

# Extent of Rural Women's Participation in Agricultural and Household Activities

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## ABSTRACT

Women's contribution to agriculture is seldom recognized in spite of their active role in the agriculture as well as household activities in developed as well as developing world. In order to probe into the matter that to what, extent women participate in agricultural and household activities, the present study was designed. Both proportionate and simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of study respondents. Tehsil Chistian of district Bahawalnagar acted as central area for the present study. Out of the whole tehsil four villages were randomly selected. From each of the selected village, 30 women were selected both from small and medium size families who were actively engage in farm as well as household activities. The data were collected with the help of validated interview schedule. The data, thus collected were analyzed by using descriptive test statistics to formulate results and draw conclusions. It was concluded that women's participation is very much high in picking of cotton among farming activities. Among livestock activities, their participation was highest in cleaning of animal sheds. Looking after the family members was the main activity where women's participation was highest in household activities.

**Key Words:** Rural women; Participation; Agricultural activity; Household activity

## INTRODUCTION

Both men and women play an important role in feeding the world. According to an estimate, women produce more than 50% of the total world food (FAO, 1995). Women's contribution in agricultural labour force in developed countries is 36.7% while, it is about 43.6% in developing countries (FAO, 1999). In Asian countries, women account for approximately 50.0% of food production overall in the region, with considerable variation from country to country. In the Philippines their participation in agricultural labour force is only 4.0%, while 35.0% in Malaysia, 54.0% in Indonesia and over 60.0% in Thailand. In Southeast Asia, women play a major role in rice production, particularly in sowing, transplanting, harvesting and processing (ESCAP, 1996). In addition to agricultural activities women often devote more time and resources under their control towards improving household concerns related to food security as compared to men and their involvement was significant in term of decision making authority (Saito & Weideman, 1990; Thomas, 1990 & Quisumbing *et al.*, 1995).

In rural areas of Pakistan, women play a major role in agricultural production, livestock raising and cottage industries and remain busy from dawn to dusk to supply food to men in fields, fetch water, collect fuel wood, and manage livestock. They are equally efficient in seed bed preparation, tilling, sowing, fertilizer application, fodder cutting, weeding, intercultural operations, transplanting, husking, threshing, drying, storing cereals and fodder, selling agricultural commodities and harvesting of all the

crops, fruits and vegetables (PARC, 1988; World Bank, 1989; Shah & Khan, 2004). Women often devote more time to carry out these tasks than men do and their participation is notably higher in food storage and processing. They carry out these tasks in addition to their normal household activities (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1990; ESCAP, 1997).

With respect to crops, women's participation is particularly high in cotton, rice, pulses and vegetables. Rice and cotton cultivation in Sindh and Punjab jointly account for more than one-third of women's annual agricultural activities. It has been estimated that women account for 29.28% of labour in rice production and 23.55% in cotton-wheat areas. One study in rice and cotton producing villages in Pakistan showed that in agricultural activities women spent 39.34 and 50.42% of their time in rice and cotton growing areas, respectively (Quadri & Jahan, 1982; UNDP, 1997 & Rashdi, 2002). They are involved in various primary and secondary cotton operations, such as weeding and thinning (59.5%), manuring (29.0%), hoeing (52.5%), cotton cleaning (77.0%) stick removing (72.5%) and storage of seed cotton for domestic use (20.0%) (Asghar, 1994). Women's participation in production of major field crops has been estimated to be approximately 30.0% in rice, 25.0% in cotton, 23.0% in sugarcane, 18.0% in wheat and 26.0% in vegetables (Ahmed & Hussain, 2004).

In Pakistan, caring for livestock takes up 35.0% of a village women's time, and it is hard to walk around a village without seeing hens, goats, cows, and buffaloes etc. (Taylor, 1985). A rural woman in Pakistan works 15.50 h a day, spending 5.50 h in caring for livestock, but provides only 50 min for the care of her own children (ESCAP, 1997).

Women are responsible for 60.0 to 80.0% of the feeding and milking of cattle (ESCAP, 1996). They also engaged in various activities related to livestock production like production of animals, sales of animal's products and by products (ghee, yoghurt), cleaning, watering and bathing the animals (Katuwal, 1991).

In addition to their participation in agricultural activities, they also involve in self reliance decision making in both economic and social spheres within the household as reported by Sathar and Kazi (1997) who examined various dimensions of women's autonomy by conducting a survey with the help of focus group interviews and separate focus group discussions both for men and women in the rural areas of Punjab. Women also perform various household tasks, such as, cooking, washing, house cleaning, fetching water, collecting fire woods and care of children and elderly members of the family (Khan & Bilquees, 1976; Ali & Ahmad, 1983; Sabir *et al.*, 1989; Alderman & Chishti, 1991; Ahmad *et al.*, 1993; FAO, 1997; AERC & PIDE, 1998). Many research studies observed that the average rural woman worked between 25 to 35 h per week in household activities excluding child care (Khan & Bilquees, 1976; World Bank, 1990; Alderman & Chishti, 1991 & Ahmad *et al.*, 1993).

Sathar and Desai (1996) conducted a research study in Pakistan and synthesized that women, living in nuclear families participate more intensively in household activities. In rural areas women fully involve during the whole day in domestic labour activities like looking after the children, cleaning the house, cooking, washing and the many other activities (Agha, 2005). Although their participation in agricultural and household activities are very high but the educational facilities and enrollment of female in primary education is hopeless because their enrollment has stayed roughly the same for the country as a whole, at about 30% (Lloyd *et al.*, 2002). Other than education women's full participation in economic and household activities impeded by cultural and legal constraints, which limits women's participation by women's relative lack of time and mobility due to their workloads and multiple roles (World Bank, 1995).

From above discussion it is crystal clear that women mostly participate in farming (agricultural) as well as household activities and they are the household managers but their work is considered as non-productive, un-organized and un-documented through out the world. They are deprived off not only in the field of agriculture, but also in all other fields like education, nutrition and health. For this purpose the present research study was designed to investigate that to what extent women participate in agricultural and household activities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Four villages from Tehsil Chistian of District Bahawalnagar of Punjab Province were selected through

simple random sampling technique as the universe for the study. The district under study is equally important for crops, livestock and vegetable production with larger area under cultivation. A sample size of 30 women involved in agricultural and household activities was selected from both small and medium size families through proportionate random sampling technique and thus, making a total sample size of 120, respondents. The data were collected with the help of a pre-tested and validated interview schedule. The data thus collected were analyzed by using Descriptive Test Statistics to draw results, conclusions and present recommendations accordingly.

The extent of rural women participation in agricultural and household activities were assessed by using a three point continuum namely 'Mostly', 'Occasionally' and 'Not at all' which was assigned scores of 3, 2 and 1, respectively. For the purpose of ranking of different activities performed by rural women the frequency of responses from each of the three columns of a specific activity under major activity was tabulated and multiplied by concerned score. Then, they were added together to get the total score for each specific activity for the purpose of their ranking (Sailaja & Reddy, 2003).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table I reveals that 91.7, 82.5, 75.8, 75.0, 74.2, 73.3, 69.2, 68.3, 45.0, 43.4, 39.2, 38.3 and 33.3% of the respondents were 'mostly' engaged and participated in cotton picking, storage of cereals and seed, binding, harvesting, drying, threshing, taking off fodder, weeding, sealing, spreading chemical, seed preparation, sowing and selling of agricultural commodities, respectively. Whereas, on the other hand, 24.2, 24.2 and 18.3%, of the respondents participated 'occasionally' in seed preparation, sowing and spreading chemical, respectively. Selling of agricultural commodities was 'not at all' performed by 61.7% of the respondents. These results were more or less similar to that of Ishaq (1998) and Nazar (2004).

The data presented in Table II reveals that women's participation in cotton picking is very much high having rank order '1' and mean '2.88' as compared to other farming activities because the major area in the selected tehsil is under cotton cultivation and picking of cotton was totally the women's task throughout the cotton zone. It is followed by other farming activities like storage of cereals and seeds, harvesting, binding, drying, threshing, taking off fodder, weeding, sealing, spreading chemical, seed preparation and sowing with rank order 2, 3.5, 3.5, 5, 6, 7.5, 7.5, 9, 10, 11 and 12 and having mean value 2.73, 2.62, 2.62, 2.58, 2.56, 2.53, 2.53, 2.08, 2.05, 2.03 and 2.01, respectively. While on the other hand the activity in which women's participation was very much low with rank order '13' and mean value '1.70' was selling of agricultural commodities due to the cultural and social norms and values.

**Table I. Distribution of the respondents according to the extent of participation in farming activities n=120**

Farming activities	Mostly (3)		Occasionally (2)		Not at all (1)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Seed preparation	47	39.2	29	24.2	44	36.6
Sowing	46	38.3	29	24.2	45	37.5
Sealing	54	45.0	21	17.5	45	37.5
Spreading chemical	52	43.4	22	18.3	46	38.3
Taking off fodder	83	69.2	18	15.0	19	15.8
Weeding	82	68.3	20	16.7	18	15.0
Harvesting	90	75.0	14	11.7	16	13.3
Binding	91	75.8	12	10.0	17	14.2
Threshing	88	73.3	11	9.2	21	17.5
Drying	89	74.2	13	10.8	18	15.0
Storage of cereals and seed	99	82.5	10	8.3	11	9.2
Selling of agricultural commodities	40	33.3	6	5.0	74	61.7
Cotton picking	110	91.7	6	5.0	4	3.3

**Table II. Ranking of rural women's involvement in Farming Activities**

Farming activities	Mean	SD	TS	R
Seed preparation	2.03	0.874	243	11
Sowing	2.01	0.874	241	12
Sealing	2.08	0.909	249	9
Spreading chemical	2.05	0.906	246	10
Taking off fodder	2.53	0.755	304	7.5
Weeding	2.53	0.744	304	7.5
Harvesting	2.62	0.712	314	3.5
Binding	2.62	0.724	314	3.5
Threshing	2.56	0.776	307	6
Drying	2.58	0.751	311	5
Storage of cereals and seed	2.73	0.618	328	2
Selling of agricultural commodities	1.70	0.940	206	13
Cotton picking	2.88	0.414	346	1

SD= Standard Deviation      TS= Total Score      R= Rank

**Table III. Distribution of the respondents according to the extent of their participation in livestock activities n=120**

Livestock activities	Mostly (3)		Occasionally (2)		Not at all (1)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Cleaning of animal Sheds	101	84.2	16	13.3	3	2.5
Watering of animals	94	78.3	20	16.7	6	5.0
Milking of animals	93	77.5	14	11.7	13	10.8
Preparing Ghee	94	78.4	10	8.3	16	13.3
Egg collection of poultry birds	89	74.2	6	5.0	25	20.8
Grazing of animal	90	75.0	10	8.3	20	16.7
Feeding of animal	98	81.7	12	10.0	10	8.3

Table III reveals that an overwhelming majority (84.2%) of the respondents participated 'mostly' in cleaning of animal sheds among livestock activities followed by feeding of animals (81.7%), preparing ghee (78.4%), watering of animals (78.3%), milking of animals (77.5%), grazing of animals (75.0%) and egg collection of poultry birds (74.2%). Women 'occasionally' participated in watering of animals and cleaning of animal sheds as responded by 16.7% and 13.3% of the respondents. But on

the other side women 'not at all' participated in egg collection of poultry birds and grazing of animals as reported by 20.8% and 16.7% of the respondents, respectively. These findings are also confirmed by the research studies undertaken by Ijaz and Davidson (1997) and Masood and Mahjabeen (1998).

The data presented in Table IV depicts that 'cleaning of animal sheds' was the main activity with rank order '1' and mean '2.82', which was being performed by our rural women. The other livestock activities which was performed by women in rural areas were watering of animals, feeding of animals, milking of animals, preparation of ghee, grazing of animals and egg collection of poultry birds having rank order and mean value 2.5, 2.5, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and 2.73, 2.73, 2.67, 2.65, 2.58 and 2.53, respectively.

Table V reveals that an overwhelming majority (97.5%) of the respondents participated 'mostly' in looking after of all family members among household activities followed by preparation of food (92.5%), fuel collection (80.8%), embroidery (40.0%), other handicrafts (30.0%) and knitting (25.0%). Women 'occasionally' participated in

**Table IV. Ranking of rural women's participation in livestock activities**

Livestock activities	Mean	SD	TS	R
Cleaning of animal Sheds	2.82	0.449	338	1
Watering of animals	2.73	0.546	328	2.5
Milking of animals	2.67	0.665	320	4
Preparing Ghee	2.65	0.706	318	5
Egg collection of poultry birds	2.53	0.819	304	7
Grazing of animal	2.58	0.762	310	6
Feeding of animal	2.73	0.604	328	2.5

SD= Standard Deviation      TS= Total Score      R= Rank

**Table V. Distribution of the respondents according to the extent of their participation in household activities n=120**

Household activities	Mostly (3)		Occasionally (2)		Not at all (1)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Food preparation	111	92.5	5	4.2	4	3.3
Fuel collection	97	80.8	16	13.4	7	5.8
Embroidery	48	40.0	14	11.7	58	48.3
Knitting	30	25.0	38	31.7	52	43.3
Other handicraft	36	30.0	5	4.2	79	65.8
Looking after all family members	117	97.5	0	-	3	2.5

**Table VI. Ranking of rural women's participation in household activities**

Household activities	Mean	SD	TS	R
Food preparation	2.89	0.406	347	2
Fuel collection	2.75	0.554	330	3
Embroidery	1.92	0.940	230	4
Knitting	1.82	0.809	218	5
Other handicraft	1.64	0.915	197	6
Looking after all family members	2.95	0.314	354	1

SD= Standard Deviation      TS= Total Score      R= Rank

knitting and fuel collection as reported by 31.7% and 13.4% of the respondents. But on the other hand women 'not at all' participated in other handicraft, embroidery and knitting as reported by 65.8% 48.3% and 43.3% of the respondents, respectively.

The data presented in Table VI depicts that 'looking after of all family members' was the main activity among other household activities with rank order '1' and mean 2.95, where rural women's participation was maximum. The other household activities which were being performed by rural women were food preparation, fuel collection, embroidery, knitting and other handicraft with rank order and mean value 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6; and 2.89, 2.75, 1.92, 1.82 and 1.64, respectively.

## CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that in farming activities women 'mostly' participate in cotton picking as reported by 91.7% of the respondents but 'occasionally' involve in seed preparation and 'not at all' involve in selling of agricultural commodities as responded by 24.2% and 61.7% of the respondents, respectively. Among livestock activities majority (84.2%) of the respondents 'mostly' involve in cleaning of animal sheds but on the other hand 'occasionally' participate in watering of animals and 'not at all' participate in egg collection of poultry birds as reported by 16.7% and 20.8% of the respondents, respectively. It was also conclude that in addition to farming and livestock activities in household activities women 'mostly' participate in looking after of all family members (97.5%) and 'occasionally' involve in knitting while 'not at all' participate in other handicraft as reported by 31.7% and 65.8% of the respondents, respectively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of conclusions drawn from the research study, following recommendations have been formulated:

- For agriculture and livestock management, government should impart trainings to rural female through female extension agents with the collaboration of NGOs, and other rural development agencies.
- Educational level of rural females should be increased through adult and non-formal educational programmes.
- Indiscriminate laws related to land and credit should be eliminated.
- Various agricultural development programmes should be initiated by Government for the betterment of rural women.

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