

Role of Women in Social and Agricultural Decision-Making in the Rural Areas of the Southern Punjab (Pakistan)

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Abstract

In the socio-economic activities, the rural women play a significant role, at the household and community level to shoulder their respective families by engaging themselves in the income generating activities most commonly related to the agriculture sector in Pakistan. It is pathetic, however, that their valuable contribution is not recognized in most part of the Punjab province, particularly in the southern Punjab. It is noteworthy that they contribute in the economic and social development of their families by working with the men-folk shoulder to shoulder in the fields from dawn to dusk performing multiple chores including taking care of livestock, unleashing their potential in the fields from sowing till harvesting the crops, poultry and handicrafts, and doing family business. Women are very actively participating in the economic activities in the district of Dera Ismael Khan (Southern Punjab) which is the focus of this present study and this particular district is selected by simple random sampling from the districts of southern Punjab. Nevertheless, the status of women in decision-making is very bleak, they are mostly disregarded in any decision-making process at the household or community levels. The study aims to investigate the role of rural women in decision making for family income generation including agricultural patterns; use of land, selection of crops and inputs or utilization of income from lands. Similarly, the study intends to investigate the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of families and the women participation in decision-making process in district Dera Ismael Khan, Southern Punjab, Pakistan. A multistage sampling technique was applied to select a representative sample of 300 respondents. At first stage, out of 21 Union councils in District Dera Ismael Khan, four union councils were selected by using simple random method. Out of the four union councils four villages were selected randomly. A total of 300 respondents (75 from each village) selected randomly from the selected villages at the third stage. A field survey was conducted through and an interview schedule which was carefully developed to address the

cultural and gender sensitivity. The women enumerators interviewed the women, and the data was analyzed using appropriate statistical technique at the Department of Rural Sociology, University of Agriculture. The study revealed that 50.0 % women participated in decision-making for the wellbeing of their respective families. 68.3 % of the respondents claimed that women had the right ability of handling the monthly family budget. 40.0 %, 35.0 %, and 31.66 % women actively played their role in the decision-making in agricultural matters, education of their children, and marital affairs respectively. 63.33 % respondents agreed that women enhance their family income by participating in the agricultural and social decision-making, 68.33 % of the respondents agreed that help the male members in the decision-making, and 75.0 % of the respondents agreed that male members consult females in the decision-making process. The study concluded that there is a need to enhance women participation in the decision-making regarding family resources, education and marriage. As results shows, women have better ability to handle the monthly household budget their participation in agricultural and social decisions will leads towards empowerment.

Key words: Role of Women, Decision-making, Agriculture, Social Construction, Family

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of Pakistan, and the total contribution of the agriculture sector in the gross domestic product (GDP) is over 25 % (Faisal, 2018) [1]. Almost half of the total population of the country is engaged directly or indirectly in the agriculture sector. It has been reflected by Pakistan Labor Force Survey 2016-2017 that more than 47 % of the total population is employed in the agriculture sector, and over 75 % of the agriculture labor force consists in women. In the rural areas of the country, over 62 % population resides where women participate in the agriculture sector, dairy and poultry farming, and

livestock from dawn to dusk with zeal and zest shoulder to shoulder with men without any discrimination contributing in the enhancement of their respective family incomes to enjoy a better living standard. The major responsibilities of women are: taking part in sowing, transplantation, weeding, crop management, harvesting and threshing, storage and the processing of major crops. Women are extensively engaged in the Punjab Province in both agriculture and horticulture value chains of all the major crops including wheat, rice, cotton, vegetables, fruits and flower (Rabail Gandahi, 2016) ^[2]. It is very pathetic that in spite of this great hard work their contribution in the decision-making process is not recognized by the men-folk. Women are not included in the decision-making regarding agriculture, education, and marriage matters because it was considered that women are not good decision makers. There are many cultural and religious doctrines based on misconceptions which are shaping the opinion building among the men folk regarding women (Asma Zafar and Saira Akhtar, 2003) ^[3]. They are not given much importance in the decision-making process in their family matters, despite the tremendous workload borne by women (Violetm, 1983) ^[4]. Women remain limited to their access to critical resources and services, in almost all the provinces of the country despite their role as food producers and providers. Women lack ownership of land in most instance but they may have access to land for labor and utilization of agriculture products for household use. Furthermore, they also have no security for land tenure (FAO 2017) ^[5]. The cropping patterns, selection of input, acquisition of agriculture loans, marketing of crops and the utilization of the proceeds from the crops is always determined by men and women are hardly consulted in this regard.

In the middle-class farming families, however, they are changing rapidly, and they due to their level of education somehow accommodates women's opinions in decision making process (Economic Survey, 2016-17) ^[6]. So, the present study was planned to assess a sociological study of female participation in decision-making process in family matters in the district Dera Ismael Khan.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The present study was conducted in the remote

district of Dera Ismael Khan which is situated in the southern part of the Punjab Province. In this region, women have no say in any matter of their life such as getting education, marrying someone of their choice, in the decisions related to job, and many more. Even in this part, it is very difficult to approach women to collect data. The study is significant in this regard that it was at least known that what is the status of women in the matters of decision-making and their role in the farm activities. This study will pave the way for other researchers to conduct more and more similar studies to explore the role of women in the decision-making process.

III. OBJECTIVES

The role of rural women in the decision-making process in the agricultural matters was the specific objective of this present research study. As far as the general objectives were concerned it included (1) to explore the demographic characteristics of the respondents, (2) to identify the factors which foster the participation of rural women in the decision-making process about agricultural and family activities, (3) and to suggest some suitable measures for the improvement for the role of women-folk in the decision-making process about familial and agricultural matters.

IV. METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the facts from the field for each specified objective of this study. A field survey was conducted in District Dera Ismael Khan of South Punjab. The interview schedule was used to interview the respondents. A multistage sampling technique was applied for the selection of 300 respondents from rural areas of District Dera Ismael Khan. Four Union Councils were selected, at the first stage, from the total of 21 Union Councils of the District randomly. One village was selected, at the second stage, from each union council which was selected randomly; From each village selected randomly, 75 respondents (including males and females) were selected randomly with the help of voter lists available at the Union Council office. A face to face interview was conducted by using a structured interview schedule containing mostly closed ended questions. The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Women Participation in Decision Making for the Wellbeing of Family

Decision Making in Family		
Decision Making	Frequency	%
Women	150	50.0
Husband	200	66.6
Elders (Men)	50	16.0

Women's participation for the wellbeing of family		
Women and Development	Frequency	Percentage
To a great extent	198	66.0
To some extent	75	25.0
Not at all	27	9.0
Monthly Budget is better handled by women		
Yes	205	68.3
No	95	31.7

This table reveals that the decision-making is generally a men's domain almost one half of the respondents (50.0 %) reported that the husbands (the male household head) made decision for the family wellbeing. While over 66.6 % of the decisions for family wellbeing are made by the male family elders in the extended family (mostly the men on the husband's family side make the decisions). Whereas, the women participation in decision-making process was very low, only 16.0 % of the respondents reported that women participated in the decision-making process for their family wellbeing. These results are very much in line with the study conducted by Zafar et al, (2005) ^[7], they found that no society can make progress without the active participation of women and women hold an important position in the overall fabric of the society. The participation of women is very important in almost all the spheres at local and regional level. Due to patriarchal norms, the Pakistani society has a rigid attitude towards the involvement of women in the decision-making process. The women participate in the family wellbeing; the data reveals that 66.0 % of the respondents agreed to great extent that women participate in family wellbeing. Similarly, 25.0 % of the respondents agreed to some extent that women participation in family wellbeing. Women do the budget management; they are considered to be the better managers for the household budget by the

respondents of this study. The table depicts that 68.3 % of the respondents agree with the fact that the women had better ability to handle the monthly household budget. Whereas only 31.7 % of the respondents disagree with this fact that women don't have ability to handle monthly budget. The literature also supports the results, Mukhtar and Mukhtar (1991) ^[8] found that the women had decision-making power in the purchase of household items and they handle the expenditures better. According to the study conducted by Mahmuda Hoque and Yoshihito Itohara in 2008 ^[20], the role of women in the decision-making process is very poor (within 10-40 %). It is revealed that the highest portion of the respondent (60.87%) make decisions on cattle, goat and poultry rearing which ranked first among all of the issues. Furthermore, it was reported in the studies conducted by Chayal et al. (2013) ^[9], Mulugeta and Tadesse (2014) ^[10], Patel et al. (1995) ^[11], Parveen (2007) ^[12], and Pandey et al. (2011) ^[13], that major decision- making were made solely by men the important issues such as cropping pattern and marketing of produce. In this regard, the results presented by Sharma et al. (2013) were similar to a great extent and exhibited a strong relevance with the results presented in this present study. More or less similar results were also presented by Katiyar et al. (2008) ^[14], Goudappa et al. (2012) ^[15] and Mulugeta and Tadesse (2014) ^[10].

Table 2: Major decisions regarding Agriculture, Education and Marriage

Decision Making regarding Agriculture, Education & Marriages		
Agriculture	Frequency	%
Male	180	60.0
Female	120	40.0
Education		
Male	195	65.0
Female	105	35.0
Marriage		
Male	205	68.33
Female	95	31.66

Table 2 shows that 60.0 % of the respondents confirm that the decisions about the agriculture are made by the men. Whereas only 40.0 % of the respondents mentioned that the women participated in decision about agriculture sector. The results of the

study conducted by Farhana Nosheen et al., (2009) ^[16] concluded that 71 % of the rural women consulted with their respective husbands regarding the agricultural, educational, and marriage decision-making in the rural areas of the southern part of the Punjab but their

husbands did bother to involve them in the decision-making process to a great extent. Most of the female respondents reported that 90 % decision regarding the family matter were taken by the male family members. The research findings of the present study corroborate with that of Arya (2002) ^[17] who also shared the similar views. The data reveals that the decisions about the education of children in a family are also men's domain. The choice to send the children to school and selection of their educational pursuits is also consider an important factor in family life and hence it needs critical decision-making role. The table shows that the women has very limited role in making the decision

about the education for the family members. Whereas the results in Table 2 shows that 65.0 % of the respondents testifies that decision about education were made by men. Mate selection for offspring and siblings; the key decisions regarding marriage are done by the men. The table shows almost similar results as of education related decisions; 68.33 % of the respondents recorded that that men made decision about the marriage of the family members. Only 31.66 % of the respondents recorded that the women (mothers and grandmothers) participated in decisions about the marriage of the family.

Table 3: Women Participation in Agriculture for Enhancing Family Incomes

Women Participation in Agriculture for Enhancing Family Incomes		
Women Contribute to Enhance Family Income	Frequency	%
Strongly Agree	190	63.33
Agree	80	26.6
Uncertain	30	10.0

The table shows that 63.33 % of the respondents strongly agreed that women participation in agriculture enhances the family income. Similarly, 26.6 % of the respondents agreed with the fact as well. A minimum minority only 10.0 % of the respondents was uncertain about the women role in the enhancement of the family incomes. At the global level, 43 % of the agricultural labor force comprises in women to support their families by performing different chores to earn in the developing countries around the globe (FAO, 2011) ^[18]. The findings reported by Haseeb (1992) ^[19] in his work entitled "Agricultural Research Extension and Development for Women in Pakistan" are very much in line with the present study. He concluded in his research study that the women are tremendously contributing both in the income generating and income saving activities to support their respective families.

But their efforts are not recognized by their respective families. At the global level, the Time-Use Survey reveals that the time contribution of women in the agricultural activities in Africa to provide economic support to their respective families is about 30 % in Gambia and 60-80 % in the different regions of Camero. In the Southern part of Asia, the time spent by Indian women is 30 % and the chineses Women is up to 50 % in the income generating activities (FAO, 2011) ^[18]. The statistics shows that they are contributing in livestock management, dairy and poultry, and in the agricultural activities such as sowing, weeding, and also in harvesting. It is estimated that the labor force participation rate for women is to be fewer than 5 %. Women spend between 20-30 % of their daily time in livestock management sector and approximately comprise 60 % of the labor family labor in agriculture.

Table 4: The role of Women in Decision Making for day-to-day Agriculture Matters

Role of Women in Decision Making for day to day Agricultural Matters		
Help of Male	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	205	68.33
No	15	5.0
Male consults decision		
Yes	225	75.0
No	75	25.0

Table 4 reinforces the results in table 3; the table reflects that 68.33 % of the respondents confirmed that women helped their men in in agriculture. The second part of the table shows that 75.0 % of the respondents confirmed that the men consult women for making their day to day decision for Agriculture related matters.

VI. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concluded that there is a need to enhance women participation in the decision-making regarding family resources, education and marriage. As results shows, women have better ability to handle the monthly

household budget their participation in agricultural and social decisions will leads towards empowerment. Some suggestions are presented in the light of findings of this present study to improve the existing status and role of women. Education is an important weapon to fight ignorance, illiteracy, and unemployment and the educational facility should be provided to both males and females to enhance their capabilities at their door step in the rural areas of the Punjab Province. The provision of education will help the rural people to frame a positive attitude towards working women. This would help to raise the status and role of women is society in general and in their families in particular. Furthermore, the government must come forward to help the rural women and to provide them interest free micro-credit so that they may be able to start their business (may invest in livestock or poultry). The role of women in family income must be recognized and expanded through positive measures e.g. diversifying income opportunities at household level. The women shall be offered skills and enterprise development training for agriculture, so that they contribute better in improved agriculture. It is a fact that the women get confidence and courage and their economic contribution enable them to participate in decision-making process. There is a need to enhance women participation in decision making regarding family resources, education and marriage. As results shows, women have better ability to handle the monthly household budget their participation in agricultural and social decisions will leads towards empowerment.

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