

# PRECARIZATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GOVERNING KHAWAJA SIRA COMMUNITY AND THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN PAKISTAN

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project examines the individual narratives of precarity, the structural issues of marginalization, and the formal and informal social protection networks available to Khawaja Siras. A key focus was on the impact of the Benazir Kafaalat Program's financial assistance on the lives of the Khawaja Sira community and hurdles they face. Their access to healthcare, education, housing stability, and identity documentation were also explored. Based on qualitative fieldwork in different districts, this project analyzes how everyday insecurity is shaped by administrative procedures, institutional coordination and welfare design.

The findings show that that routine governess processes produce Khawaja Sira precarity. It is neither accidental nor episodic. Although they are formally eligible for financial assistance, they are denied financial assistance on different pretexts like gender isn't updated in the system of NADRA, survey expired, biometric issues. Despite policy inclusion, procedural exclusion is causing socioeconomic vulnerability instead of addressing.

The research concludes that meagre intermittent financial assistance from BISP which is based on social safety net approach is marred by procedural hurdles and bureaucratic delays. It fails to bring them out of chronic poverty and offer no exit from precarity. The findings suggest that cash transfer alone cannot address the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of Khawaja Siras. A shift from residual model to social development model approach which focusses on equity, social justice, participation and empowerment, stable job opportunities, and addressing structural causes of poverty and exclusion can bring transformation into the lives of Khawaja Siras.

## **PREFACE**

This research report explores the individual narratives of precarity, structural issues of marginalization and formal and informal network of social protection available to Khawaja Sira community with a special focus on the impact of Benazir Kafalat Program's financial assistance in the lives of Khawaja siras. The idea of this research stemmed from my growing interest in listening to the voices of margins and exploring the lived realities of Khawaja siras who are forced to live in the geography of suffering and the untold stories of their resilience often overlooked in the mainstream discourse.

The scope of this research is to explore the several key dimensions of social inclusion and exclusion of Khawaja Sira community in Pakistan. Managed exposure to harm, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, policing livelihoods, crisis-shaped subjectivities, power dynamics of guru-chela system and the impact of financial assistance from BISP under Benazir Kafalat Program on the wellbeing of Khawaja siras.

This research project is the outcome of collaborative efforts of principal investigator and research team. The conceptualization of this project, development of theoretical and analytical frameworks and final report writing were executed by PI. PI also substantially conducted fieldwork interviews and contributed to transcription. Co-PIs contributed to fieldwork data collection and transcription which was immensely important for this project. Without their help, multidimensional fieldwork engaging Khawaja Siras, transgender activists, community-based organizations and institutional actors would not have been possible.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BISP	Benazir Income Support Program
BKP	Benazir Kafalat Program
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CM	Chief Minister
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
FSC	Federal Shariat Court
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MoHR	Ministry of Human Rights
MoPASS	Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety
MIS	Management Information System
NADRA	National database and Registration Authority
NSER	National Socio-Economic Registry
Non-BVS	Non-Biometric Verification System
PMT	Poverty Means Test
PSDF	Punjab Skill Development Fund
TEVTA	Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority
UNDP	United Nation Development Fund

## INTRODUCTION

The Pakistani *Khawaja siras* are made up of a diverse group of people with contested identities. They are socially produced and their lives are continuously shaped by uncertainty surrounding their self-perceived gender identity, expulsion from families, refuge in guru-chela system, everyday governance and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. A category of people who belong to non-conforming gender and have diverse lived experiences often face differential treatment when they interact with public institutions. Recent scholars are very cautious about defining *Khawaja Siras* in biological terms or based on their cultural traits. They emphasize that without understanding specific historical, legal and administrative contexts which contributed to structure, limit and formally recognize their identities through formal and informal systems, the essence of their lived experiences cannot be captured (Khan, 2016; Redding, 2021; Dutta, 2022).

Precarious conditions marked by threat and coercion limit their choices and freedoms. The public's perception about them is often shaped by their dazzling and erotic performances taking them to exotic realms and the lived realities of being *Khawaja sira* are mostly disregarded. Disempowered while forced to inhabit in the geographies of sufferings where precariousness is folded and refolded into oppressive forms of precarity. Inaccessibility to stable forms of employment constitutes a class of precariat and precariat they are. Dispossessed, socially excluded, economically marginalized and yet surviving on the margins tell an untold story of their resilience.

*Khawaja Siras* in Pakistan has an approximate population of 1.5 million (Pamment, 2010). As per 2017 census report, population of *Khawaja sira* community in Pakistan was 10,418. This undercount means officially most of their community don't exist. Azam (2023) further pinpointed that as per early estimates of census 2023 reports, population of *Khawaja Sira* community further declined by 35% in the Sindh province as if they vanished into thin air.

Regarding the acknowledgement of the rights of *Khawaja Sira* community in Pakistan, there has been a steady progress. In 2012, through a landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Pakistan recognized the transgender community's gender identity as a "third gender" and it was demonstrated to be a first step towards their social inclusion (Jaffari, 2022; Rehman, et al. 2024). Pakistani parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 and gave them right to inherit, to vote, education, employment, health, right of access to public places, right to property, assembly and to hold public office. In addition, the act also emphasized that fundamental rights mentioned in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 shall be available explicitly for every transgender person (GOP, 2018; Arqum et al., 2023).

Citing religious injunctions, the Federal Shariat Court temporarily suspended certain clauses of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 in 2023 pertaining to self-perceived gender identity and right to inheritance. More incidents of violence, abuse, and prejudice against the transgender community resulted from this ruling (UNDP, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023). The Ministry of Human Rights established a National Implementation Committee under the Transgender Persons Act 2018 (Dawn, 2020). Considering the socioeconomic difficulties that the transgender community faces, the decision to include them in the *Benazir Kafalat program* was made.

Registration of transgender people in the Benazir Kafalat Program, which is run under the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), has begun throughout the country.

The marginalization of Khawaja Siras is historically deep rooted in colonial governance where they were criminalized due to their non-conforming gender (Hinchy, 2019). It culminated in 1865 when NWP announced that its goal is to reduce the population of Khawaja Sira Community with the intention of exterminating them by creating a state of exception and reducing them to bare life.

Most of the *Khawaja Siras* reside in *deras*. *Dera* is a sanctuary providing refuge to *Khawaja Siras* who are driven out of their homes by their natal families because of their contested identities-a new home where they can find opportunities for personal growth and self-expression. *Dera* also operates as a unit of economic organization providing economic opportunities- a business centre where *Khawaja siras* are afforded key earning avenues (Zulfiqar, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this study examines how precarity is not merely experienced by Khawaja Siras but systematically produced and managed through intersecting regimes of governance. By analyzing institutional responses, welfare mechanisms, policing practices, and informal systems of social protection, the study seeks to understand how insecurity becomes normalized, sustained, and reproduced. It also studies what this reveals about the limits of rights-based inclusion in Pakistan.

### **1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This project examines several key dimensions of precarity in the lives of *Khawaja Sira* community in Pakistan. It delves deep into the intersectionality of governing arrangements, social protection, family rejection, formal and informal networks of social protection which are continuously producing and managing precarity in their lives. This project does not treat uncertainty as an accidental product of stigma and exclusion but how continuous insecurity surrounding their livelihoods, policing, their access to social protection and affective belonging are shaping up their survival and their encounters across institutions.

The scope of the study is based on empirical data collected from Lahore, Sargodha, Rawalpindi and Islamabad from both BISP and non-BISP beneficiaries, transgender activists, transgender community-based organizations and institutional actors. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to generate insight. This multi-site and multi-stake holders approach allowed us to closely study Khawaja Siras' interaction across different institutions, especially BISP with varying degrees of institutional access. This approach enabled this study to identify common patterns of procedural misalignment between different institutions, intermittent and contingent nature of financial assistance from BISP and informal network of social protection in the absence of formal network of social protection.

The purpose of this study is to document lived experiences of Khawaja Siras in terms of governance and social protection grounded in their interaction with public institutions. Particular focus of the study is on financial assistance from BISP, and the procedural hurdles faced by Khawaja Siras to get financial assistance ranging from eligibility, verification coupled with discretionary practices which are resulting in unstable and reversible access to financial assistance.

Beside it, this study also uncovers the power dynamics of guru-chela system as informal governance structure which is marked by protective-coercive duality where care, and authority coexist in the absence of any state social protection. The study aims to understand how Khawaja Siras steer through these layered forms of governance that oscillate between support and control by examining stakeholders' responses. Relying on the analytical synthesis of its findings, this study questions the limits of residual welfare models of social welfare and frames social development as more viable approach to address persistent vulnerability. Still remaining anchored in the institutional realities of Pakistan, this study contributes to broader discussions on precarity, governance and social protection.

## **1.2. Objectives**

1. To understand how continuous potential state of risk, coercive measures and socioeconomic vulnerabilities define the crisis-shaped subjectivities (navigating and adapting to perpetual state of insecurity while rearchitecting their identities, attachments and survival strategies in the process) of *Khawaja Siras* and shape public attitude towards them in Pakistan.
2. To assess whether the persistent lack of substantive social and political protection experienced by Khawaja Siras in Pakistan is the result of implementation gaps or reflects a recurring governance pattern in which recognition is granted without enforceable guarantees, rendering life administratively visible yet structurally unprotected.
3. To examine and document the institutional responses by government and civil society organizations to the social security needs of the *Khawaja Siras*.
4. To understand the power dynamics of guru-chela system; and to explore the informal networks of social protection on which *Khawaja Sira* community is reliant.
5. To explore the impact of cash benefits from BISP in terms of its long term and short-term objectives on *Khawaja Sira* community to improve their wellbeing and level of social protection.
6. To explore whether social development approach is more viable approach of social protection to address their socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

1. How continuous potential state of risk, persistent state of insecurity, coercive measures and socioeconomic vulnerabilities define the crisis-shaped subjectivities of *Khawaja Sira* community and shape public attitude towards them in Pakistan?
- 2 How does the persistent absence of substantive social and political protection for Khawaja Siras in Pakistan operate—does it stem from implementation failures, or does it reflect a recurring mode of governance in which legal recognition produces administrative visibility without enforceable guarantees?
3. How will the government and civil society organizations respond to social security needs and hurdles *Khawaja Sira* community face while getting financial assistance from Benazir *Kafaalat* program?

4. How does the hierarchical nature of relationships in guru-chela system influence the socioeconomic opportunities and personal liberties of *Khawaja Sira* community? In which ways informal networks of social protection contribute to the socioeconomic wellbeing of Khawaja Siras in Pakistan?
5. To what extent does financial assistance from the Benazir Income Support Program contribute to immediate stability and longer-term wellbeing for Khawaja Siras, and where do its limitations become evident?
6. How a social development approach is more viable framework to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities of Khawaja Siras in Pakistan?

#### **1.4. Relevance to Public Policy**

This research explores how conditions of precarity define the crisis-shaped subjectivities of *Khawaja Sira* community and evaluates the provision of social protection in Pakistan. This project explores the nuances and manifestation of precarization and how does it intersect with their access to social protection. This research aligns with the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 which aims at social inclusion of *Khawaja Siras* by giving them right to inherit, to vote, education, employment, health, right of access to public places, right to property, assembly and to hold public office and ensuring their constitutional rights. This research also aligns with the URAAN Pakistan-5Es Economic Transformation Plan- to turnaround Pakistan envisioned by Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. The fifth E of this program talks about empowering marginalized groups to unlock their true potential for growth and prosperity. This project aims at evaluating *Benazir Kafaalat* Program and identify barriers and suggest targeted interventions.

This project argues that residual models of welfare cannot alone address the problems faced by Khawaja Siras. Instead, it proposes that social development approach offers a framework for analyzing and reflecting on social protection in different contexts, as well as how citizens can impact their own well-being (Patel & Midgley, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Precarity is a state of persistent instability and insecurity that has drawn a lot of interest from sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and political scientists. Researchers study precarity as a complex issue that affects social protection, political rights, health, and employment (Butler, 2009). Butler (2004, 2009) distinguishes between precariousness—the universal human condition of vulnerability—and precarity, which refers to politically and socially induced instability distributed unequally across populations. Building on this, Lorey (2015) proposes a threefold model: Precariousness (existential vulnerability), Precarity (socially differentiated insecurity) and Governmental precarization (state policies managing populations through controlled insecurity). This framework highlights how precarity is not simply an individual condition but a structural and political construct reproduced by social institutions, labor markets, and governance systems.

According to anthropologists like Anne Allison (2016), precarity encompasses both subjective lived experiences and objective structural factors. Subjective precarity refers to people's views of insecurity and volatility in their life, whereas structural precarity results from shifting political and economic regimes. Precarity is the "radical uncertainty of everyday life," in which people do not have a clear path to social and economic security. Molé (2010) demonstrates that precarity impacts both material resources and emotional well-being by demonstrating how workplace harassment in neoliberal Italy causes workers to experience chronic worry.

Precarity for transgender persons in Pakistan is concentrated and multidimensional, encompassing social, legal, economic, and health aspects. Transgender people continue to face structural insecurity due to economic marginalization, abuse, and exclusion, despite recent advancements in legal recognition (ICJ, 2020). An important step in ensuring transgender people's rights to identification, education, employment, and anti-discrimination protection was the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018. Nonetheless, a number of evaluations point to a sizable implementation gap. Despite legal recognition, bureaucratic obstacles, a lack of knowledge, and ingrained social stigma prevent transgender people from obtaining services and rights (Amnesty International, 2023). Even though the legislation calls for anti-discrimination procedures, inclusive education, and job quotas, these policies are not always implemented, leaving people vulnerable.

The *Khawaja sira* identity is unique in that it challenges the artificial stability, desirability, and normalcy of the other gender identities. Most of them reject the masculine identity that society views as the most desirable, which is one of the main reasons their thirdness is viewed as so dangerous. Because of this cardinal sin, their lives become an unbearable maze caused by the authoritarian regimes in society. Thirdness is defined as a condition of flux, possibility, and in-betweenness where the stability of accepted conceptions of culture, space, and society are called into question. To open up new ways of conceptualizing human identity and relationships, the *Khawaja Sira* community holds a (limited) space of agency and potentiality, which is communicated through thirdness. But the prevailing social structures of governance ensure that this potential is severely constrained (Nisar, 2022).

A Khyber Pakhtunkwa, Pakistan based study explored financial linkages between chelas and gurus in Khawaja Sira communities to learn about their experiences with Guru-chela culture. The findings

demonstrated how financial interactions within guru-chela relationships are reflective of larger social forces, reproducing kinship structures, Islamic gift-giving systems, and capitalist processes occurring within Pakhtun society. The study identified that financial relationships were highly structured in guru-chela system, financial exchanges can be mutually beneficial, payment and debt systems can be exploitative and financial ties to gurus continue throughout the life course of Khawaja sira (Azhar et al., 2023).

Transgender experiences of precarity in Pakistan are not uniform. Individuals' vulnerabilities are shaped differently by factors like gender identity, socioeconomic class, education level, and geographic location. For instance, trans women are more visible in the public eye, which presents both opportunities and risks, but trans men are less visible and frequently excluded from community support systems (Naz, 2021). Comparatively speaking to their urban counterparts, transgender people in rural regions experience worse economic circumstances and less access to institutional support (UNDP, 2023). Therefore, rather than using one-size-fits-all approaches to address precarity, intersectional, context-sensitive tactics are needed.

In Pakistan, interrelated legal, economic, social, and health-based uncertainties lead to precarity among transgender populations. Notwithstanding the notable advancements made by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, its efficacy is nevertheless threatened by implementation flaws, enduring stigma, institutional discrimination, and violence. Transgender people would continue to be disproportionately impacted by structural instability and exclusion in the absence of consistent political commitment, inclusive policy frameworks, and community-centered initiatives (Amnesty International, 2023; ICJ, 2020).

People who are not allowed to have legal or political representation fall under the "bare life" category. The person who best captures the misery of "bare life" in Giorgio Agamben's mind is the stateless refugee. Downey (2009) suggests, however, that this be expanded to include political prisoners, the disappeared, torture victims, and the dispossessed, all of whom are excluded, in varying degrees, from the social sphere and have recourse to international law and the nation-state's safety net. The idea of "bare life" also offers an important lens through which to view contemporary art practices that address human rights, migration, statelessness, diasporic communities, and conflict zones; none more so than when they depict the "zones of indistinction" that are assigned to "bare life."

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This qualitative research explored the subjective experiences of *Khawaja Siras*. According to Patton (2015), qualitative research provides an exploratory research design that sheds light on meanings and meaning making processes and the ways people make sense of the world. This research design offered to investigate governance practices, access to financial assistance from BISP, everyday encounters with public institutions, informal network of social protection and crisis-shaped subjectivities of *Khawaja Siras* which could be understood by applying quantitative approaches.

### **3.2. Universe of Research**

The research universe was Sargodha, Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Lahore. Lahore was selected as most of the beneficiaries of Benazir Kafalat Program were housed in Lahore as per administrative data. As per 2023 census report, total population of *Khawaja sira* in Pakistan is 20,331 whereas 13,957 *Khawaja Siras* are residing in Punjab only. Moreover, 381 *Khawaja Siras* are residing in Sargodha, 1,344 in Rawalpindi and 270 in Islamabad (GOP, 2023). The human universe of this project were *Khawaja Siras* and *Khawaja Sira* civil society organizations and BISP officials.

### **3.3. Sampling Strategy**

For *Khawaja Sira* community that is heavily reliant upon informal social protection, snowball sampling method was used for them as a target population is hard to find. As noted by Noy (2008), snowball sampling is often promoted as a technique to be used in situations when probability sampling is impractical or impossible, such as when attempting to sample groups that are difficult to reach due to a lack of a sampling frame.

For *Khawaja Siras* listed as BISP beneficiaries in administrative data received from BISP, purposive sampling was used. As per administrative data, there were 08 listed beneficiaries in Sargodha, 03 in Rawalpindi, zero in Islamabad and 18 in Lahore. Four *Khawaja Siras* were hired to get access to deras for data collection.

### **3.4. Data Collection Method**

An unstructured interview guide for narrative interviews was used to collect primary data from *Khawaja Siras*. The number of interviews was based upon saturation of data. According to Charmaz (2006), data collection should stop when categories are saturated, which means that acquiring new data should no longer yield novel insights or uncover previously undiscovered features. At this point, your sample size is sufficient. Moreover, the responses of BISP officials and *Khawaja Sira* civil society organization were also documented by using a semi-structured interview guide. Two focus group discussions were conducted to uncover the hurdles faced by *Khawaja Sira* community to access networks of social protection.

Data was collected from Sargodha, Rawalpindi, Islamabad and Lahore. Out of 08 listed beneficiaries of BKF as per administrative data, we were able to conduct interviews with 06 listed beneficiaries in Sargodha. 15 non-BISP *Khawaja Siras* and 02 activists along with One community-based organization in Sargodha were also interviewed. 02 BISP listed beneficiaries in Rawalpindi, 18 non-

BISP Khawaja Siras, 03 activists and 02 community-based organizations were interviewed in twin cities. In Lahore, 09 Khawaja Siras were interviewed and 04 of them were listed BISP beneficiaries. Responses of BISP officials regarding the issues faced by Khawaja Sira community in getting financial assistance were recorded.

**3.5. Data Analysis**

Narrative and thematic analysis were used as approaches to qualitative data analysis. Narrative analyses were used to comprehend how Khawaja Siras make sense of their personal experiences. Moreover, it was used to identify recurring themes. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns.

**3.6. Ethical Considerations**

Adams et al. (2017) outlined guideline and ethical considerations while conducting research on transgender community which include non-stigmatizing language to avoid the risk of alienating participants, meaningful informed consent without any coercion, ensuring privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of participants were applied. Anonymity was ensured by removing all identifying details of Khawaja Sira participants, institutional representatives and civil society actors.

**3.7. Conceptual Framework**

*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*



*Source: Authors' computations.*

*Figure 2: Concepts and Constructs*

<p><b>Precarization</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> The process of making individuals' lives and work conditions unstable and insecure.</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> Job insecurity, lack of social protection, continuous potential state of risk, threat and coercion, living with unforeseeable and contingency</p>
<p><b>State of Exception</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> It refers to the normalization of suspended protections within everyday governance, where legality persists but effective access does not</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> Inclusion through suspension, Administrative visibility without security, procedural exposure, conditional personhood, reversible recognition</p>
<p><b>Bare Life</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> A state where legal recognition exists without enforceable rights</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> formal validity of law, suspension of effective protection, Administrative mediation of rights, Indefinite Deferral, Conditional Recognition</p>
<p><b>Crisis-Shaped Subjectivities</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> The ways in which individuals' identities, perceptions, and behaviors are shaped by crises.</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> Anticipatory insecurity, Adaptive compliance, Conditional self-worth, fragmented belonging, Crisis-normalization</p>
<p><b>Guru-Chela System</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> A traditional relationship within the Khawaja Sira community where a Guru provides guidance and support to Chela.</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> Roles and responsibilities, social protection, power dynamics, exploitation.</p>
<p><b>Social Protection</b></p>	<p><b>Concept:</b> Measures designed to provide security and support to individuals, especially the vulnerable.</p>	<p><b>Constructs:</b> Access to healthcare, education, financial assistance, housing stability.</p>

<b>Exploitation</b>	<b>Concept:</b> The unfair treatment or use of individuals for personal gain.	<b>Constructs:</b> Financial exploitation, labor exploitation, psychological manipulation.
<b>Power Dynamics</b>	<b>Concept:</b> The distribution and exercise of power within relationships and systems.	<b>Constructs:</b> Control, dependency, authority, influence.
<b>Community Support Systems</b>	<b>Concept:</b> Networks and mechanisms within a community that provide support and resources.	<b>Constructs:</b> Peer support, community organizations, informal networks.

*Source: Authors' computations.*

### 3.8. Operational Definitions of Key Concepts

**Precarization:** Precarization is a systematic process by which the Khawaja Sira community in Pakistan experiences unstable, uncertain, and insecure living situations, especially regarding their means of subsistence, and access to social and state resources.

**Crisis-shaped Subjectivities:** Crisis-shaped subjectivities are operationalized how Khawaja Sira community navigate and adapt to persistent, unending and perpetual state of insecurity while rearchitecting their identities, attachments and survival strategies in the process. Indicators like adapting to persistent state of insecurity and rearchitecting their identities, attachments and survival strategies in the process are used in this project to define crisis-shaped subjectivities.

**Bare Life:** Bare life, in this project, refers to a condition in which Khawaja Siras are legally acknowledged and administratively recorded but systematically deprived of stable, enforceable social and political protections. As a result, their survival is dependent on contingent, reversible, and discretionary arrangements.

**State of Exception:** In this project, the state of exception is operationalized as a condition in which ordinary legal and administrative rules formally remain in force but are selectively suspended, deferred, or unevenly applied in practice, producing a zone where Khawaja Siras are governed through discretionary decision-making rather than enforceable guarantees.

**Social protection:** Social protection of Khawaja Sira community refers to the measures designed to provide security and support systems that preserve their well-being and decrease socio-economic vulnerabilities. Indicators like access to healthcare, education, financial assistance and housing stability are used in this study.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Theme 1: Institutional Factors Contributing to Persistent Instability**

#### ***4.1.1. Theme Overview***

Interviews, focus group discussions, and institutional accounts reveal that precarity does not appear as an accidental result of poverty or social exclusion. Participants rarely described insecurity as a transient phase. Instead, it emerged in these accounts as a recurrent outcome of administrative and institution processes.

In this dataset, insecurity is not primarily something governance addresses. It is something governance works through.

Precarity is generated through a combination of unstable livelihoods and interrupted welfare access. Conditional recognition, inconsistent documentation, and uneven enforcement also result in precarity. These elements did not appear in isolation. They are repeatedly observed across institutional encounters.

What participants encountered was a state that remained visible through rules, paperwork, verification demands, and policing. At the same time, it disappears at the point where continuity, accountability, or long-term security would have stabilized their lives.

Governance, in this sense, did not rely on explicit prohibition. It operated through uncertainty. Assistance could begin and then disappear. At times sources of livelihood were tolerated and at other times penalized. Recognition existed but rarely translated into enforceable entitlements. Survival remained provisional rather than secured.

#### ***4.1.2. Sub-pattern 1: Uncertainty as a Persistent Condition***

The normalization of uncertainty surfaced as a repeated pattern across narratives. Participants were of the view that their lives were organized around not knowing whether income, housing, healthcare, or assistance would continue or just stall.

Many narratives confirmed that this uncertainty was not episodic. It was expected.

One participant explained:

“BISP financial assistance gives us breathing space. When it stops coming. We don’t complain. We just adjust.”

Another noted:

“They give us financial assistance for two quarters, then complete silence. After that, they stop answering.”

Uncertainty extended beyond welfare into everyday survival. Public functions were allowed as it served as a stable form of income and then restricted. Begging was tolerated in some periods and criminalized in others. Enforcement practices shifted without warning.

As one participant put it:

“Today they allow us begging in streets, tomorrow they arrest us. Nothing but uncertainty surrounds us.”

Clarity or predictability did not define governance practices. Instability did. Resulting survival strategies which Khawaja Siras employed to navigate were flexibility, cautious, and non-confrontation.

#### ***4.1.3. Sub-pattern 2: Conditional Access to Survival Resources***

Data showed that access to survival is defined by conditionality rather than a guaranteed right. Financial support depended on documentation status, behavior, visibility, and compliance.

While BISP officials repeatedly affirmed the eligibility of Khawaja Siras, failures across NADRA, NSER, and MIS interfaces prevented eligibility from translating into regular access. From the perspective of participants, this conditionality was experienced less as a means of support and more as a way of disciplining.

One participant explained:

“If you keep talking, your name would be removed. If you stay quiet, maybe you get your installment.”

Conditionality was not limited to state institutions. Family relations and housing arrangements were also characterized by conditionality. The moment you stop making financial contributions, support was often withdrawn by families.

Another participant said:

“As long as money goes home, we are tolerated. When it stops, our relations with family soars.”

In these lived experiences, survival did not appear as an entitlement. It surfaced as a negotiated outcome, continuously vulnerable to discontinuation.

#### ***4.1.4. Sub-pattern 3: Administrative Delay and Prolonged Processing***

Documentation, verification, and welfare processing are marked by chronic delays in these accounts. It emerged as a central mechanism through which precarity was sustained. No one denied assistance outrightly. More often, it was kept pending.

One participant described repeated visits to BISP offices:

“Every time they say, ‘your case is in process.’ Years elapse.”

Another participant explained:

“Despite a favorable decision from the Ombudsperson, I never got any payments even after elapsing one year”.

In these accounts, delay acted as a form of governance without refusal. Culture of shifting responsibility never resolved complaints, and accountability remained an elusive idea. Eligible applicants were left suspended between eligibility and abandonment.

#### ***4.1.5. Sub-pattern 4: Policing Practices and Risk Exposure***

Policing practices actively reinforced precarity in the lives of Khawaja Siras. Sources of income that were unofficially tolerated were repeatedly disrupted, be it begging, performance, or ritual labor. It caused nightmares and financial loss.

One participant stated:

“Police don’t stop crime. They are there to stop us. Because we are visible in public spaces.”

Another recalled:

“First, they extort money from us. Then they ask questions.”

Participants also described broken protection mechanisms.

As one explained:

“At Tahufuz Centres, we are treated with dignity. Outside, it is the same old story.”

Policing resulted in precarity instead of eliminating it. Survival was characterized by risk and humiliation.

#### ***4.1.6. Sub-pattern 5: Limited Exit Pathways from Insecurity***

Absence of exit pathways emerged as a defining characteristic of precarization across interviews. Despite having skills, training and a strong desire to move out of insecure conditions, many participants remained stuck there despite their earnest efforts.

One participant stated:

“I have skills. I want to work peacefully and earn my livelihood. But no one lets me do that.”

Another summed up:

“Earning is tied to youth in our culture. After that, only waiting remains.”

Over the period of time, insecurity accumulated in the absence of stable employment, disability support or elderly care. It deepened instead of decreasing.

#### ***4.1.7. Analytical Synthesis***

Combined narrative emerged from these accounts clearly indicates that precarity was not merely of experiential nature. It was administered.

Governance was characterized by uncertainty instead of assurance, conditionality instead of entitlement, delay instead of refusal, and policing instead of protection. Assistance appeared to keep them afloat but not to ensure stability.

This way of governance ensured that Khawaja Siras were visible enough to be regulated, albeit insecure enough to remain dependent.

## **4.2. Theme 2: Conditional and Interrupted Access to Social Protection**

### **4.2.1. Theme Overview**

In Khawaja Siras accounts across interviews, focus group discussions, and institutional responses, social protection did not appear as an inalienable right. Instead, it surfaced as a conditional and revokable backend mechanism for managing insecurity instead of resolving it.

Participants described their access to education, healthcare, financial assistance, and housing as something resting in legislative papers with fragmented application. Intermittent access without continuity was reported. Assistance was surrounded by uncertainty which could commence, pause, and vanish without explanation.

Instead of functioning as a safety net, social protection causes uncertainty. Partial and unstable inclusion in BISP made this program ineffective. Khawaja Siras were intermittently recognized, temporarily enrolled, and repeatedly displaced within welfare system which was meant to mitigate their miseries.

### **4.2.2. Sub-pattern 1: Temporary Inclusion and Reversible Access**

Participants consistently described financial assistance from BISP as something that could be granted for a period and withdrawn without giving any plausible justification. Inclusion felt short-lived and revocable. Financial assistance from BISP never sustained for a longer period to end their chronic poverty.

One participant explained:

“I received many quarterly installments. Then the financial assistance stalled. Despite several visits to BISP office, no one answered what happened.”

Another stated:

“Though our names were registered, surveys were conducted but financial assistance never came. On paper we existed.”

Institutional actors indirectly confirmed this gap. Eligibility was acknowledged, but cases failed to progress due to verification processes that remained unresolved.

Recognition was normalized but without delivery. Being eligible did not guarantee financial support and even being listed in BISP beneficiary data could stall your payments on different pretexts like gender isn't updated in NADRA system, survey expired, biometric issues etc.

### **4.2.3. Sub-pattern 2: Verification Procedures as Barriers**

Verification procedures were repeatedly experienced as a way of punishment not a way of facilitation. After receiving two quarterly installments, payment halted and the reason given by BISP officials was “Gender isn't updated in NADRA system” as few participants reported. What it reveals is that identity is not aligned at the backend system even when X-gender card is issued. Biometric authentication failure, survey expired were some of the responses told by the participants. In cases of biometric authentication failures, non-biometric verification systems were hardly initiated though

system exist whereas application does not. Instead of resolving access, documentation requirements multiplied.

One participant explained:

“At each visit to BISP office, officials bring a new requirement. Every visit makes you poorer as travelling costs are mounting.”

Another noted:

“They say your fingerprint mismatch. But my hands are the same. Only the machine refuses to accept my identity.”

Contradictory timelines for verification process were given by BISP officials and NADRA officials embedded in BISP office. BISP officials claimed verification process takes 1.5 years whereas NADRA officials embedded in BISP offices contradicted this claim and said verification process on our end is completed in six months. It's important to note that survey expires in two years. Verification became an unending cycle rather than a process.

Focus group discussions revealed that a cohort of 30 applicants with a valid X-gender CNIC applied for financial assistance from Benazir Kafalat Program and did not receive any payments despite meeting eligibility requirements. Another cohort of 10 applicants from another site of study experienced the identical outcome. Two cases from interview accounts revealed that despite favorable decisions from Ombudsperson office, they never got any financial assistance. What it means is that eligibility is symbolic not functional. Administrative remedies lack binding force. Exclusion is procedural. No single node is responsible for payment failure.

Time itself became a governing mechanism. Exclusion without refusal and procedural delay without denial became the norm of evasion in these administrative spaces.

#### ***4.2.4. Sub-pattern 3: Episodic Nature of Financial Assistance***

Financial assistance received under BISP was described as a source of momentary stabilizing relief. The amount was insufficient to ensure access to necessities of life. Financial assistance under BISP was intermittent and short-lived.

One participant stated:

“It did not make me secure. It allowed me to breathe.”

Another explained:

“With that money, I could manage rent and medicine. When it stopped, everything collapsed again.”

The reason behind this episodic relief is that survey expires in two years and verification process is completed in 1.5 years which effectively means that after two installments, they must reapply for survey. Instead of transforming their lives, assistance functioned as interruption. Relief only arrived to disappear.

Out of 08 listed BISP beneficiaries in Sargodha, no one was getting financial assistance under this program currently. In Islamabad, there were no listed Khawaja Sira beneficiaries of BISP. In

Rawalpindi, there were three listed BISP beneficiaries, but none was getting any financial assistance. In Lahore, there were 18 listed BISP beneficiaries, we interviewed nine and only four were currently getting financial assistance under this flagship program.

As a matter of fact, financial assistance did not reduce vulnerability over time. It temporarily slowed down its most severe effects.

#### ***4.2.5. Sub-pattern 4: Housing Insecurity and Lack of Shelter Support***

Housing stability remained largely absent. Participants were living in rented houses and even there their existence was questioned. They were under constant threat of eviction due to neighborhood pressure, stigma, or policing.

One participant stated:

“When we grow old, we have no places to live other than rented rooms until saving ends.”

Lack of housing security showed a persistent gap within social protection systems.

#### ***4.2.6. Sub-pattern 5: Social Protection as Discipline***

Interaction of Khawaja Siras across welfare, health, and administrative encounters proved that experiential nature of social protection was disciplinary rather than supportive.

One participant stated:

“Arguments even for rights is not tolerated. Staying quite can work in your favor”.

Another summarized:

“They do not help us to live. They help us to stay silent.”

There were implicit rewards for compliance, silence, and endurance whereas questioning and visibility could expose you to risk.

#### ***4.2.7. Analytical Summary***

In essence, these accounts illustrate that social protection acted as a conditional, revocable, and precarizing system of governance.

Despite formal recognition of right to get cash benefit from BISP procedural obstruction took the central stage. Assistance was given and then routinely stopped. Administrative incoherence intensified these dynamics. It pushed Khawaja Siras to seek refuge in informal network of social protection.

In crux, social protection systems which were designed to eliminate precarity, exacerbated and reorganized it in practice.

### **4.3. Theme 3: The Guru–Chela System as an Informal Governance Structure**

#### ***4.3.1. Theme Overview***

Accounts from Khawaja Sira participants unraveled that the guru–chela system was not simply a cultural arrangement or informal network of kinship. It is a governing structure that regulates the

conditions of daily living. It administers access to shelter, mobility, labor, income, discipline, conflict resolution, and social identity. Within context of sustained uncertainty created by familial withdrawal of support and inconsistent and inaccessible state protection, guru formally assumes functions related to governance.

The authority exercised within the guru–chela system is characterized by protective-coercive duality. In an exclusionary environment, it offers resources for immediate survival including housing, community recognition, collective protection and territorial legitimacy on one hand. On the other hand, it establishes a hierarchical nature of relationship where autonomy is restricted, labor and income are extracted. It also enforces obedience through punishment and surveillance. Entry into this system is rarely a matter of free choice. Instead, it is most often induced by violence, fear, expulsion, or the absence of viable alternative choices. Even where the possibility of leaving this system exists, it is fraught with high social, economic, and physical costs.

Instead of functioning as a uniform institution, the guru–chela system operates as a stratified power structure. It nurtures care and coercion simultaneously. Due to the failure of other protective structures, be it family, welfare institutions, law enforcement to provide reliable security, gurus assume governing authority. In this sense, guru-chela system is embedded in governance structure and the spaces where formal structures either withdrew or rendered ineffective. These spaces constitute the governing regime of gurus.

#### ***4.3.2. Sub-pattern 1: Entry into Guru-Chela System after Family Rejection***

Rejection, unacceptability, confinement or perpetual violence by family members or in some cases desire to live a life in one’s own way as per self-perceived gender identity push Khawaja Siras to enter into the guru–chela system. Participants said that leaving home was not a choice but a survival strategy under extreme unbearable conditions.

As one participant explained, she did not join this guru-chela arrangement out of aspiration, physical abuse forced her to leave home where she did not belong. Others recalled locking in rooms at the arrival of guests to avoid embarrassment, pushing them into social invisibility, disciplined within family homes before being driven out entirely. For many, this transition occurred at an early age, when fear and vulnerability were already deeply encoded.

The ritualized incorporation in this parallel governing structure is often portrayed as rescue or protection. It simultaneously establishes a new hierarchical nature of relationship which is marked by obedience as the condition of survival.

#### ***4.3.3. Sub-pattern 2: Regulation of Everyday Life***

Everyday life within the guru–chela system is characterized by extensive regulation. Participants narrated that even basic routines like eating, movement and social interaction were administered limiting their own control. Approval was required to leave the dera, undertake work, or engage with outsiders.

Centralization of authority was in place to manage labor allocation. It’s the prerogative of the Gurus to determine who performs at functions, who is sent to beg in the streets, who performs domestic

labor, and who is instructed toward more exploitative forms of work. Younger and more visibly good-looking Khawaja Siras were often chosen for income-generating activities. Their consent was never taken as some accounts revealed.

Within this structure, survival is conditioned to compliance. Defiance, be it verbal, non-verbal, behavioral, or economic have immediate consequences. This reinforces a system where free will and autonomy is systematically controlled.

#### ***4.3.4. Sub-pattern 3: Income Control and Economic Dependence***

Extraction of income by gurus emerged as a recurring pattern across narratives. Income coming from begging, performance, or sex work were routinely collected, sometimes partially and sometimes fully, by gurus. Transparency in income distribution was hardly observed, and decisions were taken unilaterally by gurus, participants narrated.

Beside extraction, some chelas described explicit commodification. The practice for the transfer of chelas between gurus in exchange for money established a master-slave relationship in this hierarchy. Formalization of dependency, conversion of vulnerability into obligation resulted in a predicament of economic subservience which is hard to escape.

These practices are transforming care into control and survival into indebtedness. It's a way of strengthening hierarchical relations via economic means.

#### ***4.3.5. Sub-pattern 4: Social Sanctions and Community-Imposed Isolation***

Constant monitoring, financial penalties, humiliation, and the threat of excommunication are the ways to exercise disciplinary power within these governing arrangements. Punishment operates at both material and symbolic levels.

Excommunication—*huqqa pani band*—surfaces as the most severe sanction. Ex-communicados who are subjected to this form of social erasure are denied assistance, communication, and recognition within the community. This oversight goes beyond the *dera* where others are warned not to provide credit, shelter, or support.

Compliance is ensured by these mechanisms without the need for continuous physical force. These mechanisms in return create a regime where social death serves as a credible and ever-present threat.

#### ***4.3.6. Sub-pattern 5: Protection Without Enforceable Rights***

Despite its intimidating nature, the guru-chela system also serves as a source of protection. Participants registered their responses that they were highly reliant upon their gurus to negotiate their conflicts with police, landlords, and neighborhood. Living on the edges without any institutional backing, the only channel available to them is their guru whose reputation and social capital shield them against harassment.

However, this protection is not rights-based rather it is personalized. Safety is dependent on the goodwill, capacity, and willingness of the guru to act, not on enforceable guarantees. As a result, protection remains provisional and uneven. It strengthens dependence rather than autonomy.

#### ***4.3.7. Analytical Synthesis***

As a whole, these findings divulge that the guru–chela system is a parallel governance structure that shapes Khawaja Sira lives in situations where formal protection is either completely absent or unreliable. Incorporating chelas into system after expulsion from homes, regulating daily life, extracting and commodifying labor, delivering protection without rights, disciplining through erasing social personhood is the way of governance in this regime.

Ambivalence is where this system’s power resides. It offers shelter, recognition, and mediation where the state does not. It does so from the position authority which is marked by personalization, unaccountability, and coercion. Instead of addressing precarity, it redeploys and manages it. During this process survival is ensured while exit and autonomy is confiscated.

In this way, the guru–chela system reflects the broader governance environment documented in this study. In this system care is conditional, protection is extractive, and stability is permanently provisional.

#### **4.4. Theme 4: Policing Practices and Livelihood Instability**

##### ***4.4.1. Theme Overview***

In these accounts, policing surfaces as a central mechanism which renders Khawaja Sira livelihoods unstable and continually insecure. Instead of being a source of protection, law enforcement acted as a disciplinary force. It targets everyday survival practices whether it is begging, cultural performance, or even presence in public spaces.

Criminalization in this context is not solely reliant upon formal legal prohibition. Instead, it is generated via selective enforcement and discretionary harassment. It is also produced by short-term detention, and informal extraction of earnings. These practices create a governance environment where survival itself becomes justification for suspicion. Policing thus operates as an instrument of precarization, limiting earning options. In doing so, it deepens Khawaja Siras’ reliance on informal arrangements such as guru networks.

##### ***4.4.2. Sub-pattern 1: Begging as Residual Economy and Punished Livelihood***

Despite the absence of any alternative viable income sources, several participants told that they were detained simply for soliciting alms. These unlawful detentions did not erase the need for rent, food, or medicine. They merely unsettled the already shaky survival arrangements. Here begging becomes a paradox. It is a structural product of exclusion yet punished as deviant behavior. This paradoxical nature of begging entraps Khawaja Siras in a cyclic form of detention, release, and renewed vulnerability.

##### ***4.4.3. Sub-pattern 2: Detention, Informal Penalties, and Economic Loss***

Interviews revealed that encounters with police were frequently extractive in nature. Participants reported that after arrests, rarely formal charges were pressed or legal proceedings initiated. Instead, imprisonment often terminated after informal payments, verbal abuse, or interim confinement.

Such interactions with police suggest that even the vulnerability of those depending on residual economies is cashed. In this way, imprisonment becomes an instrument of economic extraction instead of accountability. It strengthens differential power relations.

#### ***4.4.4. Sub-pattern 3: Disruption of Cultural and Performative Labor***

Cultural performance at weddings and celebrations are historically among the very few socially tolerated forms of Khawaja Sira labor. Now these cultural performances have increasingly been targeted through policing. Raids on functions, stripping them away of their earnings, and use of force were described in these accounts.

Selective application of restrictions on gatherings and sound systems was reported by the Khawaja Siras. These selective applications were disproportionately affecting their performances. This regulation is unevenly distributed across populations. It disciplines marginalized performers while leaving mainstream practices mainly untouched.

#### ***4.4.5. Sub-pattern 4: Conditional Protection and Differential Treatment***

Participants drew sharp contrasts between routine police encounters in public spaces and those occurring in Tahafuz Centres under conditions of oversight or institutional monitoring. Policing behavior was linked with external accountability mechanisms. Wherever they are in place, behavior reportedly improved.

This contrast demonstrates that responsible policing is possible. Instead, temporary and selective extension of protection reinforce the conditional nature of safety. Respectable treatment does not appear as a norm but as an exception.

#### ***4.4.6. Analytical Synthesis***

Considered collectively, these findings betray that the everyday policing practices criminalize Khawaja Sira sources of income. Begging, cultural performance, and public presence are treated as offenses in some accounts despite the fact they did not violate any laws. The reason lies somewhere else. They are defying normative expectations of gender, respectability, and social order.

This is how policing works here as governance through insecurity. It restricts income, regulate spaces, and extract value from vulnerability. Instead of minimizing risk, law enforcement frequently produces it. This is how dependence on informal systems is reinforced and precarity deepened. Honorable treatment under conditions of oversight were present which means that alternative practices in policing are possible. The selective distribution of dignity rather than absence of policy is the core issue.

In this context, criminalization is employed as a structural strategy. It aims to govern structurally displaced and systematically marginalized lives. As a result, it renders survival itself punishable.

### **4.5. Theme 5: Documentation Practices, Identity, and Access Constraints**

#### ***4.5.1. Theme Overview***

Interviews and institutional accounts divulge that identity documentation, especially the national identity card and its gender marker, does not function as a mechanism of stabilization of citizenship

for Khawaja Siras. Instead, documentation surfaces as a site of uncertainty, risk, and conditional belonging in these accounts. Instead of solving the issue of exclusion, documentary processes generate new modes of vulnerability. In doing so, documentations repeatedly determine access to welfare, mobility, inheritance, employment.

Legal recognition carries provisional status and bureaucratic discretion, and informal gatekeeping are continually reshaping it. Even after documenting their identity, security never follows. Rather it is something that more frequently turns into a new surface where the delay, surveillance and institutional withdrawal are practiced. In this context, documentation never establishes identity but destabilizes it.

#### ***4.5.2. Sub-pattern 1: Identity Recognition without Functional Access***

The interviewees regularly termed gender-marked identity cards as symbolically reinforcing but practically handicapping. Although documentation was commonly understood as recognition of selfhood, it could seldom open the everyday rights or services.

A few interviewees explained that in principal X-gender identity cards exist but the symbolic meaning of CNICs is lost in routine governance encounters. Others noted that X-gender CNICs confirmed their gender identity, yet it simultaneously restricted travel to Holy Places in Saudi Arabia, service access, or institutional engagement. These accounts point towards a deep gap as these identity documents give them legal recognition but their usability in administration is low. Documentation confers visibility without seamless data synchronization across institutions which produce dysfunctional formal inclusion.

#### ***4.5.3. Sub-pattern 2: Risk Management and Strategic Documentation Choices***

Contrary to assumptions of universal demand for recognition, many participants deliberately avoided applying for X-gender CNIC. These decisions were not shaped by gender expression or affirmation. Surprisingly, calculations of risk shaped them.

Participants expressed fears that shifting to X-gender CNIC could compromise their inheritance claims, disrupt already weakened family ties. Some perceived that it was safe to stay with older identity documents. It was their protective strategy rather than denial of identity. A form of strategic citizenship is reflected in these practices that within an unstable legal environment, documentation choices are governed by survival logic.

#### ***4.5.4. Sub-pattern 3: Documentation as an Endless Process***

Documentation was repeatedly described as open-ended rather than conclusive. They completed requirements and then they were asked to complete another set of requirements resulting in a cyclic administrative engagement.

Participants recalled repeated visits to NADRA, BISP, and related offices. In these offices compliance with one set of requirements led to the emergence of additional conditions, creating a situation where requirements never settle. These accounts show that documentation is not a conclusive administrative act, rather it is an open-ended process. It is a way of prolonging exposure to scrutiny and uncertainty.

#### ***4.5.5. Sub-pattern 5: Documentation as a Conditional Point of Access***

Identity documentation, X-gender CNIC functioned as the primary point of access to welfare schemes like BISP, yet possession of valid identity marker did not guarantee access. Participants described situations where systems acknowledged their eligibility for financial assistance from BISP, but that eligibility never actualized into financial assistance.

Here documentation is a way of rendering Khawaja Siras administratively visible while deliberately delaying policy-mandated financial benefits. Visibility without delivery became the new normal. It signals that recognition alone was not sufficient to receive material benefits.

#### ***4.5.6. Sub-pattern 6: Documentation and Moral Recognition***

For some participants, documentation carried significance beyond administrative access. Some participants described that they did not change their male CNICs because dying with X-gender means being unclaimed. Male gender marker was linked to dignity, recognition in death, and inclusion in moral community.

Participants wanted to retain male gender identity card. As this gender marker ensures respectful burial by family. In these accounts, documentation intersects with personhood itself, shaping not only life chances but recognition at life's end.

#### ***4.5.7. Analytical Synthesis***

In aggregate, these findings illustrate that identity documentation for Khawaja Siras does not guarantee rights. It causes administrative uncertainty. Gender markers do not stabilize access. Bureaucratic structures filter inclusion through discretion, delay, and withdrawal-prone status.

In some cases, documentation processes create ongoing instability. Contributory factors were lack of institutional coordination between BISP and NADRA. It made Khawaja Siras lives recognized at the level of procedure but kept them out of welfare system. Documentation, instead of addressing structural exclusion, institutionalize it through administrative practices. The conditional and unstable nature of Khawaja Sira status is strengthened through this way of documentation.

### **4.6. Findings Synthesis**

This study investigated the governance arrangements that shape the socioeconomic conditions of Khawaja Siras. Multiple districts in Punjab including Sargodha, Lahore and Rawalpindi and Federal Capital Territory of Islamabad were sites of the study with a specific focus on cash assistance from BISP and the procedural hurdles associated with it. Identity documentation, policing practices, and informal systems of regulation in guru-chela system were also covered in it. The findings divulge that exclusion from getting financial assistance from BISP was the result of procedural instability, conditional access, and lack of inter-agency coordination. Findings show that even with a valid X-gender CNIC, one can be denied access to financial assistance on the pretext that gender isn't updated in NADRA system even after getting two quarterly installments. It shows that gender markers are not aligned across NADRA, NSER, and BISP MIS systems. In findings, conditional access means gender-marker alignment and synchronization of data across NADRA, NSER, and BISP MIS systems, ongoing verification status which takes 1.5 years as per BISP officials and 6 months as per NADRA officials

embedded in BISP offices whereas survey expires in two years, behavioral compliance, and institutional discretion in application of non-BVS systems. The discrepancy in timeframe, ongoing verification, and limited window for financial assistance due to expiry of survey make this program ineffective.

Khawaja Siras are formally recognized as eligible for cash assistance from BISP with a valid X-gender CNIC. They are also exempted from Poverty Means Test. However, this recognition does not transpose into consistent or reliable access. Procedural formalities take the central stage, and financial assistance is frequently delayed, interrupted, or reversed. It produces a cumulative condition of insecurity. These are not isolated episodes of hardship. Over time, this instability shapes everyday behavior and controls mobility. It also minimizes the capacity for long-term planning or recovery.

#### ***4.6.1. Institutional Drivers of Persistent Insecurity***

The findings indicate that social marginalization or poverty are not the only factors which create precarity. Routine governance practices are actively producing and sustaining it. These narratives show that sources of income were regularly disrupted through policing. Welfare provisions largely remained irregular. Procedural delays marred the effectiveness of financial assistance from BISP. Selective policing across public spaces restrained mobility. These patterns are not atypical. When considered together, they form a structured environment. In this structured environment, survival remains provisional.

In this context, governance is characterized by uncertainty rather than resolution. Financial assistance from BISP may be started through policy inclusion and then put on hold through procedural delays without explanation. Permissions may be granted for performances or to solicit alms and later rescinded. Legal recognition exists but does not mature into actionable benefits. As a result, Khawaja Siras are counted in surveys, registered in databases, acknowledged as eligible for financial assistance yet they remain unpaid, unprotected or unserved. In this way, administrative visibility becomes a form of governance.

#### ***4.6.2. Social Protection as Provisional and Liable to Suspension***

Social protection mechanisms do not provide stable social safety nets either in the form of cash transfer or in the case of service access. They function more as administratively mediated access. Even when Khawaja Siras are formally listed as beneficiaries in BISP databases, payments are frequently deferred after release of few installments. Reasons for suspension vary across offices and over time, often referencing verification issues, biometric authentication issues, survey expiration, gender marker not updated in NADRA despite valid X-gender CNIC or technical glitches in NSER application.

This liability to suspension incrementally weakens trust in Benazir Kafalat Program. It also forces beneficiaries into repeated visits to BISP office with little assurance of resolution. Cases where financial assistance was granted temporarily eased the hardship. Intermittent assistance and its liability to suspension eroded its ability to offer protection against longer-term vulnerability.

#### ***4.6.3. Documentation as Eligibility Filter***

Identity documentation, especially X-gender CNIC, emerges as a central screening mechanism. Welfare access, mobility across bureaucratic space, religious mobility to holy places, housing-related mobility and service provision all are filtered through X-gender CNIC. Gender-diverse documentation is allowed in legal frameworks. It's the implementation across agencies and backend systems which remains uneven.

Documentation processes which are meant to resolve eligibility often results in more requirements. Timelines for verification processes are uneven across different offices. It is extended indefinitely. Eligibility is defined by X-gender CNIC on paper. However, in practice different offices processed the cases differently. One office processed X-gender CNICs without any additional requirements. At some places, in some instances medical certificates and court orders to determine gender identity were required from Khawaja Siras. Contradictory institutional timelines reflect that different institutional benchmarks are being used in different offices. It means that multiple shifting standards are used across different offices. There are some cases where front-line and backend data are mismatched in NADRA system. Participants had valid X-gender CNIC, received payments for two quarters and then denied payments on the pretext that gender isn't updated in NADRA system. This is the classic example of functional eligibility. There is diffused institutional accountability as there is no single node which is responsible for payment failure. It creates administrative inertia without violating any rules on paper. Consequently, possession of required documents does not guarantee access. It leaves many eligible applicants excluded. Database mismatches or discretionary barriers contributed to this exclusion.

#### ***4.6.4. Policing and Livelihood Insecurity***

Policing practices have a direct bearing on income insecurity. Economic survival depends on begging, cultural performance and sex work in the absence of any opportunity for dignified jobs. Interrupting sources of income through policing without providing any viable option for livelihood create income insecurity. Anti-beggary campaigns and selective application of authority disrupt already fragile sources of income.

These policing practices restrict income opportunities. It also imposes informal costs. In return, these practices incrementally increase their dependence on guru-chela system, informal network of social protection, informal patrons like Girya and Chamka. Notably, Tahaffuz Centres in Punjab where institutional oversight exists, treatment improves. It indicates that better policing with oversight in public places is possible.

#### ***4.6.5. Informal Governance as Substitution***

Abandoned by their families, neglected by the state and then contextually accepted in their community by gurus is the point where a parallel informal governing structure emerges. In guru-chela system, guru functions as the apex authority who exercises control over housing, labor, day to day activities and even social relations. This system provides shelter and mediation. Here authority is exercised through personal discretion and rights are substituted with obedience.

While they compensate for absence of effective state and familial support. In doing so, it makes chelas dependent on the system and rip them off their autonomy. Here protection is contingent and transactional. It evaporates into thin air with aging and the declining capacity to earn.

#### ***4.6.6. Consolidated Policy Insight***

If you sum up these findings, it clearly shows that formal eligibility alone is not sufficient to get access to financial assistance from BISP. Exclusion persists despite policy inclusion. The reason is embedded into procedural delays, lack of inter-agency coordination between BISP and NADRA, long verification processes, diffused institutional accountability in the absence of any single node of responsibility, varied verification timelines across different offices frontline and backend data mismatches are some of main reasons for the failure of this program.

The resulting governance environment is one in which recognition exists without obligation or entitlement guarantees. Financial assistance from BISP is intermittent. No new legislation or allocation of budget is required. Failures can be addressed through institutional synchronization, temporary safeguards which include provisional eligibility if applicants have a valid X-gender CNIC for a fixed period (i.e. 3-6 months), provisional continuation of payments during the process of verification, use of Non-BVS, or Tahaffuz Centre certification in case of biometric failures, and stopping cases' suspension due to system mismatches or backend inconsistencies without human review. There is strong need for inter-institutional coordination.

#### **4.7. Counter narratives as Exceptions**

It is hereby acknowledged that counternarratives regarding continuous BISP financial assistance, responsible policing and protection in guru-chela system exist which ranges between 10-15% in data. However, they did not emerge as patterns.

#### **4.8. Discussion**

##### ***4.8.1. Reinterpreting Persistent Insecurity in Governance Processes***

In the context of these findings, we need to understand precarity as a governing arrangement experienced by Khawaja Siras. It is characterized by periodic interruption not only in sources of income but financial assistance also. It is systematically produced through the interaction of multiple institutional domains in Pakistan. Insecurity appears repeatedly in access to financial assistance from BISP and documentation procedures. Similarly, policing encounters, kinship relations, and livelihood practices are also marked by uncertainty. This uncertainty is an unintended policy failure. It is a persisting condition which is used as a way of regulating their lives.

Exclusion of Khawaja Siras is rarely through formal denial. Instead, they are incorporated into systems that remain inconsistent, subject to withdrawal, and conditional. Policy inclusion exists, but it does not translate into consistent financial assistance. Their third gender is acknowledged legally but policing in public spaces continues, resulting in disruption of livelihood. This pattern corresponds to Lorey's (2015) argument that insecurity itself can act as an instrument of governance. It is used to manage populations via uncertainty instead of safeguarding their rights.

The concept of differential precarity (Butler, 2009) can help us comprehend disproportionate exposure of Khawaja Siras to harm, abandonment, and violence. Yet this exposure alone fails to explain persistence. The data suggest that insecurity and recognition are intertwined, and both stay alongside. The distinction between precariousness- a shared human condition which is inherently marked by vulnerability and dependence, and precarity- uneven distribution of insecurity across populations, elaborated by Lorey is therefore critical. Here vulnerability is actively reproduced by procedural delays, reversibility of financial assistance and legal indeterminacy. It is not a failure of governance as it appears. It can be better understood as governance through instability.

Aspects of unstable livelihoods and welfare dependency produced by BISP Model of financial assistance can best be seen through the lens of Standing's (2011) notion of the precariat. However, the Khawaja Sira experience extends beyond labor insecurity. Their precarity is simultaneously characterized by legal, gendered, moral, and embodied exposure. What is at stake is not only income, but the absence of sustained recognition as a legitimate subject with predictable access to rights across institutions, time and contingencies within governance structures.

#### ***4.8.2. Administrative Practices and Everyday Harm***

Administrative and bureaucratic violence is a key mechanism through which precarity is governed. Participants encountered repeated cycles of verification, deferral, and suspension across institutions most visibly between NADRA and BISP. Their eligibility was acknowledged but they received episodic or no financial assistance. Their surveys expired without notice. Biometric failure was rarely resolved through non-BVS. Non-BVS was invoked inconsistently across populations. Even favorable decisions by Federal Ombudsperson failed to restore access to financial assistance from BISP.

There was no explicit refusal. These processes kept them in waiting through procedural delays. Harm is accumulated by exhausting Khawaja Siras through repetition without explicit denial.

From an administrative angle, this looks like a way of governance through procedure rather than force. Foucault's (1991) idea of governmentality explains how populations are managed through classification, documentation, and routine use technologies of government like documentation, eligibility criteria, conditionalities etc. However, Nisar's (2018) account of bureaucracy as experienced violence is more closely aligned with the lived effects documented here. Repeated administrative engagement without resolution caused exhaustion. Institutional withdrawal without formal denial left them in a procedural limbo. Disappearance from welfare systems despite being eligible, despite being listed beneficiaries in BISP administrative data, technical glitch in NSER application rendering it unable to identify transgenders, backend gender mismatch despite valid CNIC are not unintended consequences of program implementation. They are procedural outcomes.

Inter-agency fragmentation between BISP and NADRA further reinforces this pattern. Responsibility shifts across offices without resolution. Varied timeframes are given for verification across offices. Accountability is diffused. The burden of coordination is transferred to Khawaja Siras as the institutional coordination fails. This way, they are not simply excluded but their capacity to claim rights is gradually eroded.

#### ***4.8.3. Legal Ambiguity and Implementation Gaps***

The findings reveal that Khawaja Siras are governed through a form of administrative indeterminacy where financial assistance is neither persistently granted nor denied. This pattern resonates with Agamben's (2017) later reformulation of the state of exception. Here it is defined as a normalized mode of rule rather than a moment of discontinuity in legal certainty. Here state of exception means that law is neither suspended nor enforced in full. Instead, it remains formally intact. However, its capacity to secure protection is made operationally ineffective.

Legal recognition of Khawaja Siras exists but it could not materialize into their guaranteed access to education, healthcare, stable housing and uninterrupted financial assistance from BISP. They are eligible for financial assistance, but it is without continuity. Documentation exists but it does not work seamlessly across institutions. They are formally recognized. This recognition makes them administratively visible without certain access to welfare services and protection. It implies that they are not legally excluded but their inclusion fails to activate responsibility. Rights are not withdrawn. They are held in abeyance.

#### ***4.8.4. Accumulated Exposure to Preventable Harm***

Khawaja Siras are living in a regime of managed exposure which is evident from the consolidated effects of intermittent welfare provision, administrative withdrawal, policing practices, and legal ambiguity. In Mbembe's most recent work, the scope of necropolitics is no longer limited to the exercise of sovereign power via spectacular violence. It organizes vulnerability, regulates exhaustion and withdraws protective infrastructure on which sustainable life depends (Mbembe, 2023).

Dataset reveal that their lives are marked by a gradual erosion. Their lives are characterized by health neglect, housing instability, documentation paralysis, and routine exposure to violence which accumulate over time. It produces lives that remain biologically sustained. However, these lives experience depletion of socioeconomic and institutional support over time. Harm unfolds slowly in their lives through ordinary administrative processes and everyday encounters. Institutional protection remains episodic and liable to suspension. It requires continuous compliance. In return, it offers no durable security. In this context, survival is marked by endurance rather than care.

#### ***4.8.5. Crisis, Affect, and Adaptive Subjectivities***

Particular subjectivities are produced while living under conditions of continuous uncertainty. These narratives reveal decision-making with narrowing choice horizon and rapid emotional attachment. It also signals withdrawal from long-term planning. Relationships are shaped by instability rather than choice. *Girya* and *chamka* emerge as both affective and economic arrangements.

Berlant's (2011) idea of the crisis ordinary is relevant here. Everyday life is not interrupted by crisis. It is transformed into crisis itself. Agency is reoriented and it shifts from aspiration toward immediate survival. Governance operates affectively by narrowing horizons of possibility and normalizing exhaustion.

This does not mean that Khawaja Siras lack resilience or agency. Under these conditions, agency is repeatedly rerouted toward coping leaving little room for transformation.

#### ***4.8.6. Guru–Chela System as Parallel Informal Governance***

The guru–chela system acts as a parallel informal governance structure in the absence of reliable state protection. The findings problematize both romanticized and purely critical accounts. Gurus provide shelter, territorial regulation, and act as a bridge to manage dispute. They also enforce discipline, extract labor, and administer punishment.

Ethnographic studies shows that this system has deep historical roots and internal stratification (Hinchy, 2019; Reddy, 2005). This data brings forth a new understanding of the system as non-state sovereignty. It fills the vacuum created by family and state withdrawal and guru assumes informal governance.

In this system, coexistence of protection and exploitation is not marked by cultural pathology. It is the outcome of structurally constrained survival options. Guru governance is a reflection of state governance in form: conditional recognition, disciplinary authority, and managed dependency. The difference is rooted in scale and legitimacy. However, underlying governing logic remains the same.

#### ***4.8.7. Limits of Existing Social Protection Models***

The failure of social protection, particularly BISP, cannot be explained in terms of inefficiency alone. The findings suggest that BISP offers intermittent relief rather than stabilizing support. Payments arrive episodically and are reversible. The amount given is not sufficient to secure housing, healthcare, or livelihood transitions.

Patel & Midgley’s (2023) distinction between residual welfare and social development is revealing. BISP based on residual welfare mitigates immediate deprivation without addressing structural exclusion. In doing so, it increases the possibility of institutionalizing dependency rather than enabling exit from the folds of precarity.

#### ***4.8.8. Implications for a Social Development Approach***

Considered together, the findings indicate that emergency relief in the form of welfare interventions risk functioning as tools of governance rather than pathways to dignity without a social development framework. A social development approach (Patel & Midgley, 2023) emphasizes education, livelihood security, legal protection, and participation alongside income support.

For Khawaja Siras, this would require integrated policy design. It includes stable documentation regimes, enforceable protections against discrimination, pathways to viable livelihood, and forms of state care that do not entirely rely on guru authority. Without these elements, social protection remains fragile, conditional, and unable to reduce long term vulnerability.

This study therefore suggests that precarity among Khawaja Siras is not merely endured. It is governed and produced. It is also managed, and normalized in the spaces where infrastructures of law, bureaucracy, kinship, and welfare intersect.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. Summary of Key Findings**

Over the course of this study, it became increasingly evident that the lenses of social stigma, cultural marginalization, or individual vulnerability cannot solely map the precarious conditions shaping Khawaja Sira lives in Pakistan. The findings suggest that insecurity is more deeply rooted within the everyday functioning of governance itself. Precarity in these accounts does not emerge from any single site of exclusion. It is produced through the interaction of bureaucracy, welfare systems, policing, and informal kinship arrangements.

This condition is characterized by not the absence of recognition but the very nature of its instability. During their encounters with documentation regimes, social protection programs, and regulatory institutions, Khawaja Siras are recognized as eligible subjects while remaining unable to secure continuity, predictability, or protection. Rights exist formally. It is access to rights which remains fragile and liable to suspension. In this sense, insecurity does not surface as an unintended by-product of policy failure. It emerges as a patterned outcome of administrative practices, conditional recognition, and institutional withdrawal.

### **5.2. Conceptual Contribution of the Study**

This study moves beyond individual sufferings and situates its analysis in governance processes. It offers a reframing of precarity as something which is actively produced rather than passively endured. The findings suggest that bureaucratic systems are not neutral channels through which assistance flows. They are very sites where harm is generated through delay, repetition, ambiguity, and discretion. Verification procedures, suspended benefits, expired surveys, and unresolved grievances do not merely restrict access. They gradually erode claims, exhaust individuals, and quietly normalize exclusion.

The analysis also problematizes conventional understandings of social protection. Rather than serving as a pathway to stability, welfare mechanisms appear to function as forms of managed dependency. Assistance arrives episodically, eases immediate crisis, and then retreats. Hence, it leaves underlying vulnerabilities intact. In parallel, the study positions the guru-chela system not simply as a cultural formation. Rather it is contextualized as a way of non-state governance that fills gaps left by unreliable state protection. It reproduces its own hierarchies of control in the process. Together, these dynamics move beyond binary distinctions between inclusion and exclusion. It reveals a landscape across multiple overlapping regimes in which insecurity is regulated.

### **5.3. Reinterpreting Social Protection Failure**

The findings call for a reconsideration of how failure within social protection systems is typically understood. Rather than locating breakdowns mainly in administrative inefficiency or awareness gaps, the evidence points toward a more systemic condition. Eligibility does not reliably lead to receipt. Assistance does not ensure continuity, and recognition does not secure access. Instability is not episodic. It is built into the structure of delivery.

In this context, social protection functions more as an uncertain administrative mechanism and less as a safety net. It offers few guarantees while requires constant negotiation. Assistance provides temporary relief when it arrives. Its reversible nature prevents it from functioning as protection against growing vulnerability. This pattern challenges policy narratives that treat exclusion as an irregularity. It suggests instead that uncertainty has become an ordinary feature of welfare governance.

#### **5.4. Implications for Governance and Policy**

Considered together, these insights demonstrate that policy responses focused narrowly on expanding eligibility or increasing cash transfers are unlikely to work. They cannot address the deeper conditions sustaining precarity. Without paying heed to how institutions process claims, manage verification, exercise discretion, and translate recognition into delivery, such interventions risk strengthening the very instability they seek to resolve.

The findings emphasize the importance of procedural alignment and administrative continuity. Recognition that does not translate into enforceable access, and protection that remains periodic, do little to stabilize lives. In this sense, governance reform requires engagement with everyday institutional practices as much as with formal policy design.

#### **5.5. Limitations of the Study**

This study draws on extensive qualitative material collected across multiple districts. It includes individual narratives, focus group discussions, and institutional accounts. Its analysis is situated in specific administrative environments that may differ across regions or evolve over time. Its emphasis is on depth rather than breadth. Though these findings are not generalizable but allows for close assessment of patterned governance practices as they are experienced on the ground. These boundaries do not undercut the study's claims. They clarify the contexts within which its insights are grounded.

#### **5.6. Directions for Future Research**

By dissecting how insecurity is produced through governance rather than simply absorbed by marginalized populations, this study opens space for further investigation into alternative approaches to social protection and social development. Future research may explore how welfare systems can be oriented toward continuity rather than conditional relief, and how community-based structures might be engaged without reproducing new forms of dependence or control. Such work would extend the analytical trajectory developed here, moving from diagnosis toward the careful revisiting of institutional design.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The following recommendations are based on empirical findings and are framed as procedural corrections, not structural overhauls. They are designed to reduce instability, administrative harm, and access disruption for Khawaja Sira applicants within existing legal, fiscal, and institutional frameworks.

### **6.1. Improving Access and Continuity in Social Protection Systems**

#### ***Recommendation 1: Provisional Eligibility During Verification***

Problem:

Despite formal eligibility for financial assistance from BISP, Khawaja Siras remain excluded on account of prolonged verification and gender-marker misalignment. Eligibility is therefore not translated into access.

Action:

Initiate time-bound provisional eligibility for applicants under active verification.

Implementation:

- Temporary acceptance of certification from Tahaffuz Centres or Transgender Protection Centre working under MoHR.
- During verification process, allow provisional disbursement for a fixed period (e.g., 6–9 months).

Outcome:

It will reduce delays, lower attrition caused by bureaucratic exhaustion, and improve continuity of assistance.

#### ***Recommendation 2: Written Reasons for Denial or Suspension***

Problem:

Unexplained payment suspensions and shifting verbal justifications create uncertainty and disengagement.

Action:

Mandate system-generated written notices for any denial or suspension.

Implementation:

- Modify BISP MIS to issue standardized notices. Clearly recording reasons, evidence used, and appeal options.

Outcome:

It will create greater transparency, reduced discretion, and fewer repeated office visits.

## **6.2. Reducing Administrative Burden and Procedural Harm**

### ***Recommendation 3: Single-Window for Grievance Redressal***

Problem:

Fragmented referrals between institutions produce delay rather than resolution.

Action:

Launch a single-window grievance mechanism for Khawaja Sira applicants.

Implementation:

- Establish grievance desks within Tahaffuz Centres.
- Integrate Ombudsperson decisions directly into BISP workflows.
- Require responses within a fixed timeline.

Outcome:

It will reduce procedural fatigue, improve compliance, and ensure explicit accountability.

## **6.3. From Welfare to Social Development**

### ***Recommendation 4: Link BISP to TEVTA for Voluntary Social Development Pathways***

Problem:

Cash assistance provides short-term relief. It does not enable exit from precarity.

Action:

Integrate BISP enrollment with optional skills, employment, and micro-enterprise pathways.

Implementation:

- Automatic referral to TEVTA for skill development programs for interested beneficiaries.
- post-training small enterprise grants.
- Guarantee retention in public-sector contractual roles where feasible.

Outcome:

It will gradually transit toward livelihood stability.

## **6.4. Regulating Guru-Chela System**

### ***Recommendation 5: State-Mediated Protection within Guru-Chela Households***

Problem:

The guru-chela system provides shelter but enables exploitation without recourse.

Action:

Introduce non-criminal regulatory oversight focused on protection.

Implementation:

- Voluntary registration of deras.
- Safeguards against forced labor, income extraction, and collective punishment.
- Direct access to state services independent of guru mediation.

Outcome:

It will reduce exploitation while preserving community safety nets.

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