



RESEARCH PAPER

Rural Women's Constraints of Socioeconomics and Income-Generating Activities: The Case of Larkana District

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the income-generating activities and the challenges faced by women in district Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan. Women, considered a vulnerable group, encounter various challenges in their daily activities, particularly in income generation. Despite this, there is limited understanding of their economic engagement in rural areas. This quantitative, descriptive study utilized a multistage sampling technique to collect data from 384 participants in three sub-districts of Larkana. Data were analyzed using SPSS. The findings indicate a lack of high qualifications among participants, with 40% being illiterate. Over sixty percent reside in Kacha houses, indicative of a weak socio-economic status. Despite this, rural Sindh women exhibit independence in marital decision-making. However, opportunities for livelihood work are limited, with most engaged in home-based embroidery during non-agricultural seasons. Significant portions of their income are allocated to basic necessities, revealing financial strain. To alleviate the challenges faced by rural women, interventions focusing on education, skill development, and economic empowerment are essential. Furthermore, policies promoting equal opportunities and addressing socio-economic disparities are warranted.

KEYWORDS Constraints, Income-Generating Activity, Socioeconomics, Women Empowerment, Larkana

Introduction

The economy can be divided into two sub-economies: rural and urban, depending on the size of the settlement and the economic activities (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Naqvi, 2010; Knight and Song, 1999). The source of the rural economy is agricultural activities. Whereas, agriculture and allied activities are the main sources of people living in the countryside (Pan et al., 2024). Currently, the agricultural sector is not only the source of the rural economy, but it also has other avenues as well (Ofosu et al., 2020). The number of poor people is increasing in comparison to the sustainable opportunities of employment. It is due to this reason the potential agricultural activities are tried to be enhanced as to meet the needs of such increasing number of poor population (Csaki & Lerman, 2000). In some parts of Pakistan, the capability of the agricultural sector for the livelihood of households of the farm is significantly in doubt (Ahmed, et. al. 2015; Ahmad et al., 2023; Israr et al., 2017). It is owing to the factors like an environmental catastrophe, fast growth of the population, technological slow spread, and less investment of the public in agriculture, as well as the effects of the growing sector's inability to sustain the rural economy (Afzal, 2009). The two components of the rural economy, the farm and the non-farming sectors, are changing the structure on the one hand through diversification of activities and on the other hand by increasing employment and income (Unger, 2016). In Pakistan, the employment level of women is 20.53% at the national level (Trading Economics, 2020). Therefore, it requires that women should participate in socio-economic progress at various levels for sustainable livelihood. The low growth in income results in people being away from basic facilities like health, education, safe water for drinking, and sanitation (Magsi et al., 2015). A similar condition exists in the areas of upper Sindh province of Pakistan. For instance, the women of rural areas of upper Sindh suffer from numerous socioeconomic issues for a long time. In

this regard, the objectives of this study are as follows: (i) to know the common income-generating activities, (ii) to highlight the socio-economic problems faced by working women during income-generating activities.

Literature Review

In developing countries of the world, most of the people in rural areas work in a diverse economy. Which consists of the transit economies, and non-agricultural economic activities. Those who live on small farms in areas with low agricultural production and during a single agricultural season should prefer to find local off-farm jobs that are either part-time or full-time activities (Das and Mahanta, 2023). Such jobs provide access to a significant diversity of income as well as cash at very important moments (Dary and Kuunibe, 2012). In rural areas, the non-form activities cater to the needs of surplus labor, assist in spreading the risk of agriculture-based households, and provide many compensatory activities to support or replace the income that comes from agriculture. It also supports during the off-season and in the times of the failure of farming activities (Haggblade et al., 2010). It is necessary that human capital must be utilized for socio-economic and cultural happiness (Klimovskikh et al., 2023). In the development activities, it is also essential that the equal role of men as well as women should be recognized (Pal and Haldar, 2016). The international forums have paid good attention to the participation of women in the development of rural areas (Andall, 2017). It is due to the patriarchy and less empowerment of rural women, they completely depend on the male members of their families (Islam et al., 2018; Sarker and Rahman, 2007). At large they are involved in unpaid household activities as well as caregiving activities (Wheatley et al., 2018). Sustainable livelihood and Income Generating Activity (IGA) are both approaches to intervention. Many poor women in rural areas yet do not know the probability of improvement of their livelihoods through IGAs. In fact, they are more hardworking and serious (Jabeen et al., 2020). Besides, they realize and understand the importance of the IGAs for their livelihood and progress, even if they are willing to engage in IGAs.

Rural areas have limited reach to the services provided by the governments, for instance, education, health care, banking, and policing. They have limited IGAs for their livelihoods. Generally, IGAs need an investment at the primary level (Magsi et al., 2021). In this context, the women of the rural areas have not enough money. Besides, they are lacking in the experience of administration which is also one of the needs of the IGAs. The reason behind all these lacks is the less education, which as a result creates constraints for rural women to participate in the IGAs (Nze and Emmanuel, 2017). Removing such constraints may create ways for these poor people to achieve the essentials for sustainable livelihood. Similarly, the public in less developing countries mostly stay poor due to domestic constraints which in turn are due to the low economic status of the local population (Jalalud-Din, 2014). These barriers are connected, in a manner that eventually constitutes a vicious circle. It, furthermore, places the nation in a stagnant social development. They are barred from enjoying the basic right of education. Parents do not usually send their daughters to schools as a result of a conservative mind-set that believes that sending females to schools is a serious violation of customs and traditions, and is against their religious values (Memon et al., 2015). Moreover, women are isolated in the premises of a house which fosters a general psyche that women do not have to take part in economic activities and have no role to play in the development of the same. Statistics show that only 22% of women are involved in 56% of economic activity (World Times, 2015). Women are generally kept low and humiliated at every step of their social life. On the one hand, they face many stereotypes and traditional problems. As they are not given the freedom to deal with their social issues. Especially, the problems of marriage, health, and education of their children. Additionally, they are the victim of various social and cultural atrocious, including social evils like acid attacks, honor killing, marriage with the Quran, domestic violence, and so on (Ali & Chandio, 2023; Magsi et al., 2016).

Materials and Methods

The study is designed quantitative. It is descriptive in type and conducted in district Larkana. Using multistage sampling, in the first phase, three sub-districts (Tehsils) Rato Dero, Dokri, and Bakrani of district Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan were taken for the study. In the second phase, two Union Councils from each sub-district were selected. In the last phase, two villages from each Union Council were chosen at random, and 32 respondents (female) in each village were administered the questionnaire personally. Thus, 384 people made up the study's sample size. SPSS was used for the analysis of the data, which were gathered via a closed-ended structured questionnaire. On the other hand, unpublished documents from the union council and district council offices as well as a variety of literature produced by public and private organizations provided the secondary data for this study.

Results and Discussions

In this part of the study, demographic details regarding the participants, livelihoods, the challenges of decision-making, and the insecurity experienced by working women when they are engaging in income-generating activities are given.

Household characters and working experience

It is identified that the average household size was around 7.1 members per family, with an average of 4.0 men and 3.1 females in each family. While comparing the national as well as provincial family size, the statistics have differences which constitute 6.5 and 9.5 per household (GOP, 2015). As per the findings of this research, 39 years was found to be the average age of the respondents, indicating that most of the respondents were skilled and they were the residents of pacca, semi-pacca, and kacha houses. The findings are supported by the previous literature such as Biao (2011). Women have historically been provided with fewer advantages as compared to men across the developing world, through which under the patriarchal social norms and political practices women were denied equal access to land, education, technology, and resources (Masuku et al., 2023; Horenstein, 1989). Overall 70 percent literacy rate is observed in the study area. The literacy rate of females was only 36 percent which seems very low. This finding is contrary to the previous literature. In this context, Hassan et al (2016) stated that the national female literacy rate is more than 50 percent. The situation of women in Sindh remains disgraceful throughout history. Hence, the literacy rate of the women was almost non-existent. Since the beginning, the feudal lords of rural areas were always opposed to education generally and female education particularly, which caused distress to women from access to education (Ali & Chandio, 2023). During the field survey, it was observed that the district government in collaboration with community-based organizations had been developing new techniques for improving education, particularly female education. The results also revealed that 28 percent of family members (under 16 years of age) belonged to the non-working group. Details of household characteristics can be found in Table 01.

Table 01
Description

Category	Statistics
Family size (number)	7.1
Age (years)	39
Under 16 years of age	28
Over 16 years of age	72
Percentage of Literacy rate	70
Percentage of Pacca houses	34
Percentage of Kacha houses	66

Women's decision-making

No society can develop without educating women, because women occupy a special position in all societies around the world. The participation of women from all spheres of life is essential as they make up nearly half of the nation's population. Income is the major factor for working women through which they change their status in both society and family respectively. Neglecting the role of women is akin to disregarding half of the population. However, Pakistani society somewhat believes in their traditional practices. Like many other underdeveloped countries, a male-dominated society also exists in Pakistan, which is the reason why we see very less participation of women in the process of decision-making. Significantly, most of the respondents were found independent in marital matters, followed by clothing and general shopping, family visits, financial management, and innovation and maintenance of their houses in the study area (See Table 02).

Table 02
Women's decision-making

Decision Matters	Percentage
Matrimonial Matters	36 %
Family Planning	1%
Financial Management	8 %
Innovation / Renovation	2%
Vegetable	3%
Clothing	26%
General Shopping	11 %
Relatives Visit	7%
Others	6%

Occupation, income sources, and expenditure

Women make up more than half of the population of Pakistan. Their contribution is important and decisive in almost all spheres of life. Considering the socio-economic characteristics such as education, income, family structure, etc., working women contribute more to the process of women's development and empowerment. Male dominated society also exists in Pakistan like many under-developing countries, which leads to the participation of women very low in income-generating activities. In this study, the proportion of working women age group was only 17.1 percent. Out of this ratio, embroidery was the occupation of most of the women during the times when there was no seasonal agricultural work (harvesting or cultivating crops). The finding is supported by a study of Panhwar et al (2021) who is of the view that embroidery a prominent occupation of the women in district Larkana particularly due to its ancient civilization of Moen-jo-Daro. There is no doubt that most of the population works in agricultural professions because agriculture is the backbone of our economy. Comparatively, the same thing was observed in the study area where participants have their main source of income is as agriculture. Apart from agriculture, employment in different sectors such as public and private institutes, has been observed as the second main source of income, every year an increasing number of students after intermediate and graduating; work in private schools in the field of teaching. For the educated girls in rural areas, private schools are their only option because there are no other institutions which provided them job (Magsi et al., 2016). It is further identified that small businesses rank is the third most significant source of revenue of the participants (see Table 03).

Table 03
Respondents' families involved in different economic activities

Economic Activities	Percentage
Embroidery	29%
Handicraft	14%

Off-Farm income	2%
Business	5%
Service (Private)	4%
Service (Public)	2%
Poultry Birds/Eggs	9 %
Animal Sale	6%
Milk & Ghee Sale	14%
Crop output Sale	2%
Others	13%

It was revealed that the monthly income from government jobs and businesses was even higher than that from agriculture or other sources of income. This difference in income may be attributed to the dearth of agricultural extension services in the country especially in rural areas (Rahman et al., 2021). Besides this, the study also observed that about 2.3 male and 1.9 female household members on average were involved in various income-generating activities. In order to secure their livelihood, this forces people living in rural areas to work for the government (Rind & Shah 2022), which is commonly seen among the female (youth) of Bakrani, Dokri, and Ratodero Taluks of Larkana District.

Table 04
Expenditures of Respondent's Family

Expenditure	Percentage
Participation marriage/engagements average	5%
Marriage/engagements in own family average	7%
Summer & winter clothes, shoes, footwear	19%
Health & medical care	7%
Education children	9%
Transport/ Travel	8%
Utility bills	6%
Food Consumption	15%
Religious ceremonies average	6%
Eid festivals average	6%
Death in a family or close relatives average	5%
Other expenditures average	7%

The average income utilization pattern for each household and the typical items the participants spend is shown in Table 04. The figure shows that collectively the participants spend over 75 percent of their money on essentials like food, utilities, marriages, healthcare, education, and other necessities. The results revealed that depending on their needs and preferences, each group had a very different spending pattern. As per the results, women represent only 17.1% of self-employed workers in the region in terms of average spending. A large number of respondents revealed that to participate in social and religious events, they sometimes borrow money from others, as poverty in rural areas has inflamed the country over the past span of years.

Challenges while engaging in IGA

Patriarchy creates many problems for women in the family. They are not fully independent in terms of rights to health, education, mobility, travel, and marital rights. So women have to face many problems in their normal life matters. Especially when it comes to economic activities, they have to deal with much more than in daily life. Therefore, participants were enquired regarding the issues confronted by women while engaged in activities of income-generating and their responses revealed that most of them faced problems related to agriculture, marketing, low technical level, high cost of agricultural inputs, poor infrastructure, low cost of production, lack of extension support, complications in the loan allocation process, etc. Along with these problems, women also face certain social problems such as harassment when they are engaged in income-generating activities

outside of their homes, health risks, and child morbidity. A large number of cases of harassment remain unreported in many South Asian countries, including Pakistan. In this context, the study reveals that 74 percent of women face regular harassment outside their homes during their business activities but do not report it (See Table 05).

Table 05
Problems faced by rural women while engaging in IGA

Problems faced by rural women	Confronted percentage while engaging in IGA
Lack of input supply	75
Low-level technological know-how	72
Scarcity of land	37
High cost of agriculture inputs	76
Natural disaster	61
Poor infrastructure facilities	78
Harassment by outsiders	74
Lack of financing	68
Low price of produces	75
Lack of extension support	64
Lack of marketing	67
Complications in the loan allotment proces	73
High-interest rate from NGOs	60
Health hazards	70
Children's sickness	70

Conclusion

This study of the socio-economic constraints of rural women in income-generating activities concludes that rural women face many challenges in generating income. The study provides that the average age of the respondents in this study was 39 years. Significantly, the study provided that the participants are not highly qualified and among them 40% of participants are illiterate. Whereas, more than sixty percent of respondents are living in Kacha houses (mud houses) indicating that they possess a weak socio-economic status. The findings further revealed that 28 percent of family members (below 16 years) belong to the age group that does not work. Interestingly, the study finds that women in rural Sindh are more independent in making the decisions of marital matters. Study discloses that women of rural Sindh are not provided an opportunity to work for their livelihood. It was found that only 17.1 percent of women are working and earning their livelihood. Among the working women majority of them were engaged in the embroidery at home when there was no sessional agricultural work (harvest/cultivation). In this context, the study further exposed that people prefer public and private jobs and business. It is because of more income from public and private jobs and businesses. The other reason for this preference is the shortage of agricultural extension. Besides, it is revealed that over 75 percent of the participant's income is being spent on food, utilities, education, health, marriages, and other activities. Results revealed women of rural areas face many problems while generating income. These problems are related to agriculture, marketing, low technical level, high cost of agricultural inputs, poor infrastructure, low cost of production, lack of extension support, complications in the loan allocation process, etc. Besides, women also face certain social problems like harassment when they were engaged in income generating activities outside of their homes, health risks and child morbidity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study recommendations are given as under.

- The socioeconomic constraints in income generating activities for women requires a comprehensive intervention for addressing the structural inequalities and providing targeted economic and social support to empower rural women.
- It is recommended for the more targeted initiatives to build up women's access to education. This can be possible through establishing the educational institutions for the girls in the study area.
- The study highlights that harassment is a challenge for the rural women in income generating activities. It is recommended that awareness regarding the harassment should be provided to the women of rural areas. In this context, the government institutions, NGOs, and civil society can play it's parts.
- It is recommended that women should be given due part in income generating activities. In this context, the male members of the society should be given awareness, and they should also be educated properly about the women rights.
- It is recommended that they systematic challenges that create the issues in income generating activities should be addressed. This requires holistic interventions aimed at strengthening women's access to education, promoting their economic participation, and removing structural barriers to their empowerment. By investing in the potential of rural women, Pakistan can pave the way for more inclusive and sustainable development for all.

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