



Silk and Struggles: A Study on the Health of Sualkuchi Weavers

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Introduction:

There is a famous saying that “Assamese women are the born weavers.” Though weaving is one of the oldest livelihood activities, still it is in its subsistence level. Silk industry provides a huge amount of employment of the rural people specially for the females. Almost 60 lakh weavers are in this industry of the country, out of which 60.40% are the female weavers. These weavers contribute almost 19% of total cloth produced in the country and also affix significantly to export earnings.

Presently, in Sualkuchi village there are 13,752 looms in silk weaving industry. Among these looms, 5,532 are Muga looms and 8,220 are mulberry looms. Among 12,056 weavers 5,183 are male weavers and approximately 6,873 are female weavers. Sualkuchi had provided direct employment of more than 12,000 weavers, 6,000 helpers and also provided indirect part time employment such as yarn winders, Muga reelers, and on management. Therefore the silk industry in Sualkuchi village creates employment to nearly 24,000 people (Directorate of Handloom & Textiles, Govt. of Assam, 2016).

The majority of health issues faced by the weavers are the various pain related problems such as back pain, neck pain, knee pain, foot pain, cold and fever, breathing problems and largely the eye related problems. Majority of the weavers informed about the various health related issues after joining weaving professionally. The basic reason of various health related problems of the weavers are the long working hours, mental stress, non eco friendly working environment and lack of proper lighting facility.

Objectives: In this article there is an attempt to highlight the specific health related problems faced by the female weavers in Sualkuchi village of Kamrup district of Assam. The weavers mentioned these health problems during the time of field survey.

Method of data collection: Since the numbers of female weavers are very huge in Sualkuchi village, therefore it is not possible to study the whole population. So, the article based on simple random sample survey without replacement. Out of the total weavers of the study area, 5% female weavers are

studied, because 5% of 6870 female weavers consist 345 weavers, which itself a large number and these information is sufficient to draw a conclusion.

Again, the female weavers are divided into two parts: Local weavers and Migrated weavers. Local weavers are those weavers who originated from the village itself. Migrated weavers are those weavers who came to Sualkuchi village in search of job from various native places. During data collection, it is noticed that the number of migrated weavers are more than the numbers of local weavers. Out of total 345 surveyed weavers 143 are local weavers and 202 are migrated weavers.

Major findings:

Table: 1

Health Related problems of Weavers in Study Area

	Severe Health Problem		Minor Health Problem		Total Number of Weavers
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage	
Local Weavers	23	(16.08%)	50	(34.97%)	143
Outside Weavers	44	(21.78%)	69	(34.16%)	202
Total	67	(19.42%)	119	(33.62%)	345

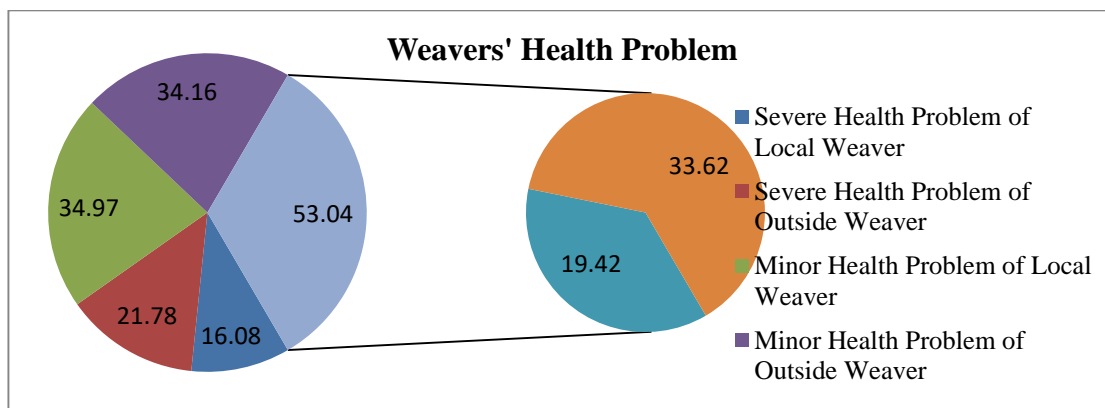
Source: Field Survey

The above table explains about the health conditions of the weavers. The health problems of the weavers are divided into two parts- severe health problems and minor health problems. 16.08% of the local weavers and 21.78% of the outside weavers were answered that they have severe health problems. On the other hand 34.97% of the local weavers and 34.16% of the outside female weavers are suffered with various minor health problems.

The following diagram represents the health conditions of the various wavers-

Figure: 1

Weavers Health Problems



Source: Field Survey

From the above figure it is observed that out of total weavers 53.04% weavers are suffered with various health issues, out of which 33.62% of the weavers are suffered in minor health problems and 19.42% of the weavers are faced with severe health problems.

These health problems reduce weavers working hour, willingness to work or in other words reduce the marginal productivity of the weavers as they expected or originally having. On the other hand, it reduces the volume of production of the silk entrepreneurs. So, they also do not able to earn expected amount of revenue.

Eye Related Problems

Eye related problem is the major health problem related with the weaving sector. Most of weavers suffered with this problem. The basic reasons behind this problem are lack of proper lighting facility, constant stress on eyes and long working hours.

The following table indicates the amount and percentage of weavers having or not having eye related problems:

Table: 2

Numbers of Weavers suffered with Eye problem

	YES		NO		TOTAL
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Local Weavers	83	58.04%	60	41.96%	143
Outside Weavers	150	74.25%	52	25.74%	202
Total	233	67.54%	112	32.46%	345

Source: Field Survey

From the table 2, it is seen that 233 weavers are suffered with eye related problems out of total 345 weavers. In the division of local and outside weavers 83 weavers are affected from eye related problems and 60 weavers are not suffered with such problems. In other words, 58.04% of the local weavers are affected and 41.96% weavers are not affected with eye problems. Again in case of migrated weavers 150 weavers are affected with eye problems and 112 are answered negatively. Almost 67.54% of the outside weavers are affected with eye related problems.

From the table, it is clearly seen that the migrated weavers are affected more on eye problems than the local weavers. The basic reasons for this are:

- Lack of proper lighting facility in large size firms than the small size firms since they having more numbers of handlooms.
- Outside weavers have longer weaving hours than the local weavers.
- The local weavers take more break than the hired weavers in working hours, which give a rest to eye pressure.

- Average ages of the outside weavers are more than the average age of the local weavers.
- More of the local weavers are worked at small size firms. So, their numbers of handlooms are less and lights are properly come.

Weavers Pain Related Problems

The study shows that key health related problems of the weavers are classified under muscular skeletal problems such as back pain, knee pain and joint pain. The basic reason of these problems are the long working hours of the weavers in various harmful positions on traditional looms and instruments used on the time of weaving. At the time of survey, more than 70% of the weavers are complained about various pain related problems such as neck pain, back pain, foot pain, joint pain etc.

Table: 3

Numbers of Weavers Having Different Types of Pain Problems

	Having Pain	Not having pain	Total
Local Weavers	85	58	143
Outside Weavers	158	44	202
Total	243	102	345

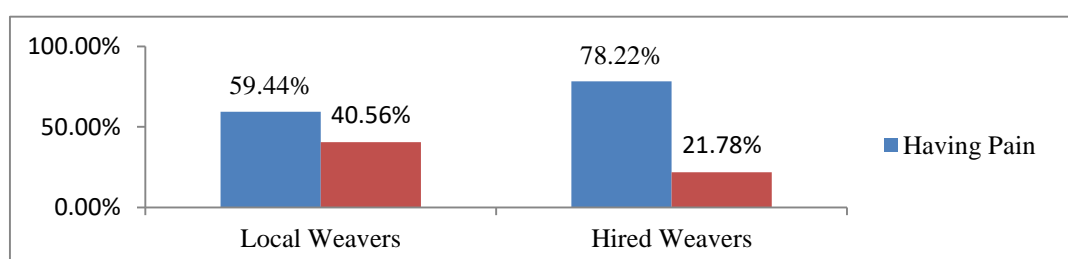
Source: Field Survey

From table 3, it is observed about the number and percentage of weavers who complain about various pain related problems. The table is divided between the local weavers and the outside weavers. Out of 143 local surveyed weavers, 85 weavers having different pain related problems. The observation clearly notified that the outside weavers having more pain related problems than the local weavers. The reason behind this

- Outside weavers have longer weaving hours than the local weavers.
- The local weavers take more break than the outside weavers in working hours.
- The local weavers' work place is near to their house. So they frequently go to their houses which give them a break and they feel relaxed.
- Average ages of the outside weavers are more than the average age of the local weavers.

Figure: 2

Percentage of Weavers Having Different Types of Pain Problems

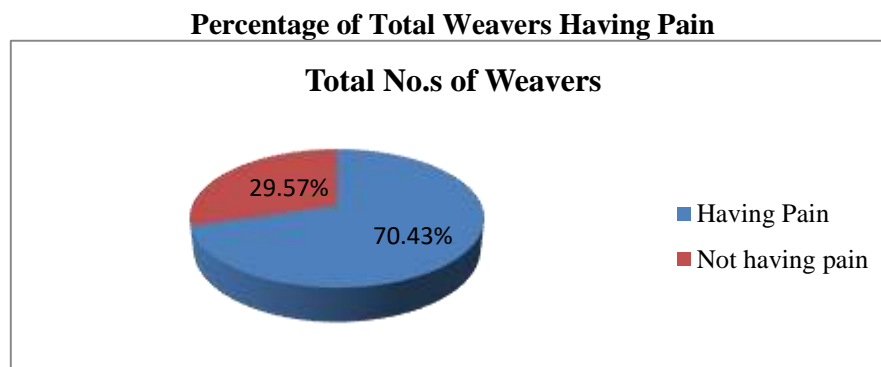


Source: Field Survey

The above Figure presents the ration between the weavers having pain and without pain on the basis of local and outside weavers. 59.44% of the local weavers complain about neck pain, joint pain, back pain, knee pain and 40.56% of the weavers are informed that they do not have any type of pain related problems. On the other hand in case of outside weavers 78.22% of the weavers having various pain related problems and only 21.78% of the outside weavers' lives without any pain related problems.

The following pie diagram given an idea about the total number of weavers having pain related problems and without pain related problems.

Figure: 3



Source: Field Survey

This figure clearly shows more than 70% of the weavers having various pain related problems. So, pain is the one of major health related problems faced by the weavers in this sector.

Recommendation and Conclusion:

The basic reason of various health related problems of the weavers are the long working hours, mental stress, non-eco-friendly working environment and lack of proper lighting facility. On the other hand, the weavers do not get any medical facility from either owner or by the Government; they were depressed due to the medical expenses. The weavers should get proper medical facilities from their owner and from the govt. hospitals. If some medical insurance should be provided to the silk weavers then they feel some amount of relax from health problems.

Due to the health problem, weavers are not able to seat longer time for weave. This reduced the working hour, willingness to work or in other words reduce the marginal productivity of the weavers as they expected or originally having. On the other hand, it also reduces the volume of production of the silk entrepreneurs. So, they also do not able to earn expected amount of income.

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