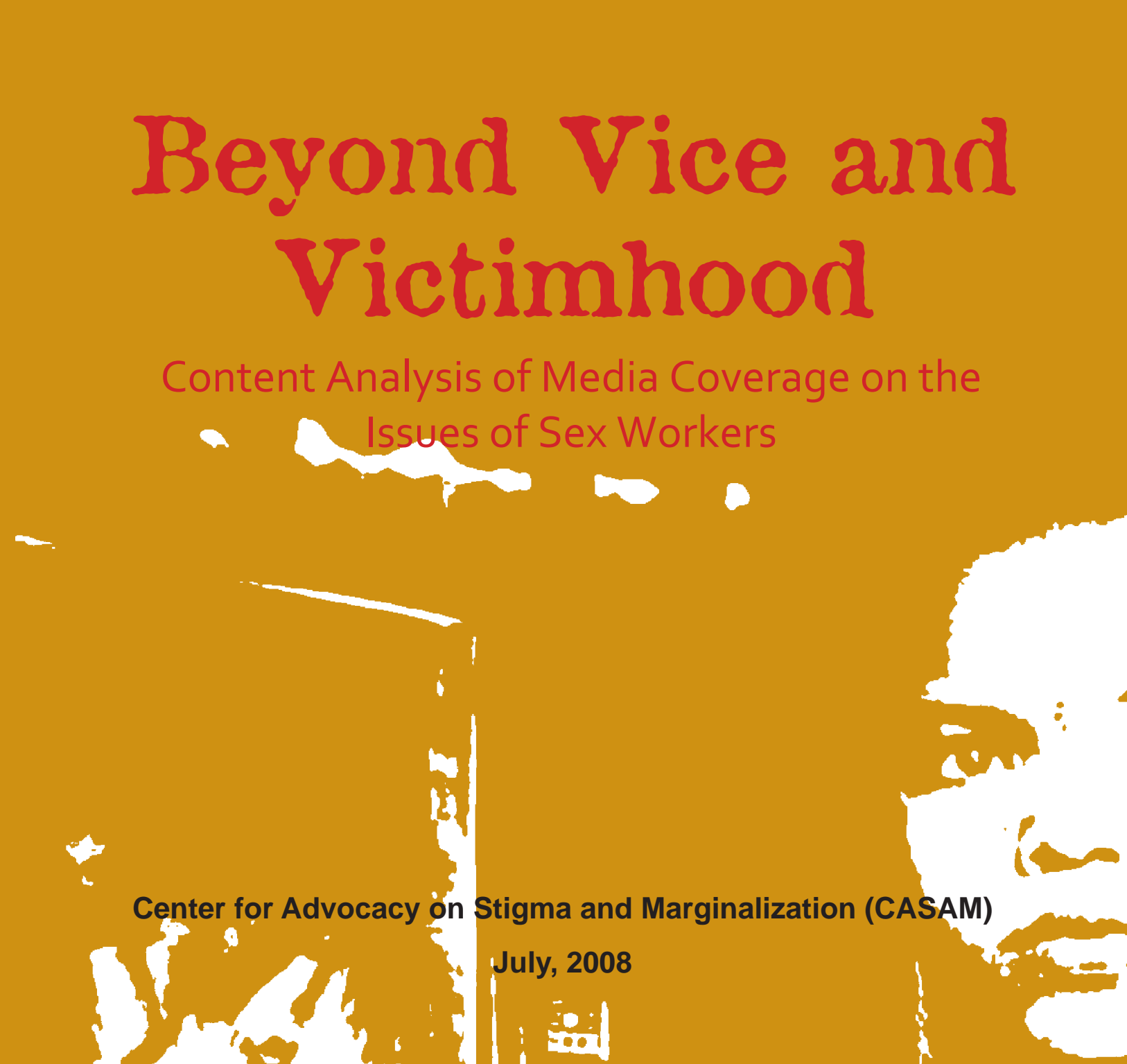


Beyond Vice and Victimhood

Content Analysis of Media Coverage on the
Issues of Sex Workers

Center for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization (CASAM)

July, 2008



Beyond Vice and Victimhood

Content Analysis of Media Coverage on the Issues of Sex Workers
Monograph Series 1.

Published by:
Sampada Gramin Mahila Sanstha [SANGRAM]

Arohan, Ghanshyam Nagar,
Madhavnagar Road,
Sangli – 416416, Maharashtra
India

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SANGRAM

July 2008

The publication of this document has been supported by the Ford Foundation.
However, the views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Ford Foundation.

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About this monograph

This monograph is an attempt to examine the representation of sex workers and presentation of issues related to sex work and sex workers in the English print media through a micro-study of 1059 English-language newspaper/periodical clippings from a little over a decade starting in 1990. It comprises three in-depth analyses based on the extent of, the trends surrounding, and the nature of coverage of sex workers and their issues.

The study explores the nature of presentation as well as representation and patterns over the years with reference to sex workers in print media in general and the English-language press in particular. The aim of the study was to examine media coverage of sex work to seek some clarity on the amount, extent, quality, and depth of this coverage and work towards improving the reportage on sex workers' issues in print media. The clippings were obtained from *Aalochana*, a Pune-based women's research and documentation centre.

The study was originally carried out by Vidya Kulkarni, independent writer-photographer and women's rights activist and journalist Dipti Raut, for a media monitoring exercise initiated by CASAM (Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization), a project of SANGRAM working with sex workers in Maharashtra.

Dr Mira Desai, SNDT University, Mumbai, was associated with the project at a later stage and helped redesign the tool for the analysis of the data provided by CASAM. The coded data was provided by Meena Seshu, Director of SANGRAM. Dr Desai records the quantitative analysis of the news clippings and draws conclusions about patterns over the years.

Journalist and media analyst Geeta Seshu examined the nature of coverage on a gamut of issues from HIV/AIDS, debates and discussions on sex work, trafficking, policies on raids and rescue, as well as overarching notions of morality. Her impressions and analysis are also part of this monograph.

Editorial inputs were provided by Laxmi Murthy, feminist activist and journalist, currently Associate Editor, *Himal Southasian*, Kathmandu. We also take this opportunity to thank Roshmi Goswami of Ford Foundation who supported this monograph.

Media coverage of Sex Workers: Between Vice and Victimhood

The Hindustan Times on 16.02.2001 carried a story on census with headline **“Thieves, Sex workers labeled as beggars in the census.”** Beggars in official parlance mean non-workers. The story says – when asked why criminals and sex-workers were being termed as ‘beggars’, Delhi Census Director Ms. Bimla Jangdar said that it was because their method of making money was not legitimate. It is because of their illegal activities that they are being listed as beggars. Same is the case with prostitutes. “If we list them as members of the ‘working class’ it will mean a blow to those who earn money by hard labour.”

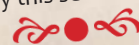
The headline **“Job status for prostitution”** in the Indian Express on 29.07.92 carried news of a proposal to declare prostitution as an occupation and treating prostitutes on par with factory workers. The proposal was mooted by Director of Maharashtra Health Services and was in no way meant to protect rights of women in prostitution but rather to control AIDS. In his opinion, “The spread of virus through prostitution can be checked only if prostitution is considered as an occupation and sexually transmitted diseases as occupational hazards. Once they are treated at par with factory workers, they would be eligible for periodical health check-ups.”

“Sex workers’ children asked to get out of school”, says the headline which appeared in the Times of India, on 26.12.99. The news talks about a happening in a pre-primary school in Turbhe run by a NGO for the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation. The social workers associated with the NGO convinced a few sex workers staying in the area to send their children to school. According to the social worker, “When we managed to convince a few sex workers to send their children to school, it was a very positive step. But soon we found that local people were up in arms about this. We managed to accommodate five such children, but pressure is mounting on us from the local community to remove them from school.”

“200 minors forced into prostitution daily” a story by Shivani Singh in [newspaper not known] New Delhi appeared on 3.08.97, is perhaps an apt example of sensational reporting. This special news, referring to an NCW study, says driven by economic compulsions, their socio-religious status and caste equations, nearly 200 minor girls in the country enter flesh trade everyday. The news in a special box gives vivid details of how these girl children are Forced Serve and is very sensational by nature. Sensationalism of any kind is likely to divert attention from real facts about

and causes of child prostitution. The news **“Khairnar assaulted with beer bottles”**, appeared in the Asian Age on 24.06.97 says ex-deputy municipal commissioner on his mission to rescue prostitutes, sex workers protested and threw bottles. The tone of the report and its headline create negative impression upon the reader, who may think that sex workers are unnecessarily meddling in a well-meaning effort. Through his organisation Savdhan he had rescued over 450 women in that period– as usual, without any long-term plan of rehabilitation or even a short-term plan of shelter. Therefore sex workers were against his ‘rescue mission’. Khairnar’s action got into the limelight and not the plight of women, who were not happy with this forced rescue operation.

“Restaurants to feed sex workers” said a news-report published in the Times of India on 19.12.92, just two weeks after the Babri Masjid demolition. The news said city’s daily wage earners, including sex workers, were worst hit by the aftermath of Ayodhya and presented how an NGO in collaboration with local restaurants made arrangements for sex workers to get food, diverting their funds for condom distribution for this immediate need. Over 800 women were benefited by this service.



CHAPTER 1

Why Media Analysis?

The researchers' association with mainstream, as well as alternative print media for over a decade, has, among other issues, led to questioning the manner in which gender issues are reflected in mainstream newspapers. We have observed a definite change in terms of increased coverage and visibility given to women's issues over the years. Several newspapers, especially regional dailies, even come out with regular special supplements on women. While the quantitative increase is certainly a welcome change, there is much to be desired in the areas quality of coverage of what goes under 'women's' issues.

There is a strikingly inadequate representation of women and their issues. Women who are marginalized in society get very little media space. One of such marginalized sections of society is that of women in prostitution.

The researcher's personal observation was that media people typically remembered sex workers only around the World AIDS Day, in the context of HIV/AIDS. Their other roles - as women, as mothers, as breadwinners, or even as citizens - fail to get media attention.


Apart from such stereotyped coverage, there are other significant consequences of the uneasy or infrequent engagement of media

with the community of sex workers. For instance, terminology to address the issues of these social groups remains underdeveloped. In Marathi, women in prostitution are referred as *dehvikray kamarya striya* (the women who sell their bodies), which is inaccurate, as a sex worker does not sell her body but gives sexual service. In English newspapers too, terms such as sex workers, commercial sex workers, and prostitutes are used interchangeably, although they have distinctly different undertones.

Newspapers influence and shape public opinion. English newspapers especially influence policy makers and reach a class of society that is engaged in decision-making. It is true that today the market forces drive the print media and the space given to social issues is shrinking. Despite this, the media is still seen as an agent of social change and possesses a strong social responsibility. Moreover the readers do expect their newspapers to inform them about events and provide expert opinions about them.

Apart from its role as a vehicle for information, the media, along with family, education, religious and political institutions, is today seen as an agent of socialization. Therefore media watchers and sociologists have been tracking the media's role in shaping values, ideas and opinions about society. Newspapers are also considered as more credible sources of news and expert opinions and therefore have more influence on the readers mind, especially on issues of marginalized groups like sex workers.

*Vidya Kulkarni is an independent writer-photographer and women's rights activist and Dipti Raut is a journalist working with print and broadcast media.



The study², based on the news clippings in major national dailies, attempts to analyze how the mainstream media has perceived and portrayed issues of sex workers.

The Study Period

The period -1990-2003- is significant as it provides a special context to the subject under enquiry. The decade saw intensified focus on programmes for checking spread of HIV/AIDS at the national as well as international levels. These have direct impact on sex workers, as they are primarily viewed as high-risk groups causing virus spread. The decade also saw the emergence of collectives of sex workers and a growing sex workers movement in many parts of the world, including India. Therefore the period also marks a shift in the discourse on the issues concerning them. Sex workers, who began to get organized in the wake of the AIDS epidemic in the process raised myriad issues related to the conditions of work, harassment from state agencies, trafficking, child prostitution, rehabilitation and its limitations, and the stigma and marginalization that they face routinely from society. Both these processes, for different and often contradictory reasons, have served to give visibility to women in prostitution.

HIV/AIDS concerns

During this decade, concern over the spread of HIV/AIDS intensified at the national and international levels. This has resulted in beginning of various interventions, backed by entry of huge funding, by the government and non-governmental agencies. In the initial period, sex workers were viewed as problems causing the virus spread, and therefore the programmes were targeted at them. Soon the need to work with them, and not against them, was realized as they were considered as part of the solution. From being branded as members of 'high risk groups'

to becoming active as 'peer educators' working for awareness on HIV and safe sex, sex workers have come a long way. Sex workers' collectives, especially, have worked hard to address vulnerabilities of sex workers in protecting themselves.

Collectives of Sex Workers

Though there is apparent consensus that the practice of sex-work is age-old, sex workers continue to constitute a marginalized group in our society. There is always an uneasiness and biased attitude towards sex workers. This mindset notwithstanding, the decade has also seen the coming together of sex workers to voice their demands. In the last decade we have seen a shift in the discourse on sex workers' issues. The sex workers' groups have challenged singular 'moralistic' perceptions of prostitution as exploitation of women. As a result the discourse has expanded to include critical issues of rights and vulnerabilities of sex workers, particularly in relation to health and violence, and legal rights. Of course, there are varied positions even among those who promote rights of sex workers. Although these debates have been vehemently contested and are as yet unresolved, they give us certain insights, listed below, to better understand the nature of sex work and issue sex workers;

- **Sex workers cannot be viewed as a homogenized group:** The term 'Sex worker' itself is not a homogeneous term. Sex workers can be differentiated according to their site of work (brothel-based and other), their mode of work (soliciting, call girls) and the structure within which they operate; that is the kind of 'industry' they are part of.
- **Sex worker and the Sex Industry:** Sex work as a structure or institution per se is not confined to the sex worker and the client alone. It includes other actors like the pimp, the brothel owner or madam, the police, quacks and doctors

²The researchers acknowledge Aalochana, a research and documentation center on women for access to its documentation. The enormous work of preliminary classification of over a thousand news clippings is done by social activist Lata Pratibha Madhukar. Thanks are also due to Geeta Seshu, journalist and media analyst, for her valuable suggestions and inputs. Shashikant Mane, Prashant Bhosale, Sarita Savadi, Natanya Robinowitz, B.R. Kamble and Shantilal Kale of SANGRAM spared time from their regular responsibilities for administering the schedule and data feeding. We are also thankful to the organizers of the Indian Social Science Congress (December 07) and Network of Women in Media (February 08) for giving us opportunity to share the study findings with social activists and media people respectively. Last but not the least, we thank Laxmi Murthy for providing editorial inputs.

and other health clinics in the area, shops in the area which have come up to cater to the sex workers, etc.

- **Denial of victimization:** At the national as well as international level, sex workers' groups have challenged the assumption that women in sex work are 'victims' in need of rehabilitation and protection.
- **Recognition of their involvement in tackling problems in the industry:** Sex workers need to be taken into confidence in tackling problems in sex work, be it child prostitution or checking spread of HIV, etc.
- **Legal interventions and their drawbacks/limitations:** Similarly limitations of present law (ITPA) have been experienced. The measures like raids to check child / forced sex work have also not proved effective enough or rather proved to be counter productive.
- **Legalization/decriminalization and other views:** Then of course there is the debate over 'legalization' of prostitution involving taking the subject outside the realm of criminal law, and advocates regulation of sex-work through zoning and licensing laws. Decriminalization on the other hand involves simply removing the issue from the ambit of criminal law.

Objectives of the study

All these deliberations have undoubtedly contributed to an enhanced understanding of sex work and sex workers. But while these debates may have been played out within organizations working with sex workers or in conferences and academic forums, how much have these issues been reflected in media coverage? Has the mainstream media discussed and covered these issues extensively or has its coverage been superficial and stereotypical? Has mainstream media provided different points of view on any issue or has it reinforced predominant notions? Has the media provided adequate space for voices of sex workers in an objective and accurate fashion? Above all, has the mainstream media adhered to its avowed principles of reportage in covering issues concerning sex work and sex workers?

The objectives of analyzing the selected newspaper clippings were:

1. To assess the nature of coverage about sex worker related news items in the national dailies.
2. To examine the nature of representation about sex work and sex workers in the national dailies.
3. To recommend the need for issues and representation related to sex workers, based on the present investigation.

Methodology

The sample - Data was accessed from news clippings during 1990 – 2003 from selected English newspapers and periodicals, compiled by *Aalochana*, research and documentation centre on women, based in Pune, Maharashtra. A total 1152 news clippings include situational and special news stories, articles, readers' letters and editorials.

Classification – Classification of the news clippings was done under following headings –

- a. Year/month-newspaper,
- b. Kind of story
- c. Issues covered by the story
- d. Dimensions of the sex workers' life covered in the story
- e. Perspective taken for the story
- f. News sources quoted by the journalist
- g. Treatment of the news story – types of word used, perception about sex work, representation of the sex worker, parties presented in the story, portrayal of the sex worker
- h. Content of the story and
- i. Geographical aspect of the story

Limitations - These news clippings published during 1990 to 2003 were made available through *Aalochana's* documentation. The researchers were unable to crosscheck whether these include all published in the period. The sample, however, is comprehensive enough to give a sense of what the study is aiming at. Another drawback was that the placement of the story (which page of the newspaper) could not be ascertained, as only clippings were available. Hence, the contextual importance given to it by newspapers could not be analyzed.

CONTENT ANALYSIS³

This study aimed to investigate media perspectives on the issue of sex workers. The core question of this inquiry focused on whether the mainstream print media, in their coverage on issues related to sex workers, reinforced prevailing stereotypes or attempted to break them. The study was carried out by analyzing news clippings on issues concerning the sex trade and sex workers in major national English dailies. The total sample size was 1153 regularized for the completeness of coding based on which final analysis was carried out on 1059 clippings⁴.

A content analysis schedule was designed originally by researchers, Vidya Kulkarni and Dipti Raut, that was modified (Annexure- A) and the data was coded by a team from SANGRAM, Sangli. The data was computerized and a Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for its analysis by Dr Mira Desai. Researchers recognize the dangers of using the data from documentation centre and also the limitation of viewing the clippings as stand alone material and not examining the context and placement with reference to the publication. Yet in the light of absence of any such collective material, the exercise provides a historical representation of sex work in the English press in India. The following paragraphs elaborate on the profile of data and analysis related to representation and patterns over the years.

The Data

The total clippings as stated above were 1059. Table-1 shows the categorization over time and suggests that a majority (80.3%) were published prior to 1999. This may be due to the

methodology of the study (based on the documentation work carried out at the centre) at the same time, it can be noted that 1996 to 2000 witnessed the emergence of organizations of sex workers and their conventions to raise their demands. This period also saw debates over the legalization issue and the emergence of varied positions about sex work within the women's movement. Also, it is during this period that sex workers were considered as a 'high risk' group in causing the spread of HIV infection and therefore measures like licensing and medical check ups, etc. were discussed from a public health point of view. Furthermore, issues related to sex work/ers would have received higher coverage in print media prior to 1999.

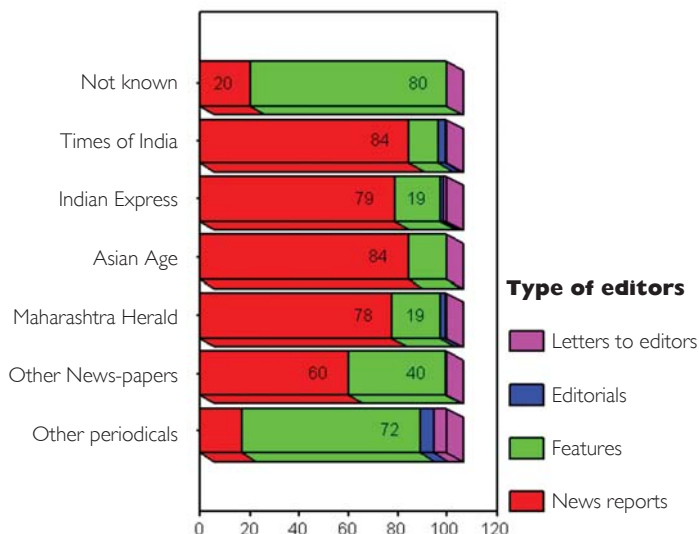
The number of stories published across the years, the lowest rate was one story in 1990 with the highest being 151 in 1996 and 149 in 1997. Interestingly, about one-fourth (28.4%) of the stories were published during two years (1996 and 1997). At the same time, averages indicate that in the period of 1990-94, average stories were 46 which had gone up to 52 by 2000-03 period as shown in Table-1 which suggests an overall increase in the number of stories related to sex work and sex workers with time. The 'Not known' category in table suggests that the publication date of 2.9 percent of the clippings was not known.

The publications included mainly national dailies and about half of the clippings came from *The Times of India* (26.7%) and the *Indian Express* (21.4%) followed by the *Asian Age* and *Maharashtra Herald*. Table-2 shows that in all, there were 15 English publications- nine newspapers and six periodicals, covered during the study.

³By Dr. Mira K. Desai, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, India

⁴News clippings, news stories, stories have been synonymously used which mainly refers to the samples of the study, the news clippings.

Graph-1: Names of the publications and type of the news story



Graph-I shows the nature of the news clippings covered in the study along with the name of the publication. A majority (76 %) of the clippings were news reports, followed by about one fifth of the stories as 'feature stories'. As the data clearly reveals, sex work or sex workers do not seem to be part of 'editorial' or 'letters to editor' categorization. Yet *The Times of India* carried the maximum number of editorials and letters to the editor compared to other newspapers. Periodicals, due to the nature of publication, carried more feature stories (72.2%) compared to news reports. The proportion of news reports was highest in *The Times of India* as it published about eight of ten (84.5%) news reports compared to about six out of ten (59.9%) in 'other' newspapers.

Table-3 shows the analysis of the total 18 issues covered about sex work or sex workers, which were then consolidated to eight categories for further analysis as shown in Table-12. Table-3 clearly shows the contradictions of representation. HIV-AIDS and sex work gets four percent attention but health issues of sex workers receive only 0.07 percent coverage. Child prostitution and rights issues gets 15 percent stories but stories about children of sex workers were only 1.5 percent. The issues related to sex workers clearly reveals 'state' interest and interference compared to the problems of sex workers as a vulnerable group.

Sen (2005) documents trafficking issues based on research conducted by the Institute of Social Science, New Delhi and sponsored by the National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi. The Study documents experiences from 13 States of India. One of the reasons for such study can also be attributed to the historical visibility of 'trafficking' issues in print media as observed in the present study.

Findings

The findings of the study discussed above have been divided into two parts: Part one refers to the nature of presentation and part two elaborates on the patterns over the years. Nature of representation examines how and what has been reported about sex work and sex workers whereas patterns over the years cross tabulates various variables in relation to the period of publication to examine trends during 1990 to 2003.

PART I: Nature of Presentation

Nature of representation of news clippings include the month and date of publishing (Table-4), mention of the by-line by the name of publication (Graph-2), perception about sex work and parties presented in the stories (Table-5), and the sources of news and context of coverage of sex work (Table-6). There is a subsection referring to the presentation of sex work/sex workers with reference to treatment given to news stories over the years (Table-7), and portrayal of sex workers over that period of time (Table-8).

Table-4 shows the analysis of the time of publication in terms of the month and date. There was not much of a difference in terms of date of the month and over the year. A more or less equal proportion of stories got published over the month, as the number of stories in the first fortnight was 48.9 compared to the second fortnight when it was 48.2 percent. Across quarters except in third quarter (July to September) compared to other quarters.

Graph-2 shows that the majority (65.7%) of the stories mention the names of the journalist having 'by-lines' while one third of them were network news. All the 16 editorials (Table-3) mentioned the names of the editors whereas one third of the stories came as network news. Two fifth of the stories in the Indian Express and Maharashtra Herald were network news while the majority of the other newspapers and periodicals had by-lined stories. For obvious reasons, most of the feature stories in periodicals had clear 'by-lines'.

Graph-2: Publication by mention of the name of the journalist

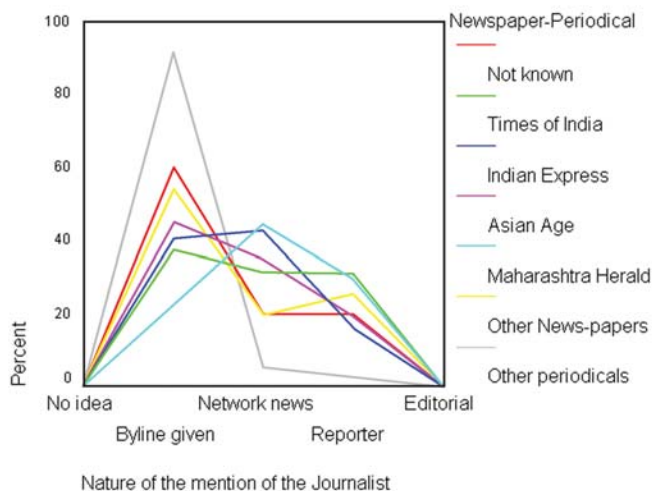


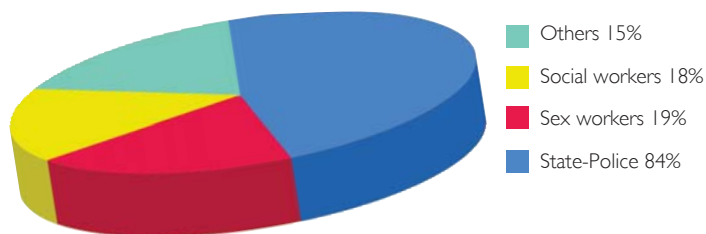
Table-5 clearly shows that the most presented parties that represent sex workers in the news clippings were the government or police (n=452) followed by society (n=341) and then social workers (n=248). This analysis suggests that as expected, government and police tend to show sex work in the domain of 'legal' (45.6%) and police and social worker deal with 'illegal' (55.6%) perception whereas society, as well as social workers, reports 'social' perception related to sex work in two fifth of the stories. Sex work as 'economic', 'political' or 'developmental' work was missing in English press.

Graph-3 clearly shows that almost half of the stories quote state/ police or court whereas only about one fifth have sex workers as sources in their story. 'Others' include researchers, filmmakers, United Nations, readers of the letters to editor or combination of other three or so-called 'reliable sources'.

Table-6 shows that the English press projects sex work as work done by girls or women. The majority, or rather all, the stories showed sex workers in the context of women (56.6%), women and girls (7.4%) or girls (22%) if percentages are cumulated. Sex work gets described with reference to 'children' by about ten percent stories. 'Others' include multiple context of presentation like women, children, men and girls. News sources for the stories also reconfirm that sex work is by 'adult women' as half of the stories by police, government, courts or even social workers takes the context of 'adult women', despite the fact that the State (along with social workers for more than one third of the stories) views sex work in the context of 'adult women as well as girl children'. Interestingly, researchers seem to be focusing on the 'future' context so one fourth of the stories quoting them takes 'girl children' in context.

As discussed earlier most of the stories quote State/police (n=434) followed by sex workers themselves (n=178) and social workers (n=173). Twenty stories quoted 'reliable sources' while 16 quote social worker with the state and 14 take and present information through social workers along with sex workers.

Graph-3: News sources in the news stories



Representation of Sex Workers

This subsection examines the nature of representation of sex workers in terms of the type of treatment given to the stories, the people who presented sex workers in the stories and the type of portrayal of sex workers over the period of time.

Based on the analysis of 'type of words' used in the story, Table-7 shows that as expected majority (81.1%) of the news stories were 'factual' yet about one fifth were 'emotional' in terms of treatment. But interestingly sex work seems to be presented more 'emotionally' over the period of time as close to one fourth of the stories have emotional tone in 2000-03 time period compared to about one fifth in 1990-94 time period.

Analysis of the type of story with sources of news stories revealed that as discussed earlier in Graph-3 very few stories allow sex workers to represent themselves. And even when they get represented, only six out of ten news reports quote them; the remaining forty percent gets into 'feature' space, which in a way is the representation by the writer/journalist rather than the sex worker. Government, police, and social workers are the main representatives of sex workers in English press and when it comes to news reports, nine out of ten stories

show the 'government' as the spokesperson for sex workers, compared to seven of ten stories doing the same using Non-government/social worker or combination of non-government/social worker and government department/state. The most interesting part is dependence on 'reliable sources' even by editorial or letters to editor.

Majority (57.1%) of the news stories take the 'victim' projection for sex workers followed by one fifth (19.6%) taking 'evil' representation as shown in Table-8. Only two out of ten news stories represent sex workers as 'human'. Though the proportion of representation as 'victim' has gone down a 'little' (from 60.2 percent stories in 1990-94 to 56.6 percent in 2000-03), there is absolutely no change as far as 'evil' or 'human' representation is concerned. In a way, over the period of 14 years, the representation of sex workers has been static and mainly negative.

PART II: Patterns Over the Years

Apart from dealing with the portrayal of sex workers over the years, this section examines the patterns with time with reference to the nature of coverage (Table-9), the type of stories published (Table-10), the content of the story (Graph-4), the dimensions of sex workers life (Table-11), issues covered (Table-12 and Graph-5), the sources of news (Table-13), the perception about sex work (Table-14), the perspectives taken in the news stories (Table-15) and the overall portrayal of sex workers (Graph-6).

Table-9 shows that since the publications covered in the study were mainly English national dailies, about one third (31.8%) of the coverage was 'international' or national (36.2%) in nature wherein 'local' coverage was only about ten percent. If one examines the coverage over the period of the study, 'local' coverage had increased as about eight (7.8%) of the ten stories were local in 1990-94 time periods, which had gone up to about 14.4 percent. Similarly state coverage too had gone up and international coverage had gone down from 45.5 percent to only about 15.8 percent.

Table-10 indicates that the proportions of news reports have gone up from 67.5 percent to 80.4 percent but representation through features (from 28.6 to 18.2), editorial spaces (from 1.7 to 0.5) and letters to editors (2.2 to 1.0) have gone down since 1990-94. In a way this indicates the creation of sex work or sex workers more of a 'news' item rather than an 'issue/theme' of discussion or reflection as evident from Graph-4.

In line with Table-10, Graph-4 also shows that the coverage has become more 'incident based' as it is made 'newsy'. Half of the stories in 2000-03 period were incident based compared to about one third (35.9%) such stories in 1990-94 period. Issue based coverage about sex work/sex workers has gone down from about six stories out of ten in 1990-94 to five stories in 2000-03 period.

In order to examine which dimensions of sex workers' lives get covered by the press, about 23 dimensions were listed which in turn were drawn together to present analysis over time.

Graph-4: Content of the news stories over the years

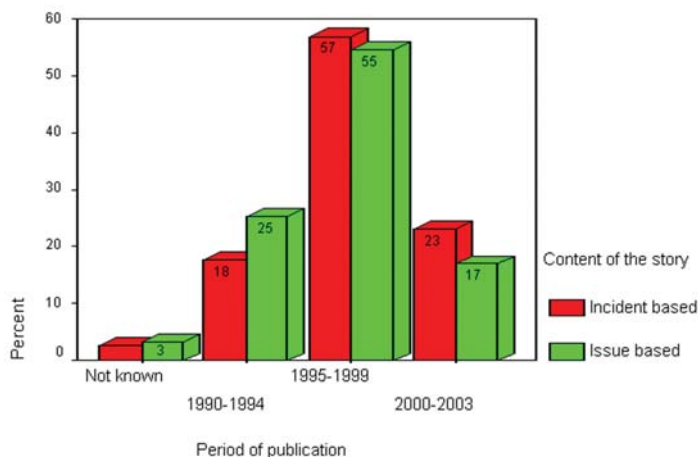


Table-11 consolidated the data from 23 dimensions to eight and created a category for 'multiple dimensions'. Living conditions included migration, entertainment, rehabilitation, poverty, and trafficking issues. Work impact covered pedophilia, sexual slavery, clients, murder while work conditions clubbed soliciting, brothel running, street walking, call girls, sex tourism and taxes together. With the period of time, as visible in Table-11, issues related to livelihood, living conditions, law, shelter and ration have received more coverage. Contrary to that, dimensions of work impact, health, work conditions, education and religion have fallen off in print media. The more disturbing fact is that rates of stories that touch upon multiple dimensions of sex work/sex workers' lives have fallen by more than half, from about 15 stories (14.7%) to six stories (6.2%).

Table-12 shows the type of issues covered by the publications, which is a consolidation of the issues listed in Table-3 previously. The data clearly shows trafficking as one of the areas with the most coverage, followed by police raids. Socio-economic-cultural effects of sex work and child prostitution are the other two areas covered by English press as far as sex work/workers are concerned. The proportion of stories reporting 'multiple issues' was very small, as only 3.5 percent of the clippings had multiple issues covered in the news story. Problems of sex workers received attention in only 8.6 percent of the stories, which was little higher than rehabilitation, health, or human rights issues.

Graph-5 shows issues covered over the period of time. As clearly evident across issues, presentation of socio-economic-cultural links were paid the most attention in 1990-94 but raids/law and rescue related issues were highest during 1995-99 but trafficking related matters were highlighted in 2000-03 period. Issues of socio-economic-cultural links, multiple dimensions received reduced coverage with time. Human rights issues have received increased coverage from 17.0 percent in 1990-94 to 26.8 percent in the 2000-03 period. Issues such as the problems of sex workers, sex racket/trade, and child prostitution have fallen to almost only half the rate in 2000-03 compared to 1990-94 period.

Graph-5: Issues covered over the years

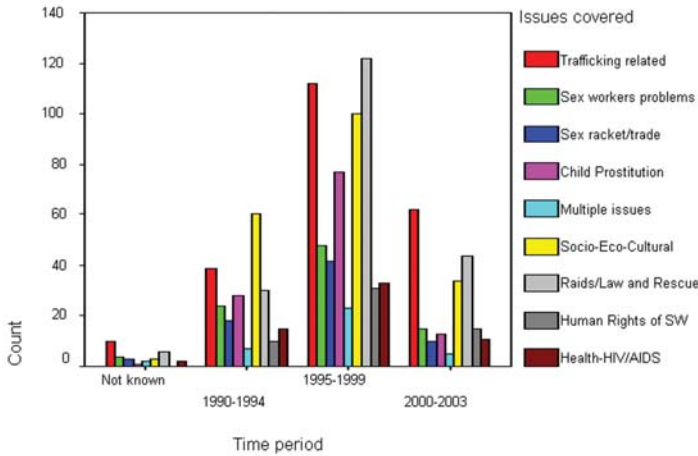


Table-13 shows sources of news stories over time and indicates dramatic reduction in sources such as researcher, sex workers and social workers, police and sex workers. Even stories quoting so-called 'reliable source' have also reduced. One fourth of the stories have 'voices' of sex workers themselves in 2000-03 compared to about one fifth (16.9%) in 1990-04 period. At the same time multiple sources have reduced from 22.4 percent in 1990-94 to 12.9 percent in 2000-03 stories. Even the analysis of parties presented in the stories suggests that news presentation has not changed over the years except for a minor increase in sources of news from government and police and a reduction in quotes from society and social worker along with sex workers.

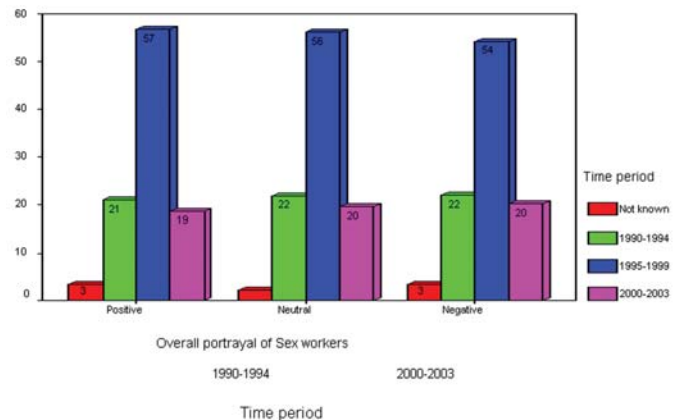
Table-14 shows that perception about sex work has gone into 'legal' domain with time, which may be in line with the increasing discourse about the legalization of sex work. Four out of ten (41.6%) stories in 2000-03 had 'legal' perspective as compared to half of that (23.4%) in 1990-94. Though the present discourse

of legalization of sex work gets reflected in English press, period of 1995-99 witnessed decrease in stories projecting 'illegal' and 'social' perception of sex work.

Table-15 shows that a majority (38.6+21.3) of the stories either deal with criminal or legal perspective for sex work. A human rights perspective has always been present over the years but the human-interest angle seems to have reduced in the print media's presentation of sex workers. From 13 percent stories taking human-interest perspective in 1990-94, the proportion has gone down to mere 2.4 percent. What is disturbing is half of the stories in 2000-03 presented a 'criminal' perspective, which was only 29 percent in 1990-94.

Graph-6 clearly shows that overall portrayal of sex work and sex workers have not changed over the time period of study. The 'negative' portrayal has continued and the improvement in 'positive' presentation has been marginal.

Graph-6: Overall portrayal of sex workers in English press over the years



CHAPTER 2

A Decade Of Media Coverage Of Sex Workers: Lives, Issues And Rights – Some Impressions⁵

There are no half measures in prevailing attitudes towards prostitution, no subtleties, and no spaces for confusion, diffidence or even dissent. Caged in a mindset as old as time, our notions of what constitutes prostitution, our prejudices towards the beings who practice it for a living, indeed even our basic information or lack thereof, of their lives - are rooted in the high moral ground of voyeuristic disgust and repulsion at 'the world's oldest profession'.


In this divide between **them** and us, how and when were our views on prostitution shaped? What processes determined our understanding of those in sex work? How did we carefully maintain our distance from **their** lives, even as we freely commented on **their** every act, condemn **their** existence and demanded that **they** be consigned to oblivion? When the threat of the AIDS epidemic forced **them** into our lives and our consciousness, what fuelled our primary reactions of panic and fear? Can we

ever begin to see our own lives reflected in the lives of so many marginalized communities - divided as they are today by myriad pigeonholes of caste, religion, race or sexuality - as human, with lives as fallible and as precarious as our own?

The gamut of media coverage of prostitution, stories of the lives of those in prostitution and the story of the AIDS epidemic ranges from full-blown prejudice laced with fear to a largely powerless anger at the continued existence of a criminally-controlled system of exploitation. There are sporadic reports, news features and stories that strike a note of empathy towards the women in prostitution or show some understanding about their lives and their struggles in a hugely unequal world, but these are subsumed by the dominant representation of the criminal system of prostitution, of sex work as morally degrading and disempowering and of the stigma attached towards anyone associated with it. Even doctors, social workers, journalists, social organizations and political workers who have tried to reach out to people in sex work are not free of taint and ridicule.

Indeed, the media's coverage of any social issue that seeks to expose the underbelly of society is fraught with obstacles. Apart

⁵By Geeta Seshu, journalist and media analyst, Mumbai



from structural biases inherent in the media due to the economic and political interests it represents, the media also reinforces the dominant values and opinions in society. The media, along with the family, educational institutions, religious institutions and the peer group, is a powerful agent of socialization. Besides being a primary source of information and a major vehicle for the dissemination of information, the media shapes public opinion and can render significance or silence to important social issues.

Unfortunately, studies on the media's coverage of sex work and sex workers have been inadequate and sporadic. Way back in 1986, 'Reporting on prostitution', a UNESCO-sponsored study, spurred by the rise in global trafficking and 'forced prostitution', focused on media coverage in three countries – India, Malaysia and the Philippines. The report is an interesting indicator of the changes in perceptions of 'prostitutes' – from fallen women to victims, the rescue and rehabilitation of whom is woefully inadequate:

The media have not yet played the role of which they are capable in educating the public, in stirring up public conscience and in inciting people to take action against professional exploiters. Moreover, the press has made practically no effort to change the traditionally biased attitudes towards prostitutes, who are in fact victims, and has done little to put pressure on the authorities concerned to tackle the inequalities and poverty that generate prostitution.

Examining coverage of major media stories of the 1980s like Ashwini Sarin's purchase of Kamla and the rescue of the Nepali girl Tulasa, the media coverage of devadasis and other headline-grabbers, the report bemoans the lack of a human touch to reportage on forced prostitution:

A number of studies on various aspects of prostitution, some of which are referred to here, in fact provide a good many leads for journalists to follow up. But, only in rare instances has this occurred. Perhaps because of the failure of women's organizations to focus on the problem and play a more constructive, active role in helping the victims, thereby creating a "news item", the press has failed to cover

important aspects of prostitution. No in-depth reports have been published, for example, on clients of prostitutes, on call girls, on child prostitution or on those women who have been rehabilitated to find out how they have fared.

In the two decades since this study, society has witnessed a sea-change in the social, political and economic arenas. Whether on the global front or the local, there are immense disparities in society as ordinary people struggle to survive and strive for the basic necessities of life. While the media has mirrored some of these changes, it has also been found wanting in the extent and depth of its coverage of crucial issues.

Rather unfairly, the media has (along with the breakdown of the family as a premier socializing unit), been held responsible for drug abuse, spiraling divorce rates in society, increasing teenage sex and a host of other 21st century social 'catastrophes', apart from being criticized for generating 'panic' on the AIDS epidemic, the spread of prostitution, gays and lesbians and other issues. But the media is also a crucial site for the expression of contentious social and cultural issues, voicing the predominant viewpoint even as it gives shape to public opinion on any issue.

In *Key Concepts in Communication*, O'Sullivan, Fiske et al (1983) write:

"Moral panics then, are those processes whereby members of a society and culture become 'morally sensitized' to the challenges and menaces posed to 'their' accepted values and ways of life, by the activities of groups defined as deviant. The process underscores the importance of the mass media in providing, maintaining and 'policing' the available frameworks and definitions of deviance, which structure both public awareness of, and attitudes towards, social problems.

So, of the media's coverage of sex work, sex workers, HIV/AIDS, trafficking or sexuality, how much has been governed by 'moral panics'? How much of it is a knee-jerk reaction to fears and biases prevalent in society towards sections seen as abnormal

and deviant? How much of it is an attempt to understand the processes governing these issues?

As one of the institutions that have shaped societal understanding of prostitution and sex work, it is interesting to examine the media's coverage of the different aspects of this complex area. It is also important to determine the processes that shape media coverage - positive or negative, accurate or biased. We can also take the opportunity to look at ourselves, both as generators of information and opinion, as well as recipients of messages. Perhaps we can then seek a more truthful representation of a reality that exists in the penumbra of society.

The following are some impressions of the coverage accorded to sex work, prostitution, trafficking, child prostitution, the intervention of law-enforcers and the state's legal strategies and approaches. These impressions are based on CASAM's media monitoring exercise detailed in the previous chapter⁶.

The coverage offers a rich load of information, news and views, besides providing a mirror to more than a decade of reportage. As in all information viewed after the passage of several years, perceptions of the impact of some reports may differ. Certainly, the selection and comments that accompany them may be colored by my own biases and understanding. In the interests of healthy debate, these are offered for dissection.

AIDS/HIV

This is an interesting section as it also outlines the manner in which media coverage moved from the earlier 'scare' and 'fear' mode to a slightly more informed reportage. However, even as coverage of HIV/AIDS affecting only high-risk groups like sex workers was broadened to include all sections of society, the coverage of several issues related to the illness/epidemic is still grossly inadequate. In the decade under review, only 6 per cent of the total coverage was devoted to HIV/AIDS.

In 1991, Jean D'Cunha writes about the fear and suspicion over the new disease 'Aidus', as it was referred to by women in prostitution, (*Red light and Black Shadows*, SO, March 3, 1991) as she discusses the implications of legalizing prostitution to check the spread of AIDS.


Another article actually casts the prostitute in a revengeful and uncaring mould stating that **'most prostitutes are aware of AIDS and their role in spreading the disease but since society has done nothing for them, clients will have to take their chances'** (*Resigned to their fate*, IE, Dec 1, 1991)

Four years later, the management of the epidemic through condom usage does get a fair bit of coverage: 'Oversized condoms trouble Kamathipura' by Clarence Fernandez (TOI, April 1, 1994) or 'No condom, no work', a UNI report (IE, May 16, 1995).

Consistency is obviously lacking. A series of reports in different newspapers in 1995-96 says that sex workers in Bihar or 'ladies of the night' in Pune, are unaware of the AIDS scourge! By 1997, the drop in business in red-light areas forced sex workers to seek clients near railway platforms (AIDS scare brings sex-workers to railway platforms, Ashish Wagh, Jan 7, 1997). Another article focuses on 'children and young virgins' being forced into the sex trade because of AIDS (*Child prostitution on the rise with AIDS fear*, AA, Dec 6, 1996) In a rare article focusing on male sex workers and the safe-sex campaign by NGOs in Delhi (*Soliciting a killer disease*, Soma Wadhwa, *Outlook*, Dec 11, 1996)

By 1997, the illness is still referred to as the 'Bombay disease' (*Nepal's lost daughters, India's soiled goods* – Tim McGirk, *Time*, Jan 27, 1997), referring to trafficking of young Nepali girls into India. Another report headlined 'MP sex-workers court AIDS', referred to the high-risk communities in Madhya Pradesh (IE, Mar 27, 1997).

⁶See Table 1 in Annexure 2 for key to acronyms of newspapers



By 1998, stories of sex-workers who managed to battle the disease began to emerge, with an insensitive and callous writer: Saleema, who 'made a remarkable recovery' after being diagnosed HIV-positive, is asked by the reporter whether she would go back to plying the trade and 'spreading the disease' (*Battling for life, rejected by society: Saga of an AIDS sex-worker*, IE, July 11, 1998)

Again, in the shadow dance of one step forward, several steps backward, some news stories cut through the prejudice, focusing on the fact that women in prostitution need to be provided with adequate protection from the disease and given access to better health care (*Who are the evil beasts?*, Geetanjali Gangoli, TOI, Feb 21, 1998)

But the pattern of several steps backward prevailed, perhaps because it made better headlines and grabbed more attention: Fear and even suspicion bordering on the vitriolic, still ruled, with news reports headlined 'Kamathipura cordoned off' (*Tough measures to fight off AIDS*, Dharmesh Thakkar, AA, Dec 15, 1998), or the 'exploitative practices being employed by CSWs' in Pune who turn the 'health precaution of condoms into a source of income augmentation' (*Money for nothing*, IE, Feb 17, 2000)

Opinions, myths and taboos : Good women, Bad women and civil society morals

The good world of 'decent people' vs the bad world of the 'streetwalkers' is stark in this report (*As evening changes to night – a different world*, Prasannakumar Keskkar, April 11, 1994 [newspaper unknown] decent residents are too ashamed or scared to even peep out of their windows –as darkness falls. The report outlines the manner in which the streetwalkers and eunuchs have taken over the areas near Pune railway station, abuse and even manhandle passersby. It does mention that they earn Rs 100 a night, not as an indication of the volume of clients but to illustrate the point that the fine imposed by police to 'round them up' is no deterrent to their trade!


By 1997, another report from Pune (*Sex no longer a dirty work here*, Alka Kshirsagar, TOI, Mar 9, 1997) refers to comments by doctors, social workers and laypersons that about 'boudoir peccadilloes and an 'outburst of sex'! The article discussed the spread of prostitution as well as the changing notions of sexuality without seeming to draw any distinction between the two.

A report on a residents' initiative to fight the 'brothel menace' in their neighborhood focused on the attempt by residents to heckle clients, call their parents or wives. That vigilantism was clearly evident was obvious by the comment that residents had trouble 'distinguishing between clients and innocent visitors', but this aspect was left unexplored by the reporter (*Residents fight prostitution on streets*, Rosy Sequeira, IE, Sept 9, 1997)

Again, basic norms of reportage are non-existent in a report ridden with shocking generalizations and prejudiced stereotypical reactions. Even girl students are not spared in a cover story article "Is philandering on the rise in Pune?" (IE- Citizen, Jan 20, 1999), in which the writers state that 'hostelites' contributed towards the increase in percentage of call girls! The report quotes a landlord, who is however not named, who was distressed at hiring his house to three girl students who 'have got lured into this profession as time pass'.

Some columnists wanted to improve the profession, so that clients are better served: the late Shiv Sena leader Pramod Navalkar aired his views on prostitution with authoritative confidence, constantly reminding his readers of the link between prostitution, homosexuality and AIDS. In a column on the 'need to monitor prostitution' (*Independent*, April 4, 1992), he recommended photo-passes and AIDS-free certificates after fortnightly check-ups and a re-location of red-light areas to outside the city limits so that 'otherwise respectable citizens think twice before being seen in a place of ill-repute'.

While Navalkar believed that 'the oldest profession cannot be banned, so it was practical to ensure customers don't pick up any disease from the brothels'. Another columnist even suggested



that sex workers get training in aesthetics to 'do their job better' (*Finesse for the carnal*, Farzana Versey, SO, August 11-17, 1998). But her blasé take on sex workers was not free of bias: she had it from 'impeccable sources' that women robbed clients in Kamathipura or told them to hurry up!

That sex workers save good women from being raped is a recurring theme, even voiced by Khairati Lal Bhola, founder of Bharatiya Patita Uddhar Sabha, an organization 'dedicated to the case of saving the fallen women' – sex workers are keeping the social and moral fabric of the country intact. Had they not been there, millions more of our country would have been raped (*Sex workers: saviors of Indian women*, MH, July 12, 1997).

Moral Panic and Terminology of Coverage

Whenever one thinks of coverage of sex work or sex workers, certain stock phrases and catch-words from news reports come to mind. These are flesh trade, ladies of the night, high class call girl racket, dens of vice etc.

The clippings are replete with examples of such phrases. Obviously, it would be a waste to recall all of them, but a cursory glance at the entire selection is a telling reminder of the stereotyping prevalent in reportage. Some headlines are designed to grab attention even when the reports are sober and empathetic. Others, unwittingly provide comic relief...

Some of the more glaring headlines:

- Police bust high class call girl racket, MH, Feb 26, 1999
- Six sentenced in sex-slave ring; MH, April 18, 1999
- Massive racket in flesh trade unearthed, MH, Aug 27, 1999
- Sleaze on the highway, Meena Menon, SO, Mar 14, 1999
- Cops nab 'illegal' prostitutes, MH, Mar 29, 1999
- Residents police this lane of lust, TOI, April 5, 1998
- A messy mass women's lib from Bombay brothel, IE, Oct 14, 1991
- What price bed and bawd?, TOI, July 9, 1995

Rehabilitation and Struggles of Sex Workers

A number of articles throughout the decade focused on the issue of 'rehabilitation', very few of which actually discussed the pros and cons or the process or whether it was really effective. There was little informed debate and generally, terminology on 'rescue' of sex workers was synonymous with 'raid'. Even basic journalistic scrutiny of funds allotted for the purpose or facilities provided didn't make the grade.

A large part of the beginning of the decade was devoted to the case of the child-bride from Hyderabad, Ameena, who was married to an Arab Sheikh and was rescued by an Indian Airlines air hostess. With the frenzy typical of the media, the case resulted in a few other news-reports of other girls being married off to old men from the Gulf, but there was little coverage of the poverty that the girls lived in, the families who allowed the marriages or investigation of the role of middle-men. The focus instead was on the community the child hailed from, making reportage communal and biased against the minority community. Yet, typical of the media, follow-up stories were non-existent and the Ameena story died its unnatural death.

Needless to add, there was also no follow-up to the story of 19-year-old Ms Universe, Sushmita Sen, who said that she would work to rehabilitate 'prostitutes and their children' (*Sushmita turns to social service*, AA, June 6, 1995). Whether orphanages were set up with the corporate fund she obtained from NRIs in Los Angeles is anybody's guess!

In January-February 1996, the Maharashtra government 'rescued 447 minors' involved in prostitution and news-reports, which would have routinely covered the government's action as a crime report, were forced to cover the issues involved in rehabilitation of the girls, primarily because the girls were vocal and angry at their detention. "Most of the girls were in a violent and resentful mood" the report said (*Rescued sex workers cry hoarse over state government's indecision*, TOI, Feb

18, 1996). The government had no action plan in mind and no rehabilitation plan in place.

Another report (*Govt. has no comprehensive plan to curb child prostitution*, Dionne Bunsha and Nina Martyris, TOI, Feb 19, 1996) also quoted social workers who identified some of the issues involved – child prostitution, girls of Nepali origin, health-care, counseling etc, all of which the government was ill-prepared to deal with!

By 1996, with sex workers becoming more organized, their voice in issues of rehabilitation began to emerge. A news item of a meeting of women by the 'Asahaya Tiraskrut Nari Sangh' criticized the government for rescuing minors without a plan for their rehabilitation (Give us jobs or leave us alone, say sex workers, TOI, June 11, 1996). Again, there was little or no investigation or follow-ups.

Other reports included:

- a writ petition filed to demand the setting up of rehabilitation homes and an end to police harassment (*Surat's sex workers move HC against police harassment*, Gautam Mehta, TOI, Mar 25, 1997)
- Pune-based Neehar home for children (*Some respite for prostitutes and hope for their kids*, Rachna Rawat Bisht, IE, April 9, 1997)
- Identity cards for sex workers that would help them obtain medical facilities and combat police harassment (*City sex workers to get identity cards*, Manjiri Damle, TOI, September 4, 1997)
- on the discrimination against children of sex workers who are asked to leave school (*Sex workers' children asked to get out of school*, R Ramesh, TOI, Dec 26, 1999)
- on the plight of ageing sex workers (*Towards oblivion*, Rajendar Menon, *The Hindu*, Mar 18, 2001)


Discussion on political activism of sex workers, or the lack of it, was also woefully inadequate. Invariably, before any election at

the local, regional, state or central level had at least one report on eunuchs or sex workers standing for elections. The report on Lalita Salunkhe, a sex worker who stood for elections to the municipal corporation in Mumbai (*To walk away from this*, Vijay Singh, IE, Jan 16, 2002) was no exception. Alas, no information as to the result of the election, the problem of standing as an independent candidate without any party support, the votes she garnered or even the impact this attempt to enter the political arena had on her life and that of other sex workers she represented.

The Global Arena

Interestingly, even as globalization made inroads into the smallest village, coverage of the sex work industry lessened over the decade under review. While most articles still covered the 'exotic' and the sensational (*Dancing girls of Lahore*, MH, April 8, 1992; *Redlight revelry*, IND, Mar 19, 1993; some did hint at the connection between the rise in prostitution and conflict during the operation of the UN transitional authority in Cambodia between 1991-93 (*UN blamed for sex boom*, MH, Nov 25, 1993).

Relying on 'official' sources but without any interviews attributed to officials, agents or the women, was a report on the trade of women across the Bangladesh-India-Pakistan (Jammu and Kashmir) borders (*Trading in human misery*, MH, April 29, 1992). Crime reports about (*Indo-Gulf flesh trade racket busted*, IE, August 12, 1992). Borderless dimensions of trafficking in women (Jean D'Cunha, SO, July 18, 1993) drew attention to the economic deprivation, ethnic and political upheavals that led to the increase in trafficking in women and by 1996, a number of articles focused on the spread of prostitution across the borders of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Gulf countries, Malaysia, Thailand etc. Most reports also focused on the alarming spread of child prostitution. The devaluation of women across the board was the focus of some articles (*Bangla brides sell for a quarter the price of a buffalo*, Asit Jolly, AA, Nov 17, 1996).



Alas, you need to read between the lines to understand the plight of women in prostitution in this report from South Africa where 'Twenty-two sex workers drown on way to work' (TOI, Nov 8, 1996). The women were in a canoe that capsized in the waters of Sierra Leone but police had no official report on the incident as the 'sex trade is an illegal one'.

The State, Law Enforcement and the Law

By far the biggest chunk of writings and reports emanated from 'official' sources – from the police- news items of police raids, arrests, round-ups, fines, etc; legal measures and debates on whether prostitution should be eradicated as one would a highly contaminating disease, legalized or decriminalized.

The role of the state in dealing with trafficking also occupied a lot of space (*Stressing the need for SAARC role in curbing trafficking of women, kids*, Albertina Almeida, MH, May 11, 1997). Another report (*Flaws in convention on sex trafficking*, Geetanjali Gangoli, TOI, Oct 20, 1998) on the same SAARC convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children pointed out conceptual problems in the prevailing approach to the issue – failing to make a distinction between women and child trafficking; by failing to look at the exploitation routinely faced by people in several other professions; flaws in the process of rehabilitation and forced repatriation to their countries etc.

A few reports did discuss the debate between legalization and decriminalization by 1998 (*Sex trade should not be legalized*, Saroj Iyer, Mar 14, 1998, TOI) taking the view that prostitution was not sex work and was the oldest form of exploitation of women. Echoing this view, other reports stated that the term sex worker was a misnomer (*Legalization of prostitution no solution*, says NCW, July 3, 1998, IE) and suggested that identity cards be given to those in prostitution for health insurance.

But other writers and lawyers argued the opposite, attacked the plan to provide identity cards and spoke out in favor of

decriminalization (*Punishing the victim*, Colin Gonsalves, July 25, 1998, SO). Some activists argued against legalization but in favor of 'eradication' of prostitution (NGO drive against legalizing prostitution (Utpal Chatterjee, Aug 20, 1998, TOI). Again, there was no clear picture about the various positions on the subject (*Social workers demand legalization of prostitution*, Mar 4, 1999, *Pune Newsline*).

Most of the other reports are brief news-items that fall into the purview of crime reportage – a few bare facts, sources usually from police or law enforcement agencies, names of those trafficked or the traffickers either not mentioned or rarely mentioned and of course, no information as to what happened to the people involved after being arrested or taken into custody.

An exception was a two-part report in the *Asian Age* by the year 2000 on the global nature of trafficking for all manner of labor – domestic work, factories and sweatshops, adoption, forced begging and the sex industry.

Debates, Discussions, Disagreements and the Empathy within

Despite the myths and biases that prevailed in most reportage, there were voices that spoke with empathy and sought the human being under the skin of the sex worker. Such sympathetic stories are rare, but do manage to cut through the prejudice (*Even prostitutes are mothers*, Rajashri Dasgupta, MH, May 5, 1993) or *HIV-positive too have a right to live: Lawat'*, focusing on the work of Pune-based social worker whose project Manavya offers shelter and health care to HIV-positive children and women (TOI, April 23, 2002).

In two articles, '*It hurts to have your kid called a whore's son*' and '*You know what they call us? We aren't human*', writer Pamela Philipose brought out the gamut of the experience of the sex worker – as a mother, rejected by family, going past the stage of the stigma and the loss of shame of being *gandhe log* with

confidence: "My body is my own field from which I can make my own living" (IE, April 4-5, 1999).

In 'Sex workers of the world, unionise', (TOI, August 21, 1994) and 'Sex is work' (TOI, Nov 23, 1997), Bachi Karkaria speaks of the need to move away from both the 'bleeding heart liberal's prisoner of circumstance image or the moralist's sanctimonious denunciation.

A number of articles on religious practices, the devadasi tradition, and its links with prostitution have been written in different publications. A few articles delved into the role of caste (*Entering the prostitution trade is an occasion to celebrate*, Harsh Mander, AA, Oct 26, 1994)

Legalization or not was another recurring theme (*Her rights, her rights*, TOI, Nov 23, 1999) pitted the views of H S Sangliana, then additional director general of police, Karnataka in favor of it – 'help eliminate middlemen and bonded labor, unionization gives basic rights and independence to the sex workers' against Suman Krishna Kant, president of Mahila Dakshata Samiti – prostitution is exploitation and illegal, it is the worst form of human commodification and a violation of human rights.

At the beginning of the decade under study, Jean D'Cunha (*Prostitution in the Third World: Free choice or force*, IE, July 27, 1992) drew attention to globalization and the internationalization of capital and industry, alienated sexuality, the North-South divide and national socio-economic-political structures and other conditions that create and reinforce the institution of prostitution.

By 1995, organizations of sex workers began debating legalization and decriminalization and deliberations of a conference in Calcutta were widely reported (*Legitimising prostitution*, Meena Menon, June 14, 1995, *The Hindu*).

Striking a note of dissent to the view that prostitutes be legally recognized as sex workers, Mrinal Pande (*Prostitution is not a dirty joke*, IE, Dec 9, 1997) likens it to the backlash politics described by US-based feminist Susan Faludi. "Prostitutes and their supporters are told that 'prudish' feminists are their worst enemies' and that since prostitution cannot be eradicated, it must be legalized, making it a strategy to divide women in a crucial moment in their long struggle for equality. Sexual exploitation in any condition, she says, is a gross violation of human rights.

By the end of the decade under study, the fissures in the movement for the rights of sex workers were beginning to sharpen. Unfortunately, it was still debated as part of a personal divide between organizations and leaders of the sex workers movements' – Gleefully commenting on an abortive discussion at a meeting, columnist Amrita Shah referred to the breezy informality with which the 'broad-shouldered representative of a Sangli-based organization' put forth the view that prostitution should be considered a legitimate, recognizable form of work while the male representative of a Mumbai-based NGO voiced the opposing view 'with a tight disapproving voice'. The columnist further decided that the latter's view that the issue was a complex one seemed like a reasonable, almost adult, observation, given the somewhat brash exuberance of the pro camp (*Derailing the discourse*, Amrita Shah, IE, May 11, 2000).

But other reports discussed the need for broadening perspectives from the 'traditional, monolithic view of prostitution as an immoral profession (*It's time attitude towards CSWs changed*, Meenakshi Shedde, TOI, May 15, 2000). By 2003, accounts of more organized efforts from sex workers and assertions of their rights began to emerge. In a column, writer Meena Menon states that prostitution rackets cannot be tackled merely by raid and rescue operations and of the need for prostitution to be decriminalized.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusions and Recommendations

There has been a sizeable increase in local coverage and during the time period of study the coverage of local issues doubled and state issues related to sex work/er had gone up and conversely international issues had gone down by three times. The analysis clearly revealed that across the variety of issues related to sex work/workers, the presentation of socio-economic-cultural links were paid most attention in 1990-94 but raids/law and rescue related issues received the highest coverage during 1995-99 and 2000-03 period highlighted trafficking related matters. Most often the sex worker is an adult woman or girl child and police or government represented her. The perception taken for sex work is that of legal and criminal. Unfortunately, the portrayal of sex worker as victim or evil has not changed much over the time period of the study.

The analysis of trends in portrayal of sex work/workers reveals an increase in 'emotional', incident-based news reports and voices of sex workers being represented by them. But at the same time sex work/workers as 'human interest' stories has gone down and so is the editorial space discussing 'issues' related to sex work/workers. The multiple dimensions and sources of news have also

reduced over the years in a way suggesting polar presentations. Researcher, film maker, social worker, society as news providers about sex work/workers have become invisible in English press as the space partially claimed by sex workers themselves.

The portrayal of sex workers and the content analysis of over a thousand news clippings reveal mixed yet disappointing trends. On the one hand, the voices of sex workers in print media have become audible and on the other, there is a reduction in representation of the multiple dimensions of sex workers' lives and of multiple sources of news. The 'realities' of sex workers lives have been diluted despite more local and national coverage. The number of stories in the form of news reports based on incidents has increased even as there has been a reduction in theme based discussion that was empathetic towards issues regarding sex workers and deepen an understanding of the complexities of these issues.

Conclusions

The study observes that the sex workers, as a social group, do receive media coverage to a certain extent. However these attempts to give visibility to the issues of the sex workers largely remain incidental and not intentional. Therefore visibility comes

primarily through incidences of trafficking and police raid and rescue measures. Despite getting larger media space, the issue of raids and rescue operations are seldom pursued further. Very few attempts on following-up these operations and finding out status of rescued girls seem to have taken place.

The reason for not pursuing these cases may also lie in the way these measures are understood. It may be so that rescue operations are viewed as an end in itself, as primary motive is to liberate the woman from what is considered to be a demeaning work. Therefore, the possibility that sex workers may have a different viewpoint is hardly ever taken into account. Thus, such measures and their reporting hardly delves into whether the girl and woman, once found in the trade by circumstances, may not now wish to go back. And also, she may have other specific needs to alleviate her sufferings.

No doubt that the sex workers work in exploitative situations. Therefore, attempts must also be made to minimize their exploitation while they are working as sex workers. Incidentally, sex work, as per the Indian Trafficking Prevention Act, is not illegal. The illegal part, such as the child trafficking, soliciting, forced sex work and so on, can only be minimized by strengthening the women who want to continue in the work and have liberty to get out of it whenever they wish to do.

Sex workers do get visibility and media attention for being in an occupation of which society largely disapproves. Thus another major area of concern is the portrayal of sex workers. The dominant image of sex workers that these stories portray is either of a victim, who is lured, forced into sex work or of an evil and criminal causing harm to moral fabric of society. Stories bringing out complexities of sex workers lives are few and far between. Media coverage seems mostly blind to social realities that push women to choose this work option for survival of their children and families. The coverage need to give emphasis on the circumstances that force women to be part of sex trade, as

much they focus on the present conditions the women.

Our study finds that portrayal of sex workers is positive and as human beings, when they themselves are source of the news stories. This clearly indicates need to include women's own voices.

Sex workers would cease to exist if they did not have clients who willingly come to them. Our study has not come across even a single new story dealing with clients, their mindset and their compulsions for opting to visit sex workers. Clients are totally rendered invisible, which helps serve their interest to maintain anonymity. However, they too are equally part of the sex trade, as sex workers and others, such as brothel owner, pimp, shopkeepers and medical service providers in the area etc. In order to bring in complexities of the sex trade, the focus should drift away from women to these other people and services that benefit from the trade.

The media coverage seems inadequate to bring forth legal aspects, especially gaps in the constitution and execution of the present law ITPA (Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act). Limitations of this Act and its improper implementation do not also feature in this debate. For instance, Jean D'Cunha's⁷ investigation in Bombay from 1980-1986, establishes that brothels and therefore brothel keepers have been raided at such a lower rate that each brothel could expect police enforcers once every 600 years. While a few hundred madams and procurers were arrested between 1980 and 1984, over 2000 sex workers were prosecuted for practicing near public place and 3000 for soliciting. Between 1980 and 1986, more than 44,000 were arrested for, in the police's estimation, indecent behavior. Hence, the researcher concludes, contrary to its declared objectives, these sections of SITA have conceived of the sex workers as the offenders.

Reporting trend shows the coverage, during the study period, was at a peak in 1996 and 1997. During these years, organizations

⁷Prostitution in a Patriarchal Society: A Critical Review of SITA Act, by Jean D'Cunha, EPW, November, 1987, 7:1919-1925

of the sex workers in various states became active and vocal. The issue of legalization of the sex trade was also raised by the government and non-government agencies, albeit for various reasons. Owing to so much action and ongoing deliberations among various stakeholders, media interest in the issues of the sex workers remained peak in these years. However, it has

declined steadily in the consequent years. Unfortunately, not only the coverage but also the valid points and ideological issues raised during the period seem to have buried in the past. The media coverage should have built on the deliberations in this active period and improved in its depth. However, it does not seem to have happened so.

Recommendations

- **For journalists**
 - Reporters covering the crime beat should be familiar with the legal dimensions of the sex work.
 - Stories of raid and rescue operations should be well investigated to assess the overall impact of these measures. Also these measures should be followed up to know whether or not they succeed in rehabilitating the girls, as they are meant to be.
 - There should be more attempts to reach out to sex workers and include their views and voices.
 - Emphasis should be given to explore and include socio-economic and cultural reasons that compel women to do sex work.
 - Attempts should be made to cover various dimensions of sex workers lives, as mothers, as breadwinners, as community workers and so on. Attempts should also be made to cover their health issues.
 - Journalists must evolve guidelines for the ethical coverage of sex work and prostitution.
- **For media houses and institutions**
 - Newspapers should adopt a more proactive and sensitive approach towards issues of sex workers.
 - Sensitization and perspective building of media professionals on issues of gender, in particular marginalized sections, is imperative. Such training inputs should be part of the curriculum in Media schools.
 - More editorials on issues of sex workers would help shape public opinion and influence policy makers.
 - Opportunities must be created for journalists to develop their knowledge and perspective and be aware of legal and ethical issues in reporting issues of sex workers, their children and HIV.
- **For organizations working with sex workers**
 - Organizations should build a rapport with the reporters as this helps to improve content of the coverage
 - Ongoing dialogue with media persons must be maintained to encourage ethical and professional coverage of issues of sex work and prostitution.

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5. Sangram/VAMP bulletin


ANNEXURE 1

Content Analysis Schedule

1. Date:
2. Newspaper:
1)TOT 2)IE 3)AA 4)MH 5)Hindu 6)Independent
7)Telegraph 8)Other newspapers 9)Other periodicals
3. Kind of story categorizations
1) News reports 2)Features 3)Editorials
4)Letters to Editor
4. Mention of the name of the Journalist
1) Byline given 2)Network news 3)Reporter 4)Editorial

5. Issues covered by the story

1	Trafficking and sex trade
2	Child Prostitution
3	Socio-economic effect
4	Police Raids and Rescue/ Law related
5	Socio-cultural links
6	Human Rights of Sex Workers
7	HIV/AIDS and Sex Work
8	Rehabilitation (Government)
9	Social intervention
10	Problems of sex workers
11	Role of peoples representatives
12	Children of Prostitute
13	Male Prostitutes
14	Health issues of sex workers
15	Infant trafficking
16	Sex racket
17	Sex trade
18	Trafficking and marriage
19	Societal response
20	Trafficking and labor

- 
6. Coverage of sex work in the context of
 - 1) Adult women 2) Girl child 3) Children 4) Boys
 - 5) Adult Men 6) Transgender
 7. Dimension of sex workers life
 - 1) Shelter 2) Ration 3) Education 4) Health
 - 5) Trafficking 6) Soliciting 7) Religion 8) Brothel running
 - 9) Union / Collective 10) Taxes 11) Sex tourism
 - 12) migration 13) murder 14) entertainment
 - 15) Livelihood 16) Rehabilitation 17) Law
 - 18) Streetwalking 19) Poverty 20) pedophilia 21) Sexual slavery
 - 22) Call girl 23) clients
 8. Perspective taken for the story
 - 1) Criminal 2) Legal 3) Human Rights 4) Human interest
 9. News sources quoted by journalists
 - 1) State / Government dept.- 2) Police 3) Social Workers
 - 4) Court order 5) Sex workers themselves
 - 6) Researcher 7) UN 8) Married women 9) Reliable sources
 - 10) Letter to editor
 10. Treatment to the news story/Type of word used
 - 1) Emotional-Tragic, Sad 2) Factual
 11. Treatment to the news story/Perception about sex work
 - 1) Social 2) Economic 3) Political 4) Developmental
 - 5) Legal 6) illegal
 12. Treatment to the news story/Representation of sex workers
 - 1) Sex workers by themselves 2) By NGO 3) By Govt.
 - 4) Film maker 5) Reliable sources 6) letter to editor
 13. Treatment to the news story/Parties presented in the story
 - 1) Police-Sex worker 2) Social worker-sex worker
 - 3) Society-sex worker 4) married woman – social worker
 - 5) Government – sex work
 14. Treatment to the news story/Portrayal of sex worker
 - 1) Evil 2) Victim 3) Human
 15. Overall Portrayal of Sex worker
 - 1) Positive 2) Neutral 3) Negative
 16. Content of the story
 - 1) Incident based 2) Issue based
 17. Geographical coverage
 - 1) Local 2) State 3) National 4) International

ANNEXURE 2

Tables of data of news clippings on sex work and sex workers.

Table 1

Names of newspapers/periodicals and number of clippings in each:

Name of the Newspaper, Periodicals	Frequency	Percentage
No idea	5	0.4
Times of India	315	27.3
Indian Express	255	22.1
Asian Age	215	18.7
Maharashtra Herald	142	12.3
Hindu	43	3.7
Independent	64	5.6
Telegraph	12	1.0
Other newspaper*	62	5.4
Periodicals**	39	3.4
Total	1152	100.0

* Other newspapers - Middy, Hindustan Times.

** Periodicals - Frontline, India Today, Illustrated weekly, Outlook, Sunday Observer and Time

Table 2

Kind of story categorization

	Frequency	Percent
News reports	876	76.0
Features	245	21.3
Editorials	17	1.5
Letters to editors	14	1.2
Total	1152	100.0

Table 3

Bylines; network news or staff reporter's story

Mention of the name of the journalist	Frequency	Percent
Byline given	484	42.00
Network news	401	34.8
Reporter	267	23.2
Total	1152	100.0

Table 4

Geographical coverage

	Frequency	Percent
Local	198	17.2
State	232	20.1
National	385	33.4
International	337	29.3
Total	1152	100.0

Table 5

Sources

Source	Frequency	Percent
State/Police	434	41.2
Social workers	173	16.2
Sex workers	178	15.5
Court order	57	4.9
Researcher	60	5.2
Multiple sources	176	15.3
Reliable sources	20	1.7
Total	1152	100.0

Table 6

Treatment of news story

	Frequency	Percent
0	93	8.1
Emotional	200	17.4
Factual	859	74.6
Total	1152	100.0

Table 7

Sources vis-à-vis type of words used

Type of words used	State/Police	Social workers	Court order	Sex workers	Researcher	Reliable sources	Multiple sources
Emotional	28.0%	26.0%	3.0%	25.0%	6.0%	4.5%	7.5%
Factual	48.6%	15.7%	5.9%	14.9%	5.6%	1.3%	7.9%

Table 8

Issues covered

	Issues	Frequency	Percent
1	Trafficking and sex trade	214	34.86
2	Police Raids and Rescue	190	18.15
3	Child Prostitution	102	9.74
4	Problems of sex workers	65	6.21
5	HIV/AIDS and Sex Work	55	5.25
6	Human Rights of Sex Workers	54	5.16
7	Socio-cultural links	53	5.06
8	Socio-economic effect	51	4.87
9	Rehabilitation	35	3.34
10	Social intervention	28	2.67
11	Societal response	19	2.19
12	Children of Sex workers	13	1.24
13	Male Sex workers	9	0.86
14	Health issues of sex workers	4	0.38
	Rest combination stories	105	9.11
	Total	1152	

Table 9

Trends

Year of publishing	Frequency	Percent
No idea	31	2.7
1990	2	0.2
1991	69	6.0
1992	89	7.7
1993	62	5.4
1994	76	6.6
1995	100	8.7
1996	153	13.3
1997	150	13.0
1998	94	8.2
1999	114	9.9
2000	64	5.6
2001	45	3.9
2002	47	4.1
2003	56	4.9
Total	1152	100.0

Table 10
Nature of representation

Representation of sex workers	Frequency	Percent
0	93	8.1
Sex workers by themselves	219	19.0
By NGO	240	20.8
By State/Police	557	48.4
By Film maker	4	.3
By Reliable sources	39	3.4
Total	1152	100.0

Table 11
Perceptions of sex work

	Frequency	Percent
0	93	8.1
Social	304	26.4
Economical	93	8.1
Political	84	7.3
Developmental	45	3.9
Legal	306	26.6
Criminal	179	15.5

Table 12
Source vis-à-vis perception

Perception about sex work	State/Police	Social workers	Court order	Sex workers	Researcher	Reliable sources
Social	28.5%	30.3%	2.3%	28.6%	4.6%	3.6%
Economical	32.3%	21.6%	4.3%	22.6%	8.6%	4.3%
Political	61.8%	17.9%	2.4%	13.1%	4.8%	1.2%
Developmental	11.1%	31.1%	8.9%	28.9%	11.1%	
Legal	63.8%	8.1%	7.8%	11.8%	1.6%	1.7%
Criminal	53.7%	8.4%	8.4%	3.4%	8.9%	3.3%

Table 13
Perspectives for the story

Perspective of the story	Frequency	Percent
No idea	93	8.1
Criminal	409	35.5
Legal	226	19.6
Human rights	358	31.1
Human interest	66	5.7
Total	1152	100.0

Table 14
Geographical coverage and perspective taken for the story

Geographical coverage	Perspective taken for the story			
	Criminal	Legal	Human rights	Human interest
Local	53.8%	12.5%	31.7%	1.9%
State	48.3%	19.8%	28.0%	3.9%
National	33.2%	22.6%	40.0%	4.2%
International	33.2%	23.7%	31.5%	11.6%

Table 15

Sources and perspective of the story

Perspective taken for the story	State/Police	Social workers	Court order	Sex workers	Researcher	State & Social worker	Reliable sources
Criminal	58.9%	9.5%	8.3%	6.1%	3.2%	1.2%	3.4%
Legal	50.8%	13.7%	4.9%	10.2%	8.0%	.9%	1.8%
Human Rights	22.7%	29.3%	2.2%	30.2%	7.0%	1.7%	.9%
Human Interest	21.2%	18.1%	6.1%	33.3%	6.1%	4.5%	9.1%

Table 16

Incident/issue based vis-à-vis perspective

Content of the story	Criminal	Legal	Human rights	Human interest
Incident based	58.5%	16.7%	20.3%	4.4%
Issue based	22.7%	25.0%	44.6%	7.7%

Table 17

Portrayal of sex worker

	Frequency	Percent
0	94	8.2
Evil	208	18.1
Victim	604	52.4
Human	246	21.4
Total	1152	100.0

Table 18

Source vis-à-vis portrayal

Source						
Portrayal of sex worker	State/Police	Social workers	Court order	Sex workers	Researcher	Reliable sources
Evil	59.9%	6.3%	8.7%	8.2%	3.9%	5.3%
Victim	48.1%	20.7%	5.5%	8.6%	5.8%	2.2%
Human	21.5%	19.9%	2.4%	44.3%	6.5%	1.2%

ANNEXURE 3

Beyond Vice and Victimhood : Towards a Balanced Media Representation of Sex Workers⁸


The post-lunch session, Beyond Vice and Victimhood: Towards a Balanced Media Representation of Sex Workers **was moderated by Laxmi Murthy.**

Introducing the session, Laxmi Murthy said that the session had been conceived because issues around sexuality have always been subject to extremes of representation in the media - ranging from silence to sensationalism. Sex work and prostitution are multifaceted questions made more complex because of lack of information, differing moral values and the social stigma attached. While commercial sex has existed in some form or the other in most societies, sex workers have lived on the margins of society through most of human history. Stereotypes, derogatory

names (in all languages), stigma and general indifference to their humanity prevail worldwide. The media has often added to the reinforcing of prejudices and perpetuating myths, and increased visibility has arguably contributed to a backlash.

In the face of extreme violation of fundamental rights of sex workers and denial of access to health, education and other welfare services, sex workers have evolved several survival strategies that are often invisible in the "victim hood" story. It is worth noting that "victim hood" results not necessarily from being in sex work (as usually depicted in the media) but that often, the portrayal is itself the victimization. Undeniably, sex work often involves poor health, financial exploitation and physical and sexual abuse; however, these abuses are not intrinsic to sex work, but rather the result of the stigmatization and marginalization of sex workers in Indian society.

⁸The Content Analysis of Media Coverage on the Issues of Sex Workers, was presented at a round table discussion in Pune hosted by the Network of Women in Media, India, "an association which aims to provide a forum for women in media professions to share information and resources, exchange ideas, promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society. Local groups linked to the NwMI are currently functioning in 16 centers across the country." At their 6th annual conference, one of the panels was specifically this analysis and the issues it raised. The following report resulted from this discussion. For more information, visit <http://www.nwmindia.org/>.



Additionally, the blurring of differences between prostitution and trafficking does not take into account the crucial difference between consent and coercion. Traditional notions of “prostitution is violence against women” mirror this position that is being challenged by organized movements of sex workers. Likewise, the conflation of sex work (commercial exchange of sexual services) with human trafficking (coercion into forced labor of all kinds) harms both the sex workers caught in the confusion and the fight against trafficking. Often, short-sighted policies aimed at tackling trafficking (such as “raid and rescue” operations led by the police) contribute to the increased harassment and vulnerability of an already marginalized section. Laws (such as the IPTA) related to sex work also operate within this binary framework of vice and victim hood, ignoring the complex lived reality of sex workers. The HIV/AIDS pandemic and regarding sex workers as “carriers of the virus”, and moves to enforce mandatory testing, has further narrowed the debate and impacted on the rights of sex workers.

The session sought to explore the underlying reasons for an unbalanced portrayal of sex workers in the media; to identify misrepresentation; to unpack the myths and prejudices surrounding sex work and prostitution; understand the proposed amendments to the ITPA (Immoral Traffic Prevention Act); provide a realistic understanding of the circumstances in which women engage in sex work; and promote alternate terminology and perspectives with which to understand and report on the lives and issues of sex workers.

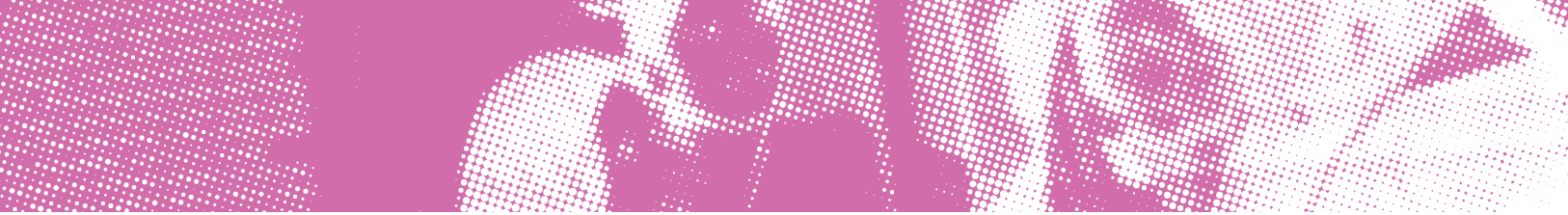
The session began with the presentation of a media monitoring exercise initiated by CASAM (Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization), a project of Sangram working with sex workers in Maharashtra. The study was carried out by Vidya Kulkarni (independent writer-photographer and women's rights activist) and Dipti Raut (journalist in print and broadcast media). The aim of the study was to examine media coverage of sex work to seek clarity on the amount, extent, quality, and depth of this coverage, in order to help in better reporting of sex workers' issues. The study analyzed 1107 clippings from

English newspapers and magazines compiled by Aalochana, a Pune-based women's research and documentation centre. The clippings covered the period from 1990 to 2003 - a period that marks a shift in discourse on these issues, as a result of the efforts of groups working with sex workers and the growing sex workers' movement in India

Presenting the key findings of the study, Dipti Raut and Vidya Kulkarni pointed out that the police and government together form the main source of the news (44%), followed by NGOs (21%) and Sex workers (17%). Since the police department remains a major and influential (29%) source the stories reflect police angle and action taken by them. Such coverage in a way reinforces stereotypes of the sex worker as a wrongdoer, engaged in illegal activities, said Dipti. Editorials constitute only 1%, showing scanty attention given to the issue by newspapers. The small percentage of readers' letters (1%) shows that the newspaper coverage has not succeeded in motivating readers to respond their views on this issue.

The news coverage of trafficking and police raids is among the highest (29%). However, very few attempts are made to follow up these operations and find out the status of rescued girls. Thus, despite getting larger media space, the issue of rescue operations has not been followed up adequately. The study found that journalists have been lacking in healthy skepticism of the version of the police. The least covered issue was the health issues of sex workers (0.38%), while the most-covered issue was trafficking and the sex trade (25.59%).

The main observations of the study were: sex workers cannot be viewed as a homogenized group; there should be a distinction made between sex workers and the sex industry; there should be an attempt to go beyond the victimization story; there should be a recognition of the involvement of sex workers in tackling problems in the industry; the media should explore more thoroughly legal interventions and methods like raids and rescue, and their drawbacks, and encourage debate about issues such as legalization of prostitution.



Meena Seshu, Director of Sangram, who has worked with sex workers in Sangli for more than a decade and a half, took up some of the issues that surfaced in the survey. Seshu said that ever since sex work had been institutionalized with trafficking, it had become difficult to extricate it from the HIV/ AIDS paradigm. Public health campaigns believe that sex workers are carriers of HIV, thus stigmatizing them further.

She said that sex work couldn't be equated with trafficking. While a lot of trafficking did occur, a section of women had continued this field "because this was the best possible option available to them."

Instead of using the clichés like the "oldest profession" or "flesh trade" or "selling of the body", Seshu suggested that sex work be looked as a business transaction of "buying and selling of sex". She said that violence was not in the act of sex, but in everything else surrounding this transaction, which contributed to stigmatization and marginalization of sex workers

The existing outlook towards sex work was the reason she said that rescue and raid operations of the police never worked. The women in the profession have more at stake, which is why they prefer to join forces with the brothel owners once the raid is over. Faced with harassment from the pimp, the customer, the lover, the police or from the street, it is the brothel owner who protects the sex worker. The society on the other hand is keen on "rehabilitating" the sex worker economically, when she does not need it. Why would a women who earns in lakhs each month agree to be rehabilitated with sewing machines, carpets or candle work, which is what the existing rehabilitation projects have to offer.

On the other hand, the sex worker continues to struggle to open a bank account, or get her child admitted in school, or own a car, owing to the stigmatization of the business of sex work.

During the heated discussion that followed, some participants said that the "choice" terminology was erroneous because

women, and many child sex workers are forced into prostitution and have no choice. The example of bar dancers in Mumbai who were forced into prostitution was also cited. Seshu clarified that children should be kept away from sex work, it was nothing short of child abuse. The problem, she reiterated, was when adult women's issues were conflated with the issues of children who were forced into prostitution. Seshu said that there was a need to decriminalize sex work. Until sex work was made safer for those who had chosen to continue with the profession, it would be difficult for those who had been forced into this profession to get out, Seshu argued.

Questions flagged included: would any of us enter sex work ourselves, or encourage our daughters to become sex workers, if not then what "choice" we are talking about. Seshu said that one is never asked if she wanted to become construction worker or a rag picker. But a distinction is made with the profession of sex work, and this was more to do with moral judgments. She reiterated that the "choice" paradigm must be seen in a larger context of lack of choices in general for women.

Sonal intervened to point that in Ahmedabad many women offer sexual services out of their homes as their men pimp for them and earn a lifestyle that they would not be able to afford otherwise. However brothels are different from home based services. Here the client is invisible but the women get picked up during raids.

Seshu said that if the government intends to formulate a law then it should sit down with sex workers during the decision-making process. She said that while the rights of the sex workers are being discussed, the right to sex work would be the next gift.

Supriya Sule, Member of Parliament, who attended the session, intervened and said that it was important for law makers to be well-briefed and understand the issues in a more nuanced manner.

For more information, go to <http://www.nwmindia.org/>.



LIST OF ACRONYMS

AA: The Asian Age

CASAM: Center for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization

CSW: Commercial sex worker

EPW: The Economic and Political Weekly

HT: The Hindustan Times

IE: The Indian Express

ITPA: Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act

MH: The Maharashtra Herald

NCW: National Commission for Women

NRI: Non Resident Indian

SANGRAM: Sampada Gramin Mahila Sanstha

SITA: Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1956

SO: The Sunday Observer

TOI: The Times of India

UN: The United Nations

VAMP: Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad

Center for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization (CASAM)