

A qualitative examination of women involved in prostitution in Mumbai, India: The role of family and acquaintances

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Abstract

In this qualitative study, 48 female prostitutes from Mumbai, India were interviewed to understand their experiences related to their entry into prostitution. Respondents' vulnerabilities and the role of family and acquaintances in entry were researched. The findings of the study indicate that poverty, marital abuse, sexual abuse and the death of a parent or husband were the main reasons for entry into prostitution. The majority of the respondents were sold into prostitution by family members or acquaintances. This research provides recommendations for policy, practice and research in the area of sex trafficking.

Keywords

India, Mumbai, prostitution, sex work, trafficking

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Kamathipura is located in Mumbai and is considered to be Asia's largest red-light area. It houses around 5000 prostitutes who are male, female and transgendered and involved in brothel-based and/or street-based prostitution (Menen, 2007). The majority of the prostitutes in Kamathipura are minor girls trafficked from other states of India and from neighboring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh (Frederick and Kelly, 2000). At any given point in time there are more victims of trafficking in Kamathipura than in any other red-light area in the country (Frederick and Kelly, 2000). This research is a qualitative study on experiences of women involved in prostitution in Kamathipura. The study highlights the reasons for entry into prostitution and in doing so uncovers the history of sex trafficking in the lives of prostitutes.

It is estimated that between 20 and 65 million Indians are affected by commercial sexual exploitation or forced labor (US Department of State, 2008). India is considered to be the epicenter for sex trafficking in the world (*India: The Sex Workers*, 2004). Over the last few decades, India has been identified as a source, destination, and transit country for sex trafficking. Although the majority of the victims of sex trafficking are from within India, cross-border trafficking also takes place, especially from Nepal and Bangladesh (Joffres et al., 2008). It is difficult to determine the number of trafficked persons in India because of the clandestine nature of the crime. However, according to research from the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India (Government of India, 2002), there are about three million females in forced prostitution in the country, of which an estimated 40 percent are children, as there is a growing demand for very young girls to be inducted into prostitution on account of customer preferences. However, Bales (2004) contended that statistics from governmental reports are notoriously low. Thus, the number of women and children in forced prostitution may be much higher than the aforementioned estimate.

Sex trafficking is reported in every state in India (Sen, 2005). Social workers play a very significant role in combating sex trafficking in India. They work in different capacities in organizations to rescue and rehabilitate victims of sex trafficking, provide care and support to victims, and advocate for stringent laws for the prevention of sex-trafficking. The present study was conducted in collaboration with one such social work organization in Mumbai, India, the Committed Communities Development Trust. Through in-depth interviews with women in prostitution from Mumbai, this study highlights the problem of sex trafficking and discusses the need for social work interventions for victims of sex-trafficking in Mumbai.

For this article, the researchers were interested in exploring the experiences of women in prostitution in Mumbai. Since the majority of the

respondents in this research study were reported to be trafficked for sexual purposes, we feel that it is important to define both trafficking in persons and prostitution. The United Nations (2000) defines 'trafficking in persons' as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (p. 2)

Thus, sex trafficking references sexual exploitation and involves an element of force or coercion. In contrast, prostitution is defined as:

a business transaction understood as such by the parties involved and in the nature of a short term contract in which one or more people pay an agreed price to one or more people for helping them to attain sexual gratification by various methods. (Bennett and Perkins, 1985: 4)

Sex trafficking and prostitution are two distinct yet semantically interconnected concepts. Through this research we attempt to qualitatively examine the experiences of 48 women in prostitution from the Kamathipura red-light area. In doing so, we attempt to bring out the interconnectedness between prostitution and sex trafficking. Two questions that guided this research endeavor are as follows: 1) What are the respondents' reasons for entry into prostitution activities?; and 2) How do the respondents describe the process of entry into prostitution activities? In the following pages, the researchers review the literature on prostitution and trafficking from India, specifically Mumbai. The researchers also highlight risk factors and process for entry into prostitution in India.

Literature review

Risk factors for entry into prostitution in India

There is a wide range of research from India that highlights reasons for entry into prostitution. Sarkar et al. (2008) examined brothel-based women involved in prostitution in West Bengal, India and found that 68 percent of women joined the profession of their free will due to poverty. Moreover, 24 percent were found to have been trafficked, and 8 percent were forced to

join by a relative. However, Kara (2009) contends that sex trafficking is the most common reason for entry into prostitution in India. The government of India country reports indicate that there are either personal or structural factors that contribute to vulnerabilities of being trafficked (Nair, 2003; Sanghera, 2000). Personal factors include illiteracy, lack of awareness about risks, and economic deprivation. Research from India indicates a strong relationship between poverty and the risks for trafficking (Mukherjee and Das, 1996; Nair, 2003; UNDP, 2002). Other personal factors may include a dysfunctional home environment, break-up of the family, marital discord, physical and/or sexual abuse in marriage, or desertion by husband (Nair, 2003).

Structural factors include lack of livelihood and income-generating options among people particularly from rural areas (Roby, 2005; Sanghera, 1999). Men and women from rural areas get involved in the trafficking industry out of economic desperation. In many rural areas there are insufficient income-generating options. As a result, the majority of the victims of trafficking as well as the traffickers in India are from rural areas (Nair, 2003). Additionally, the unequal status of women and children in societies may impact the commodification of these bodies (Roby, 2005).

Process of entry

The trafficking process generally involves the acquisition of innocent people primarily from rural areas, their movement from one place to another, and their exploitation (Kara, 2009). According to Kara (2009), there are five ways in which women and children are primarily trafficked into prostitution: deception, sale by family, abduction, seduction or romance, and/or recruitment by former victims. Trafficked victims are most commonly lured and forced into prostitution through modes of deception that include false promises of employment, or arranged marriages with the intent of forcing the wife into prostitution (Joffres et al., 2008; Rozario, 1988; Sen, 2003). Sen (2003) found that 66 percent of victims from India had been lured with the promise of employment, while one in six victims was enticed by the promise of marriage. Other means of entry include religious or traditional impetuses such as the 'devadasi system' or the traditional Indian system of temple-based prostitution, domestic violence within marriage, poverty, family migration, befriending with the intention of cheating or deceiving, or regular sexual abuse as a child (Sen, 2003). Moreover, traffickers use unstable home environments to their advantage by luring women away from

unhappy homes (Rozario, 1988). Therefore, most women who are trafficked leave their homes willingly without the knowledge that they will be forced to prostitute themselves (Project Parivartan, 2006).

The majority of victims are trafficked before the age of 18; some studies have estimated the average age of entry to be anywhere from 9 to 13 years old (Joffres et al., 2008; Rozario, 1988; Simkhada, 2008). Victims in India are commonly Hindu, unmarried, illiterate or barely literate girls from a low caste (Project Parivartan, 2006; Rozario, 1988; Sen, 2003; Simkhada, 2008). Further, many victims are married at a very young age with their first sexual experiences before the age of 18, commonly as a result of force (Project Parivartan, 2006; Sen, 2003). Sen (2003) found that 70 percent of victims of trafficking had their first sexual experience before the age of 18 and 60 percent indicated that it was without consent, while the rest associated the first experience with promises of money or favors. Moreover, the majority of participants in Sen's (2003) study reported that someone other than their husbands had sexually assaulted them during the marriage. Additionally, one-third indicated poor treatment by husbands or in-laws.

Traffickers may be known or unknown to trafficking victims and their families. While Sen (2003) contended that the majority of trafficked survivors had no relationship with their traffickers, Project Parivartan (2006) held that victims frequently know their traffickers. Moreover, Rozario (1988) found that over one-third of traffickers were family members, friends, or acquaintances, whereas less than one-third were professional traffickers or strangers. Traffickers who were family members, were commonly distant relatives, parents or parents-in-law, lovers, or husbands (Sen, 2003). Men and women are evenly distributed as traffickers, with women often being sex workers themselves. Male traffickers are typically in their 20s to 30s, while female traffickers are commonly in their 30s or 40s (Rozario, 1988; Sen, 2003; Simkhada, 2008). Further, traffickers tend to travel in packs to establish trust with young girls and to form networks with individuals in villages and cities (Rozario, 1988; Sangroula, 2001; Sen, 2003).

Due to the complexity of prostitution and sex trafficking and the common intersection between the two, the researchers in this study have chosen to seek the voices of female sex workers. Building off the works of other researchers, this study investigates the interconnectedness between prostitution and trafficking through personal interviews with women in prostitution. This research presents stories of women in prostitution as told in their own voices.

Research on sex trafficking in Kamathipura, Mumbai

Mumbai is identified as a destination city for sex trafficking in India, and the majority of victims are sold into brothels in the red-light areas of this city. There is limited research, however, on sex trafficking in Mumbai. The existing literature revolves around HIV/AIDS and kinship patterns within brothels (Silverman et al., 2006, 2007b; Tambe, 2006). One study conducted by Silverman et al. (2007a) is particularly relevant to this study and pertains to the causal factors associated with trafficking, as well as victim location of origin and trafficker characteristics. The researchers in this study found that the majority of study participants were trafficked before the age of 18 and were most frequently lured by traffickers' false promises of economic opportunities. Less common routes into sex trafficking included being kidnapped with and without the use of drugs, as well as being lured into the trade with false marriage promises. All participants indicated that poverty represented a vulnerability to trafficking, while 49.4 percent of participants attributed their experiences in trafficking to a family disruption (e.g. physical or sexual violence). Other reported catalysts included marital separation (32.9%) or illness/death of a parent/guardian (13.9%).

Victims are trafficked from multiple locations and may or may not have a relationship with the trafficker (Silverman et al., 2007a). For example, the majority of study participants in Silverman's et al.'s study indicated that they were trafficked from a public place, while others held that they were trafficked from the home of a relative or friend or from the workplace. Approximately 43 percent of this sample had no previous relationship with their trafficker, whereas others were trafficked by an acquaintance (40.3%), a family member (16.5%), or a husband/fiancé (7.9%). Finally, the researchers found that those under the age of 18 were more likely to be trafficked by relatives, while those over the age of 18 were more likely to be trafficked by friends or acquaintances.

The aforementioned study provides a wealth of knowledge about the routes of sex trafficking in Mumbai. It examined the lives of Indian, Nepalese, and Bangladeshi women who were rescued from eight major red light areas in Mumbai. The study examined the experiences of these women who were trafficked into Mumbai while utilizing secondary data in the form of case and medical records from a non-governmental organization (NGO). In contrast, our study is the result of interviews with women trafficked into Kamathipura. As a result, our study is the result of face to face interviews with trained researchers. It relies on the use of direct quotes to ensure that women have a 'voice' in the description of their personal experiences.

Methods

Women involved in prostitution (WIP) from Kamathipura were the population of interest for the study. An in-depth interviewing method was used to gather data. The study was executed in collaboration with a social work NGO named the Committed Communities Development Trust (CCDT), which works on improving the health of women and children in Kamathipura, Mumbai. CCDT has been working in Kamathipura for the past 15 years and has an office and a drop-in center in Kamathipura.

One co-author of this article, along with four social workers from CCDT, conducted interviews with 48 women for this study. The researchers conducted field visits for recruiting respondents for a period of five months during July–November of 2008. During these field visits the researchers introduced the topic to potential participants in Kamathipura. The researchers were accompanied by female prostitutes who were associated with CCDT and acted as helpers in the recruitment process. The helpers along with the researchers identified potential respondents in brothels and on the streets of Kamathipura. The research objectives as well as consent procedures were explained to the potential respondents during this field visit. The researchers also mentioned clearly that the interview was about women's experiences and reasons for entering Kamathipura. The word trafficking was not used by the researchers to screen women, and any woman above the age of 18 and currently soliciting sex in Kamathipura was considered eligible for this research. During the interviews, the respondents talked about their experiences and reasons for entry into prostitution and used words like *zabardasti*, *fasaya*, *bech diya*, and *jhooth bola* (in an Indian language). These particular words are synonymous with being forced, coerced, deceived, or sold into prostitution, which indicated that they were victims of trafficking. The researchers also gave their contact information (name, address in Kamathipura, and phone numbers) and women were asked to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating in the study. Only those who came to the interview site and volunteered to participate were interviewed.

Due to the high rate of illiteracy among respondents and cultural norms, it was neither appropriate nor a standard of practice, respectively, to require subjects to sign actual consent forms. Consent was established through verbal communications and subsequent participation in the study. This informed consent technique revealed that respondents had a clear understanding of the study, an appreciation for the invasiveness of the questions, and were willing to proceed despite minimal risks involved with discussing sensitive information about themselves. Recruitment continued until saturation was reached. Incentives to participate in this study were in the form of 'health

kits' that included soap, hand towels, sanitary napkins, toothpaste, toothbrush and a comb. The health kit also included contact information for CCDT. The decision to give health kits was made after discussions with a small group of prostitutes and social workers from Kamathipura. The average interview lasted for about an hour-and-a-half with some interviews lasting for approximately two hours. The interviews were conducted in two of the local languages: Hindi and Marathi. Interviews were not recorded. Interviewers quickly wrote notes throughout the duration of the interview. Again, for cultural reasons, the researchers all agreed that tape recording respondents would make them feel extremely uncomfortable because this practice is against cultural norms and therefore was inappropriate for this type of research. The study was conducted from 1 July 2008 to 30 November 2008. In this five-month period, 48 interviews were conducted. The above study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai in June 2008.

Instrumentation

An interview guide (in English) was developed for this research study and subsequently was translated into Hindi and Marathi. The interview guide contained several questions on demographics (i.e. age, marital status, number of children, education, place of origin), entry into prostitution, reasons for entry into prostitution, as well as specific questions about experiences living as prostitutes in Kamathipura. The interviews were semi-structured and the participants could choose to speak on any area of particular relevance to them.

Data analysis

For the purpose of analysis, the researchers translated and transcribed each interview. The transcripts contained quotes and dialogues from the interviews and captured the voice and language of prostitutes from the field. The transcripts were written by the five researchers who collected data. The transcripts and translations were cross-checked by co-researchers to maintain credibility. The analysis consisted of reading the qualitative data line-by-line, identifying themes, coding categories, and developing matrices to uncover relationships between themes and categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1997). All participants were assigned pseudonyms for research purposes. In the results, respondents' comments are introduced or followed by one of these assigned pseudonyms.

Results

Although several topics and themes emerged from these lengthy interviews, the researchers will limit these results to content related to the two previously stated research questions related to: 1) reasons for entry into prostitution; and the 2) process of entry into prostitution.

Identifying the respondents

The following discussion describes the characteristics of the women in this study who worked as prostitutes in Kamathipura. The youngest respondent was 20 years old while the oldest respondent was 60 years old. The mean age at interview was 35.07, and approximately half of the respondents hailed from rural areas of South India. Of those who spoke about their duration in Kamathipura, half had lived in the red-light area for 15 years or more, and one respondent reported being in the area for only four months. Approximately half of the respondents reported being from low-caste families, while the caste background of the other respondents was reportedly unknown. The majority of the respondents were Hindu followed by Muslims and Christians. The majority of the respondents were also either illiterate or were only able to write their names. These respondents' profiles were similar to the profiles of Kamathipura prostitutes identified by Frederick and Kelly (2000), Menen (2004), and Silverman et al. (2007a).

The majority of the respondents were street-based prostitutes. When they obtained clients, they rented brothel rooms and paid a share of their income to the brothel-owners. At all other times, they lived on the streets and inner lanes of Kamathipura. They solicited sex during the night and spent most of the day in shelters of various non-profit organizations including CCDT. Respondents also talked about their difficulties in getting clients on a daily basis. Although most respondents reported obtaining approximately three clients per day, the range was 1 to 7. Five women reported not having any clients at all due to their advanced age and/or sickness. The mean number of years involved in prostitution was 16.36 with a range of 4 months to 42 years. The income per day for these women ranged from 45 rupees to 750 rupees, which is roughly equivalent to \$0.97 to \$16.24 in US currency. The mean income for the 33 respondents who answered the question was 230 rupees (or \$5.05 US dollars).

Thirty-eight women who participated in this study identified themselves as victims of sex trafficking, and 10 women indicated that they had chosen to enter prostitution. Of the respondents who reported being trafficked, 27

Table 1. Demographics of women involved in prostitution in Mumbai, India ($n = 48$).

	Trafficked n (%) ^a	Not trafficked n (%) ^a
Age at entry		
Entry before 18 years	24 (63.16)	0 (0.00)
Entry at or after 18 years	9 (23.68)	10 (100.00)
Unknown	5 (13.16)	0 (0.00)
Religion		
Christian	2 (5.26)	0 (0.00)
Hindu	20 (52.63)	4 (40.00)
Muslim	11 (28.95)	6 (60.00)
Unknown	5 (13.16)	0 (0.00)
Education		
First through sixth grade	2 (5.26)	0 (0.00)
7th and above	2 (5.26)	0 (0.00)
Illiterate/no education	20 (52.63)	9 (90.00)
Unknown	14 (36.84)	1 (10.00)
Region of origin		
Central India	0 (0.00)	1 (10.00)
North India	9 (23.68)	7 (70.00)
Northwest India	5 (13.16)	1 (10.00)
South India	21 (55.26)	1 (10.00)
Unknown	3 (7.89)	0 (0.00)
	Mean (Range)	Mean (Range)
Current age	34.01 (20–59)	39.10 (20–60)
Age at entry	16.35 (10–37)	24.78 (18–53)
Number of years in profession	17.80 (2–42)	11.06 (4 months–21 years)
Number of clients per day	2.83 (1–7)	3.75 (3–5)
Income per day (rupees): prostitution	207.48 (50–1000)	167.14 (20–50)

^aPercentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

women (71.05%) reported being trafficked as minors. All 10 of the women who indicated that they chose to enter prostitution were 18 years of age or older at time of entry. The mean age for women at the point of being trafficked was 16.35 with a range of 10 years to 37 years. The most frequently cited age at entry when trafficked was 13 years of age. The mean age of entry for women who entered prostitution voluntarily was 24.78 years of age with a range of 18 to 53 (see Table 1).

Respondents' reasons for entry into prostitution

The first research question in this study asked, 'What are the respondents' reasons for entry into prostitution?'. Four themes emerged related to poverty, marital abuse, sexual abuse, and the death of a parent or husband. As indicated throughout the literature on women in prostitution, poverty/impoverishment was the most common theme to emerge as the reason for entry into prostitution (Mukherjee and Das, 1996; Nair, 2003; UNDP, 2002). Poverty is an expressed form of 'vulnerability' as articulated by the United Nations' definition of sex trafficking. Eighteen (37.5%) respondents indicated that they entered into prostitution because of this. Both sex-trafficked women and voluntary women attributed their entry into prostitution to poverty in whole or part. For example, Jasmin (who was not trafficked) stated:

I was earlier working as a fisherwoman. I used to carry my son (who was a baby then, now he is 14 years old) to the fish market and used to place him near me. Here the cold water from the ice would flow and he used to catch a cold as he used to be lying on it. As a result I needed money for his treatment. I had no option other than prostitution.

We see that Jasmin was gainfully employed, but made too little to pay for her child's medical treatment. Thus, she engaged in sex work as a last resort to maintain the health of her child. Mona (who was not trafficked), too, entered sex work as a result of poverty. She stated:

As I had no income and nothing to eat, I used to beg for money and food on the traffic signals. The brothel owner promised to give me food, clothes and a place to stay and told me that I would have to have sex with men in return and earn money.

Again, Mona entered prostitution due to a limited income that was insufficient to meet even basic needs. Prostitution activities were viewed as the only option, especially after Mona was enticed with food, clothing, and shelter. Sameera's motivation for entering prostitution activities echoes that of Jasmin and Mona. Sameera (who was not trafficked) stated:

I was born in a very poor family . . . later ran away and was introduced to prostitution . . . I was reluctant at first but had no other option.

While the three previous respondents made a decision to enter into prostitution activities, Chandra was forced after a relative sold her into prostitution. Chandra stated:

I was married when I was 15 years old . . . One year after my marriage my husband left me. There was nothing to do in the village and we were very poor.

It is likely that Chandra was viewed as unmarriageable after the dissolution of her first marriage. Being viewed as another mouth to feed in the context of a poor family, may have led to her sale into sex slavery.

The second theme was related to an abusive marriage. Approximately 19 percent ($n = 9$) indicated that they entered into prostitution activities as a way to escape marital abuse. Both sex-trafficked women and voluntary women attributed their entry into prostitution to an abusive marriage in whole or part. One respondent, Salima (who was not trafficked), stated that she 'was fed up with everyday quarrels and beating' and decided to leave her husband and move to Mumbai with her three children. She did not want to work in a 'red light area', but she 'couldn't find any other work for almost 15 days'. As an illiterate woman, she felt that she 'didn't have any skills' to contribute towards her livelihood. She 'entered prostitution for the survival' of herself and her children.

Sameera (who was not trafficked), too, managed to flee her abusive marriage to find prostitution activities as her only option. Sameera stated:

My husband beat me up regularly and made me do all the house work. His other wife did not do anything in the house. I stayed with him for two years and later ran away from the village with another friend (girl).

Shanta, who was trafficked, also discussed the impact of marital abuse on her entry into prostitution. Shanta stated:

He [Shanta's husband] was an alcoholic . . . [and] he started abusing me again. I decided to run away again, but this time I decided to go to my sister's house. While on my way, three men took me to a forest nearby and raped me . . . I left for the railway station. At the station I met two women and one man. They lured me to Bombay . . . They asked me to work as a housemaid. They brought me to Kamathipura's bungalow number 3 where I spent three years serving the customers.

The third theme was related to a history of childhood sexual abuse. Approximately 13 percent ($n = 6$) of respondents indicated that they resorted to prostitution after being raped, sexually harassed, or inappropriately touched as children and as a result left their respective villages to get away from the shame, guilt, or humiliation. Both sex-trafficked women and non-sex trafficked women attributed their entry into prostitution to childhood sexual abuse in whole or part. Mona, who is considered trafficked because she entered prostitution at the age of 11, stated:

Many men had tried to touch me when I was growing up . . . I choose to get into the profession and thought to myself that rather than getting raped on the roads I would at least get some money out of the same work.

Gauri (who was trafficked) stated that one of her 'neighbors raped' her as a child, but her 'sister would not believe' her. Having lost both of her parents as an infant, she had nowhere to go except to the streets. It was then that she met a couple who told her they would help her find a job. They subsequently sold her in the '17th lane of Kamathipura for 5000 rupees'. It is clear that many women face ostracism from family and/or community as a result of sexual assault. To escape this shaming, a woman may choose to flee her village and later end up in a sex-trafficked situation.

Finally, the last theme was related to the death of one or more parents or a husband. Eight percent ($n = 4$) of respondents indicated that they became entangled in trafficking activities after the death of one or more parents or a husband. Susham (who was trafficked) stated:

My mother died when I was eight months old and my father died seven years ago. I used to stay with my older sister. I was lured to Mumbai by a business man . . . He then sold me . . .

Minal (who was not trafficked) stated:

I entered prostitution seven years ago on my own will after my husband's death.

For Susham, her mother's death made her vulnerable to sex trafficking, whereas Minal indicated that she entered knowingly after the death of her husband.

A description of the process of entry into prostitution:

Acquaintances and family

The second research question in this study asked, 'How do respondents describe the process of entry into prostitution?'. Nearly 70 percent ($n = 32$) of respondents in this study identified acquaintances and family members (i.e. husbands, mothers-in-law, and uncles/aunts) as facilitators of their entry into prostitution.

Acquaintances. Approximately 46 percent ($n = 22$) of the time, the sex trafficker was someone the respondent had met recently and/or had known for some time but not very well. Most respondents disclosed that they were

deceived into believing they would find good work as housekeepers and entertainers in Mumbai upon their arrival in the city, only to find that they had been sold into brothel prostitution without their consent. Often the woman would be dropped off at a particular location for 'work' and left in a room alone for a short time, only to find out minutes later by a male or female brothel owner that they had just been sold into prostitution for a specified amount of rupees by the individual who had accompanied them there.

Monika (who was trafficked) stated,

10 days after my marriage my husband had divorced me. I was misled by a person from my village who said that I can earn quite a lot in Mumbai by working as a household help. I believed her and she brought me here and sold me in a bungalow in 12th lane. There I was forced to do sex work and never got any money.

Susham (who was trafficked) stated:

I was lured to Mumbai by a business man from the Marwari caste on the pretext of looking after children. He then sold me . . .

Pooja (who was trafficked) stated:

In my family my brothers started exploring about my marriage when I was 13 years old. I didn't want marriage so I spoke with a friend whose mother was working in Mumbai. I expressed my desire to run away to Mumbai so that I will be a film star. She promised to help me and called her mother who informed that she has contacts with directors and can help me. She also said I can come over to Mumbai with her son . . . I collected all my nice clothes, jewelry and some money and ran away from home . . . I was then informed that I have to entertain customers and earn the money.

Dolly (who was not trafficked) stated:

When I was 22 years old (by then I was married and a mother of a one and a half year old son) a man asked me to come with him. He said 'I will give you a job'. At the same time I had a fight with my husband on some issue and I slept on the road. Then that man asked me again and I got up from the bed and came with that man to Mumbai. He tried to sell me but I was not sold as I was too thin and not liked by others. My first customer raped me. Then I thought let me make it a profession itself. There anyway is no other option.

Each of these respondents entered prostitution under the pretense that they would receive employment as a housekeeper, nanny, or Bollywood film star. Further, all except Dolly were sold to the sex industry.

Relatives. Approximately 30 percent of respondents indicated that their entry into prostitution was facilitated by a husband, a mother-in-law, and/or an uncle or aunt. Below are the statements of two women whose uncle or aunt facilitated their entry.

Chandra (who was trafficked) stated:

My maternal uncle brought me to Kamathipura and sold me at a brothel in Alexandra (Kamathipura).

Pushpa (who was trafficked) stated:

After my mother left me with the aunty without telling me I asked the aunty about her. She told me that my mother has gone to the bazaar to buy some stuff. She misled me for a few days and I stayed with the aunty in her room with the brothel owner.

The majority of the trafficked respondents reported being forced to live behind closed doors of brothels for several years after being trafficked, while being denied any social contact outside of prostitution activities. They also reported being forced by brothel-keepers and pimps to take clients, thereby being devoid of all decision-making powers.

Discussion

The results of this research are similar to prior research on trafficking in India (Mukherjee and Das, 1996; Nair, 2003; Rozario, 1998; Sen, 2003; Silverman et al., 2006). However, this research is unique as it provides first person accounts for respondents' reasons and processes of entry into prostitution. Many of the respondents were trafficked into prostitution activities and were living as prostitutes in Kamathipura at the time of this research. These interviews highlight the voices of trafficked prostitutes living in the profession, unlike other research studies conducted in this area. The majority of the respondents mentioned being forced and trafficked into prostitution, while others talked about joining the profession 'on their own will'. However, in both cases, poverty, marital abuse, sexual abuse, and the death of a parent or husband were the main reasons for entry into prostitution. Family members or acquaintances sold the majority of the trafficked women into prostitution. This study contributes to the literature on women who live in vulnerable environments and subsequently end up in prostitution. Specifically, this research helps to explain the circumstances behind the history of many women who end up in India's Kamathipura red-light

area. The results identify these women and explain the trajectory of their entry into prostitution. The results also reveal the dark role of family members and acquaintances of women subjected to prostitution.

Despite these contributions, however, this research does present some potential limitations. First of all, sampling bias may have played a role in data collection efforts because researchers were led by CCDT workers to particular locations to secure respondents. This may have resulted in sampling bias because subjects who worked in prostitution areas outside the CCDT's service delivery area may have been unfairly excluded. Moreover, the snowballing technique led women who were known to CCDT staff or their selected subjects to be invited to be a part of this research project. This may have excluded other potential subjects from being a part of this study. Five different researchers also collected the data. As a result, the data run the risk of being collected with slight variance despite training to ensure consistency between researchers. The data were collected in two languages: Hindi and Marathi. Translations then put the data at risk for being misinterpreted or having lost some of its meaning during the translation process. The interview guide was originally in English. It was later translated into Hindi and Marathi so that the interviews could be conducted in two of the local languages. After the interviews, respondents' remarks (in Hindi and Marathi) were translated into English. Furthermore, the interviewers translated the data themselves. This too could lead to variances in data collected and subsequent interpretations. Additionally, the interviews were not recorded. All data are the result of handwritten notes that were later translated and paraphrased by the individual researchers. The integrity of the original data were maintained in many instances with verbatim remarks, however, although some of the data were paraphrased into the third person. This type of data analysis runs the risk of over-involvement and misinterpretation on the researcher's part.

Conclusion

This research has implications for policy in India, social work practice, and social work research. First, our study indicates that sex trafficking continues to exist in India despite laws that are in place to abolish it. Currently there is a common law that governs sex trafficking and prostitution in India. This in itself is problematic as most law enforcement agencies are unsure about the distinction between trafficking and prostitution and end up arresting victims of sex trafficking for soliciting sex instead of arresting traffickers and pimps. The current law is confusing and is implemented differently in different regions of the country (Menen, 2009). The traffickers take advantage of the

various loopholes in this law to continue criminal activity without the fear of being penalized. The traffickers are rarely arrested, and even if they are arrested, they are released on bail time (Menen, 2009; personal communication CCDT Staff, November 2008). Therefore, a stronger law and better enforcement of the law for combating sex trafficking are needed in India. Stiffer penalties are required to combat trafficking and to squelch bribery in law enforcement that encourages police officers to ignore the illegality of underage prostitution. Thus, the costs of sex trafficking (e.g. penalties for transporting trafficking victims and penalties for housing trafficking victims) must outweigh the potential benefits.

Second, this research study has implications for social work practice. Social work organizations in Kamathipura currently do not make a distinction between trafficking victims and women in prostitution. This research indicates the importance of making this distinction for providing specialized services and facilities and catering to the different needs of women involved in prostitution and those who are trafficked. Currently, the majority of the social work organizations in Kamathipura are working on HIV prevention and care and support; crisis intervention and counseling services to women in prostitution; and provision of day and night shelters for women and their children in Kamathipura. However, there are limited social work interventions for sex trafficking in Kamathipura. Currently, a few social workers work alongside law enforcement authorities to rescue women and children from brothels of Kamathipura. However, these victims are sent to government shelters, which pose additional threat and danger to them. Social workers can work toward providing safe homes and exploring alternatives for vocational training and employment for rescued women. Social workers can work on building capacity within the community and train women to be 'peer educators' for spreading awareness about sex trafficking. These women can identify victims and make referrals to social work organizations. They can also be instrumental in identifying traffickers and pimps and work closely with law enforcement to penalize criminals.

As previously stated, many of the participants in our study were deceived and coerced into prostitution. The education of women and girls, as well as family and community members, is needed to increase social awareness of the problem of sex trafficking. Social work practitioners located inside their respective communities would best provide the task of education, as they are most adept at understanding the needs of community residents. Several participants reported the incidence of sexual assault and rape that led to their ostracism from households and communities, which increased their vulnerability to be trafficked. Education is needed that attempts to reduce

the stigma around sexual abuse and rape and holds perpetrators accountable. Finally, many of the participants discussed the ease with which they were disposed of because of their sex. Education is needed around sex-related gender norms, as well as the promotion of equality between the sexes.

Last, this study has implications for social work research. Our study included women who were trafficked into prostitution against their will and now continue in the profession. While our study effectively describes these women's experiences of trafficking, we do not explore the circumstances surrounding their continued involvement in prostitution, nor do we examine the transition from sex trafficking victim to sex worker. Additionally, research is needed that examines the motivations of traffickers, especially acquaintances and their perceptions of victims of trafficking.

This research highlights the severity of sex trafficking in Mumbai. Sex trafficking is illegal in India, but law enforcement is weak. Women and children continue to be sold in brothels of Kamathipura on a regular basis (Frederick, 2000). There is a lack of response from government officials to rescue and rehabilitate victims, while social work initiatives to combat trafficking are inadequate. This research not only highlights the exploitation suffered by victims of sex trafficking in the area, but it also provides recommendations to social workers for responding to the needs of victims of sex.

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