

Exploring Mental Stress and Challenges among Women Agricultural Labourers:

A Social Work Study in Banaskantha District, Gujarat

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Abstract:

In India, Women agricultural labourers face the combined demands of agricultural work and family responsibilities, yet their mental well-being receives comparatively limited attention. This research study examines the level of mental stress among women agricultural labourers and non-agricultural/non-working women and explores the role of family cooperation among agricultural labourers in Banaskantha District, Gujarat. A quantitative, cross-sectional and comparative research design was adopted. Primary data were collected from 350 women aged 23–49 years, comprising 175 agricultural labourers and 175 non-agricultural/non-working women. Respondents were selected using a comparative sampling approach with equal representation of the two groups. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire covering demographic characteristics, mental-stress responses and family cooperation. Frequencies and percentages were used for descriptive analysis, while cross-tabulation and Pearson's chi-square test were applied to examine the association between labour status and mental-stress responses. The findings show that 91.4% of agricultural labour women strongly agreed or agreed that agricultural work affected their mental stress, compared with 28.6% of non-agricultural/non-working women. The association was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 150.578$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$; Cramer's $V = 0.656$), indicating a substantial difference in the distribution of mental-stress responses between the two groups. The study further indicates that greater family cooperation is associated with lower mental stress among agricultural labour women. The findings suggest that mental well-being among women agricultural labourers should be addressed through a social-work approach integrating family support, accessible health services and occupational well-being.

Keywords: Social Work, Exploring, Mental Stress, Challenges, Women Agricultural Labourers

1.Introduction:

The agriculture is major distribution under the occupation in Gujarat and still in India where it provides an important source of livelihood for rural households & women contribute substantially to agricultural activities. The Indian agriculture working structures are still traditional with major work participants of women along with families. Further Agriculture related work has greater challenge with higher work where women directly involve in long hard-working efforts what leads higher unmanageable things in their life. Female worker found mental disorders and physical discomfort were related to the demands of both farm work and household work (**Cezar-Vaz: 2015**). So, women's occupational and domestic environments consider along with health.

In Depth, The problem becomes more important when agricultural employment is considered together with household responsibilities. Rural women commonly perform paid or productive work while continuing to manage domestic activities and family responsibilities. Therefore, the total workload of a woman cannot be understood only from the number of hours spent in paid employment. Work inside the household, childcare and other family activities also form an important part of her daily responsibilities. The work demands were associated with mental distress, particularly when women experienced high levels of household work (**Raju:2018**).

The relationship between agricultural employment and women's mental stress also requires careful empirical examination. Agricultural work itself should not automatically be considered a direct cause of psychological problems. Women's stress may develop through several connected conditions, including work demands, economic uncertainty, family responsibilities, limited support and access to healthcare. This broader view is important because evidence from rural India has shown that socioeconomic conditions and educational characteristics can also influence women's mental health. The perceived stress was closely associated with screening for common mental disorders and that low education and poor income were among the factors associated with greater risk (Fahey:2016).

Further, here important issue is that rural women's mental health cannot be separated from their social environment. Family support may influence how women manage the combined demands of employment and household responsibilities. A woman who receives cooperation from family members may have greater opportunity to manage domestic work, childcare and agricultural employment. In contrast, limited cooperation may increase the pressure associated with multiple responsibilities. Thus, family cooperation can be considered an important social factor when studying mental stress among women agricultural labourers.

2.Research Problem:

The present research study focusses on mainly two research question wh4ere first introduce the higher mental stress among women agricultural labourers in Vadgam in Banaskantha district. Where as second one is Family cooperation & mental stress among the agricultural labour women in Vadgam in Banaskantha district.

3.Objects:

- ✓ To identify the Level of Mental Stress among women agricultural labourers & Non-agricultural Non-working women.
- ✓ To examine the relationship between family cooperation and mental stress among women agricultural labourers in Banaskantha District.

4.Research Hypothesis:

H₁: There is a significant difference in the level of mental stress between women agricultural labourers and non-agricultural/non-working women.

5.Literature Reviews:

Patel(2016) examined the relationship between women's occupational status and their experience of stress and anxiety in Gujarat. The study aimed to determine the prevalence of stress and anxiety among women and to assess whether these psychological conditions differed according to occupation. Under this study adopted the cross sectional research design where women with 18 to 50 years age drawn with different occupation from Gujarat. The tool of the measurement of stress through Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The results indicated a substantial psychological burden: 26 percent of participants were classified as most prone to stress, another 66 percent as somewhat more prone to stress, and 35 percent showed high anxiety.

Further demonstrated that occupational position was relevant to the variation in women's stress and anxiety. The study concluded that women's psychological well-being needs to be considered in relation to the conditions and demands associated with their occupations.

Rudolphi (2024) examined the relationship between farm-related stress, mental-health symptoms and social support, with particular attention to differences between male and female farmers. The study used a survey of farmers in Illinois and assessed stress arising from different farming conditions, together with symptoms of depression and anxiety and perceived support from significant others, family and friends. Depression was measured using the PHQ-9, while anxiety was assessed using the GAD-7. The result of the study observed that farmers have low family support where 62.5% of women farmers showed depressive symptoms compared with 16.1% of men, and women had significantly higher odds of depressive symptoms after adjustment for age and total stress (OR = 12.72, $p = 0.021$).

Deegan and Dunne (2022) investigated how different forms of social support were related to stress and psychological well-being among farmers. The study is different from a simple occupational-stress investigation because it specifically examined whether social relationships could function as a protective factor against farming-related stress. The results showed that family support was significantly related to financial and farm-related stress, although its relationship with overall psychological well-being was weaker than the contribution of support from friends and significant others. Participation in farming organisations was identified as a potentially protective factor against social stress, while some farm-structure characteristics were associated with lower financial stress

7. Research Method:

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional and comparative research design to examine mental stress among women agricultural labourers and non-agricultural/non-working women in Vadgam- Banaskantha District, Gujarat. Primary data has been collected from 350 women aged 23–49 years, comprising 175 agricultural labourers and 175 non-agricultural/non-working women. The primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire covering demographic characteristics, mental-stress responses and family cooperation. Descriptive statistics, frequency and percentage distributions were used to summarize the data. Cross-tabulation and the Pearson chi-square test were used to examine the association between labour status and mental-stress responses.

8.Result & Discussion:

The cross-tabulation Table: 1 showing clear difference in mental-stress responses between the two groups. Among agricultural labour women, highest 47.4 percent distributed in Agree level by 83 frequencies whereas lowest with 3.4 percent by 6 frequency distribution during period. In Non-Agricultural Working Women, highest distribution with 30.9 percent by 54 frequency in Neutral level whereas lowest with 8 percent by 14 frequency distribution in strongly agree level.

Table: 1 Labour Status & Mental Stress Level of Agri-Non-Agri Women Labourer

Mental Stress Response	Agricultural Labour Women	%	Non-Agricultural/Non-Working Women	%	Total	%
Strongly Agree	77	44	14	8	91	26
Agree	83	47.4	36	20.6	119	34
Neutral	2	1.1	54	30.9	56	16
Disagree	7	4	42	24	49	14
Strongly Disagree	6	3.4	29	16.6	35	10
Total	175	100	175	100	350	100

Source: Author's Data Analysis from Primary Data

The aggregate Agree level is highest with 34 percent by 119 frequency distribution against lowest aggregate 10 percent by 35 frequencies in strongly disagree level during period.

Further it indicates that mental stress among agricultural women is not only an individual psychological concern but also within their occupational, family, healthcare and social-support environment.

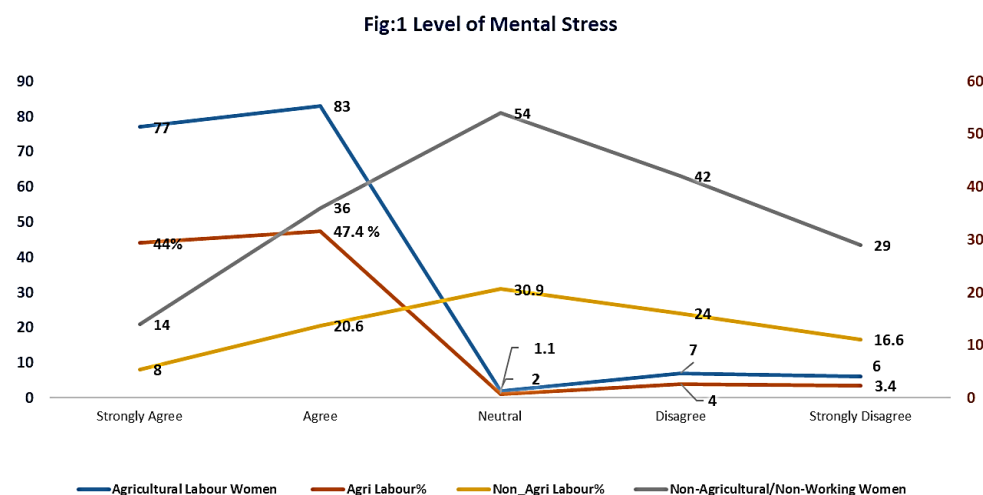


Table: 2 Chi-Square Test

Test	Value
Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2)	150.578
df	4
p-value	< 0.001
Cramer's V	0.656
Result	Statistically significant

Source: Author's Data Analysis from Primary Data

H₁: There is a significant difference in the level of mental stress between women agricultural labourers and non-agricultural/non-working women.

Here **Table: 2** representing result of testing hypothesis by Pearson Chi-Square test. The Pearson chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 150.578$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a statistically significant association between labour status and mental-stress response. Therefore, the findings provide empirical support for the study hypothesis.

9.Conclusion:

The present research study conclude that mental stress is a significant concern among women agricultural labourers in Banaskantha District. The empirical comparison shows substantially higher stress responses among agricultural labour women than among non-agricultural/non-working women, with the difference being statistically significant. The findings also indicate that family cooperation has an important supportive role in reducing stress among working agricultural women. Thus, women's mental well-being should be addressed through a combined approach involving occupational conditions, family support and accessible social and health services.

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