
IDENTITY FORMATION OF THE CHILDREN OF SEX WORKERS

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Abstract: This paper has broadly focused on the elements that can be identified as contributing to the construction of identity of the children of a particularly marginalized segment of society: sex workers. In a society where matters regarding sexuality are not a part of open social discourse and in which sex work is stigmatized and women sex workers face discrimination at various levels, children of sex workers experience discrimination and social bias for no fault of their own. Their identity is the root cause of all their problems. At least now these children are not labeled 'illegitimate' and mother's identity is recognized for most official services but in the social scenario, these children are born with a handicap that is carried as a burden all their lives. They are individuated through the predominant culture, because it does not allow them to become subjects and form an identity independent of their parentage and social background. Thus, there is a tendency to develop only coping skills at the cost of capacities, abilities and interest that form the core of the healthy personality. Identity that is the reflection of personality becomes limited in perspective and as a result does not explore itself. It gets tied to circumstances and situation. It is these aspects of identity formation, especially the limiting and restricting factors that this paper discusses.

The methodology applied in this study is mostly qualitative and exploratory in nature. The data was gathered using various methods like case study, in-depth interview and focused group discussion. The study was performed in Khalpara red light area, Siliguri, West Bengal, India. The children of sex workers belonging to the age group of 6-14years (both boys and girls) were considered as sample for the study. Narrative analysis was used later to analyze the data. The researcher ensured to meet the ethical consideration while performing this study. The dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants was the primary consideration in the research study. The researchers work within the discipline of social work focuses on intervention, service design, right based approach, recognition of human dignity and individual worth, understanding and enhancing living conditions of sex workers and their families. The study is derived from the life cycle and ecological perspective.

Keywords: Children Of Sex Workers, Identity Formation, Socialization.

Introduction: Identity formation, personality and wellbeing are intimately interconnected from a very early age. The events of the life cycle acquire significance when we seek to understand the elements that contribute to the construction of identity. From the experience of working with various communities using group work and individual case-work techniques as part of the curriculum of Social Work I have understood that the situations in which children find themselves mould the mechanisms of adjustment/coping; interaction with others within and without their environment and in the ways they shape their expectations and aspirations. As societies become more and more intermingled and come to share common hopes and aspirations, individuals need to be able to present themselves as well as think of themselves as 'capable' and 'prepared' for the understanding of modern goals of life in their individual ways with which they feel "comfortable' and 'content'. Personality as a term is derived from the Greek word 'persona' which literally means mask implying in lay terms that personality is the mask that we present to the outside world and that this mask is reinforced or challenged continuously through interaction and feedback from others. If we consider the idea of the pattern of personality, we can identify two central parts- the core of personality or the self-concept and the traits organized around the self-concept. The core is constructed of the ideal self-concept and the real self-concept or the ideas of what we want to be and what we really are respectively. An integrated and healthy personality is that in which the two components of the core are not too dissimilar or disjointed from each other and also in which the traits are harmonized and used in expression of the self. Personality is the totality of the

person. It develops with socialization and becomes shaped in such a way that there is consistency and continuity of the pattern. Pattern here refers to the ways in which the traits are organized around the concept of self that lies at the core of personality.

Identity, on the other hand is the way in which the individuals presents himself/herself to others. Identity becomes 'active' at the certain points of the life cycle. When the child grows and is able to interact with the peer and face wider range of human relationships then the question of 'defining' and 'describing' oneself arises. It is during such time that we see the emergence of identity. The dictionary defines Identity as "the condition or fact of being some specific person or thing" and claims Latin root, 'idem', or the 'same'. Erickson, who first used the term to denote the precise developmental goal, called it a sense of investigating sameness and continuity. Identity is people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others. Identity refers to the process of self-development through which we construct a unique sense of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us (Erickson, 1980). If personality is the totality of the person, identity is that aspect of personality that comes into focus during interactions and primarily contains ideas of self. If personality is the pattern, identity is the highlighted pattern by which a person is identified. In this particular problem a distinction has been made between personality and identity with a clear focus on the latter. Identity, identity arises, identity formation are important aspects of growing up and also those that need nurturance, guidance and resolution of crisis in marked ways in which socialization plays a vital role. In this paper, I will discuss the identity formation of the children of sex workers and its limiting and restricting factors with the coping skills that the children develop along the way.

Methodology: Exploratory research design was chosen to conduct this study in Khalpara red light area in Siliguri, West Bengal, India. It is a qualitative study focusing on the children of sex workers belonging to the age group of 6-14 as this age group fits best for the study. The children were chosen purposively and in-depth interview and case studies was conducted to collect information. The agents of socialization of the children of sex workers were identified and were interviewed to have a better understanding and focus group discussion was conducted with the sex workers. The data collected was analyzed in a narrative method.

Findings: The children of sex workers from Khalpara red light area are exposed to socialization in such a way that they lack behavior standards due to lack of imposition by their immediate agent of socialization. The family ties of the children of sex workers are only with their mother. The *babu* (sex worker's counterpart) has a minimal role in a family. The child is attached only to his/her mother and the mother plays a vital role in upbringing and developing the personality of the child. The mother alone act as the primary agent of socialization. There is hardly any trace of biological grandparents of these children. There is presence of inter and intra stigmatization in the red light area. Inter being the stigma attached to their profession and intra stigma arises when one sex worker falls in love or steals the other sex workers '*babu*' then the sex worker faces stigma within a stigma. This particular situation is highly avoided and therefore the neighbors do not interfere in each other's business. They fear that the children or the other sex workers may become fond of their '*babus*'. But the sex workers allow their neighbors children to stay in their room if not occupied, when their mother is attending the client. Due to lack of rooms, the mother insists the children to leave the room and stay in the neighbouring room until the client leaves. This way the sex worker tries to hide the identity of their child in front of their client thinking that their children if known as a sex worker's child will have problems when they step outside the so called their safe boundary of red light area.

The teachers in school were blind blinkers about the profession of the mother of the students from red light area. The teachers do not call the mothers to school for any meeting. There is no communication between the teacher and the mother. These are the child's microsystem and according to the Ecological system theory of Urie Bronfrenbrenner (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979) when the different elements of the microsystem work against one another the child's development could be affected in a negative way. This is reflected in the lives of these children. There is apathy in investing in formal education of the children of sex workers. Most of the children study in classes which is below their average standard due to late

admission in school or due to repetition of classes. It was found that the schools in Khalpara has number of students decreasing with the increase in the standard of the class. There is no sense of conveying the social norms by the agents of socialization. The conduct of children is not guided by the social norms. For example, if a child of a parent who is not a sex worker is seen roaming around freely in an outing uniform on a normal school day, the child is questioned why didn't he go to school by his neighbours, relatives or even a shop keeper nearby his house but if a child of a sex worker does the same and remains absent in school, nobody questions or even cares.

The children of sex workers feel embarrassed of their identity attached to their mother's profession. They use all kinds of means to hide their identity from their friends in school. While going to school, the children take the transport to school from a distance away from their home and while returning also they drop in the same place in order to not let others know that they come from red light area. The self-esteem of the children of sex workers in Khalpara red light area is average or low according to the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The emotional intelligence of the children is also very shallow. The developmental phase of the children of sex workers slightly differ from the standard children development phase. The period of childhood is shortened. For a girl if she reaches the age of puberty, she is no more looked as a child but a young lady who can do all the household chores and look after her siblings. Most of the children are superstitious by nature. The children understand the meaning of trafficking and they know how the trafficking takes place and these children take pride in it and according to most of them they know that they will not be a victim of trafficking unlike other children living outside the red light area. The children live in such an environment where they conduct life on day to day basis. They live their daily life with fear and challenge, a fear of their identity being exposed outside the red light area and a challenge to erase this identity someday.

Conclusion: As a social worker's intervention and approach we need to give the children of sex workers the necessary torque to their personality, making them self-reliant and helping them make their own decision, expanding their thoughts about themselves and helping them see the world in a larger perspective. We need to focus on opportunities for them and also the skills that are required to achieve those opportunities. Stigma and prejudice attached to these innocent children should be removed and social workers must fight for this. This research indicates that by targeting the special areas of these children's life we can come up with combination of strategies or specific strategy from the perspective of mental health, school social work and family health.

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