SOcio-economic Status of the Woman Agricultural Labourers in Madurai District

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND
The study analysed the socioeconomic status of female agricultural labourers in Madurai district. The study was made up of female labourers in four blocks in the Madurai district viz. Alanganallur, Vadipatti, Melur and Chellampatti. The study based on Empirical research design and the convenient sampling procedure was used. Twenty sample respondents were selected from each block. A total of eighty interview schedules were administered to the respondents. The female labourers had maximum unemployed days in summer as this is the off season for agriculture in the study area. During the Kharif season, labourers got more income than Rabi season. The female labourers have faced lot of problems in day-to-day life. The foremost problem is they have no time to take care of their children and husband. Another problem is they do not get employment continuously. It leads to difficulty in fulfilling their basic needs of their life.

KEYWORDS
Agriculture, Female Agricultural labourers, Socioeconomic Status, Problems Faced by the Female Labourers.


BACKGROUND
There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the conditions of women are improved; it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.

Swami Vivekananda
The holistic concept of development should perceive women as an integral part of development. Women’s role in food production is enormous. Women play an important role in agriculture sector. With the increased rate of male migration, rural women’s role in food production becomes often very important. Women contribute in all dimensions of farm operations; their participation is observed in the paddy cultivation, plantation and horticulture, post-harvest and marketing livestock management, mushroom production and so on. Besides farm operations, women have a lot of responsibilities for preparing and processing food and fulfilling their fundamental role of nurturing and taking care of their children.

It is widely recognised in Madurai district that the women often work in the agricultural fields, are involved in agricultural activities in their family lands and marketing the agricultural products.

Statement of the Problem
According to 2010-11 census, male labourers were 1,46,129 and female labourers were 1,41,602. It reveals that the number of male labourers are slightly (3.09%) more than female labourers in Madurai district. Today migration of male labourers from rural to urban is increasing in search of job. Women participation in agricultural work has been increased, but the problem is even after working for long hours in the agricultural field they get only low wages. They are not able to improve their socioeconomic status and educate their children and take care of their family. The largest group of women represent as the “unpaid” workers in both rural and urban areas. When women are employed, they are usually paid less than men, even for the same tasks. Hence, this study has been proposed to analyse the activities of female labourers in agricultural work and assess the problems of them.

Objective of the Study
The following are the objectives of the study.
1. To understand the socioeconomic status of female labourers in the field of agriculture in Madurai district.
2. To analyse the paid wage structures of the female agricultural labourers.
3. To analyse the problems encountered by the female labourers.

Research Methodology
The present study is confined to the Madurai district in general and concentrates in particular on the rural areas. This study is based on an empirical research design. Madurai district consists of 13 blocks that are Vadipatti, Alanganallur, Melur and Chellampatti which have double cropping paddy lands under the water supplied by the river Vaigai.

The intensity of farming operations was also high in these blocks. In this study, the researcher has used both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from the female agricultural labourers by sample surveys using interview schedule. Twenty sample respondents were conveniently chosen from each block.

The secondary data were collected from books, journals, websites and department of economics and statistics that are available in Madurai district.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data
The data thus collected were classified, tabulated, analysed and interpreted with the help of relevant statistical tools such as percentage and Likert’s scaling technique.

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It is evident from the Table 1 that majority of the female labourers (31%) belonged to the age group of 46-55 years; 25 percent of the female labourers belonged to the age group of 36-45 years and the 21 percent were in the age group of above 55 years. Only 10 percent belonged to the age group of 18-28 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of Female labourers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents According to their Age

Source - Primary Data

According to the Table 2, 26 percent of the female labourers had higher secondary education, 25 percent of the female labourers had high school education, 19 percent of them had elementary education, 15 percent female labourers were illiterate and 13 percent and 2 percent of the female labourers were undergraduates and postgraduates respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>No. of Workers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher secondary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Educational Level of the Woman Respondents

Source - Primary Data

It is observed from the Table 3 that in kharif season, female labourers were working for 78 days and 55 days for Rabi season and they work for 7-8 hours per day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>No. of Workers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent labourers</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual labourers</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators and casual labourers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Employment of Female labourers in Agriculture during the Kharif Season

Source - Primary Data
It is observed from the above table that the period of kharif season is extended from June to September. The female labourers have got an average for 78 days of work in agriculture during this season. They have got maximum employment in the month of June which accounted for 38 percent of the total employment in the season. In September they got work for 25 days (32%). In July and August they got work for 13 (17%) and 10 days (13%) respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Employment of Female labourers in Agriculture during the Rabi Season

Source: Primary Data

It is observed from the above table that the period of Rabi season extended from October to January. The female labourers got an average of 55 days work in agriculture during this season. They got maximum employment in the month of October which accounted for 38 percent of the total employment in the season. In January they got work for 16 days (29%). In November and December they got work for 10 and 8 days respectively.

Findings
- The 31 percent of the respondents out of 80 respondents were in the age group of 46-55 years.
- It was found that 26 percent of the respondents have studied up to higher secondary level.
- The 60 percent of the female labourers belonged to nuclear family.
- It is inferred from the analysis that the 71 percent of the labourers worked as casual labourers.
- Regarding to the occupational level, majority (68%) of the female labourers were permanently involved in agricultural works. Their main source of income was agricultural income.
- It is observed from the analysis that the 41 percent of the labourers got a range of income between Rs.10,000-15,000 per annum.
- On the seasonal employment, female labourers worked for 78 days in Kharif season and 55 days in Rabi season.
- It is found that the female labourers got maximum work in the Rabi season in the month of October (38%) and January (29%).
- The first and the foremost problem encountered by the female labourers is even after working long hours in the agricultural field they get only low wages. They were not able to educate their children and take care of their family.

Suggestions
Even though men and women are equally involved in agriculture activities, the wages for the women are very low compared to the men. Hence, the wage disparity between men and women should be reduced in future.

The government may take steps to start various agro industries to provide the employment opportunities when the female labourers face unemployment during the off seasons. Agriculture labourers may form an association for involving themselves and marketing the agriculture products during the off season. The banks are also ready to provide loan facilities to female agricultural labourers to improve their socioeconomic status. Hence, they may utilise the opportunities.

CONCLUSION
In this article, it is analysed and inferred that the socioeconomic conditions of the female agricultural labourers are not satisfactory. Their early life starts with working in the farms, i.e. at a very young age they get involved with agriculture by working in the farms. They face problems at home and at workplace. At home their basic needs are not met. At work place they share heavy work load with low wages. Regret to say, despite various uplifting schemes introduced by the government for the poor rural woman, these schemes really do not reach them. Hence, several initiatives need to be undertaken by the government to uplift the status quo of female labourers in agriculture.

REFERENCES