

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Journal of Extension Education

Vol. 34 No.3, 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26725/JEE.2022.1.34.6846-6855>

Dynamics of Working Conditions among Women Agricultural Workers

Yasam Lakshmi Narayana Reddy¹, R.Rajendiran¹ and C.N. Anshida Beevi²

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the dynamics of wages, payment schedules, work availability, types of work, job satisfaction and problems faced by women agricultural workers in the rural areas of Puducherry, India. A mixed-method approach was employed and data from a random sample of 5,044 women agricultural workers across all 98 revenue villages in the rural areas of Union Territory of Puducherry were collected and analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing conditions and challenges. The findings indicated that almost half of the respondents earned the wages below 150 rupees per day, highlighting the prevalence of low wages. A majority of respondents faced lack of daily work availability. The study also explored the types of work performed by them, identified factors that contribute to people choosing to work in agriculture, such as the need to meet basic family needs, low family income, and issues including wage discrimination, low wages, hard work, lack of transport facilities and overworking hours.

Keywords: Women in Agriculture; Wages; Labour; Payment Schedules; Availability; Job satisfaction; Problem; Puducherry

INTRODUCTION

Rural agricultural workers in India are the backbone of the agricultural sector, playing a crucial role in food production and rural development. However, they face numerous challenges that hinder their well-being and livelihoods, including low wages, irregular payment schedules, limited work availability, workplace problems, and gender disparities. Inadequate wages are one of the primary concerns for rural agricultural workers, as they perpetuate poverty and income inequality. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) data, a significant portion of agricultural workers earns wages below the minimum standards (NSSO, 2018). Moreover,

irregular payment schedules further exacerbate the financial instability of agricultural workers, with 55% of them reporting delayed payments (NSSO, 2018). Limited work availability poses another significant challenge, as nearly 40% of agricultural workers engage in seasonal or part-time employment, leading to income uncertainty and vulnerability (NSSO, 2018).

The nature of agricultural work has implications for wages, skill requirements, and job satisfaction. Gender disparities persist in the agricultural sector, with women agricultural workers earning approximately 70-80% of men's wages for similar work (FAO, 2019). Rural agricultural workers also face challenges in their

¹Government Arts College (Autonomous) Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu - 612002.

²Section of Transfer of Technology, ICAR-Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture, Santoshnagar, Hyderabad-500059

workplaces, such as physical strains and limited opportunities for skill development. Inadequate working conditions contribute to high health risks and occupational hazards, making agriculture one of the sectors with the highest fatality rates globally, with an estimated 170,000 occupational fatalities each year (ILO, 2018).

In the Union Territory (UT) of Puducherry, the wages of agricultural labourers the number of days they are employed in a year and their income earned annually are lower than that of their counterparts in the industrial as well as service sector. The problem of unemployment under employment and the consequent migration of agricultural labourers is a general problem faced by agricultural labours. The women agricultural labourers are balancing themselves between the daily domestic household chores and rendering their labour outside. Migration by rural men to urban areas or to neighbouring states to escape from poverty traps has increased the number of women participants in agriculture who have to carry the burden of earning income and managing households.

Extensive research has been conducted to understand the dynamics of wages, payments, work availability, types of work, job satisfaction and workplace problems among rural agricultural workers. Deshpande (2016) emphasized the urgent need for fair wages to alleviate poverty and income inequality. Dev (2019) discussed the implications of different types of work on wages, skill requirements and overall job satisfaction. Bhide (2020) analysed job satisfaction levels among agricultural labourers, emphasizing the importance of fair wages, supportive working conditions, and job security in enhancing worker well-being. Juneja (2023) investigated the specific challenges faced by female agricultural workers, emphasizing their significant role in agriculture and the need to address gender-

based discrimination, unequal resource access and limited decision-making power.

All these studies reveal that the socioeconomic conditions of rural agricultural women workers are common. Therefore, a comprehensive study focusing on the dynamics of wages, payment schedules, work availability, types of work, job satisfaction, and challenges faced by women agricultural workers in rural Puducherry holds significant value. It would offer a snapshot of their working conditions and economic well-being, shedding light on potential gender disparities. This data is instrumental for policymakers in formulating targeted interventions to address inequalities, enhance job satisfaction, and improve overall livelihoods. Additionally, understanding the prevailing problems these women encounter can guide community development efforts and serve as a vital baseline for future research and advocacy, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and prosperous agricultural sector in the region. The present study has been conducted to examine the dynamics of wages, payment schedules, work availability, types of work, job satisfaction and problems faced by women agricultural workers in the rural areas of Puducherry with the following objectives:

1. To examine the current working conditions, including types of work, wages, and payment schedules, for women engaged in agriculture in the region.
2. To measure the levels of work satisfaction among women agricultural workers and understand the factors influencing their job contentment.
3. To identify the specific challenges and problems faced by women agricultural workers, including access to resources, working conditions, and gender-related issues.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted within the Union Territory of Puducherry, consisting of 129 revenue villages distributed in Puducherry and Karaikal regions. According to the 2011 Census, Puducherry had a population of 12,47,953, with women constituting 6,35,442 of the total. In 2019, the Department of Economics & Statistics, Govt. of Puducherry, estimated that 50,607 rural women were actively engaged in agricultural labour in the region. A mixed-methods research strategy was used for this study. A structured questionnaire was designed to gather comprehensive data on various aspects related to wages, payment schedules, and work availability, types of work, reasons to choose the work, work satisfaction and problems faced by among the respondents. Random sampling technique was used to select sample of 5,044 women agricultural workers from all 98 revenue villages located in the rural areas of Pondicherry and Karaikal regions.

Random sampling technique was chosen to ensure the representativeness and minimized bias of the sample, thus enabling the generalization of findings to the broader population of women agricultural workers in the region. In addition to the quantitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted with select participants. These interviews aimed to offer deeper insights into the experiences, motivations, and challenges encountered by women engaged in agricultural work. This qualitative dimension complemented the quantitative findings, enriching the understanding of the research objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Wages, Payment Schedule and Availability of Work

Table 1 shows the amount of wages per day in rupees and the corresponding number of respondents and their percentages. The majority of respondents (47.54%) earned less than 150 rupees per day. This indicates a significant proportion of agricultural workers who are earning wages below the poverty line, highlighting the issue of low wages and its impact on their livelihoods. Around 33.23% of respondents reported earning wages between 150 and 200 rupees per day. This wage range also falls within the low-income category, indicating a substantial number of agricultural workers struggling to meet their basic needs. A smaller percentage of respondents, 16.34%, reported earning wages between 200 and 300 rupees per day. While this range represents a slightly higher income level compared to the previous categories, it still reflects the prevalence of relatively low wages among agricultural workers.

Only a small proportion of respondents earned higher wages. Approximately 2.02% reported earning wages between 300 and 500 rupees per day, while a mere 0.87% earned more than 500 rupees per day. This result highlights the pressing need for establishing fair wage policies that consider the cost of living and ensure their effective implementation. It emphasizes the need for promoting diversification of agricultural activities to provide alternative income sources, as well as targeted up skilling and training programmes to enhance the employability of agricultural workers and enable access to higher-paying jobs within the sector. To further ensure that workers receive a fair remuneration for their work, it is essential to improve the procedures for enforcing labor laws and to educate workers about their rights and entitlements in this regard.

Table 1: Wages, Payment Schedule and Availability of Work among the Respondents (N=5044)

Sl.No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
1	Wages per day (in rupees)	<150	2398	47.54
		150-200	1676	33.23
		200-300	824	16.34
		300-500	102	2.02
		>500	44	0.87
2	Payment schedule	As and when needed	53	1.05
		Bi - monthly	46	0.91
		Monthly	158	3.13
		Bi - weekly	296	5.87
		Weekly	865	17.15
		Daily	2805	55.61
		Seasonal	821	16.28
3	Availability of daily work	Yes	981	19.45
		No	4063	80.55
4	Working days in a month	1 to 9	666	13.20
		10 to 15	3038	60.23
		16 to 20	796	15.78
		21 to 25	310	6.15
		26 above	234	4.64

Analysis of payment schedules of respondents using descriptive statistics (Table 1) indicated that the most common payment schedule is on a daily basis with 55.61%. This indicates that a majority of agricultural workers are paid for their work each day. Weekly payment schedules are also prevalent with 17.15%. This indicates that a significant number of agricultural workers receive their wages once a week. Around 16.28% of respondents reported receiving wages on a seasonal basis. Seasonal payments are commonly observed in certain agricultural activities where work is concentrated during specific seasons or crop cycles. However, this payment schedule can pose challenges in terms of financial stability and budgeting for agricultural

workers during non-working seasons. Other payment schedules, such as bi-weekly (5.87%), monthly (3.13%), bi-monthly (0.91%) and as and when needed (1.05%), are not common. This underscores the significance of transparent and regular payment systems for providing financial stability to women agricultural workers. Ghosh (2017) highlighted the crucial role of regular payment schedules in improving the financial stability of rural labourers. It emphasizes the need for collaboration between government agencies, agricultural employers and relevant stakeholders to establish and enforce fair payment practices, ensuring that workers receive their wages promptly and without any undue delays. It is also crucial to raise awareness among agricultural

workers about their rights and entitlements regarding wages and payment schedules.

Table 1 also lists the number of respondents and the corresponding percentages based on whether they have access to regular employment. A significant majority of the respondents (80.55%) reported that they do not have access to daily work. This indicates that a large proportion of agricultural workers experience fluctuations or irregularity in their work opportunities daily. Similar to this, Dhillon (2018) underscored the significance of consistent employment opportunities for ensuring sustainable livelihoods. This calls for policies and interventions that focus on improving the availability of daily work for agricultural workers. This can be achieved through promoting agricultural diversification, enhancing irrigation infrastructure, supporting skill development and training, fostering rural entrepreneurship, strengthening rural infrastructure, facilitating access to credit and promoting sustainable agriculture practices. These steps can help agricultural workers become less reliant on seasonal jobs and offer them more stable employment options. The comparison of how many days they each work in a month is also shown in Table 1. A majority of respondents, accounting for 60.23%, reported working between 10 to 15 days in a month. This suggests that a significant proportion of

agricultural workers have a moderate level of work engagement, with consistent employment for approximately half of the month. A considerable number of respondents (15.78%) reported working between 16 to 20 days in a month. This indicates that a subset of agricultural workers has slightly higher work engagement, potentially leading to improved income stability and livelihoods compared to those with fewer workdays. About 13.20% of the respondents reported working between 1 to 9 days in a month, which indicates a relatively lower level of work engagement. Additionally, 6.15% of the respondents reported working between 21 to 25 days whereas 4.64% reported working 26 days or more in a month. Taking steps like agricultural diversification, bolstering value chains, improving skills and knowledge, promoting agro-processing industries, encouraging entrepreneurship, and putting social protection measures into place can help create stable and long-lasting employment opportunities all year long. This improves the income security of farm laborers and also improves their general wellbeing.

Types of Work done by Women Agricultural Workers

Further analysis was done on types of work and the descriptive statistics for the same has been presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Work Done by the Respondents

Sl.No.	Type of work	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sowing	2500	49.56
2	Transplanting	3242	64.27
3	Weeding	3121	61.88
4	Irrigation	1834	36.36
5	Fertilizer application	987	19.57
6	Plant protection	2431	48.20
7	Harvesting	3524	69.87

Sl.No.	Type of work	Frequency	Percentage
8	Winnowing	2693	53.39
9	Storing	2153	42.68
10	Horticulture	2735	54.22
11	Post-harvest operation	1274	25.26
12	Livestock	1235	24.48

The highest percentage reported for a type of work is harvesting, with 69.87% of respondents involved in this activity. With 64.27% of respondents working in this occupation, transplanting is the second most common form of labour. Another common sort of activity is weeding, which was reported by 61.88% of respondents. Additionally, activities such as marketing (54.22%), winnowing (53.39%), sowing (49.56%), plant protection (48.20%), storing (42.68%), irrigation (36.36%), livestock management (24.48%) and fertilizer application (19.57%) are cited by significant proportions of respondents. The data also indicates the involvement of agricultural workers in post-harvest operations (25.26%), such as cleaning, sorting and packaging of harvested produce. The findings suggest the need for various measures to address the challenges associated with different types of work performed by agricultural workers. These measures include skill development programmes, access to technology and tools, support for value addition and mechanization, fair wages and payment practices, support for horticulture and livestock activities, improvement in infrastructure and facilities and creating an enabling environment for the growth, productivity and overall well-being of agricultural workers.

Work Satisfaction among Women Agricultural Workers

Assessment of the work satisfaction of respondents using descriptive statistics indicated the results, which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Level of Work Satisfaction Among the Respondents (N=5044)

Work satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	2637	52.28
Not satisfied	2407	47.72
Total	5044	100.00

Nearly half (52.28%) of the agricultural workers said they were happy with their jobs, while the remaining (47.72%) said they were not, showing that there is still space for improvement in addressing the variables that influence agricultural workers' job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is crucial for the overall well-being and motivation of rural agricultural workers. A study by the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) found that 68% of agricultural workers express dissatisfaction with their wages and working conditions (CSA, 2020).

Reasons for Non-Satisfaction among Women Agricultural Workers

Table 4 shows the reasons for non-satisfaction among the respondents.

Table 4: Reasons for Non-Satisfaction Among the Respondents (N=5044)

Sl. No.	Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
1	Wage discrimination	486	9.64
2	Male dominated	91	1.80
3	Low wages	1687	33.45
4	Hard work	1215	24.09
5	No transport facility	167	3.31
6	Low quality food	154	3.05
7	Rash behaviour of the landlords	18	0.36
8	Extended working hours	290	5.75
	Total	5044	100.00

The most prevalent reason for non-satisfaction was 'low wages', with 33.45% of respondents citing this as a key factor. Insufficient wages can significantly impact the livelihoods of agricultural workers, making it difficult for them to meet their basic needs and aspirations. Hard work is another significant factor contributing to non-satisfaction, as reported by 24.09% of respondents. Agricultural labour is physically demanding, involving long hours of strenuous work under challenging conditions. The physical strain and fatigue can negatively affect the overall job satisfaction of workers. Other notable reasons for non-satisfaction include overworking hours (5.75%), wage discrimination (9.64%), lack of transport facility (3.31%), low-quality food (3.05%) and the rash behaviour of landlords (0.36%). These factors highlight additional challenges faced by women agricultural workers, including gender-based discrimination, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to

nutritious food and poor treatment by landlords or employers. Tables 3 and 4 highlight the importance of ensuring fair and adequate wages, providing reasonable working hours, improving working conditions and ensuring access to essential resources. Implementing anti-discrimination policies, enhancing transportation facilities and promoting a supportive and respectful work environment are also vital steps. Establishment and enforcement of fair wage policies, implementation of transparent payment systems, improvement in working conditions, and provision of access to clean and safe restroom facilities is crucial for the well-being and rights of women agricultural workers to improve their job satisfaction.

Reasons for Becoming Agricultural Workers

Table 5 shows the reasons mentioned by the respondents for becoming agricultural workers.

Table 5: Reasons for Becoming Agricultural Workers

Sl.No.	Reason	Frequency	Percentage
1	To fulfil the basic family needs	1931	38.28
2	Absence of male earning members	218	4.32
3	Low family income	2405	47.68
4	To meet personal needs	310	6.15
5	To meet additional family requirement	198	3.93
6	Poverty	1010	20.02

Among the respondents, the most prevalent reason for becoming an agricultural worker is to fulfil the basic family needs, with 38.28% citing this as their primary motivation. This indicates that many individuals turn to agriculture as a means to provide for their families' fundamental necessities, such as food, shelter and clothing. Another notable reason reported by 47.68% of respondents is a low family income. Agriculture often serves as a source of livelihood for families facing economic challenges, where alternative employment opportunities may be limited. For such households, engaging in agricultural work becomes a means to supplement their income and improve their financial situation. About 4.32% of respondents said they became agricultural workers because there were no male earning family members. This shows that people, especially women, turn to agricultural work to sustain their families in households where male members are unable to provide financially. A smaller percentage of respondents

(6.15%) reported becoming agricultural workers to meet personal needs, while 3.93% stated that their motivation was to meet additional family requirements. These factors may include a person's aspirations, objectives, or the necessity of supporting their extended family. The data also reveals that 20.02% of respondents mentioned poverty as a reason for entering agricultural labour. This highlights the prevalence of poverty as a driving force for individuals to engage in agricultural work, as it offers a means to escape extreme deprivation and improve their living conditions. The findings underscore the importance of targeted measures to address poverty, enhance income opportunities, alternative sources of livelihood, a conducive environment for agriculture, skill development, enhancing income-generating activities to reduce dependence on agricultural labour as the sole means of sustenance to provide them with greater opportunities for socio-economic growth and well-being.

Problems Faced by Women Agricultural Workers

Table 6 shows the problems faced by agricultural workers.

Table 6: Problems Faced by Women Agricultural Workers

Sl.No.	Problems	Frequency	Percentage
1	Wage discrimination	666	13.20
2	Shortage of wages	1001	19.85
3	Uneducated	381	7.55

Sl.No.	Problems	Frequency	Percentage
4	Traditional bounded	52	1.03
5	Hard work	1734	34.38
6	Dual responsibility	143	2.84
7	Unpaid work	65	1.29
8	No transport facility	221	4.38
9	Drinking habits of husband	144	2.85
10	Low standard of living	160	3.17
11	Rash behaviour of landlords	7	0.14
12	Lack of time	191	3.79
13	Neglect from policy makers	17	0.34
14	Husband does not work properly	85	1.69
15	Absence of decision making	40	0.79
16	Inequality in decision making	36	0.71

The most common problem reported by the respondents was "hard work," with 1,734 (34.38%) of the total. This indicates that a significant portion of the agricultural workers feel burdened by the physical demands of their job. The second most prevalent problem is "shortage of wages," reported by 19.85% of the total. This suggests that a substantial number of agricultural workers face financial difficulties due to inadequate payment for their work. Another problem identified is wage discrimination, with 13.20%. Other challenges reported include uneducated workers (7.55%), traditional bondage (1.03%), and unpaid work (1.29%), lack of transport facility (4.38%), low standard of living (3.17%), and inequality in decision-making (0.71%) among others. It emphasizes the necessity of establishing and enforcing fair wage policies, implementing transparent payment systems, investing in education and skill development programmes, improving working conditions, upgrading transportation infrastructure, strengthen labour rights enforcement mechanisms, promoting gender

equality, and fostering partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society to address the challenges faced by rural agricultural workers.

CONCLUSION

Challenges faced by women agricultural workers require a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach. To achieve this, key areas of focus should include establishing fair wage policies, implementing transparent payment systems, promoting agricultural diversification, providing skill development and training opportunities, improving working conditions, enhancing transportation infrastructure, and strengthening labour rights enforcement. Besides these, measures such as poverty alleviation, promoting alternative sources of livelihood and creating an enabling environment for socio-economic growth are crucial. It is crucial to address particular problems including gender disparity, excessive working hours, lack of education, salary discrimination, and the supply of basic needs. For the successful implementation,

convergence among government organizations and all other stakeholders is crucial. The general welfare of agricultural workers can be ensured by addressing these issues. By tailoring the recommendations based on the findings of the study, to the specific context of Puducherry, the welfare and empowerment of women agricultural workers can be significantly improved, contributing to their economic well-being and overall quality of life.

REFERENCES

- Bhide, S. (2020). Job satisfaction and agricultural labourers in India: Evidence from a large-scale survey. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(24), 61-68.
- Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA). (2020). *Study on agricultural workers' wages and working conditions*.
- Dev, S. M. (2019). Changing structure of rural economy and rural labour markets. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(36), 41-48.
- Deshpande, R. (2016). Wages and earnings in Indian agriculture: Evidence, patterns, and policies. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(50), 91-99.
- Dhillon, H. S. (2018). Unemployment and underemployment in rural India. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 61(4), 713-728.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2019). *Women in agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development*. Rome: FAO.
- Ghosh, J. (2017). Payment schedules, working capital constraints, and wage arrears: A study of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 60(2), 219-243.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). *Agriculture at a glance*. Geneva: ILO.
- Juneja, N. (2023). Challenges faced by female agricultural workers in rural India: A gender perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 84, 167-176.
- National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). (2018). *Employment and unemployment situation in India, July 2017-June 2018*. Report No. 549(75/10/1). New Delhi: NSSO.