

# BARRIER AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES: ACCESS TO FORMAL EDUCATION OF SEX WORKERS' CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH

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©Ontario International Development Agency ISSN: 1923-6654 (print)  
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

**Abstract:** This paper explores the barriers to formal education of sex workers' children in Bangladesh and intended to discover the effective measures accordingly. The study investigated the socio economic profile of the sex workers who are mother with children of school going age and interlinked this profile with the barriers to access in formal education of their children. This is a mixed method study; 100 randomly selected mothers who are sex worker are interviewed for quantitative section and for qualitative part three (3) focus group discussions (FDG) with the mother and three (3) FDG with the children of school going age also two (2) in-depth interview with the school teachers are arranged where 68 respondents participated in discussion from different groups. Result shows that children of sex workers' has a limited access to formal education; those who rarely get chance to be admitted by roaming enormous humiliation from every sphere of the admission and lesson learning process, are also ended up as dropout after a short period of time. A massive ignorance and reluctance is also found from the education provider's end. Mother's of the children; most of the cases who are the only parent and sole decision maker for their children's education are illiterate or merely educated to take a prompt and dynamic decision for their children's future. The continuous ignorance, discrimination and denial from the education provider and the relevant stakeholders discourage mothers to be exposed or claim education for their children. Financial crisis also sometime play a vital role for discontinuation. Moreover mothers need to struggle for coping up with the discipline and rules-regulation of the institute like formal schools.

The identified barriers are countable but enormous effort is needed to resolve those barriers. As the barriers developed from societal aspect, societal remedy is needed foremost. Mass awareness is the pre requisite to change the mindset of the people living in the society. Target oriented focused program should be undertaken by the government as well the NGOs working in the field of education to aware mothers of the children and provider's of the educational facilities. To resolve the barriers a holistic approach is required with the association of each stakeholders involved in the formal education process of children. It also should be kept in mind that the desired result will not be achieved over night and a patience effort demand to resolve the barrier and to conquer the ultimate achievement.

**Keywords:** Formal education, Barrier, Measure, Sex Worker

## INTRODUCTION

**B**angladesh is one of the densely populated countries in the world with about 140 million people within the area of 147,570 square kilometers (56,977 square miles). The density of population is 964 per square kilometer (density was 834 in 2001) is highest in the world [1]. Despite the fact; country has made significant progress in addressing health and education challenges over the past three decades after independence, but still tagged as one of the world's poorest amongst the least developed countries [2]. Almost 53% of the population over age 15 is illiterate, 40% of the

population lives below the poverty line and 41% of children under five suffer from malnourishment [3].

Policymaker, political leaders and population scientists are now divided into two platforms while interpreting the growth of population of the country, one group has identified country's huge population as a massive threat for development; on the other hand, another group recognizes the huge population as one of the major resources of the country. Nonetheless, the country is stepping throughout the population momentum and it would be the utmost apt to adopt appropriate policies to convert the huge young population to potential productive force. Unfortunately, country yet not being appropriately prepare to convert the young cohort into productive force. The country needs to stride much ahead to create a congenial environment for social, economic and political development.

Education sometime refers as the backbone of a nation; lead a nation towards greater economic output, higher employment levels, better health and improved social structure. After the independence, Bangladesh achieved noteworthy improvement in terms of the rate of literacy, though it is still ratified less than half of the population as literate and a huge inequality exists among the poor and rich people in terms of being educated as well as having access of educational opportunity [4].

Constitution of Bangladesh, Article-17 stipulates Primary Education as the responsibility of State. To address this responsibility, primary education underwent a massive deal of changes and development since the last decades. Government is committed to provide free primary education for all 6-10 year old children and has launched a nationwide universal primary education program as response of constitutional obligation [5].

Moreover, Bangladesh is one of the earliest signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Despite such endorsement, not a few number of children are still denied from the right to education due gender discrimination, language, religion, disability or simply because they are from the poor economic background or otherwise from marginalized communities. Bangladesh acknowledges the problem of child prostitution in its second periodic report to the CRC Committee. The report states that the most prevalent form of sexual exploitation affecting children in Bangladesh is child prostitution. In December 2002, Human Rights Watch spoke to numerous women who had been forced into prostitution as girls [6]

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) also showed deep concern at the prevalence of sexual exploitation of children and the social stigmatization

of the victims of such exploitation, as well as at the lack of social and psychological recovery programs and the very limited possibilities for victims to be reintegrated into society. The Committee is also concerned about the widespread practice of forcing children into prostitution. University of Minnesota (2003) [7]

### **Present situation of the sex workers and their children in Bangladesh**

Evidence reflects that, almost 13,000 children become victim in commercial sex industry and more than 20,000 children born and live in 18 registered red-light areas in a year in Bangladesh [8]. Furthermore, they lead an unhealthy life watching their mothers being exploited everyday and as a result they automatically consider themselves as a part of the similar exploitation [8]. Various sources revealed that at least 62,000 Bangladeshi women are employed in the sex trade of Indian sub-continent [9]. Over the last decade, 200,000 Bangladeshi girls were lured under false circumstances and sold into the sex industry of Pakistan, India and the Middle East [10].

A non-government source reported that about 200,000 women and children have been trafficked to the Middle East in the last 20 years. Human rights activists and agencies estimate 200-400 young women and children are smuggled out every month, from Bangladesh to Pakistan. Women lawyers' association working in the country estimates that on an average 4500 women and children are being trafficked to Pakistan each year and at least 200,000 women have been trafficked to Pakistan over the last 10 years. The Indian Social Welfare Board estimates that there are 500,000 foreign prostitutes in India 1% are from Bangladesh and 2.7% of prostitutes in Calcutta are from Bangladesh [10].

Another study discovered that, there are approximately 100,000 female sex workers are in operation in the country's urban, semi urban, and rural areas. They either are organized in brothels or work independently in hotel or residence. More than half them are aged between 18 and 30 years and have at least 1 to 2 children; those children [11] According to the non-governmental organizations working in the country, over 150,000 women are involved in prostitution in Bangladesh [12].

Girls who are born or brought up in the brothel almost invariably follow their mothers, aunts and sisters into sex work. Most of them have their first sexual experience by the age of eight or nine [13].

On the other hand, in brothel younger children usually help their mothers in household chores and bring refreshments for their mother's clients. As a result automatically boys tend to become pimps once they grow up and girls continue in their mothers'

profession. It is evident that most girls start selling sex labour before the age of 12 [14].

Bangladeshi police estimate that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 children engaged in street prostitution. About 10,000 girls are active in prostitution inside the country. Over the last decade, 200,000 Bangladeshi girls were lured under false circumstances and sold into the sex industry in nations including Pakistan, India and the Middle East. About 40,000 children from Bangladesh are involved in prostitution in Pakistan. Bangladeshi girls are also trafficked to India for commercial sex trade. 10,000 Bangladeshi children are in brothels in Bombay and Goa, India [10].

Another concealed problem is age demarcation of children. Though Bangladeshi law admit the minimum age of 18 for legal prostitution, but it is commonly ignored and circumvented by false statements of age. Procurers of minors were rarely prosecuted, and large numbers of child prostitutes worked in brothels. The UN Children's Fund estimated in 2004 that there were 10 thousand child prostitutes working in the country, but other estimates placed the figure as high as 29 thousand [7].

Moreover, Child marriage and traditional/customary laws is the hidden supply hub for commercial sexual exploitation of children and a strong evident for child prostitution as well as child pornography. A renowned NGO working for the children identified that approximately two million street children are in country become the frequent victim of sexual exploitation [15]

A situation analysis of sex workers and street children in Bangladesh revealed that the major reasons for bringing sex workers into the profession include, among others, social constraints, domestic violence, oppression and coercion by miscreants (*mastans*), polygamy, dowry, deliberate choices based on attraction for lucrative lifestyle, fraudulent promises of employment, poverty, trafficking, debt-bondage and so forth. Entry into sex work can also have socially rooted causes that can be traced to traditions, beliefs and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities resulting in varied standards for men and women in terms of policies, attitudes and practices.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study is focused on the education facility of the group of marginalized children of sex workers; who are almost deprived from all form citizen right even sometime denied from human rights too since very

childhood. Very unfortunately the children of Commercial Sex Workers of Bangladesh have been living under continual deprivation to access mainstream formal education only due to their mother's identity as sex workers.

### **General Objective**

The study is intended to explore the barriers towards accessing formal education of the sex worker's children in Bangladesh and tried to find the effective measures.

### **Specific Objectives**

(a) To know about the demographic, social and economic status of sex workers and their children in Bangladesh (b) To explore the barriers towards accessing formal education by the sex workers children in Bangladesh (c) To way out the effective measures towards accessing formal education

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

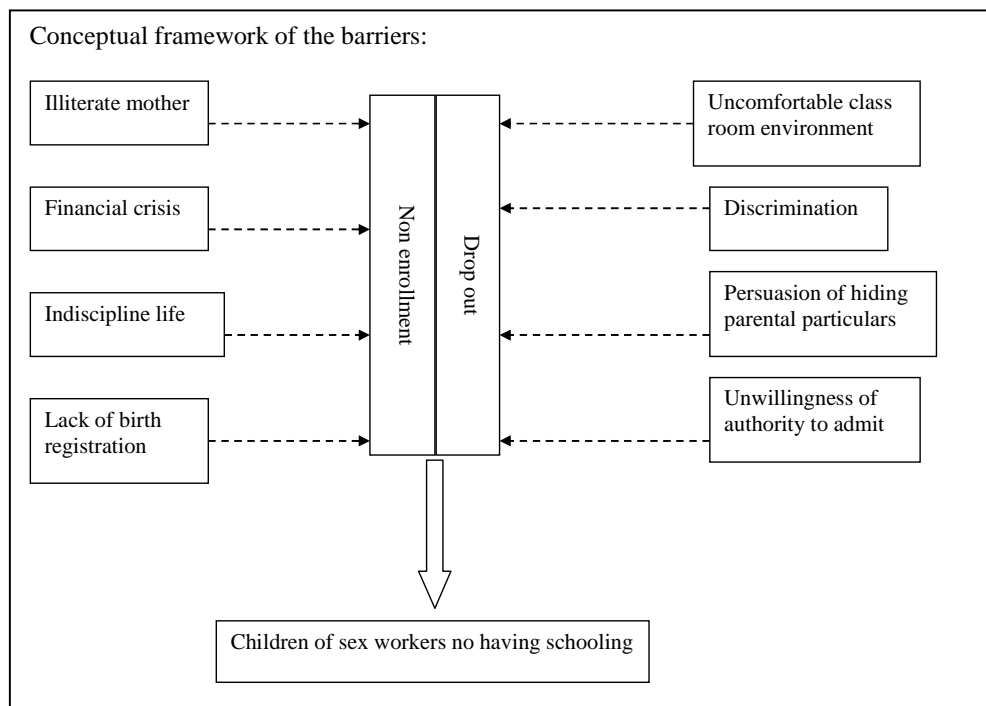
The design of the study was exploratory and a mixed method approach was used. Both the aspects of qualitative and quantitative procedures of data collection and analysis were followed in sequential process. Qualitative data collection process has been undertaken before applying the quantitative data collection and both qualitative and quantitative information were given equal priority. The study was conducted in three (3) diversified areas in three (3) district town of Dhaka division of Bangladesh; these are Dhaka Sadar, Manikgang and Mymensing. Three separate groups of respondents (children of sex worker, sex workers who are mother of the age of school going children and related stakeholders) were reached separately by using three particular tools of data collection. Structured questionnaire, in-depth interview check list and FGD were conducted.

For the qualitative data collection, three (3) focus group discussion (FGD) has been conducted purposively with sex workers who are mother and have children in the age 5 years and above. In each FGD 8-11 sex workers were present and participated in the discussion. Three FGD were also conducted with the children and 6-14 children were present on each FGD. For the quantitative information, 100 sex workers who are mother were interviewed through a structured questionnaire. In two district setting, three school teachers were interviewed by using an in-depth interview checklist, but in capital town it was not possible to reach school teachers for the interview purpose (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Sample list

Sample area	Respondent	Frequency of Participation	
		Questionnaire	FGD/ In-depth (participant)
Mymensingh	SW (Brothel)	50	09
	Children of sex workers		06
	Stakeholders (school teacher)		2
Dhaka	SW (Floating)	24	11
	Children		14
	Stakeholders (school teacher)	-	-
Manikgonj	SW (Floating)	26	08
	Children of sex workers		07
	Stakeholders (school teacher)		1
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>

Qualitative part of the data was analyzed by using the thematic content analysis technique and the quantitative segment was analyzed through SPSS 17.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework of the barriers

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mean age of the mother of the children who are engaged as sex workers is 32 (range 17 to 50, SD 7.7); half of them are in the age group 21-50 years. Almost half of the respondents (n = 100, 45%) described themselves as divorced and another (n = 100, 14%) separated. Mean income of the mothers is 12000BDT (range 1700-30000 BDT); 6 out of 10 earn 5000 to 15000BDT per month. Almost (n = 100, 47%) mother have 2-3 children (range 1-6). the literacy status is far below than the national average; (n = 100, 51%) are illiterate and another (n = 100, 34%) have the education of below primary level and only 1% are highest class VII passed.

Mothers are less interested to live with their children in the same residence, they prefer to send them in another places like relative's house or in safe home or in hostels. But very few of them could manage such alternative residence due to financial and social barriers. The fortunate mothers who are not more than 30% could positively manage schooling for their kids though they need to hide their professional identity at the time of school admission.

Birth registration is compulsory for school enrollment; mother faces complication in birth registration as they fail to provide appropriate parental identity required for registration. Due to the failure of registration process also create barrier in school enrollment and mothers become less interested to enroll their children in school to avoid such situation.

Children of sex workers are always become the victim of social exclusion. This exclusion peruses difficulties for them to be admitted in schools. If they can manage somehow, the school authority also insists to hide parentage particulars. Psychological humiliation randomly happens in the class room; teachers and peer group equally participate in the process of humiliation. The guardian of the other students also contributes in the process of humiliation. Moreover, the life style of the mothers creates certain obstacle to cope with the general routine of schools like attend classes in the morning with appropriate preparation. Consequently a good number of children of sex workers either never enrolled or dropped out after a short period of time of enrollment.

Moreover the children who can manage going school, mostly been dropped out when their mother's identity disclosed. As most of their mothers are also illiterate, a substantial number of them are not that much aware about going to school and on the other hand they have tiny capability to council their kids in a positive way rather they also insist dropping school in such diverse situation. Sometime it also happens that the

number of children had to drop out as their mother failed to bear educational expenses. Lack of proper guidance and self motivation as well as financial scarcity are the identified obstacles for the formal schooling of the sex worker's children.

Children of sex workers; the ultimate eye witness of mother's activities, being exploited at the very beginning of their childhood and as a result they themselves find them in the similar vicious cycle of exploitation at their matured stage of life. Young children, who are not in the age of selling sex but in the age of going primary schools, need to help their mothers in household chores and bring refreshments for their mother's clients. Boys tend to become pimps once they grow up and girls continue in their mothers' profession. Most girls enter the profession before the age of 12.

Moreover, the study revealed that the children could not enjoyed the class at all as they were stigmatized and isolated, teachers and classmates whispered on their mothers' identity and they were always the issue of gossiping.

School Teacher of a school near by a brothel argued that the teachers as well authority of schools are not at all sensitized and a massive social motivational approach could gradually improve the situation.

Study revealed that the respondents expect dignified live as they feel that they are at least working for their own; expect support and cooperation from the society leaders, school authority, teachers, guardians and from other relevant stakes to get favorable environment for their children in school so that they continue their education without facing any sort of stigma and discrimination.

Sensitization programs for relevant stakeholders of the community (teachers, religious leaders, community leaders, elected representatives, policy makers) for creating enabling environment, increased awareness and motivation for mothers so that they can play vital enthusiastic role to send their children in school and psychological counseling for both mothers & their children might work holistically to improve the existing frustrating situation.

Education authorities should recognize it as a challenge to enroll marginalized children and provide appropriate support to keep them continue. All the interventions for social change in marginalized communities should go parallel with efforts towards promoting inclusive education rather than the later waiting for the former to happen (Aupam Ahuja 2004).

Government is committed to ensuring free primary education for all 6-10 year old children and has launched a nationwide universal primary education

program as part of its constitutional obligation. But this group has always been untouched by the government as they belong in a socially sensitive community. We are hopeful that government and non government organization, civil society and other relevant stakes of the society will come forward and stand behind the unfortunate children of sex workers.

### Effective measures

Barriers that are identified in the study are countable but the effective measures demand numerous effort. The sex workers are the community who are always deprived for their professional identity and such identity crisis flow from one generation to next. If the people of the society fail to change their mindset towards them, the children of the sex workers will definitely be denied from the basic need education. To change the mind set, mass awareness is needed. Government should keep in mind that the target of 100% primary education by 2015 will not be possible to achieve without education those children; so it is indeed a vital challenge for the government. School teachers, authority of the schools and related stake holders should be awarded accordingly. Vital registration for the sex workers as well as the birth registration for their children should be ensured and that might give an insight for future measure and forecasting. Sex workers who are mother should be reaching under motivational approach so that they become encouraged to send their children in school. Government and NGOs might think about the financial contribution for mothers to make them enthusiastic about their children's education.

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