

Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Mental Stress of Female Sex Workers

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Abstract

Sex work is a major public health problem worldwide. Although prostitution or sex work is a global and deeply rooted social phenomenon, substantial disparity exists in its perception, depending on different social and cultural factors. Women engaging in sex work may be exposed to serious health risks and exposure to highly stressful life events which may have long term implications on their mental health. This cross-sectional study was done in drop-in center 'Swajan-33' in Sylhet district within a period of one year among 105 respondents aged of 14 to 38 years of age to assess the association between their socio-demographic characteristics and mental stress. Data were collected by face to face interview through a pretested structured questionnaire. Perceived Stress Scale was used to assess the level of mental stress. Data collected from purposively selected respondents. The analysis of data reveals that, more than half 53.3% of the respondents were in age group between 14 to 23 years and their mean age was 23.98 years with $SD \pm 6.099$ years, Muslim 65%, illiterate 49.5%, majority 59% had daily income of 600-1000 taka. The finding of this study showed that 85.7% were suffering from high perceived stress and 14.3% were suffering from moderate stress. Age, level of education, income was not associated with level of mental stress ($p > 0.05$). Literacy rate among the female sex workers are still low and invariably they are suffering from high perceived mental stress. Policies for their financial independency such as technical education, allocation of isolated educational institution, increasing social support may help them to lead a prosperous life.

Keywords: Female Sex Worker, Socio-demographic, Mental Stress

Introduction

The sex market is flourishing at an unprecedented rate and affecting each strata of the society. To encounter the ever spreading and miscellaneous sex demand of sex market in the recent years, more and more children and adult women have inducted in this booming trade. Commercial sex takes place in many kinds of fashion and includes many divergent types of people, many of them those are in no way stereotypical. People from different backgrounds and classes sell sex and they do so for an extensive range of reasons. In fact, between the educated, ingenious and resourceful woman who chooses commercial sex from a broad range of possibilities and the poor, illiterate woman who is physically forced to do it, there is an integral continuum of situations.¹

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations. The broad goals are interrelated though each has its own targets to achieve. The total number of targets is 169. The SDGs cover a broad range of social and economic development issues. These include poverty, hunger, health, education, climate change, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, environment and social justice in sustainable development goals we have a goal to reduce inequalities. Being disadvantaged group of population, they often suffer from health problems, coercion and stigmatization. Sex workers have more mental health problems than the general population. Some believe that it is their mental health problems that got them into sex work in the first place, while others think it is the nature of their job from social stigma, to legal and health risks, to exposure to violence and abuse that

causes their mental health to suffer. So, this group of population has public health importance. This group of marginalized women has major mental health needs that are currently unidentified and unmet. From a public health perspective most, research has focused on sexually transmitted disease, reproductive health behaviors, social support and condom use but less on mental stress with psychological factors. So, evaluations are required that focus on this populations to understand the precise context of their mental stress.

Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was done in drop-in center 'Swajan-33' in Sylhet district within a period of one year among 105 respondents aged of 14 to 38 years of age to assess the association between their socio-demographic characteristics and mental stress.

Selection criteria

Female sex workers were selected purposively by using the following inclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria

1. Female sex worker available at drop-in center during data collection.
2. Willing to participate the study.

Exclusion criteria

1. Severely ill or mentally unstable.
2. Who are not willing to participate.

Sampling technique

As the target population was female sex workers so sex workers who willingly participated was included as a respondent, so the study demanded purposive sampling.

Research instruments

All the information was collected by face to face interview through a semi-structured questionnaire to assess socio-demographic status and perceived stress scale was used to assess level of mental stress.

Perceived stress scale score

PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. A short 4 item scale can be made from questions 2, 4, 5 and 10 of the PSS 10 item scales.

Interpretation of Mental stress based on PSS scale:

1. 0-13 = Low stress.
2. 14-26 = Moderate stress.
3. 27-40 = High perceived stress.

Results

About half 53.3% of the respondents were under the age group between 14-23 years. Other age groups 24-28 years 21%, 29-33 years 16.2%, 34-38 years 9.5% respectively (Figure 1). Majority of the respondents 65% were Muslim, 32% were Hindu and only 3% respondents were Christian (Figure 2). Near about half of the respondents 49.5% were illiterate, less than half 43.8% reported that they had completed their primary education and only 6.7% respondent had completed their secondary education (Figure 3). Among the respondent's majority 61% were involved in this occupation for a duration of 1–5 years. About one third 30.5% respondents engaged in sex work for a duration of 6 –10 years and 8.6% for a duration of 11- 15 years. The mean duration of sex work among all the study participants was 5.16 years. Out of 105 respondents about 39% were housewives followed by 37.1%-day laborer, 1% service holder and 22.9% do some other work like maid servant, selling cosmetics along with sex work (**Figure 4**). Maximum income was 1500 taka per day and minimum income of the respondents was 200 takas. Mean income of the respondents was 682.86 taka, with $SD \pm 293.669$. More than half 59% people had an income range of 600-1000 taka per day, about 33.4% of the respondent's daily income were in range of 200-500 taka and 7.6% people had a daily income range between 1100-1500 taka. Half of the respondents 41% were found married, 39% were unmarried, 10.5% were divorced, 2.9% were widow and 6.7% were living separately from their husband (**Figure 5**). Out of 105 respondents most of them 85.7% were suffering from high perceived mental stress and 14.3% were suffering from moderate stress (**Figure 6**). Age, level of education, income, marital status was not associated with level of mental stress ($p > 0.05$).

Discussions

In present we found among 105 respondents; 22.9 % respondents were from the age group 14-18 year. About half of the respondents 51.5 % between 19-28 years. 16.2 % respondents were aged between 29-33 years and minimum number

of respondents 9.5 % were between 34-38 years. Their mean age was 23.98 years ($SD \pm 6.099$) with the minimum 14 and maximum age of 38 years. A study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa among female sex workers reported that majority 60.6 % belong to the age group between 18 to 30 years.² Majority of the respondents 64.8 % were Muslim, about 32.4 % were Hindu and only 2.8 % respondents were Christian. Regarding education level of the respondents nearly half 49.5 % were illiterate, about 43.8 % respondents had completed their primary education while about 6.7 % respondents had completed their study up to class 8. A study conducted in Nepal among same population, reported that majority 59.1 % of the respondents were illiterate and 25 % completed above primary education.³ The mean length of involvement in the sex industry was 5.16 years and $SD \pm 3.352$. Majority of the women 61 % reported involvement in this profession for 1 to 5 years, 30 % reported 6 to 10 years and only 8.6 % engaged in this profession for 11 to 15 years. In a study of Bangladesh, it revealed that nearly 33 per cent of the sex workers had been operating this profession from 5 to 9 years. Some 18 percent had been running this profession from 10 to 14 years.¹ Among the respondents they have some different occupation beside this profession. 39 % of the respondents were also housewives, 37.1 % day labourer, only 1 % service holder and 22.9 % engaged in other profession like house maid, selling cosmetics or clothes. So, it shows they had alternate income sources in addition to the existing trade. It was estimated that out of 105 respondents,

Figures

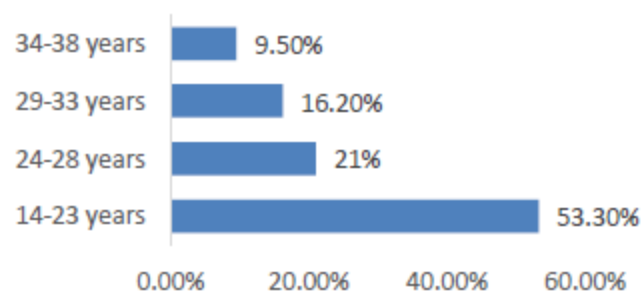


Figure 1. Age distribution of female sex worker

majority 59 % had a daily income range between 600 to 1000 taka. On the other hand, one third 33.3 % people had an income range of 200 to 500 taka, while only 7.6 % people had an income range between 1100 to 1500 taka. Another study in Dhaka showed that half 52.7 % sex workers had monthly income more than 10,000 and 47.3 % less than 10,000 per month.⁴ In this study, 41 % respondents were married, 39 % were single, 10.5 % were divorced, and 2.9 % widow and living separately from their husband is only 6.7 %. Among 64 respondent's majority 70.3 % reported that it was her first marriage and 29.7 % reported it was not their first marriage. In a study in Bangladesh revealed that irrespective of the groups, unmarried girls operate prostitution were the highest 45 % followed by married ones 28 %. The high demand for the unmarried and young girls in the sex market draws them more as compared to married and older women with kids.¹ In this study there was no significant relation in mental stress and age ($p=0.870$), level of education ($p=0.080$), duration of sex work ($p=0.624$), marital status ($p=0.514$) and daily income ($p=0.936$).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explores that the literacy rate among the female sex workers are still low and invariably they are suffering from high perceived mental stress. Majority of the female sex workers are exposed to this profession within their age of twenty years, in which poverty is claimed to be the principle contributor.

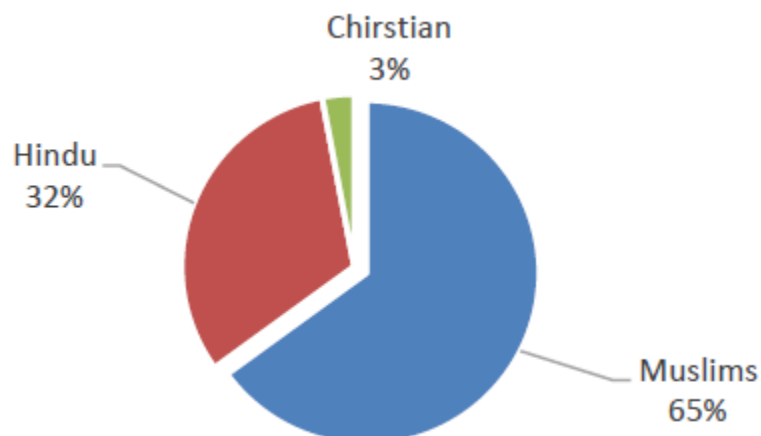


Figure 2. Religion distribution of female sex worker

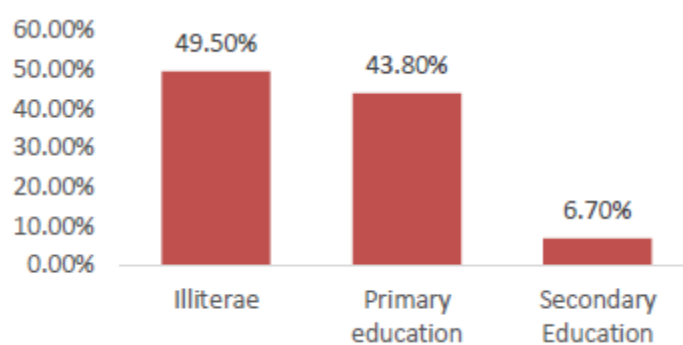


Figure 3. Level of education of female sex worker

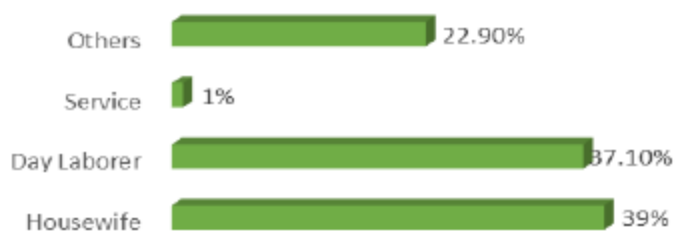


Figure 4. Types of occupation rather than sex work

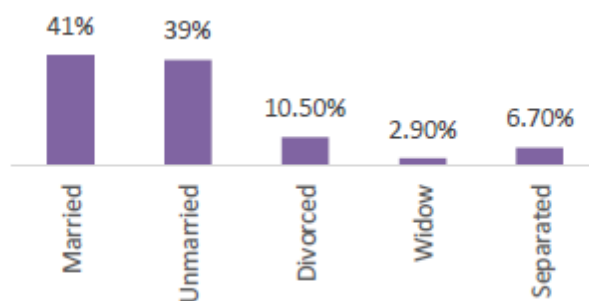


Figure 5. Marital status of female sex worker

- High perceived mental stress
- Moderate perceived mental stress

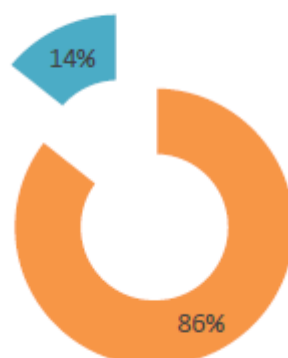


Figure 6. Level of stress

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