

# Scenario of consumer awareness among rural women of Ludhiana district and suggestions for their empowerment

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The present investigation was carried out to know the awareness of rural women regarding labels on packed food and textile items, quality assurance marks and consumer protection rights. The study was conducted on 120 rural women from four villages of Ludhiana district. Purposive sampling technique was used for sample selection and data were collected through an interview schedule. The results indicated that majority of the respondents had no knowledge about care symbols on textile goods, nearly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of respondents looked for Maximum Retail Price (MRP), manufacturing date and expiry date while purchasing packed food items. Almost all the respondents never looked for other details on labels. More than 90.00 per cent of respondents were unaware of Agmark, FPO, ISO and ECO mark, whereas more than 80.00 per cent of women were aware of ISI and Woolmark, but all of them were unable to distinguish between original clone ISI mark. Upto or less than five per cent of respondents had knowledge about Consumer Protection Rights and Act. So, there is a strong need to create consumer awareness among rural women through extension training programmes, consumer clubs and electronic media to avoid exploitation of rural consumers.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Awareness, Consumer, Care labels

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In our country, women play a dominant role in making household purchases. They purchase goods and services not only for themselves but also for their families. Hence, they play more than a pivotal role in seller consumer cycle. A survey has shown that women are the sole decision makers for consumable items, whereas in case of consumer durables, husband and wife jointly decide about the purchase (Seetharaman and Sethi, 2002). This shows that women fill the market places for purchases and are in frequent contact with all types of trade practices – fair/unfair. With technology and advertising racing far ahead of literacy, it has become difficult for women consumers to make a wise choice from entire range of products. The problem of obtaining quality goods are more in case of pre-packaged commodities which cannot be inspected before buying. Though many protective aids such as labels on products, consumer magazines, quality assurance marks, government notifications etc. are available, still the

consumers are at the receiving end. They are led away by high pressure selling methods, advertisements or buy on impulse and are exploited by the traders. The main reason for their exploitation is lack of awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities as consumers (Kaur, 2003).

As rural consumerism blooms, consumer awareness has become a necessity and consumer guidance agencies will have a positive role to play in such an atmosphere. In order to chalk out comprehensive consumer awareness programme, there is a need to study the existing knowledge of consumers regarding consumer protection aids and wise buying practices. Keeping this in mind, the present study has been undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To study the awareness of rural women regarding stamped markings/care labels on textile items.
- To determine the awareness of respondents regarding information providing labels on packed

food items.

- To study the awareness of respondents regarding quality assurance marks, consumer protection rights and Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
- To give suggestions for empowerment of women as consumers.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in four villages of Ludhiana district. Purposive random sampling technique was used for selecting respondents for the present study. For sample selection, four adopted villages of extension training scheme viz., Cheema Kalan, Galib Kalan, Rasoolour and Sherpur Kalan were purposively selected for convenience in data collection. From each of the selected villages, thirty families in which homemakers were actively involved in making household purchases and were educated upto matric level were selected for the study. Thus, a total of 120 rural women constituted the study sample.

Since women in Indian households are actively involved in purchase of family clothing and food items, so it was considered important to study the awareness of women regarding label information on items belonging to these areas.

The selected items were family clothings and packaged food items. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, an interview schedule was prepared and pre-tested on twenty non-sampled respondents to determine its suitability for achieving the objectives. The data were collected through personal interview technique and were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

### Socio-economic profile of respondents :

The data of Table 1 depict the background information of respondents *i.e.* age, education, family type and annual family income. As far as age of the respondents was concerned, the majority of respondents *i.e.* 43.33 per cent were in the age group of 31-40 years whereas more than 1/4<sup>th</sup> of respondents *i.e.* 29.17 per cent and 27.50 per cent were in the age group of 20-30 years and 41 and above, respectively.

Education is an important variable which affects the awareness of labels and habit of reading labels while

Sr. No.	Socio-economic characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age (years)	20 – 30	35	29.17
		31 – 40	52	43.33
		41 and above	33	27.50
2.	Education	Upto Matric	89	74.17
		Upto Graduation	29	24.16
		Above Graduation	2	1.67
3.	Family type	Nuclear	32	26.67
		Joint	88	73.33
4.	Annual family income (Rs.)	Upto 1,80,000	103	85.83
		1,80,000 – 3,00,000	15	12.50
		3,00,000 – 12,00,000	2	1.67

\* Multiple responses

Sr. No.	Stamped marking	Read markings			
		Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
1.	Blended fabric	10	8.33	110	91.67
2.	Mercerised	3	2.50	117	97.50
3.	Length/width/meter	8	6.67	112	93.33
4.	Washing instructions	2	1.67	118	98.33
5.	Pre-shrunk	6	5.00	114	95.00
6.	Washed wear	3	2.50	117	97.50
7.	Wrinkle free	1	8.33	119	99.17
8.	Mill's name	65	54.17	55	55.83

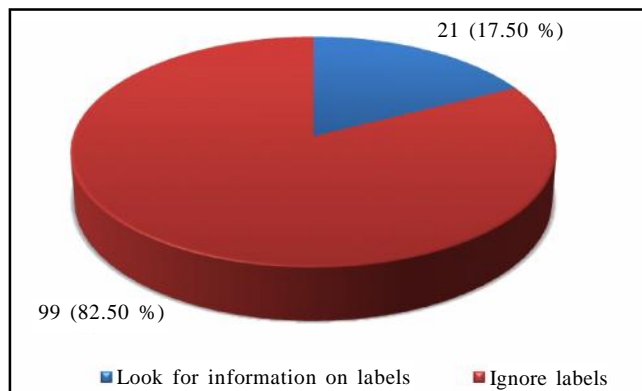
\* Multiple responses

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

purchasing. The data enclosed in Table 1 indicate that majority of selected respondents *i.e.* 74.17 per cent had education upto Matric level followed by 24.16 per cent, who had acquired education upto Graduation. Only 1.67 per cent had education above Graduation. Majority of respondents (73.33 %) were living in joint families and rest 26.67 per cent had nuclear family. Table 1 further indicates that annual income of 85.53 per cent respondents was upto 1,80,000 per annum while 12.50 per cent had income between Rs. 1,80,000 – 3,00,000 per annum. Only 1.67 per cent respondents had income between Rs. 3,00,000 – 12,00,000 per annum.

**Respondents’ practice of reading information provided on labels while purchasing textile items :**

Labelling is one of the most effective and assured means of providing information about the product. Labels enable consumers in making informed decisions about selection, use and care of a product. So, an effort was made to explore how many respondents looked for label information while purchasing household items. It was very disappointing to note that only 21(17.50 %) respondents looked for information provided on labels while making purchases, whereas vast majority 99 (82.50 %) ignored the label information due to time constraints, hasty purchase and lack of understanding of language, terms and symbols on labels (Fig. 1). Similar were the findings of Kaur (2005), who reported that majority of her respondents ignored informative labels upto some extent as they did not understand the terms/symbols mentioned on it and more than 60 per cent of her respondents ignored informative labels upto great extent due to 10 times constraints.



**Fig. 1 : Respondents' practice of reading information providing labels/stamped markings while purchasing textile items**

**Awareness of respondents regarding basic care symbols on clothing labels :**

It was observed from the data in Fig. 2 that majority of respondents were unable to understand the care symbols on clothing labels. Only 9.17 per cent respondents had awareness of symbol for washing instructions, 10.83 per cent had awareness of symbol for ironing instructions, 6.67 per cent had knowledge about dry cleaning instructions followed by awareness regarding symbol for drying instructions 2.50 per cent and bleaching instructions 1.67 per cent, respectively.

**Practice of reading stamped markings on fabric :**

The data in Table 2 reveal that vast majority of respondents *i.e.* more than 90 per cent ignored stamped marking on fabrics *viz.*, blended fabric, mercerized, length/width/meter,

Sr. No.	Label details on package	Read markings			
		Yes		No	
		F	%	f	%
1.	Price	44	36.37	76	63.33
2.	Net weight	8	6.67	112	93.33
3.	Ingredients	0	0.00	120	100.00
4.	Quality assurance mark	11	9.17	109	90.83
5.	Manufacturing date	39	32.50	81	67.50
6.	Expiry date	41	34.17	79	65.83
7.	Manufacturing address	3	2.50	117	97.50
8.	Batch number	0	0.00	120	100.00

\* Multiple responses  
 Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Sr. No.	Particulars	Awareness			
		Yes		No.	
		f	%	f	%
1.	Consumer Protection Rights	5	4.17	115	95.83
2.	CPA, 1986	3	2.50	117	97.50

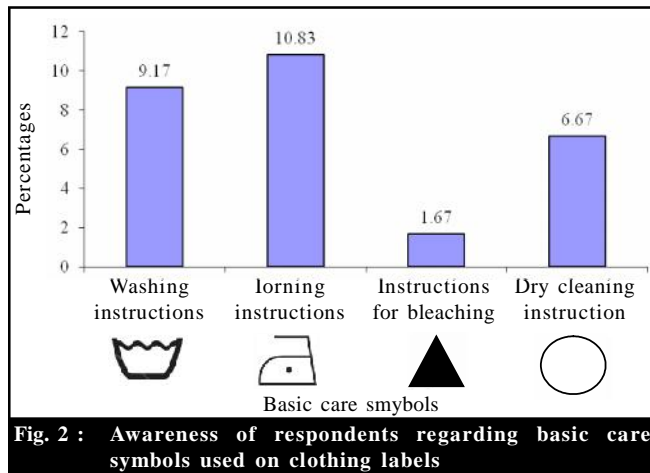


Fig. 2 : Awareness of respondents regarding basic care symbols used on clothing labels

washing instructions, pre-shrunk, wash and wear and wrinkle free, whereas 54.17 per cent were particular about reading mill's name before making a purchase.

**Practice of looking into information provided in labels of packed food items :**

The figures in Table 3 indicate the frequency of responses received for each kind of information looked for package while purchasing packed food items. The results revealed that price was a major concern and majority of respondents 36.37 per cent looked for it on label, nearly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> respondents 32.50 per cent and 34.17 per cent looked for manufacturing and expiry date, respectively, whereas only 6.67 per cent and 9.17 per cent respondents looked for net weight and quality assurance marks on the labels of packed food, respectively. However, information regarding ingredients, batch number and manufacturer's address were not given much attention while purchasing packed food items. These findings are in tune with the research findings of Kaur (2003), who also revealed that Indian women continue to be highly price conscious but pay less attention to other important information viz., quality assurance mark, ingredients, manufacturer's address and batch/lot number etc., the knowledge of which is important for protection from business malpractices of short weight, adulteration and brand imitation.

**Awareness of respondents regarding quality assurance marks :**

The consumers of today are confronted with the problem of deciding what they should look for in a product that would meet their requirements. In order to enable the consumers to identify the products of daily use of acceptable quality, quality assurance mark scheme was introduced. Quality assurance marks on products indicate the quality of a product. Thus, knowledge about quality assurance marks on processed food and textile items was assessed. On probing the data in Fig. 3, it was found that majority of respondents 101 (84.17%) and 97

(80.83%) were aware of ISI and woolmark, respectively, whereas only 9 (7.50 %) and 7 (5.83 %) respondents had knowledge about Agmark and FPO mark, respectively. However, none of the respondents had awareness about Eco-mark. So, awareness about quality assurance marks need to be created in rural area so as to enable the consumers to make right choice.

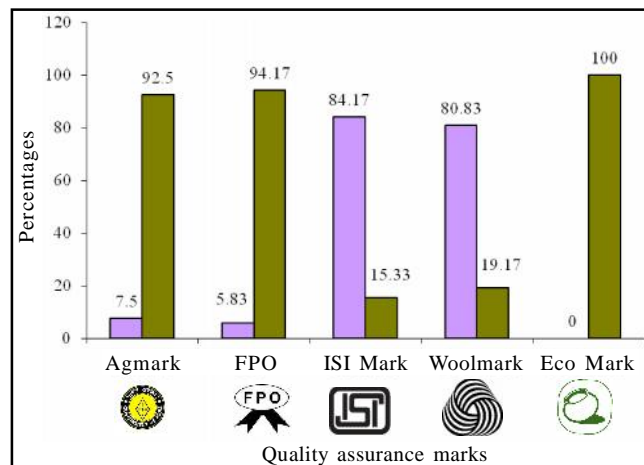


Fig. 3 : Awareness of respondents regarding quality assurance marks on packed food and textile items

**Awareness of respondents regarding consumer protection right and CPA, 1986 :**

On probing the data in Fig. 4 and 5 it was observed that upto or less than 5.00 per cent of respondents were aware of Consumer Protection Rights and Consumer Protection Act, 1986 (Table 4). The results correspond to the results reported by Sharma (2000) who reported that consumers were not aware of their rights and they think that approaching a consumer court is a long winded affair even though it is not. From these findings it can thus be concluded that one of the major obstacles in the growth of consumer movement was lack of knowledge among consumers about their rights and CPA, 1986. So, there is a need to amend/create awareness about Consumer Protection Rights and Consumer Protection Act, 1986 among consumers.

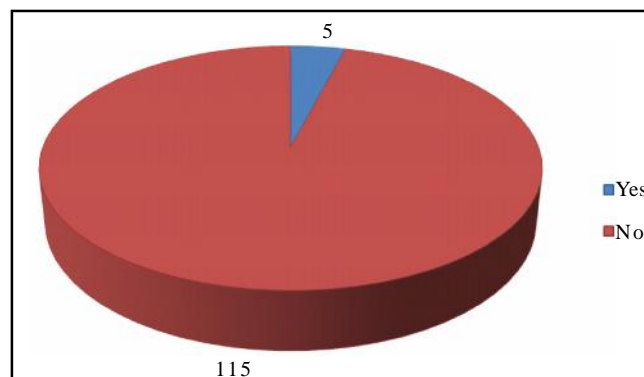
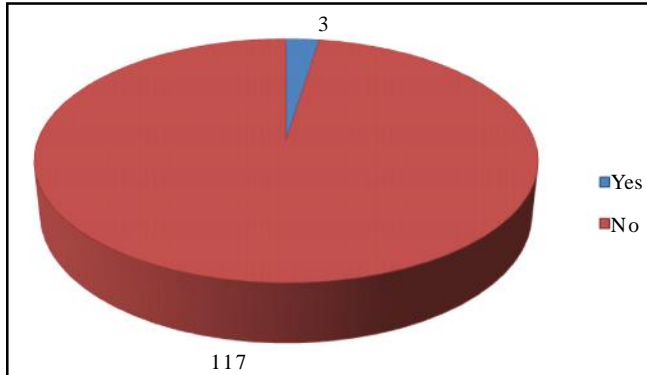


Fig. 4 : Awareness of respondents regarding Consumer Protection Rights (n=120)



**Fig. 5 : Awareness of respondents regarding CPA, 1986 (n=120)**

#### **Suggestions for empowerment of women as consumer :**

Based on the results of the present investigation and observations made during the field work, the following suggestions are made:

- Conduct extension training programme on consumer awareness.
- Distribute literature.
- Set up consumer clubs in each village.
- Prepare documentaries on consumer awareness.
- Publicize Consumer Protection Rights/CPA, 1986 and quality assurance marks through print and electronic media.
- Increase duration and frequency of T.V. and Radio programmes related to consumer issues.

#### **Conclusion :**

Majority of rural consumers were ignorant about their rights and responsibilities as consumer. It was disheartening to note that inspite of Government's effort, less than five per cent respondents were aware of Consumer Protection Rights and CPA, 1986. Hence, there is a strong need to create consumer awareness among rural women so that they may be able to protect themselves from being cheated in the market.

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