



Professional Dignity of Pediluvium Employees: Empirical Evidence from Female Foot Massagists in Changsha City, China

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Abstract

Female employees play a significant role in leisure and entertainment industry. Despite the rapid expansion of leisure and entertainment industry, study on role of females has not received a considerable attention. Especially, female employees in lower-class leisure and entertainment activities have been of less attention in empirical studies. This study empirically examines the nature and determinants of professional dignity among the female foot massagists in Changsha. Results indicate that: there is a severe lack of professional dignity among the female foot massagists; working hours, working environment and job safety are key determinants of their professional dignity at work, while labor wage and social security have positive correlation with their professional dignity; labor contract doesn't have an impact on their professional dignity at work. The study contributes with imperative implications for policymakers in enhancing labor relations, improving working environment and heightening the social security system in Pediluvium industry.

Keywords: *Changsha, Female Foot Massagists, Pediluvium employees, Professional Dignity*

1. Introduction

Pediluvium business is an emerging leisure service segment in recent years, playing an important role in Health and recreation industry. This business belongs to labor-intensive, lower-class service industry which is exceedingly depend on female employees. Consequently, it has become the source of living for large number of urban and rural female employees. According to unofficial statistics, the number of female foot

massagists in China has reached 14 million in 2015, attracting the top leader's attention of Chinese government (Huang, 2016). Traditional concepts and industry characteristics have led female employees to work in service industry, especially in lower-class service operations such as domestic caretaking. However, female employees in lower-class service operations tend to be stereotyped as working population who is weak in bargaining, humble and lack of knowledge (Yangang, 2010). Amidst this background the enhancement of their occupational values has become a critical challenge. As representatives of a lower-class emerging service sector, female foot massagists without exception are stereotyped, weak in bargaining and humble as working population (Ming, 2008). Although pediluvium business in China is legal, the biased “gazing” at female foot massagists is ubiquitous among public which makes female foot massagists be dressed “Indecently”. Given the fact that all jobs are equally noble, female foot massagists should have the opportunity to work decently and have a dignified professional life. Therefore, deepening the understanding of determinants of female foot massagists’ professional dignity, is of great practical significance in improving their professional life.

The current domestic research on pediluvium business is mainly concentrated in the medical care function of the pediluvium, spatial distribution, etc. and there is very few empirical studies on psychological cognition of the service provider (Ming, 2008; Yaoxing & Ming, 2009). The pediluvium shops are all over the Changsha and there are many female foot massagists. The pediluvium business in Changsha is prosperous and as a result this city is nick named as ‘The Capital of Pediluvium’ in China. Therefore, Changsha city was selected as the field of work to explore the professional dignity of female foot massagists and its determinants through a field survey. The key focus of this paper is to provide some effective suggestions in enhancing the professional dignity of female foot massagists. The study also aims at informing relevant authorities to support the sustainable development of pediluvium business.

This paper is organized into six sections including introduction, the review of theoretical underpinning of professional dignity, hypotheses development, methodological choice, results and discussion, conclusions, implications and limitations.

2. Theoretical Background

Professional Dignity

Dignity can be understood as respectability, as well as a sense of self-worth and integrity. As an activity, that is foundation of livelihood and social status where labor is central to modern human dignity (Hodson, 2001). Recent academic efforts have paid increasing attention towards the determinants of professional dignity. Hodson (2001) identifies four key categories of practices that contribute to diminish the dignity at work. These include mismanagement and abuse, overwork, incursions on autonomy, and contradictions of employee involvement. By using responses from a telephone survey of 589 low wage, low skilled workers in US hospitals, Berg and Frost (2005) find that higher pay, adequate levels of staffing and resources, and access to training are the variables that are most closely associated with dignity on the job. Sayer (2007) points out that words, deeds, and material conditions all impact the achievement of dignity. By examining a five-star hotel in China’s southwest Yunnan province, Otis (2008) has found that professional female

hotel workers take refuge in professional protocols that signal their moral distinction from sex workers who are informally attached to the hotel, which they use to keep their dignity. Steimel (2010) shows how pink-collar workers' dignity was threatened when female employees in subordinated service roles experienced abusive communication and outright questions of their competence from their bosses and clients. By interviewing 37 workers from a blue-collar mining community, Lucas et al. (2012) has summarized three central identity discourses of workplace dignity: all jobs are important and valuable; dignity is located in the quality of the job performed; and dignity emerges from the way people treat and are treated by others. Lippel (2012) shows how workers' compensation systems could succeed in reducing adversarial interactions, ensuring better protection and promotion of employees' dignity. Based on their analysis of media accounts of work-life at Foxconn, Lucas et al. (2012) have found that the state-system of Hukou works in tandem with wider cultural norms and the entire institution of Foxconn to institutionalize a system of indignity from which there is virtually no escape.

In China, Yueping (2011) argues that labor wage, labor safety and social security all are positively influenced on the professional dignity of migrant workers. Qian (2011) systematically and deeply discusses the intrinsic logical relation between labor relations and miner's dignity. Results show that labor wage, labor contract, working hours and labor safety all affect miner's dignity. Huang (2011) also confirms that labor wage, labor contract, working hours and labor safety all influence the workers' dignity in state-owned enterprises. Min (2011) finds the type of job, working environments, labor wages, living conditions, social benefits, social security, the acceptance by public, the Hukou system etc. have influenced on the professional dignity of new generation's migrant workers. The analysis of literatures above shows that there are many factors which affect the workers' professional dignity, including labor wage, labor safety, working hours, supervision and management, organizational structure of an institution, social identity and social stigma.

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), also commonly referred to as occupational health or workplace health and safety (WHS), is a multidisciplinary field concerned with the safety, health, and welfare of people at work and according to International Labor Organization (ILO), there are forty standards which guide the safe working environment for employees. According to Ming (2008), pediluvium industry is a sensitive field where the attention towards employee health, safety, and working place safety standards are essential. All the industrial countries of the world have developed measures to promote the economic security and welfare of individual and his family. These measures have come to be called as social security. Social security is dynamic concept and an indispensable chapter of a national programme to strike at the root of poverty, unemployment and diseases (Otis, 2008). According to ILO, the security that society furnishes, through appropriate organization, against certain risks, to which its members are exposed. These risks are essentially contingencies against which the individuals of small means cannot effectively provide by his, own ability or foresight alone or even in private combination with fellows. These risks are being sickness, maternity, invalidity, old age and death. It is the characteristics of these contingencies that they imperil the ability of the working man to support himself and his dependents in health and decency (Shuang, 2013).

Working environment is referred to the location where a task is completed. When pertaining to a place of employment, the work environment involves the physical geographical location as well as the immediate surroundings of the workplace, such as a construction site or office building. Typically involves other factors relating to the place of employment, such as the quality of the air, noise level, and additional perks and benefits of employment such as free child care or unlimited coffee, or adequate parking.

While no international statistical definition of 'usual hours of work' exists, it has been defined as the hours worked in an activity during a typical week, 7 or more technically, as the modal value of the workers' 'hours actually worked' per week over a long period. This definition is applicable to all workers with regular schedules, even to those who do not possess a working contract – for example, workers engaged in small-scale or family enterprises, or self-employed workers. For workers who do not work regular schedules, measures of average hours actually worked per week over a long period are sometimes used (ILO). Oral or written, express or implied, agreement specifying terms and conditions under which a person consents to perform certain duties as directed and controlled by an employer in return for an agreed upon wage or salary. Whether stated or not in the contract, both the employee and the employer owe the duty of mutual confidence and trust, and to make only lawful and reasonable demands on each other. Every employee is under the obligation to carry assigned duties, or the employer's instructions to the best of his or her abilities. The employer is under the obligation to protect the employee from harm or injury, and make fair compensation for any loss or damage resulting from any job-related accident.

Research Hypotheses

Previous researchers suggest that labor wage has significant influence on workers' dignity (Berg & Frost, 2005; Yueping, 2011). Labor wage is the main resource of female foot massagists' livelihood, which affects their existence needs. Through preliminary interviews, research group finds that most of female foot massagists don't have basic wage and as a result their income is uncertain. A crucial challenge in achieving professional dignity is overwork which leaves employees physically and emotionally exhausted (Hodson, 2001). It was evident that overwork is common among female foot massagists. The nature of the business demands the massagists to work long hours leaving few early morning hours as their only spare time. Tired female foot massagists compel to rest morning hours rather involving in social activities, which challenge the fulfillment of their social needs. Working environment not only refers to physical environment, but also includes social environment (Shuang, 2013). Physical environment primarily refers to female foot massagists' accommodations, sanitary condition, facilities and equipment while social environment mainly consists organizational culture, interpersonal relationship between employees and competition environment etc. According to Yangang (2010), 'Work decency' is the basic standard of laborers' dignity. A healthy working environment which is an important part of 'working decency' affects their professional dignity in a great deal (Hodson, 2001; Berg & Frost, 2005; Sayer, 2007).

Research indicates that workers usually take refuge in professional protocols that signal their moral distinction from other groups, which they use to keep their dignity (Otis, 2008). Notably, the labor contract not only plays an important role in protecting female

foot massagists' rights of life and health, but also help them to get their 'virtuous professionalism' and maintain their dignity. Social security is the main factor that influences dignity, and improving the social security system is an essential approach to improve human's dignity (Tiankui, 2004; Liubao, 2009; Yu, 2011). For female foot massagists, social security is the foundation of their survival and it plays a fundamental role in their professional dignity. Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study.

H1: Labor wage has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

H2: Working hours has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

H3: Job safety has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

H4: Labor contract has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

H5: Working environment has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

H6: Social security has significant influence on professional dignity of female foot massagists in Changsha.

3. Research Methods

Questionnaire Development

Based on the related research findings (Hodson, 2001; Qian, 2011; Huang, 2011; Fei, 2010), the questionnaire was designed with a full consideration of the characteristics of female foot massagists in pediluvium business. Questionnaire was developed in five stages: the collection of experts' opinions, the participatory observation of six female massagists in Changsha Foot Massage Center, the in-depth interviews with five foot massagists, pilot survey (28th and 29th July 2016), and test of reliability and validity statistics of the instrument. The questionnaire consists of three main sections. The first section enclosed the demographic information of informants, including country of origin, educational background, marital status and length of service. The second section focused on the current working and living conditions which encapsulated eighteen indicators (labor wage, labor contract, working time, labor safety, working environment, social security and career change intention). The third section is about professional dignity with eight indicators (see Table 2), and a five-point Likert Scale was employed to measure professional dignity, ranging from 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Data Collection

Qualitative data for current study was collected using participatory observation and in-depth interview method. Four members of research group lived together with six female foot massagists of a foot massage spa in Yuelu District (Changsha City), and closely

observed them for several days. Afterwards, five female foot massagists were selected to conduct in-depth interviews on their current working and living conditions, their innermost thoughts, the characteristics and working conditions of foot massage job. Participatory observation and in-depth interviews helped to work out the relations between factors more deeply and be the basis of further questionnaire design and operationalization.

Pilot survey was conducted followed by a formal questionnaire survey which was carried out in August 2016, nearly one month period (August 1st ~25th). Random sampling method was used to select in the self-administered questionnaire survey, comprises 560 observations of over 30 Foot Massage Spas in Changsha; of the 560 completed questionnaires (response rate of 100 percent), a total of 512 cases were valid for further analysis (Effective rate of 91.43 percent).

4. Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

The participants of this study are a close representation of female foot massagists in Changsha city. Of the respondents 76.6 percent respondents are from rural areas. The age group of 18-30 years was the largest group in the sample (77.3 percent, see Table1), followed by the age group of 30-45 years. A 45.3 percent respondents had obtained junior high school degree, followed by 39.1percent who had completed high school. The majority of respondents (61.7 percent) were married (including divorced and remarried respondents) and a 38.3 percent respondents were unmarried.

Table 1
Sample Profile (N=512)

Demographic variable	Variable category	Number of samples	Percentage
Origin	rural	392	76.6%
	city	120	23.4%
Age	<18	4	0.8%
	18-30	396	77.3%
	30-45	104	20.3%
	>45	8	1.6%
Education background	primary school	40	7.8%
	junior high school	232	45.3%
	senior high school	200	39.1%
	university and above	40	7.8%
Marital status	unmarried	196	38.3%
	Married(including divorced, remarried)	316	61.7%

Source: Survey August 2016

Present situation of female foot massagists’ professional dignity

Factor analysis was conducted to examine the validity of “professional dignity” scale. The factor model had a Kaiser Mayer Olkin measure of 0.773 and the Barlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($p=0.000<0.001$). Factor analysis was based on principal components analysis approach with a Varimax rotation. For this study, only individual items with factor loadings greater than 0.5 with eigenvalues equal or greater than 1 were considered for inclusion in further analysis. Results indicated that all items had grouped into two components and the two components explained 60.05 percent of the total variance (See Table 2). Based on literature analysis and the results of factor analysis, the two components were named “self-respect” and “respected” correspondingly.

The “professional dignity” scale’s Cronbach's alpha was 0.773, the “self-respect” component’s Cronbach's alpha was 0.711 and the “respected” component’s Cronbach's alpha was 0.803. The tested scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with all alpha coefficients reaching the acceptable level of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2
Factor analysis of female foot massagists' professional dignity

Extracted component and subordinate variables	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Mean	Variance contribution	Cronbach's alpha
Respected (X_1)		3.284	3.082	33.260%	0.711
Clients respect you and your service	0.806		3.26		
The maintenance of your dignity from your superior while handling disputes.	0.795		3.54		
The satisfaction of your present living conditions.	0.722		2.87		
The satisfaction of corporate decision-making’s fairness.	0.683		3.01		
The satisfaction of occupational injury payment.	0.597		2.73		
Self-respect(X_2)		1.520	2.91	26.790%	0.803
I feel honored to be a foot massagist.	0.784		2.70		
As a foot massagist, I am pleased with my social status.	0.761		2.48		
I think the pediluvium industry is promising.	0.739		3.56		
Accumulated variance contribution rate				60.05%	
KMO			0.773		

Source: Survey August 2016

Female foot massagists' professional dignity has been divided into “self-respect” and “respected” based on the results of factor analysis. “Self-respect” means the recognition of oneself and one’s own career while “respected” refers to others respect to one’s personality, rights and ability.

Respondents believe that their jobs can't improve their social status (mean=2.48).The mean of the item “I feel honored to be a foot massagist” was 2.70,which shows it's difficult for respondents to gain sense of pride and honor from their employment as foot massagists. Respondents agree with the statement “pediluvium industry is promising” (mean=3.56). Results above indicate that female foot massagists’ recognition of themselves and their jobs are not high, but they believe pediluvium business is promising to some extent.

Respondents are dissatisfied with the occupational injury payment (mean=2.73) and the present living conditions (mean=2.87). The mean of item “the satisfaction of corporate decision-making’s fairness” was 3.01. The mean of item “the maintenance of your dignity from your superior while handling disputes” was 3.54. The mean of item “clients respect you and your labor” was 3.26.

Few respondents expect to continue as foot massagists in the long term, and this is mainly due to their dissatisfaction with the job partially fueled by the absence of professional dignity. When asked “whether you will change your job if you have a chance”, 95.4 percent responded positively. Making their living is the leading cause which compel them do continue in this job. In short, the findings confirm that there is a severe lack of female foot massagists’ professional dignity.

The determinants of female foot massagists’ professional dignity

This study adopted the correlation analysis and regression analysis to explore the determinants of professional dignity of female foot massagists’ in pediluvium business. Firstly, the study judged the variable structure relations and established correlation matrix which depicts the relationships between female foot massagists’ professional dignity and six potential influencing factors (See Table 3). As illustrated in the table 3 below, except the labor contract, the other five factors have positive correlations with female foot massagists’ professional dignity. Test of multivariate linear regression model was performed using the remaining five factors as independent variables and professional dignity as the dependent variable. Stepwise regression was adopted to avoid estimated deviation caused by multicollinearity and to derive the optimal regression equation.

Table 3
Correlation matrix

	Professional dignity	Labor wage	Labor safety	Working hours	Labor contract	Social security	Working environment
Professional dignity	—						
Labor wage	0.302**	—					
Labor safety	0.379**	0.296**	—				
working hours	0.656**	0.284**	0.378**	—			
Labor contract	0.028	0.058	0.183**	0.036	—		
Social security	0.201**	0.414**	0.394**	0.232**	0.297**	—	
working environment	0.626**	0.357**	0.387**	0.576**	0.026	0.192**	—

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey August 2016

Table 4
Regression analysis of the determinants of female foot massagists' professional dignity

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std	Beta		
Constant	0.978	0.117		8.391	0.000
Working hours(X ₁)	0.332	0.030	0.423	11.098	0.000
Working environment(X ₂)	0.396	0.043	0.349	9.128	0.000
Labor safety(X ₃)	0.064	0.026	0.084	2.482	0.013
R ² =0.528 adjusted R ² =0.525 F=189.374 Sig=0.000					

Source: Survey August 2016

As illustrated in the table 4, the model's goodness of fit is fairly adequate (adjusted R²=0.525). Residuals' D - W value is 1.595, which shows that there is no possibility of autocorrelation between residuals. Results of regression equation's significance test indicate that regression equation is significant (F=189.374, P=0.000<0.05). Hence, a multiple linear regression equation can be established based on the analytical output. As presented in table 4, Labor hours, working conditions and labor safety were included in the regression equation, since, the regression coefficients of these three independent variables were significant at $\alpha=0.05$ level. Furthermore, tolerance in the model is 0.20, suggested VIF does not exceed the critical level (5.0). These values collectively indicate that multicollinearity is not an issue (O'Brien 2007). Based on the regression analysis results, the multiple linear regression equation can be derived as follows.

$$Y=0.978+0.332X_1+0.396X_2+0.064X_3$$

(1) Working hours was predicted to have influence on female foot massagists' professional dignity. According to the regression analysis results, this prediction was significant ($\beta=0.332$, $t=11.098$), subsequently supporting hypothesis H₂.

(2) Working environment was predicted to have influence on female foot massagists' professional dignity. The regression analytical output revealed that this prediction was significant ($\beta=0.396$, $t=9.128$), thus supporting hypothesis H₅.

(3) Hypothesis three (H₃) predicts labor safety have influence on female foot massagists' professional dignity. The results of the regression analysis showed that this prediction is significant ($\beta=0.064$, $t=2.482$), consequently supporting hypothesis H₃.

(4) Labor wage has positive relations with female foot massagists' professional dignity (see table 3), partly conforming hypothesis H₁. As shown in table 3, Social security also has positive relations with female foot massagists' professional dignity ($\beta=0.029$, $t=0.082$), partly conforming hypothesis H₆.

(5) There is no correlation between labor contract and female foot massagists' professional dignity. Correspondingly, hypothesis four (H₄) wasn't supported by the analytical output ($\beta=0.279$, $t=1.926$).

Based on closer analysis of elucidations, this paper argues that female foot massagists' attitude towards continuation on this job in a long term was negative. Moreover, the sense

of professional identity is weak among majority of respondents. Female foot massagists' ability of concentration is insufficient and they are inattentive and emotional during their working period, due to the lack of positive social identity. They are always acrimonious of their job injustice, resulting job dissatisfaction. Subsequently, younger employees incline to resign spontaneously. Consequently, the labor contract is viewed of insignificant and they even view that signing labor contract will make them lose their freedom of occupational mobility.

5. Conclusions, Implications and limitations

Conclusions

The key focus of this paper was to empirically explore the female foot massagists' professional dignity in Changsha City. It was evident that: Firstly, there is a severe lack of female foot massagists' professional dignity as a general notion. The employees personality, rights and abilities are not given due respect. Secondly, working hours, working environment and labor safety all have positive impact on their sense of dignity at work, while labor wage and social security have positive correlation with their professional dignity. These findings indicate that: reasonable working time arrangement and improvement of working environment can help to enhance the sense of professional dignity among female foot massagists; if the provision of labor safety and occupational health care get due concerns, female foot massagists shall have stronger sense of professional dignity. In order to enhance the sense of professional dignity among female foot massagists, the role of labor wage and social security draws more attention. Moreover, the study indicates that labor contract doesn't have an impact on their sense of dignity at work.

Implications

There are several practical implications that can be drawn from this analysis. Firstly, it is necessary to improve labor relations. Particularly, the following aspects are of serious concern in improving labor relations: (1) Minimum wage guarantee system should be established in pediluvium industry, which can help to ensure the basic living of female foot massagists and reduce the risk of not being paid due to low business level. (2) Working long hours is the main factor that threatens the female foot massagists' professional dignity. Pediluvium enterprises could formulate methodical shift system and respect female foot massagists' right of rest. (3) Pediluvium enterprises could implement proper training programmes before employing females and pay attention to on-the-job training to strengthen their safety awareness and self-rescue ability at work.

Working environment influences female foot massagists' professional dignity significantly. Hence, creating a favorable working environment is helpful for upholding female foot massagists' professional dignity. Specifically, the following aspects are of serious concern in forming a favorable working environment: (1) Pediluvium enterprises should provide adequate facilities and equipment (such as basic skin care medicine, sanitation and safety facilities) and constructing a mechanism of accident prevention and emergency response to make the working environment safer. (2) Additional way to boost workers' self-esteem and dignity is to create harmonious working atmosphere and help female foot massagists to form good interpersonal relationships. Work place

discriminations should be avoided and every employee should be treated equally by formulating fair regulations to protect their legitimate rights and interests. Moreover, employees' opinions should be recognized in formulating regulations which are related to them. Co-worker relations can provide important armor against indignity, including providing for solidarity and mutual defense, resisting authority, and affirming occupational, class, and gender identities (Hodson, 2001). Therefore, it is important for female foot massagists to proactively communicate with others, unite co-workers and have a good interpersonal relationship with them. (3) According to the expectancy theory, reasonable incentive mechanism has great positive effects on the realization of employees' career expectation. Hence, constructing a reasonable incentive mechanism and creating a benign competitive environment is a good way to improve female foot massagists' professional dignity. Sensible incentive mechanism and benign competition environment not only help female foot massagists to improve work efficiency, but also help them to realize the importance and value of their jobs.

Social security has positive correlation with female foot massagists' professional dignity. The social security system should further be improved to uphold the professional dignity of migrant workers whom female foot massagists belong to. Particularly, the following are recommended based on the findings of this study: (1) an integrated social security system should be established, which coordinates both urban and rural social security systems, adopting multiple approaches. (2) In the aspect of social insurance payment scheme, it is proposed the government to bear a certain proportion of cost and lighten the financial burden of female foot massagists and of pediluvium enterprises. It was observed that pediluvium enterprises don't buy insurance for female foot massagists mainly due to the high cost.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the scientific procedures followed, it is worth to note several limitations the study came across. Lack of related literature, particularly in female employees' professional dignity studied through quantitative methods, was a significant challenge in developing research instruments. Although the reliability and validity of the scale meet the research's requirements, the scale can be further optimized in future research. Furthermore, this study is limited to Changsha city and future studies in different locations could support to more replications. Future researchers are encouraged to apply advanced methods to draw further conclusions and comparison of results.

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