

RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND CONSTRAINTS IN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT NANKANA SAHIB, PUNJAB

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The role of rural women's in agricultural activities is substantial in Pakistan in general and in the Punjab province in particular. Their contribution in the agriculture and livestock is underestimated. In this milieu, this study was planned with the objective to determine the problems faced by rural women during agricultural activities. District Nankana Sahib was selected as case study. Multistage sampling technique was used for this study. At the first stage, out of three Tehsils, two Tehsils were selected randomly. Then from two selected Tehsils, six villages were selected. Finally at the third stage, 120 respondents (rural women) were selected by using convenient sampling. The data thus collected were analyzed and interpreted by using appropriate statistical package to draw the conclusions. The results revealed that that majority of the working women were participating in diverse agricultural activities including sowing, harvesting and picking. Majority of the working women were doing work to increase their family income but they were facing many problems in looking after their children and household chores. Negative attitude of the landlord is found to be one of the main problems. It is suggested that negative stereotype image of working women in rural areas should be changed with the help of mass media.

Keywords: agricultural activities, constraints, rural women, Nankana Sahib, landlords

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, agriculture sector has been playing a dominant role towards the economic landscape of Pakistan. It is still the backbone of rural economy, and in spite of structural shift towards industrialization it has deep impact on socio economic set up of the rural community (Abbas *et al.*, 2009). Approximately 45% of the total employed labor force of the country depends upon it. It is the major source of the livelihood of the rural people, and with the present contribution to GDP at about 21%, all benefits and dispossession of the rural economy revolves around it (Government of Pakistan, 2012). Population of Pakistan is increasing at a devastating rate and the mainstream of the population depends directly or indirectly on income streams generated by the agriculture sector (Government of Pakistan, 2012). Agriculture development is therefore inevitable for improving quality of life, alleviation of poverty and food insecurity and overall development in the rural areas.

In rural areas, most of the agricultural activities revolve around woman. As Pakistan is also an agriculture based country, the role of rural woman cannot be underestimated. Like other parts of the developing world, rural women in Pakistan are among millions of labourers who work very hard to acquire basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter, through crop production. They contribute in many activities, including farming, livestock maintenance, post-

harvest activities and household management. These women remain busy from dawn to dusk, as they have to supply food to men who are working in fields, fetch water and collect wood (Ranjha *et al.*, 2009). They are equally efficient in seed bed preparation, sowing, fertilizer application, fodder cutting, weeding, inter-cultural operations, transplanting, husking, threshing, drying, storing cereals and fodder, harvesting and selling the product of crops, fruits and vegetables. Females in the rural areas of developing countries often devote more time in performing agricultural tasks than the males. They carry out these tasks in addition to domestic chores and they work for about 12 to 15 hours a day (Chayal *et al.*, 2010). In the context of Pakistan Riaz *et al.* (2012) narrated that rural women contribution towards agricultural and livestock activities is considerable but they have limited access to credit facilities. Badragheh and Abedi (2011) affirmed that rural women have played historical roles in agriculture development. They are mothers and home managers. They are decision makers at home and are involved in many other on-farm and off-farm activities. Their participation in livestock care, production and management activities is substantial (Saghir *et al.*, 2005; Siddique *et al.*, 2009).

Although women play very important role in the subsistence oriented farming but they are facing many problems and constraints which hinder women empowerment. For instance due to conservative nature of society female's mobility is

restricted (Shahbaz *et al.*, 2010) and it is a constraint towards gender mainstreaming in agriculture in some regions of Pakistan. Lack of access to agriculture extension services is another constraints faced by the Pakistani rural women (Sadaf *et al.*, 2005). According to FAO (2011) agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. With reference to Pakistan, Begum and Yasmeen (2011) found that female's over shadow men in many spheres of agricultural tasks in terms of their productive participation but usually their efforts go unrecognized at national level. The due recognition of their role is constraint by many factors which are needed to be explored.

The main objectives of the present study are, to explore the literacy level of rural women in the study area, to assess the involvement of rural women in different agriculture activities, and to study the factors and limitations faced by women in participating agriculture activities and to suggest certain measures to improve the women role in agriculture activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population: The population of the present study was comprised of those women of the rural areas of district Nankana Sahib who participate in the agricultural activities.

Sample: Multistage sampling technique was used for this study. At the first stage, out of three Tehsils of the district, two Tehsils (Sangla Hill and Shahkot) were selected randomly. Then from two selected Tehsils six villages (Chak #17/R.B, Chak #18, Chak #25, Chak#80, Chak#81, Chak#82) were selected conveniently by using the criteria of accessibility and convenience of the researcher. Finally at the third stage, of 120 respondents (rural women) were selected by using convenient sampling technique. Those women were selected who were involved in agricultural activities.

Interview schedule: Data were collected through a purpose-built interview schedule. The research instrument (questionnaire) was developed in English language, but during the interview, the questions were asked in local (Punjabi & Urdu) languages. In order to assure the accuracy of the instrument it was pre-tested with 10 respondents. After pretesting, some ambiguities were identified which were removed before final data collection. The data were collected by using face-to-face interviewing. Being female with rural background, the researcher didn't face much difficulty in contacting the rural women.

Statistical analysis: The data were analyzed under the descriptive and inferential statistical technique using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). To bring data

into presentable format, percentages of various categories were estimated. Similarly frequencies were also calculated from the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education: The importance of different socio-economic or demographic characteristics in social research has been discussed by Acharya *et al.* (2005). Among these factors the most important demographic factor is education. The development of human resources in agriculture sector is also influenced by education. In rural areas of Pakistan, most of the livestock and agricultural activities revolve around women and they are the active contributors towards the rural economy (Hassan, 2010; Riaz *et al.*, 2012). However many problems and constraints experienced by women are due to their low educational level (Iftikhar *et al.*, 2009).

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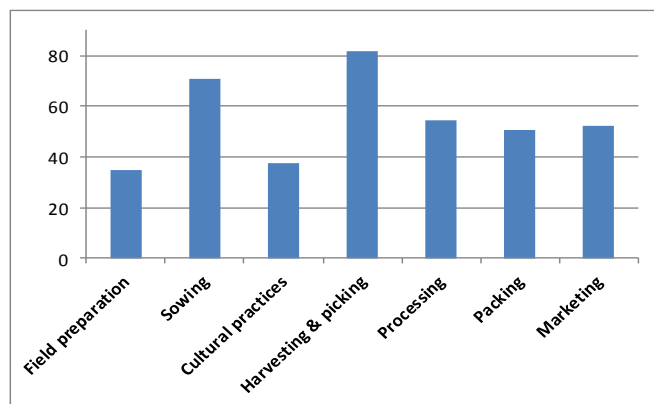
Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their education

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	49	40.8
Primary	27	22.5
Middle	21	17.5
Matriculate	20	16.5
Graduate	3	2.5
Total	120	100

The results of the present study regarding education of the respondents given in Table 1 show that most of the respondents (40.8%) were illiterate. While 22.5 % of the respondents had primary, 17.5% middle, 16.7% matriculate and only 2.5% of the respondents possessed the education up to graduate level. Regarding low educational level of rural women in Pakistan, Sadaf (2005) reported that majority (76.8%) of the respondents were illiterate and only 23.2% were literate. Another study conducted by Hassan (2010) regarding educational status of women in rural areas indicated that majority of our rural women are deprived of educational facility and are illiterate in spite of their high contribution in agricultural and livestock production. Similar findings regarding educational level of rural women were also identified by Iftikhar *et al.* (2009) while determining the training needs of rural women in agriculture in district Bahawalpur.

Involvement in agricultural activities: Rural women in Pakistan are involved in a variety of agricultural activities. In order to determine the involvement of rural women in the study area in different agriculture related activities the data presented in Fig.1 indicate that majority (81.7 %) of the respondents had participation in harvesting and picking activities. About 70.8 % of respondents in the research area participated in sowing. More than half (54.2%) of the respondents were involved in processing related activities like winnowing, drying of grains cleaning of grains. Slightly more than half (52.8%) were participated in marketing of livestock products and about 50.8% of the respondents participated in packing of vegetables. About 37.5 % of the respondents told that they participate in cultural practices (transplanting, manure application, fertilizer application, weeding, thinning, gap filling, irrigation and plant protection measures such as insecticides and pesticides). And the areas where the participation of rural women was found to be least are leveling and cleaning of agricultural fields as only 35.0% of the respondents said that they participated in these activities.

Figure 1. Percentage of the respondents' involvement in agricultural activities



Regarding involvement of rural women in different agricultural activities Ranjha *et al.* (2009) concluded that women in rural areas of Pakistan are equally capable of performing field activities like seed bed preparation, tilling,

sowing, fertilizer application, fodder cutting, weeding, inter-cultural operations, transplanting, husking, threshing, drying, storing cereals and fodder, harvesting and selling the agricultural produce. They also concluded that women in rural areas often dedicate more time in performing agricultural tasks as compared to men. Similar situation regarding participation and involvement of rural women in agricultural activities also prevails in other countries of the global world like that of Pakistan. In this regard, Chayal *et al.* (2010) also concluded that the role of rural women in agriculture in developing countries is noticeable; they perform a lot of activities such as sowing, harvesting, and cutting. Picking, cleaning of grains, drying of grains, weeding, and winning are the major farm activities performed by rural women. Such examples were also given by Reddy (2003) and Sidhu (2011) who conducted research studies in India. In a previous study, Badragheh and Abedi (2011) narrated that rural women throughout the world have played historical roles in agriculture development. Rural women are involved in many on-farm and off-farm activities. Their participation in livestock care, production and management activities is very important (Saghir *et al.*, 2005; Siddique *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, their efforts go unrecognized at national level (Begum and Yasmeen, 2011).

Problems and challenges: The results regarding problems faced by the respondents regarding participation in agricultural activities presented in Table 2, which showed that majority (44.2%) of the respondents were facing problem "looking after their children" to a great extent, while 17.5 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent and 38.3 % of them were not having problem in looking after their children. About 36.7 % of the respondents were facing problem in serving in laws to a great extent, while 20.0 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent. About 45.0 % of the respondents were facing problem in serving in parents to great extent, while 26.7 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent and 28.3 % of them were facing no problem in serve in parents. About half 52.5 % of the respondents were facing problem in looking after themselves to great extent, while 27.5 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent and

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents according to problems faced due to participating in agricultural activities

Problems/ Challenges	To a great extent		To some extent		Not at all		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Looking after children	53	44.2	21	17.5	46	38.3	120	100
Serve in laws	44	36.7	24	20.0	52	43.3	120	100
Serve parents	54	45.0	34	26.7	32	28.3	120	100
Looking after yourself	63	52.5	33	27.5	24	20.0	120	100
Household chores	66	55.0	32	26.7	22	18.3	120	100
Meeting with relatives	47	39.2	31	25.8	42	35.0	120	100
Participation in ceremonies	49	40.8	31	25.8	40	33.3	120	100

20.0 % of them were facing no problem in looking after themselves. About more than half i.e. 55.0 % of the respondents were facing problem in performing house hold chores to great extent, while 26.7 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent and 43.3 % of them were facing no problem in house hold chores. About 39.2 % of the respondents were facing problem in meeting with relatives to great extent, while 25.8 % of the respondents' were facing problem to some extent and 35.0 % of them were not facing problem in meeting in relatives. And 40.8 % of the respondents were facing problem in attending different ceremonies in family to great extent.

It is an established fact that agriculture is the backbone of our rural economy (Abbas *et al.*, 2009) and, according to FAO (2011), agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. Riaz *et al.* (2012) mentioned that women are the major contributors in agricultural and livestock activities. However rural women face different types of socio-economic constraints that reduce their productivity. Lack of access to agricultural information and extension services is another problem being faced by the small farmers Pakistan in general and rural women in particular (Sadaf *et al.*, 2005).

Better working conditions are essential for decent work. Poor working conditions not only reduce productivity but also increase stress among women (Plaisier *et al.*, 2007). In this perspective, Table 3 shows the perception of the rural working women regarding the attitude of landlords. It reflects that about one-third (33.3%) of the respondents perceived good attitude of landlords, while 22.5% reported as satisfactory, 24.2% as not good enough and 20% reported bad attitude of landlords towards their subordinate females (in case they work in landlord's field). Better attitude of employer enhance the productivity. Plaisier *et al.* (2007) stressed the importance of better working conditions for women and narrated that social protection can be an important tool for the improvement of working conditions

for females. In a previous study Sadaf *et al.* (2005) recognized the importance of the role of rural women in agricultural activities but at the same time women face multiple problems and constraints such as lack of access to agricultural information and they need technical assistance in agricultural related activities.

Table 3. Perceived attitude of landlords towards their subordinate females

Attitude of the landlords	Frequency	%age
Good	40	33.3
Satisfactory	27	22.5
Not good enough	29	24.2
Bad	24	20.0
Total	120	100.0

Response of the rural females of study area regarding attitude of people around them is recorded in Table 4, which indicates that 65.8% fathers, 61.7% mothers, 48.3% brothers, 72.5% sisters, 60.8% husbands, 60.0% father in laws, 50.8% mother in laws, 64.2% friends, 61.7% colleagues, 68.3% neighbours, and 62.5% non-working women had favorable attitude towards the respondents, while 5.8% fathers, 6.7% mothers, 30.8% brothers, 9.2% sisters, 8.3% husbands, 10.8% father in laws, 15.8% mother in laws, 6.7% friends, 7.5% colleagues, 7.5% neighbours, and 6.7% non-working women had unfavorable attitude towards the respondents. About 28.3% fathers, 31.7% mothers, 20.8% brothers, 28.3% sisters, 30.8% husbands, 29.3% father in laws, 33.3% mother in laws, 29.2% friends, 30.8% colleagues, 24.2% neighbours, and 30.8% non-working women had unfavorable attitude towards the respondents. Previously Tibbo *et al.* (2009) reported quite different results than that of present study. It might be due to the fact that the study area was different and cultural tradition, customs and values are also different in different regions. In many developing societies, Arab society does not acknowledge the extent of women participation in

Table 4. Attitude of the people around respondents

People	Favorable		Un favorable		In different		Total	
	Freq	%age	Freq	%age	Freq	%age	Freq	%age
Father	79	65.8	7	5.8	34	28.3	120	100.0
Mother	74	61.7	8	6.7	38	31.7	120	100.0
Brother	58	48.3	37	30.8	25	20.8	120	100.0
Sister	87	72.5	11	9.2	22	28.3	120	100.0
Husband	73	60.8	10	8.3	37	30.8	120	100.0
Father in law	72	60.0	13	10.8	35	29.3	120	100.0
Mother in law	61	50.8	19	15.8	40	33.3	120	100.0
Friends	77	64.2	8	6.7	35	29.2	120	100.0
Colleagues	74	61.7	9	7.5	37	30.8	120	100.0
Neighbors	82	68.3	9	7.5	29	24.2	120	100.0
Non-working women	75	62.5	8	6.7	37	30.8	120	100.0

social and economic activities and in the production of the components of humane well-being and it does not reward women adequately for such participation (UNDP, 2005).

Conclusion: The results of the study indicate that majority of the rural women in the study area were illiterate. It was found that majority of the women were participated in sowing, harvesting and picking activities and most of the working women were doing work to increase their family income and were facing problems in looking after their children and household chores. So, maintaining the balance between domestic duties and farm related activities is one of the main challenges which not only create social problems but also spoil their own health. Although the women have favorable attitude from their family members by women working in farms have to face unfavorable attitude of the landlord. On the basis of results of the current research study it is recommended that educating women is educating family. Women are not only equal partners in crops and livestock production and management but also are responsible for the food, nutrition and well-being of the family and society. There should be a balance between their role in family/household assignments and agricultural practices so that a healthy and creative environment can be flourished. Negative stereotype images of rural working women should be changed through various organ of the mass media. The research was limited to one district (Nankana Sahib), therefore to have overall picture of the province, it is suggested that more in-depth studies should be conducted with the view of gender mainstreaming in agriculture.

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