



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

**Department of Social Work**

*International Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights*

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**A Long Journey towards Social Inclusion: Initiatives of Social Workers for Hijra Population in Bangladesh**

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Author: Tahmina Habib

Supervisor: Helena Jahansson

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the recent social position of hijra as well as with the way social workers work with these people and the impact of their work. The aim of the study has been investigated by exploring the research questions focused on the perspectives of the hijra about their social acceptance, the addressing issues about social problem of hijra, working approach and actions by the social workers for social inclusion of hijra, the challenging experience of social work with hijra population and the way the initiatives for hijra including are them in the society.

The study is conducted with eight individual interviews by the qualitative design. The interviewees have been conducted with four ordinary hijra, two social worker hijra and two social work activist from mainstream society. The materials of this study have been analyzed through the concept of community work, system theory, advocacy approach and the perspective of gender.

The findings reveal the importance of a separate gender identity of hijra beyond male and female within the legal framework, the legal rights of sex work and the participation in the mainstream economic field which could make the possibility for hijra to bring the achievement of social acceptance. The findings also show that as the hijra populations are excluded from all the economic, civil and social rights because of their different gender approach and culture, the social work activists have concerned both the community's quality of life and the social changes to ensure the social inclusion. Therefore, they counsel the community to make awareness about their rights as well as advocate some part of mainstream society in favor of hijra, for instance, neighbor area, hijra family, the policy maker, religious scholars etc. Moreover, the study also reveals the challenges with the government as well as work with mainstream society.

The study concludes that along with the services by the social workers, the importance of the governmental supports is also significant for this marginalized people. Without support of the government there is a possibility to have threat to be banned this social work actions by the social and religious power. The government needs to be more responsible and aware of their commitment when they have already recognized this issue. Thus the results of the study explicitly urge the social work activist to make involve this community in their process as much as possible and put more effort to convince the government in order to approve the legal support, gender right and social inclusion.

**Key words: Hijra, social works, gender Identity, legal supports, social inclusion, religious and social norm, mainstream society, government.**

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Tahmina Habib

[habib\\_tahmina@yahoo.com](mailto:habib_tahmina@yahoo.com)

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Problem at Issue .....	7
1.2 Background of Transgender People (hijra) .....	8
1.3 Who are the hijra? .....	9
1.4 Existence of hijra in History .....	10
1.4.1 Hinduism .....	10
1.4.2 Islam .....	10
1.4.3 Eunuchs in Mughal Era (1526-1858) .....	11
1.4.4 The British Period (1765-1947) .....	11
1.4.5 Earlier Days in Bangladesh (Before 1971 till 20 <sup>th</sup> Century) .....	12
1.5 The Traditional Role of Hijra in Bangladesh .....	12
1.6 National Legal Frame Work .....	13
1.7 Today's Marginalized Hijra in Bangladesh .....	14
1.8 Purpose of the Study .....	16
1.8.1 Research Questions .....	16
<b>Chapter Two: Previous Research .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Theoretical Approach .....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1 Community Work .....	26
3.1.1 Community .....	27
3.2 System Theory .....	28
3.3 Advocacy .....	29
3.4 Concept of Gender.....	30

3.5 Theoretical Framework .....	32
<b>Chapter Four: Methodology .....</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1 Choice of Method .....	33
4.2 Selection of the Respondents .....	33
4.2.1 Target Groups .....	34
4.2.2 Access to Reach the Sample .....	34
4.2.3 Participants .....	35
4.3 Interviews .....	35
4.4 Selection of Previous Research and Theory .....	36
4.5 Method of Findings, Analysis and Discussion .....	36
4.6 Validity and Generalization .....	37
4.7 Ethical Consideration .....	38
<b>Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis .....</b>	<b>40</b>
5.1 Social Acceptance and Legal Rights .....	40
5.1.1 Analysis .....	42
5.2 Recognition the Social Rights of Hijra .....	45
5.2.1 Analysis .....	46
5.3 Work with Community and Social Systems .....	49
5.3.1 Analysis .....	51
5.4 Challenging Experience of Social Workers .....	55
5.4.1 Analysis .....	57
5.5 Criticizing Governmental Activities .....	59
5.5.1 Analysis .....	60
5.6 Impact of Social Work Supports .....	61

5.6.1 Analysis .....	63
<b>Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1 Reflection of Analysis .....	65
6.2 Conclusion .....	71
<b>Reference .....</b>	<b>74</b>

## Chapter One: Introduction

Having the opportunity to conduct a study, I thought to use my knowledge to understand the social circumstances and problems in my country. In order to prepare for the study, I looked into diverse issues regarding social problems in Bangladesh. I got interested in the issues around the hijra community<sup>1</sup>, as they face a lot of social exclusion in that society. To be honest, compared to other social problems around Bangladesh, I was quite unaware about this community and had lack of knowledge regarding their vulnerable situation. There was only a small amount of studies that explored the problems around the hijra community. Nevertheless, the information from those few studies illustrated various aspects of the extreme marginalized situation of the hijra<sup>2</sup>, the complexity of their gender identity, HIV risks and at the same times the negligence of their problems by the entire society and the state. However, these articles also showed that recently some NGOs and CBOs have started to acknowledge this community's social needs, and to work from a human right's perspective, as will be explained at the end of this chapter. Accordingly, all these circumstances have motivated me to learn more about their social situations. Therefore, I have chosen to study the issues the hijra community faces, not because of a special interest in gender issues, but because of my interest in understanding the social difficulties they are facing in their daily lives and find ways to prevent these.

### **1.1 Problems at Issue:**

The discussion and arguments on transgender groups have been studied in many different parts of the world where identity, discrimination, equal rights and their social supports are usually expressed in academic and social welfare world. In spite of this, the concept of transgender group is not widely spread and not discussed in Bangladesh. Only the term 'hijra community' is very well known in this context as it has a significant history within Indian sub-continent<sup>3</sup> countries and some part of South Asian countries<sup>4</sup> (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). In the Indian sub-continent, the centuries old term 'hijra' is generally used to describe those men who are transvestites, intersexed, eunuch and hermaphrodite (Chakrapani, 2010; Hahm, 2010). This group of people usually live or prefer to live in opposite gender role of their biological sex. The term 'transgender' was introduced more recently in the Indian sub-continent, and both terms

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<sup>1</sup> In this study when I used the term 'hijra community' or 'Community', it indicates a group of gender minority population (hijra) who are either leading a certain ritual life or live an individual life but have common sexual approach beyond male and female and have common social problems.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'hijra' is used in this study both in singular and plural sense.

<sup>3</sup> Indian sub-continent includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

<sup>4</sup> South Asian Countries comprise India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Maldives.

are now often used interchangeably, although they do not mean exactly the same (Towle, R.B. and Morgan, 2006). 'Transgender' is often used as umbrella terms to signify individuals who denied binary gender constructions and present a blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypical gender roles (Chakrapani, 2010). And so, the multi-dimensional sexual identities, in South Asian countries, have been put into 'transgender group'.

However, as a developing country with a large population, Bangladesh often faces diverse political, economic and social problems. Along with poverty and natural disasters, some problems people in this context face on a daily basis concern for example: malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, corruption, political instability, violence against gender minority people and so on. While the country has always been coping to overcome poverty and other problems; the prevention of gender discrimination regarding women has also been received as a major initiative by the state, however, the marginalized situation of the hijra community has consistently been ignored in the development sector, compared to other social problems (Josim, 2012). The government has largely overlooked the discrimination against hijra community and only very few NGOs/CBOs have been working to develop the quality of life of this community focusing on health and sexual rights. Since a few years the rights of this community have been addressed by social workers of the mainstream<sup>5</sup> society and the reasons of the exclusion and the circumstances have also been concerned within discussions among groups in civil<sup>6</sup> society. In addition, these days global networks have influenced the government sector as well as the NGOs/CBOs to address all the aspects of human rights for the hijra community to develop their quality of life.

Before introducing the research aim I will present the hijra community, their historical existence, national legal framework for sexual minority people and their margin situation in Bangladesh.

## **1.2 Background of Transgender People (Hijra):**

In Asia, people with a wide range of gender-related identities, cultures and experiences exist; for instance the hijra. Historically the presence of this community has been visible in many cultural contexts. They have been known, for example, as bakla in the Philippines, xaniths in Oman and hijra, kothi, jogappas, jogtas or shiv-shaktis in South Asia (Khan et al, 2009). Significantly hijra communities exist in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and other parts of

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<sup>5</sup> With 'mainstream society' in this context I refer to any one from 'ordinary society' who is not considered a hijra, because in my research I include social workers from both the hijra community as from the mainstream society.

<sup>6</sup> with the 'civil society' in this context I mean an (unorganized) group of people, independent from the government, often intellectuals, who make use of the freedom of speech, and often criticize the government.



south Asia. These hijra communities across south Asia have similar cultures and habits, but are not totally the same.

### **1.3 Who are the Hijra?**

The exact meaning of hijra is quite hard to express in English, nevertheless, “the most widely used English translations of the word *hijra*, which is of Urdu origin, could be described as either ‘eunuch’ or ‘hermaphrodite’ (intersex) which are connote as impotence that indicate the inability to function in the male sexual role” as stated by Nanda (1999). Following this meaning, ‘eunuch’ refers to an emasculated male whose genitals are ambiguously male-like at birth and have been previously assigned to the male sex, would be re-categorized as intersexed or hijra.

However, defining hijra and their sexual identity are a complexity among the mainstream society as well as for hijra themselves when they are exist in diverse social and gender roles. During the fieldwork of this study, hijra could be found in various ways which could fit with some provided definitions. These are illustrated below:

According to Chakrapani (2010), hijra are biologically males but refuse their masculine identity in due course of time to identify as ‘women’ or ‘not men’. As hijra usually identify themselves as ‘not men’ and prefer to have sex with men, thus, they are perceived by the society as homosexual.

Expressed by Hahm (2010), hijra are those who are by birth intersexed and can live as both male and female. On the other hand, hijra could be male who have undergone emasculation or wish to undergo emasculation and live as women.

Chakrapani (2010) again stated that hijra also found as heterosexual identity; prefer to live as both men and women which could be considered as ‘kothi’. Kothi are then heterogeneous group who can be born as male and show feminine role in a specific situation. Some proportions of kothi have bisexual behavior and marry women.

Considering all these concepts, in this study, hijra could be identified as ‘a person who is born as male or ambiguous genital sex, often put themselves in women's role and approach as women but identify themselves either as heterosexual or as apart from traditional male-female gender role, for example, hijra, kothi, third gender’.

Now, I will briefly explain the history of hijra in the Indian-subcontinent culture to understand the social environment and legal atmosphere of hijra in contemporary Bangladesh.

#### **1.4 Existence of Hijra in History:**

This transgender people (hijra) have been found in different religions along with previous historical period. But mostly the Hindu religion and the Mughal Era have played vital role to develop the contemporary role of the hijra and their public perception.

##### **1.4.1 Hinduism:**

In traditional Hinduism, several references exist to a third gender and sexual ambiguity among human as well as among Gods. Thus, it is believed that intersexuality is not unusual and all people incorporate both male and female principles (Nanda, 1999). Hindu mythology contains various examples of androgynies and individual who undergo sex changes both among deities and human. Thus hijra received religious justification and power from this ritual although some interpretations were contested. However, there is some example which shows the prestige of hijra in religion; The God Ram, who is a popular characteristic in Hinduism, acknowledged and blessed intersexuals (Hahm, 2010); Shiva, a deity who contains both male and female components and also related to symbols of fertility and eroticism which represent Shiva united with his female creative power (Nanda, 1999); Arjun, who rejected to have sexual intercourse with minor deity, was cursed by her to be neither man nor woman and he used to entertain people with performing through music and dancing (Husain, 2005); Vishnu and Krishna, who are often transformed with female and male characteristics to protect from demons and have no distinct sexual classification (Nanda, 1999).

The culture of singing and dancing in weddings and births legitimizes today's role of hijra. The endowment was given by various deities (e.g. Mother Goddess, Bahuchara Mata) who allowed hijra to be the medium of her power.

##### **1.4.2 Islam:**

The view of hijra in Islam varies which provided various way of life according to different characteristics. According to Hahm (2010), Islam acknowledges persons who are born biologically indistinct and provides them with the same rights as men and women although the rights of men and women are different in Islam and it is not clear that which way they should have this right. Sometimes, it is mentioned in religion that the eunuchs are provided all the rights according to the condition of considering either male or female gender, on the other hand, men who do castration are considered by the religious norm as non-Muslims which show quite unsympathetic toward eunuch in Islam (Husain, 2005). In addition, effeminates and cross-

dressers are not allowed to enter into the households and prescribed women to practice *purda*<sup>7</sup> in front of them.

Nevertheless, due to the inability to reproduce and subsequent lack of successors the eunuch which impacts honesty, were given high position as guards in mosques. The role of eunuchs also found at The Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina and spread to the Ka'ba in Mecca, the symbolic centre of Islam (Hahm, 2010). So, eunuchs are still can be seen as both prohibited and respected in Islam.

#### **1.4.3 Eunuchs in Mughal Era (1526-1858):**

The role of hijra, though link to their sexual ambiguity, are commonly associated with 'eunuchs' in the Mughal era by the general people and academics. According to Hahm (2010), in that era, eunuchs were slaves who were castrated and not emasculated. The importance of eunuchs in the past is, however often sympathetically treated by as general public as though eunuchs are the predecessors to today's hijra.

In the Mughal era, eunuchs were found in Islamic courts, who wore male clothes and turbans. The traditional roles of the eunuchs were to guard the ladies of the harem and the children (Nanda, 1999). And being person of trust, they were able to influence state decisions and also received large amount of money to have been closest to kings and queens. Thus hijra often mention the role of their prestige in that period.

#### **1.4.4 The British Period (1765-1947):**

In the beginning of the British period in Indian sub-continent hijra used to receive protections and benefits by some Indian states through entry into the hijra community. Moreover, the benefits included the provision of land, rights of food and smaller amount of money from agricultural households in specific area which were eventually removed through British legislation as because the land was not inherited through blood relations (Hahm, 2010).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a tendency by hijra to show their genitals if people refused to give alms<sup>8</sup>, and often children were ways by hijra to extort money. It is also claimed that there were artificial<sup>9</sup> hijra who were taken away as children and castrated to be included into

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<sup>7</sup> The word *purda* indicates while the Muslim women cover their face in front of a male (outsider).

<sup>8</sup> Alms is a religious rite which, in general, involves giving materially to another as an act of religious virtue. It exists in a number of religions, for instance, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

<sup>9</sup> Artificial hijra is defined those who both biologically and mentally male but pretend as female or ordinary hijra.

hijra community. The British attempted to criminalize these practices but it was unsuccessful because it was the only way to earn money for hijra and the people have developed the tolerance towards these practices (Hahm, 2010). Up to the present day, hijra on the Indian sub-continent still may threaten to show non-existing genitals.

Later in 1871 hijra were included as dangerous outlaws in the Criminal Tribes Act. This included all hijra who were involved in kidnapping and castrating children and dressed like women to dance in public places. The punishment for such activities was up to two years imprisonment and a fine or both. This pre-partition history influences the vulnerable situation of hijra in this contemporary world.

#### **1.4.5 Earlier Days in Bangladesh (Before 1971 till 20<sup>th</sup> Century):**

After the British Period, the hijra community in Bangladeshi context has been earning their livelihood through blessing children and performance in weddings. The community has survived behind the mainstream society because their gender and traditional roles have not been valued any more by the ordinary social norms. However, now-a-days hijra usually do not perform in public but often perform where they are called and are paid with respect. When Bangladesh was under the government of Pakistan, the state used to provide allowance for hijra in their old age. This allowance continued after the independence of Bangladesh but later on they have been deprived from this service (Husain, 2005). In addition, when the knowledge and idea of medical science spread over the society, the culture of hijra and their gender identity have been denied and pointed out as a sexual and mental disability by the biological scholars and medical doctors (Husain, 2005).

#### **1.5 The Traditional Role of Hijra in Bangladesh:**

As the historical phenomenon has put this community from a prestigious position to a vulnerable situation in the society, in contemporary world their traditional occupations are not respected like they were in the ancient Hindu religion, rather, they are called for performances for the sake of entertainment. Therefore, the cultural role of the community has changed over time and to survive in the society the hijra have found more occupations that have now become their traditional occupations, for example, other than singing and dancing they also collect money in markets from shopkeepers. Poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods lead many of them to work as sex workers and few as beggars (Husain, 2005).

As a Muslim country, both religion and indigenous cultures are strong in Bangladesh and thus hijra are carrying Indian sub-continent culture in this context by carrying out the traditional occupations. In Bangladesh, hijra could be categorized either in 'hijragiri' or in sex work (Khan et al, 2008). Hijragiri is considered as collecting money through blessing new born babies by singing and dancing called 'Baccha Nachano'. Usually hijra wear feminine dress and to earn money through baccha nachano they claim that since they are deprived of conceiving children, their blessing for children has more importance in the eyes of the divine. Another traditional work is collecting money from the shops in the markets called 'Bazar Tola'. In sex work, hijra usually dress up as women to attract men.

In addition, according to Husain (2005), mostly Hijra live and work under a *guru* who is a senior hijra, called 'mother' of a group of hijra. The hijra who are under this *guru* are called *chela* that mean 'child'. *Guru* and *chela* relationship always go through some disciplines and rules in their community. Usually *guru* doesn't earn money but the *chela* hand in their income to the *guru*. In return the *guru* takes care of them (hijra). These days, many hijra also live independently apart from the *guru* but have consistent relationship with their community.

### **1.6 National Legal Frame Work:**

The history and the social life of hijra have shown how their position changed with time which also influenced their traditional role. However, since the British period till today, in the context of Bangladesh, the gender and social roles of the hijra community have continued to be discriminatory towards the hijra and criminalized the sexual role through the social value and legal framework. In addition, the transgender people (Hijra) have often been stigmatized by the heterosexist norm of the society and abused by the informal court through local Islamic law (Godwin, 2010). Moreover, the national and international laws against discrimination are also being silent in Bangladesh.

According to Hossain (2009), Bangladesh has ratified the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Right; the Convention of Elimination of Racial Discrimination and also ratified other conventions; as well as elected as member of UN Human Rights. Along with international human rights, the constitution of the people's republic of Bangladesh categorically guarantees fundamental rights and civil liberties of citizens. The constitution also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, sex and caste. Freedom of expression, personal liberty, freedom of movement and assembly are clearly guaranteed as well.

However, the concerning matter is that the state still hasn't implement the principles against discrimination especially based on sex and gender since the country has independence

(Godwin, 2010). Even, the constitution of Bangladesh is based on only two gender; male and female while historically there is another gender role in existence. There is neither legal recognition for non-normative sexuality in Bangladesh nor any special protection against the discrimination for this group (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

In addition, in the case of sexual minority group in a post colonial nation-state, the legal system related to sexual orientation is influenced by common law traditions of England, however, the law known as Penal Code 1860 Section 377; Carnal intercourse against the order of nature, the Penalty for which is imprisonment which may extend to life (Godwin, 2010). This phrase is even ambiguous as it can be equally applicable to heterosexuals as well as homosexuals (Hossain, 2009). On the other hand, legal framework of sex work is also a concerning issue since most hijra these days are engaged with this profession. Regarding this work, the constitution of Bangladesh only indicates women that states that sex work is not legal but when a women have no way to fulfill basic need she can do it in private place but this is still ambiguous (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

However, the action against unnatural intercourse has always been taken for sexual minority group; for example, hijra community is always targeted by the police to extortion and physical torture. The offences against sexual minority group by the security sector are very common and are always ignored by the state. The fact is that no initiative has yet been taken by the judiciary to protect this sexual minority group from discrimination (Hossain, 2009).

### **1.7 Today's Marginalized Hijra in Bangladesh:**

It has been seen that this community used to possess higher social prestige due to their specific social and cultural role but for most, that role is changing. While they used to have a power through ability to bless and curse, in contemporary world, the society ridicules gender-variant people for being different which put this group in a vulnerable situation and now socially they are excluded from the mainstream society. In addition, today their existence and the roles are still overlooked by the legal framework and are excluded from the economic, political and social services because of them identifying as women or cross-dressing.

The complex gender approach has put the hijra community in the marginalized position from the beginning of their journey of life. In the transition from childhood to adolescence hijra found themselves unlike other boys, for instance, they used to play with girls and feel attraction towards boys. While the incompatible sex-gender roles and attitudes are tolerable to some extent during the childhood period of hijra; later on in their adolescence, it has always been disapproved as unnatural approach by the society but ultimately by the family, therefore, hijra are often devalued from their family members and receive different treatment in terms of food,

clothing, properties or assets, moral supports and other opportunities compared to their other siblings who are in the binary social norm (Khan et al, 2009). Further, because of this complex gender approach, hijra often experience loneliness and abusive treatment in school either by the classmates or by the teachers; for instance, the fellow students refuse to play or share the knowledge with hijra, accused by the teachers as effeminate boy for violating social norms and so on. This vulnerable hijra community, though, is willing to access the education with ordinary people; they often leave the school because of the hostile environment and lack of friendly social behaviors by the society, and also fail to find safer place to have education opportunity due to their gender behaviors (Josim, 2012). Moreover, often hijra, in their adolescence, have been victimized by sexual assault because of their female approach (Husain, 2005).

The influences of predominant norms have always forced them to give up their family and other social relations and later on are included in the hijra community by adopting the traditional life and occupations that the hijra community has developed to live and survive. Sometimes the options of begging and sex work is all they have to choose since the traditional practices of baccha nachano are less in demand as compared to before. Although away from social and family relations, hijra whether doing the traditional work or sex work, they often seek their sexual partner with whom they want to spend their entire life, however, the crucial reality is that they never find their faithful life partner in this heterosexist norm and are often misused by this mainstream society where they are usually forced to have unsafe sex and live in a risk of HIV tendency (Khan et al, 2009). A basic right such as accommodation is also inaccessible for hijra community in the mainstream society (Josim, 2012). Even the death of hijra does not end their disgrace and different religions and social norms complicate the matter of burying the body and conducting the funeral. While the hijra community is excluded from the mainstream social life, the civil society is not giving enough attention to this issue. Their basic rights and social acceptance with dignity are absent in every step of the development sector. It has been argued that the development projects for hijra could not take into account of such issues because there is no specific estimate of this community, however, a review of the news papers show that the number of hijra varies from 30,000 to 150,000 out of around 160 million inhabitants of Bangladesh which indicates 1% of total population (<http://www.prothomalo.com/detail/date/2011-10-30/news/197766>) with a huge variation in estimate. Husain (2005) explained that the threats of shame do not permit hijra to declare their self identity and this affects on the estimates of their population. Nevertheless, the community has recently been given the right to vote in the national elections but still they have to identify themselves within the binary gender groups of male or female (Josim, 2012). In addition the development sector only focuses on the issue of prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the sexual minority groups as the state has recognized the overall tendency of HIV/AIDS among sex workers both in sexual minorities and in heterosexual society (Khan et al, 2009).

## **1.8 Purpose of the Study:**

Recently, the achievement of legal right of transgender groups in Indian sub-continent countries became a popular issue which has also influenced the government of Bangladesh (<http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-10-30/news/197766>); therefore, being part of this continent, the country is showing sympathy towards the hijra community. In addition, transgender group and the social workers from NGOs/CBOs along with human rights activists and public officials have been rallying to demand for human rights and recognition of *third gender* identity (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-15398437>). This is yet not a big movement, but is progressing towards developing a larger movement (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). According to <http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-10-30/news/197766>, the discussion of this sexual minority among the civil society has been promoted by different civil society activists to pressure the government to include the hijra in the mainstream society; for instance, offer skill development to provide work, ensure the legal rights of identity as '*third gender*' and so on. Moreover, along with health issue, NGOs and CBOs have also promoted such activities as skill development to develop the capacity of this minority group. The media in Bangladesh has been talking about the initiatives of the government as well as many of the NGOs which have also embraced new working approaches for hijra community (<http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-10-30/news/197766>).

From these points, the initiatives for hijra by the social workers and the civil society through governmental supports have created an expectation on the further situation which mainly indicates the view of their rights and social acceptance. The central focus point of this research is to understand the work approach and actions for hijra community by the social work activists as well as the recent social position of this community in the mainstream society.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate five issues regarding social situation of hijra. The study will examine the perspectives of hijra about their social rights and social acceptance. Also, this study will describe the recognition of the hijra community by the social workers. In addition, I have aimed my research to describe and analyze the working approach and activities by the social work activists, within the NGOs/CBOs, for hijra community. Moreover, the study will examine the experiences of the social workers with this sexual minority group and at the end; this study will analyze and describe the impact of the social work actions in the hijra community's life.

### **1.8.1 Research Questions:**

To reach the aim of this study the following research questions are explored:



1. What thought could be expressed by the hijra regarding their needs to achieve full inclusion in the society?
2. In what way has the hijra been addressed by the social workers / NGOs in order to achieve their rights?
3. In what ways do social workers proceed their initiatives to include hijra community in the society?
4. Within the social supports for hijra, what kind of issues has been brought out by the social workers?
5. In what way the initiatives for hijra are including them in the society?

The next chapter will review previous research that has been conducted on the hijra community based on their circumstances and their new social movement. Then the theoretical framework regarding social work approach has been presented in the third chapter followed by the chapter on methodology of the research. Next, the findings and the analysis have been presented together in one chapter. The research then concludes through discussion and conclusion based on the reflections from findings and analysis.

## **Chapter Two: Previous Research**

Discussion of transgender issues is widely expressed in various contexts, however, very few studies have been conducted on this issue in Bangladesh and most are mainly focused on HIV prevention. Nevertheless, it is mentioned earlier in the introduction chapter that the specific gender minority group (hijra) and their cultures are mostly exist in South Asian part of the world. Therefore, while choosing the previous research the studies done on the South Asian contexts were considered to understand the social circumstances for social work and the social position of the hijra community. In addition, African context has also been considered regarding social construction and phenomenon of transgender group. However, it has been quite hard to find the research based on these contexts, as most of the literature is not available. The available materials that have been found are from South Asian context only and are not directly related to this study. The selected researches are mostly based on gender and sexual identity and sexual health (HIV prevention) issue of transgender people where the subjects and events of these researches reflect the social context of the service providers and the hijra community as well as the social services provided to the community. For example, situation of the human rights and various discriminations against hijra community, recommendations for social change regarding social inclusion of the hijra, methods of advocacy and counseling have been found in the literature. In addition, few materials have been found which present the recent research based on homosexual rights that include transgender people and the social movements carried out by the hijra community.

Khan et al (2009) have done an ethnographic study where they describe the social exclusion of hijra community focusing on the factors and the pathway between exclusion and sexual health issue. The study has been built on 50 in-depth interviews with hijra, 20 key-informant interviews and 10 focus-group discussions along with extensive field observations. The outcome of the study shows that hijra community in Bangladesh lives in extreme margin of exclusion having no sociopolitical space where they can lead life being with dignity. Their deprivations are grounded in non-recognition as separate gender human being beyond male-female gender construction. The study has also been pointed out that extreme social exclusion diminishes their self-esteem and sense of social responsibility, therefore, before effective safer sex interventions, hijra need to be recognized as having a space on society's gender continuum and their gender, sexual and citizenship rights need to be protected (khan et al, 2009).

In this study the authors examines how the hijra community is excluded in every step of their life from childhood until death and how these deprivations put them at risk-behavior in their

sexual life. For example, in the heterosexist norm, a hijra having feminine attitude in male body is excluded from school, family and then work. At the same time, situating at the lowest level in hierarchical social structure, hijra are refused to develop relation with mainstream society which prevent their accessibility to social institutions, resources and services. Therefore, hijra cannot participate in social, cultural, economic and political activities and remain limited in knowledge, and are not associated with any mainstream social system (Khan et al, 2009). On the other hand, being excluded from every part of the society, hijra are looking for a space through their sexual partners. Their restricted accessibility to information and their frustrated minds encourage them to pursue a risky life-style that includes unprotected sex (Khan et al, 2009). Khan et al (2009) have also pointed out the problematic environment concerning health issue, for example, hijra who work in CBO, often face severe harassment by the local boys. Having a strong religious value and no policy related to sexual and gender issues, protection of health rights (HIV intervention) for hijra remain unsuccessful.

Further, in this study, Khan et al (2009) enlighten some recommendation through their discussion. For instance, they assert that health interventions need to create a space to challenge the sociopolitical and socio-religious discourses of sex and gender relations in the society in Bangladesh (Khan et al, 2009). In addition, the authors also describe that the social movements by the hijra community alone are deficient when the legal, religious and political support is still lacking. Therefore, the work has to be done with the members of the mainstream society, policy planners and civil society as well as the exclusion of hijra community at the structural level must be addressed (Khan et al, 2009). In this study, the ultimate suggestion and hope have been drawn in order to ensure a supportive and congenial environment where along with men and women, hijra can live fulfilling lives by upholding their human, gender and citizenship rights.

Another study, concerning HIV protection, human rights and social exclusion of hijra/transgender women, has been prepared in India by Dr. Venkatesan Chakrapani under UNDP. The study is reviewed from various published research in different context of India under the human rights and exclusion framework. The discussion of the study mainly focuses on the need of sexual health service based on specific gender role of hijra and other transgender people that highlight the relation between the social exclusion and vulnerability to HIV and other health risks (Chakrapani, 2010).

The author revealed that the information about sexual risk behaviors of hijra or transgender women are limited and often found under the information about larger gender minority group for example MSM intervention. However, the available data indicate that they engage in high risk sexual behavior. According to Chakrapani (2010) the available information surveyed in 2007

in some selected districts, conducted by Integrated Biological and Behavioral Assessment (IBBA) which show that the tendency of condom use is low among hijra community.

This review also shows the exclusion of hijra in India. Though, in general, India has the tolerance to accept the wide and diverse culture but the family in that context cannot accept when their male child start behaving in a way that is considered as feminine. Parents may provide several reasons for having this reaction. For example mostly they think about the future and the end of their generation since the hijra cannot reproduce (Chakrapani, 2010). Additionally, due to the cross- dressing eventually hijra are excluded from their family. Their female attitudes become barriers for their progress in school and work as well. Even apart from family and social life they are often abused, forced to have sex, extorted for money and harassed by police. In addition, hijra community has been restricted to access in knowledge and health service because of their lower literacy and economic status. Moreover, about sex change operation, the Indian legal system is silent. Only in the state of Tamil Nadu free Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) is performed in selected government hospitals (Chakrapani, 2010). Having no recognition by the government, they are often discriminated by various social, legal and welfare services. All these circumstances put them at risky sexual behavior where they are unaware of their health issue.

Further, this review has drawn some recommendations, for example, introducing hijra in welfare scheme and increase public knowledge about hijra/transgender community through policies and law. At the same time, attitudes of government and health care system also need to be in favor of this sexual minority group.

Another review which has been done by Blue Diamond Society in Nepal discusses the treatment of homosexuals in Nepal by the authorities and the society while a new constitution in favor of this group is in the process of being implemented. The review has been conducted based on other published research and national and international annual reports concerning with the legal framework (Blue Diamond Society, 2010). The whole study has described that the period of accepting and implementation of legislation for homosexual group in Nepal took time in order to provide the space for acceptance of diverse sexual identity in the heterosexist society.

The study shows diverse sexual identity under the homosexual term, for example, gay, kothi, hijra and so on for whom new legislation and policy are being introduced. The study has pointed out that the court found the rights of sexual minority groups against the British Penal Code that has historically been carried out by the Indian-sub continent countries. The information of this study indicates that the acceptance of homosexual's protection through legislation is made possible with the efforts of the court and NGOs as they stood for the rights

of the homosexuals against the stance of the government. However, it is still a problem for the society until the government accepts this issue (Blue Diamond Society, 2010).

The study has revealed the aim of the legal acceptance in order to include this minority group in every social activity, for example, employment, and health services, political and social participation among others. Though the supreme court of Nepal prohibited the discriminations against sexual minority groups; often societies of Nepal showed discrimination towards this group for example, excluded them from family, school and work. Nevertheless, there are very few positive aspects of society towards them. And now there is a hope because, regarding identity and health services, sexual minority groups have been supported by the organizations through providing training on the concept of human rights, advocacy for legal and policy change and skill building programs (Blue Diamond Society, 2010).

Further, the whole review has been focused on the need of legislation which will ensure their identity, property rights and accessibility of basic rights without any harassment in the society. However, later on the identity rights of transgender people have been accepted through legislation which has been a great achievement of homosexual and transgender group in Nepal.

The study of Misra (2009) discussed decriminalization of homosexuality in India concerning law and policy, LGBT organizations and sexual rights. The paper examines the successful fight against provision in section 377 of the penal code of India that used to criminalize private consensual sex between adults of the same sex.

The article discusses about the history of section 377 and how it has been enforced and particularly affects people at risk of or living with HIV. Section 377 of the Indian penal code has been established as part of Britain's effort to impose Victorian value on its biggest colony. The law said that "*whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man; woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment*" (Misra, 2009). While later on most western democracies abandoned this law including Britain, the weight of the law over the centuries has fallen on homosexual sex in Indian-sub continent although heterosexual also partake in these acts (Misra, 2009). The existence of this law had enormous negative impact on many people's lives, for example, it is used to threat of possible arrest, have allowed the authorities to discriminate against homosexuals and organizations that are working with them (Misra, 2009).

The study also shows the fight against the law and successful advocacy to change the civil society group (Misra, 2009). Concerning this issue the author has pointed out that though government has been silent on this issue, sexual minority groups, child rights activists and feminist group have come together to start strong movements to fight against discrimination. In addition, various advocacy and counseling services have been provided by the organizations

and the members of the hijra community; for example, raising awareness among general public, the media, the health professions and students as well as counseling the sexual minority people regarding their identity and human rights (Misra, 2009). To achieve the legal right, this effort made a strategy against section 377 and based on that India has worked through technically to convince the government and later on this strategy made the success to draw the attention about the rights of LGBT groups.

Finally, the study has suggested further changes which are necessary for marginalized LGBT individuals to gain broad acceptance and equality within the wider society in India (Misra, 2009). Though sexual minority people have the freedom and legal rights to have their sexual partner but still there is a big challenge to change the society in this heterosexist society of India. For instance, after implementation of the law, the next challenges and responsibilities are work with family and employment. In addition, the author also points out the challenge of religious values, important knowledge on human rights within the education field of children as well as actively focuses on sexual health support (Misra, 2009).

Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed (2010) have done a comparative study of their previous researches on specific sexual minority groups that is hijra, kothi and discuss all sexual minorities, that is, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender in their study. The study is aimed to explore the similarities and differences among various sexual minority groups in Bangladesh regarding their identity, experiences, situation of human rights and how it affects and impacts on HIV prevention activities (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). The study is in itself a capacity development opportunity for sexual minority groups where a major part of the data collection has been conducted by themselves who have been trained for the purpose of advocacy for their own community and can also help to work with stakeholders when needed (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

However, the study has been conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh by way of snowball sampling and the research covered by both qualitative and quantitative component with LGBT population. For quantitative component 25 respondents has been taken from each community and for qualitative component in depth interviews, focused group discussion and specific exploratory interviews with major stakeholders have been conducted (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

The findings of this study reveal that the identification of each sexual minority group is influenced by various terms; for example, hijra deny homosexuality and identify themselves based on gender role which is in contrast with homosexual people who identify themselves based on sexual role (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). However, homosexual gay are more masculine powerful compare to hijra and kothi who are historically playing feminine role in

their male body. Women in Bangladesh, in general, are a vulnerable group, therefore, hijra who consider feminine attitude found them in that situation (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

Authors discuss about the HIV intervention and the human rights experiences based on different sexual minority groups. For example, significantly transgender people (hijra) are victimized for rape and sexual assault, in addition, often they are harassed and face violating acts by local boys during outreach work for HIV intervention because they are perceived as feminine gender which is weaker (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). Moreover, regarding accessibility to education, employment, health services or other public services, transgender group face more barriers because of their feminine attitude compared to homosexuals whose sexual identity is hidden in their masculine gender identity (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). Authors have also pointed out the challenges regarding strong religious value and marriage norm in Bangladesh which impacts all the gender minority groups.

Further, the study concludes that sexual minority groups in Bangladesh often experience limited access in basic human rights as well as have lack of expression of individual requirements. In addition, in order to achieve inclusion in public sphere and all the basic rights; long-term planning, advocacy and campaign regarding gender issue and HIV prevention has been recommended by the authors.

A qualitative study by Hahm (2010) has shown the human security of hijra in Pakistan and how the insecurities could be overcome. The study mainly looks at three dimensions of human security in the livelihood of hijra: community, economic and personal security. However, in some extent political security also has been considered by the author. The study also focuses on improving the lives of hijra from beyond the hijra community particularly while the decision of Supreme Court of Pakistan is in favor of this community. This research has been conducted with 67 respondents consisting three groups of hijra: asli-hijra, non-asli hijra and zenana. For this study, different urban and rural area from two provinces has been selected, in addition, significant discussion has been held with pro bono lawyers and two others who submitted the petition for the rights of hijra to the Supreme Court (Hahm, 2010).

The fieldwork shows that the main factors which influence human security of hijra are age, location, family wealth and gender which are very much linked with each other. Regarding age issue, the study revealed that young hijra is more secure in economy through traditional work and prostitution while old hijra depend on young hijra or begging (Hahm, 2010). Regarding gender issue, asli-hijra who is biologically in between of male and female are respected for their traditional work by the public, whereas, non-asli hijra who mentally feel like women are hated by the society. These indicate the discriminations are influenced by the reflection of social

construction regarding natural or unnatural gender role. However, in some cases all the criteria of hijra faced similar deprivation; for example, discriminated to access in education or mainstream job (Hahm, 2010). Apparently this gender issue influences other factors by which hijra community face various insecurities comprising poverty, discriminations in their rights, harassment in work and so on. The author also discussed that in order to overcome the insecurity; hijra community works and gets supports from their own living area/neighborhood. At the same time, Pakistan Supreme Court has submitted the petition which ensures the protection of the hijra community's rights through the supports of skill development and providing education accessibility as well as providing the human rights knowledge to all the children in education level (Hahm, 2010).

Further, the author concludes by pointing out that there is a lack of action to support hijra by both the government and NGOs, although there are available fund as well as Supreme Court has made the decision in favor of their human security, thus, this situation indicates that hijra have strived for a long time to achieve their rights.

Husain (2005) has done the study on transgender people (hijra) in Bangladesh which described their criteria of identity, religious view, social and gender role and their socio-economic position in that context (Husain, 2005). The study has covered by both quantitative component with 82 respondents and qualitative component through in-depth interviews and the case study as well. The research has been conducted in different district from every division of the country. In addition, the study also includes the information through informal interviews with different public welfare departments, religious scholars and psychiatrists, medical doctors and so on. The aim of this study is to draw the view of the situation of hijra community in Bangladesh which can promote the mainstream society to work for this community to achieve their human rights and quality of life (Husain, 2005).

The research shows various views regarding criteria of hijra based on cultural perspectives, scientific perspectives and religious perspectives. For example, from cultural view, there are several hijra exist in the society who are called natural hijra, mix<sup>10</sup> hijra, un-natural hijra, artificial hijra and so on. In contrast, there is no concept of hijra in scientific view as well as there is no acceptance of third gender in religious view. However, the study mainly examined that hijra community is most marginalized group in Bangladesh (Husain, 2005).

The case studies describe that since childhood hijra community are refused to access education due to their extraordinary gender attitudes. Later on, they face dilemma regarding their identity and lead a dual gender life. The author has also been presented that hijra are limited to

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<sup>10</sup> The mix hijra is described with medical science explanation in the study by Husain (2005).



access in all the public services for example, health care, employment, housing as well as they are deprived from basic rights and citizenship rights (Husain, 2005). They are discriminated to access justice and to participate in religious activities. It is also pointed out that while hijra joined the community apart from family, sometimes they do not feel freedom under the discipline of the community.

Further, the study has drawn attention towards state in order to provide support for this community as well as understand their gender construction. In addition, hijra community has their own capacities which need to be trained to develop their skills; therefore, the mainstream society should work with this community (Husain, 2005).

This chapter presents a review of the earlier research that mainly discusses the extreme marginalized position of the hijra community, within the South Asian context, along with other gender minority groups for instance women, gay, lesbian and so on. The discussions, within the studies, reflect on the recognition of the sexual minority groups by the mainstream human rights groups, the academia, and certain section of media and certain state agencies like health department as well as the gathering momentum of mobilization of this community with increasing efficient articulation of their issues by a developing movement. In addition, these researches have drawn various recommendations for civil and mainstream society as well as for the government in order to take this marginalized group into the development sectors in which the legal rights and social acceptance have been pointed out as key objectives to improve this community's quality of life. In addition, the discussions within the earlier researches apparently promote to explore further situation of this community.

Therefore, my study mostly focuses on social work with the excluded hijra and the progress of their social situations within the social supports. Nonetheless, these previous researches do not explicitly explain the social work approach with the community but briefly represent all the social, political and economical environments of hijra community which are essential for social workers to acknowledge providing the services. Further, few researches explained the achievement of legal rights for sexual minority groups in which some methods for instance advocacy, counseling and community work have been concerned to work at the grass root level. Considering these social work methods, next chapter will illustrate the theoretical framework in which various working approaches with the community have been concerned in order to perceive the social context and the services as well as the point of view of the respondents.

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Approach**

The literature review in the previous chapter shows the situation of transgender people where the reviews draw the recommendations to intervene for the betterment of the excluded hijra community as well as various challenges have been pointed out for the social work organizations and the government. As the aim of my study is to present the perspectives of the hijra community on their rights, the way social work is carried out for them, the challenges faced by them and the impact of the social work approach to the community; I have considered to use the concept of community work as well as the actions and methods under theoretical perspectives in order to understand the point of views of the respondents in that context. Moreover, in order to analyze the perspectives of this community regarding their needs, gender concepts have been used to understand their social context and where they belong. These concepts do not reflect a single theoretical approach but combine different perspectives. Most importantly, other relevant theoretical perspectives regarding social work with the community will also be presented in this chapter.

### **3.1 Concept of Community Work:**

In various literature, community work mostly has been used as a concept that represents diverse models and actions from different perspectives. However, before going through the direct theoretical approach of the work with communities within social work, the concept of community work for community development and the idea of community have been explored in order to understand the social work approaches with the community.

The importance of community work is an essential issue in community development and social change. In the work for community social justice, social inclusion, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities are considered as core to community development that influences and strengthens local democracy, capacity and voices of communities towards social change (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). Coulshed and Orme (2006) also suggest that social workers within the community involve that community in the process or practice of work through advocacy, counseling, campaign, survey, self-help projects among others that assist to build their capacity and also ensure that as many people as possible are feeling included and have their voice in this process of work. In this approach, Coulshed and Orme refer to Rothman (1968) who states that community intervention includes social planning, locality development and social action where social action indicate direct work with people particularly who are identified in a group with mutual interest and oppression.

Coulshed and Orme present the suggestion of Smale et al (1988) which explains that the community work with disadvantaged people engages in a process of reaching the aims and objectives by reviewing the needs of a wide range of people in the community and resources available. Within the work to develop the situation of the community Coulshed and Orme (2006) have also been concerned about public accountability, responsibilities and budget and networking as the actions of the workers. This network could be the neighbors, family, other disadvantaged people, different institutions, policy makers or any other systems with whom the community and the social workers are engaged. By involving in the network the community becomes stronger to achieve their needs and enforce policies they require. In addition, to work with a community, it has been suggested that the community worker should have education and skill in advocacy, counseling and various social work processes in order to build their own capacity as well as to work with the clients effectively and reach the needs of the community (Coulshed and Orme, 2006).

### **3.1.1 Community:**

The idea of the community has been considered in order to understand the community work. Many attempts have been made to define communities that mostly include the notions of size and place. However, two distinctions have been highlighted about community, stated by Coulshed and Orme (2006). They suggest, in general, community indicates residence and places in geographical area where people in that territory feel some loyalty to the area and the inhabitants and are engaged within the network of relationships. Moreover, community also describes people who have common interest based on work or social position that could be outside of geographic area. Here, the common interest could be implied as particular social disadvantage or rights and movement which are considered for this study of the hijra community.

In addition, regarding working with the communities the approach of community focuses on:

- A large unit to political force or to small unit to account that relate to the community or individual.
- A location to develop alternative models of social organization.
- Mobilization approach to effect social change that could be self-organization.
- A group of people who have sufficient resources to engage in alternative institutional arrangements.

- A unit could identify the forces and material conditions that determine social relations.

### **3.2 System Theory:**

Social work with a marginalized community is very complex as it influences individuals, groups and social environment as well as social phenomenon that defines or justifies the marginalization. While system perspectives in social work mainly focus on social circumstances that influence a group or a community rather than an individual, therefore, this approach is applicable as a method for social work which can be used to identify many of the components and processes involved in this work.

Coulshed and Orme (2006) state that system theory can be used to help to work with people, community and organization. Therefore, this approach encourages social workers to focus on different aspects of the environment. These different aspects could be explained as smaller systems within larger systems that include individuals, families, social order, wider society, legislation, government and so on all of which hold their own system in their individual contexts. As a core of system theory, close systems and open systems are seen within boundary systems where the former indicate self-contained and the latter is influenced by factors outside (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). However, regarding the social inclusion or exclusion of any disadvantage group, social workers consider this social system as open system and if so, then, social workers reframe their approach where other part of individual's social systems can be targeted to change. Coulshed and Orme, in the analysis of system theory, refers to Pincus and Minahan (1973) whose approach has been developed by Goldstein (1973) and Specht and Vickery (1977). However, Pincus and Minahan (1973) have identified four sub-systems within system theory:

- Change agent system: Social workers, their organization and policies that they work in.
- Client system: Individual or their network including family, community and other parts that seek help and engage with change agent system.
- Target system: The part of the system that include family, society, policy sector in which the change agent is working for change.
- Action system: People with whom the change agent system work to achieve their aim.

All these systems may or may not be the same but are connected and influenced by each other where one part affects the other part of the system; also there is a feedback loop within the system, which provides the capacity for change and the system always adjust sustain itself by using own energy (Coulshed and Orme, 2006).

Further, system approach considers the cultural, political, legal and religious contexts to understand the impact of structural discrimination of individuals and the perception of the problems that they experience (Coulshed & Orme, 2006). In this way, a system approach allows the workers to be more innovative so that they approach to understand the complex human relationships and the circumstances as well as the perspectives which provide the important ground to study how social work could engage in different systems for action.

### **3.3 Advocacy Theory:**

In social work field, usually advocacy approach is used for the people who are disadvantaged and discriminated having no legal rights. In various theoretical approaches, advocacy has often been used with the concept of empowerment and caring management towards elderly and people with disabilities, though, these days the approach has been extended to diverse needs and situations (Payne, 2005). In my study, the social workers from the hijra community and mainstream society have practiced advocacy, as a social work method, with this marginalized community, therefore, I have explained advocacy, apart from empowerment concept, under theoretical approach to explore the way of work of the social workers within the challenging social context.

Payne (2005) has stated that advocacy indicates representation through acting and arguing for the client's needs. In the concept of advocacy, Payne has used the idea of Philp (1979) who has explained that advocacy is the service with a set of techniques and skills in social work that represent the interpretation of user's value and need to the powerful group in the society. To elaborate the advocacy term, Payne has used the concept of Freddolino et al. (2004) who suggest that protecting vulnerable people and supports should be ensured in advocacy services. Moreover, case advocacy and cause advocacy have been emphasized in this approach where former indicates providing supports by the professionals for people's access to provisions to benefit them, on the other hand, latter indicate promoting social change for the benefit for marginalized group from where they came (Payne, 2005).

Regarding social work advocacy Payne also refers to Schneider and Lester (2001) who state different aspects of social advocacy. Those are defined as 'representation' that indicates the exclusivity of the workers to act only for clients instead of their best interest; and 'influence' that indicates changing the decisions and policies about issues that affect the clients. In the

latter term, workers focus on behalf of more than one client or raising concern about the facts that are creating disadvantage for the whole community. In both processes, client advocacy and cause advocacy, legislation advocacy could be used in social work practice in order to seek for legal rights (Payne, 2005).

Payne (2005), then, suggests that advocacy could be practiced in order to increase capacity of people to govern their own life. In addition, the importance of network within institutions (for instance, family, neighbor, policy maker and so on) has also been indicated as process to develop the situation. In this process, workers could form or reform the connection within the network. However, self-advocacy has also been accounted which explains that it involves peoples who are in a disadvantaged position in order to speak for themselves. In this process, usually people meet together to discuss their personal difficulties and demands and support each other to raise their voices against discrimination and disadvantage (Payne, 2005). The approach of advocacy though criticized but still it has wider application within the legal entitlement and the welfare services.

### **3.4 Concept of Gender:**

Gender construction, in my study, has slightly been reflected as the study explores the perspectives of transgender people (hijra) about their needs and rights through which they could achieve full inclusion in the mainstream society. Therefore, as a part of study, in order to understand the context of social work with hijra community, two approaches of gender concepts have been explained in this chapter.

Discussions and arguments about gender and sex are very much available these days in sociological field. Gender is a very wide theme and recognizing the order of gender in the world is rather easier than understanding the diverse gender role in hostile environments. Connell (2002) has described the concept of gender in terms of understanding body, gender and social arrangement, reproductive arena and social structure. Further, Connell (2002) has indicated gender as a key aspect of personal life, social relations and culture in which individual faces complex practical issues about identity, social justice and even survival. In everyday life, we take gender for granted and consider the ascribed male and female roles as natural order. When people do not follow that order they are considered as deviants and sometimes criminalized for offences considered too dangerous by the norm. However, gender is not a fixed states by nature where one may not be born but rather become such and their becoming could sometimes be unstable and ambiguous (Connell, 2002). However, in a discussion of distinction of bodies, gender is considered as reproductive arena that explains there is no

biological base for social process of gender. Rather there is an arena in which bodies are brought into social process (Connell, 2002).

Connell (2002) has also considered gender arrangements as a matter of social relation of individuals and groups. Gender relations include differences and dichotomy as well as many other patterns. Regarding these, the ordinary pattern of gender-appropriate behavior is considered to be recognized by bodily strength and speed where men are stronger and faster than female who are the soft gender, and this pattern is promoted by legislation, religion, parents, teachers, media and other events which distinguish gender in two categories (Connell, 2002). The model of the body produces gender differently which is mainly advanced by men and often been used to defend the existing gender order to ridicule feminism and to sustain these categories and the relation between them which produces inequalities in everyday life. Nevertheless, this inequality of gender order also affects men when they are gay, effeminate and do not have a strong masculine approach (Connell, 2002).

Therefore, Connell (2002) asserts that gender is not an expression of biology or fixed dichotomy in human life rather it is perceived as a social construction where it is governed through social arrangements and everyday activities or practices and also creates new situations and structures.

Regarding the idea of gender, Girshick (2008) has described social and gender construction to understand the gender identity through the scientific research with transgender, transsexual, bisexual and homosexual people where gender has been considered as a conceptual category in which a culture assigns a wide range of phenomenon and there is nothing related to sex. People are gendered by men and women and expected to correlate with their biological sex which refers to the biological characteristics of genitals and internal reproductive organs and hormones (Girshick, 2008). Further, Girshick (2008) states that our ordinary gender roles are defined as behavior, our thoughts and feelings which are created by the cultures and are appropriate for only two genders, therefore, we communicate our gender identity through our gender roles and presentations that follows the gender norm of the culture.

Further, Girshick (2008) asserts that the social construction of reality according to our thinking, relationships and social world are often govern within familial, cultural and social training that reinforce these concepts as normal. This norm maintains the hierarchical political structures, economic systems and social conventions that benefit those at the top of the pyramid, therefore, the idea of normal remain powerful. Even, if individual's experience does not fit in the binary norm of gender, the individual is criticized rather than the system (Girshick, 2008).

This concept of gender invites individuals to open the door to walk through gender in order to understand how we see and define ourselves within binary and beyond binary norms of gender.

### **3.5 Theoretical Framework:**

The diverse approaches explained above illustrate a framework with various concepts and theories which mainly explore the system actions and advocacy methods within the social work approach as well as the idea of the community who belongs to a certain gender group.

The concept of community work and the community have provided the space in order to understand the needs of the community, their involvement within the social work process and the skills and methods for community workers. The importance of social context has also been considered within this concept. In addition, the practice of system theory explores the use of capacity within the system in order to work with community and their networks as well as in social work context. Further, within this system approach, the idea of advocacy or self advocacy has also been emphasized as a method, to apply in the work with community and other parts which assist to achieve the aim and needs of the community.

The gender concept also fits with this social work approaches. In order to work with the hijra community through various theoretical approaches, it is useful to acknowledge about where they belong or who they are, therefore, the idea of the gender concepts has been explored in order to understand the community's life experiences, social phenomenon and needs which assist both the social workers and community workers to use different system approaches and advocacy methods within the community or with their outside factors. The system and advocacy approaches with a marginalized community have thus been used with the concepts of gender and community work within the theoretical framework.



## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodology of this study and describes the design of the research and the reason of choosing it. Then, it continues with presenting the procedure of the selection of respondents, the information about the participants and the materials of the interview as well as previous researches, theoretical framework and the organization of data for analysis. The chapter concludes with explaining the validity, generalization and the ethical considerations of the whole process of this study.

### **4.1 Choice of Method:**

There are two criteria of methodology in social sciences, that is, 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' methods which could be chosen in accordance with the purpose of the specific social research. The core aim of this study is not to generate facts supported by quantification procedures; rather this study focuses on the descriptive analysis of the human life phenomena and social meanings which are socially constructed (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, qualitative method has been chosen as the applied method in this study in order to seek the possible answers to the research question and gain an understanding and knowledge on the research subjects. In addition, the method has been chosen because it does not force the subject to give the answer but rather permit them to express their opinion according to their own point of view.

Regarding the qualitative method the interview guide has been designed as semi-structured interview which indicates that the purpose of obtaining information is to understand the world of the interviewee and to interpret the meaning of the expressed phenomena (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

### **4.2 Selection of the Respondents:**

While the method of the study has been decided to conduct the research I have obtained the sample of this study during the procedure of making research question. Eight interviews have been done in Dhaka which is the capital city of Bangladesh. I have experienced various circumstances to reach the sample. The reason of choosing this sample and procedure of the selection has been explained below.

#### **4.2.1 Target Groups:**

Hijra Community in Bangladesh is generally spread out across the country. Conversely ordinary social workers who work with this community work in a limited area. To conduct this study I have included both hijra and the social workers in my sample since the study focuses on the perspective of both Hijra community and the social workers regarding social inclusion of hijra and the progress of initiatives by the welfare NGOs and the state. The target groups have eventually been considered to get the respondents from diverse background in order to perceive their diverse experience. For instance, the respondents include hijra who are professionally experienced social workers and work with their community, the ordinary hijra who are leading traditional lives as well as the social workers from mainstream society. In this target group, hijra social workers are either from NGOs or CBOs, while the ordinary hijra are involved in traditional work and sex work. In addition, the social workers from mainstream society are either from NGOs or Public Welfare Department.

The reason of choosing hijra in two groups is to understand their social experience and social changes, by receiving services and providing services while the non-hijra social worker has been chosen as a respondent to understand the perspective of the mainstream society and their approach to social work for the rights of hijra. All the respondents have been selected from only Dhaka, due to the time limitation as well as lack of network in other cities. In addition, as the majorities of hijra live and work in Dhaka and the NGOs, and CBOs for this community and welfare departments are also active in Dhaka, therefore, it has been convenient for me to reach the target group given the time and resources.

#### **4.2.2 Access to Reach the Sample:**

In the initial stage of sampling, I got in touch with assistant manager of an NGO in Dhaka that work for human rights of sexual minority groups through the website of the organization. Regular contact was established with the NGO in which I explained about the purpose of the study and the target respondent group. At the same time I contacted one social worker hijra through a friend (who works with the media) and later set an appointment with the hijra to explain the purpose of the study and to know if she would be willing to participate.

During the separate conversations with the NGO and hijra, it was quite clear that it is not possible to reach the ordinary hijra without being helped by a guide. Usually these guides are part of sexual minority groups as well as work in mainstream jobs and help the researchers and the media to meet with ordinary hijra. As hijra live in separate colonies with their fellows to feel secure from the society, ordinary people usually do not enter alone in their households without knowing anybody from that community. The reason for this as explained by the hijra is that the

hijra community feels insecure to live among the mainstream society because the mainstream society shows neglectful and abusive behavior towards them. In addition, in order to get informants from this community a condition was implicitly put where I am asked to pay the ordinary hijra for their interviews. The explanation to this request is that the hijra who live in traditional way, have to take out their time from their regular jobs for this interview, therefore, they demand money to make up for the time lost at work. The guide who helped me reach the hijra community also demanded to be paid for their services; however, no specific amount was specified. In the mean time, for participating in the interview, contacts of a social worker from the mainstream society was also provided by NGO with whom I have been in touch. In this way, with the network of hijra and NGO I was able to find other informants from hijra community and the ordinary social workers. In this process, I also tried to find respondents from public welfare department but it was very difficult to get consent from social work activists for the interview regarding this issue.

By the end of the research I have paid around 150 BDT (2 US dollar) for each respondent that consist four hijra and around 800 BDT (6 US dollar) for the guide. While conducting a scientific study, the amount of information provided and the impact of payment on the provided information is a matter of concern. However, during the interview in their homes it was understood that most hijra are very poor and live by everyday earning. When they miss one opportunity, in a day, to earn money they never know how they will manage to feed themselves that day. In addition, hijra community has willingly participated in plenty of interviews to various newspaper articles and other media but nothing has ever made a big difference in the quality of life of the hijra community. Therefore, they are quite reluctant to give consent for interviews.

#### **4.2.3 Participants:**

For this research, eventually, eight respondents have been found and among those six are hijra and two are ordinary social workers both male and female. The ages of the respondents are between 22 and 43. From these target groups, all the hijra are from poor economical background and have only primary education. However, one hijra is newly experienced of both traditional work and mainstream job. Two are experienced of both traditional work and social work in NGOs/CBOs while the rest three hijra respondents are leading a traditional life. The two social workers from mainstream society are highly educated and actively involved in the NGOs.

#### **4.3 Interviews:**

The research has been conducted through individual face to face interviews with eight respondents. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that before starting the interview, the interviewee should be introduced by a briefing which indicates the situation for the subject, the purpose of the interview, the use of sound recorder and so on. These guidelines were included in the interview guideline and were followed before each interview. All the interviews are carried out in Bengali which helps the respondents to express their experiences in their mother tongue. In addition, the interview has been recorded by a voice recorder and transcribed word by word. The interview conversation helps the researcher to generate the findings and perception of the knowledge on the social circumstances surrounding the hijra community.

#### **4.4 Selection of Previous Research and Theory:**

The use of theory in social research assist to explain and understand the findings of research within a conceptual framework that imply systematic study including dynamics, content, context and structure of social research (May, 2001). To understand obtained information, it has been intended to use various theories; however, two theories on social work approach as well as the concept of community work and gender from various authors were eventually selected for describe and analyze. These selections of framework from the information indicate this as an induction in which the theories usually derive from the aspect of social life as suggested by May (2001).

In addition, to conduct a social research it is also important to use a literature review in similar issue as much as possible within various contexts. Though the transgender issues are widely discussed in western and European context but to understand the social phenomenon of this specific transgender group (hijra) as well as the social work activities within certain social norms and values, the contexts of South Asia and Africa have been considered for earlier research. However, as it has been hard to find the research on African context and to some extent on South Asian context as well, therefore, the previous research from some contexts of South Asia have been used as much as were found from internet searching.

#### **4.5 Method of Findings, Analysis and Discussion:**

To conduct the study easier, the respondents were given some codes for instance, H1, S1 and so on. Additionally the transcribed interviews were read several times and collected under some main different titles; for instance, Social acceptance, Recognition by the social workers etc. While putting the data under the titles, I was attentive that these were in accordance with purpose of the study as well as the research questions. The findings and analysis have been

combined that together explore the answer of the research questions and discover the life experience of the respondents. In addition, the information by the respondents have been put within the quotations after being translated as close to the original as possible. Within the descriptive analysis most the data have been reviewed thoroughly by using theories, concepts and previous research to get in depth understanding of the respondent's experience and perspective. Following this, the discussion is also held in a separate chapter which is reflected from the findings and analysis.

#### **4.6 Validity and Generalization:**

As suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), validity is an essential concept regarding social research which encompasses the entire stages from the thematizing to producing a scientific report. Following this, the validity has been concerned during the whole process of this study. In line with that for this study, the subject and the interview project have been designed. As this research has been made specifically by selecting the interviewees who belong to the hijra community and social workers belonging to the mainstream society working with the hijra community, therefore the research questions have been formulated to obtain maximum information from the target group.

As mentioned earlier, I was required to pay the ordinary hijra and the guide in order to get the consent for the interview. It is thus a matter of concern that how much the information would be valid. However, during the interview as well as in the provided information I have noticed that the statements from the respondents do not reflect as partial opinion to promote their personal position and benefit. For instance, regarding some issues the responses of the hijra respondents are very diverse, while at the same time various issues are similar among hijra and the social worker from mainstream society who has no personal relation or contact with those hijra. Thus much of the information is validated by cross comparison of the responses provided by the hijra community and mainstream social workers.

During the interviews the respondents have been encouraged to speak freely and leading questions have been avoided. However, regarding interviews, as a researcher it is felt that the hijra are very much experienced in giving interviews about and thus discussed various social problems that they face without being asked about them. For instance, I have tried to acknowledge the situation of quality of life their life as they are receiving the supports from service providers; they have started to talk about the discriminatory behavior by the society in their childhood. Thus at times they would divert from the research aim and, therefore I had to drive them back to my research question. In addition, it has been checked at every stage of the

interview process to specify the research on only what is intended to be researched. All the interviews were then transcribed which assisted me to obtain the required information.

The descriptive analysis from the gathered information has been explored through the theory and concepts in order to perceive the point of view of the respondents. In addition, a number of studies have also been used where often the social context for the social workers and social situation of hijra are similar to this research issue. As the information from respondents is in native Bengali language the quotes have been used for interpretation by translating them in English staying close to their original meaning.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describes that an analytical generalizability can be applied on the basis of analysis of similarities and differences of situation. As it is mentioned before that the interviewees are traditional hijra as well as social worker hijra and the ordinary social workers, they have both similarities and different perspectives based on various issues. While the respondents among hijra community are from Dhaka only, hijra in some areas of Dhaka are still not able to access social services from the social workers. Moreover, in other cities of the country social work services have still not reached this community. Therefore, this information could not be compared with the situation of all the hijra in this context. However, according to the analysis below compared with other similar studies the patterns arising from these interviews could be generalized on the challenging social circumstance of the social workers, in Bangladesh, regarding further implementation through initiatives and support for the hijra community.

#### **4.7 Ethical Consideration:**

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher are addressed as ethical guidelines. In line with this the ethical principles for social research have been considered in the report.

All the interviews have been carried out with informed consent and the respondents were informed on the overall aim and this research and that the research is being conducted for academic purpose only. Confidentiality has been ensured to the interviewees before taking the interview. Personal details of the respondents will not be used in the research other than those of particular importance to the analysis of the study. Further, anonymity of all participants has been guaranteed and the names of the organizations involved have also been kept hidden.

In 'consequence', in Bangladeshi context, collectivity plays an important role especially for hijra community who lives in group and congested areas to have a secure life. Thus, privacy is seen as something rare. Though the interviews have been conducted individually, the interference

occurs sometimes by outsider during the interviews. It was found difficult to provide privacy and find secluded place for the interviews though the importance of making the interviews in privacy were explained to each respondent. The interviews have been conducted inside of the house where hijra lives with their other fellow mates with the consent of the respondents.

## **Chapter Five: Findings and Analyzing**

In methodology chapter it is mentioned that the study has been conducted based on the interviews of three target groups, that is, ordinary hijra, social Worker from hijra community and social worker from mainstream society. The chapter presents the descriptive analysis from the information that has been obtained by these participants.

In this study, the analysis along with findings have been illustrated according to the aim of this research which is to look at the perspective of hijra about their social rights and inclusion, the initiatives by the social workers in order to work for hijra community, the working environments for the social workers and the further situation within the arena of social supports. Along with this research aim, the gender norm in that context has slightly been reflected by the statements of the hijra respondents during the conversations regarding the first research question about their need of social rights. Moreover, the governmental approach has been criticized by all the respondents regarding the issues of challenging circumstances in the ground of social supports.

Further, through this chapter, the study has been continued by combining the findings and analysis along with the provided concepts and researches of the previous chapters. For instance, the social work with the community has been considered along with the concept of community work, system and advocacy that explain the way of social work with this group of disadvantaged people. The earlier research suggests concerns with the context around the community and the social workers. The findings have been put under different themes relate to the aim of this study, following this, the information from findings has been analyzed in each theme.

The chapter, therefore, presents the hijra's (who participated in this study) needs regarding their rights and social acceptance, then it presents the issues that have been addressed by the social workers to achieve the social inclusion for this community. Later on, it shows various actions of the social workers for the hijra community by taking into account their common needs. Then, it continues with the challenging experiences that have been brought out by the social workers within their work with this community. Eventually, the chapter is concluded through the impact of the social work actions on the life of hijra community as well as on the social work arena.

### **5.1 Social Acceptance and Legal Rights:**



The social inclusion has been a concern of all the participants from the hijra community. Being excluded from all the social services, they have emphasized to take into account their social problems in the development sectors to achieve the rights and social acceptance. The information under this title has been considered by all the respondents from hijra community.

Most respondents expressed that these days their traditional work has no demand for modern people and sex work profession put them in an insecure life. They think that this income of sources became the main reason to be devalued by the mainstream society. They also asserted that they are accused for their aggressive behavior with ordinary people but if they can engage in a good job with good salary they believe that their life will be changed and will be able to integrate with the mainstream society. Therefore, the respondents have emphasized the ordinary job as one of the key paths to get the social acceptance because job in an ordinary environment is always been concerned as respected work in the society in which people often try to develop the quality of their life. Among the respondents one hijra has recently engaged with ordinary work and expressed that

*“...A person is valued by the work that what he/she is doing. When I was a sex worker I could not tell anybody about my work and often I struggled with poverty but now I can say with pride that I work in an organization. People admire that I work in an organization. Now I am also aware of my gender rights because it is very important everywhere in the society...”*

Additionally, the respondents also claimed that in this heterosexist norm, the gender role is often questioned and stereotyped in every step of individual's life that is not part of a binary system. Some respondents asserted that they always face troubles to travel in the city bus where they often rejected to sit with men even are not allowed to sit in reserved seats for women. Not only this, they also found problems when they want to save money in a bank where they don't find their gender place, thus, have to choose either male or female. They don't have even citizenship rights with their gender identity beyond male and female. Additionally, most respondents think that their non-recognition gender behavior compels their family to exclude them which affects their social life and so they are deprived from everything. Therefore, the acknowledgement of separate gender identity beyond male and female has been considered as an essential need for hijra to get access to social resources to gain social acceptance. For instance, one hijra expressed that

*“I have always been deprived from everything because there is always a complexity to enter any service unless I pronounce myself either male or female. But I want to lead my life as I am!! Actually the society recognizes us but thinks that ‘we are like a stranger’. We are stigmatized in the society because there is no granted identity and legal rights by the state, and so, we are being discriminated from education, family, work, sexual rights and everything”.*

Along with these, the respondents have also asserted that having no legal rights and their complex gender role constantly affects in their social life as well as in any social activities. They explicitly claimed that their non-recognition gender identity prevents them to sustain any social activities and lack of legal rights affect on their regular life. One hijra mentioned about their life situation within the discriminatory environment.

*“In my previous work, I have been abused in my office for feminine gesture; and in sex work, I am harassed by the police and local boys. When I ask for the justice, people wonder that you are hijra, what kind of justice can you have!”*

Further, the respondents among social worker hijra think that if they can achieve the official gender identity and their rights could be recognized within the legal framework, they could also acquire other basic rights and inclusion in the society.

### **5.1.1 Analysis:**

Through the above interview results it is perceived that most hijra respondents are eager to integrate with mainstream society and want to participate in mainstream jobs. The reasons imply that when urbanization has been growing in this country, believe of curse and bless has consistently been decreasing, thus, they could not earn enough money and no value and respect left in this work (Khan et al, 2009; Husain, 2005). Additionally, though sex trade is economically profitable, this profession is strongly against of social and religious norm, thus, it makes them more stigmatized and put them in a vulnerable situation (Khan et al, 2009; Chakrapani, 2010; Hahm, 2010). Along with this, the perception of the respondents also indicates that they have realized their hostile behavior towards the society which is the reason of their economical poverty and discriminatory behavior from every social institution that compel them to show such unusual behaviors. They think that a regular job can provide them relief from economic hardship and ensures the respected life in the society. As, the society ridicules hijra instead of perceived their experience of entire life; the hijra desire to integrate in the mainstream society through engage in ordinary work. If they participate in economic field within the mainstream society; they could gain the self-confidence and more awareness of their social rights. A study with hijra in Pakistan also emphasized that most hijra willing to join at any ordinary jobs to find a guaranteed basic income for further security (Hahm, 2010). In this study the perspective of the respondent, who recently join in ordinary work, indicates that participating in the labor market not only ensure economical flexibility but also assist to acquires the space, experience and knowledge by which the informant could find the path to strengthen her quality and capacity to integrate with mainstream society and further achievement of the gender and other rights.

According to the findings, the social acceptance of the informants also depends on the official recognition of separate gender identity beyond male and female. Lack of official gender identity is a major barrier in their every step of life. Regarding this, the perception of the respondents imply that they always discriminated and deprived, through the rigid bivariate category of gender, in the public transportation system, bank system, as well as every other systems. In the context of Bangladesh, individuals are concerned in social, civil and economical rights in order to be provided a valuable and respected life; however, the hijra community is remained inaccessible in all the social services due to their different gender approach against the ordinary norms. According to the perspectives of the respondents, the community, though, has the opportunity to access in the social activities within the binary male-female system; it is still discriminatory for hijra because most of them do not consent to live in this binary norm. They must identify either male or female otherwise their fundamental citizenship rights will not be granted as well as will be unable to access in any social resources under any other category. The similar consequences have found in the study by Khan et al (2009) where the non-recognition of separate gender beyond binary dichotomy pointed as the main reason to have deprivation in education, ordinary work and other social resources. These phenomenons indicates that the social systems have imposed binary gender, on any population including hijra, by ignoring the fact that gender is socially constructed, arranged, diverse and fluid in nature (Connell, 2002). Therefore, the perceptions of the respondents of this study explicitly urge the gender right which could place their existence within the social systems. When the social institutions do not recognize any other identity beyond male and female, this often makes the limitation for the informants to access in all the social services and are consistently discriminated against in trying improving their quality of life and therefore, remaining in marginalized position. Official acknowledgement of separate gender identity along with male and female could provide the possibility of the respondents to access in all the social systems by which they could also bring the achievement of social acceptance. Additionally, according to the results of the study, the respondents indicate that in Bangladeshi context, historically gender diversity is not rare especially about hijra community but still it is remained in ordinary order by the state as well as the social system, therefore, they deprived from the social acceptance. Having no approved gender identity of hijra; the informants often ignored from every social resources and institutions which influenced to consistent ignorance in the development sectors, therefore, the knowledge and acceptance of gender diversity could not spread widely among the mainstream society and in the public sphere, thus, makes them stranger to the society. Grishick (2008) has also argue that the gender approach mostly influenced with the social construction where the binary role is a 'normal' system and sustain through social, political and economic system where individual, who seems to be out of binary norm, often criticized rather than ordinary systems.

Not only this, the perception of the informants also indicate that lack of official gender identity influence the society and family to ignore the gender approach of hijra which affect on their further social life. For example, mainstream jobs can ensure their social inclusion but at the same time it is also a matter of issue that without having education it is hard to get a job in mainstream society. Additionally, their complex gender role could not allow entering the education systems and hijra lost their self-esteem. Thus, through family acceptance at least hijra could get the moral supports to gain the self-confidence to participate in the social resources for further development of the quality of their life. For a meaningful life, family is usually considered as one of the key social institution for a person and for hijra; family is most essential institution especially when they experienced complex gender approach and hostile social environment. Halm (2010) has showed that biologically hijra in Pakistan considered as natural phenomenon of the God, therefore, they are more acceptable in the society than hijra who are mentally female in male body. However, the perceptions of the hijra in this study indicate that for their family or social relations do not matter that in what way they are separate from binary role because within the social pressure it is always hard for the family to accept their male child who behaves unlike the ordinary gender norm. These entire phenomenons make the barrier for hijra to integrate in any social relations and mainstream systems.

Moreover, the respondents also claimed their vulnerable situations which influenced by the lack of acknowledgment about separate gender identity, their feminine gender approach and lack of legal supports against discriminations. For instance, gender discrimination by judiciary system and abusing everywhere for female approach. Therefore, the results of the interviews drew the correlations between gender identity and legal rights which explicitly influence most of the respondents to emphasize in order to have legal recognition of their social rights as well as the approval of *third gender or others* along with male and female in which they can seek their gender identity as well as can access in all the social services. These needs of the informants how show dominant binary gender role is reflected in individual's life especially when it is about those people who are in trouble of seeking separate gender identity and have no legal recognition of their right against discrimination. Instead they are often harassed by the general social system whether they are against the social norm or not. The hijra are very strong in their own community to protect themselves, however, lack of legal supports put them in the vulnerable situation where they could not even claimed to have fairness from the judiciary system, moreover, as the society is structured through maintaining male domination within the biological differences where female are formed as soft and less protective, therefore, the feminine approach of the respondent often been victimized either by masculine power or by any other system of the society. Connell (2002), therefore, argues that we always do gender in our everyday life and always try to practice dominant binary order by which we make differences and inequalities where men in general benefit from this system, however, men who

are effeminate and show female approaches often subjects to be abused, discriminated and sometimes targeted of violence. Therefore, for the hijra respondents who work as social workers; the gender identity within the legal framework and the law against discrimination indicate as platform for the community in order to have further achievement of the rights. Chakrapani (2010) have showed that gender identity of hijra community in India has also been accounted as initiative issue to achieve further inclusion while the country was in movement of transgender rights. While every system in the society is provided by the option of only *male* and *female* to identify themselves as well as the social supports and security are provided based on equity; it is hard for this informants to fit in this ordinary system. Thus, the importance of legal framework and the *third gender* option have been concerned in this context in which identity is a source of bringing achievement of social inclusion and legal right could be a ground for the community to protect themselves from discrimination.

## **5.2 Recognition the Social Rights of Hijra:**

Before starting any initiative to support a disadvantage group, it is important to address their needs in order to work for them. While the respondents, from marginalized hijra community, in this study, emphasized their needs regarding their social rights and social inclusion; the question, then, raised towards the social workers respondents that how they have recognized this community's social problems and human rights. The statements, regarding this, have been taken from both the ordinary and social worker hijra and the social workers from mainstream society.

All the ordinary hijra who have participated in this study, have asserted that HIV prevention through health services has mostly been prioritized by the social workers. The reason of it also explained that as hijra has no male genital organ, they do have anal sex with their male partner, additionally, hijra also expressed living with sexual partner and sex work profession these days very common in this community, thus, social workers often provide various information regarding health protection and safer sex. Regarding this, one ordinary hijra claimed that the NGOs/CBOs are not concerned about their (hijra) basic rights and any other problems but just involved in health care services. For instance, according to one ordinary hijra,

*"I didn't see anything except health care service."*

Conversely, though all the hijra respondents claimed about receiving only health services regarding HIV prevention, at the same time, most of them also admire this health care service by the social workers. They have asserted that the NGOs/CBOs addressed their health problems not only about HIV Prevention but also about any other problems regarding health issues. Moreover, they emphasized that whenever they got problems about their health they could not

able to visit civil doctors but get various services by the supports of NGOs/CBOs. One respondent explicitly mentioned that

*“...If we get any sexual problem in our health, we do not feel comfortable to ask the doctor from public sectors, but we get better services from organization on this issue. We don't feel hesitation to express our problem here...”*

The respondents also mentioned that the organizations not only provide health services but also discuss with us about the human rights issue, our social life and experience of everyday life. For instance, one ordinary hijra asserted that

*“...During our health service they also involve us in the discussion about our gender identity; legal rights issues and the problems in our daily life...”*

Along with this, all the social worker informants have also asserted about their working approach where they mainly emphasized that these days achieving legal rights, social acceptance and human rights and the protection from discrimination are the main issues that they have focused according to the common need of this community. Moreover, one participant from social workers expressed that

*“...The problem that they face everyday life and in sexual life, share with us and we try to provide information and make awareness for them.”*

Further, during the conversation about addressing issues all the social workers from NGOs emphasized that they do not just work for hijra community but include other gender minority groups. One informant expressed that the social problems of hijra are accounted along with women discrimination as because in the legal framework the gender discrimination law only indicates women. Therefore, to provide the legal supports for hijra, the organization include women who are discriminated against human rights. Additionally, another social worker informant mentioned that when they work with hijra they also include other sexual minority groups including gay, lesbian, and bisexual and so on. Regarding this the respondent expressed that

*“...Our beneficial are LGBT people and through health service for this group we try to make addressed their sexual right and other rights to the government...”*

### **5.2.1 Analysis:**

According to the findings, all the informants, from ordinary hijra, have been addressed by the social work NGOs/CBOs to be concerned with health rights issue. The reason of the recognition

of health rights also drew by the ordinary hijra in which their expressions mostly include the community along with individual experience. The perceptions of the informants regarding health care service indicate the lack of male organ left no choice for hijra but the only option to have anal sex for their sexual satisfaction. Not only this, the literature indicate that social circumstances exclude hijra from information accessibility, sufficient economic supports and any other systems, thus, they often seek their space in sexual life in which they might not bother to be conscious about safer sex and other health problems which influence to increase the tendency of HIV risk (Khan et al, 2009). The similar issue has been pointed out in India where the tendency of HIV risk is higher among hijra community, therefore, health services become an essential support for them (Chakrapani, 2010). In Bangladesh, in general, there is little awareness of sexual rights, sexual problems, HIV tendency and any other related issues, thus among a marginalized community as that of hijra is often found engaged in risky sexual behavior. Therefore, it is obvious that they are often provided the health service regarding HIV prevention and other health problems in order to have a better quality of healthy life. Along with this, it is also perceived that for one ordinary hijra, the social workers approach seems to be not according to the needs of the community as because the informant could not receive any services, except health care, from the NGOs/CBOs. This indicates the hijra are still overlooked to be recognized regarding their social rights, additionally, it is also a matter of concern that as the recognition of the community's social acceptance is a recent phenomenon; therefore, the social workers might not reach to all the community in order to improve of their quality of life. The social worker always need to be careful about their working approach and the aim as well as should more concern to include the people from disadvantage group, as much as possible, in the process to work for the human rights (Coulshed and Orme, 2006).

Conversely, the results of the interviews also indicate that the informants among ordinary hijra have a high regard for this health care services though they have argued about the approach of the social workers in which the activists mostly recognized only the health rights of sexual minority groups. The findings indicate that the social workers not only concern about HIV prevention but also accounted other issues regarding health problems in order to ensure the health and sexual rights. Additionally, the hijra think that their health problems are significantly noted when they have received the supports by the social workers from NGOs/CBOs than the direct service from civil doctors. Khan et al (2009) have been showed that hijra used to be deprived from health service and often neglected to visit doctors; therefore, it has been suggested towards medical doctors to understand the culture and sexuality of hijra to ensure their health rights. In this study, for most respondents it is shameful in front of civil doctors to express their problems regarding health issues as because the mainstream society do not tolerate diverse genders and the sexual approach against the order of nature. Before taken as a patient, hijra are criticized about their strange body, gender approach and the professions, however, only the approach of the social workers of NGOs/CBOs have showed the

accountability of the health and sexual problems of this community. In the beginning of the social services for hijra community; the health service, though, has been pointed out as primary initiative to provide sufficient supports according to the community's needs, this study shows that it has been still remained in non-recognition by the mainstream society, only, the NGOs have been accounted the health rights in order to ensure the sexual right which is apparently implied the recognition of the basic right.

Along with recognition of health rights, the involvement of the sexual minority group in the discussion with the social workers about other basic rights have been reflected by all the respondents from ordinary hijra. Similarly, the aim of the social workers, in this study, also implies that basic rights within legal framework, social acceptance and human rights and the protection from the discrimination have also been focused to be accounted as the common needs of hijra community. Several studies regarding hijra community explicitly suggest that along with HIV prevention other social and civil rights should addressed for the social acceptance for this community (Chakrapani, 2010; Husain, 2005; Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). The perspectives of most respondents, in this study, show that based on health care service social workers informants have provided the opportunity to have the discussion regarding the human rights issue and the circumstances that the hijra usually face in everyday life. This discussion trails the social workers to acknowledge the community's needs and experience of the life in order to provide the services regarding legal rights and social acceptance as well as make awareness of the community regarding the human rights which apparently implied that HIV prevention through health right has been accounted as an important issue of human rights. At the same time, the social inclusion and other rights of the community have also been concerned by the social workers.

The results of this study indicate that all the social workers informants have considered other gender minority groups when they addressed the social acceptance and legal rights of hijra community. As it is mentioned earlier in the analysis 5.1.1, being a minority and complex gender community as well as having no legal supports to protect the rights and no separate gender beyond male and female; hijra often discriminated in the development sectors by the government, therefore, in order to provide legal supports and actions for social acceptance, it is convenient for informants to address the common need of all the marginalized community who are socially and legally disadvantaged. Therefore, the social workers often take into account the women discrimination as because though the equal rights of women in Bangladesh have been addressed since independent but yet their situation has not changed dramatically within the values of patriarchal society (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). It is perceived that while several groups, who have common disadvantage, combined together; it makes easier to raise the voices to protect the human rights against discrimination. The recent successful event in India shows that the sexual minority groups have achieved the health and sexual rights as well



as the freedom from British law which was against unnatural sexual role where the approach of the movement has been strengthened by all the disadvantages groups that include gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, feminist group among others (Misra, 2009).

### **5.3 Work with Community and Social System:**

In the initiate action, particularly, through health care service the respondents from hijra community has been accounted by the social workers to ensure their sexual rights, however, along with this, the social workers respondents put attention to develop the life of the community through making awareness in order to get the community's perception regarding their own rights and responsibilities within the society. In the mean time the social workers have also engaged in the civil and mainstream society to provide the legal supports in order to protect human rights and achieving social acceptance for hijra. Regarding the work with community and mainstream social systems; all the information have been gathered by the social worker respondents from both hijra community and mainstream society.

All the social worker respondents have involved in community development where they mostly make awareness of hijra about their civil rights, gender identity, health rights in order to strengthen the self-confident and motivation to stand for their own rights. The social worker from hijra community claimed that yet many hijra do not know how to define their gender identity as well as unaware of their civil right. Most social workers asserted that we don't impose our aim to the community but try to find out their common needs within the discussion. They try to know in what circumstances hijra come to sex work and also support them with providing information about health rights as well as make them aware of their gender rights and human right. Additionally, the social worker from hijra community also concerned about the life style of hijra according to the culture of Bangladeshi context because the approach of hijra often judged by the ordinary society. Regarding this, one respondent asserted that

*"...I tried to counsel them to polite behave, body gesture and courtesy in their makeup and dress up. It is a Muslim country where society noticed these things. Moreover, as sex work is illegal in our country and there are many occurrences happen in this work, thus, I tried to make them aware to have safer place for this work".*

The social workers from mainstream society have concerned the economic condition of this community to ensure their financial security, development of quality of life as well as their inclusion within the mainstream society. The social workers asserted that they do not provide direct jobs for hijra as because the job vacancy is not available in the country but when the community willing to gain capability for jobs; the organizations, according to the fund, offer the vocational training to build their capacity to participate in job market. Along with this, two

social workers from both hijra community and mainstream society mentioned they rarely counsel individual from the community. It is only applied when individual experienced such a sensitive moment. According to one respondent,

*“There are many hijra who are being deprived from everything and even being separated by their sexual partner; try to committed suicide, and then we have to counsel them.”*

Moreover, according to the social workers, as sex work is illegal and socially disrespectful, sex workers hijra blamed themselves as criminal, thus, they counseled them about their dignity and rights and make awareness that no work is disrespectful and they are not responsible for it.

Further, along with the development of the hijra community’s life, all the respondents also concerned the social circumstances around the community which influence in their life. For example, one respondent claimed that often in neighborhood area hijra are teased and ridiculed because of their feminine approach when physically they are men. The social workers from hijra community think that to be integrated in the society the social acceptance is very important, therefore, people in local area are counseled by hijra in favor of them as well as the discussion with religious scholars has partly been concerned by the activist as because the society strongly influenced by the religious norms. Additionally, the social workers asserted that hijra community often harassed, when they are found in sex work profession, by the local boys and police. Therefore, the informants consider this mainstream group within their social work approach and actions. For example, one participant expressed,

*“...as because often sex workers are harassed by the local boys and the police, we try to keep a regular relation with them, technically counsel them and invite sometimes in our discussion meeting”.*

Along with this, most social worker participants have started to discuss, about education opportunity of hijra, in small public schools. To make awareness of the mainstream society the social workers also used the media as well as organized campaign in the neighbor city and the university where they try to know the public reactions.

Moreover, the social workers asserted that along with the need of social and basic rights; the importance of gender identity right and legal rights are often reflected in the life experience of hijra. The informants think that limited accessibility in social resources and sex work profession make the barrier for hijra to have social acceptance by the mainstream society. Therefore, mostly the social workers from mainstream society try to provide legal based supports when the human rights of hijra are violated in the society. They show the evidence of gender and social discrimination to the lawyer. The informants regularly keep good relation with the lawyer groups and trying to establish the law and officially a separate gender identity for this gender minority group. Regarding this, another social worker from mainstream society expressed that

*“Sex work is not clear in the law of Bangladesh, thus, to be legalized this work and to give respect in this work we do advocacy with the lawyer in this issue”*

Within the social system, the social workers from mainstream society do not prefer to work with family before establish the official recognition of hijra. In contrast, the respondents among social worker hijra have started to work with family of this community. Working with family is not often done by the informants; however, it is up to the need of the community. One respondent asserted that

*“Sometimes I work with the hijra family through advocacy. We tried to advocate for hijra to convincing their family because family support is very important for them”.*

### **5.3.1 Analysis:**

Regarding the supports for disadvantaged groups, Coulshed and Orme (2006) suggest that the work for community engages in the process of work to reach towards the objectives through the review of the needs of community and resources with a wide range of people; following this, the findings show that all the social worker respondents among hijra community and ordinary society have concerned the common needs of hijra in which basic rights, legal supports, gender identity and social acceptance have explicitly been highlighted in the social work approach. The social workers provided various initiatives that comprise both the improvement of community's life and the knowledge of diversity acceptance by the mainstream society in order to achieve legal based rights and social inclusion of hijra.

The social workers, in this study, have begun their activities in which they provide information about various social resources in order to achieve social inclusion. Regarding social work actions, system approach provides four sub-systems including change agent system, client system, target system and action system which provide various paths for social work activists to work with disadvantaged groups (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). For instance, as the community structurally excluded from every social resources they have continuously deprived in accessibility to information and any other systems, thus, still many hijra unaware about their rights and social responsibility. Social workers, therefore, engaged with the hijra community to develop the quality of this community's life where they mostly make awareness of hijra about their civil rights, gender identity, health rights to strengthen their capacity in order to make them capable to stand for their own rights. Additionally, it is perceived that social worker instead of imposing their action on the community they technically perceived the needs of hijra within their work process. In line with that it is described earlier in the analysis 5.2.1 that social workers include the community within the discussion when they willingly receive health care services. In this process, the social workers provided the supports such way where community

expressed their experience unconsciously but assist the social workers to perceive their social problems. This approach and actions embraced the agent system, client system and action system of system approach in which the hijra community involve in the organization to seek help and at the same time the social workers, in order to improve the community's quality of life, elicited the community's needs through perceive their social circumstances by counseling, making awareness and providing information within the supports of the organization.

Additionally, social work with system approach suggests to understanding cultural, legal and religion contexts that impact on structural discrimination and experience of the individual's problem (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). The findings of the interviews also indicate that social workers when work with the community they have considered the value of the society along with community's social problems. They not only took into account the basic needs of the community but also addressed the social and cultural problems that keep out this community to integrate with the mainstream society. As the needs of this community ultimately be included in the mainstream society; the respondents, therefore, have perceived the religious and social norm in the context of Bangladesh in which the hijra usually experienced the crucial discriminated life. For instance, it is mentioned earlier in the analysis 5.1.1, hijra often accused by the society when they show their aggressive behavior and the ordinary society always generalized hijra to this approach. Therefore, the informants in this study have engaged to change the community's system of life by counseling their courtesy and gesture in order to fit them within the culture of the mainstream society. Moreover, concerning to the social norm and the community's life, the respondents also counsel the community to have sex within the privacy instead of open places as because hijra community often harassed in their sex work profession by the threat of illegal work. These approaches of the work explicitly imply the client system and action system in which individuals or groups when receive the service of social supports they are prepared to develop their capacity to protect themselves by understanding the social context which usually influence their social relations and social life within the system of norm and culture (Coulshed and Orme, 2006).

Along with this, social workers also addressed the community's necessity of mainstream work. Because working opportunity in the mainstream society is one of the key aims of the hijra community to achieve respect, social acceptance as well as economical relief; therefore, in order to develop the skills of this community, the respondents from mainstream society have offered the training instead of provide direct jobs. From the perception of the informants it is perceived that the country, in general, has unemployment problems as well as the social work supports are provided vocational training according to the community's need but based on the funding of the organization. This implicitly indicates that the social workers have limited their actions within their system of work. This approach of the actions implies the agent system and client system within the system approach in which individual or community receive the

supports of vocational training for their own interest but at the same time this action are afforded based on the organization's aim and capability (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). Additionally, social workers, in this study, though work with a group of people from community and society; it is also reflected from the point of views of informants that in few cases they need to work with individual from this disadvantaged group. The findings indicate that non-recognition of sexual rights and gender rights as well as the sex work which is against social norm put this community behind the mainstream society in which the hijra consistently abused against their ordinary life. Therefore, it is very common for hijra who being discriminated in everywhere often demolish their dignity and sometimes try to committed suicide, therefore, the social workers sometime deal with this sensitive and the personal problem of the hijra that influenced by social circumstances. Many other studies also emphasized the margin situation of this community where the respected life and dignity of hijra are often seemed to be rare in the society (Khan et al, 2009; Husain, 2005; Chakrapani, 2010; Bondyopadhayay and Ahmed, 2010).

Further, as open system is implied one of the core system in a system approach which influenced by factors outsider, this approach suggests the social workers to reframe their approach where other part of individual's social systems can be targeted to change (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). Following this, social workers in this study seems to be started their activities with various systems within the society, for instance, along with awareness of the community; the informants are working with lawyer for civil rights and engaged with neighborhood area, religious scholars and many other parts of mainstream society to bring the social acceptance. For instance, as hijra is often ridiculed in the local area because of their feminine approach, social workers have concerned the neighborhood area of hijra in which this disadvantage groups experienced a crucial life, therefore, hijra community counsels in favor of them within their neighborhood area where they used to live and the social workers support them to engage in this process. This approach not only indicates the target system where social worker informants engaged with the client's network, but also emphasis client system in which the involvement of this community in this work process increases their strength and the capacity. These strengthen and the capacity could assist the hijra for further actions by their own within the community development. This action regarding the involvement of the community and the society has also been used in the study by Bondyopadhayay and Ahmed (2010) where the study itself has engaged this group to conduct the interviews within their community which assisted the community to build their capacity and develop their knowledge for further action in order to achieve their social rights. Additionally, it is also reflected from the results of this study that the social workers have partly considered the religious scholars in their social work process. The society and individual in this context generally influenced by the religious view, therefore, engaged with religious institution not only make awareness of the religious scholars but also provide space to have discussion regarding social acceptance of hijra community.

Along with personal and social life, hijra also face various problems in sex work profession. It is mentioned earlier chapter in 1.6 that sex work is unclear in the law and the sexual orientation of hijra are against of social norm; thus, hijra often harassed by the local boys and police. Social workers in this study have focused on these groups to make them aware to understand the social circumstances of hijra. It is perceived that as the harassment of the judiciary system in the sex work profession and the masculine power on the feminine approach in local area are regular phenomenon for hijra community; the informants technically engaged this group in their social work actions. In this approach, the mainstream groups could discuss their own idea, feel their participation in the social work action as well as could perceive the community's social situation by which social workers can find the way to provide the security of this community from further harassment. This approach of the action explicitly implies change agent system, target system and action system in which social worker according to their work process and the client's circumstances take the action with the mainstream groups which is connected with the community's everyday life (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). Further, in this study, the target system within the system approach seems to be mostly reflected in the social work actions for this community. Because the social workers trying to provide the knowledge about the social phenomenon of hijra to the various parts of the society in order to bring the opportunity for hijra to gain more social resources which could assist them to achieve their social rights and social acceptance. For example, discussion in the public schools for education opportunity of hijra, campaign in the university and neighborhood city to understand the opinion of young generation as well as using the media to give the message to mainstream society have been concerned, as the target groups, by the social workers. Within these target groups, media often play a major role to make awareness and change the system of the society. At the same time opinion of the young generation as well the knowledge of diversity and human rights are the essential resources for hijra community to go through a new movement towards social acceptance. Various studies recommended taking into account the supports from various institutions within mainstream society in order to perceive social circumstances of this community (Misra; 2009; Blue Diamond Society, 2010). Moreover, along with the need of social and basic rights; the importance of gender identity right and legal rights are also highlighted by the social workers to bring the social inclusion for hijra. This marginalized group has also been addressed in the study by Husain (2005) where the study emphasis the legal framework in Bangladesh is enough in order to protect this group, however, this could not be agree while the recent social situations, in this study, show that having no gender and legal right this community is discriminated in every social system. Regarding the development of quality of the disadvantaged group's life, Coulshed and Orme (2006) suggest the social workers to engage with those networks by which the policy could influenced in favor of discriminated groups. The social workers, therefore, work with advocacy method with those powerful groups (for example, lawyer) by which this hijra community could gain the legal based supports. Payne

(2005) has emphasized about the advocacy method in which the social workers act and argue for client's needs. It is perceived that this advocacy is an essential method of the social workers to work with disadvantaged group especially when it is about those people who are discriminated for lack of legal supports. Further, regarding the client's needs, Payne (2005) emphasizes the *case* advocacy and *cause* advocacy where former indicates social work advocacy based on client's need and latter implies the advocacy which is not directly based on need but is the best interest for clients. According to the result of this study, this method is often applied by the social workers to a certain mainstream group to guarantee the recognition of official gender identity and legal supports. As both the common interest and client's needs this is essential to provide security of individual's work and will ensure the protection of other basic rights.

Along with all these different social systems which are connected to the development of hijra's social life, family of the community has also been considered by the social workers when the community extremely need of their family supports. It is analyzed earlier in 5.1.1 that family is one of the key resources of the hijra community especially in the adolescence stage when they identify themselves in separate gender beyond male and female. To take into account the need of the community, social workers perceived the importance to work with this target groups. In this approach, the target system and the advocacy method have explicitly been reflected by the social workers. Through advocacy social workers could interpret the value of individual's need to the target group who is related to this individual and community (Payne, 2005; Coulshed and Orme, 2006). So, in the case of this disadvantaged group, advocacy has utilized by the social workers with the target group (family of hijra) where they convince the family to accept or support this child. Nevertheless, it is also perceived the different social work approach between hijra community and mainstream society. For instance, when the social workers hijra has mostly willing to involve with the family, in contrast, the social workers from mainstream society are still do not comfortable to work with the family of hijra. The reason is implicitly shows that in one hand, being part of this community the social workers hijra are more attach with the problem of this community as well as have more networks to address this issue, on the other hand, social workers from mainstream society are more aware of ordinary family structure, therefore, it is more sensitive institution to work for them before gaining a platform for hijra.

#### **5.4 Challenging Experience of Social Workers:**

All the social worker respondents from both hijra community and mainstream society have expressed more or less similar experience which impact on their social work activities. They mainly talk about the challenges regarding social and religious value, approach of the

government as well as low education and skills of social worker hijra within the work mainstream system of the society.

Accordingly, all the respondents have experienced various challenges during their work with this community. Mostly they have emphasized the challenges to achieve legal supports regarding sex work and gender identity rights in which they often feel insecure because of the governmental approach and religious norms. The respondents claimed that whenever they tried to work with governmental departments they were bound with unofficial commitments in which it is hard to continue the work. When they talk about health supports they get response by the civil society but when they talk about sexual right and legal right hijra are often overlooked. In addition, they claimed that they often have to work technically with this community because there is no legal support for this community. So, if government banned their work they have nothing to do. Moreover, one social worker expressed that

*“Working with sexual right is very hard in this society. Whenever we tried to work with government, we had to work with various binding that we hardly can work. Therefore, convince the government seems most difficult work to achieve the aim of this community”.*

Moreover, they think that that when the sexual right issue is raised, the government and society give excuse of religion. The social workers among hijra community claimed the work that they are doing has no security. Religious scholars say that working for sexual rights is a work against religion. They make them to scare. Further, the respondents also concern about the funding of the organization as because there is no supports from government sectors. Along with the pressure of religion and state; the respondents often face difficulties to make awareness of society and family. They respondent asserted that It is a new concept for the society, it is hard to break the conservative perspective of the society. This society afraid of religious view because it is not allowed in the religion and this also influence on the family. The society thinks that if the hijra’s right will be allowed, children will go in wrong direction. Additionally one respondent mentioned that

*“When we work with the family in favor of hijra as advocacy, usually they became angry on us. They think that we influence their son to become a hijra.”*

Further, along with all the challenges, social worker respondents have still continued their activities for the social inclusion of this community. Nevertheless, very few organizations from mainstream society have worked with this community. In addition, social workers from hijra community feel that their knowledge and skills to perform as a social workers are not enough especially while they need to work for social changes. For instance, one social worker expressed that



*“We are not educated that’s why we face problems to work with policy and structural level, it would be good if more educated people would work with us.”*

Moreover, only one social worker from hijra community asserted that the community themselves is another threat. Because when they work for other systems to spread the knowledge about discriminatory experience of hijra sometimes the society misinterpret the life of this community. In this situation ordinary hijra often become aggressive towards social worker hijra.

#### **5.4.1 Analysis:**

Working with any social problems could bring the challenges for activists whether it is by NGOs or Public department or any other systems. It has been presented in this study that when a community is extremely marginalized from their gender identity, legal rights, social resources and social acceptance; social workers respondents have to work with this community as well as with all the systems and the networks of this community. Because these different systems often influenced the community’s life experience. Thus, it is obvious for social workers who work for disadvantage group face various circumstances which makes barrier in their activities.

According to the findings, within the ground of social work actions; the ignorance of government and the pressure of religious norm have mostly been highlighted as a challenging experience for the social workers informants. The similar reflection also found by Khan et al (2009) where it has been showed that government itself violet the rights and the religious value is often take prioritize in that context. This study indicates that when the health rights of this community have been recognized in the policy level, it is still remained hard to convince the government to recognize this community’s civil and other social rights within the legal framework. Even, it is more difficult to work on any projects with the governmental department as because social workers often limited with various bindings and informal systems of the public departments. It is understood that working with this gender minority group is not easy for the social workers when the complex approach of the government shows negligence towards the community. The government rarely involves with this issue and when they involve in it often in middle of the process it is uncertain for the social workers whether the work will continue or not. Additionally, the religious approach is not only a threat for the social worker activists who work with gender and sexual right but also it is a powerful part of mainstream society for the government. In this heterosexist norm, the religion usually plays a chief role that influences the societal approach and imposed on individual. It seems like accepting the legal rights for separate gender identity and for sex work are the threats for the religion and the society because it can break the sustained social norm. It is hard for the informants to cope

with religious perspective and other social systems especially when they have no back up support, either by the legal framework or by the government, to sustain their work. Moreover, the result of this study shows the challenges of the social workers to cope with norm and culture within family that influenced by society and religion. In the South Asian context, the countries that already achieved the legal rights unlike Bangladesh still remained within the pressure of society and family (Misra, 2009; Blue Diamond Society, 2010). According to the study materials, within the work with hijra family social workers are often claimed as the actors who are against social norm. Breaking the social norm and gender binary systems are a stigma for a family in this society because boys taken as a power of the family. When the boy started to behave like a female and adopt the feminine approach, it is the threat for family to be subjected by the society as well as it is the result of lack opportunity of next generation. In addition, it is a risk for social workers because there is a possibility to split the trustworthiness of the target groups and which could badly affect on individual's (hijra) life. The situation explicitly shows that it is a toughest challenge for the respondents to play the vital role in between the rights of the community and the value of social as well as family norm. Similarly, social worker can also lose the faith of client if their involvement in the mainstream society outcome negative reaction by the society instead of positive change. This situation reflected by one social worker hijra who indicate that these days when they are working with mainstream society, the social worker feel more pressure in their work by the expectation of the community.

Along with all these challenging experience, social workers also concern about financial supports of the organization as because there is no certain economical fund is approved by the government, only, the external funding is the source of economic support by which the organization is operated. While the organizations always have to be careful about the financial condition in order to provide supports, there is always remain a chance for the social workers to away from the needs of the beneficial with whom they are involved. For instance, it has been described earlier in the analysis 5.3.1 that social workers could not often afford to provide skill development training because of their funding. Not only this, depending on the external economy also made the government unaware and avoids taking this community in the development sectors. Moreover, the social workers from hijra community feel the limitation in their work because their skills and academic knowledge regarding social work is not enough among them comparatively the social workers from mainstream society. Regarding the community work Coulshed and Orme (2006) suggest that in order to work for disadvantaged group, workers should have the knowledge and skill of actions to deal with policy and structural level. This study indicate that hijra community is often been excluded from every social resources, thus, they don't have academic knowledge and skills but acknowledged their own life and working experience. With the personal experience social workers hijra often found difficulties in order to work with various social systems, for instance, those people who are in powerful position to provide legal supports and acceptance. On the other hand, social workers

from mainstream society have the knowledge and academic education which helps them to deal with complex structural problems within various systems. It is perceived that, these circumstances raise the requirement of engaging more social workers from mainstream society in order to provide knowledge based activities and supports for this disadvantage group to achieve full inclusion.

### **5.5 Criticizing Governmental Activities:**

During the conversation about the challenging experience of hijra as well as the impact of this actions have provided the flows in which all the respondents have explicitly criticized about governmental approach. Accordingly, all the respondents from both hijra community and social workers have expressed the actions and approach of the government to the sexual minority groups.

The ordinary hijra have claimed that when the civil society and government have recently addressed the social problems and the marginalized position of the hijra community, various vocational skill development training has been provided for them in order to build their capacity to engage in the mainstream jobs. They have also mentioned the information and the opportunity to participate in this system which was not equal for all. According to one hijra,

*“I heard that government has provided training for work but I didn’t get anything. I also heard that government has a big budget for it. They told that they will provide supports for everybody but few have got the chance and many hijra even do not know about this.”*

Though some hijra participate in the training in order to develop their capacity, it has been still criticized as because the program has not been sufficient according to the commitment of the government. According to one respondent,

*“they asserted that government has provided three months training for hijra which is actually one year course for others. Moreover, the training has been closed after one month. It was not possible to learn properly. They were supposed to be provided job with 12000 BDT salary but not all of them get the work. Additionally, one hijra told that she got the work with 5000 BDT salary. But she had a doubt that what did government actually do with the money!! The salary of the hijra was not enough to survive in Dhaka city. They claimed that the can earn more money by hirjagiri so most of them gave up the work”.*

Not only this, the social workers think that the situation indicates the lack of management and plans as well as the objective regarding this initiatives which make doubt that whether the state has really aimed to include this community in the mainstream society or not. Regarding this

circumstance, all the social worker respondents from both hijra community and mainstream society have also argued about the approach of the government which is as usual for any social problems. Most participants among social worker think that government has just provided training for hijra but they don't know anything further about the procedure. They should have discussed with all the organizations who are already working with this group but government just started alone and showed up to the media about their project. In addition, the training for skill development is not based on long-term plan to sustain this program. Regarding this one social worker said that

*“Government has started the project without thinking about further. It is not easy to change the community by providing the work. Many of this community could not adopt to work in the environment where ordinary people use to work. This community needs to be counseled at first...”*

#### **5.5.1 Analysis:**

The challenging circumstances to work for hijra community have shown the limitations of the social workers informants which mostly impacted through religious and social norm as well as the governmental approach. Additionally, during the interviews the expressions of all the informants, regarding the challenging experience in this work and the impact of this work, have dragged to perceive their point of view about the initiatives through the support by the government sector.

According to the result of interviews, when the civil society and government have recently addressed the existence of hijra as well as their marginalized position; they mainly concerned the social inclusion of this community to be concern about their participation in mainstream economic field. Therefore, the vocational skill development training has been provided for hijra in order to build their capacity to engage in the mainstream jobs. These initiatives have made the hope for the NGOs as well as for the community to bring further achievement about social inclusion of sexual minority group; however, the ordinary hijra have claimed about their lack of opportunity to participate in this action. The materials of the study indicate that government has provided new initiative with a good financial budget in which few hijra have participate but still many hijra has discriminated from this opportunity as well as most hijra is unaware of this new actions. Though the existence of this community has eventually been recognized by the government, the crucial situation is that the actions from the government sector are not active to work for this community. In general, as part of minority population, this community is always limited to access in information and any other systems. When the government has a good financial budget for this initiative; before providing the supports, the information regarding this

opportunity could have been spread towards the community in order to give them the opportunity to participate in these activities.

Additionally, the vocational training by the governmental support could not help the respondents in their economic situation. Because the training which usually provide for one year has been contracted for three months in the project, moreover, this projects didn't continue after one month. Few hijra got job with 5000 BDT salary when they were supposed to be provided around 10000 BDT salary. As a result most hijra left the work, instead they prefer to income through selling sex that give better economic support than this provided work. The perception of the respondents draws the uncertain circumstances when they have participated in the initiatives by the governmental department. The respondents, though, involved within the actions by the support of the government the community still remains under discrimination because government could not fulfill the commitment and hijra got back their previous life.

Like hijra respondents, the social workers informant also draw quite similar view about this actions of the government sector where the government seems to be lack aware regarding this community's social problems. Instead, the government, for their own interest, has misused this community through showing up in front of the media that they have offered a project about social inclusion of hijra . It is true that the project has been offered for hijra community but it is also a controversial issue that providing working opportunity to few people from this community does not prove the recognition when most of them still persisting to survive within the margin position. Along with this, according to the findings, the project of the governmental department has been criticized that there is no objective and plan in this activity which directly just involve the community instead of perceive their social life and experience. In the primary initiative, government could have provided counseling for the community and have proper plan to use the budget of this project. Additionally, the materials indicate that government even didn't discuss, about the life experience of hijra, with those activists who are working with this group before providing any supports. It is not easy to change suddenly with some short-term support when this community is leading their life in margin position since long years. Apparently, the entire phenomenon slightly implies the social context of the public sector in Bangladesh where in general more or less all the initiatives of any program misused by the government.

## **5.6 Impact of Social Work Supports:**

All the informants among ordinary hijra, social worker hijra and social workers from mainstream society have been expressed the impact of the new approach of social work on the life of hijra. In the conversation, the social environment of the social workers to work with

sexual minority group and the recent social situation of hijra among the mainstream society have been reflected by the respondents.

Regarding the supports from NGOs/CBOs, the informants appreciate the health care supports; nevertheless, they also asserted that they could not receive this service when they found the good organizations are far from their place which cost money. Some ordinary hijra admired that these days they are free to go around in their own local area with feminine dress up. Additionally most respondents ordinary hijra also seem to be embraced the hope about their future life. For instance, one ordinary hijra said that

*“It seems like things are changing now. Now we can make a hope to do many things. Awareness is increasing among us. Day by day we are being noticed by all. In some way we could share our problems to others.”*

The expression of one respondent seems like she is disappointed of this social services and her non-changeable life. For example,

*“I will say still I am deprived from everything. It is hard to get house. Still I feel I m not safe in sex work profession. Actually there is no change about sexual rights. NGOs just discussed and make aware of our rights but still the society ridicules us. Actually there will be no change in Bangladesh because it is a religious country.”*

Additionally, the respondents among social workers claimed that the situation is changing but not so fast. It took three years to notify the government about the existence of hijra community. It will take longer time to change the perspective of the society as well. We always need to be conscious to step out further based on reaction of the mainstream society and the social situation of the country as because the country itself are not in stable and dealing with various problems. According to one social worker,

*“When we argue about sexual right in the civil society; we are said that still it is not a time to work with this issue. We have to keep patience.”*

Regarding this, social workers think that if we look back our previous days then things are changing now. The recent change is highlighted by the respondent is that a separate gender option in passport. Additionally, social workers hijra think that hijra now aware of their rights, they know they can raise a voice against discriminations. Moreover, while the NGOs once involved in only Health services, now they are spreading towards the issue of human rights and social inclusion of hijra according to the needs of the community. Further, the positive change is visible among young generation that explained by the social workers. At the same time, the number of organization is increasing who are working with this sexual minority group. One social worker hijra asserted that

*“...situation is changing but a bit by bit. Hijra was called disable before but now we talk about their human rights. Once I used to work for hijra in hidden by identify myself as male but now I can work with them by identify myself as hijra. Once, there was only HIV protection for hijra and now all the situation and rights of hijra has been discussed. Many hijra are now aware of their rights”*

### **5.6.1 Analysis:**

Since several years the social workers started to spread their activities among this community and mainstream society within various challenging environment. Within this support the social situation of hijra community seems influenced though it doesn't show a big change.

According to the findings, ordinary hijra argued about health care support which is good but the service is not available that cost more money. This indicates that Social workers might not reach yet to every individual's living area to improve their quality of life. This raises more social work supports to reach towards individuals door to door in order to provide sufficient health care service. Additionally, the materials of the study indicate that still hijra are remained under discrimination because yet they did not come out from their regular problems and lack of basic needs. Nevertheless, when the social workers have addressed the social acceptance of hijra community and provided initiatives to bring the social changes; this seems to be influenced on the hijra informants because most of them admired the freedom in their own local area where no one harasses them these days. Additionally, the social work services have provided the space for hijra in which they got the opportunity to share their own experience. This makes their hope to find out the path to include in the mainstream society while once they have spent their life in the margin position without paying attention by anybodies. All These perceptions of the informants imply binary situations because it does not show a huge change and a lot of things need to do by the social workers, however, at the same time, it could also be perceived as to some extent a positive movement towards the social change as well as to the development of the respondent's social life. Additionally, the result of the study shows that somehow the ordinary hijra afraid of social and religious values which seem for them will never changeable whether they are protected by legal supports or not. As the social changes yet not felt noticeable, hijra might afraid to make the hope the acceptance from religious perspectives and social view.

Further, the study shows that to notify this issue to the government, social workers have continuously work on it and today the society and government at least recognized the community's existence and their hardship life experience. This change has inspired the social workers to go further to work for full social inclusion of this community. The social workers

admire the perspectives of educated young generations which imply the tolerance to accept the gender diversity. Thus, they argue that it might take more time to convince some part of the mainstream society but the situation is changing. The findings also indicate that making the change of the social perspective might take longer time; however, the bigger change could explicitly be noticed in the work approach of social workers and NGOs. Once the social workers hijra have not been accepted for their identity but now they are quite openly working for this community without any harassment. As the social workers now spread their work in the mainstream society this approach itself is the change in the social work arena to work for this community.

Next chapter will present discussion and conclusion in which the findings and analysis have been reflected along with the concepts and literature review.



## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion**

The overall aim of this study is to examine the present-day social situation of the respondents in the hijra community in Bangladesh, as well as the social arena of the social workers providing various initiatives to include this community within the mainstream society. The interviews of this study were concerned with the social position of hijra as well as with the ways social workers work with these people and the impact of their work. Through qualitative interviews, the study has brought out – as perceived and explained by the informants among the hijra community – the necessity of gender identity rights, mainstream jobs and other basic rights of hijra within the legal framework as well as social acceptance. Moreover, the recognition of the community's needs and the actions by the social worker respondents has shown the importance of working with both the community and the mainstream society. Furthermore, within the social work process; the religious values, societal pressure, governmental strategy and lack of legal support have been identified as the challenging issues of the respondents among service providers. The perspectives of all the informants have also been perceived regarding impact of social work approach on the hijra community.

The descriptive analysis of this study has been done by comparing with/relating it to the previous research done within the South Asian context about the marginalized situation of the hijra community, and the recommendations made to develop this community's quality of life. Along with this, the theoretical frameworks with system and advocacy approach, concept of gender and community work have helped to understand the actions by the social worker respondents to include the hijra population in the society.

### **6.1 Reflection of Analysis:**

The findings and analysis show that the respondents among the hijra community are aware of their social needs in order to achieve their rights. Most of them mentioned their problems and the circumstances of their everyday life to get attention in order to receive the provided social services, by which they could achieve the opportunity to access mainstream society. Regarding this, a separate gender identity of hijra in this context has been identified as the focusing issue to achieve the basic rights as well as social acceptance. Not only this, but also other social factors like ordinary jobs, education opportunity, family supports and social security were mentioned as important issues to take into account in development sectors. All social resources are interconnected which means that they could not be separated from each other; however, the official recognition of a separate gender identity within the legal framework and financial

supports seem to be the most essential needs for the hijra respondents.

Regarding gender identity, gender often influences the personal life, social relations and culture in which the individual faces complex practical issues about identity, social justice and survival (Connell, 2002). It is very common in the society that to gain access to social resources and services, individuals are often required to provide their personal details and information where gender identity is part of this system. To take into account the importance of gender rights, within the South Asian context, Nepal, Pakistan and India have recognized the separate gender identity of the sexual minority groups within the legal framework, in order to provide them the accessibility to the social resources and institutions (Misra, 2009; Hahm, 2010; Blue Diamond Society, 2010). Following the other neighborhood countries, the social activists that I interviewed in this study are involved in the process to achieve the social inclusion of this community by focusing on recognition of gender identity as well as legal supports. The community could be recognized by the state and included in the legal framework to be provided social support when they are in the gender binary system. However, as historically this community has considered their identity separate from the traditional male and female gender, this group would remain living under gender discrimination if they could not achieve the option of *third gender* or *others* within the system.

In addition, this study also explored how individuals face several forms of discrimination in the every social system because of their different gender characteristics. For instance, my respondents among hijra, with whom I spoke, explained that being threatened by the police and local boys in the streets is very common for them. They do not even have the space to get support by the legal framework and fails to protect their rights. In addition, the sufficient economic support within the mainstream society is essential for the hijra informants, as most of them found difficulties to be included in the society when they were involved in a profession which is against the generally accepted social norm. Having no separate official identity within the binary gender system and suffering a lack of opportunities for financial support, they remain strangers. Thus, they are excluded from the society as well as often forced to become involved in prostitution to overcome poverty. Therefore, the identity rights as well as the working opportunities according to the hijra community's skills could provide the path to individual hijra community members to protect their rights with dignity. This support could also draw the attention of the civil society and the service providers to spread the knowledge of diversity among society in order to provide further inclusion.

The first attention that was given to social problems of the hijra community concerned health care services for HIV prevention because of their higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection. However, the implementation of the initiatives about health care services was still unsuccessful because, the social circumstances around this community are complicated, which tends to force them

into risk behavior. On the other hand, the mainstream society has a lack of attention to acknowledge the culture and the social problems of this community. When the separate gender identity of the hijra community in Pakistan was recognized within the legal framework, that group still did not receive enough attention from the development sector as well as from the social work activists (Hahm, 2010). However, this study shows that these days at least the social workers provided various types of support taking into account the common needs of the community. As civil society and the government have recently been addressing issues regarding the inclusion of the community into mainstream society, the social workers in the NGOs I spoke to, have engaged in new efforts to work for the community where they not only focus on health related issues, but also point out the social circumstances members of the community are going through crucial life experience. The researches within South Asian countries, including Nepal and India as well as Bangladesh, have recommended the social- and human rights activists who deal with this community to also address social change, along with improvements of the community's quality of life, in order to achieve the social inclusion (Misra, 2009; Blue Diamond Society, 2010; Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). To be concerned with this, my informants among social work activists, I interviewed, have taken various actions which could develop the community's life and social change.

As system perspectives in social work mainly focus on social circumstances that influence a group or a community rather than an individual, this approach could apply as a method and used to identify many of the process in social work (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). This study reflected this approach in which the social workers have considered various processes when they have concerned the better quality of life of the hijra population as well as integration in the mainstream society. For instance, individuals or communities have their own system within their culture and are also influenced by other systems within the norm of the society, therefore, social workers along with making awareness of the community have engaged in some parts of mainstream society which usually impact the regular life of the hijra community. Social workers have, along with health care services, now explicitly included the perception of the hijra population as well as their culture and life system. Therefore, social work activists are considered to strengthen and building up the capacity and voice of this community for social change (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). As the complex gender role and sex work profession excluded hijra from every single service in mainstream society, they have embraced the health services from the organizations where they found the space to express their health problems and other social problem in everyday life. Because the hijra eagerly responded when they got direct health care supports from these organizations, the social workers applied 'trick processes' to be able to increase awareness of their human rights among members of this disadvantaged community. For instance, social workers provided the opportunity for discussion during the health care services. When the hijra are willing to receive the health information and services, social workers technically involved this community in various discussions with other

sexual minority groups. Through these discussions social workers could provide information and make the hijra aware of their rights as well as getting a better idea of the community's common needs. Additionally, as in any relationship, commitment from both sides is a key element to continue the social system, whether it is about individual relations or the relations between different social institutions; therefore, to make the inclusion of this community within the mainstream society, both systems should accept each others needs to tolerate the diverse society. To address this, the social workers I spoke to, have took into account the value of social norms; therefore, the community has been counseled in order to understand the social norm and to engage in mainstream society.

The system approach looks at different aspects of society, such as individuals, families, social order, wider society, legislation, government, etc.; all of which hold their own systems and all these systems may or may not be the same but are connected to and influenced by each other (Coulshed and Orme, 2006). The approach of the social workers in this study reflects the systems perspective in which different mainstream systems have been working to achieve the social inclusion of the hijra. When the respondents among the hijra community pointed at the need of gender rights and economic support; along with this the social workers understood the common needs of the hijra, which indicated the social integration, therefore, the social worker informants often applied the advocacy method to be concerned with the best interest of this community (Payne, 2005). Within the systems approach, the importance of the policy and the legal supports force the social workers I spoke to try to obtain the acceptance of the societal institutions that have enough power of influence to facilitate access to hijra. For example, family of hijra often advocated in favor of them because acceptance in their family could give the adolescent hijra a safer life.

Additionally, social work activists advocate for legal assistance to achieve the support from important members of civil society, who could influence the family, religious scholars, public schools, media and next-door neighbors to socially accept this community. Moreover, social workers addressed this community along with other disadvantaged groups in Bangladesh, including women and homosexual groups who are also discriminated by society and in the legal framework. As many hijra are engaged in prostitution and often have multiple male sexual partners, they have often been neglected and harassed for their profession and sexual characteristics and accused that they lead a sexual life against the standard social norm (Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010). Thus, within the huge population of Bangladesh, involving women and homosexual groups with the hijra community could provide the possibility to have more strength to raise their voices against discrimination. The social inclusion and legal rights of this community are addressed separately by the NGOs. For instance, when one social worker is concerned with policy and legal based work, another is more focused on next door neighborhood and campaigns in the university, and yet another might concentrate on the

family, neighborhood city and religious scholars. However, the counseling of members of the hijra community is a common activity for all the social activist informants. These recent approaches of the social workers I interviewed mostly reflect the recommendations of the previous researches concerning social work and human rights activists, in which the structural problems of the community have been mapped before providing any supports for them (Khan et al, 2009; Chakrapani, 2010; Bondyopadhyay and Ahmed, 2010).

Furthermore, the social workers (working with sexual minority groups) in this study have identified various situations that create barriers, to formulate actions in order to work on the improvement of the community's rights and social acceptance. For example, making address, the social problems of hijra, to the government is the hardest task for the interviewed social workers, as the government has continuously avoided gender issues and the social problems of this community, even though recently the situation has improved a little bit because the government has recognized the community and stated to want to include them in the society by developing their skills so that they can gain access to mainstream work. To convince the government of the need for a recognized gender identity for the hijra will be a major challenge for both the hijra community and the social workers, since this seems to be the most difficult issue. Along with this issue, social workers always have to proceed their work with various commitment whenever they have tried to engage with the public departments under the government. Nevertheless, in general, this commitment has always been a common phenomenon in the Bangladeshi context. Moreover, the crucial matter is that within the social work arena, government funding seems to be another major problem for most of the social work activists because they have never obtained any financial support from the government for the work they have done in the hijra community. Therefore, since they are only working on the basis of external funding, it is hard for them to provide sufficient support to continue the initiatives for further actions. These challenges of the social workers regarding the approach of the government have also brought about various judgmental views about the activities and the support of the state through the public system. For instance, the supportive services for the hijra community by the government explicitly show the lack of governmental concern for the improvement of this community. According to the findings, when the NGOs/CBOs are bound within the limits of external financial management to provide activities but still have continued the actions, the government, on the other hand, has a certain amounts of budget for this actions but their approaches are still quite unaware of the initiatives to make it possible for the hijra community to access and continue to participate in the social services.

Accordingly, in the beginning of the announcement of the initiatives with big financial support from the government have been admired by the NGOs and the hijra community (<http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-10-30/news/197766>), however, it has been shown in this study to be just an example of the poor management of the activities. It clearly

uncovered the reality of the public system in this context, where lack of awareness by the government regarding any project, often has provoked the civil society and the ordinary people to criticize the government's approach. Regarding this, another concerning matter is that before beginning any activity, the public department should have discussed with the NGOs/CBOs that are working with the hijra population and through this they could share a lot of knowledge regarding this community which would further assist the new initiative of public department to provide sufficient activities to improve the quality of a hijra's life. It is quite hard to make diplomatic comments on the governmental activities since no informants I have found anyone from public departments who could explain more about it. However, the approach of the public system, in general, has implied just as a show-off by the government towards the hijra community as well as towards mainstream society, which is often a regular attitude of the government within the public spheres.

Besides the challenge of the government's growing (and somewhat troublesome) involvement in social work activities for the hijra, other factors have also been considered to work as barriers for this community. For instance, religious and societal values often influence individual and community life in this Muslim context. Changing the perspective of society to support this community is difficult for social workers, because whether the community achieves the legal rights or not, breaking the social, religious and family culture would be the biggest conflict of value within the society, which might put the social workers in risk to continue their work. Additionally, social workers that are part of the hijra community also face problems when they do not have enough academic knowledge with regard to social work. As the hijra community has no space in the legal, political, and social system and is extremely excluded from everywhere, it is a concerning matter that social workers often need to work with technically insufficient means on the sidelines of mainstream society and in a civil society that requires skills and knowledge for social work actions. Therefore, it would be more convenient if more social workers from the mainstream society could be engaged in this work. If the social workers from mainstream society could be involved in it in order to support the hijra community, to some extent the situation would itself reflect the social acceptance by the mainstream society.

Further, when the community is provided social support by the social workers from NGOs, the situation of the hijra is supposed to be impacted by the actions of social workers. A study by Bondyopadhyay and Ahmen (2010) has illustrated the social changes and positive developments, regarding the view of sexual minority groups, by different parts of mainstream society in Bangladesh including media, some academic department as well as among the hijra community itself, which provides more sense of responsibility for everyone involved to undertake further implementations. In this study, most respondents among ordinary hijra can feel the change, even though it does not turn their life with a big movement. The positive

developments that are mostly noticed by the hijra are freedom within the local area in which they usually live. Counseling the neighbor area and the hijra community has engaged both the hijra service users I interviewed and some part of mainstream society, which relieves the hijra and enables them to lead their everyday life without any harassment.

In addition, the perspectives of the young educated generation are quite flexible to accept the diversity. The religious values, nevertheless still influence every part of society. Along with a little change in the environment of the hijra service users with whom I spoke, social work arena has mostly been included within the work. Because, according to the findings and analysis, while once my respondents among social workers, I interviewed, were only involved with the health care services, they now have spread their work to develop the community as well as contribute to changing the perspective of the society. Moreover, since the community has by now already achieved the option of *others* beyond male and female gender in their passport, there is hope now to achieve this right in voter IDs or citizenship cards, which could provide the opportunity for this community to access every social service within the country. Along with this, continuously notifying the government with regard to the needs and rights of this community, made the state to concern themselves to some extent with this issue, although this community has not been brought into the development sector yet. However, the interviewed hijra and social workers (working with the hijra community) considered this still a positive development of their situation, because the community is addressing the matter nowadays in both the mainstream society and in the civil society.

## **6.2 Conclusion:**

In a nutshell, the recent social developments in the lives of the hijra and the social work environment in which the social workers perform their work with this group, as well as the concerning matters for further improvements, are mostly reflected in the findings and analysis of this study. Accordingly, the outcome of the study draws the attention to the gender identity within the legal framework concerning the hijra, which is a key path to ensure the accessibility to the social resources and enable the achievement of social acceptance. Additionally, as most hijra involve themselves in prostitution and live in uncertainty with economic hardship, the participation in the mainstream economic field is one of the essential resources for the hijra to overcome poverty. Moreover, achieving legal recognition of sex work as a profession could, therefore, guarantee the hijra a more secure life and protect them from the right not to be discriminated.

Within the social work arena, whenever the social worker respondents have recognized the social problems of the hijra which are connected with different social institutions and the

activists start to work with various social systems, they face various difficulties which often form a barrier to continue their work. Changing the values of society and religion are the most challenging actions for the social workers, because this will affect to break the deeply embedded structure and norms of the family, marriage, sexual life and future generations. Moreover, to convince the government as well as the civil society to provide the legal support and approval of the separate gender identity has consistently been a hard job for the social work activist. However, within this challenging environment, social workers and the hijra are both still struggling to continue the actions and participate within social work processes.

Furthermore, the recognition of the human rights and the social work actions have slightly been impacting the life of the hijra. To be able to voice their own needs is in itself a clear sign of the improvement of these hijra's social conditions while once they were not even aware that they had the rights to have a voice in this society. The change of the social situation is mostly visible in the social work arena rather than within the hijra community. While several years ago it was still impossible for NGOs to address the sexual rights and social acceptance of hijra, today social workers along with the hijra have raised the issue to the government to recognize this community within the legal framework. However, the actions and the approach that social workers, according to this study, have taken for this community, could not yet satisfy all the needs within the hijra community, because the social work actions with this community are now in a transition period in which there are still many things to achieve. To be honest, the interviewed hijra are still out of the mainstream system and the situation needs to improve through various achievements. While the social workers have just experienced a new movement within their work approach, the change may not be visible soon within the community.

Along with the services by the social workers, the importance of the governmental support is also significant for these marginalized people. In addition to the announcement by the government regarding recognition, which provided the space for the social workers to proceed further actions, it would have been easier for the activists to ensure the social inclusion of this community if the development sector would put more effort into it. Moreover, without formal support of the government there is always a possibility that this social work and actions performed could be banned due to the social and religious power. Therefore, it is important for the social workers to get the attention from the government as well as the government needs to be more responsible and aware of their commitment when they have already recognized this issue.

Thus the results of the study explicitly urge the social work activists to raise the awareness of the hijra population as much as possible. Social workers could target the community system, including guru and chela processes, to affect the hijra through their own community supports.



Additionally, as there are only a few researches that have been done regarding the hijra community, it is important to conduct more academic research about their gender identity and social problems that can provide various paths to develop knowledge about diversity and social acceptance. Furthermore, social workers have to put more effort into the actions to be listened to by the civil society and to convince the government to approve the legal support of the hijra, in order to ensure the gender rights and develop their quality of life.

The hard reality is that when the country is already struggling with several social problems regarding poverty, over-population, unemployment and women discrimination; therefore, it may take a longer time for the problems of this minority group to be placed in the development sector's programme regarding their civil, social and economic inclusion. However, within the fundamental problems of the country, social work activists who work with the hijra community might have to fight longer to be noticed by the government as well as to achieve their social inclusion.

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