A Cross Sectional Study of General and Maternal Morbidities among Female Sex Workers of a Metro City

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Abstract

Introduction: Globally the issues of morbidity among female sex workers are major concerns but mostly have been neglected.

Objective: To study the general and maternal health morbidities among female sex workers.

Material & Methods: This was a cross sectional study carried out in a red-light area of metro city with the help of a local NGO. Using Purposive sampling method, each female sex worker was interviewed individually by a resident doctor with nonbiased, non-provocative, non-judgmental interview technique.

Results: The mean age of 99 respondent was 29.3 years and 69.2% were migrated from West Bengal and Orissa. 78% were sold by their Husband and family members. The mean age at which they have started sex work was found to be 17.6 years. Current study noted 63.64% female sex workers were mother which is in correspondence with different researchers finding. Home deliveries and early weaning was reported by respondents. 63% females reported musculoskeletal pain, 54% with itching and rashes over body and 45% reported weakness, in addition 38% delineate vaginal discharge and 34% pain in lower abdomen which suggestive of sexual transmitted diseases.

Conclusion: The high prevalence of health conditions is found in female sex workers demands urgent actions.

Keywords: Female sex workers, Morbidity, Mothers

Introduction

Maternal morbidity among female sex workers and the health and wellbeing of their children are very critical health and human rights issues which have been neglected worldwide. Many women forced into prostitution because of poverty, lack of education, or family conflicts. Many female sex workers have risk factors for maternal morbidity, especially HIV-related or unsafe abortion related morbidity and complications. However, limited data is available about the impact of maternal morbidity on female sex workers compared with HIV and violence against them. Studies from different part of world suggest four out of five sex workers are mothers. Researchers have also stated that, health care is ‘low on their list of priorities’.

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Health staff working for female sex workers at Drop-in Centre described by Carr had found that the women had medical problems, such as STDs, dental problems, scabies, drug-related abscesses apart from their contraceptive needs. On average, sex workers are 10 times more likely to become infected with HIV than adults in the general population.

As a report by National Commission for Women (NCW) recognizes, "No woman suffers more discrimination in access to services, whether for health care, fertility regulations or safe abortions as much as women in sex work". It is pertinent to study the general and maternal health morbidities among female sex workers so that remedial measures can be adopted.

Methods

The study was conducted at Red light area of a metropolitan city of India. It was a cross sectional field study carried out with the help of field volunteers of Local NGO. The organization was working in the study area in the last 10 years, which made easy to identify the women working and forming of rapport with study subjects.

Purposive sampling method was used to ascertain the health problems of female sex workers. Female who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally were considered female sex worker. All female sex workers who were identified by the staff and those volunteers to give the data were included in the study. The workers who have denied in participation after explaining the study procedure were not included in the study.

Data Collection

All identified female sex workers who were earlier informed about the survey were gathered in a common hall of NGO. A group of 10-12 subjects were interviewed on a fixed day. Each female sex worker was interviewed individually by a resident doctor with nonbiased, non-provocative, non-judgmental interview technique. Semi-structured questionnaire were used as a tool for evaluation. All efforts were made to maintain privacy and confidentiality of female sex workers. The descriptive statistics were used to display the results. The data was analysis with the help of SPSS version 18.

Results

We have interviewed a total 99 female sex workers. The mean age of the respondents was 29.3 years. Majority of the workers (69.7%) were migrated from the eastern part of Country i.e. West Bengal and Orissa. Greater part of the workers i.e. 77.78% were sold by their husband and family members, some of them 19.19% arrived in the city in search of livelihood and landed up into the sex profession and 4.04% workers were born in the brothel itself. The mean age at which they have started sex work was found to be 17.6 years (Table No. 1).

| S. No. | Parameters                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1.    | Age Group                      |           |            |
|       | Less than 15                   | 0         | 0          |
|       | 15-25                          | 18        | 18.18      |
|       | 25-35                          | 54        | 54.54      |
|       | 35-45                          | 21        | 21.21      |
|       | More than 45                   | 6         | 06.06      |
| 2.    | Native Place                   |           |            |
|       | Central India                  | 4         | 04.04      |
|       | Eastern India                  | 69        | 69.7       |
|       | Western India                  | 6         | 06.06      |
|       | North India                    | 2         | 02.02      |
|       | South India                    | 18        | 18.18      |
| 3.    | Reason for entry into Profession |       |            |
|       | Sold by Husband/Relative       | 77        | 77.78      |
|       | In search of livelihood        | 19        | 19.19      |
|       | Born in the Brothel            | 4         | 04.04      |
|       | By Self Choice                 | 0         | 0          |
Sixty-three (63.64%) female sex workers were mothers, and among these mothers, 11 were already having children before entering into the profession and remaining 52 mothers delivered their first and subsequent child during the course of commercial sex work. All 63 mothers had a total of 107 children and among these children 93 were born in the brothels (Figure 1).

The study area is surrounded by group of government and private hospitals. Inspire of established hospital network in the area, 14 (15.05%) deliveries were at home and conducted by untrained dais. None of the child born into brothel was exclusively breastfed.

63% females reported musculoskeletal pain, 54% had itching and rashes over body and 45% reported weakness, in addition 38% had vaginal discharge and 34% had pain in lower abdomen which were suggestive of sexual transmitted diseases (Figure 2).

Nearly half (47%) female sex workers preferred to consult local practitioners for their health ailments, followed by government hospitals (35%) and self-Medication (18%). The positive correlation was found between age of the respondent and prevalence of STDs (p value - 0.001).

Discussion

Ninety-nine female sex workers were enrolled in the current study by using purposive sampling method. Migration into the study area was majorly from the eastern part of country. Current study found that the females entering into sex work even before they turned 18 years and four out of five were sold by their own relatives. The age of entry into sex profession during teen years was similar to the findings of report published by Maharashtra State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights and International Justice Mission. Current study noted 63.64% female sex workers were mother which is in correspondence with different researchers finding.

Female sex workers were usually addressed for their sexually transmitted diseases especially against HIV by different government and non-government organizations. Various researchers highlighted STD issue in their research, in our study we found almost 1/3rd workers were had symptoms suggestive of STDs which was similar to the finding noted by Sarna A et al.

Limitations

The objective of maternal health was not fully addressed and the result cannot generalize to all female sex workers because of the small sample size from a single area.
Conclusion

Female sex workers are neglected and underprivileged part of the society across the world. Many workers were forced into the prostitution. Many of the workers were forcefully introduced into the sex work by their own relatives. Two third workers were mother and 15% were had home deliveries and none of the female sex worker exclusively breastfed their child. Female sex workers reported musculoskeletal pain, itching/rashes and weakness in descending order along with symptoms of sexual transmitted diseases. The present study highlighted the high morbidity among sex workers which needs to be addressed urgently through special health programs.

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Conflict of Interest: None

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