

# Status of rural women in the farm and non-farm activities as well as in the household's decision making process in Gurdaspur district of Punjab

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## ABSTRACT

The present study entitled, "Status of rural women in the farm and non-farm activities as well as in the household's decision making process in Gurdaspur district of Punjab" was conducted with the specific objectives, namely to examine the involvement of rural women in farm and non-farm activities and to quantify the role of different factors in the decision making process in the family during 2014-15 in the KVK, Gurdaspur's adopted villages in the district. A total of 100 rural households consisting of 70 farm households, spread over small, medium and large size categories and 30 agricultural labour households were selected at random. Survey method was applied for the collection of primary data. To achieve the objective of the study, various statistical tools like averages, percentages, etc. were used. It has been observed in the study that the female literacy rate was lower than their male counterparts in all the household categories in the study area. Women in the villages have been found to be performing in both the domestic as well as farm activities. In Punjab, farm women, usually, do not work in the fields but they do help in tending of cattle and handling of milk and milk products. However, women of agricultural labour families do work in the fields and also in the farmhouses in the village itself or in the houses of nearby towns/cities as maid servants. The study showed that rural women in the sample villages worked over 4600 to 5700 hours during the year on small farm, medium and large households and agricultural labour households over 5433 hours. Nearly one third of the farm women's and 18.93 per cent of the agricultural labour household women's time was used on farm related activities like crop production, cattle tending, mulching and processing, sale of milk, cooking and serving food to the labour, handling and storage of crop produce and other work including work in nearby houses and factories. And, the remaining two third of farm women's and 81.28 per cent of farm labour women's time was used on non-farm activities such as cooking and serving food to the family, cleaning of the house, utensils, sending children to the school, washing clothes, tailoring, knitting and *dari* making, going to fairs and other social occasions, visiting relatives, teaching children and some time for recreation activities like viewing T.V. etc. The rural women thus, worked for 12-16 hours a day and performed numerous jobs during the period. The study clearly brought about that, in the farm activities involving financial matters, women had very little say in the family, and they were found to have

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very little or even no say in the activities like, arranging inputs, decisions about the package practices, changes in the cropping pattern, engaging labour, etc. However, with regard to domestic activities concerning family affairs, they had good decision power to make purchases of household goods, participation in the social/ religious activities, keeping relations with the relatives and neighbors, etc. However, they were found to have a significant say in the health care of the kids only.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rural women in India are extensively involved in the farm activities and their contribution in the households' food security has been substantial. However, the nature and extent of their involvement differs with the system. The mode of their participation varies with the land-owning status of the farm households. Their roles range from manager to labourer. In overall farm production, their average contribution has been estimated at 55 to 66 per cent of the total labour. They have been reported to work in all aspects of cultivation including planting, thinning, weeding, applying fertilizers, harvesting, etc. Apart from their participation in the actual cultivation, women do participate in various forms of processing and marketing activities, also. Till recently, women under Indian set up have not been able to actively participate in income generating activities due to socio-cultural reasons like, illiteracy, low level of skills, lack of access to training, credit facilities coupled with lack of entrepreneurship, restricted mobility and gender bias. The low social status of rural women stems from insignificant economic status ascribed to them resulting in continued dependence on male members (Puhazendhi and Jayaraman, 1999). As a result of technical change and consequent increase in the cropping intensity; women have been benefitted as the aggregate labour demand per hectare has increased (Rajesh and Kombairaju, 1999).

The decision making process of every household in the rural areas is also an important segment that makes implementation of every plan quite easy. Although, husband and wife both are jointly responsible for making various decisions in the family, however, women's suggestions are not given due consideration. It is only because rural women are mostly illiterate and restricted mobility due to several cultural taboos. The results of some studies show that involvement of women in the decision making process of the family is not so encouraging however, there is an urgent need to motivate

the females to have the accurate knowledge about their legal rights (Godara *et al.*, 2014). Not much work has been reported to examine the involvement of rural women in the farm and non-farm activities as well as in the decision making in the border districts of Punjab. The present study is, therefore, an attempt in this direction with the specific objective of estimating the participation of rural women in such activities and their role in the decision making.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study has been conducted in the five adopted villages under KVK, Gurdaspur, namely, Sahari (Dhariwal), Pachhowal (Dinanagar), Bhangwan (Kalanaur), Sallopur (Kahnuwan) and Sadda-Sekha (Dorangla). A total sample of 100 households, consisting of 70 farm households (Small-35, Medium-25 and Large-10) and 30 agricultural labour households, was selected for the study. The usual cumulative cube root method has been applied to classify agricultural households into different categories, designating up to 6 acres of land holding as small, between 6 to 12 acres as medium and above 12 acres as large farm households. The requisite data on the structure of family, educational level, occupational status of the family members, family type, status of women in the house *i.e.*, whether working or housewife, economic and social status of the husband and the family, social status of the parental family, involvement of women in different activities with respect to farm and non-farm activities have been collected through suitably designed and pre-tested schedules by personal interview with the women heads of the selected households for the agricultural year 2010-11. And, this data was analyzed separately for different categories of the households.

## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized

under following heads :

### Family structure :

The biggest family size was observed in case of agricultural labour household (ALH) having 6.63 numbers of family members followed by large farm households and the lowest family size in case of medium category (Table 1). As regards the composition of the family, ALH consisted of 52.79 per cent children and 47.21 adults whereas other categories of farm households composed of 17.73 to 31.57 per cent children. The male-female ratio with respect to both adults as well as children was 1.36:1 in agriculture labour household followed by 1.26:1 in small farm category, 1.17:1 in large farm and 1.10:1 in medium farm category, respectively. However, only in case of ALH adult females were found to be proportionately more than their male counterparts, whereas in all other categories males were proportionately more than the females in case of children as well as in adults.

### Earning status :

Crop production and dairy farming have been found to be the main occupations of the people in the sample area. However, some of them are also engaged in other occupations such as in services, factories and shops. Women from the ALHs work as labourer in the fields

and as maid servants in large farm households. But, the farm family women do not usually work outside of their households. They do very little work in the field, but, invariably, render help in cattle tending at home.

About 43 per cent female earners were found against 57 per cent male earners in the rural households, out of which, 53.33 per cent males and 30.56 per cent females, respectively were engaged in the farming including dairying and remaining 7.78 per cent males and 12.22 per cent female earners were found to be engaged in other occupations (Table 2). And, out of the reported women engaged in the farming, no women was found to be working for the crop production as it was stated to be a social and customary tradition of men only. Some, comparatively, light operations like, storage of grains, shelling of maize cobs, etc. were reported to be performed by farm women. In case of agricultural labour, majority of the women were engaged in agriculture and in other occupations, while men were also found to be equally engaged in the agriculture as well as in other jobs, constituting 31.65 and 26.62 per cent of the total earners, respectively. The overall percentage of male earners, engaged in other occupations such as service and business was found to be very small, *i.e.*, 7.78 per cent. And in case of females it ranged between 2.07 per cent in small farm households to the maximum of 29.86 per cent in agricultural labour households. The higher percentage of

Category	Number of persons					Total
	Adults		Children			
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Small farm	2.47 (45.16)	2.03 (37.11)	0.58 (10.60)	0.39 (7.13)	5.47 (100)	
Medium farm	1.65 (39.86)	1.51 (36.47)	0.52 (12.56)	0.46 (11.11)	4.14 (100)	
Large farm	2.17 (35.87)	1.97 (32.56)	1.09 (18.02)	0.82 (13.55)	6.05 (100)	
Agricultural labour	1.48 (22.32)	1.65 (24.89)	1.94 (29.26)	1.56 (23.53)	6.63 (100)	
Overall	1.94 (34.83)	1.79 (32.13)	1.03 (18.49)	0.81 (14.54)	5.57 (100)	

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Category	Number of earners engaged in						Grand total
	Farming		Other occupations		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Small	0.89 (61.38)	0.53* (36.55)	0.00 (0.00)	0.03 (2.07)	0.89 (61.38)	0.56 (38.62)	1.45 (100)
Medium	0.96 (88.89)	0.12* (11.11)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.96 (88.89)	0.12 (11.11)	1.08 (100.00)
Large	1.04 (55.91)	0.67* (36.02)	0.15 (8.06)	0.00 (0.00)	1.19 (63.98)	0.67 (36.02)	1.86 (100.00)
Agricultural labour	0.74 (26.62)	0.88 (31.65)	0.33 (11.87)	0.83 (29.86)	1.07 (38.49)	1.71 (61.51)	2.78 (100.00)
Overall	0.96 (53.33)	0.55 (30.56)	0.14 (7.78)	0.22 (12.22)	1.03 (57.22)	0.77 (42.78)	1.80 (100.00)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages,

\* indicates that females are not fully engaged in farming but help partially in cattle tending

women earners in other occupations in case of agricultural labour households was due to the reason that they were working as maid servants in the large farm households. So, from the above discussion, it is clear that the maximum number of farm women engaged in farming (31.65 %) and other occupations (29.86 %) were from the agricultural labour households.

### Education level :

The education level of the adult members of selected households, revealed that the highest numbers of illiterate female as well as male members, to the tune of 50 per cent and 24.39 per cent, respectively were found in the agricultural labour households as compared to the other farm household categories (Table 3). So was the case with regard to the primary level education which was also found highest in the same agricultural labour households. So, overall education level was found to be relatively low in this category, where no one was found who studied beyond matriculation. Highest number of matriculates was found in the large farm household category. One unique thing found in this regard was that in every selected household regardless of the category to which it belonged, there was the presence of at least one family member who was either middle pass or matric pass. Presence of higher secondary family members was felt only in small and medium farm households, except one female member in large households however, graduates to the tune of twenty to twenty one per cent (both males as well as females) were found in large households followed by fifteen per cent males and thirteen per cent females in medium households and just ten per cent males and eight per cent females in the small households. Just, fifteen per cent males from the large households and five per cent males and about eight per

cent females from the medium farm households were found to be post graduates.

### Participation in the farm and non-farm activities :

Farm activities such as crop production, cattle tending, mulching, processing and sale of milk, marketing of farm produce, handling and storage of crop produce, etc.

Nil participation of rural household women was found in respect of crop production activities quoting the reason that the culture, custom and social stigma of the society forbids rural women from doing work in the fields regardless of their farm size and number of male workers in the family (Table 4). However, women from the agricultural labour households did about 18.72 per cent of their total work in the fields on the operations like planting, hoeing, harvesting/picking, etc. And, in case of tending of cattle including feeding and watering, rural women do lend a helping hand to their male counterparts in the house. Thus, on an average, rural household women were estimated to have worked for about three to ten per cent of their total work hours during the year for tending of their cattle in different categories of farm households including agricultural labour households.

Thus, on an average, about 30 per cent of total working period of the rural farm households' women and 19 per cent of the agricultural labour households' women has been found to be utilized for the farm activities for their livelihood.

Non-farm activities *i.e.*, women's engagement in multiple home based activities leading to under remuneration for their work. Rural women have to lead a very busy and relatively harder life. They have to spend long hours in many house related activities. The present study has accounted for such activities and apportioned

Level of education	Categories of households							
	Small farm		Medium farm		Large farm		Agricultural labour	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Illiterate	18 (20.93)	27 (37.50)	3 (7.32)	5 (13.16)	0 (0.00)	3 (15.78)	10 (24.39)	23 (50.00)
Primary	10 (11.63)	7 (9.72)	2 (4.88)	12 (31.58)	2 (10.00)	2 (10.53)	16 (39.02)	14 (30.43)
Middle	7 (8.14)	5 (6.94)	7 (17.07)	5 (13.16)	2 (10.00)	2 (10.53)	9 (21.95)	4 (8.70)
Matric	22 (25.58)	14 (19.44)	13 (31.71)	5 (13.16)	9 (45.00)	7 (36.84)	6 (14.63)	5 (10.87)
Higher secondary	20 (23.26)	13 (18.06)	8 (19.51)	3 (7.89)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.26)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Graduate	9 (10.46)	6 (8.33)	6 (14.63)	5 (13.16)	4 (20.00)	4 (21.05)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Post graduate	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (4.88)	3 (7.89)	3 (15.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Total	86 (100)	72 (100)	41 (100)	38 (100)	20 (100)	19 (100)	41 (100)	46 (100)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

the time spent on these activities like, food cooking and serving, house and utensil cleaning, child-care, washing cloths, tailoring, knitting and embroidery, *dari* making, visiting relatives, friends, fairs and other social occasions, teaching children, general shopping for the house, labour services in the medium and large farm houses as maid servants and, in the nearby brick-kilns and factories etc. Table 4 revealed that larger quantum of time of the rural women in all the categories of farm households was utilized on the routine household activities like cooking and serving food to their respective families, cleaning of house and utensils, child care, washing cloths, etc. Whereas, in case of agricultural labour households, significant contribution of the women in the range of 27 per cent was reported in the form of working as maid-servants in the other farm households. Though, the time reported on the household chores has also been reported here, but it was quite less in comparison to their counterparts in the farm households. Time spent on teaching their children was also found in farm household to the tune of seven to eight per cent which was nil in case of agricultural labour households. Visiting to their relatives, friends, to fairs or to other social occasions also

consumed seven to ten per cent of their total time in the farm households and about eighteen per cent in the labour households. Women's role in the general shopping for their respective houses has also been reported in all type of categories as much as four to seven per cent of their total work load. Although, the time spent by women on the activities like, tailoring, knitting and embroidery in the range of three to seven per cent has been reported in all the categories of households, however, *dari* making was mainly taken up by some women in the labour households consuming up to six per cent of their total time which was found just one per cent in the small farm households and nil in other two types of farm households.

Women from the labour households have also been reported to be doing labour-work in the brick-kilns and nearby factories consuming up to two per cent of their total annual working time.

#### Status of rural women in the decision making process :

*In the farm activities :*

It may be mentioned here that in some cases actual decision with respect to some activities like sale-purchase

Type of activity	Categories of rural households			
	Small	Medium	Large	A. Labour
<b>Farm activities</b>				
Crop production	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	737 (13.56)
Cattle tending	462 (10.03)	476 (8.32)	186 (3.69)	162 (2.98)
Milk sale and processing	447 (9.70)	760 (13.28)	805 (15.95)	0 (0.00)
Marketing of farm produce	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Handling and storage of crop produce	411 (8.92)	542 (9.47)	557 (11.04)	118 (2.17)
Sub total (A)	1320 (28.66)	1778 (31.07)	1548 (30.67)	1017 (18.72)
<b>Non-farm activities</b>				
Food cooking and serving	909 (19.74)	1167 (20.39)	1011 (20.03)	458 (8.43)
House and utensil cleaning	383 (8.32)	617 (10.78)	294 (5.83)	219 (4.03)
Child care	431 (9.36)	504 (8.81)	615 (12.19)	167 (3.07)
Cloth washing	439 (9.53)	324 (5.66)	159 (3.15)	127 (2.34)
Tailoring, knitting and embroidery	143 (3.10)	219 (3.83)	177 (3.51)	381 (7.01)
<i>Dari</i> making	55 (1.19)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	343 (6.31)
Participation in fairs and social occasions	142 (3.08)	202 (3.53)	257 (5.09)	492 (9.06)
Visit to relatives and friends	260 (5.65)	207 (3.62)	226 (4.48)	489 (9.00)
Teaching children	355 (7.71)	418 (7.31)	411 (8.14)	0 (0.00)
General shopping	168 (3.65)	286 (5.00)	349 (6.91)	157 (2.89)
As maid servant	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1458 (26.84)
Others	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	125 (2.30)
Sub total (B)	3285 (71.34)	3944 (68.93)	3499 (69.33)	4416 (81.28)
Grant total	4605 (100)	5722 (100)	5047 (100)	5433 (100)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

of land might not have taken place in the past years because such activities had not occurred in the family as such. In such cases, the responses of the farm women were recorded for hypothetical transactions, *i.e.*, what would have been the response of the farm women had the transaction occurred in reality. Aggregate response of the farm women in decision making with respect to farm activities in study area shows that those activities which had longer impact on the farm structure and its functioning and that involved monetary dealings, such as purchase of land, construction and repair of farm buildings and houses, borrowings and repayment of loans, sale and purchase of livestock, etc. 94.29 per

cent, 83.52 per cent, 81.90 of women were not consulted in all the three categories, respectively (Table 5). However, in the decisions like sale of milk, savings management and purchase of household goods, their opinions were either fully implemented (in 10 to 23 % cases) or partially implemented (in 64 to 70 % cases) by the heads of the families.

Also, there were some farm activities which were of routine nature and did not involve financial implications, in such activities, there was not much difference in the response of farm women with respect to the level of decision making on various farm activities among different categories of

**Table 5: Rural women's decision making status in farm activities, in the study area, 2014-15** (Percentage of households)

Farm activity	Small farms			Medium farms			Large farms			Overall		
	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD
Land transactions	95.00	2.50	2.50	92.88	7.12	0.00	95.00	5.00	0.00	94.29	4.87	0.84
Farm buildings	75.14	12.34	12.52	88.21	4.43	7.36	87.22	1.27	11.51	83.52	6.01	10.47
House issues	56.52	11.36	32.12	66.52	8.44	25.04	72.28	4.18	23.54	65.11	7.99	26.90
General shopping	46.04	6.48	47.48	59.42	7.46	33.12	49.41	8.85	41.74	51.62	7.60	40.78
Saving issues	5.76	36.43	57.81	3.83	6.22	89.95	20.88	10.45	68.67	10.16	17.70	72.14
Loan issues	72.15	11.76	16.09	84.12	10.88	5.00	89.43	9.47	1.10	81.90	10.70	7.40
Livestock matters	55.49	8.75	35.76	63.78	12.89	23.33	82.23	15.47	2.30	67.16	12.37	20.47
Milk sale	12.63	23.14	64.23	19.12	10.53	70.35	18.56	11.54	69.90	16.77	15.07	68.16

**Table 6: Rural women's decision making status in non-farm activities, in the study area, 2014-15** (Percentage of households)

Non-farm activity	Small farms			Medium farms			Large farms			Overall		
	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD	NC	ID	JD
Children's education	80.00	7.50	12.50	85.30	5.88	8.82	69.24	0.00	30.77	79.61	6.11	36.50
Family's healthcare	5.47	92.45	2.08	9.88	82.55	7.57	12.56	70.41	17.03	9.30	81.80	8.90
Family member (s) foreign visit	80.14	7.55	12.31	88.43	8.49	3.08	83.95	6.77	9.28	84.17	6.64	9.19
Children's marriage	18.55	8.71	72.74	26.44	6.22	67.34	11.73	17.99	70.28	18.91	10.97	70.12
Relations with relatives / friends	85.44	7.51	7.05	72.14	9.74	18.12	77.89	4.53	17.58	78.49	7.26	14.25
Socializing and religious ceremonies	52.41	15.66	31.93	61.27	15.73	23.00	81.46	9.56	8.98	65.05	13.65	21.30
Political matters	90.23	9.77	0.00	95.46	4.54	0.00	92.31	6.44	1.25	92.67	6.92	0.41

**Table 7 : Agricultural labour household women's decision making status in various activities, in the study area, 2014-15**

Sr. No.	Type of activity	Per cent labour households		
		NC	ID	JD
1.	Sale of milk	12.25	24.51	63.24
2.	Children's education	52.35	32.89	14.67
3.	Managing the savings	8.14	12.56	79.30
4.	Family healthcare	6.32	42.15	51.53
5.	Marriage of children	20.48	12.37	67.15
6.	Livestock matters	67.25	21.81	10.94
7.	Property matters	56.34	35.81	7.85
8.	Loans affairs	92.43	7.57	0.00
9.	Socializing and religious ceremonies	50.23	32.86	16.91
10.	Relations with relatives / friends	42.14	12.45	43.41
11.	Political matters	92.53	7.47	0.00

size groups. This indicates the uniform status of women irrespective of the size of the farm in the rural households in the state. It is because of our deep rooted socio-cultural values that give women their due status in the household.

#### *In the non-farm activities :*

The major domain of the activities of women is her Home, so, she controls the overall affairs of the house. She may not be the master but is the care taker of the house. So, in all the activities being performed within the four walls of the house, the women have their dominant say. These are the activities about which decisions are invariably made in each household. Normally, women hold the key of their domestic and socio-religious activities; however, except for few activities like health care and marriage of their children, the farm women didn't have their say in the decision making in respect to all other non-farm activities in all categories of these border district households. This facts shows that the execution of the opinions of the farm women with respect to majority of the non-farm activities in the household ranged from just 5 to 25 per cent. In case of health care and marriage of their children, women were, either, fully responsible or these were the joint decisions of the households. But in order activities also, they were equally consulted and their opinions implemented either fully or partially (Table 6).

#### *In case of agricultural labour households :*

Although, agricultural labour families are at the bottom level in the village economy, but their role in agriculture is very important. The decision regarding socio-economic and other activities having influenced on the functioning of the household is generally taken jointly by male and female heads of the family. We have tried to calculate the household activities taken by men or women of the family.

Some decisions are taken by only the male family heads. As in case of women from the agricultural-labour households, they were also found to guide and mould the decisions taken by the family heads, invariably, the males (Table 7). The response of the selected agricultural labour household women with respect to different activities listed in the table were recorded in the same three possibility frame criteria mentioned earlier, *i.e.*, (1) Not consulted, (2) Decision by herself, (3) joint-decision. The aggregate response of agricultural

labour household women to the ultimate decision making process with respect to different activities is presented in Table 7. The table shows that except in case of few activities like purchase of small tools, health care, participation in political matters, women in the households were least consulted. But in other activities they had a dominant role to play. In such activities like sale of milk, schooling of children, marriage of children, purchase of household goods, handling of savings, keeping relation with the neighbors and relatives, their writ ruled high with respect to the decisions taken.

Women's are allowed to take few decisions. If women could be empowered with more education and knowledge, then they can take part in decision- making in all farm operations in the near future. As seen in earlier section, women played varying role in overall decision making process with respect to different activities in the households. It ranged from zero to two on a unit scale *i.e.*, from not being consulted at all (Zero Score) to the full implementation of the decision taken by the women (Two Score). The effective role of women in decision making, varied depending upon the nature of activity also varied within the same activity. The latter was due to some factors related with the personality and other aspects of the women and the household structure that influence the status and decision making role of women in the households.

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