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## A Study on Occupational Hazards faced by Female Sex Workers in Pondicherry

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### Abstract

Prostitution refers to the practice of exchanging sexual services for financial remuneration. Sex work or prostitution as a social problem is being addressed all over the world, but problems of sex workers themselves are less addressed. According to Suppression Immoral Traffic Act (SITA) of 1956, prostitution “is the act of a female offering her body for promiscuous sexual intercourse for hire, whether in money or in kind and whether offered immediately or otherwise and the expression prostitute will be construed accordingly”. There are a few social factors which are responsible for the prostitution. View of people about woman as commodity, an illegal woman trafficking, Illiteracy, Poverty, and Low economic life style are the reasons behind the prostitution in India. In India, women were trafficked into the Sex work from all parts of the country.

### INTRODUCTION

Prostitution refers to the practice of exchanging sexual services for financial remuneration. Sex work or prostitution as a social problem is being addressed all over the world, but problems of sex workers themselves are less addressed. According to Suppression Immoral Traffic Act (SITA) of 1956, prostitution “is the act of a female offering her body for promiscuous sexual intercourse for hire, whether in money or in kind and whether offered immediately or otherwise and the expression prostitute will be construed accordingly”. There are a few social factors which are responsible for the prostitution. View of people about woman as commodity, an illegal woman

trafficking, Illiteracy, Poverty, and Low economic life style are the reasons behind the prostitution in India. In India, women were trafficked into the Sex work from all parts of the country.

Commercial sex in India is part of society from the ancient period. Most of the women have not come into the business of commercial sex with their own interest. The women engaged in the commercial sex work are always been stigmatised. Along with stigmatized life, they are facing a various kinds of the problems. They are neglected part of the society. A hazard is something that can prove dangerous if not controlled. The occupational hazards are those hazards which are faced by the workers

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due to poor working environment. Every occupation comes along with certain hazards. Occupational hazards cause or contribute to the premature death of millions of people worldwide and result in the ill health or disablement of hundreds of millions more each year. The most common operational definition of Occupational hazard could include a working environment or condition that can lead to illness or death.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The term 'sex worker' refers to those engaged in prostitution. The term has been adopted as is it free of complicated, derogatory and sexist connotations which are more commonly associated with the term 'prostitute'. Women engaged in commercial sex work have been struggling for the basic facilities like food, shelter and health. [1-4] Occupational risks in sex work include violence, criminalization, marginalization, exposure to health related concerns, exclusion from civil and labour rights, and ostracism from local communities. Also argues that sex work cannot be seen through the same economic lens as mainstream business because of the global moral condemnation of women who sell sex. [2], After all, many of the occupational health and safety issues faced by sex workers are not unique to sex work, and risk factors are often shared with other occupations. For example, in the context of the sex industry workplace violence was been documented by a number of sex worker. [4] noted that there were some detrimental changes. The first was a lack of free condoms in the workplace, and the sex workers who indicated that they would still provide services to a client even if they suspected them of having a sexually transmitted infection (STI). [3] is that Thai sex workers on contract were reported to be seen as being on the lowest rung of the sex industry ladder. Thus, they were vulnerable to having their rights violated, experiencing prejudice and client abuse. [5] The employment conditions in Hong Kong, for the majority of participants, was reported as poor, with excessive working hours and low pay. I chose to concentrate on three main health issues encountered by sex workers in China, these being the use of condoms, condom slippages/breakages, and abuse by clients. Thus it could be concluded that women in sex work come across Occupational hazards.

## METHODOLOGY

### Objectives of the Study

- To know the Socio-demographic details of the respondents.
- To study the Occupational hazards faced by Female Sex Workers (FSW).

### Hypothesis

- There is a relationship between Age of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.
- There is a relationship between Educational Status of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.
- There is a relationship between Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.

### Research Design

The researcher used Descriptive Research Design for the present study as this would be more helpful in description. Description is the fact finding investigation with the adequate interpretation. The main aim to having used these designs to analyze Occupational hazards.

### Universe & Sampling

The researcher finalised the universe with reference Society for Development Research and Training in Pondicherry for the study. The size of the universe was 150 respondents who are registered beneficiary of this organization. This researcher studied 50 Female Sex Workers who were chosen by convenient sampling method. The primary data were collected using self-structured interview schedule.

### Tools for Data Collection

The researcher has collected data through Self Prepared Questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of variables with various dimensions. There were totally 42 questions which covered socio-demographic details and Occupational hazards by Female Sex Workers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table - 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S.No	Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	20 – 30 Years	12	24
		31 - 40 Years	24	48
		Above 40 Years	14	28
2.	Educational Status	Primary	13	26
		High	13	26
		Higher Secondary	16	32
		Under graduate	5	10
		Illiterate	3	6
3.	Religion	Hindu	32	64
		Muslim	11	22
		Christian	7	14
4.	Community	SC & ST	22	44
		MBC	7	14
		BC	7	14
		Others	14	28
5.	Marital Status	Married	36	72
		Unmarried	10	20
		Divorced	4	8
6.	Other Occupations	Accountant	1	2
		Beauty Parlour Work	7	14
		Company Labour	9	18
		Nursing	4	8
		Nil	29	58
7.	Monthly Income	Rs.1 – 15,000	32	64
		Rs. 15001 – 30000	14	28
		Above Rs. 30000	4	8
8.	No. Of Years in Sex Work	1 – 5 Years	20	40
		6 – 10 Years	13	26
		11 – 15 Years	14	28
		Above 15 Years	3	6

Table 1 represents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. It revealed that nearly to fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents are from the age group between 31 - 40 Years. With regard to the educational status, a portion (32 Per cent) of the respondents has completed their Higher Secondary school education. It was found that a majority (64 Per cent) of the respondents are Hindus. It was noted that one third (44 Per cent) of the respondents are from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Community of the social hierarchy.

It was significant to note that a majority (72 Per cent) of the respondents are married. It was also noteworthy that a majority (58 Per cent) of the respondents do not have any other occupation except Sex Work. It was important to record that a majority (64 Per cent) of the respondents earned monthly income between Rs. 1 – 15,000. It was found that a sizable portion (40 Per cent) of the respondents was engaged in Commercial sex work between 1 – 5 years.

**Table - 2 : Physical Factors leading to Occupational Hazards**

S.No	Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Sex with an alcohol consumed client	Neutral	16	32
		Highly disagree	5	10
		Disagree	10	20
		Agree	19	38
2.	Taking many tablets for Sex Work	Neutral	15	30
		Highly disagree	6	12
		Disagree	8	16
		Agree	21	42
3.	Taking sleeping tablets to rest Peacefully	Neutral	8	16
		Highly disagree	15	30
		Disagree	7	14
		Agree	20	40
4.	The very act of having sex with Clients	Neutral	4	8
		Highly disagree	24	48
		Disagree	8	16
		Agree	14	28
5.	Clients' unnecessary expectations such as Oral Sex, Kissing in Private Parts	Neutral	13	26
		Highly disagree	5	10
		Disagree	23	46
		Agree	9	18
6.	Forcing sexual contact for more duration	Neutral	4	8
		Highly disagree	24	48
		Disagree	8	16
		Agree	14	28
7.	Physical pain due to Sex with Clients causing Occupational hazard	Neutral	7	14
		Highly disagree	7	14
		Disagree	22	44
		Agree	14	28

Table - 2 depicts the Physical Factors leading to Occupational Hazards among the respondents. It was found that one third (38 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that sex with an alcohol consumed client causes hazard in their work. One third (42 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that taking many tablets for sex with customers become a hazard. It was found that a sizable portion (40 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that taking sleeping tablets to rest peacefully produces a hazard. Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents

highly disagreed that the very act of having sex with clients cause a hazard. Nearly to the fifty (46 Per cent) of the respondents disagreed that clients' unnecessary expectations such as oral sex, kissing in private parts make them hazardous. It was noted that nearly to fifty (48 per cent) of the respondents highly disagreed that forcing sexual contact for more duration is becoming hazard. It was found that one third (44 per cent) of the respondents disagreed that Physical pain due to Sex with Clients causing Occupational hazard.

**Table - 3 : Professional Factors leading to Occupational Hazards**

S.No	Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Sex work during Night	Neutral	14	28
		Highly disagree	2	4
		Disagree	15	30
		Agree	19	38
2.	Overtime Work causing Occupational hazards	Neutral	2	4
		Highly disagree	19	38
		Disagree	2	4
		Agree	27	54

3.	Incorrect payment by client gives Occupational hazard	Neutral	9	18
		Highly disagree	4	8
		Disagree	13	26
		Agree	24	48
4.	Police raids causes Occupational hazards	Neutral	5	10
		Highly disagree	16	32
		Disagree	4	8
		Agree	25	50
5.	Police Torture while caught and arrested of Sex work	Neutral	10	20
		Highly disagree	10	20
		Disagree	9	18
		Agree	21	42
6.	Sexual Violence by Police in Police Station	Neutral	10	20
		Highly disagree	5	10
		Disagree	15	30
		Agree	20	40
7.	Court proceedings after the Arrest	Neutral	12	24
		Highly disagree	4	8
		Disagree	10	20
		Agree	24	48

Table – 3 enumerates the professional factors leading to occupational hazards among Female Sex Workers. It was found that a sizable portion of (38 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that Sex work during Night becomes a hazard. It was found a majority of (54 Per cent) the respondents agreed that overtime Work is causing Occupational hazard. This is important to record that close to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents

agreed that incorrect payment by client becomes an occupational hazard. Fifty percent of the respondents agreed that Police raids leads to occupational hazard. One third (42 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that police torture after the arrest produces a hazard. Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that court proceedings after the arrest is a hazard in their profession.

**Table – 4 : Psycho-social Factors leading to Occupational hazards**

S.No	Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Fear that Sex with customers having STD may cause HIV/AIDS becomes an occupational hazard	Neutral	5	10
		Highly disagree	27	54
		Disagree	2	4
		Agree	16	32
2.	Clients' Ill treatment such as beating, scolding, verbal abuses lead to Occupational hazards	Neutral	11	22
		Highly disagree	8	16
		Disagree	7	14
		Agree	24	48
3.	Feeling unsecured causes Occupational hazards	Neutral	12	24
		Highly disagree	3	6
		Disagree	12	24
		Agree	23	46
4.	<b>Feeling that sex work as an indecent job creates Occupational hazards</b>	Neutral	4	8
		Highly disagree	13	26
		Disagree	12	24
		Agree	21	42
5.	Sexual Harassment by Police after the Release from court Proceedings	Neutral	14	28
		Highly disagree	6	12
		Disagree	10	20
		Agree	20	40

Table 4 portrays the psycho-social factors leading to Occupational hazards. It was noted that a majority (54 Per cent) of the respondents highly disagreed that fear for sex with customers having STI may cause HIV/AIDS creates Occupational hazards. Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that client's ill treatment such as beating, scolding, verbal abuses lead

to Occupational hazards. Feeling of insecurity plays as a hazard for close to fifty (46 Per cent) of the respondents. Feeling that sex work is an indecent job was a hazard for a sizable portion of (42 Per cent) of the respondents. One third of (40 per cent) the respondents agreed that sexual harassment by police after their release from court proceedings become a hazard.

**Table - 5**

Factors causing Occupational hazards		Age			Statistical Inference
		20 – 30 Years	31 – 40 Years	Above 40 Years	
Physical Factors	Low	1	6	1	X <sup>2</sup> =4.308 Df=4 P>0.05 Not Significant
	Medium	11	18	13	
Professional Factors	Low	1	3	0	X <sup>2</sup> =7.073 Df=8 P>0.05 Not Significant
	Medium	10	20	14	
	High	1	1	0	
Psycho- Social Factors	Medium	5	15	8	X <sup>2</sup> =3.755 Df=4 P>0.05 Not Significant
	High	7	8	6	

**Chi-square test between the respondent's Age and their Occupational hazards**

Table – 4 shows the result obtained by Chi-square test between the respondent's Age and their Occupational hazards. H<sub>0</sub> states that there is no relation between respondent's age and their Occupational hazards. H<sub>1</sub> states that there is a relation between respondent's Age

and their Occupational hazards. Above result shows that the p value is higher than the commonly accepted value 0.05. Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it can be conferred that there is no relationship between respondent's Age and their Occupational hazards.

**Table - 6: Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation between Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards**

Variable	Correlation value	Extent of Relationship	Statistical Inference
Physical Factors	0.416	Positive Correlation	P> 00.5 Not Significant
Professional Factors	0.164	Positive Correlation	P> 00.5 Not Significant
Psycho - Social Factors	0.001	Positive Correlation	P> 00.5 Not Significant

The above table shows the relationship between Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards. Karl Pearson's Co-efficient of Correlation Test was applied in order to find out the relationship. Regarding the Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards due to physical factors, significant difference was not found. Hence research hypothesis is rejected and null hypothesis is accepted. With regard to community of the respondents and their Occupational

hazards due to professional factors, significant difference was not found. Hence research hypothesis is rejected and null hypothesis is accepted. Regarding Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards due to psycho-social factors, significant difference was not found. Hence research hypothesis is rejected and null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, it can be inferred that there is no relationship between Occupational hazards and Community of the respondents.

**Table - 7: Chi-square test between the respondent's Educational Status and their Occupational hazards**

Factors causing Occupational Hazards		Educational Status					Statistical Inference
		Primary	High	Hr. Sec.	UG	Illiterate	
Physical Factors	Low	2	2	4	0	0	$X^2=2.495$ Df=4 $P>0.05$ Not Significant
	Medium	11	11	12	5	3	
Professional Factors	Low	0	4	0	0	0	$X^2=15.812$ Df=8 $P>0.05$ Not Significant
	Medium	13	8	16	5	3	
	High	0	1	0	0	0	
Psycho - Social Factors	Medium	6	7	10	2	3	$X^2=3.685$ Df=4 $P>0.05$ Not Significant

Table - 7 shows the result obtained by Chi-square test between the respondent's Educational Status and their Occupational hazards.  $H_0$  states that there is no relation between respondent's Educational Status and their Occupational hazards.  $H_1$  states that there is a relation between respondent's Educational Status and their Occupational hazards. Above result shows that the p value is higher than the commonly accepted value 0.05. Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, it can be conferred that there is no relationship between respondent's Educational Status and their Occupational hazards.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Nearly to fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents are from the age group between 31 - 40 Years.
- A portion of (32 Per cent) of the respondents has completed their higher secondary school education.
- A majority (64 Per cent) of the respondents are Hindus.
- One third (44 Per cent) of the respondents are from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Community of the social hierarchy.
- A majority (72 Per cent) of the respondents are married.
- A majority (58 Per cent) of the respondents do not have any other occupation except Sex Work.
- A majority (64 Per cent) of the respondents earned monthly income between Rs. 1 - 15,000.
- A sizable portion (40 Per cent) of the respondents was engaged in Commercial sex work between 1 - 5 years.
- One third (38 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that sex with an alcohol consumed client causes hazard in their work.
- One third (42 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that taking many tablets for sex with customers become a hazard.
- A sizable portion (40 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that taking sleeping tablets to rest peacefully produces a hazard.
- Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents highly disagreed that the very act of having sex with clients cause a hazard.
- Nearly to the fifty (46 Per cent) of the respondents disagreed that clients' unnecessary expectations such as oral sex, kissing in private parts make them hazardous.
- Nearly to fifty (48 per cent) of the respondents highly disagreed that forcing sexual contact for more duration is becoming hazard.
- One third (44 per cent) of the respondents disagreed that Physical pain due to Sex with Clients causing Occupational hazard.
- A sizable portion of (38 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that Sex work during Night becomes a hazard.

17. A majority of (54 Per cent) the respondents agreed that overtime Work is causing Occupational hazard.
18. Close to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that incorrect payment by client becomes an occupational hazard.
19. Fifty percent of the respondents agreed that Police raids leads to occupational hazard.
20. One third (42 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that police torture after the arrest produces a hazard.
21. Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that court proceedings after the arrest is a hazard in their profession.
22. A majority (54 Per cent) of the respondents highly disagreed that fear for sex with customers having STI may cause HIV/AIDS creates Occupational hazards.
23. Nearly to the fifty (48 Per cent) of the respondents agreed that client's ill treatment such as beating, scolding, verbal abuses lead to Occupational hazards.
24. Feeling of insecurity plays as a hazard for close to fifty (46 Per cent) of the respondents.
25. Feeling that sex work is an indecent job was a hazard for a sizable portion of (42 Per cent) of the respondents.
26. One third of (40 per cent) the respondents agreed that sexual harassment by police after their release from court proceedings become a hazard.

### **HYPOTHESIS TESTING FINDINGS**

1. There is no relationship between Age of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.
2. There is no relationship between Educational Status of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.
3. There is no relationship between Community of the respondents and their Occupational hazards.

### **SUGGESTION**

It is also suggested that the government and non-governmental organizations should contribute in the rehabilitation and providing minimum need of the female sex workers.

The government also needs to give more awareness programme to the Sex Workers and advice them to go for regular check up of their health. Sex workers are to be advised to stop this sexual practise and find out some other work for their future. Female sex worker have low academic education so there is need of proper awareness about education among the sex worker. Government and non- government organizations should raise their efforts to eradicate the brothel system and human trafficking for sex work. It is found that they don't have other income sources other than this profession so there is need to make available other income sources so that they can divert from the profession and will give additional income so that they can have good social and economic status. They need to have proper training to be healthy. Government should give means of self-employment. There is need to give housing facility for sex worker they are living in rented house they can't afford good housing from their current income. Government should give concrete plan of their rehabilitation and should offer the welfare programme for them. Individual and group counseling needs to be given to restore the mental strength among Female Sex workers.

### **CONCLUSION**

Poor economic status reason is for the poor social status and vice-versa. Social and economic condition is responsible for the poor health status of women in commercial sex work. There is need to have comprehensive plan of rehabilitation of women in sex work and need to provide alternate for the livelihood. It is expected from the Government and Non- government organizations that they should play important role in improvement of social and economic status of the women in the sex work. Absence of alternate livelihood option is one reason to continue in the business. So it is strong recommendation from the study is that to improve the social, economic and health status of the female sex worker. Above all, the society's attitude towards sex workers need to be changed drastically so that the stigma and discrimination attached with sex will be lessened and female sex workers can live with psychological strengths.

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