



**A Study on Women Engaged in Illicit Liquor
Trade: Challenges in the Rehabilitation Process**

**Prayas
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CONTENTS

Particulars	Page No.
Research Team	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Chapter I: Introduction and Methodology	1
Experience of Prayas in the Rehabilitation of Women into Liquor Trade	
Rationale for the Study	1
Objectives of the Study	1
Geographical Location	2
Methods and Tools	3
Chapter II: Findings	4
Socio-economic Background of the Women	4
Reasons behind Women getting Involved in the Illicit Liquor Business	4
Reasons for Women not being able to Exit the Trade	7
Challenges Faced by the Women	9
Chapter III: Learnings and Suggestions	12
Learnings	
Suggestions	12
Annexure 1 - Interview Guide for Women Participants	15

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Participants

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Bharuch Unit, Prayas

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Prayas' Experience in Rehabilitation of Women in Illicit Liquor Trade

Prayas, through its Bharuch Unit, has been working with women arrested for illicit liquor trade at the police station and prison since almost 20 years. These women are arrested under the provisions of The Gujarat Prohibition Act, 1949.

Over the years, Prayas has made various attempts to work with this group. These include:

- Intervention with cases reaching the police station and prison
- Community-development initiatives that offered skill development programmes for daughters of women involved in the trade
- Work with the police system to sensitise them to the situation of these women, who are forced into this trade due to lack of viable alternatives.

It has been our experience that though some of the women wanted Prayas's support for vocational training, children's education and acquiring citizenship documents, most of them were not ready to get involved in Prayas's long term rehabilitation process. Over the years, Prayas has identified certain issues on why we have not been able to reach out to these women.

Rationale and Objectives

Some of the challenges identified by Prayas in the course of its work with women involved in the illicit liquor trade include:

- ❖ Most women in the illicit liquor trade are either uneducated or unskilled. Prayas has not been able to offer them viable options for training or employment in absence of government schemes, or absence of NGOs in the area. The trainings which we could offer could not provide to them stable livelihood opportunities in the context of other challenges they faced in their lives.
- ❖ Most women do not have necessary citizenship documents, which would help them gain benefits of government schemes.

- ❖ Most women accept the liquor brewing and selling trade as a means to earn livelihood and thus tend to accept the challenges faced in the trade as part of an occupational hazard.
- ❖ Women are unaware of what supports they could get from the system for alternate livelihood options and have accepted this as their fate.
- ❖ There is acceptance by the community and family, and not much stigma is attached to the trade.
- ❖ There is demand from the community for illicit liquor.
- ❖ Women who are involved in the trade are trapped into vicious cycle of lack of stable source of family income leading to involvement in liquor trade. In order to deal with the challenges faced in engaging in the trade (deterioration in health, impact on education of children, effect on personal and lives of their families due to processing by the Criminal Justice System), they require money and are forced to go back to liquor brewing and trade.

To gain further insight into the lives of the women and to explore the scope for social work intervention with them, Prayas decided to do a small study of women involved in the illicit liquor trade with the following objectives in mind:

- a) To understand the socio-economic background of women involved in illicit liquor trade.
- b) To understand the reasons behind women getting involved in the illicit liquor trade and to understand the challenges faced by them while engaging in the trade.
- c) To identify reasons for women not being able to exit the trade even if they wish to do so.
- d) To explore the possible livelihood alternatives for the women to exit the illicit liquor trade.
- e) To suggest policy level measures aiming towards rehabilitation of the women.

Geographical Location

The villages of Ankleshwar Taluka of Bharuch district in the state of Gujarat were chosen for data collection. This is because Prayas had visited some of the villages, in this taluka, for follow up visits of women arrested under illicit liquor trade. Prayas had also attempted community based initiatives

in one of the villages in Ankleshwar Taluka towards the rehabilitation of women engaged in illicit liquor trade in the past. This made it a fertile ground to collect data in this area.

Methods and Tools

This was an exploratory study using qualitative methodology. In-depth interviews with nineteen women were conducted with the help of an interview guide¹ (Annexure I) by Prayas social workers and a student social worker from the Department of Social Work, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University.

Initially, visits were made to houses of the women whom the social worker had contacted in prison and those women were interviewed. Most of the women interviewed belong to Ankleshwar Taluka of Bharuch district. Once the visits were made, references were obtained from the women interviewed to identify other women in the trade living in the same village, through snowballing process. These women were interviewed for understanding their social location and circumstances under which they entered the illicit liquor trade.

The data was collected during the period May 2018 to August 2018.

¹The word 'profession' was used in women's everyday language, and the word closely reflected how the women view illicit liquor sale and so this was the word used in the interview guide. However the standpoint of this research does not view it as a profession, and hence the word 'trade' has been used in the report.

CHAPTER II

FINDINGS

Socio-economic background

“Nobody from my maternal family was involved in this profession. But inspite of knowing the fact that my mother-in-law is in the business of illicit liquor, my parents got me married into the family. And now I support my mother-in-law, who is involved in this profession.”

The women interviewed for the purpose of this study belong to the lower economic background. Most of the women lacked formal primary education or any other vocational skills which would help them look for other career opportunities. They did not have a stable source of income which could support their families. Many of them are either widows or have ailing husbands. This forced them to look for options like getting involved in the illicit liquor trade. The community that they belong to is engaged in the illicit liquor trade and there is a sense of social acceptance for the same. In some of communities, this trade is not accepted, hence in these cases, the women hide their engagement in the trade. In most cases, the families are indifferent about the women engaging in the trade; they are interested only in the economic gain from the trade. Hence, the major driving force for women to enter the illicit liquor trade is lack of economic alternatives to support their families.

Majority of the women do not have any knowledge about the welfare schemes offered by the government. Some of them do not have citizenship rights documents like ration card, Aadhar card or PAN card. There were a few women who had bank accounts while there many did not.

Many of the women interviewed mentioned that they used to work as wage labourers at factories or industries in GIDC area or in the farms before they joined this trade. Some of them were housewives before entering the trade. They started selling alcohol for additional income and stuck to it due to the high returns/or regular income it guarantees. Most of these women have cases filed against them for illicit liquor sale. Many of the women have also been to prison.

Reasons behind getting involved

“I had a love marriage. My in-laws did not accept me. My husband used to give all his earnings to his parents. Since I had to run the house smoothly, I thought of starting this profession of illicit liquor. My aunt-in-law was involved in this. So even I decided to do this. By selling liquor, I could manage my house, support my children for education, can fulfill other responsibilities. If I get support or get a good job or some support to start small business, I will leave the profession.”

i. *Lack of steady income to run the household:*

“Before joining this profession, I used to work as daily labourer. I could not manage the household only on husband’s income, I have six daughters; finally since I saw other women in my neighbourhood doing this profession, even I started doing this. The income earned supplements to the income earned by my husband.”

Most families did not earn enough for ends to meet. In some cases, other members of the family did not contribute towards the household expenses. For example, one of the women who was interviewed mentioned that her son has a steady income but does not contribute to the finances of the household. Another woman mentioned that her husband earns by driving an auto-rickshaw but that is not enough for maintaining the household expenses. Due to the lack of steady income to sustain the family, these women joined the liquor trade to help provide for the well-being of their families.

ii. *Widowhood / Ailing husband:*

“My husband was not well for many years. I had to pay for his medical expenses. My children were very young. When he passed away, for the sake of my children, I started selling liquor. My mother who was already doing this work, taught me”

Not having a steady source of income from their husbands due to widowhood, or in many cases an ailing husband, places on women the onus of earning and taking care of the welfare of the family. The prevalence of the activity of illicit liquor brewing and sale is extremely high in the region from which these women belong. There is social acceptance for the illicit liquor trade with hardly any social stigma attached to the trade. The women in the community help each other by teaching them the process of liquor brewing and sale.

iii. *Lack of family support during emergency situations:* In order to pay medical bills, which are an additional burden apart from their household expenses, women needed additional income. In cases where one of the family members is suffering from illness which requires long term treatment, there is requirement of regular medicines. Most of the women are left unsupported by their extended families when a tragedy befalls their families. They do not receive any monetary benefits from either their own families or their in-laws. This leaves these women to look for other means of sustenance. Since, illicit liquor trade is common in these areas; most of them start with the same. This helps these women pay their medical bills while simultaneously running their households.

iv. *Mother-in-law or mother already in the trade:*

“My mother was involved in this profession. I learnt from her. To manage household, I am doing this, but have told my daughters to never to get involved in this profession”

Some women stated that they joined the trade because their mothers-in-law or their mothers were a part of the trade. It was through them that they learnt how to run this trade. In some cases, the daughters-in-law joined the trade as they had to help their mothers-in-law with the sales.

v. *Lack of other livelihood options:*

“I used to work as domestic help earlier, then I started getting allergy of soap, thus had to stop going for domestic help. My daughter- in-law’s family is into this profession. They taught me to do this. Now my sons are getting settled. Once they are settled, I will stop doing this.”

Due to lack of educational qualifications and/or vocational skills, these women are unable to opt for means of livelihood which would help them earn enough money through legal means to support their families. Agricultural labour, another option of livelihood is seasonal. It does not offer round-the-year employment. Some of the women reported working in nearby industries as unskilled labourers, but this too does not provide regular income.

vi. *Provide for their children:* Due to lack of economic sources, these women enter the trade in order to provide their children with good education. If their children are young then they also require monetary help for their nourishment. This is accomplished through the trade as they are able to earn on regular basis to provide for their children.

vii. *Higher income:* Some of the women, who are stable in the trade, can generate income through the liquor trade much higher as compared to other livelihood options available to them. Some women tend to earn approximately INR 10,000 to 15,000/-per month. This kind of income is not possible through other sources of income like domestic work, agricultural labour, tailoring, etc.

Reasons for not being able to exit

Many of the women who have entered this trade find it difficult to exit the same. Some of them do think about leaving it but are unable to while there many others do not want to let go. The major reason for not leaving this trade is the regular income and immediate benefits they get through the trade. According to the data collected, some of the reasons for not leaving the illicit liquor trade are:

i. *Steady incomes:*

“With the earning of this profession, I made my elder son study engineering. I could build a house with many rooms, which I give them on rent. My engineer son is working in Bangalore. He calls me there, but I can’t leave home and go. I am thinking of leaving this profession now.”

Most of the women involved in the illicit liquor trade earn between Rs. 200-300/- per day. Some of the women reported to earn Rs. 500-1000/- per day. There are no other means of livelihood which these women can opt for, which would provide steady income to sustain their family expenses.

ii. *Income induced lifestyle:* In cases where income is high, the women and their families become used to the lifestyle that such incomes allow. Letting go of their lifestyle can be a challenge. Hence, they women feel the need to continue in the trade to maintain their lifestyle.

iii. *Pressure from families:* The lifestyle and continuous income leads to their families pressurizing the woman to continue in the trade so that there is a steady flow of income.

iv. *Dependence of families on women:*

“From my income of selling liquor, I supported my son to buy an auto rickshaw, but now he is not giving me any money to run the household or even for expenses for his own children.”

The families become dependent on the income of the women. The husband, son, or daughter may not engage in any other work or may not contribute their earnings toward the functioning of the household. In such scenario, the women have to continue their trade as the breadwinners of their families.

v. *Deteriorating health conditions:*

“Both my son and my son-in-law, help me in my profession. Now, I have knee problem, I am going old, now I am tired of this profession.”

Some of the women have health issues and also because of ageing cannot engage into other activities for livelihood. The liquor trade helps them generate income by being at home.

vi. *Endless cycle of entering and trying to exit:*

“When I was first arrested, and had to go to prison, after coming out I had stopped selling liquor. But my husband’s income was not enough, we could not manage our household, so started selling liquor again. I have started a small cabin outside my house. If I will be able to manage with the income earned from it, I will stop doing this work. I don’t want my children to get affected due to me doing this profession.”

Cases are filed against women, for being involved in illicit liquor trade. Once arrested, the women would need money for lawyers’ fees and bail. Often, this money is borrowed at high interest rates for which they would have to go back to the liquor trade to repay the loans. Also, in some cases the women have left the trade for some time, but after some time when there is need or emergency in the family, they go back to same work with which they are familiar with.

vii. *Demand for the liquor in the community:* Since there is a high demand for liquor in the community, women tend to gravitate towards this trade as it guarantees steady income.

viii. *Social acceptance within the community:* There is no stigma attached to the women for engaging in this trade and hence they do it without any interference from the community. Majority of the women within the community are also a part of the same trade and hence suggest it to women who are in financial crisis. Both family members and neighbours support women during the legal processes, especially for purposes of bail.

ix. *Benefits from the trade:*

“I will continue doing this profession till I can physically manage. I am worried about my grandchildren and medical expenses of my husband.”

Some women mentioned that they had benefitted from the trade as they were able to get their children educated, get them married, build a home for the family, get medical treatment, and

repay loans. Having benefitted from the liquor trade in so many ways, they find it difficult to leave.

x. *Lack of awareness about government schemes:*

“I am not aware about any welfare scheme of the Government, and I have no citizenship documents.”

Lack of support and information about government schemes is another factor that prevents them from exiting the trade. There are instances where women have tried to leave the trade. They have stopped making or selling illicit liquor for some time. But due to factors mentioned above like pressure from the family, lack of sufficient income to run the household, medical emergencies, lack of available livelihood options, the women have restarted the trade.

Challenges faced

Women involved in the liquor trade face various challenges and are in risk due to the illegal nature of their work. Through the interviews some of the challenges faced by the women involved in the illicit liquor trade emerged, which are:

i. *Arrest:*

“I have cases registered against me, but I have no information about it. Whenever Police or advocates inform me, I attend the court.”

The major risk in this trade is of being arrested and being processed by the Criminal Justice System due to the illegal nature of the trade. The women who are a part of this trade live in the fear of being arrested by the police. The arrested women when sent to Judicial Custody have to face the ill-effects of imprisonment, including its impact on the lives of their children left outside and on their families. Most of these women have been to prison at least once. When these women go to prison and/or are being processed in the Criminal Justice System, money is needed for the legal process. This responsibility falls on the other family members. In some cases, the woman arranges for this money before going to prison. Sometimes, the money is procured by taking loans on heavy interest rates. Repayment becomes a challenge, and driving force to again sell liquor.

ii. *Effects of the trade on the family:* In some cases, the family members get addicted to alcohol. Family members become part of the trade without much awareness (like support in brewing or getting liquor from far off places, giving to customers, or living in the same house where liquor is brewed, kept or sold). It has been reported that family members then become economically dependent on the woman, and stop sharing or taking the financial responsibilities of the family.

iii. *Effects on Young boys and children:* Young boys, instead of taking up employment, prefer to while away their time with friends.

“While doing this (selling liquor), I could not pay attention to my son, now he doesn’t earn anything, he whiles away his time with his friends and he and his wife are dependent on me.”

In many cases, children get socialized at a young age towards the habit of drinking alcohol. They become part of the negative environment at home, or get involved in the processes of Criminal Justice System, when their mothers are being processed. Children start helping their mothers with selling alcohol and the procurement of the raw materials. This opens gates for the children to enter the trade. This affects their life from a very young age and also has a major effect on their education. In many cases the children have become economically dependent on mothers and they do not get engaged in any gainful employment. Most of the women denied the participation of children and family members in the trade, but during the visits, there were observations made by social workers, that children are involved in the trade. They help mothers to carry it, and for selling the same.

iv. *Health challenges:* Women have to walk long distances with heavy weights to procure liquor. This affects their health. One woman complained about her hands and fingers aching due to tying of plastic bag parcels of liquor. Some of the women were themselves addicted to alcohol. Women reported selling liquor during odd hours; this disturbs their sleep pattern. While brewing liquor, women face many health hazards. They live in the constant fear of being caught by the police. They also have to face verbal abuse. Women face both physical and mental health challenges.

v. *Conflict within families:* There are a few women who mentioned that their family members or their own children do not want their mothers to be involved in this trade. This can lead to conflict within families.

- vi. *Addiction:* One of the major challenges that these women face is the addiction to alcohol by their husbands. Many women mentioned that their husbands are addicted to alcohol. Not just husbands, but children also start drinking because of the normalized atmosphere that they witness around themselves.

- vii. *Vulnerable to sexual abuse:* The male customers drinking in the women's homes make them and their daughter's vulnerable to sexual abuse.

- viii. *Lack of livelihood options:* As most of the women are uneducated and unskilled, they do not have means of any other livelihood. They continue with the trade because other occupations fail to provide them with enough money to run their household or to satisfy their needs. Some of the women do not have access to options by which they can earn satisfactory income for their livelihood.

CHAPTER III

LEARNINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Learnings

Women participating in the illicit liquor trade are deeply entrenched in it. While they acknowledge the negative effects it has on them and their families, they are unable to get out of it due to social situations, economic needs and lack of livelihood options. Women have accepted selling of illicit liquor as a means of their livelihood. Most women did not have any expectation from the government or NGOs to support them to get out of the trade. Their expectation was peripheral like education for children, support for obtaining citizenship documents, support for starting a small business, etc. Most of them responded that they will be able to leave the trade when their children start earning and become financially independent. The interviewers' experience and observations revealed that in cases where children were earning, most did not support their mothers. The women had to continue their engagements in the trade in spite of increasing age and deteriorating health conditions. As long as there is social acceptance for illicit liquor, it would be very difficult to help the women get out of the illicit liquor trade.

Working with individual women in isolation may only achieve results in some cases wherein they have strong need to get out of the trade and are ready to face struggles and challenges. The problem is community driven. If one needs to intervene with the women for their rehabilitation, there is need to work with them, their families, community, and with the system.

The State has to take notice of this issue, and take responsibility for designing a rehabilitation plan for women involved in the illicit liquor trade, only implementing the prohibition law would not suffice.

Suggestions

Measures need to be taken to help women understand the negative effects on them, their families and the community at large. State level strategies are required to help these women get out of the trade.

It has emerged from our study that it is very important to do a state level study on women involved in illicit liquor trade in Gujarat, to suggest policy level measures to the government.

However some recommendations have emerged from the responses of women, observations during data collection and Prayas's experience in the field.

i. *State level Research:* A clear need has emerged to conduct a state level research on women in illicit liquor trade to understand the issue at larger level (this study clearly shows the need to intervene in the problem). This study was done in the area where many women in the villages were involved in the trade. Hence, there was social acceptance for the same. There could be places where women may be doing it in the community as individuals. It is important to understand challenges faced by these women to plan a sustainable rehabilitation plan and policy to support the women to get out of the trade.

ii. *Need for special scheme on rehabilitation of the women involved in illicit liquor trade.*

Under the scheme, Rehabilitation Guidance Centres could be initiated in the community, which can promote rehabilitation of women. The activities at such Centres may include counselling, vocational training, income generation activities, legal guidance, awareness on government schemes, and support for obtaining citizenship documents.

a. Awareness:

- ❖ Since this is a community driven trade, reforms within the community could be initiated along with working with individual women. Awareness should also be created amongst children and youth of the community.
- ❖ Awareness on various other government schemes which can benefit women and their family towards education, training, health and other welfare programmes.

b. Skill Training:

The skill trainings could be organised on the basis of understanding:

- ❖ The vocational skills or handicraft skills women in a particular area possess.
- ❖ Possibility and opportunity of marketing of the products.
- ❖ Employment opportunities in a particular geographical area.
- ❖ Various livelihood options need to be presented to women so that they are able to make choices to undergo training according to their interests, social situations and livelihood options of a particular area.

c. Provision of Seed Money to encourage small business and self employment

- ❖ Seed money could be provided to start small business with minimum documents. The scheme should be designed in such a way that the beneficiary would get the amount within short period of time after making an application. Delay in the process makes women lose faith and interest from the process, and in emergency situations, they tend to restart the trade.
- ❖ Ongoing support to the women to sustain the self employment – There is also need for trainings for sustaining small business.

d. Ensuring that women earn minimum wages:

- ❖ Vocational training programme leading to income generation or support provided to women for self employment should aim at providing women with income at least equivalent to minimum wages.

e. Legal guidance and aid:

- ❖ Legal guidance could be provided to women.
- ❖ Support could be provided to connect the women with free legal aid services.
- ❖ Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) could be involved for legal awareness & legal follow up in cases.

f. Support for obtaining citizenship document & accessing benefits of government schemes:

- ❖ Support could be provided to women to obtain citizenship rights documents like Aadhar card, Ration card with BPL score, and Voter ID card. Support should be provided to open bank accounts.

iii. *Support should be provided by the government to NGOs* which support women for their rehabilitation and/or ready to work in the community for this cause.

iv. *Connection with Self Help Groups:* The women could be connected with Self Help Groups in the area. This will provide them with ideas on alternative employment, access to training, savings and access to Government schemes.

v. *Awareness programmes on Sensitization:* Awareness programmes for police, judiciary, legal aid advocates, and other departments to encourage them to intervene with women in a sensitised manner which could increase possibility of rehabilitation.

Annexure 1

Interview Guide for Women Participants

Date of Interview:

Name of the Social Worker:

Name of the Respondent:

1. Personal Details

- Age:
- Marital Status:
- Education:
- Vocational Skill:
- Monthly income:

- Address:

- Contact No:

- Information about Maternal / Marital Family:

- Citizenship Documents Available:
 - Aadhar Card
 - Election Card
 - PAN Card
 - Ration Card:- BPL -
APL -
Antyodaya-
 - Bank Account:
 - Educational Certificates:
 - Any other:

- Benefit of Govt. Schemes availed:
 - Ma Amrutam / Ma Vatsalya Card:
 - Pradhanmantri Aavas Yojana:
 - Manav Kalyan Garima Yojana:
 - Vidhwa Pension:
 - Any other Schemes:
 - Scheme benefit for children:

2. Family Details

No	Name	Relationship with Respondent	Age	Sex	Education	Occupation	Monthly Income

3. Information about the profession

- Since how many years/months are you into this profession?

- What were you doing earlier before entering into profession?

- What reasons/situations led you to enter the profession?

- Who informed you/taught you enter the profession? / Process of entry

- How many cases are registered against you or your family? / Status of the cases
 - Who supports you in the legal process against you or your family?
 - How much is your daily, monthly income?
4. What are some positive and negative changes in your life after getting involved in this profession?
5. Does your family, children support you, if yes, how? & if no, why?
6. What are the challenges / consequences in the profession?
- on self
 - on children
 - legal
 - family/societal
7. Have you ever thought of leaving the profession or made attempts to do so?
- Yes
 - No
- 7.a If yes, than what are the measures you have tried and what challenges you have faced?
8. Do you want to leave this profession?
- Yes
 - No
- 8.a If yes, than what support and services do you require?
- from family
 - from society
 - from NGO
 - from Government

8.b. In this context, are you aware of any welfare schemes of the government?

8.c.If no, why?

9. What are your future plans?

10. Notes/Remarks