



## Paper 11

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SEX WORKERS OF CHITTAGONG**

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## CPD-UNFPA Publication Series

It is now widely recognised that there is a need to take the scope of the population policy in Bangladesh beyond the confines of achieving population stabilisation through reduction of fertility. Although in recent years the approach to reduction of fertility has changed from narrow family planning to a broad based reproductive health approach, it is being increasingly felt that Bangladesh's population policy should encompass other equally important issues which have wide implications for the development process and the quality of life of people of Bangladesh. To address some of the related pertinent issues the Centre for Policy Dialogue has initiated a programme which aims at undertaking a series of studies covering the broad area of **Population and Sustainable Development**. The major objective of these studies is to enhance national capacity to formulate and implement population and development policies and programmes in Bangladesh, and through close interaction with the various stakeholder groups, to promote advocacy on critical related issues. The programme which is scheduled to be implemented by the CPD between 1999 and 2002 shall address, *inter alia*, such issues as population dynamics and population momentum and their implications for education and health services, the nexus between population correlates, poverty and environment, impacts of urbanisation and slummisation and migration, as well as human rights. The study has benefited from generous support provided by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The programme also envisages organisation of workshops and dialogues at divisional and national levels and also holding of international thematic conferences.

As part of the above mentioned CPD-UNFPA collaborative programme the CPD has planned to bring out a series of publications in order to facilitate wider dissemination of the findings of the various studies to be prepared under the aforementioned CPD-UNFPA programme. The present paper on the theme of **Socio-Economic Profile of Sex Workers of Chittagong** has been prepared by *Dr. Irshad Kamal Khan*, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Chittagong. The paper was presented at the seminar on *Population and Sustainable Development: Selected Issues of Greater Chittagong* which was jointly organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue and Department of Economics, University of Chittagong on May 6, 2000. The seminar was held at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Chittagong under the CPD-UNFPA programme on *Population and Sustainable Development*.

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### Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
FI	Field Investigator
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VD	Venereal Disease

## Executive Summary

### Introduction and Background

The population of sex workers existing in the urban centres in Bangladesh, however small in number relative to the general population, represents a crucial aspect of our society. Much of our future may depend on how we shape our attitude towards this community. The existence of a fairly sizeable population of “floating” sex workers on the streets of Chittagong is a fairly recent phenomenon. This physically visible but socially hidden population poses the possibility of some serious social problems that should be faced now. The present conditions of existence of this population can be a real threat to society in the context of an impending STD/HIV/AIDS epidemic. The subculture associated with such populations substantially magnifies the dangers faced by society from drug abuse, addiction and drugs and sex-related crimes. Society cannot remain indifferent to the human rights abuses constantly being faced by this community.

The fundamental aim of the present study is to present a socio-economic profile of sex workers in Chittagong. The more specific objectives are to obtain information about the individual and social background of sex workers; living and housing conditions of sex workers; the circumstances of entrance into the sex industry; sex workers’ incomes and expenditure; the nature of sex worker activities; health conditions of sex workers; sex workers’ awareness about sex-related social problems including the use of condoms and awareness about AIDS/HIV; and sex workers’ own perceptions about the profession.

The present study on the socio-economic profile of sex workers of Chittagong was done under the auspices of the CPD-UNFPA Programme on Population and Sustainable Development. The study was based on a survey using an 8-page structured questionnaire printed in Bangla. Ethnographic data was used to supplement the quantitative data. The survey covered a sample of 200 sex workers of Chittagong city. 5 Field Investigators conducted the survey from mid-October to end of November 1999, after they were given due orientation and training by the Research Consultant. Survey data was manually entered in computer via keyboard. A standard statistical software was used to process and tabulate the data.

### Summary of Conclusions

#### *a. Individual and Social Background of Sex Workers*

There is a significant presence of child sex workers within the community of sex workers. The growth of the sex worker population seems to have become faster in recent years and recruitment seems to be on the rise. There is a general pattern of predominance of illiteracy and lack of education among sex workers. Birth rates among sex workers seem to be fairly low and a large proportion are childless. Sex workers live as social outcasts with a minimal level of bonds and ties with their natural (biological) and conjugal families. The incidence of dead parents among sex workers is fairly high. Sex workers come from social backgrounds typical of the most populous sections of Bangladesh's population. This implies that recruitment into the sex industry is fed by most sections of the general population; it is not just some particular sections of our society which are at risk. Living conditions of sex workers are deplorable by the lowest of standards; most sex workers consider themselves permanent residents of Chittagong.

***b. Circumstances of Entry into the Sex Worker's Profession***

Sex workers have a fairly low duration of experience in the profession, especially in comparison to the duration of their stay in the city; they do not become sex workers immediately on arrival in the city. The dalal (pimp) plays a major role in the initial recruitment of the sex worker; many sex workers blame themselves for entering the profession. Poverty, trickery, abuse, coercion and rape can be identified as the main circumstances of entrance into the sex industry.

***c. Incomes and Expenditure of Sex Workers***

Sex workers apparently have high average daily income levels in comparison to the poorest sections of society, but they do not work all days of the week. The main items of sex workers' expenditure in order of importance are food, clothing, cosmetics, entertainment, transport and house rent. Although sex workers report saving from their incomes, these are actually not very large, sustain for short durations and are quickly exhausted in times of need.

***d. Nature of Sex Worker Activities***

The main offtime activities of sex workers are physical rest and sleep, watching movies and adda (gossiping with peers). In spite of some advantages of working with dalals (pimps), the great majority of sex workers do not consider them necessary. The most frequently used places for sexual services are clients' premises, hotel or boarding house, train wagons, roadside, abandoned and isolated places and neighbourhood clubs. Sex workers consider police action and mastaan (musclemen/ hoodlums) interference as the main hindrances of sex worker activity. Sex workers are fairly well acquainted with experience of jail or police custody. They accept it as an inevitable though unpleasant part of life. Sex workers describe their clients as both educated and uneducated; belonging to all classes, especially the poor and the middle classes; of all ages, but mostly young and middle aged. The significant involvement of young people in the sex industry should be of concern to society.

***e. Sex Workers' Health Issues***

Almost all sex workers claim to have daily baths and use soap. However, the water used for drinking and bathing has a high level of contamination. The level of discharge of human excreta in open spaces also appears to be extremely dangerous. There is a significant lack of medical attention among sex workers. The incidence of STD among sex workers is also dangerously high, with inadequate treatment. The adoption of birth control measures (including male condoms) among sex workers is not high enough and there is cause for social concern in this area.

***f. Sex Workers' Awareness of Sex-related Social Problems***

Frequency of condom use among clients is irregular. Most sex workers do not urge clients to use condoms, although more than 70% do prefer condom use. A little less than half of the sex workers are not aware of the role of condoms in preventing STD. There is widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of a device for the prevention of STD/AIDS. Many sex workers have no knowledge whatsoever that they are at risk of contracting STD. Most sex workers have never even heard of AIDS. The extent of the awareness among sex workers being at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is limited to only a tenth of the sex workers.

***g. Perceptions of Sex Workers about Problems of the Sex Industry***

Although a majority of sex workers claimed satisfaction with their present occupation, most would prefer to switch to other occupations, given the opportunity. Sex workers do not show any preference for their children to become sex workers. Many would like to have their

children educated. Prospective response to rehabilitation initiatives is very positive. Sex workers resist initiatives which are high handed and do not take into account their own perceptions. A court ruling has proclaimed the eviction of brothel inmates "unlawful". Sex workers perceive poverty, fate, trickery, family dissatisfaction, own mistake, abuse and coercion as the main reasons for entry into the profession. The prevalence of tobacco, drugs and alcohol use is very high among sex workers. There is a linkage between the sex industry and substance use. Ganja is the drug of choice. Prevalence of drug abuse among the male members of sex worker groups is probably very high.

### **Broad Policy Recommendations**

The findings of this study call for a variety of action targeting the sex worker population. The government has a role to play, especially in formulating the general framework of policy and in drawing up priorities. However, the actual implementation of policy and a gradual evolution of practical programmes based on real experience has to be executed by forums created from within the community at large. This is where voluntary welfare organisations, grassroots institutions, human rights organisations and NGOs can and should play a positive role.

Positive social action is called for in the areas of medical attention to sex workers, especially in the diagnosis and treatment of STD. Also, it would be useful to promote the use of female condoms both for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and STD/HIV/AIDS. Such action might warrant formulation of adequate public policies and implementation through mass participation and NGO activities.

There is an urgent need to spread the awareness among sex workers about the role of condoms in preventing STD/AIDS. Sex workers need to be educated about the association of sex and STD. AIDS awareness needs to be spread among sex workers. All this calls for awareness raising components within social action programmes associated with sex workers.

Sex workers' perceptions show that they would be receptive to social initiatives to provide education to their children. This is an area requiring motivated social action. Social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society, that take into account their own sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process can be worthwhile.



# Socio-Economic Profile of Sex Workers of Chittagong

## I. Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Prelude: The General Context

One of the first characteristics about Bangladesh as a country that commonly springs to mind is that it is an over-populated one. Needless to say, such a characterisation is at best an enormous over-simplification and a sweeping generalisation. It can certainly be hoped that the UNFPA-CPD Programme on Population and Sustainable Development will bring to light many of the important complexities of the population and sustainable development possibilities existing in Bangladesh. But population is about people, not size or abstract numbers. It is the earnest opinion of the author of the present study that the population of sex workers existing in the urban centres in Bangladesh, however small in number relative to the general population, represents a crucial aspect of our social reality. It is highly likely that a great many aspects of the future general development of our society will depend upon how we shape our attitude towards this community. The complexity of its relationships *vis-a-vis* the society as a whole touches almost every aspect of our life. It is hoped that the present study will help to create some understanding of these relationships.

The city of Chittagong has seen rapid urbanisation along with a measure of industrial development during the last two decades. However, these processes of industrialisation and urbanisation have been characterised with some marked peculiarities. The most obvious of these is the mushrooming growth of squalid slums with deplorable living conditions and the appearance of destitute rural migrants in search of employment and income. City inhabitants have witnessed the presence of a migrant population occupying the footpaths and open spaces making their homes under the open sky. These homeless people try to make a living by scavenging, begging and trying to find any sort of odd job. Many have probably attained a degree of success and moved up to slums where they manage to live more like a community. However, a section of this street population, by some quirk of demographic dynamics seems to have been transformed into a sizeable population of “floating sex workers”.

But population is about people, not size or abstract numbers

This phenomenon of a visible population of sex workers on the streets is fairly new to the city of Chittagong. Chittagong has been a busy port and a commercial centre for centuries. A sex worker population must always have existed. Before Bangladesh became an independent state, the city had an established brothel in the Sadarghat area of the old commercial hub. This brothel was burned down by zealots and the inmates were evicted. Since then, the sex industry existed in the city as a “hidden activity”; sex workers were rarely visible on the streets until about a decade ago. The existing population of sex workers in Chittagong should still be regarded as a “hidden” one, except that a large section of it has probably been forced to start operations in a visible manner, taking up the activity as an only option under conditions of complete economic immiserisation and catering to a demand generated by the largest sections of the city population. However, officially the sex industry is not recognised as such, and social opinion continues to pretend not to register its existence.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

The recent arrival in the city of a floating population of sex workers highly visible physically but “hidden” socially, poses some grave problems that the community must face now. Any delay will only make the social cost more severe. Besides being a pointer to the moral and legal system, the present conditions of existence of this population can be a serious threat to society in the context

of the very real possibility of an impending HIV/AIDS or STD epidemic. Also, the subculture associated with such populations substantially magnifies the dangers faced by society from drug abuse, addiction and drugs and sex-related crimes.

An important dimension of the same problem is that of the human rights of these sex workers, which has received very intense attention in recent times. Circumstances under which destitute people are forced to transform their bodies into sex objects and to peddle sexual services as an item of commercial transaction certainly seem to point towards a social existence devoid of basic human rights. The sub-human conditions under which sex workers are compelled to live indicate the absence of the most basic rights. The question has also been raised whether actions like the forcible eviction of sex workers by official agencies are a violation of their inalienable rights as human beings and as legitimate members of society.

In order to be able to address the above questions sufficiently equipped, we need to develop our knowledge base of the population of sex workers. Precisely for such a purpose, the present study was proposed intending to analyse the socio-economic characteristics of this population. Besides providing data regarding the socio-economic background of sex workers, their present living conditions including hygiene and medical attention, the study attempts to make an assessment of the sex workers' awareness of the threat of HIV/AIDS/STD, drug abuse and sex-related crime. The circumstances under which people have "chosen" to opt for this profession are also an object of study.

It is a fact that not the whole of the sex worker population comprises of what is generally described as "floating". In many ways, the organisation of the upper echelons of the sex industry is organised in a more intricate manner. There have been fairly authentic media reports on the existence of a sex industry based in massage parlours and such services, catering to the demand in posh upper-class areas of Dhaka and Chittagong. However, the main focus of the present study remains this "floating" population. As justification, it may be mentioned that this is precisely the section that demands most concern for its larger size and hugely larger possible impact on society. Additionally, the "non-floating" population of sex workers is more "hidden" and as such does not give in well to survey based investigation. An inclusion of a mass too heterogeneous in structure may well render survey findings too general and therefore less useful in terms of being a tool of understanding a specific social phenomenon.

### 1.3 Sex Workers as a Social, Human Rights and Media Issue – the General Context

The existence of a population of sex workers raises the question about whether our society is providing basic human rights to all its members by providing the opportunity to pursue a livelihood commensurate with such rights. Secondly, by officially ignoring the existence of this population and morally distancing itself from this population, mainstream society is at best depriving it of its rights to identify itself as equal members and at worst, violating its basic right to demand all the privileges of honourable citizens. This particular problem is dramatically highlighted by authentic reports of sex workers being denied the right to normal burial rites after death. Human rights violation may begin at birth, but does not necessarily end at death. Sex workers are universally an object of contempt and hold absolutely no social standing. Thirdly, ignoring the constant indignities with which sex workers are confronted, social opinion is being hypocritical about its equal concern for all sections of the population. This is in reference to physical and sexual harassment by clients, pimps, musclemen and even by members of state agencies. Lastly, in their attempts to redress a situation that state agencies consider a "problem", they have, especially recently, been taking steps to "rehabilitate" the sex workers. The events of July 1999,

Sex workers have become the focus of broad social, including media, interest fairly recently. From a social phenomenon best ignored that will disappear if left alone, it seems to have "graduated" into one that has a multiplicity of dimensions that cry for social attention and concern.

which were highlighted glaringly by the local print media, are only a case in point. Using the police force, state agencies raided the Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels at Narayanganj, supposedly the largest organised brothels in the country and picked up inmates to “rehabilitate” them in centres created for such purposes. That it required considerable force to implement such relocation, that such steps were obviously resisted by the inmates and that many “rehabilitated” people escaped from these centres belies the claim that these relocation attempts were implemented by consent of the subjects. Attempts by state agencies, however justifiable in intent, have beyond doubt been demonstrated to have been designed with absolute disregard for the opinions and participation of the target they are supposed to benefit. There seems to be considerable public opinion, especially among human rights groups, that these “rehabilitation” (often dubbed “eviction”) measures amount to gross violation of basic human rights.

Human rights violation may begin at birth, but does not necessarily end at death.

Media focus has dramatised the plight of the weak and helpless individual in the face of an impersonal bureaucratic machinery implementing policies created far removed from the centre of the human tragedy. Some attention, predictably, has been not so much on the social and human aspects as on the sensational side of the events, catering even to the basest instincts of a section of readers craving for some taste of the shady aspects of the “flesh trade”. In any case, this attention has probably resulted in some of the voices of sex workers themselves being heard. It is possible that it has also resulted in an amount of organisational effort hitherto unprecedented, as witnessed by reports of conferences and demonstrations by sex workers.

#### 1.4 Description of Field Setting

Chittagong, with a population of about two and a half million people, owes its growth as a city mainly to its port. It has been a maritime port since ancient times. It was used by Arab and Portuguese traders before the advent of British rule in India. Even during British rule, it was considered to be a major seaport of India. Located in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh, it has its port near the mouth of the river Karnaphuli on its northern bank. Due to a lack of sufficient berthing space and difficulty of large vessels negotiating the river channels, it relies on an outer anchorage in the Bay of Bengal, where ships have to anchor before they can be unloaded or loaded. It is one of the very few international seaports, which have an outer anchorage. Chittagong port handles about 70% of the country's export tonnage and about 80% of its import tonnage. In view of the possibility of allowing port facilities to neighbouring countries, Chittagong port's importance to the national economy could be further enhanced in the near future. Recently, the government has decided to allow the building and operation of a private container-port near the mouth of the river Karnaphuli. The government has taken a decision to promote Chittagong as the commercial capital of Bangladesh. With the Bangladesh economy's heavy dependence on imports Chittagong has traditionally played a very important role in the trading sector of the country. Chittagong's local economy is geared to cater not only to the export and import requirements of the nation, but also to the wholesale domestic trade of most other districts. There is an established stock exchange in Chittagong.

Map 1: Bangladesh



Chittagong is also a very important industrial centre of the country. The only steel mills, the petroleum refinery and the dry docks are located in Chittagong. Industry is spatially concentrated mostly along 4 industrial belts. These are located in Patenga to the south-west near the mouth of the Karnaphuli, in Barabkunda to the north along the Chittagong-Dhaka highway, in Kalurghat to the east and in Nasirabad near the city. There is an Export Processing Zone with industrial plants owned by foreign and domestic firms, near Patenga. A new Korean Export Processing Zone is being set up south of the river Karnaphuli.

Chittagong has an international airport. Its road connection with Dhaka is good, which has improved considerably in recent years. The highway system has two main shoots to the north, one linking Chittagong to Dhaka, the other to the hill districts of Khagrachhari and Rangamati. The southern highway links it with Cox's Bazar and Teknaf, a small town near the Myanmar border. It is also an important railway centre having links with the rest of the country since British times.

Chittagong is considered to be one of the most affluent regions of the country. The people are generally considered to be conservative and somewhat orthodox in their religious beliefs and practices. Chittagong has always been considered to have a distinct local cultural identity as a sub-stream of the wider Bengali national culture. Even its dialect is very distinct, more deviant from the standard language Bangla than any of the many other dialects. While urbanisation has affected the culture of the inhabitants of Chittagong by giving it a somewhat cosmopolitan character,

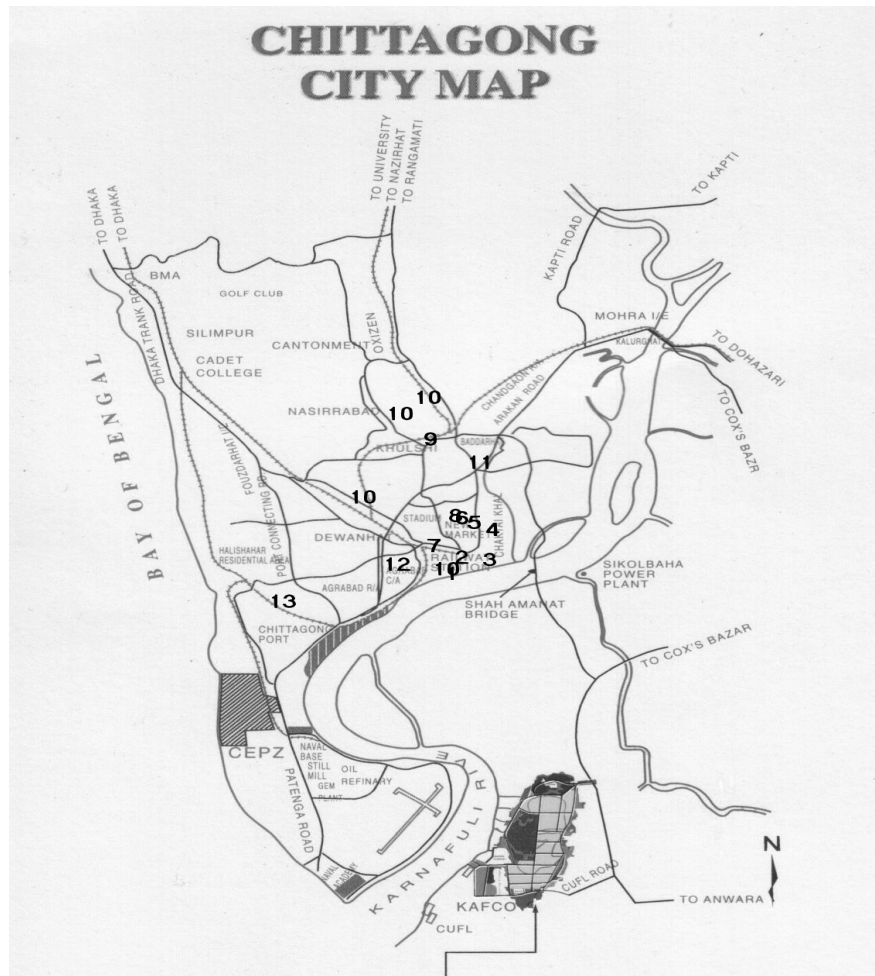
conservative moral values seem to permeate it even today. However, things are changing very fast, and one very important factor in bringing this about is the phenomenal growth in recent years of the export-oriented ready-made garments industry, "manned" overwhelmingly by women. Visitors generally agree that a lot more women are found on the streets and in workplaces these days than ever before.

While we tried to spread out the cases included in the sample spatially, it inevitably became concentrated in those areas of the city where sex worker activity is more concentrated. It has been observed that "floating" sex workers live and work in groups preferring areas outside the domain of residential, especially non-lower class, areas. Areas not delineated by private property rights and having characteristics of some sort of "no-man's land" between the invisible geographical frontiers of class demarcation seem to have become obvious choices for such activity probably as a result of a process of the evolution of the creation of a physical space necessary for the survival of a sex worker community. Examples are the temporarily free spaces in and around railway stations, footpaths in very busy areas of the city characterised by the presence of "plebeian" elements like hawkers of fares consumed by members of the lower classes, peripheries of areas considered communal property like play-grounds and parks, bus terminals where there is a huge flux of people moving in and out but not staying for too long and large commercial centres with a steady movement of people. Proximity to places like hotels, boarding houses, abandoned buildings and isolated places preferred for sexual services may also be a factor in the choice of area for this community. The most important localities of our fieldwork were the following:

1. Chittagong Railway Station
2. Footpath on Station Road near Railway Station and BRTC Bus Terminal
3. Road crossing and footpath in front of Chittagong New Market
4. Spaces and footpath around Lal Dighir Math (playground, mostly used for political and other mass meetings.
5. Nandan Kanan area footpath near Cinema Palace Bus Terminal
6. Outer Stadium, including the Stadium Market under construction
7. Eastern and south-eastern edge of the Polo Ground near the railway tracks and bus terminal
8. Footpath in front of the Shishu (Children's) Park
9. Sholashahar Railway Station and adjoining areas
10. Different bustees (slums), especially Moti Jharna, Barisal Colony, the one adjoining Sher Shah Colony and one adjacent to Amin Jute Mill
11. Footpath near the Eastern Gate of Chittagong Medical College Hospital
12. Abandoned areas near Badamtoli of Agrabad area
13. Mouth of the Chittagong-Dhaka Highway at the edge of the city centre, known as Alankar More (turning)

Although most of the subject recruitment came from the above-mentioned places, individual respondents were contacted from scattered places all over the city.

**Map 2: Chittagong City with Location of Fieldwork**



### 1.5 Layout of Report and Statistical Conventions Followed

The first chapter of the current report is the introduction, containing the general context of the study, the background, the subject matter as a media and human rights issue, a description of the field setting and a layout of the report and statistical conventions followed.

The second chapter is the one on the methodology of study. It states the aims and objectives of the study and describes the recruitment, training and orientation of the research team, the universe and the sample, the techniques of collecting information, field supervision and quality control, data entry and processing and the limitations of the study and problems faced in fieldwork.

The third chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the study. These findings and interpretations are subdivided into the following sections: individual and social background of the sex workers, circumstances of entry into the sex industry, description of incomes and expenditure of sex workers, description of the nature of sex work, matters related to the health of the sex workers, awareness about sex-related social problems among sex workers and sex workers' own perceptions about problems of sex work.

The fourth and final chapter presents a summary of the major conclusions and recommendations.

Unavoidably, this report contains a large number of tables with quantitative data. In order to make the data as reader friendly as possible without loss in content, we used percentages instead of absolute frequencies in almost all cases. Since sample size is the very convenient number 200, it is very easy to calculate the absolute count. We used the statistical convention of rounding off the figures. In almost all cases, figures are rounded to one decimal digit, except in cases where the second decimal digit is obviously significant. This is in conformity with our explicitly stated attitude of considering quantitative data as indicative rather than as precise measures. We deliberately avoided the practice of using equal ranges of class intervals in all grouped frequency distributions. The rationale is ease of interpreting data and the particular context of analysis.

The literature commonly refers to “Commercial Sex Workers”. In this report, the term “Sex Workers” is intended to convey absolutely the same meaning. We prefer the latter term because of its brevity and because we feel that the connotation of “commercial” is implicit in the term “workers”. In practical terms, our choice of name is justified as we can see no reason for confusion arising from the use of the term of our choice.

In Bangla, many terms are used to denote sex workers. The commonest term, *Veshya*, may be translated as Prostitute and is widely used in literary and common usage. The word *Patita* is the choice of word in traditional literature and literally means “fallen woman”. *Magi* is a slang/colloquial term which can be translated as “slut” or “whore”. This term is widely used in a very derogatory sense and is a common abuse. Strangely, sex workers in Bangladesh often refer to themselves as *magi*. Recently, the Bangla term *Jouna Karmi* meaning Sex Worker has come of vogue, thanks mainly to its wide journalistic use. The word *Kharap Meye*, literally meaning “bad girl” is also widely used by common people to mean sex workers.

In Bangla, many terms are used to denote sex workers

## II. Methodology of Study

### 2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Present Study

The fundamental aim of the present study is to present a socio-economic profile of sex workers in Chittagong, showing details of their background, their conditions of work, living and thinking and their relevance to social reality in general. In order to achieve this broad aim, the following specific objectives have been delineated (Box 1):

- Box 1: Objectives of Research**
- To obtain and present information about the individual and social background of the sex workers of Chittagong including age distribution, marital status, religion, literacy, education, family size, parents’ occupational background, etc.
  - To obtain some idea about living and housing conditions of sex workers.
  - To elicit information about the circumstances of entrance into the sex industry, sex workers’ experience and previous occupation.
  - To present some idea about the extent of sex workers’ incomes and expenditure.
  - To describe in some detail, the nature of sex workers’ activities including the role of dalals (pimps), nature of places preferred for sexual services, criminal association, background of clients and the nature of rest and recreational activities.
  - To provide basic data on health conditions of sex workers including incidence of STD, adoption of birth control and abortion.
  - To gather some idea about sex workers’ awareness about social problems pertaining to the sex industry, including the use of condoms, and awareness about AIDS/HIV.
  - To probe sex workers’ own perceptions about their profession, the future of their children, the existence of permanent brothels, rehabilitation initiatives and their association with substance use.

## **2.2 Recruitment, Training and Orientation of the Research Team**

It was realised that a team of trained and dedicated workers would be required to conduct the survey. For this purpose, the Research Consultant started recruiting young university graduates as Field Investigators (FIs) before the onset of the survey itself. Five FIs were recruited. Emphasis was given on a balance between social science and multidisciplinary background of the team. Two of the team were Masters in Economics, one in Sociology, one in Statistics and one was a pass-course graduate. With the Research Consultant being an Economist, the full team was considered to be fairly well equipped academically for the specific nature of the research project.

The FIs were given thorough briefing and training and special emphasis was laid on reliability of the data. FIs were instructed to report responses accurately and to be aware of imposing their perceptions sub-consciously. Given the "hidden" nature of the target population and the peculiar sub-culture pertaining to them, they were also given prior orientation regarding possibilities of rejection on the part of potential respondents. Particular importance was paid to establishing rapport with the respondents. FIs tested the draft questionnaires in the field and reported to the Research Consultant (RC). Threadbare discussion was carried out regarding problems of administering Interviews and possible changes to the questionnaire.

After the questionnaires were pre-tested, finalised and printed, the final questionnaires were discussed in detail and ethnographic methods of social survey were explained.

For almost all the components of our study we had to rely on interviews of one sort or another for information. While information for the survey part of the study was exclusively based on the structured questionnaire, the ethnographic component too relied heavily on interviews of key informants and on unstructured interviews for case studies.

Given the "hidden" nature of the sex worker population and the delicate nature of much of the information sought for the purpose of this study, emphasis was laid on the proper conduct of interviews. From the beginning, investigators were instructed not to be tempted to take interviews on false pretexts. Each interview was preceded by a brief introduction clearly stating the objectives of the study, the purpose of the interview and confidentiality and anonymity of the information.

The practice of establishing some kind of rapport with the respondent, usually through some "small talk" proved to be of importance, as otherwise it was difficult to get the respondent's cooperation, especially on sensitive issues. Investigators were trained to use standard techniques of interviewing like reflecting on respondents' statements, restating their statements, asking for clarifications, etc. The investigators were on occasions forced to create situations of confrontations, e.g. to impress upon the respondent the importance of avoiding inconsistencies.

Because of the delicate nature of many of the queries in the interviews, it was important to conduct the interview in a private environment. This became difficult at times because of the essential lack of privacy in many of the spots where respondents were contacted, and because of a lack of any need for privacy in the cultural habits of the respondents' peers. This often necessitated the actual conducting of the interview in a different, more private location (like in a corner of a teashop). Also, security was a factor in obtaining reliable information in many cases as respondents would become wary of intervention by the authorities. As such, it was necessary to create, insofar as was possible, a non-threatening, in the minds of the respondents, environment.

## **2.3 Sampling Issues**

As sex workers comprise a "hidden population" living on the fringes of a semi-legal existence with society hardly acknowledging their presence, it was not possible to pick any random sample in the strict statistical sense. However, the purposive sample of 200 female sex workers was framed in such a way as to be representative of the target population by distributing it by area,



characteristics and other features. Under the circumstances, we consider the sample quite large relative to size of the population. Although we attempted to distribute the sample spatially all over the city, most respondents were concentrated in special areas. This is because of the inevitable preference of sex workers to live in “communities” and to concentrate overt activities in limited areas of the city. However, small numbers of respondents were contacted from areas scattered all over the city. The main locations of fieldwork are shown in Map 2 and in Section 1.4 on description of the field setting.

The sample for this study had some peculiar characteristics with regard to attitude towards interviews. Respondents were extremely wary of the motives of the survey and so considerable time and energy had to be spent on “breaking the ice”. In most cases, however, once the initial barrier was overcome, respondents showed eagerness to cooperate, mostly in view of the unexpectedly friendly attitude of the interviewers. Interviews had to be conducted in an atmosphere considered non-threatening by respondents. But this entailed considerable interference from respondents’ peers and outside disturbance due to the nature of the surroundings which would usually be considered the opposite of ideal for standard surveys.

For reasons of consistency, social importance and focus on a homogeneous group, only female sex workers were chosen as respondents. Technically, male pimps and other agents involved in the sex industry are also sex workers, but such people were not included in the sample. In this report, whenever we refer to sex workers we mean female sex workers directly offering sexual services on a commercial basis. However, there are reasons to believe that there are male sex workers too offering commercial sexual services, probably only to male clients.

## **2.4 Basic Technique: the Survey**

### ***2.4.1 Construction of the Survey Instrument: the questionnaire***

Questionnaire survey was used as the basic technique of enquiry for the study. The instrument, therefore, had to be prepared with extreme care keeping in view the specific characteristics of the target population and the aims and objectives of the study. The 8-page structured questionnaire was prepared in Bangla and administered in printed form. It was divided into sections in accordance with the objectives of the study. The questions themselves were both structured and unstructured. A preamble was included at the beginning of the questionnaire to help the interviewers introduce themselves to potential respondents. This preamble was prepared to gain the confidence of the respondents, to assure them of confidentiality and to ensure reliability of data.

In construing the interview schedules, it was borne in mind that in the cultural context of Bangladesh the subject of study is by and large considered unsuited for public discussion and that many of the questions, especially those related to sexual behaviour are regarded as absolutely private and unfit for any sort of public disclosure. Respondents would constitute a “hidden”, to varying degrees, population. As such, a mechanistic administering of the questionnaire could, at best, be an insult to the cultural constraints of the respondents, and at worst, become self-defeating by creating an insurmountable cultural barrier between investigator and respondent. Field investigators were therefore carefully briefed on the importance of creating rapport at the beginning and of a non-threatening environment.

### ***2.4.2 Testing and finalisation of the questionnaire***

Keeping in view the objectives of the present research project as outlined in the research proposal prepared by the Consultant and approved by CPD, a first draft of the questionnaire was prepared. This first draft was field-tested by field investigators. The filled-in test questionnaires were discussed point-by-point by the whole team and changes were made in the final questionnaire. The final version was printed in Bangla.

For computer entry of the survey data, the variables from the questionnaire were completely disaggregated and encoded. The codes were listed in a uniform code-list.

## **2.5 Complementary Technique: Qualitative Tools**

### ***2.5.1 Unstructured Interviews***

Interviewing informants without using the structured questionnaire was widely used in the course of this study. This is a standard and widely used method of collecting qualitative data. This enabled us to supplement our information from structured questionnaire-based survey with revealing insights into the nature of the object of research. Quality of information depends to a great extent on the skills and expertise of the investigator. They had to encourage respondents to volunteer information not precisely included in the questionnaire. At the end of survey interviews, investigators collected information from respondents appropriate to the situation and the person. For the open-ended interviews investigators used checklists of a set of questions, but these were not necessarily used verbatim.

As a lot of emphasis was laid on ethnographic data for this project, FIs were encouraged to maintain extensive field notes. On the basis of these notes, FIs were given tasks of writing regular field reports and case studies. Much of the ethnographic insight into the subject of study originates from these notes, reports and case studies.

### ***2.5.2 Key Informant Contacts***

In the course of the survey, investigators developed contacts with persons identified as having access to useful information. Such key informants were interviewed from time to time. These sources revealed valuable information regarding activities of sex workers and were often instrumental in contacting respondents. We had several key informants from among tea-stall operators, rickshaw-pullers, slum dwellers and pimps.

### ***2.5.3 Case Studies***

Investigators prepared in-depth case studies of individuals, certain slums, particular locations and sex worker groups. These studies provided information about all aspects of the subject even remotely related to the object of research. Our case studies provided extremely valuable insights into the behaviour and activities of sex workers.

## **2.6 Field Supervision and Quality Control**

As the interview schedules were being administered and the data began coming in, we started a process of verifying all the questionnaires and checking for inconsistencies. The interviewers were then asked to explain the deviations and correct the mistakes. It was found that there was a significant level of such inconsistencies towards the very beginning of the survey, but they diminished markedly and tapered down to occasional cases only.

## **2.7 Data Entry and Processing**

All responses were pre-coded and printed in code-lists. The data were then manually entered through keyboard into a computer, using standard statistical software. Data-entry errors were removed through two methods. First, they were visually checked on the monitor and corrected. Secondly, the data were processed initially and the output was printed out to check for inconsistencies. All inconsistencies were checked against the raw data, and errors were identified and corrected.

Primary processing and tabulation was done using computer software. Printouts of the statistical output were used to prepare the final tables and data.

## **2.8 Limitations of the Study and Problems Faced in Field Work**

As discussed earlier, the sample had to be picked in a purposive manner rather than randomly. Understandably, this was necessitated by the nature of the target population. However, efforts were made to make the sample as representative as possible of the whole population.

A second limitation of the study was that the sample consisted wholly of the visible community of “floating” sex workers. The more “hidden” sections of the population, especially those catering to the demand of the upper classes could not be included. As these sex workers lead a dual life, establishing anonymity within the general community while clandestinely rendering sexual services, it was not possible to include this section within the sample. Actually, inclusion of this section would have created a serious methodological problem as the extreme heterogeneity of the resultant sample would have made generalisations meaningless. Besides, as the “floating” sex workers consist of the vast majority of the total sex worker population, cater to the demand of the more populous section of society and pose urgent and immediate social concern, our sample had a more practical relevance.

In our opinion, the Achilles’ heel of our findings was the data on incomes and expenditure of sex workers. Although we attempted to collect detailed information of this aspect and the questionnaire was designed accordingly, response in this area was erratic. Given the peculiar lifestyle of sex workers and the extreme wayward nature of their sub-culture, respondents showed considerable irritation when confronted with questions regarding these. After careful examination of responses in these areas, we were convinced that responses were contradictory and unreliable. We therefore had to reject the detailed data; however, the general statements regarding daily net incomes and expenditure showed consistency and were accepted for analysis. In retrospect, this seems natural as sex workers can hardly be expected to keep accounts; but they are keenly aware of the resultant net income, which is the determinant of their purchasing power. We, however, are reluctant to interpret even these figures too strictly and consider them as rough indicators rather than as absolute magnitudes.

The nature of fieldwork for this particular study was far different from most surveys conducted by social scientists. Peer interference, crowds collecting to observe interviews and outside interference were the main problems of the investigators.

## **III. Findings and Interpretation**

### **3.1 Individual and Social Background of Sex Workers**

The age distribution of sex workers would commonly be associated with the age-interval of the physiological limits of active sex life. However, a study of the age distribution of our sample (Table 3.1.1) reveals that other factors also influence the existing distribution. Firstly, the results of the survey clearly show the existence of a population of child sex workers. This fact is basically due to the extreme strength of the “push factors” determining recruitment in the sex industry (discussed later). New recruits often enter the industry under such hopeless circumstances, and they are obviously forced to make this choice at a very early age. This should be of grave concern to the whole society. It also reflects the general tolerance to child labour in our culture. Another aspect related to the existence of child sex workers is the presence of a significant level of demand for child sexual services. It also shows the existence of paedophilia in the general population. While there is no reason to suppose that there is any systematic age-bias in the sample, it is highly likely that the actual incidence of child sexual workers is higher,

because of the more “hidden” nature of this group and the practical difficulties associated with contacting this group of sex workers as respondents.

The figures on the age distribution show a significant skewness in favour of lower age. This is a reflection of the increased rate of growth of the sex worker population, as recruitment has been faster in recent years than earlier on. Again, this could be a disturbing trend for the future of society as this would enhance and expedite all the negative fallout from the existence of a sex worker population.

**Table 3.1.1: Age Distribution**

AGE INTERVAL (YEARS)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY (%)
13-15	11
16-20	41
21-25	24.5
26-30	19
31-40	4.5
Total ( $\bar{X}=21.93, s=5.27$ )	100

The marital status of sex workers gives some idea about their background. The table ranks the different status in descending order of relative frequency. Most respondents are either married or abandoned by husbands. However, ethnographic data revealed that the “married” status considered by sex workers is vastly different from the common socially accepted norm. Many sex workers consider themselves “married” to the male companion she currently lives with. Most sex workers live in groups, meaning they share work space and spend time together without necessarily being part of the same “household” or sharing the same hearth or kitchen. Usually there are several male members of this group. The role of these male members can be quite ambiguous. They do not usually operate as regular dalals (pimps). Usually, one female sex worker is accepted as the “wife” of a particular male. This relationship (or pseudo-relationship) becomes so well established that other members of this group develop corresponding relationships. For example, the “husband” of a particular sex worker addresses her co-sexworkers as *Shalee* or sister-in-law. However, we deliberately accepted and reported respondents’ own version, incorporating their own ideas about such relationships. It is difficult to establish what proportion of sex workers have or have not been married with orthodox religious/social rites. In any case, the difference does not have any practical significance whatsoever.

the “married” status considered by sex workers is vastly different from the common socially accepted norm

Abandoned, widowed and divorced status show significant levels. This usually has a lot to do with the circumstances under which sex workers are forced to adopt this profession (discussed later). Almost a third of the respondents are unmarried. This partially reflects the recently enhanced rate of new recruitment and the importance of the “push factors” facilitating entry.

**Table 3.1.2: Marital Status**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY (%)
Married	29.5
Abandoned	28
Unmarried	23
Widowed	10
Divorced	9.5
Total	100

As Table 3.1.3 below shows, the sample consisted almost exclusively of Muslim members. Of course, about 85% of the country’s population is Muslim, but the incidence is even higher in the

sample. This may reflect the fact that the proportion of population below poverty level has a disproportionately high share from the majority community. Also, entry from minority communities may be more highly restricted because of social sanctions and the difficulty of establishing anonymity.

**Table 3.1.3: Religious Affiliation**

AFFILIATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY
Islam	97.5
Hinduism	2.5
Other	0
Total	100

Predictably, the vast majority of sex workers are illiterate. But the illiteracy level is not significantly higher than the national female illiteracy level. As expected, the incidence of certificate holding sex workers is statistically insignificant.

**Table 3.1.4: Educational Status**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY (%)
Illiterate	70.5
Literate	29.5
SSC	0.5
Other	3
Total	100

The data on formal schooling among sex workers show a huge 78% without any schooling whatsoever. 14% have upto 5 years' school experience. Obviously, the general pattern among sex workers is one of a predominance of illiteracy and lack of education.

**Table 3.1.5: Formal School Experience**

EXPERIENCE (YEARS)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0	78
1-5	14
5-10	5.5
No Response	2.5
Total (X=0.87, s=2.07)	100

This survey attempted to gain some information about the size of the paternal families of sex workers in order to gain insights into their family background. Although the data seems to show a lower average family size than the national average, this may be due to under-reporting by some respondents due to the disruption of relationships with families.

**Table 3.1.6: Size of Paternal Family**

SIZE INTERVAL	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0-4	61
5-9	32
10-13	1.5
No Response	5.5
Total (X=4.11, s=2.16)	100

63.5% of sex workers reported not having any children at all. With only 23% never having been married, the proportion of childless sex workers does seem high. This must be related to a

complex set of factors. But it seems safe to conclude that natural growth rate of the sex worker population is low. 24% and 8.5% reported incidence of 1 and 2 children. The incidence of male children seems to be slightly higher than that of female children, but it is not possible to infer anything about gender preference among children. Interestingly, one of the 2 cases of 5 children shows all 5 as female.

**Table 3.1.7: Number of Children**

NUMBER	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)		
	Male	Female	Total
0	75.5	80	63.5
1	20	16.5	24
2	2	3	8.5
3	2.5	-	1.5
4	-	-	1
5	-	0.5	1
Total (X=0.57,s=0.95 )	100(X=0.32, s=0.64)	100(X=0.25, s=0.59)	100

Survey data gives us some opportunity to study the maintenance of relationship of the sex workers with their paternal families and with their husbands. More than half the sex workers do not (or cannot) maintenance relationship with their paternal families. Again, more than half of those who have husbands do not maintain relationship with their husbands. These are clear signs of being considered something like outcasts as far as the original (paternal) families are concerned. Most sex workers would be practically abandoned by husbands even if they themselves don't consider themselves abandoned. As far as family and kinship ties are concerned, sex workers are basically social outcasts.

As far as family and kinship ties are concerned, sex workers are basically social outcasts

**Table 3.1.8: Maintenance of Relationship with Paternal Family and Husband**

RELATIONSHIP	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)	
	Paternal Family	Husband
No	53.5	34
Yes	46.5	25
Not Applicable		41
Total	100	100

Table 3.1.9 shows figures on percentages of respondents living with paternal families or with their husbands. Actually, two thirds live separate from either their paternal families or their husbands. It is likely that most of the 18.5% claiming to live with husbands are those who live with male companions, not husbands in the traditional sense. This living pattern reinforces the strength of our earlier observations about the sex workers being considered social outcasts.

**Table 3.1.9: Living with Paternal Family or Husband**

SITUATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
With Paternal Family	6
With Husband	18.5
Living separate	75.5
Total	100

Table 3.1.10 presents data about the size of households sex workers currently live in. Since most live separate from parental households and husbands, this basically reflects size of the household of their choice. Average size is 2.42, much smaller than national average household size. 85% reported living in households of size not greater than 5. The reasons for the small size are that

these are not kinship based households and do not form from the demographic life-cycle of members and that with severe limitations on living space for “floating” populations, people have to eke out a living, making do with whatever nooks and crannies they manage to pry out of the vast physical space with so little to spare for human living.

**Table 3.1.10: Current Household Size**

NO. OF MEMBERS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
1-5	85
6-9	3.5
No Response	11.5
Total (X=2.42,s=1.55)	100

All respondents reported “sex worker” as their primary occupation. The responses regarding secondary occupation of sex workers show that very few have any secondary occupations at all. These few work on odd jobs or as daily labourers. Understandably, a community considered outcast by the rest of society would be hard put to find acceptance in any other occupation or environment.

**Table 3.1.11: Secondary Occupation**

SECONDARY OCCUPATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
None	94
Housemaid	0.5
Odd Jobs	2
Daily Labourer	2
Other	1.5
Total	100

By querying whether respondents’ parents are alive or not, we tried to explore the possibility of the role of parental absence in the choice (voluntary or otherwise) of sex worker as an occupation. Actually, most sex workers have either one of the parents alive. However, a large proportion, 41.5%, have lost their fathers. This could be a definite underlying cause of this choice of occupation. It also fits into the reasoning that in a patriarchal society, the loss of father could precipitate severe crises like ones that force people into desperate conditions. Incidentally, for the range of ages prevailing (13-40, average 21.93 years), the incidence of a dead parent does seem rather high. The assumption that sex workers enter the profession not by choice but by necessity is so obviously true that it does not seem to us worthwhile trying to test it as a hypothesis by linking this occupation with parental absence. What can be surmised is that parental absence can contribute to the creation of circumstances necessitating such choice.

**Table 3.1.12: Living Status of Parents**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)	
	Father	Mother
Alive	56.5	77
Dead	41.5	21
No Response	2	2
Total	100	100

Occupational pattern of sex workers’ parents can enrich our idea about their socio-economic background. Table 3.1.13 shows that an overwhelming proportion (expectedly) have housewife mothers. The incidence of sex worker mother is statistically negligible. Half the respondents have farmers/workers as fathers. Sex workers having their fathers in business/petty trade or in service are slightly higher than 10% in each case. The occupational pattern of parents seems not too different from what one would expect in the general population. There is no reason to think that the community of sex workers is a self regenerating one. People from ordinary and simple backgrounds become sex workers.

**Table 3.1.13: Occupation of Parents**

OCCUPATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)	
	Father	Mother
Housewife	-	77
Worker	25.5	1.5
Farmer	24.5	-
Business/Petty Trade	13.5	1.5
Service	11	4
Unemployed	4	-
Daily Labour	3.5	-
Self Employed	3	1
Begging	2.5	4
Housemaid	-	2
Sex Worker	-	0.5
Other	2.5	2
No Response	10	6.5
Total	100	100

As far as the literacy and educational background is concerned, again the picture seems familiar. 74.5% have illiterate mothers and 58% have illiterate fathers. Small percentages reported fathers with Bachelor's degrees, HSC and SSC. There were 6 cases of sex workers with mothers having a SSC. Obviously, people with middle class educated background don't normally end up in the community of "floating" sex workers. But the parental background of these sex workers is what one would expect among the most populous sections of the general population.

**Table 3.1.14: Educational Status of Parents**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)	
	Father	Mother
Illiterate	58	74.5
Literate	37	19.5
SSC	5.5	3.0
HSC	1.5	-
Bachelors Degree	2.5	-
Other	1.0	-
No Response	5	6
Total	100	100

One important parameter of the socio-economic condition of any community is the type of accommodation its members avail of. Our survey ranked accommodation type by frequency of respondents. Kutcha huts, railway stations and the footpath are the most common types availed. Next come the footpath, jhupri (makeshift shelter) and concrete accommodation. The last, however, is mostly accommodation made available because of unfinished structures undergoing construction or abandoned buildings. Actually, among the above named types, the kutcha huts are in practical terms the best. Only the "scum of the earth" can live in conditions under which it is possible to live in the railway station yards and the footpaths alongside roads. Living conditions as described in this picture of accommodation availed is thoroughly deplorable by even the lowest of standards.

The picture of living conditions of sex workers derived from type of accommodation availed is thoroughly deplorable by even the lowest of standards



**Table 3.1.15: Type of Accommodation**

ACCOMMODATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Kutchra (hut)	38
Rail Station	19
Footpath	18.5
Jhupri (makeshift shelter)	7.5
Pucca (concrete)	6
Semi-pucca	2
Bustee (slum)	2
Other	7
Total	100

In order to deepen the information gained about accommodation types availed by sex workers we attempted to categorise accommodation by type of ownership too. Rented accommodation accounts for the largest type (42.5%). The other large category labelled “other” would mostly mean ram-shackle arrangements in railway yards and on footpaths. We learned that even such “free” accommodation is not easily available as competition is fierce for occupancy and one has to confront or appease musclemen to gain access to these scarce resources.

**Table 3.1.16: Type of Ownership of Accommodation**

TYPE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Rented	42.5
Own house on khas (govt) land	5
Abandoned house	4.5
House/shop under construction	3
House on own land	2
Other	42.5
No Response	0.5
Total	100

Our survey collected information on whether the respondents were sex workers permanently residing in this city or were only temporary visitors. 98% of the sex workers interviewed consider themselves permanent residents of Chittagong. In order to avoid confusion and disuniformity in criteria, we considered any operator spending most of the year in Chittagong, permanent residents. This is not to infer that most sex workers hail originally from Chittagong. The status of origin, discussed later, is actually very much to the contrary.

**Table 3.1.17: Nature of Residency in City**

RESIDENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Permanent	98
Temporary	2
Total	100

Table 3.1.18 shows that sex workers have been residing in Chittagong for very different durations. Some are very recent arrivals. Average duration is 7.35 years, which is fairly long for a group with average age of about 22 years only. Obviously, in terms of duration of residence in this city our sample is an extremely heterogeneous group. This lends reason to surmise that cities like Chittagong provide a “pull” to potential recruits to the sex industry. Factors providing this characteristic to the city are the heterogeneity (cosmopolitan character) of the social structure, the anonymity provided within a huge community and of course the existence of a market demand for rudimentary cheap commercial sexual services. The ethnographic data we gathered indicate that potential entrants often feel a need to “escape” from their natural community and don the garb of anonymity in order to become regular sex workers.

**Table 3.1.18: Duration of Residence in City**

DURATION (YEARS)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0-1	11.5
1-2	9.5
2-3	9.5
3-4	10
4-5	15
5-10	20.5
10-20	20.5
20-27	3
No Response	0.5
Total (X=7.35, s=6.04)	100

Respondents were asked to state the name of the place they originate from and the investigator accordingly categorised the status origin into village, thana centre and district headquarters. The survey showed that an overwhelming majority originated from villages. We conclude that the city draws potential recruits from the remotest villages with its capacity to provide the “pull” for people who have been “pushed” by social factors and circumstances.

**Table 3.1.19: Status of Origin**

ORIGIN	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Village	77.5
Thana Centre	9.5
District HQ	8.5
No Response	4.5
Total	100

In this section on the individual and social background of sex workers, we are able to make some broad conclusions (Box 2):

#### **Box 2: Individual and Social Background of Sex Workers**

- There is a significant presence of child sex workers within the community of sex workers
- The growth of the sex worker population seems to have become faster in recent years and recruitment seems to be on the rise
- There is a general pattern of predominance of illiteracy and lack of education among sex workers
- Birth rates among sex workers seem to be fairly low and a large proportion are childless
- Sex workers live as social outcasts with a minimal level of bonds and ties with their natural (biological) and conjugal families
- The incidence of dead parents among sex workers is fairly high; sex workers come from social backgrounds typical of the most populous sections of Bangladesh’s population
- Living conditions of sex workers are deplorable by the lowest of standards; most sex workers consider themselves permanent residents of Chittagong

### **3.2 Circumstances of Entrance into Sex Industry**

In this section, we attempt to capture some of the aspects that make up the circumstances of entrance of sex workers into the profession. We consider it vital to achieve some measure of understanding of how sex workers become what they are in order to obtain some sort of an overall picture of sex workers as a social group. The actual circumstances are extremely complex, as they are as varied as the number of individuals involved. In fact, each individual is a story in itself. But the complexity does not lie solely on variety; even the depth of the circumstances can be intricate beyond comprehension. Some sort of over-simplification and

generalisation is inevitable on our part.

Table 3.2.1 shows the distribution of experience in the sex industry. Most respondents have a fairly short experience, with the sample average being 2.8 years. Half the respondents have not worked more than 2 years as sex workers. This should be contrasted with the average duration of residence in the city - 7.35 years. Apparently, potential entrants need some time to familiarise themselves with the city before becoming sex workers. It also shows that people do not just come into the city with the intention of working in the sex industry; neither do they become sex workers immediately upon arrival. Another matter to be considered is the fact that the appearance of a visible sex worker population in the city is a relatively recent phenomenon.

**Table 3.2.1: Experience in Sex Industry**

DURATION (YEARS)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
upto 1	30.5
1-2	25.5
2-3	15
3-5	18.5
6-10	9.5
10-18	1
Total (X=2.8, s=2.48)	100

The information on the occupation of sex workers prior to entrance into the industry shows that half the sample had some occupation or other before becoming sex workers. A third were either housewives or had no occupation. 25% were housewives. The most common previous occupations were housemaid and housewife. The 11% of sex workers who had no previous occupation were probably dependent on their parental families before becoming sex workers. This once again reinforces our previously observed view that sex workers are not a self regenerating community. They come from various walks of life.

**Table 3.2.2: Previous Occupation**

PREVIOUS OCCUPATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
House-maid	26
Housewife	25
Garments worker	22.5
None	11
Sex worker	1
Other Industrial Worker	4
Begging	2.5
Other	8
Total	100

To probe further the circumstances which convert people into sex workers we tried to identify what person the sex worker considered responsible for her having become one. Table 3.2.3 shows that most sex workers consider dalals (pimps) and themselves (sex workers) responsible. Others held responsible by smaller numbers of respondents are lovers, husbands, close relatives, friends, and other sex workers. We find no reason to reject the opinions of sex workers on responsibility of recruitment/ entrance. Firstly, we find that the dalal (pimp) plays a highly significant role in this process. Secondly, sex workers frankly admit their own responsibility too.

The dalal plays a major role in the process of induction into the profession; sex workers frankly admit their own responsibility too

**Table 3.2.3: Person Responsible for Joining Sex Industry**

PERSON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Dalal (pimp)	38.5
Self	38
Lover	4.5
Husband	3.5
Close Relative	3.5
Friend	3
Other Sex Worker	3
Other	5
Total	100

Even at risk of over-simplification, we queried sex workers on the precise circumstances of entrance and attempted to categorise and rank them accordingly. Responses show that poverty, trickery, abuse and coercion rank highest as circumstances. Poverty seems to explain more than a third of the circumstances. This would be expected, given the dire state of affairs in so far as poverty in our country is concerned. Obviously, poverty is the number one “push factor” in the recruitment of sex workers. The description “cheat” or trickery does not say too much about how a sex worker becomes one; it goes to show that incidental circumstances and conjunctural events can prove vital at crucial moments in one’s life. Abuse and coercion are a ubiquitous facet of life in our society that is in itself not usually visible; its effects are. A fairly large proportion, 15%, claim to have been coerced into prostitution. Coercion is usually present even when sex workers do not obviously perceive it as such. It becomes so much a part of life that it is not noticed; rather it is taken for granted. We have come across cases of sex workers bound in a chain of restrictions preventing her fleeing from the profession. In many cases, sex workers have been forced to return to this profession after having made attempts to leave it.

Poverty is the number one “push factor” in the recruitment of sex workers

In terms of the relative frequency of circumstances describing entrance, rape does not seem to rank high. But the lack of ambiguity and generality associated with the other “circumstances” is uniquely lacking in rape as a circumstance, and therefore deserves special mention. In a patriarchal society saturated with macho mass psychology, the victim of rape is ostracised; the perpetrator is at best ignored. We know of a case in which a group of young female workers were returning from work towards early evening. In a thickly populated area of the city the group was chased by some young *mastaans* (hoodlums/goons).

Some of the female workers succeeded in escaping. One unlucky female was caught, taken into a local club and gang-raped. Later, after the victim managed to overcome the intense physical and psychological humiliation, she went back to work. Her co-workers ostracised her for having been raped. It became impossible for her to continue working. This was the starting point in the chain of events that inevitably made her a sex worker. But the event has left a permanent scar on her mind. “*Ami aekta kharap meye* (I am a bad girl)” she says, apparently without emotion.

In a patriarchal society saturated with macho mass psychology, the victim of rape is ostracised. “I am a bad girl”, says a sex worker who was gang raped before she entered the profession

**Table 3.2.4: Circumstances Describing Entrance in Sex Industry**

CIRCUMSTANCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Poverty	34.5
Trickery/Cheat	17
Abuse and coercion	15
Rape	8
Cheat and Coercion	6.5
Family Dissatisfaction	4.5
Own Choice	4
Opportunity	3
Cheat and Poverty	2
Coercion and Poverty	1
Other	4.5
Total	100

Groth *et al.* say: “in all cases of forcible rape three components are present: power, anger and sexuality . . . [but] power and anger dominate and . . . rape rather than being primarily an expression of sexual desire, is in fact, the use of sexuality to express issues of power and anger.” in A. Nicholas Groth *et al.*, *Rape: Power, Anger and Sexuality* in 134 Am. J. Psychiatry 1239, 1240 (1977), [quoted in Katherine K. Baker, *Sex, Rape and Shame* in Boston University Law Review, vol 79 no 3 June 1999, p. 663 footnote]

“rape is the use of sexuality to express issues of power and anger”

We can summarise the main conclusions in this section on the circumstances of entrance into the profession of sex workers as follows (Box 3):

**Box 3: Circumstances of Entrance into the Sex Industry**

- Sex workers have a fairly low duration of experience in the profession, especially in comparison to the duration of their stay in the city; they do not become sex workers immediately on arrival in the city
- The dalal (pimp) plays a major role in the initial recruitment of the sex worker; many sex workers blame themselves for entering the profession
- Poverty, trickery, abuse, coercion and rape can be identified as the main circumstances of entrance into the sex industry

### 3.3 Description of Income and Expenditure from Sex Work

In this section, we attempt to present some idea about the incomes and expenditure of sex workers. Perhaps because of the “wayward” disorganised nature of life led by sex workers, this community is not particularly amenable to account keeping. We felt the respondents expressing their irritation when it came to answering queries regarding the details of incomes and expenditure. On analysis, we found the detailed data inconsistent and not sufficiently reliable. However, the resultant figures on daily net (residual) income and expenditure were found to be consistent enough. In any case, in this section we try to interpret very carefully on broad indicative lines, rather than as precise magnitudes.

The data on the daily average number of clients gives a mean of 3.3. Most sex workers have 3 to 4 clients daily; a large number have only 1 to 2. Of course, the number of clients varies in general, but they do seem to vary in inverse proportion to the fees charged for services. Some sex workers look out for clients who pick them up (usually late at night) and pay for services rendered in the premises of their own choice. In such cases, charges are high, but the number of times services are rendered (as also number of clients) is usually low. On the other hand, we have met sex workers who wait for clients (in fairly large numbers) to come to them, provide the most basic of services in a very mechanical manner and charge very low fees. These usually take place at all times of the day. Our Investigators have observed rickshaw pullers parking their rickshaws on the roadside, walk a few steps to the waiting sex worker, hand over 10 taka, receive sexual services in a barely hidden place and walk away to the rickshaw casually. Interestingly, although we clocked such encounters at 7 to 8 minutes, sex workers invariably claimed to spend 20 to 25 minutes for such services.

We have observed rickshaw pullers parking their rickshaws on the roadside, walk a few steps to the waiting sex worker, hand over 10 taka, receive sexual services in a barely hidden place and walk away to the rickshaw casually – all this within a span of 7-8 minutes

**Table 3.3.1: Daily Average Number of Clients**

NO. OF CLIENTS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
1-2	26.5
3-4	59
5-6	9.5
7-8	3
9-10	0
11	1.5
No Response	0.5
Total (X=3.3, s=1.6)	100

The range of average daily net income reported by the largest number of sex workers was 50 to 100 taka. Large numbers also reported 100 to 200 taka and upto 50 taka daily. Average net income was Tk. 131.66, with fairly large variations. This may seem fairly high in comparison to daily incomes of the poorest sections of city population. However, it has to be borne in mind that sex workers usually never (or cannot) work more than 4 to 5 days a week. This reduces the weekly and monthly income levels. Sex workers usually seem to have to pay commission to dalals (pimps) and make extortionary contributions to musclemen, although we could not succeed in deriving reliable detailed data on these counts.

**Table 3.3.2: Average Daily Net Income**  
(After Deduction of pimp's commission and extortionary contributions)

DAILY NET INCOME (TK.)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0-50	15.5
51-100	41.5
101-200	28.5
201-300	10
301-550	4.5
Total (X=131.66, s=96.5)	100

The ranges of average daily expenditure reported most frequently were the same as those of net incomes. But mean daily expenditure was Tk. 88.60, significantly lower than incomes. However, if we remember that sex workers do not earn daily but spend daily, then the differences do not remain as significant.

**Table 3.3.3: Average Daily Expenditure**

DAILY EXPENDITURE (TK.)	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0-50	26
51-100	49.5
101-200	20
201-300	2.5
No Response	2
Total (X=88.60, s=50.96)	100

We tried to identify the main items of sex workers' expenditure. The ranking is given in table 3.3.4. Food and clothes come highest on the list. The next items in order of importance are cosmetics, entertainment, transport, house rent, meeting family subsistence needs, medical costs, commissions, extortions and other.

**Table 3.3.4: Main Expenditure Items**  
(Multiple Response)

EXPENDITURE ITEMS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Food	97.5
Clothes	95.5
Cosmetics	86
Entertainment	56.6
Transport	43
House Rent	41.5
Family Subsistence	15.5
Medical Cost	15.5
Commissions	13.3
Extortions	5
Other	73.5
No Response	2.5

The findings on utilisation of savings show that most sex workers have no savings at all. This is in conformity with our earlier observation that sex workers usually do not work all days of the week. A fairly significant number claim to save part of incomes, while some send money home. It is our observation that whatever incomes sex workers manage to save are only for short periods. These savings are quickly exhausted during periods of various kinds of needs.

**Table 3.3.5: Utilisation of Savings**

UTILISATION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No Savings	55.5
Save/ Hoard	21.5
Send Home	12.5
Invest	2
Other	6.5
No Response	2
Total	100

The main conclusions from the analysis of data on incomes and expenditure of sex workers are (Box 4):

**Box 4: Incomes and Expenditure of Sex Workers**

- Sex workers apparently have high average daily income levels in comparison to the poorest sections of society, but they do not work all days of the week
- The main items of sex workers expenditure in order of importance are food, clothing, cosmetics, entertainment, transport and house rent
- Although sex workers report saving from their incomes, these are actually not very large, for short durations and are quickly exhausted in times of need

### 3.4 Description of Sex Worker Activities

We attempted to obtain a detailed description of the nature of work of sex workers by collecting data on off-time activities, role of dalals, types of places used for sexual services, criminal records, types of clients and modes of entertainment.

Perhaps predictably, the main off-time activity appeared to be physical rest and sleep. This is followed by watching movies, adda (gossip with peers), playing games and other. Since sexual services are rendered usually from early evening to late night, sex workers have to catch up on sleep and rest during the day. This is extremely difficult because of the lack of any congenial environment. We usually found sex workers in very irritable moods during daytime. Watching movies is a favourite pastime not just for sex workers, but among all sections of the lower classes. It is possible that movies play a significant role in the shaping of the social psyche of these classes. In any case, many sex workers are known not by their real names, but by the names of popular film actresses. This may be because it allows them to maintain the desired anonymity and perhaps also because it gives them the satisfaction of achieving some imaginary glamour by association. Adda is a popular pastime for Bengalees of all classes, although its nature varies greatly according to the respective sub-culture. Adda is a vital activity that has the capacity to sustain the existence of small communities or groups. Among games sex workers play, ludo, a simple dice game seems to be the popular choice.

many sex workers are known not by their real names, but by the names of popular film actresses

**Table 3.4.1: Offtime Activities**  
(Multiple Response)

ACTIVITIES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Physical Rest and Sleep	98
Watching Movies	74
Adda (Gossip)	68.5
Playing Games	6
Other	74.5
No Response	1

As mentioned earlier, dalals (pimps) play a major role in the recruitment of new sex workers. However, their role in the rendering of sexual services remain ambiguous. Sex workers' opinions about the advantage of working with dalals gave most importance to provision of clients and



providing protection to sex workers. However, the frequencies of even these responses were not too large.

**Table 3.4.2: Advantages of Working with Dalals (Pimps)**  
(Multiple Response)

ADVANTAGES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Providing Clients	16.5
Providing Protection	11
Other	10
No Response	81

The disadvantages of working with dalals appear to be the commission they charge and the loss thereby in incomes and the physical oppression on their part. Again, responses were not too high.

**Table 3.4.3: Disadvantages of Working with Dalals**  
(Multiple Response)

DISADVANTAGES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Charging Commission	22.5
Physical Oppression	10
Other	8
No Response	73.5

To the direct query regarding the necessity of working with a dalal, more than 80% responded in the negative. Only 17% thought it was necessary to work with a dalal. It seems that dalals are really necessary for some types of sexual services in which liaison with clients have to be established *via media*. For the most rudimentary sexual services where clients come to regularly frequented places, dalals are not *de rigueur*. However, dalals appear to be a part and parcel of sex workers' lives. Sex workers generally spend time (on and off work) in groups in which there are usually a few male members. Usually these men do not function as dalals, nor are they referred to as such. But they do extort a part of sex workers' incomes. In exchange, they probably provide protection from other predators.

**Table 3.4.4: Necessity of Working with Dalal**

NECESSITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	82.5
Yes	17
No Response	0.5
Total	100

The survey attempted to categorise places used for rendering sexual services. Most used places appear to be the client's premises, hotel or boarding house, train wagons, the road side, abandoned places, hills, forests or other isolated places and clubs. Other places used to a lesser extent are parks, the sex workers' own houses and other. Often, by clients' premises are meant not clients' actual homes, but community spaces like neighbourhood clubs which are used clandestinely for such purposes. Hotels and boarding houses are regularly used as places for provision of sexual services. The same sex worker provides services at significantly differing charges at different premises. Usually, dalals provide sex workers the necessary contact at hotels. Often, clients pick up sex workers late at night in rickshaws or cars and take them to premises of their own choice (usually neighbourhood clubs) where they receive services in a group. The nature of services provided in train wagons, roadside, abandoned and isolated places are of the most rudimentary type and fees charged are very low.

**Table 3.4.5: Places Used for Sexual Services**  
(Multiple Response)

PLACES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Client's Premises	65
Hotel or Boarding House	39
Train Wagon	24.5
Road-side	20.5
Abandoned Place	20
Hill, Forest or Isolated Place	19.5
Club	15.5
Park	6.5
Sex Worker's House	4.5
Other	40.5

We collected information on opinions of sex workers on what they consider hindrances to their activities as sex workers. Police action and mastaan (hoodlum) interference ranked highest. Other types of hindrances have fairly low responses. Police action appears to be erratic and sudden rather than continuous and sustained. Once during a Neutral Caretaker Government regime, the police picked up many sex workers in vans and deposited them outside the city. The sex workers promptly came back but this incident seemed to have created some scare among them. Mastaan interference, especially extortion, seems to be an unavoidable evil as far as sex workers are concerned. Sex workers reported systematic levy of contributions in some places.

Surprisingly, reporting of other types of hindrances are fairly low. It is true that there have not been any recent incidents of public action to evict sex workers. It is likely that reporting of police action was influenced by the events of July 1999 in Narayanganj, when police forcibly evicted inmates of the brothels of Tanbazar and Nimitoli in the name of rehabilitation.

**Table 3.4.6: Hindrances to Sexual Services**  
(Multiple Response)

HINDRANCES	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Police Action	22
Mastans (Hoodlums)	20.5
Public Opposition	6
Dalals (Pimps)	1.5
Religious Opposition	1
Other	4.5
No Response	60.5

Our survey shows that other sex workers, slum dwellers, children, husbands and dalals are preferred for companionship during off-time.

**Table 3.4.7: Companionship during Rest Time**  
(Multiple Response)

COMPANION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Other Sex Workers	86
Slum Dwellers	26
Children	18.5
Husband	15
Dalals	11.5
Male Companion/Lover	4
Relatives	2.5
Other	37

Preferred modes of entertainment for sex workers are watching movies, playing games, watching TV or video and listening to music. This overlaps greatly with our earlier observations on off-time activities.

**Table 3.4.8: Modes of Entertainment** (Multiple Response)

MODE OF ENTERTAINMENT	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Movies	78
Playing Games	10
TV or Video	6
Music	5
Circus	1
Other	48

Jail or custody experience seems to be fairly common among sex workers. Half the respondents had some experience of spending time. Average frequency calculated was 2.55 times. The largest frequency was visiting jail or custody only once – 20.5%. Sex workers seem to have accepted this unpleasant experience as a part of life that has to be endured once in a while, which mercifully ends fairly quickly. As mentioned earlier, action on the part of authorities are sporadic and sudden rather than sustained and continuous.

**Table 3.4.9: Frequency of Jail or Custody Experience**

FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0	48
1	20.5
2	14
3	6.5
4	4.5
5	2
6-10	2.5
11-15	1.5
No Response	0.5
Total (X=2.55, s=2.62)	100

The survey tried to get sex workers' impression of the educational background of clients. 89.5% reported both educated and uneducated men among their clientele.

**Table 3.4.10: Educational Status of Clients**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Educated	2.5
Uneducated	8
Both	89.5
Total	100

Sex Workers' impression of the class background of clients showed highest incidence of all classes with two thirds reporting, and a quarter of the respondents reporting poor and middle class clients. We can conclude that sex workers give services to all classes, but mostly to the poor and the middle classes.

**Table 3.4.11: Class Status of Clients**

STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Poor	3.5
Middle Class	0.5
Poor and Middle Class	24.5
Middle Class and Rich	4
All Classes	67.5
Total	100

Most sex workers reported clients of all ages. A big portion reported young and middle aged clients. Likewise, we conclude that sex workers provide services to clients of all ages, mainly to the young and the middle aged. The significant inclusion of the young group should be of concern to society as it entails the greatest risks in terms of STD/HIV/AIDS epidemics, association with other criminal activities and decadence in general.

**Table 3.4.12: Age Description of Clients**

DESCRIPTION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Young	6
Young and Middle Age	41.5
All Ages	52.5
Total	100

In this section on the nature of sex worker activities, we make the following broad observations (Box 5):

**Box 5: Nature of Sex Worker Activities**

- The main offtime activities of sex workers are physical rest and sleep, watching movies and adda (gossiping with peers)
- In spite of some advantages of working with dalals (pimps), the great majority of sex workers do not consider them necessary
- The most frequently used places for sexual services are clients' premises, hotel or boarding house, train wagons, roadside, abandoned and isolated places and neighbourhood clubs
- Sex workers consider police action and mastaan interference as the main hindrances of sex worker activity
- Sex workers are fairly well acquainted with experience of jail or police custody. They accept it as an inevitable though unpleasant part of life
- Sex workers describe their clients as both educated and uneducated; belonging to all classes, especially the poor and the middle classes; of all ages, but mostly young and middle aged. The significant involvement of young people in the sex industry should be of concern to society

**3.5 Matters Related to Health of Sex Workers**

In this chapter we analyse some matters related to the health condition of sex workers. The rationale is not just paternalistic sympathy. We feel that this is of grave concern to the whole of society as this has relevance to the probability of STD/HIV/AIDS epidemic. As potential carriers of STD, society has a deep-rooted interest in investing in the good health of sex workers. Considering having baths a basic indicator of hygiene, we collected data on frequency of baths per week. 96% claimed to have daily baths. This claim is probably fairly accurate, as the conditions under which sex workers live and work make it impossible to survive without regular baths of some sort.

**Table 3.5.1: Weekly Frequency of Baths**

BATHS PER WEEK	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
4	3
5	1
7	96
Total	100

Besides the number of baths per week, we consider the type of facility important. Responses show that most sex workers have baths under a bustee pipe or tap, public water supply, ponds, home, public toilets and under a jharna or public shower. Most slum dwellers have collective arrangements of water supply from public sources through temporary pipes. The City Corporation has always supplied water at fixed times to public taps on roadsides. Large gathering of people can be noticed at those times having bath publicly. Lots of people, especially from the lower classes have bath in ponds scattered at different places of the city. Most of these ponds are extremely dirty with dangerous levels of pollution. We observed many sex workers having bath in a very dirty pond near the railway station premises. The number of ponds in the city is rapidly decreasing because of absorption by housing requirements, and the water is increasingly becoming more polluted. Although all sex workers claimed to use soap for bath, the quality of water used should be of concern.

**Table 3.5.2: Bath Facility (Multiple Response)**

FACILITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Bustee Pipe or Tap	29
Public Water Supply	19
Pond	19
Home	16.5
Public Toilet	16
Jharna or Public Shower	7.5
Other	3
No Response	3

Sex workers being a high-risk group in terms of incidence of diseases, not just STD, we consider visits to doctors and medical check-ups an important parameter of their health condition. Our survey showed that 70% of sex workers never visited a doctor during the past year. This should be of serious concern to society, and ways and means should be devised to ensure minimal medical attention to sex workers. We have observed that sex workers never visit doctors unless they feel they are terribly sick. The first resort is usually to the street vendor of medicaments and herbs. Failing this, a sex worker would seek a quack.

**Table 3.5.3: Annual Frequency of Visits to Doctor**

FREQUENCY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
0	70
1	9
2	10.5
3-5	6.5
6-10	3
11-52	1
Total (X=1.13, s=4.09)	100

We also consider the toilet facility availed an important parameter of sex workers' health. Most claimed using public toilets, bustee (slum) facilities, facilities at home and on the roadside. The last is definitely of concern for a densely populated city like Chittagong. We ourselves observed a sex worker climb up the stairs during daytime to the top of an overbridge, squat down and relieve herself quite oblivious of her surroundings. Public toilets in Chittagong are a recent phenomenon, but these facilities are by far inadequate.

**Table 3.5.4: Toilet Facility Used (Multiple Response)**

FACILITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Public Toilet	42.5
Bustee (Slum)	26.5
Home	24
Roadside	24
Other	21
No Response	0.5

Most sex workers reported having meals regularly at cheap restaurants and at home. We discovered sex workers buying meals very cheaply from beggars, who were happy to dispose of their surplus at whatever price they could get. Of concern is the quality of drinking water in the city, especially at cheap restaurants and roadside stalls. Water borne diseases are universally present.

**Table 3.5.5: Meal Facilities (Multiple Response)**

FACILITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Restaurant	58
Home	51
Roadside	7.5
Other	13

The incidence of STD among sex workers is bound to be of immense concern to society. 78% claimed never to have been stricken by STD. 21.5% reported having contracted some STD. This level is of course much higher than that of the general population. The highest incidence was reported for syphilis. Although expected, all this should be of immense concern to us all.

**Table 3.5.6: Incidence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

INCIDENCE OF STD	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	78
Yes	21.5
Syphilis	14.5
Gonorrhoea	4
Other	2.5
Don't Know	0.5
No Response	0.5
Total	100

The sex workers were also queried on the type of treatment they availed for STD. The results, presented in Table 3.5.7, show a little less than a third availing treatment in government hospitals. Some were treated at doctors' chambers or by quacks. Small numbers took treatment from roadside vendors of medicaments and a lone patient was treated at a private clinic. A significant proportion, 5.5%, took no treatment at all.

It seems sex workers are left on their own when it comes to treatment of STD. For such a vital issue of immense social concern, this certainly seems to be a non-contentious case for positive social action. Regular medical check-up of sex workers, timely and accurate diagnosis of STD and corresponding treatment – all this should be highly worthwhile to society in the long run, whatever the costs.

**Table 3.5.7: Treatment Facilities for STD Aailed**

FACILITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Government Hospital	6
Doctor's Chamber	4.5
Quack	4
Roadside Vendor	1
Private Clinic	0.5
No Treatment	5.5
Not Applicable	78.5
Total	100

For the subsample of sex workers who have at some stage contracted STD, we attempted to follow up on the current status of the disease. Of the 21.5% who reported having contracted the diseases, 14.5% claim to be completely cured and 0.5% to be improving. Actually, most STDs are fairly easily curable if diagnosed in time and proper treatment is availed. However, the picture on current status cannot be of much satisfaction as it doesn't require too many carriers to start a disease. Again, it is possible for patients to stop treatment before complete cure once they feel better, and the disease can relapse easily.

**Table 3.5.8: Current Status of STD**

CURRENT STATUS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Completely Cured	14.5
Bad or Continuing	3.5
Improving	0.5
No Response	2
Not Applicable	78.5
Total	100

Most sex workers reported non-adoption of birth control measures. However, response showing adoption was also high – 42.5%. Of course, the reference is to standard types of measures like contraceptive pills and ligation. It was understood that sex workers adopt some other unorthodox measures they consider effective, but did not like to discuss. The high incidence of non-adoption should raise some questions, as it could result in a high level of unwanted pregnancies. The paradox may partly be explained by the fact that most sex workers report (discussed later) frequent or irregular use of male condoms. Part of the riddle may be explained by the use of the unorthodox measures discussed above. Also, there appear to be available a huge variety of prevention and termination methods of varying degrees of effectiveness and health risks. Finally, there are reasons to believe that because of constant sexual abuse, many sex workers lose their fertility, thus reducing the incidence of unwanted pregnancies inspite of lack of birth control measures.

**Table 3.5.9: Adoption of Birth Control Measures**

ADOPTION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	57
Yes	42.5
No Response	0.5
Total	100

Table 3.5.10 shows that among the birth control measures adopted, contraceptive pills and ligation were the most common. It should be mentioned that contraceptive pills (as also male condoms) are available in Bangladesh under social marketing schemes, which provide substantial price subsidy to the consumer. The social marketing schemes are some of the very rare successful schemes ever undertaken in Bangladesh. Ligation (as also vasectomies) are done free

of cost under government and NGO supervision in Bangladesh with some cash and kind incentives.

**Table 3.5.10: Type of Birth Control Measure Adopted (Multiple Response)**

MEASURE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Contraceptive Pills	17.5
Ligation	13.5
Hysterectomy	4
Intra Uterine Device	0.5
Other	15.5
No Response	50.5

The survey probed the reasons for non-adoption of birth control measures. Financial constraints showed up at very insignificant level. There was quite a high response citing lack of knowledge as the reason for non-adoption. Also, a significant proportion thought birth control unnecessary. In both cases, our findings clearly point towards an urgent need to disseminate information regarding ways and means of birth control measures. This increases in importance in light of our observations that there seem to be widely held prejudices against measures like ligation thought to thwart the sexual urge and potency. It may be mentioned that the history of a long social campaign for adoption of male condoms as a measure of birth control has made the device extremely well recognised across all sections of society. The benefits from the campaign started paying off much later. The lesson is that it takes time for such campaigns to work out, but it is in such cases worth the wait.

**Table 3.5.11: Reasons for Non-adoption of Birth Control**

REASON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Don't Know	16.5
Unnecessary	12
Lack of Funds	1
No Response/Not Applicable	70.5
Total	100

An important point deserving mention is the fact that male condoms have been able to contribute to the success of family planning campaigns because they have been used voluntarily by the users in their own interest. In the case of sex workers, though, clients have no “interest” in using birth control devices and therefore the male condom may not be so effective a device in this case. Actually, clients have an interest in using condoms to protect themselves from STD, but awareness in this regard seems to be low. It is therefore logical to assume that female condoms would be an effective device for sex workers both for the purpose of preventing unwanted pregnancies and for protection against STD. It appears that the female condom is as yet not a well known device. The experience gained from male condom marketing in Bangladesh could be used to advantage to promote female condoms. Such promotion should require some free distribution at the initial stage, awareness creation activities and social marketing.

Male condoms have contributed to the success of family planning campaigns because they have been used voluntarily by the users in their own interest. In the case of sex workers, though, clients have no “interest” in using devices and therefore the male condom may not be so effective a device for preventing unwanted pregnancies among sex workers. Female condoms should be the device of choice for sex workers both for preventing unwanted pregnancies and STD.



Our survey found a fairly low history of abortion among sex workers. Given the low use of birth control devices, this finding is a bit strange, and we have offered some hypothetical explanation earlier.

**Table 3.5.12: Incidence of Abortion**

INCIDENCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	88
Yes	11.5
1x	7.5
2x	0.5
5x	0.5
No Response	3
No Response	0.5
Total	100

Respondents with history of abortion mostly reported resort to government hospitals. It should be mentioned that government hospitals offer free abortion. There is at least one NGO in Chittagong with developed free abortion facilities. Because of some legal ambiguity and to avoid religious controversy, the officially used term for termination of unwanted pregnancies is Menstrual Regulation (MR). As mentioned earlier, there appear to be available a variety of means of abortion, some with extremely high health risks.

**Table 3.5.13: Abortion Facilities Availed**

FACILITY	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Government Hospital	3
Private Clinic	1.5
Quack	0.5
Other	3.5
Not Applicable /No Response	91.5
Total	100

In this section on matters related to health of sex workers we make the following conclusions based on our findings (Box 6):

**Box 6: Health Issues of Sex Workers**

- Almost all sex workers claim to have daily baths and use soap. However, the water used for drinking and bathing has a high level of contamination. The level of discharge of human excreta in open spaces also appears to be extremely dangerous.
- There is a significant lack of medical attention among sex workers. The incidence of STD among sex workers is also dangerously high, with inadequate treatment.
- The adoption of birth control measures (including male condoms) among sex workers is not high enough and there is cause for social concern in this area.
- Positive social action is called for in the areas of medical attention to sex workers, especially in the diagnosis and treatment of STD. Also, it would be useful to promote the use of female condoms both for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and STD/HIV/AIDS. Such action might warrant formulation of adequate public policies and implementation through mass participation and NGO activities.

### 3.6 Awareness about Sex-related Social Problems among Sex Workers

In this section we attempt to evaluate the level of awareness among sex workers about sex-related social problems. Particular aspects investigated include condom use and awareness about STD/HIV/AIDS.

Table 3.6.1 contains data about frequency of condom use by clients. Two thirds of the sex workers report that clients sometimes use condoms. Less than a quarter claim frequent use and a little more than a tenth claim clients never use condoms. This indicates very irregular use of condoms by clients. As discussed earlier, clients have no “interest” in using condoms.

**Table 3.6.1: Condom Use by Sex Workers’ Clients**

CONDOM USE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Sometimes	65.5
Often	23
Never	11.5
Total	100

Table 3.6.2 presents data about frequency of sex workers asking clients to use condoms. A little more than half the respondents do not make such requests. We assume that the reason for not urging condom use is partly due to non-preference of condom use by sex workers themselves and partly due to futility of making such requests.

**Table 3.6.2: Request by Sex Workers for Condom Use**

REQUEST	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	53
Yes	47
Total	100

The following table shows the extent of condom preference by sex workers. 71% do prefer condom use. While this figure is high enough, the fact of more than a quarter of sex workers not preferring condoms is of serious concern.

**Table 3.6.3: Condom Preference by Sex Workers**

CONDOM PREFERENCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Yes	71
No	26.5
No Response	2.5
Total	100

The reasons cited for condom preference by sex workers give us some idea about the level of awareness among sex workers about the role of condoms for birth control and for prevention of STD/AIDS. Interestingly, 57% prefer condoms because of its role in preventing STD and only 10% prefer it for birth control. The implication is that 43% of sex workers are not aware of the role of condoms in preventing the spread of STD/AIDS, which is alarming.

**Table 3.6.4: Reason for Condom Preference by Sex Workers (Multiple Response)**

REASON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Avoid STD	57
Birth Control	10
Don't Know	16.5
Other	10
No Response	13.5

Among reasons cited for non-preference of condom use by sex workers, only about a tenth explicitly state that they don't know why condom should be used. But the high level of non-response to this query clearly indicates lack of knowledge as the basic reason for sex workers not preferring condoms. This actually confirms the hypothesis that there is widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of a device for the prevention of STD/AIDS.

There is widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of a device for the prevention of STD/AIDS.

**Table 3.6.5: Reason for Non-preference of Condom by Sex Workers**

REASON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Don't Know	9.5
Unnecessary	3
Dangerous	1.5
Discomfort	0.5
Other	4
Not Applicable/No Response	81.5
Total	100

The following table gives us some idea about the extent of knowledge regarding occupational diseases of sex workers. While only 7.5 mentioned VD (bad disease) as being associated with the profession of sex workers, 70.5% mentioned a particular VD, syphilis. We can assume that almost 30% of sex workers have no knowledge whatsoever that sex workers are at risk of contracting STD.

**Table 3.6.6: Knowledge about Occupational Diseases of Sex Workers (Multiple Response)**

DISEASE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Venereal Disease/ Bad Disease	7.5
Syphilis	70.5
Gonorrhoea	25.5
AIDS	7
Other	18

We attempt to investigate the extent of basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS among sex workers. To the question, "Have you heard about the disease AIDS?" only 43.5% replied in the affirmative. Obviously, most sex workers have never even heard of AIDS.

**Table 3.6.7: Knowledge about HIV/AIDS**

KNOWLEDGE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	56
Yes	43.5
No Response	0.5
Total	100

From responses to the question, "if you have heard about AIDS, what do you know about it?", we try to infer how far sex workers are really aware about HIV/AIDS. 16% know that it is an incurable disease. But only 10% know that AIDS can be transmitted through sex. So, while more than half the sex workers have never heard about AIDS, the extent of the awareness about sex workers being at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is limited to only a tenth of the sex workers.

Almost 30% of sex workers have no knowledge whatsoever that sex workers are at risk of contracting STD... Most sex workers have never even heard of AIDS... the extent of the awareness about sex workers being at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is limited to only a tenth of the sex workers.

**Table 3.6.8: Awareness about HIV/AIDS** (Multiple Response)

AWARENESS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Don't Know about it	22
Incurable Disease	16
Bad Disease (STD)	10
Other	6
No Response	49

In this section on the awareness of sex workers about sex-related social problems, we come to the following broad conclusions (Box 7):

**Box 7: Sex Workers' Awareness of Sex-related Social Problems**

- Frequency of condom use among clients is irregular. Most sex workers do not urge clients to use condoms, although more than 70% do prefer condom use. A little less than half of the sex workers are not aware of the role of condoms in preventing STD
- There is widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of a device for the prevention of STD/AIDS
- Many sex workers have no knowledge whatsoever that they are at risk of contracting STD
- Most sex workers have never even heard of AIDS. The extent of the awareness among sex workers being at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is limited to only a tenth of the sex workers
- There is an urgent need to spread the awareness among sex workers about the role of condoms in preventing STD/AIDS. Sex workers need to be educated about the association of sex and STD. AIDS awareness needs to be spread among sex workers. All this calls for awareness raising components within any programme associated with sex workers

### 3.7 Sex Workers' Perceptions about Problems of the Sex Industry

In this section we examine sex workers' own perceptions about their problems of problems of the sex industry in general.

Most sex workers do seem to be satisfied with their present occupation. But the negative response is also very high. We explain the positive attitude in terms of the economic and individual independence sex workers enjoy in relation to the desperate situation they faced in most cases prior to their joining the profession, which forced them into the industry. This is a measure of the wretchedness of certain situations which can bring relief to people even under such degrading conditions.

**Table 3.7.1: State of Satisfaction with Present Occupation**

SATISFACTION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Yes	57
No	43
Total	100

Although a majority of sex workers claimed satisfaction with their present occupation, most would prefer to switch to other occupation, given the opportunity. A little more than a quarter prefer to retain their present profession. Almost the same proportion would switch to any other profession. The top preference for occupation next to that of the sex worker is the garment worker (19%). A tenth prefer to be housewives.

Although a majority of sex workers claimed satisfaction with their present occupation, most would prefer to switch to other occupations, given the opportunity

**Table 3.7.2: Occupational Preference Ranking (Multiple Response)**

OCCUPATIONAL PREFERENCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Sex Worker	28.5
Any Other than Sex Worker	27.5
Garments Worker	19
Housewife	10
Petty Trade or Business	4.5
Industrial Worker	4
Other	12.5

Only about a third of the sex workers work in the profession willingly. This may at first sight seem contrary to their claims of job satisfaction, but taking into consideration the complexities of attitudes among sex workers, this is realistic. It also matches the occupational preference pattern.

**Table 3.7.3: Willingness in Continuing Present Profession**

WILLINGNESS	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
No	68
Yes	32
Total	100

An enquiry into the reasons for continuing to work as sex workers unwillingly revealed poverty as the main explanation. Coercion also seems to play a significant role.

**Table 3.7.4: Reason for Continuing in Profession Unwillingly (Multiple Response)**

REASON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Poverty	49.5
Coercion	13.5
Other	18
No Response	26.5

It is clear that most sex workers are not happy to be sex workers, although a majority claim to be satisfied, under present circumstances. We thought more insight into this aspect could be gained by investigating their occupational preferences for their children. Preference for child to become a sex worker was negligible. Almost a third would prefer the child be anything but a sex worker. The very high lack of response to this query is probably due to the state of childlessness among respondents and because many haven't given thought to the problem. Anyway, the lack of preference among sex workers for their children to become sex workers is extremely significant.

Sex workers do not show any preference for their children to become sex workers

**Table 3.7.5: Preferred Occupation for Child**

PREFERENCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Sex Worker	0.5
Other than Sex Worker	31.5
No Response	68
Total	100

To the query whether sex workers would like to educate their children, more than 60% did not even respond. We explain this by childlessness, a lack of concern and sub-conscious pessimism. More than a third of sex workers would rather have their children educated. This proportion is significantly higher than the prevailing literacy rate among sex workers. However, we interpret the general response as one of a positive preference towards educating the children.

**Table 3.7.6: Preference to Educate Child**

PREFERENCE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Yes	37.5
No	1.5
No Response	61
Total	100

Exploring sex workers' perceptions on the existence of educational opportunities for their children, we find a third being positive, with most others not responding. This should be cause for optimism as far as any educational initiative for children is concerned. We infer that the resistance to education for sex workers' children would not be as great as would be usually apprehended.

**Table 3.7.7: Opinion on Existence of Educational Opportunity of Child**

OPINION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Positive	33.5
Negative	4
No Response	62.5
Total	100

The issue of having organised brothels in cities is a controversial one, and it is occasionally discussed in the media, with arguments being placed for and against. We examined sex workers' opinions on the problem. Most opinions were contrary to having a brothel. A little more than a third favoured having it. It is possible that part of the negative opinion is influenced by apprehensions about social response to having such a brothel. The events of July 99, widely discussed throughout the country, in which inmates of brothels in Narayanganj were forcible evicted by the authorities, may also be partly responsible for this response.

**Table 3.7.8: Opinion about Need for a Permanent Brothel in City**

OPINION	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Negative	56.5
Positive	36.5
No Response	7
Total	100

In terms of arguments for and against brothels, most sex workers either were ambiguous (don't know), gave vague arguments (other) or didn't respond. However, more respondents came up with arguments in favour than against. Favourable arguments are the provision of security and shelter, and the imposition of discipline and order. Contrary arguments include the exploitation

by dalals and objections on moral and religious grounds. In general, sex workers do not seem at the moment to be too concerned with the issue of a permanent brothel, but most opined that such a need does not exist.

**Table 3.7.9: Arguments for and against Permanent Brothel (Multiple Response)**

ARGUMENT	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Provision of Security or Shelter(+)	21.5
Imposition of Discipline and Order(+)	14
Exploitation by Dalals (under brothels)(-)	11.5
Objections on Moral and Religious Grounds (-)	4
Don't Know (+-)	23.5
Other (+-)	30.5
No Response	7

It is a peculiarity of the sex industry that the range of age permitting active sexual services is comparatively narrow. Combined with the socially ostracised status of sex workers, the prospects for employment at advanced age seem particularly dim. Many respondents think they will be able to find employment on other sectors. A quarter don't know the future prospects. A negligible proportion would continue in the sex industry. A relatively high proportion, 14.5%, see begging as a prospect. This last is a reflection of the real pessimism associated with employment prospects of sex workers at an advanced age.

**Table 3.7.10: Prospects for Occupation at Advanced Age (Multiple Response)**

PROSPECT	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Don't Know	24.5
Begging	14.5
Sex Industry	1
Other	42.5

In response to the query whether sex workers would agree to rehabilitation initiatives, a large majority, 85.5% responded positively. This is in conformity with our earlier observations about occupational preference pattern and unwillingness to continue as sex workers. So, the general impression about resistance of sex workers to rehabilitation initiatives is basically due to sex workers' natural impulse to oppose high handed attempts to evict sex workers or push them into "vagrant homes" against their consent. We infer that social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society, that take into account their own sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process can be worthwhile.

social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society, that take into account their own sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process can be worthwhile

**Table 3.7.11: Prospective Response to Rehabilitation Initiative**

RESPONSE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Positive	85.5
Negative	14
No Response	0.5
Total	100

In what could turn out to be a historic ruling so far as sex workers are concerned, the High Court, in a ruling on 14 March 2000, declared the profession of sex workers “not illegal” and their eviction from Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels unlawful (The Daily Star, 15 March 2000). The ruling was delivered in the wake of a writ petition by five human rights organisations challenging the wholesale eviction by authorities in July 1999. The ruling also declared unlawful the confinement of a part of the evicted sex workers to the government vagrant homes and ordered their immediate release. The court observed that the profession of sex workers is not illegal since they do it to earn a living and they could only be rehabilitated if they desired. Otherwise, they should not be forced to stop doing their job. The court observed that the right to life, as guaranteed by the Constitution under article 31 could be treated as the right to livelihood, which is a fundamental right that cannot be taken away except in accordance with due process of law. “The right to livelihood of the sex workers is enforceable as a fundamental right.” “Sex workers, being citizens of the country, are having freedom of movement and their rights of movement should not be curtailed by confining them to the vagrant home or any other forcible means.” The court reprimanded the district administration, including police, for their “failure to act for which they are entrusted with.” Human rights organisations welcomed the ruling.

In what could turn out to be a historic ruling so far as sex workers are concerned, the High Court, in a ruling on 14 March 2000, declared the profession of sex workers “not illegal” and their eviction from Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels unlawful.

The Daily *Pratham Alo* (March 16 2000) reported that the court ruled that although prostitution is not a socially recognised profession, the law does not prohibit it. Prostitutes are registered through affidavits. According to law it is a legal profession as prostitutes even have the right to vote. Prostitutes are not vagrants by the definition of the vagrant laws because they have a particular profession, incomes and homes.

Thousands of sex workers were evicted from Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels of Narayanganj in the wee hours of July 24 1999 and 267 of them were sent to government vagrant homes at Kashempur.

This study attempted to categorise sex workers’ own perceptions on the main reasons behind their entry into the sex industry. Sex workers perceive poverty, fate, trickery, family dissatisfaction, own mistake and coercion as the main reasons, in that order. This is mostly in line with our earlier observations about the circumstances of entry into the sex industry. It should be realised that this interpretation is a very broad generalisation, and perceptions about the factors mentioned here vary greatly as do sex workers’ own histories and conceptualisation of these factors.

Sex workers perceive poverty, fate, trickery, family dissatisfaction, own mistake and coercion as the main reasons for entry into the profession

**Table 3.7.12: Main Reason behind Entrance into Sex Industry (Multiple Response)**

REASON	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Poverty	38.5
Fate/Luck	34
Cheat/Trickery	29.5
Family Dissatisfaction	27
Own Mistake	22
Coercion	20
Other	1



In order to gain some insight into the prevalence of substance use among sex workers, we list the popular substances in order of prevalence and present the prevalence rates in Table 3.7.13. More than 40% of the sex workers are found to be smokers (tobacco). A significant proportion habitually use drugs and alcohol. The prevalence rate of use of drugs and alcohol is definitely much higher than that prevailing in the general population. The incidence of smoking should be considered to be very high as well, when we take into account the fact that the prevalence of smoking is very low among Bangladeshi women. This confirms the hypothesis of a linkage between the sex industry and substance use.

The prevalence of tobacco, drugs and alcohol use is very high among sex workers. There is a linkage between the sex industry and substance use. Ganja is the drug of choice. Prevalence among the male members of sex worker groups is very high

**Table 3.7.13: Prevalence of Substance Use among Sex Workers (Multiple Response)**

SUBSTANCE USE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Tobacco	41.5
Drugs	13.5
Alcohol	8.5
No Response	0.5

As drug use (and abuse) seem to be of the greatest concern to society at the moment, we tried to investigate what types of drugs are prevalent among sex workers. Ganja (cannabis) seems to be the drug of choice, with some other drugs showing low levels of incidence. This is probably due to the very easy availability and low price of ganja. As of now, prevalence of the “hard” drugs seem to be low among sex workers. Heroin use seems to be negligible. No incidence of injectibles like pathedine or buprenorphine (tidigesics) was found. Actually, drug addiction can be a deterrent to functioning as effective sex workers. However, response seems to be too low to make any definite inferences. It is likely that substance use is highly prevalent among the male members (pimps, male companions, musclemen, parasites) of the groups/communities in which sex workers live and work.

**Table 3.7.14: Types of Drugs Used (Multiple Response)**

DRUG TYPE	RELATIVE FREQUENCY(%)
Ganja (Cannabis)	4
Charas	1
Heroin	0.5
Phensidyl	0.5
Other	2.5
No Response	93.5

We can summarise the findings of this section of the report concerned with sex workers' perceptions regarding problems of the sex industry as follows (Box 8):

<b>Box 8</b>	<b>Perceptions of Sex Workers about Problems of the Sex Industry</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Although a majority of sex workers claimed satisfaction with their present occupation, most would prefer to switch to other occupations, given the opportunity</li><li>• Sex workers do not show any preference for their children to become sex workers. Many would like to have their children educated.</li><li>• Prospective response to rehabilitation initiative is very positive. Sex workers resist initiatives which are high handed and do not take into account their own perceptions. A court ruling has proclaimed the eviction of brothel inmates “unlawful”</li><li>• Sex workers perceive poverty, fate, trickery, family dissatisfaction, own mistake, abuse and coercion as the main reasons for entry into the profession</li><li>• The prevalence of tobacco, drugs and alcohol use is very high among sex workers. There is a linkage between the sex industry and substance use. Ganja is the drug of choice. Prevalence among the male members of sex worker groups is very high</li><li>• Sex workers' perceptions show that they would be receptive to social initiatives to provide education to their children. This is an area requiring motivated social action</li><li>• Social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society, that take into account their own sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process can be worthwhile</li></ul>	

## IV. Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Summary of Conclusions

#### 4.1.1 Individual and Social Background of Sex Workers

There is a significant presence of child sex workers within the community of sex workers. The growth of the sex worker population seems to have become faster in recent years and recruitment seems to be on the rise. There is a general pattern of predominance of illiteracy and lack of education among sex workers. Birth rates among sex workers seem to be fairly low and a large proportion are childless. Sex workers live as social outcasts with a minimal level of bonds and ties with their natural (biological) and congenital families. The incidence of dead parents among sex workers is fairly high; sex workers come from social backgrounds typical of the most populous sections of Bangladesh's population. Living conditions of sex workers are deplorable by the lowest of standards; most sex workers consider themselves permanent residents of Chittagong.

#### 4.1.2 Circumstances of Entrance into the Sex Industry

Sex workers have a fairly low duration of experience in the profession, especially in comparison to the duration of their stay in the city; they do not become sex workers immediately on arrival in the city. The dalal (pimp) plays a major role in the initial recruitment of the sex worker; many sex workers blame themselves for entering the profession. Poverty, trickery, abuse, coercion and rape can be identified as the main circumstances of entrance into the sex industry

### ***4.1.3 Incomes and Expenditure of Sex Workers***

Sex workers apparently have high average daily income levels in comparison to the poorest sections of society, but they do not work all days of the week. The main items of sex workers expenditure in order of importance are food, clothing, cosmetics, entertainment, transport and house rent. Although sex workers report saving from their incomes, these are actually not very large, for short durations and are quickly exhausted in times of need.

### ***4.1.4 Nature of Sex Worker Activities***

The main offtime activities of sex workers are physical rest and sleep, watching movies and adda (gossiping with peers). In spite of some advantages of working with dalals (pimps), the great majority of sex workers do not consider them necessary. The most frequently used places for sexual services are clients' premises, hotel or boarding house, train wagons, roadside, abandoned and isolated places and neighbourhood clubs. Sex workers consider police action and mastaan interference as the main hindrances of sex worker activity. Sex workers are fairly well acquainted with experience of jail or police custody. They accept it as an inevitable though unpleasant part of life. Sex workers describe their clients as both educated and uneducated; belonging to all classes, especially the poor and the middle classes; of all ages, but mostly young and middle aged. The significant involvement of young people in the sex industry should be of concern to society.

### ***4.1.5 Health Issues of Sex Workers***

Almost all sex workers claim to have daily baths and use soap. However, the water used for drinking and bathing has a high level of contamination. The level of discharge of human excreta in open spaces also appears to be extremely dangerous. There is a significant lack of medical attention among sex workers. The incidence of STD among sex workers is also dangerously high, with inadequate treatment. The adoption of birth control measures (including male condoms) among sex workers is not high enough and there is cause for social concern in this area.

### ***4.1.6 Sex Workers' Awareness of Sex-related Social Problems***

Frequency of condom use among clients is irregular. Most sex workers do not urge clients to use condoms, although more than 70% do prefer condom use. A little less than half of the sex workers are not aware of the role of condoms in preventing STD. There is widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of a device for the prevention of STD/AIDS. Many sex workers have no knowledge whatsoever that they are at risk of contracting STD. Most sex workers have never even heard of AIDS. The extent of the awareness among sex workers being at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is limited to only a tenth of the sex workers.

### ***4.1.7 Perceptions of Sex Workers about Problems of the Sex Industry***

Although a majority of sex workers claimed satisfaction with their present occupation, most would prefer to switch to other occupations, given the opportunity. Sex workers do not show any preference for their children to become sex workers. Many would like to have their children educated. Prospective response to rehabilitation initiatives is very positive. Sex workers resist initiatives which are high handed and do not take into account their own perceptions. A court ruling has proclaimed the eviction of brothel inmates "unlawful". Sex workers perceive poverty, fate, trickery, family dissatisfaction, own mistake and coercion as the main reasons for entry into the profession. The prevalence of tobacco, drugs and alcohol use is very high among sex workers. There is a linkage between the sex industry and substance use. Ganja is the drug of choice. Prevalence among the male members of sex worker groups is very high.

#### **4.2 Some Broad Policy Recommendations Based on Findings**

The findings of this study as summarised above call for a variety of action targeting the sex worker population. The government has a role to play, especially in formulating the general framework of policy and in drawing up priorities. However, the actual implementation of policy and a gradual evolution of practical programmes based on real experience has to be executed by forums created from within the community at large. This is where voluntary welfare organisations, human rights organisations and NGOs can and should play a positive role.

Positive social action is called for in the areas of medical attention to sex workers, especially in the diagnosis and treatment of STD. Also, it would be useful to promote the use of female condoms both for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and STD/HIV/AIDS. Such action might warrant formulation of adequate public policies and implementation through mass participation and NGO activities.

There is an urgent need to spread the awareness among sex workers about the role of condoms in preventing STD/AIDS. Sex workers need to be educated about the association of sex and STD. AIDS awareness needs to be spread among sex workers. All this calls for awareness raising components within social action programmes associated with sex workers.

Sex workers' perceptions show that they would be receptive to social initiatives to provide education to their children. This is an area requiring motivated social action. Social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society, that take into account their own sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process can be worthwhile.