

Research Paper

Commercial sex work and suicide attempts influence of family among the female commercial sex workers

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study was initiated to explore the role of family in women taking up commercial sex work and also its influence on the suicide attempts among female commercial sex workers (CSW's). **Methodology:** 300 Female CSWs who were referred to Victoria Hospital, a tertiary care centre in Bengaluru, India by an NGO were the sample for the study. **Results:** The findings threw light on the fact that the choice of these women in taking up commercial sex activity had a very strong family background and that their suicide attempts also was influenced by the family which proved a strong genetic predisposition. Suicidal attempts which was seen among the family members who practised or are practising sex work was more compared to the group of commercial sex workers who have no family history of sex work.

Keywords: Family History of Commercial Sex Work, Suicide Attempts

Commercial sex work in simple terms means 'selling sexual services for material/commercial/economic gains. The ancient roots of it may be found in many historical accounts of Buddhist literature, Kautilya's Arthashastra, Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata etc. The Purana states that very sight of prostitutes brings good luck. The act had religious and cultural sanction and these women enjoyed considerable respect within social hierarchy as the courtesans of king.

In south India especially in Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and a little above in Maharashtra and Orissa there were dancers dedicated to the temples called Devadasis. The kings invited these temple dancers to dance in their courts, the occurrence of which created a new category of dancers, the Rajadasis and about the practice of parents dedicating their daughters to a temple with the belief that they would receive moksha or salvation. So there has been a tradition of practising sex work in the family.

Design: This longitudinal study was conducted in the Department of Psychiatry, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, Bangalore India. A total of 300 female commercial sex workers (CSWs) between the age of 18 years to 50 years who have been into this trade

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from 1 year to more than 10 years were chosen for this study a detailed history of their family especially in this profession and suicide attempts were noted all physical co morbidities, HIV and STD's in these women were ruled out.

METHODOLOGY

300 female commercial sex workers from 1 year to 10 years of experience were chosen for this study a detailed history about their socio demographic details, family history of sex work and suicide attempt history in the family among the women involved in sex work was noted on a proforma (Appendix I).

The sociodemographic details revealed that these women belonged to low to middle socioeconomic status (Kuppuswamy's classification) and a majority of i.e., 80 % of them were Hindus while 12% were Muslims and 8% followed Christianity.

The number of suicide attempts among the family members who had a history of commercial sex work also gave an insight regarding the psychodynamics of genetics.

RESULTS

A total number of 300 CSWs aged between 18 to 50 years were taken up for this study that have been in this field since 1 year to 10 years.

The report revealed that of the 300 CSW's, 130 had their mothers, 89 had their sisters and 45 had their aunts in the field of commercial sex work and 36 of them had no family history of CSW.

Among the 130 mothers who had CSW history 120 had suicide attempts, of the 89 sisters who had CSW history 84 had suicide attempts, among 45 aunts who had CSW history 42 had suicide attempts and 54 of them had no suicide attempts.

Many of the study participants nearly 240 of them did not have any knowledge that their families were involved in commercial sex work until they started it as their own profession and many a times till they had attempted suicide after which it was brought to the light.

Study participants also revealed that it was their financial factor which made them take up this profession to make the ends meet as a majority of them reported alcoholic, abusive husbands.

Suicide attempts among the participants revealed that it was the guilt factor which pushed them to consider suicide.

DISCUSSION

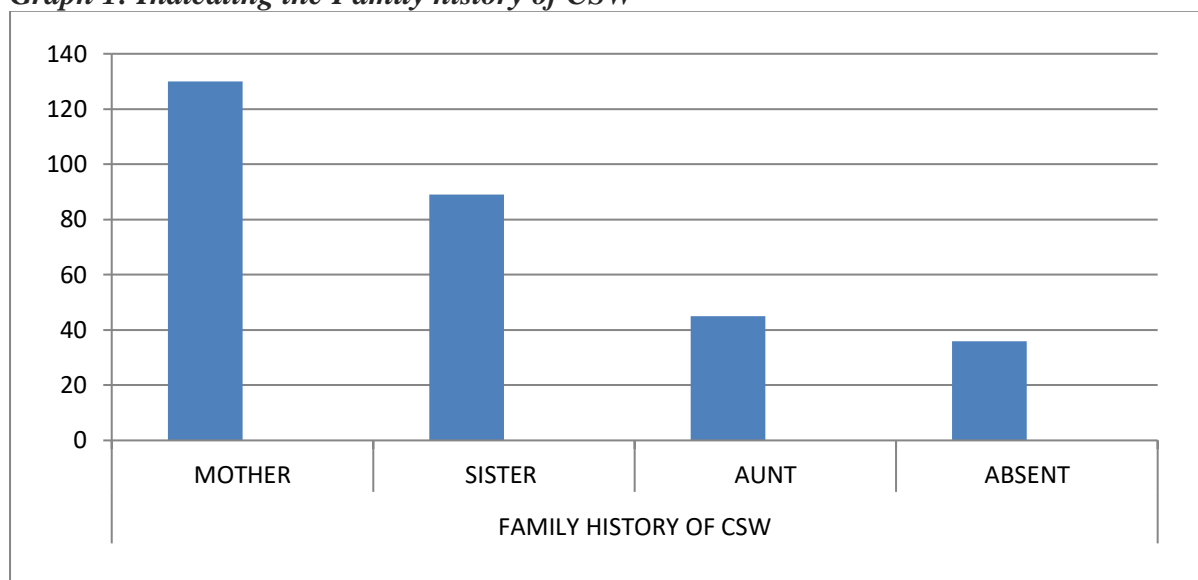
There is a very strong relationship between these women and their family history of commercial sex work with mothers being the highest followed by sisters and aunts.

Table 1: Family History of commercial sex work

FAMILY HISTORY OF CSW			
MOTHER	SISTER	AUNT	ABSENT
130	89	45	36

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Graph 1: Indicating the Family history of CSW

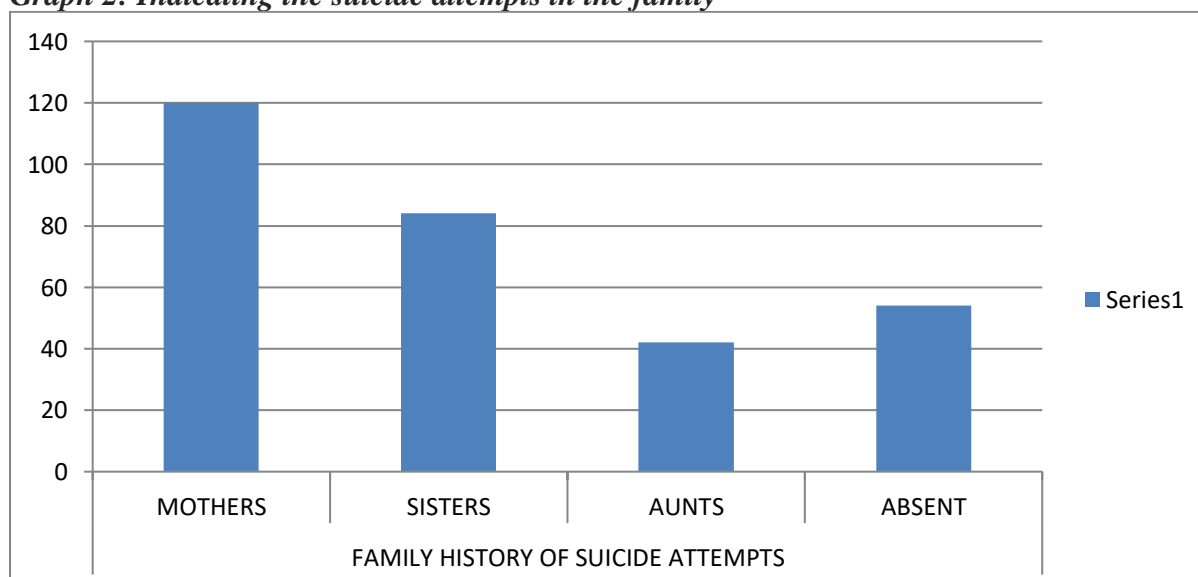


The suicide attempt that has been noted also like family history of CSW reveals that the highest number was seen among mothers followed by sisters and aunts.

Table 2: Indicating suicide attempts in the family

FAMILY HISTORY OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS			
MOTHERS	SISTERS	AUNTS	ABSENT
120	84	42	54

Graph 2: Indicating the suicide attempts in the family



FAMILY HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL SEX WORK AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

For every death by suicide there are as many as 25 suicide attempts, which can result in serious injury even when not fatal. Despite this large impact on morbidity and mortality, the genetic influences on suicide attempt are poorly understood. However, in our study the fact

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that commercial sex work and suicidal attempts among the study participants has been correlated.

The Devadasi tradition that ran in the families whether it is socially induced or a genetic predisposition cannot be ruled out. the fact that these women who participated in our study were unaware that this sex work ran into their family until they stumbled upon it after they had started practising it themselves and it is their peer group who introduced them into this profession and not their families once they realised they had their families into this profession there was guilt, shame experienced but later the family stood by these women and also advised them of quitting sex work and rehabilitating them like themselves .

Major Findings

- Of the 300 CSWs in the study except 36 women all others had a family history of CSW activity.
- Among the family members of the 300 CSWs 54 did not report any suicidal attempts.
- The study throws light on the fact that there is a strong history of commercial sex work and suicidal attempts among the family members of these women involved in commercial sex work.

Future Implications

- Many family members of these women are still practising CSW activity majority being the sisters and aunts.
- Rehabilitation of these women would be a priority if they willingly approve to quit this profession.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasises the fact that there is a strong association and influence of family history and suicidal attempts among the female commercial sex workers.

Limitations

- The information was given by the participants of the study and their family members were not directly interviewed by us.
- The sample being an urban one which visited the outpatient department of the Psychiatry department was taken up for the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Appendix I

Data Key Sheet

Socio-demographic Profile

1. Name (.....)
2. Age: (.....)
3. Sex: (0-Female)
4. Religion (0-H 1-M 2-C 3-others)
5. Marital status (0-Unmarried 1-Married 2-Separated 3-Divorced 4-Widow)
6. Income/month (0-3,000-4,900 1-5,000-6,900 2-7, 000-9, 900)
7. No. of children (0-no children, 1-1 2-2 3-3 4-4)
8. Sex of the children (0-male 1-female)
9. No. of years into CSW activity (0-6 months 1-1 year 2-1 to 5 years 3-5 to 10 years 4-10 years and more)
10. Family history of CSW: 0- nil/ 1-mother/2- sister/ 3- aunt)
11. family psychiatric history (suicide): (0-absent 1-1 attempt 2-2 attempts 3-3 attempts)
12. Do you consent to participate in this study: (0-yes 1-no)