



# Narrative Analysis Report

**Life Stories of Survivors & Children  
and Young Women At-Risk of Commercial  
Sexual Exploitation in Daulatdia, Bangladesh**



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Mashrique Sayem, Surojit Kundu, Jiniya Afroze

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## About Terre des hommes

Tdh is the leading Swiss organization for children's aid, helping over four million children and their families in more than 30 countries. We aspire to a world in which the rights of children, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are always respected. Tdh has been working in Bangladesh since 1974, implementing successful relief, recovery, and development projects in climate-vulnerable areas before extending its response to the Rohingya Crisis in 2017. Tdh now operates through four bases in Kurigram, Dhaka, Teknaf, and Ukhiya, implementing responses in Health, WASH, Child Protection, and Migration.

from commercial sexual exploitation in Daulatdia, Dhaka, Bangladesh.' The overarching goal of the project is to break the cycle of intergenerational commercial sexual exploitation experienced by children and young women in the Daulatdia brothel, thriving toward a future where children are empowered, protected, and free from violence, abuse, and exploitation. The project has received the Modern Slavery Funding provided by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) for the financial year 2023-24.

## About the project

The research, conducted between November 2023 and March 2024 in Bangladesh, forms the basis of this report, implemented by Terre des hommes in partnership with Mukti Mahila Samity as part of the project titled 'Protecting children and young women

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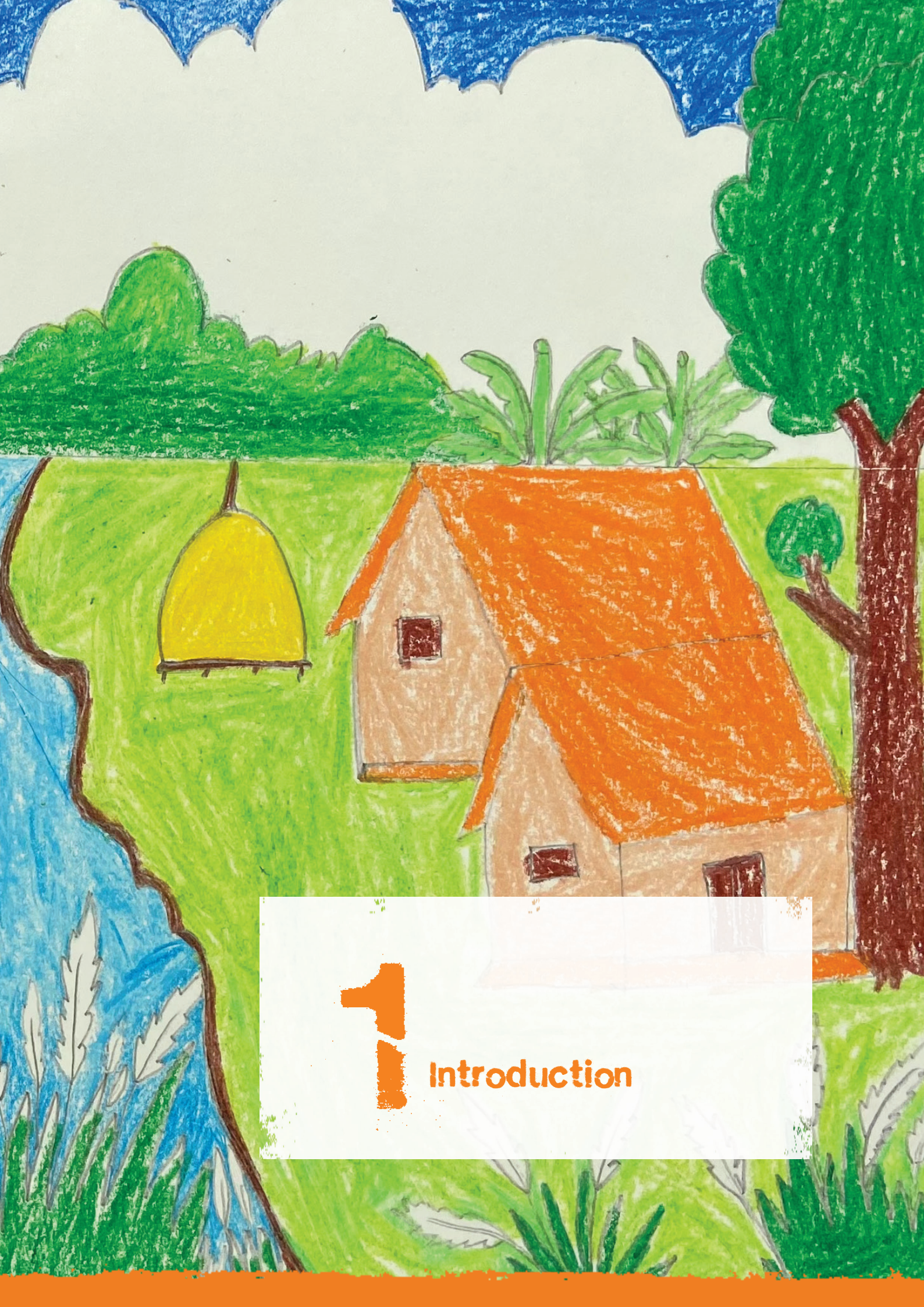
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# Table of contents

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<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Life story collection and narrative analysis methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Life story collection .....	11
2.2 Ethical considerations .....	11
2.3 Narrative analysis of the life stories .....	12
2.3.1 Developing small system maps .....	13
2.3.2 Developing big system map from the small system maps .....	15
<b>3. Causal analysis findings .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 Small system maps .....	17
3.2 Big system map .....	19
<b>4. Findings .....</b>	<b>21</b>
4.1 The causes behind joining sex work in the brothel .....	22
4.2 The consequences of joining sex work in the brothel .....	24
<b>5. Reflections .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>7. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Annex</b>	
Annex 1: Life Story Guideline .....	34



## Introduction

# Introduction

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Daulatdia, one of the largest brothels in the world, is situated in Rajbari, Bangladesh. An estimated 1,300-1,500 sex workers currently operate within the area, along with over 500 of their children [1]. Although several NGOs have been working for decades to ensure that children of sex workers are not engaged in the same profession, pervasive socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, low wages, and social stigma, have made it extremely difficult to sustainably break the inter-generational cycle of sexual exploitation. Moreover, the lack of provision for the social reintegration of sex workers, a lack of alternative income-generating opportunities, and economic exploitation make them more susceptible to abuse and exploitation. Children living in Daulatdia face discrimination and barriers to accessing their basic rights from birth [2] like the right to protection, education, family, etc. Isolated from mainstream society, they lack positive role models and essential life skills. Parenting in such conditions, marked by single female parenthood, societal stigma, irregular working hours, and an unhealthy environment, presents significant challenges.

A participatory research [3] study was conducted in Daulatdia to surface the dynamics that drive children and young women into commercial sexual exploitation and to identify sustainable solutions to break this intergenerational cycle.

Life story approach was used during the research, as it is empowering when people can tell their stories in their own ways and they are heard. 50 life stories were collected and analyzed:

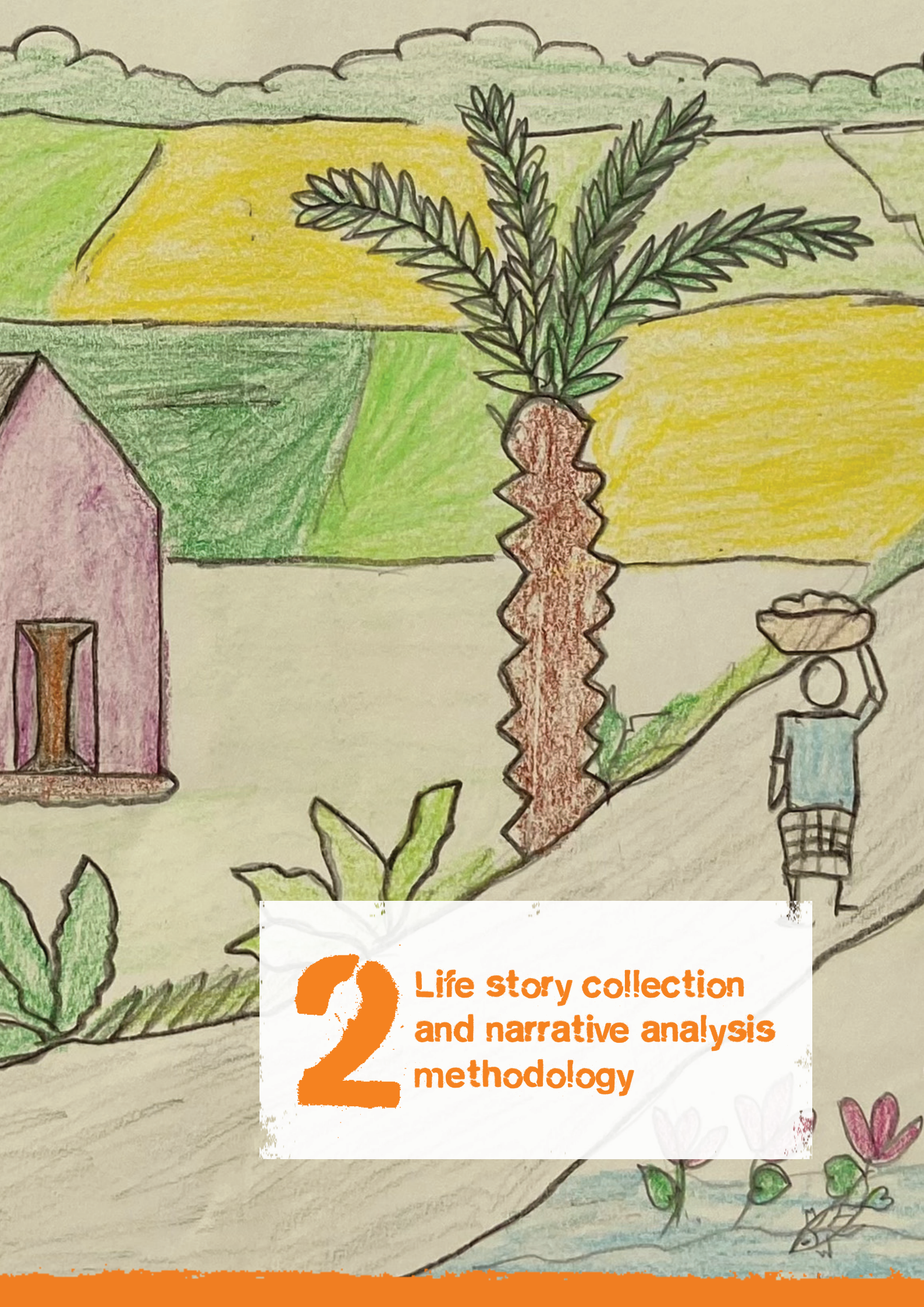
- ▶ To build a comprehensive picture of how children and young women perceive their lives and the options they have.
- ▶ To understand how children and young women are driven into and or make choices to enter sex work and how it impacts on their lives.
- ▶ Identify and understand how to contribute towards a future where children are protected, and free from violence, abuse and exploitation.

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[1] CNN (2020): "She was tricked as a teen into prostitution. A decade on, she has no work and faces starvation": <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/asia/daulatdia-bangladesh-brothel-as-equals-intl/index.html>

[2] Willis, B., Hodgson, I., & Lovich, R. (2014). The health and social well-being of female sex workers' children in Bangladesh: A qualitative study from Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 9(2), 123–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2013.804970>

[3] Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research method in which researchers and participants work together to explore social issues and implement changes for social improvement. This approach encompasses various research methods that involve stakeholders throughout the entire research process.



2

Life story collection  
and narrative analysis  
methodology

# Life story collection and narrative analysis methodology

## 2.1 Life story collection

The stories were collected by the project staffs. Out of the 50 storytellers, 15 were children at risk of sexual exploitation and 35 were practicing sex workers (who are actively involved in sex work and reside inside the brothel). Among them, 13 were aged between 11-17 years and the remaining 37 were aged between 18-25 years. Participants were invited to share their personal experiences, including their journey into sex work, their methods of coping, and their overall living experiences in the area. The focus was on enabling storytellers to share their personal accounts in a natural, unrestrained fashion, free from any predetermined frameworks imposed by researchers (Please see Annex 1 for details on the process of collecting stories).

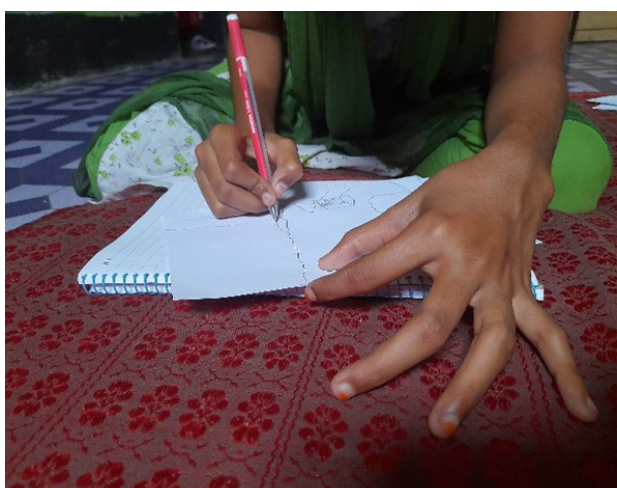
## 2.2 Ethical considerations

In conducting the life story collection sessions for this research, ethical protocols were implemented to ensure a respectful and supportive environment for participants. Firstly, utmost priority was placed

on preserving the privacy and confidentiality of the storytellers. Prior to the sessions, storytellers were contacted to determine their preferred timing, and they were granted complete freedom to select the storytelling venue. Some chose to share their stories at the office of the implementing partner NGO and others opted for the comfort of their own homes. Written consent was obtained from each participant, with additional consent sought from parents or guardians for individuals under eighteen. Participants were offered to request breaks or withdraw their participation at any point in the research. Rapport-building activities, such as small ice-breaking games, were used before beginning the story collection process.

Sensitivity to trauma was maintained by avoiding unnecessary re-telling of traumatic stories and using triggering language. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying details were removed from transcriptions, and a secure coding system was employed for data storage. Access to recordings was strictly limited to a selected team member directly involved in the research. Researchers were trained in psychosocial first aid and remained available to address any instances of trauma or abuse that may arise. Overall, the ethical framework guiding this research reflects

**Figure 1:** Life story collection



a deep commitment to respecting the rights, dignity, and safety of children and young women affected by commercial sexual exploitation, while simultaneously advancing our understanding of this complex and important issue.

## 2.3 Narrative analysis of the life stories

Narrative analysis of life stories helps identify essential 'causal links' (events with causes and consequences) and understand how they relate to one another as a system map. This was accomplished by reading the stories one by one, identifying the factors, and connecting them with arrows in small system maps, which were then incorporated into larger system maps. Initially, it was decided that the storytellers themselves would conduct the narrative analysis of their life stories. However, upon careful review by the story collectors following transcription, it became evident that numerous identifying details such as anecdotes, family histories, and personal experiences were embedded within the stories. These details were such that individuals from the Daulatdia brothel or neighbouring areas could easily recognize the storyteller due to the close-knit nature of the community which could pose a significant threat to the confidentiality of the storytellers and can undermine the ethical integrity of the entire process. Furthermore, it was realized that removing these identifiers would compromise the authenticity of the stories, stripping them of their essence. Considering all these, it was decided that the analysis of the stories would be undertaken by project staff members. The narrative analysis was implemented through a 5-day workshop, which was divided into two parts:

- ▶ Creation of 50 small system maps from 50 stories.
- ▶ Creation of one big system map from the 50 small system maps.

Figure 2: The big system map analysis process





### 2.3.1 Developing small system maps

A total of 50 small system maps were developed from 50 life stories. During the analysis, the analysts (project staff) identified essential “factors” to

understand how they causally relate to one another. They read the life stories, identified factors, and connected them with arrows in small system maps. An example is given in figure 3.



### 2.3.2 Developing big system map from the small system maps

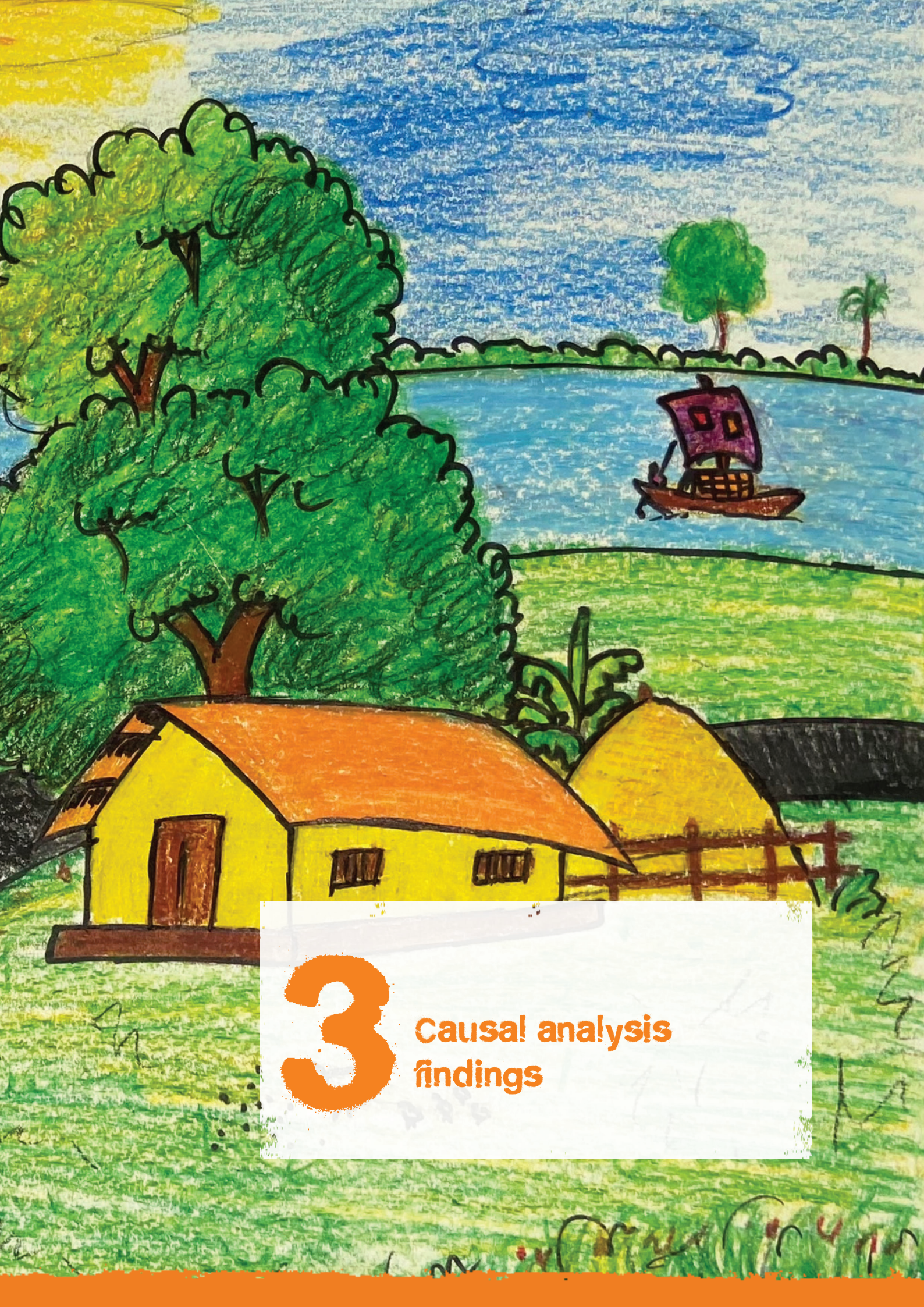
The next step of the narrative analysis process was to develop a big system map from 50 small system maps. The big system map allowed dominant patterns and system dynamics to be observed across the life stories. 12 project staffs, divided into 6 pairs did the analysis of the life stories.

During the life story analysis, participants made lines connecting different points thicker if those connections were mentioned more frequently in the stories. They reviewed smaller maps to count how many times a specific connection appeared. The number of times the lines were thickened was written next to each one. The thick and thin line depicts how strong or less strong the causal links are depending

on the number of times they appeared in each story (see Figure 4). In the workshop, each pair checked a specific number of stories to count repeated connections and shared these counts with the entire group. The total counts from all participants were added together and recorded on the big system map.

During the workshop, the analysts teamed up to review the stories they were assigned, searching for connections. The number of connections identified by each pair was then tallied up for the entire group. This method added an extra layer of confirmation as connections were verified in small groups. Incorporating the findings from the smaller maps into the larger map helped us gain insight into the factors influencing children and young women's involvement in sex work and its effects on their lives. It also sparked ideas on how to disrupt the cycle of intergenerational commercial sexual exploitation in the Daulatdia brothel.





3

**Causal analysis  
findings**





Just as with these two small system maps, when an additional 48 small maps were integrated into a larger system map, consolidating all the connections between factors, the causal relationships influencing

individuals to enter sex work and how the lives of those living within and around the brothel (both practicing sex workers and children at risk) are affected became clear.

## 3.2 Big system map

When a big system map was developed from the 50 small system maps, a total of 22 linkages were

identified which were critical for the children and young women living in the Daulatdia brothel and adjacent area. The following table shows the most prevalent causal linkages from the big system map.

**Table 1:** Prominant linkages from the big system map

Sl. No.	Cause	Effect	Frequency <sup>[4]</sup>
1	Family poverty	Getting involved in sex work	25
2	After involving in sex work	Income generation, gaining assets	19
3	After involving in sex work	Encountered physical, mental and sexual abuse	19
4	After involving in sex work	Getting fixed clients	18
5	After joining brothel	Getting involved in romantic relationship or getting married	17
6	Taking Loan	Becoming bonded worker	13
7	Sold by family members	Getting involved in sex work	13
8	Trafficked, betrayed, and sold by other people	Getting involved in sex work	13
9	Padma bridge, national election, COVID-19	Decrease of customers (less income)	13
10	Physical torture	Divorce	11
11	Deception by others	Getting involved in sex work	10
12	Mental abuse	After getting involved in sex work	10

[4] Frequency refers to the number of times linkage was recorded on a big system map (from a total of 50 life stories).

Sl. No.	Cause	Effect	Frequency [4]
13	After involving in sex work	Deterioration of health	9
14	After joining brothel	Addicted to drug	8
15	Trusting someone without much thinking	Taking uncalculated risks	7
16	After joining brothel	Obtaining license by giving bribe	7
17	Children without parents	Victims of abuse by relatives or other people	6
18	Death of parents	Led to poverty	6
19	False assurance of job	Getting involved in sex work	6
20	Extramarital affair	Led to divorce	4
21	Limited income	Planning to go abroad	3
22	After getting involved in romantic relationship	Getting involved in sex work	2



# 4 Findings

# Findings

In the process of analysing the life stories, many interconnected causal factors were uncovered, unveiling a complex network of influences propelling children and young women into sex work.

In the following section, the findings from the big system map (major trends with higher frequencies) have been discussed. The findings from the big map can be divided into two broader categories; the causes behind joining sex work in the brothel and the consequences of getting involved in sex work.

## 4.1 The causes behind joining sex work in the brothel

### *Poverty*

Poverty emerged as one of the most important factors (observed in 25 stories) driving individuals into sex work within the brothel environment.

In stories from practicing sex worker participants, a recurring theme emerged where financial hardships within their families compelled them to seek employment. Their pursuit of employment often led to victimization through fraud or deception. Many were promised legitimate job opportunities but were ultimately coerced into sex work upon arrival at the brothel. Despite their desire to leave, the pressing need to support their families financially kept them trapped in this profession. In most instances, these individuals provided financial support to their families, concealing their profession from their loved ones.

In some cases, familial instability, aggravated by a father's addiction to drugs and gambling, resulted in separation from the family. Afterwards, mothers were forced to seek employment in the brothel to sustain their children in the brothel. This perpetuated a cycle where daughters followed in their mothers' footsteps due to economic necessity.

Financial constraints often hindered children's access to education, depriving them of essential skills and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. The absence of parental care further exacerbated the situation.

Children without parents often live with their relatives. Sometimes they face abuse (mostly sexual) from their relatives. So, a few stories reveal that to get rid of the abuse, they tend to run away from their relatives' houses and end up in a brothel. Sometimes they also think that they have faced sexual abuse before, and so brothel is not going to make any difference in their lives. Hence, they end up in a brothel.

Children at risk residing within the brothel shared similar narratives, albeit from the perspective of witnessing their mothers' experiences. They recounted accompanying their mothers to the brothel, driven by the same financial hardships outlined above.

### *Deception*

The stories revealed that close family members including husbands and mothers, known and unknown individuals were involved in deceiving and selling the individuals.

#### **Deception by family members**

There were cases where family members themselves sold their wives, sisters, and daughters to brothels. The price for such transactions typically ranged between BDT 50,000 to 100,000 (Pound 375-750).

In some accounts, mothers resorted to selling their daughters due to dire financial circumstances, while husbands and brothers traded their wives and sisters to fuel their habits of drug addiction and gambling. Fathers also sold their daughters under false pretences, promising them respectable employment while concealing the realities of brothel life.

After being sold, the women were forced to work as bonded workers for the brothel owners. When they realized the truth about their situation, they wanted to leave and stop doing sex work. But they quickly realized it was not possible to escape, as they had to pay back the money they were sold for. Stuck in this situation, they had no choice but to keep enduring the challenging life.

### **Deception by individuals known to the children and women**

Girls and women occasionally fell victim to trafficking or betrayal, leading to their sell into brothels. This circumstance primarily affected children from families with unstable relationships or facing financial hardship.

When they sought refuge and employment, they were deceived by someone they knew. False promises of jobs masked the reality of being sold into brothels. This betrayal occurred to those seeking to support themselves as well as individuals striving to provide for their families.

Similarly, tales also depicted instances where girls from seemingly ordinary families found themselves compelled to seek employment to alleviate financial burdens at home. Acquaintances—be they friends or neighbours—exploited their vulnerability by offering false assurances of job prospects, ultimately leading them into the of brothels.

### **Deception by unknown individuals/middlemen**

The stories revealed a common thread among individuals who hailed from families with step-parents—a backdrop of tumultuous family dynamics marked by mental, physical, and sexual abuse. Faced with unbearable circumstances, these individuals

harboured a desperate desire to escape their familial environment and seek refuge elsewhere. When they ventured out in search of employment, they fell prey to middlemen who promised new opportunities, only to betray them by selling them into brothels.

### **Deception faced by divorced women**

Women were often forced to endure physical violence inflicted by their in-laws or spouses, leading to divorce. This reality was observed across both groups—those who were married prior to entering the brothel and those who married after.

For those married before entering the brothel, divorce often became a catalyst for their entry into the brothel. Some were subjected to violence over dowry disputes or suffered at the hands of their drug-addicted partners for financial gain. Upon divorce, whether with or without children, these women found themselves in challenging circumstances. Returning to their paternal homes was often not an option due to societal stigma and the fear of facing judgment from neighbours. Left with no support system and the responsibility of caring for their children, many saw joining a brothel as their only viable option for survival.

Some of these women, while seeking alternative employment after divorce, were deceived by acquaintances who promised them legitimate jobs, only to be sold into the brothel trade.

### ***Voices of practicing sex workers***

*“When my mother brought me here, the family situation was not good, my father used to gamble, and then my mother came to this brothel, it is better to stay here than staying at home, because no one will fight, no one will abuse, we are at peace (said in a satirical tone) ...my mother keeps on asking about money all the time.” (22 years old woman)*

*“My mother faced an accident when she was 35-40 years old, the doctors strictly said she needs proper bed rest, by then house owner was asking for the rent, this hurt our ego, then I told myself I need to pay back the money anyhow, I left education and then I told my house owner what do I need to do to pay back the money? She said to stay with her, she then said you have to stay for one year” (23 years old woman)*

*“My mother lived in Dhaka, when my father went to work, Amma stayed at home and kept me in the room. Later dropped me to someone’s room in Dhaka, I still didn’t understand. Later, I was told to do this work (sex), but I did not do it, then mother beat me.” (22 years old woman)*

### ***Taking risks after trusting someone***

The comprehensive analysis from the big system map unveiled a poignant truth: seven cases revealed a direct correlation between taking risks after placing trust in someone and ultimately finding oneself in a brothel. The data highlighted that the individuals, coerced into brothels against their will, were often already grappling with difficult circumstances. Some endured volatile family lives and wanted to escape, while others desperately sought employment to support their families. Additionally, there were divorcees struggling to provide for their children. When someone offered sympathy or promised jobs, they trusted them fully. But found themselves deceived and ended up in brothels. Their longing for trust, coupled with the relentless challenges they faced, made them vulnerable to exploitation.

### ***Mental abuse leading to joining sex work***

Analysis of 10 stories revealed another trend: mental abuse faced within families often forced individuals into the realm of sex work. This phenomenon unfolded in two distinct scenarios: firstly, within their own households, individuals confronted mental abuse inflicted by step-parents, reaching a breaking point that prompted them to leave home in search of new employment opportunities. This quest often led them to brothels, as previously explained. Secondly, when subjected to mental abuse by in-laws or spouses, individuals sought refuge in divorce. However, as they embarked on their job search post-divorce, they were defrauded by people who promised jobs but sold them to brothel.

## **4.2 The consequences of joining sex work in the brothel**

### ***Increased earnings and acquiring assets***

Sex work was perceived as a sustainable source of income and a means of acquiring assets by the sex workers. While some stories indicated fluctuations in income due to external factors (e.g., establishment of the Padma Bridge, national elections, and the COVID-19 pandemic), a consistent level of income continued. Storytellers mentioned that they allocated a portion of their earnings to support family members residing in villages, often without disclosing their

profession. Additionally, they reported using their earnings to purchase food, clothing, and educational necessities for themselves and their children living in the brothel.

In some stories shared by children at risk, it was revealed that prior to residing in the Daulatdia brothel with their mothers, they faced barriers to education due to poverty. However, with the financial resources provided by their mothers' earnings from sex work, they were able to access education.

Approximately 19 stories highlighted how earnings from sex work were utilized to acquire assets such as land, houses, and livestock, with some individuals opting to invest their money in fixed deposits in banks. Some expressed their willingness to leave the brothel and pursue better opportunities in future by utilizing the assets.

### ***Suffering physical, mental and sexual abuse***

A prevalent trend identified from the comprehensive analysis of the big system map was the experience of physical, mental, and sexual abuse after joining the brothel. Despite not being directly involved in sex work, children at risk faced social stigma due to their association with family members who were workers. Repeatedly, their stories highlighted instances of mental abuse inflicted by those around them. They recounted struggles such as being ostracized at school, facing teasing and harassment from people in the streets, and experiencing improper treatment from individuals in the adjacent area solely because of their residence within the brothel. These negative encounters had a detrimental impact on their mental well-being.

Sex workers faced routine physical, mental, and sexual abuse upon entering the brothel. Physical abuse often commenced upon their arrival at the brothel, with many finding themselves there involuntarily. Refusal to engage in sexual activities for money frequently resulted in physical violence from landladies (known as shurdarnis or bariwalis).

In some cases, sex workers were coerced into sexual activities against their will. Landladies abused them mentally for refusing to serve specific customers. In addition to other customers, "babus" (fixed clients with whom sex workers had a special relationship) also abused them physically. Sexual abuse while serving

customers was also reported by many participants. Among the 19 stories examined, 12 narrated cases where the storytellers fell ill due to the persistent physical and sexual abuse faced as a result of consecutively engaging in sex work within the brothel.

### ***Getting fixed clients***

An emerging trend highlighted by the big system map was the connection between storytellers and their “babus”. Among the stories, 18 stories depicted the dynamics between a sex worker and her “babu”, illustrating how the life of a sex worker revolved around this consistent relationship.

While some instances reveal romantic connections between storytellers and their patrons, this isn’t universally the case. Analysis of the broader picture revealed that upon entering the brothel, sex workers often establish bonds with specific clients, granting them priority over others. In many instances, these fixed clients also serve as intermediaries, effectively functioning as pimps by bringing in additional customers for the sex workers.

The sex workers occasionally financially support their “babus”, with some even providing substantial sums to help launch new ventures. In return, these patrons offer protection within the unstable environment of the brothel, acting as guardians for the sex workers. These “babus” may lead separate lives outside the brothel, yet remain loyal solely to their chosen courtesan within its confines. Some sex workers express deep affection for their “babus” while others harbour aspirations of leaving the brothel behind to start anew with their patrons.

Some “babus” exploit their position, subjecting sex workers to physical abuse for financial gain or pressuring them to entertain excessive numbers of clients. Instances of betrayal also emerged, with sex workers being cheated out of their earnings by unscrupulous patrons.

In summary, while relationships between storytellers and their “babus” can encompass elements of protection, affection, and mutual support, they also harbour risks of exploitation, abuse, and substance dependence, reflecting the complex nature of life within the brothel environment.

### ***Getting involved in romantic relationship or getting married***

Analysis of the big map revealed various trajectories individuals took upon entering the brothel environment. Some chose to pursue romantic relationships or even marriage, often with their regular clients. Others became involved with residents engaged in different professions within the brothel, such as tailors or shopkeepers.

Among the 17 stories examined, 7 depicted successful outcomes where individuals encountered no significant challenges following their romantic relationships or marriages. However, the remaining 10 stories presented less favorable scenarios. There were challenges when the groom’s family refused to accept a former sex worker, leading to separation. Additionally, instances of betrayal were reported, with partners absconding with the individual’s earnings.

None of the stories indicated individuals leaving the brothel following marriage or romantic involvement. Instead they continued their work. There were also accounts of three children born to parents who had married within the brothel, highlighting the intergenerational nature of life within these environments.

### ***Becoming bonded worker after taking loans***

Storytellers who are practicing sex work faced direct consequences, grappling with the burdens of debt, while children at risk suffered indirectly due to their mothers’ indebtedness to lenders.

In examining 13 stories, a recurring theme emerged: individuals becoming bonded workers after acquiring loans from various sources. Upon entering a brothel, registration at the police station is mandatory. Underaged individuals often resort to hefty bribes to secure registration, necessitating loans. Frequently, these loans are procured from landladies or binding the borrower to the lender until the loan, with interest, is repaid.

Individuals sold into brothels by their families or other agents must reimburse the landlady the purchase price, typically ranging from BDT 50,000 to 100,000. (Pound 375-750) Until this debt is settled, the individual remains trapped in bondage and are unable to leave

or pursue independent ventures. Financial strains, exacerbated by external factors (e.g., loans, no alternative job opportunities, inability to go back to their families) force practicing sex workers to resort to loans, further entrenching themselves in bondage.

Some individuals deliberately refrain from fully repaying their debts, citing a need for protection from their landladies within the volatile brothel environment. They prioritize this perceived security over financial freedom, as they fear repercussions if they were to repay their debts entirely.

This pattern underscores the reality faced by bonded sex workers who are perpetually obligated to relinquish a portion of their earnings to lenders. Their autonomy is compromised, rendering them unable to free themselves from sex work. The complexities of financial entanglement and the necessity of protection within the brothel create a precarious situation, highlighting the multifaceted challenges inherent in this environment.

#### ***Less customer/less income due to external factors***

Analysis of the data from the big system map revealed a trend among 13 individuals who reported a significant decline in their customer base, resulting in a drastic reduction in income. Some lamented a staggering drop from monthly earnings of BDT 200,000 to 300,000 (Pound 1500-2250) to a mere BDT 30,000 to 40,000 (pound 250-300). They attributed this downturn to three external factors: the construction of the Padma bridge, national elections, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the completion of the Padma bridge, potential customers often spent nights at ferry terminals, some of whom would subsequently patronize the brothels. However, with the bridge rendering ferry crossings obsolete, the number of customers declined, leading to decreased income for sex workers. Additionally, the inherently unstable nature of brothel environment deterred potential clients, particularly during times of political unrest such as national elections.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the situation, as nationwide lockdowns severely restricted movement, effectively halting business operations. Guards stationed at brothel entrances enforced strict containment measures, preventing anyone from entering or exiting, further compounding the financial stress of sex workers.

Faced with reduced income, many sex workers resorted to acquiring loans at exorbitant interest rates to make ends meet. However, this plunged them back into the cycle of indebtedness, forcing them to be bonded workers once again.

#### ***Deteriorating health***

Engaging in sex work has detrimental effects on the health of sex workers. The narratives revealed a constant risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) from customers who refused to use protection during sexual encounters. Despite advocating for safe practices, sex workers often find themselves exposed to these risks. They also have limited access to proper medical treatment in case of illness. The stories of nine individuals underscored a pattern of deteriorating health following their entry into sex work at the brothel.

In the absence of adequate healthcare facilities, sex workers often sought assistance from paramedics for health-related issues and did not always receive treatment from qualified doctors. Sometimes they had to cater to numerous customers in a single day, which took a toll on their health and well-being. Instances of illness stemming from physical abuse inflicted by customers or brothel owners further exacerbated their health condition.

Additionally, a concerning trend emerged within brothels, where sex workers were coerced into consuming tablets intended for livestock under the belief that it would enhance their health and attractiveness to customers. These tablets were unsuitable for human consumption, which led to adverse health effects for some individuals.

#### ***Becoming addicted to drugs***

The atmosphere within the brothel fosters a culture of substance abuse, making it difficult for individuals to refrain themselves from addiction. Eight individuals admitted that they had become addicted to drugs following their entry into the brothel and acknowledged the profound physical and financial toll it had taken on their lives.

Drugs and alcohol are easily available inside the brothel. Some storytellers recounted how they became abusing drugs through exposure to drugs and alcohol consumed by their customers. Some “babus” actively encouraged and facilitated their addiction to drugs

in anticipation of future consumption needs. Once addicted, individuals found themselves trapped in a cycle of spending money on both themselves and their fixed clients to sustain their habit.

Moreover, the analysis revealed a pervasive sense of sadness and despair among those residing inside the brothel, prompting many to turn to drugs and alcohol as a means of numbing the emotional pain. Despite recognizing the harmful consequences of their addiction and the inability to save money due to their habit, individuals found themselves unable to break free from the habit.

### ***Obtaining license by giving bribe***

The regulation stipulates that anyone starting work in a brothel must procure a license from the local authorities. Without this license, their work is deemed illegal. In some cases, individuals are compelled to offer bribes to the local law enforcement authorities to secure licenses. If an individual is underaged, they may need to provide additional bribes to falsify their age in the documents.

Upon arriving at the brothel, individuals often lack the necessary funds. As a result, they resort to borrowing money from the landladies to pay the bribes required for obtaining licenses. This arrangement transforms them into bonded workers for the landlady, obligating them to surrender a portion of their earnings daily until the loan is repaid. In some instances, individuals become so trapped by these loans that freeing themselves becomes challenging.

### ***Intergenerational influence and continuation of sex Work***

Those who were born and brought up in brothels are caught in a cycle of intergenerational abuse and exploitation. They suffer from abusive attacks and sexual violence and there is social pressure to engage in sex work. The daily environment of brothels is risky for any child and they are vulnerable to abuse by customers.

### ***Voices of children at risk and practicing sex workers***

*"We were living in a terrible family condition when my sister started this job. My father doesn't give us money, my mother has quit her job, so the family is very poor. We would have perished from starvation if my sister hadn't started this task. So, my sister joined the work after struggling a lot."*  
(19 years old girl)

*"Suppose I do not engage in this work, but if I go to any of my aunt's homes at night, other people blame me, suggesting that I may be involved in this work. I usually reply that if I were to engage in it, I would do so openly, not secretly."*  
(19 years old girl)

*"Many people ask my mother, 'Why don't you engage your daughter in this work?' They also ask me, 'Why are you not getting engaged?'"*  
(16 years old girl)



5

Reflections

# Reflections

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Initially, the researchers aimed for participatory narrative analysis involving respondents, however, they adapted the approach due to ethical concerns. Life storytelling fostered a free-flowing discussion as participants felt comfortable in sharing the narratives they wanted to tell rather than the researchers prompting specific questions. It is important for researchers to have strong psychosocial awareness and to conduct sensitive research activities like this. Prioritizing respondents' time and ensuring a comfortable interview setting emerged as crucial factors, which emphasizes the significance of respecting participants' autonomy and well-being.

Given the challenging nature of the research context, the researchers were mindful of the potential for backlash therefore measures were implemented to safeguard the well-being of the research team. Regular debriefing sessions were conducted among the researchers and the management team, allowing

researchers to process any emotional responses and seek support as needed. These sessions provided a safe space for team members to express their thoughts and feelings and seek mutual support. Furthermore, the researchers were also offered professional counseling support if needed. This ensured that resources were available to address any psychological distress that may have arisen throughout the research process. Moreover, peer support was available within the research team, allowing colleagues to lean on one another for guidance, encouragement, and solidarity. This served as a valuable source of emotional support, enabling researchers to navigate the challenges of their work with resilience and empathy.

As the researchers collected and analyzed the stories shared by the children and women without triangulation, it is possible that some stories did not capture the full picture, as people have a tendency to self-censor while sharing stories of their lives.



6

Recommendations

# Recommendations

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The recommendations were drafted following the inputs given by the children and women who shared stories as well as the analysis done by the researchers.

- ▶ Establish accessible psychosocial support services specifically designed for children and young women to address their diverse mental health needs and promote emotional well-being.
- ▶ Implement financial literacy programs tailored specifically for young women to address their needs in financial management, saving, income generation, and debt management.
- ▶ Develop the capacity of young women and equip them with practical skills and knowledge to navigate economic challenges and enhance their financial independence.
- ▶ Support alternative income generation pathways through skills training, safer livelihood opportunities, and financial assistance to alleviate economic pressures.
- ▶ Implement regular recreation and sports sessions tailored for young men, women, and children to promote physical activity, social interaction, and overall well-being.
- ▶ Include men and boys to address issues of sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, and power dynamics, and ensure child protection.
- ▶ Engage stakeholders to implement child protection efforts, empowering communities and strengthening protection committees while implementing confidential reporting and supporting survivor well-being.



3

Conclusion

# Conclusion

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The analysis of life stories and comprehensive examination of the big map data have illuminated the multifaceted pathways that lead individuals into sex work within brothels. Through these narratives, the researchers have gained invaluable insights into the complex interplay of factors shaping the lives of sex workers and the profound impact of their involvement in this industry.

The overarching theme of poverty emerged as a driving force behind many individuals' decisions to enter sex work, continuing a cycle of economic necessity and exploitation. Financial constraints, worsened by familial instability and lack of access to education, left individuals vulnerable to manipulation and coercion, ultimately leading them into the brothel environment.

Despite the inherent risks and challenges associated with sex work, many individuals perceived it as a viable means of financial support, as evidenced by their consistent earnings and acquisition of assets. However, this financial stability often came at the cost of suffering from physical, mental, and sexual abuse inflicted by the clients and brothel owners.

The dynamics of relationships within brothels, particularly the bonds formed between sex workers

and their "babus" revealed both sources of support and exploitation. While some individuals found solace and protection in these relationships, others became abused and betrayed, highlighting the realities of life within the brothel.

Additionally, the analysis shed light on the pervasive influence of drugs and alcohol within brothels, with many individuals succumbing to addiction as a means of coping with their environment. Despite their awareness of the detrimental effects of substance abuse, the environment within brothels made it difficult for individuals to break free from addiction.

Furthermore, the data uncovered instances of individuals being trafficked or sold into brothels by family members or acquaintances, highlighting the exploitation and betrayal faced by vulnerable populations.

Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and interventions to address the complex socio-economic and health-related challenges faced by sex workers.

# Annex 1: Life Story Guideline

How and where to collect a good life story?

Ensuring that people feel comfortable and safe:

Where the story is being collected matters. If there are a lot of people around, it might make the person less confident. So, a quiet, private place is needed.

Before the interview, the story collector needs to be honest and gain the trust of the storyteller. Storyteller should be ensured that their name won't be used anywhere. It will make them open more.

Being respectful to them and their information while they share their stories.

Demonstration of understanding and care can be achieved by sharing aspects of one's own life, helping with different kinds of tasks with the story tellers or playing with children.

Listening without being judgmental. The goal is to let them talk without too many interruptions. It needs to be made clear that the story collector is interested in what they have to say by encouraging them to talk about what interests them. Saying or expressing things that might make them feel judged should be avoided.

## **Asking the right type of questions.**

The questions we ask determine whether people talk about what they find important and whether the reasons and results are clear.

When gathering life stories, some use a traditional interview style, where they decide beforehand what they want to know and ask many questions about those things. However, the stories we're collecting are NOT interviews, so a different approach is needed. So, asking direct questions like these should be avoided.

Were you attacked in the past year? By whom?

Do you know anyone who has been forced out of their homes?

Have you visited a doctor recently?

People may only share information we want to know, not what they think is important. Open-ended questions are important here, not to be directive. Asking about what we already think and know is important to us, may not reveal anything new. Breaking people's answers into many questions makes it hard to see how different aspects of their life connect. People like telling stories, but they usually don't enjoy answering lots of questions. That's why we're looking for an account of their life journey and their perspective on why things happened, along with specific incidents in their lives. Instead of preparing many questions on various topics, it's better to have a good starting question that lets people talk about what matters to them.

**The following prompts questions may support us to carry out the life story collection process smoothly:**

Tell us about your childhood.

Do you remember stories of you when growing up?

For how many years have you been living here?

How did you come here? (When, under what circumstances, with whom)

What happened after you came here?

How did you adapt to this place? (Did you receive any support or not, did you want to get out of here? What were the barriers?)

How do people behave with you over here? (In your workplace, your family and others related to you or in the neighborhood)

Do you have the space of sharing your likes and dislikes in your workplace? (Value for opinion, something going against your will, can you take decisions or not?)

Do you work under someone, or do you work alone? (Earnings, expenses, family)

If given the opportunity, how would you like to see yourself in the future (using two cards to discuss)

*(From "Life story collection guideline" during the research).*







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