

We extend our sincerer gratitude to GGBK for facilitating us for conducting this study. It was a wonderful experience for us to learn and understand ground realities of social stigma face by other survivors of human trafficking and we found similarities, dissimilarities between survivors. It also helped us to explore the areas of further intervention and advocacy. Nevertheless, we would also like to thanks our fellow peer members who have extended necessary cooperation in the process of not only data collection but also sharing their feelings, vulnerabilities, different emotions, fear and executing the study.

🏠 Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra
Vill- Rajarlat, P.O.- Canning,
P.S.- Canning Town, Dist- South 24 Parganas,
Pin-743329, West Bengal, India

BandhanMukti Survivors Collective

☎ +91 97754 80681

✉ bandhanmuktisurvivorleaders@gmail.com

🐦 <https://twitter.com/BandhanMukti>

📘 <https://www.facebook.com/Bandhanmukti2011/?ti=as>

Survivors Collective and the Uniqueness



Ground Realities of Social Stigma
Among Survivors Of Human Trafficking

A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS BY
BandhanMukti - A Survivor Alliance

Facilitated by
Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra



Stigma involves negative attitudes or discrimination against someone based on a distinguishing characteristic such as a mental illness, health condition, or disability. Social stigmas can also be related to other characteristics including gender, sexuality, race, religion, and culture. The stigma attached to women trafficked for sexual exploitation is not just present at the end of the trafficking process but from the beginning of it. The social and political impacts of stigma are hatred, intolerance, violence and exploitation of people, greater conflict, and disharmony in communities

The major challenge often starts after reunification with the family and incorporating them in regular societal activities, as appropriate rehabilitation remains the most important measure for the survivors to start living a life with dignity. Rehabilitation comprises of a set of measures that assist individuals who are trafficked, to be free of forced labour, servitude, bonded labour and exploitation and be provided with compensation for physical and psychological trauma, assimilation of the survivors into regular services and protecting them from further stigmatization and discrimination and also ensuring affirmative access to health, welfare and financial services thereby leading to retribution.

The rehabilitation process is closely associated with the appropriate social reintegration of the survivors so that they can thrive in society with dignity.

Purpose of the Study

The Collective of Survivors has been formed to take an initiative in the facilitation of the process of rescue and repatriation of the trafficked women with their families and also to provide them with much-needed courage, support and to stand by them throughout the post repatriation process. Rejection from families and communities is quite a common phenomenon faced by the survivors as they start to resettle and restart their lives in society at large.

The BandhanMukti survivors have been broadly classified under two groups: the leaders and non-leaders. It needs to be clarified in the very first place that this categorisation doesn't have any

hierarchical essence attached to it, rather it simply signifies that the survivors who actively became a part of the leadership program have been defined as leaders for convenience. By virtue of being a part of the leadership program, the leaders are more exposed to daily interactions and are hence more vulnerable to stigma. Whereas the non-leaders who still remain in the confines, do not experience as much stigmatisation as them only because they are not involved in such regular exchanges.

This study has been formulated by Bandhanmukti survivor leaders in unanimity amongst themselves on the common challenges faced by them in pursuing normal life after they have been rehabilitated. Many a time they are subjected to unruly behaviour and taunts from the locals and negligence from the

Prologue

Social stigma has always impeded the path of survivors of human trafficking in their process of recovery, rehabilitation and social integration. The survivors get continued to be blamed and ostracized since the incidence of trafficking, while the offenders get away without taking ownership. Human trafficking is closely associated with processes like social ostracization owing to the stigmatization attached to this entire profession. For example, survivors less often than not go through victim shaming and blaming or even not considered as victims in the first

A statistical analysis from 2018 states that 7% of the total number of cases involving human trafficking across India takes place in West Bengal alone. During the COVID- 19 pandemic-induced lockdown, these incidents have increased manifold. With the help of relevant authorities and rescue organisations, some of them are rescued from these rackets. However, their plight of suffering does not end there.

Unfortunately, the survivors of human trafficking are still perceived negatively in our society and face acute social ostracization and stigma. It has been observed that familial, as well as extended society, are equal participants in making the survivors feel socially excluded.



Bandhanmukti

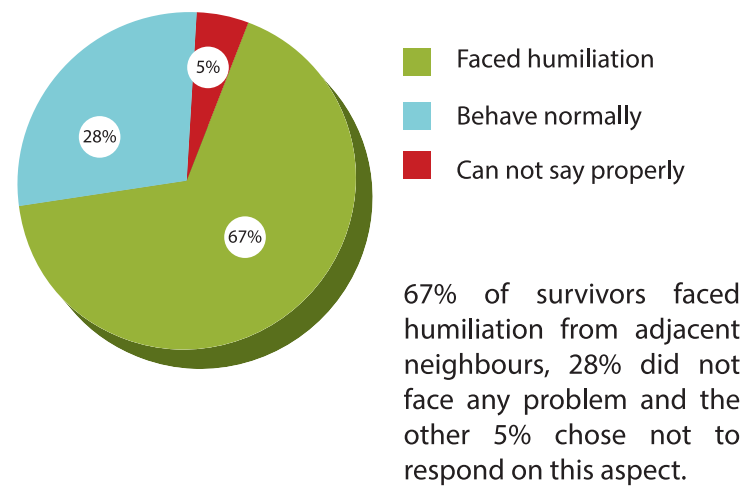
VICTORS NOT VICTIMS

Bandhanmukti is a collective of survivors of human trafficking, other sexual violence, and exploitation, mentored by Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra (GGBK) and now functioning independently in terms of planning and implementing since 2014. Bandhanmukti is a movement of survivors of sex trafficking who are not only becoming an instrument of delivering justice but also contributing to the prevention of human trafficking and child marriage in South 24 Parganas of West Bengal and in collaboration with the Indian Leadership Forum Against Trafficking (ILFAT).

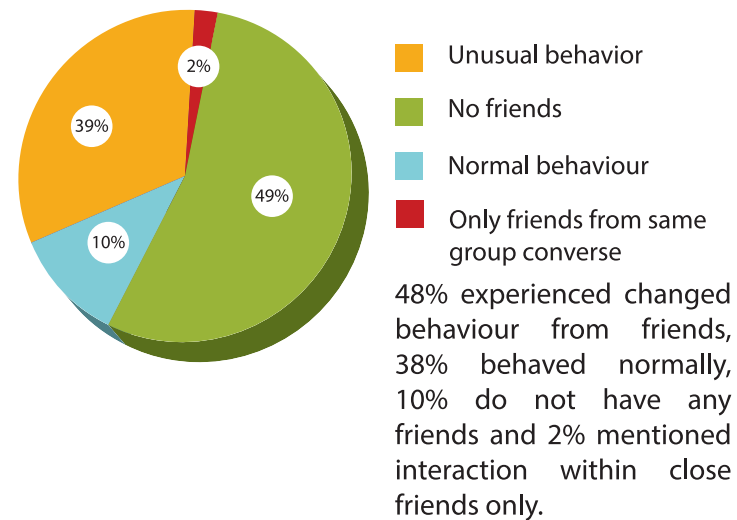
This is a platform for the survivors of sex trafficking to fight stigma at family and community and at all levels of their journey towards justice. The platform also conducts collective advocacy with the administration from local to the national level to ensure justice, legal and policy reform as well as for rehabilitation for the survivors and community people.

Members of the alliance spread awareness about human trafficking in their communities and help survivors to access their rights and entitlements through building linkage with available government schemes. The learning from 'Bandhanmukti' would certainly be the basis of this collective as GGBK has been able to rehabilitate more than 500 survivors of trafficking.

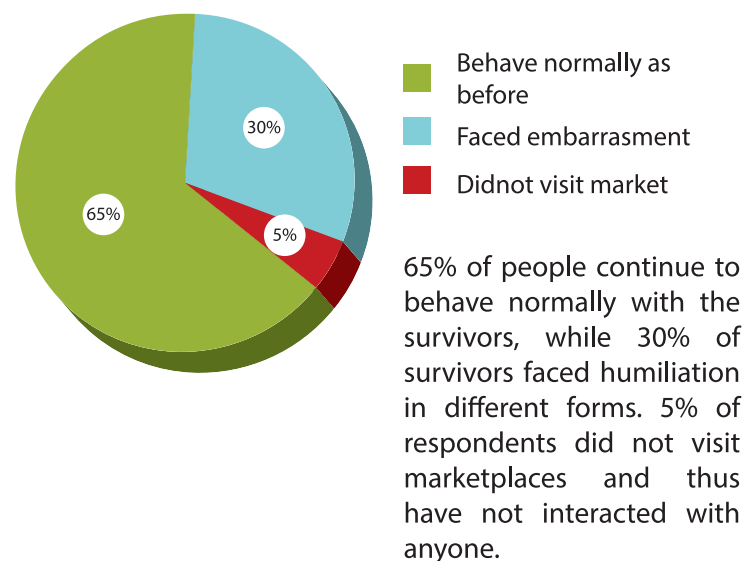
Behavior of neighbours after being rescued



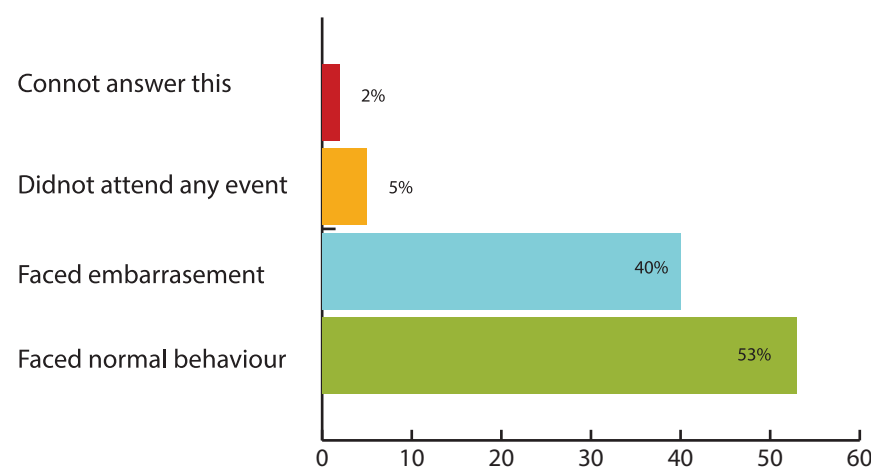
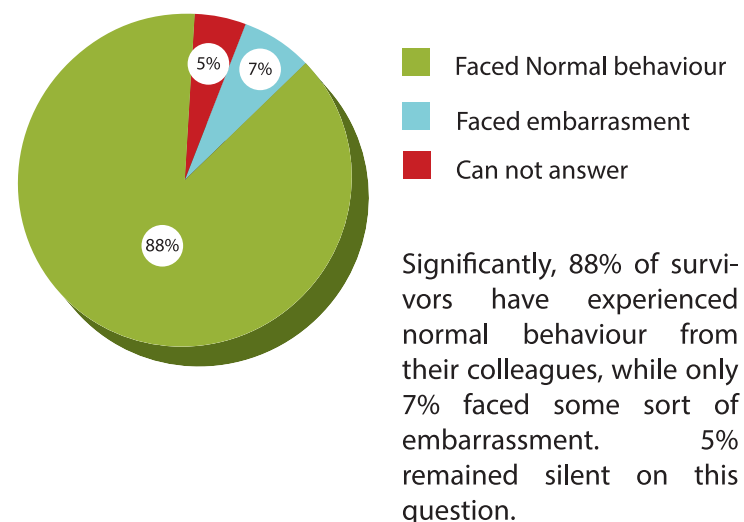
Behavior of friends after being rescued



Behavior of common people



Behavior of colleagues



Behavior faced during family function

The majority, 55% of respondents did not face any misbehaviour during a family function, on the other hand, 40% of respondents faced some sort of embarrassment. 5% did not attend any such event and 2% did not answer this question.

people around, thus refuting the very purpose of offering them a life of dignity. The study has tried to navigate through and identify the issues affecting the social inclusion and rehabilitation of the survivors with regular life situations.

Those who have come in contact with the Bandhanmukti survivor leaders have successively met with greater success in coping with the challenges of social stigma and violence operating at the familial level.

ment and thereby exploring the scope of understanding the ground realities on the scenario of stigma and its impact on the lives of the survivors has been more explicit. The survivors collective 'Bandhan Mukti' members have ardently attempted to bring in the factors that have affected or still affecting the lives of the rescued survivors.

Methodology

The assessment process has been undertaken through an online forum. The online form has been created in consensus with survivors regarding the common challenges faced and thereby suggesting effective and feasible measures to cope with them. A mock session was conducted with the ones associated with the Leadership Programme to verify the data collection tool. Later, the survivors have collected data from other fellow survivors and also captured their own experience in terms of facing the stigma and coping with such vulnerable situations. Experiences and harrowing feelings of the survivors have been considered as major indicators against the questions.

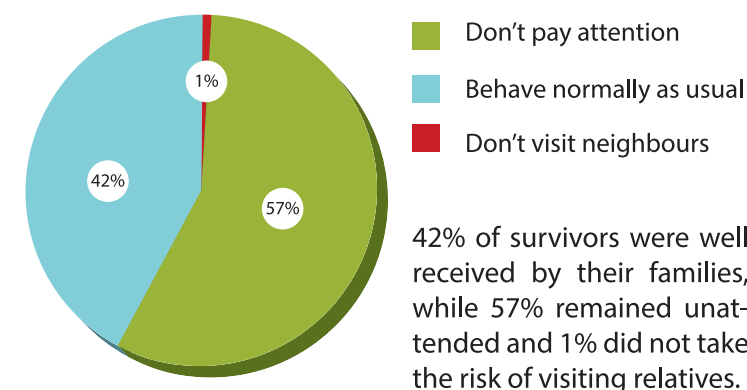
Scope of the Study

In consideration of the vast experience of working for the rights and justice of the survivors of trafficking, GGBK has been successful in establishing itself as one of the leading organisations in West Bengal to advocate for their rights and ensure appropriate justice that the survivors are entitled to. The organisation has constituted the survivors' alliance 'Bandhanmukti' and capacitated them to advocate for their rights and dignity.

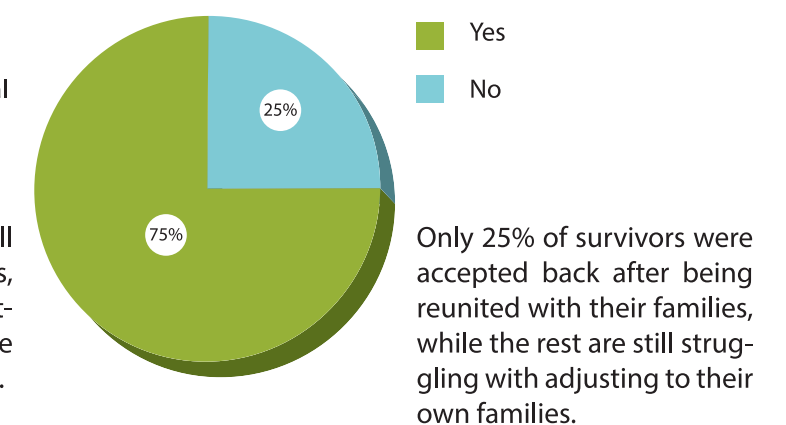
Moreover, the survivors have been brought in alliance and this study has widened the scope of their involve-

Significant Findings

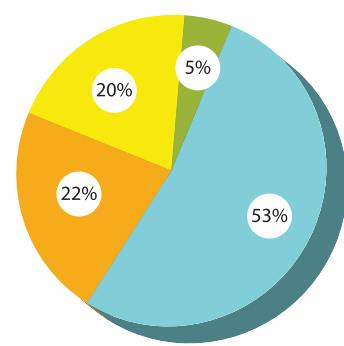
Behavior of relatives after being rescued



Acceptance by family after being rescued



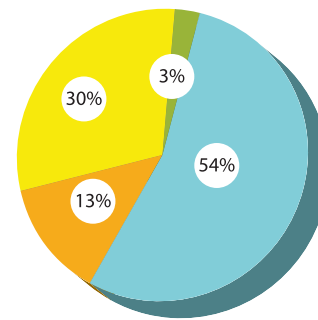
Misbehaviour in market by shop owners



- Tries to explain the truth
- Reacts directly to the shop owners
- Moves to other shops
- Not applicable

Harassment in the market remains a great problem for the survivors. 53% mentioned reacting to such taunts by shop owners, 22% referred to having moved to other shops, interestingly 5% mentioned explaining to the shop owners and 20% did not answer as they do not require going to the market.

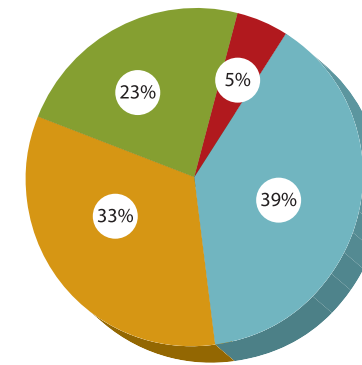
Feelings against misbehaviour of Family members



- Not applicable
- Keeps Silent
- Reacts to the persons
- Feels bad

While the family members misbehave, 54% of respondents try to remain silent, while 30% of respondents have mentioned their bad feeling and 13% mentioned instant reactions to such behaviour. 3% remained silent on this question.

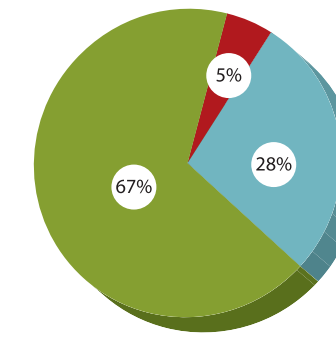
Behavior of Police



- Unusual behaviour
- Behaves in good manner
- Cannot say
- Harassment in different ways

Significantly, 39% of survivors have experienced normal behaviour from police, while 33% faced some sort of harassment, 23% faced some unusual behaviour and the remaining 5% did not respond to this issue.

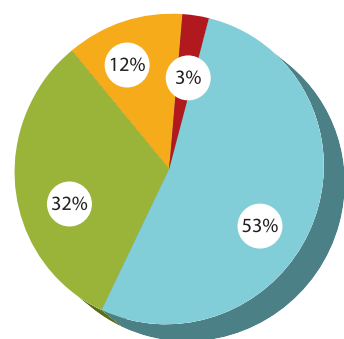
Behaviour of local administration



- Survivors can easily share issues
- Survivors are neglected
- Can not say

Unfortunately, 67% of respondents have referred to have faced ill behaviour from local administration, while only 28% mentioned well-mannered behaviour and the remaining 5% did not answer this question.

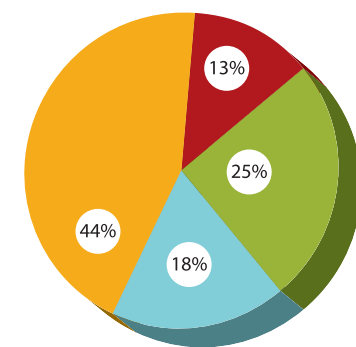
Misbehaviour from neighbours



- Doesnot respond
- Reacts directly to them
- Not Applicable
- Feels angry

In response to misbehaviour from neighbours, 53% generally react directly to them, while 32% prefer not to respond and 3% feel angry, 12% remained silent on this question.

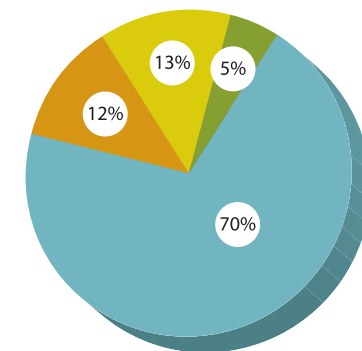
Reactions to misbehaviour from administration



- Return home disappointed
- Answer directly to officers
- Come back and inform other members
- Not applicable
- Can not say

In the case of interacting with local administration, 44% mentioned returning and informing their group members, 18% directly talked with the person concerned, 25% returned home with disappointment and 13% has not interacted with any administrative person so far.

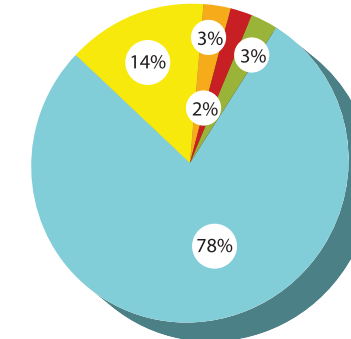
Behavior of Govt. Health Workers



- Can not say
- Behave and treat in desired manner
- Treatment done in improper manner
- Misbehave and donot provide treatment

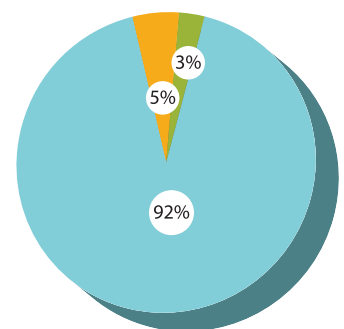
Interestingly, 70% of respondents are satisfied with the behaviour of Govt. Health Workers, 12% are moderately satisfied while 13% have mentioned misbehaviour and 5% did not have to go for treatment.

Behavior of Visitors



- Can not say
- Easily interacts with survivors
- Never interact with survivor
- Family don't allow to interact
- Interacts suspiciously

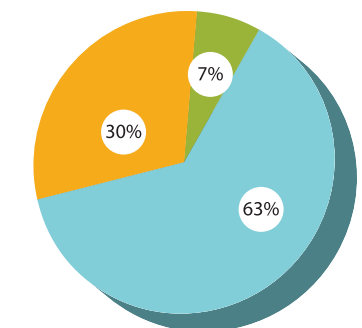
Although 78% mentioned proper behaviour from visitors, 3% have mentioned that visitors kept distances with them, another 2% were not allowed from families to interact with visitors, 3% did not respond to this question.



- Not Applicable
- EXplain to them
- Donot answer

Reaction when someone misunderstands

In case of someone is unable to understand their situation, 92% of them have mentioned that they try to clarify the situation. 5% of respondents have not answered this question while the remaining 3% did not face any such situation.



- Can not say
- Easily interacts with survivors
- Interact and talk suspiciously

Behavior of other NGO workers

Important to note that only 63% of NGO workers interact without any prejudice and 30% of NGO workers still have hesitations to interact freely. 7% of respondents remained silent on this question.

adverse for the survivors' leaders as only 16% of survivor leaders have mentioned that they have received respectful behaviour from police while 54% of non-leaders have reported having received otherwise. The situation for non-leaders is also below satisfactory level as over 46% of non-leaders have also been faced with discrimination from police. It indicates that several sensitization workshops and training could not bring about meaningful changes in the attitude and behaviour of the police personnel, particularly at the police stations.

■ 58% of survivor leaders have mentioned poor responses from the hospital staff while only 10% of non-leaders have mentioned a similar situation. The situation with the health care staff remains the same even after several sensitization and training programmes. The leaders access the health facilities more than the non-leaders and thus they need to meet the health functionaries. The overall experience of interacting with the health functionaries is quite poor for the leaders.

Above are some of the major areas where there are significant differences between the survivor leaders and non-leaders are mentioned. It indicates that leaders have come across several discussions and meetings where they could understand the situations of stigma better than the non-leaders. The understanding level of stigmatization among the non-leaders requires further orientation and exposure. This would certainly enhance their knowledge as well as coping mechanisms with stigma related situations.

Observations

This study has involved 60 survivors from the BandhanMukti team and before the study, they were oriented on the issue of stigma and based on that, questions were finalised.

The study findings indicate that starting from the family members, neighbours and relatives are all involved in the aftermath of humiliation that awaits the survivors.

Similarly, their friends as well harbour a negative understanding of them and behave in discriminatory ways.

Local administration, police and other government workers also require substantial orientation in dealing with them and also minimizing hatred towards them.

Communities still do not have an adequate understanding of the life situation of the survivors, instead, they

continue to blame them for such incidence.

Survivors cannot always keep their composure to deal with this misbehaviour and hatred from all across society. They often lose their patience and retaliate that further affects them adversely.

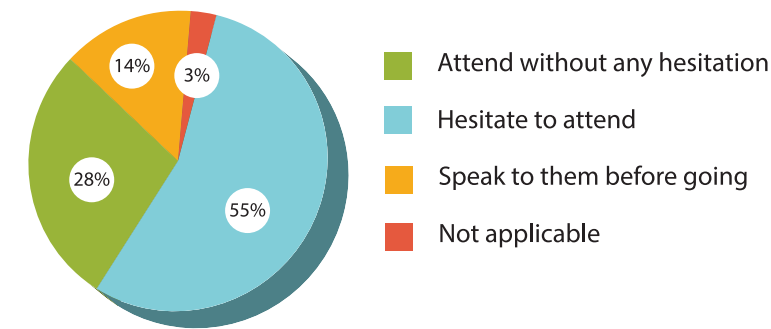
Community-based rehabilitation and non-institutional care are still not priorities in anti-trafficking interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are some of the recommendations which may be taken up to minimize the gap and improve upon the situation.

- Family and community level sensitization to minimize knowledge gaps.
- Liaise with government stakeholders and involve them in the orientation process of communities.
- The Survivors also require communication skills improvement for effective interaction with different stakeholders.
- Wider community sensitization activities and social media communication need to be enhanced.
- More stress has to be given to community-based rehabilitation for the survivors.
- Further sensitization and advocacy are required among the government stakeholders for them to behave appropriately with the survivors.
- The issue of social stigma, mental health and other support system requires to be prioritised across social legislation and schemes of the government.
- Protection of witnesses of the survivors should be taken into consideration by police and hon'ble court.
- The survivors need to be involved in collective planning for their social reintegration and raising voices at the national forums.
- Policy level advocacy is required to prioritise the inclusion of stigma in the national policies and schemes with a clear definition of rehabilitation and access to services from the government.

NOTE: The above analysis has been primarily conducted on the basis of first hand experience of the survivors themselves along with tools for research methodology being formulated by them. External assistance and interference in the above analysis has been kept minimal thereby acknowledging the prima facie case of misconduct and discrimination inflicted on the survivors. It is fundamentally recognised that the survivors would remain the flagbearers when it comes to conducting the research work on their own life experiences as it would not be possible for any other concern to even comprehend those experiences.



Reactions during social events

Attending social events are not preferred by 55% of respondents, 28% thought to attend without any hesitation, 14% speak to persons concerned before going and 3% did not attend any such events so far.

Comparative Findings

There are some important findings apart from the overall findings that indicate that there are significant variations in the responses between the survivors who have been associated with the Leadership Programme and those who are not. It is important to note that the BandhanMukti survivors who took part in this study, have gone through several orientation programmes and other forms of capacity building. The remaining other members have not gone through such orientation and that could be the reason for which they have not been able to feel the impact of stigma on their lives. The understanding of stigma is significantly improved among those being a part of Leadership Programme compared to those who are not. In the following analysis for the sake of convenience, the survivors who actively remained a part of the Leadership programme have been loosely referred to as leaders and the rest as non-leaders, disregarding any hierarchical epistemology.

■ In terms of acceptance by the family members after being reunified, it shows that only 21% of leaders have been well received by their families, compared with 49% among non-leaders. Reasons for this difference in the level of acceptance at the family lies with the post-reunification of the survivors. The leaders are proactive in taking forward the cases for further hearing and mitigation, while the non-leaders do not show such interest to carry on with their cases due to restrictions from their families.

■ It shows that 84% of survivor leaders have either received poor behaviour or have been rejected by their friends, while only 44% of non-leaders have faced the same situation from their friends. The leaders have raised issues of stigmatization during their course of social rehabilitation and discussed with their friends, but their friends could not accept such ways of responding to misbehaviour, while non-leaders did not share such incidences with their friends.

■ 53% of survivor leaders mentioned cordial behaviour

from local shops while 71% of survivor non-leaders have mentioned similar experiences. The leaders who regularly go to market, have received much hostility from the shop owners while the non-leaders hardly go to market and thus they do not face such circumstances.

■ At the workplace, the situation is a bit different in the case of survivor leaders as 95% of them have mentioned appropriate behaviour from their colleagues and it is 83% in the case of non-leaders. The reason behind this is that the leaders interact with several people regularly while the non-leaders interact or meet their colleagues at times of training & workshops. The workplace colleagues are well aware of the situation thus the situation is significantly better for leaders being closely involved almost daily. The non-leaders cannot feel the same as they have a limited scope of interaction with organisation staff or colleagues for several reasons.

■ Acceptance at social or family events for the leaders is at 42% compared with 59% for the non-leaders. The family members of leaders do not like them because they revert to any comment or remarks made by any of their relatives concerning their situation. As a result, they are not warmly received by their relatives.

■ 56% of non-leader have mentioned misbehaviour or rejection from government officials compared with 89% for the survivor leaders. The majority of the leaders regularly put up their applications and demands with the government officials. They also need to interact with the officials at regular intervals to secure their rights and entitlements. The level of discrimination and disrespect thus get sharply reflected in their engagements with the leaders compared to the non-leaders. The non-leaders rarely meet the government officials, which in turn reduces the chance of being humiliated.

■ Interactions with police have been pretty dismal for the majority of the survivors. The situation is extremely