

FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN SILCHAR TOWN: A SOCIO ECONOMIC PROFILE

This chapter deals with socio-economic and demographic profile of the sex workers in Silchar town. Category of FSWs, age, religion, family background, income, occupation, educational background, marital status, linguistic background, caste, housing pattern, drinking water facility, electricity facility, sanitation facility and personal cleanliness of respondents are discussed in this chapter.

3.1CATEGORY OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS (FSWs)

Sex workers in Silchar town do not constitute a purely homogenous category. They differ from each other on the basis of religion, language, caste and other socio-economic variables. On the basis of place of occupation Female Sex Workers (FSW) are categorized into brothel based sex worker, street based sex worker, hotel based sex worker and home based sex worker.

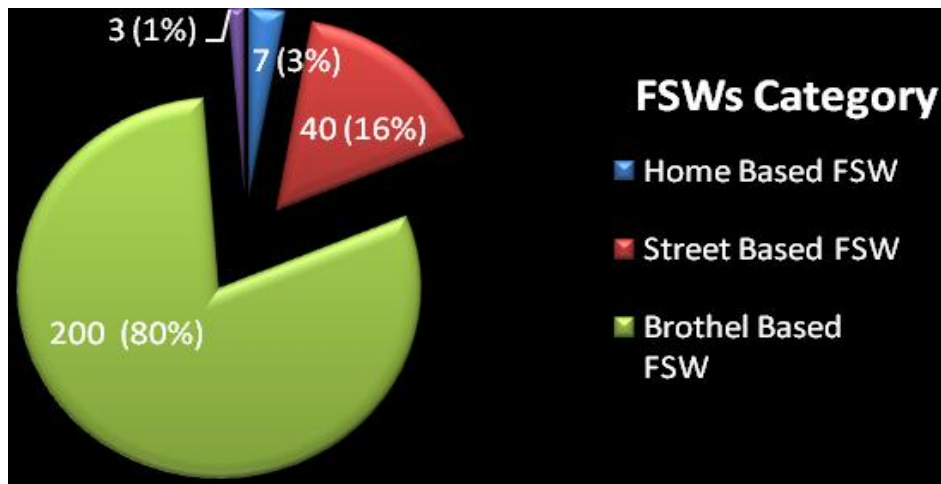
Table 3.01**Female Sex Workers (FSW's) Categorization on the basis of Place of their Work**

| Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Home Based FSW | 7 | 3 % |
| Street Based FSW | 40 | 16% |
| Brothel Based FSW | 200 | 80% |
| Hotel Based FSW | 3 | 1% |
| Total | 250 | 100% |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

The study is conducted on 250 female sex workers out of which 7 (3 %)female sex workers are home based, 40 (16%)female sex workers are street based, 200 (80%) female sex workers are brothel based and only 3(1%) are hotel based female sex workers.

The following pie diagram reveals the data.



Pie diagram of the respondent's Category

3.2 AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Female sex workers of silchar town are belonging to different age groups. It becomes important to know the age of their involvement in the sex work. Like other risk factors age of involvement in sex work also determines the risk they carry in life. Their involvement in sex work during teen age is too risky because it may cause several reproductive health problems along with the problem of STD and HIV. Age also matters in their occupation in numerous ways. The age of the responds is shown in the table below.

Table 3.02

Age of respondents

| Age Groups | Categories of Respondents | | | |
|------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based |
| 20-25 | 4(10%) | 2(28.57%) | 21(10.5%) | - |
| 26-30 | 2(5%) | 2(28.57%) | 82(41%) | 1(33.33%) |
| 31- 35 | 22 (55%) | 2(28.57%) | 60(30%) | 2(66.66%) |
| 36-40 | 10(25 %) | 1(14.28%) | 23 (11.5%) | - |
| 41-45 | 2(5%) | - | 8(4%) | - |
| 45> | - | - | 6(3%) | - |
| Total | 40(100%) | 7 (100%) | 200(100%) | 3(100%) |

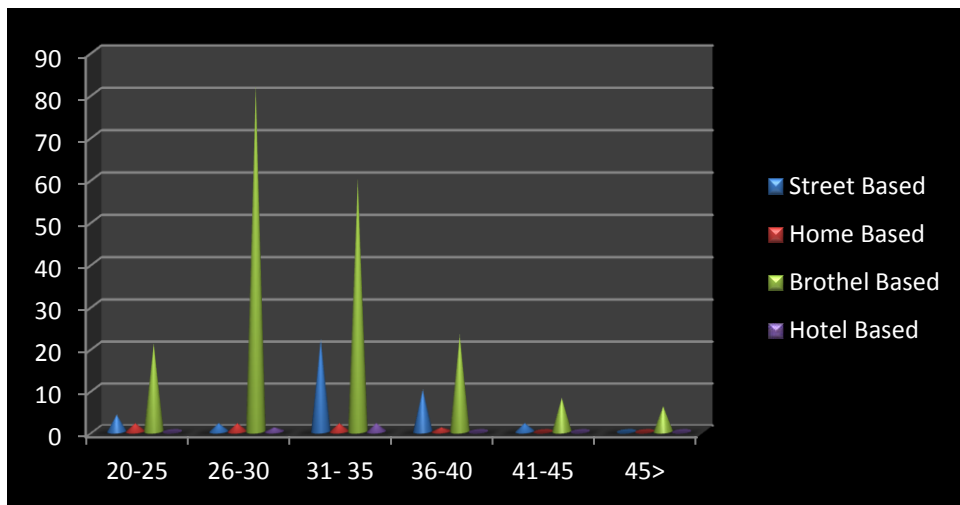
Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of total 40 street based female sex workers 10% are between age group of 20-25, 5% are between age group of 26-30, 55% are between age group of 31-35, 25% are between age group of 36-40, and 5% are between age group of 41-45.

Out of total 7 home based female sex workers 28.57% of them are between age group of 20-25, 28.57% are between age group of 26-30, 28.57% are between age group of 31-35, 14.28 % are between age group of 36-40.

Out of total 200 brothels based female sex workers 10.5% of them are between age group of 20-25, 41% are between age group of 26-30, 30% are between age group of 31-35, 11.5 % are between age group of 36-40, 4% are between age group of 41-45 and above 45 ages is only 3%. Out of total 3 numbers of hotels based female sex workers 33.33% are between age group of 26-30, 66.66 % are between age group of 31-35.

On the basis of the age group of the respondents the following graphical representation reveals the data.



Graphical representation of the respondent age groups

3.3 RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

Female sex workers of silchar town are comprised of different religious background. It is reveals from the study that female sex worker of silchar town maintained unity in diversity though they belong to different religious background. Unity is observed mainly among the brothel based female sex workers. However the streets based female sex workers, home based female sex workers and hotel based female sex workers are not found to follow this kind of unity. They follow their respective religious rituals. The religious background of the respondent is drawn in below table.

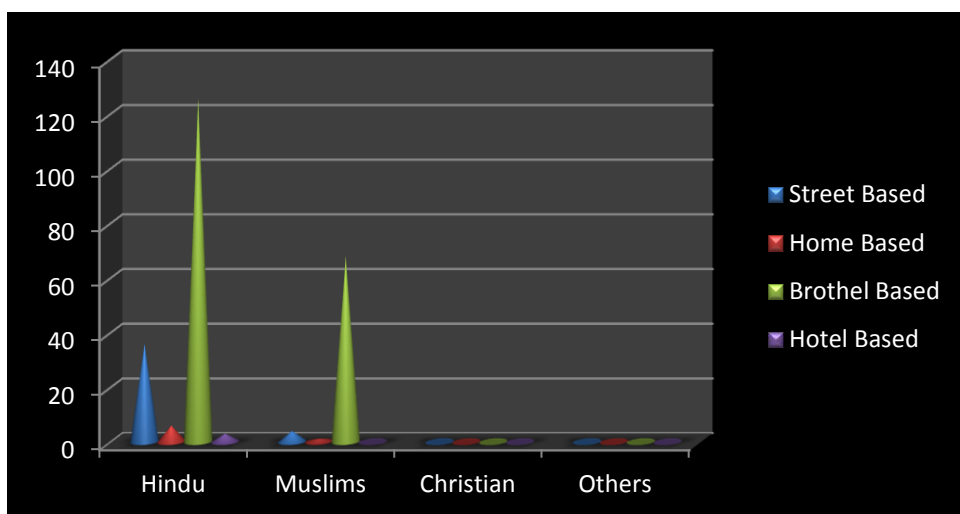
Table 3.03
Religion of respondents

| Religious Background | Categories of Respondents | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based |
| Hindu | 36 (90%) | 6(85.71%) | 126(63%) | 3(100%) |
| Muslims | 4 (10%) | 1 (14.28%) | 68 (34%) | - |
| Christian | - | - | 6 (3%) | - |
| Others | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 40(100%) | 7 (100%) | 200 (100%) | 3(100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of total 250 female sex workers 171 (68.4%) are Hindus followed by 73 (29.2%) are Muslims and 6 (2.4%) are Christians. Out of total female sex workers 36 (21.05%) are street based Hindu, 6 are home based Hindu, 126 are brothel based Hindu and 3 are hotel based Hindu female sex workers. Out of all female sex workers 4 are street based Muslim, one is home based Muslim and 68 are brothel based Muslim female sex workers. All the Christian female sex workers are found only in brothel of Silchar town.

The following graphical representation reveals the data.



Graphical representation of Respondent Religion

3.4 FAMILY BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

Most of the female sex workers under study belong to poor family background. They hail from villages of Barak valley and other neighboring states of North-East India. Some of them have come from abroad particularly from Bangladesh and Nepal. Most of the parents of female sex workers under study are illiterate and struggling for survival. Most of the respondents maintain relation with other members of their family except the brothel based respondents who cannot maintain relationship with their family members due to several compulsions. However, some of the brothel based respondents maintain family relationship occasionally. The respondents who are married and having children, use to look after their husbands and offspring. Their children are studying in neighboring government and private schools. Some of the respondents have sent their offspring's to residential schools for better education.

3.5 EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Female sex workers of silchar town have very poor educational background. Poor education always put women to unawareness and deprived of knowledge and their right. The following table shows the educational status of the female sex workers of silchar town.

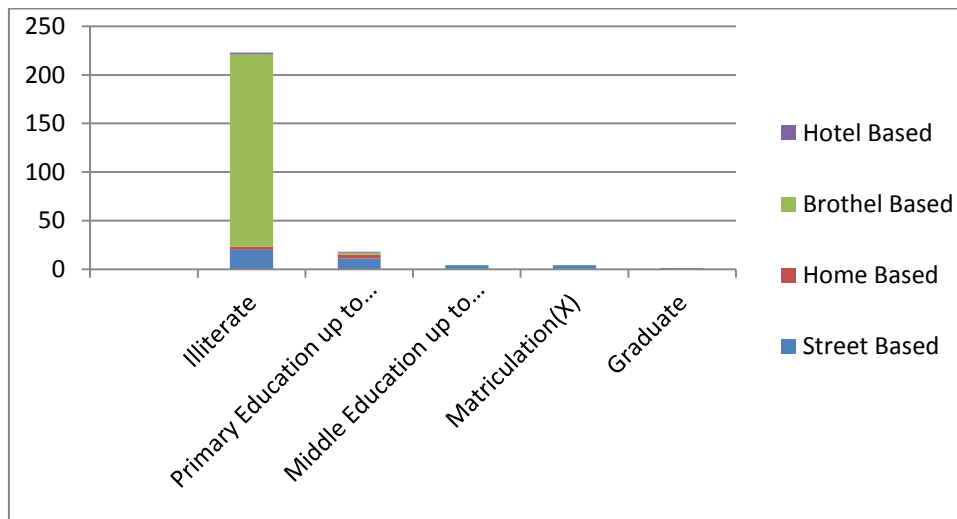
Table 3.04
Educational status of Respondents

| Educational status | Categories of Respondents | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based |
| Illiterate | 20(50%) | 3(42.85%) | 198(99%) | 2(66.66%) |
| Primary Education up to class V | 11(27.5%) | 4(57.14%) | 2(1%) | 1(33.33%) |
| Middle Education up to class VIII | 4(10%) | - | - | - |
| Matriculation(X) | 4(10%) | - | - | - |
| Graduate | 1(2.5%) | - | - | - |
| Not Known | | | | |
| Total | 40 (100%) | 7(100%) | 200(100%) | 3 (100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of 200 brothels based female sex workers 99% are illiterate and only 1% are literate up to primary level. Again it observed that out of 40 street based female sex workers 50% are illiterate, 27.5% have completed schooling up to class V, 10% up to class VIII, 10% are up to matriculation and only 2.5% are up to graduation. Among home based female sex workers 42.85% are illiterate and 57.14% has attended schooling up to primary level. Among hotel based sex workers 66.66% are illiterate and 33.33% has attended schooling up to primary level.

On the basis of educational status of the respondents following graphical representation reveals the data.



Graphical Representation of Educational status of Respondents

3.6 OCCUPATION OF RESPONDENTS

Occupation of all female sex workers is not similar. The brothel based female sex workers are solely engaged in the profession of sex work. Whereas the other female sex workers are engaged in different occupations along with the occupation of sex work. The hotel based, street based and home based female sex workers often engage themselves in different occupations like catering, house serving, sales work and other works on contract basis. Some sex workers within this category keep sex work as a part time occupation. They remain engaged permanently in other occupations and do sex work when opportunity is available. These groups of female sex workers maintain secrecy about their occupation of sex work from their family members and save themselves from social stigma and barrier. Following table presents the occupation of different categories of female sex workers.

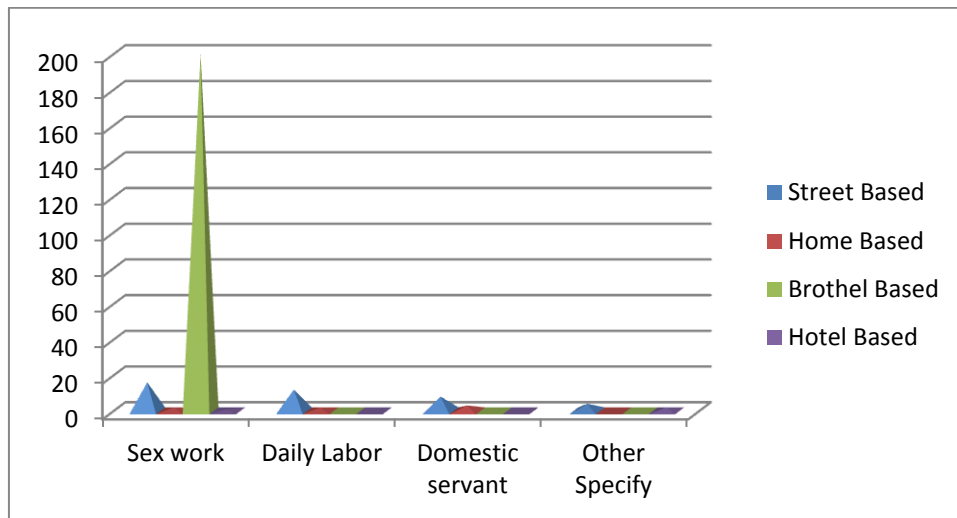
Table 3.05
Occupation of the Respondents

| Occupation of the Respondent | Categories of Respondents | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based |
| Sex work | 16 (40%) | 2 (28.57%) | 200(100%) | 1 (33.33%) |
| Daily Labor | 12 (30%) | 2 (28.57%) | - | - |
| Domestic servant | 8 (20%) | 3 (42.85%) | - | - |
| Other Specify | 4 (10%) | - | - | 2(66.66%) |
| Total | 40 (100%) | 7 (100%) | 200 (100%) | 3(100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher

It becomes clear from the data that the entire brothel based female sex workers are engaged solely in the profession of sex work. However some differences are observed among other categories of Female sex workers. Among street based female sex workers 40% of them are engaged only in the profession of sex work, 30% of them are engaged in wage earning and sex work, 20% of them are engaged in domestic service and sex work where as 10% are engaged in other works like sales marketing and sex work. Among home based female sex workers 28.57% of them are engaged only in the profession of sex work, 28.57% of them are engaged in the profession of both sex work and daily wage earning, rest 42.85% of them are engaged in domestic services and sex works. Among hotel based female sex workers 33.33% of them are engaged only in the profession of sex works and rest 66.66% of them are engaged in other seasonal works and business.

The following graphical representation reveals the data.



Graphical representation of the occupation of the respondent

3.7 INCOME OF RESPONDENTS

It is observed from the study that earning of all sex workers is not same. The brothel based sex workers are having comparatively better income than other sex workers. Sex workers other than brothel based sex workers are not regularly getting clients. They face lot of hurdles to catch their clients. Moreover, their earning from other sources is also not sound. Following data shows the income of the respondents.

Table 3.06**Income of Respondents**

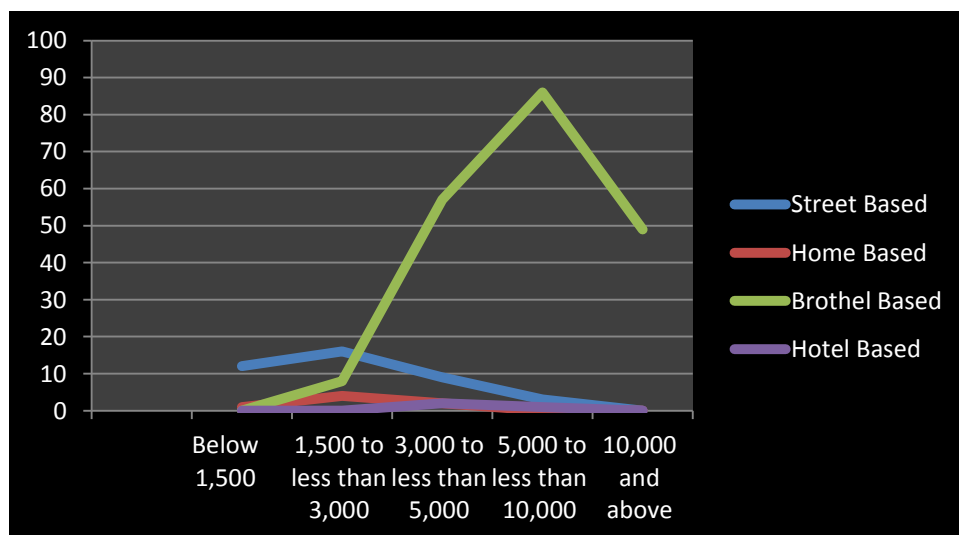
| Income | Categories of Respondents | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based | Total |
| Below 1,500 | 12 (30%) | 1(14.28%) | - | - | 13(5.2%) |
| 1,500 to less than 3,000 | 16 (40%) | 4(57.14%) | 8(4%) | - | 28 (11.2%) |
| 3,000 to less than 5,000 | 9 (22.5%) | 2(28.57%) | 57 (28.5%) | 2(66.66%) | 70 (28%) |
| 5,000 to less than 10,000 | 3(7.5%) | - | 86(43%) | 1(33.33%) | 90 (36%) |
| 10,000 and above | - | - | 49(24.5%) | - | 49(19.6%) |
| Total | 40(100%) | 7(100%) | 200(100%) | 3(100%) | 250(100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of total 40 street based female sex workers income of 30% of respondents is below Rs. 1,500/-per month, income of 40% respondent is ranging from Rs. 1,500/- to less than Rs. 3000/-per month, income of 22.5% respondents ranges from Rs. 3,000/- to less than Rs. 5,000/- per month and income of 7.5% of respondents ranges from Rs. 5,000/- to less than Rs. 10,000/- per month. Among home based female sex workers income of 14.28% of them is below Rs. 1,500/- per month, income of 57.14% ranges from Rs. 1,500/- to less than Rs 3000/-per month, income of 28.57% of respondent ranges from Rs. 3,000/- to less than Rs. 5,000/- per month. Among brothel based female sex workers income of 4% of them ranges from Rs.1, 500/- to less than Rs. 3000/-per month, income of 28.5% of them ranges from Rs.3, 000/- to less than Rs.5, 000/- per month, income of 43%

of respondents ranges from Rs. 5,000/- to less than Rs. 10,000/- per month and 24.5% of respondents' income is Rs. 10,000/- per month. On an average of all brothel based sex workers who are most active in their profession usually earn Rs. 10000/- above per month. They demand high rate from their client. The brothel based sex workers who are gradually losing their ability cannot earn as same as others who are active in their profession. But the aged and experienced sex workers, who are known as madam in the brothel, often exploit the earning of new comers in this profession. The madams negotiate with the clients on behalf of sex workers under their supervision. Out of all hotels based female sex workers income of 66.66 % of them ranges from Rs 3,000/- to less than Rs 5,000/- per month and income of 33.33% of them ranges from Rs 5,000/- to less than Rs 10,000/- per month.

The following graphical representation reveals the data.



Graphical Representation of the income of respondents

3.8 MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

Female sex workers of silchar town are having different marital status. Marriage is one of the social institutions. It is closely connected with the institution of family. In fact family and marriage are complementary to each other which can have very different implications in different cultures. Its purposes and functions differ from society to society like sex life, establishing family set up, economic support and so on. The study indicates that women who are deprived of happy and sound marital life due to different compulsions and economic pressure are involved in sex trade.

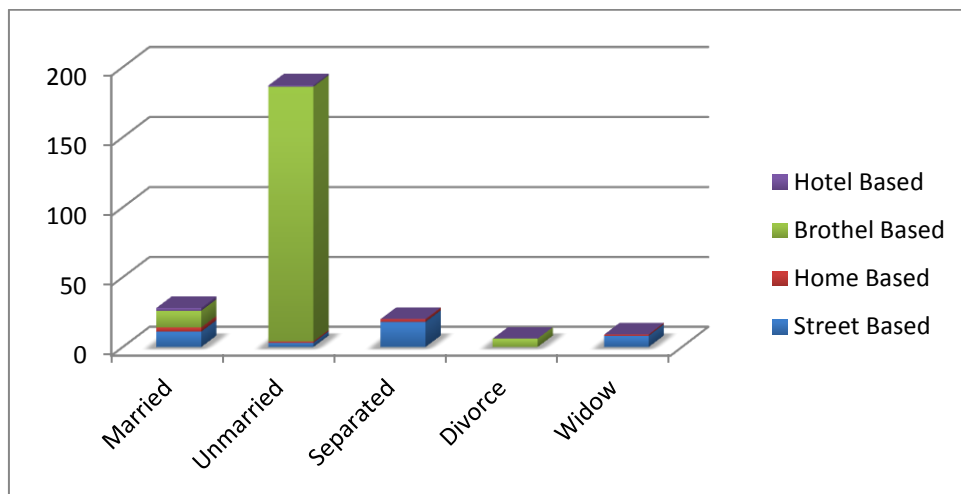
Table 3.7
Marital status of Respondents

| Marital Status | Categories of Respondents | | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based | Total |
| Married | 11(27.5%) | 3(42.85%) | 12(6%) | 2(66.66%) | 28(11.2%) |
| Unmarried | 3(7.5%) | 1(1.42%) | 182(91%) | 1(33.33%) | 187(74.8%) |
| Separated | 18(45%) | 2(28.57%) | - | - | 20(8%) |
| Divorce | - | - | 6(3%) | - | 6(2.4%) |
| Widow | 8(20%) | 1(1.42%) | - | - | 9(3.6%) |
| Total | 40 (100%) | 7(100%) | 200(100%) | 3(100%) | 250 (100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of total 40 numbers of street based female sex workers 27.5% are married, 7.5% are unmarried, 45% are separated and 20% are widows. Out of 7 home based female sex workers 42.85% are married, 1.42% are unmarried, 28.57% are separated and 1.42% is widow. Among brothel based female sex workers 6% are married, 91% are unmarried 3% are divorced. Among hotel based female sex workers 66.66% are married and 33.33% are unmarried.

The following graphical representation reveals the data



Graphical Representation of the marital status of respondents

3.9 LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

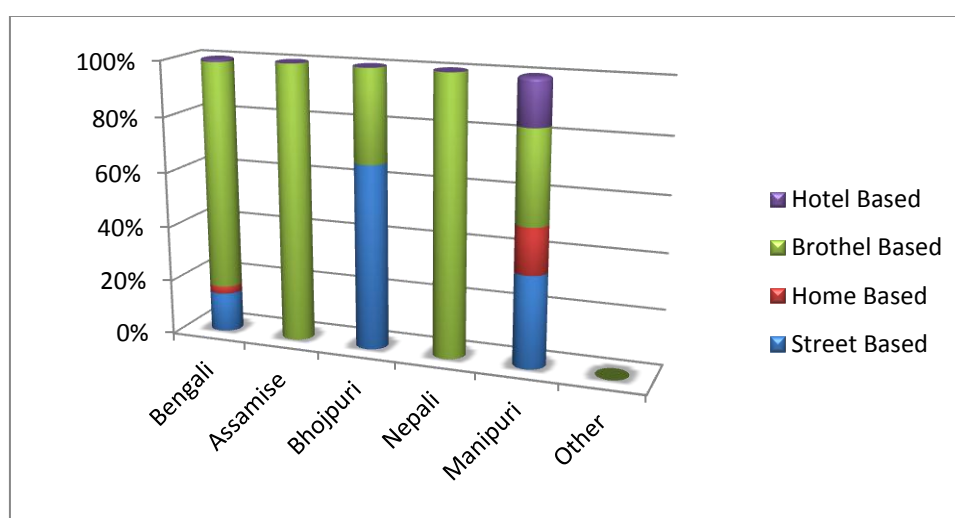
Female sex workers of silchar town hail from different linguistic background. The linguistic profile of sex workers of silcahr town reveals that Bengali speaking sex workers are more in number as compared to non Bengali speaking sex workers. Non Bengali sex workers hail from other linguistic background like Bojpuri, Nepali, Monipuri etc. However researcher speaks in hindi language with non Bengali people to collect the data. Following table shows the linguistic profile of respondents.

Table 3.8
Language known by the Respondent

| Language known | Categories of Respondents | | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based | Total |
| Bengali | 32(80 %) | 6 (85.71%) | 184 (92%) | 2 (66.66%) | 224(89.6%) |
| Assamese | - | - | 4 (2%) | - | 4 (1.6%) |
| Bhojpuri | 6 (15%) | - | 3 (1.5%) | - | 9(3.6%) |
| Nepali | - | - | 7 (3.5%) | - | 7(2.8%) |
| Manipuri | 2 (5%) | 1(14.28%) | 2 (1%) | 1(33.33%) | 6(2.4%) |
| Total | 40 (100%) | 7 (100%) | 200(100%) | 3 (100%) | 250 (100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

Out of total 200 brothel based female sex workers 92% are Bengali, 2% are Assamese, 1.5 % are Bhojpuri, 3.5% are Nepali and 1% are Manipuri. Among 40 street based female sex workers 80% are Bengali, 15% are Bhojpuri and 2% are Manipuri. Among home based female sex workers 85.71% are Bengali and 14.28% are Manipuri. Among hotel based female sex workers 66.66% are Bengali and 33.33% are Manipuri.



Graphical Representation of the language known by the respondents

3.10 CASTE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Female sex workers of Silchar town belong to different caste background. It is observed from the study that majority of the sex workers belong to lower strata of caste hierarchy. Most of the sex workers belong to scheduled caste followed by other backward caste and general caste. Sex workers who belong to general caste are mainly based at brothel of Silchar town. Scheduled caste sex workers found in all categories of sex workers of Silchar town.

Table 3.9

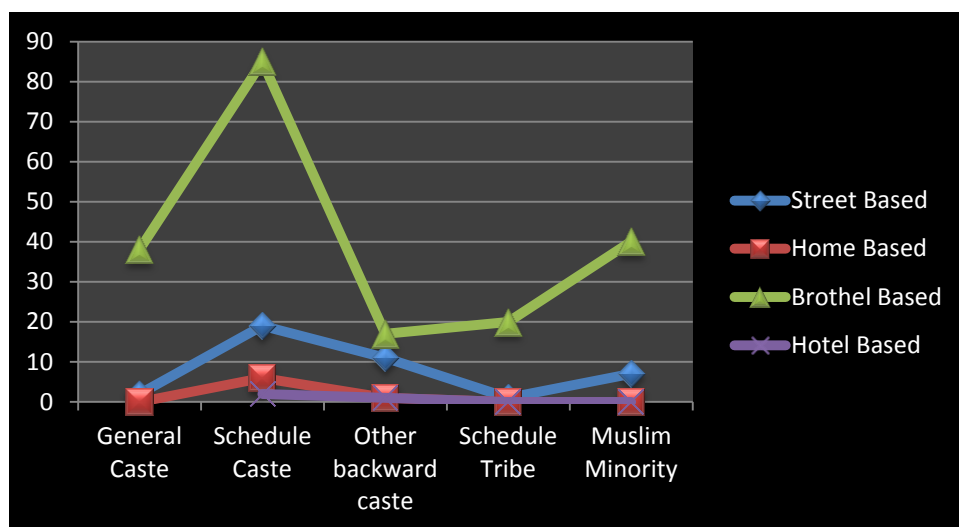
Caste of Respondents

| Caste | Categories of Respondents | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| | Street Based | Home Based | Brothel Based | Hotel Based | Total |
| General Caste | 2(5%) | - | 38(19%) | | 40(1.6%) |
| Schedule Caste | 19(47.5%) | 6(85.71%) | 85(42.5%) | 2(66.66%) | 112(44.8%) |
| Other backward caste | 11(27.5%) | 1(14.28%) | 17(8.5%) | 1(33.33%) | 30(12%) |
| Schedule Tribe | 1(2.5%) | - | 20(10%) | - | 21(4.8%) |
| Muslim Minority | 7(17.5 %) | - | 40(20%) | - | 47(18.8%) |
| Total | 40 (100%) | 7 (100%) | 200(100%) | 3(100%) | 250(100%) |

Sources: Field data collected by the researcher.

It is observed from the table that out of total 40 streets based female sex workers 5% of them belongs to general caste, 47.5% belongs to scheduled caste, 27.5%

belongs to other backward caste, 2.5% belongs to schedule tribe and 17.5% belongs to Muslim. Among home based female sex workers 85.71% belongs to scheduled caste, 14.28% belongs to other backward caste. Among brothel based female sex workers 19% belongs to general caste Hindu, 42.5% belongs to scheduled caste, 8.5% belongs to other backward caste, 10% belongs to scheduled tribes and rest 20% belongs to Muslim. Among hotel based female sex workers 66.66% belongs to schedule caste and 33.33% belongs to other backward caste.



Graphical representation of Caste of Respondents

3.11 HOUSING PATTERN OF THE RESPONDENTS

The housing pattern of brothel based sex workers is different from other female sex workers. In brothel houses are owned by outsiders. But rented rooms are taken from the land lord by the *madams*¹ of the brothel. They provide rooms to the sex workers under their supervision. The sex workers have to pay rent of the room to their *madams* either on daily or monthly basis. The type of house where brothel based female sex workers are staying is pucca house made up of concrete or semi-

¹ N.B: “Madams” means a lady who acts as a go between/ agent between clients and female sex workers.

pucca house made up of bricks and tins. There are several rooms in houses of brothel of Silchar town. There are small single rooms as well as double rooms with attached kitchen facility. But the problem of brothel based sex workers is that they use to share rooms with one another. Even a single room is shared by more than two sex workers. Single rooms are not facilitated with attached kitchen. Hence 6-7 sex workers living in single rooms use a single kitchen. Those sex workers who are staying in double rooms are comparatively comfortable than others. Around four sex workers share a double room with attached kitchen facility. Whereas street based female sex workers are coming from far distant villages in the town and few of them stay in rented house. Those who are staying in their own house reported that their housing condition is worst. They narrated that they are living in kaccha houses made up of bamboo wall and tin roof. The rented house where some of them are staying is basically both kachha and semi pucca houses. Home based female sex workers are staying at own house as well as in rented house in slum set up of the town. The housing condition of the home based female sex workers is very worst because houses are built adjacent to the bank of the river. When flood occur mostly the house situated near the bank of the river get more affected. Hotel based female sex workers are mostly coming from the nearby villages and go back to their village. So it is not possible to visit the houses of the hotel based sex workers.

3.12 DRINKING WATER FACILITIES OF THE RESPONDENT

Brothel based female sex workers use supply water and some provided by Government of the owners of houses in brothel have fixed up private tap with

motor system. However, there is also supply water tap available just outside the brothel. At time of water crisis, female sex workers also bring water from the outside supply tap for daily consumption. Home based female sex workers primarily use supply water and public hand pump for drinking and cooking purposes and also use river water for washing clothes, bathing etc. Whereas street based and hotel based female sex workers generally use supply water and sometimes buy water bottle for drinking purposes because they stay whole day in the town and after their work is over they go back to their native village.

3.13 AVAILABILITY OF ELECTRICITY FACILITIES FOR THE RESPONDENTS

Electricity facility is provided by all the brothel based female sex workers. They use eclectic fans, lights and other electric instruments for their comfort. Since most of the rooms in the brothels remain dark throughout the day they need electric light during day time also. But the land lord or *madams* of sex workers do not allow them to consume more electricity during day time. All the home based female sex workers are having electricity facilities where as few of the street based female sex workers do not have electricity facilities at their home as their earning is low and cannot maintain the electric bill regularly. As narrated by the hotel based female sex workers they are having electricity facilities at their home.

3.14 PROVISION OF SANITATION FACILITY

Brothel based female sex workers of Silchar town are using very small, unhygienic rooms. The rooms are very small with very small beds. Generally female sex workers use common toilets. One common toilet is used by several female sex workers and they do not wash it regularly. The condition of toilet used by the sex workers is very poor and unhygienic. There is no proper drainage system inside the brothel. Because of poor drainage system brothel area of Silchar town is logged with rain water during rainy season. Since brothel is situated near by a market so the garbage of the market is also dumped in front of brothel. Entire brothel area seems to be a dumping place. Moreover, sex workers living inside brothel also dump their own garbage in front of the brothel. It becomes difficult to stay inside the brothel due to bad smell of composted garbage and open drain.

Street based and hotel based female sex workers are floating and moving. They are coming from neighboring villages of Silchar town. Majority of them have taken rented house and very few home based female sex workers reside in their own house. They are poor and their housing condition is very bad where they cannot maintain proper health and hygiene. Proper drainage system and clean latrines are not available in their rented house.

Street based female sex workers are facing lot of hurdles because of their low income. The sanitation condition at their house is not proper. They usually are having both 'kachha' and 'pucca' toilet and bathroom. However, they used to stay at street for whole day during that time they choose cinema hall, few hotels, and lonely street of the town for sanitation purposes. Hotel based female sex workers

use toilets of hotels whereas home based female sex workers are very poor and they use 'kaccha' toilet and bathroom.

3.15 PERSONAL CLEANLINESS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Brothel based female sex workers used to take bath in morning and make up their face and has to sit in the front of their respective gate like 'sample' of a commodity sold in the market. Most of the brothel based sex workers maintain cleanliness but few of the sex workers are not clean. But look of their face is very charming. All the female sex workers use soap for bathing and most of the brothel based female sex workers use costly face wash for cleaning their face. Some of the female sex workers use to take bath just after sexual intercourse due to fear of diseases like STI and HIV. They use shampoo and different types of cream to have nice looks. They also cut their nails and shape the nail properly but few of the girls do not maintain it. Most of Street based female sex workers do not maintain proper cleanliness. They come early in the morning from their house and remain in the town throughout the day in search of a client. They cannot maintain themselves during day time. They carry some cosmetic items with them for makeup. They usually take two times bath before coming from home and after going at home. Home based female sex workers are different they refresh themselves before meeting customer. However they also maintain cleanliness and use soap, shampoo, cream and perfume to attract clients. Whereas hotel based female sex workers maintain sophisticated dress up and cleanliness.

3.16 SUMMARY

It is observed from the study that socio- economic condition of female sex workers of Silchar town is very poor. The poor economic condition, educational attainment and many other familial and social compulsions compel them to choose sex work for earning their livelihood. However, this occupation is not safe and peaceful for them. It is observed that they do not lead a wealthy and prosperous life from this occupation. Even they are exploited by the brokers and middlemen engaged in this occupation. They not only suffer from social evils but also from risk of several deadly diseases.