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WORKING CONDITIONS OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

India is the second most populous country of the world and has changing socio-political demographic and morbidity patterns that have been drawing global attention in recent years. Despite several growth orientated policies adopted by the government, the widening economic, regional and gender disparities are posing serious challenges for the health sector. Agricultural labourers who are largely landless and form a significant section of rural society mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture. Majority of them belong to the category of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and are among the worst exploited section of the society. Their income has always been meagre, resulting in poor living conditions and heavy indebtedness. Women are largely engaged in the agricultural and tertiary sectors. Majority of women are in service providing sectors, manual labourers such as agricultural labourers, construction workers, contract labourers, laundry and domestic workers etc. So it is very important to know the working conditions of these women working in various fields. The present empirical study focuses on working conditions of female agricultural labourers such as number of hours they work, number of days employment available in the month, wages they receive etc which directly or indirectly affect on their health.

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INTRODUCTION

India is the second most populous country of the world and has changing socio-political demographic and morbidity patterns that have been drawing global attention in recent years. Despite several growth orientated policies adopted by the government, the widening economic, regional and gender disparities are posing serious challenges for the health sector. About 75% of health infrastructure, medical man-power and other health resources are concentrated in urban areas where only 27% of the population live. Contagious, infectious and waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, amoebiasis, typhoid, infectious hepatitis, worm infestations, measles, malaria, tuberculosis, whooping cough, respiratory infections, pneumonia and reproductive tract infections dominate the morbidity pattern, especially in rural areas. However, non-communicable diseases such as cancer, blindness, mental illness, hypertension, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, accidents and injuries are also on the rise.

The health status of Indians, is still a cause for grave concern, especially for the rural population. This is reflected in the life expectancy (63 years), infant mortality rate (80/1000 live births), maternal mortality rate (438/100 000 live births); however, some progress has been made over a period of time. (Ashok Vikhe Patil, Somasudaram, Goyal 2002). Although there has been an overall improvement in the health conditions of both males and females, women still get differentiated from men when it comes to providing medical care and this shows comparative low status of women in our society. According to UNICEF, 12 million girls are born in India every year, out of which 25 percent do not survive beyond the 15th year. The reason behind this is that the mortality rate of 0-5 years age-group is about 20 times greater than any other age group. Female mortality rate up to the age of 40 years is higher than the rate of mortality as a whole. Although an increase in the life expectancy for women has been recorded in absolute numbers, but it is still lower, in comparison to the life

expectancy of males. Strikingly, maternal mortality rates are particularly high. Even the number of years they stay healthy is much lesser. (Madhu Nagla 2013). Agricultural labourers who are largely landless and form a significant section of rural society mainly depend on wage employment in agriculture. Majority of them belong to the category of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and are among the worst exploited section of the society. Their income has always been meagre, resulting in poor living and heavy indebtedness. Much worse are those who get casual agricultural work who merely exist and do not live. Their morning holds no promise for the evening and they can never sleep without tensions for they have no stocks left for the morning. Struggling for their morning and evenings they continue to pass on their whole life.

CONCEPT OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Though the term 'agricultural labourer' is extensively used in many studies, there is no unanimity in defining the term. It is generally said that an agricultural labourer is one who works on farm for wages. The first agricultural labour Enquiry Committee (1950-51) defined the agricultural labourers as those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages. The Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee (1956-57) enlarged the definition of the agricultural labour to include those who are engaged in other agricultural occupations like dairy, poultry, farming and horticulture, etc (Mamoria. 1976. 371). However, in the overall context of Indian agriculture the definition is not adequate because it is not possible to see separately those working on wages from others. According to the National Commission on Labour, an agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and wholly depends for his livelihood on his personal labour. (ibid).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY: The Objectives of the Study were

- To understand Socio-economic background of female agricultural labourers in Karveer tahsil and
- To understand the working conditions of female agricultural labourers in Karveer tahsil.

SOURCES OF DATA: The present study was based on the primary as well as secondary data. Primary data are collected through field work and secondary data are obtained with help of unpublished and published literature concerned with the topic.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The present study is undertaken to understand the working conditions of the female agricultural labourers in Karveer tahsil. The study has been conducted in six villages of Karveer tahsil. The present study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data were collected by using interview schedule and observation. A sample of 120 female agricultural labourers as respondents of six villages of Karveer Tahsil were selected by using purposive sampling technique for the study.

Research Design: Descriptive as well as empirical research design is adopted for the present study.

Study Area: The present study has been carried out in one of the taluka of the Kolhapur district. Kolhapur city is situated in Karveer tahsil. It has a rich social-cultural and historical background. The tahsil is famous for the production of jaggary.

Universe and Sampling: Universe for the present study constituted all female agricultural labourers in Karveer Tahsil of Kolhapur district. The comprehensive lists of female agricultural labourers were not readily available.

Karveer Tahsil consists of 117 villages. It was not possible to include all the villages in the sample for time and money purpose. Out of 117 villages six villages were selected, keeping in view time and money constraints. Three villages nearby Kolhapur city of karveer tahsil and three villages far away from Kolhapur city in karveer tahsil were given preference for selection. Koge, Padali, Saddle-Madle, Ganeshwadi, Bhuyewadi, Nigave these six villages from Karveer taluka were selected for the present study. These villages were selected by using purposive sampling technique. In short, due to the non-availability of readymade lists of female agricultural labourers in Karveer tahsil of Kolhapur district, the researcher had purposively selected 20 female agricultural labourers from all the six villages. Those female landless agricultural labourers were selected who were easily available for the study and were willing to respond to the questions concerned with the study. From each village 20 respondents were selected by using convenient sampling method. By resorting to Purposive Sampling Technique the researcher has actually selected six villages from Karveer Tahsil. From these six villages 120 female landless agricultural labourers in Karveer Tahsil of Kolhapur district were selected by using convenient sampling method.

Sources of Data: The present study was based on the primary as well as secondary data.

Tools of Data Collection: Interview schedule and observation were the techniques of data collection for the present empirical study.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected with help of interview schedule. Fieldwork was carried out in six villages where these female agricultural labourers live and do their activity. Secondary data were collected from various reports, Books and Journals and websites.

Data Processing: The quantifiable data were coded and codebook was prepared. The coded data were entered into the computer and have been processed with the help of SPSS software, and made ready for interpretation. The computer generated out-put is used for tabulation, analysis and interpretation.

Statistical Techniques: Descriptive statistics is used. Single frequency tables are used for data analysis and interpretation:

Data Analysis And Interpretation

SECTION-I-SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Women in rural India are involved in various stages of agricultural operations starting from sowing of seeds to hand weeding, harvesting and post harvest activities. So it is

necessary to throw light on socio- economic profile of female agricultural labourers in the present study. Socio-economic profile of the respondents has been analysed in terms of age, religion, caste, education, types of family, marital status, age at marriage, monthly income of family, nature of family occupation etc.

Age of Respondents

Let us now look at the age of the respondents. The distribution of the respondents according to the age group categories to which they belong at present has been presented in the table no.1.1 below.

Table no.1.1. Distribution of the respondents according to their Age-Group

	Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
1	18-30	31	25.83
2	31-45	53	44.16
3	46-60	29	24.16
4	Above 60	7	5.83
	Total	120	100.0

The present age-group wise distribution of the sample respondents in the table no 1.1 shows that, a majority (44.16 percent) of the respondents belong to the age-group of 31-45, followed by 25.83 percent of the respondents who belong to the age-group of 18-30, another 24.16 percent of the respondents belong to age-group of 46-60, and only 5.83 percent of women belong to the age-group of 60 and above.

The above analysis reveals that relatively a majority of the women respondents (70 percent) belong to younger age-group. Agricultural work requires a lot of physical energy and good health. This physical energy and good health is maintained at a relatively young age. So the study clearly revealed that comparatively young women are engaged in the agricultural activity.

Religion

Let us now look at the religious background of the respondents of the present study. The data regarding the religious background of the respondents are presented in the table no.1.2 below.

Table no.1.2. Distribution of the Respondents According to their Religion

No	Religion	Frequency	Percentage
1	Hindu	117	97.5
3	Muslim	3	2.5
	Total	120	100.0

The data presented in the table no.1.2 indicates that an overwhelming majority of the respondents i.e. 97.5 percent were found to belong to the Hindu religion, only 2.5 percent of the respondents were found to belong to the Muslim religion.

It is revealed from the above table no.1.2 that, an overwhelming majority (97.5 percent) of the respondents were found to belong to the Hindu religion in the context of the present study.

Caste Category

It is important to understand the caste background of the respondents under the study.

So the data regarding the caste category of the respondents were collected and presented in the table no 1.3 below.

Table no. 1.3. Caste Category of Respondents

No	Caste Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Maratha	46	38.33
2	SC (Mahar, Mang, Chambhar)	42	35.00
3	NT (Dhanagar, Gosavi, Wadar, Dombari)	17	14.16
4	OBC (Kumbhar, Sutar, Lohar, Nahvi)	07	05.83
5	Muslim	05	04.16
6	Lingayat	03	2.5
	Total	120	100.00

The data presented in the table no.1.3 indicate that, a majority of the respondents (38 percent)were found to belong to Maratha caste, another 35 percent of the respondents were found to belong sc category which includes mahar, mang and chambhar castes, another 14.16 percent of respondents were found to belong to nomadic tribes category which includes dhangar, wadar, gosavi, dombari castes, 6 percent of respondents were found to belong to OBC category which includes sutar, lohar,navhi and kumbhar, 4percent of the respondents were found to be muslims and only 3 percent of the respondents were found to belong to lingayat caste. It is revealed from the present study that, a majority of the respondents (55 percent) belongs to SC,NT and OBC caste category. Due to their economic backwardness these people are landless and found to be engaged in the labour activity. It was also revealed in the study that Maratha caste women (38 percent) were also found to be landless in large numbers as they are larger in numbers in total population and also engaged in agricultural activity as a labourer.

Educational Status

Your educational status determines your entry into the occupation. Therefore in a present study, respondent's educational status has been assessed. Educational status of the respondents is presented in table no.1.4 below.

Table no.1.4. Educational Status of Respondents

No	Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	Up to 7 th	50	41.6
2	Up to 10 th	21	17.5
3	Up to 12 th	4	3.3
4	Illiterate	45	37.5
	Total	120	100.0

The data presented in the table no.1.4 indicates that 47 percent of the respondents were found to be educated only upto 7th std, another 38 percent respondents were found to be illiterate and 18 percent of the respondents were found to be educated up to 10th std. Only 3 percent of the respondents were found to be educated up to 12th std. In the present study, it clearly reveals that an overwhelming majority (79 percent Illiterate, up to 7th) of the respondents were found to be less educated or illiterate which forced her to do agricultural work where no skill is required.

Type of Family

It is important to understand the family structure of the respondents while studying women labourers in agricultural

sector. The data regarding the kind of family structure were collected in the present study and it is presented in the table no.1.5 below.

Table no.1.5. Distribution of Respondents According to the Type of Family

No	Type of Family	Frequency	Percentage
1	Joint	61	50.83
2	Nuclear	59	49.16
	Total	120	100.0

The data regarding the type of respondents family presented in the table no.1.5 reveals that an overwhelming majority 51 percent of the respondents were found to have hailed from joint family and remaining 49 percent of respondents were found to have hailed from nuclear family. It is clearly indicated in the present study that respondents belongs to both joint and nuclear family in almost equal percentage.

Marital Status

Let us now look at the marital status of the respondents. The data regarding the marital status of the respondents are presented in the table no.1.6 below.

Table no.1.6. Distribution of Respondents According to Their Marital Status

No	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
1	Married	109	90.8
2	Divorcee	1	.8
3	Widow	10	8.4
	Total	120	100.0

The data presented in the table no.1.6 shows that, an overwhelming majority (91 percent) of the respondents were found to be married. The number of widow and divorced women were found to be extremely insignificant. It clearly reveals that married women (91 percent) are freely engaged in the agricultural activity as a labour force as compared to divorced or widow women.

Total Monthly Family Income

The economic status determines the purchasing power, standard of living, quality of life, family Size along with the pattern of disease and deviant behaviour in our community. It is also important factor in seeking health care. To understand the monthly income of the respondents, three categories of income have been given to the respondents. The data regarding the total monthly family income of the respondents' family were collected and are presented in the table no.1.7 below.

Table no.1.7. Total Monthly Family Income of Respondents

No	Monthly Family Income	Frequency	Percentage
1	Up to 5000	67	55.85
2	5001 to 10000	52	43.35
3	10001 to 15000	1	.8
	Total	120	100.0

It can be seen from the data in the table no.1.7 that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents' families (56 percent) were found to belong to the income group of upto 5000 rupees, another 43 percent were found to belong to the income group of 5001 to 10000 rupees and remaining 0.8

percent were found to belong to the income group of 10001 to 15000 rupees.

The data regarding total monthly family income from all sources shows that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (99percent) selected in the sample could be said to belong to Rs 1 to 1000 income group. It means they are economically poor.

SECTION-II: WORKING CONDITIONS OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

To understand status of female agricultural labourers, it is important to know their working conditions which directly or indirectly affect their health.

Number of hours they work in the field

The data regarding the number of hours these female agricultural labourers work in the field were collected in the present study and presented in the table no. 2.1 below.

Table no.2.1. Total Number of Hours they Work in the Field

No	Numbers of hours Working in the Field	Frequency	Percentage
1	8 hours	118	98.33
2	10 hours	2	1.66
	Total	120	100.0

The table no 2.1 indicates that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (98 percent) opined that they work 8 hours a day in the field and only (2 percent) of the respondents opined that they work atleast 10 hours a day in the field. It is clearly revealed in the present study that these female labourers have to work minimum 8 hours a day in the field.

How long the Respondents have to go to work in the field?

In order to understand the distance these female agricultural labourers have to go to work in the field, a question asked was: How long distance, you have to go to work in the field? And the responses collected from the respondents have been presented in the table no.2.2 below.

Table no. 2.2. Total Distance required going to Work in the Field

No	Total Distance required going to Work in the Field	Frequency	Percentage
1	0-1km	30	25
2	2-3 km	50	41.66
3	4-5 km	35	29.16
4	6-7 km	4	3.33
5	Above 10	1	.8
	Total	120	100.0

It is revealed from the table no.2.2 that, a majority of the respondents (42 percent) have to go 2-3 km distance to do work in the field, another (29 percent) of the respondents opined that they have to go 4-5 km distance; while another (25 percent) of the respondents opined that they have to go only 1 km distance to do work in the field. But (3 percent) of the respondents opined that they have to go 6-7 km distance for work and only 1 percent respondent opined that they have to go 10 km distance for work.

It is revealed from the present study that majority of the respondents need to go long distance to do work in the field which requires physical stamina and good health.

Did you get Lunch break during your work time?

While understanding working conditions of female agricultural labourers in a present study, a question asked was: Did you get Lunch break during your work time? The responses collected from respondents were presented in the table no.2.3 below.

Table no.2.3. Did you Get Lunch Break During Work Time?

No	Did you get lunch break during work time	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	118	98.33
2	No	2	1.66
	Total	120	100.0

It can be seen from the table no.2.3 that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (98 percent) were of the opinion that they get lunch break during work time and only(2 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that they do not get lunch break during their work time. To maintain good health condition sufficient food intake and little rest is necessary after few hours of work. It is revealed from the present study that majority of the respondents get lunch break during their work time.

Number of days Employment available in a Month

In the present study, the data regarding the total number of days employment is available in a month to the female landless agricultural labourers were collected and it is presented in the table no.2.4 below.

Table no.2.4. Number of Days Employment Available in a Month

No	Number of days employment available in a month	Frequency	Percentage
1	10 Days	16	13.33
2	15 Days	67	55.83
3	20 Days	32	26.66
4	More than 20 days	3	2.5
	Total	120	100.0

It is revealed from the above table no.2.4 that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (56 percent) were opined that they get only 15 days work in a month, (27 percent) of the respondents were opined that they get 20 days work in a month, another (10 percent) of the respondents were opined that they get only 10 days work in a month and very few (3 percent)of the respondents opined that they get more than 20 days work in a month. It is revealed from the study that majority of the respondents get only few days work in a month. It clearly shows their lower economic status.

Do you face any health problem due to work?

A question was asked to the respondents about the health problems they are facing due to the nature of their work. The responses collected were presented in the table no.2.5 below. The data presented in the table no. 2.5 revealed that, a majority (52 percent) of the respondents opined that they are not facing any health problems due their nature of work but (48 percent) of the respondents opined that they face some kind of health problems due to nature of their work.

Table no. 2.5. Do you face any health problem due to work?

No	Do you face any health problem due To work	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	58	48.33
2	No	62	51.66
	Total	120	100.0

It is clearly revealed that, these female agricultural labourers face some health problems due to kind of work they do.

How much wages they receive per day?

In order to understand the wages of these female agricultural labourers receive per day, a question asked was, how much wages they receive per day for their work. The responses collected were presented in the table no.2.6 below.

Table no.2.6. Daily Wages of the Landless Agricultural Labourers

No	Daily Wages of Landless Agricultural Labourers	Frequency	Percentage
1	80-100 Rs	118	98.33
2	101-150 Rs	2	1.66
	Total	120	100.0

It can be seen from the data in the table no.2.6 that, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (98 percent) get the daily wages in between 80 to 100 rupees, while only(2 percent) of the respondents get the daily wages in between 101 to 150 rupees. The data regarding the daily wages the female agricultural labourers receive shows that, an overwhelming majority 98% of the respondents receive less than 100 rupees as their wages. It means that, it worsens their economic condition and also affects their health also.

How frequently do you get your wages?

In order to find out frequency of the wages these female agricultural labourers get, a question asked was, how frequently do you get your wages? The responses given by the respondents are presented in the table no.2.7 below.

Table no. 2.7. How frequently do you get your wages?

No	How Frequently do you get your wages	Frequency	Percentage
1	Daily	6	5.00
2	Once in a Week	50	41.66
3	Once in 15 Days	59	49.16
4	Once in a Month	5	4.16
	Total	120	100.0

It can be seen from the data presented in the table no.2.7 that, majority of the respondents (49 percent) receives wages once in fifteen days, another (42 percent) of respondents receives wages once in a week, the number of respondents who receives wages daily and once in a month was found to be insignificant. It is clearly revealed from the data that, the wages these female landless agricultural labourers receive are very meagre and also majority of them get it once in fifteen days or in a week.

FINDINGS

Majority of the women respondents (70 percent) belong to younger age-group. Agricultural work requires lots of physical energy and good health.

This physical energy and good health maintained at a relatively young age. So the study clearly revealed that comparatively young women engaged in agricultural activity. An overwhelming majority (97.5 percent) of the respondents were found to belong to Hindu religion in the context of the present study. It is revealed from the present study that, majority of the respondents 55 percent belongs to SC, NT and OBC caste category. Due to their economic backwardness these people are landless and found to be engaged in the labour activity. It was also revealed in a study that Maratha caste women (38 percent) also found to be landless in more numbers as they are more in numbers in total population and also engaged in agricultural activity as a labourer.

It clearly reveals that overwhelming majority (79 percent illiterate, up to 7th) of the respondents found to be less educated or illiterate which forced him to do agricultural work where no skill is required. It is clearly indicated in the present study that respondents belongs to both joint and nuclear family structure. It clearly reveals that married women (91 percent) freely engaged in the agricultural activity as a labour force as compare to divorced or widow women. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (99percent) selected in the sample could be said to belong to Rs.10000 income groups against this background. It means they are economically poor. It is clearly revealed in the present study that these female labourers have to work minimum 8 hours a day in the field.

It is revealed from the present study that majority of the respondents need to go long distance to get work in the field which requires physical stamina and good health. It is revealed from the present study that majority of the respondents 98% get lunch break during their work time. It is revealed from the study that majority of the respondents 69% get only few days 10-15 days work in a month. It clearly shows their lower economic status. It clearly revealed that 48% of female agricultural labourers face some health problems due to kind of work they do. An overwhelming majority 98% of the respondents receive less than 100 rupees as their daily wages. It means that, it worsens their economic condition and also affects their health also. The wages these female landless agricultural labourers receive are very meagre and also majority of them get it once in fifteen days or in a week.

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