

Study of textile handcrafting practices on women creator's psychological well-being: a narrative review

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Abstract

It is a well-regarded fact that a woman's well-being impacts her household members as usually she is the primary caregiver for her family. Also, factors such as success, happiness, and health of the family members have been observed to be directly related to mental health and physical wellness of women. Holistic craft as a means of self-expression has brought women deep happiness like in Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). In many, if not all cultures, textile making has historically been or is presently central to the role of women. It has helped create and sustain the women's self-image while protecting the ego as escapism in the case of some big loss, significantly providing ego-uniting experiences in a quest for creative improvement and self-expression. Hence, it is significant to study the impact of textile value addition techniques on women practitioners' psychological well-being. The aim of the study is to review the related studies. In this narrative review, this study explores hand-textile craft's role and impact on women creators' well-being. This paper identifies how textile crafting can help these individuals. The paper explores the relationship of hand-textile craft of women practitioners and their well-being through narrative analysis methods. The search strategy included a combination of keywords including, mental wellbeing, women textile crafters, feminism craft etc in journals like occupational sciences, The design journal, and Art Therapy. Published articles were reviewed in English in the period of 2000-2020. Literature review portrayed the connection of textile crafters and wellbeing through development of cognitive skills, raw materials used, meaningful handcrafted gifting, social and cultural dimensions, and connection with self-image.

The data from this study could be used to conduct further experimental studies in regional countries and subsequent data can be used in rehabilitation centers.

Author keywords

Well-Being; Textile Crafting; Indian Women Creators; Connecting with Self; Life Satisfaction

Introduction

Hand textile crafting today is no longer a necessity for obtaining everyday items and clothing; instead, it has transpired into an inner desire to create things by hand for leisure ac-

tivities (e.g., Burke & Spencer-Wood, 2019; Gandolfo & Grace, 2010). Textile Crafts such as knitting, crochet, weaving, and needlework focus on repetitive actions and a skill level that can constantly be refined further. According to the famous psychologist Mihaly, this allows us to enter a "flow" state, a perfect immersive state of balance between skill and challenge. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) also discusses life management concerning the concept of flow. On the other hand, the craft can be related to the happy stress experience (Frankenheimer, 1999) because making a new artefact, learning a new technique, or making variations on a pattern can make one feel one has achieved something of value. With what is increasingly referred to today as "mindfulness" being a much-desired quality for many people, it is not surprising that crafts are much sought-after for their mental and even physical benefits. The Women, specifically, as it has been observed, have been spending more time and energy on various forms of textile-based craft making as leisure. In the entire craft process, certain sensory aspects such as meaning of the activity are incorporated into the making as well as in the finished product. These are important as these aspects help in the development of the craft maker's self-development as well. (Pöllänen, 2015; Genoe & Liechty, 2017; Jackson, 2010). It also eventually structures their place in the ever-changing world (Collier, 2011). Claire Wellesley, in her book *Resilient Stitch: Wellbeing and Connection in Textile Art*, explores the notion of resilience in textiles and its importance for mental well-being, community, and engagement with the environment. Relaxation, better moods, and satisfaction in ordinary craft has helped in recreation for the women.

Craft's particular benefits for mental health are backed up by the results of the BBC's great survey test, published in 2019. Textile crafts such as embroidery, crocheting and knitting have the highest participation rates of all the arts – more than music and painting – according to the UK government's Taking Part survey, which shows the potential impact that craft making could have. Another study showed that participating in sewing as a leisure activity contributed to psychological well-being through increasing pride and enjoyment, self-awareness, and 'flow' in younger women. (Craft Council, 2020).



In a country like India, textile crafts are inculcated culturally and practiced widely. Our ancestors have been involved in textile crafts such as knitting, crocheting and embroidery; hence, the traditions are passed on. A mother or grandmother would impart some skill to their female younger generation. Broadly defined, textiles encompass a variety of fibre-related materials that are made from plants (e.g., cotton or linen), animals (e.g., wool, alpaca, or silk), or synthetics (e.g., nylon). Fibers are felted or spun into yarn, dyed, knitted, crocheted, or woven. The material is then joined by sewing, hand stitching, or tying, into a finished piece that may be embellished by various methods such as beading or surface design. Over decades, textile crafts have become an essential and integral part of our cultural heritage. Weaver Kabir Das quoted weaving as a medium of thought and expression. Mahatma Gandhi too claimed that working on the spinning wheel (Charkha) was a deeply meditative activity: its music was like balm to his soul. "The message of the spinning wheel is much wider than its circumference." For Gandhi, the charkha had a therapeutic use too - it was a nerve relaxant and could help in con-

centration, and in controlling passion. (Kapoor, 2017). Women may also engage in these activities for leisure or gifting purposes within their family or friend circles.

This study examines how mindful practices of textile craft making such as knitting, weaving, Crocheting and embroidery etc. can impact the well-being of women practitioners. The data is collected by 'narrative analysis' method. The aim of the study is to review the related studies of *textile craft's role in women creators' well-being*. *Research question of the study can be formulated as below:*

RQ: Is there a direct relationship between handmade textile practices and psychological wellbeing of the women hand textile craft-makers?

Material and Methodology

This was a review (narrative) study, in which literature in English was evaluated using electronic search in databases of ScienceDirect, Occupational Sciences, and Art Therapy etc. in

Table 1. Compilation of results from papers reviewed for the study

S.no	Researcher	Purpose	Sample Size	Sample Type	Tools	Results
1	Sinikka Pollanen (2015)	Elements of crafts that enhance well-being.	59	Female textile craft makers (Age 19-84 yrs.)	Written Narrative	Raw materials, artefacts, sense of achievement, cognitive skills etc.
2	Ann Futterman Collier (2011)	Impact of Hand-crafted textiles on women.	821	Female textile leisure crafters (Age 18 & above)	E-Survey & wellbeing scales	Textile handcraft correlated with better emotional & cognitive adjustment in older women
3	Savneet Talwar (2018)	Wellbeing of women who work of textile design studio	25	Members of creatively empowered women design studio	Case study	CEW Design studio through textile crafts enhances life skills and cultivate a sense of community.
4	Marty Grace Enza Gandolfo Chelsea Candy (2009)	Evaluating Quality of life of mothers who takes out time to practice textile handcrafting	3	Mothers who used textile craft as self-expression and as escape/ relief from demands of mothering.	Semi structured interviews	craft making is an expression of love, helping them nurture through the things they make. Finding relaxation, handling challenges, relief from stress and joy of self-expression, playing important role in well-being.
5	Sara Nevay, Lucy Robertson, Christopher S.C. Lim & Wendy Moncur (2019)	Crafting textile connections	6	Female (Age 16 & above)	Workshops, Interviews & wellbeing scales	Study demonstrates increase in well-being following participation in textile crafting and explores new territory for well-being studies.
6	Jill Riley (2008)	Evaluating enhanced sense of well-being through creative textile making	7	Members of British guild of weavers, spinners, and dyers.	Interviews & Participant observation & notes from workshops	Engaging in creative hand craft textiles contributes to individual sense of self, sense of belonging which contributes to our quality of life, perceptions of health & well-being.
7	Tzanidaki, D. & Frances Reynolds (2011)	Exploring the meanings of making traditional arts and crafts among older women.	12	Old rural women of Greece (Age: 65 & above)	Semi structured interviews	Older women perceived artmaking as promoting continuity of self, social status, and spiritual well-being.
8	Gail Kenning (2015)	Relationship between Craft-based Textile Activities & Positive Well-being.	16	Female textile leisure crafters (Age: 45-90)	Unstructured interviews	Engagement in Textile craft activities were expressed as Health & Well-being, Self-identity, Community Sharing and belonging; Learning, growth and transition.
9	Sinnika Pollanen (2006)	Role of Textile craft making in mental health.	60	Female textile Leisure crafters (Age 19-84)	Free essay Narrative	Craft as a hobby increases the feeling of empowerment. Means to self-expression, sense of personal growth.
10	Lisa Raye Garlock (2016)	Art Therapy and Narrative Textiles	20	survivors of gender-based violence	Training module on narrative textiles & observation	Traditional art therapy groups making story cloths in community provides connection with others and cope with traumatic events.

the time range between 2020 and 2022. Search in the databases was made using key words of "Hand Textile Crafting and Well-being" and "Women Creators" and "Textile Crafting and Social Connections" and "Creative Well-being" and "Psychopathology" and "Social Factors" and "Life Satisfaction" and "Feminism Craft Well-being" and "Functional". Out of 50 articles, 10 articles were included in the study. These had conducted research on textile crafting well-being, and were of cross-sectional, cohort, case-control, interventional, and review article types. In addition, articles were selected based on wellbeing assessed among women in India and internationally. Articles with improper material regarding the adequacy of sample size, research design, and statistical methods were excluded from the study. The articles reviewed in the study were more qualitative in nature. Few studies indicated quantitative analysis where the questionnaire was circulated via emails.

The articles were evaluated by the researcher in terms of inclusion criteria. In case of meeting the inclusion criteria, the articles were reviewed, and contents related to the subject were extracted. Thus, the main results of each study with the article's specifications under the relevant title were noted. After collecting, the material and content were categorized based on scientific content in their respective area subsets

Results and Discussions

Below is detailed overview of the papers reviewed for the study.

Articles' assessment showed that the connection between women's well-being and textile handcrafting can be categorized in five factors, namely, development of cognitive skills, raw materials used, meaningful handcrafted gifting, social and cultural dimensions, and connection with self-image.

Development of cognitive skills

^{1, 2} The role of the craft and the relationship between the craft and its maker vary across cultures, geographic groups, and gender. A common thread is that craft practitioners are often emotionally invested in these activities. (Kenning, Fiddling with Threads, 2015) Many continue to make it through all stages of life until old age. Positive stress in ordinary craft enhances the sense of time management.

Raw materials

Although materials are an indispensable condition for making, according to the narratives, they may have other meanings for craft makers. The raw materials were described in the narratives as a source of inspiration. The craft makers could also express their values and creativity through the materials. The data also revealed how touching the material and the process of making had deepened the possibility of expressing the makers' feelings. It was quoted in the narrative that "I remember how during the worst part of my sickness I had to go and shop for the textiles; the strong colored clothes especially seemed to give me strength".

Meaningful handcrafted gifting

It was identified that the most noticeable features of the narratives were accurate descriptions about artefacts that were made during the long-term craft making. Articles elaborated on how the craft makers described how much time, energy, and warm feelings were connected to the making process

and the finished products. Self-made personalized gifts are given and accepted with love. It is much more impersonal to buy something "finished". Time is limited, but gifts to family members must be self-made with love. (Pollanen, Elements of crafts).

Social and cultural dimensions

In this study, the context of making crafts was the home. The narratives only touched on the possibilities of making crafts in organized contexts or in the social setting of a group that is wider than the craft maker's own family. Nevertheless, most of the narratives described features that can be connected to social connections and culture. The narratives revealed that the social dimension of crafting was intertwined with emotionality. ⁵ Even though crafting was done alone, it nurtured the feeling of togetherness with family members, relatives, and friends. As visible objects, the crafts had symbolic meanings to family members". Thus, in addition to being considered concrete and visible evidence of kinship and love, crafting was perceived as strengthening family ties. The fact that the product was made for the home or for some dear person indicated that the human connection made the making-process and the product meaningful. (Garlock, stories in the cloth).

Connection with self-image

¹¹ The findings by Jill Riley indicate that a sense of self comes from an intrinsic need to make textiles that are closely connected to one's personal background, an affinity for materials, skill mastery, passion for rhythm and process, spiritual commitment, and continuity with the past. It is related to sharing occupation and working together as a part of a group. This brings about a sense of belonging, which in turn enhances the quality of life and perceptions of well-being.

⁶ Lisa Raye Garlock elaborates the importance of narrative textiles through her training program "Common Threads" -A recovery programme for survivors of gender-based violence"

⁷ Working with fabric can be particularly comforting and meaningful, especially if there is personal and cultural history and relevance. Story cloths create lasting pictures filled with memories, connection to loved ones and effective way to work with trauma survivors"

Importance of the study

This study will be useful for furthering the Make in India initiative, and the Skill Development schemes of the Indian government, and accomplish Women Empowerment as described in the SDGs declared by the UN. It will also enable strengthening grassroots support to Indian women artisans and thus carry their legacy forward in a sustainable manner.

Conclusion

Most of the articles reviewed in the study have targeted respondents that were self-identified textile handcrafters who had good experience in the craft like knitting, weaving, spinning, and sewing. Different psychological patterns have been observed from the various papers. While conducting the review, it was observed that there have been numerous studies inquiring about the role of hand textile crafts on women's well-being, but it has been observed that the studies confirming its impact pertaining to the region of India are scarce. The analysis method that has been employed in the study is ma-

ingly descriptive and quantitative. While gathering the review it has been observed that data on experimental studies is limited. Literature review on hand-textile craft with respect to well-being covers intellectual categories who are practicing textile craft for leisure with varied age groups. However, limited information is observed from illiterate or other sections of

the society. Gap identified in the study by the researcher has helped the researcher to further gather the information from various groups of women creators from diverse sections, strata of the society and those who have never practiced any craft. Researcher is progressing primary research on the same as further scope of the study.

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