

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN MANIPUR

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Abstract

The present study investigates the social and economic determinants influencing rural women workers, focusing on variables such as age, marital status, educational attainment, family structure and size, employment and land ownership total 160 numbers of household were interviewed for the present study following simple stratified random sampling technique. Additionally, it assesses the extent of their participation in various activities. The roles of women in agriculture differ by region; however, they are engaged in nearly all agricultural tasks, excluding the most physically demanding ones. Research conducted in India and other developing nations indicates that women's contributions to agriculture are often underestimated. Rural women are not only involved in farming but also in vegetable cultivation and livestock management, all while fulfilling their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers. This study was conducted in two regions of the Churachandpur district and included a sample of 160 farm women, predominantly aged between 34 and 53 years, with the majority being married. Forty percent of the participants completed secondary education, and 67.50 per cent resided in nuclear family settings. The findings reveal that rural women engage in farming, vegetable cultivation, livestock management, and other income-generating activities, all while managing their household responsibilities.

Keywords: Socio-economic, Participation, Farming, Livestock and Unpaid domestic activities.

INTRODUCTION

Over 50.00 per cent of the country's population relies directly on agriculture and allied sectors for their livelihood. Women play a crucial role in the growth and development of agriculture and related sectors (SFAC, 2021). In India, rural women are significantly more involved in agriculture than men, with a substantial number serving as unpaid family workers and cultivators (Pathak, 2022). The total female workforce comprises 149.88 million individuals, of whom 121.83 million are employed in rural areas (Mozhui and Sharma, 2022). Despite their active participation in both agricultural and household activities, women's contributions to agriculture often go unrecognized in both developed and developing countries (Rao, 2006). Women are integral to farming and farm management activities, frequently working as cultivators, assistants to cultivators, agricultural laborers, or engaging in labor exchange in other fields (UNIDR, 2011). They are also actively involved in agricultural and allied fields, including livestock production, seasonal vegetable cultivation, agroforestry, social forestry and fishing (Yani and Sharma, 2022). To enhance women's participation in agriculture and related activities, the central government is promoting structural and functional measures to empower women, build their capacities and increase their access to input technology (Borah and Sharma, 2021).

Status of rural women: Female agricultural laborers represent one of the most economically disadvantaged groups among casual workers in rural agricultural sectors. They are compensated either through daily wages or piece rates and frequently lack access to non-wage benefits. Among the various agricultural tasks, paddy cultivation and harvesting are particularly arduous and unpleasant, often conducted under harsh conditions such as intense sunlight or during rainy seasons (Prakash, 2009). In numerous countries, the contributions and perspectives of women are undervalued. It is accurately noted that a significant portion of women's labor is either unpaid or inadequately compensated. Official statistics do not always fully capture the actual status and contributions of women in agriculture (Mishra and Gupta, 2017). Furthermore, the aggregate data on women's participation in agriculture tends to understate the significance of their role in food production (Yadav et al., 2021).

Statement of the problem: The district selected for this study is characterized by agriculture as the predominant occupation, with the majority of the population relying on it for their livelihood. The socio-economic conditions of

the inhabitants are considerably deprived (Singh and Sharma, 2021). Agriculture in this region is both seasonal and irregular, leading to unemployment during the off-season, which further exacerbates the socio-economic challenges faced by the community. This study aims to analyze the socio-economic factors affecting rural women and their participation in various agricultural activities within the study area. Objectives of the study: The main objectives of the study viz; i). to study the socio-economic status of farm women and ii). to assess the extent of participation of rural women in various activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Churachandpur district, which was selected purposively. The district comprises twelve blocks, from which two blocks were randomly chosen. A comprehensive list of all villages within the selected blocks was compiled, and ten villages were randomly selected from each block. For respondent selection, lists of all categories of farm women were prepared, and eight rural women were randomly selected from each village, resulting in a total of 160 farmers for the study. Primary data were collected using a well-structured schedule, and information was gathered through interviews. The collected data were organized, tabulated, analyzed, processed, and presented in simple percentile tables. Statistical tools such as simple averages and percentages were employed to analyze and interpret the data, facilitating the derivation of meaningful conclusions in the form of a research paper.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 reveals that the socio-economic variables of the sample respondents, including age, marital status, educational qualifications, operational holdings, family type, family size, occupation, and livestock and land holdings.

Table 1. Socio-economic status of rural women

Sl.no.	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Age	Young (<34)	31
		Medium (34-53)	92
		Old (>53)	37
2.	Marital status	Married	155
		Unmarried	0
		Widow	5
3.	Education	Illiterate	42
		Primary	48
		Highschool/ secondary	64
		>Graduate	6
4.	Operational holding	Owned	132
		Leased in	16
		Leased out	12
5.	Family type	Nuclear	108
		Joint	52
6.	Size of family	Small (upto 3)	26
		Medium (4-6)	98
		Large (more than 6)	36
7.	Occupational	Agriculture alone	122
		Agriculture along with business	35
		Service	1
		Business alone	2
8.	Livestock	Poultry	1816
		Duck	1534
		Cow	165
		Pig	380
		Other	200
9.	Land holding	Marginal (<1ha)	65
		Small (1.01-2.00ha)	66
		Semi-medium (2.01-4.00ha)	24
		Medium (4.01-10.00ha)	5
		Large (>10.01ha)	0

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Table 1 reveals the socio-economic status and the majority of respondents were in the middle age group (34 to 53 years old). Similar findings were also found in the studies conducted by Maneesha *et al.*, (2024). Most respondents were married (96.87 per cent), which is in consistent with the result of Sharma *et al.*, (2020); Salim *et al.*, (2025) with only 3.13 per cent being widowed. 40.00 per cent of respondents had attained secondary education and 82.50 per cent owned their operational land holdings. Similar studies were reported by Walling and Sharma (2018). Additionally, 67.50 per cent of respondents lived in nuclear families, and more than half of the respondents' families were of medium size, consisting of 4 to 6 members. Similar findings were also found in the studies conducted by Sharma (2012); Sharma and Sharma (2023). Agriculture was the primary occupation for 76.25 per cent of respondents and nearly all respondents engaged in livestock rearing. Regarding land holdings, 40.62 per cent of respondents had marginal landholdings, 41.25 per cent had small farms, 15.00 per cent had semi-medium farms and 3.13 per cent had medium land holdings. Similar findings were also found in the studies conducted by Sharma (2016).

Table 2 delineates the work participation of rural women across various domains, including rice farming, vegetable cultivation, livestock management practices, other income-generating activities and non-economic household responsibilities, thereby elucidating the gendered patterns of labor division in the Churachandpur districts. In the domain of rice farming, men accounted for 50.00 per cent of the total work, women for 19.85 per cent and joint work for 30.15 per cent. Similar studies were reported by Yadav (2021). This distribution indicates that men predominantly engage in labor-intensive operations such as ploughing, irrigation, and harvesting, whereas women are more involved in transplanting, weeding, and post-harvest operations. The study was found to be in conformity with Zubair, *et al.* (2025) which found that majority of working women were engaged in variety of agricultural tasks, such as planting, harvesting, and picking. In vegetable cultivation, the data reveals that men's share was 38.21 per cent, women's was 30.35 per cent and joint work constituted 31.44 per cent, suggesting that vegetable farming is a domain where both men and women actively contribute, often complementing each other's roles (Sentikumer, 2023).

Table 2. Participation of rural women in various activities

Sl no.	Activities		Extent of participation of rural women in various activities			
			Men	Women	Jointly	Total
1.	Rice based activities	<i>F</i>	68	27	41	136
		%	50.00	19.85	30.15	100.00
2.	Vegetables activities	<i>F</i>	16	12	13	41
		%	38.21	30.35	31.44	100.00
3.	Livestock practices	<i>F</i>	67	67	26	160
		%	41.63	41.88	16.50	100.00
4.	Other activities	<i>F</i>	12	54	5	71.5
		%	16.78	75.87	7.34	100.00
5.	Non-economic activities (at home)	<i>F</i>	28	103	30	160
		%	17.23	64.11	18.66	100.00
	Overall activities	<i>F</i>	38	53	23	114
		%	33.39	46.31	20.30	100.00

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Furthermore, 41.88 per cent of women were involved in livestock management, with joint participation accounting for 16.50 per cent. These findings underscore that livestock rearing is largely a shared responsibility, although women frequently assume the lead in daily care, feeding and milking. Women also participated in other activities such as wage labor, weaving, pickle making, and petty business, contributing 75.87 per cent, compared to 16.78 per cent by men and 7.34 per cent jointly. These findings demonstrate that women are significantly engaged in supplementary economic activities that provide additional household income, although these contributions are often undervalued in formal statistics. Similar studies were reported by Debbarma and Sharma (2024). In addition to their involvement in economic activities, women bear substantial responsibility for domestic and social activities, balancing household chores while contributing to farming and other income-generating activities.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that rural women are significant contributors to agriculture and related sectors. Their responsibilities encompass household duties, crop production, livestock management, and other income-generating activities. Despite their extensive involvement, they encounter numerous challenges. It is imperative that women

receive equal consideration in terms of rights, wages, and decision-making. Furthermore, additional resources should be provided to enhance their skills, and their contributions should be duly recognized. Only through these measures can there be meaningful changes in the status of rural women.

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