

# Decision Making Power among Rural Women at Gross-Root Level

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## Abstract

In the present paper an attempt has been made to assess the role of women in the decision making process of household regarding expenditure at grocery, purchase of seeds, fertilizers, selecting the crop, harvesting of crops, hiring labor, weeding and threshing of crops. Also an attempt has been made to analyze how female respondents manage their household activities. Using multi-stage sampling our analysis reveals that women are only mere spectators in decision making regarding agricultural activities, as only eight percent respondents were taking active role in decision making process. Further we found that almost all kinds of domestic work is done by the female respondents themselves.

**Key words:** Household activity, education, decision making, land ownership, management.

## 1. Introduction

In agriculture about half of the labor force is being accounted for by females. Females in agriculture households assist the farmers in fields as well as in household activities. Sometimes they are the major participants in many activities. Women participate in all agriculture activities like crop production, processing, storage and input-allocation. Women work for more hours than men, despite all these strenuous efforts women are treated as unpaid workers and their share in GDP is not accounted. Agricultural production needs to be viewed solely as production of goods for the commercial market. It could be for household consumption or exchange also. Women are rarely identified as farm operators or owners. If the unpaid labor of females is duly recognized they will constitute as major wage earners. When their household duties are also considered as the contribution it would be very high indeed. As female participation in agriculture production has been under-estimated the unpaid labor must be closely integrated into general analysis of labor. In addition to being domestic labor, women contribute to the agricultural labor force and also act as reserves for the job market. Women are overburdened and this is detrimental to the health status of women.

Decision making is a critical element in the status of family members since it involves the allocation of resources and the distribution of roles within family. In the present paper an attempt has been made to assess the role of women in the decision making process of household regarding expenditure at grocery, purchase of seeds, fertilizers, selecting the crop, harvesting of crops/fruits, hiring labor, weeding and threshing of crops.

## 2. Objectives

The main objectives of the study are as under:

- To enquire into the decision making power of women in the sample area.
- To enquire into the participation of women in the household chores.
- To analyze the management of women in balancing the in and out door household responsibilities.
- To analyze the access of women in ownership of property/land in the sample area.

## 3. Methodology

In the present study multi-stage sampling technique has been used. At the first instance two blocks Keller and Pulwama of tehsil Pulwama were selected because of agrarian nature of the people of the tehsil and concentration of women workers in farm related activities. In the second stage 200 households from three villages which have higher concentration of women workers working in the fields have been selected randomly.

Thus a sample of 100 respondents (50 male and 50 female) has been taken from the village Tengpuna of block Pulwama and 50 respondents (25 male and 25 female) from village Qasbha Yaar and 50 respondents (25 male and 25 female) from village Kalampora both from block Keller has been selected. The respondents were interviewed as per the objectives of the study.

#### 4. Discussion and Analysis

##### 4.1 Educational attainments of the respondents

Education is an important factor in the life of a woman. Her job prospects depend upon it. It determines the additional income she can make for the family in addition to the agricultural work which she is doing. The educational standard of the respondents in the sampled villages is depicted as under.

**Table 1: Educational attainments of the respondents**

S. No	Educational Level	Male (%)	Female (%)
01	Illiterate	32	62
02	Primary	10	8
03	Middle	14	10
04	High School	15	8
05	Higher Secondary	14	7
06	Graduate	11	3
07	Post Graduate	4	2
	Total	100	100

**Note: 1.**Source: Field survey

**2.** Figures in braces represent percentage.

As revealed by table 1, maximum number of illiterate respondents is female as 62 percent as compared to male folk as only 32 percent are illiterate. Further, as per the survey as the level of education increases the attainment by male folk goes on increasing as 10 percent, 14 percent, 15, 14 percent, 11 percent and 4 percent have attained their education up to primary, middle, high school, higher secondary, graduate and post graduate level respectively. But for female respondents the educational attainment goes on decreasing as only 8 percent women have completed even primary education as compared to men 10 percent. Similarly, only 10 percent female respondents have attained middle education and 2 percent have done post graduation.

##### 4.2 Sources of income

The various sources of income of the households are presented in table 2

**Table 2: Income sources of household**

	Agriculture		Service		Business		All the three		AG+ SER		SER + BUS		BUS + AG		Total (%)
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
No. of house holds	111	55.5%	14	7%	8	4%	6	3%	29	14.5%	1	0.5%	31	15.5%	100

**Note: 1.**Source: Field survey. **2.** AG= Agriculture, SER= Service, BUS= Business

Table 2 reveals that 55.5 percent of the households are having only agriculture as the source of income followed by 31 percent of respondents having business and agriculture as their income sources. The table represents that only 7 percent of respondents have government service as their source of income. Similarly 14.5 percent

respondents have service and agriculture as their income sources. Only mere 4 percent respondents have business as their source of income. It is clear from the table that agriculture dominates in the sampled area as source of living and the economic condition of the respondents is very poor, which forces the men folk to do other menial works and the women remain engaged in farm activities for more hours as they have to produce food for their children and the older parents.

#### 4.3 Monthly expenditure of the respondents

After knowing the sources of income of the respondents in the sampled area it becomes necessary to know about the monthly expenditure of the respondents. As it is obvious that expenditure depends upon the income of the family, it varies from region to region as well. Table 3 shows the monthly expenditure of the respondents.

**Table 3: Monthly expenditure of households**

S. No	Expenditure range	Number of responses	Percentage
01	1000-5000	94	47
02	5000-10000	76	38
03	10000-15000	20	10
04	15000-20000	5	2.5
05	Above 20000	5	2.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field survey

The above analysis reveals that only 2.5 percent of respondents have monthly expenditure of 15000-20000 and 2.5 percent has more than 20000 expenditure. It means that the women belonging to these two groups are having less workload outside their home. They only perform household activities and hire laborers for agricultural work as the interview suggests. These women belong to the area where only apple are produced and have government employment. The figure further shows that 47 percent of respondents fall in the expenditure band of 1000-5000, meaning thereby they are hardly meeting the necessities of life. Similarly, 38 percent of respondents have monthly expenditure ranging from 5000-10000 and only 10 percent have monthly expenditure of 10000-15000. From the above figure it becomes clear that majority of respondents have less than 1000-5000 monthly expenditure as they are dealing only with the rice cultivation and maize cultivation, both these groups had to face lot of hardships in day to day life and men had to work as laborers outside home and this results in overburden of women both at home and at fields.

Women in rural areas have a busy working schedule; they keep the house, perform the routine work meant for them and help the male members in economic activities. Moreover, they take care of health and education of children. They spend considerable time of a day in cleaning and washing and the average working hours in cleaning, cooking and washing is maximum in the age group of 20-40 years for all the three villages of the sample area. Table 3 shows the management of women in household chores.

**Table 4 Management of the household responsibility**

S. No	Activity	NUMBER OF RESPONSES						Total (%)
		Alone	(%)	Sharing with husband	(%)	Sharing with in laws	((%)	
01	Cooking and serving food	86	86	0	0	14	14	100
02	Purchase of grocery	28	28	67	67	5	5	100
03	Washing cloth	63	63	0	0	37	37	100

	and utensils							
04	Cleaning house	65	65	0	0	35	35	100
05	Care of children	49	49	10	10	41	41	100
06	Care of sick	51	51	8	8	41	41	100
07	Help to children in studies	12	12	24	24	56	56	100

Source: Field survey

As is clear from table 4 eighty six percent of respondents (female) cook and serve alone to their family members, 14 percent respondents get help from their in-laws in cooking and serving, likewise 67 percent respondents get their grocery purchased by their husband, 28 percent buy the grocery themselves and 5 percent get help from their in-laws in buying grocery for kitchen. In the same way 63 percent respondents wash clothes and utensils alone and only 37 percent respondents get help from their in-laws. Similarly, 65 percent respondents do cleaning of houses alone and 35 percent get help from their in-laws. Further, from the table it is clear that 49 percent of respondents take care of their minor children, themselves alone, 10 percent gets help from their husbands and 41 percent respondent's gets rearing of children done by their in-laws. Further, 51 percent respondents take care of sick (children or old) alone by themselves, 8 percent gets help from their husband and 41 percent respondents gets help from their in-laws lastly, there is one issue in which female respondents have less share is to help children in studies as only 12 percent respondents do this alone, 24 percent gets help from husband and 56 percent gets help from their in-law. The reason for this is that, women respondents are illiterate or less educated and this is reason that they cannot educate their children. From the above analysis, it becomes evident that women are having busy schedule at home. In spite of all such activities done by them, they had to work at farm either with men or alone during peak agricultural seasons. Further it can be analyzed that almost all kinds of work such as cooking, cleaning, washing etc. is done by the female respondents themselves.

#### 4.4 Consumption of time on household activities

After knowing the activities performed by women at home, it becomes necessary to know about the time consumed by women respondents on these activities as they are daily activities at home. Table 5 gives us information about the time consumption of female respondents on the household activities.

**Table 5 Consumption of time on household activities**

S. No	Activities	Time consumed on each activity																
		10M%	15M%	20M%	30M%	1 Hr%	1.5hr%	2Hr%	3Hr%	Total (%)								
01	Cleaning utensils	2	2	2	2	0	0	17	17	53	53	3	3	17	17	7	7	100
02	Cooking food	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	9	71	71	0	0	18	18	2	2	100
03	Fetching water	3	3	10	10	8	8	17	17	20	20	9	9	28	28	5	5	100
04	Washing clothes	1	1	1	1	1	1	21	21	43	43	0	0	31	31	5	5	100
05	Milking cow/buffalo	13	13	10	10	53	53	24	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
06	Collecting fuel wood	21	21	9	9	22	22	11	11	19	19	0	0	15	15	3	3	100

Note: 1. Source: Field survey, 2. M = Minutes, Hr. = Hours

As is clear from table 5 that women respondents had to do many tasks at home and they consume 6-8 hours

daily in home tasks from very early in the morning till late night. The questionnaire which we served to respondents is having a both open and closed type question that is why there are multi responses for every activity. Food is cooked twice a day and that is why 71 percent respondents say that cooking food takes them at least 1 hour every day, 9 percent respondents are of the opinion that they need ½ hour for cooking food, 2 percent respondents said that they require 3 hours every day for cooking food and 18 percent respondents need 2 hours for cooking food every day. Cleaning of utensils is one more activity and 53 percent respondents need 1 hour for cleaning utensils, 17 percent need 30 minutes, 17 percent 2 hours, 7 percent respondents need 3 hours and 2 percent respondents require 10 minutes and 15 minutes each for cleaning utensils. Fetching water for kitchen use and bathroom use is one of serious issues in rural areas as the water facility is not available to everyone. Since, 28 percent female respondents said that they need almost 2 hours for fetching water as they have to bring it from a long distance, 20 percent respondents need 1 hour, 17 percent need 30 minutes, 9 percent need 1.5 hours, 5 percent need 3 hours, 10 percent need 15 minutes, 8 percent need 20 minutes and 3 percent respondents require 10 minutes for fetching water, as they have water facility available to them. Washing clothes is one more hectic task which female respondents are supposed to do, and from the above analysis it is clear that 43 percent respondents require need 1 hour for washing clothes, 31 percent respondents need 2 hours for washing clothes, 5 percent need 3 hours, 21 percent need 30 minutes and 1 percent requires 10, 15 and 20 minutes each for washing clothes. Washing of clothes depends upon two conditions viz. size of family and activities or occupation of elder men folk. One more task related to women at home is milking cow and 53 percent respondents require 20 minutes for this, 24 percent respondents need ½ hour for milking cow or buffalo, 10 percent respondents need 15 minutes and 13 percent respondents need 10 minutes for milking cow/buffalo. This also depends upon the milk giving capacity of cow. In rural areas in some rare case men (respondents) also milk the cow, if the nature of cow is cruel or having any other reasons. Lastly, one more task which women are supposed to perform is collecting fuel wood for cooking food stuff. As our study is related to rural areas, there are certain elements which force women folk to dry up the cow dung. Women in rural area either make cow-dung cakes or go to nearby forests to collect the fuel wood, and it is here from the above table that 15 percent women need 2 hours for collecting fuel wood, 22 percent respondents need 20 minutes for this, 19 percent respondents takes 1 hour for collecting fuel wood, 11 percent need ½ hour, 9 percent need 15 minutes, 21 percent respondents require 10 minutes and 3 percent respondents require 3 hours for collecting fuel wood regarding this activity only two villages in block Keller goes to forests as it falls in their neighborhood.

#### 4.5 Decision making power of women in the family

Decision making is a critical element in the status of family members since it involves the allocation of resources and the distribution of roles within family. In order to assess the role of women in the decision making process, the respondents were asked to reveal who in their family holds the dominant position in making decision regarding expenditure at grocery, purchase of seeds, fertilizers, slecting the crop, harvesting of crops/fruits, hiring labor, weeding and threshing of crops. Table 6 shows the decision making of women respondents in the sample area.

**Table 6: Decision making power in the family**

S. No	Respondents	Number	Percentage
01	Male	181	90.5
02	Female	16	8
03	Both /jointly	3	1.5
	Total	200	100

**Source:** Field survey

The above analysis points out that the chief responsibility of making decision about such issues was taken in minority of the cases 1.5 percent by both male and female respondents equally. In 90.5 percent cases that is majority of the cases; male respondents were responsible for making such decisions. There were 8 percent female respondents only who make decisions in such cases themselves. The analysis of the data reveals some significant facts. It is quite clear that allocation of household functions is in the dominance of men-folk and women are mere spectators in decision making regarding agricultural activities.

Women work longer hours and their work is more arduous than men's. Still there is a general thinking, particularly in rural areas, that women, like children eat and do nothing. But in practice, women work twice as many hours as men. Men perform the operations in agriculture that entailed use of machinery and draught animals, thereby using animal, hydraulic, mechanical, electrical energy, women on the other hand always rely on

manual labor, using only their own energy. Rice transplantation, the most arduous and labor intensive task in rice cultivation is carried out almost entirely by women without the help of any tools and equipment.

#### 4.6 Owner of land in the household

The land ownership of household is shown in table 7

**Table 7: Owner of land in the household**

S. No	Land owned by	Number of responses	Percentage
01	Male	191	95.5
02	Female	09	4.5
	Total	200	100

Source: Field survey

From the above table it is clear that 95.5 percent of land holding in the sampled area is owned by male respondents and only 4.5 percent land is owned by women respondents. The amount of land holdings owned by women respondents range from 2-4 acres meaning that it is negligible. Women respondents acquire this land either due to the death of their husband or they have acquired it from their parents as they are married and their husband settled in their wife's house.

#### 5. Conclusion

The participation did not lead to a change in work patterns at home. The traditional role of women as a home works remained unaltered. Division of labour within the household reflected the pattern of authority structure. Women perform a greater part of domestic work and took care of children. They were intensely involved with the maintenance of household. Study revealed a differential rate of participation of women in decision making in home and farm related level. Decision making pattern regarding farm affairs revealed it to be more or less male domain. Socio-economic status very much influence decision making behavior of women in both farm and home activities. They worked out of necessity and their contribution to household subsistence was substantial. Men too worked but they owned no responsibility towards the household. Farm women showed low level of participation in household decision making. Their participation in decision making was influenced by various factors such as household income, type and nature of husband's employment etc.

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