

THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN DAIRY RELATED DECISION MAKING: A VILLAGE LEVEL STUDY

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Dairying has been accepted as an important subsidiary occupation by the farmers of Kerala. The State Government has been implementing various dairy development programmes since the 1960s and these programmes could make significant changes in milk production and per capita availability of milk.

This situation prompts one to think about other possible reasons for the low performance of the dairy sector in the state. Here emerges the importance of womens' involvement and their role in decision making in dairying. While it is evident that women perform most of the dairy related tasks, there is less clarity regarding their role in making appropriate decisions on various aspects of scientific dairying. Under these circumstances a study was conducted to examine the role of men and women in various household dairying related decisions.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in a village in central Kerala. Hundred members of the village milk co-operative society were selected at random from among the 200 effective members at the time of the study. The households of the selected members formed the units of the study and the member and spouse formed the respondents. Therefore, there were in all 200 respondents for the study. Six major aspects in dairy husbandry were selected based on the Package of Practices recommended by the Kerala Agricultural University. The selected aspects included selection of dairy animals, housing of dairy animals, feeding, milking, breeding and treatment.

The data were collected in pre-tested, structured interview schedules. Respondents were individually asked who made decisions regarding various

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household dairying related practices. They were given scores in the order of four, three and two for 'always', 'often' and 'sometimes' respectively and a score of one for non-involvement. A respondent's total score was calculated by adding up the scores obtained for all these six selected aspects. The respondents were categorised as high, medium and low based on mean and standard deviation of the scores of their involvement in decision making. A t-test was applied to find out the difference, if any, between the husband and wife in their role in decision making in each of these aspects as well as in general.

Results and Discussion

The distribution of respondents

based on their extent of involvement in decision making is given in Table 1. Eighteen and 14 per cent of husbands and wives respectively had high involvement in dairy related decisions in the households, whereas 21 and 32 per cent of husbands and wives respectively had only low involvement. It was evident that in the case of high involvement category in decision making, the percentage of wives was low in comparison to that of men, whereas in the case of low involvement category the percentage of wives was high in relation to that of men. This clearly indicates the low level of involvement of women in dairy related decisions in general.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on their extent of involvement in decision making

Category	Frequency (H)	Percentage (H)	Frequency (W)	Percentage (W)
High: H-21 and above W-14 and above	18	18	14	14
Medium H-11 to 20 W - 7 to 13	61	61	54	54
Low H - up to 10 W - up to 6	21	21	32	32

H - Husbands SD (Husbands) - 4.8

W - Wives SD (Wives) - 3.6

Mean (Husbands) - 15.03

Mean (Wives) - 9.6

Table 2. Involvement of husbands and wives in decision making in various aspects of dairying

Aspects	Mean (H)	SE (H)	Mean (W)	SE (W)	t-value in absolute terms
Selection	3.70	0.09	1.2	0.05	23.0349**
Housing	2.50	0.15	1.2	0.05	7.8741**
Feeding	2.04	0.13	2.4	0.15	1.8947 NS
Milking	1.80	0.13	2.2	0.14	1.9636 NS
Breeding	2.70	0.15	1.3	0.08	8.2085**
Treatment	2.40	0.15	1.5	0.10	5.1248**
Total	15.03	0.48	9.6	0.36	9.0488**

** Significant at 1 per cent level

NS - Non-significant

Table 2 reveals the results of t-test applied on the extent of involvement of husbands and wives in decision-making in various aspects of dairying. It might be seen that women had role in decision making on all aspects in dairying. In the case of selection and housing of dairy animals, husbands in the households took majority of the decisions. The same pattern existed in the aspects of breeding and treatment of dairy animals. Sadhu and Renuka (1982) had reported that women had a significant role in decision making regarding sale and purchase of animals. The results of the present study did not agree with this. Similarly, Nagpal (1989) had noted the important role played by

women in selection and purchase of cattle during cattle fairs. However, the findings of the present study did not agree with this. This might be because in the study area, cattle fairs were rare and it was the men who went to distant places to purchase cattle. The significantly higher involvement of husbands in decision making related to the housing of animals might be because the construction of shed involved money which was often under mens' control. It might be noted that as in the case of selection of dairy animals, most of the activities under the aspects of breeding and treatment were performed outside the household and as such men performed most of these works. Naturally, most of the

decisions in these aspects were made by the men themselves. However, it has to be noted that though these were vital aspects in dairying and these were not performed on a daily basis. On the other hand, in the case of feeding and milking which were done mostly by women as they formed part of the household chores, though wives had a higher mean score than their husbands, the difference was not statistically significant. These activities, however were performed on all days.

The most important of all six aspects affecting the milk production is feeding. The limited availability of land had compelled many farmers to depend upon the costly commercial cattle feed. Since it involved money and was to be purchased from outside markets, the decisions regarding the quality and quantity of feed to be purchased and the quantity to be fed were likely to be taken by men in the households. However, George and Nair (1990) have reported that in making decisions on feeding animals the housewife had a better role to play as in 45 per cent of the households studied, feeding decisions were taken by the housewife and in another 17 per cent the housewife was involved in the decision making process. This finding is only in partial agreement with that of the present study. When all the

selected aspects were considered together husbands had significantly higher role in decision making in dairy related aspects. The study findings disagree with that of Badiger (1979) which stated that women had a significant role in decision making in animal management. The present findings reveal that in many aspects of dairying women merely perform the physical tasks without a corresponding involvement in the vital decision making component.

Summary

A study was conducted in 100 dairying households to assess the extent of involvement of men and women in various dairy related decision making in a village in Kerala. It was revealed that in the case of selection, housing, breeding and treatment men had significantly higher involvement in decision making. In aspects such as feeding and milking, though women had higher involvement, the difference was not statistically significant. Since women perform most of the physical works in dairying, their inability to take part in decision making in the vital aspects of dairying might be one factor responsible for the low productivity of the dairy sector in the State.

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