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The Role of Rural Women in Decision Making Process in Arid Rajasthan

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Abstract An attempt has been made to study the role of rural women in decision making processes of various socio-economic activities. In decision making processes especially in agriculture, livestock and socio-religious matters, women were consulted by the heads of households. However, in some activities the role of women in decision making processes differ as indicated by the Friedman (Xr^2) test. By and large, little difference in decision making processes between different groups establish homogeneous character of the population.

Key words Decision making process, Role of Women, Friedman (Xr^2) test

In the rural arid areas of western Rajasthan, limited information is available on rural women. However, in this inhospitable climatic condition women play a pertinent role in households activities not only by rearing children and cooking food but also taking active part in agricultural and livestock activities. Some of the agricultural operations like weeding and harvesting of grains are entirely done by the women besides collection of fuel from grazing land and fetching drinking water from distant places. Due to early age at marriage women have to bear extra burden of frequent child birth without proper spacing. Agarwal (1975) reported that a rural Rajasthani married woman has 2.2 children before she attains the age of 25 years.

Keeping this in view a study was initiated to investigate the role of women in decision making processes and the impact of various socio-economic factors in decision making processes.

Table 1 *Socio economic characters of sample households*

Characters	Caste			Mean or Overall
	Upper	Middle	Lower	
Size of land holding (ha)				
Marginal (up to 3.50)	1(13)	2(25)	5(62)	8
Small (3.51 – 7)	4(36)	4(36)	3(28)	11
Medium (7.01 – 10)	6(67)	–	3(33)	9
Large (> 10)	16(84)	–	3(16)	19
Average size of family	7.4	6.8	6.1	6.9
Average No. of				
(A) Workers				
Male	2.4	2.2	2.0	2.3
Female	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.8
(B) Dpendents				
Male	1.6	2.0	1.2	1.5
Female	1.4	0.8	1.1	1.3
Literacy (%)				
Male	69.6	54.9	63.4	67.3
Female	11.1	16.2	–	8.0
Type of settlement				
Village	6(31)	4(21)	9(48)	19
Dhani	15(84)	1(5)	2(11)	18
Both	6(60)	1(10)	3(30)	10

Figures in parenthesis are % of total

Table 1 *Decision making (%) by farm women with various Socio-economic characters*

Decision making dimensions	Size of land holding				Caste categories			Type of farming		
	Marginal	Small	Medium	Large	Upper	Middle	Lower	Irrigated	Un-irrigated	Share cropping
Agricultural activities										
Selection of crops	87	36	56	42	48	67	57	55	48	60
Allocation of land for different crops	87	45	67	47	56	50	57	64	48	67
Application of fertilizer/FYM	75	36	56	47	37	33	43	55	43	61
Marketing of farm produce	87	27	67	47	52	50	57	64	43	67
Purchase and disposal of land	87	45	67	52	59	67	71	64	48	73
Renting in/out land	75	45	56	42	44	67	50	36	48	67
Exchange of labour	75	36	44	37	37	67	50	36	38	61
Live stock activities										
Purchase and disposal of livestock	100	82	78	79	70	83	93	91	76	87
Species of animals	100	82	100	79	55	67	71	91	81	93
Management of feed and fodder	100	82	89	84	78	83	93	100	76	93
Disposal of livestock produce	100	91	89	89	85	67	93	100	81	100
Consumption of livestock produce	100	82	89	89	85	67	93	100	81	93
Financial activities										
Management of finance	100	55	67	37	48	67	78	36	62	67
Amount and source of borrowing	87	64	67	47	55	67	71	45	62	73
Purchase of household assets	87	64	67	32	67	83	71	91	57	67
Social and religious activities										
Marital settlement of children	87	100	78	84	89	83	78	91	71	100
Education of children	87	100	100	84	85	83	78	82	76	93
Attending social function	87	91	89	79	81	83	71	82	86	94
Giving donation	87	82	44	63	84	50	71	82	62	93

Materials and Methods

Data were collected from forty seven farm families selected on the basis of size of land holding. The composition of sample was large (40%); medium (19%), small (23%) and marginal (17%). Data were analysed with the help of frequency distribution. The role of women were examined in various dimensions of decision making activities like agriculture, livestock, financial and socio-religious (Table 2) with reference to socio economic parameters like caste, type of farming and size of land holding. The difference, if any , between the different socio-economic factors with the decision making processes of women were tested with the help of Friedman (Xr^2) test (Siegel 1956).

Results and Discussion

The study was carried out in an arid village of district Jodhpur of western Rajasthan. The village is inhabited by heterogeneous caste/community. The settlement pattern was by and large, compact and *dhanis* (scattered dwellings). As far as various castes/communities are concerned socio-economically better off class formed 58% of the total households compared to others (Table 1). The dependent population was slightly more among the male (1.55) than the female (1.27). The level of literacy among the female population was only 8.0 compared to their counterparts male (67%). The intercaste variation in the level of literacy was, to some extent, observed where the level of literacy was slightly better among the middle order castes. The average size of family was 6.90, although the higher caste had more number of persons (7.36).

Role of farm women in decision making processes : It is evident that in all groups of size holding, women were consulted by their heads of family but critical examination of the table 2 shows that in case of marginal farmers frequency of consultancy of women was more, especially in economic activities (agricultural and financial activities) compared to other categories. Consultancy of women in economically well to do families were more in social and religious activities. Thus it may be inferred that size of holding do affect the women's participation in decision making.

Caste is an important factor in the socio-economic fabric of Indian society. Especially, in the rural arid Rajasthan, most of the activities are controlled by the institution of caste. It can be seen that the role of women in decision making proceeses was predominant in middle and lower caste categories as compared to upper caste. On the contrary, in social activities participation of upper caste women was more (80%).

The decision making process was further examined with the type of farming i.e. irrigated farming, unirrigated farming and share cropping. It revealed that decision making processes with type of farming did not vary significantly. In all categories more than 60% farm women were consulted by their heads of household.

The Friedman Xr^2 test also indicated significant relationship between the decision making processes with the size of land holding (Table 3).

Table 3 *Friedman X_r^2 values*

Socio-economic factors	Observed values	Tabulated values P = .100
Size of land holding	6.9*	6.14
Caste	$0.5^{N.S}$	5.2
Type of farming	$4.5^{N.S}$	5.2

Significant at 10 % probability level

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