A Thesis on Exiting Prostitution: Implications for Criminal Justice Social Work

Sharon Menezes
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

Abstract
There are various ideological positions towards prostitution and its connection with organised crime. It means that the State and non-state responses that support women exiting from prostitution are predominantly governed by law enforcement and/or protection approaches. However, the welfare and development approach receive less attention. This paper presents a working thesis on exiting prostitution and its implications on criminal justice social work. The paper is based on the voices of women attempting to exit prostitution.

Keywords: Exiting, Prostitution, Welfare, Development, Distance, Criminal Justice Social Work.

Introduction
The phenomenon of female prostitution is difficult to ignore. State and non-State responses to prostitution aim to prohibit, suppress, regulate and/or legalise it. However, due to prostitution’s connection with organised crime syndicates, prostitution is predominantly addressed by the criminal justice system. Responses that facilitate individuals exiting from prostitution have a dominant emphasis on law enforcement and protection, with limited scope for the welfare and development of women attempting to exit prostitution.

The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 (India), provides for the rescue of persons engaged in prostitution and their intermediate custody. It also penalises persons who are engaged in prostitution near public places and those who solicit or seduce for prostitution. However, an Advisory issued by the Government of India, observes that these penal sections of this Act lead to victims getting re-victimized while the exploiters remain unpunished. The Advisory suggests that law enforcement agencies adopt a victim-centred approach to investigations (Ministry of Home Affairs, India, 2009).

The protection, welfare and developmental responses to facilitate exiting prostitution include – but are not limited to – prevention of persons from being trafficked, trauma care, rescue of persons forced into prostitution, referral to shelters, legal assistance, education, training and livelihood support, medical assistance, and child support. The

1 Assistant Professor, Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai Campus, V.N. Purav Marg, Deonar, Mumbai, 400088, India.
Email: sharon.menezes@tiss.edu
challenge appears to lie in complementing the protection agenda with the welfare and developmental agendas. A case in point is Ujjawalla, a comprehensive welfare scheme developed by the Government of India that aims to prevent trafficking, rescue, rehabilitate, reintegrate and repatriate the victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The scheme focuses on safe shelter through protective homes. Protective homes are institutionalised shelter facilities for women rescued under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 (India). However, the Ujjawalla scheme offers almost no scope for community-based shelters (such as working women’s hostels, group homes managed by a group of women, or rental accommodation) that are key to facilitating women’s engagements with family, community, work, recreation, etc. State responses that entail the curtailment of freedom, custody, interrogation, referral to protective detention or shelter appears to be a universal phenomenon. For instance, Gallagher and Pearson (2010) observed that across countries, victims of human trafficking who were rescued or had escaped from situations of exploitation, are placed and detained in public or private shelters for months or even years.

Mixed responses to women engaged in prostitution have further compromised welfare and developmental agendas. At one level, women may be viewed as ‘victims’ of trafficking, those engaged in prostitution out of ‘choice’, or those ‘offending’. At another level, the women are held accountable for disturbing the moral fabric of society that socially defines women’s bodies, work and sexuality. Referring to the Vietnamese context, Vijeyarasa (2010) points out that rather than perceiving trafficking as a violation of human rights, the government pays greater attention to its effects on society and social morals, particularly where victims have engaged in sex work in tourist destination countries. The State’s approach to defining sex work as a social evil reproduces socio-economic inequality and further marginalises the trafficked women.

Thus, the functions of the criminal justice social worker are led by a context where law enforcement and protection overshadow the welfare and developmental approaches. However, as Gallagher and Holmes (2008) have asserted, criminal justice agencies must understand the limits of their influence in addressing trafficking and must not believe that they alone can curb or substantially disrupt the trade. In a related context, Gallagher and Pearson (2010) noted that criminal justice practitioners accept that the rights of victims of human trafficking must be protected to ensure that victims can assist in the investigation and the prosecution of their exploiters. However, the ‘precise contours and limits of that protection are not yet firmly established’ (Gallager & Pearson, 2010, p. 76).

Many of the challenges faced by women exiting prostitution occur from the lack of welfare and developmental approaches. This is evident in the challenges that economic factors pose to women exiting prostitution (Rickard, 2001; Dalla, 2006; Manopaiboon et al., 2003). Ingabire et al. (2012) found that while women described their profession as risky, most did not leave because of financial reasons. The women had limited education and felt that they would not find alternative employment. Rickard (2001) found that education was a major factor in determining other job opportunities and subsequent proportion of adult life spent in sex work. Manopaiboon et al. (2003) asserted that work opportunities were limited by having a low level of education. However, women recognised that unskilled labour positions were available. Månsson and Hedin (1999) reported that one-third of their respondents found themselves in a situation of unemployment and lack of support following their break from prostitution. These women
had not received help in the form of organised activities and support, and had to battle with external difficulties.

An extensive review of earlier literature by Baker, Dalla, and Williamson (2010) classified barriers to exiting prostitution as individual factors (that is, self-destructive behaviour and substance abuse, mental health problems, effects from trauma from adverse childhood, psychological trauma/injury from violence, chronic psychological stress, self-esteem, shame, guilt, physical health problems, lack of knowledge of services), relational factors (that is, limited conventional formal and informal support, strained family relations, pimps, drug dealers and social isolation), and structural factors (that is, employment, job skills, limited employment options, basic needs like housing, education, criminal record, inadequate services), and societal factors (like discrimination and stigma).

Circumstances that facilitated exiting prostitution included a steady and financially supportive relationship, being supported to resume studies or set up a business, taking a bank loan, and finding a friend to cover financial needs. Women returned to sex work to alleviate financial problems when they found that the other employment was difficult and could not adequately meet their financial needs (Ingabire et al., 2012). While asserting the relevance of supportive structures for those who wished to exit, Benoit and Millar (2001) found that those who had permanently exited the trade continued to struggle post-exiting with mental health and related problems that did not end when they left the sex trade.

The subject of exiting prostitution has attracted attention from scholarship across ideological positions on prostitution – that is, sex work as work, commercial sex/prostitution as a form of exploitation, or prostitution as sexual deviance. The harm caused to women engaged in prostitution has been at the centre of earlier research on exiting prostitution. Rickard’s (2001) research in the UK, and Benoit and Millar’s (2001) research in Canada, examined sex work from a work perspective, and exiting sex work was viewed as retirement. Their research recognised the harm caused to persons engaged in sex work. Rickard (2001) observed that sex workers ‘neither save [their money] nor emerge psychologically unscathed from the sex industry’ (p. 115). Benoit and Millar (2001) found that ‘at a more general level the criminal nature of the sex trade in Canada has a dramatic impact on workers’ rights and safety and leaves all respondents at serious risk’ (p. iv). Månsson and Hedin’s (1999) Sweden-based study viewed prostitution as a ‘downdrift’ and exiting from it as an ‘updrift’ (p.68). Saphira and Herbert’s (2004) New Zealand-based study acknowledged the economic gains in prostitution but also noted the costs incurred by women engaged in it. Saphira and Herbert (2004) suggested that the problems faced by those exiting the sex trade were similar to the problems faced by those who had suffered trauma or were recovering from addictions or tragedy.

Dalla’s (2006) US-based study argued that street-level prostitution was dangerous for a multitude of reason. For example, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) transmission through women engaged in sex work prompted Manopaiboon et al.’s (2003) study in northern Thailand; and Ingabire et al.’s (2012) study in Rwanda. Meanwhile, Oselin (2009) and McCray, Wesley, and Rasche’s (2011) studies’ in the United States located their research in intervention programmes in the United States, to study the transition from a deviant identity (associated with prostitution) to a non-deviant identity, and the relationship between stigma management and desistance respectively.

The need for systematic research on the process of exiting prostitution was highlighted by Månsson and Hedin (1999), Dalla (2006), and Baker et al. (2010). There is scarcity of
academic work on the exiting process, with most available literature from the sociological and psychological perspectives. Social work in general and criminal justice social work in particular, have paid less scholarly attention to the process of exiting prostitution. The social work profession constructs its practice from voices of affected persons – that is the clients, and from field practitioners. There is a need for local knowledge, especially knowledge gained from clients (Kondrat, 1995, as cited in Payne, 2005). The way ‘consumers’ (Mayer & Timms, 1970, p. 2) respond to social work requires further exploration. Further, ‘unwritten practice theories’ (Sibeon, 1990, as cited in Payne, 2005, p. 6) and practice-based conceptualisations have to feed into overall social work knowledge.

This paper, based on my doctoral work, is an attempt to further academic discourse on exiting prostitution. The research’s ontological position holds that prostitution entails harm, subordination and regressive practices for women – even if women have normalised it, just like they may have normalised other difficult situations in their lives. Women’s exercise of choice and agency gets undermined by vested interests of commerce, organised crime and gender inequality within the family, community and State structures.

This paper is organised into four parts. The first part summarises the research methodology and conceptualisation, and the second part summarises the key findings of the study. The third part presents a working thesis on exiting prostitution. It is hoped that the thesis is explored, contested and/or strengthened through further scientific inquiry and intervention. This working thesis may be viewed as one among many possible frameworks for criminal justice social work. The fourth part discusses implications for criminal justice social work. This is followed by conclusion.

1. Research Methodology and Conceptualisation

This research was a phenomenological inquiry that used a grounded theory approach, to explore the voices of women with current or former prostitution engagements. Data were collected from fifty-six participants across two districts of the state of Maharashtra, India. Research methods included interviews, focus group discussions and unstructured discussions, observation, and participant observation. Thirty-seven out of the fifty-six participants were interviewed. From those interviewed, life histories of seventeen participants were constructed, and this formed the basis for most research analysis. The data collected from the rest of the participants provided support or challenged trends and contributed to understanding the prostitution context and meanings that women associated with exiting prostitution.

This study conceptualised prostitution in terms of engagements in paid sex (hereafter referred to as commercial sex), and supporting engagements in the prostitution context that were considered criminal (like pimping and managing brothels, use of/contributing to force, deceit, human trafficking) under Indian legislation, and supporting engagements that were not considered criminal (like housework in prostitution sites, guiding customers to women and hotels, running errands, cooking, looking after children, selling food and snacks to customers and other persons earning from prostitution). This conceptualisation received support from earlier studies (Dalla, 2006; Sanders, 2006) that suggested that some women who engaged in commercial sex also engaged in illegal activities. Iacono’s (2014) research on Nigerian women trafficked for prostitution in Italy found that trafficking victims were ‘driven’ by their persecutors to take an active part in trafficking offences over
time (p 110). Further, using Galtung’s (1969, 1990, as cited in Confortini, 2006) theory of personal, structural and cultural violence, prostitution was conceptualised as an outcome and a process of violence. The current study borrowed from Ferracuti and Wolfgang’s (1963) thesis on the subculture of violence, to locate prostitution in such a subculture. Subsequently, the study conceptualised exiting prostitution as disengaging from a subculture of violence. This implied disengagements from commercial sex and other supporting engagements.

2. Key findings

Social, economic, and emotional contexts of disadvantage across life courses, were articulated by participants in the Hindi language as ‘majboori [force of circumstances]’. Life histories of participants indicated financially weak families; gender-specific discrimination that was reflected in deprivation of education, early marriages and loss of claim over family property and assets; disturbed family relationships; loss of parent; domestic violence; stigma due to inter-caste marriage and women’s break from conventional roles; and reduced agency within family structures due to financial dependence on family.

Entry into prostitution was facilitated by an agent who was a stranger, an acquaintance, or a family member. Women reported either being trafficked into prostitution or engaged in it with consent. Trafficking for prostitution was evident in twelve out of the seventeen life histories that were constructed. The ‘consent’ implied willingness to engage in prostitution due to social and economic difficulties. Participants expected and accepted that they would encounter violence in prostitution. Sometimes, the realisation of what prostitution actually entailed, came only after entry. Participants had internalised moral connotations linked with prostitution. For instance, prostitution was viewed as ‘bad work’, and women engaged in it were different from ‘family women’. Prostitution was a choice that was visualised as feasible and in the absence of another option.

Consent and agency in prostitution were fluid. A few participants who were trafficked into prostitution later reported accepting prostitution and carrying on with it ‘willingly’. Over time, they had learnt about prostitution networks and used them to enhance earnings, establish intimate relationships and develop support systems (through, for example, money lenders, friendships, self-help groups). Some women participated in violence when it became a means for their survival, financial gain and increased agency within the prostitution context. Hence, the research did not hold binaries of victims and perpetrators, and women trafficked for prostitution and those who reported consenting to prostitution.

Often, participants held binaries about distinct roles of women within the prostitution context and outside of it respectively. For instance, the prostitution context was often referred to as ‘this line’ or ‘outline’. The context outside of prostitution was referred to as ‘that line’, ‘normal line’, or ‘family line’. Hence, even though exclusivity of the mainstream context was not established by the women, the study retained the term ‘mainstream’. The term was closest to the meanings that participants associated with the contexts. This study took a position that each of the contexts were to be viewed as predominantly prostitution or predominantly mainstream.

The exiting process was explored from three key themes: The breakaway – that was a term borrowed from Månsson and Hedin (1999), to describe initial disengagement from prostitution; women’s experiences while trying to cover distances between the
prostitution context and the mainstream context; and their life following the breakaway. The desire to break away from prostitution was not sufficient to invoke the breakaway. Circumstances that were necessary to facilitate breakaway were being debt-free; having an opportunity to escape; having external social, economic, and/or emotional support; or police action. It was equally essential to visualise a breakaway.

Following the breakaway, women attempted to be part of the mainstream context, notwithstanding the varying levels of physical, economic, social and psychological agency.

Women worked towards developing family ties by establishing intimate relationships and trying to repair relationships with family – especially with children. Economic sustenance was explored through paid employment and self-employment. Women took support from non-government organisations (NGOs) and State structures to re-enter communities. Training and work helped women to re-enter the mainstream.

Responses from formal agencies like police, State welfare departments, and NGOs reflected intentions to facilitate inclusion of women in mainstream structures – at the socio-economic and cultural level. A few participants viewed these responses as an ability to control their behaviour, relationships, decisions and freedom. Participants voiced resistance to directives placed on their behaviour, questions about past experiences and relationships, physical movement, work habits, and routine schedule. Such control methods were especially experienced in institutionalised shelters. Esther, a participant, spoke of her experiences as she tried to adjust to the responses of State and non-state agencies:

I was in such a situation that it was difficult to understand what everyone had to say. And I did not know what to say to people, and how to answer them ... In the [prostitution] area, there is a boundary... So, after getting out from there [prostitution], I wondered ... if I have to fight, how should I fight. If I have to talk, how should I talk. I tell you truly, in the [prostitution] area I lived like a blind, deaf and mute person. After leaving [prostitution], when blindness, deafness and muteness lifted, I felt like there was a valley or a huge mountain. That was most difficult for me ... Especially, when I was sent to a shelter home. The questions, ‘where are you from, why did you come to here, family, etc?’... I was not prepared for those questions. And I do not know what [the agency] would have done with all my answers. For the help, I needed, why so many questions?

Notwithstanding contexts that curtailed women’s freedom in institutional facilities, interactions with the institutional staff significantly influenced the way women made meanings of their experiences. While Muskaan, a participant, spoke about feeling curtailed in the institutional setting, she trusted the probation officer and ‘knew that whatever happens’, she would support her. Meera spoke of how the relationship she developed with her probation officer continued over the next twelve years.

The story of exiting prostitution presents a paradox. On the one hand, women drifted into prostitution due to inadequacy or failure of social institutions. On the other hand, while exiting from prostitution, women attempted to re-enter and negotiate spaces within the same social institutions, specifically family, community and the State. Yet, women desired to exit prostitution.
3. The Working Thesis on Exiting Prostitution

The working thesis on exiting prostitution is based on the following assumptions:

1. *Women face contexts of disadvantage on account of institutional inadequacies.* Central to contexts of economic, social and emotional disadvantage faced by women; is the failure or the inadequacy of social institutions of family, community and the State to address disadvantage. Women’s agency and consent within disadvantaged contexts are compromised.

2. *Departure from social institutions.* Physical, social and cultural departure from social institutions, especially family, and caste/regional/geographical community, begins early in life.

3. *Limited access to assistance.* Given that informal and formal social assistance are mostly located within social institutions, women receive limited support. The cycle of disadvantage continues.

4. *Public failures become a personal disadvantage.* Disadvantage then becomes personalised – for instance – as a matter of personal or family’s financial problems or individual’s difficulty in adjusting or finding options. The women attempt to address disadvantaged contexts with limited personal resources.

5. *Women explore work.* Women explore work to increase their financial and social agency, and to reduce disadvantage. Work helps them obtain some level of control over their lives.

6. *Entry into prostitution happens when breaking the context of disadvantage.* Women attempt to search for opportunities to reduce the context of disadvantage and improve life circumstances for themselves and/or families. Entry into prostitution often occurs during this attempt.

While exiting from prostitution is viewed as disengagement from the prostitution context, the *process* of exiting prostitution is theorised with use of a geographical metaphor, as a matter of distance from the prostitution context. Figure 1 presents the working thesis on exiting prostitution from a distance paradigm (Menezes, 2016). The distance paradigm emerged when several participants did not view the exiting process in terms of complete disengagement from prostitution. Some moved away from commercial sex and engaged in other supporting engagements. Others did not see the prostitution context as exclusive from the mainstream context, as the latter was supported by prostitution engagements or prostitution earnings facilitated re-entry into the mainstream context. Sometimes the prostitution context offered scope to reduce disadvantage in the mainstream.
Figure 1. The Working Thesis on Exiting Prostitution: The Distance Paradigm

**Personal, Structural and Cultural Violence in a Context of Disadvantage**

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<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Prostitution</th>
<th>Re-entering Mainstream</th>
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<td>Context of social, economic and emotional disadvantage</td>
<td>Drift into a subculture of violence</td>
<td>Distancing at these levels:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continued context of disadvantage</td>
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<td>Geographical, Social and emotional, Economic, Psychological</td>
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<td>Support provided/available to women in the mainstream</td>
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<td>Associations in the mainstream context</td>
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<td>Constraint from the prostitution context</td>
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<td>Meaning making of the exiting process</td>
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<td>Autonomy and connectedness</td>
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*Women attempting to reduce the cycle of disadvantage at social, economic and emotional levels*
Opportunities to reduce disadvantage are explored either outside the prostitution context or within it. These opportunities determine the level at which women are distanced from the prostitution context. This, and given the location of prostitution in a subculture of violence, imply that there are three factors central to women’s agency in exiting prostitution: the level of informal and formal support women can access in the mainstream context, whether women’s social and personal relationships (including intimate) facilitate the exiting process, and constraint exercised by the prostitution context. Subsequently, the distancing from the prostitution context takes place at the following levels:

i. **Geographical distancing** involves physical distancing of residence and work from the prostitution context. Geographical proximity to prostitution led women to get identified with the prostitution role; pressure, threat and assault from prostitution agents to return to prostitution; and reduced exposure and access to social networks and formal supports outside prostitution.

ii. **Social and Emotional distancing** is linked with women’s relationships with intimate partners, children, friends, family and neighbours. When the networks were a part of the prostitution context, financially dependent on the women’s earnings, or reminded the women of their prostitution past; there was reduced distancing from the prostitution context. Increased social and emotional distancing from prostitution occurred when families – especially intimate partners, facilitated the exiting process, and were not dependent on prostitution earnings, could psychologically deal with the women’s prostitution identity, and could support or connect women with police or non-state agencies during crisis and emergency situations.

iii. **Economic distancing** involves financial sustenance outside prostitution. Economic engagements assume significance considering that prostitution primarily served an economic purpose. Finding sources of income outside prostitution was associated with developing support systems (for example, crisis support and friendships) and creating alternative identities outside prostitution. When economic engagements outside prostitution were inadequate to meet basic and developmental needs of women and families, women re-entered prostitution wholly or partly.

iv. **Psychological distancing** involves the extent to which women can address past prostitution memories, deal with trauma associated with prostitution engagements, and develop personal and public identities that are not dominantly associated with prostitution. Distancing from prostitution at the geographical, social and emotional, and economic levels influenced psychological distancing from the prostitution context.

Participants’ explorations and negotiations with mainstream systems were significant to the exiting process. Also significant was the mainstream systems’ response to participants’ initiatives and existence. These responses facilitated participants’ experiences of being part of, or apart from the mainstream. Two crucial processes are associated with how women made meanings of their experiences: perceptions of ownership and control, and exploration for autonomy and connectedness. These processes influence, and are influenced, by the distancing from the prostitution context.
v. Ownership and Control: Women’s perceptions of ownership and control emerged from their interactions within formal, informal and intimate relationships. For instance, when ownership over a shelter home and control over its resources were not perceived, the exiting process was viewed with constraint. Similarly, loss of ownership over children and family were associated with loneliness, leading some women to establish new families with partners. When a child welfare officer mistakenly thought that Padma, a participant, was not familiar with English, she remarked in English, ‘She [Padma] is a street woman; she cannot look after the children’. Padma started believing that exiting from prostitution, in fact, weakened her relationships with her children as she had no means to provide for them. When in prostitution, Padma had serviced customers in five-star hotels and had money at her disposal. Her lost income had resulted in the loss of ownership over her children, in comparison to the ownership exercised by the father of the children who earned from trafficking. Besides, she was now referred to a ‘street woman’.

The level of ownership and control experienced by women is significantly influenced by social structures, especially by individuals and agencies that interact with the women. Experiences of ownership and control are also linked with how women understood themselves and their bodies. Coy (2009) borrows from Budgeon (2003) to explain how women’s embodied self was located in the lived relations, ‘involving particular experiences and engagements in certain practices which allow the body to make new, transformative connections. In this way, she moves from experiencing her body as an object to a relation in which the body is lived in terms of what it can do’ (p. 62).

vi. Exploration of Autonomy and Connectedness: Since early lives, women who attempt to break routine and traditional social structures (that this thesis views as women’s attempt to reduce the contexts of disadvantage or to improve their circumstances), exercise autonomy within family and community structures. They stay connected with these structures, by exploring economic sustenance, social supports, identities and roles within. As Gilligan (as cited in Larrabee, 2000) suggests, there is a ‘quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationship that characterises women’s ties’ (p.268). Savita, a participant, spoke about women’s attempts to stay connected with her context – prostitution or mainstream. ‘This line or that line, [one] has to search for a line and hold on to it. But that is possible when one is allowed to’. Savita’s thoughts echoed four related processes during the covering of distances. Firstly, as discussed earlier, women held a view about cultural characteristics of the prostitution and the mainstream context respectively. Secondly, women exercised agency in searching and holding on to a line/context. Thirdly, they attempted to stay connected with their context. Fourthly, the responses of the mainstream (even if unintended), were crucial in helping or hindering the covering of distances.

The exiting process is an exploration of connections within the mainstream context while exercising autonomy about family and community. Women’s agency to exercise autonomy and connectedness in the mainstream was reflected in processes including:

- Saving money to invest in property or live off savings after they disengage from prostitution.
- Exploring shelter, adjusting to available shelter.
- Seeking intimate relationships, companions, friendships, ‘someone who understands’.
The Scope of the Working Thesis

This working thesis offers scope for exploration and intervention in keeping with the voices of women. Firstly, when exiting prostitution is explored from a distance paradigm, it traces the yo-yo pattern (Sanders, 2007, as cited in Baker et al., 2010) of women entering, exiting and re-entering prostitution, rather than focusing on the outcome – complete disengagement from prostitution. The re-entry into prostitution is then not viewed as a ‘failure’ in the exiting process, but rather a part of the process. Subsequently, women’s attempts are appreciated and explored for strengthening it. As Reema, a participant observed succinctly:

*It takes time to get out ... There are so many problems we have to address ... A woman who attempts to get out [from prostitution] may fall several times, but you must see that she is also making herself stronger ... It feels good to get out from there [prostitution].*

Secondly, when women’s attempts are explored in the context of disadvantage, there is a need to place equal, if not more emphasis on external support systems, rather than individual factors. In the Indian context, and in the context of the social and economic context of participants of my study, focus on external support is significant.

This thesis has limitations that emerge from its sample, processes hidden or not visible to me, and my decision to limit analysis to keep it manageable. This thesis hopes to contribute and further the conceptualisation of exiting prostitution – through support, contestation and critique; with the intention to inform policy and field interventions.

4. Implications for Criminal Justice Social Work

The meanings that women give to the exiting experience emerge from their explorations within the prostitution and the mainstream context. Areas of exploration may be considered intervention points by policymakers and interventionists. Figure 2 presents such intervention points. However, they must not be construed as an answer to help women in the exiting process. Anyone seeking answers must ask the women. The complex process of exiting prostitution cannot be understood in terms of merely a few pointers.
Women’s exploration of work must be treated as central to the exiting process. Their drift into prostitution often occurs while they are searching for work. Viewing women exiting prostitution as those desirous of work could lead to structuring policy, legislation, and intervention around the needs of working women. Work is important to the exiting process and for reducing contexts of disadvantage. A work-focused approach could
facilitate women’s experience of autonomy and connectedness with the mainstream context.

When work – rather than the prostitution experience – becomes central to the exiting process, other services are meant to aid women’s work. These other services include legal assistance, training and education, crisis intervention and medical assistance, children’s support, support to agents (for example, customers, partners, family of the women) facilitating the breakaway, assisting women in re-connecting with families and communities, helping women reason and deal with the past, obtain documentation and access to schemes, protective assistance to foreign nationals, and toll-free helplines for women in distress.

Additionally, an area that requires consideration is the role and support of intimate partners in facilitating the breakaway. When partners facilitated the breakaway, there were mostly no accompanying formal supports. For many participants, intimate relationships were one of the key reasons for continuing with prostitution or deciding to disengage from it. Most participants desired to make a breakaway with a partner, but only a few had partners who were willing to support or facilitate the breakaway. Even when partners initially supported and facilitated the breakaway and when they were not dependent on the women’s earnings, the relationship had to withstand the memories that the women and the men had of the prostitution past, expectations from society, patriarchal mindsets that men carried from the mainstream social order, and confrontations with trafficking and prostitution agents. Subsequently, when relationships soured, women were left with no visible support in the mainstream, unless they were in contact with NGOs that they could trust. Extension of support to men and women in the relationship-building may, therefore, is an area for consideration to interventionists.

Conclusion

Exiting from prostitution does not necessarily result in a reduction of disadvantage at social, economic and emotional levels. In the absence of strong social and economic support, women could continue to live constrained lives. Then, it is not a matter of improving lives or reducing disadvantage, but merely subsisting.

This working thesis places onus on structural factors within family, community, and State, to facilitate the exiting process of women involved in prostitution. The interaction between women and social structures influences the meanings women make of their exiting experience. This implies that the designing of formal services must consider the content of the interaction between women and formal services, and how women make meanings of those services. Criminal justice social workers in keeping with the social work mandate of listening to their clients play a crucial role in furthering the agenda of welfare and development of women exiting prostitution.

In line with constitutional morality, the welfare and development agenda to facilitate exiting prostitution must be positioned as a matter of right. This is especially in the context of the Constitution of India in its Article 14, Equality before law; Article 21, Right to life and personal liberty; and Article 23, Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour (Bakshi, 2006). Given that a significant percentage of women engaged in prostitution have faced contexts of social, economic and emotional disadvantage; the responsibility for their exiting from prostitution rests with the State. Also crucial is the recognition of criminal justice social work for facilitating exiting from prostitution. In the
absence of a rights-based approach, and the construction of social work that is based on the voices of women; the participation of women in the exiting process will continue to remain inconsequential and compromised.

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