



HIV prevention while the bulldozers roll: Exploring the effect of the demolition of Goa's red-light area[☆]

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A B S T R A C T

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Interventions targeting sex-workers are pivotal to HIV prevention in India. Community mobilisation is considered by the National AIDS Control Programme to be an integral component of this strategy. Nevertheless societal factors, and specifically policy and legislation around sex-work, are potential barriers to widespread collectivisation and empowerment of sex-workers. Between November 2003 and December 2005 we conducted participatory observation and rapid ethnographic mapping with several hundred brief informant interviews, in addition to 34 semi-structured interviews with key-informants, 16 in-depth interviews with female sex-workers, and 3 focus-group-discussions with clients and mediators. This provides a detailed examination of the demolition of Baina, one of India's large red-light areas, in 2004, and one of the first accounts of the effect of dismantling the red-light area on the organisation of sex-work and sex-workers' sexual risk. The results suggest that the concentrated and homogeneous brothel-based sex-work environment rapidly evolved into heterogeneous, clandestine and dispersed modes of operation. The social context of sex-work that emerged from the dust of the demolition was higher risk and less conducive to HIV prevention. The demolition acted as a negative structural intervention; a catastrophic event that fragmented sex-workers' collective identity and agency and rendered them voiceless and marginalised. The findings suggest that an abolitionist approach to sex-work and legislation or policy that either criminalises this large group of women, or renders them as invisible victims, will increase the stigma and exclusion they experience. For the targeted HIV prevention approaches advocated by the National AIDS Control Programme to be effective, there is a need for legislation and policy that supports sex-workers' agency and self-organisation and enables them to create a safer working environment for themselves.

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Introduction

The HIV epidemic in India, the world's second most populous country, is of global importance (Chandrasekaran et al., 2006). Community mobilisation of sex-workers is pivotal to HIV prevention in India (National AIDS Control Organisation, 2006). Despite evidence for targeting sex-workers as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy, coverage remains an elusive goal (Shahmanesh, Patel, Mabey, & Cowan, 2008). The extent, to which this is a result of societal factors, and specifically abolitionist approaches to sex-work, is the question we explore through examination of the demolition of Goa's large red-light area.

Acknowledging the role of structural factors in sexual behaviour change, implies that interventions need to alter the 'risk environment' for individuals to adopt safer sexual behaviours (Blanchard

et al., 2005; Campbell, 2000; Desmond et al., 2005; O'Neil et al., 2004; Wight et al., 2006). This has led to a recent *Lancet* series to promote 'highly active HIV prevention' as the synergistic combination of interventions situated at the level of society (structural), and community (participation and empowerment) and individual (cognitive, behavioural and biomedical) (Bertozzi, Laga, Bautista-Arredondo, & Coutinho, 2008; Gupta, Parkhurst, Ogden, Aggleton, & Mahal, 2008).

Collectivisation of sex-workers in India suggests that the democratisation of sex-worker interventions through community action can be effective and has led to endorsement of empowerment as integral to health promotion (Blankenship, West, Kershaw, & Biradavolu, 2008; Halli, Ramesh, O'Neil, Moses, & Blanchard, 2006; Jana et al., 1998; Moses et al., 2008). However, if empowerment is a process wherein a sex-worker moves from consciousness to knowledge to action, the very conditions of her marginalisation and violence could constitute an insurmountable barrier (Asthana & Oostvogels, 1996). Indeed, a controlled trial of a structural intervention found that the policy milieu was instrumental in allowing community mobilisation of sex-workers (Kerrigan et al., 2006). In other words, for individual behaviour change to be implemented through community action, there needs to be simultaneous changes at a societal level. Empirical data on this complex relationship between society, community and the individual will help policy makers understand the social processes that support sex-workers' agency (Campbell, 2000; Cornish & Ghosh, 2007).

Despite the National AIDS Control Programme's commitment to community mobilisation as a HIV prevention strategy, collectivised and empowered sex-workers are not the majority. This failure reflects the tension between the two opposing philosophies, harm reduction versus prohibition. Sex-work is an emotive subject, condemned by forces as disparate as the religious conservatives – indignant at the affront on sexual morality – and social reformists – angered by the exploitation and 'commodification' of women's bodies. These seemingly incongruent forces have frequently converged, leading to the complex politics of abolition versus regulation of prostitution during the 19th and 20th centuries, and the current moves to tighten laws against trafficking and criminalise men who buy sex (Corbin, 1990; Hershatter, 1997; Hobson, 1990; Hubbard, 1998; Levine, 2003; PRS Legislative research, 2008; Walkowitz, 1980).

The Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act regulates sex-work in India. Whilst the act does not prohibit prostitution per se, prostitution carried out in a brothel or within 200 m of certain public places is a criminal offence. On 14th June 2004, the Government of Goa demolished Baina red-light area. Since the demolition of Baina several high profile closures of red-light areas and dance bars have taken place in India. In all cases, the settings were governed by populist religious (Hindu) fundamentalist political parties at the time of the closures and evictions. In most cases, the public reaction was mixed with many, including social reformists, supporting the abolitionist actions (Prayas, 2005).

In this paper we will describe the course of events in Goa relating to the demolition as one that exemplifies the abolitionist policies that disturbs the environment and potentially forces women into more clandestine and invisible types of sex-work. The events will be described from the perspective of the community with a particular focus on those social processes that affect the practice of sex-work, the sex-workers' collective identity, their sexual health, and their risk environment. This will inform the public debate around the ramifications of prohibition and social disruption on the future of evidence-based HIV prevention.

Background to the demolition

Goa is a small coastal state with a population of 1.37 million. Goa has more than 1.5 million domestic and international tourists visiting annually, and a corresponding number of seasonal economic migrants making the most of employment and market opportunities (Government of Goa, 2007; Government of India, 2001).

Baina beach, situated in Goa's largest port town of Vasco da Gama, had been a renowned red-light area since the early 1960s. By 2003 this small, well-demarcated area had become home to 6–7000 people and around 2000 sex-workers. The majority had migrated in different waves from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Many had resided in Baina for more than three decades. The first HIV prevention programme in Baina was conducted by *Positive People*, the oldest HIV non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Goa. A decade later four NGOs provided a composite of sexual risk-reduction counselling, free condoms and sexually transmitted infections treatment for symptomatic women. Another organisation provided training for alternative employment and legal services for the women. Routine surveillance suggested a pre-demolition HIV prevalence of 30–50% in Baina sex-workers (Goa State AIDS Control Society, 2006) and high levels of HIV awareness and condom use (National AIDS Control Organisation, 2001).

In July 2003 a high court judgement was passed instructing the government of Goa to demolish the brothels in Baina red-light area and to organise the rehabilitation of the sex-workers. The rationale for the judgement was to counter the immoral trafficking of women into the sex-trade – the writ petition having originally been filed by a local counsellor concerned about sexual exploitation of trafficked women. In practice, the government of Goa concentrated on the expulsion of sex-workers, perceived to be outsiders, rather than rehabilitation. By June of the following year they had withdrawn the alcohol licenses from the bars and restaurants, placed a police cordon around Baina, and finally demolished the brothels and the surrounding areas, without providing any of the promised rehabilitation (Shahmanesh & Wayal, 2004; Sharma, 2004). Although the NGOs mounted a campaign to repeal the High Court order, or ameliorate its effects, they were constrained by the fear of being perceived to condone 'prostitution'.

At the time of the demolition we were engaged in a study to develop a participatory evidence-based HIV prevention intervention. It was quickly apparent that the dispersion and marginalisation of the women following eviction would impact upon the type of interventions that could be implemented. The aims and objectives of the study were therefore expanded to include a description of the effect of the eviction on organisation of sex-workers and their vulnerability to HIV.

Methods

Study design and setting

The study was conducted in three phases. The pre-demolition phase (November 2003–June 2004) consisted of an ethnographic study that documented the effect of the police cordon in the run-up to the demolition. The early post-demolition phase (June 2004–December 2004) consisted of rapid ethnographic mapping of the spatial and social organisation of sex-work in the immediate aftermath of the demolition. The late post-demolition phase (December 2004–December 2005) was an in-depth qualitative study of sex-workers to determine the impact of the demolition on their lives and risk behaviours.

The study was implemented through *Positive People*. A team employed specifically for this purpose, with a separate administrative structure to the service providers, conducted the research.

The study was based in Baina red-light area before the demolition, and expanded to include all urban settings, migrant slums, and coastal areas of Goa, following the demolition.

The research team

A team of thirteen male and female researchers, aged between twenty and fifty, from diverse educational, social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds were recruited. Collectively the team could speak eight Indian languages and included members of all the key migrant groups from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Maharashtra. In November 2003 there were two researchers, in March 2004 four researchers joined the team, by September 2004 two researchers left and seven new researchers were recruited. The team of eleven continued until the end of the research period.

Study population

Sex-workers were defined as women who are currently providing sexual services in exchange for goods or money. Key informants were defined as people who worked in close proximity to sex-work or were knowledgeable about their locality and included health-professionals, bar and lodge-owners, *gharwali* (Female brothel-owners), pimps, motorcycle-taxis, rickshaw and taxi-drivers, security-guards, NGO workers, shopkeepers, *paan-wallahs* (Betel nut sellers), street-vendors, security-guards, and local leaders.

Details of each phase of the study

Pre-demolition

Data were collected using a mixture of participatory observation (PO), serial interviews and group discussions with key-informants. A team of six researchers were based in the area for the months preceding, during and following the demolition. During 2000 h of PO they engaged approximately 100 key-informants (sex-workers, *gharwalis*, peer educators, motor-cycle taxis, bar-owners, trinket-sellers, clothes-washers, and local politicians) in interviews and group discussions. Several key-informants were re-interviewed on a daily, weekly or opportunistic basis.

Early post-demolition

Eleven researchers mapped the urban centres, migrant slums and coastal belts. They drove and walked through each area marking parks/beaches, temples/mosques/ churches, pharmacies, health facilities (clinics & hospitals), traditional healers, *paan-wallahs*, trinket-sellers, hotels, bars, wine-shops, alcohol drinking spots, restaurants, truck halt points, factories, construction sites, motor-cycle taxi and rickshaw stands, bus stands, official buildings, and schools/colleges. Site inventories were completed for each area detailing the population size, social class, major sources of employment, the presence of vulnerable populations such as migrants, truckers, fishermen, tourism-related workers, types of housing, and presence of NGOs and other social welfare groups in the area. Over 3000 h of PO and several hundred mapping interviews were conducted to identify health problems, leisure activities for young men, the type and number of sex-workers, where, when and how they worked, how they found customers, who were the clients, and how this picture changed after the demolition of Baina. During the mapping interviews 34 key-informants were identified for open-ended semi-structured interviews. The selection of key-informants was based on knowledge about sex-work in their locality, the rapport with the interviewer and purposive selection of different types of informants from a wide range of locations. Three focus-group-discussions (FGD) were conducted with occupational

groups identified as clients and mediators: fishermen, truckers and motorcycle taxi-drivers.

Late post-demolition

Sixteen sex-workers were purposively selected to include different types of sex-work, age-groups, ethnicities, and areas of work (Table 1). The interviews were conducted in a variety of private settings, including a community centre, NGO offices and rented rooms. Three core topic areas were explored: their experience of sex-work; the impact of the eviction on their working practices and sexual risk (including non-Baina sex-workers); and their perception of HIV and sexual health. The first part of the interview consisted of a detailed life history. The second part concentrated on their current working and living conditions and any changes since the demolition. The third part contained specific probes relating to security and violence, sexual and mental health, HIV and its prevention, and health beliefs.

Data management and analysis

Several hundred key-informants were interviewed during approximately 5000 h of PO. Field researchers kept a daily record of their observations, serial key-informant and mapping interviews in their field-notes, which were transcribed on a monthly basis. Maps were drawn of the area and then supplemented using an inventory to collect additional data in a systematic manner. Sixteen in-depth-interviews and 34 key-informant-interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, translated and then checked by the interviewer against notes taken during the interview. Three FGD's were transcribed from the tape recording with the aid of an observer's notes. Quality control and feedback was provided through regular review of the tape-recordings.

The qualitative data were entered into NVIVO 2 (QSR International Pty, Ltd, Melbourne, Australia) software for analysis. The mapping interviews and PO were analysed in an ongoing and iterative way. Accordingly, the contents of the observations and mapping interviews were discussed by the team in their weekly meetings. These discussions then fed into the construction of maps, the next stage of mapping, and the topic guides for the in-depth and key-informant interviews (Desmond et al., 2005). The PO in the run-up to the demolition, the key-informant interviews, in-depth interviews and FGD, all underwent detailed content analysis through close reading by three independent researchers. We coded the data independently, discussed our coding in face-to-face meetings, and reached a consensus through discussion. The in-depth interviews and key-informant interviews were analysed using an analytic framework that allowed concepts to surface from the raw data. These were then grouped in broad thematic headings and sub-headings. The interviews and the observational data were then re-interrogated with the themes and sub-themes that had emerged on our initial close reading of the text, as well as our particular interest in the social structuring of HIV risk in the context of the demolition.

The events leading to the demolition and after created a challenging research context. The anger and impotence that the research team felt as they watched the bulldozers demolishing Baina and the animosity that they faced from the embittered Baina community created complex emotions. Establishing trust, communication across barriers of class, caste and ethnicity became an important methodological challenge. The weekly meetings created the space to reflect on the unfolding events, the relationship between the team and the community, and to deconstruct the complex emotions, physical, moral, and communication challenges. The evolving relationship with the community was thus documented, and reflected back into the study process and findings.

Community engagement and ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the Independent Ethics Commission, Mumbai and University College London's ethics committee. Two core themes governed this important aspect of our study. One was the process of engaging the community to participate in the study design and implementation and the second was advocacy to prevent the demolition and in support of the sex-workers' rights.

The team of nine peer-educators were trained to disseminate the study aims and to provide the interface between the research team and the community. The research team raised community awareness through community meetings, flipchart presentations and group discussions. Engagement with the community was strengthened through the community advisory boards, the first of which held its inaugural meeting two weeks before the demolition.

We actively participated in a forum advocating for the rights of the people of Baina. We lobbied local and national politicians and institutions; wrote articles in the print media; and appealed against the ruling in the High Court. In the immediate aftermath of the eviction we provided relief and shelter for the now homeless Baina inhabitants. We discretely provided sexual health and HIV prevention services and lobbied for the sex-workers' right to rehabilitation.

Findings

In the first part we present a chronological narrative of the demolition. In the second part we explore the social disruption and its effect on the risk environment¹.

The demolition

Pre-demolition

Prior to the demolition, Baina was divided between independent sex-workers and those who worked with *gharwalis*, either on contract or on commission. This corresponded broadly, but not exclusively, to the ethnic and geographical division of the red-light area into Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka sides.

The Andhra side consisted of around sixty *gharwalis* who contracted young women from Andhra Pradesh. The income from these sex-workers would exclusively belong to their *gharwalis*, for the contracted period. This was the time during which they were expected to earn back their brokerage fee (the sum of money that had been paid by the brokers to the sex-workers families). Time taken off for menstruation or sickness, and the costs incurred through living expenses were added to the total. The *gharwalis* in return were responsible for finding customers. Once the debt was fully repaid the sex-worker either, remained with her *gharwali* and shared her income, or became a *gharwali*, or became independent.

The Karnataka side was dominated by *devadasi* sex-workers. This is a caste-based traditional sex-work common in northern Karnataka. Traditionally women of this caste were dedicated to the temples and the goddess *Yellamma* in childhood and enter sex-work through this route. The ritual of dedication to the goddess *Yellamma* was symbolised by tying of a yellow bead and *devadasi* sex-workers are often identified by this motif. This practice was banned in 1982,

however, remnants of this form of socially sanctioned caste-based sex-work persists. They were usually independent, paying a small commission to the *gharwalis* from whom they rented rooms and pimps (a man or a woman who solicits for customers in exchange for a commission from the sex-workers) who supplied their customers. Occasionally a group of independent sex-workers would join together to save money on room rental and commission.

The accounts from the women pointed to animosities, often expressed in ethnic terms, which predated the demolition. The increasingly visible sex-workers from Andhra Pradesh were vilified by their traditional counterparts from Karnataka. The implication was that the visible, brash and modern sex-work had brought undue attention to Baina and thus left them vulnerable to societal antipathy.

The sex-workers described HIV changing from a virtually unknown condition, to one which dominated all of their contact with government and non-governmental services. The more senior peer-educators remembered the early 1990s when they were ridiculed for talking about HIV/AIDS. Ex-Baina sex-workers reminisced about the early days when NGO workers performed skits about HIV and taught them how to put a condom on a wooden piece. By the time of the demolition, there were queues outside the sexual health clinics, the *gharwalis* would insist upon condom use, and new arrivals were rapidly referred to the peer-educators.

Siege conditions

The police cordon was placed around Baina during December 2003. Police blocked the various routes into the red-light area and continuously patrolled the beach. The tactic used to enforce the siege was to punish customers visiting Baina. This took the form of beating, threats of arrests, demands for bribes and public humiliation, such as being forced to do sit-ups in front of the sex-workers and NGO staff. Soon the harassment extended to the whole community; women and men described a barrage of abuse even when returning from the market or hospital.

The official reason given for the police cordon was to prevent criminal elements from functioning in the area. However, the sex-workers believed that the real goal was to starve them out. The relationship with the police during the siege was frequently juxtaposed with memories of a more amicable and symbiotic relationship.

Lost income

A common theme was the severe loss of income for both sex-workers and those on the periphery. The worst affected were the independent sex-workers who were wholly reliant on customers who visited the red-light area. These women would describe their hunger in vivid terms, complaining to the researchers that they were starving and unable to even afford the small sums required for a plate of *idli* (a traditional south Indian breakfast). The reduced income from sex-work reverberated throughout this interconnected community. Older sex-workers and peer-educators who relied on rental from their rooms; the owners of the now deserted bars and restaurants; the destitute women who eked a meagre living from washing the sex-workers' clothes or selling trinkets; and the motorcycle-taxis who made lucrative business from the commissions and tips, all found themselves without income. In the words of one of the women who washed clothes for a living,

"It has hit us in our stomach very badly. Now [sex-workers] don't have anything to offer, so, how can they give me? If they had something then they would be in position to share it with me.... If they had some work, then they would employ four persons.... but if they don't have work then how can they feed me? They were providing the money for our house rent,

¹ Non-English words are in italics without quotation marks. Quotations in double inverted commas are translations of informants and participants speech either from key-informant-interviews, in-depth interviews or field notes. Quotations in single inverted commas are taken from field notes. The source of a quotation is identified as (KI) for key-informant, (IDI – number) for in-depth interviews and (FN) for field notes.

clothes and food and somehow we could have our meals.... But now, who can give us all this?"

Uncertainty

The pressure of lost income was made worse by the overwhelming feeling of uncertainty that pervaded Baina in the run-up to the demolition. The insecurity was exacerbated by the complex array of messages imparted by the authorities. The government delegated two NGOs to enumerate and register the sex-workers, and provide them with photo-identification to collect weekly rice and lentil rations. On the one hand, the sex-workers understood that if they did not register they would not be eligible for the pledged rehabilitation package and on the other hand, once registered they were threatened with severe penalties if they were found to be practising sex-work. Rumours circulated that the registration and rations were a ruse to identify and blacklist practising sex-workers in preparation for the demolition. The women became increasingly suspicious as they found themselves placing their fingerprint against a growing number of incomprehensible official documents and surveys.

Their powerlessness was exacerbated by structural factors that excluded them from the decision making process. The advocacy meetings held with politicians or the public were conducted in English. This created a clear language barrier for the sex-workers as the majority spoke only their regional languages and a minority spoke Hindi. Even when translation was available the hierarchical nature of the seating and discussion prevented all but the most senior community members from speaking. The voicelessness of the women in such public gatherings was in stark contrast with the articulate and boisterous group discussions recorded in the field-notes and during the community advisory board meetings. The community became dependent on the more educated outreach workers and researchers to decipher and translate the complex processes that were engulfing them. The inequality of this dependency on young, affluent, and higher caste, female NGO workers, became a source of tension.

Competition

The extreme competition for the few available customers heightened the ethnic conflict between the contracted sex-workers from Andhra Pradesh and independent sex-workers from Karnataka. The latter were convinced that *'the police took money from the Andhra side gharwalis and let customers in that area'*, while the independent Karnataka women starved,

"One girl on Karnataka side [was] angry and violent shouting "the Andhra Gharwalis are making their girls do oral sex and so all the clients are going to them". Shouting at the NGOs for not doing anything [she said] "they [the AP side] have chicken Biryani and beer whilst we have nothing'" (FN)

Deserted Baina

The *'padlocked cubicles'* and the *'deserted lanes'* of the red-light area was testimony to the reduced number of sex-workers in Baina. Sex-workers explained that rumours of Baina's potential demise had reached the Andhra villages causing brokers to divert their trade to other red-light areas. A researcher who had previously worked in Baina as a photographer recorded the following passage in his diary,

'In the month of February 2004 [Baina] was an entirely different place compared to what I had seen earlier as a photographer between 1989 and 1997. In those days Baina used to be full of people and full of activity. I saw so many different types of people coming to Baina They spent lots of money. Baina had never been as sad as how I saw it in February 2004'.(FN)

Movement for work

To continue to work during the police siege required women to meet the clients outside of the red-light area. Those who had regular customers or contacts with *pimps* could arrange such rendezvous. Mobile phones, which had not previously been required, became an important tool to organise sex-work. One form of mobility that blossomed was short (10–14 days) working trips to lodges in Goa and neighbouring States, called *dates*. These *dates* to unknown lodges were particularly frightening for women, who had rarely ventured outside of Baina,

"Because Baina was closed, we started going out for dates for the sake of survival... [Otherwise] we would have died of starvation... [Since] the whole thing was banned by police." (IDI-1)

The demolition

On 14th June 2004, following the sex-workers unanimous rejection of an attempt to be forcibly rehabilitated to a former mental asylum, the bulldozers demolished the red-light area and part of the neighbouring slum. It was during the first of the monsoon rains and no relief was provided for the several thousand families made homeless overnight. Many had not removed their valuables from their homes. Identity documents and gold were amongst the many items that lay buried under the rubble as they fled the bulldozers.

Early post-demolition

Several of the families continued to camp out in the rubble of the demolition whilst some moved into the slums of the immediate vicinity. There was considerable animosity towards the sex-workers who were blamed for the demolition. So the sex-workers hid amongst the *'family people'*, camouflaged by exchanging the modern jeans and makeup associated with sex-work with the more traditional sari.

For the women who left Baina the situation remained equally precarious. Many key-informants suggested that Baina women had spread throughout Goa. However, animosity towards Baina women, and police harassment and fines for those who accommodated sex-workers, discouraged them from resettling in Goa. The FN provide a graphic testimony to this as the research assistants describe arriving at one place after another in search of the evicted sex-workers only to realise that they had already left and were *'driven out'* by either police or a vigilant community. There was a striking similarity to the accounts coming from various parts of Goa,

"If you mean like the Baina business, there is no such business here. Immediately after the demolition [Baina sex-workers] came here and stayed. But the police soon came to know about it and... sent them away. The police collected a fine of Rs.500 from each sex-worker and the people who accommodated her." (KII-migrant slums Vasco)

Women either hid amongst communities or repeatedly relocated to avoid recognition. The fear of punishment should they be seen as aiding and abetting Baina sex-workers led the adjacent communities to be particularly vigilant in preventing sex-workers from resettling. The ethnic tensions flowed over into the post-demolition period with Andhra sex-workers being the group most likely to be targeted and stigmatised. The majority of Andhra women were forced to leave Goa.

Almost all the *gharwalis* relocated, as they were unable to continue the brothel-based sex-work in the more hostile atmosphere of post-demolition Goa. Moreover, although the majority of *gharwalis* had lived in Goa for decades, it was the slums of Baina to which they had moved: a tightly-knit and familiar community.

Elsewhere in Goa was an alien space that they were frightened to negotiate their way around. Despite the decades that they had lived in Goa none of them spoke the native language, Konkani. Baina gave them an identity, albeit a stigmatising one,

“Earlier there was Baina so we could give this address... If we were caught, the police would know that we are from Baina and they would release us after bringing us here, but now since there is no Baina, where can we claim to be our place if we are caught?”(IDI-3)

The women felt betrayed and disillusioned. During the interviews many of the ex-Baina sex-workers reminisced nostalgically of their previous life in Baina and the money they could earn. They described the demolition as a “*kick in the stomach*” and Baina developed a mythical status,

“Oh, what money [I had]... I hired a room for seventy rupees (US\$1.50) a day...every morning I would give this amount... Just calculate the monthly rent of such a room!” (IDI-7)

Late post-demolition

The demolition destroyed the homogeneous brothel-based sex-work that was concentrated in the well-demarcated red-light area of Baina. It was replaced by heterogeneous, dispersed and clandestine sex-work. The post-demolition sex-work in Goa attracted both Baina women who either relocated or continued to work from their homes in the Baina slum, as well as new recruits. The *gharwalis* were replaced by a new cadre of pimps. Part-time and informal sex-workers such as construction workers and family women replaced full-time and easily recognisable sex-workers.

New modes of operation

Post-demolition there were dramatic reductions in brothel-based sex-work. Of the 57 *gharwalis* identified before the demolition only a handful continued to operate in Goa after the demolition. The vacuum left by the departure of the brothel-owners was filled by Goan pimps who brought short-term contract girls to work in the lucrative tourist belt, and lodge-owners who became more proactive in organising *dates*. Independent sex-workers became more reliant on intermediaries for customers.

Expansion of existing sex-work

Baina sex-workers started to make inroads into other sex-work areas. The best described of these was the movement of Baina women into the small-scale street and lodge-based sex-work of Goa's large commercial hub, Margao city. The arrival of the ex-Baina women led to an expansion in the number of sex-workers in Margao, territorial fights and increased police vigilance. It also altered the organisation of sex-work in Margao, with more experienced Baina women replacing the existing lodge-based sex-workers,

“...Now I find it difficult to earn even one hundred rupees... * because the market is flooded with Vasco (Baina) girls...they tell me that they are not allowed to do this business in Vasco. Their huts have been demolished.(IDI-11)

New entrants

The demise of Baina red-light area encouraged new women to enter the sex-trade. These new entrants were described as less professional i.e., more likely to be part-time, working from home, through mobile phones, or on the street.

“No, these girls are not ex-Baina sex-workers. They used to come to Mangor before Baina demolition also. But in those days nobody was interested in them. Because, even though they were

young, they looked ugly, their clothes were dirty, and they smelt bad.... But after the Baina demolition the situation changed; the same dirty, smelly, rag-pickers have become like gold” (KII Mangor hill)

Heterogeneous dispersed sex-work

The resultant sex-work included street-based sex-workers who solicited in the railway stations, bus-stops and municipal parks; sex-workers working 10–14 day contracts in a range of lodges scattered throughout Goa; sex-workers working from their homes and through mobile phones; sex-workers on short-term contracts to pimps and confined to flats in the coastal tourist belt; construction workers and women residing in slums who subsidised their meagre income with transactional sex; and the survivors of the Baina demolition who continued to work from the neighbouring slum.

Attitude to demolition

The media and public opinion was largely supportive of the demolition. The local Catholic Church even organised a large demonstration in support of the demolition.

The argument put forward was that Baina was the source of the contagion and thus demolishing it would halt the spread of HIV,

“He [senior politician visiting red-light area] blamed Baina for the HIV epidemic in Goa and giving HIV to the Goan boys. ... He said that HIV/AIDS is spreading and people are suffering because of this red-light area, hence it is better to close it” (FN-interview with gharwali)

Key-informants who lived and worked in close proximity to sex-workers were more conflicted about the merits of the demolition. However, their main concern was the impact on men and their wives and daughters; there was little empathy for the sex-workers. A common theme was that sex-work is a necessary evil to protect innocent women from men's uncontrollable sexual urges. The majority of key-informants were sure that sex-work would spread and the dispersed sex-workers would become the source of contagion.

The risk environment

Reduced negotiating power

Unfamiliar territory, increased secrecy, and greater reliance on intermediaries for customers, weakened the women's negotiating position. They had much less control over the number of clients and their expectations,

“Three guys from Bombay had booked her for a night but the pilot had taken money for one full night plus a full day... When the girl wanted to leave the clients refused to let her go and locked her up inside the lodge.” (FN)

According to the peer-educators, ‘*without money to eat, health became the lowest priority*’. Women were forced to take risks in order to provide food and security for themselves and their dependents. One of the private doctors suggested that this need for money and the lack of negotiating power was leading to reduced condom use, and that he was seeing more sexually transmitted infections in women returning from *dates*.

Loss of community support

Sex-workers described the close-knit community in Baina as being one they relied on to protect them against customer violence.

They also found that the *gharwalis'* insistence on condom use helped them to enforce it,

"In Baina... one man [customer] caught me by the dress, pulled me and asked me why I did not come? So the bar boys working there chastised him... 'If the girl doesn't want to come that is her business... why are you raising your hand to this girl?'" (IDI-5)

The forced destruction of the Baina community also destroyed the informal social safety nets that women had depended on in the past,

"Earlier, if we did not have enough money, someone would give us 10-20 rupees [with which] we could run our domestic life.... But now, even if you ask, there is no one who can give you a single rupee." (IDI-6)

Police raids

In the aftermath of the demolition the concern that sex-work would spread throughout Goa led to increased police vigilance. Shopkeepers were requested to prevent women from soliciting and there were weekly raids on the lodges. The increased vulnerability to police raids translated into fines and bribes, which in the context of reduced custom and increased poverty, meant taking greater risks to pay back the debt. This is illustrated in the following vignette,

An ex-Baina-sex-worker went on a *date* to an unfamiliar lodge in northern Karnataka. Partly due to her unfamiliarity, she was involved in a police raid and had to pay a large fine. Her *gharwali*, her intimate partner and moneylenders were reluctant to lend her money that she was unlikely to be able to pay back. Unable to raise the funds and rejected by the intimate partner that she had provided for during more affluent times, she took rat poison and killed herself.

Access to HIV prevention

After the demolition three of the four NGOs working towards HIV prevention in Baina abruptly ceased their activities in Baina. Interventions for sex-workers outside of Baina were not in place. The organisations did not attempt to trace the sex-workers, and fear of revealing their identity was a barrier for relocated sex-workers to access services. The main source of HIV prevention for sex-workers was provided by the research team.

Service utilisation was further constrained by sex-workers' ambivalence towards the NGOs. Sex-workers were tired of the HIV prevention message, and angry at the negative media coverage that resulted from NGO reports on trafficking and high HIV prevalence amongst sex-workers. Some blamed the interventions targeted at clients for their reduced custom. Others held the NGOs responsible for the police presence. Ultimately, they felt betrayed by the failure of the NGOs to protect them, and angry at being made a scapegoat for the HIV epidemic, despite cooperating with the government's prevention projects.

Access to health-care

During one week of the police cordon one sex-worker committed suicide, another died of a septic abortion in the local hospital, and two died of acute febrile illnesses, preferring to risk a 48 h train journey to their home-town, rather than avail themselves of public-health services in Goa. This comment by a sex-worker during group discussions tries to make sense of the tragedy,

"...We are dropping dead like flies... we have no money to go to private doctors. Because we are from Baina we would have to spend 10,000–20,000Rs [\$200-\$400] each time we get sick. We do not have that money and the *gharwalis* and moneylenders are also afraid to lend us money.... So we have to go to government service and no one wants to go because there they test us for HIV and we will die anyway"(FN).

Discussion

Despite India's pioneering work on the effectiveness of collective action on HIV prevention in sex-workers (Blankenship et al., 2008; Halli et al., 2006; Jana et al., 1998) the policy environment of India continues to permit events such as the Baina demolition or the closure of the dance bars in Mumbai. We believe ours is the first detailed account of the effect of dismantling a red-light area on the reorganisation of sex-workers and their sexual risk. The findings suggested that a concentrated and homogeneous sex-trade rapidly evolved into a clandestine, heterogeneous and dispersed form. The social context of sex-work that emerged from the dust of the demolition was one of higher risk and less conducive to HIV prevention.

In the short-term, fear, insecurity and economic need de-prioritised sexual health for sex-workers. Economic necessity and unfamiliar territory weakened their negotiating position. Populist rhetoric espoused by media and politicians, portraying the demolition as a means to rid Goa of HIV, eroded the sex-workers trust and confidence in HIV prevention services. In the long-term, sex-work became dispersed and fragmented, very heterogeneous, mobile, and clandestine. Although the overall numbers of sex-workers dropped in the immediate aftermath of the demolition, soon new women, working in new ways, near-impossible to reach by the disrupted HIV prevention services, began to fill the vacuum. A survey of sex-workers conducted shortly after the demolition, found that the young, recently started, street-based sex-workers who had not accessed HIV prevention services were more likely to have sexually transmitted infection- a surrogate for high-risk sexual behaviour (Shahmanesh, Cowan, et al., 2008; Shahmanesh, Patel, et al., 2008).

In effect, the demolition of Baina was a negative structural intervention, a catastrophic societal event that fragmented sex-workers' collective identity. The process of the demolition disengaged women and made them feel powerless. The women were rendered voiceless; with decisions regarding their lives being made in fora to which they had no access, using languages with which they could not engage. The disruption of their social context, the forced dispersion, and the heightened animosity towards sex-work jeopardised the very collective identity (Campbell, 2000; Cornish & Ghosh, 2007), which has been associated with the successes in reducing HIV in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu (Chandrasekaran et al., 2006) and Karnataka (Halli et al., 2006; Moses et al., 2008). The violence of the demolition became the overriding violence in their lives and all other violations, including HIV, became secondary (Downe, 1997).

How did the forces of abolition and prohibition, in direct contravention to the national health policy, prevail over advocates of harm reduction and destroy a well-established red-light area? By taking a closer look at the socio-political forces at play in Goa we can understand some of the barriers to empowerment of sex-workers and assess how these abolitionist forces and discourses fare in relation to sex-workers' agency.

Here we draw out three threads that converged to enable the events of June 2004 to occur. Firstly, the legal framework conflates sex-work with trafficking and thus inadvertently supports

Table 1
Describing basic characteristics of the 16 sex-workers who gave in-depth interviews.

IDI number	Demographics	Type of sex-work
IDI-1	Andhra early 20s	Ex-Baina- contract sex-worker now goes on dates to lodges
IDI-2	Andhra early 20s	Ex-Baina- contract sex-workers now goes on dates to lodges
IDI-3	Andhra early 20s	Ex-Baina –contract sex-worker now goes on dates to lodges
IDI-4	Karnataka late 30s	Ex-Baina – devadasi sex-worker
IDI-5	Karnataka 30s	Ex-Baina – devadasi sex-worker now lodge-based (Mapsua)
IDI-6	Karnataka late 20s	Ex-Baina – sex-worker now street and home-based (Baina)
IDI-7	Andhra late 20s	Ex-Baina gharwali now street and lodge-based (Margao)
IDI-8	Goan late 20s	Mobile phone sex-worker (North Goa)
IDI-9	Goan < 20	Mobile phone sex-worker (Mapsua)
IDI-10	Goan < 20	Street-based sex-worker (Margao)
IDI-11	Goan early 40s	Street-based sex-worker (Margao)
IDI-12	Marathi late 30s	Street-based sex-worker (Vasco)
IDI-13	Karnataka late 30s	Street-based sex-worker (Margao)
IDI-14	Marathi early 20s	Street-based sex-worker (Mapsua)
IDI-15	Karnataka early 20s	Home-based sex-worker (Calangute)
IDI-16	Karnataka early 20s	Short-term contract sex-worker (North Coastal belt via Mumbai)

prohibition. Under the auspices of the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, brothels are illegal. The High Court judgement that instructed the government of Goa to demolish the brothels was acting within the remits of this act. Secondly, sections of the social reform and women's movement in India oppose sex-work, which they interpret as sexual exploitation of women. Notably, it was a female counsellor and a social activist that brought her concerns about sex-work in Baina to the attention of the high court and started a process which eventually culminated in the judgement to demolish Baina. Few opposed the demolition order on the grounds of sex-workers' right to livelihood. The majority saw this as a means to secure the rehabilitation of the sex-workers. Thirdly, the religious fundamentalists oppose sex-work as inherently immoral. This combined with the fact that the majority of Baina sex-workers were considered 'outsiders' from other states; provided the government with a popular mandate to implement the High Court order with full impetus.

The convergence of these forces can be seen in other settings, both nationally and internationally. There was a similar mixed response to the closure of the Mumbai dance halls with some women's groups supporting and others opposing it (Prayas, 2005; Research Centre for women's studies, 2005). The proposed amendments to Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act of India, which aimed to penalise clients, were introduced by the Ministry of Family and Social Welfare, despite the opposition of the Ministry of Health. Similar legislative changes to criminalise the purchase of sex are being proposed in the UK and elsewhere, whilst in most countries sex-work remains illegal or criminalised to a variable degree. What is apparent from events like Baina demolition, is that both of the abolitionist discourses, religious or social reformist, converge at the point that they strip the female sex-worker of any agency, whether through stigmatising her as engaged in an immoral profession, or, depicting her as a victim of trafficking.

There has been much attention paid to the role of stigma and its impact on self-esteem and agency in sex-workers (Campbell, 2000; Cornish, 2006; Scambler & Paoli, 2008). The vocal animosity of the media, the church, politicians and neighbouring communities preceding the demolition heightened the stigma that sex-workers experienced. The police harassment and systematic hounding of

sex-workers out of Goa that continued following the demolition compounded this marginalisation and exclusion. Sex-workers were thus forced to take on alternate identities, for example to don the traditional attire of the family woman – the sari.

In conclusion, an abolitionist or prohibitive approach to sex-work supports a policy environment that, either criminalises this large group of women, or renders them as voiceless victims. This ultimately disempowers them and increases the stigma and exclusion they experience. For the targeted HIV prevention and community mobilisation that has been advocated by the National AIDS Control Programme to be effective, there is an urgent need for legislation and policy that provides a stable environment, supports sex-workers' agency, promotes self-organisation and democratisation of HIV prevention. Such an environment will enable sex-workers to ensure a safer working context for themselves.

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