

Education of Children

A study aimed at finding out the reasons for high attrition rate of sex worker's children from schools and residential homes run by Durbar

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Introduction

Durbar is a non-profit organization working in the red light areas of Kolkata, West Bengal. The NGO is a strong advocate of the rights of sex workers and their children. It has been active in addressing the structural issues that frame the everyday reality of sex workers' life. As part of their efforts they run various developmental programmes in the area in the field of education, finance and health awareness.

In the field of education they run the educational programme BERAVHENG (Breaking Fences) that tries to deal with the problem of stigma and discrimination that the sex workers' children and sex workers themselves face in the society. The programme has three components – special assistance for school going children, education centres for school drop-outs and special coaching centres for children of higher classes.

They also run two residential homes for the children of sex workers:

1. RAHUL VIDYA NIKETAN – Located in southern suburbs of Kolkata, Baruipur, it houses about 80 children in the age group of 5-14 years
2. INDUBALA ABASIK VIDYALAYA – Located in Ultadanga, it houses around 25 children in the age group of 4-10 years

Problem Definition

From the above section it is clear that Durbar is very much active in the upliftment of the sex worker's children in the society and bringing them in par with the normal children through various kinds of educational programs and residential homes that it runs for them.

However, in recent times the NGO is facing the problem of drop in the number of children going schools and also new admissions to these schools are very less. Moreover, this same problem of high attrition rate of children is prevalent in the residential homes that are being run by Durbar in Baruipur and Ultadanga, although the living expenses of children residing there is very low (approximately INR 500 per month).

Keeping in view the above developments, the aim of the project is to find out the reasons behind the low turn-up of the children and drop-outs of the admitted children for this programme and in the residential home as well and based on the findings formulate a strategy for making their mothers convinced them to send their children to these schools and to these residential homes.

Research Methodology

The research started with the collection of secondary data which included collection of data through the Durbar website and subsequent discussion with the employees of Durbar working in this area.

To know the current situation of the children residing in the residential homes (keeping in mind the objectives to be met), a field research based methodology was conducted. The field visit/survey was conducted in three parts:

1. Interaction with the mothers, in Sonagachi area, of the children who were residing in the residential homes or had resided sometime in the past.
2. Interaction with the children of the residential home INDUBALA ABASIK VIDYALAYA in Ultadanga who were in the age group of 4-10 years.
3. Interaction with the volunteer (Mousumi Mitra), who comes to interact with children, residing in Ultadanga residential home, and conduct sessions for their mental growth and psychological support.

The entire above mentioned field surveys was conducted through a questionnaire (different for each one) which included majorly qualitative questions. Field survey with the mothers was conducted in an in-depth interview fashion and a total of 8 interviews were conducted. The other two surveys included some spontaneous questions, different from the ones already prepared in the questionnaire, depending upon the insights to be acquired.

Findings

Based on the 2 day field visit and various in-depth interviews conducted with mothers and the other two groups (children and volunteers working in residential homes), the following insights have been found out. For simplicity the findings are listed below according to the concerned group.

Mothers (of children) working in Sonagachi area

Mothers whose children are residing in residential home

The insights that we got from these section was a pretty mixed one.

- a) Some were satisfied with the residential homes as they thought that the place where they work will have negative impact on their children in case their children live with them.
- b) However some were dissatisfied with the homes and were thinking to put their son/daughter in other hostels

Mothers whose children have left the residential home

On taking in-depth interviews of this group, they cited the following reasons for their children being taken out of the residential homes:

- a) First reason turned out to be expensiveness. These were the mothers who fall in low and medium income group among the sex workers and find it difficult to pay the hostel fees of their children that was charged from them. They usually preferred to keep their children with themselves.
On asking about the education loan facility that “Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society” provided, some said that they were ignorant about this facility provided by Durbar.
- b) The second reason cited by the mothers for this high attrition rate was the living condition at these residential homes. According to them, the living conditions at these homes were not up to the mark and even the rules at these residential homes

are so strict that children are never allowed to go and play outside even under someone's supervision. The only option left with children was to play inside but the infrastructure at these homes didn't allow them to do that.

As an alternative to these residential homes, some mothers were keeping their children in other hostels paying up to INR 2500 per month which clearly shows that these mothers are having the money and are ready to invest it on their child education. Some of them even availed education loan facility for their child education.

- c) The third and the most alarming reason for this attrition rate is the fear among the mothers about their child getting fall in the wrongdoings.

One such incident was shared by a mother Sankari Chakravarthy who told that the reason which led her to stop her son's education was the skipping of classes by her son and roaming with other local children during school hours. After this incident she keeps her son with herself.

Volunteer who conduct session for children in residential homes

Following insights were provided by the volunteer, Mrs Mousumi Mitra, about the children living at the residential homes:

- a) Infrastructure is not sufficient for 25 students.
- b) Children are always in depression and quarrelling among the children is a common scene.
- c) Students who are doing well in their education too are the victims of depression.
- d) Recreational activities at the homes are very low and most of them are indoor activities.
- e) According to her the main problem with the children is their mental health which gets badly affected
- f) Children get to meet their mother once in a month
- g) Frequency of visit of Durbar officials to these residential homes is very less
- h) Staffs looking after the children aren't fully trained to handle all the children's queries.

Children residing in residential homes

Asking direct questions to the children wasn't considered a good option for getting the insights as in the case of asking questions they might become conscious and hesitate in sharing everything. Therefore, a friendly talk was done with the children and during this talk, following insights were found out:

- a) Some of the children were very excellent in their studies and were among the toppers in their class while some are very good in other activities like drumming, drawing, etc.
- b) However they all were very depressed and it was very clear in their responses

Recommendations

Based on the interaction with mothers, children and volunteer and getting the above mentioned findings following recommendations are proposed to decrease the attrition rate and increase in new enrolment of the children in the Durbar run schools and residential homes:

Increase in Recreational Activities

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", this statement seems to fit in this case. The infrastructure at the homes does not allow the children to play outdoor games and even they are not allowed to play outside with other kids under someone's supervision. This in a way becomes the factor of depression among the children which needs to be taken care of.

It's recommended to take the children on weekends to a playground or a field (say a picnic) where they are allowed to play according to their wish. This holds a greater amount of intangible benefits for the children in their overall development.

Identifying Achievers

Those students who are good in their study can be categorized as Achievers and can be given the responsibility to help others in their study. This will instil in the "Achievers" a

sense of pride in him/her and he/she will get respect from other children also. Seeing the kind of treatment that the Achiever will get will give an impetus to other children to perform to such level as to become the next Achiever.

Increase in Volunteer activity

Along with the physical development of the child, it's necessary that the mental growth of the child takes place in the same pace. This gap is currently minimized by the volunteer Mousumi Mitra who takes session for mental development and psychological support of these children. However, her visit is limited to 3-4 times a month.

It's recommended to involve more such volunteers living in the vicinity of the homes as children are able to connect to them personally and share their problems. Also the meeting of children with their mothers must be made mandatory to 4-5 times a month.

Standardization of Infrastructure

It was found in the survey that some mothers were keeping their children at other hostels and were paying monthly rental close to INR 2500 and the only reason that they aren't keeping their at these residential homes is the lack of infrastructure. Therefore, it becomes necessary to enhance the infrastructure of the hostel and to cover the cost, a slight increase can be done in the monthly rental of the children which is currently only INR 500.

Awareness about educational loan facility

Since some of the mothers were hesitant to keep their children in hostels because of money shortage, it is very necessary to increase the awareness among them regarding the educational loan facility that is provided by "Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society". This will help them in overcome the money crisis barrier and they will start sending their children to schools and residential homes.

Appendix

Questionnaire for interviews with mothers

1. Name?
2. Income Range?
3. How many children do you have?
4. How many of them are male and female?
5. How many of them go to school?
6. In which class do they study?
7. What is their school timing?
8. Does your child avail the facility of Durbar residential homes and schools?
9. If yes, reason?
10. If no, reason?
11. Does your child avail the coaching facility?
12. Does he/she take part in extracurricular activities?
13. What is the per month cost of educating your child?
14. Do you avail the educational loan facility for your child?
15. If your child lives in residential home, how often do you go to see him/her?
16. Any development in your child that you have noticed?
17. Is your child happy being at the residential home?
18. Is your child interested in further education?