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The Brothel – A Refuge for Idle Child

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Abstract : This paper examines the situation of children of brothel based female commercial sex workers (FCSWs). The brothel is a refuge for idle children. Children of 6-14 years of brothel in Kolkata (Bowbazar) had been studied to know their idleness and their future. Stigma of sex workers' children was the prime factor of their idleness and they had confined themselves within their community. About 70% of FCSWs' children were idle and they used to assist their mothers from the age of 6 years for domestic chores and trade related help. They were in vicious cycles of stigma. There is need of inclusive programme to save these children from this situation.

Keywords: Brothel, female commercial sex workers, idle children, stigma

Children who are neither in paid work nor go to school are called idle children. These children generally enjoy their leisure or do household chores which are not considered as child work (Wells 2015). According to the Oxford Dictionary (1884), idle means lazy, not working or unemployed or absence of significant activity or a person passes time without purpose. In poor family, poverty is a basic obstacle to send the children in school because poor parents are not able to invest for children education (Foster and Rosenzweig 1996). But they send their children to the labour market for arrangement of minimal self of the family (Kochar 2004). Several studies throughout the globe state that the above factor is the common cause of children in work force (Ersado 2005). Similarly, it is evident from developing countries that the number of idle children is also significant. In India, 19.87 % children are idle (Chamarbagwala and Tchernis 2010). Deb and Rosati (2002) reported that girls were idler. In Philipines a significant portion of children are idle. Children's mental ability is attached with this (Bacalod and Ranjan 2004). Thus, the number of idle child is evident in various developing countries due to different reasons like lack of employment opportunity, ability of children, child's health conditions and importance of household chore activities to explain this phenomenon (Biggeri et. al. 2003). The presence of idle children is the cause of imperfect labour market, and family makes idle child because schooling of children is costly to poor families. The amount of schools in the locality is also a determinant. But mental ability of children is always supportive to produce idle children (Basu and Van 1998). Various studies analysed that household income, household composition and educational attainment, costs of schooling, and proxies of cultural norms are prime factors of children idleness (Ersado 2005). Further, schooling costs involve two main dimensions: the monetary costs of schooling, given by tuition fees, school supplies, uniforms, and other costs, and the opportunity costs of time, measurable by school availability (Cartwright 1998, Ersado 2005). In some cases, they are

involved in household chores and its provision of credit to poor households. Further, sometimes they help to expand the household business activity. Thus, studies reveal that more children are idle than the children engaged in child labour (Chamarbagwala and Tchernis 2010).

The idleness of children also depends on social norms and the social context within which the children grow up (Bongaarts and Watkins 1996; Rosero-Bixby and Casterline 1993, 1994; Montgomery and Casterline 1993; Watkins and Danzi 1995). Bongaarts and Watkins (1996) found that there were three distinct aspects (the exchange of information and ideas, the joint evaluation of their meaning in a given context, and social influence) that determine social interactions which shape the behavior and actions and it affects their mental cost and benefits. Regular interaction with others might change their own attitudes, certain perceptions, and preferences. It also influences their changing behaviour and activities.

There are many types of sex services throughout the globe considered as sex trade, a stigmatized female dominated profession. The brothel is known as whore house and it's the oldest one mode of sex service. The distressed and deserted female folks mainly from lower social and economic strata of the society are engulfed into the profession for their alternative livelihood (Adhikari 2007). They are mainly victims of extreme poverty, gender disparity and gender discrimination. In brothels, these commercial female sex workers (CFSWs) set up their household in a rented/leased small and single room with their male counterparts (with whom an emotional tie up is established, but not legally sanctified, known as their self-declared husband) and their offspring. They deliberately bear their offspring to testify their motherhood as cultural practice and emotional security. Their children grow up in a truncated stigmatized family known as 'line bari' with inappropriate control and strategies (Adhikari 2007). In their family they do not get proper care and attention as a child desires for its up-bringing. CFSWs are dual (only earner and care-giver) service providers in their family. The husband/male counterpart is parasitic and the fatherhood of the child gets little recognition or is absent as far as their role and responsibilities are concerned. Here, fatherhood might be

‘costless’. CFSWs play dual role of expressive and emotional leader of their children. The social network of their family is restricted within the brothel community. The family as well as children’s relation with paternal side is absent. When any maternal kin is connected with the trade, they have thin maternal relationship (Adhikari 2009).

Practically and particularly this stigmatized profession is not suitable for the up-bringing of children into the larger society. Due to their born stigma, their physical, social and psychological states are confined within their own community. That’s why, a vicious cycle of CFSWs – child – CFSWs exists generation after generation (Adhikari 2012). In spite of various rehabilitative and welfare measures of governments and development agencies for these children, they are in almost the same condition. The brothel’s environment is refuge for idle child. How and what circumstances were making this idleness was explored in this paper and secondly, how the future of these children are shaping up is to be analysed.

Method:

Out of eight brothels of Kolkata (the only metro city of eastern India), Bowbazar brothel was selected for this study because: (a) It is the oldest brothel where household set up of CFSWs is prominent, (b) The size of CFSWs’ population is comparatively small. About 2200 CFSWs operate sex trade from congested, old and dump 45 houses of Prem Chand Boral Street and 11 houses of Nabin Chand Boral Street of central Kolkata under Muchipara Police Station jurisdiction and it falls under ward no. 45 of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, and (c) The population is homogenous in terms of their occupation and income. The inhabitants of this area are involved directly or indirectly (selling alcohol, foods and others to the client or customers of CFSWs and community people) in the trade.

For the purpose of the study, a household survey was conducted to identify the children of CFSWs of 6-14 years of age. Out of total 374 children of 6-14 years, 260 children were idle. These children were not schooled, or dropped out within a short period of their admission into the schools which was located within 200 metres of their community or

they were assisting their mothers or other CFSWs residing in the same house for household chores (fetching water, cooking, sweeping, marketing, sibling care, supplying food, liquor and so forth to the clients of their mothers or other CFSWs. But a small portion was in school.

An informal interview schedule was design and developed to collect information through interaction, discussion and observation with individual child and their mothers about the children's regular activities, view about education and future, their association within the community and outside, mothers' attitude regarding child's education and future, trade status and income, and prospects and challenges in child's care and development. Data was collected for a period of 5 years and it included children's movement and activities from morning to night.

Result:

CFSWs (mothers) trade status, income and children's education:

From the collected data, it was found that 69.5% (260 out of 374) of these children was idle within the age group of 6-14 years. The rest of them were either child workers or in school. The statistics showed that 16.5% of them were in school and most of them were in primary education and below 10 years of age. Of them, 14% children were in paid work within their community as helpers of liquor shops (unauthorized), eateries and tea stalls.

It was found that the trade status of CFSWs is determined by their involvement into the trade and it was in three categories. The first category was CFSWs who used to directly entertain/provide sexual satisfaction; second category was *malkin* (brothel owner) who used to let their rooms to the CFSWs; and the third category was CFSWs who withdrew from the trade, but continued living in the brothel. Their earning generally varied according to their trade status and the *malkins'* income was the highest and handsome. Table 1 describes the children's educational status according to their mothers' trade status and income.

Table 1: Children's educational status according to CFSWs'(mothers) trade status and income

CFSWs' (mothers) Trade status	Children's educational status												Total (%)
	CFSWs' income per month within 4000 INR				CFSWs' income per month > 4000 INR - <8000 INR				CFSWs' income per month > 8000 INR & above				
	Not schooled (n, %)		Dropped out (n, %)		Not schooled (n, %)		Dropped out (n, %)		Not schooled (n, %)		Dropped out (n, %)		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
CFSWs directly in trade	22 (8.4)	26 (10)	14 (5.3)	16 (6.1)	18 (6.9)	20 (7.6)	22 (8.4)	26 (10)	4 (1.5)	2 (0.76)	6 (2.3)	4 (1.5)	180 (69.2)
<i>Malkin</i> (brothel Owner)	-	-	-	-	8 (3)	12 (4.6)	12 (4.6)	14 (5.3)	4 (1.5)	6 (2.3)	6 (2.3)	8 (3)	70 (26.9)
Withdrawal From the trade	-	-	4 (1.5)	6 (2.3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 (3.8)
Total	22 (8.4)	26 (10)	18 (6.9)	22 (8.4)	26 (10)	32 (12.3)	34 (13)	40 (15.3)	8 (3)	8 (3)	12 (4.6)	12 (4.6)	260 (100)

Source: Field work

It is revealed from Table 1 that the highest percent (69.2%) of these idle children's mothers was directly involved in the trade and among them, 35.16% children (including 18.36% female children) were not schooled and the rate of drop out was also high (34.04%). The income (per month) of their mothers was within 4000 INR (29.8%), within the range of 4000-8000 INR (32.9%) and above 8000 INR (only 6.06%). According to the trade status of the FCSWs, the second largest group of idle children's mothers was *malkin* (brothel owner). And 17.5% children the mothers' income per month was within 4000-8000 INR and 9.4% of their mothers earned above 8000 INR per month. The rate of non-schooled children was 11.4% (including 6.9% girls), while 15.5% (including 8.3% girls) of them were drop outs. The children of FCSWs who had withdrawn from trade were 3.8% idle and they were drop outs. Among them, 2.3% were girls. Their income status was also the lowest i.e. within 4000 INR per month. The above statistics show that there is

no such relation between children's education and FCSWs' income. Education as a developmental tool has not influenced them for their mainstreaming because there were others factors closely attached to their adverse milieu responsible for their idleness.

FCSWs' assistance and support to their children's education:

For children education the types of inputs the FCWSs provided was explored in Table 2. It describes their mothers' attitude for their children's educational development. It reveals that majority of these idle children i.e. 43% did not get any educational support and it was the cause of non-schooling. But they were lettered because they learned literacy and numerical skills from NGO run non-formal education centres at their community. On the other part, 10% girls (13.4% idle children) were supported by their mothers with school fees, dress, books and educational materials, coaching and separate shelter (outside mothers' room where they used to operate their trade). But they did not continue their education. It was found that 8.4% children (including 3.8% girls) were supported with school fees, dress, books and educational materials, and coaching. Of them, 3.4% children only provided school fees and 3.8% of them provided only dress, books and other educational materials for their education.

Table: 2 Nature of educational support and assistance by FCSWs

Nature of assistance and support	Children as service receivers		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Only school admission/tuition and other fees (1)	5 (1.9)	4 (1.5)	9 (3.4)
Only dress, books and other educational material(2)	4 (1.5)	6 (2.3)	10 (3.8)
Only arrangement of coaching/appointment of tutor(3)	-	-	-
Only separate shelter(4)	-	-	-
Altogether 1 + 2	12 (4.6)	10 (3.8)	22 (8.4)
Altogether 1 + 2 + 3	26 (10)	36 (13.8)	62 (23.8)

Altogether 1 + 2 + 3 +4	9 (3.4)	26 (10)	35 (13.4)
Nothing above	56 (21.5)	66 (25.3)	122 (43)
Total	112 (43)	148 (56.9)	260 (100)

Source: *Field work*

Children's age and work pattern (household chores and assistance to mothers or other CFSWs):

The study explored that the children in brothel were either not schooled or dropped out from school within a short while. There were various factors associated with the above fact. Stigma of a CFWS child and adverse milieu of their community were prime factors. But these children were not paid workers/child labour. But they used to perform their household work. Table 3 describe their work pattern according to their age.

Table 3 : Children's age and their work pattern

Children's work pattern	Children's age				Total (%)
	6-10 years		10-14 years		
	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	
Household chores	12 (4.6)	18 (6.9)	14 (5.3)	8 (3)	52 (20)
Household chores & sibling care	8 (3)	22 (8.4)	6 (2.3)	20 (7.5)	56 (21.5)
Household chores, sibling care & assistance to mothers for trade	8 (3)	16 (6.1)	8 (3)	32 (12.3)	64 (24.6)
Assistance to other FCSWs	9 (3.4)	8 (3)	18 (6.9)	18 (6.9)	53 (20.3)
Nothing	8 (3)	6 (2.3)	21 (8)	-	35 (13.4)
Total	45 (17.3)	70 (26.9)	67 (25.7)	78 (30)	260 (100)

Source: *Field Work*

Statistics show that the highest percent (24.6%) of these children assisted their mothers in household chores, siblings care and also assisted in their mothers' trade (i.e. supplying liquor, foods and beverages, etc for their customers). And 9.1% (including 6.1% girls) were within the age bracket of 6-10 years and 12.3% (excluding 3% boys) were within 10-14 years of age. Of them, 21.5% used to perform the household chore and sibling care and among them, 11.4% (including 8.4% girls) were 6-10 years of age and 9.8% (including 7.5%) were 10-14 years of age. More children of 6-10 years (11.5%) of age had been assigned to household chores and it was 8.3% for the children of 10-14 years. A significant portion (20.3%) of them used to assist other FCSWs because they used to enjoy some monetary gifts from these FCSWs. But it was not regular. It was also found that 13.4% were doing nothing and majority of them (11%) were boys and out of which 8% children were 10-14 years of age. The work pattern of the children reminded the traditional aspects of son preference in the family for which they were getting extra advantage than girls in the family.

Discussion:

Stigma and children:

Stigma of sex workers' child confines them within their community from their early childhood. Larger society consciously avoid with different remarks of their birth and residents. It is a prime hindrance of their mainstreaming. Various rehabilitative measures by governments and development agencies (NGOs) do not meet with success. These programmes work as a machine-made and desired outcome is insignificant. The adverse milieu of their household as well as community was imperfect for children rearing with proper control and strategies. Firstly, FCSWs played dual role of parenting i.e. expressive leader and instrumental leader. Inappropriate shelter / absence of separate shelter, micro world and social network of household, insignificant fatherhood, etc. were invalid to this community. Secondly, their occupation was unsupportive to provide child care and psycho-social development of children.

From their infancy, the children suffered from lack of care and attention with detachment from their mothers and they had to stay outside their mothers' room. Education centres run by NGOs provided assistance to the children and their mothers because it provided pre-primary education to these children at local clubs (a platform of males of all ages in their locality and a rest house cum entertainment centre) daily for 2-3 hours. During this time FCSWs used to operate their trade without any obstacle by their children. The children developed peer relation and playmates within their community. When they were admitted into formal school outside their community with the initiative of NGOs, they had to face problems relating to their residence and mothers' occupation. Their classmates and schoolmates did not accept them. Secondly, due to poor performance in schools because of insufficient guidance, community structure and process and absence of FCSWs' monitoring and supervision and behavioural problems, they withdrew from school.

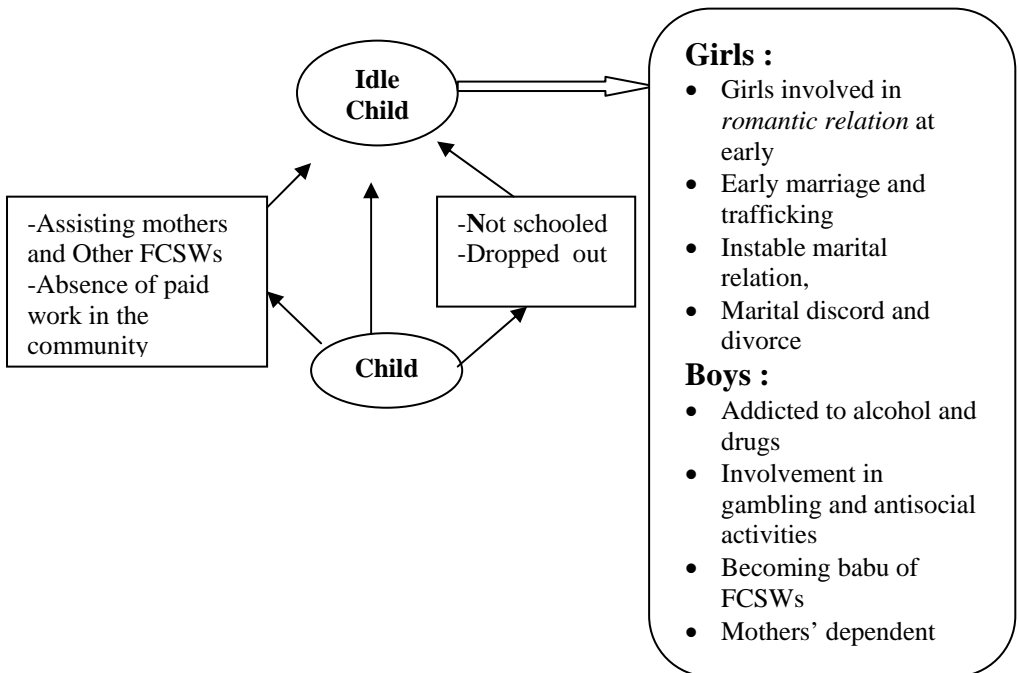
FCSWs' support for children's education was not effective because their involvement in trade was questioned by their off-springs. Absent/uninvolved/insignificant/parasitic fatherhood, change of babus (male partners), in some cases, rejection of children by FCSWs sudden migration with male partner were obstacles faced in their household. Emotional bonding of FCSWs with their children gave to pampering. As a consequence of this, they had to assist their mothers in household chores i.e. sweeping, fetching water, cooking, cleaning utensils, shopping and care of siblings, etc. Sometimes, they used to assist other FCSWs who used to provide money. But it was not fixed and regular. Thus, girls confined themselves within the house and boys confined themselves in the local clubs. Due to lack of work facilities in their community, they get hardly involved in paid work (Fig. 1).

Mothers' fate and their children's fate:

The discussion with FCSWs revealed that involvement into this trade was considered a punishment of their past life. And it was more responsible than poverty and gender discrimination or exploitation of males in their lives. Initially, they felt agony and depression. But after a few months, they surrendered to the circumstances and they adjusted

and adopted with their occupation and started to enjoy everything of their dark world. They shared that they enjoyed freedom and liberty besides their occupational obstacles. They took crucial decisions regarding settlement of household, bearing and rearing of child(ren) and enjoyment of motherhood without bothering for their stigma, trauma, trivialities and the paradox of existence, etc. They found a normal life within all abnormalities. According to them, ‘... Nothing lasts. Life goes on’. They considered their life as a journey in which all ‘join the caravan only for a while’. Their inability to provide proper care and attention to their children, community environment and imperfectness in their household and instable relation with male, etc. did not change their mind set for giving birth to child(ren). So, their children were born and grew with misfortune like themselves. Their fate was fixed with their mothers’ fate. And obviously they were representatives of their vicious cycle and thus, idleness was shown as the right path.

Fig. 1: Idle child in brothel community (cause and effect)



Idle children and their future:

Fig.1 also describes the idle children and their future in brothels. From the study, it has been seen that the children were the younger representatives of FCSWs' profession and their community. There was a little initiative among FCSWs and also among their children to come out from their community. These initiatives did not continue for long because of its failure within a short period. On the other side, initiatives of governments and other development agencies (NGOs) had failed due to its strict schematic nature and funding variation. In addition to this, stigmatized profession, residents and other reasons in the brothel were also responsible to bring change in the lives of children. Although initially it was delighted with some visible hopes among a very few children, but at large it was a failure and it was sustained only as publicity of effort to this community. Analysis of their future prospect proves it.

The girls of FCSWs were involved in romantic relations at early teen with outsiders (mother's client or visitors to this community). They were also involved in sexual relation before getting married when they toured with them. Then, they were married and trafficked to unknown places with their partner without the mothers' approval. Some of them returned to other brothels of Kolkata or even at their mothers' place and sex trade was their earning. FCSWs of a little percentage arranged their girls' marriage either with their relatives or sons' of other FCSWs. But it was unstable; girls had to face marital discord or mutual divorce. Then they were to depend on FCSWs and had to live with FCSWs. Unstable marital relation was due to their born stigma. Further, a significant portion of these married girls could not adjust with outside environment. So, they left their husband's place. Gradually, they used to enter into this sex workers' world.

The idle boys were unable to mix up with the larger society and stigma worked in their psychology. It was fear and anxiety to their life. The local clubs used to provide them a platform for gambling, entertainment and hooliganism. It was an advantage to the political leaders regardless of their party affiliation and they used them for their very own purpose. Sexual development and sexuality was significant

from their early teen when they developed romantic relations and got involved sexually with other FCSWs of their community. They were becoming husbands/babus mutually and there was hardly any scope for legalization of their marriage. They preferred this relation for their survival and amusement. They were dependent on FCSWs. This was also unstable in nature because both of them used to alter their partners. About 28% of them were dependent on their mothers whose trade status was generally *malkin*. They used to look after their mothers' business as male brothel owners. Consumption of alcohol, marijuana and drugs were common practices. FCSWs who identified them as husbands/babus, developed their emotional relation because it was a certain type of social and emotional security which saved them during crisis i.e. torture of customers, police and *malkin*. Sometimes, babu was 'costless' security of their children as uninvolved father.

Simultaneously, the study found out about 3-4% of male who were self-dependent. They worked outside their community as brokers of long distance bus tickets, courier delivery boys and worked with catering agencies. Majority of them settled at their community. But a few of them settled outside their community after hiding their mothers' occupation or birth place.

Conclusion:

Idle child is the cause of poverty like many other issues relating to children development and welfare. Parents from poor families feel investment in child education as a bad investment. In large and poor families where the number of children was more than two, they could not get scope of education. So, the children are generally involved in paid work. But where the availability of paid work is low, the children usually assist their parents in domestic chores or they assist in their parental jobs for their survival. Thus, these children become idle and they have to lead a life in adverse situation. From various studies, it had been seen that poverty, parental attitude, educational facilities and again the non-availability of paid work determined the population of idle children. In developing countries like India, these idle children are significant in number.

Apart from the above causes of idleness, stigma as well as parental occupation is important responsible factor of children idleness. From this study, it is revealed that brothels are a refuge of idle children and the stigma of sex workers' children is a fundamental cause of idleness. About 69.5% (260 out of 374) children was idle within their age group of 6-14 years. Typical structure, process and functions of the brothel community did not support for children education as an instrument of their settlement outside their community or mainstreaming them into larger society. The female commercial sex workers were excluded from the larger society, while they felt as inclusive members and they had to follow the culture of family and child bearing and rearing. FCSWs had to face dual role of household management and economic assistance and husband/male's role was insignificant for child development. Their adverse milieu was inappropriate for children up-bringing. Mothers' income according to their status in the trade, attitude and other aspects were less responsible than stigma of sex workers' child. It confined them within the brothel community. So, overall process of idleness pushed them to their vicious cycle. From early childhood, they used to assist their mothers in domestic chores. They were even helping their mothers for client entertainment.

Though various rehabilitative and welfare measures for these children have been taken by governments and development agencies in this area, it is not enough for a change of their lives. These programmes are monopole and nature of the activities is schematic time bound so far as funding is concerned. The involvement of FSWs in planning of these programmes is thin or virtually absent. Following strategies might be planned for all round development of these children for their integration into the larger society and it might be facilitated to break the vicious cycle of their brothel community.

- a) FSWs' involvement and support for their children's education and settlement outside their community to be ensured through participatory planning and implementation of programmes for educational development and skill training for sustainable employment outside their community.

- b) There is need of continued education for these children and teachers and school mates to be sensitized to extend their social support and co-operation for their social integration.
- c) There is need of separate shelter for these children to protect them from their involvement with their mothers' trade and behavioural pattern and habits.

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