

Rural Non-Farm Sector (RNFS) In Punjab: A Path for Women to Achieve Self-Reliance?

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Abstract

The stagnancy of growth in the agricultural sector in Punjab has led to a shift in the workforce from traditional agriculture to the non-farm sector. In order to ensure that an inclusive growth takes place in this upcoming sector, the marginalized section of rural women should also be actively included in it. The women of rural areas face a lot of cultural barriers when it comes to work. Rural women are not allowed to go outside the village and some are not even allowed to leave the house for working. In order to make such women self-reliant and to empower them to the extent that they are able to participate in decision making actively, quality employment must be generated in this sector.

RNFS in Punjab has been seeing a growth in the employment of women. These women are engaged either in the secondary or the service sector. The given paper studies the quality of employment which is being generated for Punjabi women in RNFS using the primary data of five hundred women. It also lays down the prospects this sector offers to women in order to achieve the goal of self-reliance. The policy suggestions for further ensuring provision of good quality jobs to women in RNFS have also been proposed.

Keywords: Self-reliance, non-farm employment, female empowerment

1. Introduction

Studies which have been previously conducted on the rural non-farm sector of Punjab stress that the development of this sector is the key to save the state from the dearth of increased rural unemployment. The excessive levels of unemployment are a result of the reduced labour absorption capacity of the agriculture sector. The push from the agricultural sector is leading to the shift of people to the non-farm sector (Ghuman, 2005; Anupama et al., 2018).

Even though many of studies in context of Punjab have elaborated on the extent of female employment in RNFS but unfortunately they have failed to dig into the dynamics of female employment in this sector. They do not provide an insight into the quality of employment in the RNFS being created for women. They do not give a picture if the sector is growing in a direction which would help women of Punjab achieve the goal of self-reliance and help empower them. An inclusive growth in this sector can only be achieved if women are engaged actively in quality jobs in this sector.

Researchers agree that when it comes to gender-based participation in the RNFS, it was higher for males than females. Ghuman (2005) and IAMR (2013) show merely 2 percent involvement of rural females in the NFS in the state and that 97.3 per cent of the rural females of the state are limited to doing household work only. Nevertheless the proportion of female workers from total workers involved in the non-farm workforce was higher in comparison to the respective proportion in case of men (Ghuman, 2005). Vatta

and Garg (2008) also had similar findings. This might indicate that females have an inclination towards doing non-farm work.

The services sector in comparison to the secondary sector provides more employment opportunities in RNFS in Punjab (IAMR, 2013; Anupama *et al.*, 2018). This is true especially in case of females. Higher proportion of males were engaged in construction activities, followed by services (Vatta and Garg (2008)). The nature of employment in the state is found to be favourable for self-employed workers, considered, (IAMR, 2013; Anupama *et al.*, 2018), followed by regularly employed and the least are casually employed. However this pattern of employment is not uniform across all the regions of Punjab.

2. Methodology

This study on tracing the quality of employment of women in the rural non-farm sector in Punjab is based on the primary survey of three random districts of the state. It is a cross-sectional analysis related to year 2021-22. The technique of multistage random sampling has been used for the collection of data.

The paper evaluates pattern of women employment in the rural non-farm sector of the state by using the primary data of 500 working women collected from three districts, namely Jalandhar, Mansa and Patiala. Amongst the selected districts, Patiala is a medium RNFE district whereas Jalandhar and Mansa are high and low RNFE districts respectively. The districts have been chosen this way, so as to capture the broad variation in the quality of employment for women which takes place as the employment in RNFS increases in a particular district.

Analytical tools:

Standard statistical tools like percentages, proportions and mean values have been used for the tabular analysis and support the findings.

3. Discussion and Result

The primary survey showed that the women in the RNFS are characterised to be working in low skilled and low income jobs. Table 1 confirms this assertion. It is observed that about 70, 75 and 60 per cent of women in Jalandhar, Patiala and Mansa i.e the high, medium and low RNFE districts respectively earn less than Rs. 10000 per month. Shockingly 10 percent of women in RNFS in Mansa are not even paid for the work they do. Such women were found to be working as a helper in household enterprise. On the contrary, fewer percentage of women in Jalandhar as compared to Mansa are unpaid workers. This can be due to the fact that a high RNFE district probably has more paid opportunities for the women relative to the low RNFE district. Very low percentage of women, i.e about 6, 5 and 8 per cent in Jalandhar, Patiala and Mansa respectively earn more than Rs.40000 in a month. Even though Jalandhar is a high RNFE district, the low rates of women being paid more than Rs. 40,000 can be attributed to the fact that there is a higher supply of workforce in Jalandhar, putting a downward pressure on the wages.

These results are an indicator of the fact that even though employment of women is increasing in RNFS but it is not enough to make women self-reliant and help empower them. Just like the women employed as unpaid family labour in the agricultural sector, the women in this upcoming sector are also treated as unpaid helper in family enterprises.

Table 1: Distribution of sampled worker in selected district by income of respondents

Income of the respondent (rupees)	Jalandhar		Patiala		Mansa	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Unpaid worker	5	2.63	15	7.50	11	10.00
Less than 5000	65	34.21	76	38.00	25	22.72
5000-10000	61	32.10	60	30.00	30	27.27
10000-15000	27	14.21	24	12.00	13	11.81
15000-20000	7	3.68	5	2.50	12	10.90
20000-25000	8	4.21	6	3.00	4	3.63
25000-30000	2	1.05	3	1.50	3	2.72
30000-35000	3	1.57	0	0	2	1.81
35000-40000	1	0.52	1	0.5	1	0.90
Above 40000	11	5.78	10	5.00	9	8.18

Source: Primary Survey 2020-21

Pattern of women employment in RNFS

Employment amongst respondents

Table 2: Sectoral distribution of sampled workers in RNFS

Sector of employment	Jalandhar		Patiala		Mansa	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Secondary	57	30.00	56	28.00	21	19.09
Tertiary	133	70.00	144	72.00	89	80.91

Source: Primary Survey 2020-21

The subsector which employs a higher percentage of the either genders in the non-farm sector indicates the quality of employment being offered. The employment levels of women in either the secondary or the tertiary sector is an indicator about the quality of the work they get. The secondary sector includes subsectors like manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying. The tertiary sector includes subsectors

like retail trade, education, public administration, transport, communication, restaurants and medical services. Previous studies indicate that in RNFS, the services sector is the largest employment provider (IAMR, 2013; Anupama et al., 2018) mainly for the females.

Table 2, gives results from the primary survey for the employment of the rural women in Punjab. It also indicates that the tertiary sector is the largest employer amongst rural females. This holds true for the High, medium and Low RNFS district as well. More than 70 per cent of females in Jalandhar, Mansa and Patiala are employed in the tertiary sector.

Table 3: Distribution of sampled worker in selected district by nature of employment

Nature of employment	Jalandhar		Patiala		Mansa	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Casual Labour	19	10.00	17	8.50	1	0.90
Regular Employed	98	51.57	92	46.00	48	43.63
Self Employed	73	38.42	91	45.5	61	55.45

Source: Primary Survey 2020-21

When it comes to the nature of employment of the people, most of the people in RNFS are self-employed, followed by regular jobs and the least in casual employment. But according to literature, this pattern is not uniform across all the regions in the state. IAMR (2013) and Anupama et al., (2018) found that whereas in Bathinda, maximum number of people are self-employed but in Gurdaspur majority holds employment in casual works.

Table 3 shows the nature of employment found in the primary survey. Casually employed females were the least in all the three districts. In Mansa maximum females were employed in self-employed jobs, this pattern was different for the other two districts. Jalandhar and Patiala had more women are regular employees. It was also observed that self-employed women in rural areas were generally involved in petty shops attached to the household.

Prospects of women participation in RNFE in Punjab

The future which the RNFS lays down for Punjabi women needs to be looked upon in order to ensure a smooth and successful movement of women from traditional agriculture to the modern non-farm sector. If this transition is smooth and uplifts the status of women from simply family labour or a person confined to do the household chores, it will empower the women of rural areas. The quality of employment RNFS is providing to the women indicates the direction the future of rural women of Punjab is headed towards. In order to judge the prospects of the women working in RNFS in Punjab the study has formulated a job quality index. This index would indicate if the future RNFS is offering to the women of Punjab is bright or not.

Job Quality Index

An analysis of the job quality of the women working in the RNFS in Punjab has been done by formulation of a Job quality index. The formulation of this index is in reference to the quality of work index (QoW) by Steffgen et al. (2015). A multi-dimensional approach had been used to determine QoW by measuring the work intensity, physical environment at workplace, social environment at workplace and the working time quality.

The present study uses five broad determinants to determine the job quality of an individual including:

- Working hours
- Job satisfaction
- Maternity benefits
- Provision of paid leave
- Wage differential

Working hours (A1): The duration of working hours a woman puts in her work and the income she receives for the same, affects her likelihood to continue that job by trading off her time from domestic responsibilities. A woman needs to fulfil both the domestic responsibilities as well as her job unlike the males who are generally not involved in fulfilling the domestic responsibilities.

W_0 is the current working hours of the respondent, W_{min} is the minimum working hours a respondent works for. W_{max} is the maximum working hours a respondent works for. A1 is then determined as:

$$A1 = \frac{W_0 - W_{min}}{W_{max} - W_{min}}$$

Job satisfaction (A2): A ranking was given by the sampled women to the level of satisfactions they determine on the basis of their working conditions, the benefits they received and the salary they obtained for their work. J_0 is the satisfaction ranked by the individual respondent, J_{min} is the minimum level of job satisfaction, J_{max} is the maximum level of job satisfaction A2 is thus determined as:

$$A2 = \frac{J_0 - J_{min}}{J_{max} - J_{min}}$$

Maternity benefits (A3): As taking care of the children is considered as the most important responsibility of a woman many women who are not offered maternity leave quit their jobs when they are about to have a child. Hence maternity benefits are essential. The women who get maternity benefits have been assigned the value one and zero otherwise.

Paid leave (A4): The value of one has been assigned to those with paid leave benefits, zero otherwise.

Wage Differential (A5): The respondents were questioned if they received equal wages as the males doing similar job. Provision of equal wages to the women in RNFS makes them feel equally valued for the hours they put into work. The value of 1 is assigned to the women who are paid equal wages as males, 0 otherwise.

The job quality index is then calculated using the above five determinants as:

$$\text{Job quality} = \frac{A1 + A2 + A3 + A4 + A5}{5}$$

This index lies between zero and one. A higher index means that the women employed in the RNFS are getting quality employment. On the contrary a low index indicates that the employment being created for the women in RNFS of low quality.

Results:

1. Jalandhar (High RNFE) district has a job quality index of 0.64.
2. Patiala (Medium RNFE) district has a job quality index of 0.66.
3. Mansa (Low RNFE) district has a job quality index of 0.70.

The results of the job quality index of Punjab shows that even though Mansa is a low RNFE district, it has the highest value of job quality index implying better quality of jobs than Jalandhar and Patiala. This can be attributed to the least number of casually employed women in Mansa. Jalandhar, a high RNFE district has the lowest job quality index indicating that the quality of employment here is inferior to the low and medium RNFE district. Moreover Jalandhar has the highest percentage of casually employed women. From the above discussion it can be concluded that there is a deterioration of job quality in RNFS as the employment in this sector increases in a particular district. Moreover greater casualization of workforce is also seen as RNFE increases.

4. Policy suggestions

The results from the job quality index indicate that even though women employment is being generated in the RNFS in Punjab but it is of an inferior quality. The value of the job quality index in all the three districts is less than 1. It has been found from the present study that as the RNFE in a region increases, greater casualisation of workforce comes in along with that. This deteriorates the job quality. This indicates towards the need of formalisation of the non-farm sector in rural areas. It is something which is only possible through appropriate policy measures by the government aiming at rural development and diversification.

Maximum number of women in RNFS of Punjab were involved in self-employment. This is due to the burden of domestic responsibilities of the women. Taking care of the children and the elderly is considered as primary responsibility of the women. If the government is able to provide a childcare and elderly care facility in the rural areas, it might be possible for the women of the household to go to work outside their houses. So, rural areas need a proper and cheaper creche facility.

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