

Job Satisfaction among Women Weavers in Kerala: A Grounded Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

Weaving is a part of the rich heritage of India. Weaving is a profession that is taken up by women as their livelihood in many parts of the country. This study applies grounded theory on the social phenomenon of job satisfaction among the women weavers of three old and popular weavers' villages in Kerala. The aim was to explore and analyze the job satisfaction among the rural women and the components which positively affect the overall wellbeing of these women artisans. The study applied grounded theory method of data collection and analysis on the job satisfaction among the women weavers in Kerala. The favorable family and work environment were the core categories for analyzing the job satisfaction. The associated properties include wellbeing of children and other members in the family, efficiency in managing household activities and support from elders, the traditional nature, training, welfare scheme and flexible work option.

According to the need of the grounded theory, a particular social process was chosen for analysis and data was collected according to the emerging interpretations. The above study shows that job satisfaction for rural women can be achieved only if she experiences a good family wellbeing. The women weavers of Kerala were enjoying this favorable family and work environment being a weaver as they are able to efficiently manage their work and house hold duties. The weaving profession is a blessing for the rural women with basic education to work and earn without compromising their home responsibility.

Keywords: Women weavers, Job satisfaction, Family environment, Work environment.

INTRODUCTION:

Weaving is a part of the rich heritage of India. Most of the traditional fabrics woven in India are handloom fabrics. Weaving is a profession that is taken up by women as their livelihood in many parts of the country. This study applies grounded theory on the social phenomenon of job satisfaction among the women weavers in Kerala. The objective of this study was to generate a substantive theory of job satisfaction among women weavers that describes the processes involved in this profession. Even though so many studies have been conducted about the problems and prospects of weavers all over India, no study has been conducted among the women weavers who are engaged in weaving while shouldering the responsibilities at home. Majority of men from the traditional weaver's family, have shifted from their traditional business to other professions for better income. But we witness a paradigm shift when it comes to women weavers in these villagers. This study has come up with the inference that there is an increase in the number of women opting for weaving as a profession. It also explores the reasons for the change in the mindset of these women in rural areas of Kerala. The researcher has done ethnographic study among the women weavers of Kerala, to quantify the data. Since it involves data collection and analysis of an activity (weaving) which forms a main source of income for the subject under analysis, it is important to find out the emotional quotient and the level of job satisfaction

experienced by the women weavers.

The study described in this article provides a detailed analysis of job satisfaction among the women weavers, including various conscious and subconscious processes in balancing their household activities along with their profession and how these processes are influenced by their culture and lifestyle.

The traditional weaver community of Kerala, known as '*Padma Saliyas*' is a community that has migrated from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. These weavers were settled in streets or particular centers which were against the Kerala pattern of dispersed settlement. This community enjoys certain respect in the Kerala society. The loom had been set up in their home and the family members including women and children were involved in the production process. The return from this skill oriented labour intensive work was very less compared to other category of jobs and even now it is not attractive. Due to this, the younger generations of these traditional weavers shifted to other profession which provides them a better living.

The Government has established many organizations and welfare schemes for the benefit of artisans in the rural areas. These schemes and training programmes have attracted many young women from these weavers' village. They have successfully entered this field, which helped in reducing the issue of unemployment among the rural women in Kerala. Today the older generations of women are more into weaving, not only in Kerala but also in India as a whole. Indian society does not consider weavers as laborers, but respects them as weavers. Weaving in India always elicited a lot respect throughout history.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The unique feature of grounded theory is the close assessment of empirical data prior to intense literature review. The objective is to adapt earlier findings to the result of the study, rather than developing preconceptions based on the extend literature which influence the research design and interpretation of data. This theoretical process focuses on identification of theoretical categories. The data is collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Hammerley, 1989). The constant comparative method demands the researcher to evaluate the contents of each interview or observation with another and with emerging theoretical concepts to identify hidden themes (Wells, 1995; Barnes 1996). The comparative method used in this particular study pertains to women weavers in Payannur, Balaramapuram and Paravur.

The use of the grounded theory method in analyzing job satisfaction of women weavers in Kerala is confined to general references and to the implementation of a "grounded approach" to the data collection and analysis as far as this research is concerned. It means that data collection has largely preceded the review of the relevant literature in order to allow the emergent themes to closely reflect on the nature of the data as opposed to the conclusions drawn in the extant literature.

The use of grounded theory in this field of research is also characterized by the analysis concluding at the point of theme generation rather than advancing through the identification of the core categories and their properties, understanding of job satisfaction can be clearer through the thorough application of the grounded theory method (Pettigrew, 2000).

METHODOLOGY:

According to the need of the grounded theory, a particular social process was chosen for analysis and data was collected according to the emerging interpretations. This data was collected prior to the review of literature, and the central theme was permitted to come out from the data, rather than making an effort to fit into a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Participant observations, non-participant observations, and also intensive interviews using systematically generative and concept related questions were used to gather data relating to job satisfaction of women weavers in Kerala. The selected samples for the study are the women weavers working at the Department units, Cooperative Societies and also the weavers who are working at home by setting looms at their residence. In total, 150 women weavers were interviewed and observed, from three old and popular weavers' villages of three zones of Kerala. From the weavers' village of Payyanur in Kannur District of Northern Kerala (the oldest weaver's villages in Kerala), 60 respondents were selected for the study. Forty respondents were interviewed from the North Paravur Village at Ernakulam district of Central Kerala which functions under the Gandhi Smaraka Grama Seva Kendra, (one of the earliest Centers of Kerala), and 50 respondents were from the women weavers of Balaramapuram, at Thiruvananthapuram, an Internationally renowned weavers' village of Southern Kerala.

Majority of the weavers interviewed were working under the departmental units and Cooperative societies. Many women weavers were working at the loom installed at their own home under the guidance of instructors

of the Department units and Cooperative societies. The researcher collected the information by interacting with the weavers personally and recorded the data in the form of videos as well as audios. The interview was based on a structured questionnaire. In addition to the interviews conducted at cooperative societies and department units, additional interviews were conducted among the women weavers who were working at home, to provide a broader view of the job satisfaction among the women weavers of Kerala.

In addition to weaver informants, seven instructors from these cooperative society and department units were also interviewed to collect more information about the women weavers as they are closely connected with the weavers of these villages. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. The weavers and instructors of cooperative society and department units helped a lot by providing the address and contact numbers of weavers who are working at their residence. The weavers weaving at home loom cooperated much more than the weavers who were working at different centres. Suitable approaches were made to different informants, depending on their age and work place. The nature of the subject matter seem to be very interesting to the respondents, and it helped to extract detailed information on their working atmosphere and its role in giving them job satisfaction. Manual method for coding and analyzing was used in this particular study. The data collected as videos, audios and observation notes were transmitted into transcript and submitted to the expert for coding purpose. The researcher along with the coders studied the transcript thoroughly which improved the acquaintance with the data to define and label the categories, the derivation of meaning and the development of a grounded theory.

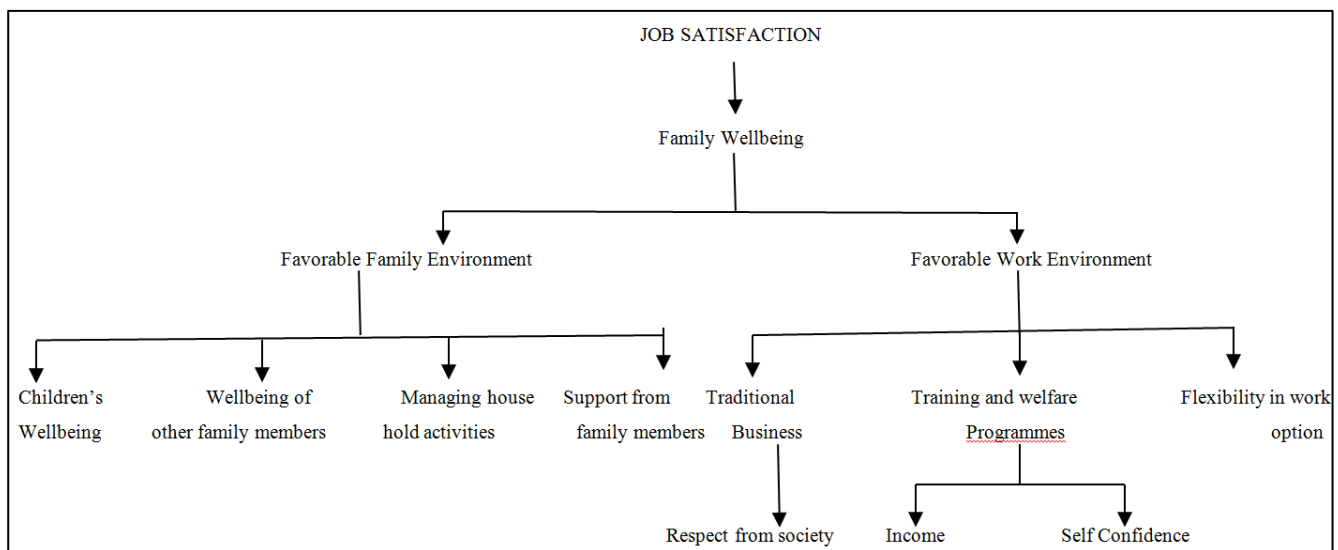


Figure 1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the grounded theory approach generally used to create explanations about certain phenomenon, which include development and identification of core categories and examining its related properties. Through the inductive theory generation process employed in this study, the primary concern of women weavers was found to be family well being. This concern is thus proposed to constitute the core category relevant to job satisfaction among women weavers in Kerala. Family wellbeing has significant influence on the favorable family environment and work environment and these were in this context refer to the main factors which effects their job satisfaction (refer figure 1). Family wellbeing influences the physical and psychological wellbeing of women, which has a direct impact on the job satisfaction of a woman. This process involves weavers experiencing both positive and negative feelings during the course of maintaining better family wellbeing.

The study focused primarily on women who are full time home makers. Weaving is not a full time profession for them. It is a part time job to supplement the family income. Women have to shoulder the full time responsibilities of the house and children along with this activity. Family is the prime concern for these respondents. They are women who believe in the age old tradition that family is the most important thing for a woman. The relevance of family wellbeing as a core category was also apparent in respondents' belief that for a women, family is more important than career, so for attaining job satisfaction one requires a happy family atmosphere. The personality characteristics have effective influence on the physical and psychological

wellbeing of women, mainly the balance of positive and negative emotions and psychological liberty, which may help the maintenance of a well balance between the need of self and those of other family members (Kieran Mc Keown, Jonathan Pratschke, Trutz Haase, 2003).

Properties:

Properties signify the features or characteristics of a core category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The properties of the core category, family wellbeing includes two main primary components, favorable family environment and favorable working environment (refer figure 1). The primary components of favorable family environment include positive relationship with children's wellbeing, wellbeing of other members in the family, efficiency in managing household activities and support from the other members of the family. The traditional nature of the business, training, welfare scheme and flexible work option are the main factors that influenced the favorable work environment.

Family Wellbeing:

Women have traditionally been very much involved in family life and family is the most important factor for their happiness. This happiness will contribute to the family wellbeing. The components included in the family wellbeing are the children's wellbeing, wellbeing of other members of the family, efficiency in managing household activities along with the job, support from the elders and economic independence. There are several factors that are relevant to these properties, including their age, number and age of their children, and the structure of their family (Nuclear family or joint family). The family well-being will be influenced by so many factors, both inside and outside. According to the women weavers of these villages, weaving is the most respectful and suitable job for a low educated rural woman, which they can perform without affecting their children's wellbeing and wellbeing of other members of their family, which they believed to be the most important responsibility of a woman.

The requirement for childcare is vital to the development of individuals and society. The primary concern of a woman weaver is her child. Sending the children to the childcare centres on working days are not feasible for these less educated women as the job opportunity available for them are of low profile with low salary and not sufficient to meet these expenses. More over these kinds of facilities are very rare in rural areas in Kerala. This weaving job provides them with a better environment and with a flexible time schedule. Because of the flexibility of time schedule, they are able to look after their children along with the work. According to Emma Saman, Elizabeth Prester-Marshall, Nicola Jones (2016), the pressure of trying to balance the work and children are the main reasons behind women taking low profile job in the informal sectors. The women weaver's enjoy the flexibility in time schedule, the unique feature of weaving profession, enables them to balance the role as a home maker and a professional. The weaver's who are working at home loom are comfortable with this job as they can work without compromising their children's need.

A respondent named Priya Krishna, aged 23, who had completed her matriculation, states:

"... a woman like me who has only basic education and who belongs to the economically challenged section, this weaving job is real blessing. This profession helps me to work and earn comfortably. I have the advantage of staying at home, managing my household activities and taking care of my two year old daughter without troubling my in laws".

The advantages of women entering this profession are many. There is no dislocation of family responsibilities; the greatest challenge being the fragmentation of the joint family which makes women solely responsible for child care. This flexi system gives them time and space to create more economic and social security. Economic insecurity is the greatest trauma for women belonging to this category. This structure ensures more emotional security when it comes to two important ingredients of family well being i.e. financial independence and total freedom to execute their work at one's own convenience. Most of the respondents were unanimous in voicing that they consider family as their greatest priority. In modern society a woman plays a key role in the sustainable development and ensuring quality of life in the family.

Many of the respondents belong to the joint family and the flexibility in the time schedule allows them to spend time with the elder members of the family.

A respondent named Mini, aged 27, states that:

"...there is no fixed time schedule at the Cooperative society and I can work according to my convenience. It enables me to take care of my mother in law, who is suffering from severe arthritis".

The interview with the women respondents categorically establishes the fact that family well being is more important to them than anything else. This is very much connected to their job satisfaction.

The hostile work environment will not offer them any job satisfaction. Women in general wanted to remain in conflict free zones and this is very important for them than earning more money. Most of the respondents belonged to families which were very conservative in their beliefs and practices. According to them the self – reliance that they experienced in this profession, earned them support from their elders in the family and it generated a lot of good will in the community at large. This offered more stability to their homes and kept them free from stress.

Traditional family practice is very important dictum for the women weavers in Kerala. They appeared to be very happy and proud of the fact that they are weavers. The weavers who were interviewed in this study demonstrated efficiency in managing the job and home activities and these are being fed as main variables into their job satisfaction. Respondents often mentioned that they were aware of the working pattern of their peer, and it was evident that they engaged in a constant comparison between their own working pattern and those of others. This working atmosphere ensured that their working pattern remains acceptable to the set parameters of the society where they belong to and hence these weavers felt much more comfortable with their pattern of work. They assured that they had chosen the “right” job and are satisfied with their work even though it is not economically very productive.

The environment of the family largely influences a woman’s job satisfaction. A 72 year old mother- in- law of a Khadi woman weaver Meenakshi, who is a widower, is still doing the spinning using ‘charka’ at her home and helping her daughter in law. She said she is very happy and proud of her daughter-in- law for continuing their family profession. The attitude of the elders in the family also affects their mental satisfaction. Thus the women weavers of these villages seem to be very happy with their weaving job – a job with traditional importance, which they can perform along with their household responsibilities, provides a large amount of job satisfaction.

Working Environment:

Unemployment is the major issue faced by the rural women in Kerala. The economic pressure and rise in cost of living in urban and rural area have created an impact on the women to go for work and they are struggling to balance their role as a homemaker as well as a professional facing all the challenges from the family and the society. The weaving profession is a solution to this issue among low educated women in the villages of Kerala. The job opportunities in rural area remain very limited and these rural women are not willing to go out of their village for work. The male community of weavers’ family has been shifted from their traditional weaving business to other profession for a better living. Many daughters-in-law of this weaver’s village, who do not have prior knowledge in weaving, have been attracted to the training provided by the Central Government with a monthly stipend, have successfully entered this field as professional weavers. The weavers are paid on the basis of meters of fabric that they weave. An amount of Rs.33/- is paid per meter as wages. Production based incentives and marketing development assistance (MDA) are provided by the Government as an additional incentives.

According to a respondent named Asha, 32 years old house wife states:

“...it is difficult for us to go out and work. Even though my husband shifted his traditional weaving profession to another work for a better income, he encouraged me to learn the weaving process and helped me to set up a loom at my residence with the help of Khadi Board. I feel very proud that I am able to support my family with my income and being at home looking after my children and managing my other house hold work”.

The flexibility in the work option in this profession is also an important factor which attracted many house wives to this field. There is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and flexible work options. Studies show that the flexibility in the workplace provides more satisfaction among the women workers (Thulaseedharan, A. & Kumar V, N, 2015).

The weaving job provides them a favorable working atmosphere in which they can work by balancing their role as a home maker and as a professional. It also enabled them to earn and contribute an income to their family. Many rural women with basic education make use of this profession. They work at home, at Cooperative Societies and at different department units in Kerala. This helped to reduce the unemployment among rural women with basic education in the State.

The Department units and Cooperative societies have found that the majority of women weavers were attracted by the flexibility of the work pattern in this profession. No kind of compulsion is there in the amount of fabric to be woven in a day (e.g. this much meters of fabric has to be woven in a day). The weavers have freedom to weave according to their convenience. The women weavers were delighted that they are able to contribute a substantial income to the family without affecting the family wellbeing.

A respondent named Devi states that:

"...there is no strict work schedule in the cooperative societies. We can work according to our convenience and I am able to work only for 4 hours in a day, which is according to my convenience. The remuneration is based on the meters of cloth which we weave".

They believe that it is better to become a weaver than going outside the village, which in turn provides a better income and one needs to compromise on family time".

A respondent named Karthika aged 39 state that;

"...Even though the returns from this hard skill labour is not that satisfactory, we are happy with this as it is our traditional and family profession where we enjoy the respect from society".

The predominant analysis of the data highlights the fact that there is a lot of respect for the weavers as the community values the essence of the sacred work that they do. The respect from the society is very important for them, as they always perform according to the nature and traditional practice of the society in which they live.

A 75 year old respondent named Shanthamma states that:

"...in those days whole family was involved in weaving process. Women in the family usually did the spinning and the men will carry out the weaving process".

The understanding of the importance of weaving provides a proud feeling in them.

Young women weavers were more active in their working style, and are able to learn and adapt new techniques in the weaving process which helps them to be productive. The regular training from the Government has equipped them to become successful weavers which help them to earn more income and enable them to develop confidence. The flexible work option provides them a comfortable working environment, where they can work peacefully. The assumption tends to be that the nature of their job is flexible and they need to work according to their comfort. The weavers accept their job nature and environment rather than attempting to search and understand the nature and benefit of taking up other jobs outside their village. They believe that being a rural woman weaver is the apt profession for them and their family wellbeing. They are very much interested in updating their weaving skills, and are able to efficiently balance their household work along with their profession.

Women weavers had communicated their feeling and experience of their profession to the researcher. The researcher was able to create a bonding and trust among the weavers and the other members who are closely related with them. (e.g. the family members and the instructors of Khadi Board). The weavers had communicated clearly the process and nature of their work. They also demonstrated the weaving process with devotion at work.

The communications with the weavers and with the other people who are closely related with them facilitated the researcher to draw rich information related to job satisfaction. Flexibility in workplace brings more satisfaction among women; there is a positive relationship between the job satisfaction and the flexible work option (Thulaseedharan,A & Kumar V N, 2015).

A respondent Lakshmi, states that:

"...I opted for this weaving profession because of its flexible time schedule, as it is not possible for people like me to take up a job which demands a fixed time schedule".

The family environment also plays a vital role in their job satisfaction. One respondent named Asha, aged 29 years, whose father- in-law is bed ridden and who has 2 small children is successfully doing this profession along with taking care of her in-laws and children.

According to a respondent, named Asha (35 years):

“...Sometimes it seems to be difficult to manage both, but the flexibility in the time schedule is helping me to balance my responsibility as a home maker and a professional; moreover this weaving is a stress buster for me and it helps to build confidence in me”.

Thus this weaving profession provides the less educated women of the weaver's village a better working environment which helps them to earn income and to develop confidence. This contributes to their family wellbeing that leads to their job satisfaction.

Theoretical implications:

The grounded theory of women's job satisfaction outlined above has several implications of existing Job satisfaction theories. The prime concern of the women is the family, not career. High levels of family responsibility cause increased time requirements and strain on the family and this will interfere with the employee's work roles (Higgins,1987), Women in general wanted to remain in conflict free zones and this is very important for them than earning more money. Flexibility in workplace brings more satisfaction among women; there is a positive relationship between the job satisfaction and the flexible work option (Thulaseedharan, A. & Kumar V N, 2015). Work in unorganized sector with a flexible work option provides the women an economic security which will be a solution for rural women unemployment.

The personality characteristics have effective influence on the physical and psychological wellbeing of women, mainly the balance of positive and negative emotions and psychological liberty, which may help the maintenance of a well balance between the need of self and those of other family members (Kieran Mc Keown, Jonathan Pratschke, Trutz Haase, 2003). Support from elders provides a mental support for the working women. The studies show that the family wellbeing has influence on the children's wellbeing (Higgins, 1987). These women belonged to families which were very conservative in their beliefs and practices, the self-reliance that they experienced in the traditional family professions, earned them support from their elders in the family and it generated a lot of good will in the community at large. This offered more stability to their homes and kept them free from stress. The skill oriented jobs like weaving is a stress buster for women.

Studies show that people who have satisfying jobs have a higher level of wellbeing and happiness, thus we can say that the wellbeing and happiness is closely related with the job satisfaction. Happiness is the core factor for the job satisfaction and this happiness will be achieved only if they have a favorable family and work environment.

CONCLUSION:

The use of the grounded theory method in the analysis of Job satisfaction among the women weavers of Kerala was useful in analyzing and developing an idea in detail regarding the process of job satisfaction among the women weavers of Kerala. It can be concluded from the above study that Job satisfaction for rural women can be achieved only if she experiences a good family wellbeing. These women are emotionally very much concerned about their family and its wellbeing. The women weavers of Kerala are enjoying this favorable family and work environment being a weaver as they are able to efficiently manage their work and house hold duties. The main reason behind this is the flexible nature of this profession, which provides weavers with flexible work option and time schedule. The women weavers of Kerala are very much satisfied with this profession as this is a versatile job which the society respects and consider them as weavers rather labourers. The weaving profession is a blessing for the rural women with basic education to work and earn without compromising their home responsibility.

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