

# Socio-economic status as an indicator of farmers family well being

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Women in India are the backbone of the society and important human resource. Women constitute nearly half the population in any country either it is developed or developing country. They play a significant and crucial role in agriculture and allied operations and household activities. Without socio-economic equality for women in poor sectors of India, the impacts of efforts at development can not become fully realized. Socio-economic status (SES) is an important determinant of the health, nutritional status, mortality, and morbidity of an individual. Through this paper an attempt has been made to assess socio-economic status of farm families of selected villages of Relmagra block of Rajsamand district. The data revealed that a vast majority of household had low socio-economic status in spite of good land holding and irrigation facilities, this calls for bringing improvement in land utilization pattern and diversifying the cultivation pattern.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Socio-economic status, Agriculture, Farm families, Development

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**A**griculture is the largest sector of the rural economy and is a family enterprise, since 56 per cent of its population is dependent on it in India. India's economic security is heavily dependent on agriculture. In terms of employment, it is the most important sector. Traditionally, women have always played an important role in agriculture – as farmers, co-farmers, family labour, wage labours and managers of farms. The selection, preservation and maintenance, the development and sharing of seed stock has long been preserve of women. They have been active not just in crop cultivation but also in allied areas such as horticulture, livestock and fisheries. The fact is that women's

contributions in these sectors have either been largely ignored or inadequately acknowledged.

A critical cultural perspective becomes difficult when presented with multifarious factors such as patriarchy, labour, education, and government initiatives that influence women's socio-economic development in India. Without socio-economic equality for women in poor sectors of India, the impacts of efforts at development cannot become fully realized. India must value women as human resource assets and not liabilities. Socio-economic development can both empower women and raise the status of the Indian economy. Women need employment justice. Education, vocational training, and

skill improvements would increase the capacity for gainful economic participation of women in India. The needs of women in poor sectors of India should be included in a national approach to workforce development.

From a U.S. perspective, Jacobs and Hawley (2013) described workforce development as coordinated policies and programs that collectively “enable individuals the opportunity to realize a sustainable livelihood and organizations to achieve exemplary goals, consistent with the history, culture, and goals of the social context” (p. 1017). Holton and Naquin (2002) described workforce development systems as a means of serving needs of organizations, communities, and nations. India is a complex social context – it will require many integrated approaches of private and public systems to serve the pressing needs of women in poor sectors of India.

The socio-economic status (SES) is an important determinant of health, nutritional status, mortality and morbidity of an individual. SES also influences the accessibility, affordability, acceptability and actual utilization of available health facilities (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2005).

There has been a lot of discussion of late in the country regarding the number of people living below the poverty line (BPL families). They vary from 42% and 26% in rural and urban India. They also differ based on the different committees that had been formed to look into the problem. There is a need to identify the actual beneficiaries who will be benefitted by the government programs/subsidies. One of the tools available to measure the problem is the identification of SES of the family by applying the SES scales.

The socio-economic status (SES) is an important determinant of health, nutritional status, mortality and morbidity of an individual. SES also influences the accessibility, affordability, acceptability and actual utilization of available health facilities.

There are many different scales to measure the SES of a family. Prasad’s classification proposed in the year 1961 is a scale based on per capita monthly income (modified in 1968 and 1970), and has been used extensively in India. In rural areas Pareek classification based on nine characteristics *viz.*, caste, occupation, education, level of social participation of head of the family, landholding, housing, farm power, material possession and total members in the family is widely used. Modified Kuppaswamy scale is commonly used to

measure the SES in the urban communities. The scale includes the education, occupation of head of the family and income per month from all sources. To get current income group, a conversion factor calculated based on current All India Consumer Price Index (AICPI) is applied. The Government of India in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS - II) had used the Standard of Living Index (SLI) scale which contains 11 items *viz.*, house type, source of lighting, toilet facility, main fuel for cooking, source of drinking water, separate room for cooking, ownership of the house, ownership of agricultural land, ownership of irrigated land, ownership of livestock, ownership of durable goods for measuring the SES both urban and rural areas for the entire country. However each of these scales available for measurement have their own advantages and disadvantages. (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov 2013).

The need and significance of quantifiability and measurability of the concept and variables in social science have led to the formulation of devices/methods for their measurement. Socio-economic status (SES) is one of the most important variables in social science studies/researches. It plays a significant role in planning 309 Indian J. Med. Res., 122, October 2005, pp 309-314 and execution of developmental programmes and, therefore, there is a need for the development of a valid and reliable instrument for the measurement of SES. Socio-economic status of a family would mean the ranking of the family in the milieu to which the family belongs, in respect of defined variables *viz.*, physical assets, economic status, education, occupation, social position, social participation, caste, muscle power, political influence, etc. Some elements of the above variables have a tendency to go together.

## ■ RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in one district of Rajasthan named, Rajsamand, covering 500 farm families of three villages *viz.*, Morra, Madara, and Sakrawas in Railmagra Panchayat Samiti. The socio-economic status was studied as a part of a larger project as a pilot initiative, so as to plan and execute the interventions depending upon the socio-economic status of the families. The unit of enquiry was primarily the active women of the household. The respondents were selected randomly.

Socio-economic status (SES) is an important determinant of the health, nutritional status, mortality, and

morbidity of an individual. SES also influences the accessibility, affordability, acceptability and actual utilization of available health facilities (Annual report AICRP-Home Sciences Ext. Education, 1997). There are many different scales to measure the SES of a family. The B.G. Prasad classification proposed in the year 1961 is a scale based on per capita monthly income and has been used extensively in India. It can be applied to assess the SES in both rural and urban areas, as it takes into consideration only the income as a variable and is simple to calculate. In rural areas, the Pareek classification based on nine characteristics, namely, caste, occupation, education, level of social participation of head of the family, landholding, housing, farm power, material possession, and total members in the family, is widely used. This was modified and used by AICRP- Home Science Extension Education (1997) which was used for the present study.

The socio-economic status scale developed by All India Coordinated Research Project on Home Science under Extension Education (1997) was used to elicit the SES profile of farm families. The scale measured various social and economic variables *i.e.* age, marital status, education, caste, occupation, family size and type, organizational membership, ownership of fixed assets, farm assets, household assets, media ownership and certain distinctive features. The scores obtained from various variables were compiled for assessment of socio-economic status of families. For socio- economic status three categories were formed as shown in Table A.

Sr. No.	Categories	Scores
1.	Low socio- economic status	Below 30
2.	Medium socio- economic status	30 – 50
3.	High socio- economic status	Above 50

## ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been presented under following heads :

### Socio-economic background :

#### *Social factors :*

#### Social class/Caste :

In India the social stratification in rural communities is generally based on caste distribution. The caste distribution of the women engaged in agriculture activities according to the classification mentioned in Table 1

showed that majority of the subjects (72.6%) in all three villages belonged to other backward class (OBC), followed by SC/ST (19%). Only (8%) were from General class category which included upper caste people.

#### Family structure :

Data depicted that joint family system is fast disintegrating in rural India too. The percentage of nuclear families was more in Sakrawas (58%) and Madara (51%) while percentage of joint families (56%) was more than nuclear families (43.81%) in Morra village. The medium size of family *i.e.* 5-8 members was more (51.2 %) prevalent, followed by small size (40 %) in all the three villages. Large size families were very limited to 8.8 per cent only.

#### Family occupation :

A roaring majority (99%) from all the villages pursued agriculture as their main occupation, while 79% also considered dairy as their main occupation. It was reported that 50% subjects had no subsidiary occupation, followed by 41.80 % having one, and 8.2 % having more than one subsidiary occupation as depicted in Table 2.

#### Family education :

The data relating to the educational status of the respondents as depicted in Table 3 made it clear that the majority was either illiterate or could only read and write and had no formal education. About 19 per cent females were educated upto middle school and only 5 per cent were educated upto high school and above. The educational level of males was comparatively better than female counter parts.

#### Organizational membership :

Majority of respondents did not hold membership of any organization. Very few held the membership or were office bearers of either formal or non-formal organization, negligible membership was reported from Morra and Madara villages, while some membership (about 12-13%) was observed in Sakrawas village, though it was quite meagre (Table 4).

#### *Economic factors :*

#### Ownership of fixed assets :

Majority of the respondents (46 %) from all the villages were in marginal farmer category as per

landholding possessed, followed by medium (19.8 %) and small farmers (18.8 %). Very few (1%) were possessing large landholding.

Majority (54.8 %) owned pucca house *i.e.*, construction with cement and bricks, followed by mixed construction (34.4 %). Very few resided in kaccha houses.

Majority (62.8 %) possessed livestock in small herds, followed by medium herd (19%) and large herd

size (12.4%). Possession of livestock was maximum in Sakrawas village. Most of the respondents (46.4%) housed their livestock's in open *i.e.*, without a shed, (40.8%) had thatched animal sheds while only (12.8%) possessed pucca sheds for animals (Table 5).

Farm assets :

Majority (92.4%) of respondents possessed small hand tools and implements used for farm related work.

Table 1 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per class/caste				(n =500)
Class/Caste	Village			Total
	Morra (n=105)	Madara (n =172)	Sakrawas (n =223)	
SC/ST	14 (13.33)	47 (27.33)	36 (16.14)	97 (19.4)
OBC	87 (82.86)	111 (64.53)	165 (73.99)	363 (72.6)
Upper caste	4 (3.81)	11 (6.40)	25 (11.21)	40 (8)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

Table 2 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per family occupation				(n=500)	
Family occupation		Village			Total
		Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n= 223)	
Main Occupation	Agriculture	104 (99.05)	171 (99.42)	221 (99.10)	496 (99.2)
Subsidiary Occupation	Dairy	42 (40.00)	23 (13.37)	54 (24.22)	119 (23.8)
	Nil	30 (28.57)	79 (45.93)	141 (63.23)	250 (50)
	Only one	55 (52.38)	83 (48.26)	71 (31.84)	209 (41.8)
	More than one	20 (19.05)	10 (5.81)	11 (4.93)	41 (8.2)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

Table 3 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per level of education								
Level of education	Village						Total	
	Morra		Madara		Sakrawas		Male (n=500)	Female (n=500)
	Male (n=105)	Female (n=105)	Male (n=172)	Female (n=172)	Male (n=223)	Female (n=223)		
Illiterate	66 (62.86)	70 (66.67)	91 (52.91)	95 (55.23)	121 (54.26)	149 (66.82)	278 (55.6)	314 (62.8)
Can read and write/ lettered	13 (12.38)	16 (15.24)	21 (12.21)	27 (15.7)	27 (12.11)	21 (9.42)	61 (12.2)	64 (12.8)
Primary school	10 (9.5)	7(6.67)	20 (11.63)	25 (14.53)	38 (17.04)	39 (17.5)	68 (13.6)	71 (14.2)
Middle school	10 (9.5)	8 (7.62)	15 (8.72)	10 (5.81)	23 (10.31)	8 (3.59)	48 (9.6)	26 (5.2)
High school	6 (5.71)	3 (2.86)	13 (7.55)	7 (4.07)	10 (4.48)	6 (2.69)	29 (5.8)	16 (3.2)
Post metric diploma	-	1 (0.95)	7 (4.07)	5 (2.91)	3 (1.35)	-	10 (2)	6 (1.2)
Graduate and above	-	-	5 (2.91)	3 (1.75)	1 (0.45)	-	6 (1.2)	3 (0.6)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

Table 4 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per organizational membership				(n=500)
Organizational membership	Village			Total
	Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n= 223)	
No membership	100 (95.24)	160 (93.02)	209 (93.72)	469 (93.8)
Member of one or more formal organization (Panchayat, cooperative, political etc.)	3 (2.86)	7 (4.07)	29 (13.00)	39 (7.8)
Office bearer of formal organization	4 (3.81)	3 (1.74)	29 (13.00)	37 (7.4)
Member of one or more non-formal organization (Panchayat, cooperative, political etc.)	0 (0.00)	4 (2.33)	28 (12.56)	32 (6.4)
Office bearer of non-formal organization	2 (1.90)	0 (0.00)	30 (13.45)	32 (6.4)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

About 34 per cent of them had pump sets which were mostly used for pumping water from wells for irrigation. Very few 13 per cent had implements drawn by bullocks, while only 7.2 per cent owned tractors and tractor drawn implements and machinery. Less than 3 per cent possessed threshers. Rest of the farm assets were possessed very scarcely.

**Household assets :**

A good number of farm women (80%) possessed improved grain storage structures. Only 12% of respondents had sanitary latrines which was alarming. Absence of sanitary latrines creates lot of health and sanitation problems. Possession of LPG was also bare

minimum, which calls for provision of improved cooking stoves as majority still used traditional cook stoves, which used lots of wood and poses health hazards to women. Less than 20% owned modern household furniture (Table 6). It was reported that a few, about 25 in total biogas plants were installed in these villages under some programme but none of them was in operation.

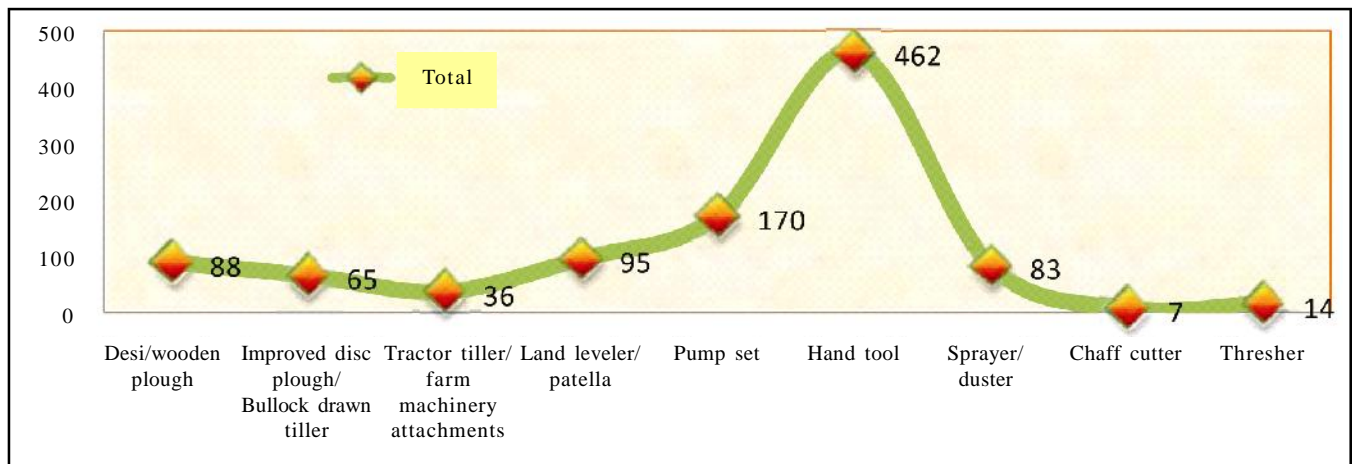
**Media ownership :**

Less than half (43%) possessed television while about 41% had no access to media. Very few (12%) purchased newspaper etc. radio/transistor was also not possessed by many (14% only), most of them enjoyed radio on cell phones (Table 7).

**Table 5 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per ownership of fixed assets (n = 500)**

Fixed assets	Details	Village			Total
		Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n= 223)	
Land holding	Less than 1 acre	16 (15.24)	5 (2.91)	73 (32.74)	94 (18.8)
	1.0 to 2.5 acres	38 (36.19)	100 (58.14)	92 (41.26)	230 (46)
	2.6 to 5.0 acres	28 (26.67)	51 (29.65)	20 (8.969)	99 (19.8)
	5.1 to 10.0 acres	3 (2.86)	11 (6.39)	10 (4.484)	24 (4.8)
	More than 10 acres	1 (0.95)	3 (1.74)	1 (0.448)	5 (1)
Housing	Kaccha house	2 (1.90)	18 (10.47)	34 (15.25)	54 (10.8)
	Mixed house (kaccha + pucca)	37 (35.24)	66 (38.37)	69 (30.94)	172 (34.4)
	Pucca house	66 (62.86)	88 (51.16)	120 (53.81)	274 (54.8)
Livestock ownership	Nil	14 (13.33)	22 (12.79)	22 (9.865)	58 (11.6)
	Small herd size (1-3 milch animals, or 10 small animals)	60 (57.14)	118 (68.60)	136 (60.99)	314 (62.8)
	Medium herd size (4- 6 milch animals, or 20 small animals)	28 (26.67)	29 (16.86)	38 (17.04)	95 (19)
	Large herd size (More than 6 milch animals, or more than 21 small animals)	3 (2.86)	30 (17.44)	29 (13)	62 (12.4)
Dwelling for livestock	Open/ Nil	51 (48.57)	95 (55.23)	86 (38.57)	232 (46.4)
	Thatched/ Kaccha	50 (47.62)	68 (39.53)	86 (38.57)	204 (40.8)
	Pucca	4 (3.81)	9 (5.233)	51 (22.87)	64 (12.8)

Parenthesis indicate percentage



**Fig. 1 : Number and percentage distribution of respondents as per ownership of farm assets**

*Distinctive features :*

Transport facilities owned by families were very limited. About half of them possessed bicycles (51.4%), scooter/motor cycle (47.6%). Tractor trolley was possessed by only (11%) and bullock carts or improvised carts were possessed by about one fourth of the respondents, while (7%) did not own any means of transport.

Little more than half of the families (55%) had electricity connection at home but almost all the households were lighted with unauthorized connection.

About half of the respondents (51%) had electric connection at farm.

It was surprising to note that very few (18%) possessed pressure cooker for cooking, LPG gas stoves were possessed by (16.8%) and kerosene stove by only (24%). The major reason for low possession may be attributed to use of traditional cook stoves using wood as fuel.

A good number of respondents possessed (66%) improved kitchen tools. A high per cent (94%) also possessed small electrical kitchen and other equipment

Household assets	Village			Total
	Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n= 223)	
Sanitary latrine	4 (3.81)	35 (20.35)	21 (9.42)	60 (12)
Biogas	1 (0.95)	5 (2.91)	19 (8.52)	25 (5)
Grain storage bin/ improvised structure	99 (94.29)	116 (67.44)	186 (83.41)	401 (80.2)
Hand pump/ water tap	11 (10.48)	98 (56.98)	20 (8.97)	129 (25.8)
Modern household furniture	6 (5.71)	38 (22.09)	43 (19.28)	87 (17.4)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

Media ownership	Village			Total
	Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n=172)	
Nil	25 (23.81)	58 (33.72)	125 (56.05)	208 (41.6)
Newspaper/magazine	6 (5.71)	28 (16.28)	26 (11.66)	60 (12)
Radio/ transistor	15 (14.29)	28 (16.28)	30 (13.45)	73 (14.6)
Television	40 (38.10)	84 (48.84)	91 (40.81)	215 (43)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

Distinctive features	Particulars	Village			Total
		Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Madara (n=172)	
Transport	Nil	4 (3.81)	9 (5.23)	22 (9.87)	35 (7)
	Bullock/ mule/ camel cart	7 (6.67)	22 (12.79)	60 (26.91)	89 (17.8)
	Improvised cart	1 (0.95)	10 (5.81)	24 (10.76)	35 (7)
	Bicycle	70 (66.67)	98 (56.98)	89 (39.91)	257 (51.4)
	Scooter/ motor cycle	43 (40.95)	92 (53.49)	103 (46.19)	238 (47.6)
	Tractor trolley/ four wheeler	5 (4.762)	12 (6.977)	38 (17.04)	55 (11)
Electricity	At home	99 (94.29)	148 (86.05)	29 (13)	276 (55.6)
	On farm	65 (61.9)	58 (33.72)	136 (60.99)	259 (51.8)
Household items	Kerosene stove	24 (22.86)	55 (31.98)	43 (19.28)	122 (24.4)
	Gas stove	15 (14.29)	36 (20.93)	33 (14.8)	84 (16.8)
	Pressure cooker	20 (19.05)	42 (24.42)	31 (13.9)	93 (18.6)
	Improved kitchen tools	60 (57.14)	95 (55.23)	176 (78.92)	331 (66.2)
	Small electric gadgets (fan, iron, mixer, butter churner etc.)	99 (94.29)	160 (93.02)	212 (95.06)	471 (94.2)
	Refrigerator	4 (3.81)	15 (8.721)	14 (6.278)	33 (6.6)
	Sewing machine	30 (28.57)	66 (38.37)	72 (32.29)	168 (33.6)

Parenthesis indicate percentage

SES category*	Village			Overall (n=500)
	Morra (n=105)	Madara (n=172)	Sakrawas (n=223)	
High Socio-economic status	5 (4.76)	2 (1.16)	2 (0.89)	9 (1.8)
Medium Socio-economic status	16 (15.23)	10 (5.81)	34 (15.24)	60 (12)
Low Socio-economic status	84 (80)	160 (93.02)	187 (83.85)	431 (86.2)

\*Source- SES scale by ACIRP, Home Science (HECM) 2006

Parenthesis indicate percentage

like fan, mixer grinders and butter churners etc; only (6%) owned a refrigerator, sewing machine was possessed by (33%) of the respondents (Table 8).

### Socio-economic status :

Based on the scoring of various parameters under social and economic factors, the socio-economic status of the respondents was derived. The scoring was done as per SES scale by ACIRP, Home Science (HECM) 2006.

A vast majority of 86 % respondents had low socio-economic status in spite of good landholding and irrigation facilities which indicate poor management of resources and lack of improved know how and availability of alternate avenues for income generation. Very few (12%) fell in medium category and almost negligible number enjoyed high socio-economic status (Table 9).

### Conclusion:

The study included various variables to measure the socio-economic status of farm families and found that main source of income of farm families was agriculture followed by dairy. A vast majority belonged to lower social strata of the community *i.e.* SC/ST and fell in marginal farmers category and possessed traditional small hand tools for agriculture activities over improved tools and technologies. They had no formal education and were either illiterate or could only read and write. In spite of good land holding possession most of farm families were found in low socio-economic status category. The data clearly indicated that an effort to improve quality of life of farm families should target at improving agricultural practices because main source of income of farm families is from agriculture. So, the farm families should be taught the integrated cropping pattern which will surely bring change in the socio-economic status of the family.

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