

Impact of Home Environment and School Climate on Academic Performance of the Children of Sex Workers in Alternative Care: A Case Study

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Abstract

The children of sex workers (CoSWs) stand at considerable risk of myriad challenges that affect their lives in multifarious ways. The weight of the stigmata of their descent invariably cripples their social standing depriving them of the opportunities ordinarily available to children otherwise. The home environment which plays a pivotal role in any child's development and upbringing is at a huge stake for the CoSWs due to its uncongeniality towards the basic needs and requirements of a growing child. The hostility and apathy towards the CoSWs get more stringent as they step into the outer world. They are denied their basic rights and receiving education for them is a far-fetched dream. The school climate, which ideally and generally is curated in a fashion, to facilitate the all-round development of a child often transpires to be unfavorable towards the CoSWs. To combat the adverse situations of the CoSWs, the alternative care settings are a respite providing a home away from home fulfilling the crucial necessities of life. This paper presents a case study of the role of an alternative care setup for the CoSWs and the impact of the home environment and school climate on their academic performance. It is a longitudinal study where children between the age group of 6 to 16 years have been studied over a period of three years. The findings of the study show that a favourable and congenial environment, be it at the home front or school is important to boost the academic performance of these underprivileged children.

Keywords: Home environment, school climate, academic performance, children of sex workers, alternative care, case study.

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1. Introduction

Education as a vehicle of human progress has stood the test of time. It is an assured means for individual as well as societal development and is an irrefutable agency for the empowerment and upliftment of those lagging in the social structure. Amongst underprivileged children, an important yet often forgotten, category of children that is deprived of the necessities of life is that of the children of sex workers. In comparison to other children, the children of sex workers are at a greater risk of being exploited due to the vulnerable conditions that they live in. In a study conducted on the sex workers' children in Bangladesh, it is reported that the children of sex workers are excluded from mainstream society and denied even their most basic human rights such as housing, health, and education due to several complex factors such as their position in a 'legal vacuum', a lack of political commitment and so on. They are the victims of the power structures in their local community as well as the greater society that leaves them exposed to inhumane life conditions such as the obligation of drug abuse, lack of access to pure

drinking water and sanitation, no property rights, and legal protection, extortion, people trafficking, and everyday violence (Shohel and Mahruf, 2013).

All children have a claim for those things in a society that would help in their care and provide protection. All children have the same rights, it does not matter whether the child is rich or poor, has parents or is an orphan, is strong or weak, sick or healthy, or lives in any part of the world (Chopra, 2015). The children of sex workers, on account of being children, have a claim over the rights that any child otherwise would have, however, they are denied of such rights.

Research shows that there are, many conditions under which parents might find themselves unable to fulfill these obligations, rendering their children without proper parental care and protection concerning the provision of necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, health care, protection, and/or education. This loss of parental care and protection may result in children having to live in alternative care arrangements (Petrowski, Cappa, and Gross, 2017). Alternative care is defined as a placement either in foster care; a Child and Youth Care Centre or temporary safe care following an order made in respect of the Children's Court or Child Justice Act (National Department of Social Development and UNICEF, South Africa, 2012). While family is ideally best suited for a child, in the absence of family or family support, the State is mandated to provide care and protection to the child. The State has to initiate appropriate measures through laws, policies, schemes, and programs. Within the current system of care, options for vulnerable children are institutional care or residential homes for children, non-institutional care or family-based alternatives, school, and community outreach programs, and aftercare facilities for children. In India, as well as globally, a safe and appropriate biological family is identified as the best place for children. The next option is Non-Institutional Care followed by Institutional Care (Nigudkar, 2017, p.15). For this study, the alternative care system taken into consideration is institutional care or residential home arrangement for the children of sex workers. The participants for this study belonging to the region of North Bengal have been taken into consideration owing to the pervasive flesh trade in the region due to its strategic geographical location working as a corridor to other North-Eastern states and neighboring nations, thereby increasing their vulnerability and probability of being exploited.

Many studies have been conducted on the children of sex workers and a myriad of aspects concerning them have been researched. The issue of the education of the children of sex workers is such that calls for attention as education plays an instrumental role in the empowerment of the exploited ones. Formal education is a purposeful activity, it aims at achieving stipulated goals and objectives which include the personal development of its beneficiaries as well as the progress of its stakeholders. Formal education leads to educational attainment, which is measured by one's academic performance. Numerous variables influence academic performance. In this study, the impact of the home environment and the school climate have been considered because they form the primary and immediate environment of a child influencing it in every way.

1.1 Academic Performance

The intricacies of academic success lie in its conceptualization. It is also known as school preparedness, academic achievement, and school performance, although the differences in concepts are only clarified through semantics as they are synonyms (Lamas, 2015). Martinez (2007, as cited in Lamas, 2015) states that academic performance is "the product given by the students and it is usually expressed through school grades" (p. 34). Pizarro (1985, as cited in Lamas, 2015) referred to academic performance as a measure of the indicative and responsive abilities that express, in an estimated way, what a person has learned as a result of a process of education or training. Academic performance is influenced by elements such as intellectual level, personality, motivation, skills, interests, study habits, self-esteem, or the teacher-student

relationship. A diverging performance arises when there is a discrepancy between academic performance and the student's predicted performance. Unsatisfactory academic performance falls short of expectations (Marti, 2003 as cited in Lamas, 2015).

1.2 Home Environment

The term environment has been derived from the French word 'environner' meaning to surround or encircle. It refers to an aggregate of conditions or surroundings in which living beings such as humans, animals, and plants live or survive, and non-living things exist. In other words, it can be defined as a set of conditions surrounding an organism or as the complex socio-cultural conditions affecting an individual. The family or home is the primary or significant institution that has a continued influence or impact on the child right from the early stages of his or her life and is the socio-biological unit that exerts influence on an individual and their development (Singh, 2017) Home environment is not an abstract concept. It is a combination of the physical and psychological environment. The first one includes rooms, basic facilities such as water, shelter, clothes, food, and other physical needs of the individuals, while the psychological environment of the home includes affection, care, security, acceptance, the mutual interactions of family members, respect, say in family matters and such other things. Both aspects have a direct and significant influence on the overall development of students (Khan, et al. 2019).

1.3 School Climate

School climate encompasses the quality and nature of experiences within a school. It is often referred to as "the heart and soul" of the institution, embodying what inspires students, teachers, and administrators to appreciate and eagerly anticipate each school day. A supportive school climate fosters feelings of social, emotional, and physical safety among individuals in the educational environment. This concept includes the norms, beliefs, and relationships of students, parents, and school staff, along with the practices in teaching and learning and the organizational structures of the school. The National School Climate Council asserts that a sustainable, positive school climate enhances both academic and social-emotional growth for students. In a study, it has been observed that the overall school climate for these children is created to be beneficial for their academic growth (Sharma & Mishra, 2023). Research indicates that a favourable school climate correlates with numerous beneficial outcomes for students, such as improved academic achievement, enhanced mental health, and reduced instances of bullying. The curriculum, teaching strategies, and teacher-student relationships had to be redesigned and reshaped to meet the diverse academic, personal, and emotional needs of the children (Sharma, 2021). Various factors influence the quality and character of school life, though there is no agreed-upon definition or framework for school climate. Generally, these factors can be categorized into four key dimensions: safety, teaching and learning (academic climate), relationships (community climate), and the overall environment. The school climate determines the tone for all instruction and learning that takes place there and predicts how well pupils will be able to learn and grow states the National School Climate Center, 2019.

1.4 Objectives

The present study is carried out to attain the following objectives:

1. To examine the home environment of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years.
2. To examine the school climate of the participants of the study over a span of five years.
3. To evaluate the academic performance of the participants of the study within a span of five

years.

4. To explore the effect of home environment and school climate on the academic performance of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years.

1.5 Literature review

A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted to examine the issue from various angles. This literature review employed both electronic and manual search techniques to find relevant peer-reviewed articles and grey literature, along with informal interviews with individuals working with sex workers and their children. During these discussions, the education of children born to sex workers emerged as a critical concern that requires urgent attention. Previous research has provided considerable empirical insights into the commercial sexual exploitation of children in both Western and non-Western contexts. However, children born to women engaged in the sex trade, particularly those whose work and family lives intersect within a brothel setting, represent a distinct at-risk group that differs fundamentally from other sexually exploited children. There is a limited number of studies specifically addressing the circumstances of children living in brothels, leaving many aspects of this population unexplored (Dalla, Erwin, Kreimer, 2018). While sufficient research exists regarding the health issues, socioeconomic conditions, and experiences of abuse and violence faced by children of sex workers, there is a notable lack of literature focused on their educational challenges and opportunities—particularly concerning academic performance, the home environment, and school climate in alternative care situations in the North Bengal region. This paper aims to contribute new knowledge to the academic community, which will be invaluable for this vulnerable population.

2. Methodology

The methodology used to examine the present problem is a case study. A case study is undertaken to examine a social unit. The unit may be a person, a social group, a family, a social institution, or a community (Koul, 2018). This study focuses on the children of sex workers sheltered and supported in an alternative care setting in Siliguri of the North Bengal region. The sampling procedure employed is that of purposive sampling and the participants of the study have been observed over a span of five years. It is an observational case study with participant observation as the major data-gathering technique supplemented with formal and informal interviews, focus group discussions, and review of documents. The methodology of this study comprises the steps mentioned below.

2.1 Research questions

At the outset the research questions about the broad area of the topic were framed.

- i. What kind of home environment do the children of sex workers in alternative care have?
- ii. What kind of school climate do the children of sex workers in alternative care have?
- iii. What kind of academic performance do the children of sex workers in alternative care have?
- iv. How do the home environment and the school climate of the children of sex workers in alternative care affect their academic performance?

2.2 Selection of Participants

The sampling procedure employed is purposive sampling. A total of 33 participants were taken as the sample of the study. These included children of sex workers falling in the age group

of 6 to 16 years, their teachers, caregivers, and NGO personnel.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

In this study, the ethical and moral aspects concerning the participants were kept in mind due to the sensitivity of the issue in concern. Informed consent from the participants was obtained before conducting the study. The real identities of the participants are concealed and certain sensitive and controversial information gathered during the study is kept confidential. Only the data related to the topic of the study have been stated in the findings with utmost care to maintain the ethical standards of studies conducted on children and sensitive issues.

2.4 Collection of Data

Qualitative data are detailed; dense descriptions; inquiries in depth; direct quotations capturing people's professional perspectives and experiences. Such data are based on an inductive approach with a focus on specific situations, institutions, communities, groups of people, or cases. The emphasis is on personalized experiences, interpretations, and implications instead of numerical figures or quantitative measurements. It assumes that each case is special and unique because of purposeful sampling in which all cases are selected purposefully because they are information-rich and illuminative (Patton, 1982).

Data for the study has been collected using various techniques and methods wherein the information was collected through recorded data in the form of documents, observation, focus group interviews, and semi-structured questionnaires. The study has been conducted within a span of five years wherein the participants have been closely observed and their academic performance recorded along with the evaluation of the home environment and school climate on various dimensions. These data indicate what the samples in the study have said in their own words about their experiences and interactions in natural settings.

2.5 Analysis of Data

To analyze the data, the process suggested by Marshal and Rossman (1999) was adopted; where they recommended following the sequence of organizing the data, developing the themes, and then interpreting the data (Shohel and Mahruf, 2013, p.7). Hence, the process of thematic analysis of data has been followed and the results are grouped to answer the research questions stated in the findings below.

3. Findings

The findings of the study are stated in alignment with the objectives and research questions of the study. The findings are presented in the form of a thematic analysis.

The details of the participants of the study are presented in Table 1.

Sl. No.	Name Code	Sex	Age				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1	A	F	6	7	8	9	10
2	B	F	8	9	10	11	12
3	C	M	10	11	12	13	14
4	D	F	16	17	18	19	20
5	E	M	11	12	13	14	15
6	F	F	6	7	8	9	10
7	G	F	15	16	17	18	19
8	H	F	13	14	15	16	17
9	I	M	7	8	9	10	11
10	J	F	12	13	14	15	16

Sl. No.	Name Code	Sex	Age				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
11	K	M	13	14	15	16	17
12	L	M	15	16	17	18	19
13	M	M	16	17	18	19	20
14	N	F	9	10	11	12	13
15	O	F	9	10	11	12	13
16	P	M	7	8	9	10	11
17	Q	F	8	9	10	11	12
18	R	F	14	15	16	17	18
19	S	M	14	15	16	17	18
20	T	F	15	16	17	18	19
21	U	F	16	17	18	19	20
22	V	M	10	11	12	13	14
23	W	F	10	11	12	13	14

Table 1. Details of the participants of the study

The school performance of 23 children was taken for the study in which there are 14 females and 9 males. Their names have been withheld on ethical grounds and so an alphabetical name code has been used to identify them. The age group of the children ranges between 6 to 16 years and the data has been collected over a span of five years. Since the study ranges within a period of five years, 8 of the children reached the ages of 18, 19, and 20 years by the end of the study.

3.1 Objective 1 and Research Question 1

The home environment of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years.

Dimension and Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Basic Physical Amenities (Food, Shelter, Clothing)	Healthy food, safe and secure shelter, comfortable clothing for all seasons	Healthy food, safe and secure shelter, comfortable clothing for all seasons	Healthy food, safe and secure shelter, comfortable clothing for all seasons	Healthy food, safe and secure shelter, comfortable clothing for all seasons	Healthy food, safe and secure shelter, comfortable clothing for all seasons
Interpersonal Relationship (Cohesion, Conflict, Expressiveness, Acceptance, and Care)	Difficulty in establishing trust and bond despite showing acceptance and care by the caretakers	Peer group bonding, Openness towards the caretakers, Occasional conflict with the peer group and the caretakers	Cohesion, Acceptance and Care. Adapting to the environment	Cohesion, Acceptance and Care. Getting used to the environment	Family-like bonding was established. However, the absence of a biological family was felt.
Self-Improvement (Independence & Active Recreational Orientation)	Self-care and encouragement of basic social behavior/ soft skills	Instilling life skills	Identifying, encouraging, and promoting personal talents/potential	Creating opportunities for confidence building and improving self-esteem	Creating opportunities for self-regulation
System Maintenance (Organisation and control)	Creating awareness of basic moral and ethical conduct	Familiarization with the rules and regulations of the environment	Maintaining and following a daily routine	Punishment and reward	Involvement in home affairs

Table 2 Details of the home environment over a span of five years

The contents of Table 2 display thematically, the significant aspects of the home environment of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years based on four important dimensions of a home environment.

It was observed that despite meeting the requirements of most of the dimensions of a congenial home environment for healthy development and good academic performance of the children in the alternative care setting, yet the absence of a biological family could not be ameliorated and compensated for.

3.2 Objective 2 and Research Question 2

The school climate of the participants of the study over a span of five years.

Dimension and Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Safety	Protection from external adversities	Clearly communicated rules and norms for safety	Ensuring physical and socio-emotional security	Clearly communicated rules and norms for safety, Ensuring physical and socio-emotional security, protection from external adversities	Clearly communicated rules and norms for safety, Ensuring physical and socio-emotional security, protection from external adversities
Teaching and Learning	Basic support for learning and schooling.	Use of supportive teaching practices: suitable teaching methodologies and teaching-learning materials	Catering to diversity in learning capacities	An atmosphere conducive to dialogue and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention	Forward-looking and future-oriented instructions
Institutional environment	Suitable infrastructural facilities	Safe and secure school plant	Management's acceptability towards the child and its family	Openness toward parental involvement	Flexible approach
Socio-emotional relationships	Guidance and Counselling services for students to cope with personal and academic problems	Respect for individual differences and diversity	Fostering inter and intra-relational capacities	Building resilience and grit	Strengthening emotional intelligence

Table 3 Details of school climate over a span of five years

Table 3 puts forth thematically the condition of the school climate of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years based on four important dimensions necessary for any school to provide an environment of wholesome development for its learners.

In this study, it has been observed that the overall school climate for these children is created to be beneficial for their academic growth. A lot of modifications regarding the level of teaching in connection with the age had to be made as many of them had not had age-appropriate formal schooling. The curriculum, teaching strategies, teacher-student relationships, use of supportive teaching practices: suitable teaching methodologies and teaching-learning materials (Sharma, 2022) had to be redesigned and reshaped to meet the diverse academic, personal, and emotional needs of the children.

It is also learned that it is imperative to have a separate school for such children in the initial stages of their academic journey for their educational rehabilitation instead of including them in a mainstream school right away. Once these children catch pace with the regular pattern of academics, they can be transitioned into a mainstream school.

3.3 Objective 3 and Research Question 3

The academic performance of the participants of the study within a span of five years.

Sl. No.	Name Code	Sex	Class					Academic Performance				
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Good: ≤ 60%, Average: 46-59%, Satisfactory: 35-45%, Below Average: ≥ 35%				
								Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
1	A	F	I	II	III	III	IV	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average
2	B	F	III	III	IV	V	VI	Below Average	Average	Satisfactory	Good	Good
3	C	M	V	V	VI	VII	VIII	Below Average	Satisfactory	Average	Good	Good
4	D	F	VIII	VIII	IX	IX	X	Below Average	Satisfactory	Below Average	Average	Average
5	E	M	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Average	Good	Good	Good	Good
6	F	F	I	II	III	IV	V	Satisfactory	Average	Average	Average	Good
7	G	F	VII	VIII	IX	IX	X	Good	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Average	Average
8	H	F	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
9	I	M	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Satisfactory	Average	Average	Average	Average
10	J	F	VI	VII	VIII	VIII	IX	Good	Average	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
11	K	M	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Average	Good	Average	Good	Good
12	L	M	VII	VIII	IX	X	X	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Below Average	Below Average	Satisfactory
13	M	M	VIII	IX	IX	X	VT	Average	Below average	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Average
14	N	F	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Average	Good	Good
15	O	F	III	IV	IV	V	V	Average	Below average	Good	Good	Good
16	P	M	IV	V	VI	VI	VII	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Below Average	Average	Good
17	Q	F	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Average	Average	Average	Good	Good
18	R	F	VII	VIII	IX	X	VT	Below Average	Average	Good	Average	Good
19	S	M	VII	VIII	IX	X	VT	Below Average	Average	Good	Average	Good
20	T	F	VII	VII	VIII	IX	X	Below Average	Average	Below Average	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
21	U	F	VIII	VIII	IX	X	VT	Below Average	Average	Good	Average	Good
22	V	M	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Good
23	W	F	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	Average	Average	Average	Good	Good

Table 4 Academic performance of the participants within five years

Table 4 shows the academic performance of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years.

It is observed that with time the academic performance of the children became better, and 4 students opted for vocational training the girls trained in tailoring and beautician courses while the boys pursued training for driving and electrician. The ones completing their secondary and higher education obtained their degrees from a regular school affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education and their academic performances were good and satisfactory.

3.4 Objective 4 and Research Question 4

Effect of home environment and school climate on the academic performance of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting over a span of five years.

Year	Home Environment	School Climate	Academic Performance
Year 1	Provision of basic physical amenities Building interpersonal relationships Aiding self-improvement Ensuring system maintenance	Ensuring Safety Promoting effective Teaching and Learning Conducive Institutional environment Healthy socio-emotional relationships	Below average
Year 2			Below Average - Satisfactory
Year 3			Satisfactory - Average
Year 4			Average - Good
Year 5			Average - Good

Table 5 Effect of home environment and school climate on academic performance

The data shows that in the first year, a considerable number of students could not perform well and on enquiring, it was found that such children had not received any prior formal education. Their academic performance was affected due to the disorientation in their lives but as the years progressed, many showed marked and consistent improvement in their academic performance hence, qualifying the fact that a congenial home environment and conducive school climate can positively impact academic performance of the children of sex workers in an alternative care setting.

3.5 Future Directions

The study reveals the plight of the children of sex workers in a particular situation as it is a case study. However, the implications of the findings of the study can be adopted in other cases where similar circumstances exist. The study brings forth the following measures to be adopted while dealing with the children of sex workers and their education. The measures listed in Figure 1 may not be exhaustive however, they bring to light the areas that can be investigated and studied further for the social upliftment of the children of sex workers.



Figure 1

Measures for addressing the needs of children of sex workers in alternative care settings pertaining to the home environment and school climate

The measures listed above may be enhanced through innovative pedagogical approaches and technology integration (Sharma & Begum, 2024).

4. Conclusion

The alternative care arrangement in concern with this study has been set up to reach out specifically to the children of sex workers and make provisions for them in the areas that are crucial for their development of which they are otherwise deprived. The improved home environment and educational facilities in the form of a favorable school climate add to the well-being of these children. Additionally, the psychological impact that the children have while they are in the brothel setting, in comparison to the alternative care center that they are in is massive. The insecurity and uncertainty that they experienced about their life earlier has been considerably removed and they feel more confident to face the future.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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