

UNDERSTANDING TECHNIQUES OF SOCIAL WORK:

THROUGH THE LENS OF NEHA'S CASE



BACKGROUND:

Kavita¹ was dedicated into the Devadasi system² and subsequently sold into the sex trade. Young Kavita was trafficked from the Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh. Her association with Prerana began in 2006 during an outreach visit by Prerana's team in the red light area of Kamathipura. She shared with the social workers that she felt her daughter was not safe in the brothel and that she wanted a life of dignity for her daughter. Hence, she got her daughter Neha* admitted to Prerana's Night Care Center (NCC) in May 2006. She was enrolled in formal schooling when she was 6 years old. Neha has an older brother Rakesh* who was also enrolled in the NCC and subsequently in school. Both Rakesh and Neha actively participated in all the activities and programs that were conducted at Prerana's NCC.

Kavita, Neha and Rakesh used to visit their native place in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, during the children's school holidays. In 2010 when they went to the village, Rakesh did not return. Neha informed the social worker from Prerana that her brother did not like his mother's 'lifestyle' and didn't want to stay in the red-light area. Therefore, he decided to stay with his maternal grandmother. She also shared with the social worker that he was enrolled in a local school and that he was committed to pursue further education. After Neha cleared 5th grade in 2011, Kavita's *aadmi*,³ who had been in their life even when Prerana's team met her, had accompanied them to the village during her summer holidays. He had stayed back while the mother and daughter returned to Mumbai.

Post their return, Neha's attendance at the NCC became irregular as she was taking care of Kavita who was ill. During follow-up outreach, Prerana's team found that Kavita's was showing symptoms of tuberculosis. The Prerana team mobilized the existing resources in the community and immediately linked Kavita to *Asha Mahila Sanghatana*.⁴ The Prerana team conducted regular follow ups and ensured that Neha's education wasn't compromised amidst this situation. On 1st August 2011, the women from the community informed Prerana's team that Neha and Kavita had left for their village with all their belongings and had informed the brothel keeper and other women that they were 'leaving for good'. In the past Kavita had never left for her village without informing Prerana's NCC staff.

[1] Names have been changed for confidentiality purposes

[2] Devadasi is an established practice in South India and parts of Maharashtra where a girl is dedicated to serve the God before puberty. With the disintegration of feudal empire, they lost their traditional patrons and were sold into the sex trade.

[3] The woman's partner, who is the pimp or a regular customer.

RESCUE, REHABILITATION AND INTERVENTIONS

Prerana's team received a call on 9th August 2011 from a local NGO in Pune. The caller informed that a girl child who knows Prerana was rescued from a brothel in Budhwar Peth, red-light area in Pune. When the team enquired for more details, the caller informed that the girl has an identity card of Prerana's Night Care Center, and it mentions her name as Neha. Post the rescue, Neha had informed the social workers of the local NGO to reach out to Prerana and that she was attending school and Prerana's NCC while in Mumbai. Soon after receiving the call, Prerana's team left for Pune to meet Neha and Kavita. Having worked on similar cases in the past, the team was aware that Neha and Kavita may not disclose all details during the first meeting, and confronting them could seriously harm the client- social worker relationship.

After ensuring that Neha and Kavita were safe, the team spoke with Neha. Neha shared that they had not visited the village. Instead, Kavita's *aadmi* had met them at the CSMT station and took them to Pune. It was only after reaching there that they learnt that Kavita was transported from a brothel in Mumbai to another one in Pune. Neha had overheard a conversation between the *aadmi* and Kavita where he was convincing her to sell Neha. He couldn't have sold Neha while in Mumbai due to her association with Prerana. Neha had always been attentive and alert of her surroundings and had a fairly good understanding of personal safety rules. She immediately applied what she had learnt at Prerana: *to call the police or Prerana's team when she feels unsafe or if a crime is about to happen against oneself or another child in need.*

While interacting with Neha, the social worker sensitively did not over-question her as that would make her feel she was being doubted, ensured to not overreact to the disclosure and that she didn't feel blamed for the situation at any point and assured her that she had done nothing wrong. The social worker appreciated Neha on her decision to inform the police and the local NGO about Prerana and added that the situation was the offender's fault and not hers. The social worker was also aware of the strong trauma bonding that does occur between victims and their traffickers and that Prerana's interventions may not be viewed by Kavita as help. The social worker also listened to Kavita instead of confronting her and helped her think on the next steps in the best interest of her child.

Neha's case was presented to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Pune as a child in need of care and protection. She was admitted into a local Children's Home (CH) at the CWC's order. *During the next follow-up visits, the team interacted with the case worker of the CH to assess if Neha had any symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The case worker of the CH shared that initially Neha faced difficulty sleeping, would easily get startled at any sudden sound, and could not concentrate. However, she had slowly started to settle.* During subsequent follow-up visits, Neha shared her happiness about being able to continue her education, and acquiring new skills at the CH. She also shared that she was concerned about her mother's safety and wellbeing. The team learnt from Neha that the *aadmi* would pressurize her mother to accompany her for these visits. Further, she added that she wasn't happy that her mother's *aadmi* also came to visit her at the CH and wanted to understand if it could be stopped.

The social worker acknowledged her feelings by saying, "I realize that this is a difficult situation for you, but let's try and find a solution," and encouraged Neha to share her concern with the Superintendent and also the CWC when she gets the opportunity to meet them next. The social worker also educated her about a provision in the law wherein the child can decide whom she wants to meet. She was also assured that Prerana's team would write to the Child Welfare Committee and the Superintendent regarding her concern. During telephonic follow-ups with the Superintendent and the CWC, they assured the social worker from Prerana that they would take necessary steps to ensure the *aadmi* does not visit the CH.

During one of the follow ups by the Prerana team, Neha once again expressed that she did not approve of the aadmi accompanying her mother during her visit to the CH. Despite the CWC and the Superintendent instructing Kavita and the aadmi that he is not permitted to visit her, Neha said he still accompanied her mother, and waited outside the gate of the CH. She shared that she wanted to stay at a CH in Mumbai and continue her education. Considering her request, Prerana's team submitted a letter highlighting Neha's concerns to the CWC and suggested for Neha's transfer to a CH in Mumbai. However, it wasn't accepted as Kavita was living in Pune and Mumbai would fall under a different jurisdiction. Moreover, Kavita had given the statement that she would continue to stay in Pune and the aadmi had claimed to be Neha's father. The team tried to discuss with the CWC to understand Neha, the uniqueness of her problem and the safety concern shared by her. The team made efforts for the CWC to consider a decision on Neha's placement following the principle of participation according to the JJ Act and look at Neha's case as an individual one. They also discussed about the provisions in the Act that emphasize on taking decisions on a case to case basis and in the best interest of the child.

During a follow up, Neha shared that she felt embarrassed, angry, or sad when her mother came “drunk” during some of her visits to the CH. She shared that she was worried about her mother’s health and safety. She added that she felt frustrated, overwhelmed, depressed, and anxious that her mother wasn’t changing her behaviour. The social worker helped Neha to talk to her mother about her feelings and suggested her to open up with someone she trusts whenever she feels overwhelmed. The social worker added that she should not try to suppress her feelings or pretend that everything is OK. The social worker also helped her understand that she should not judge her mother and that neither she nor her mother was to be blamed for the circumstances. The social worker also suggested that her mother be linked to a support group that can help her with de-addiction. Eventually, Kavita was linked to an NGO that had a de-addiction program and a support group. Kavita went through the deaddiction program but kept relapsing.

In 2014, Neha with the Orders of the CWC was transferred to a CH in Lonavala. Between 2014 and 2018, Prerana’s team was not able to contact Neha. The CH in Lonavala had refused to grant permission for the social worker to connect with her and she also couldn’t find a way to contact the team. Prerana’s team had no way to check if the *aadmi* continued to visit Neha along with Kavita in the current CH. The team also couldn’t trace the residential or contact details of Kavita. In September 2018, Prerana’s team was able to reconnect with Neha over Facebook when a team member noticed some notification, and acted on it immediately. She shared that she was restored to her mother in 2018 and was studying in F.Y. B.Com at Savitribai Phule University, Pune. She also provided the team with her then residential address. During the subsequent follow-up interaction, Neha requested Prerana’s team to assist her with educational sponsorship, as the local NGO who had assured support was unable to provide it due to certain reasons. During the sponsorship process, Neha shared that she didn’t have a PAN Card or a bank account. The team motivated her to draw out a course of action to get her PAN card issued, and open her bank account using the same as an identity proof. Eventually, as she procured the required documents the sponsorship was approved.

When the COVID-19 induced lockdown was declared in March 2020, Neha was studying in T.Y. B.Com and her examinations got postponed. During this period, the team had telephonic contact with her and discussed about the safety measures to be followed during the pandemic. Neha also shared that she had started working at a small company and it helped her family income. She had also expressed her desire about getting enrolled in a computer class and requested Prerana to support her fees for the training. The request is currently under consideration as Neha is yet to submit more details on the same. Currently, she is awaiting the results of her exam and is also assisting her mother in preparing packets of the wafers that her mother sells. She also shared that her brother continues to stay in the village with his grandmother, had completed his education and was well-settled.

Throughout the case work intervention, the social workers recognized Neha's potential to shine through her circumstances if she was provided with the required support and guidance. Thus, due to the social workers observance of the principles of client participation and client self-determination, Neha was able to determine her own path for self-development. Simultaneously, the social workers also empowered Kavita to be a part of her children's growth and save them from falling to the perils of inter-generational exploitation. Furthermore, with Prerana's support, through the pandemic Neha was able to access the existing social resources essential for her and her mother's well-being.

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Years of ATC

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