

ASSESSMENT OF DRUDGERY LEVEL AND WORK PATTERN OF FARM WOMEN OF HIMACHAL

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Abstract: Women play a pivotal role in household, farm and allied activities. They are the veritable back-bone of subsistence agriculture in Himachal Pradesh because about eighty percent of the field work in agriculture, from sowing to harvesting, post-harvest management and dairy management is done by hill farm women. For assessing out the work pattern and drudgery level of hill farm women, sixty respondents from three blocks of district Mandi of HP were selected. The extent of participation of women in different activities and the exertion and discomfort perceived during performing these activities was worked out. Majority of farm women spent an average time of 2-4 hours/day in agriculture and less than two hours in livestock and poultry. Data on perceived exertion by the women highlighted that agricultural activities were experienced as moderately heavy to heavy types in exertion. Main activities in horticultural crops category were harvesting/plucking, storage and post-harvest which were light to moderately heavy in exertion range. Involvement in livestock activities caused mild pain. All the household chores were measured as moderate on the scale.

Keywords: Farm women, Himachal Pradesh, Overall discomfort rating, Perceived exertion, Work pattern

Introduction

Agriculture in developing countries depends heavily on manual labour where, major contribution comes from women. The contribution of women to the Indian agriculture and allied activities is a recognized factor. The women work force in agriculture and allied sectors is estimated to be around 92 million which amounts to 40 per cent of the total rural workers in the country (Singh et al 2007). As per Census 2011, women constitute 25.51 per cent of the total workforce in the country. The percentage share of women as cultivators, agricultural labourers, workers in household industry and other workers is 24.92, 18.56, 2.95 and 47.20 respectively (Verma and Singh, 2019).

Women play pivotal role in agriculture – as female agricultural labour, as farmers, co-farmers, female family labours, as farm managers and farm entrepreneurs. Women as farmer or farm workers, participate in several activities such as seeding, transplanting, weeding,

fertilizer application, plant protection, thinning, harvesting, processing, selling, winnowing, storing, etc. (Sudharani and Raju, 1991) and still remain as invisible worker. Their work is not recognized in any statistical terms. Several research studies over the years have confirmed that women work for 14-18 long hours (Kaur and Punia, 1986) of manual work daily on farming operations, livestock raising, fetching fodder, fuel and water from distant places and expending more total energy (Batliwala, 1982) per day. The physical strain of female farmers seems to be too high because of heavy work tasks of various activities done by them in agriculture and allied field (Singh and Vinay, 2013).

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Though modernization of agriculture is taking place at a rapid pace, but the jobs attended by women remain more or less the same. Assessment in Indian Himalaya depicted that a pair of bullock work for 1064 hours, a man for 1212 hours and a woman for 3485 hours in a year on one-hectare farm (Ojha et al., 2012). Women share abundant responsibilities to perform wide spectrum of duties both in the home and outside. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. In agriculture, women are engaged in various agricultural activities like land preparation, transplanting, weeding, irrigating, processing, harvesting and threshing operations.

Women are the major work force in Himachal Pradesh and play a significant role in agriculture and other allied activities. They are the veritable back-bone of subsistence agriculture because about 80% of the field work in agriculture, from sowing to harvesting, post-harvest management and dairy management is done by hill women farmers. These women participate in extremely tedious, time consuming and labour intensive agricultural operations, viz. land preparation, manuring, sowing, transplanting, weeding, hoeing, applying fertilizers, taking care of crops, harvesting, storage of food grains and so on (Kishtwaria et al. 2009). The rural hill farm women are therefore involved in manual, continuous, rigorous and extensive work on fields and at household levels daily and also have to undergo a very hard life due to geo-physical conditions of the hilly region. Farmers of hills face the constraints of difficult accessibility, small and fragmented land holdings, poor and shallow soils, erratic rainfall, damage caused by the wild animals, inadequate market infrastructure, meagre input

availability and poor dissemination of the knowledge, that's why agriculture in hills has been a challengeable task (Joshi et al., 2014).

Human productivity and human performance, especially in women specific activities is the most neglected area in agriculture in developing and under developed countries. The work efficiency and productivity of women are directly related to the health and nutritional status and physical work capacity of women, which is especially true when they perform various activities manually in the field of agriculture. Agriculture is considered to be a highly physical-demanding occupation in which workers exert continuously in awkward and stressful postures and consequently suffer from pain and discomfort in different parts of their body which lead to drudgery, musculoskeletal disorders pain and discomfort in different parts of the body (Ojha and Kawatra, 2014). Drudgery of farm women is an important aspect that has attracted wide attention of researchers. If measured by the extensiveness and intensiveness of their involvement, farm women shoulder much more burden than men and are involved in more strenuous activities as compared to men. Various studies on women in agriculture point to the fact that women are generally employed in the operations which are either not mechanized or least mechanized and involve a lot of drudgery. Most of the activities are not only drudgerious but time consuming also. So, a farm woman suffers a lot of drudgery while performing operations. Drudgery is generally conceived as physical and mental strain, agony, monotony and hardship experienced by farm women while performing these farm operations (Bhushan et al 2016). The drudgery prone condition leads to various health and mechanical hazards which creates physical exhaustion, fatigue and low productivity. Considering the multiple roles of agricultural women, the present study is an attempt to assess the status of hill farm women and to estimate the drudgery level involved in different farm operations.

Methodology

The survey was carried out in district Mandi of Himachal Pradesh. Sixty farm women who were performing agricultural and allied activities regularly were selected from three blocks viz. Chauntra, Mandi and Sundernagar (twenty each) for the investigation. For assessing out the work pattern and drudgery level of hill farm women, a well-structured questionnaire containing aspects related to study was developed. Pre-testing of questionnaire was done to make it more functional for final study.

An inventory of different activities performed by farm women in agriculture, horticulture, livestock, household chores and poultry sectors was prepared. The activity profile of 60 farm

women respondents selected from three different blocks was studied by subjective expression of their feelings towards the activity *i.e.* how easy or difficult the subject finds her activity. Overall discomfort rating (ODR) for each activity was measured by VAD scale- a 10-point scale based on adoption of technique developed by Corlett and Bishop (1976). It is used to determine the discomfort during the activity and doesn't attempt to measure the severity and intensity of the pain. It is a 10 point scale, 0 being the lowest point showing no discomfort and 10 being the uppermost point showing the extreme discomfort. The category scale constructed by Borg (1980) was used to assess the rate of perceived exertion of farm women in different agricultural activities.

The data were collected personally regarding types of activities performed (household, farm and allied activities), frequency of performance, time spent on each activity and their perception regarding each activity performed by them *i.e.* exertion perceived and discomfort score to find the most drudgery prone task on hierarchy basis. Time spent in doing each of these activities was calculated on hours/day basis.

Results and discussion

The involvement of women in agriculture and allied sectors causes high physical strain and fatigue and exposes her to potential health hazards that can result in chronic illness, debilitation, or death. An assessment of health status of farm women was therefore done to evaluate if the respondents suffer from any health ailment or disease after years spent on performing various agriculture and allied activities. So, during the interview, the women were asked in detail about their health ailments, if any. Table 1 interprets the type of health hazards faced by the farm women during their life time. Further questioning about their status revealed that 86.67% suffered from backache followed by joint pain (71.67) and breathlessness (70%). Around 60% of the farm women suffered from headache and bodyache leading to tiredness and lethargy in body (55%) and problems related to gastrointestinal system (53.33%). An equal percentage of 46.67 suffered from loss of appetite and leg pain. 30 per cent of women reported high blood pressure whereas a very small percentage of 6.67 had problem of diabetes.

In Himachal, most of farmers are small and marginal having terraced and fragmented land holding pattern. Due to the undulating topography of region, farmers/farm women are still using traditional modes of cultivating crops. The tasks are laborious and since the woman is unaware of the latest technical know-how, her output and productivity are low. So, lack of mechanisation add burden on the shoulders of women thereby increases the drudgery level,

affecting their nutritional status and health and reducing the productivity/output. Drudgery assessment of farm women in agriculture and allied activities was worked out by assessing perceived exertion and overall discomfort in different farm and household activities done by them. Before that, the data on their experience (year) and time spent (hours/day) in agriculture and allied activities was also taken into consideration (Table 2 and Table 3). 41.66 and 36.66 % farm women had more than 20 years of experience in agriculture and livestock while 45 and 31.66 % had 10-20 years of experience in reported sectors. There was less involvement of the respondents in horticulture and poultry activities so 96.66 % farm women had less than ten years of experience in these jobs. Majority of farm women spent an average time of 2-4 hours/day in agriculture and less than two hours in livestock, poultry and household chores. All the respondents spend less than two hours in horticulture activities, as there was less stuff to take care off. Most of the farmers are shirking agriculture because of unpredictable weather, increase in wild animals attack on crops and farmers and being a less profitable venture. Most of the population in Himachal are in various public and private sectors and have less dependency on agriculture as a source of their income. A study on work participation and drudgery of hill women of Himachal Pradesh conducted by Thakur and Tiwari (1995) revealed a high work participation of women folk in all farm and household activities. On an average, nearly 5 hours were required by farm women to undertake different household activities. More than 85 per cent of the total work related to livestock management was accomplished by female workers except marketing of milk and milk products.

Table 4 depicts the mean score of perceived exertion by selected farm women for different agriculture and allied activities. Data on perceived exertion by the women highlighted that agricultural activities were experienced as moderately heavy to heavy types in exertion. Ploughing, levelling, irrigation, harvesting and threshing were rated as heavy type activity by the respondents while manuring/fertilization, plant protection measures, winnowing and storage of harvested crops were considered moderately heavy. Agriculture work is considered to be a highly physically demanding occupation. Farm workers have to perform a fair amount of manual, continuous rigorous tasks in the agricultural field leading to exertion and drudgery. Watch and ward activities and weeding/interculture were perceived as light chores. Main activities in horticultural crops category were harvesting/plucking, storage and post-harvest consumption which were light to moderately heavy in exertion range. Pruning or training of the trees and the grafting/budding were considered light tasks. Since the horticulture crops reported by the respondents were mainly their backyard plantations so

activities like basin preparation and manuring required for maintaining healthy plants/trees were missing. Almost all the activities reported under livestock sector like fodder collection, feed making, milking, cowdung collection, cowshed maintenance and preparation and marketing of milk products were perceived as moderately heavy tasks. Only grazing of animals was calculated as light activity as reported by respondents on the scale. All the household chores segregated in the table were reported as moderately heavy by the farm women.

Table 5 illustrates the overall discomfort rating (ODR) reported by selected farm women for different agriculture and allied activities. In agriculture sector, all the activities undertaken by the farm women were experienced for moderate discomfort as measured through 10-point scale. Prolonged work activity, high repetitiveness, and remaining constantly in an awkward posture for a prolonged period of time etc. were the major factors of drudgery, acute pain and discomfort among farm workers (Ojha and Kawatra, 2014). Only threshing of crops was considered as an activity that causes severe discomfort. Farm women experienced mild pain in using plant protection measures and irrigating horticultural crops. No pain was experienced by them in remaining activities undertaken by them. Involvement in livestock activities viz. fodder collection, grazing of animals, feed making, milking and preparation and marketing of milk products, the respondents shared mild pain as per the scale. Only in two activities i.e. cowdung collection and cowshed maintenance, they experienced moderate pain while performing these chores. In poultry sector, they considered the related activities as light in comparison to allied fields hence experienced no pain during their performance. All the household chores were measured as moderate on the scale.

Women are considered as the backbone of hill agriculture which is regarded as the largest sector of the region's economy. Women in hills perform various activities to earn livelihood for the family. The farm women are involved in extensive work on fields and at household levels daily and are hence exposed to all the risks of ill health, poor nutrition and inadequate care. The women also have to undergo a very hard life due to geo-physical conditions of the hilly region. All the agricultural operations are time-consuming and full of drudgery leading to pain and discomfort in different body parts which are high risk factor for muscular stresses in women. This huge amount of work in the absence of proper nutrition and health care creates serious health repercussions. Many research studies have reported that nutritional and health status of hill women is unsatisfactory and needs interventions. The agricultural policies and programmes need to be more nutrition-sensitive to impact the health

and productivity of families (FAO, 1999). The data base in this investigation would help in having a clear picture of the current situation of health, nutritional status and physical fitness of farm women of Himachal. Information on drudgery level involved in different farm and allied operations will help in assessing the risks associated to work of women in agriculture.

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Table 1: Health ailment status of selected farm women

Particulars	Blocks			
	Chauntra (n=20)	Mandi (n=20)	Sundernagar (n=20)	Total (N=60)
Backache	20	17	15	52(86.67)
Joint pain	17	16	10	43(71.67)
High BP	7	9	2	18(30.00)
Diabetes	4	0	0	4(6.67)
Skin infections	4	7	5	16(26.67)
Headache	12	16	8	36(60.00)
Arthritis	0	1	0	1(1.67)
Respiratory problems	3	2	1	6(10.00)
Heart burning	2	0	1	3(5.00)
Repeated fever	3	1	0	4(6.67)
Stomach problem	13	13	6	32(53.33)
Allergy	2	0	4	6(10.00)
Loss of appetite	13	12	3	28(46.67)
Body ache	13	17	6	36(60.00)
Tiredness/lethargy	14	14	5	33(55.00)
Leg pain	14	11	3	28(46.67)
Jaundice	2	0	1	3(5.00)
Breathlessness	13	16	13	42(70.00)

Figures in parentheses represents percentage

Table 2: Experience (years) in agriculture and allied activities of selected farm women

Particulars	Blocks
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	Chauntra (n=20)	Mandi (n=20)	Sundernagar (n=20)	Total (N=60)
Agriculture				
<10	5	3	0	8(13.33)
10-20	13	6	8	27(45.00)
>20	2	11	12	25(41.66)
Horticulture				
<10	20	18	20	58(96.66)
10-20	0	2	0	2(3.33)
>20	0	0	0	0
Livestock				
<10	14	3	2	19(31.66)
10-20	4	7	8	19(31.66)
>20	2	10	10	22(36.66)
Poultry				
<10	19	19	20	58(96.66)
10-20	1	1	1	3(5.00)
>20	0	0	1	1(1.66)
Household chores				
<10	1	2	1	4(6.66)
10-20	9	4	8	21(35.00)
>20	10	14	11	35(58.33)

Figures in parentheses represents percentage

Table 3: Time spent (hrs/day) on different agriculture and allied activities by selected farm women

Particulars	Blocks			
	Chauntra (n=20)	Mandi (n=20)	Sundernagar (n=20)	Total (N=60)
Agriculture				
<2	7	2	3	12(20.00)
2-4	13	16	17	46(76.66)
5-7	0	0	0	0
>7	0	0	0	0
Horticulture				
<2	20(33.33)	20(33.33)	20(33.33)	60(100.00)
2-4	-	-	-	-
5-7	-	-	-	-
>7	-	-	-	-
Livestock				
<2	14	5	9	28(46.66)
2-4	0	13	11	24(40.00)
5-7	0	0	0	0

>7	6	0	0	6(10.00)
Poultry				
<2	19	20	20	59(98.33)
2-4	0			0
5-7	0	-	-	0
>7	1	-	-	1(1.66)
Household chores				
<2	1	16	7	24(40.00)
2-4	12	2	5	19(31.66)
5-7	5	1	8	14(23.33)
>7	2	1	0	3(5.00)

Figures in parentheses represents percentage

Table 4: Mean score of perceived exertion for different agriculture and allied activities by selected farm women

Activity	Blocks				Rank	Activity type
	Chauntra (n=20)	Mandi (n=20)	Sundernagar (n=20)	Total (N=60)		
Agriculture						
Ploughing	2.15	2.40	2.55	2.37	II	Heavy
Levelling	2.65	2.55	3.05	2.75	II	Heavy
Manuring/fertilization	3.45	2.69	3.35	3.16	III	Moderately heavy
Sowing	3.50	3.20	3.40	3.37	III	Moderately heavy
Irrigation	2.55	2.50	3.20	2.75	II	Heavy
Weeding/interculture	2.55	2.60	2.80	2.65	IV	Light
Plant protection (spraying)	3.55	3.60	3.30	3.48	III	Moderately heavy
Watch and ward	4.55	4.45	4.25	4.42	IV	Light
Harvesting	2.70	2.30	2.80	2.37	II	Heavy
Threshing	1.55	2.30	1.05	2.75	II	Heavy
Winnowing	2.35	2.70	2.90	3.16	III	Moderately heavy
Storage	2.50	2.90	3.15	3.37	III	Moderately heavy
Horticulture crops						
Basin preparation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manuring	-	-	-	-	-	-
Plantation	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grafting/budding	4.70	4.46	4.35	4.02	IV	Light
Pruning/training	4.24	4.54	4.25	4.26	IV	Light
Plant protection	-	-	-	-	-	-
Irrigation	3.85	4.20	4.35	4.13	IV	Light
Harvesting/plucking	3.15	4.35	3.35	3.62	III	Moderately heavy
Storage	3.85	3.15	3.20	3.40	III	Moderately heavy
Post-harvest	4.85	4.10	4.43	4.46	IV	Light
Livestock						
Fodder collection	3.20	3.85	3.95	3.67	III	Moderately heavy
Grazing of animals	4.20	3.85	4.15	4.07	IV	Light

Feed making	4.15	3.95	3.35	3.82	III	Moderately heavy
Milking	4.15	3.95	3.60	3.90	III	Moderately heavy
Cowdung collection	3.15	3.95	3.75	3.62	III	Moderately heavy
Cowshed maintenance	3.20	3.15	2.95	3.10	III	Moderately heavy
Preparation of milk products	3.15	3.65	3.15	3.98	III	Moderately heavy
Marketing of milk and milk products	3.10	3.60	3.00	3.90	III	Moderately heavy
Poultry						
Feed	4.20	4.15	4.95	4.43	IV	Light
Shed maintenance and hygiene	4.20	4.19	4.00	4.23	IV	Light
Hatching	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slaughtering	-	-	-	-	-	-
Household chores						
Cooking	2.85	4.25	3.80	3.63	III	Moderately heavy
Cleaning/ maintenance of home and premises	3.10	4.00	4.10	3.73	III	Moderately heavy
Water fetching	3.00	3.80	3.45	3.42	III	Moderately heavy
Washing utensils	2.90	3.60	3.75	3.42	III	Moderately heavy
Fuel wood collection	3.05	3.55	3.65	3.42	III	Moderately heavy
Child care	3.15	3.65	3.65	3.48	III	Moderately heavy
Care of old/sick member	3.35	3.85	4.10	3.77	III	Moderately heavy
Knitting/stitching/ other entrepreneurial activity	3.00	3.80	3.75	3.52	III	Moderately heavy
Washing of clothes	3.05	3.65	3.54	3.41	III	Moderately heavy

Table 5: Overall discomfort rating (ODR) for different agriculture and allied activities by selected farm women

Activity	Blocks				Pain type
	Chauntra (n=20)	Mandi (n=20)	Sundernagar (n=20)	Total (N=60)	
Agriculture					
Ploughing	7.25	5.30	6.05	6.20	Moderate
Levelling	5.45	5.21	5.55	5.40	Moderate
Manuring/fertilization	4.10	3.60	5.40	4.37	Moderate
Sowing	7.75	5.15	5.15	6.02	Moderate
Irrigation	6.40	4.05	4.75	5.07	Moderate
Weeding/interculture	5.55	5.20	6.15	5.63	Moderate
Plant protection(spraying)	4.75	4.00	3.25	4.00	Moderate
Watch and ward	3.89	3.10	5.55	4.18	Moderate
Harvesting	5.80	5.75	6.30	5.95	Moderate
Threshing	8.15	8.40	8.00	8.18	Severe
Winnowing	7.75	5.11	6.05	6.30	Moderate

Storage	5.05	5.05	5.55	5.22	Moderate
Horticulture crops					
Basin preparation	-	-	-	-	-
Manuring	-	-	-	-	-
Plantation	-	-	-	-	-
Grafting/budding	0.00	1.15	0.35	0.50	No Pain
Pruning/training	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.17	No Pain
Plant protection	-	-	-	-	-
Irrigation	3.20	1.20	0.40	1.60	Mild
Harvesting/plucking	2.20	1.05	0.35	1.20	Mild
Storage	0.00	0.70	0.10	0.27	No Pain
Post-harvest	0.00	0.90	0.15	0.35	No Pain
Livestock					
Fodder collection	3.20	2.48	2.95	2.88	Mild
Grazing of animals	2.37	2.85	3.15	2.79	Mild
Feed making	2.25	2.95	3.35	2.85	Mild
Milking	3.25	2.95	2.60	2.93	Mild
Cowdung collection	4.50	2.95	2.75	3.40	Moderate
Cowshed maintenance	2.40	3.15	2.95	2.83	Moderate
Preparation of milk products	4.40	2.65	3.15	3.40	Mild
Marketing of milk and milk products	3.30	2.60	3.00	2.97	Mild
Poultry					
Feed	0.20	0.15	0.95	0.43	No pain
Shed maintenance and hygiene	0.20	0.00	1.00	0.40	No pain
Hatching	-	-	-	-	-
Slaughtering	-	-	-	-	-
Household chores					
Cooking	3.00	3.00	3.30	3.10	Moderate
Cleaning/ maintenance of home and premises	3.05	2.95	3.35	3.12	Moderate
Water fetching	3.05	3.15	3.45	3.22	Moderate
Washing utensils	3.05	3.25	3.55	3.28	Moderate
Fuel wood collection	3.10	3.30	3.40	3.27	Moderate
Child care	3.10	3.05	3.30	3.15	Moderate
Care of old/sick member	3.10	3.10	3.45	3.22	Moderate
Knitting/stitching/other entrepreneurial activity	2.95	3.30	3.60	3.28	Moderate
Washing of clothes	2.50	3.25	3.45	3.07	Moderate