

# Female Sex Workers: From Health Perspectives to an Integrative Intervention Model Crimes against commercial Sex workers:

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## **Abstract:**

*Female sex workers are always the target of the HIV/AIDS government intervention program and disease control. But they are exploited by multiple stakeholders, living in stigma, discrimination, illhealth and abuse. An understanding of the sexual and reproductive health status of the female sex-workers and an assessment of effectiveness of the community mobilisation program for the emancipation of the female sex workers are essential to bring positive policy change. Even though multiple government programs are available for the welfare of this community and civil society organisations are working closely to give awareness and assisting to implement government programs, the living conditions of the female sex workers are reported to be worse. By using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, this research work unveils the living realities of the female sex workers in Pune city from their perspectives. Instead of being engaged as part of the solution to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sex workers are treated as part of the problem. The research shows that sex work is segmented between the enclosed and street segments, marked by main differences in working conditions, risk of victimization, and self-esteem. FSWs in street sectors are always discriminated and labelled as criminals by the hostile society, due to their low levels of education, and become vulnerable to the violence by criminals and the police force-with obvious consequences for the health and well-being of sex workers. The existing laws are criminalising and victimising the sex workers without initiatives for prevention, changing their living conditions and protection of their rights. Instead of compulsory detention, this research suggests an evidence-based, voluntary, community empowerment services and integrative intervention strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Sexual exploitation, human rights, Stigma, Criminalisation*

## **I. Introduction:**

The commercial sex work has been universal and prevailed throughout the civilization and prostitution is known as 'oldest profession' and the oldest form of oppression. Most of the research focuses exclusively on

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street prostitution associated with female workers, wherever it is illegal with much less attention devoted to prostitution at private spaces. There are economic, social, religious, psychological, cultural and biological causes of entry into prostitution. The deviance framework attached to prostitution is based on the traditional stigmatization of sex work and highlights the ways in which actors are subjected to social control and discriminatory treatment. An analysis of the socio economic profile of the female sex workers shows that caste, economic background, illiteracy, marital status, and their family background are the key variables in entering into sex work. However, short-term opportunities in prostitution put women at risk of never acquiring skills that pay a living wage outside of sex work (Edlund & Korn, 2002) In India , their area of work is also divided in terms of street base, home based or brothel based sexual activities. The working conditions, remuneration and the causes of entry of female sex workers are also not same. But across the country the chief reason that forces women to enter into sex work is for economic factors, ranging from survival to a desire for financial independence or upward mobility. Research findings from India, across the states also highlights that substantial segment of women had prior experience of alternative work and opted for sex work, for better income and livelihood opportunities. As per the Ministry of women and child development data in 2007, there are around 2 million prostitutes in India, 35.4% of them entering to this profession before 19 years. The human rights watch reported 20 million female sex workers in 2011, among them 2 lakh sex workers reside in Mumbai alone, the largest in Asia. Trafficked data and factors of vulnerability.

Prostitution happens in the red streets in unhygienic environment and the portion of money earned will be taken by landlords, pimps, financiers and policemen and part of their income they are sending to their families. Cultural factors such as prevalent devadasi system in Karnataka where young girls of poor families are dedicated to goddess Yellamma which force them into prostitution. India deep rooted discomfort in dealing with the sexuality, the government focus on female sex workers embark only as part of National Aids Control Program III, in 2007 where sex workers are considered as the high risk group in HIV infection and branded as the main stakeholders in HIV transmission and the prevention of the spread of HIV through HIV/AIDS awareness outreach programs, contraception's and ARV treatment is considered as the rights and duties of sex workers. Sex workers are labeled as carriers of sexually transmitted diseases and they have always been considered outcastes because they are believed to be infecting the community with their compromised morals. Since the women who opt to become sex workers are from vulnerable socio economic background, their awareness of the existing laws, legal entitlements and rights are reported as limited. The emerging discourses on rights at the global and local level argue that efforts to respect, protect, and promote the human rights of sex workers need to be centered on ensuring their rights as citizens under the Constitution.

## **II. Theoretical framework:**

The theoretical perspectives of sexual exploitation and sex work is mainly macro theories which explain the causation of sexual exploitation and sex work at the structural level. The three theoretical perspectives available in the literature include the oppression paradigm, empowerment paradigm and polymorphous paradigm. The oppression paradigm holds that sex work is a quintessential expression of patriarchal gender relations. The

most prominent exponents of this position go further, however, claiming that exploitation, subjugation, and violence against women are intrinsic to and ineradicable from sex work, transcending historical time period, national context, and type of sexual commerce (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1997; Jeffreys 1997; MacKinnon 1989). A diametrically opposed perspective is the empowerment paradigm, which focuses on the ways in which sexual commerce qualifies as work, involves human agency, and may be potentially empowering for workers (Carmen & Moody 1985, Strossen 1995). This paradigm holds that there is nothing inherent in sex work that would prevent it from being organized in terms of mutual gain to both parties—just as in other economic transactions. Both the oppression and empowerment paradigms are one-dimensional. Although exploitation and empowerment are certainly present in sex work, there is sufficient variation across time, place, and sector to demonstrate that prostitution cannot be reduced to one or the other. An alternative perspective the polymorphous paradigm holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations, and worker experiences. Unlike the other two, this paradigm is sensitive to complexities and to the structural conditions shaping the uneven distribution of agency, subordination, and job satisfaction

Feminist theory is broad one neo-abolitionists condemns all forms of voluntary and involuntary prostitution as a form of oppression against women. Neo-abolitionists, including radical and Marxist feminists, postulate that prostitution is never entirely consensual and cannot be regarded as such (Tiefenbrun, 2002). The other group, including many sex positivists, argues that a woman has a right to choose prostitution and other forms of sex work as a form of employment or even as a career. Radical feminism is rooted in its understanding of social organization and structure as inherently patriarchal, as sexism exists to maintain male privilege and patriarchal social order (Loue, 2001). The patriarchal organization of both government and society has provided a social context for the widespread sexist acceptance of hierarchy, thereby excluding women from the public sector, higher education, structural labor forces, and religious institutions (Loue, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Because radical feminists generally view all commercial sex acts as patriarchal and oppressive, advocates should be inclined to ban all forms of sex work and sex industry from existence (Weitzer, 2007). Women's sexuality and sexual energy is appropriated by the men who buy or control the sexual services exchange (i.e., pimps) just as any worker's energy is appropriated to the capitalists for their profits, leading to alienation of one's bodily capacities and very bodily being (Miriam, 2005). Catherine MacKinnon, a Marxist feminist legal scholar, argues that all forms of pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking are abuses of sex and a form of power taken away from women (MacKinnon, 1982). The pro-sex work perspective, or sex positivism, split from previously derived feminist schools of thought to advocate for women's right to an autonomous choice of sex work. Advocates of this perspective hold that sexuality, including paid forms, is consensual in many cases and that a woman should be free to make her own decision regarding the type of work in which she chooses to partake (Ferguson et al., 1984). feminist legal scholars (Wolken, 2004) and researchers (Chong, 2014) have described the devaluation of women of color specifically as victimization by sexual exploitation, because they are even more likely to be considered as embodying perversions of desire and to be treated systemically as a lower class of individuals than their White counterparts. In view of sexual exploitation, women who are poor and have few options for survival may fall victims to traffickers or may prostitute themselves when they seemingly have no other choice (Anthias, 2013).

### III. Legal Intervention:

In India, while prostitution is not an offence, practicing it in a brothel or within 200 m of any public place is illegal. Legal context of female sex workers is quite complex as they are generally arrested by the police under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986 (ITP Act) which confers wide powers to the latter. Such legal structures results in inaccessibility of government programs and entitlements to the invisible sex worker populations and increases the risk of further violence. The abuse of power by the police personnel in the form of lodging of false/fabricated cases and arrest; not informing the grounds of arrest; physical and sexual assault during the arrest and in lockups; denial of basic needs such as food and medical help when they were in lockups, delay in producing the arrestee in the court, forcing them to purchase articles for police station and for the personal use of police personnel; detaining money or valuables of sex workers etc. are widely reported. Access to justice for female sex workers is constrained by lack of knowledge of their rights, dependence for assistance and resources and the threat of sanction. The failure to get fair trial for these women due to stigmatization and discrimination led to their inability to enjoy the fundamental rights such as the right to life, dignity, equality, right to education, equal protection and due processes under the law. People involved in sex work are not only at a higher risk for violence, but are also less likely to get protection from the police as often they themselves are the very perpetrators of this violence. Since society deems women in sex work to be morally corrupt, they are considered guilty and thus deserving of any violence committed against them. .

Provisions of ITPA have been used to arrest and harass sex workers, regardless of whether they are in sex work voluntarily or have been coerced. Provisions of ITPA have been used to arrest and harass sex workers, regardless of whether they are in sex work voluntarily or have been coerced. The ITPA, 1956, contains provisions for special courts to be set up by the state and the central governments and for summary trials to be directed by the state governments to ensure speedy disposal of trafficking offences. To date, none of these provisions have been enacted either by the states or the central governments.<sup>2</sup> The shelter and protective homes prescribed under The Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA) do not have adequate facilities to cater to victim's needs, whereas victims in child care institutions are ousted upon reaching the age of 18, due to the absence of after-care homes.<sup>3</sup> The Supreme Court of India, in *BudhadevKarmaskar v. State of West Bengal*<sup>4</sup>, dealt with the welfare and rehabilitation of sex workers. The court has observed that sex workers are entitled to a right to life and must be accorded the protection guaranteed to every citizen.

Their uncertain status in law results in judgments that often mark sex-workers as criminals and repeat offenders. Despite Free Legal Aid being enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the Committee's recommendations that the State Party ensure free legal services to poor and marginalized women, and monitor the quality and impact of such services, access to legal services for sex workers remains a dream. . As the very name of the major legislation relating to trafficking and sex work in India-the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act of 1986- makes clear, about social attitudes about sex work as immoral have influenced government policy towards sex work. The society at large and policy makers in particular are reluctant to respect basic human Rights including

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2 Source: <http://hrln.org/hrln/anti-trafficking/pils-a-cases/238-prajwala-v-union-of-india-.html#ixzz4R0pmbxWY>

<sup>3</sup> TRAFFICKING AND THE LAW, Socio Legal Information Cent, 2011  
<sup>4</sup>(2011) 11 SCC 538

social entitlement of sex- worker. Violation of Human Rights remained a ‘non issue’ even among the progressive and liberal – when the victim is a sex worker and even juridical redresser mechanism hardly reach out to sex worker Human rights organization in general has shown very little interest in sex workers rights related issues. Police and administration uses all possible abusive practices (both as a protector of law and guardian of moral code) against sex worker- and in most circumstances practices are not necessarily follow the code of law. Legislations, policies & program for sex workers should address the groups of sex workers & reasons for sex workers differ among individual sex workers. Some adults make a relatively free personal choice choose to work as the right to sexual liberation, other choose sex work because of economic pressures as there are no better paying alternatives yet. Others overtly pressurized by third parties in the form of deception, violence & or debt bondage. Policy makers need to be cognizant of this distinction & one blanket policy cannot apply to both situations (Fredrick, 2000) Policy makes often face the dilemma over the difference in approach on sex work and trafficking.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To analyze the awareness of the FSWs about their rights and the challenges faced by the FSWs in accessing the existing legal system.
2. To obtain a better understanding of the sexual and reproductive health rights of FSWs and its impacts.
3. To comprehend the effectiveness of the community mobilization to empower the FSWs in Pune city.

#### **IV. Methodology:**

The methodology to be used in this research is the combination of quantitative and qualitative ones. Data are collected from FSWs with the help of an interview schedule, with a multistage stratified random sampling method. It is intended to have an inclusion criteria restricted to FSWs within the age group of 18-60 years, operating in Pune city and inclusion to those arrested by the police at least once in last five years. Quantitative data is analyzed using SPSS to obtain basic descriptive statistics and association measures. In-depth interviews and focused group discussions also conducted in community based groups to have their opinion about the safety of FSWs and other related issues. The questions are categorized under three groups, viz., Participants’ opinion of existing stigma, social isolation, violence and community support, Participants’ beliefs about the responsibilities of the family, society and state in protecting their rights and Participants’ opinion about areas for improvement of existing laws, policies and programs affecting FSWs. Out of the 100 participants interviewed, 80 of them belonging to brothels and 20 of them were operating in private spheres.

#### **V. Findings**

Majority of the participants are migrants’ populations from economically poor background entered into this profession out of scarcity to bear the family responsibility and some of them are refugees from Bangladesh and Nepal and 10% of them are trafficked by trickery either by friends neighbours or strangers. The age groups

are ranging from 19 years to 50 years. 42% of them are abandoned by their husbands who highlight that marriage is not a guarantee of social and economic security to these women. 96% of the 80 respondents said that the number of clients decreased over the years and earning from sex work is not enough for their survival. As organised sex work is not legal, police raids are regular and sex workers are exploited and threatened by pimps, financiers and police who loot their earned money and valuables. Due to illiteracy and socially disadvantaged background, they are vulnerable to multiple atrocities and violence. 40% of them reported that they are exposed to violence from multiple stakeholders ranging from clients to the police. 60% of the respondents reported health complications due to infections from sexual activity as many of their clients are from socially and economically poor background and malnutrition is visible as many of them are surviving on some snacks such as vadapav. Infections and illhealth are common to them due to the social isolation they will not avail the social security programs and entitlements. Only 5% of them have ration card and 26% of them have bank account. Due to lack of identity cards such as Adhar Card many facilities are denied to them. Getting free medical facilities and bank loan is difficult to them, which force them to depend on money lenders and getting exploited by them. Accommodation is the main problem faced by them, 80% of them are homeless and are living in brothels and half of their money earned is spend for accommodation. 85 % of them are not happy with the existing work conditions and 20% of them are involved in other domestic work along with sex work for their livelihood. There is one CBO working in the area to mobilise the group and give awareness to them, but infrastructure, funding, resources, governance and participation of the community and the interaction with the state is not achieved.

The activities of the CBOs include HIV awareness, care for the children of sex workers and empowerment workshops etc. 65% percent of them opined that they were forced to go for compulsory HIV test without their consent and some of them clarified that those who were HIV positive are marked with some symbols. Alcohol consumption and addictions among the sex workers are also rampant wine and marijuana is available in the street. Only 11% of them reported about their sexual violence incidents to the police, their migrant status and identity stops them from reporting about the harassment. Physical and mental injuries are a common phenomenon to these women. 46% of the respondents have depending children staying with them. 92% of them are reported that they are using condoms in sexual intercourse, 8% of them opined that due to the client demand and fear of losing clients are the deciding factors for the use of contraception. Some of them shared that their clients force for the video recording of the sexual activity. Lack of support and cooperation from the family and society, and fear of false case of drugs and robbery are the barriers in complaining to the police. But the participates are aware of the legal aid facilities and 82% of them are unhappy with current forced mass rescue and rehabilitation initiatives of the government. Majority of them demanded alternative livelihood options and skills development and integration to the mainstream population rather than institutionalised segregations.

The 20 female sex workers interviewed involved in private spaces, are from the age group 19 to 45 and 74% of them are educated with minimum S.S.LC and majority of them are students working women such as beauty parlour workers and are aware of the existing laws and safety precautions. In the era of social networking, getting clients is easy. Their main motivation to enter into this activity are monetary benefits as well as to get special favours and their daily earning is ranging from 3000 to 30,000 rupees. They are successful in negotiating with their clients and denying the services if felt necessary. But this group is also reported of violence from the clients due to the alcohol and drug consumption of the clients and inability to report due to the taboo involved in

sexual activities. Sex work is only a temporary work for them and 70% of these women said that they are ready to quit this activity and it is not a profession to them. Even though they are aware of their rights, 60% of them opined that getting legal aid is not easy to them, due to the moral policing, harassing punishing and criminalising nature of existing laws related to sex work and the related attitude reflected in the legal system. Half of the participants in this category narrated that there are regular client who turned into partners. But knowledge about existing laws, and having sex in their private spaces is not a guarantee of safe sexual practices free from harassment and violence. But compared to the street sex workers, due to educational levels and choices available to them they are successful in negotiating with their clients financially as well as sexually. Their activities are in indoor in closed secret space due to the fear of isolation from the neighbourhood and family as Indian social psyche is not liberal towards the sexuality and sexual rights of the women. It is clear from the study that experiences of the street and enclosed females sex workers are different and both oppression and empowerment paradigm is existing. women from street category are fall prey to the violence due to their poor economic and educational status which is the hurdle to protect themselves from exploitation.

## **VI. Conclusion/Recommendations**

The existing laws are criminalising and victimising the sex workers without enough initiatives for prevention, changing their living conditions and protection of their rights. Any move to regulate or legalise sex work without considering the voices and experiences of sex workers is harmful and will not serve the purpose. Any regulation that forces women to undergo compulsory health check-up is not suited to the ethos of democratic society. Prevention of sex work and protection of sex workers is not possible by having a blind eye towards refugee issues. There is an urgent need of policy change from victimization and exploitation approach to individual rights, autonomy, self-limitation and determination. Sensitivity to issues faced by sex workers should be made a part of training for police personnel, public prosecutors and the judiciary in partnership with community organizations of sex workers. Develop mechanisms to recognize and act against violence faced by women in sex work to guard against arbitrary arrest and detention of sex workers, and investigate harassment, extortion and abuse by law enforcement staff itself. Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women also calls for the protection of sex workers from exploitation from violence. To achieve this state must take immediate actions to end police violence against sex workers by putting in place an effective, accessible and non-discriminatory complaint mechanism to register complaints against police officials for the commission of acts of violence as well as the omission to protect sex workers from violence by others. Simply enacting laws restricting sex work or introducing health care interventions unlikely to prove effective. There is an urgent need of policy change from victimization and exploitation approach to autonomy, rights, self-limitation and determination. To achieve this, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach in realizing the human rights of sex workers and recommend that interventions affecting sex workers be undertaken through consultation, participation of the leaders of the community-based organizations.

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