



THE DYNAMICS OF MENTAL HEALTH AMONG FEMALE SEX WORKERS IN BULELENG BALI

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ABSTRACT

Mental health in female sex workers (FSWs) are influenced by a complex array of factors. Significant challenges impacting mental health include social pressure and unstable working conditions. This study aims to understand the influence of social stigma, working conditions, and social support on the mental health of FSWs. Method: This research utilizes a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The independent variables are social stigma, working conditions, and social support, while the dependent variable is mental health. The study population consists of FSWs in Buleleng Regency, with a sample size of 120 participants selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments include the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) scale for measuring anxiety and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) for measuring stress. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Social stigma has a direct and significant impact on the mental health of FSWs ($\beta = 0,294$, t -statistic=2,868, $p < 0,01$). Additionally, working conditions also have a significant direct effect on mental health ($\beta = -0,343$, t -statistik=4,569, $p < 0,01$). Social support acts as a mediator, mitigating the negative impact of social stigma and working conditions on mental health ($\beta = -0,247$, t -statistik=2,253, $p < 0,01$). Overall indicating that social stigma, working conditions, and social support are key factors influencing the mental health of FSWs.

Keywords: female sex workers; mental health; social stigma; social support

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial aspect of every individual's life, (Acoba, 2024) including sex workers, who often face various psychological pressures.(White,2024) FSW are in a vulnerable position due to their work, which is frequently viewed with disdain and deemed immoral,(Crivatu et al., 2023) leading to a strong social stigma that adversely affects their mental well-being.(Brouwers, 2020) This stigma often arises not only from the general public but also from formal institutions such as healthcare services, which should provide support.(Lim et al., 2022)(Goldenberg et al., 2021) The social stigma surrounding FSW creates an environment where they feel isolated and undervalued, hindering their willingness to seek help for mental health issues (Beattie et al., 2020)and exacerbating their psychological conditions.(Toubiana & Ruebottom, 2022) Fear of judgment and discrimination drives many FSW to silently endure their suffering, ultimately worsening their mental health.(Mirbahaeddin & Chreim, 2022) Previous research indicates a strong correlation between social stigma and increased anxiety, depression(Charlson et al., 2016) and high stress levels among FSW.(Daniel et al., 2023) The work conditions faced by FSW also significantly impact their mental health, as unstable employment, hazardous work environments, and lack of legal protection add to their psychological burden.(Keplinger & Smith, 2022) Income uncertainty and the risk of violence from clients or others are part of their daily reality,

triggering stress and anxiety, (Martín-Romo et al., 2023) compounded by inadequate access to healthcare and social support. (Ahad et al., 2023).

Social support amid these challenges has been shown to be a significant protective factor for the mental health of FSW.(Abdulla et al., 2024; Bjørlykhaug et al., 2022) Support from family,(Bražínová & Chytil, 2024) friends, or the community can help them cope with stigma and difficult work conditions, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance vital for building psychological resilience. (Kirkbride et al., 2024) Research has revealed that social support can mitigate the negative effects of stress and anxiety, enhancing individuals' capacity to cope with life pressures.(Gronholm et al., 2024) (Beattie et al., 2020) This study aims to delve deeper into the impact of social stigma, work conditions, and social support on the mental health of FSW in Buleleng, Bali. By employing a quantitative approach and cross-sectional design, this research seeks to provide a clearer picture of the dynamics affecting the psychological well-being of FSW. This study aims to understand the influence of social stigma, working conditions, and social support on the mental health of female sex workers (FSWs). The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for formulating effective policies and interventions to improve the mental health and quality of life of FSW in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study utilizes a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design to analyze the influence of social stigma, work conditions, and social support on the mental health of FSW. The population consists of FSW working in Buleleng, with a sample size of 120 individuals selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire comprising several standardized instruments. The instruments used were tested for validity and reliability. The validity test showed that all items had a correlation coefficient (r) above 0.30, indicating good construct validity. For the reliability test, the instruments were measured using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha for each construct was as follows: social stigma 0.82, work conditions 0.78, Social support 0.85, Mental health 0.88. All values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability. Therefore, the instruments used in this study are valid and reliable for measuring the variables under investigation. The primary instrument is the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) scale, measuring the respondents anxiety levels through seven items rated on a likert scale from "never" to "almost every day." The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was used to assess the level of stress experienced by respondents over the past month, comprising ten items also rated on a likert scale.

Social stigma was measured through a questionnaire assessing negative perceptions from society, discrimination experienced, and social isolation. Work conditions were evaluated through items assessing job stability, work environment, job security, and working hours. Social support was measured using a questionnaire assessing emotional, practical, and peer support from family, friends, and coworkers. Data were collected through direct surveys conducted by the researcher and three trained enumerators. Respondents were informed about the study's purpose and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their data. After consenting to participate, respondents completed the provided questionnaires. Collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with statistical software to test both direct and indirect relationships between independent variables (social stigma, work conditions, social support) and the dependent variable (mental health), evaluating the theoretical model simultaneously while assessing the mediating role of social support.

RESULTS

The analysis model demonstrating the impact of social stigma, work conditions, and social support on mental health indicates that social stigma and work conditions have a moderate influence of 49.1%. Moreover, the combined effects of social stigma, social support, and work conditions on mental health account for 60.8%.

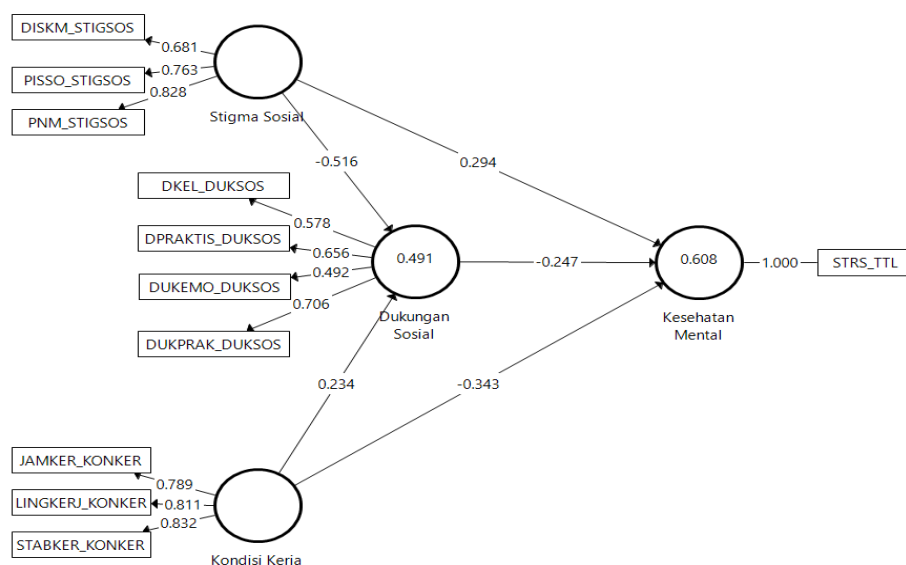


Figure 1. Measurement Model

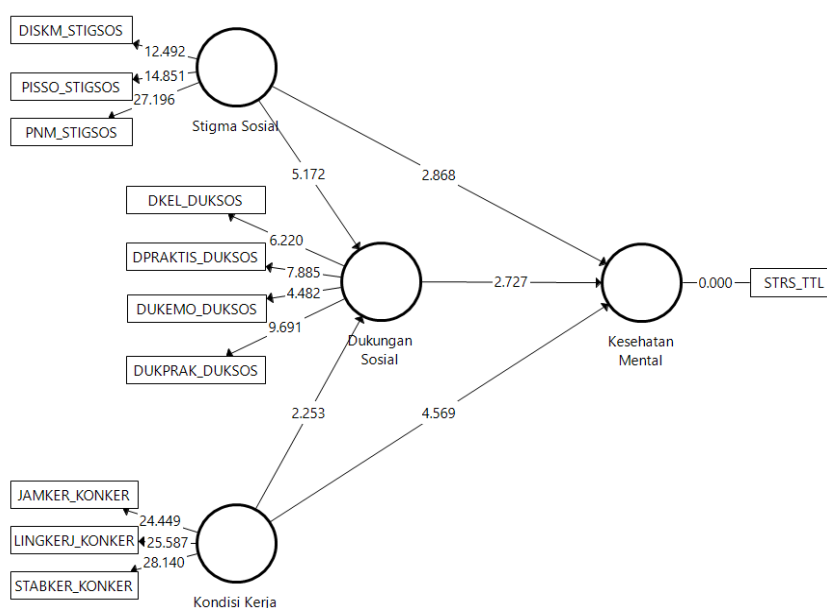
The results have met the goodness of fit criteria, suggesting a moderate evaluation of the model.

Table 1.
Construct Reliability and Validity

Items	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability
Social Stigma		0,803
DISKM_STIGSOS: Discrimination Experienced	0,681	
PISSO_STIGSOS: Experience of Social Isolation	0,763	
PNM_STIGSOS: Negative Perceptions from Society	0,828	
Social Support		0,703
DKEL_DUKSOS: Support from Family	0,578	
DPRAKTIS_DUKSOS: Practical Support	0,656	
DUKEMO_DUKSOS: Emotional Support	0,492	
DUKPRAK_DUKSOS: Practical Support	0,706	
Work Conditions		0,852
JAMKER_KONKER: Working Hours	0,789	
LINKERJ_KONKER: Work Environment	0,811	
STABKER_KONKER Job Stability	0,832	
Mental Health		1.000
STRS_TTL	1.000	

Table 1 shows that all indicators of the variables of social stigma, social support, and work conditions are valid as they have outer loading values ≥ 0.4 . Composite reliability indicates good reliability with values ≥ 0.7 , making all constructs in this study suitable for the model. The modeling results meet the criteria, with both latent and manifest variables modified appropriately. The measurement of fit after SEM modifications is displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Structural Model



Based on Figure 2, it demonstrates that social stigma, social support, and work conditions significantly influence mental health, with t-statistics of 2.868, 2.727, and 4.569, respectively, all ≥ 1.96 . Social support serves as a mediator in the relationship between social stigma and mental health. The hypothesis testing compared the p-values with the significance level alpha of 0.05. The results of the hypotheses are detailed in Table 2

Table 2.
Result of Hypothesis Testing

No	Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
1	Social Support → Mental Health	-0,247	0,091	2,727	0,007	Supported
2	Work Conditions → Social Support	0,234	0,104	2,253	0,025	Supported
3	Work Conditions → Mental Health	-0,343	0,075	4,569	0,000	Supported
4	Social Stigma → Social Support	-0,516	0,100	5,172	0,000	Supported
5	Social Stigma → Mental Health	0,294	0,103	2,868	0,004	Supported
6	Work Conditions → Social Support → Mental Health	-0,118	0,048	2,520	0,011	Supported
7	Social Stigma → Social Support → Mental Health	0,127	0,050	2,563	0,014	Supported

The data analysis results in Table 2 show that the hypothesis is accepted if the statistical value ≥ 1.96 , indicating that social support negatively influences mental health with a t-statistic of $2.727 \geq 1.96$ ($\beta = -0.247$). As social support improves, psychological stress scores for SW decrease. Work conditions negatively impact mental health with a t-statistic of $4.569 \geq 1.96$ ($\beta = -0.343$); better working conditions lead to reduced psychological stress scores. Social stigma affects mental health with a t-statistic of $2.868 \geq 1.96$ ($\beta = 0.294$). SW experiencing social stigma will see an increase in psychological stress scores. Furthermore, social stigma influences mental health through social support, as indicated by a t-statistic of $2.563 \geq 1.96$ ($\beta = 0.127$). Increased social stigma leads to

decreased social support, resulting in higher psychological stress for FSW. Work conditions also impact mental health through social support, supported by a t-statistic of $2.520 \geq 1.96$ ($\beta = -0.058$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that social stigma has a significant impact on the mental health of FSWs in Buleleng, Bali. This finding is consistent with various previous studies showing that social stigma can be a substantial source of stress for individuals working in the informal sector, including FSWs. Research by (Wulifan, 2024) highlights that stigmatization contributes to chronic stress and mental health issues among marginalized groups, such as sex workers, who often experience societal rejection and discrimination. Similarly, studies by (Sari et al., 2023) emphasize that internalized stigma when individuals accept and believe negative stereotypes about themselves can lead to decreased self-esteem, increased anxiety, and depression among FSWs. This is in line with the present study, which found that social stigma exacerbates mental health issues, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.45$, indicating a considerable impact. Work conditions also have a significant influence on the mental health of FSWs. According to studies (Van Laar et al., 2019) FSWs often work in unsafe environments, facing unstable working hours, lack of legal protections, and the constant threat of physical and psychological violence from clients or law enforcement. These adverse work conditions can heighten stress and anxiety, directly affecting their mental health. (Winter & Olivia, 2024) further affirm that such precarious working conditions contribute to chronic stress and anxiety, aligning with this study's finding that work conditions, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.38$, significantly affect FSWs' psychological well-being. This research also uncovered the interesting finding that social support acts as a significant mediator in the relationship between social stigma, work conditions, and mental health.

Studies have long established that social support is a protective factor in mental health, reducing stress and improving emotional resilience. For instance, research by (Voss et al., 2023) and (Singer et al., 2021) demonstrates how emotional and practical support from family, friends, or community members helps individuals cope with negative experiences and mitigates the adverse effects of stigma. In this study, the mediation coefficient of $\beta = -0.42$ highlights that social support can buffer the detrimental effects of stigma and poor work conditions, helping FSWs manage stress and maintain better mental health. (Kelloway et al., 2023) similarly found that individuals with strong social networks tend to experience lower levels of anxiety and depression. These findings have important implications for policy formulation and interventions aimed at improving the mental health of FSWs. Interventions focused on reducing social stigma, such as public awareness campaigns and healthcare worker training, can create more inclusive environments for FSWs, as emphasized by studies on stigma reduction in marginalized populations by (Kanayama et al., 2022). Additionally, efforts to improve work conditions by advocating for safer environments and legal protections for FSWs, as suggested by (Bemme & Kirmayer, 2020) are crucial for reducing occupational stress and improving psychological well-being.

Interventions focused on reducing social stigma, such as public awareness campaigns and training for healthcare workers, can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for FSW. (Potter et al., 2022) Furthermore, efforts to improve work conditions, such as ensuring access to safe working environments and legal protections, are also crucial for reducing stress and enhancing the psychological well-being of FSW. (Hoffman et al., 2021) However, it is essential to acknowledge that this study has limitations, including its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for causal conclusions. Additionally, this research is confined to one geographic location, so generalizing the results to FSW populations in other

regions should be approached with caution. Future studies using longitudinal or experimental designs could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of FSW mental health and how specific interventions may affect their well-being in the long term.

CONCLUSION

The mental health of FSW in Buleleng is influenced by a complex array of factors, including social stigma, working conditions, and social support. Social stigma has been found to have a direct and significant impact on the mental health of FSW, increasing their levels of anxiety and stress. Additionally, unstable and high-risk working conditions also negatively affect their psychological well-being. However, social support plays a crucial role as a mediator that can mitigate the negative effects of social stigma and poor working conditions. Support from family, friends, and the community can be a source of strength that helps FSW cope with the pressures and challenges they face, thus maintaining their mental health. Efforts to improve the mental health of FSW should include strategies to reduce stigma, enhance working conditions, and strengthen social support. Integrated and sustained interventions in these three areas are essential to ensure better psychological well-being and quality of life for FSW.

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