



Research Article

HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY CHALLENGES IN THE WAY OF EMPOWERING FARM WOMEN IN PUNJAB

Mehak Jain\* and Shalini Sharma

Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 141002

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to analyze household and community challenges among farmwomen in Punjab. A multistage random sampling technique was used for the collection of data and the sample size was 240 farm households. The findings of the study revealed that among household challenges, patriarchal norms (2.04) were found major challenge (Rank I) while at the community level farm women were deprived of legal rights (rank I) and unsupportive community ethics (rank II). Lack of capacity-building avenues (rank I) was another challenge faced by women at the market level. The study suggested that normative patterns of the family and society at large towards women need to be made more inclusive to overcome the myriad barriers imposed upon rural women, especially farm women.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in India are the society's backbone and a significant resource in agriculture and rural economics. They contribute significantly to agricultural production, allied household activities, and the pursuit of diverse livelihood strategies. These chores include growing crops, cleaning animals, field preparation, seeding, drying grains, preparing meals, collecting fodder, caring for dependents, and maintaining their dwellings. They have always been food producers from seed to kitchen. Women endure a disproportionate share of the workload in food production, however, due to gender discrimination they receive lesser pay for their work. Women's multiple roles lead to a significant contribution to the productive system in real terms. However, it is unfortunate that her contribution is not appropriately recognized and they remain invisible workers and her contribution is not qualified in the male-dominated society. They have been underrepresented in the development process. Even after 7 decades of Indian independence, 70 percent of people are living in rural areas, and 60.4 percent of people are depending on the agricultural sector for their livelihood (Dutta and Bhakta 2017, Sunitha *et al* 2018). Women in India still face significant disadvantages in wages, land ownership, and representation in local farmer groups. Aside from that, women have several challenges due to limited access to productive resources in agricultural production, which prevents them from increasing productivity and their participation as decision-makers in these activities is questionable. (Slathia 2015, Shrivastva and Shrivastava 2017) In all developing nations, women contributed significantly to the agricultural and rural economies. Agriculture required hard effort, and it

was seen that women contributed more to agriculture than men did when the task was divided by gender. (Rathirane 2013, Mishra 2014) Rural women play a very significant role in the working women population in our country so it is important to understand their role and status in agriculture. According to the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) 2018, 80 percent of women are economically employed in the agriculture sector. It consists of 48 percent of self-employed farmers and 33 percent of the agricultural labor force.

Punjab is particularly proud of itself among the Indian States for its remarkable contributions to agricultural growth. Participation of women is seen in some farming activities like threshing, grading, harvesting, weeding, and post-harvesting operations. (Sidhu 2011, Rani *et al* 2022 and Singh *et al* 2022) Agriculture is perceived to be a male-dominated activity, and women working in the field are viewed as simple helpers. Although sharing an equal hand with husbands, farm women faced many problems, constraints, and difficulties, many faced sexual assaults, and abuse inside the household situation and outside of their households too. Their work involved lots of drudgery. They did continuously their work without taking any rest. They faced many physical problems due to their job. Now many improved technologies are developed to reduce their drudgery. Society remained feudal and women's development appalling resulting in a low gender development index. (Kaur and Kaur 2014 and Kaur 2018) Furthermore, traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement. Women are generally married at a young age, quickly become mothers, and are in dual burden of

\*Corresponding author: Mehak Jain

Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 141002

domestic and financial responsibilities. Women are frequently undernourished since they are usually the last member of a family to eat and lastly to get medical attention. Not only discriminated against in the allocation of food and health care, educationally too, they are deprived of even basic education. Science and technology were made a very important part of daily living. Rural women also get benefited from these technologies. This science and technologies resolve many problems in rural women's life (Acharya 2016, Dutta and Bhakta 2017). Many labor-saving technologies related to household and field situations were introduced to them. However, because of some constraints such as low literacy rate, less technical knowledge, less support from family members, and low credit, they did not use these innovations and on the other hand, men get more benefits from them. Technological innovations and developments in agricultural mechanization were done keeping menfolk in center stage and hardly any innovation was women-centric and addressed to the drudgery reduction of women. With this backdrop present study was an effort to measure household and community challenges to empower farm women in Punjab.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in three agro-climatic zones of Punjab state namely sub mountainous zone, central plain zone, and south-western zone. In the first stage, one district was selected randomly from each selected zone, and in the second stage, two blocks from each selected district were selected randomly for the study. Similarly, in the third stage, three villages from each selected block were taken randomly. So in the present study, six blocks and eighteen villages were selected from three zones of Punjab. From each selected block, forty households based on probability proportionate from three categories of farm households i.e. small, medium, and large were selected randomly. The total sample size was 240 farm households. Self-structured interview was formulated for the collection of data. The data were tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted by simple percentages, means scores, and ranks to reach logical conclusions. The findings of the study are discussed as under.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1** Distribution of farm women based on ownership of material possessions

Ownership of land	Small n <sub>1</sub> = 77	Medium n <sub>2</sub> = 66	Large n <sub>3</sub> = 97	Total N=240
No ownership	73 (94.82)	61 (92.43)	90 (92.78)	224 (93.34)
Sole Ownership	1 (1.29)	3 (4.54)	5 (5.15)	9 (3.75)
Joint ownership	3 (3.89)	2 (3.03)	2 (2.07)	7 (2.91)
<b>Owing Gold/Silver items</b>				
Own control	17 (22.07)	21 (31.82)	37 (38.14)	75 (31.25)
No control	60 (77.93)	45 (68.18)	60 (61.86)	165 (68.75)

Note-Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Land and property ownership empowers women by providing income and security. Ownership of land is a major source of power and authority in rural India and Punjab is an agricultural state in its famous for disputes related to its ownership (Jodhka 2002, Judge 2002, Aggarwal *et al* 2007,

Beteille 2012). In many countries around the world, women's property rights are limited by social norms and customs, restricting their economic status and opportunities to rise out of poverty. Although the Indian constitution provides equal property rights under the Hindu Succession Act 2005 her status towards land rights were limited. According to Agricultural Census 2015-16 of India, women's ownership of operational land holdings was just 13.87 percent, and in the state of Punjab, it was only 1.55 percent. The present study has also tried to examine the ownership status of land among farm women in the state of Punjab. The study analysed that the majority (93.3%) of respondents had no ownership of land while 3 percent and 2 percent had sole and joint ownership over land respectively. Further, the study also identifies the possession of precious ornaments by respondents. Owing gold and silver ornaments is one of the secured possession for the women. It provides security in difficult times and is constituted as the most important component of stree dhan by law (IPC 406). The study also found that more than two third (68.7%) of respondents had no control over their possessions. It was reported that either mother-in-law, father-in-law, or another elder member of the family had control over those ornaments whereas 31 percent had self-control over their jewelry. The results were according to Roy and Tisdell 2002, and Pandey and Gautam 2022 respectively.

**Table 2** Challenges faced by farm women at household level

Particulars	Small n <sub>1</sub> = 77		Medium n <sub>2</sub> = 66		Large n <sub>3</sub> = 97		Overall N=240	
	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R
Household chores too taxing	1.95	IV	1.73	III	1.73	III	1.99	II
Patriarchal norms	2.10	II	1.92	I	2.08	I	2.04	I
Lack of education/skill	2.04	III	1.82	V	1.67	IV	1.80	V
Lack of confidence	1.95	IV	1.85	IV	1.91	II	1.90	IV
Lack of familial support	1.62	VI	1.48	VII	1.58	VI	1.56	VIII
Mental harassment	1.95	IV	1.79	II	1.67	IV	1.79	VI
Dowry issues	1.91	V	1.64	VI	1.73	III	1.76	VII
Gender discrimination	2.14	I	1.79	II	1.62	V	1.83	III

Note: MS: Mean score, R: Rank

Despite representing half of the world's population, women have been an oppressed group since the beginning of history. Society in India is always male-dominated and women always faced discrimination, criticism, and even exploitation. Patriarchal norms have relegated women to a lower position in the society and she became deprived of education, legal and social rights. Studies like Shettar and Rajeshwari (2015) observed that women account for about half of the world's population, yet India has a disproportionate sex ratio, with females having a lower population than males. In terms of their social standing, they were not treated equally to males in all areas. Women's empowerment has become one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century not only at the national level but also at the international level. However, in practice, women's emancipation remains a fantasy. In our daily lives, we see how women are afflicted by a variety of social ills. The present study has tried to explore the challenges faced by farm women at the household level. Table 2 reveals that in the overall sample, patriarchal norms (2.04) were found major challenge (Rank I) which leads to male dominance in rural areas and household chores to taxing (1.99) with Rank II where women are always involved in heavy loads of drudgery and she never gets her own leisure time and study also found that gender discrimination (1.83) and lack of confidence (1.90)

were other challenges faced by farm women with ranked III<sup>nd</sup> and IV<sup>rd</sup> respectively. The study tried further explore the obstacles faced by respondents according to farm size category which shows that deep-rooted norms of patriarchy were a major challenge faced by large and medium size farm households whereas gender biases were faced by small and medium size farm women in the study area at household level.

**Table 3** Challenges faced by farm women at a community level

Particulars	Small n <sub>1</sub> = 77		Medium n <sub>2</sub> = 66		Large n <sub>3</sub> = 97		Overall N=240	
	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R
	Less awareness of welfare schemes	1.65	II	1.53	IV	1.73	IV	1.65
Unsafe social environment	1.44	VI	1.52	VI	1.65	V	1.55	VIII
Sexual harassment	1.47	V	1.36	VIII	1.96	II	1.64	IV
Denial of legal rights	1.96	I	1.45	VII	1.96	II	1.82	I
Denial of social rights	1.38	VIII	1.45	VII	1.91	III	1.61	VII
Fear of hearsay	1.64	III	1.56	III	1.60	VI	1.60	VI
Poor self-image	1.60	IV	1.74	I	1.58	VII	1.63	V
Lack of confidence	1.64	III	1.70	II	1.63	VI	1.65	III
Unsupportive community ethics	1.42	VII	1.55	IV	2.13	I	1.74	II

Note: MS: Mean score, R: Rank

Empowerment of women essentially refers to a feeling of awareness of one's situation backed up with the knowledge, skills, and information that could enable women to gain higher self-esteem and facilitate their role as decision-makers in the current patriarchal society where women have always been subordinate to men. Many development efforts have been undertaken since the dawn of globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup>, but rural women remain impoverished. Women in India are not safe in their own homes or in their communities. Rural masses are often unaware of their legal rights and fearful of what others say about them in the community. Men and women are socialized according to gender norms, and their perceptions are shaped by their roles in society. Men must play the majority of the instrumental roles, while women only play expressive roles. (Kumari *et al* 2016 and Kaur and Kaur 2018). The present study has also tried to explore community challenges faced by farm women. The study found that denial of legal rights (rank 1), and unsupportive community ethics (rank II), were major hurdles faced by farm women among rural masses. Among farm size category, the small landowning category, the denial of legal rights (rank I), lack of awareness of welfare schemes (rank II), and lack of confidence (rank III) were the major challenges faced by them while moving into the community. They also expressed sexual harassment (rank V) was also a big challenge for them and they found the place unsafe for women as well as the girls who want to do something of their own. Further, in the medium land-holding category, poor self-image (rank 1), lack of confidence (rank II), and fear of hearsay (rank III) were major challenges faced by them. They had seen a lack of confidence as they find the society to be patriarchal and men always being dominating in the society. In the large landholding category, the respondents revealed that unsupportive community ethics (rank 1), denial of legal rights (rank II), and sexual harassment (rank II), as well as denial of social rights (rank III), were major issues faced by them. Overall, the denial of legal rights followed by unsupportive community ethics were major issues at the community level faced by the respondents at the community level.

**Table 4** Challenges faced by farm women at a market level

Challenges	Small n <sub>1</sub> =9		Medium n <sub>2</sub> =11		Large n <sub>3</sub> =6		Overall N=26	
	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R	MS	R
Fear of uncertainty	1.78	I	2.44	I	1.71	III	2.00	I
Use of ICT Gadgets	1.56	V	1.56	V	1.71	III	1.72	III
Digital banking	1.44	VI	1.67	IV	1.57	IV	1.56	VI
Inaccessibility to Market	1.78	I	1.56	V	1.86	II	1.60	V
Lack of capacity-building avenues	1.78	I	1.78	III	2.57	I	2.00	I
Lack of institutional support	1.67	IV	1.89	II	1.71	III	1.76	II
Less risk-bearing capacity	1.44	VI	1.78	III	1.71	III	1.64	IV

Note: MS: Mean score, R: Rank

Various studies raised the issues and challenges of women's empowerment in our country. Studies like Singh (2018) studied the role of women in the agriculture sector. According to the study, women had multi-dimensional roles in agriculture and allied activities. She had to participate in many operations of agriculture, household, and in allied activities. They worked as paid laborers, as cultivators, or as a manager performing different activities of agriculture. The study concludes illiteracy, lack of technical knowledge, lack of credit, lack of decision-making power, etc. were some of the problems that women faced. This study also recommended some recognition for reducing these gender issues and for improving their role in the agriculture sector such as more infrastructure provided to farm women for agriculture and subsidiary extension activities, equal wages to be provided to both men and women, etc. Some other studies like Tiwari (2010) also investigated that the economic and technological barriers that agricultural women faced. It was found that the majority of respondents experienced socio-economic and technical limitations. 90 percent of the women reported that one of their biggest challenges was doing many roles in both on- and off-farm activities. 82 percent of the respondents reported that they dealt with male domination in the fields and a lack of participation in agricultural choices. They encountered illiteracy, a lack of technological know-how, and restricted access to credit and money. Present study has also try to examine challenges faced by working women in farm households. It was found that fear of uncertainty (rank I) and lack of capacity-building avenues (rank I) were found major constraints faced by women which shows that she feels unsafe and did not have many prospects to establish their enterprise or fewer job opportunities. Further study also explores that less institutional support (rank II) and unable to use ICT gadgets were other barriers faced by them at the market level. The further dissection of data shows that in the small landowning category, the inaccessibility to market (rank 1) and lack of capacity-building avenues (rank I) were major issues faced by the farm women when they go to market. They also found fear of uncertainty (rank 1) as a major challenge. In the medium category, fear of uncertainty (rank 1), lack of institutional support (rank II), and less risk-bearing capacity (rank III) were the challenges faced by the farm women. Among the large landholdings category, lack of capacity-building avenues (Rank I), inaccessibility to the market (rank II), and lack of institutional support were major hurdles at the market level.

## CONCLUSION

True nation development cannot be achieved without the development and empowerment of the female population. Patriarchal norms have relegated women to a lower position in

society and they became deprived of education and legal and social rights. Moreover, unsupportive community ethics and gender discrimination were major constraints faced by women not only at the community level but also at the household level. The study suggested that normative patterns of the family and the society at large towards women need to be made more inclusive to overcome myriad barriers imposed upon rural women, especially farm women. The burden and drudgery of unpaid household and care work advocate the need for redistribution of unpaid work within the family institution which requires collective reflection and challenges the social construct of gender and its norms. Government initiatives alone will not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take the initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full autonomy in making their own decisions and participating equally in the country's social, political, and economic life.

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