

Participation, awareness and health problems of women in agriculture

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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to elicit the information regarding participation, awareness and health problems of women in agriculture. A survey of 150 rural women was conducted through personal interview method. It was observed that the activities such as weeding, cotton picking, dibbling etc. were solely performed by women. Women spent more than six hours per day in the field. They performed all agricultural tasks in traditional manner and were unaware of the new technologies. Bodyache, headache, pain in knees, hands, shoulder were the common health problems reported by rural women.

Key words : Farm activities, Health problems, Awareness, Farm women

Rural women play an important role in agriculture. The contribution of farm women in Indian agriculture is estimated to be 50-60 per cent (Anonymous, 1981). About 60 per cent of agricultural operations are handled exclusively by women (Sri Sankari and Uma, 1995). In truth, women are involved in all aspects of agriculture, from crop selection to land preparation, to seed selection, planting, weeding, pest control, harvesting, crop storage, handling, marketing and processing.

The multifarious duties performed by the farm women in home, farm and allied fields make their life quite miserable as the tasks are quite tedious and time consuming. Most of the women have to work hard for performing various household and farm activities from early morning to late evening without rest (Sethi, 1991). Studies brought out that the farm activities were physically strenuous due to long hours of bending and standing in the field (Shrivastava, 1985; Borah and Kalita, 1998)

It is necessary to have a detail examination of women folk and its effect in terms of physical and mental health. It is necessary to analyze them in terms of physical stresses, the postural positions and their effect and occupation related health problems. Hence this study was undertaken with the objectives to know the participation of selected respondents in farm activities, to determine awareness of the selected respondents regarding drudgery reducing technologies related to farm activities and to know health problems faced by selected respondents while performing farm activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in five villages of Parbhani district namely, Erendeshwar, Ukhalad wadi, Asola, Bharswada and Tamaswadi. Two self-help groups (comprised of 15 rural women in each group) in each

village, thus a total of 150 farm women were enrolled and survey of these farm women was conducted by personal interview method. The main objective of the survey was to know their participation in farm activities and health problems/hazards in agriculture and awareness regarding new farm technologies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were tabulated and presented herewith.

Occupation of the selected families

From Table 1 it is clear that out of total families surveyed, 88.66 per cent families were land-holding families and only 11.33 per cent families were landless. The percentages of large and medium land holding category families were similar *i.e.* 24 per cent, whereas 40 per cent families were the small landholders.

Performance of farm activities individually or jointly with male/female members:

The information regarding participation of selected 150 farm women in farm activities is presented in Table 2.

It was observed that maximum farm women (88-96%) performed cotton picking, weeding, cotton stalk uprooting, uprooting of seedlings individually without any help of male members. The activities performed by women jointly with male members were maize shelling, preparation of tillage, manuring, sowing and threshing.

Frequency of performance of farm activities:

Majority of the farm women performed all the selected farm activities in winter and rainy seasons. The activities, which were performed in summer season were

Table 1 : Distribution of respondents according to land holding					(N=150)
Land holding category	Land holders			Landless	Total landholders
	Large	Medium	Small		
Percentage of the respondents	36(24)	37(24)	60(40)	17(11.33)	133(88.66)

Table 2 : Percentage of women performers and their frequency in farm activities								
Activity	Total no. of performer		Performers				Frequency of performance	
	Number	Individual	Joint with male	Joint with female	Daily	Weekly	Seasonal	
							Winter	Summer
Farm activities								
Cotton picking	145(96.6)	145(96.6)	-	-	145 (95.6)	-	140 (93.3)	145 (96.6)
Wheat harvesting	140(93.3)	140(93.3)	-	-	140 (93.3)	-	-	140 (93.3)
Weeding	145(96.6)	145(96.6)	-	-	145 (93.3)	-	145 (96.6)	10(6.6)
Top dressing of fertilizer	115(76.6)	115(76.6)	-	-	-	-	115 (76.6)	-
Cotton stalk uprooting	140(93.3)	140(93.3)	-	-	140 (93.3)	-	-	140 (93.3)
Maize shelling	55(36.6)	55(36.6)	-	-	-	-	55(36.6)	55(36.6)
Sowing	144(96)	-	-	-	-	-	144(96)	-
Irrigation	93(62)	-	-	-	-	-	40(26.6)	93(62)
Threshing	91(60.6)	-	91(60.6)	-	-	-	91(60.6)	91 (60.6)
Any other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentages

cotton-picking, wheat harvesting, uprooting of seedlings, irrigation, cotton stalk uprooting and maize shelling (Table 2).

Time spent for performing farm activities:

It was observed that maximum farm women spent on an average 6-7 hours (360-390 minutes) per day on farm activities. These results are in the line with the study conducted by Singh *et al.* (2001) on drudgery prone activities and women's participation in paddy cultivation in Meghalaya. The study revealed that women spent maximum time / day for harvesting of paddy crop (387 mins/day) followed by transplantation of seedlings (385 mins/day). Other time consuming activities were weeding (225 mins/day), uprooting of seedlings (219 mins/day) and threshing (183 mins/day).

Number of days spent per year on farm activities:

On an average, maximum days *i.e.* 90 days were spent by the farm women on weeding. Cotton picking activity required 50 days of the year whereas only 15 – 20 days were spent on remaining farm activities. Preparing of tillage required 8 – 10 days per season.

Awareness of farm women regarding drudgery reducing farm technologies:

It was observed (Table 3) that majority of the women

(94%) were aware about only threshing machine. Very few women were aware about the new technologies such as sprinkler (46.66%), Hand rake for stubble collection (33.33%) and cotton stalk puller for uprooting of cotton stalks (26.66%).

Few farm women were aware about groundnut decorticator (16%) and maize sheller (21.33%) and only 5.33 per cent women were aware about the new technology for wheat harvesting.

It was also observed that very few farm women possessed the drudgery reducing technologies *i.e.* cotton stalk puller (26.66%), maize sheller (6.66%), groundnut decorticator (4%), hand rake (10%) and sprinkler (4.6%) and thresher (2.66%).

Singh *et al.* (2001) observed that women's participation was comparatively very high than men in transplantation, weeding, harvesting etc. in paddy cultivation in Meghalaya. Farmers in Meghalaya were ignorant about the improved tools and machinery like tractors, weeder, sprayers, dusters, mechanical harvesters, threshers etc., which are very popular in other parts of country.

Majority of the women reported that unawareness was the reason for not possessing the drudgery reducing technologies. All the women reported that the cost of sprinkler and thresher was very high and they can not afford to purchase these. They were using these

Table 3 : Percentage of women regarding their awareness and possession of improved technologies

Farm activities	Aware	Not aware	Possess	Not possess
Cotton picking:	-		-	
a) Improved cot bag		150(100)		150(100)
b) Apron				
Wheat harvesting:			-	
a) Falcon sickle (plastic handle)	8(5.33)	142(94.6)		150(100)
b) Falcon sickle (wooden handle)				
Weeding:				
a) Saral khurpi	-	150(100)	--	150(100)
b) Hand wheel hoe	-	150(100)		150(100)
Top dressing of fertilizer: Fertilizer trolley	-	150(100)	--	150(100)
Cotton stalk uprooting:				
Cotton stalk puller	40(26.6)	110(73)	40(26.6)	110(73)
Maize shelling : Maize sheller	32(21.33)	118(78)	10(6.6)	140(93)
Groundnut/castor decortication:				
Decorticator	24(16)	126(84)	6(4.4)	144(96.00)
Uprooting of seedling:				
Mat nursery	--	150(100)	--	150(100)
Stubble collection: Hand rake	50(33)	100(67)	15(10)	135(90)
Potato harvesting:				
Tractor operated digger	-	150(100)	-	150(100)
Preparing tillage	-	150(100)	--	150(100)
Manuring	-	150(100)	-	150(100)
Sowing : Seeder	-	150(100)	-	150(100)
Irrigation : Sprinkler	70(46.6)	80(53.3)	7(4.6)	143(95.3)
Threshing : Thresher	148(98.6)	2(1.4)	4(2.6)	146(97.3)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages

equipment on rent basis.

The equipment like cotton stalk puller, maize sheller, groundnut decorticator and hand rake were not available in these villages.

Health problems faced during the performance of farm activities:

It was observed that bodyache, fatigue, shoulder pain, back ache, joint pains, pain in hands, etc. were the common health problems faced by farm women while performing all the farm activities (Fig. 1). Heat stress, insect bite, itching, cough and cold etc were the common problems reported by the farm women.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded from the study that women were found to be playing an important role in all the agricultural activities, throughout the year and in traditional way. They were working in the field more than six hours per day. Women without any help of male members solely

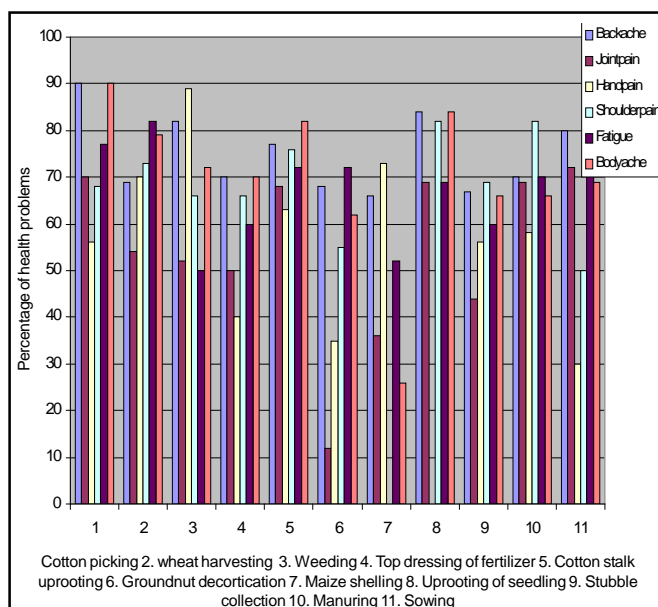


Fig. 1 : Health problems faced by farm women while performing farm activities

performed most of the activities. Majority of farmwomen were unaware about the new technologies developed for various farm activities. They were facing many health problems amongst which body and backache, shoulder pain, fatigue etc. were most common.

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