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## Examining the Use of Technology by Mobile Sex Workers for Service Utilization in Andhra Pradesh

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### **Abstract :**

*Till now, extensive research has been done related to the female sex workers and their crucial role in transmitting HIV infection. Their mobility also has been targeted and still the studies are undergoing yet.*

*The current paper attempts to examine the use of technology by mobile sex workers for service utilization. The data has been collected in and around Tirupati urban area. A total of 20 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion have been conducted by using qualitative guidelines. Out of twenty in-depth interviews, 10 each from female sex workers and key informants have been conducted with the help of in-depth interview guideline. The qualitative data has been analyzed by using Atlas-ti software package. The results of this study show that usage of technology among mobile female sex workers is high for solicitation of clients. They are also knowledgeable about the advance communication techniques which are available at present. Majority of the studied population found to have mobile phones. Few of them, especially those who are obtained higher education, found to be utilizing internet. They opined that technology can be used to enhance the accessibility to mobile population by the Government or Non- Government programmes.*

**Keywords:** Female Sex workers, mobility, mobile phones, technology, internet, service utilization, Andhra Pradesh

### **1. Introduction**

The majority of FSWs still operate through traditionally defined approaches such as the street, establishments, and the home. However, anecdotal evidence suggested that traditional modes of solicitation might be changing (USAID). There is evidence that FSWs' use of cell phone is increasingly becoming common in India (Buzdugan R 2010). Studies in Andhra Pradesh in India showed that the use of cell phones by FSWs to solicit clients has increased from 3% in 2006 to 9% in 2009(FHI 2007&2010) and to 27% in 2011(HLFPPT 2011). It should be noted that while there are many successful examples of programs reaching out to women residing in brothels, there are not many such examples of programs reaching out to flying sex workers in India.( Sunny Sinha,2012). Hence, few studies put effort to understand the changing dynamics of Female sex workers in soliciting their clients or in their daily life. Sex workers who tend to move from place to place for the purpose of finding clients have been particularly difficult to cover by the programme, compared with sex workers who remain in the same location. Those are difficult to contact, follow-up, treat, and empower. (Population Council,2007-08).The study also assessed the potential to use these new means of communication or technology to provide available health facilities in HIV prevention and general health issues services to the FSWs themselves.

### **2. Objective**

To examine the technology usage by female sex workers' and its association with the service utilization

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1. Qualitative data analysis*

The qualitative data has been translated into English language. The in-depth interviews with female sex workers, key stake holders and a focus group discussion have been assigned into Atlas-ti package for analysis.

#### *3.2. Codes*

After completing electronic documenting of the in-depth interviews, the codes have been developed for analyzing the qualitative data. The codes were developed and defined for understanding the extent of the relevance in the text. Each code is defined and over all 45 codes was developed for the study.

### 3.3. Quotations

After assigning the codes with relevance to the text cited qualitative in the interviews, the listing of quotations was carried out. The listed quotations helped in understanding the key issues. The qualitative findings have been used to substantiate the quantitative findings in different chapters of the thesis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Socio Economic Background Characteristics

Among the female sex workers during the pre-survey qualitative assessment, respondents were between 20 to 40 years old and four of them were from urban areas where as others from rural areas. More than half of them have observed of doing nothing other than sex work as profession and only few of them are currently married. Respondents were observed to practice the sex work ranged from 6 months to 17 years. Similarly, among them who were interviewed post survey were observed of aged 19 years to 33 years. They have been practicing sex work 2years to 13 years. Three of them are from rural and two are from urban areas. Two of them found to be unmarried, two are widowed and one respondent is married. Majority of them have observed to practice sex work in other places.

Among the key stakeholders who were interviewed, three of them are pan shop keepers, two are mediators in the sex work profession, and two out-reach workers, one counselor and one doctor who are associated with local NGO and providing services to the female sex workers in the study area.

Nine female sex workers of different age were participated in the focus group discussion. Majority of them are having no other occupation except sex work and four of them were from rural areas and five of them from urban areas. Five of them are married and four of them are separated. All the participants were observed to have attained primary education. All of them have ever been migrated to other places for sex work.

### 4.2. Utilization of Mobile Phones/Internet for Solicitation of Clients

Utilization of technology among female sex workers in the recent time is emerging and it is evident. Majority of the female sex workers mentioned that they use technology. It is also evident that they use the technology and particularly mobile phone for the purpose of soliciting clients is increasing and reported in this study. They prefer technology to solicit their clients rather than the traditional methods of solicitation due to various reasons.

Respondents expressed that they prefer to use mobile phones for contacting clients.

To quote a respondent "Now-a –days, everyone is using mobile phone to contact clients. It is easy to contact over phone than standing on the streets. Broker also contacts us through phone if there is any client. I give my mobile number to the clients once I meet them. They will call me thereafter if they need me".

It is reported by the majority of the clients that mobile phone is used in this profession for contacting clients or brokers or pimps.

To mention a respondent "I mostly contact my clients through mobile phone. My madam has my mobile number and she will call me if there is any client"

It is revealed by the respondents that they have difficulties with police and media to continue this profession in public areas. They also express their concern of their identity if they get caught either by police or by any media personnel. It is mentioned as one of the reason for not doing this profession in public and doing at their homes. They are also afraid to solicit publicly due to these reasons and prefer to use mobile phones to solicit their clients.

To quote a respondent "It is difficult to do this business in public due to police or media. They always try to expose our business if they don't have anything to write. That's why we afraid to do sex outside and doing at our home. We call clients over phone and do it at home."

It is clearly showing the usage of advance technology to solicit clients and the respondents hand in utilizing up to date technology.

To express a respondent "I do use Facebook to contact clients. I get young clients through Facebook and my current partner is also introduced through Facebook only. I got many software guys as my clients through Facebook. They are all working in different areas but do meet when they need me. I will be in touch with them in Facebook."

### 4.3. Utilization of Mobile Phones/Internet for Contacting Family Members and Friends During Mobility

As the mobility among female sex workers is usual phenomenon in search of clients, the usage of technology also found increased to contact their family members and friends during their mobility to different places. Majority of the mobile female sex workers reported of having contacts with their children or parents when they are away from home on this profession.

To express a respondent "I contact my children and my mother over phone when I am out of my home. I use phone only to contact my friends or any relatives and that is the only way through which we can contact them. We don't know where we go and where we stay. At least we can be in touch with children through phone."

In this context, respondents have comprehended that they use the internet technology for contacting family members or others during their mobility. It is obvious that they are getting exposure to use new technology in their day to day life.

To mention a respondent "I do contact my partner through internet when I am out of home. I will tell him about the place where I am. I have internet in my mobile and I also use Whats app."

### 4.4. Utilization of Mobile Phones/Internet in Crisis During Mobility

Interviewed population has opined that having mobile phone is always helpful for them during their mobility for sex work. They feel that their work is bit challenging during out-doors and hence having mobile phones with them can be saved them from few

crisis situations. It is also found that they go to the places where their clients are comfortable but don't have the choice of locations. They are helpless and cannot choose the locations at out-doors. They have to entertain the clients though they feel any insecurity in deserted areas or new places.

To quote a respondent "Having phone is good. We can call anybody in danger situation. We don't know where we go for sex work with clients and anything can happen to us at anytime. Our work is always dangerous. So, phone is necessary to carry."

It is also obvious that they are expected to face police raids or arrests more in outside places than the local places. They feel that having any means of contact with them is helpful for them to contact family members or any person to help them in such crisis situation.

To mention one respondent "I was arrested by police when I went to Velankani for sex work in a lodge there. I could not inform anybody about this as I did not carry mobile phone with me. I could only get chance to inform my mother after one month I spent in jail. I would have been released if I carried a mobile phone with me on that day."

Violence is also a major threat in this profession. It can be at least informed to their friends or concerned person if they have a mobile phone with them. They always feel some secure if they have mobile phone with them when are out for their work.

To mention a respondent "I always carry mobile phone with me as I know the need of it in my profession. I can call madam or my friends if Clients trouble me. Clients may beat us if we refuse to do as they want. They don't like to wear condom or they may demand for group sex. They also force to drink alcohol. They will beat us like anything if we refuse to do so. We can call anybody for help in that situation if we have mobile phone with you."

To quote another respondent "Some clients leave us in isolated areas after sex and go without paying us. Somebody will try to kill us if we try to fight for that."

#### *4.5. Utilization of Mobile Phones /Internet for Utilization of Services During Migration*

Utilization of different means of technology in service utilization is found significant among mobile female sex workers. They are efficiently using technology for procuring different services. Among them majority of them are reported of using mobile phone vividly.

It is important to mention that majority of the respondents reported that they get the information of Ration availability in Fair price shops through mobile phones by their friends or neighbours and even from the ration shop dealers in some places. They feel it is very helpful them to acquire ration on time though they are away from their places.

To quote a respondent "I feel my mobile phone helps me in many ways when I am outside for my profession. I will call ration shop dealer and come home accordingly to collect the ration. Otherwise, I would miss my ration every month. All dealers will not entertain this kind of calls but she is known to me and inform me about the availability of ration when I call her."

Majority of the interviewed population mentioned that they are informed by the NGO office staff about the health camps and health visits. They have also opined that it is really helpful for them as they are mobile in nature for their profession in search of clients. They have informed that they will come back to the places where they have registered for the services if informed in advance and avail the provided services so that they will not be missed from those services.

To mention a respondent "I get call from NGO office if there is any meeting or health camp. I will reach my place before that and attend the meeting or any health camp or session. That type of contact information helps us a lot in attending and using their services without missing. Otherwise, we don't know what happens and we cannot go to office and we don't stay at home when come to visit us."

It is reported that registering mobile phones are found helpful at the NGO offices as they contact the sex workers to pass on the information and also helpful to get any suggestions when in need during their mobility.

To state a respondent "Giving mobile numbers at NGO office is good so that they can inform us if there is any doctor come for check-up. As we people keep moving from one place to another place for our profession, we will not be reached by their staff personally all the time. They will contact us through phone where ever we are. We also contact them for any help when we are at out-doors. They give us helpful information during crisis situations also."

There are noticeable findings that sex workers who are on ART get ART services on time though they are highly mobile and reported that using mobile phone is the reason behind it.

To quote another respondent "I am on ART and I get a call on due date to collect ART medicine and on some regular check-ups from the office so that, I will receive them on time. As we are not much educated and leading hectic and disturbed life style we don't remember the dates correctly. They will help us in visiting hospital on time."

## **5. Discussion**

As Among the female sex workers mobility is more common, it is the big challenge to reach them for several Government and Non-Governmental programmes. It's been most confront part of research to reach them during their mobility to empower them. There are few studies those who focused on their mobility but insufficient research has been done yet about their ability or the exact situation on usage of technology and how they can be used for various programmes. The current study results pointed towards the utilization of technology in accessing various Government and Non-Government services which are available for their betterment. It also shows the positive implication of technology use in utilizing services and it is bit encouraging part to the policy makers those who wants to implement in this direction. Mobile female sex workers those who are ease at using technology are likely to cover by the services and are up to date of the available services provided by the Government and Non-Government bodies. It is suggested that technology can be used more effectively in the in the programmes which are either Health programmes or other welfare programmes to reach them more and cover them under particular interventions with more feasibility. Even though, the uneducated population also constitutes substantial proportion among the female mobile sex workers, they are using

technology with basic knowledge. It is suggested that they can be involved in different intervention programmes with minimum skill provision in usage of technology for service utilization more effectively.

## 6. Conclusions

Usage of technology by female sex workers orated was increased and observed the usage of technology like mobile phones and internet for better communication.

These findings focus on the scope of utilizing the technology to reach the mobile female sex workers and enhance the service provision in various aspects among the migrating female sex workers' population. These results also suggest for the development of new strategies to extend services to the mobile population among those who reported of using technology in different purposes.

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**ANNEXURE**

	Age	Education	Occupation other than sex work	Duration of sex work	Native (rural/urban)	Marital status	Practiced sex work in other places
<b>Pre survey</b>							
Respondent 1	24	2	--	8yrs	Rural	Married	Yes
Respondent 2	39	12	Small vendor	10yrs	Urban	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 3	30	10	Nurse/ beautician	12yrs	Urban	Married	Yes
Respondent 4	22	10	--	5yrs	Rural	Married	No
Respondent 5	21	4	--	6months	Rural	Separated	Yes
Respondent 6	36	6	--	7yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 7	30	0	Non-agricultural labourer	6yrs	Rural	Separated	No
Respondent 8	28	5	Service private	9yrs	Urban	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 9	38	7	--	17yrs	Urban	Divorced	Yes
Respondent 10	25	2	--	4yrs	Rural	Separated	No
<b>Post survey</b>							Yes
Respondent 1	29	5	Small vendor	5yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 2	27	0	--	2yrs	Rural	Widowed	Yes
Respondent 3	19	5	--	2yrs	Rural	Never married	Yes
Respondent 4	20	9	--	3yrs	Rural	Never married	Yes
Respondent 5	33	7	--	13yrs	Rural	Married	Yes

Table 1: Profile of the respondents: In-depth interview

	Age	Education	Occupation	Duration of stay in this area	Aware about number of sex workers in their area
Respondent 1	65	0	Mediator	30yrs	Yes
Respondent 2	45	0	Mediator	15yrs	Yes
Respondent 3	37	13	Outreach worker	5yrs	Yes
Respondent 4	40	15	Project officer	3yrs	Yes
Respondent 5	28	12	Outreach worker	7yrs	Yes
Respondent 6	30	MSW	Counselor	2yrs	Yes
Respondent 7	50	MBBS	Doctor	4yrs	Yes
Respondent 8	37	7	Pan shop keeper	10yrs	Yes
Respondent 9	48	3	Pan shop keeper	15yrs	Yes
Respondent 10	55	5	Pan shop keeper	17yrs	Yes

Table 2: Profile of the respondents: Key stakeholders

	Age	Education	Occupation other than sex work	Duration of sex work	Native (rural/urban)	Marital status	Practiced sex work in other places
Respondent 1	31	6	--		Rural	separated	Yes
Respondent 2	25	8	--		Urban	married	Yes
Respondent 3	26	5	--		Rural	married	Yes
Respondent 4	23	6	Bidi making		Urban	separated	Yes
Respondent 5	32	7	--		Rural	separated	Yes
Respondent 6	27	5	--		Urban	married	Yes
Respondent 7	24	5	--		Rural	married	Yes
Respondent 8	29	6	--		Urban	separated	Yes
Respondent 9	27	7	Packing labourer		Urban	married	Yes

Table 3: Profile of the respondents: FGD participants