



PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLD AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN SELECTED AREAS OF KISHOREGANJ DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the participation of rural women in household and agricultural activities in five villages of Pakundia Upazila of Kishoreganj. Data from 110 respondents were collected through a structured interview schedule. Findings revealed that an overwhelming majority (96.36%) of rural women actively participated in both household and agricultural activities, with significant involvement in food preparation and crop production. Socio-demographic factors such as education, family size, and coping

capacity to household shocks positively influenced their participation, while age showed a negative correlation. However, family income and exposure to communication media did not exhibit significant effects. The study highlights the pivotal role of rural women in maintaining household stability and advancing agricultural productivity, emphasizing the need for targeted policy interventions to enhance their contributions.

Key words: Rural women, Agricultural participation, Household activities, Socio-economic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh economy is dominated by agriculture, contributing approximately 15.96% to the national GDP and providing employment to 44.4% of the population (Bangladesh Economic Review, 2015). Within this context, women play a vital yet often unrecognized role in agricultural and household labor, which forms the foundation of rural livelihoods. The contributions of women are not limited to domestic tasks but extend into critical areas of crop production, livestock rearing, and post-harvest processing. Despite their significant involvement, the labor of rural women is typically undervalued and remains "invisible" in formal economic assessments.

The participation of rural women in household and agricultural activities is influenced by various socio-economic factors, including education, family structure, income, and exposure to information sources. In regions such as Kishoreganj, where traditional gender roles still predominate, understanding the factors that either facilitate or hinder women's participation is essential for formulating policies that can better integrate women into rural development efforts. This study aims to evaluate the participation of rural women in these dual roles and identify the socio-demographic characteristics that most significantly impact their involvement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Pakundia upazila of Kishoreganj. The area is predominantly rural, with agriculture as the primary source of livelihood. Five villages—Husaindi Moddhopara, Husaindi Purbapara, Husaindi charpapra, Kumarpur, and Husaindi Nayapara of Husaindi union—were selected for the study based on their representation of the socio-economic diversity of the region.

Sample and Sampling Method

A total of 1522 rural women were identified as the population for the study. Using Yamane's (1967) formula with a 9% precision level, 50% degree of variability and the value of $Z=1.96$ at 99% confidence interval, a sample size of 110 was determined. A random sampling technique was employed to ensure unbiased representation. Additionally, a reserve list of 10% of the respondents (11 women) was prepared to address any non-responses during data collection.

Data Collection

Primary data were gathered using a structured interview schedule. The schedule was pretested to ensure reliability and validity. Interviews were conducted by the researcher in person, in the native

language, to facilitate clear communication. The survey collected data, focusing on socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, family size, income, media exposure) and participation in household and agricultural activities.

Measurement of Variables

- **Participation in Household Activities:** Women were asked about their daily time allocation to tasks such as food preparation, cleaning, child education, and household management.
- **Participation in Agricultural Activities:** Agricultural tasks included crop production (land preparation, sowing, weeding, harvesting), livestock rearing, poultry farming, and post-harvest activities.
- **Independent Variables:** Age, education level, family size, household income, and exposure to communication media were recorded. These were measured using appropriate scales (e.g., education in years, family size by number of members, income in thousand takas).

Data Analysis

Data were processed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) were

used to summarize the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationships between the socio-demographic factors and the women's participation in household and agricultural activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Age:** Respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 66 years, with a mean age of 40.22 years. The majority (91.81%) were young to middle-aged, reflecting a demographic more capable of active participation in demanding activities (Table 1).
- **Education:** About 72% were literate, with varying levels of formal education. Higher education levels positively correlated with participation in agricultural activities, as educated women were more likely to adopt innovative agricultural practices and management strategies (Table 1).
- **Family Size:** Most respondents had medium-sized families (5-7 members), enabling a balance between household and agricultural responsibilities. Smaller family sizes often allowed for greater focus on quality agricultural outputs (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by age, education level, and family size

Variable	Categories	Frequency (%)	Mean	SD
Age (years)	Young (≤ 35)	40.91		
	Middle (36–55)	50.91	40.22	12.18
	Old (55+)	8.18		
Education (years of schooling)	Illiterate (0)	28.18		
	Primary (1–5)	15.45	6.15	4.37
	Secondary (6–10)	44.55		
	Above Secondary (11+)	11.82		
Family Size (members)	Small (≤ 4)	45.45		
	Medium (5–7)	50.00	4.73	1.57
	Large (7+)	4.55		

Participation in Household Activities: Rural women spent considerable time on food preparation, childcare, and other domestic tasks. Time allocation to these activities was influenced by education level and family size. Women with smaller families reported higher participation in household activities due to fewer competing demands.

The most time-intensive household activity was food preparation, followed by childcare and cleaning. These activities, though unpaid, formed the backbone of family sustenance. Older women often assumed supervisory roles, ensuring continuity and efficiency in domestic management.

Participation in Agricultural Activities: Participation in pre- and post-harvest crop production activities, livestock rearing, and poultry farming was substantial. Younger women were more involved in physically demanding agricultural tasks, while older women focused on less labor-intensive but equally essential roles, such as seed selection and crop storage (Table 2).

Crop production, particularly rice and vegetables, was a primary focus. Women played critical roles in transplanting, weeding, harvesting, and threshing. Livestock rearing, including poultry and dairy, also featured prominently, contributing significantly to household nutrition and income (Table 2).

Coping capacity to household shocks: Capacity to cope with household shocks by the respondent varied from 8 to 29, with a mean and standard deviation of 16.72 and 3.86 respectively. Considering the coping capacity, the respondents were classified into three categories. Women under the study were requested to indicate how much they cope with some unexpected

household shocks that disrupted their everyday lives. Results indicate that most (78.18%) of the respondents had medium shock reduction ability, about 12.73% of them had high ability and 9.09% had low shock reduction ability to cope with household shock (Table 3).

Table 2. Average daily time allocation to household and agricultural activities

Activity	Average Time Spent (hours/day)
Food preparation	3.5
Child education	1.5
Crop production	2.0
Livestock management	1.5
Poultry rearing	0.5

Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors

- **Positive Correlations:** Education, coping capacity, and family size significantly increased participation in both household and agricultural activities. Educated women displayed greater confidence in decision-making and resource management, enhancing productivity.
- **Negative Correlation:** Age inversely affected participation, with younger women demonstrating higher involvement in physically demanding tasks. However, older women's experience added value in decision-making and supervisory roles.
- **Non-significant Factors:** Family income and exposure to communication media did not exhibit notable effects on participation. Despite low media exposure, traditional knowledge and interpersonal communication remained primary sources of agricultural information.

Challenges Faced by Rural Women: Rural women encountered several challenges that limited their participation and productivity. Key issues included lack of access to quality agricultural inputs, financial constraints, and insufficient training opportunities.

Additionally, societal norms often restricted women's mobility, limiting their engagement in market-related activities.

Opportunities for Improvement: Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to enhance rural women's roles in household and agricultural activities. Programs focusing on skill development, access to credit, and market linkages can empower women to maximize their contributions. Collaborative efforts between government agencies and NGOs can also address gender-specific barriers effectively.

Correlation between Socio-Demographic Factors and Participation

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed that education level and family size had a significant positive correlation with women's participation in both household and agricultural activities ($r = 0.432$, $p < 0.05$; $r = 0.387$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). In contrast, age had a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.451$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that older women were less involved in agricultural tasks (Figure 1).

Table 3. Correlation between selected characteristics of rural women and their participation in household and agricultural activities

Predicted Variable	Selected Characteristics of Rural Women	Computed Value of r	Table Value of r at 108 d.f. At 5% level = 0.187 At 1% level = 0.245
Participation of rural women in household and agricultural activities	Age	-0.334**	
	Education	0.237*	
	Family size	0.209*	
	Annual family income	0.104NS	
	Exposure to communication media	0.054NS	
	Coping capacity to household shock	0.249**	
	Husband-wife relation	0.015NS	
	Financial contribution to the family purchase	0.125NS	
	Participation in social activities	0.169NS	
	Problem faced in household activities	0.062NS	
	Problem faced in agricultural activities	—	

Notes: * Significant at 5% level ($p < 0.05$). ** Significant at 1% level ($p < 0.01$). NS = Not significant.

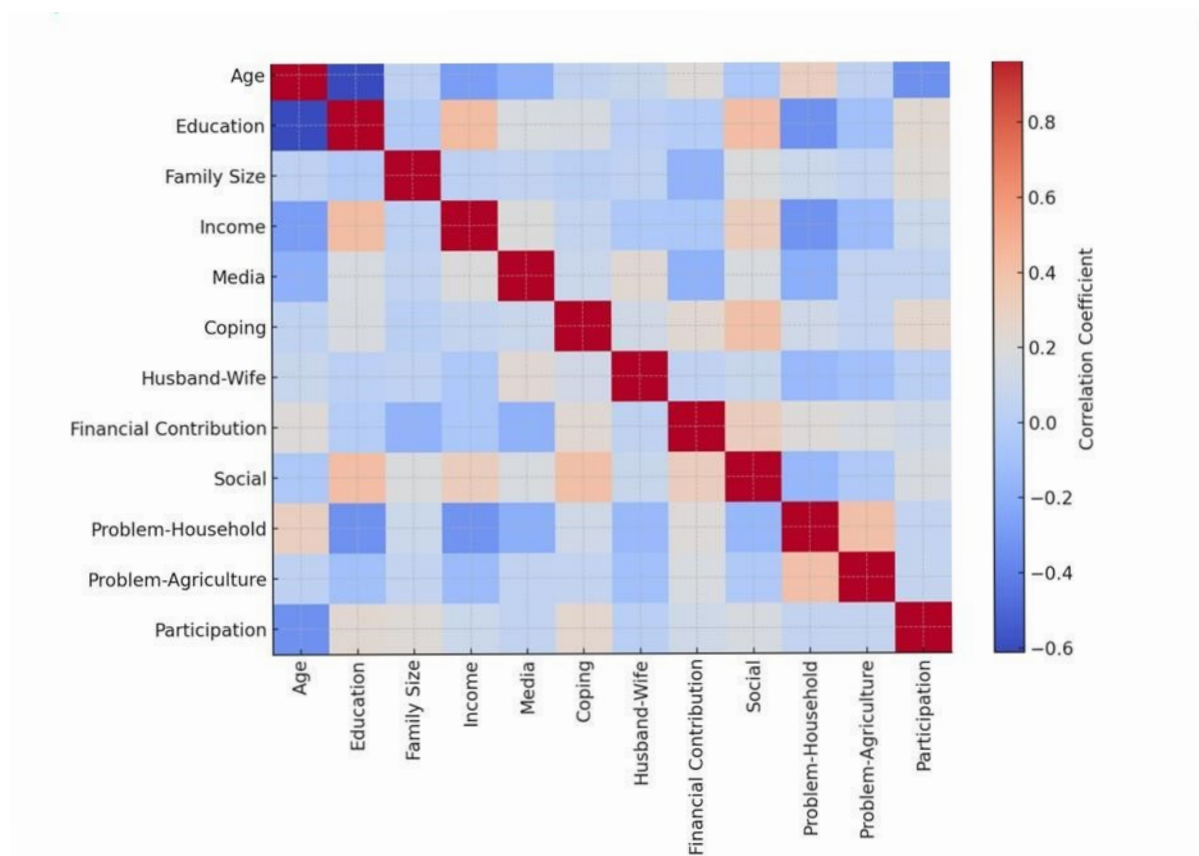


Figure 1. Matrix of Correlation showing relationships between socio-demographic factors and participation in household and agricultural activities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the essential contributions of rural women in household and agricultural activities in Kishoregonj District. Their participation is significantly influenced by socio-demographic factors such as education, family size, and age. To maximize their contributions, policies should focus on providing educational opportunities, improving access to agricultural resources, and promoting gender equality in rural areas. Addressing these factors will not only empower women but also enhance the overall productivity and sustainability of rural economies in Bangladesh.

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