

## VIOLENCE AMONG MOBILE FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN TIRUPATI, ANDHRAPRADESH

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### ABSTRACT

Female sex workers are the most vulnerable population group to and they have been prioritised in HIV prevention programs throughout the world. In India, too, FSWs have been recognized as one of the three core high-risk groups population that are worst affected by the HIV epidemic in India (NACO, 2006). Female sex workers are often mobile and migrate to other places, in search of clients, to get rid of stigma and discrimination. Mobility among female sex workers also restricts them to access key health and social services. The present paper, discusses mobility among female sex workers and its role in utilization of key social and health services. The data has been collected in and around Tirupati urban area. A total of 20 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion have been conducted by using qualitative guidelines. Out of twenty in-depth interviews, 10 each from female sex workers and key informants have been conducted with the help of in-depth interview guideline. The qualitative data has been analyzed by using Atlas-ti software package. The results show that, migration among female sex workers is influenced by low socio economic status. Majority of them opined that violence among female sex workers is predominant when they were in migration. Lack of support system, poor knowledge about the service facilities, fear of identity disclosure are major factors to restrict them in accessing the service facilities. Health problems, violence by different perpetrators, availability of condoms are their immediate concerns to be addressed during the destination places. Addressing violence and enhancing knowledge about social and health services should also be included in HIV prevention programs.

**KEYWORDS:** Female Sex Workers, Andhra Pradesh, Mobility, Violence

### INTRODUCTION

Female sex workers (FSWs) are recognized as the most vulnerable population group to HIV infection (World Health Organization (WHO) 2005). Female Sex Workers have been recognized as one of the three core high-risk groups population that are worst affected by the HIV epidemic in India (NACO, 2006). Empirical evidence suggests that they are at a greater risk of experiencing violence, contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV and stigmatisation (Beattie et al. 2010; Popoola 2013). Female sex workers are surrounded by gatekeepers; such as pimps, brothel owners, goons and law enforcement authorities with strong control over the lives of FSWs and are often perpetrators of violence against them. FSWs experience violence not only in the sex work from gatekeepers and clients, but also from their intimate partners and husbands, other family members, and even fellow sex workers (India HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2014). Few studies in India reports that about 10%-50% of FSWs experienced physical violence. (Beattie et al. 2010; Deering et al. 2011; George, Sabarwal and Martin 2011; Ramesh et al. 2012). Paying partners, police, brokers, madams and non-paying partners are found to be main perpetrators of violence (Beattie et al. 2010). Mobility and violence are widely recognised as an important risk factor contributing to the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (Verma, RK, et.al, 2010). Studies also pointed out that, mobile FSWs, particularly in India

(Swain SN. et.al, 2011), one third of them reported violence and FSWs exposed to violence were more likely to be infected with HIV and sexually transmitted infections (Sarkar K et.al, 2008). Keeping the importance of the issue, the paper attempts to understand the migration/mobility of female sex workers and utilization of services during the mobility period.

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand violence incidents faced by female sex workers during their mobility.

## **METHODS**

The study has been conducted in Tirupati area of Andhra Pradesh state. Tirupati is one of the major pilgrimage and cultural city in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh with well transportation connectivity to cities in Andhra Pradesh and other states and attracts large mobile population. Chittoor is one of the high priority districts in Andhra Pradesh, for HIV prevention programs being implemented by NACO, which has all three types of core high risk population.

The data for the present paper has been used from the qualitative data collected for pursuing doctoral degree course. The data collection for the study has been done in both quantitative and qualitative phases. The present paper is based on the qualitative data collected during April to June 2014. The qualitative collection was collected from the purposively selected respondents. However, help from an NGO providing HIV prevention services to female sex workers has been sought. The recruitment happened with the help of the program staff of the NGO. The qualitative phase data has been collected from female sex workers and key stake holders. The qualitative data has been collected from a sample of 25 respondents, of which 15 female sex workers and 10 stake holders and one focus group discussion with 9 female sex workers. Data has been collected for in-depth interviews, using in-depth interview guideline from female sex workers (15) selected from a range of age, mobility backgrounds, work settings and exposure levels. Among these five female sex workers were selected after completing the structured interview, as identified during the process of interview, to get better insights as per the study objectives. The program staff working in NGO and providing services for female sex workers (5), two women mediators, and 3 Pan shop keepers were interviewed as stakeholders who are well aware about the dynamics of female sex workers mobility. One focus group discussion with female sex workers (9), who are mainly involving with NGO program activities, was conducted. The qualitative guidelines, focused on issues of migration pattern, sexual behavior, experience of violence, and their perceptions of the health and service utilization within and outside district. The qualitative data was collected in mother tongue of the respondents, Telugu language, further it has been translated to English language for analysis.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data has been translated into English language. The in-depth interviews with female sex workers, key stake holders and a focus group discussion have been assigned into Atlas-ti package for analysis.

### **Codes**

After completing electronic documenting of the in-depth interviews, the codes have been developed for analyzing the qualitative data. The codes were developed and defined for understanding the extent of the relevance in the text. Each code is defined and over all 45 codes was developed for the study.

### **Quotations**

After assigning the codes with relevance to the text cited qualitative in the interviews, the listing of quotations was carried out. The listed quotations helped in understanding the key issues. The qualitative findings have been used to substantiate the quantitative findings in different chapters of the thesis.

## RESULTS

### Socio Economic Background Characteristics

Among the female sex workers during the pre-survey qualitative assessment, respondents were between 20 to 40 years old and four of them were from urban areas where as others from rural areas. More than half of them have observed of doing nothing other than sex work as profession and only few of them are currently married. Respondents were observed to practice the sex work ranged from 6 months to 17 years. Similarly, among them who were interviewed post survey were observed of aged 19 years to 33 years. They have been practicing sex work 2 years to 13 years. Three of them are from rural and two are from urban areas. Two of them found to be unmarried, two are widowed and one respondent is married. Majority of them have observed to practice sex work in other places.

Among the key stakeholders who were interviewed, three of them are pan shop keepers, two are mediators in the sex work profession, and two out-reach workers, one counselor and one doctor who are associated with local NGO and providing services to the female sex workers in the study area.

Nine female sex workers of different age were participated in the focus group discussion. Majority of them are having no other occupation except sex work and four of them were from rural areas and five of them from urban areas. Five of them are married and four of them are separated. All the participants were observed to have attained primary education. All of them have ever been migrated to other places for sex work.

### Mobility among Female Sex Worker

Almost all of the female sex workers participated in this study reported that they move to one place to another in search of clients. Majority of the respondents found to have moved two or more than two places in the past one month according to the demand of clients. Among the respondents majority of them reported that they have faced violence either sexually or physically when they go outside for sex work. Respondents move to other places for sex work from their native place mostly to avoid the disclosure to the local people about their profession. They have also reported of having more volume of clients if they go to urban areas.

Data clarifies the reason for the mobility of the female sex workers for their work. To narrate a respondent, *“I usually go out of this place for sex work because any of my people may identify me while doing this in this area. It is dangerous to me and my family.”*

Earning more money and engaging for more days are the cited reasons for going out for sex work profession. To quote a respondent, *“I get more money if I go outside district or state with client. They book for two days or three days or sometimes for one week. They like to take us and enjoy anywhere in tourist place. They also scare of their families and take us to farther places to enjoy with us.”*

Unavailability of clients in their local areas is found to be one of the reasons for mobility of female sex workers to other places. To state one respondent, *“We don’t get clients in our area and we have to go outside district where we get more number of clients. I go to Chennai, Nellore, Mysore for clients”.*

To quote another respondent, *“I usually go out only for sex work. I go and stay there for one week or ten days and come back home. I go to madanapally, Guntakal and Gulbarga most frequently. I also visit Tiruttani sometimes.”*

### Experience of Violence

All most all of the respondents have reported of facing any kind of violence. They informed that they face verbal, physical and sexual violence when they go out with clients or in search of clients. Few incidents showed clearly the evidence for their statements of violence.

It is evident that sex workers are not concerned with the places where they are going and they only concern for grabbing the opportunity to attract a client. This attitude leads them towards prone to the violence. To state a respondent, *“I go wherever the client takes me for sex. They take me to their rooms or lodges or any isolated places. They force to have sex in different styles. They beat me if I don’t cooperate”*.

Lack information on their mobility is also one of the reasons which make the mobile sex worker more vulnerable to violence at outside districts or states. To Describe a NGO worker: *“they face variety of violence daily, violence from the partners, brokers, Goons and other senior sex workers in that area. We help them if there in local areas but they don’t even inform where they go with clients. They face such violence mostly when they are outside this place.”*

### Perpetrators of Violence

Mobile female sex workers reported of facing violence by clients are widely reported when they are outside places. They will be beaten by clients for different reasons like not cooperating the clients for weird sexual acts, and condom usage practices. Clients beat and abuse verbally female sex workers when they go out with them as they know that they are helpless and are alone. It is evident from the data and to narrate one respondent, *“I went to Nellore and met a client. He took me to one lodge and asked me to keep his penis in my mouth and I refused it. He started abusing m. Why you came here if you don’t want to do sex? I am stinking rich to give you for free. You should satisfy me. You cannot simply escape taking money from me. He abused with filthy language and did forcefully by dragging me by my hair”*.

It is clearly evident from the data that mobile female sex workers are more prone to violence when they are outside and clients are aware that they are not local. To state one respondent, *“Clients also beat us if they know that we are non-local. They try to escape without paying after doing sex. I experienced many such cases. They also force us for different types of sexual acts and kick us if we don’t agree.”*

Data clarifies the violence increase with the distance places and the lonely travel with clients to the distant places. Another woman describes, *“I went to Goa with a client and did not tell anybody and not even to my close friend where is I am going. Client took me saying he will be alone and pay good amount of money but five of his friends came to have sex with me in the guest house in Goa. I was beaten by them brutally for raising voice about the cheating. They did not even pay me. They all had sex in different angles and without condoms and also forced me drunk. They abused me with filthy language and treated me very badly. They left me there itself without paying even for travel expenses. I had to stay three more days and find clients to earn the money to return home. I was very much scared that time.”*

Violence by local goons was also reported considerably by mobile female sex workers. They were either beaten or threaten by local goons when they are outside their local areas. It is clearly evident from the study that, lack of support from local female sex workers also makes the mobile FSWs more vulnerable. To narrate a respondent, *“Local Goon beat me as I have not given him the money in my earning. He demands for more money and snatched all of my money. He threatened me killing if I don’t give him demanded money. Nobody helped me and the local sex workers enjoyed it as they feel I am the competitor to them”*.

Demanding money is not only the cause of violence and it is also well documented that, keeping valuables and ornaments also makes the local goons to perpetrate violence. According to a respondent, *“When I went to Venkatgiri, I was walking along with my sister on the road, a local goon attacked me. I escaped by him two three times earlier and I have not given him money which all non-local sex workers supposed to give him. He was very angry with me for that. He slapped me and snatched my finger ring and flee on his bike”*.

Data shows that female sex workers are very much scared about the police as they are beaten by them when they are outside districts. To state one respondent *“I feel it is really hard. We never know what happens and we cannot expect. We face problems from police, Goons, brokers and clients. Police will beat us if we do sex in any public place. They even beat us if they suspect that we are sex workers and standing for clients. It happens mostly outside this place.”*

Violence by local sex workers has also reported by the respondents during their mobility for sex work. It is clearly evident from the data that lack of collectiveness and support among female sex workers also leads to the violence against them. According to a respondent *“Other sex workers also attack us when we go outside district or state. They think that we came for competition and we are spoiling their business. I was beaten in Tiruttani bus stand by the local sex workers when they saw me talking business with client”*.

Female sex workers have reported the violence which they face by their partner. They face violence by their partners. According to the respondents, mobility is one of the reason for violence by their partner as their profession getting disposed because their frequent movement to other paces and ultimately its leading to violence.

To quote a respondent *“My partner is suspicious about me. He drinks and come home daily. He beats me for no reason saying I am a prostitute and have affairs with others. Of course, I am a prostitute and doing sex with others but not for fun. I am doing only to survive not only myself and also making him survive with my earnings. He beats me if I don't give him money whenever he demands for it. He beats me whenever I go outside this place for sex work. He doesn't bother if work and come back home in the night but if I go outside and could not come home for one or two days, he will start shouting and beating me.”*

### **Utilization of Services during migration**

While observing service utilization by the mobile female sex workers in accordance with the violence they faced by various perpetrators, majority of them cited of not informing immediately about the violence they faced. It is also observed less likely to have approaching any service provider related to violence when they face such violence outside districts or states. It is mostly because of the unawareness of service availability in that particular areas where they go for sex work, discrimination to be faced by the service providers and fear of identity of their profession in new areas were widely reported reasons for poor approach or disclose of violence.

Data reveals that mobile female sex workers don't approach local health centres or any supportive sources when they faced violence at outside their native place. They seek any treatment and disclose the violence only when they return to their native places. To state a doctor who works in an NGO *“they mostly come to seek treatment for their wounds when they return from any outside visit with clients. I have seen few women who were rudely beaten in various parts of their body. All of them went with clients for one week or ten days outside. They often complain that they go with one client but his friends also come and force to have sex with them too. Then there would be no scope for negotiation. I feel they face such violence more in outside districts or states.”*

Data shows the helplessness and unawareness of the crisis management programs and sources which are available at other states and districts among the mobile female sex workers which is leading to more susceptibility to violence. To state one respondent, *"I can't do anything if I am beaten outside this place as I don't know anybody who can help me in that situation. I will inform NGO worker if I face any such incidence here. Because I know these people will help me"*. To quote another respondent *"We discuss about that within our friends and console each other and we cannot do anything else."*

## DISCUSSIONS

Mobility among female sex workers, though is common phenomenon, deserves proper attention and must be focussed in the research among female sex workers. Violence among mobile female sex workers have been documented in few studies in India, which reveal that, they often tend to experience more than the non mobile sex workers. The study findings also suggests on par with the earlier studies. Results indicated that mobility was positively associated with the experience of violence in majority of cases. Female sex workers who were at a higher risk level of mobility and alone at outside places were more likely to experience sexual or physical violence by different perpetrators. Utilization of services, especially when the female sex workers face violence in the places other than their regular places of practice, are difficult to access due to lack of knowledge. Despite they are one of the core group population in HIV prevention programs in the country, it is suggested that, the findings demand that, they also should be provided adequate information on social protection.

## CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the respondents opined, that mobility among female sex workers is predominant and it is influenced socio economic conditions. Fear of disclosure of their involvement makes the female sex workers vulnerable to be mobile and further making them prone to experience difficult situations during their mobility. Poor knowledge about the service facilities, fear of identity disclosure and lack of support in the destination places, emerged as barriers for accessing the service facilities. Health problems, violence by different perpetrators, availability of condoms are their immediate concerns to be addressed during the destination places. Addressing violence and enhancing knowledge about social and health services should also be included in HIV prevention programs.

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## APPENDICES

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents: in-Depth Interview**

	Age	Education	Occupation Other Than Sex Work	Duration of Sex Work	Native (Rural/Urban)	Marital Status	Practiced Sex Work in other Places
<b>Pre survey</b>							
Respondent 1	24	2	--	8yrs	Rural	Married	Yes
Respondent 2	39	12	Small vendor	10yrs	Urban	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 3	30	10	Nurse/ beautician	12yrs	Urban	Married	Yes
Respondent 4	22	10	--	5yrs	Rural	Married	No
Respondent 5	21	4	--	6months	Rural	Separated	Yes
Respondent 6	36	6	--	7yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 7	30	0	Non-agricultural labourer	6yrs	Rural	Separated	No
Respondent 8	28	5	Service private	9yrs	Urban	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 9	38	7	--	17yrs	Urban	Divorced	Yes
Respondent 10	25	2	--	4yrs	Rural	Separated	No
<b>Post survey</b>							
Respondent 1	29	5	Small vendor	5yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes

**Table 1: Contd.,**

Respondent 2	27	0	--	2yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 3	19	5	--	2yrs	Rural	Never married	Yes
Respondent 4	20	9	--	3yrs	Rural	Never married	Yes
Respondent 5	33	7	--	13yrs	Rural	Married	Yes

**Table 2: Profile of the Respondents: Key Stakeholders**

	Age	Education	Occupation	Duration of Stay in This Area	Aware About Number of Sex Workers in Their Area
Respondent 1	65	0	Mediator	30yrs	Yes
Respondent 2	45	0	Mediator	15yrs	Yes
Respondent 3	37	13	Outreach worker	5yrs	Yes
Respondent 4	40	15	Project officer	3yrs	Yes
Respondent 5	28	12	Outreach worker	7yrs	Yes
Respondent 6	30	MSW	Counselor	2yrs	Yes
Respondent 7	50	MBBS	Doctor	4yrs	Yes
Respondent 8	37	7	Pan shop keeper	10yrs	Yes
Respondent 9	48	3	Pan shop keeper	15yrs	Yes
Respondent 10	55	5	Pan shop keeper	17yrs	Yes

**Table 3: Profile of the Respondents: FGD Participants**

	Age	Education	Occupation other than Sex Work	Duration of Sex Work	Native (Rural/Urban)	Marital Status	Practiced Sex Work in other Places
Respondent 1	31	6	--		Rural	separated	Yes
Respondent 2	25	8	--		Urban	married	Yes
Respondent 3	26	5	--		Rural	married	Yes
Respondent 4	23	6	Bidi making		Urban	separated	Yes
Respondent 5	32	7	--		Rural	separated	Yes
Respondent 6	27	5	--		Urban	married	Yes
Respondent 7	24	5	--		Rural	married	Yes
Respondent 8	29	6	--		Urban	separated	Yes
Respondent 9	27	7	Packing labourer		Urban	married	Yes



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