Background Characteristics of Female Sex Workers

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Abstract

The present study endeavoured to cast a glance at some background characteristics of Female Sex Worker in CREATE (Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship and Technical Education), Lucknow. An expost facto research with an exploratory orientation was conducted, on 30 female sex workers selected on the basis of purposive sampling. An effort was made to identify some demographic characteristics related to female sex workers through self devised questions. Results revealed that majority of female sex workers were within the age group of 25-30 years majority were married and semi literate, they lived in unhygienic slum areas and belonged to low socio economic status.

Key words: Female sex worker, prostitution.

Introduction

"*Prostitution is the business or practice of engaging in sexual relations in exchange for payment*"- Merriam - Webster Dictionary (2013). Prostitution is sometimes described as commercial sex. Each country has its own legal status on prostitution from being permissible but unregulated, to an enforced or unenforced crime or to a regulated profession.The Foundation Scelles (2012) has released its latest report on Sexual Exploitation which states that at this given moment there are 40-42 million prostitutes at work, which is more than the population of Australia and Canada. A cursory glance at the

Indian scenario.

Indian Scenario : Presently there are an estimated 3 million women working as prostitutes in India. 1.2 million of the sex workers are under the age of 18.The average age that a girl enters the sex trade in India is reported to be between 9 and 12 years old.The human trafficking industry in India is estimated to generate $4 Billion a year **MacAskill and Pradhan 2013**.

Sex work in India is neither legal nor illegal it is tolerated since prostitutes can practice their trade privately but cannot legally solicit customers in public. Brothel ownership and pimping is illegal. They come across problems in all walks of life as they are being abused physically and mentally. Sex workers are unable to get help from police in situations where they are victims of violence. Laws that allow police to abuse, harass and extort money and sex from sex workers create a considerable barrier to access to health services. One of India's most striking characteristics is its material poverty. An estimated 40% of India's population lives in poverty. This means that almost 400 million people cannot meet basic survival needs like food, clothing, and shelter. This is an overwhelming, almost unimaginable statistic. Poverty is often said to be a supportive factor for the root of India's growing prostitution problem.

Sex workers in India are discriminated against within public services and subjected to violence from clients, brokers, brothel owners, family members and police. The situation is exacerbated by laws that criminalize sex work that push them on the streets, into unsafe and violent situations.

Prostitution history revisited: The profession of prostitution is one of the oldest in almost all the countries since long in every type of society. In the ancient history of India the

prostitution was present as an organized and established institution and it was also referred in our Vedas. In the earlier Indian mythology there were many instances of high class prostitution in form of very beautiful demigods showing as prostitutes. They are called to as Menaka, Rambha, Urvashi, and Thilothamma Jaishankar and Haldar 2006. These are very beautiful, charming and are very perfect in giving attractive dance and musical performances. These prostitution are used in heaven for amusement of guest in the court of Lord Indira, the Lord of Hindu Gods. These prostitutes were used as to test the zeal and devotion of the 'tapasya' of the great saints.

In the rule of historian Indian rulers Pandavas and Kauravas, indulging with prostitutes were common. They were an important part of the court and both dynasties possessed harems of aristocracy in Brahmanic India.

In the 3rd century A.D. in the Sanskrit works of Mahakavi Kalidas. Religious prostitutes were attached to the famous temples of Mahakala of Ujjain and the system of holy prostitutes became common. This was related to the girls who had been offered by their parents to perform these services of the god and their religion, these types of girls are known as Devadasi in South India and as Mukhies in North India.

In the period of Mughal Empire the great importance was given to women and wine, except of Aurangazeb the other Muslim rulers have recognized prostitution and this profession flourished under their eye. During the period of the British regime the place of women in India were the same. Position of the female sex workers continued to become more and more vulnerable.

Having gone through the history of prostitution now moving towards the problems faced by female sex workers.

Problems faced by female sex workers: There are numerous problems faced by female sex worker some of which are mentioned below: Physical problems - Aside from the high rate of HIV/AIDS and other STI's encountered by sex workers, there are other forms of physical implications which need to be remedied through medical attention such as tuberculosis, diabetes, arthritis, cancer, syphilis, asthma, anemia, hepatitis B and C, STD's, menstrual problems, urinary infections, ovarian pain, pregnancy, abortion complications, and infertility.

Psychological Problems - Laws that justify legalization or decriminalization of prostitution to safeguard women's health fail to address the psychological harm of prostitution....PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] is characterized by anxiety, depression, emotional numbing, flashbacks, hyper alertness, insomnia, and irritability. Symptoms are more severe and long lasting when the stressor is of human design. PTSD is normative among prostituted women. Dissociation, depression, and other mood disorders are common among prostituted women in street, escort, and strip club prostitution. Dissociation in prostitution results from both childhood sexual violence and sexual violence in adult prostitution.

The life of the female sex workers seemed to be seriously threatened in many aspects. There is a high need for the Mental Health Professionals to be sensitive to develop empathy and to provide a platform for the female sex workers to uncover their crude day to day realities. With all the reasons, necessity of exploring the background characteristics of the female sex worker was felt.

A string of questions emerged in the mind while going through the problems of F.S.W. viz. In which age group majority of female sex worker belong to? What are the problems they are facing? How much educationally qualified they are? Are they self sufficient in terms of money? What are their living conditions, marital status? Do their significant others

accept them? Does our society accept and support them?

This intrigued the researcher to take up the present research. The present study is an attempt to give a directional view of the situation of female sex workers and providing an answer to some of the selective and significant questions.

Methods

Design : The present study is an expost facto research with exploratory design.

Sample: The participants for the present research comprised of 30 female sex workers selected on the basis of purposive sampling from N.G.O CREATE (Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship and Technical Education) at Daliganj, Lucknow.

Measurement Tool: A self devised questionnaire was used that comprised of 10 items.

Procedure: For developing an interview schedule first all the information from local, national and international sources were scanned. Before starting the main administration a pilot study was done to get ease with the procedure of data collection as well as to get a prior glimpse of the problems to be faced during the actual data collection. For this purpose, a study was done on a sample of 10 female sex workers. Slight modifications were done in terms of language of the questions.
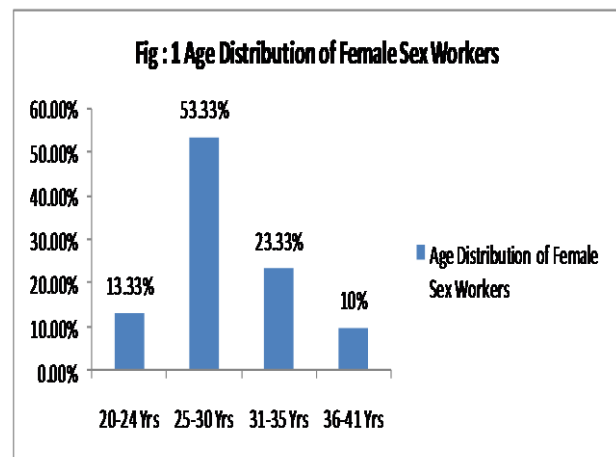
Data Analysis : Information in the interview schedule was carefully content analyzed and was revealed in terms of background characteristics: Age, Location, Hygiene, Marital Status, Children, Social Support, Educational Status & Socio Economic Status

Results and Interpretation

The distribution of the sample as per age among female sex workers is given in the fig.1 denotes that majority of female sex workers that is 53.33% belong to the age group of 25-30 yrs followed by 23.33% in the age group of 31-35 years, where as 13.33% of female sex
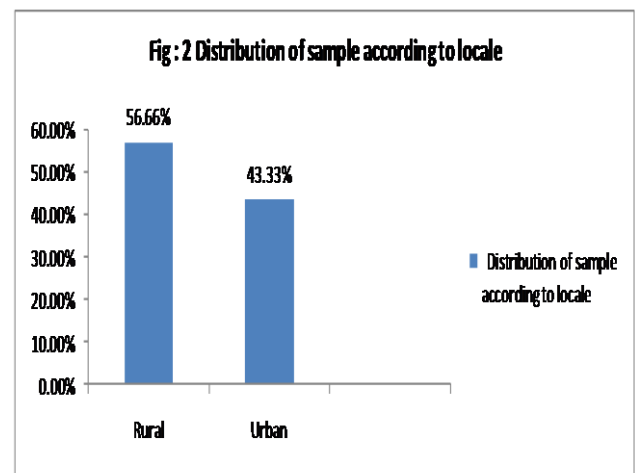
workers belong to the age group of 20-24 years, and only 10% belong to 36-41 years of age.
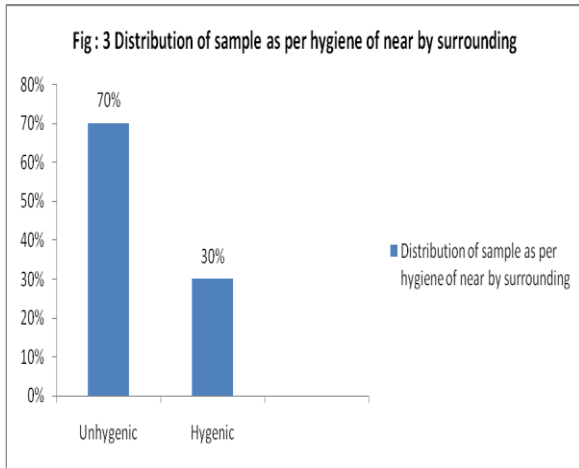
This was supported by Sahni & Shankar (2011) in which 3000 females sex workers were selected, results revealed that 0.53% were aged 15-17 years, 7.5% were 18-20 years, 51.43% were 21-30 years, 33.66% were 31-40 years,6.06% were 41-45 years and 0.7% were above 51 years.

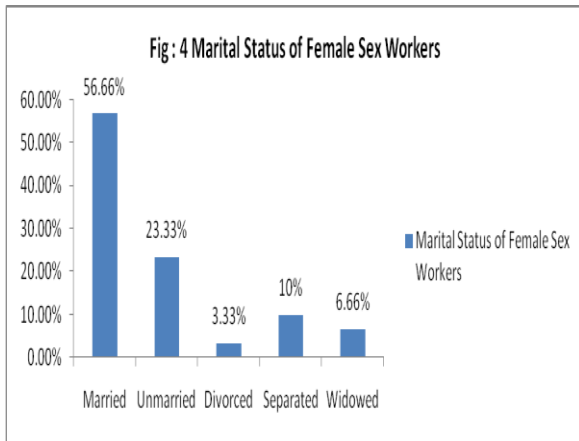Fig : 1 Age Distribution of Female Sex Workers

With reference to fig: 2 majority of female sex workers were from rural background that is 56.66%. Sahni & Shankar (2011) in their study found that 60% of the prostitutes belong to rural background.

Further an effort was made to acquire information in terms of hygiene. Here hygiene pertained to the cleanliness of the nearby surrounding where they resided.

Fig : 2 Distribution of sample according to locale

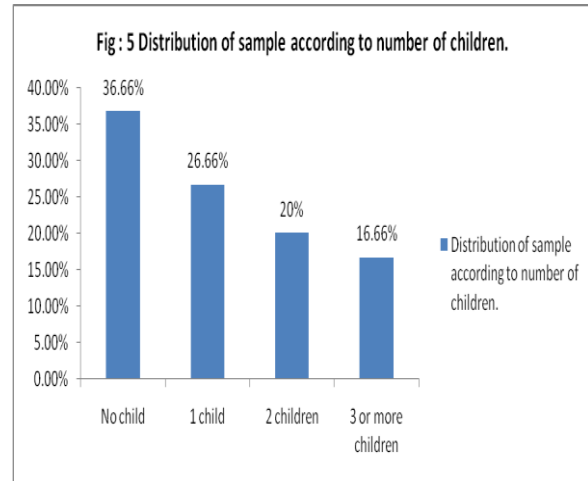Fig : 3 Distribution of sample as per hygiene of near by surrounding

As depicted in fig:3 what came to forth was shocking as majority of female sex workers that is 70% stated that the environment where they lived was not hygienic as majority of them lived in slum areas.

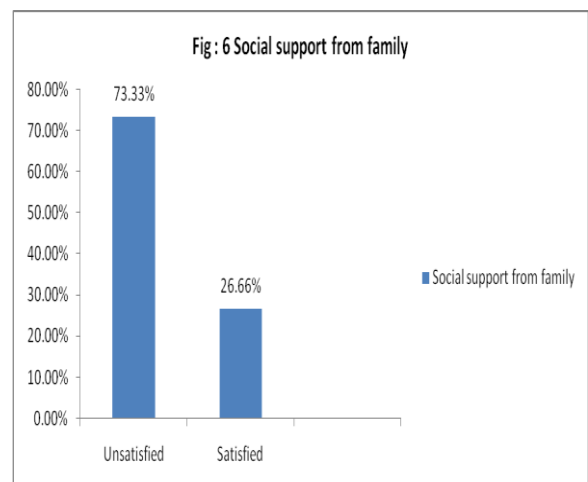Fig : 4 Marital Status of Female Sex Workers

As shown above in fig. 4 56.66% were married, 23.33% were unmarried, 10% where separated, 6.66% were widowed and only 3.33% is divorced.

This fact was well collaborated by Fisher (2003) who in his research found that almost none of the sex worker were currently married, although at least a third have been married at some point citing the abandonment or death of their spouse as the impetus that led them to selling sex.

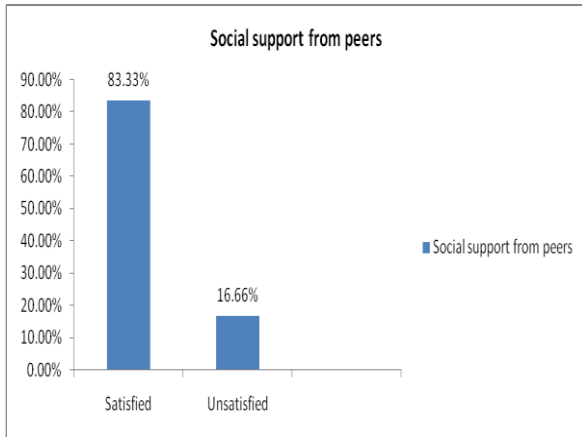Fig : 5 Distribution of sample according to number of children.

With reference to number of children as shown above in fig : 5 majority that is 36.66% of female sex workers had no child, 26.66% has one child, 20% had two children and 16.66% belong to the category of having three or more than three children.
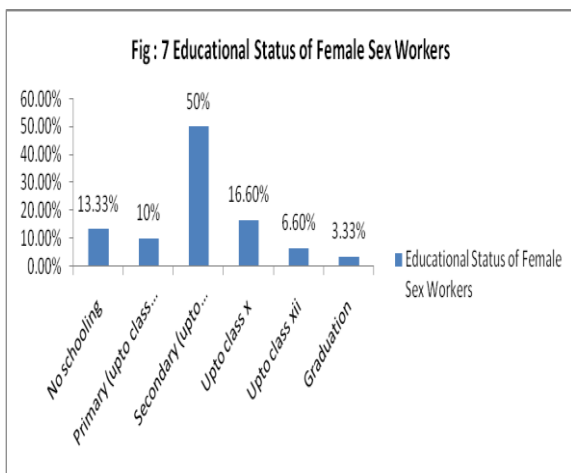
To support the above results, a study done by Yerpude, Jogdand (2012) revealed that out of the 38 children born prior to entry into sex work, 34.21% were sent to hostels and 65.79% were with their families in their native village. Out of the 49 children born in sex work, 34.69% children were being raised in the brothel. The children were kept in the brothel up to 5 years of age. Some of the local NGOs were running a residential school for the children of the sex workers.

Fig : 6 Social support from family

Data in the fig: 6 reveals that majority of female sex worker that is 73.33% were not satisfied with the social support they get from their family, majority of them replied that they get family support only when they are extremely ill and cannot come for their profession.
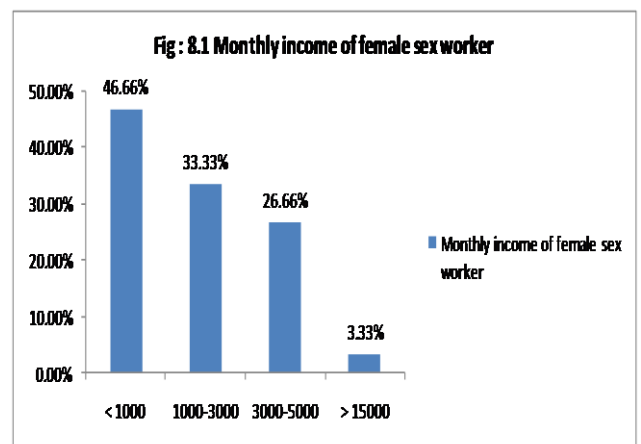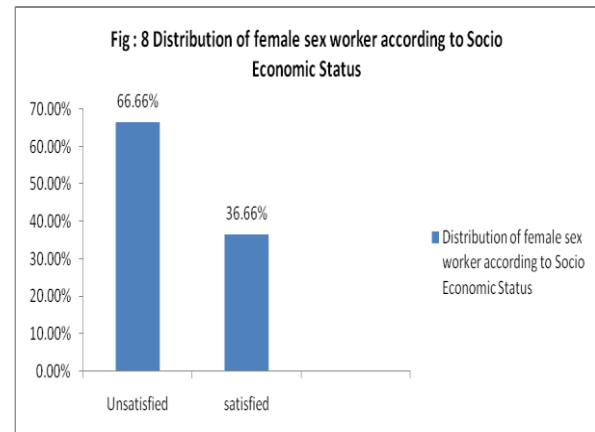

An interesting finding which came to fore was that majority of female sex worker 83.33% stated that they get full social support from the peers as they understand each other and the problem they face are the same, where as only a small number of sex worker were not satisfied with the social support they get from their peers.

With reference to fig: 7 it was observed that in female sex workers were less educationally qualified. The findings showed that 50% FSW did secondary education that is up to class VII, 16.60% did schooling up to class X, 13.33%

FSW did not receive schooling, 10% up to class IV, 6.60% received education up to class XII, and only 3.33% FSW was graduate.

To add more poor education as well as lack of training and qualification impact on vulnerability; driving entrance into sex work and reducing the chances of finding alternative forms of employment as stated in the findings by Balfour and Allen (2014)

Data reveals that majority of female sex workers 66.66% were not satisfied with their socio economic status whereas 36.33% accepted that they were satisfied with their socio economic status as they can meet their basic needs of clothes, food and shelter.

As depicted in fig: 8.1 that is monthly income of female sex workers revealed that 46.66% of female sex worker's monthly income was less than 1000 rupees followed by 33.33% FSW whose monthly income was between 1000-3000 rupees where as 26.66% of the sample's

monthly income was between 3000-5000 rupees and only 3.33% admitted that their monthly income was above 15000 rupees.

Supporting evidence was witnessed in a research by Basu, Jana, Rotheram-Borus, Swendeman, Lee, Newman, Weiss, findings revealed that most of the sex worker perceived that they were at risk for STD/HIV. About one third were married and more than half had a regular sexual partner; about 1 in 4 had been verbally abused in the past 3 months. Most had been working in the profession for at least 7 years and earned less than 500 rupees per month.

Conclusion

To sum up the picture as pertaining to background factors what come forth was the majority of female sex workers were in the age group of twenty five to thirty years. Further majority of sample belong to rural areas where the conditions were unhygienic as many of them mentioned that they belong to slum areas and therefore they had to clean their area of their own.

Majority of them were maried . With reference to children most of them had either no child or only one child. Data revealed that majority of female sex worker are not satisfied with the social support they get from their family as a major chunk of sample reported that they get family support only when they are extremely ill and cannot go for their profession.

Further major chunk of the sample was less educationally qualified as data revealed that majority of the sample only received secondary education that is up to class seventh. Maximum of female sex worker were not satisfied with their socio economic status as well as with their monthly income.

All the above findings were indicative of the fact that ignorance, illiteracy, poor income prepared a base to become sex worker.
Implications

As mentioned earlier this study is a small attempt to bring to fore some basic realities of FSW. Yet a great deal remains to be explored as enormous amount of knowledge about prostitution was gained during the course of working in this area, but what becomes most clear during this effort is the vast amount that remains unknown, undocumented and unspoken.

The exact number of female sex workers in India is open to dispute, the exact number of sex workers is unknown and calculating the number of female sex workers is very difficult as sex work is mostly hidden and the population is transient, with people moving in and out of sex work constantly.

Despite tall talks of social welfare, women empowerment and community development female sex worker is the grass root reality. An effort must be done to bring them into main stream, to build a platform where one can uncover the crude realities existing in society. The need of the hour is not just to add more theoretical based documents but plan some intervention that would build a bridge between the female sex workers and society. Further providing education and rehabilitation to the female sex worker population can be done which would empower them. Also vocational education and training that would create awareness regarding issues of health, learning of social and life skills. This would handhold female sex worker population to move towards optimism, life satisfaction, quality of life and well being.

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