

ASSESSING GENDER ROLE IN DECISION MAKING REGARDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN RURAL PUNJAB

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The Pakistan society is male dominated and all matters concerning outside home are usually dealt with by the male members. The women remain busy in household chores and other domestic works. However, the women in the rural areas perform a number of functions out of household such as participation in agricultural operations including crop production, looking after the farm animals and collection of fuel wood for domestic use and fetching water from distance. But the participation of women folk in socio-economic activities seems to be not encouraging. Therefore, a study was conducted to assess gender role regarding socio-economic activities in rural Punjab. District Chakwal was selected as the universe of the research study. A snap shot survey research was conducted for collection of data. A well thought/conceived and pre-coded instrument of data collection (interview schedule) was applied in the field. The data were analyzed by using SPSS. The results showed that Majority (about 71%) of females (wives) in rural area of the Punjab and especially in rain fed area consulted their husbands to larger extent regarding family matters, where as on the other hand, their husbands either do not consult or consult at very low extent (about 8%) in family matters. Females were more involved in deciding process on family matters followed by farm, social and economic matters. Female respondents reported that husbands were the main decision makers (about 90%) in the family. However, on the overall situation, the female respondents reported that the highest involvement of their husbands in decision-making was in family matters, education of children and their marriages. Patriarchy; cultural values and ego were main constraints of limiting the role of women in decision making of socio-economic activities in rural Punjab. It is suggested that females should be more motivated in taking better decisions in sectors of agricultural marketing, economic matters and farm operations on priority basis and females working together with males by consulting with one another in household and farm activities should be educated to the male and female children in educational institutions.

Keywords: Patriarchal Society, discrimination, intervention, head of household, assertiveness, unfeminine, gender segregated, socioeconomic variable, emotionally expressive

INTRODUCTION

Gender analysis is the process to assess the differential impact of policies, programs, projects and legislation on men and women. Gender analysis recognizes that the realities of men and women's lives are different, and equal opportunities do not necessarily mean equal results (Penh, 2006; Naqvi and Shehnaz, 2003). Gender is useful socio-economic variable to analyze roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities, and incentives of the people who are involved in development discourse.

When we discuss about gender, our minds immediately go to women, because we know that women have been the main victims of gender biases and discrimination in development. Specifically, development experts are interested in the gender issues, which should be addressed by policy interventions for rural development. Women are expected to be emotionally expressive, dependent,

passive, cooperative, warm, and accepting of subordinate status in marriage and employment. Competitiveness, assertiveness, anger, and violence are viewed as unfeminine and are not generally tolerated as acceptable female behavior (Shahnaz, 1996; Rahman and Alamu, 2003).

A number of factors contribute to this disadvantaged position of women in developing world. They have low levels of skill, literacy and lack of organizational structures, through which resources could be mobilized for their own benefit. A gender segregated school system limits their access to formal education, as boys' schools are accorded priority (Penh, 2006). While poor health conditions and high fertility rate constraint their development, lack of mobility further aggravates the situation (Parveen, 2001; Rani, 1992).

Gender issues in agriculture and rural development policy in Asia and the Pacific (FAO, 2000) has recommended that it is essential to collect rural women statistics for formulation of policy regarding to rural

development in Pakistan. Further, it is recommended that all data collected should be gender disaggregated. It is also recommended in the same document that in-depth qualitative studies of women's role in the agriculture sector must be undertaken to comprehend the women's constraints and their share and participation by crops and seasons (Khuskh and Hisbani, 2004).

The most downtrodden women in Pakistan belong to backward and traditional areas like Chakwal, Bhakkar, Muzafar Garh, Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahawal Nagar districts in particular and in rural area in general (Sathar and Kazi, 1997). The sociologists (Lovenbalk *et al.*, 2003) attribute this phenomenon of relegating women to low paid chores as an outcome of feudal system in which men have more importance due to their muscle power, consequently they choose economically more rewarding tasks and give less paying activities to the women (Atta, 2000).

Today, it is widely accepted that the full participation of all citizens, both men and women is the best way to build and sustain society that will reduce conflict and achieve human development (Damisa and Yohanna, 2007). Comprising over 50 percent of the world's population, women are essential to address the pressing challenges of new era. The workingwomen in the rural areas of Pakistan are facing a number of challenges ranging from lack of access to education, resources, property rights and skill development to gender discrimination in the labor markets (Safdar, 1996).

In Pakistan, women are working in the crop and livestock production, cottage industry and household maintenance. Their work is not recognized due to lack of adequate statistics. Disegregated data on women and their activities, particularly in non-farm households, is not available to planners for policy making and decision making level. Therefore it is necessary to analyze the gender involvement in agriculture decision-making and rural development.

Pakistan is a traditional patriarchal society and its social formation is based on the inequitable division of class, caste and sexual difference. The allocation of roles and functions in society is made on the basis of sexual differences and social space is organized in accordance with the principle of segregation between women and men (Naqvi and Shehnaz, 2003). Thus the home and domestic enclosure-the private sphere is traditionally allocated to the women or belongs to the women, who are cast exclusively in the domestic role of mothers and wives, while the public sphere-space of economic productivity is legitimately the realm of men, who are seen as the providers. In Pakistan, the disparity between economic growth and social

indicators is the highest in the world (Hassan, 2008). Social indicator differences for women and men reinforce the low social index and expose the poverty and alienation at the other end of the social spectrum. Therefore, the study in hand was conducted in rural Punjab (Chakwal district) to assess the gender role in socio-economic activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional survey research design was used for the study conducted for gender mainstreaming. District Chakwal, especially rural area was selected as the universe of research. District Chakwal has four tehsils and it had total population of 1059,491 persons (Census, 1998; Govt. of Pakistan, 2007). Present estimated population of this district is 1.31 millions and total literacy rate is 69.02%. There are 58 rural and 10 urban union councils in the district and total villages are 461.

A multistage random sampling process was used for this research study. Two tehsils out of four were selected by employing simple random sampling technique. Afterwards five villages were selected randomly from the selected two villages and twenty households (farming and non-farming families) of each village were further selected by using systematic random sampling technique. One married couple from the selected households was selected as respondents and total 400 respondents (200 female and 200 males) were interviewed. The data were collected through pre-tested interview schedule survey. The collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Moreover, the data were analyzed by calculating simple frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A research study to assess the gender role in socio-economic activities in rural Punjab was conducted. The results are described in the following paragraphs:

Gender role regarding socio-economic activities

It is evident from the data in Table 1 that majority (about 71%) of females (wives) in rural area of the Punjab and especially in rain fed area consulted their husbands to larger extent regarding family matters. Where as on the other hand, their husbands either do not consult or consult at very low extent (about 8%) in family matters. It is also revealed from the same table that the situation is similar regarding other socio-economic aspects like, farm operation, agri-marketing, participation in social matters, matters regarding child

Table 1. Involvement level of spouses in decision making

Socio-economic activities	Wife respondents (200)					Husband respondents (200)				
	1 Freq. & %	2 Freq. & %	3 Freq. & %	4 Freq. & %	5 Freq. & %	1 Freq. & %	2 Freq. & %	3 Freq. & %	4 Freq. & %	5 Freq. & %
Family matters	11 (5.5)	17 (8.5)	30 (15.0)	66 (33.0)	76 (38.0)	-	1 (0.5)	5 (2.5)	10 (5.0)	5 (2.5)
Farm operations	50 (25.0)	36 (18.0)	26 (13.0)	46 (23.0)	42 (21.0)	1 (0.5)	2 (1.0)	8 (4.0)	6 (3.0)	4 (2.0)
Agri. Marketing matters	67 (33.5)	47 (23.5)	31 (15.5)	24 (12.0)	31 (15.5)	1 (0.5)	-	10 (5.0)	8 (4.0)	2 (1.0)
Participation in social matters	37 (18.5)	37 (18.5)	47 (23.5)	32 (16.0)	47 (23.5)	-	1 (0.5)	7 (3.5)	10 (5.0)	3 (1.5)
Child marriage matters	27 (13.5)	29 (14.5)	32 (16.0)	43 (21.5)	69 (34.5)	-	1 (0.5)	5 (2.5)	11 (5.5)	4 (2.0)
Livestock care and management	61 (30.5)	48 (24.0)	34 (17.0)	28 (14.0)	29 (14.5)	-	2 (1.0)	5 (2.5)	10 (5.0)	4 (2.0)
Economic matters	45 (22.5)	43 (21.5)	32 (16.0)	35 (17.5)	45 (22.5)	-	1 (0.5)	7 (3.5)	10 (5.0)	3 (1.5)
Education of children	21 (10.5)	27 (13.5)	34 (17.0)	43 (21.5)	75 (37.5)	-	1 (0.5)	5 (2.5)	12 (6.0)	3 (1.5)
Conflict resolution	41 (20.5)	29 (14.5)	32 (16.0)	35 (17.5)	63 (31.5)	-	2 (1.0)	4 (2.0)	11 (5.5)	4 (2.0)

Scale: 1 = to some extent. 2 = below average extent. 3 = to average extent. 4 = to above average extent. 5 = to much above extent

marriage, livestock management, and education of children and conflicts management at house level as well as at community level.

Averaging out the Likert scale measured data on the above delineated issues confirmed the described order with minor changes in position for issues like economic matters, farm operations, agricultural marketing and livestock care (Table 2). The information on different aspects of gender involvement was also grouped into family matters, farm matters, social matters and economic matters. Although statistically significant differences in evaluation of various statements were present across gender, however, an interesting pattern of involving females was observed. It was found that females are more involved in deciding process on family matters followed by farm, social and economic matters. These results are in line with the findings of Vandana (2004) and Damisa and Yohanna (2007) who reported that females were more influencer in decision making process in family matters as compared to social and economic matters.

Determinants of overall decision making

It was reported by female respondents (Table 3) that husbands were the main decision makers (about 90%) in the family. However, on the overall situation, the female respondents reported that highest involvement

of their husbands in decision-making was in family matters, education of children and their marriages. It is also reflected from Table 1 that females are relatively independent in decision-making regarding farm operation, livestock management and economic matters. They consulted with their husbands to some extent, which means that they themselves are the main decision makers in these activities. These results corroborate with the findings of Naqvi and Shehnaz (2003), Damanisa Yohanna (2007), and Atta (2000) that females were comparatively independent in decision making regarding agricultural and economic activities

Constraints regarding to decision making

Pakistan in general and its rural area in particular is a traditional patriarchal society and its social formation is based on the inequitable division of class, caste and sexual difference. The allocation of roles and functions in society is made on the basis of sexual differences and social space is organized in accordance with the principle of segregation between women and men. The respondents (both husbands and wives) were inquired to reflect about the constraints/reasons responsible regarding different level and degree of involvement of male and females in decision making. The results presented in Table 4 show that patriarchy; cultural

Table 2. Gender based ranking by mean scores about the degree of empowerment in decision-making

Nature of issues	Wife respondents (n=200)			Husband respondents (n=200)			F-Ratio	Signif. Level
	Mean ¹	Standard Deviation	Ranking order	Mean ¹	Standard Deviation	Ranking order		
Family matters	3.750	1.370	1	0.415	1.229	1	656.719	0.000
Education of children	3.485	1.582	2	0.400	1.195	3	496.037	0.000
Children marriage matters	3.365	1.573	3	0.407	1.215	2	441.730	0.000
Conflict resolution	3.120	1.646	4	0.400	1.203	4	356.002	0.000
Participation in social matters	2.930	1.529	5	0.390	1.168	7	348.593	0.000
Farm operations	2.840	1.583	6	0.365	1.122	9	325.398	0.000
Economic matters	2.810	1.567	7	0.392	1.171	6	304.576	0.000
Livestock care & management	2.450	1.483	8	0.397	1.193	5	232.099	0.000
Agricultural marketing matters	2.385	1.499	9	0.367	1.106	8	233.901	0.000
Gender involvement groups								
Involvement in family matters	10.580	4.035	1	1.226	3.626	2	592.935	0.000
Involvement in farm matters	7.675	4.129	2	1.136	3.404	1	296.825	0.000
Involvement in social matters	6.050	2.745	3	0.790	2.363	3	421.795	0.000
Involvement. In economic matters	2.810	1.567	4	0.392	1.171	4	304.576	0.000

Table 3. The main decision maker

Decider	Wife respondents (200)		Husband respondents (200)	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
Himself/herself	9	4.5	179	89.5
Spouse	105	52.5	6	3.0
Any one else	86	43.0	15	7.5
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0

Table 4. Main constraints regarding decision making by spouses

Constraints	Wife respondents (200)				Male (200)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age
Patriarchy	160	80.0	40	20.0	190	95.0	10	5.0
Cultural values	134	67.0	66	33.0	187	93.5	13	6.5
Ego	145	72.5	55	27.5	179	89.5	21	10.5

values and ego were the main constraints of limiting the role of women in decision making of socio-economic activities in rural Punjab. Similar findings were reported by Rani (1992), Parveen (2001) and Hassan (2008).

CONCLUSION

1. Majority (about 71%) of females (wives) in rural area of the Punjab and especially in rain fed area consulted their husbands to larger extent regarding family matters, where as on the other hand, their

husbands either do not consult of consult at very low extent (about 8%) in family matters.
 2. Females were more involved in deciding process on family matters followed by farm, social and economic matters.
 3. Female respondents reported that husbands were the main decision makers (about 90%) in the family. However, on the overall situation, the female respondents reported that the highest involvement of their husbands in decision-making was in family matters, education of children and their marriages.

4. Patriarchy, cultural values and ego were the main constraints of limiting the role of women in decision making of socio-economic activities in rural Punjab.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Females should be more motivated in taking better decisions in sectors of agricultural marketing, economic matters and farm operations on priority basis by national and international agencies, where females should be focused for decision making in the said matters; while males should be motivated to encourage the females decision making regarding to agriculture and rural development.
- Respecting females and working together with males by consulting with one another in household and farm activities should be educated to the male and female children in educational institutions. This is important to inculcate these elements in the character building right from their childhood.

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