

# Chapter 12

## Social Exclusion of the *Hijra* During COVID-19 Pandemic in Odisha: Vulnerability and Precarity Dimensions

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**Abstract** The chapter discusses the challenges faced by the *Hijra* community, one of the most marginalised and transgender groups in the state of Odisha in eastern India, during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the strict lockdown period. The popular perception was that the pandemic is a 'great equaliser', turned out to be a myth as it exposed the differential vulnerabilities in society, the *Hijra* community being one. Based on an empirical study in five locations of the state, an analysis of the impact of the pandemic on *Hijra* life and livelihoods is attempted in the chapter. The coping mechanisms amidst heightened exclusion experienced by the *Hijra* groups is also discussed. Vulnerability to precarity of the *Hijra* life and livelihoods during the pandemic forms the central analysis of the study. However, during the pandemic, group dynamics manifested in solidarity and support for each other was evident, that helped them partially tide over the livelihood challenges faced by them. Insights from post-COVID-19 lockdown situation are also analysed focusing on *Hijra* trepidations, possibilities of pre-COVID income earning and maintaining their identity. Some concluding remarks are given in the form of suggestions made by the *Hijra* groups on how to deal with pandemic like situations.

### 1 Introduction

The transgender are those individuals whose gender identities are not part of the binary categories of females or males. The other synonyms by which they are typically referred to as are—'gender variant', 'intersexed', 'differently gendered', 'non-heteronormative', 'cross-dressers' 'third gender', and 'gender non-conforming'. A male-to-female transgender person is referred to as 'transwoman' and a female-to-male transgender person is, 'transman'. The chapter at hand focuses on one of the transgender groups—*Hijra* (eunuch). It draws from an empirical study conducted in the state of Odisha during the COVID-19 strict pandemic lockdown period which lasted for 5–6 months in 2020. The main objective of the study was to understand

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