

**RESEARCH ARTICLE :**

# Needs and preferences for information seeking in farm women of submountaneous and undulating plain (Kandi) zone of Punjab (India)

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**SUMMARY :** Farm women are resourceful agents who work as entrepreneurs, farmers and non-farm labourers for employment. Lack of access and availability to information sources restricts their knowledge which subsequently hinders their involvement in decision making. In order to enhance their access and utilization of information sources understanding of the needs and information seeking behaviour of farm women is imperative. The study depicts that information on governemantal policies regarding inputs and credit is the major need for information for farm women in submountaneous and undulating plain (Kandi) zone of Punjab (MWS=2.58, 2.54) and information on soil preparation is of least need (MWS=2.10). Their preferred source of information are TV (MWS=2.67) and mobile internet (MWS=1.23), followed by KVK/ University scientists (MWS=1.20) and family and friends (MWS=0.75). Lack of time, lack of awareness about availability and knowledge to handle that source are the major constraints that bar 55.47 per cent, 42.46 per cent and 32.87 per cent farm women from using them in Kandi area of Punjab.

**KEY WORDS :**

Farm women,  
Information sources,  
Submountaneous  
zone, Information  
needs

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## **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

Women are resourceful agents who contribute to the families and community in many ways. They work as entrepreneurs, farmers and non-farm labourers for employment. In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84 per cent. Women make up about 33 per cent of cultivators and about 47 per cent of agricultural labourers. These statistics do not account for work in livestock, fisheries and various other ancillary

forms of food production in the country (Khyade and Khyade, 2016). They are actively involved in farming operations too. But they get a disproportionate share of payment for work (Sharma, 2012) and their contribution is limited by unequal access to resources due to gender norms which need to be addressed to allow the realization of their full potential. Resources include not only the financial ones but knowledge resources too. In current scenario information is the key aspect for knowledge. Lack of access and

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availability to information sources restricts their knowledge which subsequently hinders their involvement in decision making. This is the reason that in spite of great development in IT sector the utility of recent technologies like Internet, social media etc is limited for farm women. Sahu *et al.* (2009) revealed that the overall knowledge gap of farm women in relation to vegetable cultivation technology was 39.15 per cent and it ranged from 21.87 (sowing time) to 53.15 (improved variety). Similarly Kaur *et al.* (2017) revealed that majority (68.75%) of women have medium knowledge level on various recommended dairy farming practices, 13.75 per cent had low and only 17.5 per cent had high (17.50%) knowledge level. Further this knowledge was significantly correlated with the number of labor employed, milk production, herd size and education level. Study concluded that there is an emerged need to educate women on scientific dairy farming practices.

Manda (2002) noted that there is a positive relationship between the increased flow, access and utilization of information and food production. In order to enhance the access and utilization of information sources understanding of the needs and information seeking behaviour of farm women is first step. Doing so will eventually augment their connect to recent developments in their interest areas thereby, in addition to achieving household food security, women can also play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post harvest operations, agro/ social forestry, fisheries, etc and improve their income (Shailaja and Reddy, 2003). Thus, armed with adequate information, rural women can reduce inputs costs, improve transport links and can have collective negotiations with buyers, hence, widening the market for their products (Siyao, 2012). Dasgupta (2000) conducted a study to determine information needs of the rural communities in India and the needs identified included income generation, bank loans, government policies, and transportation. Zhang and Yu (2009) also concluded that rural dwellers in China have an extensive range of information needs, with agricultural technology, market information, income generation and policy information being the most needed types. In light of above facts a study was planned in Kandi (Submountaneous) zone of state of Punjab to ascertain the information needs of farm women as no study on this aspect has been conducted so far in this area.

### Objectives of the study:

- To identify the information needs of farm women
- To identify various sources of information used by them to meet their information needs and find the most effective one as perceived by them.
- To ascertain the perceived constraints faced by farm women.

## RESOURCES AND METHODS

A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection, while interview method was followed to clarify some aspects of the questionnaire. Questions were objective type where the respondents were supposed to tick one or more appropriate options. As few literate women were able to complete the questionnaire on their own, some had to be interviewed. Total 150 respondents were randomly selected in Kandi districts Ropar, Nawanshahar and Hoshiarpur of Punjab state with 50 respondents from each district. All 150 respondents were tested through questionnaire out of which 146 questionnaires were found complete for data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using tables, percentages, mean weighted score and frequency distribution. To identify the information needs of farm women, the respondents were asked to indicate their areas of information needs on a three point Likert-type scale with options namely: very important, important and not important. Weights assigned to these options were, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. Mean weighted score was used to give ranks to need for a particular area of information. The effectiveness of various sources for the farming women was measured with the help of three-point interval scale. The three points were high effectiveness, medium effectiveness and low effectiveness and assigned weighted scores of 3, 2, 1, respectively.

## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present study as well as discussions have been summarized under following heads:

### Socio personal characterisation of respondents:

Fig. 1 depicts the demographic information about the age of the respondents which indicates that among the 146 respondents, 36.98 per cent respondents belonged

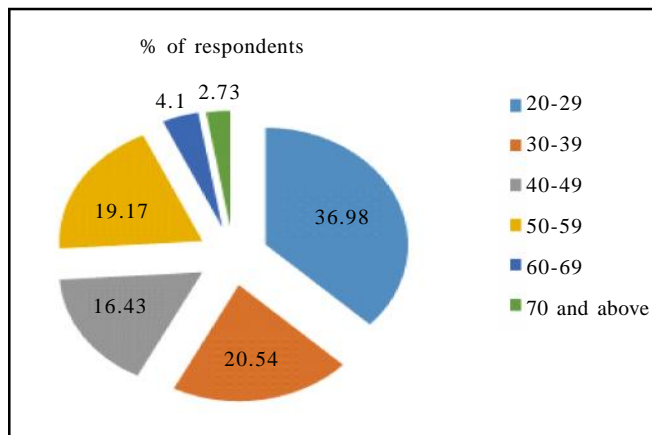


Fig. 1 : Distribution of respondents according to their age

to 20-29 years age group and 20.54 per cent belonged to 30-39 years age group *i.e.* more than 50 per cent of sample population was young and belonged to less than 40 yrs of age. While about 7 per cent of the respondents were above 60 years of age. Rest 35.56 per cent respondents fell in categories of 40-60 yrs of age. Out of total 146, 116 were married while 30 were unmarried.

Fig. 2 indicates the level of education of the respondents. The result shows that majority of the women had matric and secondary school education with a total of 50.67 per cent respondents in both the categories. Nearly 20 per cent farm women were educated upto graduation and post graduation level. However, 9.58 per cent farm women were illiterate and 4.10 per cent each

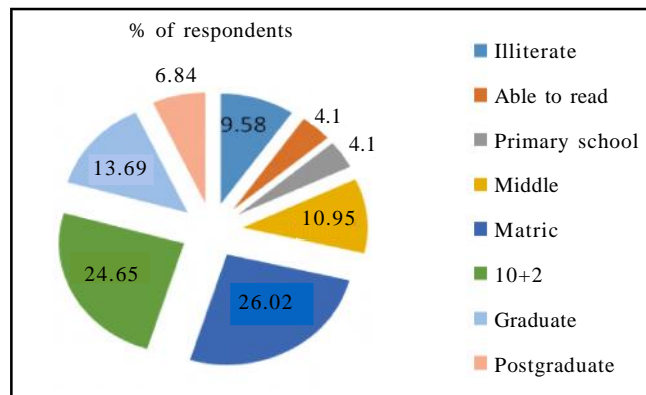


Fig. 2 : Distribution of respondents according to their qualification

were just able to read and primary educated.

### Information seeking behaviour characterization of respondents:

Table 1 shows that the information needs of rural women on the top was occupational facilities provided by the government in the form of inputs or credit (Rank I and II). 58.90 per cent and 54.80 per cent respondents referred this area of information as very important, respectively (Fig. 3). This observation was supported by Singh *et al.* (2016) but contrary to the observation Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) found that merely 10 per cent of respondents need information on government policies/politics. However, Anugwa and Agwu (2018) also

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their information needs

Information area	Very important		Important		Not important		Total weighted score	Mean weighted score (MWS)	Rank
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%			
Agriculture and veterinary related	86	58.90	60	41.1	-	-	378	2.58	I
Government schemes									
Transport facilities	20	13.70	126	86.30	-	-	312	2.13	XII
Weather information	24	16.43	122	83.57	-	-	316	2.16	XI
For soil preparation	16	10.95	130	89.05	-	-	308	2.10	XIII
Credit information	80	54.80	66	44.20	-	-	372	2.54	II
Crop/animal insurance	42	28.76	104	71.24	-	-	334	2.28	V
Agri/vety marketing-	26	17.80	120	82.20	-	-	318	2.17	X
Seeds and fertilizer availability	30	20.54	116	79.46	-	-	322	2.20	VIII
New agriculture/vety technology	40	27.39	106	72.61	-	-	332	2.27	VI
Animal purchase	28	19.17	118	80.83	-	-	320	2.19	IX
Animal treatment	64	43.83	82	56.17	-	-	356	2.43	IV
Water management	66	45.20	80	54.80	-	-	358	2.45	III
Pest management	38	26.02	108	73.98	-	-	330	2.26	VII

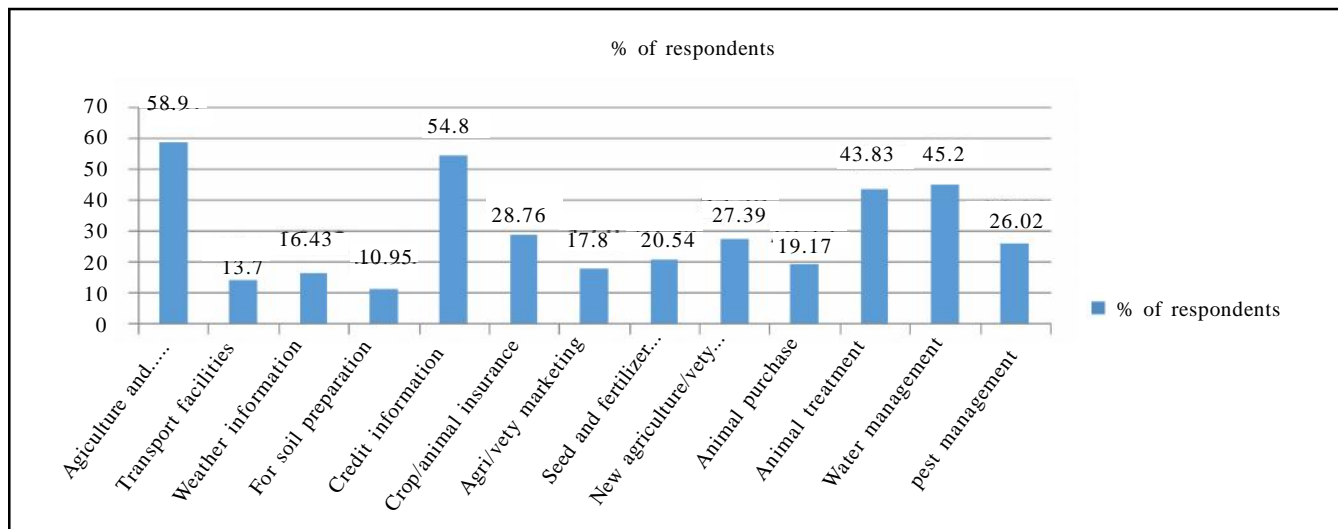


Fig. 3: Percentage of respondents according to their perception about information areas' importance

supported the findings of on going study and reported that rural women perceived information on productive resources such as land, inputs and capital (M=1.18); as their most important information needs.

About 45.20 per cent respondents feel the need to know about water management (III) and 43.83 per cent need information on animal treatment as very important (IV) probably due to the fact that both the aspects have involvement of farm women in it. While crop/animal

insurance (V), new agri/veterinary technology (VI), pest management (VII), seed and fertilizer availability (VIII), animal purchase (IX), agri/vety marketing (X) weather information (XI), transport (XII) and soil preparation (XIII) are the aspects of comparatively lesser needs 10-30 per cent respondents referred them as very important, indicating that farm women don't play a key role in these chores. Markedly, none of the respondents rated any of the area of information as not important

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents according to preference for use of sources of information and their effectiveness (n=146)

Sources of information	Frequency	%	Effectiveness			Total weighted score	Mean weighted score (MWS)	Rank
			High	Medium	low			
Radio	24	16.43	4	11	09	43	0.30	X
TV	80	54.79	68	11	1	391	2.67	I
Pashu Palan Mela	12	8.21	09	2	1	32	0.22	XII
Computer internet	40	27.39	29	09	02	107	0.73	V
Advertisement	36	24.65	12	12	12	72	0.49	VII
Facebook	26	17.80	14	8	04	62	0.42	VIII
Library	10	6.84	4	3	3	21	0.14	XIII
Newspapers	50	34.24	26	11	03	77	0.52	VI
Magazines	20	13.69	12	4	4	48	0.32	IX
Kisan Call Centre	6	4.10	1	2	3	10	0.06	XIV
University/KVK scientists	64	43.83	48	16	-	176	1.20	III
Mobile internet	72	49.31	44	21	7	181	1.23	II
VO/RVO/VI	22	15.06	11	6	5	39	0.26	XI
Family/griends	48	32.87	23	16	9	110	0.75	IV
NGO	2	1.36	-	-	2	2	0.01	XV
Progressive farmer	20	13.69	07	05	08	39	0.26	XI

which is a positive indicator of information seeking behaviour of farm women.

Table 2 indicates that the major source of information for the respondents was TV (MWS =2.67) due to its ease of availability. Study by Devi and Verma (2011) supports this finding as they inferred that TV was media of choice for information seeking. 59 per cent of the farm women denoted television and radio as their information source in study by Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) too, however, their major source of information was family and friends (95%). In ongoing study family/friends source was preferred by 32.87 per cent respondents (rank IV) due to fact that here they can interact, cross question, verify and follow up later on. Although progressive farmers also satisfy the need for face to face interaction, they were preferred by 13.69 per cent due to availability issues hence, effectiveness of this source fell to XI rank. Ansari and Sunetha (2014) also inferred that farm women preferred family and friends to seek information as compared to progressive farmers.

Mobile internet was the second choice of information source with 49.31 per cent respondents using it (MWS=1.23). University/ KVK scientists were preferred by a decent fraction *i.e.* 43.83 % (MWS=1.20, III). Newspaper and magazines were preferred by high fraction (34.24 and 13.69%) due to their availability at home. However, Library was preferred by merely 6.84 per cent farm women due to the constraint of availability and distance and the observation was well supported by Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) as 3 per cent of respondents in their study used library as information source.

Facebook was preferred by 17.80 per cent respondents. Computer internet was preferred by 27.39 per cent and Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) also support

this finding. MWS=0.73 for computer internet reflects its underutilization but higher efficacy. Worth mentioning is that usage of computer internet was quite lower than mobile internet due to availability and financial barriers.

Minimum preferred source was NGO (1.36%) due to lack of awareness and knowledge about their existence, where abouts and working. Library and Kisan Call Centre also had low preference (4.10 and 6.84%) due to non- availability and lack of awareness, respectively.

VOs were attested to be preferred by 15.06 per cent respondents as farm women were aware about this source and VOs have a fixed place of availability. But a female veterinary officer was the preferred choice for interaction.

From Table 3, it is clear that lack of time was the major constraint as 55.47 per cent respondents attested this and the figures are well supported by Protz (1998) who stated that due to family responsibilities farm women are unable to get benefitted from extension services especially when time of extension services coincides with their other household chores. FAO (1998) also supported this by stating that domestic tasks and social restraints give the farm women the constraint of time to seek the benefit from extension programme. The proceeding trend reflected that lack of awareness about availability of various information sources affected 42.46 per cent respondents and language barrier affected 35.61 per cent. Lack of knowledge about usage of information sources was a hindrance to 32.87 per cent, distance to KVK / university/any other source to 27.39 per cent and illiteracy was affecting 6.84 per cent respondents. Non-availability of required information was a constraint for 36.98 per cent farm women. Iqbal *et al.* (2013) also quoted similar results *i.e.* barrier to the accessibility of information by rural women were lack of resource as

Constraint	Frequency	%
Not aware about sources of information	62	42.46
Illiteracy	10	6.84
Non-availability of relevant information	30	20.54
Lack of knowledge about using information sources	48	32.87
Language barrier of information sources	52	35.61
Distance from the University/KVK/any other source	40	27.39
Lack of time	81	55.47
High cost of electronic gadgets	48	32.87

there was no single public library in their study area. Lack of time, language barrier and lack of knowledge about use of information sources like internet were some other constraints as reported by Iqbal *et al.* (2013).

### Conclusion:

This study depicts that governmental policies regarding inputs and credit is the major need for information for farm women in Kandi area of Punjab, it is important to reach rural women with these identified information needs so that their role in agriculture and allied enterprises gets improved greatly. Their preferred source of information are TV and mobile internet. Family and friends are preferred but their knowledge may not be upto the mark. Lack of time, lack of awareness about availability and knowledge to handle that source bars many farm women from using them in Kandi area of Punjab.

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