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Exploring stress management strategies among farm women of South Odisha

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Abstract

The study investigates stress management practices among farm women in South Odisha, a demographic historically pivotal in agriculture yet confronted with significant disparities. Utilizing a sample of 180 respondents from 18 villages across six agrarian blocks, data was collected through structured interviews. The findings reveal a range of coping strategies adopted by farm women to manage stress, encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions. Notably, practices such as rest, hydration, leisure, deep breathing, and dietary adjustments were prevalent for physical stress management. Meanwhile, religious activities, prayer, mantra chanting, yoga, and meditation were commonly employed for mental stress relief. Social support mechanisms, including communication with peers, group work, and participation in social functions, were also prominent. Moreover, strategies to reduce responsibilities and engage in recreational activities were observed. The study underscores the importance of understanding and addressing stress among women in agriculture, not only for gender equality but also for sustainable agricultural development. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners to design targeted interventions that support the well-being and productivity of farm women in rural communities.

Keywords: Farm women, stress management, physical stress, mental stress, social support

Introduction

According to historians, it is believed that women played a pivotal role in the early stages of agriculture by domesticating crop plants. While men were primarily engaged in hunting, women took the initiative to gather seeds from plants and began cultivating them to fulfil their food, fiber, and fuel requirements (Majumdar & Shah, 2017) ^[5]. Despite constituting nearly half of the global population and contributing approximately 60 percent of working hours, women are confronted with significant disparities. They make up around 30 percent of the formal work force yet earn just 10 percent of the income and hold fewer than 1 percent of the world's property. In India, out of a total of 90 million working women, approximately 5.23 million are employed in the organized sector, while a substantial 85 million women work in the unorganized sector, particularly in agriculture, making up a significant 88 percent (Gennari *et al.* 2022) ^[2].

Rural women are actively involved in a wide range of agricultural activities, including the production, processing, preservation, and utilization of food (Singh *et al.* 2016) ^[7]. They play vital roles throughout the entire food production cycle, from selecting seeds to planting, fertilizing, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, drying, and storing, all the way to providing for their families using the harvested

produce (Malik *et al.* 2019) ^[6]. Importantly, they also have a significant influence on decision-making within farm households, shaping the characteristics and choices related to specific crops or animal species. They impact the adoption and implementation of new agricultural technologies, management decisions, and other production-oriented aspects (Sreedevi and Rao, 2017) ^[8].

Stress management among women in agriculture is a vital area of research that seeks to illuminate the multifaceted dimensions of stress management practices adopted by women who are actively involved in farming activities. Stress in this context encompasses a broad spectrum of physical, psychological, and social pressures that can arise due to the demanding and complex nature of agricultural work. This assessment delves into the unique coping strategy that women encounter in agricultural settings, analyzes the underlying factors contributing to such stress, and explores potential consequences for both individuals and the broader agricultural community.

Understanding and addressing farm stress management among women in agriculture is not only a matter of gender equality but also of sustainable agricultural development (Jost *et al.* 2016) ^[3]. Stressed women farmers may be less productive, compromising the overall efficiency and output of farming operations. Furthermore, their well-being

influences the health and educational outcomes of their families and communities, underscoring the broader implications of this issue.

The issue of stress management among women, particularly those engaged in agriculture, is a significant aspect of the ongoing social changes in India. Historically, Indian women primarily worked within the family structure. However, today, they have increasingly become part of the formal workforce, alongside men. This shift has resulted in women straddling two distinct systems, requiring them to fulfill both familial and occupational responsibilities. Consequently, this dual role places a considerable amount of stress on women in farming communities (Luke & Munshi, 2011) [4].

Materials and Methods

Data Collection

Gajapati and Rayagada district in Odisha state has one of the highest rural female populations in the state (Acharya, 2018) [11] and was purposefully chosen for the research study. Six blocks from the two district which were agrarian in nature viz, Gosani, Gumma, Kasinagar from Gajapati district and Rayagada, Gunupur, Kolnara from Rayagada district were selected for the study. With the help of guide 3 villages from each block were chosen randomly. Thus, a total number of 180 sample from 18 villages were selected for the present study.

The primary data related to stress management practices followed by farm women were acquired utilising a well-developed and well tested schedule, that is developed by Jayashree Nayak. Initial information was collected from respondents using pre-tested schedules and personal interviews with their prior agreement. The data is mainly related to the coping strategies adopted by individual women farmer to escape from stress.

Result and Discussion

Depending upon the current situation the schedule was further divided into two parts.

1. Physical Stress Management
2. Mental Stress Management

Physical Stress Management

Relaxation

The result from table no. 1 clearly indicated that the cent percent of respondents take rest followed by 81.11 percent respondents drinking water, 73.33 percent respondents take out time for leisure and 72.77 percent respondents deep breathing for physical stress management.

Diet

From the table no. 1 it clearly observed that a significant

proportion of respondents (57.22%) eat less, while a substantial number of respondents (27.78%) consume more food many times in small quantities while (25.00%) take balance diet and (16.11%) of the respondents eat high fiber diet for physical stress management.

Physical exercise

The result from table no. 1 it clearly observed that majority of the respondents (95.00%) doing work at home, a significant proportion of respondents (89.44%) going field by walking, while a substantial number of respondents (87.77%) going for a walk and (35.55%) of the respondents doing yoga for physical stress management.

Medicinal Therapy

In medicinal therapy majority of the respondents (86.66%) take tea/coffee for physical stress management.

Natural Care

In case of natural care, 11.66 percent of the respondents take water therapy for their physical stress management.

Table 1: Distribution of respondent according to their level of physical stress management

(n=180)			
Sr. No.		Frequency	Percent
A Relaxation			
1	Take rest	180	100
2	Take out time for leisure	132	73.33
3	Deep breathing	131	72.77
4	Drinking water	146	81.11
B Diet			
1	Take balance diet	45	25
2	Consume more food many times in small quantities	50	27.78
3	Eat less	103	57.22
4	Eat high fiber diet	29	16.11
C Physical exercise			
1	Yoga	64	35.55
2	Going field by walking	161	89.44
3	Doing work at home	171	95
4	Going for a walk	158	87.77
D Medicinal therapy			
1	Mood altering drugs	0	0
2	Tea/Coffee	156	86.66
E Natural care			
1	Water therapy	21	11.66
2	Hot water therapy	0	0
3	Colour therapy	0	0
4	Aroma therapy	0	0

Table 2: Distribution of respondent according to their level of physical stress management

Sr. No.	Category	Respondents (n=180)	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Low (<8.03)	79	43.89
2	Medium (8.03 to 9.16)	67	37.22
3	High (>9.16)	34	18.89
Total		180	100
Mean= 8.60 SD= 1.13			

The result from the Table 16 clearly indicates that maximum number of the respondents (43.89%) had followed low physical stress management, (37.22%) respondents had

followed medium physical stress management and (18.89%) respondents had followed very high physical stress management.

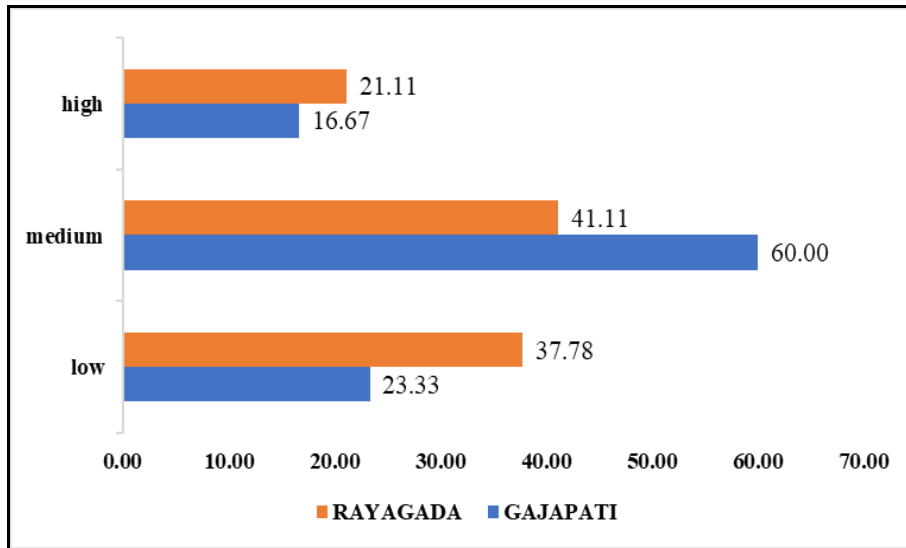


Fig 1: District wise distribution of respondents according to their level of physical stress management

The figure 1 clearly indicates the district wise distribution of farm women according to their level of physical stress management. The data presented in the figure 1 indicates that majority of the respondents (60.00%) from Gajapati district belongs to medium level of physical stress management category and 41.11 percent of the respondents from Rayagada district belongs to medium level of physical stress management category.

The reason may be due to lack of proper education facilities, improper extension contacts between farm women and low-income level among rural women. Limited access to resources and employment opportunities in rural areas can constrain their physical stress management ability.

Mental Stress Management

Religious

The result from table 3 indicates that a large number of respondents 84.44 percent doing religious activity followed by 68.89 percent doing offer prayer, 48.89 percent chanting mantras, 35.55 percent doing yoga and 31.11 percent of the respondents doing meditation for their mental stress management.

Psychotherapy

From psychotherapy a great majority of the respondents 86.11 percent doing fun with family followed by 36.66 percent laughing, 33.33 percent crying, 30.55 percent following change in routine and 27.22 percent respondents adopted positive thinking for their mental stress management.

Social Support

In case of social support, the data from table 3 shows that

98.33 percent of the respondents talking to other women followed by 91.11 percent work in group and 85.00 percent attending/organizing social functions for mental stress management.

Altering Situations

The data from table no. 3 clearly shows that 85.00 percent of the respondents maintaining good home followed by 63.89 percent avoiding painful memories for mental stress management.

Reducing Responsibilities

From reducing responsibilities, the result presented in table 3 indicates that 36.66 percent respondents avoid disliking task followed by 32.22 percent changing in preferences, 24.44 percent delaying the task and 20.55 percent of the respondents postponing a specific task for mental stress management.

Most Liked Activities

The data presented in table 3 shows that cent percent of respondents talking with others followed by a large extend of respondents 98.88 percent watching TV, 70.55 percent going to shop, 42.22 percent spending time in farm for watching good crop condition, 33.33 percent listening songs and 23.33 percent listening radio for mental stress management.

Counselling

From counselling the data presented in table 3 indicates that a small number of respondents 18.00 percent followed counselling for their mental stress management.

Table 3: Distribution of respondent according to their level of mental stress management

(n=180)			
Sr. No.		Frequency	Percent
A	Religious		
1	Offer prayer	124	68.89
2	Meditation	56	31.11
3	Yoga	64	35.55
4	Religious activity	152	84.44
5	Chanting mantras	88	48.89
B	Psychotherapy		
1	Positive thinking	49	27.22
2	Fun with family	155	86.11
3	Change in the routine	55	30.55
4	Crying	60	33.33
5	Laughing	66	36.66
C	Social support		
1	Work in group	164	91.11
2	Talk to other women	177	98.33
3	Attending/Organizing social functions	153	85
D	Altering situations		
1	Avoiding painful reminders	115	63.89
2	Maintaining good home	153	85
E	Reducing responsibilities		
1	Postponing the task	37	20.55
2	Delaying the task	44	24.44
3	Change in preferences	58	32.22
4	Avoid disliking task	66	36.66
F	Most liked activities		
1	Watching TV	178	98.88
2	Listening radio	42	23.33
3	Listening songs	60	33.33
4	Going to shop	127	70.55
5	Spending time in farm for watching good crop condition	76	42.22
6	Talking with others	180	100
G	Counselling		
1	Take counselling from other when in trouble	18	10.00

Table 4: Distribution of respondent according to their level of mental stress management

Sr. No.	Category	Respondents (n=180)	
		Frequency	Percent
1	Low (<13.22)	47	26.11
2	Medium (13.22 to 15.91)	55	30.56
3	High (>15.91)	78	43.33
	Total	180	100
Mean= 14.56 SD= 2.69			

The bird's-eye viewpoint in table 4 clearly shows that maximum number of respondents (43.33%) belonged to high mental stress management category, (30.56%)

belonged to medium mental stress management and (26.11%) of the respondents belonged to low mental stress management category.

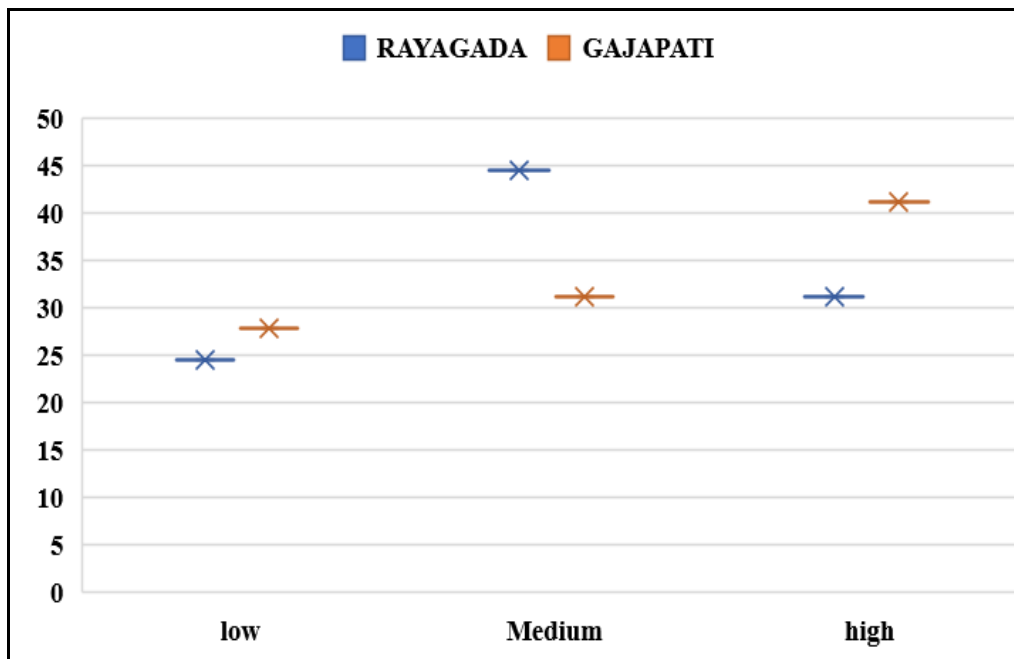


Fig 2: District wise distribution of respondents according to their level of mental stress management

The figure 2 clearly indicates the district wise distribution of farm women according to their level of mental stress management. The data presented in the figure 2 indicates that majority of the respondents (44.44%) from Rayagada district belongs to medium level of mental stress management category and 31.11 percent of the respondents from Gajapati district belongs to medium level of mental stress management category.

Conclusion

Stress management among farm women in agriculture is a critical area of study, often overlooked yet profoundly impactful. These women face unique stressors stemming from the intersection of agricultural demands, household responsibilities, and societal expectations. Understanding their coping mechanisms and resilience strategies is essential for improving overall well-being and productivity within farming communities. Research indicates that farm women often employ a variety of strategies to manage stress, including social support networks, time management techniques, and mindfulness practices. By exploring these methods in depth, we can gain insights into culturally relevant and sustainable approaches to alleviate stress and promote mental health resilience among farm women in agriculture. This knowledge can inform targeted interventions and support systems to better address the well-being of this vital demographic within rural communities.

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