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WORKERS PERCEPTION OF WELFARE FACILITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SUGAR MILLS OF PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study aims to examine and compare the workers' perception towards various labour welfare facilities provided in the co-operative and private sugar mills of Punjab state of India. The study also examines the association of perception scores for welfare facilities with the personal characteristics of workers.

Methodology: Data was collected from 490 workers (280 from co-operative sugar mills and 210 from private sugar mills) with the help of a structured questionnaire. The sample was drawn using referral sampling method.

Findings: Results showed that out of 29 welfare facilities examined in this study, facilities like canteen, medical, sitting, drinking water, housing and cycle sheds are found satisfactory in both the types of sugar mills. The study also found that workers' perception scores on welfare facilities were associated with most of their personal characteristics.

Implications: The study emphasizes on provision of need based valuable welfare facilities which can enhance the efficiency of workers that will ultimately lead to increased individual and organizational productivity.

Limitations: The main limitation is the size of sample which restricts the generalization of results in Punjab state and secondly, the use of random sampling might have improved the results of the study.

Keywords: Punjab, Sugar Mills, Welfare, Cooperative, Industrial Relations.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Martin (1967) 'People (at work) are entitled to be treated as full human beings with personal needs, hopes and anxieties'. These words are equally relevant even today. In recent times, when organizations are at par with equal opportunities to acquire technology, finance, systems, the cutting edge of an organization will be its human resources (Monappa, 2006). In the present era of competitive business environment every organisation desires full co-operation of its workforce in order to ensure higher output which can ultimately bring higher profits. However, the co-operation of employees is possible only when they feel satisfied with the benefits provided to them (Prabhu, 2011). Earlier, the employers were having the opinion of providing only the wages and salary to the workers as per the agreement of service. But with the passage of time workers started looking for something in addition to salary and the employers also felt the need of providing the additional benefits in the form of 'employee welfare facilities' (Agarwal, 2014).

Labour welfare refers to those efforts of the organization which makes life worth living for workman (Joshi, 1968). Saligman (2006) defined welfare work as "voluntary efforts of the employers to establish within the existing industrial system, working and sometimes, living and cultural conditions of the employees beyond what is required by law, the custom of the country and the conditions of the market". Welfare does not mean only amenities but the right atmosphere where the worker can breathe an air of growth and development and think constructively so as to understand the play and interplay of his subconscious instincts and conscious emotions (Madhumathi and Desai, 2003).

Welfare measures may not directly increase productivity, but it may add to general feelings of satisfaction with the company, reduce absenteeism and cut down labour turnover (Armstrong, 2006). Employee welfare is an essential part of social welfare which enable the employees to balance work life with family and social life (Lalitha and Priyanka, 2014). Further, employee welfare is also regarded as a useful tool to reduce stress by boosting the moral of employees and is considered as a base for branding of organisations (Srinivas, 2013; Raju and Niak, 2015) and enhancing financial performance (Das and Panda, 2015).

Thus, labour welfare is a significant facet of industrial relations that adds stimulus to keep the body and soul of workers together which a good salary alone cannot. It is recognised as employees' social right and employers' internal social responsibility (Monappa et al, 2013). Furthermore, most of the labour welfare facilities belong to the category of 'hygiene factors' in Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory which creates dissatisfaction if not provided. Besides removing dissatisfaction valuable welfare measures create sense of belongingness among workers towards the organization.

In the modern era, employers have realised the crucial role that extra amenities can play at workplace as need based welfare measures build up a great sense of loyalty on the part of employees for their organization. In an industrialized society the welfare activities have far reaching impact on the workers' lives as these activities not only secure existential necessities but also ensure improvement in spiritual and emotional quotient (Mishra and Bhagat, 2007). Madhumathi and Desai (2003) emphasized for the adequacy of welfare facilities which will influence workers' motivation whereby they feel that the employer and the government are interested in their welfare and happiness. As a result their tendency to grouse and grumble steadily disappears. And from this the industrial peace will emerge and ultimately higher productivity will be achieved. Therefore, employee welfare activities are equally beneficial for both the employees and the employers, as welfare enhances satisfaction for employees and industrial efficiency for the employer (Tatareddy and Kumari, 2014).

Though the statutory welfare practices are imposed on the organisations by the interference of the state, but still the appropriate level of welfare requires financial sufficiency (Fuess et al., 2004). In the past, majority of employers considered welfare facilities as financial burden. Only those welfare measures which were mandatory were provided to the employees. Moreover, trade unions and employees didn't play any significant role in the administration of the benefits and often remained ignorant of their shares and dues (Madhuri, 1978). However, in recent times, employee welfare facilities are taken care of by the managements voluntarily and with enlightened willingness. In other words, now the welfare facilities are considered as a wise investment which can bring profitable returns in the form of enhanced workers' efficiency (Sharma, 1997; Manasa and Krishnanaik, 2015). In fact welfare measures are regarded as inexpensive benefit program in case these are capable of producing the following results : (i) enhanced ability to attract and retain competent employees; (ii) improved attitudes and loyalty, and (iii) indirectly improves employee productivity (Howard & Mikalachki, 1979).

THE STUDY AND ITS OBJECTIVES

Harmonious industrial relations are considered as healthy indicator of economic growth of a nation. Although conflicts between employers and employees are a part and parcel of the industry but these can be reduced to minimum by adopting some proactive measures. One of such measure can be providing valuable welfare facilities for workforce. Employee welfare ensures the benefits not only for the employees, but also for the organisation and society (Prasad, 2011). Moreover, the socio-economic aspects of the life of workers have a direct influence on the development of a country. In this regard, an attempt has been made to assess the labour welfare facilities in sugar mills of Punjab state of India. Specifically, the main objectives of this study are

1. To examine and compare the workers' perception of welfare facilities in co-operative and private sugar mills of Punjab.
2. To examine the association of workers' perceptions of welfare facilities with their personal characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The sample

The present study was conducted on a sample of 490 workers (280 from co-operative sugar mills and 210 from private sugar mills of Punjab). The sample was drawn using referral sampling method. The workers in the sugar mills included boilers, bitters, cane loaders, cane unloaders, machine men, centrifugal operators, khalasi and other manual workers engaged in sugar production.

“take in Table I”

Table I: Socioeconomic profile of sugar mill workers

Socio Economic Characteristics		Type of Mill				Total	
		Co-operative		Private			
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	276	98.57	210	100.00	486	99.18
	Female	4	1.43	0	0.00	4	0.82
Age Group	18-27 years	7	2.50	15	7.14	22	4.49
	28-37 years	15	5.36	56	26.67	71	14.49
	38-47 years	87	31.07	90	42.86	177	36.12
	48-58 years	163	58.21	43	20.48	206	42.04
	59 years & above	8	2.86	6	2.86	14	2.86
Marital Status	Married	259	92.50	196	93.33	455	92.86
	Unmarried /Separated/ Widowed	21	7.50	14	6.67	35	7.14
Educational Qualification	Below Matric	131	46.79	94	44.76	225	45.92
	Matric	77	27.50	69	32.86	146	29.80
	Senior Secondary	13	4.64	19	9.05	32	6.53
	Diploma	41	14.64	16	7.62	57	11.63
	Graduation	18	6.43	12	5.71	30	6.12
Family Type	Joint	150	53.57	79	37.62	229	46.73
	Nuclear	130	46.43	131	62.38	261	53.27
Family Size	1-3 members	34	12.14	35	16.67	69	14.08
	4-6 members	224	80.00	121	57.62	345	70.41
	7 members & above	22	7.86	54	25.71	76	15.51
Residential Status	Migrant	58	20.71	58	27.62	116	23.67
	Local Resident	222	79.29	152	72.38	374	76.33
Accommodation	Rented	35	12.50	12	5.71	47	9.59
	Owned	184	65.71	139	66.19	323	65.92
	Company Premises	61	21.79	59	28.10	120	24.49

Socio Economic Characteristics		Type of Mill				Total	
		Co-operative		Private			
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Total Experience	1-10 years	32	11.43	56	26.67	88	17.96
	11-20 years	82	29.29	104	49.52	186	37.96
	21-30 years	134	47.86	42	20.00	176	35.92
	31 years & Above	32	11.43	8	3.81	40	8.16
Experience in the Present Mill	1-10 years	37	13.21	107	50.95	144	29.39
	11-20 years	82	29.29	91	43.33	173	35.31
	21-30 years	131	46.79	12	5.71	143	29.18
	31 years & Above	30	10.71	0	0.00	30	6.12
Salary (Monthly)	< ₹5000/-	7	2.50	24	11.43	31	6.33
	₹5000-10000/-	34	12.14	115	54.76	149	30.41
	₹10000-15000/-	18	6.43	52	24.76	70	14.29
	₹15000-20000/-	66	23.57	12	5.71	78	15.92
	₹20000-25000/-	127	45.36	2	0.95	129	26.33
	Above ₹25000/-	28	10.00	5	2.38	33	6.73
Nature of	Permanent	132	47.14	108	51.43	240	48.98

Source: Compiled from the primary data.

Characteristics of sample

Table I shows the socio-economic profile of the workers. Majority of the workers are male in co-operative sugar mills and in case of private sugar mills all the participants are male. Most of the workers belong to age group of 48 to 58 years in co-operative sugar mills. Whereas in case of private sugar mills, majority of the workers lies in the age group of 38 to 47 years. In both types of sugar mills, majority of the workers are either matric or below matric. Majority of the workers have total experience of twenty one to thirty years, and eleven to twenty years in the co-operative and private sugar mills, respectively. As far as the experience in the present mill is concerned, the co-operative mill workers are having more experience in comparison to the private sugar mill workers. Salary wise, the workers of co-operative sugar mills are drawing more salary than the workers of private sugar mills. A major chunk of workers in both types of the mills are local residents and are living in their own houses. Regarding nature of employment, majority of the workers are permanent or seasonal permanent both in the co-operative and private sugar mills. Skill - category wise, most of the workers are skilled in both the types of sugar mills.

Measuring instrument

In order to examine the perception of workers regarding welfare facilities in the sugar mills a self constructed scale is used which consists of 29 items. These items are selected on the basis of literature review. The review for the selection of items mainly consists of doctoral studies in the area of employee

welfare by Prasad (2011), Dhobale (2012), and Prabhu (2011). In addition, some of the relevant items are adapted from the structured questionnaire on labour welfare provided by Srivastava (2004). The study has included different statutory and non statutory welfare facilities which are provided within or outside the precincts of the sugar mills. These items have been examined through five point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 5 indicates “highly satisfied” and 1 indicates “highly dissatisfied”. The reliability of this scale was found good as the value of Cronbach Alpha for these welfare items was .853.

Procedure of data collection

Data were obtained from the sugar mills premises, workers’ workplace areas, from restrooms and canteens during the lunch breaks, and also from workers’ residential areas. A total of 405 questionnaires for the mill workers were distributed in the co-operative sugar mills. Out of these, 292 questionnaires were received back. On the other hand, in private sugar mills, 350 questionnaires were distributed to workers, of which 229 questionnaires were received back. But after discarding the incomplete questionnaires, the analysis of the data is based on total 490 questionnaires consisting of 280 and 210 workers of co-operative and private sugar mills, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fulfill the main objectives of the present study, the obtained data were analyzed statistically in terms of means, standard deviations, t-test, and Chi-square test. The perception of mill workers regarding welfare measures has been examined through the weighted mean score of satisfaction from the different welfare facilities as listed in the table II. A comparison has been made between co-operative and private sugar mills on these facilities. In addition, the association of the perception scores with the socio economic profile has been also examined for the workers. For differentiating the welfare facilities among the co-operative and private sugar mills, t-test has been applied by framing the following hypothesis.

H_{0a} : There is no significant difference between the perception of the co-operative and private sugar mill workers regarding various employee welfare facilities. “take in Table II”

Table II: Perception of mill workers regarding welfare facilities

Sr. No.	Welfare facility	Mean score		t value	p value
		Co- operative sugar mills (X ₁)	Private sugar mills (X ₂)		
1	Education	1.35	1.22	1.465	.144
2	Canteen/lunch room	3.59	3.77	-1.470	.142
3	Medical	4.14	4.00	1.792	.074
4	Creches	1.19	1.02	3.448	.001*
5	Washing	1.74	1.38	3.247	.001*
6	Drying	1.58	1.36	2.193	.029**
7	Sitting	3.21	3.50	-2.078	.038**

Sr. No.	Welfare facility	Mean score		t value	p value
		Co- operative sugar mills (X ₁)	Private sugar mills (X ₂)		
8	Drinking water	4.03	4.12	-1.073	.284
9	Transport	1.39	1.57	-1.627	.105
10	Housing	4.00	3.81	1.028	.306
11	Rest/shelter	2.59	1.56	7.938	.000*
12	Welfare officers	2.70	1.14	14.713	.000*
13	Rest and breaks	2.88	2.25	4.297	.000*
14	Market co-operatives and credit societies	1.30	1.09	3.124	.002*
15	Cycle sheds	3.99	3.97	.202	.840
16	Uniforms	2.47	1.16	12.428	.000*
17	Free coffee/tea	1.05	1.39	-4.412	.000*
18	Festival advances/bonus	1.21	1.65	-4.318	.000*
19	Vocational training	1.31	1.27	.463	.644
20	Active participation in decision making	1.33	1.04	4.445	.000*
21	Literacy programs	1.32	1.10	3.138	.002*
22	Social get together/celebrations	1.86	1.94	-.588	.557
23	Health weeks or health fairs/wellness camps /smoking/tobacco cessation	1.31	1.41	-1.113	.266
24	Medical insurance	1.61	1.94	-2.614	.009*
25	Financial advisory help desk	1.10	1.13	-.668	.504
26	Loan	1.49	1.99	-4.185	.000*
27	Treatment of dust and fumes	2.17	2.10	.500	.617
28	Fire brigade in case of accidents	1.78	2.40	-4.766	.000*
29	Cleanliness	2.82	2.58	1.762	.079

Source: Compiled from primary data.

Note:* represents significant at 1 % level of significance. ** represents significant at 5 % level of significance.

On the basis of mean scores of welfare facilities as perceived by the workers of co-operative (X_1) and private (X_2) sugar mills, data in the table II reveals that out of total 29 welfare facilities, very few facilities are found to be satisfactory in both type of mills. This includes facilities such as canteen facility ($X_1=3.59$, $X_2=3.77$), medical facility ($X_1=4.14$, $X_2=4$), sitting facility ($X_1=3.21$, $X_2=3.50$), drinking water facility ($X_1=4.03$, $X_2=4.12$), housing facility ($X_1=4.00$, $X_2=3.81$) and cycle shed facility ($X_1=3.99$, $X_2=3.97$). Out of these facilities medical, housing and cycle shed facility are found better in the co-operative sugar mills as depicted by the respective mean scores. On the other hand sitting and drinking water facility are found better in the private sugar mills. Statistically, the difference is found between the co-operative and private sugar mill workers for the sitting facility among these facilities ($p=.038$).

Most of the other welfare facilities are not perceived as satisfactory by the workers of co-operative and private sugar mills. However, in case of the co-operative sugar mills facilities like education ($X_1=1.35$, $X_2=1.22$), crèches ($X_1=1.19$, $X_2=1.02$), washing ($X_1=1.74$, $X_2=1.38$), drying ($X_1=1.58$, $X_2=1.36$), rest/shelter ($X_1=2.59$, $X_2=1.56$), welfare officers ($X_1=2.70$, $X_2=1.14$), rest and breaks ($X_1=2.88$, $X_2=2.25$), market co-operatives and credit societies ($X_1=1.30$, $X_2=1.09$), uniforms ($X_1=2.47$, $X_2=1.16$), vocational training ($X_1=1.31$, $X_2=1.27$), active participation in decision making ($X_1=1.33$, $X_2=1.04$), literacy programs ($X_1=1.32$, $X_2=1.10$), treatment of dust and fumes ($X_1=2.17$, $X_2=2.10$) and cleanliness ($X_1=2.82$, $X_2=2.58$) are found better. Among these facilities the statistical difference is found for crèches, washing, rest/shelter, welfare officers, rest and breaks, market co-operatives and credit societies, uniforms, active participation in decision making, literacy programs at 1 % level of significance ($p<0.01$). For the drying facility the difference is observed at 5 % level of significance ($p<0.05$).

On the other hand facilities like transport ($X_1=1.39$, $X_2=1.57$), free coffee/tea ($X_1=1.05$, $X_2=1.39$), festival advances/bonus ($X_1=1.21$, $X_2=1.65$), social get together/celebrations ($X_1=1.86$, $X_2=1.94$), health weeks or health fairs/wellness camps /smoking/tobacco cessation ($X_1=1.31$, $X_2=1.41$), medical insurance ($X_1=1.61$, $X_2=1.94$), financial advisory help desk ($X_1=1.10$, $X_2=1.13$), loan ($X_1=1.49$, $X_2=1.99$), fire brigade in case of accidents ($X_1=1.78$, $X_2=2.40$) are found, to some extent, better in the private sugar mills are found better in case private sugar mills in comparison to the co-operative sugar mills. Among these facilities the statistical difference is observed for the facilities like free coffee/tea, festival advances/bonus, medical insurance, loan, fire brigade in case of accidents at 1 % level of significance ($p<0.01$). Thus, the workers of the co-operative and private sugar mills are satisfied from very few facilities.

Further, the study found significant difference in sixteen welfare facilities for co-operative and private sugar mills. Hence, null hypothesis (H_{0a}) is rejected for these 16 welfare facilities. On the other hand, no significant difference found for the remaining 13 welfare facilities. Hence, the null hypothesis (H_{0a}) is accepted for the remaining 13 welfare facilities.

Association of perceptions scores with personal characteristics of workers

Pearson's Chi-square test of association has also been applied to find the association between perception of the workers regarding welfare facilities and personal characteristics of respondents namely type of mill, gender, age group, marital status, educational qualification, family type, family size, residential status, accommodation, total experience, experience in the present mill, salary, nature of employment and level of skill. Perception scores are categorized into three different groups namely, low (below 58), moderate (59-87) and high (88 or above). The following hypothesis has been framed for applying the Chi square test.

H_{0b} : There is no significant association between perception scores and various personal characteristics of workers. "take in Table III"

Table III: Association of perceptions scores with personal characteristics of workers

Sr. No.	Hypotheses	d.f.	Chi value	p value
1	H_{0b1} : There is no significant association between perception scores and type of sugar mill	2	14.000	.001*
2	H_{0b2} : There is no significant association between perception scores and gender	2	.216	.897
3	H_{0b3} : There is no significant association between perception scores and age group	8	19.563	.012**
4	H_{0b4} : There is no significant association between perception scores and marital status	6	7.021	.319
5	H_{0b5} : There is no significant association between perception scores and educational qualification	10	16.822	.032**
6	H_{0b6} : There is no significant association between perception scores and family type	2	6.987	.030**
7	H_{0b7} : There is no significant association between perception scores and family size	4	5.148	.272
8	H_{0b8} : There is no significant association between perception scores and residential status	2	9.678	.008*
9	H_{0b9} : There is no significant association between perception scores and accommodation	4	16.640	.002*
10	H_{0b10} : There is no significant association between perception scores and total experience	6	25.022	.000*
11	H_{0b11} : There is no significant association between perception scores and experience in the present mill	6	33.657	.000*
12	H_{0f12} : There is no significant association between perception scores and salary	10	29.527	.001*
13	H_{0b13} : There is no significant association between perception scores and nature of employment	6	36.955	.000*
14	H_{0b14} : There is no significant association between perception scores and level of skill	6	14.619	.023**

Source: Compiled from primary data.

Note: * represents significant at 1 % level of significance. ** represents significant at 5 % level of significance.

The data analysis in the table III shows that type of sugar mill ($\chi^2=14.000$, $p=.001$), residential status ($\chi^2=9.678$, $p=.008$), accommodation ($\chi^2=16.640$, $p=.002$), total experience ($\chi^2=25.022$, $p=.000$), experience in the present mill ($\chi^2=33.657$, $p=.000$), salary ($\chi^2=29.527$, $p=.001$) and nature of employment ($\chi^2=36.955$, $p=.000$) has significant association with low, moderate and high perception scores at 1% level of significance. Hence, null hypotheses for these variables (H_{0b1} , H_{0b8} , H_{0b9} , H_{0b10} , H_{0b11} , H_{0b12} and H_{0b13}) are rejected. In addition, age group ($\chi^2=19.563$, $p=.012$), educational qualification ($\chi^2=16.822$, $p=.032$), family type ($\chi^2=6.987$, $p=.030$) and level of skill ($\chi^2=14.619$, $p=.023$) has also shown significant association with low (below 58), moderate (59-87) and high (88 and above) perception scores at 5% level of significance. Hence, null hypotheses for these variables (H_{0b3} , H_{0b5} ,

H_{0b6} , and H_{0b14}) are also rejected. These findings are in conformity with the findings of the study conducted by Prabhu (2011) which concluded that the satisfaction regarding welfare was highly associated with the demographics of the labour. The other demographics like gender, marital status and family size have not shown any significant association with the perception scores ($p > .05$). Hence, null hypotheses for these variables (H_{0b2} , H_{0b4} and H_{0b7}) are accepted.

Thus, the result of Chi square test has shown the association of low (below 58), moderate (59-87) and high (88 or above) scores from the welfare facilities with the categorical variables like type of mill, age group, educational qualification, family type, residential status, accommodation, total experience, experience in the present mill, salary, nature of employment and level of skill.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In summary, the study examined the perception of workers regarding the welfare facilities in the sugar mills of Punjab. Data was obtained for 29 welfare facilities and the study found that apart from the facilities like canteen, medical, sitting, drinking water, housing and cycle sheds none of the other facilities were satisfactory in both the co-operative and private sugar mills. The study also found significant difference between co-operative and private sugar mill workers' perception for sixteen welfare facilities. In addition findings revealed significant association of workers' perception regarding welfare facilities with most of their personal characteristics considered in the present study.

To conclude, the labour welfare measures aims at providing rich and satisfactory life to working class. Apart from statutory welfare provisions, workers always desire something additional from their organization. However, welfare measures attract cost component also. In case of sugar mills of Punjab the present financial position is not good at all especially that of co-operative sugar mills (Randhawa and Gupta, 2014), so careful planning is required that can serve twin objectives, i.e., satisfying the workers and at the same time keeping cost component under control. One of the best ways for the organizations is to ensure which welfare measures will be most valuable to workers. This can be done by the HR department by conducting periodic need assessments rather than the misinterpretations of workers' priorities by employers (Hayes, 2002). Employees will also appreciate the opportunity provided to them for their inputs in designing welfare schemes. This will also ensure that organizations are providing exactly those welfare measures which are essentially required and that can bring appreciation from the current employees and also act as a source of attraction to new applicants. Provision of variety of need based welfare facilities aims to enhance the efficiency of workers which will ultimately lead to increased productivity as with the help of welfare facilities the real income of workers will surely increase. Workshops should be conducted on regular basis, by the concerned authorities to educate the workers regarding the various statutory and voluntary welfare facilities available for them. It will assist in increasing workers' commitment and help in the retention of core workers. On the other hand, state government should keep a check that employers are properly complying with the various statutory labour welfare provisions.

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