

## Harassment and Rehabilitation Process of Floating Sex Workers: A Study in Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Floating Sex Workers (FSWs) are the most underprivileged among all the commercial sex workers in Bangladesh. They do not have voices in society and what have are heard always against them. Moreover, they are facing problems, hazards and leading very miserable life, in spite of being a member of the society. In this study, it is tried to explore the factors affecting in harassment and rehabilitation of FSWs in Bangladesh. For this, a total of 100 FSWs were interviewed from Rajshahi City Corporation during January to March 2011. Percentage distribution and logistic regression method is used to analyze the data. The results point out that age, education, place of origin and duration in the profession, among other factors have been identified as the factor affecting the harassment and rehabilitation process of FSWs more. This study also identifies that social acceptance, proper opportunity of employment and elimination of various obstacles could reduce the harassment and indicate the suitable way of their rehabilitation. Therefore, to address the issues of the FSWs in an appropriate manner and to alleviate their sufferings, befitting their rehabilitation, both government and NGOs must come up with some specific programs in relation to social education and awareness.

**Key words:** Harassment, rehabilitation, Floating Sex Workers (FSWs), factors, awareness

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### INTRODUCTION

Floating Sex Workers (FSWs) are most disadvantaged among all the commercial sex workers in Bangladesh (Hughes *et al.*, 1999). They face extortion, rape, physical torture and discrimination every day (Ahmad, 2005). The situation of FSWs is much more vulnerable than the women living in the relative protection of a brothel. Women in the streets are engaged in an illegal activity and they are regularly harassed. In Bangladesh, four types of harassments are frequently being faced by the sex workers. Those are physical torture, sexual and financial exploitation and psychological persecution (Hossain *et al.*, 2004). These harassments occur mostly by police, mastan (muscleman), dalal (pimp), sardarni (leader of the prostitutes), political leader and some other persons (NGO workers, reporters/journalists, etc.) of the society.

The human rights of all sex workers are violated and they do not have voices in society. As a result, they are evicted from their own polli or lodge in the area of Tanbazar in 1999 from Magura and Patuakhali in 2003 from Jamalpur in 2004 to 2008 to 2010 from Mymensing in 2005

to 2007 from Tangail in 2006 from Faridpur C and B in 2006 to 2007 to 2008 from Bagerhat in 2006 from Narayanganj in 2007 and from Mir Hajirbag and Jatrabari in 2006 without planned rehabilitation or following any socially secured policy (Shikdar, 2012). Consequently the prostitution spread in larger areas and took varied means. That has negative effect and is a serious threat to the civilized society. Most recently, some intervention programs, mostly by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) started working for protecting their human rights and providing their effort to rehabilitate them (Hossain *et al.*, 2004). Since, the society has tacitly accepted and even set a seal of approval on the system of prostitution, the rehabilitation process is associated with various aspects. These sex workers need a better environment to glow and become a part of responsible citizens. Therefore, it is imperative to study the factors which are responsible for harassment of the sex workers and their rehabilitation process.

A study on street sex workers was conducted by Abedin and Khan (2010) focused on the study on some pain related health problems in Rajshahi City. In fact, most of the research was carried on brothel or hotel based sex

workers and perhaps there are no research has been conducted regarding harassment and rehabilitation of FSWs in Rajshahi District. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the factors associated with the harassment and rehabilitation process of FSWs in Rajshahi City Corporation of Bangladesh.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

There are 30 wards under Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC). For this study, only 10 wards, out of 30 wards were selected following simple random sampling method. A total of 100 FSWs were interviewed purposively from these 10 wards during January to March 2011 where at least two respondents were included from each wards as the exact number and location of FSWs were unknown. To analyze the data, the well known statistical tools such frequency distribution and Logistic Regression Model were used. The Logistic Regression Model can not only be used to identify risk factors but also to identify the interaction and causal effects between them. In this study, there are two dependent variables feel any harassment in the profession and having willingness of rehabilitation, assigned by the value of 1 if they answered yes and 0 otherwise. The explanatory variables are age of the respondents (year) their educational status, religion, place of origin and duration in the profession (year).

**Background information of FSWs:** The demographic and socio-economic profile always provides important insights about a community upon which future preventive interventions may be formulated and undertaken. Table 1 shows that 37.0% of the respondent enters in the profession at the age of 24-28 which is highest in number followed by 27.0% at the age of 19-23, 23.0% at the age of 29 and over and 13.0% at the age of ≤18 years which is the lowest in number. About 92.0% of the respondent’s having place of origin in urban and only 8.0% having in rural area. Out of total respondents, only 6.0% are Non-Muslim and the rest of them are Muslim. Only 7.0% of FSWs are secondary and higher educated. However, 43.0% are up to primary and 50.0% are from 6-9 studied. Among the total respondents most of the respondents (76.0%) have children (Table 1).

In this study, 28.0% FSWs work in the residential hotel whereas 43.0% work according to their personal choice and 56.0% workers depend on their clients. There are 29.0% respondents who earn ≤200 taka per day, 27.0% earn 201-400 taka, 20.0% earn 401-600 taka, 9.0% earn 601-800 taka, 7.0% earn 801-1000 taka and 8.0% earn 1000+ taka per day for their sexual activities (Table 1). It is noticeable that among the total respondents, 39.0% respondents having sex with 1-7 male persons, 27.0% with 8-14, 31.0% with 15-21 and 3.0% with 22 and more partners per week. The result also reveals that 22.0% of the

**Table 1: Background information of Floating Sex Workers (FSWs)**

Characteristics	Respondents (%)	Characteristics	Respondents (%)
<b>Age of the respondent (year)</b>		<b>Sex per week</b>	
≤18	13	1-7	39.0
19-23	27	8-14	27.0
24-28	37	15-21	31.0
29 and over	23	22+	3.0
<b>Place of origin</b>		<b>Duration in the profession (year)</b>	
Urban	92	≤3	22.0
Rural	8	4-7	30.0
<b>Religion</b>		8 and over	48.0
Muslim	94	<b>Causes to be involved</b>	
Non-Muslim	6	Family’s perspectives	6.0
<b>Education</b>		Economic insolvency	74.0
Up to primary	43	Duped	12.0
Six to Nine	50	Spontaneously	8.0
Secondary and Higher	7	<b>To be influenced</b>	
<b>Having children</b>		Self	12.0
No	24	Pimp	47.0
Yes	76	Mother	2.0
<b>Income per day (TK)</b>		Sister	3.0
≤200	29	Husband	9.0
201-400	27	Others*	27.0
401-600	20	<b>Family acquaintance about profession</b>	
601-800	9	No	52.0
801-1000	7	Yes	48.0
1000+	8	<b>If knows, their mindset</b>	
<b>Place of sexual activity</b>		Abominate	27.1 (13)
Residential hotel	28	Avoid	12.5 (6)
Respondent’s choice	43	Neutral	29.2 (14)
Client’s choice	56	Help	31.2 (15)
Total	100	Total	100.0

\*Friends, lover, relatives, neighbors

respondents are in the profession for  $\leq 3$  years, 30.0% for 4-7 years and 48.0% respondent for 8 and over years (Table 1).

To find out the underlying causes of involving at this profession, the data were collected carefully. Among the total, there are 6.0% of the respondents who have come to this profession due to familial perspectives, 12.0% due to cheat, 8.0% due to spontaneously and a high proportion of sex workers (74.0%) have been joined in prostitution due to economic hardship. It is a matter of regress that 47.0% respondents are influenced by agent, followed by 27.0, 12.0, 9.0, 3.0 and 2.0% by others (friends, lover, relatives and neighbors), self, husband, sister and mother, respectively.

In this study, 52.0% respondents have reported that their families are informed about their profession. Among them, 27.1% respondent's family abominates, 12.5% avoid, 29.2% neutral and 31.2% help the respondents (Table 1).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Harassment:** Table 2 reveals that about 4 respondents out of each 10 are being harassed in their profession. Of the 42% respondents, 4.0% are harassed by police, 6.0% by pimp (dalal), 2.0% by fixed client (babu), 5.0% by client and 4% by family members and 3.0% by others means muscleman (mastan), political leader and blacker. In addition, 2.0% sex workers are harassed by both police and pimp (dalal), 3.0% by police and client, 2.0% by fixed client and family members, 3.0% by pimp and family members, 3.0% by pimp and others (muscleman (mastan), political leader, blacker) and 2.0% respondents are jointly harassed by police, pimp and others (muscleman (mastan), political leader and blacker).

**Rehabilitation circumstances:** There are about 8 respondents out of each 10 having willingness in rehabilitation. That is almost all the sex workers would like

Table 2: Percentage distribution of harassment and to be harassed by whom

Harassment and to be harassed	Yes (%)
Police	4
Pimp (dalal)	6
Fixed client (Babu)	2
Client	5
Family members	4
Others*	3
Police and others*	3
Police and pimp (dalal)	2
Police and client	3
Fixed client and family members	2
Pimp and family members	3
Pimp and others	3
Police, pimp and others*	2
Total	42

\*Muscleman (mastan), political leader and blacker

to survive in another profession except two. If they get opportunity, they desire to be a maid servant (13%), labor (6.0%), housewife (11.0%) and business (26.0%) among them who wants to leave the prostitution. The respondents having enthusiasm in rehabilitation, reported that they are not leaving the profession because of economic insolvency 32%, fear of in acceptance by society 5%, bound/forced to do 5%, no opportunity 32% and others (hesitate to say) 5% (Table 3).

**Opinion about rehabilitation:** Among the total respondents, half of them reported that proper opportunity of employment could be the suitable way of rehabilitation (Table 4). In addition, arrangement of monthly allowance (8.0%), social acceptance (16.0%) and elimination of various obstacles (15.0%) are also their suggestions in rehabilitation whereas 11.0% have no opinion.

### Factor affecting floating sex workers

**Associated factors of harassment:** Harassment is common to floating sex workers. The logistic regression analysis is run to identify the associated factors of harassment (i.e., being felt any harassment). The results shows that age of the respondents and duration in the profession are statistically significant factors affecting the FSWs to be harassed (Table 5). The relative odds ratio for each category of the categorical variables and its statistical significance are also presented in the Table 5.

From Table 5, it is observed that age of the respondents is identified as the statistically significant factors affecting to be harassed of the floating sex workers. This finding is very similar to the study of Alam (2005). The results indicate that the odds ratios for age group 19-23, 24-28 and 29 and over years are 0.699, 0.533

Table 3: Rehabilitation circumstances

Willingness in rehabilitation	Yes (%)	Unwillingness in rehabilitation	Yes (%)
Maid servant	13	Economic insolvency	32
Laborer	6	Fear of inacceptance by society	5
Housewife	11	Bound/forced to do	5
Business	26	No opportunity	32
GO-NGO's service	23	Others*	5
Total	79	Total	21

NA: Not Applicable; \*Hesitate to say

Table 4: Opinion regarding rehabilitation

Opinion	No. of respondents	Percent
Arrangement of monthly allowance	8	8
Proper opportunity of employment	50	50
Social acceptance	16	16
Elimination of various obstacles	15	15
Others*	11	11
Total	100	100

\*No opinion

Table 5: Odds ratio of harassment and rehabilitation according to the background information of the respondents

Covariates	Odds ratio	
	Feel any harassment	Having willingness of rehabilitation
<b>Age of the respondents (year)</b>		
≥18 <sup>®</sup>	1.000	1.000
19-23	0.699***	2.223**
24-28	0.533***	2.697**
29 and over	0.366**	2.255**
<b>Religion</b>		
Muslim <sup>®</sup>	1.000	1.000
Non-Muslim	1.325	0.098*
<b>Place of origin</b>		
Urban <sup>®</sup>	1.000	1.000
Rural	1.954	1.376
<b>Education</b>		
Up to primary <sup>®</sup>	1.000	1.000
Six to nine	0.684	1.269
Secondary and higher	0.185	1.061
<b>Duration in the profession (year)</b>		
≤3 <sup>®</sup>	1.000	1.000
4-7	0.677**	0.891
8 and over	0.509**	1.584
Constant	2.420	1.571

<sup>®</sup>Means reference category; \*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05 and \*\*\*p<0.10

and 0.366, respectively. It clearly implies that FSWs of age group 19-23 years have  $(1-0.699) \times 100 = 30.1\%$  of age group 24-28 years have  $(1-0.533) \times 100 = 46.7\%$  and of age group 29 and over have  $(1-0.366) \times 100 = 63.4\%$  lower risk of harassment than that of age group ≤18 years (reference category). Therefore, it is to say that the higher the age of FSWs, the lower the rate of harassment as aged FSWs have more sustained capacity than the younger one.

Religion is also an important factor associated with harassment of sex workers. The logistic regression analysis indicates that the odds ratio for non-muslim respondents is 1.325. It indicates that the non-muslims are being harassed 1.325 times more than that of muslims counter part. But the result is not statistically significant. Respondent's place of origin is also a factor affecting FSWs to be harassed. The odds ratio corresponding to rural origin is 1.954. That means, the rural origin FSWs have about two times higher risk of harassment than the urban origin FSWs. The main cause of behind it, the urban origin FSWs is generally more aware, more communicative and heroic than the FSWs of rural origin. Educational status is an important matter for the harassment of the floating sex workers. The logistic regression analysis identifies that the odds ratio for the FSWs having 6-9 year of education is 0.684 and it is 0.185 for FSWs having education secondary and higher. That means, education having 6-9 years are 31.6% and secondary and higher studied are 81.5% lower risk of harassment than the FSWs having up to primary studied (reference category). It is because naturally

literate workers deserve more motivation power to manage any level of people at any circumstances. But the result is not statistically significant.

The result of logistic regression analysis confirms that duration in the profession is associated with the harassment of floating sex workers. Considering the duration ≤3 years as reference period, the odds ratio for 4-7 and 8 and over years are 0.677 and 0.509, respectively which indicate that duration in the profession decreases the risk of harassment (Table 5). It is because over the times the sex workers are adapted that change their mentality, they are acquainted with the environment, find the negotiating power and are able to survive her as better situation.

**Associated factors of having willingness in rehabilitation:** The logistic regression model is also performed to identify the factors associated with the willingness of rehabilitation. It is showed that age of the respondents and religion are among the other factors, significantly associated with the rehabilitation process. The results are also presented in Table 5.

Age of the sex workers is an important factor to be considered in their profession. Alam (2010) showed in a study that the female sex workers expect their rehabilitation to survive in older age or before their retirement age of 30 year from the profession. The odds ratios of FSWs corresponding to the age group 19-23, 24-28 and 29 and over years are 2.223, 2.697 and 2.255, respectively. This reveals that the older aged FSWs would more likely for having willingness of rehabilitation comparing with the FSWs in the age group ≤18 years (reference group). It is to mention here that this rate is highest among the FSWs of the age group 24-28 years.

Religion is another important factor showing the statistically significant effect on the rehabilitation process of FSWs. The respondents are classified into two categories, those of muslims and non-muslims. The odds ratio of non-muslims FSWs is calculated, considering the muslims FSWs as reference category. The results demonstrate that the non-muslim FSWs are less likely for having the willingness of rehabilitation than the muslim (Table 5). It may be due to the feelings of non-muslims that they would have less opportunity of rehabilitation in muslim dominated society.

To identify the impact of education of FSWs in rehabilitation process, the respondents are grouped into three and respondents having up to primary education considered as reference category. The results show that the odds ratios for another two groups respondents having education six to nine and secondary and higher are 1.269 and 1.061, respectively. It depicts that the

respondents in 6-9 education group is 26.7% and in secondary and higher education group is only 6.1% would like to rehabilitate themselves than the reference group mentioned earlier. It is because the lower educated or somehow uneducated respondents have less idea for better way of life but the medium educated are frightened about their future. On the other hand, respondents in the education group secondary and higher are able to contact with others and have possibility to get better facilities. But the results are not statistically significant.

Duration in the profession of FSWs is also important factor for their rehabilitation process though the results show no significant effect. The logistic regression analysis shows that the odds ratios for the duration of service of 4-7 and 8+ years are 0.891 and 1.584, respectively. It implies that the longer the duration of FSWs in the profession, the more desired for rehabilitation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Floating Sex Workers (FSWs) are deprived from most of the urban facilities though they are living in metropolis. As the higher the age of FSWs, the lower the rate of harassment occurs in their profession. Appropriate measure should be taken so that the entry at very younger ages in this profession would come in zero level. Again, it is clear that the longer the duration in this profession, the harassment is less likely. So, the FSWs should be counseled in a manner that they could protect them from any kind of harassment and gradually come up from this profession though it is known to all that the rehabilitation of FSWs is a lengthy procession. Moreover, in this study, age of the respondents and beliefness to religion are shown statistically significant impact on rehabilitation of FSWs. Therefore, both government and NGOs must come up with some specific programs to design an action plan for prevention, protection and rehabilitation of FSWs.

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