Beyond Generational Representation of Children of Female Sex Workers (FSWs) in sex trade (a syigmatized hidden profession): A desperate self strategy of FSWs

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Accepted 05 July, 2013

Prostitution, a stigmatized profession is historically present in all societies in various forms. Women of different social strata, especially from lower social strata have taken this profession due to extreme poverty and other societal disturbances. Women operate flesh trade in many forms – brothel based sex workers, call girls, escorts and street sex worker, etc. But brothel based sex workers operate particularly from a place considered as Red-light area. It meets dual purpose of business and shelter with their immediate family members (children, male counterpart and relatives). The alarming threat of HIV/AIDS, the deadly disease, has helped to turn the focus of all (Govt. and others) towards female sex workers (FSWs) as high risk intermediary group for its prevention and control. Secondarily the rehabilitation measures have been taken for FSWs and their children. It includes alternative earning for FSWs and measures for educational development of their children. A study was conducted to evaluate the impact in respect of above taken measures in two red-light areas of West Bengal. One red-light area was situated in a cosmopolitan city, Kolkata and second one was at a sub-divisional town, closely attached to the rural area. But it reveals that the intervention did not meet success as desired because no such situational change has occurred. While the mothers' strategy to hide the profession from their children with separate space and educational facilities had brought change to some of their children. It would be the model direction to the Govt. and other agencies working for them to reach the desired need of breaking up their vicious cycle or generational representation.

Key words: Prostitution, sex workers, education, rehabilitation, household.

INTRODUCTION

Prostitution, world's oldest profession (Varela, 1995) is present in some forms or other in all stratified societies. It is a complex form of social relationship in morality, ethics, the pattern of economic inequality, gender relationship, etc interwoven farther to form a multidimensional, multi-layered institution (Waltman, 2011). In most of all cases women, especially from lower social strata for their own survival and to assist their immediate family members are being driven off into the stigmatized profession due to extreme poverty (McGregor, 2011) in both the families-natal and in-laws family. Of course, other causes like broken family and false sense of security of the paramour or the close relatives also push the women of different ages into the trade. For the essence of the operation of their trade as well as their resident brothel based female sex workers, a direct position, out of 25 types of sex work was identified according to work site, principle mode of soliciting clients or sexual practices directly or indirectly (Harcourt and Donovan, 2005); they have developed their own separate community known as red-light area where the female sex workers have restricted their resident with their own household set with their male partner (babu or

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After independence the policy ambivalence of the Government of India vis-à-vis the sex workers led to the passing of law, namely the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 as amended in 1978 without any firm steps being taken to implement the stringent restrictive provisions rather than some measures for its eradication. But recently the threats of deadly disease-HIV/AIDS- has alerted all to the needs of its effective control and prevention. Thus, the female sex workers are now considered as ‘high risk’ (Tucker, 2011) intermediary group. They are now receiving attention aimed at preventing and restricting the spread of the deadly disease. In this connection the civil society development organizations (NGOs) were the first to work for prevention and control through behavioural changes with education and motivation, clinical services and other developmental programmes for awareness and empowerment of sex workers.

But it was realized that only such intervention might not lead to permanent solution to the problems faced by larger society. So, the attention has been paid to promote the development of children of sex workers through education, health care and skill training etc aiming to enable them to take up a profession outside the circle in which they were born and thereby lead a normal life with gradual integration with the larger society.

Objectives of the study

As important as the above measures at the level of FSWs and their children, they have not met with success. The problems of such children cannot be adequately tackled and measures designed to educate them by the Govt. and NGOs cannot be successfully achieved. But a few of these children had left their nexus with sex trade because of their mothers’ desperate strategy. So, the objective of the study was to articulate the strategy which their mothers had taken to mainstream them into the larger society beyond their generational representation in their stigmatized profession (sex trade).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodologically we would adopt the broad frame of comparative perspective, especially as it was necessary to understand the different kind of social environments that the sex workers lived in.

Two red-light areas, first one, Bowbazar red-light area; out of eight red-light areas of Kolkata, only Metropolitan City of Eastern India is historically famous located under jurisdiction central Kolkata. About 2200 resident female sex workers excluding 800 floating sex workers were operating the trade from this place. For the purpose of this study 2200 FSWs were categorized into two groups- the FSWs with biological or adopted children and FSWs who had no offspring. The survey helped to identify 1557 FSWs who had biological or adopted children. And out of which 200 (around 12.5%) FSWs were selected based on their differences in the manner of recruitment to the trade, status as sex workers, pattern of clientage and presence of children at various stage of growth in the family. Secondly 250 children of these FSWs between the age group of 6-25 years, out of the total 325 had been selected purposively to find out their experience of growing up, the problem of participation in education and the ultimate state of living as well as their future aspiration.

Second place of our study was a century long red-light area of Diamond Harbour, a sub divisional town of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal located at the estuary of rivers Hooghly and Haldi. It is the Western gateway of Sundarban Delta region of West Bengal with close attachment to Bengal rural chapter and it is about 48 kilometers away from Kolkata. Like Bowbazar red-light area here too the FSWs were plying their trade from a single area where the number of FSWs was estimated to be around 144 and 206 children at their different ages through census method.

The respondents were selected according to a variation in terms of social, cultural and economical milieu. Second place of our study was different from the first one. More specifically, the researcher had clearly observed a difference in their family tied up. At Bowbazar FSWs had to use the place for dual purposes of sex trade and shelter. They had set up their household with their immediate family members (children, male counterpart as husband or paramour and sometimes relatives). Their household used to provide all facilities like a family in larger society.

Generally, FSWs of Diamond Harbour did not allow their children to stay in their place. They used to use the place for their trade only and shelter of their own. Only their male counterpart as husband or paramour had chance to live with them beyond their working hours. But for their children it was strictly prohibited. They had arranged separate shelter and care outside their place of business. So, the structure and function of their family was firmly different from Bowbazar.

The mixed method research (Creswell, 2009) was used for collection of data and its analysis on FSWs’ families and upbringing process of their children. The special emphasis was adhered on the role of FSWs as mothers and their male counterpart so far as child care and protection were concerned. For collection of data a community survey was done aimed to identify mothers and their children. Thereafter an unstructured interview schedule was used during an interaction with FSWs and their children. This session was for 3 years long. The case studies and life histories were added also. The researcher with community assistant observed and monitored the children’s daily activities along with their educational development. For secondary information he conducted collateral visits in their school. The interaction with teachers also helped to know their level of participation in classes and their academic performance. The interaction with teachers of community education centre run by NGOs was important because the researcher directly participated in their class session and it helped to gather information on their parental role. The reason of their attachment with their vicious cycle of sex workers and effort from various corners (from family as well as sex workers) and other policy level efforts to break their cycle and its impact had been sincerely observed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Case 1

Sabita (38 years) entered into the trade after 5 years of her marriage to a migrant labour. She was from rural poor family of South 24 Paraganas district with primary level of education. She was deserted by husband when her male child (Rahul) was 3 years of age. Her natal family did not give place in their family further. So, she came in contact
with her relative who arranged a job as maidservant at Kolkata. But her earning was not enough to maintain them. One day she was insisted by her relative to involve in the trade for better earning. Then she kept her son to their natal family for his up-bringing. She used to bear all expenses for her child and education. So, she used to visit the place at least once in month. She had always been given due emphasis for their child's education. Her son was studying law in a reputed institute outside West Bengal.

When an interview was arranged with Rahul, he expressed that her mother was doing hard labour in a nursing home and she used to stay with her colleagues in working women hostel at the city.

So, the hiding of mother profession and strategy to not allow children in their working place had helped to establish him in a larger society.

### Demographic profile of the female sex workers

The demographic profile (Table 1) of FSWs of both places of the study shows that majority of them (93.7%) were from different districts of West Bengal, a state of eastern India bordered by Indo-Bangladesh boarder. The representation was dominated by some of these districts (out of 29 districts). It was estimated highest (41.2%) from Murshidabad, a bordering district of Indo-Bangladesh and out of which 13.8% of them was from Muslim community. While, 23.7% of them was from Scheduled Castes (SCs) of Hindu community. Second representation (18.3% altogether) was from South 24 Paraganas district fallen under the Sundarban Delta region of West Bengal. Of these 16.7% was from Hindu community. North 24 Paraganas district occupied third in percentage (16.2%). Lastly these 3 districts are located within the juncture of Kolkata Metropolitan City of Eastern India. However, we also find that 2.3% of them were from Bowbazar/Diamond Harbour.

Table 2 reveals that FSWs of Bowbazar entered into the trade at very young ages of 10-15 and most of them were unmarried; in that case, 4.6% of them were pushed by their neighbours. Furthermore, 4% of them were also married at such young ages. Of course, 15-20 years of age were important to enter into the trade in both places. At Bowbazar, 16.5% of them were unmarried and 15.1% were married at their time of entry when they were 15-20 years of age. While at Diamond Harbour, all of them (13.3%) were married.

From Table 3, we find that altogether 53.6% of them were illiterate, 16.4% of them were literate, 8.7% had attended their primary standard and significantly 20.4% had high school education who were from Bowbazar. The overall educational status describes that FSWs of Diamond Harbour were poor in education.

### Household set up of female sex workers with the facilities of child bearing and caring in both places of study

The female sex workers (FSWs) with varied marital status, sometimes with husband and children at Bowbazar were recruited in the trade for various reasons, especially due to economic crisis or extreme poverty. Typically, the matrifocal nuclear family of sex workers of Bowbazar was known as line bari (prostitute family) (Adhikari, 2007). The stigmatized profession of the FSWs pushed them in an isolated life where they were considered as unwanted to their natal family. Only the FSWs who used to share earning with their natal family or whose mothers or kin were in the same trade had a thin and truncated network of relations.

The spousal relation was unstable because it was just one of emotional contact or living arrangement. That's why the husband (male counterpart or paramour) was
Table 2. FSWs, their age, marital status and recruitment process into the trade in both places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting person</th>
<th>Age group at the time of entering into the trade</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>15-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bowbazar</td>
<td>D.Harbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband/Lover</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative</td>
<td>8(2.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>5(1.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38(11%)</td>
<td>14(4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field work.

Table 3. The relationship of educational status of FSWs in respect of place from where they had been recruited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native place</th>
<th>Education Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Literate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bow-bazar</td>
<td>D-Harbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>43(12.5%)</td>
<td>4(1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Pgs. (North)</td>
<td>1(0.3%)</td>
<td>22(6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Pgs. (South)</td>
<td>4(1.1%)</td>
<td>48(13.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other districts of West Bengal</td>
<td>8(2.3%)</td>
<td>40(11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowbazar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>9(2.6%)</td>
<td>4(1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65(18.8%)</td>
<td>120(34.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field work.

identified with familiar name as “babu” (male partner) to the sex workers and it was as “kaku” (uncle) to their children. They remain attached to the FSWs but his role in the family as provider or instrumental leader was insignificant or absent altogether. The fatherhood in the family was “costless” and uninvolved. But in some cases the male partners (babus/husbands) of FSWs (8-10%) especially those who were relatively will-off and got emotionally involved extend their support for the children’s care and development through possession of separate shelter, even outside their community. Some-times, they (about 1%) had been given place to their illegitimate children in their lawfully established family. Only 2-3% of them used to provide educational support to their children, even they had been allowed their identity as father at the time of their admission in school. In their family FSWs used to play the dual roles of (i) caring for children, preparing food and assuming responsibilities for domestic chores as expressive leader and (ii) she had also to ensure the financial support and maintain the necessary link between families and the community as well
as social world (Jamieson, 1988). We find that majority of the mothers (about 82-85%) used to provide limited care up to a certain stage to their grown up child due to cause of their involvement in the trade. About 4-5% have realized that the constant stigmatized life was a problem so that they were struggling valiantly to keep children away from the unfortunate affiliation with the sex trade by shielding them from the social life and by providing adequate education and moral support through interaction.

Besides this we find that FSWs of Diamond Harbour red-light area were engulfed into the sex trade after getting married. They had forcefully dissolved their nuptial ties up. They did not get support from their natal family because of their poor economy and pressure of the societal norms that married women's survival in their natal family was a stigma. That is why they had done a mutual settlement with their natal family to nurture their children in exchange of financial support to their children.

The family of FSWs of Diamond Harbour might not be defined conceptually as 'line bari'. It was considered as 'pros-quarter' (brothel) because a group of 12 to 15 FSWs used to operate absolutely their trade in a house consisting of 12 –15 small single rooms. They had developed common norms of living together in all respects. Their relation with the ‘verua’ babu (Babu-male client with whom they had developed emotional tie ups) was temporary and secret. In their place they did not permit their children to stay with them. For their children they used to arrange absolutely a separate shelter from the place of trade at “family bari” (normal household). About 28-32% of them had left their children at boarding school to separate as well as to hide them from their profession. Generally, they used to bear their responsibility through visit to their hostel once in a month and they used to provide all expenses with a schedule task of monitoring of their children's performance in school. About 55-60% of FSWs kept their children permanently to their natal family. Their attachment and attentiveness were monitored when they used to visit their place with financial support for their children education.

**Education opportunity and its impact for settlement of the children outside the sex trade**

The FSWs were generally taking care of their children for their upbringing even in adverse milieu of their community.

At Bowbazar red-light area we found that only 36% of them were continuing their education and 30% of children did not attend school. Among them 30 % of these children were dropped out from school.

It was observed that the pre-primary education facility run by NGOs in collaboration with Govt. and other agencies was almost common to all the children because the mothers found it as expedient to keep their children away from their rooms. This was also a help to be free from their encumbrances.

Primarily the children’s education depends on various factors like FSWs’ economic condition, parental education and relationship with the male, etc. Thus for their children’s education they had to arrange separate space and they were sometimes providing coaching facilities to their children (68%). But they were usually facing problem of identity and lack of care on the part of mothers for their development.

The educational performance in annual examination shows that it was higher (40 out of 46) in percentage among the children provided separate shelter than those who were getting support from NGOs. Out of 104 children who got the support of NGOs 36 children had passed with consideration. The private coaching had also helped 87 out of 146 children to pass the annual examination with special consideration. But only 4% of them had reached their education above class IX and out of them only 2(1 male and 1 female from a household) had completed their post graduation because of their mothers' restricted involvement with proper plan of action. Another 2 of the girls had completed their graduation through detachment from the place with proper care and attention of their father/mother’s babu.

**Occupation of children in later life**

The economic condition of the children in the later life shows that majority (48.2%) of the adolescent were depending on their mothers for their daily needs even after getting married. Only 11.7% of them were independent.

The young boys of Bowbazar were involved in various occupations. Among them 80.5% were in locally available jobs within their community and it was obviously linked to the sex trade i.e. liquor selling, etc. Significantly 19.5% boys who had education up to class IX and above were involved in eateries, catering business and courier agency, etc hiding their stigmatized life outside their community. 35.4% children were unemployment.

On the other hand, it was found that the occupational status of girl child of same area revealed that 33.3% of them were directly engaged in the trade as FSWs. A significant portion of the girls (39.5%) between 16-18 years were assisting their mothers either in their trade or as malkins (pimps). But it was also found that at least one girl had been able to break the shackle of her birth and she was a schoolteacher.

On the other part at Diamond Harbour majority of the children (49.5%) were in education process and 21.3% of them were non-school going and among them 29.1% was dropped out from their school. Only 17.6% of these children had Class IX-X standard of education. But 0.98% girls had graduated and 1.9% of the boys possessed professional education like Engineering and Law from
reputed educational institution.

The reasons of drop out of children from school were different like poor economy and lack of mothers’ support (25%), marriage at early age (20% for girls and 1.6% for boys) and household pressure (13.3%), etc.

It was recorded that children at Diamond Harbour were differently involved in various work forces beyond their mothers’ trade. We find that majority of them (31.6%) was assisting their families where they were living without their parents in domestic work. Of them 13.3% including 18.3% boys of 10-16 years was engaged as child workers, rickshaw puller (11.6%) and 8.3% of them were engaged in private service sectors.

Figure 1 reflected the pathways of development of children of FSWs of both places (Bowbazar and Diamond harbor) were taking sex trade as their profession due to their extreme poverty and other causes. There was little variation in their demographic profile. These brothels based female sex workers developed their family tie up in two places differently. At

**Conclusion**

From the above study we find that FSWs of both places (Bowbazar and Diamond harbor) were taking sex trade as their profession due to their extreme poverty and other causes. There was little variation in their demographic profile. These brothels based female sex workers developed their family tie up in two places differently. At
The FSWs were using the places for both their shelter and earning, while the FSWs of Diamond Harbour were only for their earning. So, the children’s growing up process were different in two places. At Bowbazar the children were closely attached to their mothers while at Diamond Harbour the children were not. So, at Bowbazar children grew up in a complex milieu with their mothers’ insufficient and infrequent support. Especially the mother’s attachment to the trade was shaping their inner self differently. Their attachment to their community was the prime burden to grow up differently. As a consequence of this the Govt. and Non-Government efforts for rehabilitation of the children outside the trade were not meeting success largely. But in some cases the study showed that mothers’ hidden involvement and proper care and attention and sometimes the effort of the male partners i.e. separate shelter and input had brought changes.

At Diamond Harbour, children were not getting any hints of their mothers’ involvement. The children who had not got proper facilities and support were settled in larger society in different unskilled jobs. Although they were out of mothers’ care and attention, the secrecy of involvement in trade was the main strategy not to bring them in the trade.

Thus the restriction of mothers’ involvement and their specific schedule of opportunity (safe and separate shelter) along with the males’ support had brought a change in the lives of the children. But the Govt. policy and the intervention of NGOs were eventually a routine programme of social security and welfare. So, the intervention strategy would be redesigned based on the mothers’ desperate strategy for integration of future generation into the larger society.

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