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Sociological appraisal on working conditions of agricultural women labourers in rural community of Haryana

¹Kirti, ²Subhash Chander and ³Vinod Kumari

¹M.A. Sociology, Department of Sociology, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

³Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India

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Corresponding Author: Kirti

Abstract

This study presents a sociological appraisal of the working conditions experienced by agricultural women labourers in rural Haryana. We explore the multifaceted challenges faced by women engaged in agricultural work in this region. Our analysis highlights the intersectionality of gender, economics and social dynamics in shaping the experiences of agricultural women labourers. Despite contributing significantly to agricultural production and household economies, women often receive lower wages, lack job security and endure harsh working conditions. The Study was conducted on 140 respondents from two districts named Jhajjar and Fatehabad of Haryana state. Analysis clearly revealed that more than three-fourth of the respondents (76.42%) reported long and irregular working hours followed by exposure to harsh weather (75.00%) and gender discrimination (67.85%). In conclusion, this study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to address the systemic inequalities faced by agricultural women labourers in rural Haryana. By promoting gender equality, enforcing labour rights, and improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, policymakers can work towards creating more equitable and empowering environments for women in rural agricultural communities.

Keywords: Working conditions, agricultural women labourers, socio-economic information

Introduction

Agriculture serves as the cornerstone of numerous economies worldwide, providing employment for a substantial segment of the global workforce. Within this sector, women play a pivotal yet frequently underappreciated role as agricultural labourers, contributing significantly to food production, rural livelihoods, and sustainable development. Despite their crucial contributions, agricultural women labourers confront a host of challenges in their working conditions, encompassing limited access to land and resources, occupational health hazards, wage disparities, and social inequalities (Mazumdar and Neetha, 2011) ^[8].

Access to land and productive resources is indispensable for agricultural livelihoods. However, agricultural women labourers often encounter formidable barriers to land ownership, control, and utilization. Patriarchal norms and legal systems in many societies prioritize male land ownership, relegating women to subordinate or dependent positions. Even when women possess legal rights to land, customary practices and inheritance laws frequently curtail their authority over land assets. This lack of land tenure security not only undermines women's economic autonomy but also constrains their ability to invest in agricultural productivity, adopt sustainable farming methods, and access credit and other financial services (Agarwal, 2016) ^[1].

Moreover, women labourers often confront difficulties in

accessing essential productive resources for agricultural production, including seeds, fertilizers, tools, and irrigation facilities. Limited access to these resources hinders women's agricultural productivity and perpetuates their economic vulnerability. Addressing gender disparities in land and resource access necessitates comprehensive policy reforms that acknowledge and safeguard women's land rights, ensure equitable access to productive resources, and promote gender-responsive land governance frameworks (Gupta, 2012) ^[4].

Agricultural work exposes women labourers to various occupational health and safety risks, ranging from exposure to agrochemicals and pesticides to physical strains and ergonomic injuries. Women engaged in tasks such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and animal husbandry often work long hours under challenging environmental conditions, including extreme heat, cold, and adverse weather conditions. Additionally, the extensive use of chemical inputs in modern agriculture poses significant health risks for women, including respiratory illnesses, skin disorders, reproductive health issues, and long-term chronic conditions (Mukhopadhyay, 2014) ^[9].

Women agricultural labourers face significant challenges including inadequate healthcare, safety measures, and protective gear due to lacking regulations and cultural barriers. They also endure wage disparities compared to men, reflecting broader gender inequalities in the labour

market. These disparities contribute to poverty, limited access to essentials, and vulnerability to exploitation. Addressing these issues requires equal pay enforcement, improved working conditions, and enhanced access to formal employment and income-generating opportunities (Kabeer, 2005) ^[6].

Women in Haryana, as in many parts of India, play a vital role in agriculture, contributing significantly to the agrarian economy. This introduction aims to provide a brief overview of the socio-economic aspects surrounding agricultural women labourers in Haryana, drawing upon existing literature and research. Haryana, known for its agrarian economy, relies heavily on agriculture as a primary source of livelihood. Women actively participate in various farming activities, including sowing, harvesting and post-harvest tasks. However, their contributions are often undervalued and they face challenges related to social norms and gender-based disparities (Srivastava *et al.*, 2016) ^[11]. Access to and control over agricultural land remain crucial for women's economic empowerment in Haryana. Despite legal provisions, women often encounter obstacles in securing land rights due to entrenched patriarchal norms and practices. Unequal landownership patterns can contribute to the economic vulnerability of women in the state (Gupta, 2012; Malik and Dahiya, 2016) ^[4, 7]. The gender wage gap persists in the agricultural sector of Haryana, with women frequently receiving lower wages than their male counterparts. Factors such as limited access to education and skills training, along with societal norms, contribute to this wage disparity, impacting the socio-economic status of women labourers (Hooda and Yadav, 2017) ^[5]. In addition to their paid work in agriculture, women labourers bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work within farming households. They are responsible for domestic chores, childcare, eldercare, and other reproductive tasks essential for family well-being and community sustainability. Nevertheless, unpaid care work often goes unacknowledged and undervalued, perpetuating gender inequalities and limiting women's opportunities for economic participation and personal development.

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work reinforces traditional gender roles and norms, constraining women's autonomy, mobility, and decision-making power. Additionally, the time and energy devoted to caregiving responsibilities detract from women's capacity to engage in income-generating activities, pursue education and training opportunities, and participate in community and political life. Reducing the burden of unpaid care work on agricultural women labourers necessitates transformative shifts in social attitudes, policies, and practices to promote gender equality in caregiving responsibilities, redistribute care work more equitably within households and communities, and recognize the value of women's unpaid contributions to sustainable development (Tyagi, 2018) ^[12]. Social norms and cultural attitudes significantly influence the working conditions and opportunities available to agricultural women labourers. Patriarchal beliefs and traditional gender roles often dictate women's roles within agricultural communities, reinforcing inequalities and impeding their access to resources, education, and decision-making processes. Discriminatory practices based on gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, or indigenous status further

marginalize women within agricultural settings, exacerbating their exclusion and vulnerability. The study was conducted with the objective of socio-economic conditions of the agricultural women labourers in rural community of Haryana.

Materials and Methods

This paper explores the working conditions of agricultural women labourers, shedding light on the challenges they encounter and the implications for their well-being and livelihoods. The Study was conducted on 140 respondents from two districts named Jhajjar and Fatehabad of Haryana state. From each district one block was chosen at random. Bhattu Kalan block from Fatehabad district and Beri block from Jhajjar were taken for the study. From Bhattu Kalan block Dhingsara and Mehuwala village were chosen and from Beri block, Dubaldhan and Majra village were chosen for the study. Purposively random sampling method was selected for data collection. The well-structured interview schedule was used to collect the primary data from the field of the study. The suitable statistical techniques were used in the study.

Results and Discussion

Personal information of the respondents

The result analysis of the age composition depicted that the maximum number of the respondents (45.71%) belonged to the age group of 36-50 years and up to 35 years of age group (41.43%) respectively. Further analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents (51.43%) were up to 35 years age group in Jhajjar district whereas nearly one-third of the respondents (31.43%) were up to 35 years of age group in Fatehabad district. Results analysis revealed that nearly one-third of the respondents (32.86%) were educated up to primary level and up to middle school (18.57%) respectively. Contrary to that nearly two-fifth of the respondents (37.86%) were illiterate. Region wise analysis revealed that maximum number of the respondents (44.29%) had primary education in Jhajjar district. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (48.57%) were illiterate in Fatehabad district.

Table 1: Personal information of the respondents

Sr. No.	Variables	Jhajjar (N=70)	Fatehabad (N=70)	Total (N=140)
1.	Age group (years)			
	Up to 35 years	36 (51.43)	22 (31.43)	58 (41.43)
	36 to 50 years	28 (40.00)	36 (51.43)	64 (45.71)
	Above 50 years	6 (8.57)	12 (17.14)	18 (12.86)
	Total	70 (100.00)	70 (100.00)	140 (100.00)
2.	Level of education			
	Illiterate	19 (27.14)	34 (48.57)	53 (37.86)
	Primary School	31 (44.29)	15 (21.43)	46 (32.86)
	Middle School	13 (18.57)	13 (18.57)	26 (18.57)
	Secondary School	4 (5.71)	5 (7.14)	9 (6.43)
	Higher Secondary School	3 (4.29)	3 (4.29)	6 (4.29)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage

Social information of the respondents

Overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.86%) were

married and only few percentages of respondents (12.14%) were widows. Same trend was found in both the regions. Analysis revealed that majority of the respondents (56.42%) belonged to nuclear family. Region wise analysis revealed that more than three-fifth of respondents (61.42%) belonged to nuclear families in Jhajjar district whereas majority of the respondents (51.42%) were having nuclear families in Fatehabad district. Data regarding family size revealed that majority of the respondents (54.29%) had medium family size. Region- wise analysis revealed that more than three-fifth of the respondents (61.43%) were having small family size in Jhajjar district. Contrary to that 30.00% of the respondents had small family size i.e. upto 4 members in

Fatehabad District. The results revealed that agricultural labour was the main family occupation in the field of the study. Three-fifth of the respondents (60.00%) engaged in agricultural labour and as artisan (23.57%). More than three-fifth of the respondents (63.57%) had minor children as dependent in the family and as elders (32.14%), respectively. A few percentages of respondents (4.28%) were Physically challenged in the family. Data on social participation indicated that majority of the respondents (56.42%) were not engaged in any social organization. More than one-third of the respondents (35.00%) engaged in one organization. Same trend was found in both regions.

Table 2: Social information of the respondents

Sr. No.	Variables	Jhajjar (N=70)	Fatehabad (N=70)	Total (N=140)
Marital Status				
1.	Married	61 (87.14)	62 (88.57)	123 (87.86)
	Widow	9 (12.86)	8 (11.43)	17 (12.14)
Family type				
2.	Nuclear	43(61.42)	36(51.42)	79 (56.43)
	Joint	27(38.57)	34(48.57)	61 (43.57)
Family size				
3.	Small (Up to 4 members)	43 (61.43)	21 (30.00)	64 (45.71)
	Medium (5 to 8 members)	27 (38.57)	49 (70.00)	76 (54.29)
Family Occupation				
4.	Agriculture Labour	63 (90.00)	21 (30.00)	84 (60.00)
	Artisan	--	33 (47.14)	33 (23.57)
	Small Scale Enterprises	--	16 (22.86)	16 (11.43)
	Government Job	7 (10.00)	--	7 (5.00)
Dependent members in the family				
	Minor children	40 (57.14)	49 (70.00)	89 (63.57)
	Elder person	28 (40.00)	17 (24.28)	45 (32.14)
	Physically challenged	2 (2.85)	4 (5.71)	6 (4.28)
Social participation				
6.	Nil	38 (54.28)	41 (58.57)	79 (56.42)
	Member of one organization	27 (38.57)	22 (31.42)	49 (35.00)
	Member of more than one organization	5 (7.14)	7 (10.00)	12 (8.57)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage

It was found from the field of the study that maximum number of the respondents (48.00%) belonged to Schedule Caste and Backward Classes (33.00%) respectively. Data analysis revealed that overwhelming majority of the

respondents (80.71%) had low level of socio- economic status and medium level of socio- economic status (18.10%).

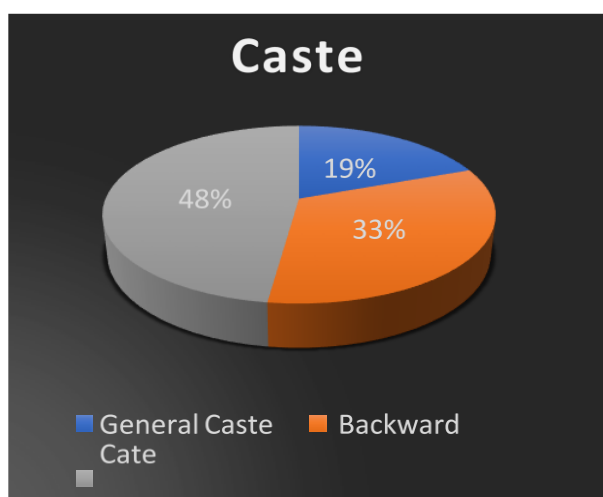


Fig 1: Caste of respondents

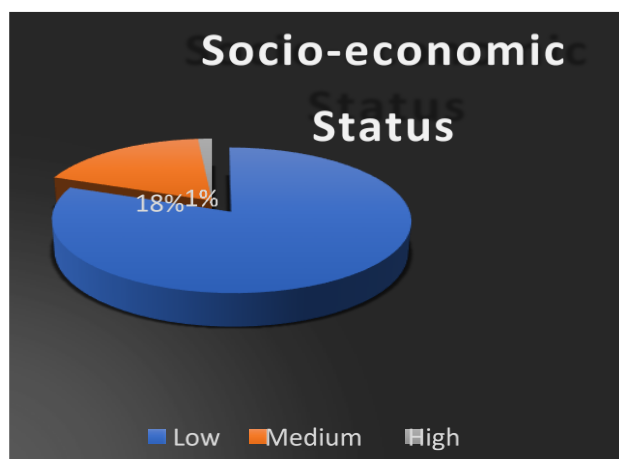


Fig 2: Socio-economic status of the respondents

Economic information of the respondents

Data analysis revealed that more than three-fourth of the respondents (78.57%) lived in pucca houses. On the other hand, nearly one-fifth of the respondents (21.42%) lived in mixed houses. Region-wise analysis revealed that overwhelming majority of respondents (81.43%) were having pucca house in Fatehabad district. Contrary to that, nearly one-fourth of respondents (24.28%) had mixed house in Jhajjar district. The data indicated that an Overwhelming majority of respondents (91.43%) were landless. Only a few percentages of respondents (8.57%) owned land up to 1.5 acres. Region-wise analysis revealed that overwhelming majority of the respondents were landless in both the districts. On the other hand, only a few percentages of

respondents (14.29%) had size of land holding up to 1.5 acre in Fatehabad district. The data indicated that more than three-fifth of the respondents (62.14%) had no animal in the field of the study. More than one-fourth of respondents (27.85%) had cow/goat and buffalos (10.00%) respectively. The perusal of the data indicated that about two-third of the respondents (65.00%) engaged in Seasonal agricultural labour. Only a few percentages of respondents (11.43%) were also having Contractual farming labour. Analysis clearly revealed that overwhelming majority of the respondents (82.14%) were not engaged in any subsidiary occupation. Contrary to that a few percentages of the respondents (17.86%) were engaged in small scale enterprises. It was found from the field of the study that overwhelming majority of the respondents (84.29%) had up to 2 family members working as agricultural labourers while few percentages of the respondents (15.71%) had more than 2 family members working as agricultural labourers. Analysis revealed that majority of the respondents (51.43%) earned annual income up to Rs. 50,000/-. Few percentages of the respondents (2.86%) also earned annual income above Rs.1,00,000/-. Maximum number of the respondents (48.57%) were having family annual income between Rs.1,00,000 – Rs.2,00,000. A few percentages of the respondents (4.29%) had family annual income above Rs. 2,00,000/-. The results revealed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents (82.86%) were below poverty line while nearly one-fifth of the respondents (17.14%) were above poverty line. The results revealed that nearly two-fifth of the respondents (38.57%) had medium level of domestic material possession and Low level (33.57%).

Table 3: Economic information of the respondents

Sr. No.	Variables	Jhajjar (N=70)	Fatehabad (N=70)	Total (N=140)
House				
1.	Pucca house	53 (75.71)	57 (81.43)	110 (78.57)
	Mixed house	17 (24.28)	13 (18.57)	30 (21.42)
Landholding				
2.	Landless	68 (97.14)	60 (85.71)	128 (91.43)
	Owned (up to 1.5 acre)	2 (2.86)	10 (14.29)	12 (8.57)
Animal Possession				
3.	No animal	48 (68.57)	39 (55.71)	87 (62.14)
	Cow/Goat	14 (20.00)	25 (35.71)	39 (27.85)
	Buffalo	8 (11.42)	6 (8.57)	14 (10.00)
Major Occupation of the respondent				
4.	Permanent agricultural labour	28 (40.00)	5 (7.14)	33 (23.57)
	Seasonal agricultural labour	42 (60.00)	49 (70.00)	91 (65.00)
	Contractual farming labour	--	16 (22.86)	16 (11.43)
Subsidiary Occupation of the respondent				
5.	Not engaged in any subsidiary occupation	63 (90.00)	52 (74.29)	115 (82.14)
	Small scale enterprises	7 (10.00)	18 (25.71)	25 (17.86)
Family members work as agricultural labourers				
6.	Up to 2	62 (88.57)	56 (80.00)	118 (84.29)
	More than 2	8 (11.43)	14 (20.00)	22 (15.71)
Annual Income of respondent				
7.	Up to Rs.50,000/-	18 (25.71)	54 (77.14)	72 (51.43)
	Between Rs.50,000 to 1,00,000/-	48 (68.57)	16 (22.86)	64 (45.71)
	above Rs.1,00,000/-	4 (5.71)	--	4 (2.86)
Family Annual Income				
8.	Up to Rs.1,00,000/-	15 (21.43)	51 (72.86)	66 (47.14)
	Between Rs.1,00,000 – 2,00,000/-	51 (72.86)	17 (24.29)	68 (48.57)
	Above Rs.2,00,000/-	4 (5.71)	2 (2.86)	6 (4.29)

9.	Level of Economic status			
	Above poverty line	6 (8.57)	18 (25.71)	24 (17.14)
	Below poverty line	64 (91.43)	52 (74.29)	116 (82.86)
10.	Domestic material possession			
	Low (up to 5)	--	47 (67.14)	47 (33.57)
	Medium (6-10)	31 (44.29)	23 (32.86)	54 (38.57)
	High (11- 16)	39 (55.71)	--	39 (27.86)
11	Mass Media Exposure			
	Low (up to 3)	--	10 (14.29)	10 (7.14)
	Medium (4 – 6)	65 (92.86)	56 (80.00)	122 (87.14)
	High (Above 6)	05 (7.14)	04 (5.71)	08 (5.71)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage

Analysis revealed that overwhelming majority of the respondents (87.00%) had medium level of mass-media exposure whereas only a few percentages of respondents (6.00%) had high level of mass media exposure and high (7.00%).

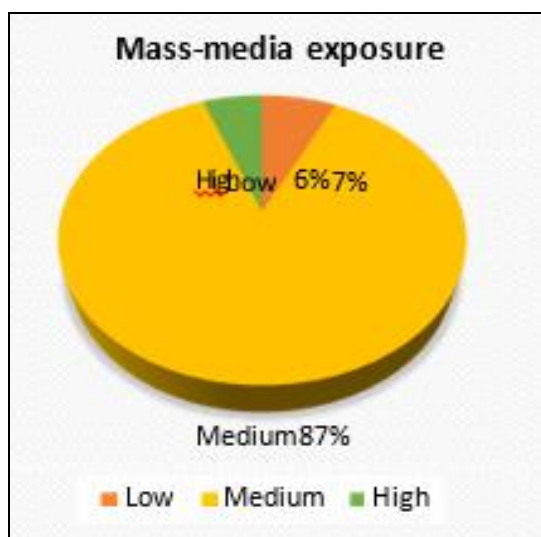


Fig 3: Level of mass-media exposure

Table 4 provides a summary of the working conditions of the agricultural women labourers. Analysis clearly revealed that more than three-fourth of the respondents (76.42%) reported long and irregular working hours followed by exposure to harsh weather (75.00%) and gender discrimination (67.85%). Other conditions include unsafe working conditions (60.71%), rest allowed during working hours (53.57%), limited access to healthcare (48.57%), employer asks for extra work (40.00%) and so on.

Table 4: Working Conditions of the agricultural women labourers
(N=140)

Sr. No.	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Long and Irregular working hours	110	76.42
2.	Exposure to Harsh Weather	105	75.00
3.	Lack of Protective Gear	95	67.85
4.	Gender Discrimination	95	67.85
5.	Unsafe Working Conditions	85	60.71
6.	Rest allowed during working hours	75	53.57
7.	Limited Access to Healthcare	68	48.57
8.	Lunch break during work	61	43.57
9.	Employer asks for extra work	56	40.00
10.	Child Labour Involvement	37	26.42
11.	Any other	7	5.00

Responses multiple

The various supporting results were found about this study. Existing research by Chung *et al.* (2018) ^[2] underscores the adverse effects of extended working hours on productivity, fatigue and work- life balance. Further results revealed that three-fourth of the respondents faced exposure to harsh weather (75.00%). The vulnerability of agricultural labourers to climate-related challenges was found in line with the study by Nelson *et al.* (2020) ^[10] on climate change and agriculture highlight the need for adaptive strategies to protect workers in the face of changing weather patterns. The prevalence of gender discrimination reported by two-third of the respondents (67.85%) reflects systemic inequalities. Existing literature on gender in agriculture emphasizes the need for gender-responsive policies and interventions to address discriminatory practices (Doss, 2018) ^[3].

It was concluded that sociological appraisal of working conditions among agricultural women laborers in rural Haryana reveals complex intersections of gender, economics, health, and social dynamics. By recognizing these challenges and implementing targeted interventions, policymakers can strive towards creating more equitable and empowering environments for women in rural agricultural communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals the multifaceted realities of agricultural women laborers in rural Haryana. From demographics to socio-economic status and working conditions, the analysis underscores the complex interplay of factors shaping their lives. Despite contributing significantly to the agricultural sector, many women face educational and economic constraints, living below the poverty line with limited access to resources. Moreover, the prevalence of gender discrimination and challenging working conditions highlights the need for targeted interventions and gender-responsive policies. By addressing these issues, policymakers can work towards creating more equitable opportunities and empowering environments for women in rural agriculture.

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