



Research Article

Analysis of Unpaid and Invisible Labour Force Supporting Family Farming in the Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract | It is considered that family farming is the backbone of agriculture worldwide. It is that type of farming in which all the adult family members of a household including men and women participate in various agricultural activities. Contribution of females to the success of family farming has been hidden behind the prominent image of male farmers. The comprehensive description highlights the gender inequality at farm level. The largest tehsil Nankana Sahib of the study district was purposively selected for this study. Primary data were collected from 360 respondents who were approached by snowball sampling technique. Moreover, primary data were collected through reliable and validated research tool (interview schedule). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the collected primary data. It was concluded that preparing food (mean=4.95), cleanliness (dusting) of houses (mean=4.85) and taking care of sick family members were prominent household activities being done by female family members. The females were also doing crop harvesting (mean=3.59), weeding operation (mean=3.0) and disease scouting (mean=3.0) at field level. In family-based farming the females were also participating in general agricultural activities like post-harvest handling (mean=3.86), crop storage (mean=3.51) and post processing and value addition (mean=3.42). The unpaid female labour was also helping the male farmers in case of livestock activities such as animals drinking (mean=3.78), feeding (mean=3.77) and milking (mean=3.67), the same kind of scenario was in poultry farming like females were participating in poultry marketing (mean=4.29), eggs collection (mean=4.27) and poultry care (mean=3.40). It was suggested that the females should encouraged with equal professional status in family-based farming. There is also need to strengthen them with equal rights of land ownership and decision-making power.

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Introduction

All the family members follow the principle of division of labour at household. The female family

members and the young ones are working at home and they are doing all home related activities with the help of the family labour. The owner or head (either male or female) of the family can easily manage all agricultural

related activities. In this way steady livelihood is getting by the family farmers (Michael, 2021).

For getting massive amount of living, whole family members were working at their farm. They were getting out put in form of goods or money or agricultural products. Farmers are doing different agricultural activities like they are producing major and minor crops, raising nursery and forestry, rearing animals and fisheries. Most of the massive agricultural activities in family farming are done by the family labour including a considerable quantity are being completed by female family unpaid labour. In farm related activities the female family members are playing active role like they are contributing for agricultural marketing, protection of agricultural products (Saito, 2021).

On family farm land the labour could be divided on the basis of gender. The females and children are unpaid or invisible type of labour at family farm (Rossier, 2015). Family based farming is considered as the base sustainable agriculture and rural development. But it has some drawback and one of the majors is gender inequality regarding family labour at farm level. The female labour is not acknowledged as they deserve (Brandth, 2002). Male farmers of the family are involved in the heavy agricultural activities like they are managing their farm and operating agricultural machinery while females are supporting their male family members by taking care of livestock, poultry, orchards, households and family. The comprehensive description highlights the gender inequality at farm level (Price, 2012).

Females are facing challenges of no reward of their work and restrictions of their rights in traditional Western family-based farm (Folbre, 2000). Farm labour is almost based upon the population of working male and females in family farming. It was also concluded that the male are the heads of family farms (Cloke *et al.*, 2006).

For the major agricultural tasks and trading male is responsible, owner and operator of family-based farm. Moreover, he holds a massive part of decision-making power than the women (Bartley *et al.*, 2015). In family farming the female family members are responsible for household, social and family relationships and emotional care taker. She is helper of her husband the farmer at farm level. For this supporting role she is

not gaining legal credit (Bjorkhang and Blekesaune, 2017). For the success of family farming, contribution of the females is blurred due to prominent image of male farmers. In farming population females have been presented as the independent farmer's wives and turned as "super-housewives" (Haugen and Blekesaune, 2005). In the process of cultivation and other agricultural tasks labour is an essential factor. Men are doing heavy agricultural work but the role of females is considered essential in cultivation activities (Attah, 2012). For sustainable agricultural and rural development females, role is essential and absolutely necessary (Ekenta *et al.*, 2012). Housewives' fate is invisible work and legal status, lack of recognition, and work without any cost. The females are facing challenges like in the unequal professional status, land ownership and unequal rights in term of decision-making power. In total they are living in the state of autonomy (Hoggen, 2014). Male is dominated in agriculture due to doing heavy work but females are also showing dominance in some farming activities for example it can be seen in cultivation and planting activities (Pogy *et al.*, 2016). Although nowadays, the females are doing every essential and rough agricultural activities, but their role has no value even more than a helper of male farmers (Ekenta *et al.*, 2016). At planning stage, the level of females' participation is low but it is high at the stage of implementation. Women's participation in agricultural activities is necessary especially in developing countries. It is obvious that females are playing their role in various agriculture-based activities from generation to generation. The economic and educational motivation of women's is helping their male farmers but it is challenging to give credit and land ownership status to this particular gender (Salsadyra, 2022).

Methodology

Nankana Sahib district of Punjab Province of Pakistan was the study area and all the family farmers of this district were study population. Sample size was selected by using multistage sampling technique. A largest tehsil named (*Nankana Sahib*) was selected purposively as it has 45 rural union councils (UCs). From selected tehsil twenty union council and from each selected union council three villages were selected randomly. Furthermore, three farm families were also identified following snowball sampling technique. Finally, to collect pertinent data, two respondents as one was the head of selected family and other was

any other adult family member were selected. Hence the sample size was 360 respondents. Concerned data were collected with the help of pretested, reliable and validate research tool (interview schedule). Experts and review of literature were helpful for the formation of questions. five-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree) was used for the evaluation of respondents' perceptions as it was used by Rehman, 2011. The collected data were analyzed using computer software i.e., Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean, standard deviation, weighted score and rank order were calculated to improve the collected primary data.

Results and Discussion

The data presented in [Table 1](#) unveil that preparation of food for family members (score=1784 & mean=4.95) by female family members occupied 1st position, value of mean is in middle of agree and strongly agree but tilted to strongly agree. Dusting of the houses (score=1746 & mean=4.85) obtained 2nd position and its value of mean is in the middle of agree and strongly agree but representing the response of strongly agree. Taking care of sick family members (score=1395 & mean=3.88), taking care of elders (score=1168 & mean=3.24) were ranked at 3rd and 4th position respectively and the mean value of 3rd position is in the middle of somewhat agree and agree but tilted to agree and mean figure of 4th ranked is in the middle of somewhat agree and agree tilted to somewhat agree, income record and expenditures (score=819 & mean=2.25) obtained 5th position but it is clear from mean value the response is more towards disagree. It could be inferred from the data presented in [Table 1](#) that the female family members of farm families were actively participating and helping their male family members to improve their health by cooking healthy food, providing neat and clean environment and taking care of all the family members. It shows high level of skills of females regarding management at domestic level. Indirectly the sincere efforts of the female family members lead towards the nation building but unfortunately most of the time their efforts are not encouraged at any level. Hence, they are continuously working for their families ultimately country. These results are similar to the study of [Craig \(2006\)](#) who reported that female family members were responsible for preparation of food, household activities and care of children.

Table 1: Household activities done by female family members

Household activities done by female family members	Mean	Standard deviation	Weighted score	Rank order
Food preparation for family members	4.95	0.452	1784	1
Dusting of houses	4.85	0.352	1746	2
Care for sick family members	3.88	1.410	1395	3
Taking care of elders	3.24	0.707	1168	4
Record of income and expenditures	2.27	1.417	819	5
Budget making for crops	2.25	1.574	818	6

Table 2: Agricultural field related activities done by female family members

Agricultural field related activities done by female family members	Mean	Standard deviation	Weighted score	Rank order
Harvesting	3.59	1.307	1295	1
Manual weeding operation/intercultural operation	3.00	0.604	1081	2
Disease scouting	3.00	1.570	1080	3
Nursery transplanting	2.58	1.238	932	4
Fertilizer applications in the fields	1.04	0.524	374	5
Ploughing and land preparation	1.09	0.452	392	6
Sowing	1.08	0.450	389	7
Irrigation application	1.03	0.193	371	8
Desilting (cleaning of water channel)	1.03	0.193	371	8
Pesticides application	1.03	0.193	371	8

The information given in [Table 2](#) reveals that harvesting (score =1295 & mean= 3.59) and weeding operation/intercultural operation (score=1081 & mean= 3.0) got the upper most two positions. Mean value of upper 1st position of [Table 2](#) is in the middle of somewhat agree and agree but tilted more to agree. Further mean value of 2nd position lies on agree. It can be concluded that female members of the family were taking part in the harvesting of crops. Disease scouting (score=1080 & mean=3.00) got 3rd placed and mean's value lies at somewhat agree. Irrigation applications, desilting or cleaning of water channels, pesticides applications

were occupying the 7th position by attaining similar values of score and mean (score=371 & mean= 1.03) and value of mean connecting two categories of response (strongly disagree and disagree) but tilted to disagree. It may be deduced from above findings that female family members were not doing major agricultural tasks like irrigation, fertilizer application and spraying to the crops but they were taking part in intercultural practices and harvesting but not on regular basis. The heavy agricultural tasks were being done by the female family farmers but they getting support from the female family members. Major findings also lead to conclude that females of farm families were actively participating in harvesting, they were helping their male members to harvest, collect, pick and store the agricultural products. In some way, findings are interchangeable with conclusion of [Gangopadhyay et al. \(2005\)](#) who concluded that female labour is doing agricultural activities like picking up the fruit and vegetables.

Table 3: General agricultural activities done by female family members

General agricultural activities done by female family members	Mean	Standard deviation	Weighted score	Rank order
Post-harvest handling	3.86	0.980	1390	1
Crop storage	3.51	1.264	1264	2
Post processing and value addition	3.42	1.074	1231	3
Marketing	2.82	1.520	1015	4

The data given in [Table 3](#) reveal that post-harvest handling (score =1390 & mean = 3.86) got 1st rank, and mean's value of this category is in the middle of somewhat agree and agree but more tilted to agree. It can be deduced; female's family members were participating in different agricultural activities regarding post-harvest handling. Marketing related to agricultural products (score=1015 & mean=3.82) categorized at 2nd position and the mean value tilted to agree. It could be understood that the unpaid labour was working for marketing of the agricultural products at local level. There was no hesitation between the said gender to communicate and to sale and purchase the agricultural products. Crop storage (score=1264 & mean = 3.51) achieved 3rd position in [Table 3](#). Mean figure tilted to agree. It is clear that the respondents unveiled that females are actively participating to store the crops at the time of harvesting at local and domestic. They had stored

the grain for the whole year and this job was totally unpaid. level. Post processing and value addition (score=1231 & mean= 3.42) occupied 4th position, value of mean value is in the middle of somewhat agree and agree but tilted to somewhat agree. Findings shows female family members were taking part in agricultural activities like in post processing the crop production and post-harvest handling in this way they were supporting the family base farming. These results are similar with the results of [Brumer \(2008\)](#) who indicated that female family members have significant experience regarding agriculture and they were helping their male members in harvesting, post processing the crop yield and economic activities in family farming.

Table 4: Livestock related activities done by female family members

Livestock related activities done by female family members	Mean	Standard deviation	Weighted score	Rank order
Providing water to animals	3.78	1.225	1361	1
Animals grazing and feeding	3.77	1.224	1357	2
Milking of animals	3.67	1.210	1321	3
Cleaning the animal barns and sheds for animal keeping	3.56	1.217	1282	4
Culling of animals	3.42	1.308	1231	5
Taking care of animals	3.38	1.138	1217	6
Animals' health care	2.47	1.347	889	7

Data presented in [Table 4](#) reveals providing water to animals (score =1361 & mean = 3.78), animals grazing and feeding (score= 1357 & mean = 3.77), milking of animals (score= 1321 & mean = 3.67) and cleaning the animal barns and sheds for animals keeping (score =1282 & mean = 3.56) attained the upper most four positions respectively. Although the values of mean are in the middle of somewhat agree and agree but tilted to agree. Culling of animals (score= 1231 & mean = 3.42), taking care of animals (score= 1217 & mean = 3.38) occupied 5th and 6th places respectively. Although values of mean are in middle of two categories i.e., somewhat agree and agree but tilted to somewhat agree. Animals' health care (score=889 & mean= 2.47) were ranked at 7th position. Values of mean tilted to disagree. From the findings it could be concluded that female family members were taking part in livestock related activities like they were

providing water and feed to animals. The females were also doing milking and cleanliness related activities. Furthermore Table 4 explored that female were undertaking various activities in livestock they were participating in cutting of fodder, providing water and feeding the animals, females were also taking part in activities like shed cleaning and milking of animals. However, participation of females in various livestock related activities like selling, purchasing and breeding of animals, cultivation of fodder and in the management of animals' barn and sheds was low. In some way, these results are interchangeable with the report of Arshad *et al.* (2010) who reported, there is active participation of females for livestock activities.

Table 5: *Poultry related activities being done female family members*

Poultry related activities done by female family members	Mean	Standard deviation	Weighted score	Rank order
Eggs selling and marketing	4.29	0.625	1545	1
Eggs collecting	4.27	0.622	1538	2
Poultry care	3.40	0.615	1225	3

Data displayed in Table 5 show that eggs selling and marketing (score= 1545 & mean = 4.29) got the 1st position and value of mean is in the middle of two categories (agree and strongly agree) but more tilted to agree. Eggs collecting (score= 1538 & mean= 4.27), poultry care (score= 1225 & mean = 3.40) acquired the next two (2nd and 3rd) positions respectively. Although value mean for collecting of eggs is in middle of two categories of response (agree and strongly agree) but tilted more to agree and the mean value for taking care of poultry more tilted to somewhat agree. It could be inferred that female family members were trying to raise the family income from poultry farming. They were interested to rare poultry birds and in this regard, they were also participating in different activities like the unpaid labour were taking part to build poultry sheds and its cleanliness for poultry, feeding the birds and protection. Moreover, they were collecting and selling the eggs on regular basis to raise their family income. The important thing is that they were struggling for the betterment of their family even they were trying to raise their income by selling the poultry birds and their eggs. Further females' family members of family farming were also raring poultry for the healthy chicken in this way they were also saving money but they were not getting any

reward, credit and salary for their valuable efforts even they were not acknowledged by their male family members. This conclusion is somehow resembled with conclusion of Alem *et al.* (2014) who reported, females were responsible for providing treatment to sick poultry birds. They also had a major share in the management of different poultry related activities like collecting and selling of eggs. A good percentage (45%) of the women was responsible for consumption and selling of eggs, cleaning of sheds and taking care of poultry chickens.

Conclusions

It was concluded that the women involved to prepare food, clean houses and look after the family members without any remuneration. But they indifferent to income sources. At the time of harvesting when labour is unavailable even on wages, women come forward to manage crops. After harvest, in management and transportation women stand shoulder to shoulder with men. Beside this looking after the cattle such as foddering, watering, milking and cleanliness of cattle shed is being done by unpaid labour (females) without any compensation/wages. Moreover, they were lessening the economic pressure by doing poultry and managing food need. The female family members were working alongside the male family members but their work was not acknowledged behind the massive image of the male farmers. It was suggested that the females should encouraged with equal profession status in family-based farming. There is also need to strengthen them with equal rights of land ownership and decision-making power. Moreover, in family-based farming females are almost working in all farming activities so it is absolutely essential to provide training opportunities for their better labour efficiency.

Recommendations

In family-based farming systems Government should recognize women as co-farmers. Equal land ownership rights should be ensured for rural women.

At household and community levels women should be included in agricultural decision making.

Government should arrange training programs on modern farming techniques, poultry management and better livestock production.

Government should start microcredit and finance support scheme for women in rural community.

Agricultural extension services should directly target female farmers rather than only household male heads.

Novelty Statement

The Study advances existing literature by integrating gender-disaggregated insights and socio-cultural dimensions to reveal how such labour sustains rural livelihoods while remaining excluded from formal recognition and policy frameworks.

Author's Contribution

Safdar Ali: Conducted the research

Muhammad Usman: Paper writeup

Muhammad Luqman and Rao Sabir Sattar: Data analysis

Muhammad Yaseen: Proof reading

Moula Bux Peerzado: Research methodology

Generative AI and AI-assisted technology statement

The authors declare that no generative AI and AI assisted technology was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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