

# **Socio-economic Condition and Livelihood Generation of Sex Work An Analytical Study on Cachar District in Assam**

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## **Abstract**

*This study has analysed the socioeconomic and living conditions and livelihood generation of sex workers in the Cachar district of Assam using secondary data. It has examined how sex work has provided a source of income for many individuals, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. The research has explored various aspects, including income levels, living standards, social stigma, and challenges faced by sex workers. It has been found that many sex workers have struggled with issues such as lack of education, poor healthcare access, and financial instability. The study has also highlighted how legal restrictions and social discrimination have affected their lives. Despite these difficulties, sex work has remained a primary source of livelihood for many, helping them support their families and meet daily needs. The role of middlemen and the risks of exploitation have also been discussed. As the sex work contributes to widespread stigma, which can affect their personal lives, health and access to services. The findings have suggested that better policies, financial support, and healthcare facilities are needed to improve their living conditions.*

*So, by using existing literature, reports, and research studies, the present paper has aimed to discuss a deeper understanding about their quality of life.*

**Keywords:** *Sex work, socioeconomic conditions, livelihood, middlemen, exploitation.*

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## **I. Introduction**

In India, the socioeconomic conditions of sex workers vary widely, influenced by factors such as legal status, social perception, and economic opportunities. Study on women engaged in sex work presents a unique case for studying the impact of sex work on livelihood generation. Given the social stigma associated with sex work, individuals involved in this profession often face discrimination, exclusion, and lack of access to basic rights and services. Sex work remains a primary source of income for many, highlighting its role in sustaining livelihoods and ensuring financial stability for those engaged in the profession.

The study has utilized secondary data to analyse the living conditions of sex workers focusing on their socioeconomic status, income patterns, health conditions, and essential services access. The data has been collected from government reports, academic research, and non-governmental organizations working in the region. By examining existing literature, this research has aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic and social realities faced by sex workers. The study has also explored the factors such as education, healthcare, housing, and social acceptance influence their quality of life. Additionally, it has investigated how sex work has contributed to livelihood generation in the district, enabling individuals to support their families and secure financial independence. The findings from this study have provided valuable insights into the broader discourse on sex work and social justice.

One of the primary concerns related to sex work has placed sex workers in a vulnerable position, exposing them to exploitation, police harassment, and lack of legal protection. The stigma attached to the profession has further limited their access to financial resources, healthcare services, and social support systems. Many sex workers have struggled with financial instability, as their earnings are often inconsistent and subjected to external control by intermediaries. The paper advocates for emphasizing the need for policy interventions that recognize sex work as legitimate labour and provide necessary protections for those involved in the profession.

In addition to legal and economic challenges, sex workers often faced significant health risks, including exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), skin problem and inadequate access to medical services. The

lack of awareness and availability of preventive healthcare measures has contributed to poor health outcomes for many sex workers. Moreover, the absence of proper housing and sanitation facilities has further deteriorated their living conditions (Banerjee, 1991). The study has examined these aspects, highlighting the urgent need for improved healthcare services, awareness programs, and government support to enhance the well-being of sex workers. Addressing these health concerns is crucial not only for the individuals involved in sex work but also for public health and community welfare. The review of literature also explored the role of social organizations and healthcare initiatives of the sex worker.

Echoning Banerjee (1991), mentioned that the living conditions of a sex workers continued to live in a congested and unhygienic condition, sharing same rooms, households etc. Whereas the author also mentioned about the brothel of Sonagachi, of West Bengal that the Red light area which is more 100 years old. These brothel are well maintained and sufficient equipped are available with necessary amenities. Some are A- class category rooms are available which are air conditioned, sometimes clients cannot afford for the high price of their room.

This study has aimed to contribute to the ongoing discourse on sex work and socioeconomic development by providing a detailed analysis of the situation in Cachar. By relying on secondary data, it has aimed to explain based on the factual and evidence-based perspective of the issues faced by sex workers. The findings have emphasized the need for inclusive policies that focus on livelihood security, social acceptance, and improved legal protection for sex workers. Understanding the socioeconomic aspects of sex work in Cachar is essential for formulating better policies and interventions that address the challenges faced by this vulnerable group.

## **II. Review of Literature**

Sex work has been a subject of extensive academic inquiry, particularly concerning its socioeconomic dimensions. Research has analysed how sex work functions as a livelihood strategy, especially for marginalized populations with limited employment opportunities. This literature review examines the existing body of knowledge on sex work, focusing on its socioeconomic impacts, livelihood generation, and policy implications, with a specific emphasis on the Cachar district in Assam. Various theoretical frameworks explain the existence and persistence of sex work. Feminist theories provide differing perspectives, from radical feminism, which views sex work as exploitation, to sex-positive feminism, which considers it a legitimate form of labour (McKeganey, 2006). The structural-functional perspective argues that sex work serves as a social institution fulfilling economic and sexual needs while reinforcing existing gender hierarchies (Parsons, 1991). Meanwhile, Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars focus on the commodification of bodies in capitalist societies (Agustin, 2007).

Several studies highlight that poverty, lack of education, gender-based violence, and limited employment options push women into sex work. Sarkar et al. (2008) found that financial insecurity is a primary factor compelling women to engage in sex work in India. Similarly, Dandona et al. (2006) report that many sex workers in India originate from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and for them, sex work is a means of survival rather than a choice. In Assam, factors such as rural-to-urban migration, displacement due to floods, and ethnic conflicts exacerbate vulnerabilities, compelling many women into sex work (Hussain & Thomas, 2015). The Cachar district, with its diverse demographic composition and border proximity, experiences high rates of migration, contributing to the growth of the informal sex trade (Chakraborty, 2017).

Contrary to common perceptions, sex work is not just a survival strategy but also a source of economic empowerment for many women. Studies indicate that sex workers contribute significantly to the informal economy by supporting families, educating children, and investing in local businesses (Jana et al., 2004).

Research in Assam by Lahiri-Dutt and Gopa (2012) emphasizes that women engaged in sex work often develop financial strategies, including savings and cooperative lending practices, to sustain livelihoods. This aligns with global trends where sex workers form collectives to ensure economic security (Empower Foundation, 2016). Health risks remain a significant challenge for sex workers. Studies indicate that a high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, exists among sex workers due to inconsistent condom use and lack of access to healthcare facilities (Jha et al., 2001). In India, government programs such as the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) have worked towards harm reduction through awareness campaigns and healthcare initiatives (Dandona et al., 2006).

However, stigma and discrimination continue to hinder sex workers' access to healthcare services. In Assam, cultural stigma prevents many from seeking medical care, exacerbating health disparities (Choudhury & Dutta, 2020). Furthermore, police harassment and legal uncertainties contribute to their vulnerabilities, making it difficult for sex workers to exercise their rights (UNAIDS, 2019).

India's legal stance on sex work is ambiguous. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, criminalizes organized prostitution but does not criminalize individual sex work. This paradox creates legal ambiguities that expose sex workers to exploitation by law enforcement agencies (Kotiswaran, 2011). In Assam, local policing practices often lead to human rights violations against sex workers. Studies suggest that legal

recognition and decriminalization could enhance their socioeconomic conditions (Chakraborty, 2017). Internationally, countries that have legalized or decriminalized sex work, such as New Zealand, have demonstrated improved health and labour rights for sex workers (Platt et al., 2018).

Community-based interventions play a crucial role in improving the lives of sex workers. NGOs such as the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) in India have demonstrated that collectivization leads to improved bargaining power, financial stability, and healthcare access (Jana et al., 2004). In Assam, emerging Self-Help Groups (SHGs) among sex workers have created microfinance models to promote economic independence (Hussain & Thomas, 2015). These initiatives have shown promise in reducing reliance on exploitative intermediaries and increasing financial resilience.

### **Factors of Sex work based on the Literature Review**



### **Scope**

This study examines the socioeconomic living conditions and livelihood generation of individuals engaged in sex work in Cachar district, Assam, based on the secondary data. It explores how sex work functions for economic survival in the district, particularly for marginalized communities facing poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. The study investigates the impact of legal policies, social stigma, and health concerns on the well-being of sex workers. By analysing government reports, academic research, NGO publications, and media sources, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural factors influencing sex work in the region. It also evaluates the role of public policies and social welfare programmes in improving the living conditions of sex worker. The findings can contribute to policy discussions on labour rights, alternative employment opportunities, and social protection mechanisms for individuals in the sex industry.

### **Need**

Sex work remains a significant part of the informal economy, yet it is often excluded from mainstream economic and policy discussions. In Cachar district, where economic hardships limit employment opportunities, sex work serves as a means of livelihood for many individuals, particularly women. Despite its economic relevance, sex workers face severe social stigma, lack of legal protection, and inadequate access to healthcare and financial resources. Secondary data from government reports, research articles, and NGO studies highlight the structural disadvantages that force individuals into this profession. There is a pressing need to analyse these existing data sources to identify trends, challenges, and possible interventions that could improve the

socioeconomic status of sex workers. Understanding their financial dependence, living conditions, and access to welfare schemes can help policymakers and organizations design better legal, economic, and social support systems. Through a secondary data analysis, it can contribute to evidence-based policymaking, helping stakeholders develop more inclusive approaches to labour rights and livelihood security in the informal economy.

### **Objectives**

This research aims to:

1. Examine the socioeconomic conditions of sex workers in Cachar district.
2. To identify the key factors that contribute women to engage in sex work
3. To know the role of NGOs for improving the living conditions of women sex workers.

### **Limitations**

Since this study is based entirely on secondary data, it has several inherent limitations. First, data availability and reliability pose a challenge, as official government reports may not always include accurate statistics on sex work due to the profession's legal and social marginalization. Second, gaps in existing research could result in an incomplete understanding of sex workers' lived experiences, as most studies focus on specific aspects such as health risks rather than comprehensive socioeconomic conditions. Third, bases on secondary sources some reports may reflect policy perspectives rather than the realities of sex workers. Additionally, regional specificity is a limitation, as the study focuses only on Cachar district and may not fully capture variations in sex work across Assam or India. Finally, policy changes or new interventions that have emerged after the data collection period may not be reflected in the study. Despite these challenges, this research aims to synthesize existing knowledge and provide a critical analysis of the socioeconomic dimensions of sex work in Cachar district, contributing to discussions on socio economic and social protection policies.

## **III. Methodology**

This study is based entirely on secondary data, utilizing existing literature, government reports, NGO publications, and academic research to analyse the socioeconomic aspects of sex work in Cachar district, Assam. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical approach to examine various dimensions of sex work, including livelihood generation, financial dependence, legal frameworks, and social challenges. Data sources include reports from government agencies, such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), as well as policy documents, journal articles, and media coverage. NGO reports and studies conducted by social researchers provide additional insights into the experiences of sex workers, focusing on economic conditions, access to healthcare, and the impact of legal restrictions. A comparative analysis is conducted by reviewing studies on sex work in other parts of India, helping to contextualize the findings from Cachar district within broader regional and national trends.

The study employs qualitative content analysis to interpret the collected data on the socioeconomic living conditions of sex workers. A thematic approach is used to categorize the information into key areas, such as economic stability, social stigma, legal protection, and government intervention. Statistical data from previous research and government records are analysed to assess employment trends, income levels, and access to public services. Policy analysis is also conducted to examine how existing legal frameworks influence the profession and whether government initiatives provide adequate support. While the study does not involve fieldwork or direct interviews, or case study, it critically evaluates available literature to ensure a balanced perspective.

The methodology employed involves an extensive review of existing literature, reports, government publications, academic papers, and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports related to sex work in India, particularly in Assam. The primary sources of secondary data include:

1. **Government Reports and Surveys:** Reports from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), Ministry of Women and Child Development, and Census of India provide demographic and economic insights into the sex work industry in Assam.
2. **Academic Studies and Journals:** Peer-reviewed articles from reputed journals offer theoretical and empirical analysis on the socioeconomic impact of sex work, gender dynamics, and policy interventions.
3. **NGO and International Reports:** Organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Rights Watch, and local NGOs working with sex workers provide valuable insights into the lived realities, challenges, and social stigma associated with the profession.
4. **Media Reports and Case Studies:** Newspapers, online media, and documentary sources provide contemporary accounts of the conditions of sex workers in Cachar District.

A qualitative approach is adopted and analyse the collected data. Content analysis is used to identify recurring themes related to economic stability, social marginalization, access to healthcare, and legal challenges. The

study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between sex work and socioeconomic development.

#### **IV. Discussion**

##### **1. Socioeconomic Conditions of Sex Workers**

Sex work is both a means of livelihood and a contested profession in India. In Cachar District, the primary socioeconomic conditions affecting sex workers include:

##### **Economic Dependence and Livelihood Strategies**

Sex work serves as a significant source of income for many marginalized individuals, particularly women from economically weaker section of the society. The absence of alternative employment opportunities, a lack of education and vocational skills, lack of family supports compels many women to engage in sex work as a means of financial survival.

##### **Economic Imperatives and Entry into Sex Work**

Sex work in Cachar is largely driven by economic desperation and the absence of employment opportunities. Many women, particularly from marginalized communities, enter the sex work due to factors such as poverty, illiteracy, displacement, and domestic abuse. The economic structure of the region, characterized by limited industrial growth and seasonal agricultural employment, offers little stability. Women who are widowed, abandoned, or victims of domestic violence often find themselves with no means of economic sustenance other than engaging in sex work. Migration, both from neighbouring states and from within Assam, come into this professions. (Dutta, 2000)

##### **Living Conditions**

Most sex workers in Cachar reside in low-income settlements with inadequate access to basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. Housing insecurity remains a vital issue often. Which makes worsen to the locality.

##### **Livelihood Generation and Economic Stability**

The earnings of sex workers in Cachar vary significantly depending on factors such as location, customers and network affiliation. Many operate through informal networks, broker systems, or independent arrangements. Some are part of sharing the amount where a portion of their earnings goes to intermediaries such as pimps, brothel owners, or even law enforcement officials in exchange for protection. While some sex workers are able to achieve relative financial stability, a large section remains trapped in exploitative cycles where their earnings are barely sufficient to meet basic needs, let alone allow for economic empowerment.(Sarma, 1994)

Additionally, lack of access to banking systems, proper implementation of the schemes, further turn to vulnerability. However, it is found that some women strategically invest in assets such as gold, property, or small businesses to secure a future beyond sex work.

##### **2. Key Factors Contributing to Involvement in Sex Work**

Various socio-economic and structural factors drive individuals into sex work, often leaving them with limited alternatives for survival. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing policies and interventions that address the root causes rather than just the symptoms of the issue. One of the most significant contributors is poverty, which forces many individuals, particularly women, into sex work as a means of financial survival. When employment opportunities are scarce, and basic needs remain unmet, sex work often becomes a last resort for earning a livelihood. The lack of economic security makes it difficult for individuals to escape the cycle of exploitation and marginalization.

Limited access to education is another major factor, as it directly impacts employment opportunities and financial independence. Many individuals who enter sex work have either dropped out of school or never had the chance to receive formal education due to financial constraints or social barriers. Without education, finding stable, well-paying jobs becomes a significant challenge, pushing individuals toward survival-based labour. Gender discrimination further exacerbates the situation, particularly for women and marginalized gender groups. Societal norms often restrict economic opportunities for women, limiting their access to resources, inheritance, and financial independence. Additionally, in patriarchal societies, women may face domestic violence, forced marriages, or abandonment, leaving them with few options to sustain themselves.

Economic instability and lack of social support networks also contribute to the involvement in sex work. Economic downturns, job losses, and financial crises often push individuals into informal labor, including sex work, to support themselves and their families. Moreover, the absence of strong social safety nets means that those who are financially vulnerable have limited access to alternative means of survival.

### **3. Social Stigma and Marginalization**

Despite its economic significance, sex work is widely stigmatized in society. Sex workers face discrimination in multiple spheres, including healthcare, education, and legal services.

#### **Access to Healthcare**

Sex workers in Cachar district encounter significant barriers in accessing healthcare services, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health. Fear of discrimination and stigma often deters them from seeking medical assistance, increasing their vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other health issues. (Malakar, 2015)

#### **Health and Well-Being: Challenges and Responses**

Health concerns, particularly sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, pose significant risks to sex workers in Cachar. The lack of consistent healthcare access, combined with stigma, prevents many from seeking timely medical intervention. Although NGOs and government initiatives have attempted to provide healthcare services, gaps remain in terms of coverage and effectiveness. Limited awareness about reproductive health and inconsistent condom use due to client preferences exacerbate these health risks. (Malakar, 2015)

Mental health challenges also play a critical role in the lives of sex workers. Depression, anxiety, and trauma are widespread due to the nature of their work, social exclusion, and experiences of violence. Support structures remain minimal, as mainstream mental health services rarely cater to this demographic, and the social stigma surrounding their profession discourages them from seeking psychological assistance.

#### **Societal Exclusion and Violence**

Sex workers in Cachar experience high levels of violence, both from clients and brothel keeper. The lack of legal protection and institutional support leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

#### **Social Stigmatization and Legal Challenges**

Despite its economic significance, sex work remain heavily stigmatized, leading to severe social exclusion. Sex workers are often denied social life, healthcare, and education for their children due to the moral prejudices against their profession. The legal framework surrounding sex work in India further complicates their status. While prostitution is not illegal, related activities such as soliciting, brothel-keeping, and trafficking are criminalized under laws like the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA). This legal act creates a space for systemic exploitation by law enforcement agencies and local authorities, who often demand bribes or subject sex workers to harassment and violence.

The impact of stigma extends beyond the sex workers themselves to their families, particularly their children. The lack of formal identification documents and the discrimination they face in educational institutions and workplaces limit their opportunities for social mobility. As a result, a generational cycle of poverty and marginalization is sustain, reinforcing the socioeconomic vulnerability of sex workers and their dependents.

### **4. Role of NGOs and Social Support Systems**

Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of sex workers and providing essential services such as healthcare, legal aid, and vocational training. Organizations working in Assam have implemented various intervention programs aimed at improving the quality of life for sex workers.

#### **Empowerment and Resistance Strategies**

Despite these challenges, sex workers in Cachar have developed various mechanisms to assert agency and improve their conditions. Peer support networks play a crucial role in mitigating exploitation and providing a sense of solidarity. Some sex workers have actively participated in advocacy groups, demanding legal recognition and social security benefits. Self-organization into collectives has helped in negotiating better working conditions, accessing healthcare, and even securing legal aid in cases of harassment. (Bannarjee, 1991)

Vocational training initiatives, although limited, have shown potential in providing alternative livelihood options. Some NGOs like Desubondhu Club have introduced skill development programs i.e Livelihood Project for Women which helps to boost up in there income general activities and Strengthen the financial aspects in areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship, offering sex workers an opportunity to transition to alternative professions if they so desire. However, the success of these programmes is contingent on sustained funding, community acceptance, and structural policy changes that support economic reintegration. Approx. 140 numbers of Women has attained the tailoring course. (Source Annual Report 2021-22)

### **Legal and Policy Framework**

Although sex work is not illegal in India. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), meant to combat human trafficking, is frequently misused against sex workers, resulting in human rights violations.

### **Economic Contributions and Policy**

Sex work contributes to the local economy through financial transactions involving accommodation, healthcare, and other related services. Recognizing the economic dimension of sex work can help frame policies that focus on empowerment.

Policy recommendations include:

1. **Legal Reforms:** Decriminalization and legal recognition of sex work to ensure protection against exploitation and violence.
2. **Economic Rehabilitation Programs:** Providing skill development and employment opportunities to those willing to transition into other professions.
3. **Healthcare Access Improvement:** Establishing specialized healthcare centres catering to the needs of sex workers.
4. **Social Awareness Programs:** Reducing stigma through community engagement and awareness campaigns.

The socioeconomic conditions of sex workers in Cachar District highlight the urgent need for policy reforms and social interventions. While sex work remains a contentious issue, focusing on economic stability, legal protection, and social inclusion is essential for improving their quality of life. The socioeconomic landscape of sex work in the Cachar district of Assam presents a complex interplay of economic necessity, social stigmatization, legal, and structural constraints. While sex work remains a contentious and often morally debated issue, its presence in Cachar district is deeply tied to poverty, migration, gender inequality, Violence and lack of alternative employment opportunities. This analytical study aims to examine the socioeconomic living conditions of sex workers in Cachar, the factors driving individuals into the trade, their livelihood generation mechanisms, and the broader implications on their lives and the local society.

### **Policy Recommendations and the Way Forward**

A multiply approaches is necessary to improve the socioeconomic conditions of sex workers in Cachar. The following policy measures can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment:

1. **Legal Reform and Rights-Based Approaches:** There is an urgent need to clarify the legal status of sex work and decriminalize aspects that criminalize the workers themselves while strengthening laws against trafficking.
2. **Economic Empowerment Initiatives:** Expanding access to microfinance, vocational training, and alternative employment opportunities can help sex workers achieve economic independence and to focus on linkage between the industry and the worker for income generating activities.
3. **Healthcare Accessibility:** Strengthening health services, particularly STI prevention and mental health support, is crucial for improving the well-being of sex workers.
4. **Social Welfare Inclusion:** Ensuring that sex workers and their children have access to social welfare schemes, education, and housing can help break the cycle of marginalization.
5. **Community Sensitization and Reducing Stigma:** Public awareness campaigns and engagement with local communities can help in reducing societal stigma and creating a more supportive environment.

## **V. Conclusion**

Sex work in Cachar district is deeply embedded in the socioeconomic realities of poverty, gender discrimination, and structural inequality. While it serves as a means of livelihood for many, the challenges associated with stigma, legal constraints, and economic instability. The academic discourse on sex work highlights its deep-rooted socioeconomic dimensions, shaped by structural inequalities, legal ambiguities, and cultural stigmatization. This review has examined how sex work functions as a livelihood strategy, particularly among marginalized communities, with a specific emphasis on the Cachar district in Assam. The literature underscores that while financial insecurity, displacement, and lack of education push many into sex work, the profession also provides a means of economic survival and empowerment. Sex workers significantly contribute to informal economies, support families, and participate in community development. However, their lives are fraught with legal uncertainties, health risks, and social exclusion.

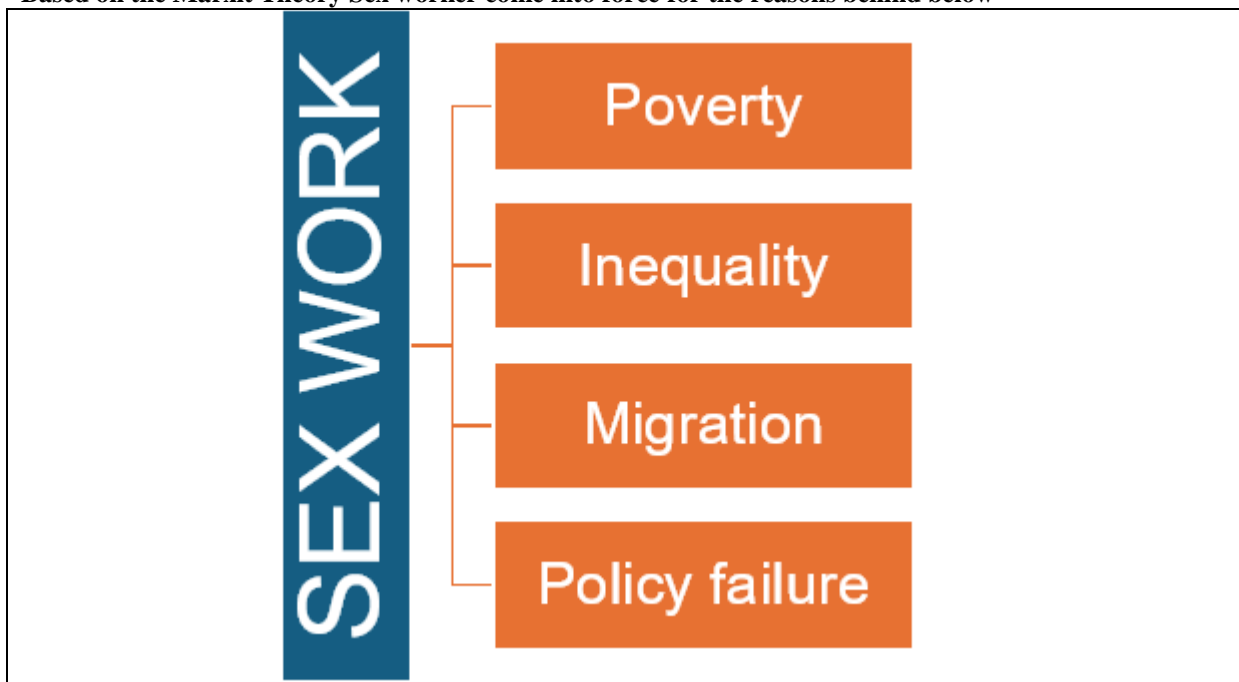
From a theoretical perspective, feminist debates remain polarized, with radical feminists viewing sex work as inherently exploitative and sex-positive feminists advocating for its recognition as legitimate labour. Structural-functionalism and Marxist frameworks further contribute to understanding the role of sex work in

broader socioeconomic structures. Empirical studies in India and Assam highlight that the intersection of poverty, gender inequality, migration, and policy failures exacerbates vulnerabilities among sex workers.

One of the critical findings from the literature is that criminalization and ambiguous legal frameworks expose sex workers to exploitation and human rights violations. Despite government interventions, such as those led by the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), the stigma attached to sex work remains a significant barrier to healthcare access and legal protection. International examples, particularly New Zealand's decriminalization model, suggest that legal recognition can enhance the welfare and rights of sex workers, reducing abuse and improving health outcomes.

Community-based interventions, including self-help groups and collectives like the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), have demonstrated three interconnected principles which are 3R i.e RESPECT, RELIANCE and RECOGNITION. These 3 models can bring inequality, respect and social security and a quality of life of a sex worker. (Source-Wikipedia)

**Based on the Marxist Theory Sex worker come into force for the reasons behind below-**



### **Way Forward**

Given the insights drawn from academic research, several measures can be taken to address the challenges faced by sex workers and enhance their socioeconomic well-being:

#### **1. Legal Reforms and Decriminalization**

- India's current legal stands on sex work creates vulnerabilities for sex workers, as the criminalization of brothel-keeping and solicitation leads to police harassment and lack of protection. A shift towards decriminalization, similar to New Zealand's model, could provide legal recognition, improving their access to justice and labour rights.
- Policy reforms should aim at distinguishing between voluntary sex work and trafficking, ensuring that laws against human trafficking do not inadvertently criminalize consensual adult sex work.
- Legal assistance programs should be established to help sex workers navigate existing legal frameworks and protect them from exploitation by law enforcement agencies.

#### **2. Economic Empowerment and Alternative Livelihood Opportunities**

- While sex work is a means of survival for many, offering alternative livelihood opportunities through vocational training, microfinance, and entrepreneurship programs can provide economic choices beyond sex work.
- Government and NGOs should implement income-generation programs for skills development and needs of sex workers, allowing them to diversify their financial sources.
- Cooperative models, such as self-help groups and credit schemes, should be expanded to provide financial security and reduce dependency on exploitative intermediaries.

#### **3. Healthcare and Social Welfare Initiatives**



- Accessible and non-judgmental healthcare services must be strengthened to address the high prevalence of STIs, including HIV/AIDS, among sex workers. Mobile clinics, peer-led health initiatives, and integration of sex worker-friendly healthcare facilities within public health systems should be encouraged.
  - Mental health services should be incorporated into social welfare programs to address the psychological distress often associated with stigma and social exclusion.
  - Welfare programs should extend beyond health, including housing support, childcare services, and social security schemes, recognizing sex workers as legitimate workers entitled to state benefits.
- 4. Reducing Stigma and Social Inclusion**
- Awareness campaigns should be conducted to challenge societal perceptions of sex work, reducing discrimination and encouraging a more inclusive approach toward their rights and well-being.
  - Media representations should shift from portraying sex workers as victims or criminals to acknowledging their agency and economic contributions.
  - Educational programs should incorporate for their children and should access all the facilities.
- 5. Strengthening Community and Collective Action**
- Strengthening community organizations, such as sex worker unions and advocacy groups, can enhance collective bargaining power and self-regulation.
  - Encouraging participatory policymaking by involving sex workers in discussions on laws and social programs that affect them can lead to more effective and rights-based interventions.
  - Research initiatives should be expanded to document their live experience of sex workers, ensuring that policy recommendations are informed by ground realities rather than moralistic or assumptions.
- 6. Regional Focus: Addressing the Specific Challenges in Assam**
- Given the impact of migration, displacement, and border economies on sex work in Assam, targeted policy interventions should address these unique challenges.
  - Special attention should be given to regions like Cachar, where the sex trade is influenced by cross-border movements.
  - Collaborations between local NGOs, academia, and government agencies should be fostered to create comprehensive strategies for sex workers' welfare in Assam.

### **Final Thoughts**

The discourse on sex work needs to move beyond moralistic. The existing body of research understood the urgent need for legal reforms, economic support systems, healthcare access, and social inclusion initiatives. In Assam, particularly in Cachar district, addressing migration-induced vulnerabilities and economic instability can significantly improve the conditions of sex workers. By adopting a holistic and intersectional approach, policymakers, activists, and scholars can contribute to a more equitable, where sex workers are not marginalized but recognized as active contributors to the economy and society. Assam, like in many other regions, is a complex socio-economic phenomenon shaped by historical, cultural, and economic factors. Research on this subject is crucial to understanding the lived experiences of sex workers, the socio-legal challenges they face, and their contribution to the informal economy. Many individuals engaged in sex work come from marginalized backgrounds, often lacking access to education, alternative employment, and social security. Understanding their conditions can help policymakers and social organizations develop more effective interventions, including harm reduction strategies, healthcare access, and legal protections. Henceforth this significant research can make a clear vision.

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