

Negotiating Choice in Leisure Pursuits of Women: A Sociological Investigation

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Abstract:

Women are loaded with double-burden of official chores and household chores. It is crucial to identify the amount of time they are getting for leisure pursuits and also to fathom whether they are being coerced to negotiate with their leisure time. Scholars of Sociology have identified, leisure time is when one is free from obligatory activities. It is important to understand whether women who are doubly burdened at all have time away from obligatory activities and whether they can exercise their choice during leisure time. The present study is mainly based on secondary data including journal articles, book chapters, newspapers and so on. The objectives of the present study are, firstly, to find out whether working women, unmarried or married who have to take care of their families get sufficient leisure time, secondly, to find out how far does their leisure time and activity is manifested according to their own choice. Some studies have identified, even during their leisure time they usually cater to the needs of their family, either they stitch clothes for their children or spouse or they organize house parties for their husband and his friends and so on. The concern of 'choice' has to be addressed in this case and whether 'choice' too can be socially constructed. Satisfaction during leisure time creates sense of fulfilment and is an absolute necessity for well-being.

Keywords: Women, leisure, time, choice.

Introduction

Leisure is an integral part of life and it is arguably one of the prerequisites for subjective wellbeing. Participating in leisure activities has resulted in the reduction of stress and anxiety in fact, it also provides relief after heavy workload. No leisure and only work may negatively affect the overall wellbeing of people across gender, age, class and other intersecting categories. Scholars of Sociology, Psychology and other disciplines are considering leisure and well-being and the connection between the two to be a significant area of study to fathom the human interactions in the micro sphere and how it in turn influences the macro sphere. In recent times researches have been conducted to evaluate the quotient of well-being among people and how it is affected by or is affecting the leisure time. Working women or women who are homemakers, staying in the patriarchal structure have to undergo huge amount of work pressure. They work outside the house and come back home to resume work again, in this case the nature of work only changes but the pressure usually remains the same. Working women after finishing their work at office are expected to come back home and take responsibilities of the household. Similarly, female homemakers also have to manage the outside world like shopping groceries and other essentials, visiting the doctor if any family member faces any health issues, taking children to school, attending any function at their school, taking children for other co-curricular activities and so on. They too come back home to perform

more tasks for the well-being of the family. It is extremely crucial for researches of social sciences and other disciplines to enquire about the leisure time and activity of these women.

Review of Literature

In recent years many studies have focused on well-being as an indicator for determining social progress and designing public policy (Mansfield , Daykin, & Kay , 2020). Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Economics and various other disciplines are involved in the investigation related to well-being. Well-being is connected with happiness, quality of life, positive and negative effects and other intersecting factors (Mansfield , Daykin, & Kay , 2020). Well-being is often associated with other crucial factors like self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination, mental health and so on (Mansfield , Daykin, & Kay , 2020). Some branches of leisure studies have successfully associated leisure with well-being. Leisure, some scholars have identified, is an antidote to alienated labour and is identified as a way of leading a good life that includes overall well-being (Mansfield , Daykin, & Kay , 2020). Leisure practices lead to fell-good moments among people therefore evoking positive feelings that leads to happiness and breaks monotony. Well-being leads to personal growth and provides a sense of life. The connection between leisure and well-being is materialized when experiences of human beings are noted and they declare to have derived meaning, pleasure and purpose from leisure (Mansfield , Daykin, & Kay , 2020).

Homemakers are often a forgotten sample for conducting research as identified by some scholars (Choudhary & Ahmad, 2017). Home making is not quite considered as a full-time occupation however, they perform arduous tasks throughout the entire day and even on weekends and holidays (Choudhary & Ahmad, 2017). Women who work outside often face extreme stress due to work load outside and inside (Choudhary & Ahmad, 2017). Women often are compelled to negotiate with their physical and psychological well-being. Well-being is important for leading a healthy life without compromising on the close relationships. Dearth of well-being often jeopardizes close relationships within the family. Well-being as identified in some studies is a multifaceted concept (Choudhary & Ahmad, 2017). Well-being determines whether a person experiences enough freedom or suffers from frustration.

Women and men in the patriarchal structure are not entitled to equal access to resources be it at home, at workplace or during leisure (S, 2016). Women with disabilities whether working or homemaker face double discrimination in India and they do not have easy access to leisure activities that in turn negatively affect their overall well-being (S, 2016). Women of lower castes in rural areas also face discrimination and are not allowed in certain leisure spots of their village, that lead to an intense sense of deprivation. Women are kept secluded from many leisure experiences which the male members of their family are entitled to leading to a dissatisfaction among them ultimately impacting their psychological well-being. Working women face a conflict of managing dual responsibilities leading to limited or no leisure time experience for them. It results in dysfunctional outcomes, negatively impacting their overall well-being.

Methodology

Secondary analysis refers to the studies that use existing research data to find new answers to research enquires (Babbie, 2007). Existing surveys, observations, interviews sourced from books, websites, articles are used for secondary analysis. The intention of this study is to include secondary analysis to find newer answers. The article intends to analyze the importance of leisure time and choice of leisure for overall well-being of women including working women and home makers. Gender as the primary attribute has enhanced the analysis of the content. The objectives of the present paper are: 1) to find out whether

working women, unmarried or married who have to take care of their families get sufficient leisure time. 2) to find out how far does their leisure time and activity are shaped according to their choice.

Analysis

Women and leisure time

In the last hundred years or even more, women's participation in the work force has increased remarkably. It has, to some extent dismantled the notion, women and men are born to be in separate spheres. Media has contributed in two different ways, firstly, it has re-affirmed the fact, gender roles are indeed changing. Secondly, sometimes more than re-affirming, it is upholding the narratives of conventional gender roles sometimes at the cost of questioning the recent progressive attitude. It is more visible in some commercial advertisements, regional mega serials of the country and so on. Increase in workforce participation of women only slightly impact the unequal distribution of household chores and leisure time that women manage for themselves. In the industrial and industrializing countries where lives move faster, workers regardless of their gender do not find enough time to accommodate everything. In such a scenario, it is all the more difficult for women who most of the time are burdened with two or three fold responsibilities of office work, household chores and child care, to find leisure time purely for themselves. Marx, in his analysis of commodification of time mentioned that labour is measured according to time, therefore time too becomes a commodity (Mi-Hye, 2006). Though Marx himself has ignored the gendered aspect of time, one may argue, for homemakers there is no one to even measure their labour with reference to time for the unpaid service they deliver. In case of paid workers, time certainly is commodified but at least they are paid for the amount of time they have invested their labour. Homemakers, in the Marxist feminist sense are expected to cater to the needs of capitalism by offering their unpaid labour to facilitate the needs of the paid worker that is their husband and to reproduce and prepare the next generation of workers to serve capitalism. Time in the lives of women and men are determined by social relations of gender that instigates gender inequalities. The household responsibilities of women and men may vary depending on the nature of paid work time but the primary household responsibilities are not yet divided considering gender equality. There is still a clear allocation that decides the working time of mothers and wives, roles that are assigned to them for twenty four hours. Financially independent women even though they are responsible for care giving and home making, are also capable of buying their own leisure after spending on their household needs. Household work does not only include cooking, laundry, cleaning, shopping etc. It also includes emotional work that are considered invisible work. Women are found to orient their leisure catering to the needs of the family, making woolen garments for children, is an instance. Childcare even today is primarily considered to be the responsibility of a woman while a 'good' man is there as a helper, it is not considered his primary responsibility. The gap in labour time in the household for women and men is more on workdays compared to weekends. Men are also seen to engage more in active leisure. Active leisure activities are usually outdoor activities and also planned activities. Men are noticed to participate more on active leisure compared to women, for instance, chess clubs and other recreational clubs are mostly occupied by men in the evening of weekdays. The societal expectations attached to women and men are different, therefore the constraints faced by them are varied. Married women who have children have to do almost three times the work done by men in weekdays and two times the work done by men on weekends thus getting lesser time for themselves and their personal leisure .

Women, Leisure and Choice

Feminist leisure studies has analyzed women's lives and have identified and documented the inequalities that are present in the social and cultural spheres. It has addressed the issue of 'choice' in all aspects of women's lives including choice in leisure pursuits. Leisure studies and women studies have collaborated in identifying the compromises that women are compelled to make in utilising leisure spaces and activities. Patriarchal nomenclatures intend to control the lives of women and cease them from exercising their choice. During the nineteenth century, few women in India who were engaged in paid jobs were also occupied with household chores and child rearing activities. When they came back home they neither had time nor choice of leisure. The scenario has shifted today, more women compared to the nineteenth century are now engaged in paid work outside the house but the rest more or less is still unchanged or has only slightly changed. Women of affluent families in the nineteenth century mostly spent their leisure time doing leisure activities that were prescribed by the society and their respective families like engaging in music and singing during occasions especially religious ones and getting involved in embroidery work. 'Choice' here was not a factor that was considered, women themselves too internalized the prescriptions and were hardly aware of their own capability to choose their course of action or even leisure activities. The songs that they sang were usually the ones preferred by their closed ones, the embroideries that they stitched were for the members of their family. They could hardly engage in leisure activities that were solely for themselves. The leisure of upper class women were mostly private, they were not encouraged to move out in public sphere. In earlier times, men were engaged in outside leisure activities like hunting, fishing or even drank in parties, watched performances by courtesans. Women did not have any serious leisure or sports activities that they could participate in. Middle class women were responsible for household chores and often travelled with their families to places like Ghatshila, Giridi, Shimultala for health purposes. The travel destinations and other logistical decisions were taken by the male members of the family. Women's choices were hardly or not considered. Women were responsible for cooking and taking care of their husband and children even while they went out for vacation. Women's leisure was controlled, apart from doing extensive household chores, Hindu women were also responsible for performing regular puja. The scenario has still not shifted especially for women who are homemakers. Lower class women who were the only link of middle class or upper class women with the outside world, who came home to put alta on their feet during festivals, entertained them with gossip (Mitra, 2020). Gossiping today is considered as a leisure pursuit that women engage in by choice, such is the claim of patriarchal notions. This too is a stereotype that patriarchy has attached to women and claimed it as their own choice however, the factor of 'choice' is flawed here. The instance of RasuSundari Devi can be mentioned here, who secretly learned to read and write going against the rituals and customs of the family that considered if a woman learns to read and write, she turns into a widow at a very young age of her life. RasuSundari Devi exercised her own choice during 1800's by learning to read and write during her leisure time after completing all household responsibilities.

Conclusion

Time spent between women and men varies remarkably and quite evidently especially in a heterosexual marital relationship. Although, there has been a shift in the last few decades in the responsibilities shared between women and men. Some expectations are however gendered in nature and are still majorly followed. Women perform more household responsibilities in weekdays as well as in weekends and therefore they get minimum time for leisure activities. Men are usually seen to choose their own leisure

time compared to women who are bound by responsibilities. Even families who appoint domestic helps, it is the women of the household who supervise the work of the domestic helps. Financially independent women to some extent have the liberty to spend on their own leisure pursuits. However, in most of the cases, in a heterosexual marital relationship, the decisions regarding a leisure trip is usually taken by the older male members of the family. Choice for most of the women is a rare instance, be it leisure or while taking any other decision in the everyday life.

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