

Learning Interests and Limitations of Rural Women

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ABSTRACT

Women have been making prominent and important contributions to agriculture right from creation and they constitute the bulk of the world's food producers. It is known that women are responsible for generating food security for their families in developing countries. Women are key agents for achieving economic, nutritional and social changes required for sustainable development. Although rural women are actively involved in the process of food production, processing and marketing but the social and economic constraints have placed barriers around their access to scientific and technological information. Generally, girls are seen as relatively "transitory assets" – not worthy of long-term investment – as they leave their parents' household upon marriage. The limited role of women in decision making, education, training and poor nutritional status becomes a challenge in economic growth. The present investigation was conducted in Jalandhar District during ex-trainee sammellen in 2013 to find out learning interests and limitations of farm women for the economic empowerment. The study was aimed at determining women farmer's agricultural information needs and accessibility. The findings of the study showed that the main limitation for taking trainings was mismanagement of time, unorganized farm activities, unevenly distributed household chores etc. Other major reasons were family restrictions, lack of transport facility etc.

Keywords: Agriculture right; Women in decision making; Economic empowerment; Rural women;

Women are the key agents towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. Over two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate persons are women (UNESCO, 2010) – many of whom live in rural areas. A country's economic development crucially depends upon the participation rates of its women as they constitute around 50 percent of its human resources (NIPCCD, 2010). The status of women is directly connected with their economic position, which depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. Increasing rates of women's participation have enabled developed countries to embark on a path of higher growth (*The Economist*, 2006). Though the female work participation rate is increasing, it has been found that in developing countries like India, women's participation in the workforce has been remarkably low as compared to men.

It is a well established fact that better female literacy, greater participation of women in employment,

improved female access to economic resources and a greater voice of women in social and political spheres has significant positive outcomes for the immediate family and for the nation as a whole. (*World Bank*, 2012). From a developmental point of view, investing in girls' training and education has the highest rate of return of any possible investment in developing countries: raising the productivity of future generations, increasing their income, and generating sustainable growth (*FAO*, 1997).

In all developing countries, women make essential contributions to agricultural and rural economies. Their roles are changing rapidly in the era of transformation of agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are

not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households (Raney, 2011). In Punjab, females constitute 47.23 per cent of total population as compared to 48.5 per cent at National level. Punjab has the lowest female work participation rate in the country and female unemployment rate is greater than male unemployment rate. Women’s employment is crucial for raising their living standards and well-being. Most of the rural women are casually employed and are engaged in low-paying agricultural work. (Srivastava *et al*, 2009).

Training is a pre requisite tool for human resource development of any nation, communities or people. Trainings are the powerful tools against many challenges like access to credit, health care and education. Educated and trained women are more likely to be healthier, have higher earnings and exercise greater decision-making power within the household than non trained women. They are also more likely to ensure that their own children are educated, thus breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger (Burchi, 2009). Identification of training needs among trainees act as a motivating force for its positive outcome and impact.

Social, cultural and economic constraints limit rural girls’ and women’s education and training (Acker, 2009). Understanding the training needs of farm women enables extension providers to impart result oriented effective trainings and to tailor extension services for better and effective approach to empower them. the present study was undertaken with this hypothesis. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To know the training interest and needs for the economic empowerment for the rural farm women.
- ii. To determine the preferred training methods with regard to income generating activities
- iii. To study the limitations faced by the subjects in accessing trainings.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried in Jalandhar District in 2013 at KVK, Jalandhar. During ex-trainee sammellen at KVK, Jalandhar in 2013 total 85 respondents were selected regardless of age. Who already received training, those who are currently receiving training and those who wish to receive training. Data were collected to know the learning interest of farm women and assess the need for result oriented effective trainings to be

imparted. No information about the locale of the study, which organization, how sample was selected etc.

Data were collected through survey and focus group discussions with the respondents. This survey was based on representative interviews. The questionnaire was developed based on published literature on training needs assessments as well as previous experience in the field. The questionnaire was specially designed with open and closed questions. Training need was defined as the expressed need of rural women to obtain training in a particular area. A three point rating scale (very much needed, needed and not needed) was employed to measure the training interest in selected areas. The women were asked to specify any of the three alternate responses against each selected area depending on their training interests. The total training interest score of a particular area was calculated by multiplying the cell frequencies with respective score values. The mean score of particular item was worked out by dividing the total score by number of respondents. On the basis of mean score training interest extent was categorized as low (up to 0.66), medium (0.67 –1.33) and high (1.34 –2.00).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 reveals that age distribution of the respondents in the present study was found to be evenly spread over various age groups with maximum

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to selected personal characteristics (N = 85)

Personal characteristics	No.	%
<i>Age (years)</i>		
Less than 20	16	20.0
20-29	23	27.0
30-39	26	30.5
Above 39	20	25.0
<i>Education</i>		
No formal education	05	6.2
Not finished primary school	04	5.0
Completed primary school	15	18.7
Completed secondary school	36	42.3
Completed high school	16	18.8
Higher than high school	09	11.2
<i>Household members</i>		
Three members	8	10.0
Four members	26	30.5
Five members	41	48.2
Six or more	10	12.5

respondents (30.5%) aged between 30-39 years followed by 27.0 per cent respondents in the age group of 20-29 years, 25.0 per cent in the age above 39 years and 20.0 per cent in less than 20 years of age.

It is important to consider education level while developing extension materials and assessing or planning trainings for farm women. Findings of present study stated that 6.2 per cent farm women had no formal education, 5 per cent had not finished primary education, 18.7 per cent completed primary education, 42.3 per cent completed secondary education, and 18.8 per cent had completed high school and 11.2 per cent higher than high school.

Majority of the respondents (48.2%) belonged to family size of five members, (30.5%) to four members followed by 12.5 per cent to six or more family members. Only 10 per cent respondents belonged to a family size of three members.

Learning interests / Training interests : Interest based

training programme acts as effective tools for motivating rural women. Training interest identification acts as a foundation pillar of training and helps in prioritizing the training areas for particular group of trainees. The training interest's assessment was done by asking various questions for their concerned area of interests. Training interest of rural women was assessed mainly under four sub-areas i.e. clothing and textile, family resource management, food and nutrition and other income generating activities.

Respondents were given a pre - designed list and asked to self-select the area of interest and were then asked to indicate their perceived current knowledge and the importance of the area for them. The training interests were then ranked according to participant responses and are presented in the Table 2 below. The highest ranking is considered the most important training interest.

Learning interest / training interest of rural women

Table 2. Training interest of rural women in Home Science (N = 85)

Learning interests / Training interests Training areas	Most needed (2)	Needed (1)	Not needed (0)	Total score	Mean score
<i>Clothing and Textile</i>					
Technique of tie and dye	73	12	-	158	1.85
Technique of block printing	34	44	7	112	1.31
Skill development in care and repair of sewing machine	21	58	6	100	1.17
Skill of garment construction	18	59	8	95	1.11
Technique of removing stains	28	37	20	93	1.09
Technique of machine embroidery	22	48	15	92	1.08
Hand embroidery	7	45	33	59	0.69
<i>Family Resource Management</i>					
Time and energy management skills	28	31	26	87	1.02
Technique of using solar devices	11	44	30	66	0.77
Grain storage	13	30	42	56	0.65
<i>Foods and Nutrition</i>					
Technique of fruit and vegetable preservation	60	21	4	141	1.65
Low cost nutritious recipes for pregnant and lactating mother	34	32	19	100	1.17
Technique of using green leafy vegetables in day to day cooking	34	32	19	100	1.17
Technique of making milk products like paneer and khoya	46	36	3	128	1.50
Technique of making soymilk and tofu	26	30	29	82	0.96
Technique of making sprouts and their use in various recipes	23	32	30	78	0.91
<i>Other income generating training programmes</i>					
Technique of making detergent	44	36	5	124	1.45
Technique of candle making	23	52	10	98	1.15
Technique of grinding and making spices	12	34	39	58	0.68
Technique of packaging and marketing	11	30	44	52	0.61
Technique of making soft toys	3	25	57	31	0.36

was assessed mainly under four sub-areas i.e. clothing and textile, family resource management, foods and nutrition and other income generating activities. The findings suggested that according to the mean scores obtained under the subhead clothing and textile, the learning interest of rural women was highest in technique of tie and dye (1.85). According to the mean score obtained, the learning interest of women was medium in the technique of block printing (1.31), followed by skill development in care and repair of sewing machine (1.17), skill of garment construction (1.11), technique of removing stains and hand embroidery (1.09) and technique of machine embroidery (1.08). Results depicted a high interest of rural women in taking trainings in the area of tie & dye and block printing indicate the desire of rural women to acquire technical knowledge for new ventures which are easy to do and adopt as start up. They also showed a keen interest in stitching to reduce family's expenditure and enhance family income. The more interest in such learning's may be since stitching own clothes and value addition to clothes by various techniques not only give pleasure but also give them an opportunity to earn without much investment and formal area required for the enterprise. Comparable results were given by *Ghani et al. (2012)*, who used detailed micro-data on the unorganized enterprises and analysed the spatial determinants of female entrepreneurship in India in the manufacturing and services sectors.

Under the another sub head of family resource management, according to the mean score obtained the time and energy management skills (1.02) was of maximum interest followed by technique of using solar cooker (0.77) and grain storage (0.65). A high interest shown in the training interest of time and energy management may be due to the fact that women in rural Punjab remain extensively busy from early morning in the care and work of dairy animals, unorganized contribution in farming related work, cooking meals and tea for farm labour etc. Other reason may be a desire of better life style. A medium score obtained in the area of technique of using solar cooker reflect that if solar cooker technology is disseminated regularly and with the help of on farm trials, demonstrations and vocational trainings etc. soon it can be adopted. *Yadav et al., 2007* also reported similar results. In other study in Bangladesh *UNEP (2008)*, Grameen Shakti micro loans financed

the installation of over 100,000 solar home systems in rural areas and trained local youth and women. This provided women employment opportunities and improved their daily lives, while solar systems are facilitating business startups such as mobile phone centers, repair shops and handicrafts.

Data shown under the sub head of food and nutrition in Table 2 showed that the training demand on technique of fruit and vegetable preservation was with a mean score of 1.65 followed by technique of making milk products like paneer and khoya and their recipes (1.50). A medium interest was observed in trainings regarding low cost nutritious recipes for pregnant and lactating mother (1.17) and technique of using green leafy vegetables in day to day cooking (1.17) followed by technique of making soymilk and tofu (0.96) and technique of making sprouts and their use in various recipes (0.91). Results indicated a higher interest for the training of food and vegetable preservation which may be due to the availability of vegetables in district, as majority of farm families grow vegetables for their own use and they preferred homemade products for their use. Higher interest in the training of technique of making milk products like paneer and khoya and their recipes and use of green leafy vegetables in day to day cooking may be again due to availability of milk and green leafy vegetables in villages. A medium interest of women in the training of making sprouts and their use in various recipes and technique of making soymilk and tofu indicated acceptance of farm women towards new techniques.

The highest ranking training interests for income generating activities, as determined by the mean scores was in the technique of making detergent (1.45). Medium interest was noted in technique of candle making (1.15) and in the technique of grinding and making spices (0.68) followed by low interest represented by less than 0.66 mean score in technique of packaging and marketing and technique of making soft toys (0.36).

Data analysis of learning interests showed a keen interest of rural women in learning various techniques during trainings. in Table 3 reveals limitations faced by the women for learning during trainings. Learning about improved production technologies and methods, new products and markets, business skills, as well as life skills (such as health management, decision-making, self-confidence, or conflict management) can make a

Table 3. Distribution of the subjects according to the limitations faced by women for their participation in the trainings at KVK (N = 85)

Limitations	No.	%
Limitations from home	35	41.17
Not allowed to go for trainings alone	64	75.29
Management of time between work, home and training	68	80.00
Difficulty in reaching KVK due to distance	52	61.17
Travelling cost	80	94.11
Lack of transport facility	54	63.52
Short duration of vocational trainings	57	67.05
Trainings are not planned like a course of three or six months	68	80.00

significant difference. Women often have different training needs than men, linked to their domestic work and care responsibilities, as well as to gender-based division of labor for managing or undertaking specific tasks (Acker *et al.*, 2009). Table 3 depicts distribution of the subjects according to the limitations faced by women for their participation in the trainings at KVK.

The most common limitation was travelling cost faced by 94 per cent subjects in the open-ended questions. It was clear that parents of majority of the subjects found it not as necessity to spend on travelling and go for trainings. Further, the next limitation faced by 80 per cent of the subjects was management of time between work, home and training and trainings are duration of trainings i.e. trainings are not planned like a course of three or six months. The limitation of management of time between work, home and training was prevalent because in rural houses the work of women at home is unorganized and according to the day to day need of other members. The other limitation observed regarding trainings not planned like a course of three or six months was more because subjects and their families did not feel that a person who is not very well educated can be trained in five days to start an entrepreneur or even practice it well at home. This also brings a short break in their family routines and it becomes difficult for them to arrange and rearrange transportation, convincing their families for permission of various short courses.

Further, short duration of vocational trainings, lack of transport facility (63%) and difficulty in reaching at KVK due to distance (61%), limitations from home (41%) (regarding taking permission etc.) were the

Table 4. Correlation between learning interests and different parameters

Relationship between different parameters	Correlation (r)
Age	-0.621
Education level	0.398
Family income	0.543
Family size	-0.386

commonly observed limitations among subjects. In line with present study, Gonzalez *et al.* (2015) found that the presence of gender-based restrictions, e.g. women's rights to inheritance and property, as well as legal impediments to undertaking economic activities (such as opening a bank account or freely pursuing a profession) are strongly associated with larger gender gaps in labor force participation. Further, Murray, 2010 also reported long distances to training institutions and lack of public transport, fear of sexual harassment, training expenditure etc as limitations for women training and employability.

The data in Table 4 presents the relationship between age and learning interests. It is evident that learning interests of younger women are more among younger women as compared to aged women. The higher is the age, lower is the awareness index. A positive relationship between the educational level and family income of women and their learning interest was observed whereas family size and learning interests were negatively correlated. Comparable results were given by Saha *et al.*, (2015) found that women's self-employment is positively related with age and experience. Analysis of various education level shows that women who have low-level education highly tends towards self-employment than women who have high level of education.

CONCLUSION

Farm women are the bedrock and key to food security. They have varied interests in learning. The findings of the present study suggest that young women have more interests towards learning especially income generating activities. Majority of the farm women were interested towards learning different techniques which require no formal set up for start-up and involve least possible investment. They wanted to work from home. It was found that time management, shyness from male trainers, difficulty in reaching training centers, illiteracy, restrictions from home and family were the major

obstacles perceived by the women for their participation in the trainings on recent technologies. The education level of women and the family income was found to be positively associated with their awareness level regarding the recent technologies. Thus, farm women; there is a need to devise learning strategy to enhance their exposure and contribution to family income. Though, women face numerous limitations in learning a

skill or starting an entrepreneur but if their extension education needs are addressed appropriately it would go a long way to ameliorate poverty and bring food security in the world. This study also indicated that to make women and their families aware about their role in ameliorating poverty and food security, women should as a policy be involved in farmer clubs, panel discussions and other extension programmes.

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