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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING OF LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES AMONG SELF-HELP GROUPS FEMALES: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Meenu Verma*

School of Continuing Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi 110068, India

*Corresponding Author E-mail: meenuverma@ignou.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Leisure is often defined either as a quality of experience or as free time—time not devoted to work, household duties, education, or essential activities such as eating and sleeping. Previous studies have shown that women who engage in leisure activities with peers develop positive social and self-identity. This study aims to assess the leisure time patterns and activities of Self-Help Group (SHG) members in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, to identify their training needs and provide insights for future interventions.

Methods: The study was conducted in collaboration with two Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Varanasi: World Literacy of Canada and Yuva Gramya Vikash Samiti. A total of ten SHGs, comprising 184 female respondents, were purposively selected. Data were gathered through structured personal interviews using an interview schedule specifically developed for the study. The collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 16.0, applying descriptive statistical tools such as the chi-square (χ^2) test.

Results: The study revealed that 57.8% of respondents had more than four hours of leisure time. The duration of leisure time was significantly higher among members of NGO-I compared to NGO-II, as women in NGO-I were less engaged in activities beyond routine household work. In NGO-I, a higher proportion of women engaged in idle or unproductive activities such as bidi rolling, agarbatti making, gossiping, and watching TV (42.2%). Conversely, NGO-II members showed higher participation in productive activities such as dairying, bead making, and sewing (34.0%).

Conclusion: The study highlights varying leisure time patterns and activities among SHG members. It suggests that while some women engage in unproductive activities, others participate in more constructive tasks. These findings emphasize the need for targeted training programs to enhance the productive use of leisure time, particularly for women in NGO-I.

KEYWORDS

Leisure, Leisure Time Activities, Women, Self-Help Groups, Training

1. INTRODUCTION

Leisure has often been defined as a quality of experience or as free time. Free time is time spent away from business, work, job hunting, domestic chores, and education, as well as necessary activities such as eating and sleeping. Situations International proposes that leisure does not evolve from free time, and free time is an illusory concept that is rarely fully “free”; economic and social forces appropriate free time from the individual and sell it back to them as the commodity known as “leisure”. Women generally favor cultural and social activities and tend to have less leisure time because of childcare and household duties. With increasing age, their leisure preferences change in line with shifting role demands and health-related factors. Mai and Hao (2020) found that women who engaged in leisure activities with their peer groups developed a positive sense of social and self-identity. Through these activities, they learned to navigate private and public leisure spaces differently, enabling them to rebuild their social capital within both the family and the wider

community. In accordance with their regular routines, people engage in leisure activities during their free time. Those are not task-oriented activities and do not include household chores like cooking, cleaning, and sleeping. Reading, swimming, cycling, walking or hiking, meditation, traveling, painting, listening to music, and uncountable other enjoyable activities are among the leisure activities preferred by individuals globally. More precisely, leisure time is defined as the time when individuals can relax, have fun, or develop themselves according to their preferences, desires, and needs, as well as the obligations to undertake during this time (Havitz et al., 2013; Latip et al., 2020). Leisure time and activities with gender differences are essential to reducing inequality in the quality of life. Women’s leisure is more bounded by family work or cares, while men carry out leisure activities away from family and work boundaries while performing leisure (Yerkes et al., 2020). Leisure is an uncovered activity that people do in their free time, using their abilities and free time in a satisfying and fulfilling way (Stebbins, 2015). Jin and Whitson (2014) observed that women’s selection of leisure spaces and

their gendered performances within those spaces reinforced a new form of hegemonic masculinity and conformity to femininity, while also creating opportunities to renegotiate traditional gender roles and the use of leisure spaces. Not all activities undertaken during free time are experienced as leisure. Women's daily routines, in particular, illustrate that leisure time is highly context dependent. Activities such as taking children out for a walk may be perceived either as an obligation or as leisure, depending on the circumstances. This highlights that leisure is defined not by the activity itself, but by the experience associated with it (Dollase et al., 2013). For many rural groups, leisure activities traditionally centered on collective pursuits such as gossiping and sports; however, these patterns have changed with the advent of television and mobile phones, as well as the influence of migrant populations moving between rural and urban areas (Modi, 2012). Cerin and Lesline (2008) argue that enhancing leisure-time physical activity among the most disadvantaged population groups requires comprehensive, multilevel interventions that address social and physical environments along with related attitudes and skills. Thus, leisure activities are generally those activities that are different from work or self-maintenance but involve engagement in leisure activities for pleasure and satisfaction with internal motivation (Taylor, 2003).

Leisure activities play a crucial role in the overall well-being of individuals, providing relaxation, personal growth, and social interaction opportunities. The fact that rural women spend more time in order to produce less has their families and their productive lives affected, weighing on the choices they make. He can decide to make more time for leisure, including the possibility of setting aside a certain number of hours. For women in self-help groups (SHGs) in India, engaging in leisure activities can significantly impact their quality of life, self-esteem, and community involvement. This study aims to explore the understanding and comprehension of leisure time activities among women in SHGs, focusing on the Indian context. The main objective of this study was to understand the leisure time and activities of female SHGs for training needs assessments:

- To find the duration of leisure time for female self-help groups.
- To understand their choices of leisure activities at home and sources of learning about different types of activities.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh in collaboration with two purposively selected Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): World Literacy of Canada, Gangamahal Ghat, Varanasi, and Yuva Gramya Vikash Samiti, Basani, Varanasi. The selection of these two NGOs for the study was justified by their active involvement in promoting SHGs and women-centered development initiatives, as well as the substantial presence of SHGs in the area, which provided a suitable and accessible setting for examining leisure activities and skill training needs among SHG members.

2.1 Sample

The sample was drawn from two NGOs in Varanasi district, with five SHGs selected from each NGO through purposive sampling. In total, 184 female SHG members aged 15-65 years from ten SHGs participated in the study.

2.2 Tools and Procedure

Data were gathered from selected SHG members aged 15-65 years using a structured interview schedule that assessed the amount of leisure time available to them and their preferred leisure activities at home. Data was collected through a personal approach. The SPSS 16.0 package programme was used in the analysis of the study. The data obtained are indicated by a percent distribution. Frequency percent values have been used in the analysis of the data, while the chi-square test has been used to analyze the relationship between leisure time activities of NGO-I and NGO-II SHG members.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Description of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of NGO

Respondents (Shgs Members)

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents from the two NGOs (NGO-I, n = 90 and NGO-II, n = 94) is presented in Table 1, covering age, educational status, religion, caste, marital status, and type of family.

With respect to age, the majority of respondents in both NGOs belonged to the 21-35 years age group (64.4% in NGO-I and 60.6% in NGO-II), accounting for 62.5% of the total sample. Respondents aged 20 years and below constituted 19.0%, while those above 35 years formed 18.5%. The mean age of respondents was 27.08 ± 7.56 years in NGO-I and 29.12 ± 7.34 years in NGO-II, with an overall mean age of 28.12 ± 7.50 years. The difference in mean age between the two groups was statistically non-significant ($t = 1.86, P > 0.05$). This finding is consistent with the observations reported by Rathod and Damodhar (2015), Varghese (2011), Verma (2010), Bharathamma (2005), and Shanthy and Thiagarajan (2011).

Regarding educational status, a larger proportion of respondents had middle-level education (middle school to high school), comprising 44.4% in NGO-I and 42.6% in NGO-II. Respondents with lower education (illiterate to primary level) constituted 38.0% of the total sample, while those with higher education (intermediate and above) accounted for 18.5%. The association between NGO type and educational status was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.39, P > 0.05$). Comparable findings have been documented by Rathod and Damodhar (2015), Rokonzaman (2013), Ghosh et al. (2013), Shanthy and Thiagarajan (2011), Tayde and Chole (2010), Cerin and Leslie (2008), and Joseph and Easwaran (2006).

In terms of religion, the majority of respondents were Hindus (77.8% in NGO-I and 85.1% in NGO-II), forming 81.5% of the total sample. Muslims constituted 18.5%. The difference between the two NGOs with respect to religion was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.64, P > 0.05$).

Analysis of caste composition revealed that most respondents belonged to the Other Backward Classe (OBC) category (58.9% in NGO-I and 67.0% in NGO-II), making up 63.0% of the total. Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) respondents accounted for 29.9%, while those from the general category constituted 7.1%. The variation in caste distribution between the two NGOs was statistically non-significant ($\chi^2 = 4.90, P > 0.05$). The present findings are in agreement with those reported by Ayanwuyi and Akintonde (2011).

With regard to marital status, more than half of the respondents were married (55.6% in NGO-I and 57.4% in NGO-II), comprising 56.5% of the total sample. Unmarried respondents accounted for 37.5%, while separated/divorced/widowed respondents formed 6.0%. No significant association was observed between marital status and NGO type ($\chi^2 = 5.23, P > 0.05$). These results closely align with the observations reported by Salunkhe (2011) and Varghese (2011).

Concerning the type of family, a majority of respondents belonged to nuclear families (64.4% in NGO-I and 51.1% in NGO-II), constituting 57.6% of the total sample, whereas 42.4% belonged to joint families. The difference between the two NGOs was also statistically non-significant ($\chi^2 = 3.37, P > 0.05$).

Overall, the findings indicate that the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents from NGO-I and NGO-II were largely comparable, as none of the observed differences across variables were statistically significant.

3.2 Description of Duration of Leisure Time of NGO Respondents (SHGs Members)

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents from NGO-I (n = 90) and NGO-II (n = 94) according to the duration of leisure time per day. In NGO-I, the majority of respondents (57.8%) reported having more than four hours of leisure time, followed by 27.8 per cent who had 2-4 hours of leisure time. A smaller proportion (14.4%) reported less than two hours of leisure time. In contrast, respondents from NGO-II were more concentrated in the 2-4 hours category, with 43.6% reporting this duration. About 39.4% of NGO-II respondents had more than four hours of leisure time, while 17.0% reported less than two hours.

Table 1 Distribution of the Respondents According to Their Socio-Demographic Background in Relation to Different Selected Ngos (N=184)

Socio-Demographic Classification	NGO					
	I (90)		II (94)		Total (184)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Age (years)						
≤ 20	20	22.2	15	16.0	35	19.0
21 – 35	58	64.4	57	60.6	115	62.5
> 35	12	13.3	22	23.4	34	18.5
Average Age ± SD	27.08 ± 7.56		29.12 ± 7.34		28.12 ± 7.50	
$t = 1.86, df = 182, P > 0.05$						
Educational Status						
Lower (Illiterate –Primary)	35	38.9	35	37.2	70	38.0
Middle (Middle - HS)	40	44.4	40	42.6	80	43.5
High (Intermediate +)	15	16.7	19	20.2	34	18.5
$c^2 = 0.39, df = 2, P > 0.05$						
Religion						
Hindu	70	77.8	80	85.1	150	81.5
Muslim	20	22.2	14	14.9	34	18.5
$c^2 = 1.64, df = 1, P > 0.05$						
Caste						
SC / ST	33	36.7	22	23.4	55	29.9
OBC	53	58.9	63	67.0	116	63.0
General	04	4.4	09	9.6	13	7.1
$c^2 = 4.90, df = 2, P > 0.05$						
Marital Status						
Unmarried	31	34.4	38	40.4	69	37.5
Married	50	55.6	54	57.4	104	56.5
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	09	10.0	02	2.2	11	6.0
$c^2 = 5.23, df = 2, P > 0.05$						
Types of the Family						
Nuclear	58	64.4	48	51.1	106	57.6
Joint	32	35.6	46	48.9	78	42.4
$c^2 = 3.37, df = 1, P > 0.05$						

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents According to Duration of Leisure Time

Duration of Leisure Time (Hrs)	NGO					
	I (90)		II (94)		Total (184)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 2	13	14.4	16	17.0	29	15.8
2 - 4	25	27.8	41	43.6	66	35.9
> 4	52	57.8	37	39.4	89	48.4
Total	90	100.0	94	100.0	184	100.0
$\chi^2 = 6.64, df = 2, P < 0.05$						

Table 3 Ngo-Wise Distribution of Respondents According to Their Leisure Time Activities

Type of Leisure Time Activity	NGO						Test Statistics	
	I (90)		II (94)		Total (184)		df =2	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	χ^2	P
Bidi Rolling	06	6.7	02	2.1	08	4.3	2.28	>0.05
Agarbatti Making	04	4.4	02	2.1	06	3.3	0.78	>0.05
Spinning and Weaving	02	2.2	09	9.6	11	6.0	4.42	<0.05
Beads Making	12	13.3	22	23.4	34	18.5	3.10	>0.05
Dairy and Making Cow Dung Cake	16	17.8	28	29.8	44	23.9	4.64	<0.05
Basket Making	11	12.2	15	16.0	26	14.1	0.53	>0.05
Knitting	06	6.7	04	4.3	10	5.4	0.52	>0.05
Sewing and Embroidery	25	27.8	32	34.0	57	31.0	0.85	>0.05
Gossiping and Idle Sitting	46	51.1	22	23.4	68	37.0	15.15	<0.001
T.V. Watching / Listening Radio	38	42.2	18	19.1	56	30.4	11.56	<0.001
Any Other	16	17.8	11	11.7	27	14.7	1.36	>0.05

Considering the total sample, nearly half of the respondents (48.4%) had more than four hours of leisure time, followed by 35.9% who had 2-4 hours, and 15.8% who reported less than two hours of leisure time.

The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two NGOs with respect to the duration of leisure time ($\chi^2 = 6.64$, $df = 2$, $P < 0.05$), indicating that the pattern of leisure time availability varied significantly between NGO-I and NGO-II respondents. Batish and Naurial (2003) reported that 66% of leisure time for these activities was between 2-4 hours. The observations recorded in the present investigation were in close conformity with the findings of Kandula and Lauderdale (2005), and Park et al. (2003). Grassi et al. (2015) reported that 72% of women reported having at least half an hour of free time each day for leisure.

3.3 Description of Type of Leisure Time Activities of NGOs Respondents (SHGs members)

Table 3 depicts the distribution of respondents from NGO-I (n = 90) and NGO-II (n = 94) according to the types of leisure time activities they engaged in, along with the results of chi-square tests to examine differences between the two NGOs.

Among income-generating and productive activities, a small proportion of respondents were involved in bidi rolling (6.7% in NGO-I and 2.1% in NGO-II) and agarbatti making (4.4% and 2.1%, respectively), with no statistically significant differences between the two NGOs. Spinning and weaving showed a significant difference, with a higher proportion of respondents from NGO-II (9.6%) compared to NGO-I (2.2%) participating in this activity ($\chi^2 = 4.42$, $P < 0.05$).

Participation in beads making was relatively higher in NGO-II (23.4%) than NGO-I (13.3%), though the difference was not statistically

significant. A significantly higher proportion of NGO-II respondents (29.8%) were engaged in dairy work and making cow dung cakes compared to NGO-I (17.8%) ($\chi^2 = 4.64$, $P < 0.05$). Basket making and knitting were practiced by a modest proportion of respondents in both NGOs, with no significant differences observed. Cerin and Lesline (2008) suggest that, to increase leisure-time physical activity levels in the most disadvantaged segments of the population, comprehensive and multilevel interventions targeting social and physical environments as well as relevant attitudes and skills are needed. Sewing and embroidery emerged as a commonly practiced activity in both NGOs, reported by 27.8% of NGO-I and 34.0% of NGO-II respondents, though the difference was statistically non-significant.

Regarding non-productive leisure activities, gossiping and idle sitting was reported by a significantly higher proportion of respondents from NGO-I (51.1%) compared to NGO-II (23.4%) ($\chi^2 = 15.15$, $P < 0.001$). Similarly, television watching and listening to the radio was more prevalent among NGO-I respondents (42.2%) than NGO-II respondents (19.1%), with the difference being highly significant ($\chi^2 = 11.56$, $P < 0.001$). Engagement in any other activities was reported by 17.8% of NGO-I and 11.7% of NGO-II respondents, with no statistically significant difference.

Overall, the findings indicate that while several leisure time activities were common to respondents of both NGOs, significant differences were observed particularly in spinning and weaving, dairy related activities, gossiping and idle sitting, and television/radio use, suggesting variation in the utilization of leisure time between NGO-I and NGO-II respondents. This finding is in close conformity with the views reported by Kandula et al. (2005). Baudrillard (2012) argues that leisure time cannot be made meaningful by creative activities. Ishaq et al. (2017) reported that women are also involved in animal herding, which is vital for family food and the household economy.

Table 4 Distribution of Respondents Regarding Source of Learning Different Types of Activities

Classification	Source of Learning Skill							
	At Home		From Neighbors / Friends / Relatives		From School / Institute / Training center		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
NGO								
I (90)	33	36.7	37	41.1	20	22.2	90	100.0
II (94)	47	50.0	36	38.3	11	11.7	94	100.0
Total (184)	80	43.5	73	39.7	31	16.8	184	100.0
$\chi^2 = 4.99, df = 2, P > 0.05$								
Age								
≤ 20	12	34.3	14	40.0	09	25.7	35	100.0
21 - 35	49	42.6	47	40.9	19	16.5	115	100.0
> 35	19	55.9	12	35.3	03	8.8	34	100.0
$\chi^2 = 5.05, df = 4, P > 0.05$								
Educational Status								
Low	36	51.4	28	40.0	06	8.6	70	100.0
Middle	35	43.8	30	37.5	15	18.8	80	100.0
High	09	26.5	15	44.1	10	29.4	34	100.0
$\chi^2 = 9.74, df = 4, P < 0.05$								
Economic Status								
< 1000	44	42.3	44	42.3	16	15.4	104	100.0
≥ 1000	36	45.0	29	36.2	15	18.8	80	100.0
$\chi^2 = 0.80, df = 2, P > 0.05$								

3.4 Description of Source of Learning Skills of Respondents (SHGs members)

Table 4 presents the classification of respondents according to their sources of learning skills, namely learning at home, learning from neighbors/friends/relatives, and learning from school/institute/training centers, across NGO type, age, educational status, and economic status, along with the results of chi-square tests.

With respect to NGO-wise distribution, in NGO-I, the largest proportion of respondents acquired skills from neighbors, friends, or relatives (41.1%), followed by learning at home (36.7%), while 22.2% learned skills from schools, institutes, or training centers. In NGO-II, half of the respondents (50.0%) reported learning skills at home, 38.3% from neighbors/friends/relatives, and only 11.7% from formal institutions. Overall, among the total sample, 43.5% learned skills at home, 39.7% from informal social networks, and 16.8% from formal institutions. The association between NGO type and source of learning skill was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.99, P > 0.05$).

Analysis by age groups revealed that learning at home increased with age, from 34.3% among respondents aged 20 years and below to 55.9% among those above 35 years. Learning from neighbors/friends/relatives was most common in the younger age groups (40.0% in ≤ 20 years and 40.9% in 21-35 years), while learning from formal institutions declined with increasing age, from 25.7% in the ≤ 20 years group to 8.8% in the > 35 years group. However, the association between age and source of learning skill was statistically non-significant ($\chi^2 = 5.05, P > 0.05$).

Regarding educational status, respondents with low education primarily learned skills at home (51.4%), with only 8.6% reporting institutional learning. Those with middle-level education showed a more balanced distribution, while respondents with higher education were more likely to acquire skills from neighbors/friends/relatives (44.1%) and formal institutions (29.4%), with a comparatively lower proportion learning at

home (26.5%). The relationship between educational status and source of learning skill was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.74, P < 0.05$), indicating that education level influenced the source of skill acquisition.

In terms of economic status, respondents in both income categories (< ₹1000 and ≥ ₹1000) predominantly acquired skills either at home or from neighbors/friends/relatives, with a relatively smaller proportion receiving formal training. No statistically significant association was observed between economic status and source of learning skill ($\chi^2 = 0.80, P > 0.05$).

Overall, the findings suggest that informal sources such as home and social networks were the primary means of skill acquisition among respondents, while formal institutional training played a comparatively limited role. Educational status emerged as the only factor significantly associated with the source of learning skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that a majority of females reported having excessive leisure time, defined as more than four hours per day. The leisure activities most commonly preferred by female SHG members included gossiping and idle sitting, watching television or listening to the radio, sewing and embroidery, routine household work, and activities such as bead making. Most respondents acquired these skills informally at home through family members, neighbors, friends, and relatives. Recognizing and promoting meaningful leisure activities among SHG women can substantially enhance their personal well-being as well as collective community outcomes. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of leisure participation on the lives of SHG women. Moreover, the findings of this and related studies highlight the need for more effective planning and implementation strategies to ensure the purposeful utilization of leisure time.

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