

Accessibility of Rural Women to Family Decision-Making Process

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Abstract

The major purposes of the study were to ascertain the accessibility of rural women to family decision-making process and to explore the relationships between the nine selected characteristics of the women with their accessibility to family decision-making. The study was conducted in two selected villages of Paba upazila under Rajshahi district. The population of the study included 698 women who were the wives of farm family heads and data were collected from a sample of 105 women selected by random sampling method using interview schedule during March to April 2011. Against the possible score range 0 to 90, the observed overall scores for rural women's accessibility to family decision-making ranged from 21 to 81. The highest proportion (51 percent) of the rural women had medium overall accessibility to decision-making, while 26 percent had high accessibility and the rest 23 percent had low accessibility to family decision-making. The components in which the rural women had relatively high accessibility to family decision-making in descending order were: food and nutrition, health and sanitation, cloths and ornaments, family literacy, housing and social activities. The remaining three components had lesser accessibility to family decision-making. Correlation analysis indicates that education, extension contact, cosmopolitaness and family cooperation of the rural women had a significant and positive relationship with their accessibility to decision-making, while age and superstition had significant but negative relationship.

Keywords: Accessibility, rural women, family decision-making.

Introduction

Rural development in general and particularly agricultural development in Bangladesh is no alternative to this and it is an important issue that development activities should be equally participated by women and men. Undoubtedly, access of rural women to decision-making provides various benefits of development not only to the family but also to the society through which people seek a better livelihood in the rural area. The basic aim of the Government of Bangladesh is to raise family income and ensure the better life through participatory and harmonious effort of the exploited people, who are considered as the target people of development (Biswas, 2003). Rural women are mostly under utilized, largely unrecognized though they contribute significantly to agricultural and

non-agricultural activities (Akanda, 1994). So, proper documentation of women participation in different productive works is necessary to provide due weightage and recognition. On the other hand, there is a need to find out working areas for intensifying their participation and ensuring access to their decision making in the family. As women are the disadvantaged class of the society, accessibility of rural women to decision-making is of crucial importance for the success of any development programme. Their decision-making abilities have to be encouraged and achieved. Decision-making in planning and implementation of different programmes is important. Because, through this process women learn to change their behaviour for their

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own development, family development and thereby community development.

GOs and NGOs have been giving emphasis to involve women in different activities of the country because they are now a definite strength in the nation-building process. The involvement of women will have to be started at first from the family. Decision-making of rural women in family activities is expected to affect their lives in personal, social and economic dimensions by increasing their access to and control over resources. This is possible by altering the level of women's knowledge, awareness, skills of wider environment and by modifying bargaining power in a variety of

relationships and also by changing the way in which people perceive women and in which women perceive about themselves with references to the opinion about their participation. The purpose of the present study was to have an understanding on the accessibility of rural women to family decision-making process in different rural development activities and related aspects. However, the specific objectives of the study were as follows: to ascertain the accessibility of the rural women to family decision-making process; and to explore relationships between the selected characteristics of the respondent rural women and their accessibility to family decision-making.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Bugrail and Sonthospur villages of Paba upazila of Rajshahi district. In the two villages there were 698 male headed families having at least one housewife which constituted the population for this study of which, 105 housewives were selected randomly. A pre-tested interview schedule used to collect data from the respondents during March to April 2011. Age, education, family size, annual family income, extension contact, cosmopolitaness, leadership experience, family cooperation and superstition of the respondent was considered as independent variables whereas rural women's accessibility to family decision-making process was considered as dependent variable for this study. A three point rating scale was used for computing the extent of accessibility of rural women to family decision-making process score.

There were 9 major components (food and nutrition, cloths and ornaments, housing, health and sanitation, family literacy, farm and homestead production, IGAs, social activities and organizational participation) and each component contained 5 statements. Thus, the scale contained in

total of 45 family decision-making statements. Weightage of the responses against each decision-making statement were assigned in the following way. Scores of 2, 1 and 0 were assigned for "full access", "partial access" and "no access at all", respectively. For each of the major component, accessibility to family decision-making of the rural women was determined by summing the scores obtained by herself for the 5 concerned statements, while the composite accessibility to family decision-making of an individual woman was computed by adding together the scores obtained by her for all the nine components (45 statements).

Therefore, the possible composite accessibility to family decision-making score of a respondent woman could theoretically range from 0 to 90, while 0 indicated no accessibility to family decision-making and 90 indicated very high accessibility to family decision-making. Statistical measures like number, range, percent, mean, standard deviation, co-efficient of correlation (r) and rank order were calculated using SPSS program.

Findings and Discussion

Selected Characteristics of the Respondent Rural Women

Table 1 revealed that the highest proportions (63 percent) of the women were young, while 34 percent belonged to the middle-aged category. In case of education it was observed that 15 percent, 55 percent and 12 percent of the women had primary, secondary and above secondary level of education respectively. In view of family size, 61 percent of the women had small sized family where as medium and large sized family was 39 percent altogether. Data indicated that the highest proportion (55 percent) of the women had low annual family income compared to 28 percent and 17 percent having medium and high family income respectively. It was demonstrated that majority (71 percent) of the women had low extension contact as compared to 24 percent having medium extension contact. It was again observed that the highest proportion (52 percent) of the women had low cosmopolitaness as compared to 39 percent having medium cosmopolitaness. Findings revealed that majority (64 percent) of the women had very low leadership experience and 32 percent of them had no leadership experience at all. Data further showed that majority (73 percent) of the rural women had medium to low family co-operation. In addition, findings also indicated that the highest proportion (41 percent) of the women had low superstition, while 23 percent had high superstition. However, the salient features of the selected characteristics have been presented in Table 1.

Accessibility of the Respondents' Rural Women to Family Decision-Making Process Component-wise Accessibility to Family Decision-Making

Rural women's overall accessibility to family decision-making was conceptualized as consisting of nine components. These components included: food and nutrition, cloths and ornaments, housing, health and sanitation, family literacy, farm and homestead production, income generating activities, social activities and institutional participation. It was found that the rural women used the above components in which decisions were taken concerning the respective family issues. Data presented in the Table 2 indicate that highest proportion of the respondents such as 79, 58, 46, 66 and 53 percent had high access to decision-making on food and nutrition, cloths and ornaments, housing, health and sanitation and family literacy, respectively. But in the case of farm and homestead production and social activities 29 and 37 percent had medium access to decision-making and in view of income-generating activities and organizational participation most of the women (55 and 51 percent, respectively) had low access to decision-making. It was also found that the rural women had the highest accessibility (considering mean value) to family decision-making in respect of food and nutrition which was followed by health and sanitation, cloths and ornaments, family literacy, housing and social activities as indicated by the mean values. The remaining three components were of lesser accessibility.

Table 1 Salient features of the respondent rural women's selected characteristics

Characte- ristics	Measuring units	Ranges		Categorization of rural women and score range	Respon- dents' Percentag e (n=105)	Mean value	Standard deviation
		Possible	Observe				
Age	Years	Unknown	18-65	Young (below 36)	63	33.49	9.93
				Middle aged (36-50)	34		
				Old (above 50)	3		
Education	Years of schooling	Unknown	0-14	Illiterate (0)	5	7.00	3.84
				Signature literate (0.5)	13		
				Primary level (1 to 5)	15		
				Secondary level (6 to 10)	55		
				Above Secondary (above 10)	12		
Family size	No. of members	Unknown	2-11	Small (below 5)	61	4.33	1.34
				Medium (5 to 6)	36		
				Large (above 6)	3		
Annual family income	Taka	Unknown	21,0-440,0	Low income (below 1,10,000)	55	109.41	67.54
				Medium income (1,10,000 to 1,50,000)	28		
				High income (above 1,50,000)	17		
Extension contact	Scores	0-42	1-32	Low extension contact (below 9)	71	7.76	5.10
				Medium extension contact (9 to 15)	24		
				High extension contact (above 15)	5		
Cosmopo liteness	Scores	0-18	0-16	No cosmopolitaness (0)	5	6.33	3.65
				Low cosmopolitaness (below 7)	52		
				Medium cosmopolitaness (7 to 12)	39		
				High cosmopolitaness (above 12)	4		
Leadership experience	Scores	0-18	0-6	No leadership experience(0)	32	0.93	0.91
				Very low leadership experience (1 to 2)	64		
				Low leadership experience (above 2)	4		
Family cooperation	Scores	0-36	0-36	No family cooperation (0)	10	15.73	10.05
				Low family cooperation (below 16)	32		
				Medium family cooperation (16 to 25)	41		
				High family cooperation (above 25)	17		
Superstition	Scores	0-42	0-34	No superstition (0)	6	10.65	8.59
				Low superstition (below 8)	41		
				Medium superstition (8 to 15)	30		
				High superstition (above 15)	23		

Table 2 Rural womens' component wise accessibility to family decision making

Components	Categories (scores)	Observed score range	Rural women (n=105)	Mean	SD
			Percent (%)		
1. Food and nutrition	Low (below 5)	2-10	7	8.59	2.06
	Medium (5 to 7)		14		
	High (above 7)		79		
2. Cloths and ornaments	Low (below 5)	2-10	12	7.69	2.40
	Medium (5 to 7)		30		
	High (above 7)		58		
3. Housing	No (0)	0-10	14	6.14	3.58
	Low (below 5)		17		
	Medium (5 to 7)		23		
	High (above 7)		46		
4. Health and Sanitation	No (0)	0-10	1	8.16	2.16
	Low (below 5)		8		
	Medium (5 to 7)		25		
	High (above 7)		66		
5. Family literacy	No (0)	0-10	7	6.97	3.18
	Low (below 5)		14		
	Medium (5 to 7)		26		
	High (above 7)		53		
6. Farm and homestead production	No (0)	0-10	25	4.21	3.35
	Low (below 5)		26		
	Medium (5 to 7)		29		
	High (above 7)		20		
7. Income generating activities	No (0)	0-10	4	4.35	2.73
	Low (below 5)		55		
	Medium (5 to 7)		24		
	High (above 7)		17		
8. Social activities	No (0)	0-10	3	6.14	2.52
	Low (below 5)		26		
	Medium (5 to 7)		37		
	High (above 7)		34		
9. Institutional participation	No (0)	0-10	14	3.69	2.27
	Low (below 5)		51		
	Medium (5 to 7)		30		
	High (above 7)		5		

Possible Score Range: 0-10

Composite Accessibility to Family Decision-Making Process

The possible composite accessibility to family decision-making scores of the rural women could range from 0 to 90. But the observed decision-making score of the women ranged from 21 to 81, the mean score was 56.02 with the standard deviation of 14.72 and CV 26.27 (Table 3). Based on the observed composite accessibility to decision-making scores, the women were classified into three categories as follows:

It was revealed that the highest proportion (51 percent) of the respondents had medium accessibility to decision-making, while 26 percent of the respondents had high accessibility and 23 percent of the women had low accessibility to decision-making. This means that majority (77 percent) of the women had medium to high level of accessibility to decision-making. It is obviously true that adequate accessibility to decision-making is essential for gaining better output by utilizing its maximum potentials.

Table 3 Distribution of the respondent rural women according to their composite accessibility to decision-making

Categories according to accessibility to decision-making scores	Women		Mean	Standard deviation	C.V.
	Number	Percent			
Low accessibility (below 48)	24	23	56.02	14.72	26.27
Medium accessibility (48-65)	54	51			
High accessibility (above 65)	27	26			
Total	105	100			

Relationship Between the Selected Characteristics of the Rural Women and Their Accessibility to Family Decision-Making Process

The findings of the study demonstrate that education, extension contact, cosmopolitanism and family cooperation of the rural women had a significant and positive relationship with their accessibility to decision-making. This meant that the rural women having more education were likely to have more accessibility to family decision-making. More extension contact of the rural women also facilitated more to increase their accessibility to family decision-making process. A woman having more cosmopolitanism would have more opportunity to come in contact with others, share ideas and exchange views and opinions that may lead to increase her accessibility to family decision-making. Similar result was also reported by Nahar (2000). Moreover, the rural women having more family co-operation were likely to have better accessibility to family decision-making. Age and superstition had significant but negative relationship with the accessibility to family decision-making process. This indicates that the rural women having more age were likely to have less accessibility to family decision-making process. This is interesting to note that the older aged rural women are on the verge of losing their control in the family decision-making activities. It also indicates that the women who had more

superstition were likely to have lesser accessibility to family decision-making. On the other hand, family size, annual family income and leadership experience of the rural women had no significant relationship with their accessibility to family decision-making process. This meant that family size, annual family income and leadership experience of the rural women was not the important factors for improving their accessibility to family decision-making process. However, the summary of the results of the correlation analysis has been presented in Table 4 showing the relationship between nine selected characteristics of the women and their accessibility to family decision-making.

Table 4 Relationship between the accessibility of rural women to family decision-making process and their selected characteristics (N=105)

Independent variables (women's selected characteristics)	Co-efficient (r) value (103 d.f.)
Age	-0.198*
Education	0.331**
Family size	0.071 ^{NS}
Annual family income	0.067 ^{NS}
Extension contact	0.244*
Cosmopolitanism	0.208*
Leadership experience	0.087 ^{NS}
Family cooperation	0.278**
Superstition	-0.212*

* Significant at 0.05 level of probability (table value 0.192 at 103 df)

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability (table value 0.251 at 103 df)

Conclusion

Rural women's accessibility to family decision-making process in the study area had satisfactory level. It is true that the traditional belief, folkways, social ethos and ego play a vital role in backwardness and low status of rural women. Our cultural heritages, social rule and superstitions have provided the higher status to male than female. The participation and leadership of women in any decision-making is not considered as a good sign in rural families. Thus, women, particularly, rural women are avoided in socio-economic decision-making process in the family or society.

The rural societies also have their deep faith in well established traditional norms and values. Thus, the society does not allow women for participation in family decision-making process. However, on the basis of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations can be drawn that the organizations and personnel who are concerned with women rights and empowerment should provide necessary efforts for upliftment of the rural women's accessibility to family decision-making through various educational and motivational programs.

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