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Research Article



TOWARDS GENDER INCLUSIVE AGRICULTURE: STRENGTHENING NUTRITION LITERACY IN FARMING COMMUNITY THROUGH POLICY INNOVATIONS IN INDIA

¹Shrutiba Zala, ²,*Hemlata Saini, ¹Namitha Rajendran, ¹Radadiya Prins N

¹Master Student, B. A. College of Agriculture, Anand Agricultural University, India. ²Assistant Professor, B. A. College of Agriculture, Anand Agricultural University, India.

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ABSTRACT

Nutritional security is inevitable for the healthy and disease-free population. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 5 (2019 to 2021), India suffers from double burden of malnutrition. Child malnutrition is reported as 36.00 per cent of the children under 5 are stunted, 19.00 per cent are wasted, 32.00 per cent are underweight, 03.00 per cent are overweight and 67.00 per cent suffers from anaemia. Among adults, 16.00 per cent males and 19.00 per cent females suffer from under-nutrition, 23.00 per cent males and 24.00 per cent females suffer from over-nutrition and 25.00 per cent males and 67.00 per cent females suffer from over-nutrition Mission, Integrated Child Development Services Scheme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme and various state government programmes. The current study reflects the status of nutrition literacy comprising nutritional knowledge, attitude towards nutrition and practices followed to meet nutritional requirements by the male and female farmers. The findings conclude that there was difference between the nutritional knowledge, attitude and practices followed by both genders and calls for attention to address these differences through targeted policy innovations. This paper suggest policy innovations aimed at enhancing nutrition literacy through gender-inclusive agricultural extension and rural development programs. It explores strategies such as integrating nutrition education into agricultural advisory services, promoting gender inclusive approaches and leveraging digital tools for targeted outreach.

Keywords: Nutritional security, Malnutrition, Gender inclusive, Policy innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition has a significant impact on the human capital as it enhances the physical and cognitive development of an individual. India is the fifth largest economy in the world and also the top producer of milk, millets, second largest producer of the cereals. India suffers from double burden of malnutrition. Child malnutrition is reported as 36.00 per cent of the children under 5 are stunted, 19.00 per cent are wasted, 32.00 per cent are underweight, 03.00 per cent are overweight and 67.00 per cent suffers from anaemia. Among adults, 16.00 per cent males and 19.00 per cent females suffer from undernutrition, 23.00 per cent males and 24.00 per cent females suffer from over-nutrition and 25.00 per cent males and 67.00 per cent females suffer from anaemia (National Family Health Survey (NFHS) -5,2019). This introduction sets the stage for exploring the significance of gender inclusive approaches in promoting nutrition literacy within farming communities. A gender inclusive approach to nutrition literacy acknowledges and addresses these disparities, recognizing the diverse roles, knowledge, and experiences of men and women in farming communities. It involves empowering women by enhancing their access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making power, while also engaging men as partners in promoting equitable nutrition outcomes. Furthermore, such an approach goes beyond binary notions of gender, recognizing the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups such as indigenous communities, and people with disabilities. By fostering inclusivity and diversity, nutrition literacy initiatives can better reflect the realities and needs of all community members.

*Corresponding Author: Hemlata Saini,

Although many studies have been conducted on nutritional knowledge, attitude and practice among rural and urban women, adolescent girls in rural and urban areas, gender neutral studies are limited in number in the field of agriculture. Therefore, the study titled as "Towards Gender Inclusive Agriculture: Strengthening Nutrition Literacy in Farming Community through Policy innovations in India" was conducted to explore the role and contribution of both male and female farmers towards the nutritional literacy (knowledge, attitude and practice regarding nutrition) and understand the actual situation on the ground. The study was to enable the understanding of the knowledge possessed by the farming community regarding nutrition, their attitude towards the nutrition, the practices they follow to get the required nutrition and the constraints faced by the farming community in meeting their nutritional requirements. It was also to enable the sensitization of male farmers towards the nutrition and involve them in household decisions regarding nutritional aspect.

The above provided data from NFHS-5 (2019-2020) presents the nutritional outcomes among both males and females. The plethora of initiatives by the Government of India and various states government are launched to address the malnutrition. Initiatives like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, Pradhan Mantri – Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN) Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) have given an impactful result and transformed India's nutritional security for children, adolescent girls, lactating and pregnant mothers. The recent Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) strategy aims to reduce prevalence of anaemia in children, adolescents, and women in life cycle approach.

There is a need to address the root cause of the problem. Only when the people are aware about the solutions, they can tackle the problem. The scope of the study is to understand the dire essentiality of creating awareness about nutritional security and nutrition related disorders among the rural population so that they can take care of

² Assistant Professor, B. A. College of Agriculture, Anand Agricultural University, India.

their nutrition intake and India can combat the problem of double burden of malnutrition. Both the men and women should be inclusively made a part of the nutritional awareness campaigns, knowledge enhancing training modules, nutritional camps and programmes like Millet Mahotsava, Millet fairs and exhibitions. The rural population, inclusively of both male and female is to be made aware of nutrition related disorders like obesity, diseases like anaemia, osteomalacia and micronutrient deficiency. Along with direct disorders, poor nutrition also leads to weak immune system leading to increased risk of diseases like cancer, tuberculosis, Type-II diabetes and other chronic health problems. Therefore, the paper also suggests policy innovations aimed at enhancing nutrition literacy through gender-inclusive agricultural extension and rural development programs. It explores strategies such as integrating nutrition education into agricultural advisory services, promoting gender inclusive approaches and leveraging digital tools for targeted outreach. By addressing gender differences in knowledge, access, and decision-making, these policies can enhance nutrition literacy, improve household food security and foster a more inclusive agricultural system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1. To study the profile of the farmers
- 2. To assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of the farmers towards nutrition
- 3. To ascertain the relationship between the profile of the farmers and their knowledge, attitude and practice towards nutrition
- 4. To study the constraints faced by the farmers in meeting their nutritional requirements
- 5. To provide policy innovations to bridge the gender differences and enhance the nutrition literacy among the farming community

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in the Anand district of the Gujarat state in the year 2024. Out of 8 taluk as in the district, Anand taluka was selected for the study and five villages were randomly selected for the sampling. Sample comprised of the 50 male and 50 female farmers from the villages, making it the total sample size of 100. Ex-Post Facto research design was used in the present study (Kerlinger, 1976). The data were collected using pre-tested Gujarati interview schedule and investigator personally contacted all the respondents.

The profile of the male and female farmers was assessed. Age, education, family size, children below five years, annual family income, possession of milch animals, family land holding, social media exposure, training received and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme were used as independent variables in the study. The data of the profile of the farmers were gathered, processed and analysed to draw a meaningful conclusion. The statistical tools used for the analysis of the data were percentage, mean and correlation coefficient.

The nutrition literacy was taken as a dependent variable. It comprised of three components that is nutritional knowledge of the farming community, attitude of the farmers towards nutrition and the practices followed by them to meet their nutritional requirements. To assess the nutritional knowledge of the farmers, a structured schedule comprising 20 statements was prepared by the researcher. The correct answer to a question was given score of 1 and for wrong answer the score of 0. The scores of all the 20 questions were summed up and total score of each respondent was measured. The minimum and maximum score one could get was 0 and 20, respectively. Based on the scores obtained, the farmers were categorized into five categories. The attitude of the farmers towards nutrition was measured using a scale developed by Geetha et al., (2022) with due modifications. In this total 20 statements were kept to elicit the attitude of the farmers towards nutrition with five-point continuum of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree carrying the scores of five (5), four (4), three (3), two (2) and one (1), respectively and the reverse scoring for negative statements. The minimum and maximum score one could get was 20 and 100, respectively. Based on the scores obtained, the farmers were categorized into unfavourable, favourable and highly favourable categories. The practice component comprised of 20 statements and each statement was measured using yes or no. Score of 1 was given to the response of yes and score of 0 to the response of no. The minimum and maximum score one could get was 0 and 20, respectively. Based on the scores obtained, the farmers were categorized into poor, fair and good categories.

Pearson's co-efficient correlation was used to find out the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The constraints faced by the respondents in meeting their nutritional requirement were studied and effective policy measures are suggested to address the problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the farmers

It is observed from table 1 that more than two-fifths (46.00 per cent) male farmers and nearly two-thirds (64.00 per cent) of the female farmers belonged to young age group.

A little over two-fifths (44.00 percent) males and 46.00 per cent females had gained education up to secondary level. The findings are in line with Phukan and Bora (2023). More than half (60.00 per cent) males and half of (50.00 per cent) female farmers had medium family size. The findings are in line with Divya *et al.*, (2022)

More than half (60.00 per cent) male farmers and over two-fifths (44.00 per cent) of the female farmers had one child below five years of age. The findings are in line with Thaisha *et al.*,(2023)

Half (50.00 per cent) of the male farmers and majority (72.00 per cent) of the female farmers had marginal land size. The findings are in line with Geetha *et al.*,(2022).More than half (52.00 per cent) of the male farmers and more than four-fifths (84.00 per cent) of the female farmers had annual family income up to Rupees one lakh.

More than two-fifths (42.00 per cent) of the male farmers and more than half (56.00 per cent) of the female farmers had one milch animal in their household.

Majority (94.00 per cent) male farmers and slightly less than half (50.00 per cent) of the female farmers had low exposure to social media regarding nutrition related content. The findings are in line with Phukan and Bora (2023).

Majority (76.00 per cent) of the male farmers did not receive any training related to nutrition. The findings are in line with Rajesh and Vivekanandhan (2019). Comparatively, over two-fifths (42.00 per cent) of the female farmers had received two days training on nutrition from Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Anand under Nutri-Sensitive Agricultural Resources and Innovations (NARI) initiative.

Nearly one-third (34.00 per cent) of the male farmers and less than one-third (33.00 per cent) of the female farmers were aware about

(n=100)

PM-POSHAN Scheme. The findings are in line with Jaydevi and Moorthy (2023)

Table 1: Profile of the male and female farmers

Sr.	Profile of the	Categories	Male		Female	
No.	farmers		f	%	f	%
1	Age	Young age group	23	46.00	32	64.00
	C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C	(Upto 35 years) Middle age group	17	34.00	15	30.00
		(36 to 50 years) Old age group (above 50 years)	10	20.00	3	06.00
2	Education	Illiterate	0	00.00	1	02.00
		Primary (1 st to 8 th standard)	8	16.00	21	42.00
		Secondary (9th	22	44.00	23	46.00
		Higher secondary (11 th and 12 th	16	32.00	5	10.00
		standard) Graduation & above	4	08.00	0	00.00
3	Family size	Small (Up to 4	16	32.00	9	18.00
		members) Medium (5 to 8	30	60.00	25	50.00
		Large (Above 8 members)	4	08.00	16	32.00
4	Children below five vears	No children below five years	14	28.00	15	30.00
	,	One child	30	60.00	22	44.00
		Two children	6	12.00	13	26.00
5	Family land	Landless	0	00.00	0	00.00
	holding	Marginal (Up to 1.00 ha)	25	50.00	36	72.00
		Small (1.01 to	15	30.00	14	28.00
		2.00 na) Medium (2.01 to 4.00 ha)	8	16.00	0	00.00
		Large (Above 4.00 ha)	2	04.00	0	00.00
6	Annual family income	Up to 1,00,000	26	52.00	42	84.00
		□ 1,00,001 to □ 2,00,000	11	22.00	7	14.00
		2,00,001 to 3,00,000	9	18.00	1	02.00
		3,00,001 to 1 4,00,000	2	04.00	0	00.00
7	Possession of milch	No milch animal	2 15	04.00 30.00	U 10	20.00
'	animals		10	30.00	10	20.00
		one milch animal	23 12	46.00 24.00	28 0	56.00 18.00
		animals More than two	0	00.00	3	06.00
0	Social modia		47	04.00	10	10.00
0	exposure regarding	Low (Up to 3) Modium (4 to 6)	41 3	94.00	42 8	40.00
	nutrition related	High (above 6)	0	00.00	0	00.00
9	content Training received for	No training	38	76.00	11	22.00
-	nutrition	received	10	2/ 00	10	36.00
			۱2 م	24.00 00.00	10 01	10.00
10	Awareness about	Yes	0 17	34.00	21 16	42.00 32.00
	Scheme	No	33	66.00	34	68.00

Nutritional literacy among the farmers: Nutritional Knowledge, Attitude towards nutrition and Practices followed to meet their nutritional requirements.

Nutritional knowledge of the farmers

Table 2 reveals that more than half (56.00 per cent) of the male farmers had low level of nutritional knowledge, followed by 40.00 per cent and 04.00 per cent with medium and high level nutritional knowledge. Comparatively, more than half (56.00 per cent) of the female farmers had medium level nutritional knowledge, followed by 34.00 per cent and 10.00 per cent with low and high level nutritional knowledge. The findings are in line with Soni and Verma (2019).

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to their nutritional knowledge

					(n=100)
Sr. No.	Categories	Male	e (n=50)	Female (n=50)	
		f	%	f	%
1	Very low (0 to 3)	0	00.00	0	00.00
2	Low (4 to 8)	28	56.00	17	34.00
3	Medium (9 to 12)	20	40.00	28	56.00
4	High (13 to 16)	2	04.00	5	10.00
5	Very high (17 to 20)	0	00.00	0	00.00
Total		50	100.00	50	100.00

Attitude of the farmers towards nutrition

Table 3 reveals that more than half (52.00 per cent) of the male farmers had more favourable attitude towards nutrition, followed by 48.00 per cent with favourable attitude and none had less favourable attitude. Comparatively, little less than two-thirds (62.00 per cent) of the females had favourable attitude towards nutrition followed by 38.00 per cent with more favourable attitude and none had less favourable attitude. The findings are in line with Prasanthi and Sireesha (2022)

Table 3:Distribution of the respondents according to their attitude towards nutrition

					(n=100)	
Sr. No.	Categories	Male (n=50)		Fem	Female (n=50)	
		f	%	f	%	
1	Less favourable (up to 27)	0	00.00	0	00.00	
2	Favourable (28 to 54)	24	48.00	31	62.00	
3	More favourable (above 54)	26	52.00	19	38.00	
Total		50	100.00	50	100.00	

Practices followed by the farmers to meet their nutritional requirements

Table 4 reveals that among male farmers, more than four-fifths (84.00 per cent) of the respondents followed fair practices, followed by 16.00 per cent with poor practices and none with good practices to meet their nutritional requirements. Comparatively, majority (92.00 per cent) of the female farmers followed fair practices, followed by 06.00 per cent with good practice and 02.00 per cent with poor practices to meet their nutritional requirements. The findings are in line with Priyadarshini and Biswal (2023).

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents according to the practices followed by them to meet their nutritional requirements (n=100)

Sr. No.	Categories	Male (n=50)		Female (n=50)		
		f	%	f	%	
1	Poor (0 to 6)	8	16.00	1	02.00	
2	Fair (7 to 13)	42	84.00	46	92.00	
3	Good (14 to 20)	0	00.00	3	06.00	
Total		50	100.00	50	100.00	

Relationship between the profile of the farmers and their knowledge, attitude and practice towards nutrition

Relationship between profile and nutritional knowledge of male and female farmers

Table 5 reveals that in case of male farmers, variables like age, education, family size, children below five years, annual family income, possession of milch animals, training received for nutrition and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme are positively related to nutritional knowledge. This might be attributed to reasons like with increasing age, people become aware about what foods are good for health, education increases the ability to understand the nutritional quality of food, presence of children below five years makes them aware about nutritional food for them and their importance for health, increase in income will lead to more consumption of fruits, millets and dairy products. Milch animals are best source of milk and other dairy products for rural household leading to their daily consumption. Training on nutrition will enhance the farmers' ability to learn about nutritional foods, their importance leading to their increased consumption. Awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme leads to enhanced understanding of importance of millets, milk products for children, adolescents and women. However, family land holding and social media exposure are negatively related to the nutritional knowledge.

In case of female farmers, age, education, family size, children below five years, possession of milch animals, are positively related to nutritional knowledge. Annual family income is significantly related to the nutritional knowledge as increased income will lead women to spend more on nutritional foods and access to more information about nutritional foods. However, family land holding, social media exposure, training received for nutrition and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme are negatively related to the nutritional knowledge. This might be due to the low participation or passive participation of the women farmers in such initiatives.

Relationship between profile and attitude of male and female farmers towards nutrition

Table 5 reveals that in case of male farmers, age, education, family size, children below five years, possession of milch animals, training received for nutrition and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme are positively related, family land holding and social media exposure are significantly related and annual family income is negatively related to their attitude towards nutrition.

In case of female farmers, age, family size, children below five years, family land holding, possession of milch animals, social media exposure, training received for nutrition and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme are positively related, education is significantly related and annual family income is negatively related to their attitude towards nutrition.

Relationship between profile and practices followed by the male and female farmers to meet their nutritional requirements

Table 5 reveals that in case of male farmers, age, children below five years, family land holding, annual family income, social media exposure, training received for nutrition are positively related whereas education, family land holding and awareness about PM-POSHANScheme are negatively related to the practices followed by the them to meet their nutritional requirements.

In case of female farmers, age, children below five years, family land holding, annual family income, social media exposure and awareness about PM-POSHAN Scheme are positively related whereas education, family size, possession of milch animals and training received for nutrition are negatively related to the practices followed by the them to meet their nutritional requirements.

 Table 5: Correlation between the profile of the farmers and their knowledge, attitude and practice towards nutrition

Sr. No.	Variables	Knowledge		Attitude		Practice	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Age	0.088	0.201	0.056	0.176	0.104	0.064
2	Education	0.030	0.089	0.020	0.315*	- 0.035	-0.160
3	Family Size	0.074	0.088	0.189	0.274	0.038	-0.190
4	Children below five years	0.042	0.166	0.030	0.202	0.064	0.018
5	Family land holding	- 0.211	-0.062	0.303*	0.172	- 0.024	0.058
6	Annual family income	0.051	0.310*	-0.420	-0.206	0.120	0.205
7	Possession of milch animals	0.004	0.144	0.166	0.145	0.164	-0.023
8	Social media exposure	- 0.222	-0.128	0.319*	0.176	0.158	0.026
9	Training received for nutrition	0.146	-0.056	0.026	0.061	0.016	-0.034
10	Awareness about PM- POSHAN Scheme	0.004	-0.169	0.207	0.017	- 0.298	0.022

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Constraints faced by the farmers in meeting their nutritional requirements

On interaction with the respective respondents, it was found that male farmers faced various constraints like lack of exposure to awareness campaigns about various initiatives like PM-POSHAN Scheme. The study also confirms that majority of the male farmers were unaware about the scheme. A gender stereotype prevailed among male respondents that nutrition and food related information is useful to women and their patriarchal mindset needs to be changed. Also, the male respondents were least interested to go to *Anganwadi*is with their children to learn about the nutrition for healthy growth of the children. The responsibility was borne by the mothers of the children. Majority of the male respondents were not aware of the cause of fatal diseases like anaemia.

Comparatively, female respondents faced constraints like lack of decision making power regarding cooking food as it was mainly based on the preference of male members of the house, inadequate knowledge about nutritional qualities of different foods, passive participation in initiatives like PM-POSHAN Scheme and lack of

access to digital tools like mobile phones and internet to get information about nutrition-sensitive programmes by the central and state government.

It can be concluded that both the male and female farmers had different constraints but not independent of each other and therefore gender inclusive approaches and strategic interventions are required to address these constraints and strengthen nutrition literacy among the rural population.

GENDER INCLUSIVE POLICY INNOVATIONS TO STRENGTHEN NUTRITION LITERACY IN FARMING COMMUNITY

Current Status of Nutrition Outcomes in India

Nutritional security is inevitable for the healthy and disease-free population. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 5 (2019 to 2021), India suffers from double burden of malnutrition. Child malnutrition is reported as 36.00 per cent of the children under 5 are stunted, 19.00 per cent are wasted, 32.00 per cent are underweight, 03.00 per cent are overweight and 67.00 per cent suffers from anaemia. Among adults, 16.00 per cent males and 19.00 per cent females suffer from under-nutrition, 23.00 per cent males and 24.00 per cent females suffer from over-nutrition and 25.00 per cent males and 67.00 per cent females suffer from anaemia.

Prioritizing Policy Innovations in light of the current status

The constraints faced by the rural population in achieving nutrition literacy are to be addressed through targeted policy interventions. Therefore, the following points describe the applicable components to be included while formulating such a gender-inclusive policy to strengthen nutrition literacy in the rural population.

Components of the policy:

Knowledge enhancement and capacity building

- Establish social institutions for training rural population about nutritional foods like millets and include both men and women in these programmes
- Organize regular health camps in villages for providing information about nutrition-related disorders and diseases like anaemia
- Collaboration of health department persons and extension officials to cover a larger target area
- Design programs like training on kitchen gardening for both men and women
- Set up Nutri-smart villages
- Build digitals tools like nutrition related information providing application, social media interventions like WhatsApp groups where healthcare staff and government officials upload information regarding nutrition.

Promote nutri-sensitive agriculture among the farmers

- Promote farmers to grow highly nutritional crops like millets, adopt organic farming practices
- Knowledge building about bio-fortified varieties and encourage their cultivation

Involve participation of civil society organizations

- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can help to reach the wider target area and influence the rural population to adopt nutritional practices.
- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) should be encouraged to take up millet-based entrepreneurship to supply more nutritional foods into the market
- Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs) should be trained by SHGs or private players like food processing companies to take up valueadded enterprises to produce nutritional foods

Targeted programmes in village schools and community led programmes

- Create awareness among the children from school stage itself about nutritional food intake
- Prepare school kitchen gardens with high nutritional value vegetables like carrot, cabbage, spinach and coriander
- Organize millet fairs and exhibitions, organic food exhibitions to promote their marketing and encourage farmers to grow nutritional crops and vegetables.

The success of any policy and program depends on its successful implementation. Therefore, effective implementation with regular monitoring is essential for the positive transformation on the grass root level.

CONCLUSION

The study is concluded with the findings that majority of the male respondents had low nutritional knowledge whereas females had medium nutritional knowledge. Male and female farmers had more favourable and favourable attitude towards nutrition. Overall, male and female farmers followed fair practices to meet their nutritional requirements.

Therefore, it is suggested that more gender inclusive approaches and strategic interventions like nutri-gardens, awareness campaigns about nutrition related diseases disorders, digital tools to combat the prevalence of lack of information and various community led programmes are required to address the constraints mentioned in the study, which are faced by the male and female farmers and strengthen the nutrition literacy at the grass-root level in the rural population and especially in the farming community.

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