these programs supported their well-being. The researcher examined five main issues: mental health, social connections, general health, money matters, community involvement, and work life. This study follows a complete approach to well-being to determine how vocational training impacts the lives of transgender people beyond their economic situations (Alanko & Lund, 2020). The research results offer important insights to those encouraging inclusive development in Pakistan. The study proposes that approaches that combine economic support and mental health care can best serve the needs of transgender learners. In addition, it supports the broader conversation about gender fairness and social inclusion by providing facts to help policy plans match people's real-life experiences. The end goal is to feature the stories of transgender individuals in South Punjab so that their experiences can guide projects to improve their job prospects and quality of life in the area.

### Literature Review

New studies reveal the multifaceted issues that transgender individuals in Pakistan face daily. Although the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 promises to protect transgender people in areas such as inheritance, education, and jobs, these guarantees are not appropriately applied in reality (Butt & Jawed, 2020). Although laws exist to help transgender people in the workplace, they continue to deal with outright discrimination and are often rejected for job posts based solely on their gender identity (Khan et al., 2021). Because they cannot find formal work, many transgender individuals end up selling sex or begging on the streets to survive. The shortage of financial jobs and being denied bank accounts or loans only add to the financial difficulties transgender people face (Haq & Khan, 2019). Transgender people in Pakistan's conservative regions face a tough cycle because of economic and social isolation. Ahmad and Nawaz (2022) point out that South Punjab is a special case because transgender people here have to deal with added struggles because of its strong patriarchy and higher levels of religiosity (Ahmad & Nawaz, 2022). According to research, transgender individuals here face higher rates of family rejection than in cities, and many are forced out of their homes as teens, making them easy targets for victimization and harm (Khan et al., 2021). Because of this isolation, many transgender individuals do not receive fair healthcare or must expose themselves to humiliating treatment when seeking gender-affirming care (Winter et al., 2016). Because of this exclusion, many transgender individuals in Pakistan experience immense psychological problems, as depression, anxiety, and suicide are quite common and are made worse by the scant availability of services trained for these issues (Keyes, 2002).

There are doubts in academic circles about whether vocational training can effectively help those who experience social marginalization to find employment. Despite the UNDP and others viewing skills development as key to empowerment, field research has shown flaws in program preparation and results. The training offered by many vocational programs does not include support for transgender individuals and focuses on areas where transgender



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people are particularly at risk of discrimination (Haq & Khan, 2019). Most programs are only active for a short time; therefore, unsurprisingly, they do little to solve the years of educational disadvantage and social separation experienced by many participants (Ahmad & Nawaz, 2022). Many of these job training efforts are not followed by strong support systems, missing opportunities to address the biases that hinder job opportunities for new graduates (Butt & Jawed, 2020). The separate paths between skill acquisition and real jobs indicate the need for career support groups, such as helpful laws, informed employers, and mental health services (Winter et al., 2016). When considering the well-being of transgender individuals, it is important to examine psychosocial issues alongside more traditional economics. Keyes (2002) pointed out that flourishing means being well, not just being healthy enough to avoid mental illness. For people who identify as transgender in Pakistan, their flourishing is regularly interrupted by weaknesses at multiple levels of social ecology (Winter et al., 2016). On a microsystem level, being rejected by your family and being separated from others causes you to feel that you do not belong. The gap between these programs and workplaces keeps many people out of the labor force in the mesosystem. At the system level above the micro, discrimination in healthcare, education, and workplaces sets up obstacles, while on a broad scale, cultural and religious attitudes help support transphobia (Khan et al., 2021). Because of these different levels, interventions that target only a single component of skills training usually do not improve well-being on a lasting basis (UNDP, 2020).

Research conducted to date shows significant problems with studying transgender well-being in Pakistan, which this study attempts to solve. Very little research focuses on the problematic issues faced by transgender people in conservative regions like South Punjab, while paying attention to what happens in urban centers such as Karachi or Lahore (Ahmad & Nawaz, 2022). In addition, policies for transgender individuals are primarily created by cisgender leaders who talk about these programs without consulting transgender individuals (Butt & Jawed, 2020). Because we lack research that has followed up on participants for many years, it is difficult to know whether vocational programs result in lasting improvements in people's lives or provide them with temporary help with jobs (Haq & Khan, 2019). In this study, we examine the impact of skills training on the daily lives of transgender trainees in South Punjab using qualitative methods.

This study was guided by the following research questions.

- How do transgender learners in South Punjab perceive the impact of vocational training on their mental, social and physical well-being?
- What are the primary challenges and support systems that influence the financial stability and community belonging of transgender individuals after vocational training?
- In what ways do work engagement and vocational motivation shape the overall wellness and future aspirations of transgender learners in this region?

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the perceptions of transgender learners in South Punjab regarding the impact of vocational training on their mental, social, and physical well-being.
- To identify the primary challenges and support systems that influence financial stability and sense of community belonging among transgender individuals after completing vocational training.



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- To explore how work engagement and vocational motivation affect the overall wellness and future aspirations of transgender learners in South Punjab.

### Methods

A hundred open-ended surveys completed by transgender individuals in South Punjab who had undergone vocational training were analysed in this qualitative study. To examine the perceptions and feelings of the participants regarding their well-being after the training, we relied on interpretative phenomenology and tried our best not to forget any ethical principle and reveal their true stories. From January to March 2025, we used three community organizations to help us distribute the survey forms to people working with trans people in South Punjab. This placed us in a position to reach participants with more ease and establish trust with the community. All the samples were composed of characteristic demographics, age, education level, and occupation, and lengthy answers regarding the major well-being areas. Smith et al. (2018) mention a possibility of respondents to answer both in Urdu and English, but in this case, the majority prefer Urdu as it is the prevailing language in this area. The survey could be answered by a community organizer who could explain to those who were weak in reading. Liaisons were asked to read the questions precisely as they were written, with no extra guidance, so that proper responses could be gathered from all potential survey participants.

Using this method helped to add the voices of people who might have been omitted from the study because of low education. At the start, all data were anonymized, and every survey was assigned a unique number for analysis. Next, the researchers reviewed all hundred surveys numerous times to become familiar with the information and understand what the participants lived through. In this review, the researchers found recurring storylines, a few unusual outliers, and some stories that stood out the most as data were examined very closely. A codebook was developed by examining how participants described their experiences. Terms such as "family rejection," "workplace discrimination," and "new confidence" were used as basic codes to summarize what participants said. With this software, researchers applied the codes to all data from qualitative surveys, making it easier to see the number of times each concept occurred and how the concepts were related (Cicero & Wesp, 2017).

During the study, a strict data coding procedure was followed. Various iterations of the coding were carried out with subsequent iterations of team discussions aimed at refining and solidifying the emergent themes. Meetings of the researchers were organized regularly to analyze such emergent themes from different angles and to ensure that conclusions were in line with the genuine answers in the data. Our main goal was to identify both the commonalities and unique differences among the participants. The research team had to use several techniques to validate their analysis. We looked for, investigated, and described cases that differed from the initial themes. Member checking was conducted by discussing early insights with community representatives to check how they matched with what the participants had experienced. All decisions made during the analysis were documented using an audit trail to ensure a transparent interpretation of the data.

The analysis identified six significant aspects of well-being: mental and emotional, social and relationship, physical, financial, community, and vocational well-being. In every one of these categories, numerous sub-themes were found that described how vocational training affected participants in several ways. Several issues must be considered in the strategy used. Observations from the 100 surveys provided valuable information, but



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cannot be generalized to everyone in South Punjab, especially those who are least included or need the most help. As surveys depend on individuals' accounts, the results are naturally subjective, which helps us see what life is like in practice. Researchers do not follow the same individuals over time but capture their experiences simultaneously. Ethical factors were given top importance from the beginning of the study process (Kelley et al., 2022). In addition to following informed consent and anonymous data, the research team took extra steps to avoid unintended harm to those participating. The survey questions were designed to encourage sharing but in a way that would not cause any distress. Every aspect of the project was reviewed with community partners to ensure cultural appropriateness. The results were presented to the participating organizations before publication to check for accuracy and importance to the community. By studying 100 direct accounts from this area, the research team understood how transgender skills training affects multiple well-being factors in South Punjab. As the participants' words guided the analysis, the findings remain connected to what the people involved have gone through. Through this approach, important social experiences and unique individual thoughts about being transgender in Pakistan were identified (Stockmann & Diaz, 2017).

### **Data Analysis**

By analyzing all the survey answers, we found important information about the effects of vocational training on different aspects of the lives of transgender people. Our analysis identified five strong themes describing aspects of both progress and sustained issues.

### **Theme 1: Transformations in Mental Well-being and Self-Perception**

The programs worked wonders for mental health and self-image, but they also showed that participants still faced difficult psychological issues. The data demonstrated that while training and professional progress improved individuals emotionally, societal stigma continued to cause mental health problems.

### **Positive Psychological Shifts Through Vocational Training**

Vocational training helped many participants boost their self-esteem and become more emotionally resilient. Training programs offered both job skills and satisfaction with what they accomplished. Many participants emphasized using better ways to cope with stress, such as changing from staying alone or using drugs or alcohol. A beauty therapy graduate explained the change this way: When I felt stress before training, often I would cry alone. I now perform facials that feel calming for me and are fun for the clients. Others explained that working in their ministry gave them personal benefits and pleasure as well. As an example, a 25-year-old person already working in embroidery training commented, concentrating on stitches calms me down, making my anxiety disappear. When I create something beautiful, I know I can do it, even though the world tells me differently." Many participants noted that the training environment felt psychologically safe. Many of them pointed out that being valued for their talents stood out sharply from the discrimination they faced daily. A computer skills trainee aged 30 said: I had no unique status in the classroom because I was just another student. There was no one staring at me or murmuring about it. Instead of being 'the hijra,' I was trying to pick up Excel just once (Zeeman et al., 2017).





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### **Lingering Mental Health Challenges Due to Societal Stigma**

Even with these favorable results, the survey showed that having vocational skills alone was not enough to completely protect participants from the emotional damage caused by society's rejection. Nearly half of the respondents (43%) mentioned that depression, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness are ongoing problems for them—most often when excluded from their families or the communities they live in. It was common for me to feel a real struggle when my achievements were not met with acceptance at home. A 32-year-old trainee for the trade of tailoring shared these feelings: I know how to sew now, but when I return home, my brothers won't let me serve them food. How useful are skills if we are not respected for who we are? It highlights a common trend in the data: getting a vocational education led to economic and personal improvement but not always to being accepted in society. Many contestants explained that they gained confidence in their work but were still rejected by their families and friends at home. Several participants pointed out that experiencing discrimination damaged their mental well-being. A 27-year-old who is training in hospitality said: The bakery class was a breeze for me, but when I tried to get work, the answer was, 'We don't employ people like you here.' I began to realize that it was not even worth focusing on why it was happening (Avera et al., 2015).

### **The Role of Peer Support and Future Aspirations**

What came out from The research revealed that peer networks established during training were crucial for maintaining mental health. Many participants said they turned to each other emotionally and were able to build solidarity that lasted after the program ended. According to one participant, we ended up feeling like family. If a person is feeling gloomy, we let them know: 'Let's remember our journey and how far we've made it.'" Many have noticed that the improved way they feel has encouraged them to consider new opportunities for the future. The hope of both steady work and personal independence existed despite the difficulties in the present. An electrician trainee of 24 years reported: Since I have the skills, I wish to start my own business. Simply having a goal helps cope with bad days.

### **Theme 2: The Dual Reality of Social Connections**

Participants described a significant split in their social lives, with close bonds made in training areas and constant exclusion elsewhere. This theme highlights the power of accepting spaces and the ongoing obstacles to completing social integration.

### **Formation of Supportive Peer Networks**

Within the training environment, participants reported the feeling that examples happened and started to see connections between different situations. Most people in the study described forging real friendships through their programs, which was new to many of them. A comment from a 25-year-old in a computer course—"Now, for the first time, other people can use my chosen name without laughing"—sums up the reassurance found by many in these programs.

Often, these friendships became important lifelines. Over two-thirds of the respondents said they offered job opportunities to others (68%). Supporting others emotionally when they are having a hard time (79%). Setting up informal mentorship groups (53% of respondents). A student studying tailoring at 28 said, "We care for each other like actual sisters. Whenever one person gets employment, she includes those in her company."



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Solidarity among the trainees is frequently made up for family issues, as shown by 61% of the participants. as "chosen family."

### **Persistent Social Exclusion in Broader Society**

Although things are improving, 56% of people who participated said they still face exclusion in their communities. The training and my normal life were very different for me. This story makes it clear that a person's professional skills may not be as important in society as their appearance.

Significant findings on community exclusion were that nearly half of them had housing discrimination issues despite having a stable income. More than half said they did not feel included in community events. 63% of those surveyed said they had suffered some form of verbal harassment in public spaces.

My customers tell me how much they like what I do until they find out who I am. The next step is for them is to act as if they have no idea who I am in the market." Being considered valuable for what I could do at work, but being seen as worthless as a person became a continual worry for me.

### **The Bridge Between Social Worlds**

Around a third (29%) of the participants said that succeeding at their job gradually made them feel more respected. An electrician who is 26 said: "When I finished working on the mosque's wiring, the imam now greets me politely." They indicated that regularly displaying professional value over the years can help avoid unfair stereotypes. However, this process is still vulnerable. According to one expert, "The moment their work requires my skills, the respect can disappear." The data clearly show that while vocational training initiates change, making a difference over time calls for changes throughout society.

### **Theme 3: Physical Health - Small Wins Amid Systemic Barriers**

We found that those interviewed showed steady progress, although many healthcare challenges were consistently present. The statistics highlight that although having a stable job creates health opportunities, continuing discrimination limits these opportunities.

### **Benefits from Doing the Same Thing at the Same Time**

Sixty-three percent of people said they experienced visible good health changes due to:

*Job schedules that do not change to permit the same regular eating habits (71%)*

*People are using bad coping strategies less frequently (58%).*

*Better and more regular periods of sleep (49%)*

That a beauty graduate is now able to eat two meals daily due to salon hours at work shows the important role training can play in putting back together self-care previously disturbed by economic hardship. Substance use went down for a lot of participants, and one said: "When I need to get up for work the next day, stopping drinking at night becomes easier."

### **Issues in Occupational Health**

The survey found evidence of work-related physical health issues. More than 4 out of 10 surveyed said they had ongoing pain caused by sitting or standing for long periods. A third



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of the group listed symptoms they found related to stress in their job. One in four workers had no safety provisions at work. He said that he wore glasses. They made it clear that the importance of earning often caused participants to set health aside.

### **Problems in Gender-Affirming Healthcare**

Just over forty-six percent said that healthcare discrimination is the worst barrier to good physical health. A young embroiderer aged 30 told me that her hormone injections made it very hard for her to sit and do her craft. Many go without necessary medical care because doctors refuse to treat them if they know that the person is transgender.

Important barriers to healthcare were as follows: more than half of those polled stayed away from clinics because they had been mistreated in the past. Approximately two out of every three transgender individuals do not have access to gender-affirming care. 72 per cent of participants had providers who mixed up their gender. Another participant, age 27, said this in their statement: "Rather than show us respect, they'd rather we die."

How Health and Work relationships are tied together. The data show a complicated link between maintaining the same job and staying healthy. Although stable employment made it easier to look after myself, my health made it difficult to do more work. Participants described:

**Getting part-time or flexible work so that they can deal with their health (39%)**

**Not sharing issues with health to keep their jobs (47%)**

**Private healthcare accounts for a large part of people's earnings (52%)**

One woman, age 29, shared the same idea: "I have to take on this job to cover medical expenses, but my health gets worse." This proves that a person's health is tied to their finances and access to healthcare.

### **Theme 4: Financial Progress with Fragile Foundations**

The financial narratives described steady growth that was regularly challenged by basic issues. Despite achieving economic significance for most, vocational training was steady under the threat of discrimination and hard barriers in the marketplace.

For a large number of respondents, training was their introduction to financial security. Nearly all participants said they switched from irregular, daily wage jobs to having steady incomes, and most from tailoring, beauty, and IT made up to PKR 25,000 in monthly earnings. A graduate of tailoring, who managed to pay her monthly rent, and is now aged 27, illustrated this important change in financial security. Several participants told us that they moved out of begging or sex work and learned trades, with some going on to start their own businesses or get stable work. A journey from doing free wedding performances to running her own beauty business was captured in the case of the 31-year-old beautician.

*Because I had a steady income, I could manage my money in ways I could not have imagined before. Nearly half of those who participated in the project managed to open a bank account, and a similar number of people said they were saving money for the first time.*





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Approximately one-third of the participants purchased professional tools and equipment, suggesting that they were becoming more confident about their future jobs.

However, their impressive achievements were accompanied by a consistent lack of financial strength. Many respondents shared that customer prejudice was always a significant risk, with many having their income taken away instantly if clients learned their gender identity. When a customer told a 35-year-old beautician that she would not do her hair because of her race, it reflected how this existence was often enough to be rejected. Consequently, close to half of the participants stayed hidden at work to avoid bias, and over 60% had unpredictable dips in their income when their gender became clear.

Most jobs were found in the informal and insecure sectors. Most craftsmen did not have jobs that promised fair pay, decent benefits, or lawful support, which meant that their income could change in an instant. An electrician said that his work began with his bills growing all at once and then going down to nothing, over and over. Consequently, individuals had multiple income streams and, in many cases, relied on traditional transgender jobs for safety. They confirmed that making a living with their training was possible, but the problem arose when simple discrimination left them with no work options.

### **Theme 5: Vocational Pride Versus Workplace Realities**

Although attaining occupational status was challenging, it became clear from the research revealed that workplace discrimination remained an obstacle for many.

The vast majority of those questioned showed strong professional pride and excitement about what they were able to learn. In many cases, learning a trade for the first time made students feel recognized for what they could do. This 29-year-old man's happiness in teaching computers and truly mattering at work showed how much he valued his new career. Many expressed career ambitions outside the usual transgender jobs, and some even began mentoring others in their line of work.

Because of their confidence, many were able to produce excellent results. Many people involved said that the participants made a real effort to perfect their work and enjoyed it. A striking case occurred when an electrician wired a whole house perfectly and was discriminated against when the owner saw their ID. It often happened that people did not receive fair recognition for their abilities.

Many different kinds of insidious discrimination were found in the workplaces. It was found that people were limited to working behind the scenes, despite being top experts; for example, a hospitality worker was unable to serve clients after perfecting tea preparation. Several participants said they were paid less than their cisgender peers for the same tasks and that their academic qualifications were frequently doubted. Approximately 50% of those who participated said they faced workplace harassment, ranging from rude comments to actual threats of violence.

One of the most depressing points was when qualified people were pushed back into transgender workplaces after regular job opportunities dried up because of discrimination against them. A tailor missing out on work during the quiet months and taking up begging or a cosmetologist joining wedding dances when income dropped are examples of how unfair rules could still challenge the most skilled workers.



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Despite these problems, the data held up well and remained stable. Some participants worked out ways to address discrimination at work, such as choosing good employers and starting their own businesses. There are cases where workers' skills and experience slowly built trust at their jobs, which implies that their abilities can, over time, lessen some prejudices.

The current research investigates how these people who identify themselves with their jobs feel empowered yet remain vulnerable to discriminatory behaviors. As these outcomes are two-fold, vocational projects must focus on the hurdles that prevent the acknowledgment of individuals' skillsets.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

- The delivery of education should include counselling and peer support facilities incorporated within centers to deal with the related mental health issues of social stigma. The psychological outcome of discrimination can be reduced through the administration of stress-management interventions to participants, which could include wellness workshops and periodic health checkups.
- Concerted efforts should be made to overcome workplace discrimination. Employer alliances could produce non-discriminative recruitment and mandatory equality coaching for transgender applicants, and participation in the certification of organizations that deliver such training. Recognized employers would, in turn, work together with recognized placement agencies to improve skills utilization and fair labor market outputs.
- Educational programs should be launched to break myths and combat exclusion in the most conservative places throughout South Punjab. Religious leaders, business players, and elders in society can take leadership roles to normalize the involvement of transgender people in society.
- Access to gender-affirming healthcare is important. Medical providers must be trained to provide competent care for transgender issues, and this should be coupled with education of the staff on the various health needs of this group of people. Health camps stationed in vocational training centers provide an effective platform for strengthening physical and psychological health.
- Avenues for participatory financial inclusion are not dispensable. Banking and financial service institutions must be involved in developing relevant products and programs for transgender entrepreneurs. Alumni should be offered grants and specially designed business-management training to set up ventures.
- Alumni network organizations of social capital can enhance program effectiveness. The development of formal mentorship channels with continuous professional growth will enable participants to continue their ties, minimize exit problems, and promote skill advancement.
- Empirical evidence must be used to advocate for policies. Systems that ensure that transgender workers are not subjected to harassment and discrimination must be strictly implemented, and vocational programs must undergo ongoing evaluation to assess their effects and tackle possible impediments.
- Various fields, such as skills development, mental health promotion, legal protections, and youth engagement, must be included in future initiatives, as these areas affect life prospects in their turn.



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In conclusion, vocational training in the form applied is effective but not sufficient, as interventions based on the principles of co-location are required to overcome stigma, institutional bias, and discriminatory labor processes. They should be in constant interaction with policymakers, civil-society organizations, and training providers in South Punjab and other areas to achieve comprehensive progress. With the proven ability of transgender learners to endure, it is only good that society should also develop environments in which the learners are not only recognized to be talented and their dignity assured, but their daily lives offer great improvement in their lives.

### Conclusion

The study shows the important ways vocational training can improve the lives of transgender people in South Punjab but also points out the difficulties in making it more effective. The results indicate better self-esteem, improved social relationships, better health, and increased financial security, all contributing to increased life satisfaction and anticipation of the future. However, these improvements continue to be unsteady and inadequate because of ongoing discrimination in society, widespread exclusion from workplaces, and inadequate healthcare. The research shows that training increases transgender individuals' abilities and self-respect, yet many still do not find real success due to unfair structures. The stories of the participants reflect a strong will to face challenges and demand solutions that help both people individually and transform entire communities.

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