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Violence against Women Working in Sex Trade: A Study in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the nature of violence against sex workers in Bangladesh and their challenges. The study was conducted in Tangail Brothel, which is the largest brothel in Bangladesh. This is a primary study, and a quantitative method was employed to find out the real facts from sex workers at Tangail brothel. The findings of the study show that women face multiple acts of violence including physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, pressures for minimum earnings, lack of legal and medical support, and discards of social movements are the main challenges of sex workers. The study recommends that governments, authorities, human rights organizations and law enforcement agencies should pay more attention to preventing such violence and establishing their human rights.

Keywords: Sex worker, Violence, Clients, Drugs, Physical violence, Verbal abuse, and Challenges.

INTRODUCTION:

Women are considered as the most vulnerable group of society. Sex workers are receiving money or goods in exchange for sexual services, and who consciously define those activities as income generating even where they do not consider the sex work as their occupation (Overs, 2002). According to a report from Foundation Scales (Gatherine, 2011) there are about 40 to 42 million prostitutes worldwide. The statistics demonstrate that the number of sex workers is more in middle-east countries. For example, in the Arabian Countries, there are 13,500 sex workers in Bahrain (Nicholas, 2017) and 30,000 in the United Arab Emirates and 54,000 in Yemen. In European Countries, there are top most about 30,000 prostitutes in Austria (UN report, 2013) and 60,000 in Italy (Exeter University, 2009; Sultana *et al.*, 2021).

The study conducted by Panchanadeswaran *et al.* (2010) surveyed 100 abused female sex workers using a structured questionnaire. The study found severe forms of violence by intimate partners were reported by most (98%) respondents where 76% experienced violence by clients. Sexual coercion experiences of the FSWs included verbal threats (77%) and physical force (87%) by intimate partners and forced unwanted sexual acts (73%) by clients. Another study, conducted by the Scottish cities found that working outdoors, versus indoors, was the most significant predictor of client-perpetrated violence, as 81% of women working outdoors and 48% of women working indoors reported experiencing client violence (Church *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, Raphael and Shapiro (2004) found that the nature and extent of violence may be related to venue and the degree of physical isolation of the sex worker (Weitzer, 2005). Many women enter sex work in times

of financial vulnerability (Urban Justice Centre, 2005), and a number of sex workers are reluctant to go for regular jobs as they will lose the flexible working hours (Crmino, 2007). Some sex work starts to finance a drug habit, so the causal relationship appears to be drug misuse 'causing' sex work. On the other hand, the stresses associated with sex work may promote drug use as a means of managing the job (Kennedy *et al.*, 2007). Study demonstrates that low education levels as well as learning difficulties also acted as barriers for getting employment opportunities in other fields of work (Crmino, 2007). Farley, (2004) noted that, in nine countries (Canada, Germany, South Africa, Zambia, Turkey, United States, Colombia, Mexico and Thailand) across widely varying cultures, that two-thirds of 854 women in sex work had symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at a severity that was comparable to treatment-seeking combat veterans, battered women seeking shelter, rape survivors and refugees from state-organized torture.

Bangladesh is Asian as well as Muslim country but the existence of prostitution is expanded in a broad aspect. Though prostitution is legal in Bangladesh, but still few restrictions are mentioned against prostitution. The number of sex workers are approximately 1,40,000 (UNAIDS, 2016). Male prostitution is illegal, but anything else is legal. Bangladesh has a severely vulnerable to trafficking, which is perpetuated by corruption. Pimping and owning a brothel is also the legal here (Bhattacharya, 2015). The poor and rural area women and girls mostly are vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution. Under 18 years old, prostitution is illegal (The Penal Code, 1860) and child prostitution is another severe problem in Bangladesh. Though not reliable statistics, it is estimated that there are approximately 10,000 to 29,000 victims of child prostitution, according to the report of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and most of the girls enter the profession before the age of 12 (Azad, 2013). The challenges they face are the daily life basic needs as well as social needs. Multiple challenges exist for the sex workers in the family and in daily lifestyle which includes the poor housing and social exclusion also. Analysis of the present study is capable of addressing the problems that the sex working women face in daily life. The primary goal of the study is to

explore the nature of violence faced by the sex worker. Other study had done based on the connection of Prostitution and AIDS (Ullah, 2005) has done to represent the increasing risk of AIDS/HIV for prostitution, the profile of Sex worker in Bangladesh (AKM Ullah, 2005) but this study is focused on nature of violence against sex workers to explore the actual fact and situation of them.

METHODOLOGY:

This study has been done by following descriptive research design. As the subject matter of the study actually focused on nature of violence and challenges faced by the sex workers on Tangail brothel therefore, quantitative method has been chosen to completion the study. Data has been collected from sex workers who experienced different types of violence and faced various types of challenges in their daily routine works. There are defined numbers of sex workers present in brothel area so, probability sampling where simple random sampling has been used here for data collection. The total number of sex worker at Tangail brothel is 480 and the study finds 81 respondents (according to Slovene formula) and interview has been taken from 68 respondents because of the unwillingness and fear of leaking information about respondents. Survey questionnaire have been used in this study. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel has been used for data processing and analysis in this study. The study maintained full ethical protocols. Due to the sensitivities of the study, participation in this research was voluntary, and the participant was declined to take part or withdraw from the research without explaining at any time until the work is prepared for publication. Within the research, the participant was allowed also decline to answer any question. In setting up the interviews, we invited the participant to select a location and time of their choosing as a sign of respect for their involvement in the research process. Having the participant guide the terms of the interview also helped to ensure that the engagement takes place in an environment where the participant feels at comfortable, thus facilitating both the quality of responses and dynamic of relationality. Finally, we also ensure that no identifying information were included in written interview records. Furthermore, in any publications arising from the project,

pseudonyms will be used to mask personal identity and no details will be given that could be used to identify. Finally, no one will be identifiable in any reports or papers published on the project.

Theoretical Framework

The study uses radical feminism theory where patriarchal theorists frame issues of violence against women in a long line of institutional and structural sexism and paternalistic views (Atkinson, 1969). Radical feminism seeks to expose a society defined by male norms that objectify women's sexuality. Radical feminists reject the notion that women are empowered by fulfilling male desire, and they see the desire for prostitution as male. Therefore, the present study analyses the nature of violence among the sex workers which is related with the male supremacy and patriarchal attitude that are the reasonable causes of violation. Deviant Place Theory of victimization also states that the sex workers are likely to become the victim of violence when they are exposed to violent and dangerous areas. Forms of victimization include bullying or peer victimization, physical violence, verbal abuse and assault. Sex work is inherently risky because it often involves intimate contact with the stranger, but the criminalization of prostitution has created a climate of fear that often works against the protection and well-being of women who are employed as sex workers (Augustine, 2015). The study also employs Goffman's concept of stigmatization in order to describe society's negative attitude towards sex workers. French sociologist Emile Durkheim was the first to explore stigma as a social phenomenon in 1895.

Erving Goffman was one of the most influential sociologists who described stigma as a phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute which is deeply discredited by their society is rejected as a result of the attribute. Goffman saw stigma as a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity. A stigma is an attribute, behavior or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way for the sex workers. Stigmatization causes the sex workers to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable, rejected stereotype rather than in an accepted and normal one. Stigma is defined as a special kind of gap between virtual social identity and actual social

identity of sex workers. Female sex workers find themselves at greater risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and other health issues than women in the wider community (Ward *et al.*, 2008). Sex workers unsurprisingly feel negative about their work. These feelings do not necessarily stem primarily from their employment as sex workers but rather arise from the awareness of the fear and stigma surrounding their industry (Holroyd *et al.*, 2008). Most women selling sex can be rational, ordinary, pragmatic and autonomous. Sex workers mostly are uneducated who suffers from the false consciousness, the failure to recognize their own oppression.

Analysis

Primary data has been collected from the respondents from Tangail brothel (Kandapara) where the socio-demographic analysis shows that, among 68 respondents most of them (42.6%) are belong (24-29) age. About 45.6% respondent's daily income is about 500-1000 Tk, 19.1% respondent's daily income is about 1100-1600 Tk, and 35.3% respondent's daily income is about 1700-2200 Tk. Most of the workers (42.6%) are married, 16.2% are divorced and 7.4% respondents are widowed. About 57.3% respondents did not face any type of sexual violence at any time in their life before coming to the brothel and 44% respondents are related with this sex trade for 1-5 years where 32% respondents are involved in this profession for 6-10 years. About 33.8% respondents earn about 200-300 Tk from each client and maximum (61.8%) respondents earn about 400-500 Tk from each client.

Nature of violence experienced by Sex workers

The figure of this study explores the types of violence that are experienced by the respondents. About 14.71% respondents have experienced physical violence and 16.18% respondents admitted verbal abuse. A number of 54.41% respondents have faced both physical violence and verbal abuse at their working place.

Perpetrators of sexual violence

The agent who brought them to the brothel are (41.2%) forced them to make sexual intercourse before handing over them to the authority of the brothel. The other 58.8% respondents did not become a victim of that respective case but came there for poverty.

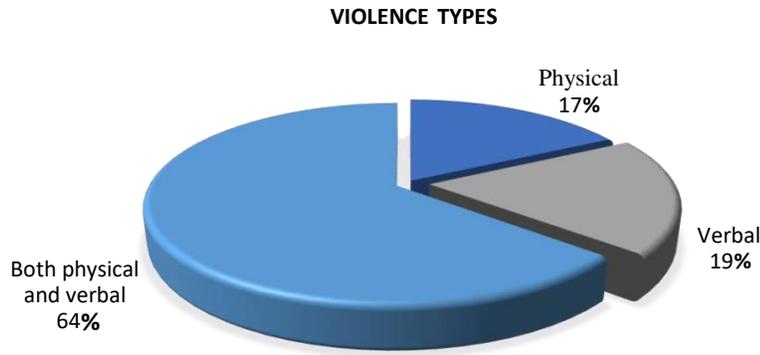


Fig. 1: Violence Types.

Table 1: Perpetrators of sexual violence.

By Whom Victimized	Frequency	Percent
Agent	28	41.2
Didn't face it	40	58.8
Total	68	100.0

Physical violence faced by respondents

The sex working women about 51.9% respondents have been a victim of physical violence for at least 1-5 times in recent period. Around 28% respondents faced physical violence about 56 times. There were 7.4% respondents who had a record of facing physical violence for 11-15 times.

Verbal abuses experienced by respondents

This table explores that maximum (91%) of 68 respondents have been experienced verbal abuse regularly. Around 32.3% respondents said that they have been facing verbal abuse by clients, owner and other local persons on a regular basis and 26.5% said that they have been experiencing verbal abuse in an uncountable number.

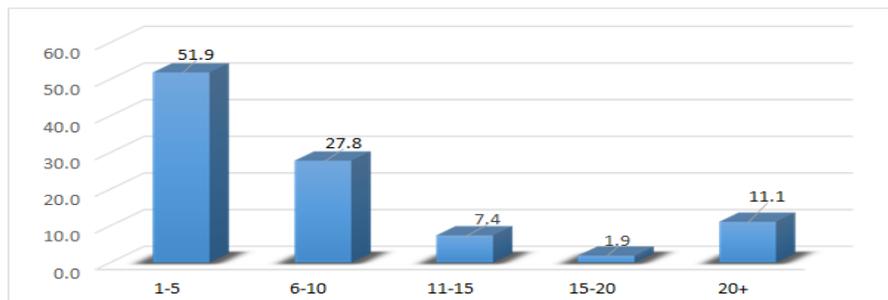


Fig. 2: Physical violence faced by respondents.

Table 2: Verbal abuses experienced by respondents.

Number	Frequency	Percent
On a regular basis	22	32.4
Uncountable times	18	26.5
Unlimited times	22	32.4
Didn't face verbal abuse	6	8.7
Total	68	100.0

By whom respondents experienced violence

The study represents by whom respondents have been experienced violence in the study area. 47.1% respon-

dents experienced violence by their clients in the working place. 10.3% said that they were victimized by their owner more often. Rarely 1.5% experienced

violence by the co-workers along with them works there. Around 41.1% respondents have been experienced violence both by the clients and owner in the study area.

Factors of violent behavior

This table demonstrates the actual causations of violent behavior of clients which they provided to the respondents. Around 17.6% respondents said that most of the clients were drunk when they behaved violently. 19.1% respondents faced violent behavior of clients when they asked them for payment. About 25% reason of violent behavior of clients were both drunken condition of clients and asking time of the payment by the respondents. Radical feminists stated this kind of aggressive behavior of clients as male supremacy on the women where they are being oppressed by the male. About 16.2% responded that both drunken

condition of the client and their aggressive sexual behavior are the real causations of their violent activities towards the respondents working in the study area.

Challenges during work

About 14.71% respondents have been facing the physical problems for taking drugs that they take to get more clients. 19.12% respondents have been facing the violent and aggressive behaviors of the clients during the work. Violent behavior and threatening of the locals show the reflection of ‘Deviant Place Theory’ of victimization. Respondents are living in a place which is out of the concern of legal authorities and for that any criminal activities can be occurred there. A number of 27.94% respondents identified the obstacle that is the interference of police by arresting the clients unnecessarily during the working time.

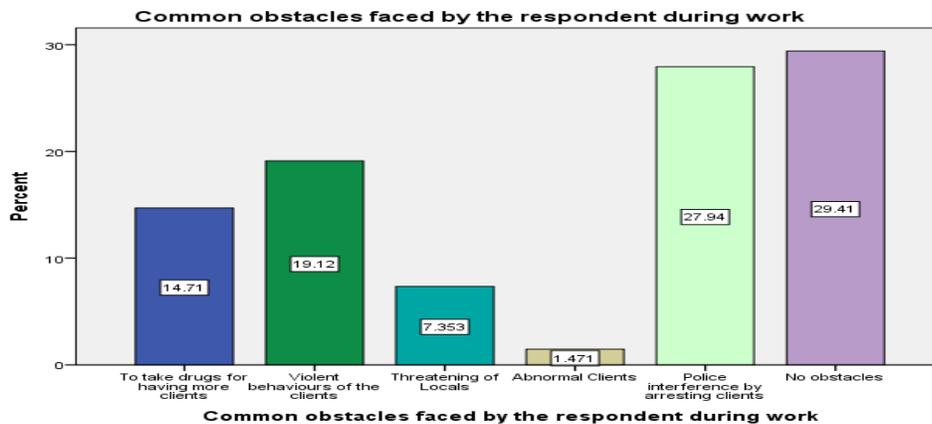


Fig. 3: Challenges during work.

Main Challenges faced by sex worker

The following table shows that 36.8% respondents faced challenges for minimum earning, 14.7% respon-

dents faced challenges for legal support, 26.5% respondents social movements and daily life is always challenges and discard their free movements.

Table 3: Challenges faced by Sex Worker.

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Pressure for minimum earning	19	36.8
Lack of Legal support	10	14.7
Social movements and daily life challenges	18	26.5
Lack of Medical support	2	2.9
Child birth and parenting challenges	13	19.1
Total	68	100.0

DISCUSSION:

The study exhibits that the maximum (45.6%) respondent’s monthly income is between 15,000-20,000 Tk. Among 68 respondents, 58.82% were illiterate and UniversePG | www.universepg.com

33.8% were unmarried. This study also finds that, 42.7.% of respondents were victims’ sexual violence before coming to the brothel, and (41.2%) were trafficked to brothel by local agents. The respondents

(44%) also responded that they were associated with sex working profession for 1-5 years. Among all the respondents, 27.9% of respondents are facing pressure for family maintenance (61.1%), bearing the cost of house rent (27.8%), and their husband's pressure (11.1%). Sex workers working in the study area indicated that they had to pay around 7000-10,000 Tk per month as their house rent. The study also reveals that women face aggressive behaviors from clients 67 (19.1%), interference from police by arresting the clients unnecessarily (27.94%), and face threats of local leaders (7.35%). The dark side of the study finds that 61.76% of respondents took drugs, including Yaba (33%), Alcohol (43%), Barbiturates (5%), & Marijuana (20%). The main reason of drug addiction was to increase their sexual power (36.7%), for having more clients (16.2%), relieve from the mental depression (26.5%).

The study also unfolded that 42.6% of respondents tried to escape from the brothel by the help of co-workers (46.7%), (13.3%) by the help of customers, and (40%) by themselves. However, all of them ended up becoming a victim of physical violence by the owner (2.9%). Around 34% sex workers claimed that their clients behaved badly with them. This study identified that 79.4% of respondents have faced violence at inside their workplace (92.6%), including physical violence (17%), verbal abuse (19%), and both physical and verbal abuse (64%). Where 47.1% of respondents experienced violence by clients (47.1%), the owner (10.3%), and by the both clients and owner (41.1%).

Furthermore, the study finds that 51.9% respondents became a victim of physical violence for at least 1-5 times, 27.8% 5-6 times, 7.4% 11-15 times, and 11.1% more than 20 times. Victims admitted that they have experienced physical violence for asking for payment, own aggressive behavior, breaking the owner's command, and for drunken and addicted clients. The measure that the respondents took reveals that 73.5% respondents informed their violence to owners, co-workers, husband, police & leaders. 42.9% responded that no necessary steps had been taken, the owner took legal measures (30.4%), legal measures taken by Nari Mukti Sangha (19.6%), and only in 7.1% of cases, police arrested the perpetrators after informing issue.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Violence and abuse in brothel areas are deviant acts against the honor, dignity and self-respect of the sex workers. However, the social structure, mentality, and behavior toward sex-working women determine their face. Society's negative impression of sex workers severely humiliates them and makes it impossible for them even to receive medical treatment. This study explored how the sex workers in the study area experienced physical violence, verbal abuse, and daily challenges. It appears that for victim sex workers, physical violence and verbal abuse emanate from both their intimate partners and clients. To understand the relationship among the sex worker's experiences of violence, abuse, and regular challenges, it is critical to developing exact prevention policies and measures. Studies in the future would need not only to explore the nature of violence and challenges faced by the sex workers. Being a victim of such violent activities, victims can have severe psychological and behavioral effects. So, it is anticipated that by proper enforcement of law and taking a multi-layer solution process, sex workers would get a better treatment in society. This study recommends some of the initiatives that should be implemented to combat unwanted physical violence and abuse among the sex workers listed below:

- i). First of all, necessary steps should be taken to emerge the rights of sex workers at the global and national level. The Government should make efforts to respect, protect, fulfill and promote the human rights of the sex workers besides ensuring their rights as citizens under the constitution of Bangladesh.
- ii). The State needs to be more accountable to ensure those rights are appropriately protected where the sex workers can access social, economic, and legal entitlements as most often they lack access to resources.
- iii). Bangladesh does not have gender-neutral laws, which makes it easy access way to justice for women. Poor infrastructure and discriminatory laws limit access to justice for the sex working women.
- iv). The promotion of workplace security should be made by negotiating with owners and managers of sex establishments to protect sex workers from perpetrators of violence.
- v). Sex workers can get the effectiveness of laws, policies, and programs through international human rights instruments whenever they become a victim of

violence. Still, the Government of Bangladesh has failed to recognize the marginalization, stigmatization, vulnerabilities and human rights of sex workers.

vi). Programmes should be developed and implemented to guarantee access to health care, and to create a support system for sex workers who face gender-based violence and abuse.

vii). The acts of the violence, abuse, and humiliation experienced by sex workers can be prevented once the police appropriately investigate these cases, the real perpetrators are prosecuted and the victims are adequately compensated.

viii). Last of all, the health service should be made obtainable, accessible and satisfactory to sex workers based on the principles of avoidance of stigma, non-discrimination and the proper right to health

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The author(s) declare there are no conflicting interests in the article.

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