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Gender empowerment of farm families in Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Gender empowerment can be defined as the difference in the capacity of a man or woman to translate choices into desired actions and outcomes given the opportunity structure within which one operates. The objective of the study is to analyse the gender empowerment of the farm families. The present study was conducted in Ottanchatram and Reddiyarchatram block of Dindigul district. By simple random sampling technique, 15 farm families were selected from each village which constitutes the total of 60 farm families which includes 60 farmers and 60 farm women. The study assessed gender empowerment among farmers and farm women across five dimensions: decision-making, social, economic, political, and legal empowerment. Results indicated that in home management, food preparation decisions were primarily made by women, whereas major financial and agricultural investment decisions, such as land transactions and purchase of farm inputs, were predominantly made by men. However, most critical family and farming decisions, including crop selection, irrigation, and livestock management, were jointly taken by both spouses. Social empowerment indicators revealed moderate autonomy in mobility, independent initiatives, and decision-making despite social pressures, with a majority reporting occasional or frequent freedom from domestic violence. Economic empowerment was reflected in women's ability to spend on themselves and maintain independent savings. Political empowerment showed that majority of women showing low participation or interest in politics. Legal awareness was high, with more than 85% familiar with key acts such as Child Marriage Restraint, Dowry Prohibition, and Right to Property. Overall, farm families fell in the medium empowerment category. The findings suggest that while legal and economic awareness among rural women is strong, political engagement and independent decision-making in high-value farm operations remain limited. Strengthening participatory approaches and targeted gender sensitization programs can further enhance balanced empowerment in farm households.

Keywords: Gender, empowerment, Dindigul, economic, social, decision making

Introduction

Gender is socially constructed set of roles and responsibilities associated with being girl and boy or women and men, and in some cultures a third or other gender. Gender empowerment can be defined as the difference in the capacity of a man or woman to translate choices into desired actions and outcomes given the opportunity structure within which one operates. Empowerment in agriculture is generally defined as one's ability to make decisions on matters related to agriculture as well as one's access to the material and social resources needed to carry out those decisions (Alkire *et al.*, 2013) ^[1]. The comparative differences in the opportunities available for men or women to translate their choices into desired actions and outcomes. It helps to exclusively identify the empowerment status of men and women in the societies and specifically mentions the area which requires interventions for their development. The mainly identified constraints in the empowerment of women farmers are the lack of recognition as farmers and no right over resources (Bhati, 2023) ^[2]. According to Sharma *et al.*, (2022) ^[3], the household allocation and access to resources especially in terms of farm resources followed a

gendered pattern where the men had major control over resources. This pattern may cause certain delays and inefficient utilization of resources and further act as an impediment to women from realizing as well as utilizing ulterior capabilities.

Here, the present study has been taken with the objective of

- To study the gender empowerment of the farm families in Dindigul district.

Research methodology

The present study has been taken in Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu. Dindigul district has 14 blocks, out of which Oddanchatram and Reddiarchatram block were selected for the study. Odaipatty, Idayakottai in Ottanchatram block and T. Pudhupatty, Ammapatty villages were selected purposively for the study. By simple random sampling technique, 15 farm families were selected from each village which constitutes the total of 60 farm families which includes 60 farmers and 60 farm women. The gender empowerment is measured on the dimensions of decision making, social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment and legal empowerment. The

procedure followed by Milkah (2006) ^[4] was used for the study. Thus, the total score was obtained by summing up the scores obtained by all the respondents. Based on mean and standard deviation, the respondents were categorized as low, medium and high. A well-structured interview schedule was prepared and response has collected from the respondent through personal interview method. The statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for the analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results of gender empowerment of farmer and farm women were depicted in different tables as follows. Gender empowerment includes decision making, social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment and legal empowerment.

1. Gender empowerment of farm women

1.1 Decision making

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their decision making. (n=60)

S. No.	Decision making	Female		Male		Both	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Home management decision							
1.	To cook a particular food	49	81.67	1	1.67	10	16.67
2.	Construction /repairing or renovation of house	10	16.67	39	65.00	11	18.33
3.	Setting children’s arguments and fights	18	30.00	3	5.00	39	65.00
4.	Deciding the education of children	4	6.67	4	6.67	52	86.67
5.	Marriage age of son /daughter	3	5.00	0	0.00	57	95.00
6.	Selection of match for son/daughter	1	1.67	1	1.67	58	96.67
Farm Related Decision							
1.	What crops to plant	1	1.67	20.00	33.33	39.00	65.00
2.	Deciding on fertilizer to use	0	0.00	47.00	78.33	13.00	21.67
3.	Irrigation related decision	6	10.00	25.00	41.67	29.00	48.33
4.	Plant protection aspects	1	1.67	19.00	31.67	40.00	66.67
5.	Deciding labours work allocation	11	18.33	24.00	40.00	25.00	41.67
6.	Types of livestock to be kept	10	16.67	7.00	11.67	43.00	71.67
Financial related decision							
1.	How much to spend on different times	14.00	23.33	13.00	21.67	33.00	55.00
2.	Buying /selling of land	0.00	0.00	45.00	75.00	15.00	25.00
3.	Buying farm inputs and implements	1.00	1.67	42.00	70.00	17.00	28.33
4.	Decision on taking loans	0.00	0.00	16.00	26.67	44.00	73.33
5.	Deciding on savings and other capital transaction	1.00	1.67	10.00	16.67	49.00	81.67
6.	How much to spend on different times	14.00	23.33	13.00	21.67	33.00	55.00

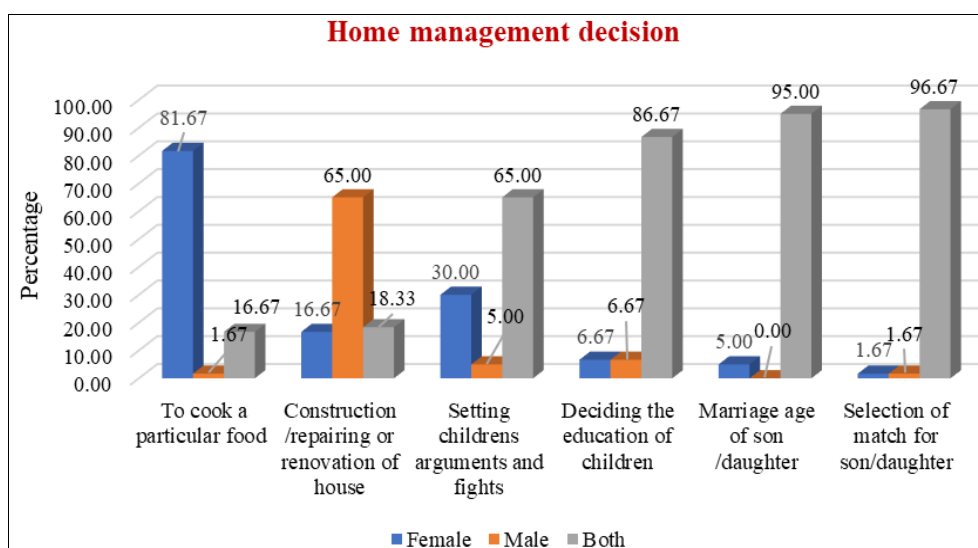


Fig 1: Distribution of respondents according to their home management decision

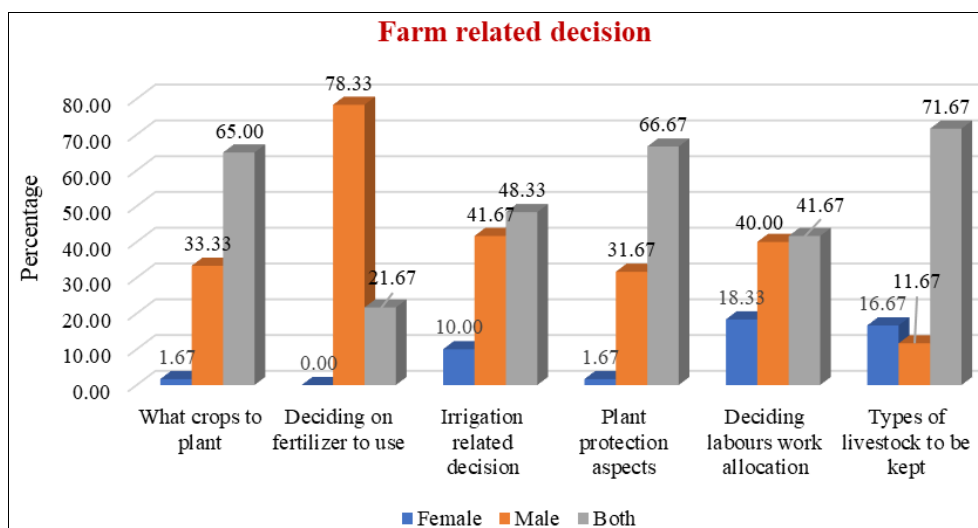


Fig 2: Distribution of respondents according to their farm related decision

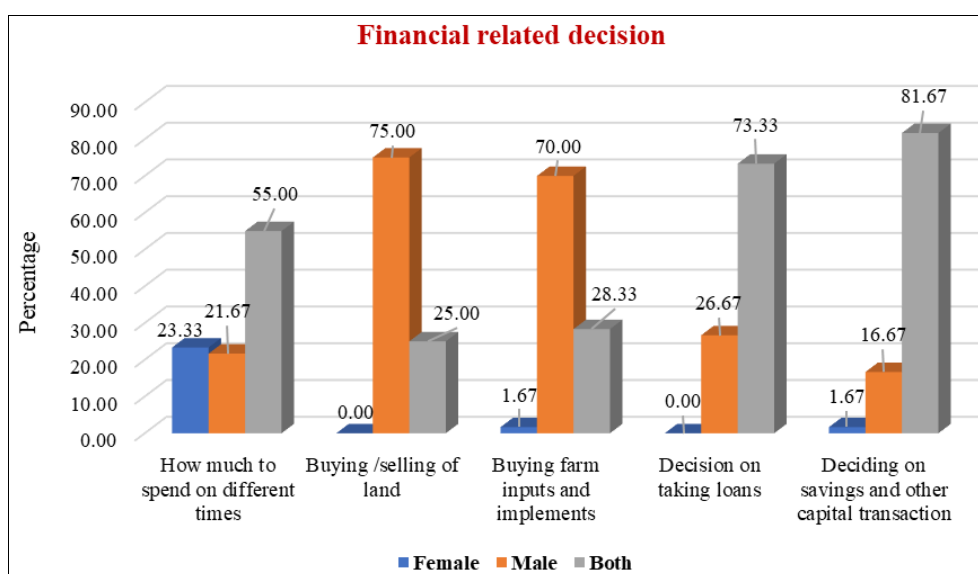


Fig 3: Distribution of respondents according to their financial related decision

From the above mention Table 1 and Figure 1 in decision making among home management decision, to cook a particular food is majorly decided by female at 81.67%. For, construction/repairing or renovation of house is majorly decided by male at 65.00%. For, setting children's arguments and fights is majorly decided both at 65.00%. For, deciding the of children is majorly done by both at 86.67%, marriage age of son/ daughter is majorly decided by both at 95.00%, and for, selection of match for son/daughter is decided by both at 96.67%.

From the above Table 2 and Figure 2 in decision making among farm related decision, what crops to plant is majorly decided by both at 65.00%. For, deciding on fertilizer to use is majorly decided by men at 78.33%. For, Irrigation related decision is majorly done by both at 48.33%. For, Plant protection aspects are majorly done by both at 66.67%. For,

deciding labours work allocation is majorly done by 41.67%. and For, Types of livestock to be kept is majorly decided by both at 71.67%.

From the above mention Table 3 and Figure 3 which depicts financial related decision from the farm women side like. How much to spend on different times is decided by both at 55.00%. for, buying/selling of land is majorly decided by farmers at 75.00%. for, buying farm inputs and implements the decision is taken by farmer 70.00%. for, decision on taking loans is decided by both at 73.33%. for deciding on saving and other capital transaction is decided by both at 81.67%. and for how much to spend on different times is decided by both at 55.00%.

1.2. Social empowerment

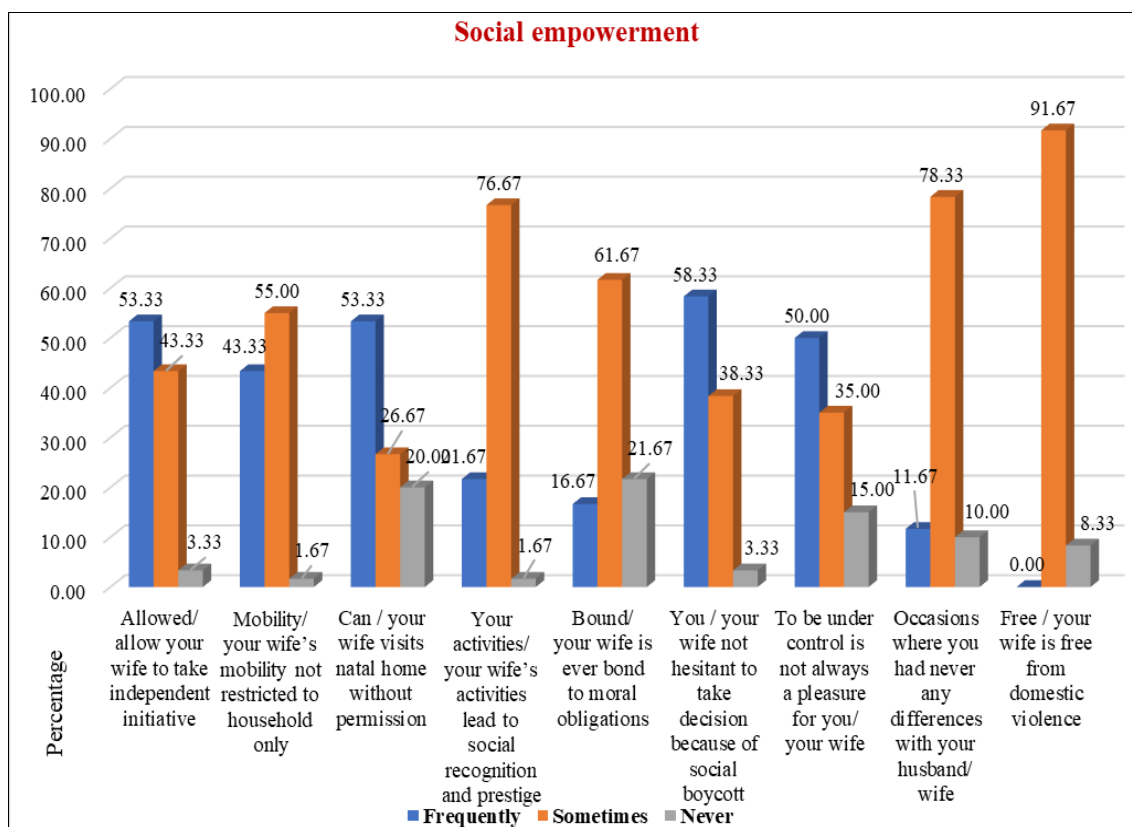


Fig. 4: Distribution of respondents according to their social empowerment (n=60)

From the Fig.4, which depicts the response of farm women regarding the aspect of social empowerment, the farm women are allowed to take independent initiative frequently at 53.33 per cent. For, the mobility of the farm women is not restricted to household only sometimes at 55.00 per cent. The farm women are allowed to visits natal home without permission frequently at 53.33 per cent. For, the farm women's activities lead to social recognition and prestige at sometimes (76.67%). For, the farm women is ever bond to moral obligations sometimes at 61.67 per cent.

For, the farm women do not hesitant to take decision because of social boycott frequently at 58.33 per cent. For, farm women been under control is not always a pleasure for you/ your wife frequently at 50.00 per cent. For, occasions farm women had never any differences within husband/ wife sometimes at 78.33 per cent, and the farm women are free from domestic violence sometimes at 91.67 per cent.

1.3. Economic empowerment

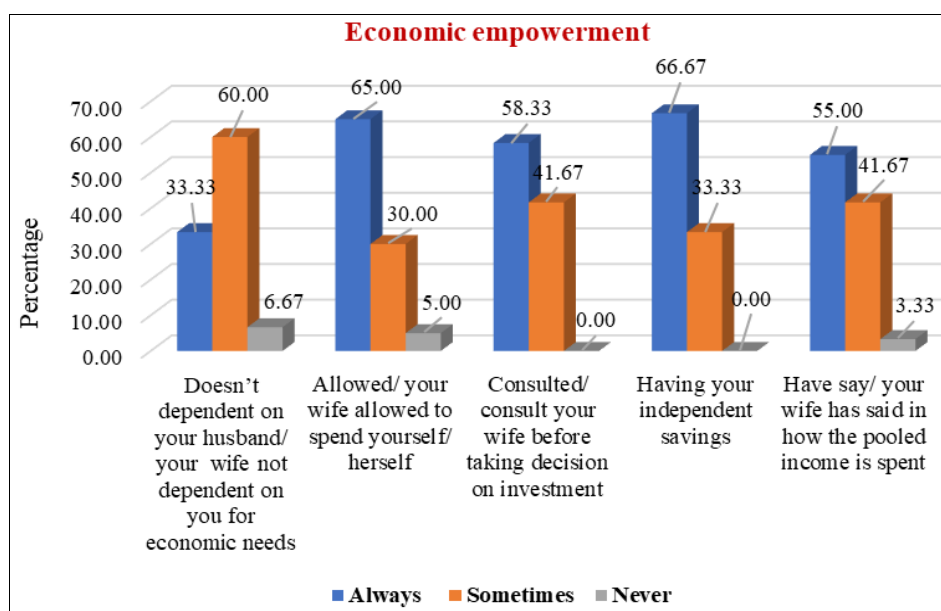


Fig 5: Distribution of respondents according to their economic empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 5, which depicts the response of the farm women regarding the aspect of economic empowerment. The farm women did not dependent on their husbands for their economic needs sometimes at 60.00 per cent. For, the farm women are allowed to spent on herself always at 65.00 per cent, the farm women are also involved in taking decision on investments always at 58.33 per cent, farm women are allowed to have their independent savings always at 66.67 per cent and the farm women plan the pooled income to be spend always at 55.00 per cent.

1.4. Political empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 6, which represents the response of farm

women on the aspect of political empowerment. The farm women are interested in politics and public affairs never at 75.00 per cent, farm women had discussed about politics and public affairs with others never at 60.00 per cent. For, the majority of the farm women is not interested in participating in election never at 83.33 per cent, politics is a domain where women should and must involve never at 41.67 per cent, the farm women feels that more women representatives in legislature should be encouraged sometimes at 43.33 per cent. For, the farm women attend the grama Sabha meeting never at 75.00 per cent and majority of the farm women does not support any candidate contesting based on caste/religion never at 61.67 per cent.

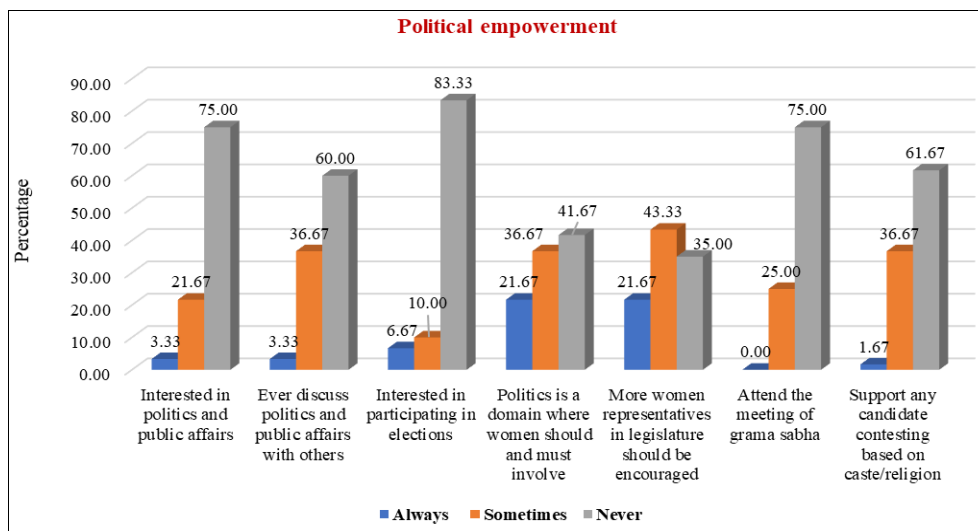


Fig 6: Distribution of respondents according to their political empowerment

1.5. Legal empowerment

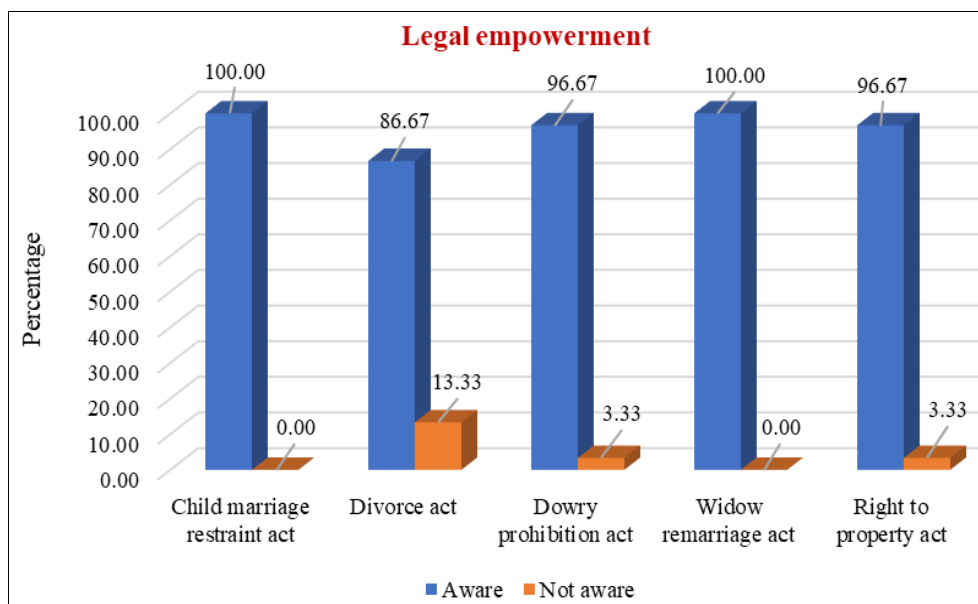


Fig 7: Distribution of respondents according to their legal empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 7, which represent the response of farm women on the aspect of legal empowerment, the farm women are well aware of child marriage restraint act at 100 per cent, divorce act at 86.67 per cent, dowry prohibition act

at 96.67 per cent, widow remarriage act at 100 per cent and the farm women is aware of right to property act at 96.67 per cent.

2. Gender empowerment of farmers

2.1 Decision making

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their decision making. (n=60)

S. No.	Decision making	Female		Male		Both	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Home management decision							
1.	To cook a particular food	47	78.33	1	1.67	12	20.00
2.	Construction /repairing or renovation of house	12	20.00	40	66.67	8	13.33
3.	Setting children’s arguments and fights	16	26.67	4	6.67	40	66.67
4.	Deciding the education of children	4	6.67	3	5.00	53	88.33
5.	Marriage age of son /daughter	3	5.00	1	1.67	56	93.33
6.	Selection of match for son/daughter	2	3.33	0	0.00	58	96.67
Farm Related Decision							
1.	What crops to plant	1	1.67	20	33.33	39	65.00
2.	Deciding on fertilizer to use	0	0.00	45	75.00	15	25.00
3.	Irrigation related decision	5	8.33	25	41.67	30	50.00
4.	Plant protection aspects	0	0.00	22	36.67	38	63.33
5.	Deciding labours work allocation	9	15.00	25	41.67	26	43.33
6.	Types of livestock to be kept	9	15.00	9	15.00	42	70.00
Financial related decision							
1.	How much to spend on different times	14	23.33	15	25.00	31	51.67
2.	Buying /selling of land	1	1.67	47	78.33	12	20.00
3.	Buying farm inputs and implements	0	0.00	45	75.00	15	25.00
4.	Decision on taking loans	0	0.00	15	25.00	45	75.00
5.	Deciding on savings and other capital transaction	0	0.00	9	15.00	51	85.00
6.	How much to spend on different times	14	23.33	15	25.00	31	51.67

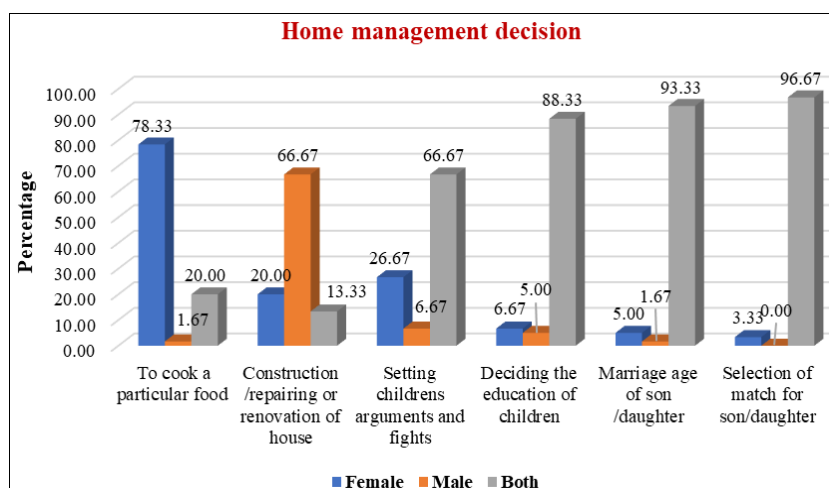


Fig 8: Distribution of respondents according to their home management decision

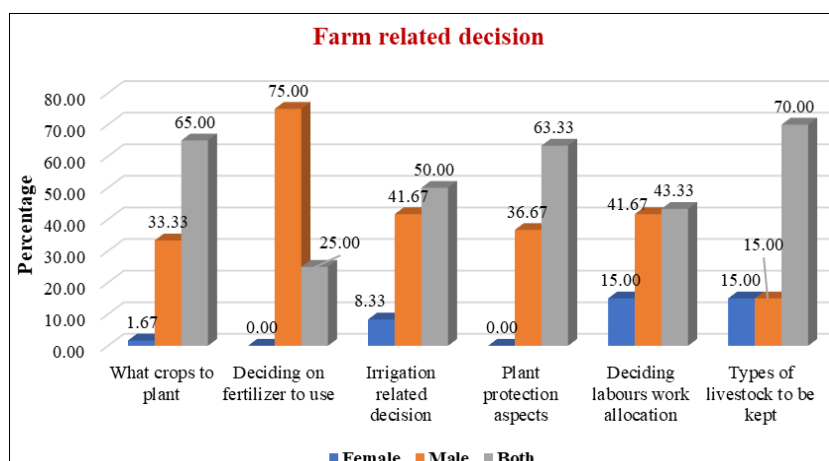


Fig 9: Distribution of respondents according to their farm related decisions

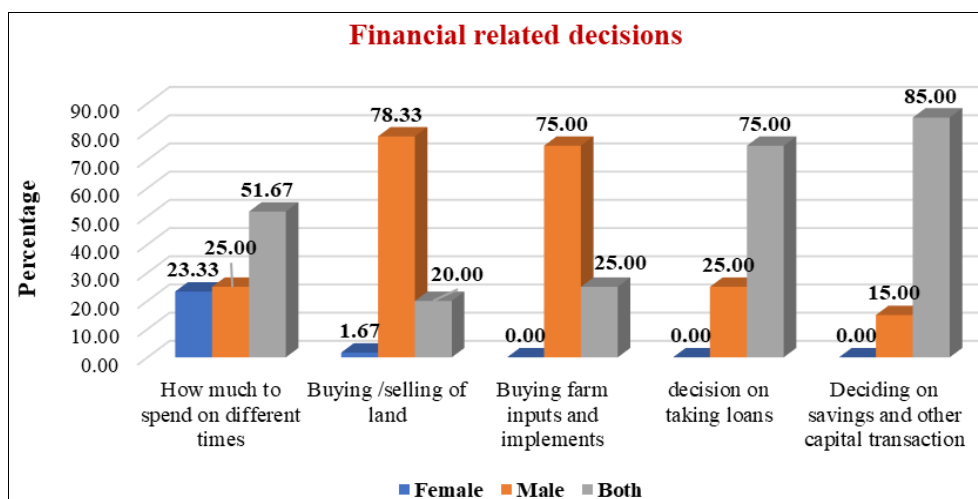


Fig 10: Distribution of respondents according to their financial related decisions

From the above Table 2 and Figure 8 in decision making among home management decision, to cook a particular food is majorly decided by female at 78.33 per cent. For, construction/repairing or renovation of house is majorly decided by male at 66.67 per cent, setting children's arguments and fights is majorly decided by both at 66.00 per cent. For, deciding the of children is majorly done by both at 88.33per cent, marriage age of son/ daughter is majorly decided by both at 93.33 per cent and for, Selection of match for son/daughter is done by both at 96.67 per cent.

From the above Table 2 and Figure 9 in decision making among farm related decision, what crops to plant is majorly decided by both at 65.00 per cent. For, deciding on fertilizer to use is majorly decided by men at 75.00 per cent, irrigation related decision is majorly done by both at 50.00per cent, plant protection aspect is majorly decided by

both at 63.33per cent, deciding labours work allocation is majorly done by both at 43.33 per cent and for, types of livestock to be kept is majorly decided by both at 70.00 per cent.

From the above Table 2 and Figure 10 which depicts financial related decision from the farmer side like, spending on different times is decided by both at 51.67 per cent, buying/selling of land is majorly decided by male at 78.33 per cent, buying farm inputs and implements the decision is taken by male at 75.00 per cent, decision on taking loans is decided by both at 75.00 per cent and for deciding on saving and other capital transaction is decided by both at 85.00 per cent.

2.2 Social empowerment

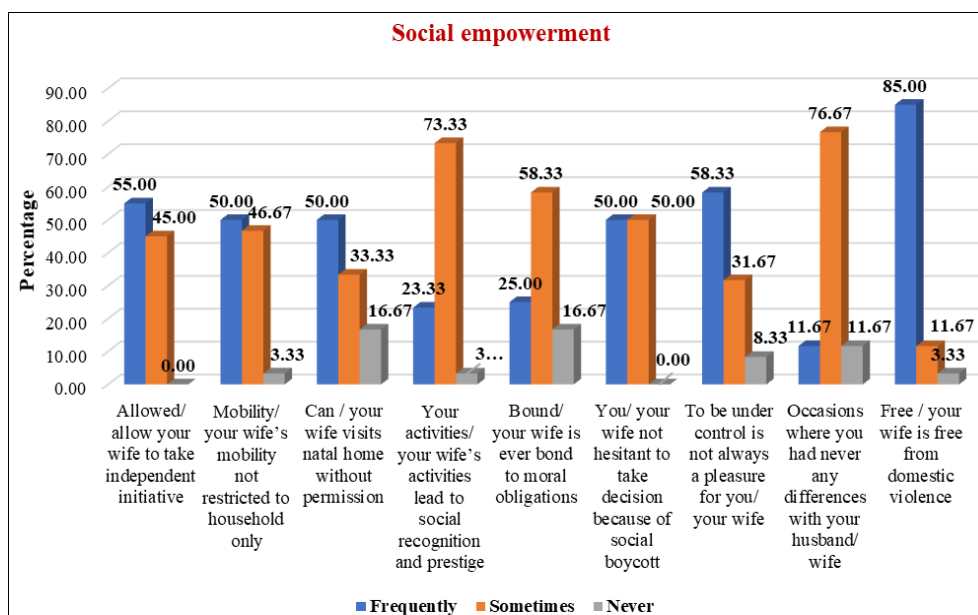


Fig 11: Distribution of respondents according to their social empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 11, which depicts the respondents from the farmer regarding the aspect of social empowerment, farmer allows their wife to take independent initiative frequently at 55.00 per cent, farmer do not restrict the mobility of wife to

household only frequently at 50.00 per cent, farmer allows his wife to visit native home without permission frequently at 50.00 per cent, farmer realizes wife's activities lead to social recognition and prestige sometime at 73.33 per cent,

farmer wife is ever bond to moral obligations sometime at 58.33 per cent, 50.00 per cent of the farmer allows his wife to take decision despite of social boycott frequently, whereas, 50.00 per cent of the farmer allows his wife to take decision despite of social boycott sometime. For, farmer feels that having their wife under his control is not pleasure frequently at 57.33 per cent, from the side of farmer

occasions where they had never any differences within them sometime at 76.67 per cent and farmers are sure that their wife is free from domestic violence frequently at 85.00 per cent.

2.3 Economic empowerment

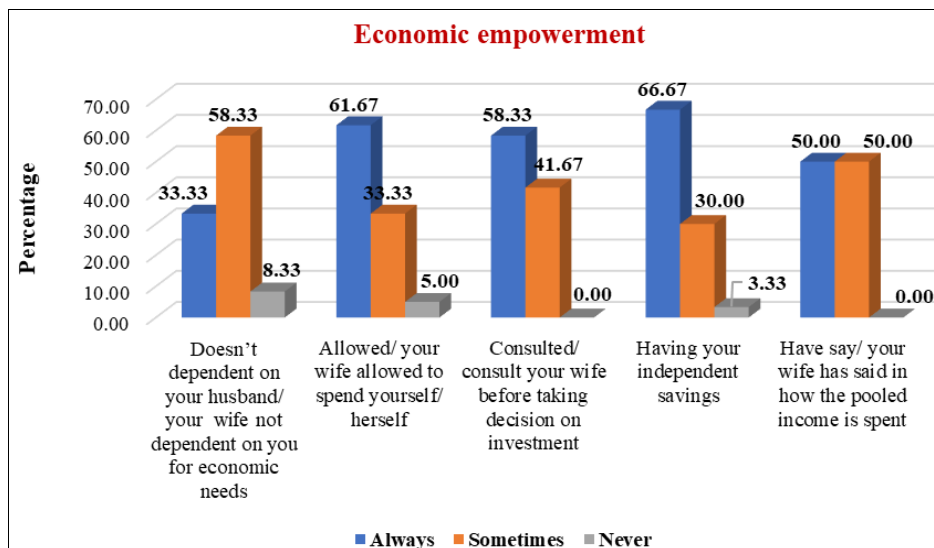


Fig 12: Distribution of respondents according to their economic empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 12, which depicts the respondents from the farmer regarding the aspect of economic empowerment. The farmer states that their wife does not depend on them for their economic needs sometimes at 58.33 per cent, the farmer allows their wife to spend on herself always at 61.67 per cent, the farmer consults their wife before taking decision on investment always at 58.33 per cent, the farmer has their independent savings always at 66.67 per cent,

50.00 per cent of the farmer consults with their wife regarding how the pooled income should be spend always, whereas, 50.00 per cent of the farmer consults with their wife regarding how the pooled income should be spend sometimes.

2.4 Political empowerment

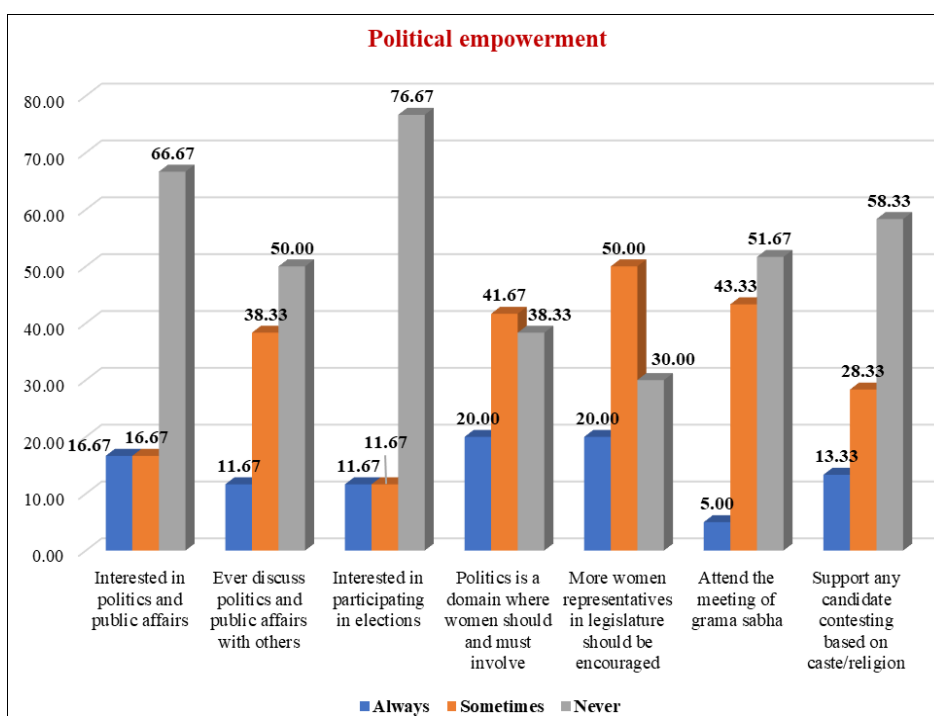


Fig 13: Distribution of respondents according to their political empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 13, which depicts the respondents from the farmer regarding the aspect of political empowerment, farmer are interested in political and public affairs never at 66.67 per cent, the farmer never discussed politics and public affairs with others at 50.00 per cent, the farmers are interested in participating in election, never at 76.67 per cent. The farmer believes that politics is a domain where women should and must involve sometimes at 41.67 per

cent and believes that more women representatives in legislature should be encouraged sometimes at 50.00 per cent. The farmer never attends the meeting of grama sabha at 51.67 per cent and farmer never support any candidates contesting based on caste/religion at 58.33 per cent.

2.5 Legal empowerment

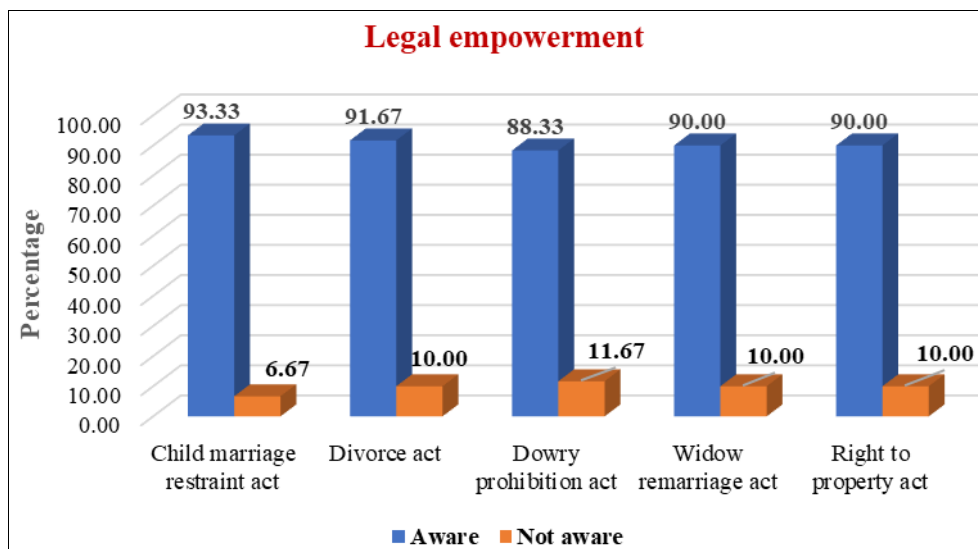


Fig 14: Distribution of respondents according to their legal empowerment (n=60)

From the Figure 14, which depicts the respondents from the farmer regarding the aspect of legal empowerment, the farmers are aware of child marriage restraint act at 93.33 per cent and divorce act at 91.67 per cent. The farmer is aware of dowry prohibition act at 88.33 per cent, widow remarriage act at 90.00 per cent and farmers were aware of right to property act at 90.00 per cent.

3. Overall gender empowerment of the farm families

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their gender empowerment. (n=60)

S. No	Categories	Farmers		Farm Women		Farm Families	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Low	13	21.7	8	13.3	10	16.7
2	Medium	36	60	40	66.7	39	65
3	High	11	18.3	12	20	11	18.3
Total		60	100.0	60	100.00	60	100.00
Mean		105.35		105.47		105.41	
SD±		5		4.96		4.79	

It is clear from the data in Table 3, that majority (60.00%) of the farmers were medium, followed by 21.70 and 18.30 per cent belongs to low and high level of gender empowerment respectively. Similarly for farm women, majority (66.70%) per cent of the farm women were medium, followed by 20.00 and 13.30 per cent belongs to high and low level of gender empowerment respectively. Whereas, for farm families as whole, it was observed that majority (65.00%) were medium, followed by 18.30 and 16.70 per cent belongs to high and low level of gender empowerment respectively. High literacy rates among rural women and better access to

primary and secondary education have gradually improved self-confidence and decision-making abilities. Awareness programs conducted by government and NGOs have helped both men and women understand the importance of gender equality in family and farming decisions.

Conclusion

The study revealed that gender empowerment in farm families is characterized by a balanced yet complementary role of both men and women across different domains of decision-making, social participation, economic independence, political involvement, and legal awareness. While home management and certain farm-related decisions show higher female participation, major financial and input-related decisions are still largely dominated by men. However, in most critical areas, especially child-related decisions, livestock selection, and loan management, joint decision-making by both spouses emerged as the most common pattern, reflecting a gradual shift towards shared responsibilities. Social and economic empowerment indicators suggest that women are increasingly able to take independent initiatives, manage personal finances, and contribute to investment decisions, though political participation remains limited for both genders. Legal awareness was notably high among both farmers and farm women, indicating the success of awareness and literacy initiatives in rural areas.

Overall, the majority of respondents - farmers, farm women, and farm families, fall into the medium category of gender empowerment, with only a small proportion at the low end. This indicates progress toward gender equality in rural households, supported by improved education levels, exposure to awareness programs, and evolving social norms.

Continued efforts in enhancing political participation, strengthening women's role in high-value farm decisions, and promoting shared responsibility in economic matters could further elevate gender empowerment levels in farming communities.

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