

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email [Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca](mailto:Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca).

9 January 2015

### PAK105027.E

Pakistan: Incidents of violence or mistreatment involving sexual minorities in Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore; loss of employment or inability to rent housing due to sexual orientation (2014)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Overview

The BBC reports that "homophobia has wide social and religious sanction" in Pakistan (BBC 18 Aug. 2014). Similarly, the *International New York Times* states that discrimination and prejudice against sexual minorities "run deep" in Pakistani society (*International New York Times* 30 April 2014). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Women Employees Welfare Association (WEWA) [1], indicated that sexual minorities in Pakistan "suffer [from] various forms of discrimination in both public and private spheres," including by the "state, society, religious groups, friends and ... family" (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014).

Media sources describe the gay community in Pakistan as "underground" (Al Arabiya News 24 Aug. 2014; AFP 28 Apr. 2014; *The Times* 29 Apr. 2014). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Pakistan country advisor for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), an international organization dedicated to human rights advocacy for people experiencing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (IGLHRC n.d.), said that transgender people are the only "visible" sexual minority in Pakistan, while there is "a lot of invisibility" among gay men and lesbians, who keep their sexual orientation hidden (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Neengar Society, an NGO located in Islamabad and Multan working for human rights of youth and sexual minorities in Pakistan, and that also runs a shelter at an undisclosed location for LGBT people who face threats from family and society, said that the gay community in Pakistan "has never been publically visible" (Neengar 31 Dec. 2014). He said that homosexuals start facing problems when their sexuality is exposed to the people around them (ibid.). According to the WEWA representative, no lesbians or gay men can be open about their sexuality and move "freely" in Pakistani society (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014).

In September of 2014, Pakistan was one of 14 nations to vote against a UN resolution opposing LGBT discrimination [2] (UN 2 Oct. 2014; *The Nation* 28 Sept. 2014; *Daily Today's Muslim Peshawar* 28 Sept. 2014).

For further information about the situation of sexual minorities in Pakistan, including legislation and availability of state protection, see Response to Information Request PAK104712.

#### 2. Violence

Sources indicate that LGBT people in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi are subject to violence (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014; WEWA 31 Dec. 2014; Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014), and other mistreatment (ibid.).

A 2014 report by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) entitled *Violence: Through the Lens of Lesbians, Bisexual Women and Trans People in Asia*, in which 41 LBT people were interviewed [3], indicated that family violence against lesbian, trans, and bisexual women in Pakistan is "disturbingly common, triggered by disobeying social and cultural expectations, gender non-conformity, rebelling against repressive gender practices, being caught in homosexual activity, or being discovered in a homosexual relationship" (IGLHRC 2014, 11). The same source also explained that "[f]amily members as well as peers see homosexual desire as a threat to family stability and religious integrity, both individual and social" (ibid., 10). The report also noted that the individuals who perpetrated the family violence "were usually parents, supported by siblings and, in joint family homes, extended family members as well" (ibid., 11). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the IGLHRC country advisor said that violence against LGBT people is most common within the family and that "men and women who are sexually non-conforming may be subject to beatings and confinement by their families" (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014).

According to the President of the Neengar Society, between January and November of 2014, their organization provided emergency medical support, shelter and psychological support to 145 LGBT individuals, including 50 from Karachi, 10 from Lahore and 2 from Islamabad (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014). He said that in all the cases, family members had beaten and threatened to kill the LGBT individuals, but that no one was willing to register a police complaint for fear that they would be arrested because of their sexuality (ibid.).

The IGLHRC country advisor also noted that partner violence among gay and transgender men is "common," largely because the violent partner may feel that his "masculinity was compromised" because of the relationship (ibid.). According to the IGLHRC report, of the lesbian and bisexual women interviewed in their study who had been forced to marry members of the opposite sex all experienced "severe physical and sexual violence" from their husbands (ibid. 2014, 12). Further or corroborating information about LGBT partner violence could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the IGLHRC country advisor, "gang violence" against people who appear to be gay or transgender is "common" (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). He explained that in "gay cruising" areas of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, a gay man or transgender person may get into a car with someone who then takes the person to a group who beats and/or rapes the individual (ibid.). He said that this happens "frequently" and "can be life threatening" (ibid.). Further or corroborating information about gang violence against LGBT people could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Al Arabiya News, an English-language news service based in Dubai, most hate crimes against LGBT people in Pakistan are unreported or are out of the public spotlight (24 Aug. 2014). Similarly, the WEWA representative indicated that in cases in which gay men or lesbians are murdered, the family often does not report the motive of the crime in order to not dishonour the family, or claims it was an "honour killing" or a suicide (31 Dec. 2014).

In the IGLHRC report, a *khwajasara* [transgender male who identifies as female] in Lahore who was interviewed said that she experiences everyday harassment on the street, such as lewd comments, jokes, and unwanted touching (IGLHRC 2014, 15). She stated that she was also gang raped by drunken men at a party for which she had been hired as a dancer (ibid.). The same report also notes that a *khwajasara* from Karachi said she had been physically and sexually assaulted by strangers on the street as well as by police officers (ibid., 17).

As an example of violence against LGBT people in Pakistan in 2014, the Neengar Society president reported that on 17 April 2014, a police officer in Karachi was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment for sexually abusing and robbing a man (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014).

## 2.1 Homicide

In April 2014, media sources reported that a serial killer was arrested and confessed to killing three gay men in Lahore because of their sexual orientation (*International New York Times* 30 April 2014; Press Trust of India 28 Apr. 2014; *The Times* 29 April 2014). The killings reportedly occurred in March and April of 2014 (ibid.; AFP 28 Apr. 2014). In an interview with AFP, the murderer said that he committed the murders to stop the victims from "'spreading evil in society'" (ibid.). The murderer reportedly targeted the men after meeting them through the social networking site Manjam (ibid.; *International New York Times* 30 April 2014; *The Times* 29 April 2014). Media sources report that the murderer gave the victims sedatives and broke their necks (Press Trust of India 28 Apr. 2014; *The Times* 29 April 2014; AFP 28 Apr. 2014). Manjam reportedly closed its site to non-members in Pakistan after the arrest due to privacy and security concerns (AFP 28 Apr. 2014; *International New York Times* 30 Apr. 2014).

According to Al Arabiya News, the serial killer was depicted as "'the epitome of righteousness' by news outlets in Pakistan" (24 Aug. 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Press Trust of India, an Indian news agency, the police were interrogating the suspect for his involvement with two additional murders "which appear similar in nature" (28 Apr. 2014). Further and corroborating information about the two additional murders could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the IGLHRC country advisor, there were three cases from the summer of 2014 in which men were picked up in the gay cruising areas in Lahore and then killed (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). However, he said that the families were ashamed of the cause, claimed it was for a different motive and did not press charges (ibid.). He noted that without the families pressing charges, the cases could not go to court (ibid.). Corroborating information about these cases could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The IGLHRC report indicates that some LBT women are killed by their family members or relatives (IGLHRC 2014, 11). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### **3. Threats and Hate Speech**

The IGLHRC country advisor said that if someone's sexual orientation becomes known, he or she is frequently subject to blackmail (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). Al Arabiya News states that "[p]ersecution and intimidation remains a constant danger to the gay community in Pakistan" (24 Aug. 2014).

According to the BBC, a former journalist who made an online appeal to find support for a lesbian couple in Pakistan received anonymous phone calls "warning him not to promote homosexuality" (18 Aug. 2014). Al Arabiya News states that the couple's lives were "put on the line" and their "jobs were compromised" by the appeal that sought to help them (24 Aug. 2014)

A Pakistani-Canadian published an illustrated children's book in Pakistan called *My Chacha is Gay* (Al Arabiya News 24 Aug. 2014; *The Times of India* 31 Aug. 2014), through an international crowdfunding campaign (ibid.). The author reportedly received dozens of hate e-mails daily, including being called an "enemy of god" (ibid.). People also reportedly called for the death of the fictional character in the book (Al Arabiya News 24 Aug. 2014).

According to the IGLHRC country advisor, there is a campaign in Pakistan against people who "go against nature," that targets LGBT individuals, with banners stating that they should be thrown off cliffs or stoned to death, and similar messages posted on social media sites (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). According to the President of the Neengar Society, religious extremist groups began organizing protests against homosexuality after a diplomatic mission in Islamabad hosted an event by Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies (GLIFAA) (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014), an organization that represents LGBT people in US foreign affairs agencies (GLIFAA n.d.). Media sources report that in June 2011, the US embassy in Islamabad hosted an LGBT pride ceremony that resulted in public protests by Pakistani religious groups (Plus News Pakistan 7 July 2011; *The Nation* 9 July 2011; *CNS News* 5 July 2011), who accused the US of "cultural terrorism" (ibid.; Plus News Pakistan 7 July 2011).

### **4. Access to Employment**

Sources indicate that lesbians, bisexuals and gay men are not open about their sexual orientation at the workplace (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014; IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). According to the IGLHRC country advisor, if they come out in the open about their sexual orientation, they would "face problems at work" and "would likely face harassment to conform and might lose their jobs" (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). The WEWA representative similarly said that LGB people hide their identity at work because it would be "hard for them to continue" their job or they might lose their position if people at work found out (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014). According to the President of the Neengar Society, when their organization conducted a workshop on gender sensitivity, even though participants were open to having LGBT friends, 43 of 45 participants said they would not want to work with an LGBT person in their office because they wanted to present a "serious and professional environment" of their organization to the public (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014). He expressed the opinion that this showed that if someone revealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to their colleagues, it would cost the person his or her job (ibid.). The WEWA representative said that if LGB people revealed their identity at work, they might also face criminal charges (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014).

Both the WEWA representative and the President of the Neengar Society said that transgender people have difficulties finding employment in practice despite a Supreme Court ruling (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014; Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014) that protects their rights as equal citizens in Pakistan (ibid.) [4].

## 5. Access to Housing

Sources indicate that if a homosexual couple's sexual orientation is known, they will not be able to rent an apartment in Lahore, Islamabad or Karachi (WEWA 31 Dec. 2014; IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). Sources indicate that people are even reluctant to rent places to a single man or a single woman in these cities (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014; IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014), because they do not want their tenant to bring someone else into the home (ibid.). The president of the Neengar Society noted that the police in Lahore have issued orders not to rent out apartments to tenants without a "proper check," because of the "conservative culture" and the "increase in terrorism" (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014). According to the IGLHRC Country Advisor for Pakistan, two men or women might be able to rent a place if they keep their sexual orientation hidden, as it would appear that their motives were for economic reasons, but if they came out about their sexual orientation, "they would definitely have problems and lose their place to stay" (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). He noted that he did not know of any specific cases of housing discrimination, because gay men and lesbians keep their sexual orientation hidden (ibid.). Similarly, the President of the Neengar Society said that since people are not open about their sexual orientation, it is unknown how many lesbian and gay people face housing issues in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014). He was aware of a case in Islamabad, in which a male who had undergone sex reassignment surgery was asked to leave the house he rented and find another place to live, as well as a case from Lahore in which a lesbian couple could not find a place to live because they "looked like boys" (ibid.).

Sources indicate that transgender people in Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi have difficulty accessing housing in good neighbourhoods and usually live in slums (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014; Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014), "shabby areas near truck workshops" (ibid.), or "in the margins in these cities" (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014).

## 6. Specific Challenges for Lesbians

Both the WEWA representative and the IGLHRC country advisor said that lesbians are more vulnerable than gay men in terms of accessing housing and employment (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014; WEWA 31 Dec. 2014). The WEWA representative said that lesbians face more violence, and a greater chance of losing their housing or job if their sexual orientation is revealed (ibid.). The IGLHRC country advisor said that, regardless of sexual orientation, women face a lot more challenges accessing housing and employment, and may be subject to sexual harassment (IGLHRC 30 Dec. 2014). He explained that women who wish to live alone are viewed "suspiciously" by landlords (ibid.). The Neengar Society President said that in 2014, their organization handled two cases in which lesbian couples had to run away from their families and could not find jobs or housing in Lahore (Neengar Society 31 Dec. 2014).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### Notes

[1] The Women Employees Welfare Association (WEWA) is listed on ILGA's directory of LGBTI and allied organizations as an organization founded in 1995 that works for the lesbian and trans community (ILGA n.d.).

[2] The UN Human Rights Council's resolution, which was passed by 25 members of the 47-member council, expressed "grave concern at acts of violence and discrimination, in all regions of the world, committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity" (UN 2 Oct. 2014; *Daily Today's Muslim Peshawar* 28 Sept. 2014).

[3] Of the 41 LBT people interviewed, 12 self-identified as lesbians, 5 as bisexual women, 3 as female-to-male transgender individuals, and 17 as *khwajasara* (a transgender male who identifies as female) (IGLHRC 2014, 8). The majority of those interviewed were from Lahore, but there were also three interviewees from Karachi, one from Islamabad, and one from Multan (ibid.).

[4] According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that transgender people be recognized as a "third gender" who can obtain national identification cards, which allowed them to vote for the first time in the May 11 2013 elections (US 27 Feb. 2014, 57). Other related Supreme Court decisions include rulings protecting transgender people's rights in employment (*The Express Tribune* and *The International New York Times* 26 Sept. 2012; Foreign Policy 30

Mar. 2012), including access to civil service jobs (ibid.) and the right to adopt any profession (*The Express Tribune* and *The International New York Times* 26 Sept. 2012).

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact representatives of the following organization were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA).

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; Asia Human Rights Commission; ecoinet; *Dawn*; Freedom House; Global Gayz; Human Rights Watch; Integrated Regional Information Networks; International Federation for Human Rights; International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA); Pakistan – Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights; Pink News; United Nations – Refworld.

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