

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF WOMEN
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS
IN GRAPES FARMING IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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Research in agriculture conducted in India and other developing and under developed countries all point to the conclusion that women contribute far more too agricultural production than has generally been acknowledged. Recognition of their crucial role in agriculture should not obscure the fact that farm women continue to be concerned with their primary functions as wives, mothers and homemakers. Despite their importance to agricultural production, women face severe handicaps. They are in fact, the largest group of landless labourers with little real security in case of break-up of the family owing to death or divorce; inheritance laws and customs discriminate against them land reform and settlement programmes usually give sole title and hence the security needed for obtaining production credits to the husband. Agricultural development programmes are usually planned by men and aimed at men. Mechanization, for example alleviates the burden of tasks that are traditionally men's responsibility leaving women's burdens unrelieved or even increased. The excess burden of work on women ("the double day" of the farm work plus house work) also acts as a stimulus to have many children so that they can help out with chores from an early age. Extension workers almost exclusively aim their advice at men's activities and crops. In some regions, this bias may depress production of

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subsistence food crops (often women's crops) in favour of increased production of cash crops (often men's crops) in favour of increased production of cash crops. Estimates of the time contribution of women to agricultural activities ranges from about 30 percent in The Gambia to 60-80 percent in different parts of Cameroon. In Asia, estimates range from 32 percent in India to over 50 percent in China. China and India, women represented a share of 21 percent and 24 percent. But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere, face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints. Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the 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.

It may not be out of place to mention here that considering their dual responsibilities within and outside the home, it would be in the fitness of things that more and more in the village training is organized for rural farm women to suit their convenience with due realization that institutional training is important in its own place. In order that farm women get a fair deal at the hands of change agents, one of the remedial measures that needs to be undertaken is to induct a sizeable number of well-trained women personnel in training and extension programmes of agricultural development agencies at all levels and more so at the grass-root level. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the general characteristics of women labourers, to assess the problems faced by the women labourers and to empirically analyse the economic impact of employment of women in Coimbatore district. The hypotheses tested were that there wasn't any significant difference in the income, expenditure and the impact on the income earned.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on random sampling method, about 75 women agricultural labourers were selected from Thondamuthur Taluk, Coimbatore District. This area is noted for its grape farming. To analyse the data, percentage method, t-test and multiple regression were used. About 44% of the respondents belonged to the age group of above 40 years. Only 9.3% and 21.3% of the respondents completed their high school and secondary level of education respectively. All the respondents were married. Around 1.33%, 16% and 2.67% were separated, widow and divorce respectively. Around 32% and 33.33% of the respondents belonged to the MBC and SC community respectively. None of the respondents belonged to ST and FC community. About 12% of the respondents were from joint family. Around 2.7% of the respondents had more than 6 members in their families. About 24% of the respondents earned income of above Rs.10000. Around 10.7% of the respondents earned a monthly income of less than Rs.5000. The mean family income was Rs. 9377.33, standard deviation was 3193.77 and t value was 28.249*. Around 11% each of the respondents spend below Rs.5000 and above Rs.10000 respectively. The mean monthly family expenditure was Rs.7528.67 and standard deviation was 2308 and the t value was 25.428*. Based on t-test it can be inferred that there was significant difference in the income and expenditure of the respondents.

Table 1: Socio-Economic conditions

S. No.	Socio-Economic Characteristics	Percentage
1.	Age	
	>20	1 (1.33)
	20-40	41 (54.67)
	Above 40	33 (44)
2.	Education	
	Uneducated	52 (69.33)
	High school	7 (9.33)
	Secondary	16 (21.33)
3.	Marital status	
	Married	60 (80)
	Separated	1 (1.33)
	Widow	12 (16)
	Divorce	2 (2.67)
4.	Caste	

	SC	25 (33.33)
	MBC	24 (32)
	BC	26 (34.67)
5. Type of family		
Joint	9 (12)	
	Nuclear	66 (88)
6. Size of family		
1-5	73 (97.33)	
Above 6	2 (2.67)	
7. Family Monthly Income		
	Below 5000	8 (10.67)
	5000-10000	49 (65.33)
	Above 10000	18 (24)
8. Monthly Expenditure		
Below 5000	8 (10.67)	
5000-10000	59 (78.67)	
Above 10000	8 (10.67)	
9. Assets		
	Nil	50 (66.67)
	House	23 (30.67)
	Both	2 (2.67)
10. Debt		
	Nil	15 (20)
	Relatives	31 (41.33)
	Bank	1 (1.33)
	Moneylenders	28 (37.33)
11. Savings		
	Nil	30 (40)
	Bank	34 (45.33)
	Relatives	11 (14.67)

Source: Based on Field Survey

About 30.7% had house, but 2.7% had both land and house. About 41.3% and 37.3% of the respondents had borrowed money from relative and moneylenders respectively. The respondents borrowed money for family expenditure (62.67%), medical (2.67%), education

(1.3%), house purchase (6.7%) and marriage (6.7%). They borrowed for a period of 2-4 years and the amount borrowed for 57.3% of the respondents was below Rs.20000. About 45.3% and 14.7% of the respondents saved with bank and relatives. The amount saved annually was above Rs.40000 for 60% of the respondents the reason for the saving was for future (34.67%), education (12%), marriage (8%), future and education (2.67%) and land purchase (2.67%).

About 77.3% respondents could get the drinking water in the house tap itself, but 22.7% of the respondents had to fetch the water from the public tap. All the respondents had electricity in the house. In the case of toilet facilities about 82.7% had used public places and 17.3% had it in their house. Living conditions of the respondents were moderate.

Work Experience

About 17.3% were involved in weeding and rest were engaged in grapes cutting. About 32% of the respondents worked for 8 hours and 65% worked for 9 hours. Around 10.7% worked for 7 days, 4% worked for 5 days and 85% worked for 6 days. problems like less wages, shoulder, hand, leg pain and dust. But they also had to encounter problems like eye sight (82.67%), snakes and leeches (73.33%), cold and cough (76%) and wounds (33.33%). About 66% suffered due to fertilizer and 6.67% had leg pain due to long hours of standing.

Impact of Employment

To find out the impact of employment on income and expenditure of the respondents t- test was used. From the below table it can be inferred the mean monthly expenditure before and after joining the job was different. The mean food expenditure was Rs. 3309.33 but after it was Rs.3315.33. There was a significant difference in the income earned and the amount spent for non-food expenditure. But for food expenditure there wasn't any significant difference in the amount spent by the respondents.

Table 2: Working Conditions

Sl. No	Working Condition	Percentage
1.	Type of work	
	Grapes cutting Weeding	62 (82.67) 13 (17.33)

2.	Hours of work		
	8	hours	24 (32)
	9	hours	49 (65.33)
3.	Days of work		
	10	hours	2 (2.67)
	5	days	3 (4)
4.	Years of experience		
	6	days	64 (85.33)
	7	days	8 (10.67)
4.	Years of experience		
	>10		19 (25.33)
	10-20		34 (45.33)
	Above 20		22 (29.33)

About 29.3% of the respondents had above 20 years of experience, about 25.3% had less than 10 years of experience. For 69% of the respondents the employer provided transport. All the respondents faced the

Table 3: Income Analysis- t-values

Mean	Before	After	't' values
Income	3316	3601	26.792*
Expenditure			
Food	3309.35	3316.33	0.047
Non food	3896.34	4216.34	7.815*

Source: Based on Field Survey

To estimate the impact of selected variables on income earned, multiple regression equation was fitted using OLS method. The equation was estimated with the explanatory variables like days, hours of work, experience, type of work and labourers. For type of labour, a dummy variable was used assigning value “1” for permanent and “0” for temporary. Similarly for type of work dummy variables were used.

Table 4: Impact on income - Regression Analysis

Intercept	β values	't' values
Constant	2805.052	17.454*
Days	44.888	3.469*
Hours	32.529	1.967**
Experience	0.522	0.678*
Type of work Labour	-157.129	-9.649*
	94.334	1.791**

$R^2 = 0.705$ $F = 32.935^*$, *Significant at 1%, **Significant at 5%

The estimated regression equation on income is given in table with increase in days, hours of work and experience, on an average the income earned also increases similarly if the woman worker was a permanent worker then the income is bound to increase. If the woman worker works for weeding her income on an average is bound to decrease by Rs.157. About 71% of the variation in income is due to the above variables.

CONCLUSION

During rainy season, labourers were affected with diseases like cold, cough, eye sight, wounds etc. They were mostly affected due to the usage of fertilizer for the plant. Due to inadequate resting shed, women labourers are not able to take rest during their resting time. Wages provided to the workers were low. Reasonable wage should be provided to the women workers to raise their living conditions. Efforts should be undertaken to improve the working conditions by using eco-friendly fertilisers, this not only increase the productivity but also maintain the health of the workers.

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