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WEAVING THROUGH PAIN: UNDERSTANDING THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF WEAVERS

Arati S. Hattiholi[1], Sadanand B. Sugandhi[2]
[1]*Research Scholar; Department of Studies in Anthropology Karnatak University Dharwad*
[2]*Assistant Professor Department of Studies in Anthropology Karnatak University Dharwad*

ABSTRACT
Power loom and handloom industry are one of those few industries where practically all the family members are involved in either weaving or allied activities. Weaving is the ancient art of transforming threads into tapestries of beauty and utility, often hides a darker narrative - one of occupational health hazards that silently weave their way into the lives of those who practice it. From musculoskeletal disorders, eyesight problem to respiratory illnesses, weavers pay a significant price for their dedication to their craft. This article aims to unveil these hazards, their causes, and advocating for a healthier and more sustainable weaving future.

KEYWORDS: *occupational health hazards, power loom and handloom weavers, government policies.*

INTRODUCTION

Weaving, an ancient and revered craft, transforms threads into intricate textiles that are both beautiful and functional. However, this art form conceals a darker reality: the significant occupational health hazards that affect the weavers. From musculoskeletal disorders to respiratory illnesses, the physical toll on weavers is profound. Additionally, the psychological stresses associated with long hours, economic instability, and inadequate working conditions further exacerbate their challenges. This article delves into these hidden health issues, examining their causes and proposing potential solutions. By shedding light on these concerns, we aim to advocate for a healthier, safer, and more sustainable future for weavers, ensuring that the legacy of their craft continues without compromising their well-being. Weavers, while creating beautiful textiles, grapple with several health issues. Let us examine some of the common hazards:

Metgud et al. (Cardio-Respiratory and Musculoskeletal Profile): A study on women workers in a woollen textile factory revealed that 91% of subjects experienced musculoskeletal pain, with postural pain in the lower back (47%) and neck (19%).

Alka Goel and Isha Tyagi (2012): in this study the author as studied on the occupational health hazards related allied to weaving. The study conducted in Mahua Dabra village, near Jaspur in Uttarakhand, where 70 handloom weavers were personally interviewed and gathered the data related to health problems, they are facing related to weaving occupation. The author found inhaling woollen fibre causes respiratory diseases as the do work without wearing mask and bobbin winding is seating poster work where weavers sit for 4 to 6 hours which causes postural health hazards. In the same way the author says about all the heath related problems weavers faces during weaving process. And he suggests weavers should be provided well-ventilated room and have health camps for weavers.

Dogra (2009), Indian weavers have multi-faceted problems. They survive on unbelievably low wages, are under high debts perennially and have a very low level of education. All of these lead the handloom weaver to a life of insecure livelihood many a times on the threshold of starvation. Thus, it is not surprising that a significant number of young weavers are giving up the traditional occupation and moving towards greener pasture.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the health status of the weavers.
- To Identify the causes of health problems among the weavers.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a combination of mixed research methods, a census was collected of weavers to understand the socio demographic, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data regarding the health risks and working conditions of power loom and handloom weavers face. Data from two units were selected for the study: Ramdurg taluk in the Belagavi district and Hungund taluk in Bagalkot district of Karnataka. 300 respondents were chosen randomly from each taluk.

Musculoskeletal Problems

The repetitive nature of weaving, involving prolonged sitting, awkward postures, and intricate hand movements, takes a toll on the musculoskeletal system. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), such as backache, neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and tendonitis, are prevalent among weavers worldwide. Studies in India, Pakistan, and Iran report high incidences of these issues, impacting weavers' physical well-being and productivity.

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Respiratory Issues: (Breath of Dust)
Weaving environments, especially in small workshops, are often poorly ventilated and dusty. Fibers, dyes, and other airborne particles can lead to respiratory illnesses such as asthma, bronchitis, and allergic reactions. This risk is amplified in situations where natural ventilation is scarce or synthetic fibres are used. Weavers inhale dust, fibres, and other particulate matter, leading to respiratory problems.

Eye Sight Problem
The health hazards faced by weavers extend beyond the immediate physical realm. Studies suggest correlations between weaving and visual impairments, likely due to the strain of focusing on intricate patterns under poor lighting conditions. Additionally, psychological stresses arising from long working hours, low wages, and economic uncertainty can take a toll on mental well-being.

Joint Pain
This problem is common among weavers due to poor ergonomics, extended sitting, manual manipulation of heavy materials, repeated actions, and inactivity, weavers frequently experience this issue. Painful joints, stiff joints, and injuries from repetitive strain are all caused by these things. Among weavers we can even find other health problems like obesity problem, blood pressure, and sugar.

Government schemes and policies for the health benefits of weavers
Group Insurance Scheme (Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana)
Through LIC of India, a group insurance plan for handloom weavers is being established. The program is open to all types of handloom weavers between the ages of 18 and 59 (K.H.D.C., Co-ops, and disorganized). In addition to the advantages, the LIC offers scholarship for the children of weavers through the Shikshak Sahayog Yojana. The State Government is providing 50% of the yearly premium payment, or Rs. 40/- weaver beneficiary, to support the handloom weaver's

Health Insurance Scheme: (ICICI Lombard)
ICICI Lombard General Insurance Co. Ltd is the organization responsible for implementing the Health Insurance Scheme for handloom weavers. The program gives the weaver community access to the highest calibre of medical facilities. The weaver, spouse, and two children are covered by the plan. It keeps a sizable amount set up for OPD and covers all newly discovered and pre-existing conditions.

Health Scheme
Reimbursement of the medical expenditure for treatment of Cancer (maximum limit Rs.50.000/-) and financial assistance of Rs.500 per annum during the treatment Period.

Reimbursement of the medical expenditure for treatment of Heart operation and transplantation of Kidney (maximum limit Rs.50.000/-) and financial assistance of Rs.500/- per annum during the treatment period.

Financial assistance to mentally retarded and leprosy patients (Rs.500/- per annum).
Rs.1000/- will be paid to the family members for cremation of the deceased weaver.

CONCLUSION
Weaving is not just about creating beautiful fabrics; it is about the lives and livelihoods of the artisans behind them. Recognizing and addressing the health hazards they face is crucial for ensuring their well-being and the sustainability of this age-old craft. By implementing ergonomic improvements, prioritizing safe working environments, and advocating for fair working conditions, we can weave a brighter future where the beauty of the craft is not overshadowed by the shadows of health risks. Weaving, an age-old craft that produces exquisite textiles, is intertwined with significant health risks for those who practice it. Addressing these hazards is vital to ensure the well-being and sustainability of this profession. By understanding the health challenges faced by weavers—ranging from musculoskeletal disorders to respiratory illnesses—and implementing targeted solutions such as ergonomic improvements, proper ventilation, and mental health support, we can create a safer and more supportive working environment. Ensuring fair wages and social security further contributes to their overall well-being. Ultimately, the goal is to weave a future where the beauty of the craft is matched by the health and happiness of its artisans.

Solutions for Weaver's Occupation Health Hazards
- Adjustable chairs and tables, proper lighting, and footrests reduce strain.
- Regular stretching and strengthening exercises are beneficial.
- Educate weavers on good posture and proper techniques.
- Promote health awareness and symptom recognition for a healthy lifestyle.
- Conduct regular health checks and provide on-site healthcare.
- Perform ergonomic assessments and enforce safety regulations.
- Use anti-fatigue mats, supportive cushions, ergonomic sensors, and exoskeletons.
- Install proper ventilation or increase natural airflow.
- Provide masks and respirators.
- Use hypoallergenic natural fibres or safer synthetic options.
- Ensure adequate and adjustable lighting.
- Provide access to counselling services and supportive work environments.
- Ensure fair wages and access to social security.

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