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Issues of Vulnerabilities and Elements of Social Exclusion in the Life of Sex Workers: A study

Sudhansu Sekhar Datta

Assistant Professor, Vidyasagar School of Social Work, Kolkata, India

Abstract:

The purpose of the Article is to explore the vulnerabilities faced by women in sex work and exploring the dimensions of isolation in understanding the level of social exclusion faced by them. This article also includes the discourse on sex work in the contemporary world. It highlights the issue of legalization, criminalization and decriminalization which are linked to sex work. This Article is based on an empirical study and seeks to find out the status of the women from their own perspectives and draw out what expectations they have from the society and Government. The Article suggests recommendations to include the sex workers in the mainstream society.

Keywords: Prostitution, sex work, sex workers, vulnerabilities, social exclusion

1. Introduction

Sex work is a universal phenomenon. It has flourished in all societies at every stage of human civilization. But sex work is never really accepted in any modern society as part of the social mores. Sex workers or prostitutes generally are held at the lowest ranks of the social ladder. Even in societies where sex work is legalized, it is not an expression of society's acceptance of sex work, but instead epitomizes a policy of isolation and stigma.

1.1. Prostitution as Sex Work

Prostitution refers to the practice of exchanging sexual services for financial remuneration. The practice has been seen in almost every culture and reported in throughout recorded history. According to Bullough and Bullough (1987) prostitution is "the institutionalized market place for the sale of sex".

The terms 'sex work' and 'sex worker' has been coined in 1980 by sex worker activist Carol Leigh. The use of the words becomes popular after publication of the anthology, 'Sex Work: writings by Women in the Sex Industry' in 1987. The sex workers have adopted this term to redefine commercial sex. They feel that prostitution is an income generating activity or form of employment for women and men. It can be considered along with other forms of economic activity. A labour perspective is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for making sex work a part of the mainstream debate on women's right at local, national and international level (Bindman 1997).

The concept of sex work unites women in the industry prostitutes, porn actresses and dancers-who are enjoined by both social and legal needs to disavow common ground with women in the other facets of the business (Nagle, 1997).

In India, the prostitutes of Kolkata have transformed themselves into a powerful collective force. They have raised a slogan, "gatar khatiye khai, sramiker adhikar chai"

(We labour to earn a living, we want worker's rights) (Dutta, 2005). Sinha and Das Dasgupta (2009), claim that many of the affected feel that the dishonor which is attached with prostitution is connected to the non-recognition of the occupation as legitimate work. Thus, the demand for proclamation of commercial sex as legitimate labour and women who exchange sexual services for money, as sex workers have become central to their activism (Carol Leigh,1997; Murry,1998).

In Indian society, sex work is a survival mechanism for coping with poverty and unemployment. It may be a method which women use to compensate for the poor implementation or lack of availability of the social welfare policies and income maintenance programs. Patriarchy, male domination, oppression of women and gender bias across societies explain the perpetuation and growth of sex work. Public apathy towards the sex workers, especially brothel based women is so deep rooted that very little effort was made to investigate their conditions. Sex workers continue to live inside the traditional red light areas and cater to men from different economic classes.. The brothel based sex workers live in a world which is unknown to the mainstream society. Even they are addressed with derogatory terms when they come out.

In West Bengal, there are many well-known brothels in the city of Kolkata as well as in different small towns and cities. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) which is an organization set up and run by sex workers to address their health and welfare issues- boasts of a membership of 65,000.

1.2. Key Issue and Objectives of the Study

In tune with the key issues the following are the main objectives of the study:

- To explore the economic vulnerabilities faced by sex workers
- To understand social vulnerabilities and survival strategies adopted by sex workers
- To study the health related vulnerabilities specially relating to STIs (Sexually Transmitted infections) and HIV/AIDS faced by brothel based sex workers.
- To create space to hear grievances and expectations from society, so that their voice can be accommodated in the policy measures

1.3. Research Methodology

A triangulated methodology (quantitative and qualitative data collection tools) was used by the researcher to collect information from sex workers. The researcher used triangulation to overcome the weaknesses inherent in using one main method. In this research, this combination helped the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the life of sex workers and their perceived views regarding it.

In analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher adapted basic descriptive statistics, mainly frequency distribution using SPSS. Transcription and summarization were used to analyze the qualitative data. Case studies based on in-depth interviews of sex workers were also done to establish a pattern in the information given to validate the research. This combination of techniques was to ensure a greater coverage and opportunity for an in-depth understanding of the perception of sex workers on their life.

A total of 150 sex workers were reached for getting quantitative data. The qualitative study reached out to 12 participants in one Focus Group Discussion session and ten case studies were collected through in-depth interview.

1.3.1. Research Design

The descriptive and exploratory design has been used to identify socio-economic vulnerabilities in the lives of women in sex work. As a first step, a literature review was carried out to know the area, a literature review was carried out to know the area, population and condition of the sex workers. The extensive literature review helped to formulate a road map to undertake primary research and design research tools.

1.3.2. Rationale for the Choice of Methodology

The choice of a quantitative methodology is informed by the fact that it is not possible or feasible to interview every sex worker in the red light areas of Kalighat and Chetla. So, it was necessary to draw a sample from them. The choice of quantitative methodology, which uses a survey method to collect data, can inform socio-economic, health and living conditions as well as vulnerabilities of the sex workers. The survey was administered face to face in the form of a standard interview. Quantitative research represents the ability to generate results which can be applied to the larger population with some or similar attributes.

Prostitutes are excluded by contemporary society and even looked down upon by the female groups. While deciding on the research methods, the researcher has taken cautious approach so that chosen methods do not force upon participants an agenda that they do not consider their own but of the researcher.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was accepted to observe the collective interaction. In addition to the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the researcher conducted in-depth interviews documented as case studies..

The qualitative method helps the researcher to gain social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances and situations.

1.3.3. Sampling

In India, brothel is considered illegal and brothel based sex work is also not legal in the eye of the law. It is really difficult if not impossible to determine the number of sex workers in the city of Kolkata. Kolkata's red light areas are home to approximately twenty thousand female commercial sex workers plus their families (Sleightholme & Sinha, 1996). The precise population of practicing female commercial sex workers in Kolkata is impossible to estimate. This also applies to Kalighat and Chetla red light areas. Again the number of practicing sex workers is also subject to seasonal variations.

The researcher had to depend on a local NGO to get the approximate figure. The medical cards which are maintained in the NGO clinic became the source of obtaining the names. The women in sex work who reside in the above mentioned red light areas were considered as sampling frame the researcher first conducted a pilot study in two red light areas of Kolkata- Kalighat and Chetla. The two areas later became research sites. Interaction with sex workers in the sites informed the fact that socio-economic conditions are almost homogeneous and problems that exist are almost similar.

One hundred respondents were taken into consideration from the Kalighat area and fifty respondents were collected from Chetla. At the time of the data collection, it was estimated that one thousand sex workers were in the Kalighat and five hundred were in Chetla. Ten percent sample was collected from each area to make the sample representative in nature.

1.3.4. Methods of Gathering Data

The researcher personally collected data by administering structured interview schedule to selected respondents. He himself conducted the FGD and in- depth interviews for the purpose of case studies.

1.3.5. Interview Schedule

One interview schedule which is appended to appendices was developed for quantitative study; this was administered to the sex workers. The schedule is divided into five sections. The general section includes present age, address, old residence, entry age, duration of stay, marital status. The other sections deal with economic, social, health and living conditions and vulnerabilities.

1.3.6. Focus Group Discussion

A Focus Group Discussion was conducted to get qualitative data. The researcher prepared a Focus Group Discussion guideline for that. It indicated sex work or prostitution- the desirable term, the reason to come to the trade, major life problems, financial constraints, health issues, issue of legalization, perception on marginalization and exclusion, feeling towards mainstream society.

1.3.7. Case Studies

Case studies of willing participants were documented from Kalighat as well as Chetla red light areas. The researcher used case studies in this context as part of qualitative research with the expectation to have a deeper understanding regarding the perception of sex workers on their lives and existence in the society.

2. Literature Reviews

The complexity of the issue of commercial sex work is fiercely debated all over the world, starting from whether or not this practice should be allowed, to what is best in the interest of the community and society. There have been different approaches to commercial sex work in countries around the world: from taking a stand to “abolish” the practice; to ‘legalizing’ it; or to ‘decriminalizing’ sex work.

The issue of legalization of sex trade is of immense contemporary significance. If commercial sex is labeled as ‘sex work’, it requires that the trade be recognized and possibly legalized as work or at least left without regulations in the free market (Sinha and Das Dasgupta, 2009).

There are two broad ways in which State responds to prostitution i.e. by criminalization and legalization. The regulatory mechanisms fundamentally have two goals. One is to protect the public from real and perceived negative impacts and second is to protect abused and exploitation of sex workers.

Criminalization of sex work is founded on the “Abolitionist Approach” which declares that the institution of prostitution itself constitutes a violation of human rights. It is similar to the institution of slavery. The proponents of the Abolitionist approach believe that even an adult is not believed to give genuine consent to engaging in prostitution. Prostitution only continues through the efforts of procurers or pimps, the ‘third’ parties, who induce a woman into prostitution, openly or by means of deceit and coercion, to extort her earnings from her. The abolitionist approach requires governments to abolish prostitution through the penalization of this ‘Third party’. It is the ‘third parties’ who profit from the transaction that takes place between prostitute and client. The prostitutes cannot be punished, as she is the victim of a process she does not control. Without the ‘third party’, it is believed that the institution of prostitution will wither away (Bindman, 1997).

.This criminalization approach gives excessive power and authority to the police, which they generally misuse to harass, torture, blackmail and abuse sex workers. It is prone to promote police corruption and can contribute towards the underground practice of prostitution where police may play an active role of keeping prostitution “invisible” from the society and thus impede the necessary actions required from public health dimensions (Shestra, 2007).

In Decriminalization approach, the law remains silent in regard to prostitution. All provisions that impose criminal sanctions for the commercial performance of sexual services are removed and no regulatory measures are enacted. General legal provisions are employed to address potentially undesirable aspects of sex work, such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In this approach prostitution is neither outlawed, nor is it strictly controlled by the State mechanism; it may not even be specifically acknowledged to exist within the law (Shestra, 2007).

The most visible argument against legitimizing commercial sex is offered by Radical Feminist (abolitionist) politics. The supporters of this position include prostitution in the plethora of violence against women and believe that criminalization of commercial sex focused on curbing the demand, would ultimately phase out prostitution. The assumption here is that prostitution harms women, whether the women victimized by it agrees or not (Bales, 1999). Thus, the perspective takes a moralistic stand and pushes for criminalization of pimps, customers, brothel owners, and all other ancillaries to the women who directly sell sex (Sinha and Das Dasgupta, 2009). Sullivan (1997) a sympathizer of the radical feminist spectrum, states that legalized prostitution system assists in maintaining male dominance, the sexual objectification of women, and the cultural approval of violence against women.

It is interesting to note that in the present world different countries have adopted different approaches that have been mentioned above. But none of the approaches are free from shortcomings. Every approach has its advantages and disadvantages. So, uniformity cannot be found to address the issue of prostitution all over the world. It is important to note that the sex industry exists in almost all cultures.

2.1. India's Approach to Sex Work

Though India ostensibly opts for an abolitionist approach, like all other states which claim to do so, in reality, it is not so. It has instead, been adopting a tolerationist approach. Under the Indian law, though prostitution per se is not an offence, soliciting and carrying on prostitution in public places are offences. The Indian law is not particularly concerned with the prevention of prostitution, nor is there any law to specially address the abusive treatment of prostitutes. In practice, clients are not criminally prosecuted (Patkar and Patkar, 2003). The Indian Legal system follows a particularly hypocritical attitude towards prostitution. On one hand, it does not

prohibit or abolish prostitution (Solanki and Gangoli, 1996). The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 is the primary statute that deals with sex work in India. It was meant to curb the recruitment, transport, or sale (defined as trafficking) of women and children for sex, and to punish the trafficker and financial beneficiaries.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Profile of the Respondents

Particulars	Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Age (years)	18-23	20	13.3
	24-29	44	29.3
	30-35	37	24.7
	36-41	15	10.0
	42-47	18	12.0
	48-53	13	8.7
	54-59	3	2.0
	Total		150
Age at starting of sex work(years)	Below 18 (years)	42	28.0
	Above 18(years)	108	72.0
	Total	150	100.00
Previous residence	Outside India (Nepal, Bangladesh)	39	26.0
	Outside West Bengal	16	10.7
	Within West Bengal	95	63.3
	Total	150	100.00
Educational Status	Illiterate	77	51.3
	Can give signature	46	30.7
	Primary	23	15.3
	Secondary	4	2.7
	Total	150	100.00
Marital Status	Married	69	46.0
	Divorced	6	4.0
	Widowed	11	7.3
	Deserted	26	17.3
	Never Married	38	25.3
	Total	150	100.00

Table 1

The above table indicates the brief profile of the respondents. It highlights age group of the sex workers, age when they joined this sex trade, previous residence, educational status and marital status of the respondents.

3.2. Economic Vulnerabilities

3.2.1. Mode of Operation

This aspect is important to get an idea about the exploitation faced by the sex workers. It is well known that most of the sex workers in Kolkata work independently even though there are other modes under which women also work. The mode of operation is directly responsible for the financial and physical exploitation. Sex workers in Kolkata work independently or live and/or work under adhiya or chukri systems. Women working independently simply rent a room on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, solicit clients for them, and keep all of their income with which they pay rent and meet other expenditures. The woman who operates under adhiya gives fifty percent to the madam. The sex workers under chuki system do not get anything except food, clothing and lodging.

Mode of Operation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Independent practice	134	89.3
Adhiya	15	10.0
Chukri	1	0.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 2: Mode of operation
Source: Field data

The table shows that majority of the women (89.3%) work independently and 10% of the total respondents operate under adhiya system. It indicates that most of the women are in a position to avoid direct financial exploitation by madams. But those who work under Adhiya system face tremendous hostile environment and it is evident from the statement of one sex worker who actually worked under the Chukri mode.

I had to work as a bonded sex slave (Chukri) for several years in the Sonagachi red light area to repay the amount that my madam paid to the trafficker to procure me. The condition was inhuman and pathetic. Even during illness and menstruation period, I had to take clients. I had neither freedom nor permission to go even outside the brothel. (Ms. Alka)

Those who work under Adhiya and Chukri system face more financial and physical vulnerabilities than their independent counterparts.

3.2.2. Payment Received as Per Demand

In the red light areas, there is no concept of fixed rate. The sex worker and client tend to negotiate the amount before they 'sit' (in Bangla *bosano*). The absence of fixed rate opens the door for bargaining and places the client in a slightly better position.

Payment Received	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	36	24.0
Most of the Time	66	44.0
Sometimes	45	30.0
Seldom	3	2.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 3: Payment received as per demand

Source: Field data

The table shows that only 24% of the respondents get the payment as per their demand and 44% of them get it most of the time but a significant numbers don't get it as per their claimed rate. So, the bargaining is there and it may not be wrong to assume that with the passage of time (i.e. becoming old), the sex workers face problem in bargaining.

3.2.3. Savings

The Sex workers generally live for the day. They never allow thoughts of the future spoil their merriment today. It is believed that they spend whole of their income without a thought of the tomorrow. It is relevant to know whether they save or not to avoid future vulnerabilities which may rise because of not having any savings.

Savings	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	123	82.0
No	27	18.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 4: Savings

Source: Field data

The table shows that majority of the women save money.

3.2.4 Purpose of Savings

An individual saves with a particular purpose. Sex workers have their own rationale to save money. It is desirable to get an idea about the purpose for which they save their hard earned money.

Purpose	Frequency	Percent (%)
Meet contingency	42	34.15
Future security	34	27.64
Building house	4	3.25
Children	43	34.96
Total	123	100.0

Table 5: Purpose of savings

Source: Field data

Table shows that majority of women save for their children (34.96%) and meeting contingencies (34.15%). 27.64% of the women save money for future security.

3.2.5. Opinion Regarding Savings

Savings are needed for future security. As the span of staying in the trade is very short, many save for future. It is relevant to know about their perception regarding adequacy of the savings. Only adequate savings can assist them in future.

Opinion on savings	Frequency	Percent (%)
Adequate	19	15.45
Inadequate	104	84.55
Total	123	100.0

Table 6: Opinion regarding savings
Source: Field data

Table-6 shows that overwhelming majority of respondents (84.55%) who save, feel that their savings are inadequate. It may be argued that it is a perception and it varies from person to person. Here, it is assured that respondents have given answer on the basis of present living. They feel that it is not sufficient. It shows that there is every possibility of facing financial vulnerabilities in future.

This sense of insecurity can be understood from the following statement-

I have some savings but I am not sure whether it is sufficient for the future. Again I think about my old age. I cannot trust anybody not even my own child. The savings does not give you security as you may not be in a position to handle the money. I often go to the Kali Temple and pray to the mother. This is the last refuge for me to get some solace. (Ms. Jamuna)

It shows that most of them feel that in future they would face financial crisis especially in the old age when they would not be in a condition to take up any vocation to survive. This is the major reason that many become beggars at their old age. There is lack of social security net and even if there is few provisions, most of them could not get access to those because of the administrative apathy, corruption or lack of knowledge. This aggravates the financial insecurity and has an adverse impact on the quality of life.

3.2.6. Existence of Debt

The sex trade is volatile in nature. It cannot be expected that women in sex work are always in a position to meet the demand of their lives. So, there is every possibility that they need to borrow to face any contingency. It is desirable to know whether they are in debt or not.

Facing debt problem	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	101	67.3
No	49	32.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 7: Existence of debt
Source: Field data

Table shows that 67.3% of the respondents are facing problem of debt. It shows the pathetic condition of sex workers who could not meet the demands with their daily earnings. It is to be noted that though majority of the sex workers are operating independently, their income is not sufficient to meet the needs as well as the contingencies of life.

3.2.7. Source of Borrowing

The sex workers are in informal sector and it is not recognized. In India, it is not yet recognized as work. So, it can be easily assumed that they are not in a position to show collateral. In the red light areas, the interest rate is very high and sex workers have to pay that. It is important to know the source of borrowing.

Source	Frequency	Percent (%)
Mashi alias madam	32	31.68
Pimp	1	0.09
Other sex workers	26	25.74
Money lender	19	18.89
NGO	21	20.79
Others	2	1.98
Total	101	100.0

Table 8: Source of Borrowing
Source: Field data

Table indicates that 31.68% of the sex workers who are in debt, depend on the mash is (madams) to get the money. Moneylenders are still there as the data indicates that 25.74% of the respondents depend on them. But the most significant thing is that 20.79% of

the respondents are going to the local NGOs for borrowing.

The presence of the moneylenders indicates that there is every possibility that the sex workers fall victims of them. It can be seen from the admission of a sex worker who borrowed from a money lender.

I borrowed from a money lender eighty thousand rupees to bribe a government servant to get a job for my husband who is unemployed. He cheated me. I am still paying the debt. The interest is very high, I have to pay ten rupees per hundred rupees per month. The interest rate really hurts. (Ms Nisha)

It can be observed that the sex workers do not have access to the formal financial institutions as they don't have any collateral for taking the loan. The informal agents take this opportunity to exploit them financially.

It is found that most of the sex workers are working independently. There is existence of 'Adhiya' system which is very much exploitative in nature and to the financial vulnerabilities in their lives. The study also shows that bargaining is very much part of the trade, which is evident from the qualitative data. The aged sex workers face the problem to get the demanded amount. It is interesting to note that most of them felt that they did not face any direct financial exploitation. The study also shows that contrary to popular believe that the sex workers do not sex, majority of the respondents tend to save. There are several reasons for saving money. They mainly save to meet the contingencies and future security. Even though, the majority of them save money, they feel that the savings are not adequate. So, it can be assumed that the amount they save may prove to be inadequate in the future which leads to certain vulnerabilities.

The study also shows that a significant number of sex workers (67.3%) is under debt. So, even if most of them operate independently in those two red light areas, the income is not sufficient or stable to meet the needs or contingencies of life. The reasons behind debt also show the inadequacy of the welfare services as well as the inaccessibility of those services by them as most of them, of all in debt because of health problems or children.

It is clearly seen from the study that sex workers need to depend on the informal sector for borrowing. The qualitative data also show that lack of recognition and absence of collateral assets force them to seek money from the informal sources. They have to pay huge interest, thereby facing financial exploitation. It only shows the financial vulnerability in their lives.

3.3. Health Vulnerabilities

A stigma is attached with the sex work in Indian society and it limits the access of the women to the health care services. There is also lack of response in terms of health programmes to meet their specific demands. It is seen that the health risks associated with the sex work is often not addressed by the conventional health care system in the country.

3.3.1. Sexual Disease in Last Twelve Months

Sexual Disease	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	25	16.7
No	125	83.3
Total	150	100.00

Table 9: Sexual diseases in the last twelve months

Source: Field data

Table shows that 16.7% of the total respondents suffer or contacted sexually transmitted diseases in the last one year.

3.3.2. Access to Condom as Per Need

Condom is being promoted for birth control as well safe sexual practice. State Aids Control Society and many local NGOs are trying to create awareness about the use and also distributing among sex workers. It is pertinent to know the accessibility of sex workers regarding condoms as per their need.

Accessibility	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	98	65.3
No	52	34.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 10: Accessibility to condoms

Source: Field data

Table shows that 65.3% of the respondents get condoms as per their needs. But more than one-third of the respondents (34.7%) do not have access. It points out the failure of government as well as the non-governmental initiatives to make condoms available to them to practice safe sex.

3.3.3. Usage of Condom

Sex workers use condom to protect themselves from venereal diseases as well as avoid unwanted pregnancy. Even a single unprotected sexual encounter can be prove to be fatal. It is highly recommendable to use condom every time especially at the

backdrop of spread of HIV/AIDS. The use of condom also requires the cooperation of the client. It is important to know the position of the women regarding condom use.

Usage	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	77	51.3
No	73	48.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 11: Usage of Condom during every sitting

Source: Field data

Table shows that 51.3% of the total respondents are in a position to ensure cent percent condom use. But 49.7% of them still go for unprotected sex sometimes. This high risk behavior often leads them to face many unwanted consequences. It may be deduced that sex workers themselves are often not in a financial position to refuse these customers and those who are financially worse off or aged will have to take the risks in order to survive.

The FGD shows that the usage of condom is an important issue in the lives of sex workers to protect themselves from the diseases and especially provided a guard against HIV infection. All the participants agreed that condoms are the most popular method utilized in the community. But simultaneously they added that most of them could not ensure hundred percent condom uses. Those who have crossed their thirties stated that most of them did not get regular clients and when the clients refused to use them, they did not have any option but to comply because of the financial constraints. Most of them also admitted they used with customers but not with their fixed clients (*Babus*). However the risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS remained very high. They agreed that they were yet to implement slogan "No Condom, No Sex".

3.3.4. HIV/ AIDS Test

In Western world, the sex workers usually go for the HIV/AIDS test periodically. Certain countries have made it compulsory to go for testing. In India, the sex work is not legalized and government cannot impose the test because of the underground nature of the sex work. NGOs propagate the HIV test and it is necessary to look at the scenario.

Periodic Test	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	53	35.3
No	97	64.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 12: Periodic test for HIV/ AIDS

Source: Field data

Table shows that majority of the respondents (64.7%) does not go for the periodic testing for HIV/ AIDS. The study shows that many are engaged in the unsafe sexual practice and even then they are not particular about the testing. It only increases chance of getting deadly infection and belated detection. It also indicates the shortcoming of the NGO interventions.

3.3.5. Addiction

Addiction among sex workers is very common. Most of the time, they are forced to take alcohol with their clients. Alcoholism is an occupational hazard for them (Sleightholme & Sinha 1996). This study also proves that nearly 80% of the respondents have one or multiple addictions. Addiction ranges from taking alcohol, cigarette, guthka etc. This addiction interferes with some medication and may aggravate some illnesses.

3.4. Status in Society

3.4.1. Feeling of Exclusion

The social life of the sex worker is generally confined to the red light area. They have very little interaction with community. Because of their nature of work, they tend to stay inside and reluctant to leave their restrained social situation. They seem to leave their restricted social situation. They seem to be unable to fully accept her way of life. The general presumption is that in every sex worker's heart, there is a feeling on being despised, degraded and dehumanized.

Feeling of exclusion	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	85	56.7
No	33	22.0
Can't say	32	21.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 13: Feeling of exclusion for being in the trade

Source: Field data

Table shows that majority of the respondents (56.7%) believes that they are excluded from the mainstream society. 21.3% of the respondents cannot say as they never thought about it. It seems that they have become indifferent about their social life. Only 22% of the respondents feel that they are very much part of the society.

3.4.2. Opinion on Stigma Attached with Sex Work

The sex workers are considered as 'other' and even a toxin to be eliminated from the social body. Sex workers are stigmatized and the stigma is powerful and pervasive that constructs sex workers as unwanted, unmissed and ultimately disposable (Lowman, 2000). It is important to the sex workers about their work.

Opinion	Frequency	Percent (%)
Stigmatized	128	85.3
Not stigmatized	22	14.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 14: Opinion regarding stigmatization
Source: Field data

Table shows that overwhelming majority of respondents (85.3%) believes that the sex work is stigmatized.

The researcher found the same reactions while doing interviews for case studies. They can be articulated as follows- Stigma is attached with this trade. We have no dignity. The society never distinguishes if one practices for a while or long time. Society labels us as beshya (Whore) . Once you are in the trade, the label is permanent. (Ms. Subhra)
Stigma is part of our life. I see nowadays that many young girls and housewives are coming to this locality and doing business and go back. As we stay in these line baris (Brothels), we are despised by the people and face stigma. (Ms. Nisha).

3.4.3. Opinion on Legalization

Legalization of sex work is a debatable issue. In some countries it has been legalized but India follows abolitionist approach and brothel based sex work is not legalized till date. But it is important to know the views of the sex workers who are in the trade.

Legalization	Frequency	Percent (%)
Support legalization	120	80.0
Oppose legalization	30	20.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 15: Opinion on legalization
Source: Field data

Table shows that 80.0% of the respondents feel that the trade should be legalized.

3.4.4. Issue of Motherhood

Motherhood is considered as the core of femininity and has historically occupied the central position in women's lives (Sinha and Das Dasgupta,2009).The prevailing notion in the Indian society is that sex work and motherhood is not compatible and even if it exists, it cannot be said 'good' motherhood. But if one goes to red light areas, he/she may find that most of the adult sex workers are mothers. The reason is "these women (sex workers) were surviving only because of their employment but largely aspired to the same goals as mainstream society-marriage and family" (Jana et al, 2004). Ghosh (2004) states that "..... The prostitutes considered childlessness to be a curse, a mark of incomplete womanhood." The issue of motherhood may be even more complicated for women in Bengal. The concept of motherhood has been elevated to the high level of spirituality. Both fertility and motherhood are associated with feminine power in Bengali Hindu culture. This belief has also seeped into Muslim, Christian, and other religious cultures of Bengal. A Bengali woman is not a woman if she is not a mother. The sex workers have also internalized this value and it was evident during the course of the FGD. All the participants agreed that it is difficult to become a good mother and safeguard the interests of the children in the locality. They feel that the environment is not conducive to raise the children properly. There is generally no or little supervision as the mothers found it hard to balance between their work and child caring activities. Even then they felt that motherhood is the only glory in their despised life. Each of them wanted to be a mother regardless of her occupation.

4. Conclusion

This study looked at the life of sex workers by using the concept of social exclusion. This concept has been used to understand the marginalized existence of sex workers. It is found that sex workers are facing mainly three kinds namely social, economic and health vulnerabilities which ultimately force them to face social exclusion in their day to day life.

Social vulnerabilities show that many of them started work as a child which indicates that the concept of safe childhood is still not ensured in India. Low level of education shows the helplessness of sex workers to opt for other vocations. Instability and insufficiency of income show the financial vulnerabilities. Health vulnerabilities expose the sex workers to the risk of getting sexual diseases

including HIV/AIDS.

This study also highlights the feeling of exclusion from the mainstream society and the sex workers feel that social stigma attached to the profession in primarily to be blamed for this. The voice of the sex workers is not heard because of the clandestine nature of the trade and lack of organization. It may be concluded that the voice is deliberately ignored as the policy makers of the nation do not feel it to be important enough to give importance to plight of the sex workers.

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