

RURAL WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING REGARDING LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT

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Women play an important role as livestock caretakers in many countries including Pakistan. They undertake various activities of livestock management like fodder cutting, watering and feeding of animals, animal shed cleaning and milking. However, their involvement as decision makers regarding these activities is questionable. Hence the present study was conducted to determine the contribution of rural women in decision-making in livestock management. A sample of 120 female respondents was selected randomly from Tehsil Jhang through multistage random sampling technique. The data were analyzed by computing weighted score, rank order, mean values and standard deviation. Analysis of the data shows that rural women's participation was relatively high in activities like treatment of animals, deciding about size of herd, purchase of animals, sale of animals' produce and feeding of animals. However, their participation was relatively low in activities like sale of animals, breeding of animals, fodder cultivation and construction of animals' sheds. About 66% of the respondents were satisfied with their existing involvement in decision-making in livestock management. A large majority (about 75%) of the respondents believed in male dominance in decision-making. Age of rural women, male dominance and traditional belief system appeared to be the main factors which had affected the involvement of rural women in decision-making process.

Key words: Rural women, decision-making, livestock management

INTRODUCTION

Livestock production is an integral component of farming systems (FAO, 2000). It plays a crucial role in the rural economies of developing countries including Pakistan (Moser, 2007). Livestock sector accounts 52% share in agriculture and 11% in GDP (Govt. of Pak., 2008). Pakistani women play a major role in agricultural production and livestock raising (Rasheed, 2004). Traditionally women are involved in agriculture and livestock production activities in the rural areas (Waters-Bayers, 1985). Women often devote more time (16-18 hours) against men to these tasks (McCorckle, 1987). They contribute 60 to 80% of labour in the animal husbandry (Younas *et al.*, 2007). They undertake various activities of livestock management like fodder cutting, fodder chopping, watering and feeding of animals, animal shed cleaning, milking, making dung cakes and looking after the health of the herd. Among 90% rural families having livestock in Pakistan; primary medication, animal look after and marketing of animals' produce are exclusively done by rural women (Ishaq, 1998). Despite their incredible role in livestock sector, their involvement in decision-making regarding livestock management still seems questionable. The level of women participation in decision-making process not only varies from region

to region but also from one activity to another (Tipilda and Panhwar, 2008). In some areas women, alone or together with men, play important roles in most of the decisions related to animal production activities (Timsina *et al.*, 1989). However, in some areas gender biases prevail against women and the male dominance in decision-making in the household has continued even in areas where women are the key providers of the labour. Male dominance in decision making in the household and economy has continued even in areas where women are the key providers of labour because the influence of women has not been recognized (Green, 2000) due to lack of education, less awareness of their civic/ human rights, traditional norms, lack of credit facilities from the Government (FAO, 2003; Habib, 2000; Ali, 2007). Keeping in view the contribution of rural women in livestock management, the present study focuses on their share in decision making regarding livestock management and also on identification and ranking of the factors affecting their contribution in decision making.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Tehsil Jhang which consists of 32 rural union councils, of which 5 union councils were selected randomly. From each selected

union council, 2 villages were selected at random and from each village 12 women respondents involved in livestock management were selected randomly, thereby making a sample of 120 respondents. The data were collected with the help of a pre-tested and validated interview schedule. Weighted scores, rank order, mean values and standard deviation were calculated with the help of a computer software i.e. Statistical Package for Social Sciences. A five point Likert scale was used (1 being very low and 5 being very high) to determine the extent of respondents' involvement in decision making. In order to determine weighted score, the frequencies were multiplied with the corresponding score value allotted to each category of the scale. Means and standard deviations were worked out and ranking was done on the basis of mean values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural women's involvement in decision-making

The data about the extent of participation of women in decision making regarding various livestock management activities were collected. In order to rank various activities based on the involvement of respondents in decision-making, the frequency counts were multiplied by the weighted score allotted to each category of the scale. The rank order, weighted score, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

The data given in Table 1 indicate that the activities like treatment of animals, deciding about size of herd, and purchase of animals were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd with mean values 4.60, 4.15 and 4.07 and weighted scores of 553, 498 and 489 respectively. It may imply

that rural women's participation was relatively high in these activities. However, their participation was relatively low in activities like sale of animals, breeding of animals, fodder cultivation and construction of animals' sheds.

Respondents' perception about their right of making decisions

Decision-making is the power of an individual to decide any matter in his/her daily life. It can be regarded as an identifying and choosing alternatives based on the values and preferences of a decision-maker (Harris, 2008). Respondents' participation in decision making is likely to be affected by their perception about their right for making decisions. Respondents were therefore inquired about their perception whether or not their male family heads should give them the right in decision-making concerning to livestock production. A simple majority (55.83%) of the respondents was of the view that their family heads should give them the right of making decisions relating to livestock management. While 44.17% respondents were not in favour, they were of the view that their family heads should not give them the right of taking decisions. The respondent were further asked whether or not they were satisfied with their existing contribution in decision making. The majority (65.8%) of the respondents was satisfied with their existing involvement in decision-making in livestock management, while the remaining 34.2% respondents were not satisfied.

Respondents' beliefs in male dominance

Male dominance is an important social aspect in many developing countries. Generally males are considered

Table 1. Ranking of livestock management activities based on respondents involvement in decision-making

Activities	Rank order	Mean	S.D.	Weighted score
Treatment of animals	1	4.60	0.93	553
Deciding about size of herd	2	4.15	1.07	498
Purchase of animals	3	4.07	1.10	489
Sale of animals' produce	4	3.98	1.20	478
Feeding of animals	5	3.96	1.14	476
Sale of animals	6	3.56	1.30	428
Breeding of animals	7	3.04	1.21	365
Fodder cultivation	8	2.90	1.38	348
Construction of animals' sheds	9	2.87	1.37	345

as heads of their respective families and are held responsible for all family matters. The women are supposed to take care of their children and undertake household tasks. Though they are playing important role outside the home in economic activities. However, their economic contribution is less visible and less recognized so far. Due to social pressure their male counterparts might be reluctant to give them power and involve them in certain matters. Olaleye (1998) opined that men are usually intimidated by the concept of "empowerment" because they erroneously believe that empowering women require dis-empowering men, more so, the women might not be submissive as culture demands. The respondents were asked about their belief about male dominance and the data reveal that a large majority (74.16%) of the respondents believed in male dominance in decision-making, while the remaining 25.84% respondents had opposing views.

Factors affecting decision making process

The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households based on uneven power relations can stagnate women's potential to develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in a social system. The decision-making process within the social system is affected by a complex set of environmental, socio-economic and cultural variables. The relationship among these variables is especially strong in traditionally subsistence societies. The poorer the household, the greater the importance of the role of women in ensuring survival and in carrying out fundamental productive activities and, consequently, the greater the influence women actually have on important household decisions, although women may not be recognized either culturally or socially as the ones who make such decisions (Lubbock, 1998).

Based on the respondents' responses, ranking of various factors that might affect their participation in decision making has been made, which is given in Table 2.

The data presented in Table 2 depict that age of rural women and male dominance both fell in between high and very high categories with mean values of 4.96 and 4.80 and weighted scores of 596 and 576 respectively. It means that these two factors had affected the most in decision-making process. Traditional belief system fell in between medium and high categories with mean value of 3.31 and was ranked the 3rd most important factor that had affected women's participation in decision making. While misinterpretation of religious teachings, cultural norms were the factors which fell in between low and medium categories with mean values of 1.77 and 1.49 and weighted scores of 213 and 179 respectively. Resistance from family members, control over resources, education of rural women and lack of awareness fell in between very low and low categories. It means these factors had very little influence on decision-making process.

CONCLUSIONS

Rural women's participation was relatively high in activities like treatment of animals, deciding about size of herd, purchase of animals, sale of animals' produce and feeding of animals. However, their participation was relatively low in activities like sale of animals, breeding of animals, fodder cultivation and construction of animals' sheds. About 56% of the respondents were in favour that their family heads should give them the right in decision making. However, about 66% of the respondents were satisfied with their existing involvement in decision making.

Table 2. Ranking of different factors affecting the respondents' participation in decision-making process related to livestock management

Factors	Rank order	Mean	S.D.	Weighted score
Rural women's age	1	4.96	0.18	596
Male dominance	2	4.80	0.42	576
Traditional belief system	3	3.31	0.93	398
Misinterpretation of religious teachings	4	1.77	1.47	213
Cultural norms	5	1.49	1.46	179
Resistance from family members	6	0.23	0.77	28
Control over resources	7	0.21	0.62	26
Rural women's education	8	0.15	0.55	18
Lack of awareness about their social rights	9	0.04	0.23	05

A large majority (about 75%) of the respondents believed in male dominance in decision-making. Age of rural women, male dominance and traditional belief system were the main factors identified by the respondents which had affected their participation in decision making. The factors identified by the respondents can be justified in the cultural milieu of population as the older people of the society are generally given respect and honour by virtue of their age as compared to the younger ones while making decisions on various form and family matters. Similarly male dominance is also very obvious in our traditional society, especially in the study area, the male members generally play dominant role in deciding various matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness should be created among male members of the society about women' social/civic rights by Govt./Private sector, religious leaders or through media. Moreover, awareness should also be created among male members for the benefits of providing opportunities to the female members to participate actively in making decisions in all aspects of livestock management activities. They need to be educated to decide things mutually and not to dominate in decision making. The youth (male and female) must be given equal chances to participate in discussion on various matters relating to livestock management and also to participate in decision making which will help to reduce the male dominance at later stages.

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