A Qualitative Study to Explore the Socioeconomic Status of Women Working in Livestock Production

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Rural women comprise of one quarter of the total world population, and they are considered key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. The purpose of this study is to assess the socioeconomic status of women working in livestock activities and to find out the impact of this work on their lives.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Data was collected from three different villages of District Rahim Yar Khan Punjab Province, Pakistan. In-depth interviews were conducted from a selected group of ten rural women, which were further divided into two groups based on age.

Findings: The thematic analysis revealed the deprived socioeconomic status and vulnerabilities reported by women working in this sector in rural areas. Although financial benefits are reported as a positive impact, health risks, work and gender related issues surfaced the negative impact of this work on their lives.

Implications/Originality/Value: The findings indicate the need of women friendly policies and development projects to facilitate women’s work in the livestock sector to improve their socioeconomic conditions and well-being.

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Introduction

Women working in livestock care and management are working on harvesting, fodder collection and cutting, care of animals, handling and processing of milk products, feeding and maintenance of animal sheds (Yaqoo et al., 2014). In Pakistan rural women are contributing much to economic development by working in the agriculture sector or fields associated with poultry, care and management of animals (Makhijani et al., 2015). It is estimated that about 71.7% of rural women are working in livestock care and management. 50% of the rural women are those who spend 4-7 hours working in livestock activities, performing different tasks (Menhas, Yaqoob, Akhtar and Jabeen, 2014). Rural women are key agents for achieving sustainable development, but they are facing problems due to limited access to credit, health care and education facilities. The fulfillment of their basic needs depends on the income generating from
agriculture and livestock activities, but most of the women are doing an unpaid job in this sector (Zahoor, Fakhar, Ali and Sarwar, 2013).

Although, women in rural areas are working in livestock management and contributing financially to the well-being of their families, their work and efforts are not acknowledged and they are facing significant hurdles (Menhas et al., 2014 & Arshad et al., 2013). Challenges faced by women in this sector reported as lack of land and water, lack of access to marketing, social factors restricting them to work outside the home, dual responsibility and risk of diseases from animals (Sikhweni and Hassan, 2013). Women’s participation in livestock care and management activities is possibly more than men, but their work is not considered important and still underpaid (Hassan et al., 2007). Access to the market and mobility restriction is also a major issue for rural women (Makhijani, Kumbhar, Mughal & Talpur, 2015). Likewise, they have very little or no power of decision making due to lack of resources, patriarchal society, age, social and traditional beliefs. As women perform a lot of work in the livestock there is need of their decision-making participation in agriculture as well as livestock, but they showed very little or no participation in decision making in the rural context of Pakistan (Arshad et al., 2010).

Okitoi (2007) stated that in livestock, women are just allowed to take decisions about the non-cash related decisions while cash related decisions are taken by men. They face many constraints because of their gender role due to which they are not able to use their potential properly (Ahmad, 2013). In rural areas of Punjab, despite the fact that women have greater participation in livestock activities they are victims of malnutrition and lack of proteins because they are facing discrimination both in quantity and quality of food (Jehan, 2000).

Ahmad (2013) in his study found that women might be facing problems due to lack of their updated knowledge and less training in livestock sector because all the livestock services, education material and extension programs are controlled and designed by men and for men. Possible changes can be made or designed in technologies to increase the condition of livestock sector (Quddus, Davies & Lyebecker, 1997). Moreover, diversification into livestock and increase in livestock productivity is an important strategy to improve the income of people living in rural areas (Shekwani & Hassan, 2013). In this context, the present study is conducted to identify the socioeconomic status of rural women associated with livestock management in the District Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab. Findings can be a source of information for policy makers to take steps to improve the status of rural women. Rahim Yar Khan is a famous city in the south of Punjab which was previously known as Noshera. According to district census report the population of Rahim Yar Khan was almost five million in 2016. It is predominantly known as the hub of agro-based industry with barely 19% of the population residing in urban areas. Nearly 52% out of school children are females and 56% of never enrolled in school children are females (ASER, 2008). Agriculture is the occupation of about 65% of the people of the Rahim Yar Khan. This study helps to formulate suggestions to overcome the issues and to improve the status of women in livestock production.

Rationale of study
Livestock plays a significant role in increasing economic development of the nation. By realizing that rural women are the actual custodians of livestock sector the government of Punjab, Pakistan has started certain programs and training sessions for the capacity building of women. Rural women spend most of their working hours in performing livestock activities. Certain initiatives that have been taken by the Punjab province government included the distribution of animals among needy or poor women of rural areas, insurance coverage of animals, trainings of women and distribution of animals to women (Livestock Punjab, 2017). Despite of the significant importance of livestock sector in economic development of countries like Pakistan, the data related to livestock are limited and is scattered.

Therefore, it is very important to understand the status of women involved in the livestock business to analyze the effects of these initiatives and to identify whether these are producing desired results in the lives of women. Additionally, the development of women is a prerequisite to achieve the national and
international commitments such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

**Research Questions**

1. Why do women engage in livestock management?
2. What are the problems faced by women in livestock management work?
3. How does this type of work impact the lives of women?
4. What can be done to improve the situation faced by women?

**Literature Review**

Globally, around 600 million women are associated with the management of livestock (FAO, 2011). Additionally, previous literature has widely highlighted aspects of gender in the business of livestock (BravoBaumann, 2000; Rota and Sperandini, 2010 & FAO, 2011). Moreover, women’s contribution as a keeper of livestock acknowledged by various researchers (Flintan, 2008; Herath, 2007). These studies emphasized the need of gender sensitive programs for the development of livestock.

In rural areas of Pakistan livestock is considered as the backbone of economic development as it contributes 56% to the agriculture value (PILDAT, 2016). Many researchers explored the nature of work performed by women in livestock management. Menhas, Yaqooob, Akhter & Jabeen (2014) found that women are working in livestock care and management activities for improving the living standard of their family. The majority of the participants reported their activities mostly in collecting and cutting of fodder and taking care of animals.

According to a study by Afridi et al. (2009), a rural woman an average spends 5 to 6 hours daily in different livestock management activities, whereby 68% of the time spent on the activities of milking, farmyard manure collection, stall feeding and fodder cutting. Tibbo et al. (2009) found that the rural women are over-burdened as they perform multiple tasks/roles whether at home or at farm. But their livestock activities are considered routine activities. According to a study done by USAID, the mobility and self-employment of women in Pakistani culture is discouraged (Goheer and Penksa, 2007). Kishore and Gupta (2009) studied the poverty and women’s vulnerabilities in female-headed household due to having less education and unavailability of employment opportunities. Rushton (1998) found that the income of females increases the status and well-being of women by increasing their socioeconomic position which consequently brings improvement in their status. Furthermore, training is a major substantial part of the livestock profession. The impact of livestock training course is studied by Hussain et al. (2004) concerning livestock productivity. Bravo-Baumann (2000) highlighted that in many parts of the world, it has been found that the males have better access to technologies compared to females.

**Theoretical Framework**

Amartya Sen’s (1989) capability approach is used in this study. The capability approach focuses on two things, freedom of choices and capabilities to function. Sen proposes that people lose capabilities when they lack of freedom. Therefore, according to Sen providing an enabling environment of freedom is important for development. The process of development includes minimizing all the constraints such as racial, religious, and social and gender-based discrimination, poor infrastructure, lack of economic facilities, policies limiting human rights and so on (Sen, 1989).

Similarly, Rowland’s (1997) theory of power provides level of power and its application purposes. This theory stated that power operates at four interconnected levels, i.e., “power over” which means to be dominant on others by using power and is seen in win-lose kind of relationship; “power with” which is based on mutual support and collaboration; “power to” refers to a unique and productive ability of the person to change his/her life or world; and “power within” which include the person’s sense of self-worth which promote respect and acceptance for others (Rowland, 1997). If women have access, ownership of and decision making over the assets and resources of livelihood, then they can improve their standard of
living.

The assumptions of these frameworks are applied to understand its existence in the case of women working in livestock management in the context of district Rahim Yar Khan. These theoretical frameworks help to explore the experience of working women involved in livestock care and management activities and to understand the impact of their work in their lives.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative framework. A descriptive exploratory research design was used to collect data. Through a purposive sampling technique, interviews were conducted from three approachable villages (for researchers) of the Punjab Province, which is highly populated province of Pakistan. Overall, ten women, having age 15-65 years, associated with this sector (5 young and 5 old women) in the management of livestock were selected. 3 participants were taken from the village Kandaani (1 old woman, 2 young women), 3 participants were taken from the village Meer Deen (2 old women, 1 young woman) and 4 participants were taken from the village Topp Sarri (2 old women, 2 young women). These villages were purposively selected from the District Rahim Yar Khan, South Punjab as the majority of women population of these villages associated with livestock management.

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used as a tool to collect the required information from the participants. Interviews were conducted in two stages, first from the group of young women and in second stage from the group of older age women. Conversational interviews were conducted after getting the informed consent from the individuals in a private and comfortable room. The participants were contacted personally in their homes from selected villages. Ethical consideration with regard to confidentiality was insured. Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis.

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(Demographics of sample of this study)

Result and Discussion

The technique of thematic analysis was used for analysis. Recorded interviews were further transcribed to extract codes and themes. The first theme emerged for both groups, while revealing the reasons for working was socioeconomic status comprised of poverty, vulnerability and family circumstances. Most of the respondents of the young group reported that due to poverty and low income they were facing difficulty in fulfilling the basic needs of the family. One of the participants said,
“apni mehnat mazduri se ye kaam shuru kiya h k ghareeb log hain to dudh wagera baicha k kuch munafa ho jata hy”. They were unable to bear the educational expenses of their children, “beton ko parhana chahti hun par ghar ka kharcha hi pura nahi hota, nokar ho k nokar to nahi rakh sakty na”.[“We started this work by our own efforts because we are poor people, so we earn little by selling milk. We want to educate our sons but are unable to bear the educational expenses of our children. It’s already a challenge to fulfill our household expenses” (verbatim from sample of this study)].

Similarly, respondents in the 31-65 age category stated that burden of household expenses prompted them to perform dual responsibilities. One study conducted by Zahoor, Fakhar, Ali and Sarwar (2013) supported this finding. Another reason reported by the 15 to 30 age group referenced their vulnerable condition, as most of them were poor, uneducated or less educated and did not know any other work. Heffernan (2004) also highlighted the vulnerabilities of livestock keepers due to their poor socioeconomic background. As one of them said,

“majburi kiwajasy ye kaamkarna parar zarorat yahan tak aa pohanchi thi k logon sy mang kar khana parta tha, parhy likhy to hy nahi k koi nokri milti”. [“We started this work to fulfill the necessities of life, we were so poor that at one time we used to beg food from others. We are not educated so we can’t get any job (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Other reasons which made them vulnerable are the common practices of polygamy, child marriage and the husband’s threat of the second marriage. Son preference is also reported as a factor to add their vulnerability. Most of the women in rural areas have no other job opportunities so they have to do livestock activities to earn and to fulfill life expenses. While others reported family experiences as an additional factor of working such as absence of male members in the family. Similarly, some of the women were performing dual responsibility because of the unemployment of their husband or father. They received no financial help from their husbands, which left them no choice except to join this work. For instance, one of the respondents from 31-65 age category reported,

“bachpan sy hi ye kaam kartyhain pehly waldain k ghar karty thy ab shohar k ghar bhikharcha pura karny k liyeyehi kam karnaparta ha”. [“We have been doing this work since our childhood, we used to do the same work in our parent’s home now we are doing same in our in-laws to fulfill the basic needs of life (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

One of the respondents of 15 to 30 age group stated that after the death of her father, she took the responsibility to look after the household expenses as the eldest sibling. She started to sell milk and butter so that she may be able to buy medicines for her mother and fulfill other basic needs of her family. She reported,”

Abuki wafaat k baad hath kafi tang ho gyatha is liye ye kaamkarna para ta’ak ami ki dawayian to khareed sakun”. [“After the death of my father the financial condition became so bad. At that time, I had no other choice but to do this work so that I could at least buy medicine for my sick mother (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Other reasons which made them vulnerable are the common practices of polygamy, child marriage and the husband’s threat of the second marriage. By relating to the concept of ‘power over by the Rowland (1997) claimed that most of the females are oppressed and exploited by the male members. Their male counterparts have control over their lives, resources and decision making which in this context pushed them to join the labor force for their survival. Women had to face financial issues due to second marriage as one of the women reported,

“dusri biwi phupho ki beti thi or me ghair thi is liye unka jab dil kartatha kharcha dety thy warna nahi” [“Second wife was a cousin of my husband, and I was from outside the family, so they financially support
Son preference is also reported as a factor to add their vulnerability. Most of the females had to face problems because they were unable to give birth to a boy. Therefore, the family members of their in-laws forced their husbands for second marriage as they wanted a son. Respondents of 31-65 age category reported that women are much more economically dependent on their male members and in the absence of male members their survival seems difficult not only in their home but also in society. This is supported by Khan (2010) who found that in the prevailing culture of Pakistan without the proper support or presence of husband it becomes more difficult for a woman to get the desired positive status in the family and work.

One of the 15 to 30 age group participants said,

“Is kaam ki waja s tabdeeli to bohat ayi h zindagi me warna hmain logon sy mangna hi parta”. [“Due to this work, there is a great change in our life otherwise we had to beg from others (verbatim from sample of this study)]]

They shared satisfaction about the feeling of empowerment in terms of material gain. By earning themselves, they are able to fulfill the household expenses and educational expenses of their children. Financial stability prevents them from begging to others.

Respondents reported a feeling of empowerment as they consider themselves an earning hand in their family. They can spend money by their own choice.

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The finding is also consistent with the study of Parveen and Leonhauser (2004). Similarly, respondents of 31-65 age category revealed the feeling of satisfaction that earning by themselves enables them not to be dependent on others,

“talaaq k baad maa baap k ghar rehti thi phir ye k jb bhi zarurat hoti thi bhai s mangna parta tha to acha nahi lagta tha lakin ab me apna or bachon ka kharch khud karti hun”. [“After getting divorced, I started living in my parent’s house and there I had to ask my brother for money which was embarrassing for me. But now I have started livestock work and I am able to bear all the expenses of my children by myself (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Moreover, a group woman from 31-65 age category also reported their increased level of participation in decision making in their work and private life compared to women of alternate age category. This seems like the “power to” approach given by Rowland (1997). Most of the women had to face some negative personal and family experiences too. Females of age category 15-30 had to leave their schools as they had to earn for their family. Due to large family responsibilities some females don’t able to get married. One of them stated that,

“barri behn hony k naaty ghar k or bahir k kaam kaaj mjy hi dekhny party thy or ghar k halaat kuch esy thy k meri shadiki umar nikal gai wese bhi gareeb k ghar kon rishta karta hy”. [“As I was the eldest child, so it was my responsibility to do all the household chores and other outdoor works as well. And due to such household responsibilities, my age of marriage has passed. Moreover, no one wanted to send proposal in poor family (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

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Whereas, while reporting negative impacts women from 31-65 age category stated that due to the burden
of dual responsibilities it becomes difficult to give much attention to their children. They woke up before sunrise and engaged themselves in doing domestic chores and performing livestock activities which is supported by study of Afridi (2009). Participants of the present study reported that sometimes it became difficult to cook food on time as they had to go far in search of fodder. One of the individuals said that,

“Subha k gaye sham ko ghar atyhain q k chaara to zaruri dhundna parta h. khudki roti kodair ho jaye to khair hy lakin janwaronka paitbharna partahy”. [“Sometimes we return home after dusk as it is important to find fodder for animals. There can be delays in our own food, which is okay, but we can’t do this to animals (verbatim from sample of this study)]”

This situation also reveals a lack of support system and application of traditional gender roles in their lives. Tibbo, et al. (2009) in his study found that rural women are over-burdened as they have to work in homes and in farms. The livestock activities they perform are considered as daily routine work. While elaborating the types of problems faced by women, the reported problems are categorized as health-related risks, lack of of enabling conditions, gender issues in family and work-, and work-related problems. Participants of 15-30 age group shared that their work has no time limits, and they even have to work in extreme weather, as one of them said,

“Din raat naahi dekha bas kaam kiyahy to aj do waqtki roti kha rahy hain”. [“We are now able to have food for two times after working days and nights (verbatim from sample of this study)]”

While working with animals they are at high risk of getting diseases from animals by touching or biting the animals. Most of the women of age group 15-30 must face health problems while working during their pregnancy. They suffer from weaknesses as they are unable to have a healthy diet and unable to take proper rest. Similarly, women of other age category 31-65 reported that mostly they must face problems due to weakness and pain in joints. They must face certain health problems due to long working hours and they do not have much money to go to the doctor. One of them stated,

“itni amdani ho to hi ksi achy doctor ky pas jayn bs tbeat khrab ho to khud hi dawayian khalety hain or uth k kam py chaly jaty hain”. [“We don’t have enough earnings… we are unable to consult a doctor in case of illness or sickness, we just take some pain killer by our self and then again go to work (verbatim from sample of this study)]”

Qamar (2000) reported that rural women are malnourished and suffer from health issues. They also shared health related problems which they had to experience due to lack of awareness about animal diseases, vaccination and handling and availability of services which is supported by Kristjanson et al. (2014). While reporting about the gender problems related to family females from 15-30 age group highlighted issues such as son preference, polygamy, lack of decision-making power, depending on male and no land ownership. Women reported that all the important decisions about family and livestock management are taken by their male members. One of the participants said,

“ghar k sary zaati faisly mera bhai karta hy”. [“All the household personal decisions are taken by my brother (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Furthermore, they reported that they must face problems due to son preferences. They have a large family size wishing to have a son and it becomes difficult to manage the household and child’s expenses. This result is supported by the study of Azid et al. (2001) in which he found that women having a large family size increase their responsibilities as a housewife and as a mother, which may hinder the economic empowerment of females. Meanwhile, women of 15-30 age category of rural areas are also facing educational problems because of schools are not located nearby and they are not allowed to go out of homes without guardians. This finding is also supported by the study of Tibbo (2009).
Women of both age groups must face work-related gender issues. They have to face mobility issues and harassment issues. The data collected from participants showed that females before their marriage have better mobility status while after marriage, they are not allowed to go out of home especially women living in joint families. This finding is consistent with the study of Ahmad (2013). One of the respondents from 15-30 age category shared,

“maabaap k ghar to bnd apnimarzi krskta h bahir b aa ja sakta h par idar susral me kuch esa kar lo to sab ta’any deny lg jaty hain”. [“It can be said that we used to enjoy our freedom in our parent’s home, but while living with our in-laws if we talk to someone with having smile on face, people will start taunting us (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Similarly, women of 31-65 age group reported the issues of harassment at the marketplace. According to their point of view it’s a male job to handle the market activities. Furthermore, the market is far from the village, and they face difficulty in bringing animals or other products to market because of the poor condition of roads or lack of transportation. Additionally, the absence of male members causes difficulty in selling of animals or milk. Participants also reported that women have to face security issues, especially during the season of sugarcane as kidnapping rate increases during this period. One of them said,

“ghar sy bahir k kam kriijazat ni di jati hmain ku k halaat thek ni hoty khas tor p gannay k mosam me bohat larkiyan aghwa hoti to maa baap dar jaty hain”. [“We are not allowed to do work outside the house as there is danger for girls’ security, especially in sugarcane season there are many cases of girl’s abduction in village areas, so parents get scared (verbatim from sample of this study)].”

Likewise, they have to face problems calling a doctor due to their gender if any of animals suffer from some disease because of unavailability of medication facilities for animals and veterinary hospital in villages. A study of Nosheen et al. (2011) seems to verify the trend found in this study.

While exploring the future status, the trend of both groups found unhappy, but hopeful. Participants of the 15-30 age group said that this work is not safe for girls. They have to face harassment and mobility issues which is somehow found consistent with the findings of Kristjanson et al. (2014). Similarly, women of other 31-65 age category reported that females should only work at home because the working environment is not suitable for females. On the other hand, respondents of both groups found hopeful for change in their status.

By responding to the solution of the problems, respondents of both groups focused on need of training for capacity building of females regarding handling of animals. If they have access to services such as micro credit, animal vaccination, animal health related and other opportunities, then this may help them to enhance their capabilities to work and live in better condition as suggested by Sen (1989). This needs to be supported by freedom of choices which consequently leads to their development. In this study it seems somehow absent, especially in the case of women of 15-30 age group. The concept of ‘Power with’ given by Rowland (1997) can be exercised only through providing the initiatives by government and starting such policies and programs which create the possibility of forming equitable relations which can help to reduce social conflicts. As everyone has the power to make a change.

**Conclusion**

It is extremely important to have a coherent understanding of different factors which creates the problems in the lives of women working in livestock care and management activities. Different factors such as poverty, vulnerability due to poor socioeconomic condition, family circumstances made the women to engage in livestock care in this study. Consequently, both the age (15-30 and 31-65) groups of women reported their contribution in the family and acknowledged the feeling of empowerment in terms of material gains, however, they still have to face the dual responsibility, and cultural norms in their private
life, whereas structural barriers, health issues and gender issues in private and work life also creates hurdles in their lives. Older women somehow enjoy the power of decision making compared to young women. Most of them suffer from hopelessness due to their time demanding jobs, health, security and mobility issues linked to this work, however they wish for a better future for their children by giving them education. They emphasized that the government should start certain training programs for women regarding animal care. Moreover, the government should also extend the services such as provision of credits and health programs for the animals in order to improve the status of women working in livestock care and management activities. The significant impact of study is for government to increase training programs for women working in livestock so that they may enhance their capabilities to become empowered.

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