

Motivational factors in sex trade – A Study in Kolar district of Karnataka state

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Abstract:

Sex work is recorded as occurring in every society and in every period of history. It has been the subject of public and political debate in many different settings. Consistently, a major focus of that debate has been about public safety and the risks to public health from prostitution. In India, a social development perspective has been applied to reduce the risk of HIV by empowering sex workers and changing their health behavior in the long-term. Findings from this study confirm that individuals decide to enter into sex work because their lives are affected in early ages by incidents at the household and societal levels. This study also suggests that multiple underlying determinants resulted in women's decision to enter sex work.

Keywords: Sex work, Motivations, profession, women.

Introduction:

Sex work is a contractual agreement regarding sexual service between two consenting adults. This exchange is either for cash or kind. Sex work in India is clandestine (Dandona et al., 2006). Studies in India show that women either involve in sex work involuntarily, often due to economic reasons (Blanchard et al., 2005) or they are forced into sex work (Dandona et al., 2006; Silverman et al., 2007). Women who join sex work for economic reasons belong to particular social, caste and class groups. Reza-Paul et al., (2008) document that the majority of women in sex work are illiterates, belong to lower castes, are destitute and/or are from poor economic backgrounds.

Recent research with 3000 sex workers in 14 Indian states also finds a substantial segment of women had prior experience of alternative work and opted for sex work, for better income and livelihood opportunities

Sex work is recorded as occurring in every society and in every period of history. It has been the subject of public and political debate in many different settings. Consistently, a major focus of that debate has been about public safety and the risks to public health from prostitution.

Researches on initiation of sex work usually make a distinction between voluntary and involuntary prostitution (UNESCO, 2002). Earlier it includes women who enter sex work “willingly” either due to poverty or family pressure, while the latter it includes those who are forced into sex work through trafficking, coercion or traditional practices. Studies from across the world also place sex workers in these two categories.

Simons and Whitbeck (1991) confirms that exposure to early sexual abuse and destructive parenting results in women running away from their home which in turn leads to increased participation in deviant activities, which includes prostitution. In adults, interpersonal network influences also play a crucial role in a culmination of events that result in a woman’s first experience with prostitution (Dalla, 2001). In India, it has been documented that sex work is largely involuntary (Nag, 2006). Some women choose it knowingly but find the conditions unacceptable to come out, while others are forced in the beginning and then decide to stay on (Nag, 2006). Study showed that women experienced lack of power, freedom and control because of their low education and status in society. Previous research about this topic in India documented that the decision to enter into sex work is largely involuntary (Nag, 2006). Some women choose it knowingly but find the conditions unacceptable. Others are coerced in the beginning and then decide to continue with it (Nag, 2006).

In India, a social development perspective has been applied to reduce the risk of HIV by empowering sex workers and changing their health behavior in the long-term (Chattopadhyay, 2004). The proponents of this approach argue that efforts to improve health seeking behavior of female sex workers, particularly for condom negotiation, will not be successful until the larger economic, social and political underpinnings that affect their decision-making powers are addressed (Chattopadhyay, 2004). Findings from this study confirm that individuals decide to enter into sex work because their lives are affected in early ages by incidents at the household and societal levels. This study also suggests that multiple underlying determinants resulted in women’s decision to enter sex work. The typical view held is that women who lack alternative viable options enter sex work to find a quick, short-term source of income (Whelehan, 2001). The decision to engage in sex work may either be a balanced choice or an

involuntary one. It is worth noting that most studies in India which explored women involvement in sex work have employed them.

Most of the organizations are focusing sex workers in the broader framework; believe them to be the carriers of HIV/AIDS, rather than as a single entity facing problems in terms of the health, risk, crisis, stigma, taboo, social discrimination and denial of human rights. The issue has gained momentum due to alarming rate of increase in HIV infections across the world. This has contributed to the identification of the sex workers as HRGs (High Risk Groups) and they are dealt under extension of HIV targeted intervention programs. There are many critical issues linked with the sex workers like sexual violence, exploitation by police officials and by clients, security and education of their children (especially of a girl child). But the current approach of targeted intervention is not able to take care of these concerns because of its structure and accessibility to the population of Female Sex Workers. The vulnerability of sex workers to HIV is an issue of concern and many studies have been conducted to analyze various components and contributing factors with specific objectives and corresponding research designs to assess the situation and connection between these two.

This study examined with the respondents what are their motivations to choose sex work as their profession and what are their mechanisms to carry on this profession though there are more risks associated with the profession and what are the safety methods followed to safeguard themselves from health and social hazards with regard to sex work profession.

Methodology:

The main objective of this study is to examine the reasons and motivational factors for women in getting into sex trade. A research design is the framework for the study used as a guide in collecting and analyzing data.

Based on the aims and objectives of the current study an exploratory research design has been used. The exploratory research design has helped in describing the situations and the factors in getting into the sex work profession. The approach has also accurately depicted the behavior patterns of FSWs with regard to safe sex practice. Moreover it was also instrumental in describing the conditions of care and support services and challenges faced by the FSWs.

All the Female sex workers registered in TI Program in kolar district is formed the universe for the present study. As there are different types of female sex workers across the district, it is important that all of them are included to make the study representative. Therefore stratified sampling was used and all the three categories and all five talukas sex workers had the same proportionate of respondents. Random sampling technique is chosen here in the study to include all talukas sex workers. The social taboos attached to sex worker issues restrict people to get vocal about them. Thus, the respondents who were willing to participate in the study were interviewed as the respondents to collect the information.

Total 300 FSWs across all taluks i.e from KGF 84 FSWs, Kolar 81 FSWs, Malur 35 FSWs, Mulbagal 47 FSWs and Srinivas pur 53 FSWs were proportionately selected from Taluk wise registered FSWs by using random sampling. Primary data was collected from female sex workers, Program Managers of TIs, staff of SSS and MYRADA which is technical support organization for SSS.

To strengthen and substantiate the findings of primary data secondary data was collected through reviewing literature from journals, books, websites which are working on the cause, training materials of HIV awareness and publications of NACO etc. The resources have been very helpful and instrumental in designing the tools for primary data collection. An extensive research article review related to female sex workers in India was carried out for developing the context of the study. A structured interview schedule was prepared for the female sex worker which was administered by the researcher to collect the primary data.

Limitations of The Study

- Due to fear of detection and getting exposed it was difficult to gather information from the respondents.
- Presence of peer educators caused mild lopsidedness of the information.

Demographic characteristics of Female Sex Workers

Age:

Age is considered an important dimension in social profile. Age is also the critical criteria in the profession of sex work. The study has done with 257 women in sex work in kolar district of Karnataka. Among them 9 percent are in below 25 years of age, 40 per cent are in 26-35years of age, 46 percent are in 36-55 years of age and remaining are above 45 years of age. The Project has been working with the women for the last 10 years and more and more women are getting registered every year.

The sex work is a never ending process in the society and along with the general population, number of women in sex work also in progressing trend. The women in sex work most of them reside in rural areas, are married, mobile and have a small income-earning occupation, in addition to sex work. All these women visit urban areas due to several reasons out of which, one reason is to get the handsome income through sex work and the diversified urban society where the women can be anonymous. Most of these women are in 25-55 years of age group.

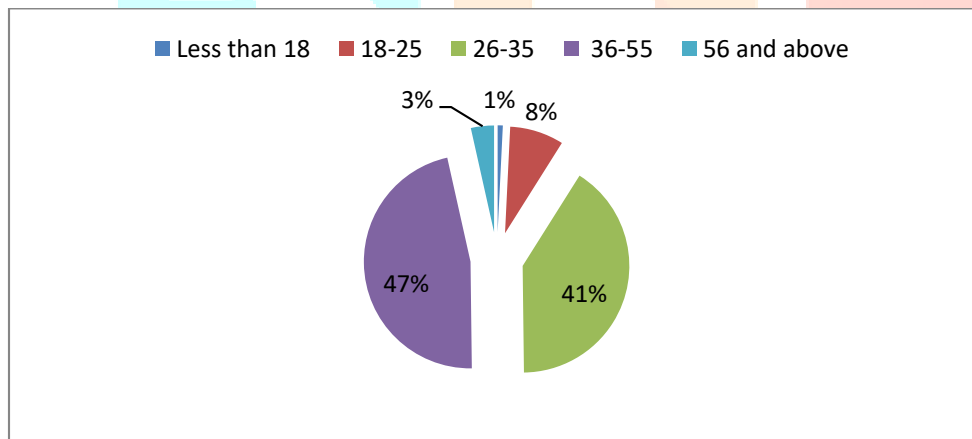


Fig1: Distribution of women by age

Education:

Educational qualification is an important indicator to measure the social layers. It also decides the opportunities of employment for the individuals. Moreover it also defines the contextual and social space of the respondents. It can be an important influence for female sex workers to get into the profession which is evident from the findings of this study as majority (46.69% percent) of the respondents reported are illiterate and 34.24% reported that they have completed primary education while few 3.50% of them completed intermediate/+2 education.

The low level of literacy can be an interpretation of economic constraints within their families which could be the reason of many women and girls to join the profession of sex work, which is increasing with due course of time. It also restricts their access to various awareness supplies and facilities apart from the range of professional choices of the respondents. This in turn emphasizes the continuation in the profession of sex work. The level of their education may also impact the awareness of the respondents in terms of accessibility to the information regarding STI/HIV and care and support services, which are otherwise important for the prevention of the infection.

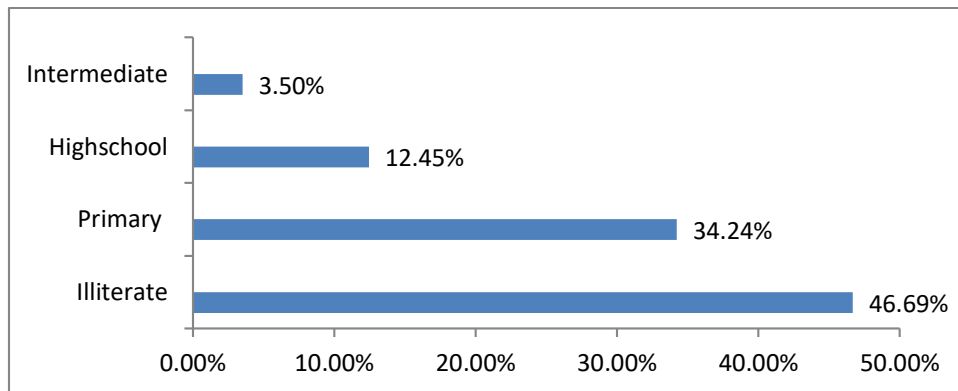


Fig 2: Distribution of women by education

Reasons for getting into sex work

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Cheating love/Love failure	66	25.7
To feed the children	48	18.7
Force from the life partner	38	14.8
separation from husband	21	8.2
Motivation from friends	15	5.8
Force from the family	9	3.5
Tradition	6	2.3
One of the source of income	3	1.2
Cheating love, Force from the family, Motivation from friends	16	6.2
Mixed all above	25	9.7
others	10	3.9
Total	257	100

Of the total 257 respondents 41 members selected more than one reason for getting into sex work. The reasons they gave were complex, overlapping and not necessarily exclusive. Details on underlying mechanisms to the reasons mentioned above are described as follows:

Cheating by known people

Of the 257 women interviewed, 66(25%) mentioned being deceived and/or forced into sex work. The in-depth inter-views exposed how they were trapped through deception by known persons including kith and kin and friends, as well as by unknown persons and strangers, through promise of marriage by a lover/boyfriend. In some of the narratives, women used terms such as „cheated“, „forced“ or „lured“, but in some cases these terms did not match their descriptions of immersion in sex work.

As discussed earlier, a majority of the women who were deceived by known people were mostly illiterates and were from poor families with little or no social support. Most were given false promises. They ended up in brothels from where escape was impossible. In a few cases, parents were involved in selling them to brothels.

Another woman narrated that deception by her lover landed into sex work:” while I am 18 years old I escaped with the man I loved. We lived together for an year and had a child and enjoyed our lives without any problems. Later we faced some financial difficulties. One day he left me and my daughter suddenly and did not return. One of my friends used to work as a sex worker in the area and through her I started this work to survive me and my child”.

Many young girls decided to leave their homes because of infatuation towards men who promise them with better life and unfortunate family circumstances such as violence perpetrated by the family. These girls became easy prey for traffickers who lured them with promises of good jobs, accommodation and so on. Most of the girls with less education levels, poor knowledge on societal conditions easily trapped by the trafficking agents in the name of love and marriage. Once these young girls came out of home with different reasons, they are not ready to go back due to the stigma. Then with no opportunity left for the women to survive willingly or unwillingly getting in to sex work.

Family

Of the 257 women interviewed, 68 reported lack of moral and financial support from their partners and family members were reasons for rationalizing their decision to enter sex work.

Few of the women interviewed expressed that their family played a major role in choosing sex work as her profession. When they started undergoing marital problems, As One woman said:“I went to my parents’ house along with my children due to marital problems. There also I was unhappy. My parents used to taunt me saying I had left my husband and came to their house, where I was not welcome.” Confronted with dysfunctional families, disturbed marital lives and exploitative circumstances, women adopted sex work as a means to live independently and avoid social ill-treatment.

Economic reasons:

The statement “poverty is an evil” was echoed by almost two third of the women who were interviewed (257 women). They stated that poverty was the reason why they opted for sex work. Nearly 20% of the women reported that they had borrowed money from several people for emergencies – to pay for the treatment, food and education of a child which had led to an increasing pressure on them to repay the loans. Poverty was often the result of women being left to fend for themselves because of the cheating of love or love failure to feed their children. Most of the women who attributed their poor financial situation as the reason for engaging in sex work mentioned that their involvement in sex work was facilitated by a known person who was well aware of their poor financial condition.

Further In-depth analyses of respondents suggests that some women wanted to work in other occupations to survive their family but did not seem to find those options economically attractive and hence they chose sex work as a profession and remained. One respondent said, “I used to work as a domestic servant but with the money I earn is sufficient only to feed the children. I knew that people who go outside for sex earn a lot of money and chose this option through one of my friends.”

Tradition:

There are many such groups of caste-based traditional sex workers in our India. Because of the nature of this traditional customs, girls born into these families are pre-destined to become sex workers. They don't have individual freedom. Even though there is an explicit cultural reason for involvement in sex work, the underlying determinant continues to be socio-economic reasons in nature. One woman says "After my father's death due to poverty my family members left me to become a Devadasi.

Societal conditions:

Confronted with dysfunctional families, disrupted marital lives and exploitive circumstances, women adopted sex work as a means to live independently and avoid social ill-treatment. Some of the women reported that they were sexually assaulted by many individuals and even by the police. As a consequence, consistent exposure to an exploitative society and working environment made many decide to enter sex work.

Although the reasons for involvement in sex work pertain to a range of negative life circumstances, the modes of association can be summarized by key mechanisms. The themes highlighted in this section shed light on the myriad ways in which women enter sex work.

Other family members already in to the sex work

	Frequency	Percentage
Sister/widow sister	29	11.2
Mother/widow mother	14	5.4
Aunt	5	1.9
No Body	209	81.3
Total	257	100

Of the total 257 interviewed 29 respondents said that they have already their sister who is in to the sex work profession. 14 respondents said that their mother is in sex work profession. From the discussion with the respondents its learned that the mother or sister or for any women when she loses the life partner and become widow is too vulnerable to choose the sex work profession as she needs to take care of her children with her low education status for which they don't get well-paid jobs and due to their poverty conditions. As per the data 16.6 % of the family members who are already in the profession motivated these women to choose the sex work profession without any hesitation. The data also reflects that 81% of the women decided to enter in to the sex work profession by themselves without anybody's motivation in the family.

Major role in bringing into sex work

	Frequency	Percent
Self	88	34.2
Friend	50	19.5
Stranger	36	14
Family/relative	34	13.2
Others: broaker/Neighbour/pimp	36	14
Family & Broker	3	1.2
Combination of above	10	4
Total	257	100

Conclusion:

Some sex workers who were interviewed stated that they searched for opportunities to join sex work when they were faced with the conditions discussed above. When they became victims of such situations, they chose to enter into sex work instead of any other profession. Many women felt that sex work was the only work they could do competently. Such women also complained about the low wages in any other work. They felt that sex work was a profession where they could negotiate with their clients and earn more. While they were making a decision to enter into sex work, women encountered members of the sex work networks such as agents, brothel owners, and women who were already practicing sex work who facilitated their entry.

This study shows that the social, economic, and cultural factors combine to effect women's decision to enter into sex work. There are several different pathways to get motivated. One common pathway is the desire to escape from marital life which represents freedom from violence, humiliation and dominance from the husband. This escape is accompanied by a desperate desire to earn for self-survival and/or to provide for the immediate family. Women experience a number of threatening situations both within society and at the workplace. Their vulnerability is further heightened by individual level factors such as unhealthy dietary habits, lack of education, low socioeconomic conditions and dependent children. Another pathway for involvement in sex work is when girls are lured into sex work either by offer of large sums of money or a job or a promise to earn easy and quick money. These girls are then sold into brothels by a network of sex traffickers. Economic conditions and the environmental conditions affect the women in choosing vulnerable professions like sex work. Moreover once the women enter into sex work profession she is nowhere find the path to come out of it due to several reasons which needs more insights in the topic.

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