

Project on the Sex Workers Community

Definitions ([Source](#)):



Commercial Sex work is the provision of sexual services for money or goods.

Sex workers are women, men, and transgender people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services and consciously define those activities as income generating even if they do not consider sex work their occupation.

Introduction:

Sex work is work. As the WHO definition states, it is a form of labour used to provide services to a client in exchange for money. However, this explanation has never been enough to designate sex work as a form of work. The sex-workers community has always been in conflict with the gatekeepers of morality and tradition in every society. Despite being one of the oldest professions globally (Garg 2015), sex workers are continually invisibilised by the stigma associated with their work. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an **exposé** of the existing inequalities, lack of political interventions, inadequate laws and missing social safety nets for everyone. While the privileged could follow 'COVID-appropriate behaviours' and access resources to an extent, the marginalised communities were abandoned in the worst way possible. The focus of this research is the sex-workers community residing in G. B. Road, Delhi, India.

Research Points:

The news of the pandemic and unprecedented lockdown in March 2020 rendered the Sex Workers' community entirely devoid of business for an unforeseen duration of time. With social and physical distancing as the 'new normal', the community seemed entirely out of work. According to the National AIDS Control Organisation, a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, **about nine lakh female sex workers are out of work, steeped in debt, and at risk from the virus**, due to the pandemic and lockdowns in India (Kumar 2021).

There are about 5,000 registered sex workers that reside in Delhi, according to government figures. Due to loss of livelihood amid Covid lockdown, many of them were pushed to the brink of starvation. **About 60% of the workers, which accounts for about 3000 of them, left for their hometowns since the pandemic** (PTI 2020).

The departure of migrant workers — their core clientèle — during the 2020 national lockdown left them with little to no work. Left with no other choice and facing starvation, sex workers slashed their fees by up to 75%. Additionally, when Delhi announced weekend and night curfews in 2021, just as things had started slowly resuming, it came as another blow for the community. "The average factory worker is no longer allowed to step out either

at night or on the weekend, so how will he visit? We need help to survive. I do not know how we will feed ourselves if things go on like this (Aanand 2021). **Workers past 35-40 have always struggled to get as much work as their younger colleagues.** *"We are old, so no one comes to us. Clients say they want younger girls, and we can't force them to come," added Rukmani* (Bansal 2021). Therefore, even when clients were beginning to return, the older workers continued to be unemployed.

Even though their work has stopped, their expenses did not. Rent, ration, hygiene, education for their children, medical requirements, and other personal costs kept piling up. With hardly any savings to turn to, they had to ask for frequent debts from brothel owners and anyone who would agree. Without Government aid and support, they have had to live on borrowed money for over a year. *Beena, 24, a sex worker in Delhi, has a debt of ₹1,10,000. "Even if I begin to earn the amount I used to earlier, it will take me two years to repay the debt," she says. She has not earned a rupee in the past two months. Since Beena has no address proof, she cannot access loans easily, so she has borrowed money from her brothel owner* (Kumar 2021). **Findings of new research indicate that more than 90% of commercial sex workers in three states - Delhi, Maharashtra and West Bengal-face the prospect of permanent debt bondage by the end of this year** (IANS 2020).

This has led to a severe increase in Mental Health Issues –Poverty, low education, violence, alcohol and drug use, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), stigma and discrimination and currently loss of livelihood, separation from close ones, starvation have led to alarming mental health conditions among sex workers. **Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal behaviour are higher than they have ever been before.** According to the *Mental Health Problems Among Female Sex Workers in Low- and middle-income Countries: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis Report*, there is hardly any intervention focussed on mental disorders. It is alarming as the prevalence of mental disorders and mental health issues are much higher in female sex workers in middle- and low-income countries than in the general population (Beattie et al.).

The legal system has not been in their favour which has led to further marginalisation. The primary law dealing with people in sex work is the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (ITPA) of 1986 focuses on prohibiting sex work, as it sees it as an extension of trafficking and nothing more. The people in sex work range from people opting for it because of deprivation and lack of opportunities to those duped and trafficked into the profession. Others have different reasons to opt for this profession (Sethia 2018). The law completely ignores the reasons and agency of the sex workers community in its framing, language and implementation. While the Act does not openly criminalise prostitution, it makes it improbable for the community to exercise their Right to work, jeopardising their inclusion in any category of workers. It leaves them out of any social security benefits and entitlements offered by the Government. Due to the lack of permanent address, the minimum balance for bank accounts, acquiring essential legal identity documents becomes nearly impossible for them.

During the pandemic, it **led to their expulsion from availing assistance and resources that require identification documents such as voters' I.D. cards, Aadhaar numbers, caste**

certificates, ration cards, or bank accounts. **Not only does it affect them, but their children also suffer due to a lack of documents, which makes resources and opportunities inaccessible to the majority of them** (Sheeshu et al.). This snowballed into more problems as they **missed out on relief work, funds transfer, and even a petition was denied as they could not be located and placed with sufficient data.** *On 11 May, the Delhi High Court [heard](#) a petition filed by advocate Anurag Chauhan that sought directions to the central and Delhi Government to provide food, shelter and medicines to sex workers and the LGBT community during the lockdown period. The court dismissed the petition stating, among other reasons, that the petitioner did not know "how such people/persons are to be identified." The judges added, "To say the least, the petition is filed without any groundwork and without any thought to it."* (MS 2020). They missed out on dry rations (Bansal 2021) and cash transfers to Jan Dhan accounts (PTI 2020) due to the lack of documents and fear of identification that might criminalise them under the current law. **The lack of documentation has made it difficult for them to assert their identity as a community, which has allowed the Government to shrug off any accountability to provide for them effectively** (Chandna 2020). An unprecedented mishap, such as the **fire that tore through 'Kotha number 58' in G. B. Road that housed about 45 sex workers** in the first week of November 2020, led to irreversible losses such as losing their money and other documents due to lack of bank accounts and even their place of residence (PTI 2020).

The issues faced by the sex worker communities are interconnected and overlapping. To address one, one would need to pay attention to other areas as well. The pandemic has forced them to look beyond their current work to survive in the future. There has been an evident shift in the attitude of sex workers on G.B. Road. Given their complete loss of livelihood and the issues that followed, many women have shown interest in developing alternate livelihood skills. *As shared by the Kat-katha, in an assessment **survey conducted for 600+ women, 70 per cent of women on G.B. Road wanted to enrol in alternative livelihoods at the moment as their usual economic activities slowed down.*** (Saha 2020).

Problem Statement:

However, to turn that want and need into reality, it is essential to look at their holistic development. While youth programs target children in the community and young sex workers, there are hardly any initiatives looking at older workers. These sex workers have been losing out on work; given their age, they have to work longer hours, yet they earn way less than their younger colleagues (Gupta, Ahluwalia 11). They have additional responsibilities and expenses that need to be covered. Without social security, it becomes impossible to support themselves and provide for their families. They must find alternate options to sustain and survive, as age is a serious determiner in this profession. There is a need to empowering middle-aged sex workers with a resilient sense of identity (as a woman, mother, worker, citizen), alternate livelihood options and awareness about their rights and entitlements. It is not easy for them to switch to another job or work. It will require internal and external preparation that goes beyond vocational training centres. They have years of experience solidifying their identity and attitude towards the world around them. A holistic and transformational social, emotional and ethical intervention needs to be in place for them.

It is a slow process where they assert their agency to demand the rights that have been long denied to them.

Needs Assessment



1. Scope of the Needs Assessment



- **What is the purpose?**

The idea is to build and empower middle-aged sex workers residing in G.B Road. These Didis have lost work due to the pandemic, and even if the situation begins to get better, their earning might not. They will eventually lose out on clients as this is an age-sensitive profession. These women need support and training to look at alternate ways of survival and livelihood. A holistic intervention to empower them through social, emotional, and rights and knowledge-based learning needs to be in place for them. The aim is to instil a robust and empowered sense of self based on their current identity, which can lead to better asserting their agency in every aspect of their life.

However, this can only be possible if there are systematic changes, such as alternate livelihood options, ethical interventions and support systems while they make these shifts and changes.

- **Who will use the results?**

Didis, their children, their families, and organisations who work with them.

The age group we are looking at is 40-45/50.

We intend to begin with a smaller batch size of 5-8 Didis.

They will mostly be the mothers of the children associated with Project Phoenix because they might be more open to an intervention like this, and their children can be instrumental in the process.

- **What are your resources?**

We are building a transformative SEL curriculum and intend to connect/list livelihood opportunities that Didis can avail. We also plan to connect practising counsellors who can help with the process, as a mental health intervention is crucial to this intervention.

- **How will you involve the community?**

The plan is to train a small batch of didis who can go ahead and empower and teach others in the community. While doing this, we are looking at empowering the identities of these

women as women, citizens, mothers, partners, working professionals, and other important aspects. We plan to involve their children and build on their connections and relationship. We also intend to involve other organisations working in the areas and have considerable knowledge and existing relationships with the community.

- **Who will be the Stakeholders?**

Stakeholders: Didis, their children and families, brothel owners, organisations working with training didis (SPID, TARA, Kat Katha, Naz, Light up, etc), Government officials involved in different processes affecting them, medical experts.

2. Determine Assessment Criteria



- **List meaningful criteria for our context**

We will prepare a checklist for impact assessments meaningful for our intervention, such as job security, salary, skills, documentation acquired, Information/awareness about rights, etc.

The impact in this context would be Didi getting a job with a sustainable salary or getting relevant documents to avail services and claim entitlements.

- **Figure out how to evaluate and prioritise needs**

Self-report survey questionnaires.

Interviews can be used to collect information about SEL competencies related to awareness (beliefs or thought processes).

Observation Protocols and Rating Scales.

Performance-based assessments that will provide structured opportunities for Didis to engage in complex, real-world or simulated tasks that can be used as direct measures of their SEL skills. These assessments can take many forms, including documentation or rights-based projects and game-based simulations.

3. Plan for Data Collection



- **Identify the data we need- qualitative, quantitative, mixed**

Mixed: We will combine qualitative and quantitative questions to make a single mixed method questionnaire.

Entry-level basic questionnaire- <https://forms.gle/Bj1kRi64QbNDVXCJ8>

- **Identify existing sources of data**

Kunal & Aakash and others can help with initial data collection and relationship building with their mothers.

Light Up, other organisations working in G.B. Road

- **Develop a plan for collecting and analysing the data**

4. Collect, Analyse and Present Data



- **Collect and synthesise data**
- **Present the data to our primary stakeholders- Didis and their children**

5. Apply the Criteria and Prioritise Needs

Empowerment: self-awareness, communication, resilience, participation, critical thinking

6. Identify Next Steps and Report Back

- **Identify issues for the prioritised needs-** Identify risk/protective factors, causes and consequences.

Approach the risks from a lens of what could be the barriers for didis: ex- time, financial resources, awareness, stigma (self and societal)

What could be their triggers: Interference of pimps, brothel owners,), health issues

Other factors such as lack of motivation, opportunity, dropouts, trust issues (for ex- what if they are not willing to trust us or the process of this curriculum as they already have had bad experiences)

7. Pedagogy



Our Approach would include - Critical Pedagogy and Action Learning

Critical pedagogy is a teaching philosophy that invites educators to encourage learners to critique structures of power and oppression. In critical pedagogy, teachers use their enlightenment to encourage students to question and challenge inequalities in families, schools, and societies (Lynch 2019).

In the simplest definition, action learning is a process for developing creative solutions in tackling complex problems of individuals, groups of people, and corporations. It involves

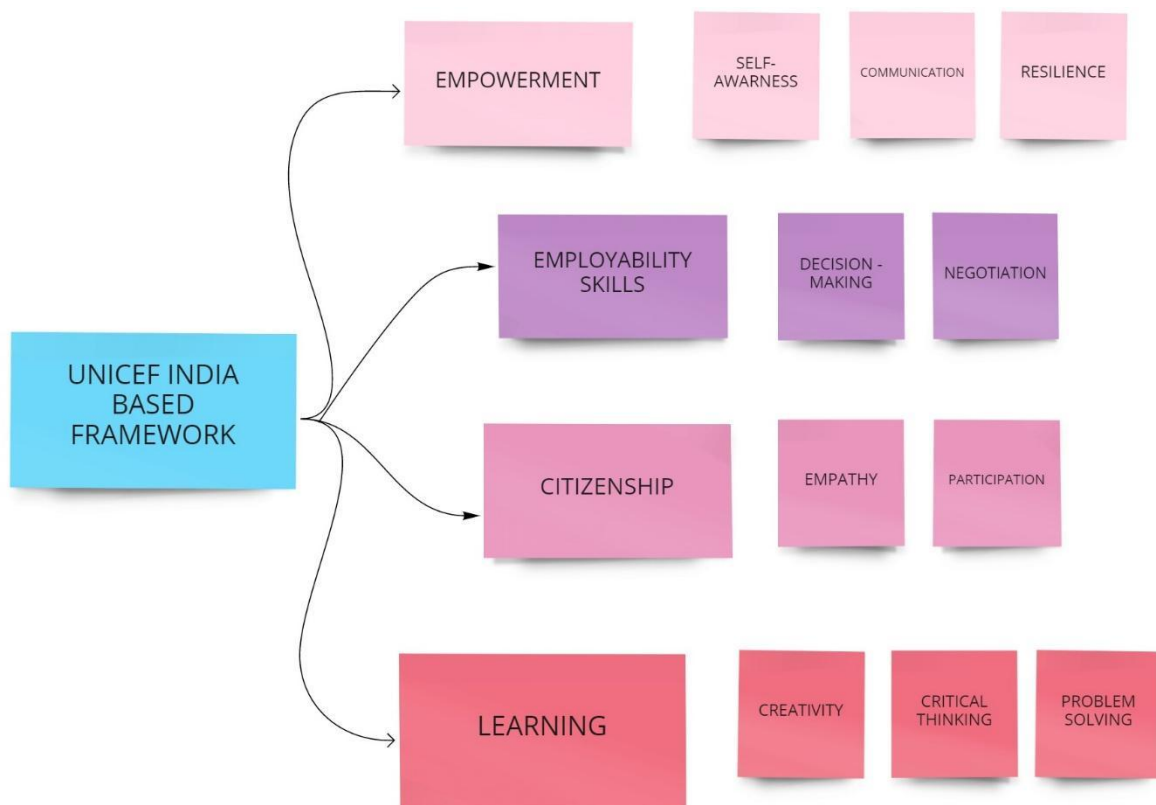
taking steps to solve a problem and then evaluating the effectiveness of those steps – in other words, looking to LEARN from the ACTIONS you take to solve a problem. It helps improve the problem-solving process as well as simplify the solutions developed by the team. Hopefully, one can formulate a new, more effective solution to the problem and put that solution into action (Corporate Finance Institute).

Theory of Change



Problem	Input	Activity	Output	Outcomes	Vision
Empowering middle aged sex workers with a resilient sense of identity (as a woman, mother, worker, citizen), alternate livelihood options and awareness about their rights and entitlements.	Curriculum based on transformative SEL Information brochures/ manual/ handbook on documents and rights Kits for activities/art supplies Questionnaires Transformative SEL facilitators Indicator: What are the elements included in the curriculum, how many lesson plans, how long is the intervention?	Lesson Plans based on Self-awareness , Self-management, communication, resilience. Handbook for legal knowledge that their children can use with them Movement activities Indicator: No. of didis attending the program, no. of didis continuing.	They are able to identify emotions, understanding identity & relationships, their needs and wants. Increased awareness of rights and documents. Reflect on their agency. Knowledge of their barriers / strengths and weaknesses Indicator: no. of didis who know about rights and documents, able to identify emotions/ elements of self-awareness /management	Short Term: carry out documentation and use them to access resources using it. Long-term: Stronger sense of Identity (personal & legal) Increase in self-confidence) Are able to assert their agency (tell their own story) Placements Ability to negotiate at the workplace. Indicator: no. of didis actually getting new documents, Didis identifying skills, Didis getting placed with skills training, increased self worth	Empowerment-mentally, legally and occupationally They are self-reliant. They move out of this space. They become grassroots leaders of change for their community. Indicator: Better livelihood options, Didis using documents to claim their rights, Didis asserting their identity, didis agreeing to become grassroots leaders.

Framework and Competency Mapping



Framework: [Comprehensive Life Skills Framework by UNICEF India](#)

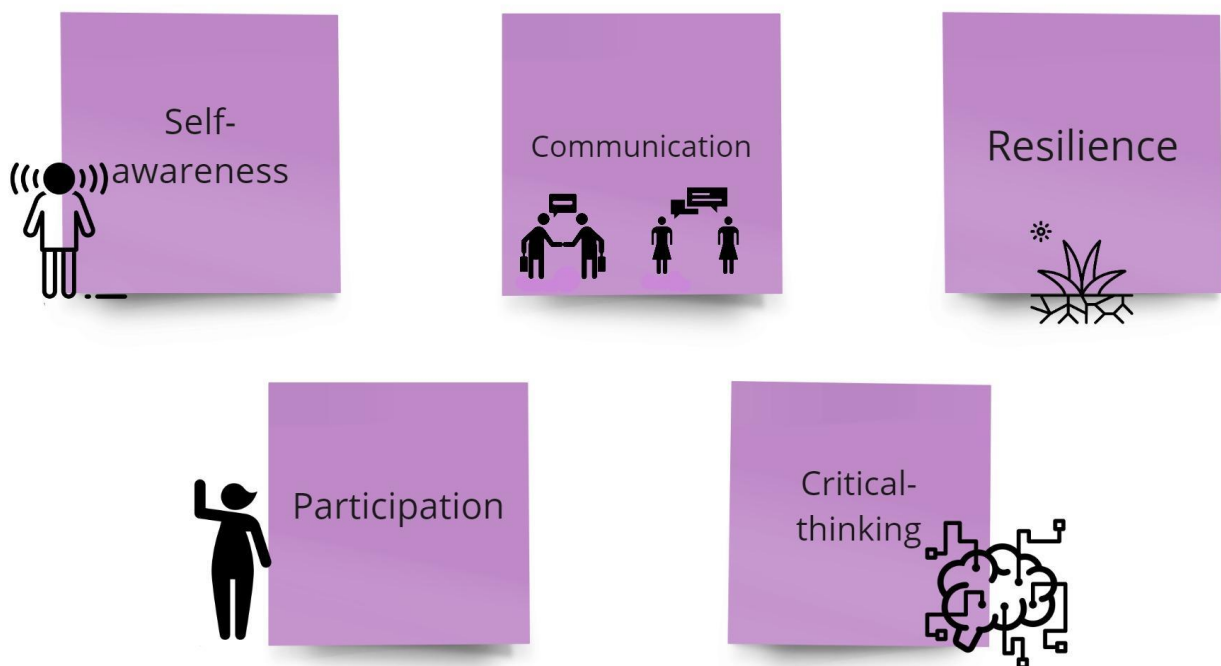
Why have we chosen this framework?

Our research targets adult learners; the group consists of sex workers aged 40-50. The UNICEF model is a holistic framework that combines SEL competencies with a rights-based approach. The primary aim of the intervention is to empower the target group to enable them to assert their needs and demands at all spaces they occupy.

The intervention is to build transformative SEL competencies that will support them in everyday life and prepare them for a more resilient approach towards the future.

The approach is diverse as it involves building skills and competencies that will enable them to understand themselves, take care of their needs, understand their position concerning the external world, and prepare them to take up alternate options for livelihood generation. The focus is to help them identify their agency and assert it wherever required. Given the nature of their work, most Didis are empowered in their own way, leveraging that we intend to use transformative social, emotional learning to build on some areas that will provide them with a more robust sense of identity and agency. We intend to prepare them for alternate livelihood opportunities, which would require some form of self-awareness, self-management, communication, decision making and problem-solving skills and most importantly, resilience while making and sustaining these changes. The aim is to empower them both socially and emotionally.

Competencies



There are more competencies in the framework, but these are our primary focus while building the curriculum.

Mapping themes under competencies

Framework	Competencies	Themes
UNICEF	Self-Awareness	Feelings, thoughts, and values
		Self Esteem and Identity
		Growth Mindset
	Communication	Collaboration
		Conflict Management
		Empathy and Compassion
		Negotiation
		Relationship building
	Resilience	Managing one's emotions
		Identifying and using stress management strategies
		Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation
	Critical Thinking	Agency
		Knowledge of rights
		Identification of unequal power relationships,
		Problem solving
	Participation	Understanding and practicing citizenship concepts (democracy, justice, equity, responsibility, rights, legislations, etc)
		Speaking or testifying before public bodies
		Managing conflict peacefully and fairly
		Building coalitions

Livelihood options



- ✓ Nursing/caregiving programs [Sahyogini_nationaltrust](#)
- ✓ SEWA - [SEWA Delhi - Across India](#)
- ✓ Cognizant- [Livelihood Training for Women](#)
- ✓ Pad making set-up ([Myna Mahila Foundation | Women Empowerment NGO](#))
- ✓ Cook/preparation for mid-day meal schemes - [Mid Day Meal \(MDM\), Dang Recruitment for Cook & Helper Posts 2021](#)
- ✓ Cattle rearing - using govt schemes - [Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying | Government of India, DAHD: Cattle and Dairy Development](#)
- ✓ Driving - [Azad Foundation in India|Earning opportunities for poor women, India](#)
- ✓ Make-up artist and other options - [AshaCareTrust-Home](#)
- ✓ [Livelihood & Community Development - Humana India](#)
- ✓ SRCC has programs that help the underserved communities, we can contact them as well- [ENACTUS](#) and [Connecting Dreams Foundation](#)
- ✓ Connecting with Apne Aap to re-open their resource centre in Delhi <https://apneaap.org/>

Exploring rights as a community



Rights are crucial to the framework (UNICEF) we have adopted and the curriculum designed for the participants. Awareness regarding rights and violations is essential for empowerment, identity and agency; the three core focuses of the intervention.

- 1) Comprehensive understanding of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956. It would enable them to demand legal representation for the community. The Act states the release of women and says that women cannot remain in custody for more than three weeks in case of raids.
- 2) The six Fundamental Rights, Article 14-32. It is crucial to building their identity as equal and dignified citizen of the country and appealing to understand their rights and entitlements declared by the constitution.
- 3) The right to complain against violence towards the community under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA 2005).
- 4) Protection of civil liberties under - The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, which legislated mandatory testing of sex workers for venereal disease and restricted their movement and practice to specifically allocated areas, offers one example of conferring "legal" status on sex work.

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