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Social worker's experiences of working with women in sex work and their children

A qualitative study conducted in the organization Saheli Sangh

SUBJECT: *Social work*

AUTHORS: *Amenaghawon Ogbomo, Ida Jardstedt and Olivia Gran*

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Amenaghawon, Olivia, Ida

Abstract

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Authors: Amenaghawon Ogbomo, Ida Jardstedt and Olivia Gran

Tutor: Mary McCall

Examinator: Monika Wilinska

In India, the estimated number of people in sex work is high - figures show an appraisal of three million female sex workers. Most women who enter sex work tend to be very young and do so due to severe economic circumstances. The situation is considered especially severe in some parts of India due to a combination of poverty and the low status of females, which contribute to their exploitation in the sex industry. This vulnerability often leads to women being marginalized and stigmatized from society.

The aim with this thesis is to investigate how social workers, at an organization in Pune, India, work with women in sex work and their children. What motivates the social workers to pursue work with this group? How do they feel about their work and their clients? Further questions we wanted to answer were how the organization worked to secure good and sufficient living conditions for the children. Our initial goal for this study was to examine how the staff members at Saheli Sangh work to prevent the children from entering sex work. While doing so, we gained knowledge about the social worker's own thoughts, values and experiences of doing social work with this group. Hence, this newfound knowledge became our main focus throughout our study.

The results showed that education and safe housing were the primary interventions offered to prevent children from entering sex work. It also showed that the staff in the organization forms a special bond with the children and women with whom they work. To provide the needed interventions, the organization needs more resources and more support to combat negative perceptions and stigma from the society of women who do sex work and the social workers who help them address their needs.

Key words: Women in sex work, children of sex workers, attachment, stigma, marginalization, social constructionism, social worker's perspective of sex work

Sammanfattning

Titel: Socialarbetares upplevelser av att arbeta med kvinnor i sexarbete och deras barn – En kvalitativ studie gjord i organisationen Saheli Sangh

Författare: Amenaghawon Ogbomo, Ida Jardstedt och Olivia Gran

Handledare: Mary McCall

Examinator: Monika Wilinska

I Indien är det uppskattade antalet personer i sexarbete högt - siffror visar en uppskattning på tre miljoner kvinnliga sexarbetare. De flesta kvinnor som börjar med sexarbete tenderar att vara väldigt unga och gör det på grund av svåra ekonomiska omständigheter. Situationen anses särskilt svår i vissa delar av Indien. Detta på grund av en kombination av fattigdom och kvinnornas låga ställning i samhället, vilket bidrar till deras utnyttjande i sexindustrin. Denna utsatthet leder ofta till att kvinnor marginaliseras och stigmatiseras.

Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka hur socialarbetare, i en organisation i Pune, Indien, arbetar med kvinnor i sexarbete och deras barn. Vad motiverar socialarbetarna att arbeta med denna grupp? Hur upplever de sitt arbete och sina klienter? Ytterligare frågor vi ville ha svar på var hur organisationen arbetade för att säkerställa goda och tillräckliga levnadsvillkor för barnen. Vårt ursprungliga syfte med denna studie var att undersöka hur socialarbetarna i organisationen arbetar för att förhindra barnen från att börja med sexarbete. Under processens gång fick även kunskap om socialarbetarens egna tankar, värderingar och erfarenheter av att arbeta med denna grupp. Därigenom blev denna nyfunna kunskap vårt huvudfokus under resten av vår studie.

Resultaten visade att utbildning och tryggt boende var de primära insatserna som erbjuds för att förhindra att barn börjar med sexarbete. De visade även på ett starkt band mellan personalen och de kvinnor och barn som de arbetar med. För att kunna erbjuda nödvändiga insatser behöver organisationen mer resurser samt stöd från samhället för att bekämpa den rådande negativa uppfattningen som finns om kvinnor i sexarbete.

Nyckelord: Kvinnor i sexarbete, barn till sexarbetare, anknytning, stigma, marginalisering, social konstruktionism, socialarbetares perspektiv av sexarbete

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Introduction

The unpleasant feeling spread through our bodies the closer to the Red-light area we got. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, but the heat was unbearable, and we knew that the area ahead of us would be very poor and dirty. We stopped outside one brothel. The social workers had brought a questionnaire for the women to fill in regarding their health. We did not speak the same language, so there was nothing else for us to do but observe. A few meters to the left, there was a man selling drugs to one of the women. To the right, a severely crippled man begged for money and on the street on which we stood, countless numbers of possible customers passed by. Men entered and left the brothels. Fixating our eyes on the ground did not help us from feeling the stares on our bodies. The feeling of being judged and priced – objectified – was awful. The tears were not far away. We stayed in that area for one hour, some women stay a lifetime. – Olivia, Amenaghawon and Ida, 2018.

According to Karandikar, Gezinski and Meshelemiah (2013), one of India's largest social problems is prostitution and sex work. Results from their study, in West Bengal, showed that 68 percent of women in sex work entered their labour by free will due to poverty. Explanations for why women chose that particular job had to do with personal factors such as illiteracy, economic deprivation, having a dysfunctional home environment and lacking awareness of the potential risks.

Maynard (n.d) noted that previous research has almost exclusively paid attention to the women in sex work and hardly focused anything on their children. In her article, Maynard (n.d) says that women doing sex work are facing discrimination and stigma. The occupation can often pass through generations and girls are the most vulnerable, and more likely, to end up in sex work. Previous research implies that these children have a higher risk of becoming sex workers, to lack education, face sexual abuse, and be victims of social marginalization. According to Maynard (n.d), there is limited research on these children and their vulnerable situation. She states that there is a need for more actions, programs and research to raise awareness towards the tenuous position these children are in, and to

find out how many children are affected. Furthermore, she declared that due to the lack of research in this area, it is difficult to determine the short-term and long-term consequences for different intervention programs, but she stated that these children need education, counselling, health services, safe places and other necessary efforts. Verner (2004) also stressed the importance of education, meaning that low-quality education often leads to low income, which perpetuates poverty.

Evidently, there is a knowledge gap regarding children of sex workers and their well-being. Research show that mothers often enter sex work due to insufficient economic resources and that education can be a way to reduce poverty. To educate the children of sex workers might be a way to prevent them from entering sex work. Children of sex workers are a vulnerable group, who need to be acknowledged. Therefore, this study was carried out in an organization working with women in sex work and their children – Saheli Sangh. Hopefully, by shining light on the organization's efforts to empower these women and provide safety for their children, it might contribute to the knowledge gap regarding interventions provided for children of sex workers. By looking into the social worker's opinions, knowledge and experiences within this area, proposals can be provided for ways one can work with women in sex work and their children in the future. This kind of information can be relevant for current social workers world-wide, since this is a socially vulnerable group that exists everywhere. To gain knowledge of what interventions are beneficial in one context can help social workers with similar problems in other contexts.

Notes on terms utilized

- The members of staff in Saheli Sangh have various titles, ages and backgrounds. Most of them are women. The organization consists of educated social workers, volunteers, child minders and peer-educators. However, their efforts are equally important, and they are all conducting social work with the women and their children. Because of this, we have chosen to call all of them *social workers*, or simply *staff*.

- When referring to the *Red-light area*, we mean the district in Pune where the brothels were located. The brothels were the workplace of the women doing sex work.
- The staff at the organization have explicitly asked us to use the term ‘women in sex work’ when referring to the women working in the Red-light area. The terminology is discussed later in the thesis, but intentionally, we have chosen to stick to their proposal. The word *prostitution* is mentioned, but always in relation to researcher’s findings, and not our own result. When referring to the women working in the Red-light area, we have used the terms: *women in sex work*, *sex workers*, *women* and *mothers*.

Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate what support social workers provide for children of sex workers. We want to know what drives social workers to continue to work in this field despite setbacks and negative societal views. We also wish to learn how social workers experience their work and their ability to have an impact on women in sex work and their children.

To achieve the purpose of our study, we have formulated the following questions:

- How do social workers support women in sex work and their children?
- What motivates social workers to work with women in sex work and their children?

Background

Sex work in India

In India, the number of people in sex work is high. According to Sagade and Forster (2018), the estimated number of female sex workers is three million. The number of child prostitutes as a percentage of the total is also considered high. The World Health Organization [WHO] (2001) has suggested that 40 percent of female prostitutes begin selling sex before they turn eighteen. Most women who enter sex work do so due to terrible economic circumstances. Those entering brothel and street prostitution sectors tend to be very young, and many of them are children. The situation is considered especially severe in some parts of India due to a combination of poverty and the low status of females, which contribute to their exploitation in the sex industry. In many desperately poor regions, it is commonly accepted that girls ought to become prostitutes in order to help their families (WHO, 2001).

Legislation regarding sex work in India

The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act [ITPA] (1956) is the primary law that concerns sex workers in India. In an amendment done in 1986 the law states that prostitution is legal for a person who is selling sexual acts in private spaces. All other aspects of sex work are illegal, such as human trafficking, owning or operating a brothel, and underage prostitution. The law indicates the difficulty in defining trafficking, but describes it as procuring and trade of humans for the purpose of exploiting them. The law also states that it is illegal for a person over the age of eighteen to live off the earnings of a person who makes a living from prostitution (ITPA, 1956).

In their article, Sagade and Forster (2018) argue that the current law regarding sex work in India could use some amendment. They believe that there could be a better way of approaching the law – to highlight a women’s human rights approach even further. This could be done by a combination of what they call partial decriminalization and a pro-work

model. Here, partial decriminalization means legalizing sex work for adults who choose to do sex work voluntarily. All sex work in relation to coercion and trafficking would still be strictly prohibited. A pro-work model would ensure sex workers would be covered by an employment law. This would reduce crime in the sex trade, allow occupational health, and improve legal and human rights for the sex workers.

However, the authors understand the possible challenges with their proposal. They mention the generally low standard for workers in India regarding their employment protection as one challenge. Doing sex work is already frowned upon in the society, labelled a 'social evil' and 'threat to the marriage-family institution'. The authors doubt that women in sex work would gain respect or status only because of a legal change. The current attitudes would remain in society. The working conditions would not become better, either. Therefore, they argue that for their proposal to work, there must be a change in other laws regarding employment and human rights protection.

Sagade and Forster (2018) also discuss different views of sex work. They mention that some people see prostitution as violence, modern slavery and/or reflecting gender inequality. Others strive towards getting society to accept sex work just as any other profession. The authors also mention the Swedish view on sex work. According to them, sex workers are seen as victims in Sweden, who lack agency and are exposed to vulnerabilities. They also remind the readers that Sweden was the first country to criminalize the customer and not the sex worker.

Saheli Sangh

Saheli Sangh is a community-based organization in Pune, India. The organization works with 100 non-brothel-based sex workers and approximately 2000 women in sex work living in the Red-Light area, and their children. They strive to empower women in sex work through collectivization. Furthermore, they want the women to have the same rights as other citizens in the society. Preferably, the staff of Saheli Sangh wish for the women to be able to live their lives and do their work in peace, without harassment and discrimination by local authorities and others in the society. They wish to change the societal view and attitude towards the women (Saheli Sangh, n.d).

Saheli Sangh was founded in 1991 by women living and working in the area. Those women, former sex workers, are now board members of the organization. In the beginning, the other women living and working in the Red-Light area did not appreciate the work Saheli Sangh did. The social workers felt that the more they communicated, the more trust was gained, and a mutual respect evolved between the women and the staff. Today, Saheli Sangh is an established organization that is well-known in the area (personal communication, October 23, 2018).

The initial purpose of Saheli Sangh was to raise awareness and to spread information about HIV/AIDS to the women in sex work, distributing condoms and telling them about the risks with unprotected sex. Today, the organization also provides additional services for the women and the children in the Red-light area, such as a clinic in the office, a 24-hour day-care, food and education (Saheli Sangh, n.d).

Education is not only for the children, but also for the women and the staff at Saheli Sangh. Being part of a sex worker's collective, women in sex work have the opportunity to become peer-educators. The social workers describe a peer-educator as a person who has comparable life experiences or social background as the group of people they intend to reach out to. In this case, the person needs to have been involved in sex work. Saheli Sangh's peer-educators work in the field, close to the women, spreading information regarding health issues and other necessities to raise awareness and strengthen the community in the Red-light area (personal communication, November 12, 2018).

Previous research

In this section, previous research will be presented on the topic of sex workers and their children, and in relation to social work. The various studies provide different perspectives on why some women enter sex work, how children of sex workers perceive their mothers' occupation and how social workers work with this group. These investigations were chosen

because they give a wide perspective on the subject and comes from different parts of the world.

Vulnerabilities faced by children of sex workers

In their study, Servin et al. (2014) describe how research on children of sex workers in the Mexico-USA border region is very limited, in comparison to the research that has been done regarding their mothers. Through statistical analyses, the authors found that having a parent engaged in sex work increased the likelihood of their children using alcohol and drugs as a minor and being forced into sex as a minor. Also, they discovered the fact that these children had a more than 50% probability to report being exposed to sexual violence in their childhood (Servin et al., 2014). Consequently, Servin et al. (2014), concluded that children of sex workers, in fact, are a vulnerable group. The authors stated that knowing this, further research is called for to determine exactly what kind of interventions should be provided for these children.

To know what interventions are needed, it is important to know what the eminent threats are. Respondents in Willis et al.'s study (2014) reported a range of serious threats to their children, which they attributed to stigma and discrimination. Threats included abuse, exploitation, and lack of protection from the police. The women reported that if they disclosed that they were sex workers, their children would not get the services they needed from the health and well-fare sector. Also, the women in the study brought up safe housing as a problem. If the women mentioned what they did for a living, they were at great risk of being evicted. According to this study, there were also reports of staged police raids on sex worker's apartments, where the children become separated from their mothers. The authors understood that this act is very traumatizing for children of sex workers. The stigma and discrimination affect the access to health services for children when the providers know that their mothers are sex workers. It also impacts their access to education. If they were even admitted to school, they were often harassed and bullied. According to this article, almost 100% of daughters of sex workers were likely to end up doing sex work. Also, respondents said they wanted their daughters to marry instead but that it was difficult to arrange if the mother's work was known (Willis et al., 2014). This

goes in line with what Servin et al. (2014) stated about the children being a vulnerable group.

Willis, Vines, Bubar and Suchard (2016) also raised the issue of children of sex worker's risk of enduring physical and sexual violence. They, too, mention that these children are at great risk of getting infected with diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis. The respondents in Willis et al.'s (2016) study consisted of 76 women who had been trafficked or involved in sex work. According to them, being abused or witnessing abuse may have a negative impact on the child's performance in school. For example, they noticed that some of the children have learning disabilities and anger problems.

Other researchers have also called attention to the lack of research on this group of children. Willis, Hodgson and Lovich (2104) studied the health and social well-being of children of female sex workers in Bangladesh. Their qualitative study showed that many new-born babies of sex workers were born sick and with different forms of birth defects. Deaths among infants and stillbirths were common, although the cause was generally unknown. The authors found that many sex workers worked into their third trimester, used drugs and alcohol, were underweight, and infected with sexually transmitted infections. Also, they were told that it's common for the sex workers to not breastfeed due to them having to be away from their infants for many hours to work (Willis et al., 2014).

Mother-child relationship

Other researchers have looked beyond the children themselves to their relationships with their mothers. For example, Praimkumara and Goh (2016) conducted a qualitative study that explored street-walkers relationship with their children. The women respondents in this study emphasised the internal conflict of being a "bad mother" for earning dirty money on the streets, lying to their children about their trade and hiding their occupation from society while at the same time wanting to provide money for her family. The women struggled with not wanting their children to find out their trade, being afraid that they will unintentionally send a message to their children, approving sex work as a future job option

for them. At the same time, the women in this study reported that they wanted to do everything they could to provide earnings for their family and to be able to feed their children. The main themes that surfaced in this study regarding entering and leaving street walking sex work was being in urgent need for money, ambivalence stemming from self-imposed expectations as a mother, children's influence on women's decision to leave the trade and lastly the impact of past help-seeking experience on current service utilization (Pramikumara & Goh, 2016).

In contrast to mothers hiding their work and children being ashamed of their mothers' work, the article *Beyond compassion: Children of sex workers in Kolkata's Sonagachi* (Sircar & Dutta, 2011) presents another perspective on children of sex workers. The authors bring up a collective called *Amra Padatik*, meaning "we are foot soldiers", which consists of children of sex workers from the Kolkata's Sonagachi red-light district. The collective aims to achieve dignity for their mothers while also striving to become advocates in their own rights as children of sex workers. With this article, Sircar and Dutta (2011) wished to show another dimension of these children, rather than to victimize them, although not dismissing their suffering. When interviewing these children, the authors found that the children often confronted themselves with the question of why they couldn't respect their mother's sort of employment when it is their earnings that run the household, enabling the children to go to school. According to the article, this became a wake-up call for the children who decided to form a collective to support their mothers in their profession to challenge the stigma around it.

However, the children in the study reported having differing relationships to their mothers. Some of the children had been brought up in the brothels, while others were forcibly taken away to live elsewhere when very young. Many of the respondents wanted to emphasize the importance of having their mother close and compared being "rescued" through moving from the brothel environment, to being trafficked. They wanted to protest the view of them as doomed because of their situation (Sircar & Dutta, 2011).

Beard et al. (2010) also bring up the phenomenon of children of sex workers being separated from their mothers. According to their article, there is a dilemma involving the

need to document the family's situations to target their vulnerability and special needs. Doing this, the families will then expose themselves to law authorities and child welfare advocates who have the ability to separate the children from their mothers. Beard et al. (2010) state that this separation can thoroughly endanger the child-parent attachment.

Interventions needed - education, healthcare and safety

Like many of the other articles mentioned above, Beard et al. (2010) stated that there is a knowledge gap regarding the vulnerability of children of sex workers. In their article, they inspected 18 organizations around Asia that worked with children of sex workers to see what necessary interventions they provided to improve the families' well-being. The authors found that through these organizations, children were provided education and safe places when their mothers were working. The mothers were offered peer-support, health-care, food and accommodation. Also, the mothers could get support if they decided to quit sex work. The above interventions strongly relate to what the Willis et al.'s (2014) respondents answered when they were asked what they thought children of sex worker needed. They replied need for food, shelter and education, which is exactly what the organizations in Beard et al.'s (2010) study provided.

Similar to the above, Verner (2004) indicated that education, training and good health are important risk-reducing factors for breaking the cycle of parents who are poor and have low education. Not being able to read or write are great risk factors of a life lived in poverty. Since most children living in poverty have parents with very little formal education, the child is at much greater risk of not achieving any level of education themselves. The authors state that this might be due to lack of support at home. According to them, poverty does not just include insufficient income, but also voicelessness, powerlessness and the lack of basic needs such as education, health, nutrition and security (Verner, 2004).

According to Ali, Ghose, Jana and Chadhuri (2014), most research on the topic of sex workers and their children focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention. Therefore, in their article, Ali et al. (2014) took a closer look at a certain organization who works with this group to

see what interventions are provided for them. The organization is called Durbar, and through their Sonagachi program, they work to improve the social, political and institutional attitudes, and misconceptions towards, sex workers and their families. The authors indicated that sex workers' own involvement in community mobilization will increase their and their children's quality of life. The Sonagachi program operates a medical clinic, offer support and education for children of sex workers and collaborate with banks on behalf of the mothers. Reports from Ali et al.'s (2014) study emphasized that the above interventions have improved the life conditions and well-being of the sex workers and their children.

While most articles have explored what interventions are being provided to the children of sex workers and their mothers, Praimkumara and Goh (2016) also brings up the importance of the social workers' attitudes towards this vulnerable group. Many of the respondents in the articles above had stated that stigma, discrimination and a negative attitude from society are big risk factors for the women and children. In Praimkumara and Goh's (2016) article, they state that social workers should be respectful and show acceptance towards this group, seeing them first hand as humans and mothers – not sex workers. The authors mean that having a non-judgmental attitude is crucial to retain the sex worker's dignity. Also, they encourage outreach efforts – going out to the women in the streets and inform about existing interventions -- instead of waiting for the women to come to them in their office. This way, when needing social services, facing benefactors can become a little less daunting (Praimkumara & Goh, 2016).

Social work and sex work

In her article, Stephanie Wahab (2002) gives an overview of how social work in relation to sex work have been shaped and changed from the mid-1800's and onwards, as well as the social responses towards sex work. The occupation of sex work has existed for a long time, for the same amount of time as social work. Social workers have always, in various forms, worked to intervene in sex work-related issues. Wahab (2002) begins her article by discussing the fact that society has always had an idea that women need to be protected for their own good. She describes how women are seen as less capable than men, and that

this is grounded in a sexist view of women. In early social work, sex workers were seen as the weakest of the weak. Sex workers have rarely been considered experts of their own lives. Instead, they are often regarded as incapable of taking care of themselves and in need of protection. Societies of this time did not have a place for “women who had lost their virtue”. Therefore, evangelical reforms took it upon themselves to save these women and to try and control the male sexual aggression. Reforms of this period always regarded non-marital sexual relationships to be a result of the exploitation of women, and never a sexual expression expressed by freedom of choice (Wahab, 2002).

During the progressive era, labelling sex work and trafficking as “white slavery” was prominent. This created the impression that all sex workers were involved in sexual enslavement. This impression was fuelled by fear of cultural contamination, moral pollution, social anxieties about changing gender roles, sex, class and race relations at the turn of the century (Wahab, 2002). However, studies suggest that very few sex workers reported being trapped or coerced when asked.

According to Wahab (2002), historically reform efforts have almost exclusively targeted the female working and not the male client. Women’s bodies have been regulated and controlled as a result of social concerns around sex work. The way social work has targeted women through reform and rescue efforts, social workers have contributed to, and maintained the belief, that women are the heart of the “sex work problem” (Wahab, 2002).

Social services targeting women in sex work, who also want to remain in sex work, is not existing in the United States (Lacey & Wahab, 2000). The social services that do exist are provided to sex workers through correctional, welfare, domestic violence, rape crisis, public health and HIV/AIDS-related programs. Although, most sex workers rarely disclose their occupation to social workers and the social services because of fear of stigma and arrest (Lacey & Wahab, 2000). Because of that, social workers do not always know when their clients are involved in sex work, therefor their ability to meet the clients’ needs that are related to sex work is limited.

Theoretical framework

In this section, we will present the theories we utilized in to analyse and interpret the data. The theories presented below include the sociological terms: *social constructionism*, *stigma* and *marginalization*, and the *theory of attachment*. These theoretical frameworks form the basis for the analysis of our data collected in this study. Social constructionism was chosen because we wanted to be able to discuss and analyse the results of our interviews on a micro and macro level. Sex work is a service demanded from society but at the same time it is also seen as wrong and immoral by the same society. Social constructionism is a tool to try and understand the societal view of sex work from a higher level, instead of just looking at individuals. The sociological terms stigma and marginalization were terms used by the social workers themselves, when describing the women's everyday-life and society's view on their occupation. Because of this, and because we considered that the meaning of the terms applied well to our results, we chose to incorporate them in our theoretical framework. The reason why we chose the theory of attachment was because the word was mentioned in our interviews, but also because the relationship between the social workers, children and mothers was central in almost all the interviews.

Social constructionism

The concept of social constructionism varies according to different researchers, states Burr (2015). She notes that current attitudes and values in society are affected by historical and cultural contexts. Social constructionists believe that nothing is real unless humans have constructed it, by giving it a meaning or a value. There needs to be a social agreement in the society about the meaning of something, though sometimes different meanings are given by different people to the same thing. We are giving things existence, and the meaning of one phenomenon in a society becomes the norm, and that norm can retain from social processes. Gender and health issues are examples of social constructions, since they depend on human opinion (Burr, 2015).

Social constructionists believe that our identity is formed through our interaction with other people, which some researchers call 'the self'. Burr (2015) states that strong believers in social constructionism hold the view that reality is created through social habits and languages. Language is seen as a social construction. Without having humans give meaning to a language, it would just be words.

Social constructionism can be seen on two different levels, micro and macro. Micro social constructionism is taking place in the everyday discourse between people in interaction. Macro social constructionism is especially interested in analysing different forms of social inequalities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability and mental health (Burr, 2015). Macro social construction acknowledges the power of language but sees this as derived from material or social structures, institutionalised practices and social relationships. The concept of power is therefore at the heart of this form of social constructionism (Burr, 2015). One form of social power that can be used is that of stigmatizing and marginalizing individuals and groups.

Stigma and marginalization

Goffman (2014) describes stigmatization as excluding a group of people, or an individual, from full participation and social acceptance, due to negative perceptions and traits considered unwanted. He explains that stigmatization is due to people's need to categorize everything they see. Categorization becomes important when meeting someone new, to know how to act around this person. When meeting a stranger, in our minds, we automatically place them in different compartments, depending on features or traits like occupation, religion or other trivial things. We try to build a picture of this stranger before getting to know them. By doing this, we risk nurturing misconceptions, pre-conceived opinions and a "we vs. them" mentality. We might choose to focus on our similarities, but often, we focus on the differences (Goffman, 2014).

According to Goffman (2014), the way society and organizations talk about stigma is ambiguous. On the one hand, organizations and authorities highlight that stigmatized

people are valid members of the society and should feel included. At the same time, stigmatized people are often portrayed as being accountable for their own alienation. It is up to them to work with themselves to come back to the society's view of what's normal.

Related to the stigma concept is marginalization. Petersson and Davidsson (2016) describes being marginalized as being denied full access to rights, resources and opportunities in the society in which they live. The authors mention that social exclusion and vulnerability often can be used as synonyms to marginalization. Marginalizing groups is detaching them from mainstream society, putting them at a social disadvantage and in unequal living conditions. This can emerge from society not accepting one's ethnicity, employment status, social class etc. What the established society sees as anti-social or other abnormal behaviour may cause social exclusion. The socially excluded might face discrimination in terms of not receiving enough health-care, education or the ability for self-sufficiency. This makes it difficult for the marginalized group to change their life situation on their own. Being marginalized is not a static condition, it can change due to the context of time and place. Furthermore, social exclusion is socially constructed and maintained by humans (Petersson & Davidsson, 2016).

According to Giddens (2014), single mothers are one of the poorest and most vulnerable group in society. They work more part-time jobs and are generally at a higher risk of being marginalized by society.

Attachment

John Bowlby (Bowlby, 1982) and his Attachment theory are commonly mentioned in the field of children psychology and development. His theory narrates the importance of infants forming a relationship with a caregiver, usually a parent, in their early stage of life. This is something that they must do to survive, because they have no way of taking care of themselves. The child seeks the caregivers' attention in different ways, usually by crying or smiling. The roll of the caregiver is to comfort, support and confirm the child during the developing years. Doing this raises the chances of the child growing up to be a secure person with a positive self-image, who later can develop relationships of their own with

other people. If the caregiver doesn't give the child all the affection and response it needs, this may impact the child in a negative way for the rest of its life. Being separated from a caregiver can also have negative effects on the child (Bowlby, 1982).

Hart and Schwartz (2010), mention Bowlby's three different types of attachment, one secure and two insecure:

- Secure attachment
- Anxious-ambivalent attachment
- Anxious-avoidant attachment

Since we have not actually observed the children and the mothers together, we will not attempt to guess what kind of attachment they have developed to each other. That would be wrong, and it is not what our study aims to explore. Instead, what we want to focus on regarding Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory is his concept of *primary and secondary attachment*. Primary attachment is something that a child typically forms with a primary care giver, like a parent. Secondary attachment is formed with other important people in the child's life, like a kindergarten teacher or someone else that the child meets and sees a lot and have a special relationship with.

A secondary attachment can be crucial to a child's sense of well-being and security in the absence of a primary attachment. Younger children are particularly vulnerable. If the child can develop a lasting bond with one carer who is consistently accessible to them, they can avoid stress and anxiety. An example of a secondary attachment person is a kindergarten employee. She or he can contribute with supplementary safety to a child. The quality of the day-care in which the child is placed in can determine how the child develops its social and emotional skills, which also affects the child's cognitive capability (Bowlby, 1982).

Method

In order to explore our question of interest, we conducted a qualitative study. To gain material for our study we conducted nine interviews with social workers from an organization that works with women doing sex work, Saheli Sangh. The interviews were then read through several times and coded for important elements. Through a thematic analysis, four main themes emerged. In the following method section, we will present how we have proceeded to conduct this study in detail. A discussion will pursue throughout the section, with details of our visit, difficulties, challenges and emotions we faced during our field study.

Establishing contact and field visits

Our contact person in the host country – Lakshmi Kumar – initially helped us to get in touch with Saheli Sangh. We got to know her through common acquaintances. Lakshmi also helped us organize our visits and meetings with the organization before we arrived in Pune. In that regard, one could say she worked as our gatekeeper (Bryman, 2018).

Before traveling to India, we were asked to contemplate certain safety considerations. From our experiences, western media have a tendency of portraying India as an unsafe country for women. This led us, three young women, to have some preconceived opinions about the country we intended to visit. However, when arriving in Pune, our gate-keeper and the director of Saheli Sangh took very good care of us and made us feel secure. Our preconceived opinions turned out to be misconceptions. During our two months in the country, we rarely felt unsafe, but on the contrary – very well treated.

Our first meeting at Saheli Sangh was an informal interview with the director of the organization. Together we decided to conduct our interviews during a two-week period to gather the information needed to answer our question. This way, we had some spare time the following weeks for possible complementary data-gathering, if needed. The same day,

we were introduced to the social workers and got a tour around the office, day-care centre and the Red-light area.

We didn't speak the same language as the women, so in our field visit to the Red-light area, the social workers had to translate some words for us. Mostly, we observed the social workers while they were talking to the women. One woman who worked in the brothel showed us her workplace, which was also where she resided. The room was small, but she presented it proudly.

The fear that we felt in the beginning of our journey arose when visiting the Red-light area. Even though we had the social workers by our side, the stares from the men and the overall ambience of the place made us ill at ease. It was an unpleasant and frightening experience, but also necessary. We started to wonder how our study could possibly change anything for these women and children. The feeling of hopelessness was hard to get rid of. We thought 'who are we to think that we can help these women in any way?' However, when getting to know the social workers at the organization, we learned that most women in the Red-light area want their work to be accepted and be treated with respect. Thus, we understood that our purpose was not to stop them from doing sex work. Instead, we wanted to spread knowledge about their situation.

When visiting the day-care, we felt that it was so many children in such a small space. The day-care consisted of a kitchen, bathroom, laundry-room and one room where the children played, slept and where the teacher taught. We also observed the care-home teacher one morning when she was teaching the children before they went to school. During that one hour, the teacher spoke in Hindi, Marathi and English. The class sang songs and had a homework quiz on English words. The class was loud and noisy, and all the children sat in a semi-circle on the concrete floor. Despite the limited space, it was interesting to see how well the day-care and the teacher manage.

The organization has a clinic on Wednesdays, where a health team comes to do check-ups and provide free medications for the women and the children. One Wednesday, we helped in the clinic, filling in forms and taking notes. It was interesting to participate and not only

observe because when we participated, we got a real insight in how the work is being done. We got to experience the daily challenges that the social workers told us about, and we got to see how they tackle them with great expertise.

Observations of the different areas of the organization became a natural and important part of our study. They gave us so much more knowledge and understanding of the context of the women's, children's and social worker's everyday lives.

Sampling and conducting the interviews

To answer our research questions, we chose to interview the staff at Saheli Sangh. They are the ones who work with the women and children daily and therefore seemed most suitable to ask. Bryman (2018) describes this as purposive sampling, since the choice of interviewees is purposively made in relation to the research question.

We interviewed nine staff members, all women with different backgrounds, ages and levels of education. Some didn't have a formal education while others had master's degrees in social work. There were social workers who worked full time, while other worked part time at the organization. Some were previous sex workers and others had never been in contact with sex work before starting work at Saheli Sangh. Their position in the organization did not matter to us – we wanted to know how they, collectively, worked with the children and the women. For this, we composed a semi-structured interview guide. This kind of interviewing allows the social worker to speak freely about his or her views and ideas whilst still being able to go back to the questions asked (Bryman, 2018). This also made it possible for us to maintain a flexibility in the interviews, making it more like a conversation than a structured interview would. The order in which we asked the questions, and the questions themselves, changed, depending on who we interviewed. Before doing the interviews, we had the director of the organization read through our questions to make sure we did not ask anything that would be considered too sensitive to talk about.

All the interviews were held in Saheli Sangh's office, with all three of us present together with the interviewee and when needed, a translator. The office was not big, which meant that we did not have a private area to do the interviews in. Instead we sat in the only room available, with other people in the room next to ours. This setting was not optimal for the confidentiality, but it was our only choice. All the interviewees emphasized that having people hear their answers was not a problem for them – they speak openly about these matters anyhow.

We contemplated whether it would be too intimidating for the interviewed person to have all three of us be part of the interview. Having all of us present would be beneficial for us, since it's easier to apprehend what's being said when the story is told in person. The surroundings, body language and tone of voice make a big difference versus only listening to a recording. Hence, we asked each interviewee what they would be most comfortable with. All social workers insisted on us all being present in the room. However, we chose to have one person asking the actual questions, while the other two made observations and took notes on computers. This was so that the interviewer would not get distracted with taking notes while talking to the respondent, but also so that the interviewee did not have to wait for the interviewer to finish writing before answering. With permission from the interviewees, we used audio-recording during the interviews to be able to transcribe them and analyse the material. All but two social workers agreed to this. At the end of each interview, the interviewer asked the other two observers if they had any additional questions. The interviewer finished with asking the respondent if she wanted to add anything that she thought we had missed. Afterwards, the three of us compared our notes to see if we had perceived the interviews similarly.

Processing the empirical data

Even though we had limited time in the field, we felt that we reached what Padgett (2016) calls saturation after nine interviews. The interviewees all had similar answers to our questions, even if the more personal questions varied in answers. Having more people to interview would have been interesting but wouldn't necessarily contribute new information. So, after conducting the nine interviews, we transcribed them. We chose to

divide the interviews among us and then read through each other's transcriptions. Before doing this, we discussed exactly how to put the interviewee's words into text so that we would transcribe similarly. We decided to transcribe the interviews word-for-word, even though many sentences were grammatically wrong due to language barriers. According to Bryman (2018), replacing words in a transcription may later change the meaning of quotes.

To analyse our data, we chose to do a thematic analysis (Padgett, 2016). Subsequently, we wanted to identify recurring themes and similarities expressed by the interviewees. Going through the transcribed interviews, line by line, we looked for reappearing words and concepts - this is what Bryman (2018) calls initial coding. We did this individually to get an initial understanding of what codes and themes we might have, without influencing each other. The focused coding, we did together, discussing what subjects we found relevant and interesting. Example of codes we found were education, societal view and relationships. Selecting themes was a more difficult task due to so much being interesting and important! We felt that we wanted to write about everything that had been said in all the interviews. After some discussions and re-readings, we decided on four main themes, which were all connected: Safety and security, Social construction of sex workers, Relationships and Challenges, Improvements and Impacts. These were broken down into sub-themes, and quotations were picked out to illustrate the topics. Our interviews served as our main data, while our observations along the way helped us gain more understanding of the context of the work that was done in Saheli Sangh.

The trustworthiness of our study

According to Bryman (2018), when evaluating research, the criteria applied to assess credibility varies depending on the methodology of the study. To evaluate the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, the researcher needs to take these concepts into account: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability. Bryman (2018) describes how the credibility of a study is measured by how well the researcher has perceived his or her empirical material correctly, and if the study is carried out in accordance with good research practice since qualitative studies often are conducted in unique contexts, the researcher can let the reader estimate the transferability from his or

her study to another through thick descriptions. To gain dependability, the researcher must keep records of all the stages of the study to make it possible for others to review the study, and thereby raise its reliability. The confirmability of a study deals with the researcher's ability and obligation to act in good faith, being aware of the impossibility of being totally objective when conducting social research (Bryman, 2018).

The participants in our study will get the opportunity to read our thesis. This way, we will find out whether we have perceived their stories and facts correctly. By doing this and having followed the ethical guidelines from Vetenskapsrådet (2017), we believe that our study will be credible. To make our study dependable, we have, in the method segment of our thesis, thoroughly described how we have conducted our study, step by step. Trying not to let our own values and opinions get in the way, we are still aware of the impact the surroundings and social context had on us when doing our interviews, which we understand have influenced us in this process. However, we have tried to let these thoughts be expressed in a more discursive way in the discussion segment rather than letting it affect the results section.

Ethical considerations

In the beginning, we didn't know that many of the women at the organization had previously been involved in sex work. This became an ethical dilemma for us. We questioned whether it would be ethically correct to interview previous sex workers due to their vulnerable position. After discussion, we realized that our aim was not to investigate their personal experiences of sex work. Our focus was to learn about their experiences as social workers.

We worked according to the ethical guidelines from Vetenskapsrådet's (2017) report 'Good research practice'. Thus, the participants were informed about the aim of our study before the interviewing began. We explained to them that they had right to refuse answering the questions asked, regardless of the reason why, and that they could leave or finish the interview whenever they wanted to. After this, the participants were asked to

sign a consent form, which would secure their anonymity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Total anonymity was difficult to achieve, partially due to limitation in space. Because of this, we decided not to mention the age or name of any interviewee. Thus, all the Indian names following the quotes in the results are fictional.

We assured the interviewees that all the information about them would be confidential and handled by us only and perhaps our supervisor. In addition, we informed them that their answers would serve as a foundation for our thesis and not be used for anything other than that. The consent form was written in English and verbally translated into Hindi by an interpreter for the participants who did not speak English. Based on Vetenskapsrådet's (2017) and SSR's (2015) ethical guidelines, we chose not to interview the women and their children, to respect their integrity and not expose them to potential harm. Instead, we focused on the people working with them – the social workers. The questions we asked them solely dealt with the organization, its work and how the work affected the participants as social workers. No question was asked about possible previous experiences of doing sex work or such. One participant didn't want to record the interview or sign the consent form, because she was afraid that we would ask about her previous experiences as a sex worker. Other women were more open to tell us about their experience of being a former sex worker, even if we did not ask any questions about it. To respect the women's integrity, we decided not to mention specific details about their background or experiences. Instead, we chose to provide more general information about them, to write according to the ethical guidelines. Not providing specific details was also because of the small sample size, due to the limited number of social workers at the office.

We knew before going to India that not everyone in Saheli Sangh would be able to speak and understand English. Therefore, in some interviews, we needed a translator. The director of the organization suggested that we could use one of the staff members for this. We discussed it, knowing that this might be uncomfortable for the respondents and jeopardise total anonymity and confidentiality. However, since we did not have anyone else available, and the social workers didn't mind, we went with the director's proposal. But having someone translate stories and expressions from one language to another can potentially cause errors in the original narrative. Padgett (2016) explains how sometimes, in the translation, the interpreter might have reasons to leave out sensitive information, to

protect the community values. We were aware of all of this but hoped that even though there was a language barrier, the participants would feel that they were able to tell their stories properly and that we heard them clearly, as well.

The name of the organization

As mentioned previously, we didn't know from the beginning that many of the women in the organization had own experience of sex work. This led to discussions during the entire process, whether to mention the name of the organization in our thesis or not. Saheli Sangh was very eager to have their name mentioned, while guidelines from our university suggested we not. The organization faced many challenges and saw our thesis as an opportunity to gain recognition and use our study for funding purposes. Our initial idea was to leave the name out and focus on the work that they do. However, after being in the organization and taking part in their extraordinary work, we wanted to acknowledge it by mentioning their name in our thesis. They are proud of their accomplishments and therefore, we believed that they should be given attention. Also, we did not want to generalize our data to all organizations working with this target group but focus on Saheli Sangh, in particular. We talked our ideas through with our supervisor and other professors working with ethical considerations. After this and consultation among ourselves, we decided to leave the organization's name in our thesis.

Results and analysis

While analysing our data, there were several subject matters that seemed to reoccur in each interview. These were categorized and developed into four themes with content found particularly important. The first theme 'Safety and security' discusses the ways in which Saheli Sangh works to provide safety for the children of sex workers, focusing on education. The following theme 'Social construction of sex workers' provides a description from the social workers at the organization about how society looks upon their work and

sex workers in general. The third theme 'Relationships' examines the different relationships in the Red-light area. It depicts mother's relationships with their children as well as the bonds made between the women and the staff at the organization. Lastly, the theme 'Challenges, improvements and impacts' is a summary of the challenges the organization is facing and the advancements they have made during the years. After each theme, an analysis will follow with connection to previous research and the selected theories.

Safety and security

Improving children's living conditions

Saheli Sangh provides security for the mothers and their children in many ways. Something that the social workers find crucial is providing a safe place for the children. According to them, the Red-light area is an inhospitable and unsafe environment for the children to stay in. Therefore, they encourage the mothers to let their children stay in the organization instead. The social workers describe the Red-light area as insanitary, and the mothers are having a hard time maintaining a good hygiene. In addition, residing in the area increases the risk of the children facing abusive clients or witnessing their mothers work. The staff find that this could be traumatizing for a child. Consequently, Saheli Sangh gives the mothers the opportunity to place their children in the organization's care home. They always leave it up to the mother whether to move her child or not – they never force the mothers to take their children out of the Red-light area.

The care home is a transitional home for children of sex workers aged 2-8. It's not a permanent resident -the children stay there until they proceed to a residential school or hostel. However, during that time, the organization serves as a home for the children where they eat, sleep and play when not attending school. The space is limited and Saheli Sangh doesn't have the capacity for infant care. Through the organization's own teacher, the children get some additional education before going to their school, which is located nearby the organization. The care-home teacher comes for one hour, four times a week. She educates the children in general knowledge, small things and habits in different languages, such as Hindi, Marathi and English. Saheli Sangh provides notebooks, pencils,

rubbers and all necessary things for the children's education and learning. Also, the staff at Saheli Sangh try to contribute to the children's education through teaching them about their culture, festivals, good habits and how to speak to other people. In the interviews it was reported that many of the staff members treat Saheli Sangh's children like their own children. One social worker says: "Saheli is their home. I have two children, I teach my child good habits, about what's the important of studies. Like this, we are also teaching them [Saheli children]" – Laxmi bai, 2018.

Education as a form of security

In the interviews, the social workers all emphasized the importance of education, as it is a way to prevent the children from entering the profession of sex work. According to them, this becomes especially important for the girls, since education may be the only way out of the Red-light area for them. The staff explained that girls are more vulnerable to enter sex work, while boys are more likely to enter sex work in the form of brothel-keeping or human trade.

Girls are more sincere when it comes to studies. That is very positive thing, so we try our best to educate the girls. Not only the basic primary school, but you know higher school, going to college, getting a degree and start earning on her own. She should be independent financially also. That is only way to prevent them getting into sex work. – Shakuntala, 2018.

When the child reaches the age of eight, Saheli Sangh will provide further education through assisting the child and mother with hostel or school admission. The reason why the children can't stay in the care-home is because they have limited space at the organization. According to the social workers, the Indian government has a procedure that the organization must follow when applying for school admission. It is mandatory for the children to present their case in front of the Child and Women development department. It's a government department which decides what hostel or residential school is best suitable for the child. After this, they go through with the placement. Since the residential schools cooperating with Saheli Sangh are government funded, the mothers don't need to pay any fees. The schools are located around Pune, and the mothers can visit their children

whenever they want. This is something that Saheli Sangh thinks is important – that the mothers are permitted to make visits.

Sometimes, the admissions are refused by the committee. Then Saheli Sangh must engage in advocacy for the child. If the child is accepted and placed, the staff at Saheli Sangh will do follow-ups by visiting the child and continue communicating with the residential school. The child will then stay there all throughout the academic year. All placement is done with the mother's approval. As previously mentioned, the staff doesn't force the mother to do anything against their will.

The staff told us that the teachers in the schools sometimes have complaints about the children from the organization, saying that they have noticed behavioural issues. In that case, staff from Saheli Sangh will attend the school and observe the children's behaviour. One of the services the organization provides is counselling, and not only with the women. They also counsel children who they consider in need of it. This could be due to traumatic events, for example, previous abuse of various kinds. However, the staff at Saheli Sangh find education very important and want the children to develop as much as possible. Sometimes, due to the children being so active and disobedient, the teachers let them play instead of participating in the class. This is something that Saheli Sangh has reprimanded the teachers for, because too much freedom in school will prevent the children from learning. Hence, the communication and collaboration between the organization and the schools is key.

Preventive work

Clearly, education is something that the staff members of Saheli Sangh promote for the children of women in sex work. They wish to have an impact on the children through education and having a safe place to stay. The social workers believe that this can help the children get a better future and possibly keep them away from entering work in the Red-light area.

If a woman wants to send her child back to her village, to provide them with a better life, the organization will help her. The social workers know from talking to the mothers that none of the mothers want their children to end up in the same profession as them. A staff member explains it like this:

Mothers are always having good attitude about their children. They don't want to enter them into the sex work, so that's why they are doing education of their children. Some of the time they send their children in to their village also, and they are providing money to them. [...]. So, this kind of way, we are preventing the children. – Shakila, 2018.

Saheli Sangh also helps many of the mothers to open bank accounts, so that they can save their own money. Some of the mothers are saving money for their daughters' marriage ceremony, because marriage is another way for the mothers to secure their daughter's future. They also wish for their children to get an education so that they, eventually, can earn money on their own. Accomplishing this might also make it possible for the child to take care of the mother in the future.

Analysis – Safety and security

As previously mentioned, it has been suggested that 40 percent of female prostitutes begin selling sex before they turn eighteen (WHO, 2001). Maynard (n.d) describes how girls are especially vulnerable to become involved in sex work, due to having low status in society and often lack education. Verner (2004) stresses the importance of education when it comes to prevent girls from entering sex work. He means that education can be a risk-reducing factor.

As mentioned above, Saheli Sangh provides education for the children of sex workers living in the Red-light area. The staff believe that getting an education can create opportunities that could prevent the children from entering sex work. The mothers are of the same opinion, which is the main reason why they agree to place their children in the

organization's care home, residential schools or hostels. They know that the chances are slim for their children to get a good job without a proper education. Hence, the organization's attitude towards education consorts with Verner's (2004) idea of education being a risk-reducing factor.

Also, the social workers in Saheli Sangh see how girls are more vulnerable than boys to enter the same line of work as their mothers. However, in the interviews, the social workers said that even though the girls are the ones most vulnerable to start selling sex, the boys also risk getting into the industry, but in a different way. Since male sex workers are not an accepted entity, they risk getting into human trafficking or become brothel keepers instead. The way in which Saheli Sangh works to prevent this is, first and foremost, through providing school admissions and safe-housing for the children. In addition, they try to give the children an upbringing filled with love, learning and stability. Willis et al. (2014) describes that respondents in their study wanted their daughters to marry, so that they could have a chance of a better life. This is something we learned from the social workers as well – marriage is a way out of the Red-light area.

In addition to education, safe housing is something that previous research brought up as a necessity for a stable and secure life. Willis et al. (2016) raised the issue of living in an unsafe environment, like the Red-Light area. According to them, children living there might be at more risk of being subjects to abuse, and that being abused might lead to behavioural-and anger issues. The authors stated that being abused by a parent can cause great trauma, which could affect the attachment. In conformity with Willis et al. (2016), Beard et al. (2010), also found that safe housing is necessary for families' well-being.

Saheli Sangh offers a place for the children to stay when their mothers are working, and a place for the children to live in if the mothers do not have any home to offer. The residential schools and hostels in collaboration with Saheli Sangh also serve as safe-housing for the children. By collaborating with residential schools, Saheli Sangh tries to make the children of sex workers visible in society. Hence, by providing education and safe housing for the children, the organization is working preventively, raising the chances of these children obtaining a bright future filled with opportunities.

Social construction of sex workers

As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, providing sexual acts for payment in organized contexts such as brothels is illegal in India (ITPA, 1986). Still, the phenomenon is widely spread across the country (WHO, 2001). Saheli Sangh provides social services to all types of sex workers. Since the staff are located within a walkable distance from the Red-light area, they are always available for guidance and support.

Stigma and discrimination

According to the staff at Saheli Sangh, doing this work - helping and empowering women in sex work - gets mixed responses from the rest of the society. They described that when people come to know that the organization is a sex worker's collective, they immediately assume that the organization is promoting sex work and that the women might be involved in human trade. Since the organization is providing a care home for the children, some people suspect that the staff have total control over the lives of these children. Others have another perspective regarding the organization. When they hear it is community-based and a collective of sex workers, they believe that they know best what is best for their children. So Saheli Sangh gets an entire range of responses regarding their work.

A question that arose during the interviews was whether paying for sexual acts is frowned upon in the society. According to staff at the organization, this question is rather complicated. Generally, going to sex workers for sex is not acceptable in the society, it's stigmatized. At the same time, there is a prevailing macho image of men and sex. Having many sexual partners, including sex workers, is considered manly. So, in that regard, visiting brothels is indirectly accepted. If the activity was strictly forbidden, the entire Red-light area would not exist. But it does, and it's no secret that the area is often visited – people know. One of the staff members expressed it like this: “Sometimes the mainstream society understands that this is a need. Having a sexual quirk, having a community of sex workers, having the Red-light area is a need in the society” – Tulsa bai, 2018.

However, a recent law proposal suggests criminalizing buying sex from trafficked victims. The staff at Saheli Sangh find this amendment of law a bit confusing. They are wondering who interprets whether a person selling sex is trafficked or not. Defining trafficking can be problematic, as well as proving that someone has been trafficked.

Turning a blind eye towards the men buying sex is seemingly easier than doing the same with the sex workers. Something that the social workers in the organization and the women struggle with is disrespectful attitudes from local authorities and law enforcement. They have to face police, advocates and brothel-keepers who sometimes create problems for their work. These authorities harass the women and use bad words when talking about them. It is a challenge for the social workers to gain respect for the women. The women's work space is in the middle of a street, in the heart of the city, which makes them a great target for heckling by shop owners and other people passing by. There is no guarantee either that the customers will behave respectfully. These are the kinds of situations the women and social workers must tackle. It's recurring in many interviews that the women in sex work are stigmatized by the Indian society:

They [society] are having perspective, after all they [sex workers] are the sex workers. So, they are not looking us as a very good way. Always they are having mad things. Out of hundred, one or two persons maybe having respect for us. But not all of them. Always having stigma, and discrimination. – Rani, 2018.

Terminology

When Saheli Sangh started, a discussion arose amongst the staff about how to address the women concerned. The social workers urged people to not call the women prostitutes, because they don't define all sex work as prostitution. They argued that the women are doing voluntarily sex work and accentuate a disparity between prostitution and sex work. One of the social workers described their final decision and attitude:

You need to understand her as a human being first, as a woman first, and what she is doing for her survival is sex work. And sex work is definitely a different terminology than calling her as a prostitute because prostitute is a very negative terminology. We don't even encourage using the term commercial sex because again it becomes stigmatizing. Commercial sex work worker means that she is providing sexual services commercially. Then why don't you call doctor a commercial doctor, or lawyer as a commercial lawyer? He is also giving services to earn money. [...]. As a sex worker's collective, we respect her being a woman, a human being, so we say *women in sex work*. – Shakuntala, 2018.

Subsequently, 'women in sex work' became the official term. Although, in the office, another expression was used. The staff told us that when they talk among each other and with the women, they use the term 'Deedee', in Hindi meaning elder sister. The word refers to a very close relation, without any stigma. According to the social workers, the women in sex work have an indifferent attitude to the term used when talking to them. Because no matter how they are treated by the organization, the rest of society will call them 'Rundi'. 'Rundi' is a derogatory word referring to a woman with bad character – an immoral woman. It is a reality for women in sex work in the organization to not only be treated in a negative manner, but also addressed condescendingly.

The social workers repeatedly have to confront local authorities, police and doctors who are using bad words when talking about the women in sex work. According to them, the authorities behave as if they are superior to the women and the social workers, disregarding their feelings and opinions in several matters. Evidently, their tone of voice is rubbish, which truly reflects their attitudes and perceptions of the women. Their communication with the women and social workers is negative, using harmful statements. But this fact will not stop the social workers from challenging their way of speaking. Every time Saheli Sangh is faced with insulting terms, they order the person to talk to the women respectfully. They want to make it clear that the people they are degrading are first and foremost women and not their profession:

They're using very bad words for our women. So, I'm also, I am telling them that "No, no, first you have to talk with them respectfully. They are the women first and then their profession. So, you have to talk with them very well, otherwise I will do the complaints." – Shakila, 2018.

Social workers' views

The social workers in the organization all have different backgrounds and reasons why they entered this field of work. When Saheli Sangh started, people were angry with the staff for working directly with women in sex work. There was a tremendous lack of knowledge about HIV and therefore, people nurtured a discriminatory attitude towards the women. The government did not respect their efforts. In that situation, one of the founders told the doubters that "one day, you will see, recognize and respect our work". Nowadays, as mentioned above, people look at the organization in both positive and negative terms, but Saheli Sangh considers they have a right to come in mainstream society.

Some of the social workers are fully open about their work and even use the knowledge gained from working with the women as facts when being questioned by relatives or friends. Others want to keep their profession secret, afraid of being dismissed or excluded from their families. People find talking about being a helper of sex workers daring. Some social workers had supporting friends, some not. Thus, the acceptance and opinions from loved ones varies a lot. Something that does not differ is the social workers' attitudes towards the women and working with them. All the staff working in Saheli Sangh considered their work as very happy, familiar and interesting. Many of the social workers described how welcoming the women are when they visit the Red-light area and their gratitude towards the work they're doing. One social worker described her work like this:

I realized that this entire work definitely has tremendous potential to learn, to know things which you hardly come to know when you are a part of mainstream society, lots of challenges, lots of life learning experiences, and I think it gives you a different perspective of your life. When you go through the lives of the women and their children and their struggles, I think that is

something you can't get anywhere. So, the women and their lives and their survival instinct - I think that is the biggest encouragement for me. – Shakuntala, 2018.

While working with the women and children is happy for them, it also provokes a lot of emotions. However, this is something that the social workers find positive. They believe that being emotional is important in their kind of work. It is crucial to be able to understand and cope with what the women share and need help with. Lacking empathy is considered a loss within the organization. Also, showing respect towards one another is essential at Saheli Sangh, among the staff and women.

Saheli Sangh has suffered threats from the society several times but have never given way to the trouble-makers. Something that the social workers are worried about, however, is that a modification of law might prevent them from doing their work. They have resisted to the law proposed by their politicians: removing the clauses which criminalize sex work to instead punish the customers. If buying sex becomes illegal, the women in the brothels doing sex work will go underground. That way, they will be harder to reach and provide social services for. The women will be more vulnerable and face more violence. The social workers believe that this is necessary to consider when designing the law.

Analysis – Social construction of sex workers

The women in sex work are a perfect example of what Petersson and Davidsson (2016) describes as a marginalized group. According to the social workers at Saheli Sangh, there is a collective opinion in society that women who sell sexual acts for a living are “lesser” women. The social workers mentioned the common word used when talking about them - ‘rundi’ – bad, immoral woman. This way of talking about women in sex work relates to what Burr (2015) calls social constructionism on a micro level. It takes place in the everyday discourse between people in interaction. By maintaining a condescending approach by harassing the women verbally, the socially constructed attitude on micro level stretches to an overall negative societal view on a macro level.

Even though Saheli Sangh works hard to question society's view, and sometimes succeeds to change minds, there are still groups with high status who maintain the stigmatic view on sex workers. The sex workers face authorities and law enforcement who patronize and harass them. Goffman (2014) describes how stigmatized people are excluded from full participation in society due to negative perceptions and traits considered unwanted. The women in sex work in Saheli Sangh have a trait that makes them targets for suppression – their occupation. When society has made up its minds regarding this occupation, and labels the women as immoral, there is not much the women in sex work can do to change this. They are marked, stigmatized, by the majority and because of this, asking for help to possibly get out of their situation, becomes very difficult. Just as Petersson and Davidsson (2016) state – trying to make a change to conform to what is socially accepted is impossible to do on your own, when the opinion about you is already determined.

Being open-minded and non-judgmental when working with vulnerable groups is key. Praimkumara and Goh (2016) highlight the importance of social workers showing respect for the women in sex work. They encourage the social workers to see the human behind the occupation and that these women are so much more than just sex workers. Saheli Sangh is of the same opinion and try to do this in many ways. For example, the social workers call them 'women in sex work', or 'deedee', because that is exactly what they are – women. They are also mothers who wish to provide for their children. To try to challenge the stigma concerning this group using the right terminology is one step in the right direction. Using encouraging words to describe the women in sex work is also an example of socially constructing attitudes in society, but in a positive sense.

Relationships

When interviewing the social workers at Saheli Sangh, one thing became clear - how important relationships are. We identified several different types of relationships when analysing our interviews and decided to focus on three types that we found important and interesting. These were all described from the social workers' perspective:

- The relationship between mother and child

- The relationship between the staff and the women
- The relationship between the staff and the children

Mother – Child

Many of the mothers who are Saheli Sangh members have their children living outside the Red-light area, either at Saheli Sangh, a residential school, hostel, their native village, or some other organization. The social workers understand the difficulty for the mothers to decide to not live with their children but emphasize that this can be necessary to keep the child safe. In the interviews, the staff told us that they never force the mothers to make this decision. They simply provide information about the possible options for their children. The social workers know that the mothers want what's best for their children and wish for them to have a different life with other opportunities that they, themselves, are lacking. One social worker described it in the following way; “all mothers do not want to live separated from their children, they want their children close. The women don't automatically become bad mothers just because they live in the Red-Light area.” – Kanta bai, 2018.

In society, a common way of looking at the women in sex work is as bad mothers with bad morals. The social workers contradict this and say that on the contrary, the mothers are working hard to provide for their families, just like anyone else would in any other job. Since the mothers know what a life in sex work means, they wish for their children to have another life, other opportunities and job options. The mothers are aware of education being a great way to succeed this and therefore understand why moving away from the Red-light area and attending school is good for their children.

Saheli Sangh is located on a street near the Red-Light area. One of the reasons they chose to move there was so that the staff could be closer to the women who needed help, but also for the women to be close to their children if placed at the organization. This could also be used as an argument when encouraging the mothers to take their children out of their working area. The social workers stress that being so close, the mothers can come

and visit their children as often as they want, but the children are spared from residing in their mother's work environment.

Saheli Sangh wants the mothers to keep their relationships with their children because they know how important it is. The residential schools in which the children are placed are also located in or around Pune. This allows the mothers and children to continue their relationship, without living together.

When we have taken this decision that we don't want to separate mother and child and when we have started networking with those organizations who are definitely allowing the mother to meet the child, that has really served a purpose, you know, so most of the cases, children do have that attachment to their mother and they don't want to stop interacting with their mothers so they do take care of them. – Razia, 2018.

Saheli Sangh promotes a continuing relationship between mother and child because they believe this is important for the child's development. The staff told us that sometimes, the mothers can have problems with the upbringing of the child, since they have never learned how to be a mother. Many of the women moved away from their own homes at a young age. This reality, in combination with having mental difficulties, can create an unstable environment for the child, sometimes involving violence and verbal abuse. The social workers believe that growing up in such an environment might have a negative effect on the child and influence the ways in which the child will act later in life. This is something that Saheli Sangh sees as a problem and wants to work on together with the mothers. Therefore, they talk to the mothers, and try to teach them different techniques to communicate with the children than scolding them and using violence.

Regardless of what others in the society think, the mothers are doing sex work because they do not have any other option and they need to support their families. Saheli Sangh is doing what they can to improve the relationship between mother and child, to help them rebuild and strengthen their bond instead of just separating them.

Staff – Women

Saheli Sangh is a small organization, which creates the opportunity for a more intimate and familiar work place. This is something that has been mentioned in some of the interviews, in informal conversations and observed by us when we visited the organization. The women who started Saheli Sangh are former sex workers and they know what it's like to live and work in the Red-Light area. They understand the problems the women are facing and are therefore glad to have the organization be a collective. One social worker expressed the sex worker's role in the organization like this: "But, see, Saheli is a community-based organization - their own organization. Not like non-government organization. So, all of them are willingly, by their heart, doing work here". – Rani, 2018.

As said in the quote, Saheli Sangh is a community-based organization. The staff working in Saheli Sangh visits the area as often as possible. Almost every woman living in the Red-Light area is a member of Saheli Sangh. The staff and the women have a close bond, especially since there are peer-educators who have previously worked as sex workers. To have this mutual understanding of what life as a sex worker truly is, establishes a trust in the organization and for the people who work in it. When asked how her work with the women affected her, one respondent answered: "Actually, the thing that...the courage the women have here, how much problem they are facing here – still they are trying, struggling hard. That is very much learning for me". – Rama, 2018.

This sort of answer is recurring in the interviews - that the staff is inspired by the women, their courage and how they all learn from each other. The social workers see how much the women struggle and how still, they keep fighting for earning a living. This inspires the staff and reminds them to be grateful for their own lives. Having that mutual respect and admiration for each other impacts the relationship in a positive way. The social workers also find respect and integrity to be important factors when working with such a sensitive matter. As mentioned earlier, the terminology then becomes important. To use the right term for the women, to see them as more than their occupation is significant, according to the staff. The social workers see the women as women and mothers first.

In Saheli, we always keep in mind that we are not looking towards these sex workers in very pity form. We don't, we never. We think that yes, they have problems because of some situation at their places, and at their working place also, but we should not pity on them. Because they are very much hopeful for their life. They have hope for their life and they are doing a lot, facing a lot, to get out of this situation. Maybe they are planning to go outside this work, maybe they are saving money or purchasing homes or farms, so if they are very much hopeful – who are we to pity them? And we never pity on them. We treat them as a woman, like any other woman in the society. That is the main thing, I think. – Rama, 2018.

The quote above is from an interview where a social worker is talking about how the women is seen by the staff at Saheli Sangh and how they are treating them as any other women in the society. Because regardless what their occupation is, they are still women in the same way as every other woman on the planet.

Staff – Children

In the interviews, the social workers kept referring to themselves as 'parents of the children of Saheli'. Repeatedly, they expressed how much pride and love they felt for the children living in the organization. They said that they work with the children as if they were family, treating the children as if they were their own. When visiting the care home, the social workers always try to teach the children about small habits, lecture them on wrongs and rights and play with them. According to the staff, Saheli Sangh is meant to be a safe place for the children to grow up in – a place where the children can play and learn in with loving adults around them. Even though the facility is small, and funding is a problem, the staff do everything they can to improve the lives of the children.

The social workers talk about saving the children from entering the same line of work as their mothers. Often, they hear from the mothers how even though the mother's life is spoiled, they will not spoil the life of their children. Thereby, the mothers want to keep the

children in a safe environment. The social workers believe that providing education and a safe place to stay for the children is a good way of controlling their fate. When asked what Saheli Sangh does for the children, one social worker said: “Saheli tries to give all the things to them, like their home. So, Saheli tries to give them all types of opportunities”. – Kondu, 2018.

To do so Saheli Sangh does not just provide education and free medical support, but they also try to do activities with the children. They celebrate holidays and practice worship. Everything Saheli Sangh does for the children is for the children to have a better prospect in life than having to move back to the Red-Light area. In one interview, the social worker believed that: “Childhood is very important. If the childhood is good, they can become good person”. – Laxmi bai, 2018.

Analysis – Relationships

Praimkumara and Goh (2016) write that women in sex work often feel insufficient in their roles as mothers, and that they are ashamed of the way in which they earn their income. Social workers in Saheli Sangh told us that, on the contrary, their women in sex work do their work to support their children financially and are proud to be able to do so. However, as previously mentioned, they do not wish for their children to face the same destiny as themselves. In her article, Wahab (2001), describes how sex workers previously have been considered incapable of taking care of themselves. She noted that society’s way of dealing with the “issue” of sex workers, was to focus on changing the women, and not the men demanding the favour. Wahab (2001) also mentioned the societal view that women need to be protected, for their own good. This is a perfect example of a form of social constructionism on a macro-level regarding gender inequalities, as Burr (2015) describes it.

The social workers in Saheli Sangh work hard to question this type of socially constructed attitude towards women in sex work. They try to boost the sex workers and encourage them to be the agents of their own lives. As one social worker said in the interviews – they never pity on these women. They are aware of the difficult situations the women are in and try their best to help with these difficulties. But they never see the women in sex work

as “lesser” human beings because of their occupation. Instead, the social workers empower the women in sex work, and fight alongside them to make their voice heard.

Regarding the mother-child relationship, Saheli Sangh encourage the mothers to keep developing their relationship with their children, regardless of where the child is staying. Bowlby (1983) and Beard et al. (2010) explain how separation can endanger the mother-child attachment. In Sircar and Dutta’s (2011) study, children of sex workers opened up about how traumatic it can be to be forcibly separated from a parent. Bowlby’s (Bowlby, 1983) attachment theory states the importance for a child to develop a relationship to a caregiver when very young, and that having an insecure attachment can impact the child’s life in a negative way. This is the reason why Saheli Sangh works so hard to let the women – the primary attachment persons - maintain a close relationship with their children. The organization has established connections with schools that allow the mothers to visit. Knowing that attachment is very important, the social workers never force the mothers to move their children from the Red-light area. They simply encourage them to do so, to protect the children.

The social workers at Saheli Sangh have observed that not all mothers in the Red-light area are comfortable in mothering. Some mothers are very young, and many of the women have not grown up in environments where mothering was taught. This might cause confusion for the mothers, not knowing how to nurture a child. The social workers at Saheli Sangh try to educate the mothers in how to behave towards the child and the needs of the children. Some social workers urge the mothers to talk to the children when they are being disobedient, instead of scolding them. They promote conversation instead of violence, informing the mothers of the effects that violence can have on their child. Trauma and abuse can influence the child later in life, but it can also affect the school performance by children.

Since many of the children are moved from the Red-light area, to live in Saheli Sangh’s care home or elsewhere, the children start developing important bonds to the staff. The children see the staff every day and feel safe in their presence. Even the social workers state that they treat the children as if they were their own children. Therefore, one could

say that the children form secondary attachment to the staff at Saheli Sangh. In the absence of their mother, they need to hold onto someone else who can provide safety and security for them. This is where Saheli Sangh step in, taking on a parenting role, while simultaneously encouraging further emotional development between the children and their mothers. The organization wants these children to have every opportunity in life. They want to give them a proper chance to have a happy childhood and to grow up with positive prospects.

Challenges, improvements and impacts

Previous and current challenges

When Saheli Sangh was founded, their main focus was on HIV prevention. Their work tasks included informing the women about contraceptives and raising awareness of various health aspects. Back then, none of the women used condoms and the number of HIV positive women was high. The women lacked knowledge of the disease and refused to be accused of being a victim. Their attitude towards the organization in the beginning was overall negative. The staff didn't let this affect their work, and after several visits to the Red-light area, they began to gain the trust of the women.

The bad attitudes did not only come from the women, but also from local political parties. Local leaders, positioned close to the Red-light area, felt threatened by the organization and had misconceptions of what kind of work Saheli Sangh did. Saheli Sangh explained that their organization did not belong to any political party, and that they just wanted to help anyone who needed help. After an election, Saheli Sangh started its own board, with nine board members. The politicians now had to do a registration of Saheli Sangh, and ever since, the two have not had any problems between them. One social worker explained what it's like working in the organization:

We know we are doing good things, and we have many challenges, but each day we survive. Some of the times we don't have financial support with us, but

still we survive, we manage. From 2013 we left our government fund, but still we are here. And still we are working for our women. – Tulsa bai, 2018.

The quotation above shows that Saheli Sangh faces many challenges, but still manages to pull through. In the past, one challenge the organization faced was limited literacy among the staff members. Therefore, they decided to hire well-educated staff and provide salaries for them. This way, Saheli Sangh began to widen its competence.

Today, most of Saheli Sangh's challenges stem from their lack of funding. Saheli Sangh helps a lot of children and mothers, but not having proper funding prevents them from advancement. Previously, the organization obtained funds from the government, but not anymore. Currently, the organization survives due to private donations or donations from other organizations. One of the work tasks within the organization is approaching old and new donors to encourage further cooperation. However, Saheli Sangh manages day to day matters, for example necessities for the care home, such as groceries and toiletries. Luckily, Saheli Sangh has regular collaboration with the Family planning association, which provides free health care check-ups and medicine for the women and children. Also, the collaboration with residential schools is key, since they are government funded. But funding is crucial for Saheli Sangh's survival, for them to hire more staff members and educating peer-educators. One social worker stress:

Because of the many limitations – mostly funding limitation and space, we will not reach all the children. Sometimes we help them do the other admissions, but we don't have support with us. But always, we reach many children and many mothers. – Razia, 2018.

In the interviews, many of the social workers mentioned the language barrier, regarding both the children and the mothers, to be a challenge. Since the women come from different parts of India, everyone speaks different languages. This makes it difficult for the social workers to communicate with them. However, in their training, the peer-educators learn multiple languages to be able to carry out their job. This is a great advantage for the organization.

Improvements and having an impact

During their years of activity, Saheli Sangh has accomplished a great deal. One of the improvements that the organization has succeeded with, is, as previously mentioned, placing the children of sex workers in mainstream schools. Before, many schools refused to teach children of sex workers. Therefore, these children were excluded to attend schools that only taught children of sex workers. This distribution marginalized the children and they were not respected by society. Saheli Sangh has worked hard to question society's views and encouraged understanding among citizens. Through advocacy in schools, the health-care sector and law enforcement, Saheli Sangh has made its voice heard and started to modify society's views. Subsequently, the collaboration with prestigious, residential schools, has decreased the stigma and discrimination surrounding the children of sex workers and has also provided them with better education.

Another improvement was made when the organization decided to accept payment from the mothers. This proposal was initiated by the mothers. At first, the social workers objected to this, believing that it was their duty to provide services for the women and not the other way around. One social worker describes the process like this:

But when you are not having any funding source - how will you survive? Just depending on outside volunteers and outside donations are not going to help. So, the women themselves came forward, the mothers, and they said "See, we have chosen to send our children to boarding-schools. We can't afford that cost. But whatever money we might have spent on our child when they are with us, that much money we can contribute". That was very logical thing, and that came from them. So, I thought that: yeah, it's their organization, their decision, and if they really want to contribute to their own children, then I need to respect that decision! That really helped, so now, we do have some limitations, obviously, but still, for the daily activities or the care home, we don't face problems. – Shakuntala, 2018.

As stated, when Saheli Sangh is receiving some income from the mothers, they face less challenges. This is extra important for funding the care home. However, the social workers explain that not all mothers pay fees, but the ones that have some spare money will contribute. The ones that are not paying will not have any problems, though.

When Saheli Sangh started, the birth-rate in the Red-light area was very high. The staff started to provide the women with alternative birth-control and safe abortions. With the peer-educators informing the women about sexual health and reproduction during the years, the birth-rate has declined. According to the social workers, they are making the women aware of their lives and their personal choices. This improves the chances of the children getting better lives and today, the women have more planned pregnancies, with steady partners. Also, giving the children a safe place to stay at Saheli Sangh has become an important security.

Saheli Sangh has a favourable hospitality – they are always available for the women. Women and children can come whenever they want to eat food, receive medication or ask for guidance. Something that has become essential for Saheli Sangh is the volunteers coming to the organization. They can be students, housewives or missionaries, wanting to give the children quality time. Together, they play with the children and teach them about mannerisms and compassion. Sometimes they include music and dancing. The volunteers give the children something that their mothers or staff can't – time. One social worker says: "We have huge variety of volunteers from different backgrounds, and it really enriches the experiences of the children because they bring something different with them" – Kanta bai, 2018.

All social workers at Saheli Sangh believe that they have an impact on the women and the children that they're working with, although to varied extents. They explain that the women's lives are so complicated that it is very hard to have a large impact on them. However, especially when asked about the evolution of the children who have previously lived in the organization, the social workers beamed with pride. Excitedly, they told us about how some children have attended prestigious colleges on scholarships, completed

their master's in medicine and now have well-paid jobs. They have become nurses, doctors and lawyers. Some of the children keep in contact with the organization, some of them not. The staff at Saheli Sangh are very proud of the children and everything they have managed to achieve. One social worker told us: "One of the daughters has taken her mother out from the Red-light area. Now she is having her own children a very happy family" – Kondu, 2018.

Analysis – Challenges and improvements

This theme discusses the challenges Saheli Sangh is facing but also the immense improvements the organization has made since their start. Presenting the development, they have made also shows the reason why the social workers keep going, even though they lack funding. One improvement that was mentioned was the collaboration with the government funded residential schools in the area. Before, the children of sex workers were sent off to special schools who only took in children of sex workers. This is stigma in its purest form. By doing so – punishing children whose parents are involved in work that is considered "immoral" – these children will never get rid of their stigma label. However, since Saheli Sangh has started collaborating with mainstream schools who accept children of sex workers, they are taking baby steps towards a new societal attitude. This shows what Petersson and Davidsson (2016) states – that being stigmatized and marginalized is not a static condition. According to them, this can change due to the context of time and place. This is something one can see when reading about Saheli Sangh's improvements during the years. From not being welcome in the neighbourhood at all, to receive students and volunteers who eagerly seek to help with their cause, is astonishing.

Petersson and Davidsson (2016) say that social exclusion is socially constructed and retained by humans. By openly questioning the negative attitudes towards women in sex work and their children, Saheli Sangh is actively trying to re-construct the views of sex workers in the society.

In their article, Ali et al. (2014) mention the organization Durbar and their 'Sonagachi program'. In the program, the organization work to improve attitudes and misconceptions

towards sex workers and their families. Also, they operate a medical clinic, offer support and education for children of sex workers and collaborate with banks on behalf of the mothers. In the article, Ali et al. (2014) indicated that sex workers' own involvement in community mobilization will increase their and their children's quality of life. Reports from their study emphasized that the above interventions have improved the life conditions and well-being of the sex workers and their children.

The results of Ali et al.'s (2014) study could easily be comparable to Saheli Sangh's work with women in sex work and their families. Particularly interesting in their study was the fact that sex worker's own involvement in community mobilization will increase their quality of life. This relates to Saheli Sangh's approach towards being a collective of sex workers. Saheli Sangh believes that the women in sex work should be involved in the organization to better be empowered. Mentioned above is the fact that the women themselves came forward and wanted to contribute financially to the organization for it to proceed. This gesture shows how important the organization and its work are to the women in sex work. Furthermore, in resemblance to Ali et al.'s (2014) study, Saheli Sangh provides many services to the women in sex work and their children, such as education, counselling, a weekly clinic, accommodation for children etc. The organization also serves as a voice in society for the women in sex work who doesn't get theirs heard. The results of these efforts are shown in the way the social workers proudly share their stories of Saheli Sangh children. In the interviews, they described how many children of sex workers, who have been in contact with Saheli Sangh, now have bachelor's degrees, steady jobs and families. Consequently, these children managed to grasp opportunities which improved their quality of life, a lot of the times due to Saheli Sangh's efforts. These extraordinary stories make it easy to understand why the social workers keep up their work. In addition to help improve the lives of women in sex work and their children, Saheli Sangh's urges to modify the current societal attitude towards this group. Regardless of what threats they're facing, they persist in raising awareness of human equality. This is truly remarkable.

Discussion

When looking for previous research, one thing became clear to us, and that was the lack of research made on the topic of children of sex workers. Research on social work with sex workers and their children was also limited. Most articles we found discussed the women in sex work and the struggles they are facing. Every article we read stated the same thing – there needs to be more focus on the children of sex workers. However, what the articles did say was that these children need education and safe housing, and that the women in sex work need to be more respected and supported from society regarding their occupation. Our purpose with this thesis was to investigate how social workers support children of sex workers and how they experience their work. What we found regarding their support goes in line with what the previous research promoted. For the children, Saheli Sangh mainly provides education, a safe place to live and emotional support. These efforts have made a huge impact on these children, creating opportunities and a chance of a brighter future. The social workers do not just work for the children's living conditions, they also work to improve the lives of the women working in the Red light-area. Consequently, Saheli Sangh works tirelessly for these children and women, wanting to help them achieve a better quality of life.

As stated in some of the previous quotations, some of the social workers see themselves as parents of the children living at Saheli Sangh. Something we asked ourselves was if the secondary attachment the child develops with the social workers, could endanger or affect their primary attachment to their mother. A discussion arose about the concept of family, about how it differs between cultures. Sweden is an individualistic country, which often has a clear image of how a family is supposed to look like. For example, we separate family from work to maintain our privacy. This is not always the case everywhere. Seemingly, in India, the concept of family, and who are included there, is different. In the case of Saheli Sangh, both the social workers and the women seem to want what is best for the children. We believe that the more love and safety provided for the children, the better.

To do social work as a family and with a familiar feeling is uncommon for us doing social work in Sweden. Among the first things we heard when we entered Saheli Sangh was “we

work too much as a family here, we need more professionalism, like you have in Sweden”. We, on the other hand, feel like the way the social workers in Saheli Sangh do their work is something that we want to implement more of in our profession. Meeting clients with more heart and maybe a little less strictly by the rulebook, could be something for Swedish social work to consider.

The women working in the Red Light-area are subject to stigma and discrimination for providing for their families, and for providing a service that is demanded from the society. They are regarded as “lesser” women – a disgrace to the society. The customers, however – the people, often men, who demand the service - are not stigmatized or accused of being immoral men. Their actions are somewhat overlooked because of the prevailing societal view of men being allowed to do what they like. This socially constructed view sounds ancient to us, but unfortunately still proceeds in many societies, including our own.

According to social constructionism (Burr, 2015), nothing is real unless humans have given it a meaning. The Red-light area is constructed by society, but society has also decided that working there is wrong. However, sex work exists because there seems to be a demand for it. By visiting brothels, by paying for sexual acts, people keep this field of work alive. How, then, do people feel the right to criticize the sex worker, who are not the person demanding the act? To target the women is unfair and sexist, regardless of whom the law wishes to punish.

The women in sex work, in Saheli Sangh, are discriminated by law enforcement and society but they never give up hope. The same goes for the social workers, who do their best every day to empower the women and question society’s attitudes. We wanted to know what motivated the social workers to keep doing their impressive work. What we found was that these social workers have a strong belief in not pitying the women in sex work, but instead see them as equals and hard-working women who provides for their children. They also have a real interest in these women, working from their hearts to make the women’s voices heard, in a society where they are perceived as immoral. This was truly inspiring for us.

Going on this trip has made us challenge our own ways of perceiving the women in sex work in Saheli Sangh. When we first visited the Red-light area, we were overwhelmed by the women's situation. Immediately, we saw them as victims, and we pitied them. To us, it seemed so unfair that they had to do this kind of work. However, after spending weeks within the organization, talking to both the women and the social workers, we were given another perspective. The social worker's perspective affected us, and we opened our minds for this different approach, which made us understand their work better.

As previously mentioned, when it comes to sex work in Sweden, the law incriminates the buyers and not the sellers. This is something that might not work in every country. Saheli Sangh, as a sex worker's collective, does not want their law to incriminate the buyer. They fear that this would make the sex workers go underground. In turn, this would make the social worker's job more difficult, not being able to reach the women in need of help. Also, if buying sex becomes illegal, it would prohibit the women from earning their income. What the organization wants, is for the women in sex work to have a safe work place, to be respected in the society and to be able to make a living for their families. Hence, their view of carrying out sex work is slightly liberal, in the sense that they support women doing sex work. This was difficult for us from Sweden to understand, our law being as it is. However, being in the organization demanded an open mind from our side and through the social worker's stories, we got a new perspective of the concept of sex work. By being open-minded, it was easier for us to understand how views regarding social problems differs around the world.

Even though we listened to and respected the social worker's reasons for supporting sex work, our opinion about legalizing sex work remained the same during the whole process. We understand that the women in sex work's position would possibly improve if selling sex in organized forms would become legal. Also, we understand that these women are living in a country without a well-functioning welfare and security net. They need to work, some way or another, to be able to survive. What we are questioning, is whether an occupation like sex work, where safety cannot be guaranteed, should be promoted in any society. Also, we are wondering if legalizing work that exposes women, and increases their vulnerability, is a step in the right direction in the reach for equality. Can we change the

women's low position in society while continuing to encourage sex work as a legit profession?

The staff at Saheli Sangh emphasized the women's own willingness for proceeding sex work. Although we understood this, we started to question whether the women's willingness had to do with their lack of other options. Is entering sex work due to poverty, with no other choices to earn money available, really the same as entering sex work by free will? We believe that having other job options would prevent women from entering sex work, and that this is a social problem that should be recognized by the state, regardless of the country concerned.

According to Lacey and Wahab (2000), interventions provided for women in sex work, in the United States, involve helping them to quit sex work. Meanwhile, there are no interventions available for women who, for different reasons, must or wish to continue selling sex. This is something that we have come across as well. When visiting Saheli Sangh, we experienced that they have a different approach towards women in sex work. They offer support to these women regardless of whether they wish to continue doing sex work or not. In Sweden, however, we feel that there is a similar approach regarding sex workers as the one Lacey and Wahab (2000) mention. We understand that Sweden has a more developed safety net than other countries, which enables more interventions available. However, we feel that since our society is of the opinion that sex work has too many risk-factors to be considered a legit profession, social workers would encourage leaving that sort of work. Because of our safety net, there are other options for women in sex work. When we visited Saheli Sangh, we understood that the women in sex work in India don't have the same opportunities or options if they wish to quit their work. Even if the organization are more than willing to help with that, there is no help available from the government.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a knowledge gap regarding children of sex workers and their well-being. Articles have been written to shine light on this issue and some have emphasized the work being done by various organization to secure safety for these children. The recommendations are all the same - the children need safety, education and health-care. We believe this is something that every child should have the basic right to, regardless of what work its parents do. Research show that mothers often enter sex work due to insufficient economic resources, and that education can be a way to reduce poverty. To educate these children may be a way to prevent them from entering sex work. Many of those entering sex work do so at a young age, which means that interventions are needed at early ages. The children also need a safe space to sleep, study, and live in, without the imminent threats of abuse to be able to grow and develop. Children of sex workers have long been neglected due to the society's discrimination towards them and the lack of knowledge about their living conditions. These children are a vulnerable group who need to be acknowledged.

Saheli Sangh staff are working hard to do so, and during the years they have existed, they have helped many children to get a brighter future. Side by side with the women, they challenge society's views and work, to the best of their ability, to empower them. The impact Saheli Sangh has had on the women and children residing in the Red-light area deserves more attention. Regardless of all the challenges they are facing, they keep doing their important work. The engagement and motivation these social workers show towards their work and their clients, is inspiring. Using outreach-methods, to reach the women and children concerned, and having peer-educators to develop loyal and trusty relationships with the women, are brilliant courses of action. Most importantly, the social workers respect the women and listen to what they have to say.

Seeing how social work is being carried out in a different culture, with much lesser means has truly made an impact on us. We will, without a doubt, take this experience with us and remember it for the rest of our lives. Taking part in Saheli Sangh's family-oriented work has affected our way of viewing social work. We will be happy to take these experiences with us into our future as social workers. Also, we believe that recognizing their work is one way to contribute knowledge about how social work can be carried out in relation to sex workers and their children. Telling their ways of working might be a good way to

influence social work globally – working from the heart, being committed and easily accessible to the people in need of help.

Future research

We believe that future research is needed to make the children of sex workers more visible, preferably by focusing on their own perspective of having a parent involved in sex work, and how this affects them. Furthermore, additional research on children of sex workers could provide more information about what kind of long-term interventions should be provided for them to obtain better living conditions.

Lastly, we would like for social workers working with women in sex work and their children to gain recognition in the field of research. Suggestions for future research would be to explore how this type of social work is carried out in different contexts, societies and countries. Also, it would be of interest to learn about social worker's experiences of working with this vulnerable group.

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Appendix

Semi-structured interview guide

- What is your role in the organization?
- How was the organization founded?
- How does your organization work with the children of the sex workers?
- Do the children get any education?
- How does the organization secure good and sufficient living conditions for the children?
- What kind of resources does the organization supply?
- How is the organization funded?
- What challenges are the organization facing? And do they have any areas of improvement?
- How does the organization work to prevent these children from entering sex work?
- Why have you chosen this occupation? How does your work affect you?
- Do you feel that you make an impact on these children?
- How is your work considered by others in the society?
- Is there anything else you would like us to know?