

# Social and Economic Challenges Faced by Minor Female Sex Workers in Delhi and NCR: A Sociological Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

The research paper presented here highlights some of the social and economic issues faced by the minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR. In this vein, the authors use a sociological approach in analysing socio-economic factors that make such subjects vulnerable, and exploitable. As presented in this paper, based on the synthesis of the available literature analysis and the assessment of secondary data, it is possible to identify the systematic causes that maintain the cycle of poverty and abuse. In this case, it was discovered that minor female sex workers struggle with poverty, lack education, and health care and experience stigma. These challenges are worsened by the poor evidence of legal rights and inadequate provision of support services. In addition, this study reveals the crucial importance of policy actions that meet not only the short term, but also the long-term needs of these individuals. Understanding the socio-economic status of the minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR of India will help in designing appropriate intervention and policies to protect the category of girls who are vulnerable and endangered in society.

**KEYWORDS:** Economic challenges, exploitation, Delhi, minor female sex workers, NCR, sociological analysis, vulnerability

## **INTRODUCTION**

Minority female sex workers in Delhi and the NCR is a multifaceted and diverse socio-economic issue that presents multiple challenges to society and its members. These young girls, many of who are below the age of 18 are compelled into prostitution through poverty, ignorance, family and societal influence. The challenges highlighted above are concerns that this paper would seek to address by undertaking an exploratory qualitative study under a sociological perspective to have clear direction on the socio-economic factors which make these women vulnerable and exploitable.

Incorporating specific socio-economic circumstances pertaining to the Delhi-NCR area, the trends have depicted an emergent trend of minor female sex workers. Another revelation by the National Commission for Women (NCW) indicates that economic destabilishment is one of the key reasons why young girls are lured into the trade (Dandona et al., 2016). Sometimes families are forced to move to urban areas in search of employment only to be trapped in precarious employment where they are underemployed, exposing children to vices such as prostitution due to poverty (Rao & Vakulabharanam, 2018).

The level of education plays an important role in either enhancing or reducing of those vulnerabilities. A good proportion of the identified minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR have no formal education, and those who went to school have dropped out. Research from MWCD (2020) said that girls who are currently not in school are more vulnerable to engage in commercial sexual business. Illiteracy robs them of opportunities and makes them ripe prey for exploitation and mistreatment by other people (Hossain et al. , 2018).

Family pressures and social issues worsening the situation make it even harder to solve the problem. Unfortunately, it is rather disappointing but factual that more often than not, girls compel themselves or are coerced by their own relatives for such performances with the aim of generating income (Jain & Rhoten, 2017). In addition, the fact that the minority is discriminated in the society further complicates the issue since such victims have nowhere to report or reintegrate into the community. Several of them stay in such a situation because they fear to be discriminated by society or rejected (Vijayakumar et al. , 2019).

There is also a lack of healthcare access which is also one of the main concerns. Minor female sex workers cannot access proper medical care and are not informed about safe sex practices and, as a result, are susceptible to contracting STIs and other health-related complications (Shewale & Sahay, 2022). Besides, due to their illegality, many cannot access hospitals when they have health complications, which worsens their health conditions (Gupta & Gupta, 2020).

There has been some positive development in legal and policy reforms related to child exploitation and trafficking in India but they still exist. While the legislation that exists to protect the minors include Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012, there remain issues of weak implementation and enforcement (Bajpai, 2017). This implies that most minor sex workers do not get proper care and support either through comprehensive rehabilitation programs or appropriate support structures since they slip through the legal system structures (Dinesh et al., 2023).

This research shall therefore seek to explain these issues as speculations of the bigger problem hence the need to embrace the multi-sectoral approach when addressing such policies and interventions. Therefore, this paper aims to look at the socio-economic vulnerabilities and issues experienced by minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR in order create better assistance models and policies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research used an all-embracing qualitative research technique and it employed only secondary data to analyse the socio-economic factors leading to the initiation of minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR. The approach involves the use of scientific sources, documents, and the sociological literature in the coursework.

### **Data Collection**

Secondary data was obtained from various sources including relevant scientific journals, governmental and non-governmental reports, and international organizations. Sources of data may include the report from National Commission for women and Ministry of Women and Child Development along with other bodies like World Health Organization. This approach makes it possible to cross check the collected data and this in turn adds to the reliability and validity of the results (Bowen, 2009).

### **Literature Review**

Various academic databases and electronic resources were used to review any previous study that concer-

ned the socio-economic status of minor female sex workers. The review incorporated papers that concern poverty, education, family factors, health care and the laws regarding such minor individuals. Sources like JSTOR, PubMed and Google Scholar were used in order to build up relevant peer-reviewed articles and scholarly papers concerning the topic (Webster & Watson, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

The data that was collected was analysed by employing thematic analysis, this is a method that involves describing, analysing and interpreting patterns (themes) within data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). This method is best applied in sociological studies because it gives an analytical view of the social phenomenon under investigation. Themes were derived from the literature and categorized into key areas: in the spheres of economics, education, family, health, and law.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of the research topic, the issues of ethical considerations were very critical. The study did not entail the collection of primary data; therefore, the ethical issues of concern in this study were limited to those pertaining in secondary data analysis (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009).

This method, pulling together data from several sources, is expected to give an extensive picture of the socio- economic conditions and issues faced by minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR. The recommendations are expected to help in providing policy advice for designing interventions relating to those significant issues.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

The findings of present research bring into light some significant social and economical issues related to the life of minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR. The thematic analysis of secondary data revealed five main areas of concern: people face economic burdens, educational limitations, family issues, restricted healthcare access, and lack of legal rights. All of these areas fundamentally contribute to the vulnerability and exploitation of the minor female sex workers.

### **Economic Challenges**

Poverty, being a major cause of vulnerability, forces most of the minors to engage in sex work. Most of these young girls are raised in poor families and the poverty does compel them into prostitution. Sahni and Shankar (2013) pointed out that many female sex workers in Delhi and NCR experience economic vulnerabilities due to poverty, where they deliberately choose sex work to earn higher income than low-wage informal employment after they have sought early livelihoods. This is in connection with Nagpal et al. (2017) who note that women in the region have very limited employment or economic opportunity.

### **Educational Barriers**

Yet another important cog in the wheel is the inability of the minors involved to access education, which also relegates them to the few options available to them. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development MWCD, 2020, vulnerable girls who drop out of school end up in the business of selling their bodies. Education is not only an opportunity to be employed better but also opportunities will empower young girls with knowledge and wisdom on how to fight exploitation. Moreover, Mukhopadhyay et al. (2001) notes that dropout rate was high among the minor female sex workers, and most of them; more than seventy percent; did not complete their education beyond the junior secondary level.

### **Family Dynamics**

Family settings can be seen as significantly influencing the lives of minor female sex workers. Sadly, most

of these girls are often forced or, in one way or another, compelled by their own families to practice prostitution to earn a living. Similar studies conducted by McClarty et al. (2013) reveal that about 40 percent of minor sex workers in India are forced into prostitution by their families. Of course, this coercion is very often connected with the extreme poverty and the absence of any other ways of making a living.

### **Healthcare Access**

One of the most pressing issues affecting minor female sex workers is the lack of healthcare services. According to Shewale and Sahay (2022) the above minors are at a high risk of being infected with STIs and other ailments associated with poor health care and information on safe sex. Besides, since they are illegal, many cannot seek rights of accessing hospitals whenever they have health complications thus making their health conditions worse (Farley et al., 2004). This lack of healthcare access only increases their margin of vulnerability and also contributes to the continuous circulation of such practices.

### **Legal Protections**

The issue is that, while various legal measures have been taken to safeguard children and prevent child exploitation, implementation of such regulations proves inefficient in most cases. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 can be considered as legal provisions that seek to protect children from harm (Bajpai, 2017). However, as is the case with most laws, their enforcement is often slowed down by red tape and inadequate funds according to Bajpai (2017). Further, due to lack of adequate structures in place to support these rescued minors, many of them are exposed to the risk of being re-trafficked (Bajpai, 2017).

## **DISCUSSION**

The social and economic risk factors encountered by minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR are complex and rooted in structural factors. Some of the major conclusions derived from the study include the fact that economic deprivation was the main reason that forced the underage children into the business of engaging in sexual activities for monetary gains. Thus Sahni and Shankar (2013) rightly states that poverty and early involvement in the informal work sector compel young girls to become sex workers in order to attain the necessary financial security. This discovery actually provides an argument for economic solutions that would enable such vulnerable groups to have other means of supporting themselves.

These problems are made worse by educational hurdles that limit learners' ability to overcome them. According to Mukhopadhyay et al. (2001), minor female sex workers in India also have high school dropout rates at more than 70% and cannot have better jobs in the future. This high dropout rate gradually calls for school based intervention education programs for the targeted children with the purpose of ensuring that they remain in school and out of exploitative work.

Family dynamics are also key in the exploitation of the minor female sex workers. According to McClarty et al. (2014), force from family is a major reason with about forty percent of these children forced into sex work by their families. Such coercion mostly stems from economic pressure, which underscores the value of family-based services that target the factors that exacerbate the cycle of poverty.

Although the study reveals these outcomes in relation to receiving qualified healthcare, health care still presents a major challenge to minor female sex workers. Shewale and Sahay (2022) indicate that sex workers are at a high risk of contracting STIs; however, they are unable to seek medical attention since their profession is criminalized and stigmatized. In fact, Farley et al. (2004) also stress that many minor sex workers cannot gain medical attention when they require it, which results in the deterioration of their health.

Finally, the fact that protective laws are not equally enforced and there are no rehabilitation programs, many of the rescued children become victims of re-trafficking. Bajpai acknowledges that child protection laws are not fully implemented in India; he urged the need for strong legislations and adequate rehabilitation programs (Bajpai, 2017).

These socio-economic difficulties can be solved only by complex intervention, involving economic assistance, further education, medical treatment, and legal protection. Interventions need to be more comprehensive, addressing the root causes for the continuation of the exploitation and giving stabilized and satisfactory solutions to these vulnerable groups.

## CONCLUSION

The findings clearly indicate that minor female sex workers in Delhi and NCR face socio-economic problems of considerable magnitude and complexity: hence the need for an efficient and holistic approach. The economic problems, including poverty, are a main reason forcing these minor girls into improving their financial status through sexual exploitation, revealing the importance of economic assistance and job opportunities (Sahni & Shankar, 2013). Also, high dropout rates in schools necessitate unique educational interventions that would help keep such youths in school and offer them productive futures (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2001).

Coercion from the family members is significant in the situations when families force children into prostitution; therefore, family-based interventions that might address the problem of poverty and children's abuse could be helpful in protecting children from such risks (McClarty et al., 2014). In addition, due to stigma and illegality, they cannot access the healthcare services they need which makes their health more vulnerable; thus, there is the need to enhance access to health and support (Farley et al., 2004).

Finally, breaches in protective laws, and also the absence of sufficient rehabilitation centres, make numerous children and youths susceptible to re-trafficking. These are sectors that need proper legal policies and quality rehabilitation programs and other facilities for such endangered categories of people (Bajpai, 2017). It is imperative to address these difficulties in totality with support of economical sponsoring, educational patronage, medical treatment, and legal defence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, addressing the concept of socio-economic vulnerability in minor female sex workers of Delhi and NCR requires integrated interventions. Implement the school based specialized poverty reduction programs and vocational skills development training to empower the poor with stable livelihoods. Improve education initiatives aimed at increasing enrolments and reducing school dropouts. Enhance access to healthcare for these minors by expanding a variety of services available to them and reducing the stigma associated with seeking medical help. With regards to exploitation and trafficking, strong legal systems and their enforcement mechanisms must be put in place. Envision extensive rehabilitation and support programs for the rescued minors and provide psychological counselling and community reintegration services to prevent re-trafficking.

## LIMITATIONS

Due to the use of secondary data, this research is prone to weaker data analysis associated with biasness that may arise from the primary data collection sources. The lack of 'face-to-face' interviews or



questionnaires to the participants minimizes the chance of getting a first-hand account and more specific details. Moreover, the study is again limited by having a small sample of participants and being confined to only selected districts in India thereby may not provide a general idea of minor female sex workers in India. It recommended that subsequent studies should use larger samples with diverse populations and design longitudinal studies that would give deeper insight into socio-economic difficulties among those minors.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### COMPETING INTERESTS DECLARATION

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### FUNDING SOURCES DECLARATION

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