



RESEARCH PAPER

**Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the Transgender Community
in District Peshawar KP**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 on the transgender community in Peshawar District KP, using a qualitative approach and snowball sampling technique to select a sample of 55 transgender individuals. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study found that the transgender community faced significant challenges due to their social exclusion by their Gurus, illiteracy, lack of employment opportunities, and complex gender identity. The impact of Covid-19 exacerbated these problems, resulting in social exclusion, homelessness, mental health issues, economic dependency, and gender complexity. The study recommends that the government and transgender-led organizations conduct awareness sessions, direct religious leaders regarding transgender rights, provide access to healthcare, financial support, and affordable housing facilities, and support the transgender-led organization for inclusion and acceptance.

Keywords: Covid-19, Socio-Economic Impacts, Transgender

Introduction

Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. A transgender can be identified as a girl even though she was born with a male organ. Transgender identity is generally found in less than 1% of the worldwide population, with figures ranging from <0.1% to 0.6%. Many transgender people face discrimination in the workplace, in accessing public accommodations, and in healthcare. In many places, they are not legally protected from discrimination. It is often revealed that a transgender is trying to hide his gender due to social stigma and discrimination. The term Trans is often used as a shorthand way of referring to a transgender person. Transsexuals are the type of transgender, which are seeking medical help to transition from one gender to another gender (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Transgender/ Khawaja Sara has a very rich history. Numerous examples of sexual activity and practices with people other than men and women in the Sanskrit sexual discourse revealed the existence of a third gender in the past. In the ancient book, "Kama Sutra" the author discussed 4000 years earlier that there was another gender other than male and female. The deep-rooted history of transgender profiles makes them special in the precolonial Mughal Empire. From the 13th to 18th century, Khawaja Sara/ Hijra were the most trusted people in the Mughal palaces. Because of their intelligence and cleverness, they were appointed as an army administrator, in charge of Mughal treasures, and responsible for the protection of Harem (a sacred place of living). Khawaja Sara was in charge of numerous well-known roles in administration, courtly affairs, and as a political counselor. Without the Harems, the Mughal palaces would not have been possible, and the Harems would not have been possible without the Eunuchs (the term used for Khawaja Sara and

Hijra in colonial text). In the Mughal empire, Khawaja Sara was male identified as intelligent, and have a key role in military and diplomatic administration despite slavery while the Hijra was mostly indulged in singing and dancing. Khawaja Sara has a significantly high social status than Hijra in the Mughal period (Khan, 2020).

Terminologies associated with transgender

Non-binary and genderqueer are umbrella terms for gender identities that are not solely male or female identities that are outside the gender binary. Non-binary identities fall under the transgender umbrella, since non-binary people typically identify with a gender that is different from their assigned sex, though some non-binary people do not consider themselves transgender

Crossdresser

A person who sometimes wears clothes usually worn by a different gender usually a man who sometimes wears the clothes, make-up, jewelry, etc. usually worn by women: He is a self-described crossdresser.

Homosexual

Homosexuality” is a sexual relationship/desire between male-to-male and female-to-female. This simple definition has a vast sensation. People differ greatly in terms of their same-sex behaviors, sexual preferences, and self-definition. People who engage in such relations are defined differently by culture.

Bisexual

Bisexuality is a process through which a person is fascinated (sexually, romantically, and emotionally) to participate physically or sexually with people of either sex. A bisexual person's level of attraction to either sex might not be equal, and it might change over time. Self-perception is the key to a bisexual identity. Many people engage in sexual activity with people of both sexes, yet do not identify as bisexual. Likewise, other people engage in sexual relations only with people of one sex, or do not engage in sexual activity at all, yet consider themselves bisexual. There is no behavioral “test” to determine whether or not one is bisexual.

Transvestites

Transvestites are the person who likes to wear clothes and shoes of the opposite sex. Transvestites are the older name of crossdresser. Crossdressers often dress only in certain situations.

Drag Queens

A drag queen is a person, usually male, who uses drag clothing and makeup to imitate and often exaggerate female gender signifiers and gender roles for entertainment purposes. Historically, drag queens have usually been gay men, and part of gay culture (Cardoso & Werner, 2003).

Coronavirus/Covid-19 was a terrible pandemic that was raised in Wuhan City of China in 2019 which adversely affected 675 million people in 230 countries until January 2023. This pandemic has negatively affected all aspects of society. Globally, terror and alarming situations have spread by this pandemic and people have started thinking that the world is going to the end (Ashiq, Abbas, & Sajid et al, 2023).

As COVID-19 pandemic affected the social, political, religious, educational, and economic institutions of society. Besides the general community, the pandemic has worst affected the lives of marginalized communities including displaced persons, old citizens, women, and Transgender. Among these marginalized people, the pandemic also severely affects the lives of the transgender community in the whole world. As a deprived segment of society in Pakistan, they are already living a miserable life. However, COVID-19 four folded their problems. Due to the marginalized segment of society, the government, political parties, and civil societies helped them with a little package of food and basic needs (Hedge, 2020). Moreover, Naila & Aqsa (2015) stated that the transgender community faces difficulties in carrying out their businesses, finding accommodation, and other financial activities. They also revealed that the transgender community is treated as an outsider of the community and no one has taken a serious step toward their inclusion and acceptance into the mainstream community.

Hence, the effective provision of basic, civil, fundamental, and constitutional rights of the Trans community in India, the Indian penal code, and the criminal procedure code, which had derived from British law, create a groundwork for the application of the criminal law in British India. On the other hand, Bangladesh followed the Pakistan penal code, which is similar to the Indian, and British penal codes and procedures after the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971. According to Article 27th of the Pakistani constitution, all citizens are equally protected and equal before the law. While the 28th Article prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, sex, and caste, the 29th Article states that every citizen has equal access to jobs, business, and other activities (Sneha, 2020).

The majority of transgender were linked with dancing, begging, and sex work. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic has controlled people from marriage ceremonies and another gathering, as a result, the dancing component of transgender had badly affected. Similarly, due to the lockdown in the country, people had obstructed from visiting outside, and the making of the crowd was strictly prohibited. Therefore, these limitations alternately affect the rest two components (begging, and sex work) of the transgender community (Mantri, 2020). Likewise, transgender in Pakistan have also the same source of income i.e. dancing, begging, and sex work. Which ultimately affects all the components of the transgender community during a pandemic. Which ruins the lives of transgender in Pakistan. According to the census report of 2017, the population of registered Transgender is above 10,000 in Pakistan. However, rights groups have claimed the figure to be more than 300,000 in the country's total population of 220 million people. Among these ten thousand transgender, 1500 are living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Trans toll in Peshawar district is four hundred. These estimates place the percentage of transgender people in the general population at 0.005%. (GOP, 2017).

The transgender community faces many challenges in the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and harassment. To date, there are no registered police complaints in favor of transgender when they were harassed/physically and sexually abused during marriage ceremonies or birthday parties. There is no information available on the frequency of mental diseases or psychological trauma among Pakistan's transgender community (Aurat Foundation, 2016).

In Pakistani society, the general word *Hijra* is used for transgender. *Hijra* is a phrase that encompasses various gender deviations. Besides these, the term *Hijra* is use to express the different gender i.e. cross-dressers, homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens, and transgender. According to Abdullah et al. (2012), the *Hijra* word covers all these categories of transgender. On the other hand, children who feel that he is transgender then, mostly he is excluding from their whole family because he knows that their presence will stigmatize their family. Transgender faces many hurdles in their society where their family and society demand and battle for their identity. These hurdles and barriers directly affect his conscious and unconscious behaviors. Moreover, the majority of the kids live with

their family in the early stage where the family tries to improve their behavior based on their gender identity. At this stage, transgender experienced bias and undesired behavior from their family in the form of verbal and physical criticism both formal and informal.

In 2018, the Pakistani parliament approved a transgender act, which revealed the fluidity of gender identity and defined transgender people to include these marginalized people in an inclusive society. This act also includes the right to the registration of transgender people in all government agencies including NADRA with their self-desirable gender identity. The successful provision of this act will stop gender-based discrimination; gender-based violence and gave them freedom for self-identity (Ingber, 2018).

It is very hard for transgender to survive and achieve their fundamental rights in a society where there is no acceptance of different gender. Transgender has a different and very low status in Pakistani society, particularly in major events, such as weddings, birthday parties, Eid celebrations, and other social events. These transgender were treated inhumanly in the events and mostly their basic, civil, and human rights are brutally violated everywhere in Pakistan. All these violations rises due to low social acceptance and the negative views of the people surrounding to them (Saddique & Gang, 2017).

Additionally, Janjua (2020) stated that in 2009, Pakistan Supreme Court ruled a decision that no law in the country can avoid the constitutional rights of transgender. Furthermore, the Supreme Court instructed the National Database and Regulation Authority to ensure that transgender with computerized National identity cards. After the announcement of the decision, the NADRA started to issue the NICs to transgender by adding the Khawaja Sira as the third option along with male and female in the sex option. The court's decision also stated that transgender names need to register in the voter list of all concerned areas to meet their right to vote. Multiple human rights activists and civil society organizations cheered the step taken by the Pakistan Supreme Court. Once the decision has taken, the popular transgender group in the transgender community will enter politics and contest for provincial and federal legislature through a majority of votes taken by the transgender. The decision is not easy now, but in the future, it will be fruitful.

While following Mohyidin, (2018), a transgender perspective has revealed that the transgender community was still unregistered and it was so annoying for the transgender community that they could not register themselves as a third gender. Most of the transgender want to legally register themselves but most transgender avoid the legal process. Many transgender were still confused that they are either male or female because there is no third classification for transgender in the voting form. Due to the fear of asking about their gender, most transgender avoid polling or voting. According to the interviewer (transgender), he has worked in the sex industry and still, he has not registered in Pakistan and cannot poll his vote, the election commission of Pakistan fails to issue us national identity cards that clearly show our identity.

Literature Review

According to the report of the transgender population health survey (Trans pop) conducted from 2016-2018, the US transgender population was 1.4 million. Among the population, most transgender were firstly affected by other multiple diseases. As the data shows that 208,500 transgender were victims of Asthma, 81,100 have diabetes, 72,700 are victims of heart disease and 74,800 suffer from HIV. Additionally, 587,100 transgender adults have attempted suicide in their lifetimes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) finds that social isolation, financial strains, and job loss were the main causes of suicide among transgender. Public health announces that covid-19 plague can increase the chances of suicide in the transgender community. On the other hand basic health facility is much important for every citizen but in a pandemic like Covid-19, it is critically important. Nonetheless, there are 137,600 transgender adults without health

insurance in the United States. Additionally, transgender people may feel uncomfortable or discriminated against in medical settings, which may discourage them from seeking necessary health care. The Trans Pop survey shows that 483,000 transgender adults worry that they might not receive quality medical treatment if they disclose their gender identification. 77,000 transgender were displeased with the care provided to them, while 450,400 have not gone to doctors due to unstable financial conditions due to Covid-19 (Herman & O'Neill, 2020).

The socioeconomic and political aspects of transgender in the sub-continent were diverse. In 1871, the British government approved a criminal tribe act in which all the communities were label as criminals. Because of this act, the transgender community suffered and was label as a criminal tribe, which separate them from the mainstream community. This act was enforce up to the separation of the sub-continent and later on, it was eliminate. The technical development of the middle-class community eliminate the entertainment and other social function of the society which were filled by the transgender community and was also the source of income of the transgender community, as a result, they become dependent and there was no other source of income for them. In addition, the transgender community was compel of begging, sex work, and drug dealing as a source of income. The transgender populations in Pakistan have been speaking up in this environment to demand their inclusion in society by being granted socioeconomic and political rights by the state authorities and having their identity accepted by society at large as equal citizens of the state (Sneha, 2020).

Socioeconomic impacts of covid-19 on the transgender community.

A study was conducted regarding covid-19, which has negative consequences on the socio-economic, psychological, and medical life of each human. Covid-19 has resulted in more than 37 million cases and more than 1 million death globally. Each country adopted a wide range of measures to cope the covid-19 in the form of the closure of educational institutions, restricted transport, and closure of business cancellation of all medical surgical treatment. While these interventions had brought for controlling, covid-19 cases and improve health facilities. However, unfortunately, covid-19 has negative consequences on health access, psychological as well as economic aspects of human life. Covid-19 has also badly affected transgender and non-binary people. Before the pandemic of Covid-19 transgender people faces many barriers to achieving good health facilities, removing economic dependency caused by social stigma, accommodation barriers, mental health, and social isolation. Healthcare facilities are less accessible for 17-19 years of transgender and non-binary people due to a lack of clinicians skilled in gender-affirming procedures and widespread transphobia among medical professionals (Jarrett, et al, 2020).

According to WHO (2020), Covid-19, or coronavirus was introduced in late December 2019 and affects millions of people globally. The information regarding affected people was 3,759,967 and 259,474 deaths were registered until May 2020. While the Indian government has provided 56,342 registered positive cases of covid-19 and about 1886 deaths.

Similarly, the Indian government has provided a package of 22 billion USD to the most vulnerable segment of society, including poor people, disabled, transgender, older and widowed people, daily wagers, and farmers. While in Kerala state, the government announced a relief package of relief kits (including temporary housing and food facilities) for 1000 registered transgender (Sebastian, 2020). In utter Pradesh, the government provides financial aid and bulk rations for the next six months for the victims of Covid-19. However, the step taken by the Uttar Pradesh government is creditable but there is no single transgender beneficiary (Chaudhary, 2020).

As per the 2011 Indian Census, the total count of transgender people in India is about 4.88 lakh. However, the real population is above 3 million. They are socially excluded, discriminated against, face a lack of education, and medical facilities, and are avoided in job opportunities. However, individuals who do not adopt the "Hijrahood" lifestyle and do not enter the workforce in the mainstream have a different struggle in the current environment. On the other hand, the transgender community indulges in universal jobs i.e. begging, dancing, and paid sex for their surveillance. However, the lockdown has stopped their earning and limited them to their residence. In contrast, Rs 1500 were provided to 4500 transgender by the National Institute of Social Defense, which is just like a drop in the ocean as the registered population is 4.88 lakhs. (Priyadarshini and Swain, 2020). Similarly, Nussbaumer-Streit *et al.*, (2020) argue that during COVID-19, social isolation, lack of basic health facilities, discrimination, and absence of daily income has ruined the lives of transgender. Working at home and quarantine has proven to be advantageous. But, it has rendered the transgender community and makes them economically unstable. As they are, engage in social activities. About 2 million transgender had badly affected by the decision taken by the Indian government in the form of lockdown and social distancing.

Material and Methods

This research was conducted at the provincial capital of KP "District Peshawar". The study aimed to closely identify the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on the transgender community in District Peshawar. The study was qualitative; Qualitative is a method through which a researcher can get data according to the objectives. A snowball sampling method was adopted for the identification of the targeted population. The sample consisted of 55 transgender of different areas in the Peshawar District, among these, some were educated and some were uneducated. An in-depth interview was adopted as a tool of data collection through which a researcher can get keen information regarding the problem. Closed-ended Questionnaires and pre-planned interviews cannot cover the sensitivity of the problem. Therefore, in-depth interviews and open-ended questions were asked of the respondents to get deep information. The above data tools have been used to gather data from the 55 transgender.

Result and Discussion

Globally Covid-19 has a vast impact on the socio-economic aspect of each society. Around the globe, each country had affected and the system was stopped. According to Khan, (2020), Khawaja Sara is engaged mostly in begging, singing, dancing, collecting charity, and performing voluntary dancing or celebration to the newborn child and the newly married couple. Likewise, some Khawaja Sara indulges in begging at the traffic signals, and people offer them a good amount for their recreation through dancing and singing. Due to the SOPs of covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan and across the world, the ascribed practice of Khawaja Sara for earning was badly affected. Social distancing has not only controlled the free movement of Khawaja Sara but also has the worst effect on their earning and created multiple problems for them as well. Briefly, we may claim that this group already experiences structural discrimination, suffers greatly from the oppressive actions of community members, and is further marginalized by the threats of COVID-19 and social exclusion (Khan, 2020).

The covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of every individual. As I observed that, the majority of the people are dependent on daily wage income. As all the members were suffering from this crucial pandemic, the transgender community was also deeply suffering. It has concluded from primary and secondary data that dancing, begging, sex work, and collection of charity, are the ascribed source of income of the transgender community after the Mughal Empire. Their source of income is related to the social function i.e. marriage, birthday parties, and other social events. During the pandemic, the government of each country gave direction to strictly follow the SOPs of Covid-19, which include social

distancing, closure of transport, closure of the educational institution, banning of marriage ceremonies, etc., which ultimately was the source of income of the transgender community. As a result, the socio-economic and psychological problems of the transgender community increased rapidly. The transgender community was unaware of the coronavirus and its transmission due to illiteracy. They were fully confused about the seriousness of the virus and the compulsory preventive measures to save themselves from the virus. One of the respondents share his story, that before the pandemic we used to live a happy life, as the government directed us to strictly follow the SOPs, then our source of income suffer and stopped, and we start spending what we have earn. We were living with eight people including *Guru* in a single room. We became economically that much weak that we were even unable to pay the room rent. Therefore, the *Guru* directed us to leave the room due to lack of economic resources. Once the owner of the room warn our *Guru* if they did not pay the rent on time, they left my room.

Conversely, in India mostly the transgender population is uneducated. They were socially excluded, stigmatized, and victims of violence. Normally they fight hunger with their traditional activities i.e. dancing, sex work, and *badhai*. However, after the pandemic, they lost their source of income and being the victim of hunger, anxiety, and more mental health problems (Barik, and Pattaya, 2022). Similarly, in the US lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people have the worst impacts of both health and economic instability. Due to covid-19, pandemic most LGBTI people remain the victim of job loss, and poverty, face financial crises, and lack access to basic needs. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affected people's consumption, a significant proportion of transgender and non-binary people reduced the amount of their meals in order to deal with the financial crises. Usually, LGBTI people have fewer job opportunities and live mostly below the poverty line as compared to normal people (Ahmed, Lebbos, Howell et.al (2022). Moreover, Bishop (2020) segmented reports of outright international, which were base on qualitative in-depth interviews of 38 countries having the same impacts of Covid19 on LGBTI people.

Factors that speed up the socio-economic vulnerability of transgender during Covide-19

The international day against transphobia and Homophobia was celebrated through webinars on every 17 May 2020 in Europe organized by UNESCO and chaired by Masen Davis, He is working as executive director and advocate for trans rights since 1988. He discussed how transgender people are invisible during health and financial crises in a pandemic like COVID-19. He claims that the transsexual community, one of the most affected groups due to a variety of factors, including financial instability and lack of support, is extremely concerned about these crises. The absence of support from families and community can cause a severe problem in the form of less social protection and no accommodation for transgender people, which has been intensify by COVID-19. For instance, with the closure of educational institutions around the globe, many LGBTI students were ask to come back to obstructive homes, where there is no acceptance, increasing mental health problems, suffering from domestic violence or even becoming homeless. It is crucial for students, especially LGBTI youth, to be able to come out and feel included in safe spaces, including online (UNESCO, 18 May 2020).

Transgender people are victimize by lack of family support, lack of social protection, and economic vulnerability. They have the capacity of doing something for their family and community, but due to their stigmatized personality, they cannot do anything even if they cannot secure themselves. The main factor, which makes a transgender economically vulnerable, is lack of family support. For economic stability, they can do anything. As in the interview of transgender;

He was expel from home at the age of 15 years. When he looked out to the other side of the community he was scared and searched for a secure shelter, he spend multiple nights in bus

*stands which was the hardest time of his life and he feel shy and cried to share the pain he have got there. After some time, he was caught by a transgender **Guru** who brought him to his residence and there he got self-protection and was able to earn money to remove the economic dependency.*

About 667,100 transgender people live below the poverty line in the US. In 2020, an annual income of \$25,520 was enough for the survival of a single person. A Trans Pop survey (2016-2018) shows that the average joblessness ratio of transgender was 12.8% while the ratio of jobless normal people was raise from 3.9 to 4.9%. It has been concluded that approximately 139,700 transgender were lost their job during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to unemployment, 96,400 transgender have remained the victims of homelessness for the past year. People who were destitute might be unable to practice social isolation and consistent hand washing to avoid coronavirus infection. Additionally, homeless individuals frequently seek shelter and services in communal areas, which present special risks for the virus's transmission (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Factors, which exclude transgender from the community

Transgender were exclude based on their complex gender identity throughout the world. The reason for the negligence of social exclusion were remain the same all over the world. For instance, Emilia et al. (2008) conducted a study on US transgender community, the study consisted of 402 transgender respondents, having multiple variables i.e. employment, ethnicity, age, and level of income. More than half of transgender people were victims of harassment, violence, and social exclusion. The result of the study shows that there is no proper social acceptance, no proper job opportunities, also the victim of ethnicity and complex gender identity. The legislation needs to be revise for the fulfillment of transgender people's rights in the right way to dislodge the social exclusion and harassment of the transgender community. Similarly, Ozturk and Tatli, (2016) observed the discrimination against transgender people in the UK. Transgender people were discriminating against in Job opportunities and job selection. The study revealed that job opportunities do not exist for transgender but in rare cases, if they were get selected for a job, then after the interview, they faced discrimination and biases at the workplace.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

From the study, it has concluded that the majority of the transgender community in the Peshawar district has the worst effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the total population 37% respondents of the total population have studied up to the primary level, 39% of transgender have 20Kto 25K monthly income, 60% transgender has no national identity cards (NICs), 84% transgender have lost their jobs due to Covid 19 i.e. Dancing, sex work and begging, offer for sex work transgender were 37.5%, 51% transgender got help from a different organization, 73% respondents have negative Covid19 cases while 27% of the transgender were affected by the Covid 19 and didn't make a single visit to the hospital due to gender complexity. Like other marginalized communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the socio-economic condition of transgender people in Peshawar as well. It has revealed that most transgender indulge in dancing, begging, and sex work for their survival. Therefore, the imposition of a globally strict lockdown left them with restrictions on their social mobility, loss of livelihoods, hunger, and more economic hardships, which collectively made their lives more miserable and vulnerable. Furthermore, lack of gender identity proofs such as NIC, Passport, right to vote, driving license, and bank account make it difficult for them to certify their transgender identity, which further excludes them from accessing government relief packages such as monetary compensations, rice, and dal under the social security schemes. Finally, all these economic hardships, loss of livelihoods, family ignorance, fear of Coronavirus, and other health vulnerabilities collectively left them with more mental anxiety.

Correspondingly, living things have multiple rights. These rights may be human, fundamental, and civil rights. Each living thing is compelled to live in the orbit of these rights. If there is a violation of any right then it can cause a huge anarchy. As honorable creature, we should cooperate with humans whether it is male, female, or transgender. For the betterment of this vulnerable community during the pandemic as well as normal routine, the Government and organization should assess their basic needs and emphasize providing financial support, healthcare, and social services to this community. Moreover, to deeply understand the vulnerability and challenges faced by this community more academic research should be conducted and develop operative solution. Furthermore, the Covid 19 has revealed the discrimination and variations against the transgender community. This community was excluding in every aspect; to address these issues government and organizations should take a serious step and make an effective policy for the inclusion of the transgender community in all aspects of society, i.e. healthcare, education, employment, and other social activities. Additionally, most transgender are the victim of stigma and discrimination, which is a barrier to accessing resources and support. To cope with these hurdles, raise awareness of the distinctive challenges faced by this community during the pandemic to shrink the stigma through education and awareness. In addition, most transgender was face insecurity in respect of housing, which has worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Stakeholders and humanitarian organizations should assist needy individuals and provide reasonable housing and rental assistance. Likewise, this pandemic has the worst impacts on the mental health of society, including transgender, it should be better to provide mental healthcare accessible to each individual in the form of counseling, therapies, and other forms of mental health support. Finally, transgender-led organizations have worked for the welfare and uplift of the transgender community during Covid19. It is necessary to support and increase the work of these organizations through funding and volunteerism.

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