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'New bill against trafficking may not be beneficial'

By [Prachee Kulkarni](#), Pune Mirror | Apr 18, 2018, 02.30 AM IST



Sex workers claim they were never consulted

A national network of sex workers has claimed that the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention Protection and rehabilitation) Bill 2018 has failed to take the primary stakeholders —sex workers — into consideration. The sex workers have claimed that though this bill aims at stopping trafficking and is expected to affect them on a large scale, it fails to address the basic issue of rehabilitation. Considering this, while the bill is to be tabled in the monsoon session, the organisation has now started a campaign against the bill and is meeting MPs to ensure that their concerns are addressed before the bill is finally approved.

Rina (name changed to protect identity) was taken into custody for working as a sex worker despite being a minor. After her arrest she was sent to a remand home for rehabilitation where she was taught to cook. After spending one and a half months there she was back home where she started working as a sex worker again.

“My mother had to borrow money to get me out of the rehab. This amount was huge and so there was no option for me but to continue working in the same profession. Also the kind of treatment I got there was worse. I was not allowed to talk to anyone and if I tried to approach someone the officials would tell the other kids not to talk to me as she is a ‘dhandewali’. If this is the kind of experience would I even think of rehabilitation?” she said.

“They taught me to make pickle and papad at the rehab. Through this I could barely earn Rs 60 a day. How will I pay for the money that has been spent on getting me out of the rehab? They had to borrow the money from a private money lender who charges an interest of more than 10 per cent. We have to pay it back and this makes it necessary for us to come back to this work,” shared another sex worker.

This is not just her experience and is true of more or less every sex worker who was arrested during a raid. They are now worried that the situation will worsen after the government approves the new anti-trafficking bill. According to the bill, there will be a continued focus of the state on the raid-rescue-rehab model and activists have raised an objection to this.

Meena Seshu of Sangram said, “We recently conducted a research called ‘Raided’ covering the raids that had taken place in the recent past. We found out that almost 77% of the women who were taken away during the raids were back in business. There is overwhelming evidence that the model has been used to forcibly incarcerate sex workers for long periods of time without recourse to judicial mechanisms. This despite sex workers stating that they are adults and consent to being in the profession. But this bill supports continued focus on this system.”

Tejaswi Sevekari of Saheli Sangh added, “They have mentioned that there will be a system for long term stay homes. What difference is the duration going to make? Also they have not given clarity on how much time and the method of rehabilitation”.

Along with this the sex workers have also raised questions on why they are not being consulted though this bill is going to affect them. One of the sex workers said, “They did not even disclose what is there in the draft even when it was tabled. I was in Delhi for four months. But they did not reveal anything to us. We don’t know why they are doing this despite the fact that we will be affected most by the bill.”

Seshu added, “Some consultations were held by WCD but these were mostly with the organisations working in the anti-trafficking sector. None of the sex workers or organisations were consulted”