

## **Rescue: A challenging Intervention by NGO's with commercially sexually exploited women in South India**

**Dr. Kumudini Achchi <sup>[a]</sup>**

### **Abstract**

India, being rich in culture women have special place and also been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation specially with prostituted women. Women in commercially sexually exploitative situations are living a dead life because of social non-acceptance of prostitution, physical and mental tortures by clients, economic crisis etc., which denies human rights strongly. Such situation demands rescue intervention as it is the first step for rehabilitation of exploited women. A study was conducted in South India to understand rescue programme by NGOs and the problems in implementing the programme. *17 selected NGOs were considered for the study. The descriptive and diagnostic research design was adopted along with interview schedule as tool for collecting data.* The study reveals that need for rescue has been identified through public, women in distress, field staff members, referrals and rescued from brothels, red light areas, families, neighbours, beauty parlours, during trafficking etc. The people involved in rescue team are NGO staff, police, media personnel, social activists, advocates, the public and perpetrators in different capacities such as informants, decoy customers, moral supporters during the process, counsellors, legal assistance, witness/ complaints, care and support providers, supervising and monitoring the rescue procedure and process etc. The immediate needs of the victims recognized are psychological support, legal support, legal action consent for medical intervention economic. The problems in the process rescue are social, legal, financial political which are hindering the rescue operations.

**Key Words:** NGOs, Commercially Sexually exploited women, Rescue, South India.

<sup>[a]</sup>**Dr. Kumudini Achchi,**

Assistant Professor,  
Postgraduate Department of Social Work,  
JSS College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Ooty Road,  
Mysore – 570 025, Karnataka, India.  
Email: kumudiniachchi@gmail.com

### **1. Introduction:**

India being a country with rich traditions and unique culture, treated women with great respect. Contradicting to the above depiction, women have been the victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation from time immemorial, specially with prostituted women. Prostitution is an age old practice which had religious sanction too. It can be noticed from the history that they were treated with dignity as they were well qualified in various disciplines. The courts of king would use them for political purpose because of their intelligence in application of knowledge. Gradually the status of women started decreasing with the influence of various social and political factors. When the institution of marriage became legalized and sanctified, the sex trade became clearly demarcated. Since then, the sex trade has been in existence in one or the other commercial forms. As a recent trend, the efforts are being made to legalize the sex trade by naming it as "Sex Work", in the hopes of turning prostitution into an institution in the society by giving full legal rights. As a result, the business of prostitution could not remain merely a matter between the prostitute and her paramour but the middlemen in the names brokers, pimps etc., gradually appeared on the scene to exploit these women. In such commercial form, all types of rights are denied to women in sex trade. Many studies have re-

vealed that *female victims in flesh trade are subjected to innumerable physical, sexual and psychological tortures, which leaves irreversible scars in the mind and the body. The damages that are caused to the victims are unsolvable, highly damaging almost permanently. No human person deserves to be forced into such situation that destroys dignity and damages self for lifetime. The application of secured human rights becomes a huge and expensive factor here. Such situation demands rescue intervention badly as rescue is the first step of mainstreaming sexually exploited women.*

The word 'Rescue' here means to safeguard the victims from the exploitative situation and brings them out to a safer place where their human rights and other rights are protected. As a result, the victims would feel self dignity and find the scope for expression. The very intervention has its own challenges because each social evil has its own network and the mediators and gainers are always in the stronger part though very act is illegal. The issue exist accurate with related to sexually exploited women too as the issue of trafficking for sex trade is the third huge social evil in the world. In the NGO sector, it is observed through studies that a very few number of NGOs intervenes in mainstreaming commercially sexually exploited women in South India. Among, very small number adopts rescue programme insuch NGOs. This observation made the present study to take place with an intention to understand mode of conducting rescue programme and also the hurdles they are facing in the implementing process.

## **2. Research Methodology:**

A study was conducted in South Indian states and Union Territory such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Pondicherry to understand their efforts in rescuing women from commercial sexual exploitation. 17 selected NGOs were considered for the study who really works for mainstreaming these women, without advocating legalization. The descriptive and diagnostic research design was adopted along with interview schedule as tool for collecting data. Statistically, simple descriptive and Contingency Co-efficient tests were adopted to analyse the collected data.

## **3. Results and Discussion:**

Rescue is a challenging intervention which demands huge amount of professional knowledge as well as personal ability and commitment. Since the legal support is in weaker part and in turn threaten the professional social workers' safety, much of the NGOs who are working for mainstreaming of sex workers hesitate to adopt rescue programme. With all above limitations, a small number of NGOs have adopted rescue programme.

To conduct the rescue programme, the first challenge is to identify women in exploitative situation in some corner of the society. It is not a easy task as well as not impossible task too. The study attempted to look into modes adopted by NGOs to identifying women in exploitative situations.

**Table – 1: Frequency and percent responses for the statement “Mode for identification of the status of CSEW” by respondents’ in different states:**

SL. NO.	Mode of identifying the status of CSEW	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON		KL
1	Public	F	5	1	2	0	0	8
		P	41.5%	12.5%	33.5%	0%	0%	24.9%
2	One Self	F	3	1	1	0	0	5
		P	25%	12.5%	16.7%	0%	0%	15.6%
3	Staff	F	3	3	4	1	0	11
		P	25%	37.5%	66.9%	100%	0%	34.1%
4	Referral	F	2	3	1	0	0	6
		P	16.7%	37.5%	16.7%	0%	0%	18.6%
5	Research	F	2	0	0	0	0	2
		P	16.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6.2%
6	Counselling	F	2	2	0	0	0	4
		P	16.7%	25%	0%	0%	0%	12.4%

CC=.777; P=.439

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 137

It is understood from Table No. 1 that 8 organisations (24.9%) receives information from public, 4 organisations (12.5%) gets information through women in distress, while counselling; 11 organisations (34.1%) get information through keen observation of their field staff who visits the transit points personally and have a hold about the happendings in the field; 6 organisations (2.9%) get the information through referrals, i.e. by other NGOs and other sources such as youth associations who do not work for commercially sexually exploited women directly, but has concern about their welfare; Another 2 NGOs gets the information through research activities. Though major work done through the field staff members recruited by the organisations, it is interesting to know that other major source is public. It shows that though society is biased about the issue, there are many concerned individuals who wants to express their concern towards welfare of the society. It is a very positive paradigm shift that is taking place from masked society to learned society; The recently establisehd organisations from from Andhra Pradesh have conducted research activities to understand the field but no other research has been done. 4 organisations (12.5%) receive information through counselling the victims to get more information about status of girls in the field. Generally, when the victims after rescue get counselled and many a times during counselling reveals many information about other victims who are suffereing in the field. They may be their frineds, relatives or the co-workers who are victims of the exploitative situation. The information is utilised effectively by the agencies. When the statistics applied on the analytical data, a non significant association was observed between states and their modes to gather information about victimized women, where contingency coefficient value of .777 failed to reach significant level criterion of .05. In other words the pattern of information gathering methods adopted by different NGOs in different states for rescuing exploited women is statistically same.

**Table - 2: Frequency and percent responses for the statement ‘Places of rescue’ by respondents’ in different states:**

Sl. No.	Place of Rescue	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON		KL
1	Brothels	F	6	4	3	1	0	14
		P	49.8%	50%	50%	100%	0%	43.4%
2	While Trafficking	F	6	3	3	1	0	13
		P	49.8%	37.5%	50.1%	100%	0%	40.3 %
3	Family	F	6	4	3	0	0	13
		P	49.8%	50%	50%	0%	0%	40.3%
4	Domestic Labour	F	1	0	0	0	0	1
		P	8.3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3.1%
5	The Pavement /Transit centers	F	3	1	0	0	0	4
		P	24.9%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%
6	Not Applicable	F	5	3	2	0	5	15
		P	41.7%	37.5%	33.3%	0%	100%	46.6%

CC=.709; P=.802

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 145

The NGOs have been working for the rescue of girls from various source areas such as brothels, red light districts, families, neighbours, beauty parlours, during trafficking, etc. 14 organisations (43.4%) are working in brothel areas for the sake of rescue. Pondicherry is the state which has the organisation to work in the brothels constituting 100% of involvement. The brothels in the state are not too posh but the researcher witnessed it as more like a sophisticated slum. In Karnataka and Tamilnadu states, rescue takes place in brothels where majorly the small independent houses are used by the pimps and gharwalis to entertain the customers. In Andhra Pradesh which has 6 organisations (49.8%) involving in rescuing the women from brothels, the situation is not too different from Karnataka and Tamilnadu. 18 NGOs costing 55.8% of the universe do focus on transit centers such as bus stations, railway stations, cinema halls, beauty parlour or massage centers etc. Karnataka and Tamilnadu states have 50% of their organisation dedicating themselves to work in these areas. 4 more organisations (12.5%) from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh concentrated on the pavements where generally, class III type of prostitutes (they are those women who enter into prostitution because of single meal and having no shelter) live and their children eye witness the field, which prepares the next generation for exploitation. It can be noticed that brothels and families are the major focal points for rescue operation as they both have scored total 43.4%. It is scaring that the family, which supposed to be the safest institution to rear the children, has been proved by the study that it is no safer in socio-economically poor families but the chances of trafficking for prostitution are as equal as in the brothel areas. The religious practice, dowry system, substance abuse by the men folk of the family, child marriage have turned out as the major contributory factors for these conditions. Domestic labour practice is the least focused point for rescue as there is less number of organisations work in the area and it is quite neglected. Infact, many studies have revealed that domestic labour is the first stage to get sexually exploited for the major group, but since obtaining evidence against the perpetrator is the hardest part and no legislative support exist, the NGOs are facing lot of problems in handling this issue. When statistics is applied, a non-significant association was observed between states and their number of rescues from the exploitative situations, where contingency coefficient value of .709 failed

to reach significant level criterion of .05. In other words the number of rescues executed by different NGOs in different states is statistically same.

Table - 3: Frequency and percent responses for the statement “The Team of rescue” by respondents’ in different states:

Sl. No.	Rescue Team	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON	KL	
1	Staff	F	7	5	4	1	0	17
		P	58.1%	62.5%	66.8%	100%	0%	52.7%
2	Police	F	6	3	4	0	0	13
		P	49.8%	37.5%	66.8%	0%	0%	40.3%
3	Public	F	0	3	0	0	0	3
		P	0%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%	40.3%
4	Media personnel	F	2	3	0	0	0	5
		P	16.6%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%	15.5%
5	Advocates	F	1	1	0	0	0	2
		P	8.3%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%	6.3%
6	Activists	F	2	1	0	0	0	3
		P	16.6%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%	9.4%
8	Perpetuators	F	0	0	0	1	0	1
		P	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	3.1%

CC=.774; P=.011

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 148

The study reveals NGO people involving professionals and representatives from various segments of the society at various capacities in conducting rescue operations. As a team members, the people involve themselves as informants, decoy customers, moral supporters during the process, counsellors, legal assistance, witness/ complaints, care and support providers, supervising and monitoring the rescue procedure and process etc. This results in public participation which improves social responsibility and also helps in NGOs to carry over their duties. The professionals involved in helping the NGOs, are NGO staff, police, media personnel, social activists, advocates, the public and Gharwalis / Pimps. A NGO from Pondicherry has experienced the perpetrators leading rescue team after they received counselling and orientation about the causes and consequences. The representatives of this particular NGO expresses that they are receiving the intimation about the trafficking cases involved by their opposite party or the people whom they does not like. It is also a smart way to break the network of perpetrators. Through this, the chance of perpetrators getting sensitized and opt for rehabilitation cannot be ignored. Such activity needs a lot of diplomacy and dynamics in the field and for that NGOs have to be more competitive. It is a good sign that media personnel are also involving in rescue operations and expressing their commitment to secured society. But with public, unless like informing about the exploitative situations in the society to NGOs; they are not involving in rescue operations, which has to be promoted by NGOs to the maximum extent. It is also recommendable to involve advocate more and more in rescue operation as the legislations does not support rescue operation much, it will be useful in advocacy or in altering the legislative parts of the field. When statistics is applied, a significant association was observed between states and their efforts in involving the various segment of the society in their team of rescue operations, where contingency coefficient value of .774 successfully reaches the significant level criterion of .05. In other words the involvement of different segment of the society by NGOS in rescue team in different states varies statistically.

**Table - 4: Frequency and percent responses for the statement “The immediate need after rescue” by respondents’ in different states:**

SL. NO.	Immediate Need	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON		KL
1	Psychological Support	F	6	5	2	1	0	15
		P	49.8%	62.5%	33.4%	100%	0%	46.5%
2	Legal Support	F	3	1	0	0	0	4
		P	25%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%	12.5%
3	Medical Intervention	F	5	3	1	0	0	9
		P	41.5%	37.5%	16.7%	0%	0%	27.9%
4	Economic Support	F	2	0	0	0	0	2
			16.6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6.2%

CC=.741; P=.520

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 151

Though at surface level identifying and fulfilling the immediate needs of the victims seems to be not a major factor, it is very essential to gain confidence of victims which boost their will power to cope up with reality. In this way, an attempt was made to understand the efforts put in by the NGOs to understand the immediate needs of the victims and found that 15 NGOs (46.5%) identify psychological support as an important need. Often when the rescue operation takes place, the victims get psychologically disturbed along with their physical and mental disorders they already suffering from. The staff of the NGOs and other concerned people in the team would provide them counselling and attempts to fulfill their needs. According to these NGOs the further steps will be facilitated better once these needs are fulfilled properly. Legal support has been identified as the immediate need of victims by 4 NGOs as legal action after the rescue operation is mandatory procedure under law and also essential for prosecution. Otherwise NGOs cannot provide social justice or legal justice to the victims. It is so because many victims request the NGOs to punish perpetrators so that their psychological rehabilitation is possible. This statement of the victims made them to feel legal support as immediate need. 9 NGOs (27.9%) identify medical intervention as one of the immediate needs as they believe in addressing the victim's physical as well as mental health issues which acts as a base for further steps. Since threat of STDs including HIV/AIDS is severe in nature, attending the medical checkup become essential. Such documents also act as a good legal evidence to prove the exploitation against them, it is felt essential by the NGOs. 2 NGOs from Andhra Pradesh have felt economic support as an immediate need of the rescued. It is so because they believe that during rescue through raids, the victims will not be in the position to fulfil their basic needs such as clothing, medicines etc. To fulfill these requirements, economic support is very essential. Keeping this need in view, Andhra Pradesh government has given the facility of releasing Rs.10,000/- to victims towards fulfilling basic need. This service includes even reintegration expenditure. But NGOs claims the amount insufficient to fulfill their needs. But this facility is not to be seen in other states. Statistically, a non-significant association was observed between states and their identified immediate needs of the victims after rescue, where contingency coefficient value of .741 failed to reach significant level criterion of .05. In other words the identified immediate needs of the victims after rescue in different states are statistically same.

**Table - 5: Frequency and percent responses for the statement “The problems while rescue” by respondents’ in different states:**

SL. NO.	The problems while rescue	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON		KL
1	Social	F	6	1	3	0	0	10
		P	49.8%	12.5%	50%	0%	0%	31%
2	Legal	F	3	1	1	0	0	5
		P	24.9%	12.5%	16.7%	0%	0%	15.5%
3	Financial	F	5	5	3	1	0	14
		P	41.5%	62.5%	50%	100%	0%	43.4%
4	Political	F	4	4	1	1	0	10
		P	33.2%	50%	16.7%	100%	0%	31%

CC=.805; P=.010

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 158

Any work with good intention has to have several obstacles which is the factual statement in Indian context. As such the NGOs are facing problems in rescuing girls from exploitative situations and these problems directly influence the quality of intervention and success of the NGOs. By the results of the Table No. 5, it is understood that majority of the organisations (14) are facing financial problems to conduct rescue operations. A set of 10 organisations (31%) are facing social problems which includes threatening from pimps/mediators, psychological status of the victims, social stigma, caste system etc. Another set of 10 organisations (31%) are facing political problems which is the blend of power and money. Perpetuators normally have ‘hands in gloves’ of political leaders, as a result, the politicians intervene in activities of NGOs by instructing NGO personnel to not to work against certain people or not to work in particular areas where traffickers are good to them having the network in that particular area. The least number of organisations (only 5 organisations constituting 15.5% of the universe) have felt the legal problems which comprises situations such as police helping the traffickers and not co-operating in carrying out the legal procedures, having less knowledge about legal provisions and lawyer’s un-preparedness to fight cases for victims. In this background the present result declares that rescue programme suffers under influence of legal problems or with the lack of legal knowledge of practitioners. When statistics is applied, a significant association was observed between states and the problems they are encountering while rescuing the victims from exploitative situation, where contingency coefficient value of .805 successfully reaches the significant level criterion of .05.

**Table - 6: Frequency and percent responses for the statement “The challenges for the organisation staff after rescue” by respondents’ in different states:**

SL. NO	Challenges after rescue	STATES					TOTAL	
			AP	KA	TN	PON		KL
1	Consent for medical checkups	F	4	5	4	0	0	13
		P	33.2%	62.5%	66.8%	0%	0%	40.3%
2	Fulfilling legal requirements	F	3	2	1	0	0	6
		P	25%	25%	16.7%	0%	0%	18.6%
3	Lack of shelter home	F	1	3	2	0	0	6
		P	8.3%	37.5%	33.4%	0%	0%	18.6%
4	Language	F	2	1	0	1	0	4
		P	16.6%	12.5%	0%	100%	0%	12.4%
5	Mental health of the victims	F	2	1	0	1	0	4
		P	16.6%	12.5%	0%	100%	0%	12.4%
	TOTAL	F	12	8	6	1	5	32
		P	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

CC=.764; P=.280

Source: Ph.D. Thesis, Kumudini Achchi, Pg. No. 162

There are many challenging situations the NGOs have to address soon after they rescue women from exploitative situation. Out of them, few are considered less challenging and few as more challenging to them. Among such challenging jobs, 13 organisations (40.3%) have felt that obtaining consent from rescued victims for medical checkup is a challenge. In fact, according to Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, the organisations has to let the victims undergo medical examination as early as possible soon their arrival to the organisation. Practically, psychological condition of the victims will be worse and they would not be in the position to give consent specially for medical testing. It may be because of guilt feeling, shyness, fear of unwanted questions and insecurity about future makes them to not to cooperate for medical testing. In many cases, as the researcher witnessed, majority of the victims would suffer from psychiatric problems such as depression, psychosomatic disorders etc. In such condition taking consent for medical testing should be great challenge for NGO personnel. Another 6 organisations (18.6%) have sensed fulfilling legal requirement after rescue operations as challenge. According the response of NGO representatives this challenge is because of the biased attitude of police towards whole process of mainstreaming and their lack of knowledge about field and its requirements. Another 6 organisations (18.6%) have observed lack of shelter home facility as the problem. In such situation, they have to search for alternatives or otherwise they may have to think about reintegration with family. The threat of re-trafficking can be sensed with instant decisions of reintegration. Another 4 organisations (12.5%) have suffered from language problem. As the rescued victims represent different parts of the nation as well as globe and speak different dialects, this problem exists. The communication gap becomes a big drawback for effective rehabilitation and mainstreaming. In such case, referral technique is used so that local NGOs will take charge of their welfare. Another 4 organisations (12.5%) have sensed psychological condition of the victims is challenging for them. Since victims usually suffer from psychological disorder, their activities become unpredictable and decisions are inconsistent. Rarely they follow instructions of caretakers and mostly reject their guidance. This made the NGOs to feel victims themselves as problem for their further intervention. Statistically, a non-significant association was observed between states and their felt challenging tasks after rescue, where contingency coefficient value of .764 failed to reach significant level criterion of .05. In other words the challenging tasks after rescue in different states are statistically same.



#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in culturally rich Indian atmosphere women has special place who have also been the victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation from time immemorial, specially with prostituted women. In course of time, when social institute like marriage become strong in the society, prostitution took commercial form, where exploitation denied basic human rights of victims. Women in commercially sexually exploitative situations are living a dead life because of social non-acceptance of prostitution, physical and mental tortures by clients, economic crisis etc., which denies human rights strongly. Such situation demands rescue intervention as it is the first step for rehabilitation of exploited women. ***Such situation demanded rescue intervention as it is the first step for the welfare of exploited women. A study was conducted in South India to understand the rescue intervention and the problems in implementation. 17 selected NGOs were considered for the study who works for mainstreaming these women, without advocating legalization. The descriptive and diagnostic research design was adopted along with interview schedule as tool for collecting data. Statistically, simple descriptive and Contingency Co-efficient tests were adopted to analyse the collected data. The study reveals that the modes adopted by NGOs to identifying women in exploitative situations the general public, women in distress, field staff members referrals by other NGOs. The NGOs have been working for rescue of girls from various source areas such as brothels, red light areas, families, neighbours, beauty parlours, during trafficking etc. The people involved in rescue team are NGO staff, police, media personnel, social activists, advocates, the public and perpetrators in different capacities such as informants, decoy customers, moral supporters during the process, counsellors, legal assistance, witness/ complaints, care and support providers, supervising and monitoring the rescue procedure and process etc. The immediate needs of the victims recognized are psychological support, legal support, legal action consent for medical intervention economic. The problems in the process rescue are social, legal, financial political which are hindering the rescue operations.***

It is a appreciating factor that the NGOs with good lot of obstacles in conducting rescue operations, specially with weak legal and social support, are putting their sincere efforts towards protecting women from commercially sexually exploitative situation. But tragedy is that their number is very less, where they are failing to reach the needy people who are in larger number. This calls more number of NGOs to enter and involve in mainstreaming commercially sexually exploited women by focusing more on rescue programme.

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