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**Deepika Deswal**  
Research Scholar,  
Department of Sociology  
CCS Haryana Agriculture  
University, Hisar, Haryana,  
India

**Subhash Chander**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Sociology  
CCS Haryana Agriculture  
University, Hisar, Haryana,  
India

**Vinod Kumari**  
Professor,  
Department of Sociology  
CCS Haryana Agriculture  
University, Hisar, Haryana,  
India

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Subhash Chander**  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Sociology  
CCS Haryana Agriculture  
University, Hisar, Haryana,  
India

## Role of female headed households in Agricultural production in rural Haryana: A sociological study

Deepika Deswal, Subhash Chander and Vinod Kumari

### Abstract

India occupies the 67<sup>th</sup> position worldwide in terms of female-headed households. The concept of the head of household was related to economic well-being, power, authority, and decision-making process of the household. Although FHHs are confronting numerous economic vulnerabilities day by day, they had become a hidden phenomenon in our society. Agriculture and allied activities support livelihoods of nearly 58 per cent of India's rural population. The study was conducted into two cultural zones namely Bagar from Hisar district and Nardak from Karnal of Haryana state. A total of 260 respondents were selected from the field of the study. This paper shows the role of female headed households in agricultural production in Haryana. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (73.68%) weeded in all crops during both the seasons. Majority of the female heads worked generally in agricultural activities like harvesting, collecting produce at one place, loading it for transportation, storage and treating grains and seeds and in threshing also. Most of the female heads were helped by in-Laws, neighbours, friends and other kins in family disputes. It was concluded that female heads were managing all the agricultural affairs single handedly. It was also suggested that female heads were not aware of agricultural development programme so it was necessary to provide them need based trainings to generate income.

**Keywords:** Female headed households, agricultural production, agricultural activity, socio-economic variables, agricultural problems etc.

### Introduction

The concept of female headed households is of fairly recent origin. This is not to say that such households did not exist in the past. But that till recently the traditionally held belief that the man is the 'natural' head of the household was firmly held and there was no consciousness about the fact that a very large number of families were in reality headed by women. Generally, the eldest of family is considered as head of household. Even a twelve-year old boy may be listed as head of household, as the eldest male of household present. This tendency has resulted in to invisibility of the female headed households in the eyes of planners and policy makers. As a result, these are the households who have been bypassed in the process of development. A large number of soldiers' wives who become widows got married to husband's younger brother as a social custom. Hence the precedence of such widows taking on headships of their families is also rather small. In the said forces a vast number of men being away from home, their wives adopt the role of heads of the household in their absence. Unlike females of many other states most Haryanvi soldiers' wives look after the agricultural work, back home instead of joining their husbands in peace stations. Having assumed the headship role in the absence of their husbands they continue to carry on as such even when their husbands come home after retirement. Trend towards production of cash crops, mechanisation of agriculture, changes in landholding systems along with population growth resulting in landlessness and: surplus male labour in rural areas are factors that help to explain the increased incidence of male migration from the rural areas and the resultant female headed households. In spite of the long absence of males there is little change in the authority structure of family and major decisions regarding purchase of household items, cattle, inputs for land, credit, expenditure on ceremonies etc. are postponed till the migrants' visit. Women, however, take decisions on problems regarding the daily subsistence of the family and keep it from slipping into deeper poverty. Malawi showed that in addition to farming and growing of crops as strategies for survival in Malawi, FHHs also went into forests in search of resources such as firewood and thatch grass, among other items. The forests were a source of livelihood income for many FHHs in Malawi since most of them lacked access to land for agriculture. The forest resources were put to home use to roof their small houses and for sale to generate income

(Kamanga, *et al.* 2009) [2]. In rural areas, the number of households headed by women is 16.65 lakh, while in the urban areas the number is 12.99 lakh. The data that also interprets the number of households on the basis of religion and sex reveals that in the state, more percentage of Muslim women head the households than women from other faiths (Census, 2011) [1]. The population of woman is almost half of the total population of India. A country or a community cannot be considered civilized where woman is not honoured. Indian Laws are being made without discrimination against woman, as a result Indian woman enjoying high position in our society (Roy, 2013) [4]. A variety of factors can lead to the emergence and persistence of households headed by women in both rural and urban areas. Among the demographic factors, marital dissolution, migration and death of spouse are primary. In some households the male head migrates for short-term circular migration leaving his wife to remain behind and in other cases both male head and his wife migrate leaving the elderly mother of either the head or his wife. Traditional household models and gender ideology theories assign older males as the household head. These theories assume that men are the family's main income providers, decision makers, and thus, they implicit household head's responsibility (Lampietti and Stalker, 2000) [3]. Keeping these points in view, the present study was conducted with the following specific objective i.e. role of female headed households in Agricultural production in rural Haryana.

**Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted into two cultural zones namely Bagar from Hisar district and Nardak from Karnal of Haryana state. From each selected district, one block from each district was selected randomly for the purpose of the study. After the selection of the blocks, three villages were selected randomly from each block. One hundred twenty eight respondents from Karnal district and 132 respondents from Hisar district were surveyed with the help of well structured interview schedule. A total of 260 respondents were selected for the purpose of the study as per objectives.

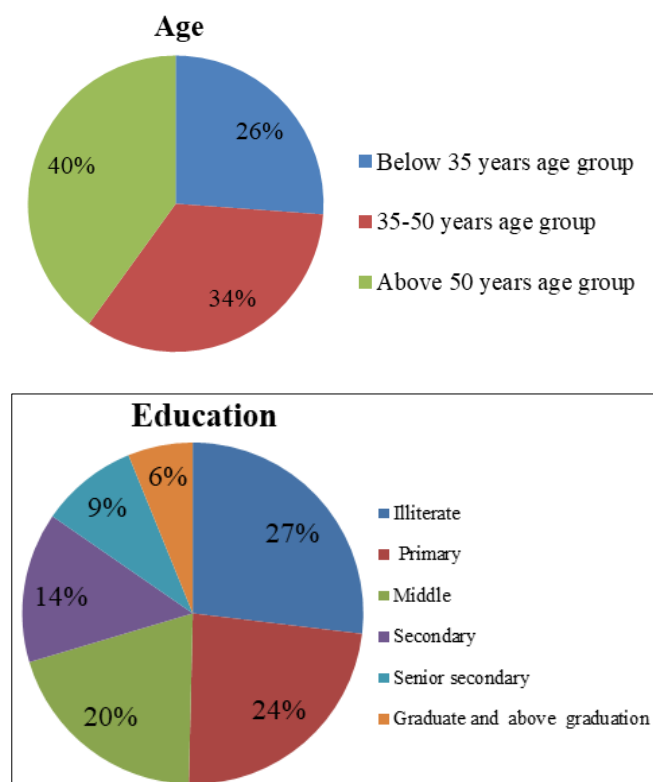
**Results and discussion**

**Contextual matrix of the respondents**

Analysis revealed that maximum number of respondents had 40.01 percent who were above 50 years of age group and one-third of the respondents (33.84%) 35-50 years of age group followed by 26.15 per cent below 35 years of age group. Nearly two-third of the respondents (65.00 %) belonged to nuclear family and 35.00 per cent joint family respectively. Majority of the respondents (55.00%) had medium family size i.e. between 5-8 members and small family size (23.46 %) between up to 4 members respectively. Even 21.54 per cent had large family size with eight members. Majority of the respondents (53.46%) were from general caste. Rest 23.84 and 22.70 per cent respondents were from backward caste and scheduled caste, respectively. More than one-fourth of the respondents (26.92%) were illiterate followed by (23.46%) educated upto primary school level and middle school level (20.00%).

More than one-third of the respondents (39.24%) were engaged in farming occupation and in labour work (32.69%), respectively. Distribution of size of land holdings among

respondents found that more than one-fourth of the respondents (28.84%) had Small sized of land holding i.e. between 2.5-5.0 acre and marginal sized of landholding size (28.46%) followed by 14.23 per cent semi-medium size of land holding i.e. between 5.0-10.0 acres. Majority of the respondents (51.15%) earned income up to Rs.1,00,000 followed by between Rs. 1,00,000-2,00,000 and above 2,00,000 (19.61%). It was found that field of the study majority of the respondents (51.53%) had medium level of farm machinery assets followed by nearly one-third of the respondents (30.39%) who had low level of farm machinery assets and had high farm machinery assets (18.08%).



**Fig 1:** Contextual matrix of respondents

The data revealed that majority of the respondents (52.69%) hailed from low level of socio-economic status and medium level socio-economic status 36.92 per cent followed by more than one- third of the respondent 36.92 percent were hailed from. Remaining 10.39 percent hailed from high level of socio-economic status.

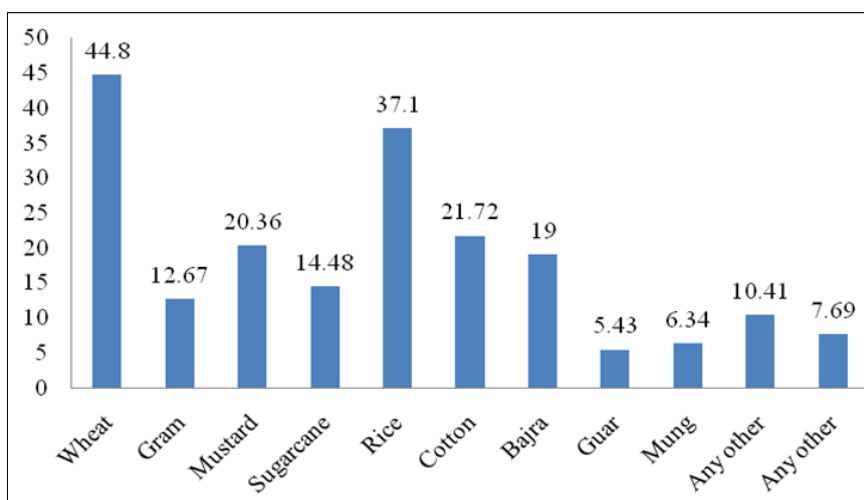
**Cropping pattern**

**Rabi season:** Analysis clearly revealed about cropping pattern in *rabi* season that maximum number of the respondents (44.80%) grew wheat crop followed by (20.36%) cultivated mustard in table 1. Remaining 14.48 and 12.67 percent cultivated sugarcane and gram crops. Region wise analysis revealed that more than one-third of the respondents (35.13%) cultivated wheat followed by (30.63%) respondents who cultivated mustard in Hisar district. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (54.55%) cultivated wheat followed by more than one-fifth of the respondents (20.90%) who cultivated sugarcane in Karnal district.

**Table 1:** Distribution of FHHs as per cropping pattern

Cropping pattern	Hisar (N=111)	Karnal (N=110)	Total (N=221)
<b>Rabi crops</b>			
Wheat	39(35.13)	60(54.55)	99(44.80)
Gram	23(20.72)	5(4.55)	28(12.67)
Mustard	34(30.63)	11(10.00)	45(20.36)
Sugarcane	9(8.11)	23(20.90)	32 (14.48)
Any other	6(5.41)	11(10.00)	17(7.69)
<b>Kharif Crops</b>			
Rice	18(16.22)	64(58.18)	82(37.10)
Cotton	38(34.23)	10(9.09)	48(21.72)
Bajra	27(24.32)	15(13.64)	42(19.00)
Guar	10(9.01)	2(1.82)	12(5.43)
Mung	9(8.11)	5(4.54)	14(6.34)
Any other	9(8.11)	14(12.73)	23(10.41)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.  
Responses were multiple



**Fig 2:** Distribution of FHHs as per cropping pattern

**kharif season:** It was found from the data cropping pattern in *kharif* season more than one-third of the respondents (37.10 %) grow rice crop followed by 21.72 per cent who cultivated cotton. Remaining 19.00 and 6.34 percent cultivated bajra and mung crops. Tariq (2018) <sup>[9]</sup> was also found approximately the same results in his own study. Region wise analysis revealed that more than one-third of the respondents (34.23%) grow cotton crop followed by 24.32 per cent who cultivated bajra. Remaining 16.22 and 9.01 percent cultivated rice and guar crops in Hisar district. On the other hand, majority of the respondents (58.18%) respondents cultivated Rice followed by 13.64 per cent who cultivated bajra in Karnal district.

**Problems faced by respondents during agricultural activities**

Analysis clearly revealed that nearly three-fourth of the respondents (70.45%) faced the problems at the time of hiring labour followed by selling produces (65.15%) and financial problems (54.54%) in table 2. Category wise analysis revealed that all respondents whose husbands were migrated faced the problem at the time of hiring labour followed by selling produces (81.81%) and purchasing seed, fertilizers and other agriculture material (63.63%). Overwhelming majority of the respondents whose husband were drunkard (95.65%) also faced the problem at the time of selling produce and travelling (82.60%), respectively.

**Table 2:** Problems faced by respondents during agricultural activities in Hisar district

Problems faced during agricultural activities	Types of FHHs							Total (N=132)
	Widowhood (N=53)	Outmigrated Male (N=11)	Drunked husband (N=23)	Disabled male (N=12)	Divorced (N=4)	Unemployed male (N=19)	Working but not contributing (N=10)	
In purchasing seeds, fertilizers and other agril. material	24(45.28)	7(63.63)	11(47.82)	10(83.33)	-	5(26.31)	5(50.00)	62(46.96)
In selling produce	32(60.37)	9(81.81)	22(95.65)	9(75.00)	-	7(36.84)	7(70.00)	86(65.15)
In hiring labour	43(81.13)	11(100)	16(69.56)	5(41.66)	-	9(47.36)	9(90.00)	93(70.45)
In travelling	22(41.50)	5(45.45)	19(82.60)	7(58.33)	-	8(42.10)	8(80.00)	69(52.27)
Financial problem	33(62.26)	7(63.63)	12(52.17)	10(83.33)	-	4(21.05)	6(60.00)	72(54.54)
In bringing daily use material	21(39.62)	10(90.90)	15(65.21)	9(75.00)	-	7(36.84)	8(80.00)	70(53.03)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.

It was found from table 2 that nearly three-fourth of the respondents (74.21%) faced the problem in selling produce followed by purchasing seeds and fertilizers (67.18%). Category wise analysis revealed that all respondents whose

husbands were migrated faced the problem at the time of hiring labour (88.88%) and hiring labour (86.66%). Whose husbands were drunkard faced the financial problem (70.03%) in Karnal district.

**Table 3:** Problems faced by respondents during agricultural activities in Karnal district

Problems faced during agril. activities	Types of FHHs							Total (N=128)
	Widowhood (N=58)	Outmigrated male (N=9)	Drunked Husband (N=27)	Disabled Male (N=9)	Divorce (N=5)	unemployed male (N=15)	working but not contributing (N=5)	
In purchasing seeds, fertilizers and other agril. Material	44(75.86)	2(22.22)	19(70.37)	7(77.77)	2(40)	9(60)	3(60)	86(67.18)
In selling produce	45(77.58)	7(77.77)	18(66.66)	6(66.66)	5(100)	10(66.66)	4(80)	95(74.21)
In hiring labour	30(51.72)	8(88.88)	22(81.48)	5(55.55)	3(60)	8(53.33)	4(80)	80(62.5)
In travelling	22(37.93)	4(44.44)	12(44.44)	4(44.44)	2(40)	4(26.66)	2(40)	50(39.06)
Financial problem	37(63.79)	3(33.33)	19(70.37)	4(44.44)	3(60)	13(86.66)	2(100)	81(63.28)
In bringing daily use material	22(37.93)	2(22.22)	8(29.62)	3(33.33)	3(60)	5(33.33)	2(100)	45(35.15)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage. Responses were multiple.

**Association between Agricultural problems as per socio-economic variables**

Age, caste, occupation, education, Type of family, Size of family of the respondent and level of agricultural problem were not found significantly associated. Whereas marital

status, land holding, mass-media exposure was found significantly associated with level of agricultural problems in table 4. On the other hand Socio-economic status was found highly significantly associated with agricultural problems.

**Table 4:** Agricultural problems faced by respondents as per socio-economic variables

Variables	Level of agricultural problems			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
<b>Age (years)</b>				
Below 35 years	35(51.48)	21(30.88)	12(17.64)	68(26.16)
35-50 years	50(56.82)	28(31.82)	10(11.36)	88(33.84)
Above 50 years	53(50.96)	36(34.62)	15(14.42)	104(40.00)
Total	138(53.08)	85(32.69)	37(14.23)	260(100.00)
$\chi^2 = 0.804$				
<b>Caste</b>				
General caste	79(56.84)	40(28.78)	20(14.38)	139(53.46)
Backward caste	35(56.46)	19(30.64)	8(12.90)	62(23.85)
Scheduled caste	24(40.68)	26(44.07)	9(15.25)	59(22.69)
$\chi^2 = 0.261$				
<b>Occupation</b>				
Labour	46(54.12)	27(31.76)	12(14.12)	85(32.69)
Service	18(42.86)	14(33.33)	10(23.81)	42(16.16)
small scale enterprises	4(12.90)	18(58.06)	9(29.04)	31(11.92)
Farming	70(68.63)	26(25.49)	6(5.88)	102(39.23)
$\chi^2 = 24.87$				
<b>Level of education</b>				
Illiterate	34(48.58)	27(38.57)	9(12.85)	70(26.92)
Primary school level	33(54.09)	24(39.35)	4(6.56)	61(23.46)
Middle school level	38(73.08)	7(13.46)	7(13.46)	52(20.00)
Secondary to school level	12(32.43)	16(43.24)	9(24.33)	37(14.23)
Senior secondary school level	13(54.16)	6(25.01)	5(20.83)	24(9.23)
Graduation and above graduation	8(50.00)	5(31.25)	3(18.75)	16(6.16)
$\chi^2 = 22.15$				
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	71(52.99)	45(33.58)	18(13.43)	134(51.54)
Widowed	63(56.76)	35(31.53)	13(11.71)	111(42.69)
Divorced	1(16.66)	2(33.33)	3(50.01)	6(2.31)
Separated	3(33.33)	3(33.34)	3(33.33)	9(3.46)
$\chi^2 = 10.65^*$				
<b>Type of family</b>				
Nuclear	93(55.02)	53(31.36)	23(13.60)	169(65.00)
Joint	45(49.45)	32(35.16)	14(15.38)	91(35.00)
$\chi^2 = 0.896$				
<b>Size of family</b>				
Upto 4 members	17(27.86)	37(60.66)	7(11.48)	61(23.46)
5-8 members	107(74.82)	18(12.59)	18(12.59)	143(55.00)
9 and above	14(25.01)	30(53.57)	12(21.42)	56(21.54)

$\chi^2 = 70.07$				
<b>Annual income of the family (Rs.)</b>				
Upto 1,00,000	57(42.86)	55(41.36)	21(15.78)	133(51.15)
1,00,000-2,00,000	43(56.58)	22(28.94)	11(14.48)	76(29.23)
Above 2,00,000	38(74.51)	8(15.68)	5(9.81)	51(19.62)
$\chi^2 = 16.49$				
<b>Size of land holding</b>				
Landless	19(48.72)	15(38.46)	5(12.82)	39(15.00)
Marginal (upto 2.5 acres)	34(45.95)	26(35.13)	14(18.92)	74(28.46)
Small (2.5-5.0 acres)	41(54.66)	24(32.01)	10(13.33)	75(28.85)
Semi medium (5-10 acres)	25(67.56)	8(21.62)	4(10.82)	37(14.23)
Medium farmer(10-25 acres)	13(59.09)	7(31.82)	2(9.09)	22(8.46)
Large (above 25 acres)	6(46.16)	5(38.46)	2(15.38)	13(5.00)
$\chi^2 = 5.97^*$				
<b>Social participation</b>				
Nil	133(53.85)	80(32.38)	34(13.77)	247(95.00)
Low (1-2)	5(38.46)	5(38.46)	3(23.08)	13(5.00)
$\chi^2 = 1.44$				
<b>Mass media exposure</b>				
Low (up to 9)	25(59.53)	14(33.33)	3(7.14)	42(16.15)
Medium (10-19)	93(48.69)	66(34.56)	32(16.75)	191(73.46)
High (above 19)	20(74.08)	5(18.52)	2(7.40)	27(10.39)
$\chi^2 = 7.80^*$				
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
Low (up to 9)	75(54.74)	38(27.74)	24(17.52)	137(52.69)
Medium (10-19)	55(57.29)	35(36.46)	6(6.25)	96(36.92)
High (above 19)	8(29.63)	12(44.44)	7(25.93)	27(10.39)
$\chi^2 = 46.07^{**}$				

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.

\*Significant at 5% level of significance.

\*\* Highly significant at 1% level of significance.

**Cooperation at the time of agricultural activities**

As regards discussion of agriculture affair in Hisar district more than three-fifth of the respondents (64.39%) did not discuss about farming matters with anybody followed by sale of produce (49.24%) and purchase of fertilizers, insecticides, etc. (44.69%). More than one-third of the parents (34.84%) cooperated at the time of purchasing agricultural machinery

and official matters about sale and purchase of land, bank loan etc. (21.96%), respectively. Nearly two-fifth of the respondents in laws (39.39%) cooperated at the time of sale and purchase of animals. Majority of the neighbours and friends (56.06%) helped at the time of hiring labour about agricultural activities in Hisar district.

**Table 5:** Cooperation at the time of agricultural activities in Hisar district

N= 132

Agriculture affairs	Self	Parents	In-laws	Neighbours	Friends
With whom did you discuss farming matters?	85(64.39)	13(9.84)	27(20.45)	2(1.51)	5(3.78)
Who did your sale of produce?	65(49.24)	12(9.09)	35(26.51)	13(9.84)	7(5.30)
Who did your purchase of fertilizers, insecticides etc?	59(44.69)	12(9.09)	49(37.12)	5(3.78)	7(5.30)
Who did you purchase of seed?	52(39.39)	26(19.69)	39(29.54)	5(3.78)	10(7.57)
Who helped you in purchase/ sale of animals?	39(29.54)	25(18.93)	52(39.39)	7(5.30)	9(6.81)
Who did your purchasing of agricultural machinery (tractors, harvester, tubewell etc.)?	21(15.90)	46(34.84)	53(40.15)	5(3.78)	7(5.30)
Who look after your official matters (sale and purchase of land, bank loan etc.)?	56(42.42)	29(21.96)	44(33.33)	2(1.51)	1(0.75)
Who did hiring of agricultural labour?	21(15.90)	12(9.09)	25(18.93)	45(34.09)	29(21.96)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.

On the other hand in Karnal district majority of the respondents (53.12%) discuss about marriage of their children followed by 50.78 per cent who did not discuss about farming matters with anybody. Majority of the in-laws (40.63%) cooperated in purchase of fertilizers, insecticides, etc. More than one-third of the respondents cooperated official matters about sale and purchase of land, bank loan etc. (39.06 %), respectively in Karnal district. Suchitra (2017) [7] and Jodha (2018) [8] also revealed that social capital helps households

escape from poverty by utilization of different schemes and social support from relations. It helped family to have greater capacity to resolve their own conflicts as well as take advantage of new opportunities for improvement. Most of the families had very strong relation with family members, friends and got support during the time of distress. Most of the families had never got support in farming and official matters.

**Table 6:** Cooperation at the time of agricultural activities in Karnal district

N= 128

Agriculture affairs	Self	Parents	In-laws	Neighbour	Friends
With whom did you discuss farming matters?	65(50.78)	13(10.15)	32(25)	13(10.16)	5(3.91)
Who did your sale of produce?	45(35.15)	17(13.28)	57(44.53)	2(1.57)	7(5.47)
Who did your purchase of fertilizers, insecticides etc?	29(22.65)	39(30.46)	52(40.63)	2(1.57)	6(4.69)
Who did you purchase of seeds?	22(17.18)	17(13.28)	68(53.12)	2(1.57)	19(14.85)
Who helped you in purchase/ sale of animals?	45(35.15)	20(15.62)	51(39.85)	5(3.91)	7(5.47)
Who did your purchasing of agricultural machinery (tractors, harvester, tubewell etc)?	25(19.53)	39(30.46)	45(35.15)	2(1.57)	17(13.29)
Who look after your official matters (sale and purchase of land, bank loan etc.)	50(39.06)	20(15.62)	36(28.12)	7(5.46)	15(11.17)
Who did hiring of agricultural labour?	33(25.78)	9(7.03)	49(38.29)	24(18.75)	12(9.37)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.

### Participation in agricultural activities

It is clear from the field of the study that female respondents did not participating in field preparation. More than three-fifth of the respondents (62.5%) prepared the field for sowing by

hired labour and male family members (29.16%), respectively. Majority of the male member of the family (57.98%) prepared the manure and fertilizer for crops in both the seasons.

**Table 7:** Participation in activities related to agriculture in kharif and rabi crops

Agricultural activities	Self	Male family member	Female family member	Self and family member	Self and hired labour	Self and relative	Hired labour	Family member and hired labour	Total (N=221)
Field preparation	-	7(29.16)	-	-	-	2(8.33)	15(62.5)	-	24(10.85)
Preparation and application of manure and fertilizer	2(10.52)	11(57.89)	-	-	-	2(10.52)	4(21.05)	-	19(8.59)
Spraying insecticides/pesticides	-	7(46.66)	-	-	-	3(20.00)	5(33.33)	-	15(6.78)
Weeding	14(73.68)	-	-	5(26.31)	-	-	-	-	19(8.59)
Irrigation	1(5.00)	17(85.00)	-	-	-	2(10.00)	-	-	20(9.04)
Harvesting	9(40.90)	-	-	5(22.72)	-	8(36.36)	-	-	22(9.95)
Thrashing	-	-	-	7(25.00)	8(28.57)	-	2(7.14)	11(39.28)	28(12.66)
Collection of the produce at one place	11(52.38)	3(14.28)	-	4(19.04)	-	1(4.76)	2(9.52)	-	21(9.50)
Loading unloading by transportation	5(17.24)	12(41.37)	2(3.38)	-	2(3.38)	-	8(27.58)	-	29(13.12)
Treating grain and seeds	9(60.00)	6(40.00)	-	-	-	-	-	-	15(6.78)
Storing	6(66.66)	3(33.33)	-	-	-	-	-	-	9(4.07)

Figures in parentheses denote percentage.

Responses were multiple

Maximum number of the male members of the family (46.66%) sprayed for insecticides and pesticides on crops during Rabi and Kharif seasons. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (73.68%) weeded in all crops during both the seasons. It was also found that overwhelming majority of the respondents (85.00%) irrigated the crops in both the regions. Maximum number of the respondents (40.90%) harvested the crop in both the seasons and self and relatives (36.36%), respectively. More than one-fourth of the respondents and hired labour (25.57%) threshed in crops during both the seasons. Agricultural activities namely collection of produces of one place, loading and unloading, treating grain and seeds and storing were completed by the respondents. Nandinia and Kiresur (2013) <sup>[6]</sup> also observed that large proportion of respondents (65.0%) had crop production as their sole livelihood source, followed by farm wage employment and non-farm wage employment (10.0%), crop production and non-farm wage employment (9.2%). Samal *et al.* (2006) <sup>[5]</sup> also revealed the approximately same findings in his study. It was concluded that female heads were managing all the agricultural affairs single handedly and were involved in doing a number of agricultural activities. But they had no access to new knowledge, skills and other service to improve their performance. The need was to ensure the coverage of FHHs in all the programmes related to agriculture and allied activities whether it was training, input supply or credit

services. Female heads were not aware of any agricultural development programme so it was necessary to provide them need based trainings to generate income at household level. Women heading the households were found to be burdened with multiple roles. Along with the double work burden they share with all the rural women, they were found to responsible for looking after and managing all the household and economic affairs themselves. But the level of household technology of these households was found to be very low.

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