

Social Exclusion of Sex Workers and their Children: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

The socialization process of human being is affected by different agents. Parents are the most important agent in this regard. On the other hand, peer group, classmate, social and religious institutions are also important in this process. The children of sex workers are vulnerable in comparison with other children. They do not get same opportunity in the society due to some social and cultural stigma, norms, values, taboos etc. Bangladeshi society and culture do not permit the children without their legal parents. As a consequence, the children of sex workers are not accepted socially, psychologically and culturally. The whole processes make the children of sex workers vulnerable and exclude them from main society. This study focuses on the process of social exclusion of the children of the sex workers in Bangladesh and how their socialization process and childhood development have been constrained by socio-economic and cultural constraints. A rigorous in-depth interviewing and some case studies have been conducted to get the vivid picture of exclusion of sex worker's children.

Keywords: Sex worker, social exclusion, children.

Introduction

There are significant numbers of children living at the margin all over the world. The major causes of their marginality perhaps war, poverty, and social vulnerability and so on. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), especially useful in addressing the needs of the world's most vulnerable children including those who live in "Difficult Circumstances" whose rights are particularly unfulfilled and denied by society. In the same manner there could be a number of children in our country living in "Difficult Circumstances" even after ratifying CRC (1989) by the government. Due to poverty and social barriers children rarely have opportunities to be part of accessibility and scope of socialization. In most cases, scope of expression of independent opinions and participation in decision-making are impossible because society hardly permit them to do that. Most of them even who are from urban environment find no support to perform their physical activities by taking parts in various cultural and sports events, various traditional festivals (Mohajan, 2014). Oppression is a frequent matter in Bangladesh. It is due to the unwillingness of concern authority to identify the priorities or issues that require as part of

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abiding by the Convention on the Rights of the Child or promotion and protection of human rights in general (AITPN, 2003).

Review of Literature

Khan & Arefeen (1989) conducted a study on 'sex workers' from feminist anthropological perspectives. Beside feminist perspectives it also looked into the role of the state in the institutionalization process of prostitution. It also examined the nature of social and cultural stigma that attributed to the occupation of prostitutes for their promiscuous sexual activities. In addition, it treated the whole prostitution as a sub-culture rather than as an institution of the deviants. In fact, the concept of pollution is associated with prostitutes and the in children are revealed to be part of social restriction. This fact was very relevant for the present study as the main focus of study was the children aspect particularly children's rights.

Further Khan & Arefeen (1992) also undertook a comprehensive study on "*prostitution in Bangladesh*" covering some of the popular brothels in Bangladesh and floating prostitutes of Dhaka city. They conducted their fieldworks in Tanbazar at Narayanganj, in Tangail town, Jessore and the floating prostitutes of Dhaka city. In this study, among many things there emerged the notion of pollution that prevailing with body of the sex workers and the institution itself. For example, in the Tangail brothel the pollution notion was so strong that the sex workers have their own shrine/ mazar of Bibi Fatima within the premises of the brothel, only brothel where women perform rituals connected with religious norms and values. Even they have their own graveyard where only sex worker's burial takes place. This issue was crucial for our present study since our focus of attention were the children of sex workers, particularly whether or not these children were subjected to discrimination for the pollution notion that their mothers were sex workers.

Siddiqui *et al.* (1986) studied urbanization process in Dhaka City where they highlighted on the state of prostitution. The findings indicate that hardly any scope to portrait the situation of children of the prostitutes. There was another brief study on the sex workers of Dhaka by the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, Dhaka. In fact, this study was conducted following the widespread media coverage on the tragic death of Shab Mehar, a child prostitute at Tanbazar, brothel in Narayanganj. Like the previous study it was conducted in a controlled situation for the sex workers were brought in the office of the project and conducted interviews. However, these two studies failed to provide insights into the vulnerability of prostitutes and their children. Following the tragic death of Shab Mehar the child prostitute at Tanbazar, there were many reports and articles in the dailies and weeklies. These provided valuable information into the circumstances that lead women into sex works.

Blanchet (2001) studied child rights in Bangladesh, which highlighted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) under the title of "*Lost innocence stolen childhood*". The study covered children from different socioeconomic categories and occupations. It

also did include prostitutes of brothel and their children. In the discussion, it was specifically focused on prostitution in which a woman creates and extends motherhood through procuring girl children who born to a prostitute mother and later being trafficked. These girls lineally end up as sex workers in this institution. These women and girls are socially marginalized due to poverty, and pollution in their bodies for selling their flesh. Blanchet also talked about worker's children who were denied of their rights and services. As a result, they had little scope for healthy childhood. In spite of these, the author was hopeful that one day these children will overcome their miseries with the support of government's policy and changing outlook of society. In short, Blanchet's study was unique and pioneering for it made a detailed discussion on child rights situation in Bangladesh.

Blanchet (2004) in a similar vein, made a brief study named "*Slavery revised: bonded girls and daughters in brothels*". It was the study on two brothels in Bangladesh and pointed out that a third of the prostitutes of these brothels were the child prostitutes known as *tsukris*. In fact she made a depressive picture of the child prostitutes whom she termed as bonded slaves. She hoped that her study would contribute towards building awareness so that such an exploitative slavery situation can be abolished in course of time. Save the Children Sweden conducted a study on the situation of children in Daulatdia and Kandapara brothels (Save the Children, 2001). It blatantly pointed out the worst situation of the children who grow up in the brothel despite of Bangladesh's ratification to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). It also mentioned about some program interventions initiated by NGOs in establishing safe homes for the children of brothel prostitutes providing them shelter and schooling. But there were report of sexual abuses of children by the male workers which severely damaged the reputation of these homes. However, they tried hard to succeed in reviving the tarnished image of these homes because of unethical behaviour of some unscrupulous workers of these homes. The report thus suggested that additional resources should made available so that more effective initiatives can be launched incorporating large numbers of children and their mothers. Finally, the report made a positive note by indicating that these women and children would have inner strength to re-shape their lives.

Ali et al. (1997) conducted study on the "*Child prostitutes of Dhaka City*" and indentified the increasing trend in the number of child sex workers. This was the result of growing and diverse sex demands of the male population. Also, in this study an effort was made to focus on male child sex workers. However, the study revealed that the existing socio-sex culture and moral structure failed to prevent child abusing. The authors, however, suggested long term and short term policies to stop the entry into sex trade, they furthermore, suggested that it needs awareness building and advocacy to check child workers to enter the sex market. This study sought advocacy to eliminate the abuse of child sex workers. It also provided important and interesting data on sex culture of child sex

workers of Dhaka city. In fact, these data were important at least it provided the recent trend of sex market, which help formulate plans and policy for reducing sex trade of the child in the country.

The above literature on sex workers and their children depicts the ground relations in terms of vulnerability and exploitation. But it provides scanty information of sex workers and their children. Moreover, the available literature by and large was on sex workers and the institution of sex works. No doubt, these studies were appropriate particularly focusing on the exploitative aspects of sex workers and also the abusive dimensions towards child prostitutes. However Khan & Arefeen (1986, 1990, 1992 & 1994) strongly indicated the sub cultural aspects and the deep down pollution attributed to the bodies of prostitutes and their children. Also, other studies not directly mentioned about purity-pollution notion but indicated sufficiently about the notion of purity-pollution. They mentioned about bodily impurities, sinfulness etc. emanating from sex work. This creates strong social exclusion process through which sex workers and their children became socially excluded vis-a-vis subjected to high level discrimination from the people and institution at large. It should be mentioned here that the overwhelming number of sex workers came from economically very vulnerable groups compelling them to take up sex work as an occupation, which is readily available for their livelihoods. It should be mentioned here these literatures indicated that early life sexual abuse along with economic vulnerability forced them into sex work situation either willingly or unwillingly.

This study therefore has intended to assess the extent of the vulnerability of the children of sex work with regard to deny their rights and privileges. The above literature indicated that it is not only the children of sex workers vulnerable but also the sex workers themselves. They had been subjected to various kinds of exploitation and discrimination originated from their bodily pollution for selling their flesh sex and also for the helplessness due to lack of power and prevailing power of patriarchal domination.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- to explore the relationship between children of sex workers and their socialization process;
- to identify the dynamic of social exclusion of sex workers children; and
- to identify the nature of hindrance in sex worker's children's childhood development.

Methodology

For collecting primary data from the respondents the study selected two areas of Dhaka city i. e. Shyamaol and Chankherpul. The primary data were collected from the sex workers and their children. The study areas were selected by using snowball sampling and the respondents were selected by using purposive sampling. The data were collected

through in-depth interviews and case studies by using a checklist. To strengthen the rationale of primary data, some secondary data were also consulted from several books, articles, and research work, newspapers. Recorded interviews and case studies were properly presented and analyzed.

Results

Social and Demographic Information

The study selected five women and 20 children of sex workers as respondents. Among them 20 children of sex workers age was between 6 years and 12 years. Among them, only 1 was 6 years old, 2 were 9 years old, 3 were 7, 11 & 12 years old, and total 8, were 8 and 10 years old respectively. Out of 20 children of sex workers, a significant portion of respondents (12) didn't have any brother and sister. The majority 85% respondents were Muslim and 15% were Hindu. There were no Buddhist and Christian. The collected data showed that 10 respondents got primary education which was seems very progressive but these 50% children belonged to the NGO only for five years and were able to get education within this short time. Among the rest of the respondents 7 were illiterate and 3 were only able to write their name.

Table 1: Knowledge about Father's and Mother's occupation

| Mother's occupation | No. of Participants | Father's occupation | No. of Participants |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Doing Work (not specified) | 9 | Do not know | 12 |
| Doing work at home | 2 | Business (not specified) | 2 |
| Selling Rice | 3 | Rickshaw Puller | 1 |
| Selling Paper | 1 | Dade | 5 |
| Working at Garments | 4 | Total | 20 |
| Working at NGO | 1 | | |
| Total | 20 | | |

Source: Field work, 2018

Mother's Occupations

Nine of the respondents were aware about their mother's occupation. They knew about their mother's profession. Two respondents reported that their mothers were working as domestic aid; other 2 respondents reported that their mothers' were selling paper and working at NGO, 3 respondents said that their mothers were selling rice followed by 4 respondents who said their mothers were working at garments.

Father's Occupations

Out of 20 respondents 12 did not know about their father's occupation. Five respondents reported that their fathers were Dade, 2 said that their fathers was doing business but they could not specify. One respondent said his father was a rickshaw puller. The data reveal that most of the children do not aware of their mother's occupation rightly. And the

knowledge, which they got, by their mother about their father's occupation was also vague and their children were unaware.

Mother's Occupation and its Impact

Indeed, the children who were detached from their mothers didn't have any idea about their mother's occupation. And most of the children said that their mothers were working but they could not specifically mention their mother's occupation.

Among 20 respondents only a 12 years old girl was aware about her mother's real occupation. She regrets answering the following question:

What you want to be in future?

Ans:-Ami shunsi gari chora manush gula annek leha-pora jane. Ogo onek taka-poisa ase. Ami laha-pora koera ogo moto borolok hoite chai;taile amar ma era r kharap kam koron lagtona. [A daughter, 12]

A 12 years old daughter regretted that if she enabled to go to school then she would be a rich person and all of their sufferings would have finished. Then her mother could maintain a decent life.

In the analysis of psychological aspect, the respondent's aim in life was an essential subject. Out of 20 respondents, 8 respondents aimed to be a doctor and all of them were female respondents. Again, 9 respondents wanted to be rich, because they think that by being a rich man all of their sufferings will be finished. There were two children who wanted to be a hero like 'Shakib Khan' and 'Arefin Shuvo'. And only one child who was 6 years old wanted to be a bus conductor.

Actually the children of sex workers deprived from all the facilities, rights, and charm of life only because of their mothers occupation and for abject poverty.

Social Status of Sex worker and their Children's Development

As an occupation, prostitution is not recognized. Though many NGOs struggling for the recognition of sex trade as a commercial activity but they are not succeeded. As a Muslim country, Bangladesh government and the whole society could not recognize prostitution as an institution and give a distinguished status.

Moreover, the family members of sex workers do not want to maintain any contact to them. So, they treat like most hated segment with having nay social status, power, dignity and esteem. As a consequence, the children of sex workers are also being excluded from the society.

Marginalization of Sex Worker's Children

At the very beginning a child need of parental love and affection, and overall a family environment where the boy or the girl could able to grow up with proper care. But the children of sex workers hardly have a family life. Some children also deprived of their mother's love and affection. Because of extreme poverty, mothers are forced to sell their

flesh and keep their children in the shelter homes supported by some NGO's. We asked all the children that:

When did you become very saddened?

Ans:- *Amer mon hub kharap lage jeshum ma anek din por ama k daktease. Basae mar shate thakte ichaa kore. Sheshum ami anek kandi.* [Son, 7]

(I become very saddened when I could meet my mother after a long interval. I wish if I could stay with my mother, when my mother leaves me I keep crying.)

Among 20 respondents, most of them are always feel saddened as they are deprived of mother's accompany, love, care and affection. When these children were going to the shopkeeper or to any vendor for fetch some snacks they are treated very rudely.

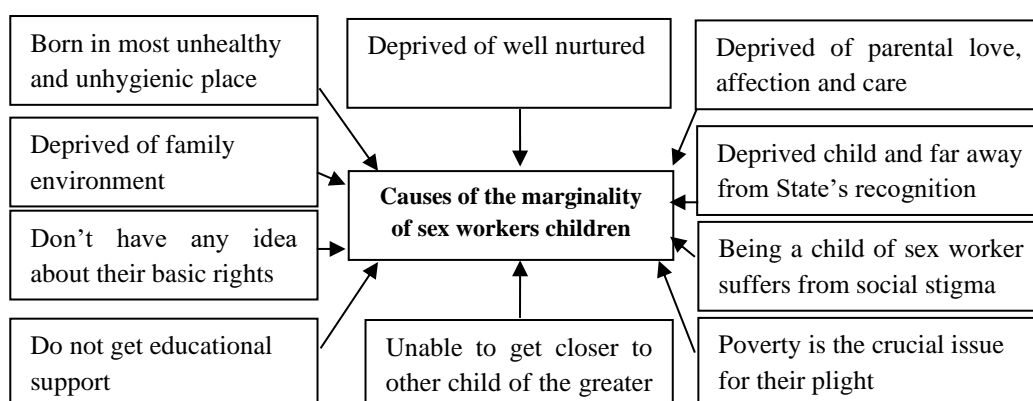


Figure 1: Causes of the marginality of sex workers children

Source: Field work, 2018

Moreover, ratifying the child right convention in 1990, Bangladesh government showing the international organization that government ensures the right of all types of children in our society indicates that they are without any concern of the state and civil society including mass people. Most of the children of the sex workers reported that due to the abject poverty their socio-economic conditions are below quality life. By reviewing previous study it was assumed that the sex workers and their children live in a marginal environment and this study also reflected the same findings. But only the sex workers who are supported by some NGOs are aware about their right and have courage to raise their voice against the discriminating behavior of the community people. Even to some extent they can fight with police who often disturb them. Here, the empowerment factor is a missing agenda.

Discussion

Constructs of Childhood: Socialization and Development

Every child has a right to their childhood—a hopeful existence, free of exploitation, violence, neglect, and get rid of extreme poverty. Children need education, health services, consistent support systems as well as love, hope and encouragement. All these things are required in order to experience the childhood into a healthy environment. Most of the children of sex workers are not under proper protection and socialization as confirmed by the empirical.

In fact, huge numbers of children globally, regionally and locally are experienced family disorder and breakdown. It is also well documented that many schools environment and constitute obstacles—even threats—to the learning and integration process of the children of sex workers. The ideal environment that childhood everywhere should be a period of play, school, and freedom from major economic and social responsibility does not easily withstand scrutiny. Children flourish in many parts of the world where they both work and study, share economic and social responsibilities with adults, and have broad community access to the information and activities available to adults.

Role of Civil Society

All most all society possesses a portion of well intellect people who often raise the question of social problematic issues for the awareness of general people and also to the governments; so that government could aware and enable to take into the account of the existing social stigma that prevailing with community people's mid, attitudes, behavior and role.

Though a large number of children of sex workers are living in a very difficult situation but role of civil society is not supportive at all.

When, intended to speak with a homeless sex workers she asked should mention:

Why do you want to speak with me? Would it make any difference to change and improve my existing vulnerable situation? (Mira, 28)

From the above statement we can easily understand to what extent these sex workers are being treated by the society. These distressed sex workers are very much upset with the behavior of local people of their own society.

The major points of the workers children's vulnerability are:

- These children have no parental recognition.
- They are not able to register their date of birth.
- They are not allowed to get admission to any public school.
- They have no social security to their life.

In this way the children of sex workers lead measurable life and the society hardly play any positive role.

Role of Government

Following war of liberation of 1971, the government has passed the Bangladesh Abandoned Children (special provision) or order that has provided special guardianship and adoption of war babies or children orphaned in the wake of war. The government soon realized that the mechanism was being misused. Subsequently the order was repealed. In view of the irregularities experience at that time the government, during ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, put a reservation against the clause of adoption (GoB, 2007, p.95).

According to the Constitution of Bangladesh; citizens are protected under Article-28, against discrimination by the state on the ground of religion, race, castes or place of birth.

However, it was recognized that there was a distinct need to establish some form of alternative care for the protection of these children. But the children of sex workers subjected to ill-treat.

Although, the convention provides special care and protection for the children that would be ensured by the government but in the context of our country, The Convention of the Rights of the child grossly violated. This study showed that the large portion of children of sex workers remaining in vulnerable situation. All of the 5 respondents (sex workers) reported that police abuse them in many ways.

Actually, not only the government's policy implications but also the entire society deprives the children of sex workers economically, socially, culturally and psychologically.

Situation of Sex Workers and Their Children

The 'sex culture' of homeless sex workers their bodily pollution acquired through sex works discussed here and the condition of the children of sex workers as to why these children had been subjected to various types of discrimination, abuse and violation of child rights.

Table 2: Reasons for entry in sex work

| Reasons for entry in sex work | Number |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Need to help parents | 2 |
| Need to help husband | 1 |
| Need to rare up own children | 5 |
| Sexually victims in work place | 12 |
| Total | 20 |

Source: Field work, 2018

We realized that sex workers have a culture of their own based on sexuality which was discussed in these studies (Khan & Arefeen 1989, 1992). We used the term sex culture

because it was the central point around which the life of sex workers' revolves. This was a deviant way of life from the total cultural setting. In our culture we know that sexual relation is not permissible and sexual activity outside marriage is not only taboo but also polluting and prohibited by the society and the state. The sex workers indulge in these aberrant sexual activities and the state and society also allow it. Although condemning it, the patriarchal society allows men to have premarital and extra marital sexual activities, thus prostitution prevails. Since their source of livelihood is by entertaining man sexually, they come in contact with male partners outside the normative code of sexual behavior within wedlock. Also, the more clients they get more income they earn which in turn enables them to maintain a higher standard of life. Since they have to live on selling flesh have to bargain with the clients, agents, and even with personnel from state agencies such as the police and the judiciary.

Condition of Children of Homeless Sex Workers

The general background of street based sex workers and their culture provides to indicate an aberrant and highly vulnerable life. Since, the main focus is the situation of children of homeless sex workers, the life and culture of homeless sex workers are very well indicated the vulnerable situation of their children who mostly grow up in the streets. In fact, smoking and drug addiction had direct bearing on the children of sex workers. It had been observed that those children, who stayed with their mothers, were utterly neglected. Data provided that the children know about their mother's occupation. Mothers disregarding the pressure of their children they use abusive languages as a result the children learned abusive languages when they were very young. Even many mothers regretted that when children said, "mother was going to perform some *kam* (work)? *Beda* (man) is already there". Even many women reported that the children supply to their mother's client condoms.

These women said that their children freely use abusive words as their mothers do. For example, the children call abusive languages like "fuck your mother", "you bastard child". In frequent instances polices; *mastans* abuse these children and often beat them mercilessly. Apparently they are the product of sinful deeds. For example, when people make morning walk at parks round aside they see sex worker's children and pass comment that the whole day would be awfully bad because we met sex workers children which are highly inauspicious. Even these women mentioned that their children had no esteem rather they were regularly subjected to various kinds of sexual abuse. These women also mentioned that ordinary people always make sarcastic remarks pointing to these children as bastards, also reiterated that the daughters of whore would surely be a whore. They also pointed out that their children grew up in very unhealthy situation. Mostly the children of sex workers have been rearing up in an uncared situation and environment. Also women themselves admitted that they could not take care of their children regularly. Sex culture and homelessness did create an atmosphere in which violation of child right was made in

every step. Women frankly admitted that their life style based on sex culture reflect on the behavior of their children. As mentored already that most of the children knew about their occupation as a result their behaviors provide abnormality.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study showed that most of the time the sex workers' children could not know their father in their life. They live with their mother. Moreover, in the absence of their biological father, their mothers take all kind of responsibilities of their children on shoulder. Due to their mothers' occupation, the sex workers' children do not treat like a normal child in the society. They are not recognized even the as normal human being. For this reason, the children did not get proper education, company and societal supports to be socialized. Therefore, they are excluded from the greater society. Some recommendations are given below to overcome these challenges:

- to make effective and appropriate policy for proper rehabilitation of the children of sex workers;
- to extend governmental supports for educating the drop out children of sex workers; and
- to involve non-governmental organization with the help of government for the overall welfare and wellbeing of the sex workers' children.

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