

Sex work characteristics of Female Sex Workers (FSWs) in Ahmedabad city



Medical Science

KEYWORDS : FSWs, solicitation

Dr. Vaibhavi Patel	Assistant Professor, Community Medicine Department, AMC MET Medical College, Maninagar, Ahmedabad
Dr. Bhavna Puwar	Assistant Professor, Community Medicine Department, AMC MET Medical College, Maninagar, Ahmedabad
Dr. Sheetal Vyas	Professor and Head, Community Medicine Department, AMC MET Medical College, Maninagar, Ahmedabad

ABSTRACT

As per NACO about an estimated 1% of the adult women in India are engaged in sex work. This cross sectional study was done in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation during April–May-2010. Mean age of FSWs was 32.85±7.6 and mean age of first sexual contact was 18.39±2.53 years. 30% were illiterate and 63% were married. More than one place were used by FSWs for solicitation and brothel was most common. Age, marital status and income/client were not significantly associated while duration of sex work and average no. of clients/day were significantly associated with place of solicitation. Inverse association was found between age and average no. of clients/day and between age and income/client. Conclusions: Solicitation of clients occurs through more than one place.

Introduction :

FSW is an adult woman who engages in consensual sex for money or payment in kind, as her principal means of livelihood.[1] Sex work is widespread in India. Women often get involved in sex work due to poverty, marital break-up or because they are forced into it.[2] Sex workers form an important target group for HIV/STI prevention because, the high incidence of HIV, their role as 'core groups' and targeted programmes have been shown to be feasible and cost effective.[3] In India HIV prevalence is generally 10 to 20% or more among FSWs.[1] It is difficult to envisage a decrease in the numbers of FSWs affected with HIV/AIDS unless the basic factors are addressed. Data on various aspects of sex work like no of their clients, place of solicitation and age of first sexual contact could assist in increasing the reach of HIV prevention activities for them.

Methodology:

A Cross sectional descriptive type study was carried out in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation area during April–May-2010. In the present study 10% of total registered (3500) FSWs were included by systematic sampling method, thus it was decided to select 350 FSWs but practically 353 FSWs were included. Pre-designed and pre-tested proforma was used for collection of data from the respondents. The data collectors were trained. The information from the FSWs was collected by personal interview after obtaining the written consent. Five percent sample was concurrently cross checked by the investigators and feedback was given to the data collectors. Data so collected were analyzed with Epi info version 3.5.1. Percentages, Proportions, Mean, Standard Deviation and suitable statistical tests were calculated.

Results :

Mean age of FSWs was 32.85±7.6 years, and their age ranged from 18 to 55 years. 30% of FSWs were illiterate. 222(63%) FSWs were married. Proportion of married to unmarried / widow/divorcee/ separated was 1.7: 1. Half of the FSWs were in this profession since >10 years. The mean age of first sexual contact was 18.39 ± 2.53 years and the age range of first sexual contact was 10 to 29. About half of FSWs (49.3%) had first sexual contact with their relatives whereas about 125(35.4%) had with their husband. Among 189(53.54%) FSWs the most common reason cited for accepting this profession was money. 31% of FSWs had not disclosed their profession to either husband or other family members. Average no. of clients/day ranged from 1 to 12, and among 229(64.9%) FSWs it was 1 to 5. When asked about income/client, 232(65.72%) FSWs were getting <Rs 100/client and 121(34.28%) were getting >Rs.100. (Table- 1) Place of solicitation is the place from where the FSWs solicit the clients. The place of sex work may be different or may be the same as place of solicitation. Multiple responses were obtained re-

lated to the place of solicitation during the last one year which included mainly their homes, streets, recognized brothels and dhaba. Apart from this, solicitation was also done at other places which included massage parlors and beauty parlors. Streets included public places such as parks, railway stations, bus stands, markets or cinema halls. This typology was mainly derived from NACO's categorization. [1] As mentioned FSWs solicited through more than one place, when asked about the place of solicitation in last one year brothel scored highest with 142(40.2%), followed by home 136(38.5%), street 114(32.3%), others 62(17.6%) and lastly dhaba(12.5%), thus indicating that brothel and home were utilized more commonly for solicitation. Brothel was most preferred by FSW in 20 to 29 years age group(47.93%). Among FSWs >44 yrs home was most commonly used (52.6%). Age of FSWs was not significantly associated with place of solicitation (p=0.57). Among married FSWs highest used place was home (40.9%) and among single it was brothel (47.3%). However marital status of FSWs was not significantly associated with place of solicitation. Among FSWs working since <10 years, home was most commonly used (55.9%) and among FSWs working since >10 years, brothel (26.7%). Association between duration of sex work and place of solicitation was statistically highly significant (p<0.0001). The proportion of FSWs having 1 to 5 clients/day was more in brothel (44.9%), home (41%) and street (37.1 %) and proportion of FSW who had average >5 clients/day was more in dhaba(23.3%) and other places (26.6%). There was highly significant association of average number clients/day and place of solicitation. The proportion of FSWs having income <Rs.100 was more in home (38.7%) and dhaba (13.3%) in comparison to FSWs having income >Rs.100 which was more in brothel (44.6%) and street (42.1%). Income/clients was not significantly associated with place of solicitation.(Table 2) Bivariate analysis was done and current age of FSWs was correlated with the different variables of sex work. It was found that there was an inverse association between age and average no. of clients/day (p=0.9452) and a significant inverse association between age and income/client (p=0.0027). (Table-3)

Discussions. :

Three fourth FSWs belonged to the younger age group (15-39 yrs). Mean age of FSWs was 32.85± 7.6 years which was similar to a study in Andhra Pradesh.[4] 30% of FSWs were illiterate and 63% were married. Majority of FSWs had average 1 to 5 clients/per day and majority earned <Rs.100/client. FSWs had solicited through more than one place. The study finding showed that brothel was the most commonly used place for soliciting clients (40.2%), while in another study in southern India found streets as the most common place.[5] Brothel was highest used place among younger (20-29 years) age group of FSWs this was similar to another study by Rakhi Dandona et al[6] while

home was highest used among >44 years age group. The brothel based FSWs tended to be younger as compared to home and street based which indicated brothel usually employed young women. However the age of FSWs was not significantly associated with place of solicitation. Similar to BSS[2] our study also reported highest used place among married FSWs as home and among single FSWs, brothel. Safety might be one of the reasons in case of single FSWs to choose brothel for sex work. However marital status of FSWs was not significantly associated with place of solicitation (p-0.47). Our study found the association of place of solicitation with duration of sex work and average number clients/day statistically highly significant, another study in south India also found significant association.[6] Those FSWs who had higher client volumes have a higher risk of getting HIV infection, requiring special focus. The proportion of FSWs having income Rs <100/clients was highest in home and having income Rs.>100/clients was highest in brothel. In this study Income/client was not significantly associated with place of solicitation. It was found that there was an inverse association between age and average no. of clients/day which was similar to another study from south India.[6] and a significant inverse association between age and income/client.

Conclusion :

Clients are solicited at more than one place by FSWs, thus problem may be faced in providing services to them, brothel being most used place, prevention activities for HIV/AIDS must focus more on brothel. Second most common place is home so there are chances that some of the FSWs may not be reached by the program. Avoiding disclosure of their FSWs status to husband and family may play a role in HIV transmission.

Table-1: Socio demographic variable and Sex work characteristics.

Variable	Frequency (n=353)	Percent
Duration of sex work(yrs)		
1-5	71	20.1
6-10	106	30

>10	176	49.9
Age at first sexual contact(yrs)		
<15	35	9.9
15-19	199	56.4
20-24	111	31.4
25-29	8	2.3
Partner of first sexual contact		
Relatives	174	49.3
Husband	125	35.4
Friends	51	14.5
Neighbor	3	0.8
Main Reason for accepting FSW profession		
Money	189	53.54
By force	108	30.59
Pleasure	52	14.73
Do not want to disclose	4	1.13
Status as FSW known		
Husband	137	38.8
Family member other than husband	108	30.6
No body	108	30.6
No of clients/day		
1-5	229	64.87
>5	124	35.13
Income/clients(Rs.)		
≤100	232	65.72
>100	121	34.28

Table-2: Socio-demographic variables versus place of solicitation.

Variable	Place of solicitation*(n=353)					P Value
	Home	Street	Brothel	Dhaba	Others	
Age(years)(n=353)	136 (38.5%)	114 (32.3%)	142 (40.2%)	44 (12.5%)	62 (17.6%)	
15-19(n=6)	0(0)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	1(16.7)	3(50)	0.5749
20-24(n=44)	15(34.1)	14(31.8)	20(45.5)	8(18.2)	9(20.5)	
25-29(n=77)	32(41.6)	27(35.1)	38(49.4)	7(9.1)	17(22.1)	
30-34(n=73)	26(35.6)	20(27.4)	24(32.9)	14(19.2)	11(15.1)	
35-39(n=70)	27(38.6)	23(32.9)	25(35.7)	10(14.3)	10(14.3)	
40-44(n=45)	16(35.6)	17(37.8)	20(44.4)	1(2.2)	6(13.3)	
>44(n=38)	20(52.6)	12(31.6)	14(36.8)	3(7.9)	6(15.8)	
Marital Status(n)						
Married(n=222)	91(40.9)	71(31.9)	80(36.1)	27(12.2)	40(18)	0.47
Single#(n=131)	45(34.3)	43(32.8)	62(47.3)	17(12.9)	22(16.7)	
Duration of work						
≤10(n=177)	99(55.9)	71(40.1)	95(53.6)	13(7.3)	25(14.12)	<0.0001
>10(n=176)	37(21.0)	43(24.4)	47(26.7)	31(17.6)	37(21.0)	
No of clients						
1-5(n=229)	94(41)	85(37.1)	103(44.9)	15(6.5)	29(12.6)	<0.0001
>5(n=124)	42(33.8)	29(23.3)	39(31.4)	29(23.3)	33(26.6)	
Income/clients(Rs.)						
≤100(n=232)	90(38.7)	63(27.1)	88(37.9)	31(13.3)	35(15.1)	0.2576
>100(n=121)	46(38)	51(42.1)	54(44.6)	13(10.7)	27(22.31)	

* Row percentages are based on the numbers of FSWs so total percent in each row is greater than 100 because of multiple places used for solicitation.

Unmarried, Divorcee, Separated

Table-3 Age of FSWs versus different variables of sex work.

Variables	r (correlation coefficient)	95% C.I.	P value
Age – no of clients	-0.003675	-0.1082 to 0.1009	0.9452
Age – income per clients	-0.1593	-0.2595 to -0.0556	0.0027

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