Families and food: exploring food well-being in poverty

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Abstract
Purpose – This paper aims to investigate dynamics of food consumption practices among poor families in a developing country to advance the Food Well-being (FWB) in Poverty framework.

Design/methodology/approach – The research design used semi-structured interviews with 25 women and constructivist grounded theory to explore food consumption practices of poor families in rural South India.

Findings – Poor families’ everyday interactions with food reveal the relational production of masculinities and femininities and the power hegemony that fixes men and women into an unequal status quo. Findings provides critical insights into familial arrangements in absolute poverty that are detrimental to the task of achieving FWB.

Research limitations/implications – The explanatory potential of FWB in Poverty framework is limited to a gender (women) and a specific country context (India). Future research can contextualise the framework in other developing countries and different consumer segments.

Practical implications – The FWB in Poverty framework helps identify, challenge and transform cultural norms, social structures and gendered stereotypes that perpetuate power hegemonies in poverty. Policymakers can encourage men and boys to participate in family food work, as well as recognise and remunerate women and girls for their contribution to maintaining familial units.

Originality/value – This paper makes an original contribution to the relevant literature by identifying and addressing the absence of theoretical understanding of families, food consumption and poverty. By contextualising the FWB framework in absolute poverty, the paper generates novel understandings of fluidity and change in poor families and FWB.

Keywords Gender, Food consumption, Poverty, Families, Food well-being

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Consumption of food is the most basic aspect of consumer behaviour. Marketers have for long sought to understand food consumption. Indeed, marketing originated as an industry to analyse mechanisms to distribute food commodities to consumers (Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Twenty-first-century marketers have mainly considered that consumer behaviours occur atomistically – that is, in individual autonomous units (Cynamon and Fazzari, 2008). However, throughout history and across contexts, familial units have been critical sites and

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conduits of food consumption values and practices (Davis et al., 2016). Scholarship on family food consumption touches on food-centred life histories of families in different cultures (Counihan, 2004), food-based “co-construction in action” of family identities (Epp and Price 2008, p. 52) and family-centred consumer socialisation processes (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). The existing literature addresses directions of influence between families as institutions and food as consumption activities.

The intersection of family and food consumption has changed in modern consumer settings that have become globalised, marketised and urbanised in a short period of time. This has necessitated research to generate novel insights to understand this topic. Of particular interest is the growing call for research to explore family compositions other than the nuclear suburban family that is the focus of much scholarship in this field. This paper focuses on the changing dynamics of family and food consumption in poor families in developing countries. We do so for a reason. Environmental crises such as dwindling land resources, inadequate energy supply and growing water stress have their most acute effects on poor countries (Westphal et al., 2017). These crises reduce the food security of poor families in developing economies. However, implications of these crises for food marketers are less clear. In part, this is because of an absence of scholarship on dynamics of fluidity and change in poor families in developing countries.

This lack of scholarly understanding of family food consumption in contexts of absolute poverty is untenable given that a staggering 767 million people live in extreme poverty worldwide (World Bank, 2016, p. 35). This figure is based on an average daily income of US $1.90. Furthermore, over 3 billion people live on less than US$2.5 a day. Research on family food consumption practices of such a large segment of the global poor would mean we achieve a more general theory of family and food. Research on family food consumption has focused on issues that are relevant to the Western world, such as obesity, organic foods and food advertising. However, these studies largely focus on consumers with disposable incomes, scope to make independent consumption choices in relatively free economies and have basic literacy to understand and respond to food education campaigns.

To date, family food consumption literature has not focused on poor and illiterate families in developing countries (Kerrane et al., 2014; O’Malley and Prothero, 2006). However, poor and illiterate families are at the forefront of developing countries’ food policies and programs. International organisations such as the World Bank and United Nations and research institutes such as the International Food Policy Research Institute have reported on food practices of poor households under the rubric of food security studies. Marketing research can offer novel insights on this topic. For example, economic policy frames food consumption as primarily an activity to improve nutrition, alleviate hunger and ensure human survival. For this reason, much research on food consumption in developing countries focuses on public health, nutrition and paediatric medicine. However, food is essential not just for human survival but also for human development – “the good life” (Sen, 1989, p. 770).

Adequate nutrition is needed for survival. However, human development implies the need for “psychological nourishment – comfort, pleasure, love, community” (Block et al., 2011, p. 5). This underscores the need for a Food Well-being (FWB) framework that addresses aspects of food beyond nutrition. This nuance is illustrated in the following statement from a poor woman experiencing absolute poverty and what food means for her:

We [my daughters and I] eat together otherwise I don’t feel like eating. Whenever I remember my husband and son I feel sad and I don’t eat. But for the daughters’ sake I eat. They tell me that if I eat, only then will they want to eat.
My youngest daughter says, “father died, and do you want to leave us as orphans?” She also says, “I will not leave you and go anywhere, I am here as a daughter and son for you”. She is a good child (Bindu – 40 years old, no schooling, living with three daughters in absolute poverty).

Bindu’s story portrays the discrepancy between global food narratives and the lived realities of poor women. In other words, while food as nutrition is imperative to Bindu’s existence, food as constituting family ties and interpersonal relations is essential to her well-being. As such, the linking of lived realities to global narratives demands critical investigation.

To this end, this paper draws on literature on families’ food consumption and FWB to explore food consumption in contexts of absolute poverty. Specifically, this paper asks: “What does food mean to poor families, and how does this understanding inform FWB?” Findings from this study provide theoretical insights at the intersection of family, food consumption and poverty. Everyday activities of choosing, buying and consuming food reveal unequal power dynamics that influence familial relations with consequences detrimental for women and girls and that hinder poverty alleviation and attainment of FWB. The familial gaze within the FWB in Poverty framework as developed in this paper has the potential to identify, challenge and transform cultural norms, social structures and gendered stereotypes that maintain an unequal status quo in contexts of poverty.

This paper demonstrates important links between families, food consumption and poverty. First, the paper reviews contemporary understandings of FWB against literature on families and food consumption. Second, the paper explains the methodology used to conduct primary research with consumers of poverty alleviation programs. Third, the paper discusses food consumption stories garnered from interviews with 25 women from rural South India, living in absolute poverty. The paper concludes with implications and limitations of this research and suggestions for future research on FWB.

**Literature review**

*Family consumption and Food Well-Being in Poverty*

Consumer and marketing research has had a long history of explaining consumer behaviour in families (Epp and Price, 2008). Early inquiries in the 1970s sought to understand the influence of working wives and mothers on family consumption expenditures and behaviours (Strober and Weinberg, 1977). Since then, the field has studied phenomena that range from effects of family structures on consumer behaviour (Rindfleisch et al., 1997), socialisation of children and adolescents into marketplace roles as consumers through family communications (Moschis, 1985) and effects of family rituals on consumption (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991). However, recent research offers an emerging critique that this body of work may have used an overly homogenizing lens on the experiences of family members (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013).

Epp and Price (2008, p. 52) offer a family identity framework that describes family as a collective enterprise whose identity is dependent upon the “shared interactions among relational bundles within the family that engages in both complementary and competing consumption practices”. Epp and Price argue that family decision-making is a co-constructed and whole-of-network project that produces family identities that are distinct from individual or relational identities of any given family member. Supporting this thesis, Kerrane and Hogg (2013) argue that children develop strategies to influence their parents’ consumption decisions. Factors that constrain or enable families’ ability to achieve co-constructed goals and enact their desired familial identity include monetary resources, cultural norms (for example, gender disparities) and religion (Epp and Price, 2008; Block et al., 2011). These mechanisms affect the physical and mental health of the family unit. In addition, they can influence power dynamics within families (Hossein, 2017).
Food decision-making is a distinct consumer behaviour that is situated in a multi-faceted and often complex set of family dynamics (Ferzacca et al., 2013). In addition, food decision-making as consumer behaviour has unique significance to the family identity project. Giving, receiving or refusing food can renew or rupture family relationships like no other family decision (Counihan, 2004). For women, food decision-making connotes cooking, stock-keeping, provisioning and cleaning. As such, women’s food decision-making has more scope than other consumption practices to reinforce their gender identity. Mothers in particular represent a key constituency as they play a more decisive role in the familial unit to attain food security, dietary diversity and health and well-being for their children (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017; Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). Mothers seldom are members of political or economic elites – however, their role in food decision-making gives them influence (Counihan, 2014).

That said, poor families have less freedom of choice in food decision-making and consumption practices than wealthier families. This is due to inadequate resources and information to make consumption decisions around food and to the overall strain of living in poverty. In advanced and developing countries, families of low socio-economic status or in absolute poverty are more likely to face food insecurity, malnutrition and higher rates of non-communicable diseases (Gundersen et al., 2011; Hardcastle and Blake, 2016). Poverty forces families to make difficult decisions to ensure adequate supply of nutritious food (Wight et al., 2014). This leads many poor families to forgo essentials to provide nutrition for certain family members, such as children (Patel et al., 2015). Few interventions to improve health behaviours and food security among poor families have succeeded (Attree, 2005). This might be due to the failure to account for complex dynamics around families’ food decision making and consumption.

Many interventions to improve health behaviours and food security among poor families have focused on mothers. However, such interventions have targeted mothers based on an atomistic view that assumes families function in isolation (Rao et al., 2017). This overlooks complex relational identities within families that impact food consumption. Many interventions have ignored unequal economic access, sociocultural norms and family arrangements that create differences in power between women and men within and outside of family environments (United Nations, 2015). Mothers – and particularly single mothers – living in poverty have reduced capacity to ensure their own and their families’ food security (Rao et al., 2017) and food well-being. Generating insights into mothers’ perceptions on the role of food and food consumption practices within their families can help develop and optimise interventions to create food well-being for poor families.

From food security to food well-being
The term “food security” originated in the mid-1970s. It denotes access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food that meets lifestyle needs. Food security has four interrelated objectives (availability, access, utilisation and stability) that aim to reduce non-communicable diseases (Ares et al., 2014). Food security has come to be seen as essential to human development and well-being (Gartaula et al., 2017). Yaro (2004) described food security as encompassing food availability, food entitlement and livelihood and food sovereignty. There is consensus on elements that comprise food security. However, perspectives on food security differ in their strategic foci, from means-based to outcomes-based approaches to attain food security (Patel et al., 2015).

Most food policy recommendations and interventions based on literature on food security have focused on nutritional and caloric value of food. Block et al. (2011) argue that this understanding of food is normative and paternalistic. Indeed, existing literature on food
security emphasises economic access to food and views food as important for solely biological, reproductive and physiological reasons (Ares et al., 2014; Craven and Gartaula, 2015). Few studies to date have explored families’ consumption patterns and perspectives on food. This highlights the need for research to examine the role of FWB in families.

Discussion of subjective nuances of food has emerged in several academic fields. These studies have focused on empowering families to access food and become self-sufficient in food-related decision making. Governments and researchers have argued for policies that embrace social structures and relationships that intersect with feeding related responsibilities and consumption practices (Moisio et al., 2004). This paradigm shift around food has seen the development of the Food Well-being (FWB) framework. FWB argues for “a positive psychological, physical, emotional and social relationship of food at both the individual and societal levels” (Block et al., 2011, p. 6). FWB defines food in broader terms than food security. It encompasses factors that influence consumers’ food attitudes and behaviours – food availability, food socialisation, food marketing, food literacy and food policy. Figure 1 illustrates the FWB framework developed and advocated by Block et al. (2011).

Food availability focuses on the marketing mix mechanism of place, and in turn, it refers to the influence that distribution and availability of food has on consumption behaviours in different environments (for example, in grocery stores and community gardens). Food socialisation refers to individual and societal experiences of learning and training about the role of food in cultural realms that align with food well-being (for example, direct dietary exchange between children and their parents). Food literacy includes knowledge and motivation to use this knowledge to attain food wellbeing (for example, self-confidence and nutritional knowledge can lead to healthier food decisions). Food marketing views the traditional marketing mix of price, product and promotion (an example is food packaging) as fundamental to enrich food marketing practices and their overall influence on food consumption patterns. Finally, food policy refers to food system policies (such as food safety and food security policies) that influence food well-being. FWB combines societal and individual sub-frames across these five dimensions so that the framework is complete when it is closed and enables fluid interchange across the dimensions when it is open (Block et al., 2011).

In spite of its contribution to understandings of food consumption and decision-making, studies to date have not examined dimensions of FWB empirically. For this reason, the FWB framework underexplores dynamics in the family environment, variations in family composition (for example, dual- versus single-parent households) and other socio-cultural mechanisms (such as gender inequalities) that have distinct effects on food consumption practices (Epp and Price, 2008). Specifically, the role of the family is identified as only influencing the dimension of food socialisation, where the family unit is standardised and children’s food consumption patterns are socialised in a similar manner by parents. We contend that such a focus on family is simple, non-encompassing and in need of theoretical finesse. This type of understanding of family resonates with the trope of research within family consumer research (Commuri and Gentry, 2005; Cotte and Wood, 2004; Moore et al., 2002) which has a narrow focus on individuals in collectivities rather than the multiple identities that affect collective decisions (Epp and Price, 2008). In other words, they do not acknowledge that families are made up of dyadic relationships (e.g. mother–father, father–daughter, son–daughter, mother–daughter), each of which impact family consumption practices differently. For instance, Kerrane and Hogg (2013, p. 519) identify parental differential treatment of siblings in child rearing which leads to different socialisation
processes within families and “individuals within the same family experience family life in very different ways”.

Therefore, in this paper, we intentionally use a complex, nuanced and dynamic understanding of families at the intersection of food consumption and poverty. The authors of the FWB framework acknowledge its North American perspective. However, they argue that it can address global food issues, such as hunger (Block et al., 2011). This paper assesses the utility of FWB in the context of families living in absolute poverty in an otherwise rapidly emerging economy, India.

Methodology

Contextual condition

The Global Hunger Index ranks India 100 out of 119 countries (IFPRI, 2017, p. 13). Approximately, 190.7 million Indians experience hunger every day (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017, p. 89). Many Indians have limited access to food despite India’s recent economic progress and agricultural growth (Thorat et al., 2017). Historically, the Government of India has provided food security programs for its poor citizenry. The National Food Security Act 2013 made these food security schemes into entitlements, including the Midday Meal Scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (Desai and Vanneman, 2015). These programs often are referred to as anti-poverty programs. This study interviewed women participating in gender-targeted anti-poverty programs in India about food consumption.
Participants for the study were chosen from two food management programs – the Ultra Poverty Program run by a nongovernmental organisation, and the Indra Kanthi Pathakam, offered by a state government. These food management programs were appropriate research sites because both programs had an explicit mandate to alleviate poverty and to empower local women. In addition, both programs were representative of antipoverty programs in the region (Prennushi and Gupta, 2014; Voola, 2016). Both programs targeted only women. For this reason, only women were interviewed for this research.

Method
This study took place as part of broader research conducted over six months on food consumption practices in rural South India. Participants were recruited at village offices for both food management programs. Specifically, participants were recruited from program meetings held in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh villages. In total, 25 participants agreed to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews. Participants on average were 33.3 years old. Most (n = 18) said they had received no formal education (for example, primary schooling); 15 participants were single parents (see Table I). After the program recipients agreed to participate in the study, it was explained that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no penalties for withdrawal at any time. Participants did not receive incentives to participate in the study. Interviews were used to qualitatively explore routine experiences of poor women in rural India, including food consumption practices beyond nutrition and calorie intake.

Research design ensured that food narratives obtained through interviews aligned with sociocultural and situational contexts (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006) of poor families living in rural India. Family studies research has identified that women and mothers are a window into family food consumption practices (DeVault, 1991; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Tanner et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2016). In the same vein, this paper seeks women and mothers to explore family food consumption practices. Interviews were conducted by two authors of this paper, in the local vernacular (Telugu), in participants’ homes and at times that did not interfere with participants’ daily work and caregiving duties. The researchers’ cultural background enhanced their sensitivity towards the research participants and topic (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Interview topics were categorised based on the five FWB dimensions adapted from the work of Block et al. (2011). Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 min and were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Interviews then were transcribed verbatim into English and verified for accuracy. This resulted in 150 single-spaced pages of transcribed text. These documents were then imported into the qualitative software program NVivo 10. This program was primarily used to store, code and retrieve data, rather than for analysis (Bazeley and Jackson, 2007). Pseudonyms were used throughout data analysis to ensure participants’ anonymity.

Data analysis
Data analysis was guided by constructivist grounded theory – that is, data and theory were compared and contrasted continuously throughout data collection and analysis (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). This study took a hybrid approach to thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Schuster et al., 2013). This approach involved data-driven inductive and deductive analysis through an a priori template that enhanced the researchers’ theoretical sensitivity and guided analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Interview transcripts first were open-coded as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (2008). This involved an initial reading to gather main themes around food consumption and dimensions of FWB. Next, data from transcripts were categorised according to the five dimensions. Researchers then undertook
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Family living arrangements</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Years of membership in the program</th>
<th>Education level</th>
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<tr>
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</table>
secondary axial coding to identify relationships between categories. Owing to the iterative nature of the data analysis process, researchers amended the a priori template at regular intervals and reapplied it to transcripts that had been coded earlier (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Memos were maintained to document theoretical categories that overlapped and novel concepts that emerged from the data. For instance, the a priori template of categories included Food Literacy and Food Marketing as distinct food consumption activities. However, study participants’ limited literacy and numeracy implied that literacy-based marketing (newspapers, food guides) were not relevant in the context of this research. Instead, participants’ routine buying, selling and consumption of food were tied intrinsically to mothers’ informal and interpersonal experiences with the food marketplace. In this way, the data analysis process generated an unanticipated dimension – food capability. Once theoretical saturation was reached and no new insights emerged from the data, identified themes drove further reviews of the relevant literature.

**Findings and discussion**

The researchers examined transcripts from interviews with the 25 participants to demonstrate the evaluative purchase of Block et al.’s (2011) FWB framework. Interview transcripts reflected some individual and societal elements of FWB dimensions. However, these elements could not fully explain the complex realities of their everyday lives. Analysis revealed references to familial elements embedded in all the narratives, which if deployed on to the FWB pinwheel, more fully capture the concept of food well-being (Figure 2). Therefore, this paper develops a new version of Block et al.’s FWB framework, called FWB in Poverty, which echoes the food consumption practice of families in absolute poverty. There are two significant points of departure in the FWB in Poverty framework as compared with Block et al.’s conceptualisation of FWB. Firstly, findings at each dimension of FWB portray a familial focus for women’s relationship with food (Figure 2). This particularly resonates with consumption literature which states that the “family represents an important site where culture, consumption and gender intersect” (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006, p. 981). Similarly, Davis et al. note that family is a location of “discourse and practice” where food work materialises familial bonds (2016, p. 138). Specifically, in the context of rural Indian women, family ties represent closest bonds signifying the embedded nature of their consumption to familial consumption (Venkatesh et al., 2017). Loyalty to the family is seen as Dharma or sacred duty (Lindridge and Dhillon, 2005). This compels family members to adhere to cultural and social norms. Therefore, the familial tab inserted between individual and societal tabs (shaded region of Figure 2), provides an additional and productive lens to conceptualise FWB in poverty.

The second point of difference for the FWB in Poverty framework is emergence of a new dimension weaved out of the experiences of the participants. The lived experiences of rural poor households did not resonate with the Western framing of Food Marketing and Food Literacy. There were no meaningful narratives about the work of food marketing practitioners in any area of the marketing mix. Instead, the narratives highlighted that rural poor households remained insulated from mainstream marketing. Therefore, the dimension of food marketing was removed in FWB in Poverty framework. Similarly, the education profile of the participants (Table I) brought into question the communicability of materials such as leaflets, newspapers or TV announcements regarding food, food sources, nutrition. In other words, acquisition and application of nutritional knowledge depended on relevance to their context and the trustworthiness of the source. To address this inconsistency a new dimension – food capability – was developed which built on food literacy but is better able to capture the situational and contextual realities of these particular consumers. In other
words, this dimension captures nutritional learning amongst poor families outside of mainstream literacy channels.

Having introduced expanded and customised FWB in Poverty, in the following section, the paper unpacks each of these dimensions in the everyday food consumption practices of poor families.

**Food availability**
This dimension captures dynamics of food availability for the respondents. Food availability influenced participants’ consumption behaviours strongly. Interdependency to ensure food access emerged as an important theme in interviews (Figure 2). For instance, more than half of respondents were widows. They described that widowhood had made them vulnerable and that their survival depended on interdependent relationships. Common issues for participant were consistent with other research in rural India, such as lack of control over their late husband’s assets, moral prohibitions that discouraged paid work and mobility restrictions (Rao et al., 2017; Chen, 1997). This is also consistent with other research on women and widows in rural India. Widowed women said they used interdependency strategies to ensure food access in particular. Sandhya, Sujata and Shilpa described allocation of food procurement tasks among family members, such as their brother, husband’s second wife and mother-in-law, respectively. All three women were widowed but living in joint family structures. This necessitated interdependency in tasks related to food access. Sandhya said:
My brother goes to shop and gets the material, that is his responsibility. He goes once a week to
get vegetables etc., chicken, mutton [...]. We collect firewood every day when we go to the field [...]

My sister-in-law fetches water for the family. We have bore well pipes in our village, so we have
access to water throughout the day.

Interviews showed pronounced reliance on interdependent relationships among
participants. Married women relied on interdependency also – not for survival like widows,
but to establish and reinforce relational identities within the family. Chinamma explained:

I use firewood from the forest. It is close to the canal. It takes 10 minutes to go there. It is not very
far. Myself or my husband collects the firewood. It depends on who is available. Once in two days
we get it.

Participants used interdependency within their families, both as a means of survival, and
also as a way to shore up and manage relational identities, such as husband and wife,

However, further analysis showed that participants used interdependency mainly to
manage the front end of food availability – that is, activities that included shopping and
collecting water and firewood. Front end activities were varied and required complementary
skills. Some activities, such as collecting firewood, were to be undertaken after completion of
other primary tasks or at times of unemployment. This effect induced interdependency
based on family members’ availability. Vijaya explained:

I collect firewood from the field. Whenever I don’t get work, I go and collect firewood the whole
day. By evening I can collect a big bundle of firewood.

In contrast, interdependent working relationships within participants’ families were less
prominent in activities around actual food consumption – that is, preparation and eating of
food. Activities in this latter end of food availability, such as cooking, collecting safe
drinking water and serving meals, appeared ordered by gender roles and associated
behaviours (Lindridge and Hogg, 2006). Interviews revealed daily food routines of most
participants that reflected cultural values that regard care work and food work as feminine
(Bhopal, 1997). Roja said:

I get up at 5 am. I do all the household work. I wash our cow [...]. I also wash clothes. I finish
cooking by 11.30 am [...]. From 2 pm to 6 pm I take the cow to the field for grazing [...]. I wash the
cow and cook food at 6 pm for the night.

But, on Sundays when I go to the field, my younger daughter is at home and she does the cooking.

As a woman and mother, Roja prepared all meals for her family. Her experience reflects a
social order that puts mothers at the centre of food availability for their family. This vision
of maternal nurturing and mothers as holders and intergenerational conduits of food
knowledge can empower women collectively. However, responsibility for food availability
can burden individual women, in particular when accompanied by rigid patriarchal norms
that absolve men from responsibility for food availability. When asked if her son helped
with cooking, Roja said:

He does not help. He sits on the sofa and watches TV.

Disproportionate responsibility to make family meals available can debilitate women and
girls in contexts of poverty (Chant, 2016). Revathy said:
I do the cooking. I don’t have anybody to help me […] It is difficult, but I have learnt it and I am managing. We women have to do the household work and we have to work outside also. Men do only outside work.

When discussing availability of new food technologies as per the FWB framework, the participants mostly replied in the negative. Instead, participants described using indigenous food methods such as firewood stoves, despite evidence of harmful health and environmental outcomes associated with internal air pollution caused by firewood burnings (World Health Organization, 2002). The Indian Government subsidises purchases of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders for home cooking. LPG cylinders release less carbon dioxide than firewood stoves and are more efficient and compact in homes. However, participants were reluctant to purchase or use LPG stoves. Previous studies have noted limited uptake of new food technologies in rural poor communities (Miller and Mobarak, 2014; Hanna et al., 2012). However, these studies have not discussed the influence of family dynamics on assimilation of new technologies. Suryamma noted her hesitation to integrate LPG gas cooking in her everyday food practices despite its presence in her village for more than five years:

We got LPG gas recently, i.e. 3 ½ months ago […] My children were still quite young and if they mishandled the switch or the regulator something dangerous could have happened. They are grown up now. We do not need to worry.

In other words, preferences are not driven just by what the food technology can do but also what unintended consequences it can produce for the family. In poor families, this effect is magnified because of limited resources to manage unintended consequences of new technologies. In sum, findings regarding food availability resonate with literature on families and food consumption, in that food practices connect to social construction of gender roles (Johnson et al., 2011; Moisio et al., 2004; Charles and Kerr, 1988).

Food socialisation
This dimension of FWB denotes the influence of cultures and subcultures on food consumption. FWB holds that the family unit often is the primary influencer of food practices through socialisation from childhood (Moore et al., 2002). Vijaya explained her socialisation around food:

I learned cooking from my parents. What my mother taught me, I have been following even after my marriage.

This reflects an explicit process of socialisation that demands mothers act as bearers of feminine knowledge – in particular, food knowledge – to their daughters. Knowledge of food is valued for its utility to enable the survival and nurturing of families. In addition, food knowledge has symbolic value that communicates femininity and offers voice and soft power to women (Counihan, 2004).

Participants described learning by observing, or implicit socialisation. Vimala said:

Before cooking, I wash the vegetables, rice and dhal. My mother use to do it that way and I learned from watching her.

Intergenerational (Figure 2) socialisation around food takes place through transmission from mothers to daughters. Participants’ cultural setting perpetuated collectivist values of obedience, cooperation and duty (Triandis et al., 1988; Lindridge and Hogg, 2006) that uphold hierarchies of authority from parents to children and not vice versa. Asked whether she learnt to cook from her daughters, Shravanthi said:
No, but I have taught them everything they know [laughs]. Why will they teach me? They only learn from me.

In poor communities in rural India, children’s role is to support their parents – that is, learn from them rather than be on par with them. With respect to food, this means daughters learn from their mothers and not the other way around. Specific scripts and roles surrounding food consumption provide an authoritative voice and sense of collective identity and bonding among family members (Marshall, 2005; Arnould and Price, 2000). Research on food socialisation at the community level focuses on media and marketing as socialising agents (Block et al., 2011; Harris et al., 2009). However, participants in this research said they had not strayed from food practices that they learnt in childhood. Vijaya explained:

Things are the same now and as what they were before, during my parent’s time. I do things in a similar manner to what was done previously. They used firewood for cooking and now I am also using firewood.

They cooked the same vegetables as the ones I use now. There has been no change.

This illustrates that the intersection of rurality, poverty and femininity in family settings can isolate women from broader social processes around them, in this case media and marketing in India. This finding runs counter to the axiom in family and consumption literature that social contexts greatly influence family dynamics (Oláh et al., 2014).

Participants did not describe transmission of knowledge about meal preparation and cooking to or from men – for example, from father to daughter, father to son or mother to son. Learning occurred exclusively from mother to daughter. This gendered demarcation around food work shapes individual, relational and collective identities within families. Certain food practices embody cultural meaning of masculinity and femininity (Davis et al., 2016; Umiker-Sebeok, 1996). Hence, food socialisation in the context of poverty is informed by gendered identities. Participants’ interactions with food provided overt and covert messages of merit, privilege, power and autonomy (Fox and Murry, 2000).

Roja noted that her son did not help with food preparation such as fetching water or cooking meals. Rather, he engaged in leisure activities such as watching television. Asked if her daughter engaged in similar leisure activities, Roja explained:

She likes to watch [TV], but she feels for me. I ask my son to help with collecting water and he says, ‘Do it yourself. I am not a girl to bring water.’ My son says he won’t bring water or help around the house.

Girls usually do everything, and he has male egoism.

Maintaining kinship emerged as another important theme in interviews. Nuclear and extended family ties represent important social networks for poor women in rural India (Venkatesh et al., 2017). These networks provide buffers of social capital in settings that are vulnerable to injury, death or financial problems (Narayan, 2002). Participants described food customs as sites to maintain these networks and as markers of familial values. Several participants referred to their food responsibilities as an “honour”. Mariyamma said:

We share meals with our friends and other members of our community. When relatives and guests come to our house we feed them happily. It is an honour. When we meet, we definitely eat together.

First, we serve them tea and corn. After that, we serve them some other snack (upma). After finishing all this, we cook meals and serve them, and we eat together.
This ritual of feeding guests reflected participants’ understanding of acceptable behaviours within their social milieu. Chinamma said:

Friends and relatives visit us once in a month. I prepare chicken, mutton or vegetables as special items for them. When they come to visit us, we have to treat them in a special way.

It is our custom. If we don’t do that, we feel sorry about it. They treat us similarly when we visit them.

Participants’ experiences of food socialisation align with the “family effect” – that is, the idea that families are the channel of learning around food consumption (Moschis, 1985). In addition, participants’ experiences illustrate the “poverty effect”, whereby very poor families are insulated from effects of broader social processes such as media marketing. Food socialisation underscores also the “gender effect” that predisposes men not to participate in preparation of family meals and maintaining the power hegemony (Newcombe et al., 2012; Kacen, 2000; Allen and Hawkins, 1999). In rural poor communities within India, the unequal gendered identities have practical deleterious consequences of unequal sharing of food within family, with female members getting a much lower share in food quality and quantity (Hossein, 2017). Lastly, participants’ food socialisation experiences highlight that food work, such as feeding guests, materialises familial and kinship bonds (Davis et al., 2016).

Food capability

Food capability is not part of Block et al.’s original FWB framework. However, it builds on the food literacy dimension of FWB regarding nutritional knowledge. This dimension captures consumers’ food proficiency and cognitive and emotional energies related to food. Interview transcripts suggested that participants had developed their consumer food proficiency through oral informal or experiential learning techniques rather than formal schooling on numeracy and literacy. This aligned with participants’ low literacy and numeracy skills (Table I). Therefore, marketing sources such as television, newspapers and nutrition pamphlets had minimal influence on participants’ knowledge of nutritional value of food. This is consistent with other research in subsistence settings in India (Viswanathan et al., 2009). Participants described their primary access to nutritional information was through trustworthy sources, such as family members. Scholars have observed that families develop and maintain food proficiency together (Bisogni et al., 2016) to ensure generational transfer of nutritional knowledge.

Additional nuances of food capability emerged from examination of participants’ daily routines. Participants reported being engaged in intensive paid and unpaid work that restricted their time and energy to acquire, recall and apply new nutritional knowledge (Guthrie et al., 2015; Chant, 2016). Shilpa explained her daily routine:

I will get up early in the morning at 6 am. I wash my face. I clean the firewood oven with cow dung and mud. I then wash the dishes and sweep the house. I take a bath. I bring water in and use it to cook food. My mother is elderly, so I cook the food.

My son goes to school by 8 am. I pack lunch for him [and he takes] whatever I cook, for example tomato curry or dhal. After I finish cooking, I wash our clothes.

I go to work by 10.30 in the morning. It is very far, and I travel along with the other women. While going we chit chat with each other. Every day, we get work and we receive INR 150 per day.
collect cotton in the fields. The men get INR 50 more than we get, as they do more work than us women.

I come back by 6 pm in the evening. The auto driver brings my son home, drops him off and then goes away. By the time I come home my son will be studying and doing his homework. After I come back in the evening, I cook.

Familial caregiving duties (son in school, elderly mother at home) and the nature of her work (long commute, hard physical labour) left Shilpa with little time to develop new nutritional knowledge. Shilpa had no practical opportunity to contemplate better nutritive options for her family. She might have some knowledge of variety, taste and nutrition of food from her childhood experiences with her mother. However, her daily routines left her no time or resources to recall and implement that knowledge. Shilpa had no freedom to change her routine to enhance her capabilities as a food provider. Her lack of literacy also prevented her developing formal food literacy (Viswanathan et al., 2009; Ratzan, 2001).

Liminality emerged as another important theme in the data. Liminality denotes uncertainty, crises and change (Turner, 1967) that are experienced by families in absolute poverty. For example, Lakshmamma experienced an event that tested and re-established familial definitions in her family. Her husband left the family when their children were young. Food consumption practices, such as eating family meals together, helped Lakshmamma and her children through this liminal phase. She explained:

We all eat at the same time. Lunch we may not eat together. But dinner, we eat together. If we don’t eat together, we are not happy and there is no peace of mind.

Scholarship on food and families notes that everyday consumption practices such as family meals construct, manage and enact familial identities (Epp and Price, 2008; Marshall, 2005). This is true of families in liminality in particular. Data from this research reiterate this thesis. For example, Ramanamma, a widowed working mother of two children, described her family food consumption decisions:

According to the cost of that particular material, on that day, I decide to buy from the market. Each day I want to cook different items. If I cook palak today, the next day I prepare brinjal. I want to maintain variety. If I cook the same curry everyday they don’t eat happily.

Sometimes when I don’t cook mutton or chicken once in a week they point it out. When I tell them that I don’t have the money, then they adjust and eat what I prepare. Sometimes they question me.

If I scold my daughter, she weeps and says that her father would not have done it like that. I do my best to make them happy. When children behave like this I feel very sad. The whole day I work hard alone outside and inside the house and it pains me.

The “in-between-ness and ambiguity” (Beech, 2011) of family liminality can offer opportunities for family members to develop new capabilities (Kobak and Waters, 1984).

This link between mothers and food decisions emerged as another theme in the data. Interviews revealed that mothers, as female heads of their house, had primary responsibility for food decisions. Other family members’ food desires were considered, but mothers had the final say. Vijaya said:

I sit and think about what our needs are. I also decide about the necessary quantity that we need. In this manner, I decide what to purchase from the shop next. I decide by myself what to cook. I cook vegetables and dhal on alternate days. The children enjoy eating whatever I prepare. There is no problem with them.
Participants based their purchasing behaviour on convenience (Carrigan and Szmigin, 2006). Their responsibilities in paid work and/or unpaid caregiving left limited time for intensive food preparation. Mariyamma said:

There is change in how food is prepared over the years. For example, the earlier generation pounded the chilli powder at home. I used to pound chilli powder, paddy, pulses etcetera, but now I send them to the mill factory for grinding.

We are now buying chilli powder and turmeric packets. We can open the packet and use it immediately. It is good and useful to use packed food. It also saves time. Now we can finish all our household work by 9 am.

Earlier, we used to finish the household work by 12 noon. Now we are eating by 8.30 am whereas before it took more time.

This theme captures the role of mothers as providers of nutritional knowledge as well as marketers of food choices (Moisio et al., 2004; DeVault, 1991). Participants’ roles in this respect counter the fragile positioning of women in family food consumption described in much of the relevant literature. Participants described themselves as key to their households’ food well-being. Their everyday food-related routines were embedded in household chores and caregiving. This left minimal time to engage in formal food literacy activities. Traditional food marketing in contexts of poverty targets mothers as independent decision-making entities (Rao et al., 2017). Instead, marketers should focus on mothers’ role in familial relations of production and reproduction of food.

Food policy
This dimension of FWB captures the relationship between government policies related to food (such as agricultural and food safety policy) and consumer food decisions. Exploring participants’ experiences with food policies highlighted policies that influenced their food decision making. An important theme emerged around agricultural policy. This includes food production, pricing and packaging systems (World Health Organization, 2003). Findings suggested capacity for agricultural policy to govern women’s opportunities for work, leisure and care (see Figure 2). This finding resonated with the themes of gendered roles and associated behaviours in the food availability dimension, which established the hyper responsibility of women to undertake activities such as cooking, collecting safe drinking water and serving meals, as if this responsibility is natural and limitless (Petersen et al., 2014).

Time spent preparing made-from-scratch meals at home meant less time for paid work, leisure or caregiving. Indira explained her decision to purchase readymade powdered spices:

Previously, we used to make powders at home. Nowadays, we buy packets [from the market]. Now readymade powders are available in the shops. Those days women stayed at home. Now we don’t have time to make the powders. If we make at home, it is less expensive, but it is time consuming work.

On the other hand, for 32-year-old widow Madhu, purchasing food from the market created additional financial pressure:

I go to work in the fields at 10 in the morning and I return home by 6 in the evening [… ] I earn INR 160-170 for the fieldwork and if the work is less I get INR 100 per day.

Despite participation in paid work, Madhu could not afford to purchase time saving packaged goods:
We prepare chilli powder, turmeric powder at home. We don’t spend money on buying packaged food material. We must prepare it at home.

Familial resiliency emerged in interviews as another important theme. Participants and their families developed resilience to adjust and respond to risk. Poor families adapt their food consumption patterns to reduce potential risks such as hunger and starvation. Resilience in family settings refers to “characteristics, dimensions, and properties [...] which help families to be impervious to disruption in the face of [...] crisis situations” (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988, p. 247). This theme relates to the global food policy focus on sustainable food systems with zero food loss or waste (for example, Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals). Participants were asked about their food management practices, such as handling of leftovers since most had no refrigeration appliances. For example, Revathy said:

My husband and myself eat left over rice in the mornings. We don’t throw it out. We are not rich people. We are poor people. We don’t throw leftover rice, we eat it.

Marthamma gave another example of food management with zero food loss:

We usually never have left over food. We cook just enough for our daily needs. We never waste food. If we cook rice at night and there is some leftover, we put water in it, and in the morning, we eat that rice and drink that water. If there was to be leftover food that is spoiled, then we give it to the cows.

Resilience does not imply that poor families are unaffected by risk. Rather, family resiliency becomes “a coping strategy [...] to more quickly process [risks] [...] and not become encumbered by them” (Pettigrew et al., 2014, p. 1782).

The last theme to emerge around food policy from the data related to co-creation of food safety policy within the family. Mothers primarily were in charge of socialising food policies in household. However, participants co-created practices of hygiene and safety with family members (Bisogni et al., 2016). Practices such as washing raw materials before cooking, keeping the oven clean from burnt firewood remnants and washing hands prior to eating were established through sources in and outside participants’ families. For example, Marthamma explained:

I wash rice twice in water. I watched my mother doing this, so I follow that method. I wash vegetables in water as well. Even chicken I wash thoroughly before cooking. I learnt all my cooking from my mother.

Praneetha, who did not know her age because her parents died early in her childhood, noted the influence of extended family members on her food practices. Asked about the origins of her food safety practices, such as cleaning her firewood oven, she responded:

My parents [...] died when I was a young child [...] I was brought up by my sisters-in-law [...] I learnt it [cleaning the oven] from my sisters-in-law.

Food policy and food socialisation overlapped to explain strategies Praneetha used to co-create food safety practices. This shows that dimensions of FWB are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they overlap in ways that mirror the challenges faced by participants. Participants described learning food safety practices from external sources as well - in particular, staff from anti-poverty programs. Mariyamma said:

They [program staff] told us about the necessity and benefits of washing hands and maintaining good health. Our children also learn these things in their school through their teachers.

What I learned from [the staff] and what the children learned from their teachers is the same. We follow these instructions, and in this way, we have learned these skills.
Co-creation of food safety practices occurred only through hierarchies of authority (for example, from parents, teachers and program staff). Food policy highlights that agricultural, food safety and food labelling policies intersect with opportunities that govern the capacity of work, leisure or caregiving for women in poverty. Food policies can intensify the feminisation of responsibility (Chant, 2016; Rao et al., 2017) in childcare, farm work and other household duties and therefore excuse or alienate men from these tasks.

Having highlighted the explanatory power of FWB in Poverty framework (see Figure 2) at the intersection of families, food consumption and poverty, the next section argues that the familial sub-frame of FWB in Poverty offers novel insights.

Implications for research and public policy

This section summarises the findings of this research to examine implications for research on consumption and marketing of food and public policy that influences food consumption. Findings of this research support the conceptual merit of the FWB dimensions developed by Block et al. (2011). Nevertheless, given its North American perspective, the original FWB framework does not capture experiences of consumers in absolute poverty. One major contribution of FWB in Poverty framework is the framework’s insights on the role of families in dimensions of food consumption. Block et al.’s (2011) FWB framework described families as institutions for food discourse, but only in one dimension of the framework – food socialisation. In contrast, this paper draws on research on families and food to unravel individual, relational and collective identities that were co-constructed in action within families (Epp and Price, 2008). Data from this research have demonstrated that analysis of families’ food consumption offers theoretical insights on the intersection of family, food consumption and poverty. These insights are:

- Food availability encapsulates varying levels of familial interdependency, trust in indigenous food methods and gender roles and associated behaviours in food work. Research on food consumption practices of families in absolute poverty can employ these concepts to investigate the “puzzle” of low uptake of new technologies amongst poor families (Sudhir et al., 2015). This includes the association of food consumption practices to interdependent relationships and social construction of gender roles. Feminisation of food work suggests that policymakers need to unhinge the gender ordering of roles and associated behaviours by recognising and remunerating women and girls for tasks involved in food availability.

- Food socialisation unravels the hierarchical nature of intergenerational behaviour transference, food consumption as a means to maintaining kinship bonds and the clear demarcation of food work that constructs and manages gendered identities. Further studies in families and food can build on insights from this study to examine reverse generational and/or intra-generational consumption behaviours (Kerrane and Hogg, 2013) in contexts of absolute poverty, so as to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity and femininity in everyday practices of choosing, buying and consuming food. Specifically, policymakers can target men and boys to de-stigmatise male caregiving. In addition, this would acknowledge unpaid work that is involved in maintaining family units.

- Food capability uncovers that food proficiency is gained through informal and experiential learning. This happens in particular among illiterate populations and in states of familial liminality that are engendered by absolute poverty. Links between mothers and food decision-making highlight that feminine identities are at once fragile and firm. These insights can inform research on mothers’ cultural and
functional role as conduits of nutritional knowledge in contexts of absolute poverty. In particular, policymakers need to intentionally create enabling environments that recognise mothers’ status in families’ food decision-making as well as allow for them to gain visibility as part of the political and/or economic elite (Counihan, 2014).

- Food policy in contexts of absolute poverty unpicks familial resiliency to adjust and adapt to risks, co-creation of food safety policy with other adults, as well as the social construction of gender relations and division of labour governing women’s opportunities for work/leisure/care. Scholarship in the field can use these insights to investigate links between women and girls’ hyper-responsibility for food work and caregiving and gender stereotypes that limit female participation in other spheres of life such as work, education, and leisure (Rao et al., 2017). Policymakers need to facilitate contributions from marginalised groups, such as poor women, to food policy-making processes.

Power hegemonies that fix men and women in unequal status are evident in all dimensions of the FWB in Poverty framework. Such unequal power dynamics have potential negative flow-on effects to the larger task of attaining FWB and alleviating poverty. Inclusion of the familial sub-frame in the FWB in Poverty framework provides an opportunity to identity, challenge and transform cultural norms, social structures and gendered stereotypes that maintain an unequal status quo in contexts of poverty. The global food policies such as the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal No. 2 of Zero Hunger, focusses primarily on achieving nutrition. For example, one of the targets for Zero Hunger states “By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round” (UNDP, 2017). However, our research demonstrates that while nutrition is imperative to survival, nurturance is essential for well-being in absolute poverty. In other words, policy interventions and programs seeking FWB must incorporate an in-depth understanding of the familial unit at the core of their interactions. This study illustrates the shifts that are needed in research and policy discussions on food consumption and marketing among the poor in developing countries.

Limitations and future research directions
This study has limitations that can be addressed in future research. The first limitation is that this study collected data from consumers belonging to one gender cohort (that is, women) and one country setting (villages in rural India). This limits the explanatory potential of FWB in Poverty framework to a gender and a specific country context. Future research can explore FWB in Poverty in other developing countries (for example, in the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe) and segments of consumers (such as youth and men) to overcome this limitation.

Second, this research has generated the familial sub-frame of FWB from the perspective of consumers experiencing absolute poverty. However, poverty in developed and developing countries is a continuum of absolute and relative thresholds. Future research that examines experiences and perspectives of low-income consumers from contexts of absolute and relative poverty can enhance the FWB in Poverty framework. Finally, future research could investigate commonalities, connections and contrasts across dimensions of FWB in Poverty and within its sub-frames (individual, familial and societal). This fell beyond the scope of this study. In this vein, the FWB in Poverty framework is an avenue for future qualitative and/or quantitative work to investigate these issues.
Conclusion
This paper answers a call to explore family compositions other than the nuclear suburban family that is the focus of much scholarship in this field. To this end, the paper explored the everyday practices of choosing, buying, preparing and eating food, to develop the FWB in Poverty framework. By identifying and addressing an absence of theoretical understanding of families, food consumption and poverty, this paper generated novel understanding of fluidity and change in poor families and FWB. This is an early attempt to represent a large segment of the population that is often invisible and marginalised. Future research can build on FWB in Poverty framework to develop deeper insights into this consumer group.

References


Further reading


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