

INTRA HOUSEHOLD DISPARITIES REGARDING FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERN: A CASE STUDY IN RURAL AREAS OF DISTRICT GUJRANWALA

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Abstract

In this case study intra-household food consumption pattern has been examined and the nature and extent of gender discrimination has been focused. The information in this study was gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions with women of study area and field observations. The results indicated that severe gender discrimination in house-hold resource allocation in feeding and health care exists in rural areas of Punjab. The low status of women has been found the reason for this discrimination. The literacy and education level has been found to reduce these gender disparities. This study concluded that creation of awareness to reduce inequalities, enhancement of literacy rate and health care services for women and children may ensure their better participation in labor market. This study recommended exclusive efforts at Govt. level to increase and diversify production especially in agriculture to expand employment opportunities for women and availability of food on a sustainable basis.

Key Words: Gender Discrimination, Food Consumption Pattern, Intrahousehold Resources

Introduction:

The process of intra household resources allocation has been extensively studied by both academics and policy makers (Agarwal, 2002; Rehman, 2002; Rama Chandran, 2004).The persistence of gender inequalities in sharing of resources and deprivation of women and female children have been pointed out in all the south Asian countries especially Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sirilanka. This paper examines the mechanisms by which resources are allocated among the household members. The objective of the paper is to closely identify the motives responsible for extent of disparities in intra household consumption patterns with respect to food

and health resources. Scientists have been concerned with the intra household variation in respect of allocation of feeding, health care and educational resources (Rehman, 2002; Bose, 2003; Nira Chandran, 2006; Miller 2005; Dasgupta, 2002)

Gender based discrimination has been reported from all south Asian countries including Pakistan. Bias against girls and females has been reported in home food allocation, seeking medical care for various ailments, such gender bias is likely to have an influence on the health of women and female children. Burdhan, 2007 has pointed out that disparities in intra household allocation of food and nutrition and health care might be a cause of lower survival chances of female children. Pakistan, along with other countries in South Asia, adheres to a conventional family system that gives significance to the male members. Pakistan's position in terms of genetic inequality is low, ranking at 123 among 148 countries, as per the 2013 United Nations report. Rains et al. (2000) described that people's growth in Pakistan has been badly affected by treating females unfairly. A number of studies (Behrman 1998, Thomas 1994) have shown that gender discrimination is due to son preference in these regions. The sons are preferred in intra household allocation of nutrients because they are bread winner for the family.

Ijaz and Kramat (2012) reviewing the gender discrimination in the intra household allocation of foods note that the kinship system in Pakistan leads to strong son preference and discrimination against daughters. They conclude that son preference existed because men confer identity to the children. The rights of the women are transferred to the husband's family at the time of marriage. Then the women future services, productivity belong to husband's family. Consequently daughter is less welcome than a son. A study from Indian Punjab has shown a sharp difference in quality of diets of women as compared to men. The study has documented with empirical data that women consume 1000 fewer calories than men (Development Gate Survey 2004). A similar study by Dasgupta 1987) in 11 villages of Punjab (India) found that although boys and girls were given more calories intake had roughly similar calorie intake , the girls were given more cereals while boys were given more milk, fats, high protein foods in addition to cereals. The study found that discrimination against girls is mostly caused by cultural beliefs, rather than financial difficulties. People in other countries also report experiencing this kind of unfair treatment.

Kabeer (1998) finds that in Bangladesh are considered as residual category in intra household food distribution eating after men with whatever was left. Ahmad (2012) has noted a similar pattern prevails in Pakistan and stated that such deprivation was self-imposed in rural culture. It was due to the low status of females. Occasionally, women abstain from eating to allow the men in their family to have a greater portion of food. Rehman (2002) found that men have more advantages when it comes to getting costly and energy-rich foods like fish, meat, milk, and other dairy products. He found that when women have less ability to negotiate, it affects their position and ability to get good food. Another important discovery from his research is that although there are differences between boys and girls in wealthier families, the mistreatment of adult women continues to be a problem in all social groups. The ability of women to have enough food depends on how much money they have, how much education they have, and how they are treated in their family and society. Women who are not highly regarded in society often have less power when it comes to things like money, healthcare, and feeling good about themselves. According to Smith (2003), when women don't get enough nutrition, two main things happen to them. First, they don't grow as much as they could. Second, they develop a condition called anemia. Both can increase the chance of problems during pregnancy. Anemia during pregnancy makes it harder to have a baby and can cause moms and babies to die. It can also lead to babies being born with low weight. The enormity of the problem can be gauged by the fact that 60% women in Pakistan were found anemic (Ghazala et al., 2011). Furthermore, approximately 50% of the infants in this region are delivered with a weight below the average of 2.5kg (Rama Cahndran, 2004). Therefore, by giving women a higher position in society, we can greatly improve the overall health, lifespan, ability to have children, and productivity of future generations.

This paper argues that we need to look at how women contribute to making sure there is enough food and nutrition for their families and themselves if we want to solve the problem of not having enough good food. Hence, this study looks at how women and food security are connected in rural areas. It emphasizes the important issues that need urgent attention. This study may have important implications for policy makers.

Material & Methods:

Most of the studies of intra house hold food allocation has used anthropometric indicators such as weight and height for age for a given population. Others have measured diet adequacy/calories and nutrient intake of individuals as compared to standardized requirements. Each house hold member's food intake or consumption has been assessed using recall method or through direct observation. In this way disparities in food consumption between different members of house hold such as between boys and girls, male and females were compared. It has been noted that both anthropometric and diet adequacy measures have certain limitation. Because substandard growth may also be attributed to factors other than undernourishment such as genetic factors, unsanitary having conditions and inadequate health care (Osman 1990). This paper intends to focus on the causes of disparities in the intra household consumption patterns. Are the females and the girls disfavored in allocation of food and health care? If so, how extensive is daughter disfavor across various social strata, landed or landless population. Does it have correlation with women's bargaining position and status?

The information on the above mentioned dimension was collected by in depth interviews and focus group discussions with women and girls of various ages from the two villages selected purposively from Gujranwala district. In depth interviews were carried out in two villages namely Aroop and Kotfazla. Aroop village is located 5 km from Gujranwala was selected as most of the farm families having a land holding of 5-15 acres represent the whole district. They derive their livelihood from cultivating the wheat and rice crop.

The traditional form of family structure is joint family system with brothers and their families. Family members share the land, cultivation, machinery and implements living in shared residence. The interview and discussion were held with groups composed of 7-10 females. They were picked due to their shared qualities that held significance in this study. Asking specific questions to help stimulate discussions and encourage people to share their different thoughts and perspectives. The information from three groups for each village was selected and interviewed. Only one group was approached in a day. As such three days were spent in each village to gather information and observations to reach a conclusion.

The other village Kot fazla is located 30 kilometers toward north side of Gujranwala city in Wazirabad tehsil. The land holdings are in range of 5-10 acres. In other words mostly small and marginal farmers predominate in the village. Due to its location this village lacks many basic amenities of life like educational institution and health facilities. Their lively hood consists of cultivation of crops. Out of 50 women interviewed in village Aroop & Kotfazla, 25 were uneducated, 14 had primary education, and 10 were having high than primary education. Husbands of most of the females were farmers having 8-15 acres of land.

Results & Discussion:

Almost all of these women's were of the view that male child should have preference over the female child. The reasons stated by them was that the boys are ours asset while the girls are others. It was told that the female child is responsibility or burden. One of these women said that girls when grow up become a heavy responsibility of parents. She is always safeguarded or accompanied with someone from the home to school. Contrary the responsibility of boys decreases as they grow older. It was noted during discussion that educated women were of the view that the girls should be treated as with boys as far as education is concerned. However they told that boys deserved better food than girls. It was transpired that girls were being given only cereal food whereas milk other dairy products were mostly given to boys. It was told that boys were required to take high energy diets because they have to share and assist their elder's cultivation and other agriculture operations. Overall discussion showed that the boys were being favored in allocation of foods especially nutritious food. All of the uneducated women were of the view that it was justified that males of household should eat the meals first and then the leftover be eaten by female members. It was enquired that whether it was done in view of shortage of food or norms favor this practice. It was told that the quality of food had nothing to do with this practice but the norms of this culture did not allow females to eat with males or before the males.

It was surprising to note that it was being done by the females on self-imposed basis. During in depth interviewers it was observed that the mothers who had low land holding were more pro boy views than the women belonging to homes having higher land holdings. Dasgupta (2004) in her study in Punjab Ludhiana showed that twice as much money is spent on boys than on girls,

medical care and food allocations, landless peasants discriminate more against the girls in expenditure on education, health care and food. Similar findings have been pointed out by Laitha and Kalaipon (2009) by showing that among landless laborers male children were given high calorie foods than female children. However in landowner's families there was no marked discrimination in the type of food and health care given. Another significant finding of this study was that 2 women of our study population were doing job in primary school. These women have different views than other females. Their behavior and views were less discriminatory against female children. They told that similar foods, healthcare and expenditure were being allocated for girls. It's revealed that when women have control over their own money and can make decisions, their households spend money in ways that are different from households where men are in charge.

Studies conducted in various countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America have shown that when women have more access to money and play a larger role in making decisions about money in the household, the overall nutrition of the family improves. This is because women usually spend more money than men on buying food for their family. (IDRC 2004). Agarwal (2000) found women in poor households in India and other places tend to use most of their money on basic household items. Meanwhile, men tend to spend a significant portion of their money on personal things like tobacco and alcohol. There is clear evidence from South Asia that supports the same idea, even though it is not very much evidence. The findings from the study carried out in Pakistan and India reveal that women allocate a larger portion of their funds towards nutrition and health expenses. Among small-scale farmers living close to large cities, the women who grow vegetable gardens and have control over the produce, have been found to improve child nutrition consistently (Kumar, 1978; Abid, 2012). A recent study in Bangladesh discovered that when women borrowed money from banks, they spent more on things like food, clothes, their children's education, and their health (Kelkar et al., 2005).

The majority of women in rural Pakistan took out loans to fend for their children's needs, particularly their daughters. (Nazli & Hamid, 1998) This has made policy makers and donors believe that we should focus on giving credit and support to women who want to start small businesses (Rama Chandra 2004). Another thing we found in our study is that when women in

nuclear families are in charge of giving out food, they give an equal amount to both boys and girls. They also possess an equivalent quantity of food for their own consumption. However, when a mother-in-law is present, women are prohibited from dining with men or even young boys. In this situation, a pregnant woman's food needs are not being looked after. So, the makeup of a family is also important for women's nutrition (Mondal 2003, Khan 2010).

It was observed during field survey that educated women had better knowledge about nutritional requirements of themselves as well as their children. Their children were healthier than those of uneducated ones. Moreover educated females showed fewer tendencies for sex discrimination in education and nutritional allocations. Previous studies have shown that maternal literacy has been found to play a key role in child nutrition and decreasing disparities among male and female children (Mehrothra, 2006; Alam 2010). The importance of literacy for the physical and mental health of both males and females is now recognized. The study assessed surveys spanning across diverse regions in India and Pakistan in order to evaluate the extent of malnourishment among girls. They separated the data based on the level of education the girls' mothers had. In all countries, a correlation can be observed between higher levels of maternal education and decreased instances of child malnutrition (Osmani, 1997). Data from 25 developing countries revealed that if mothers receive education, it can decrease child death by 15% (IDRC, 2004). Focus group discussion during the study indicated that the women's status was more important in reducing gender discrimination as compare to differences in house holdings. It was revealed that low status of female in rural areas results in girls getting less than their fair share of food within house hold. Status of women is associated with literacy and earning capabilities. Smith (2003) noted that increase in women's status has both long term and short term nutrition status of children.

Conclusion:

The forgoing analysis provides sufficient evidence that high degree of gender inequality exists in rural areas of Punjab. A vast segment of society is deprived of its due share and not allowed to play its role. The deprivation of women and girls is not solely due to poverty but it is the social norms which restrict women's freedom and equal status intense the discriminatory practices against women. It is evident that if women feed the husband and male children first and eat

herself last along with daughters, adequate quantity of food may not be left over for the females in poor households. Combined with work required for a women in patriarchal society, limited food or poor quality food left over for them may be translate into poor health status. Thus it is necessary to eradicate gender inequalities. Measures for creating more economic opportunities for female employment and empowerment should be undertaken. It is well established fact that the households where women have greater decision power distribute the resources among male and female members more equitably.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

- Ensuring sustainable supply of food in adequate quantity for all women and children. In order to achieve this goal efforts are needed at Govt. level to increase and diversify production especially in agriculture in order to expand employment opportunities for women and availability of food on a sustainable basis.
- Providing women and children with economic access to food by expanding employment opportunities capacity building of women by providing vocational training, enhancement of general economic growth, guaranteeing good work environment.
- Creation of awareness to reduce inequalities, enhancement of literacy rate and health care for women and children literacy may ensure their better absorption in labor market by increasing their competitiveness.

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