

Impact of Mass Media Exposure on coping Mechanisms Adopted by the Women Farmers during Covid-19 Pandemic in Telangana State

K. Sonali^{1*}, M. Preethi², R. Geetha Reddy³ and Aparna Kuna⁴

¹Research Scholar, Department of EECM,

College of Community Science, Saifabad, Hyderabad (Telangana), India.

²Professor, Extension Education Institute,

PJTSAU, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad (Telangana), India.

³Professor and HOD, Department of EECM,

College of Community Science, Saifabad, Hyderabad (Telangana), India.

⁴Senior Scientist, MFPI- Quality Control Laboratory,

PJTSAU, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad (Telangana), India.

(Corresponding author: K. Sonali*)

(Received 11 September 2022, Accepted 29 October, 2022)

(Published by Research Trend, Website: www.researchtrend.net)

ABSTRACT: Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy which was under stress during Covid-19 pandemic. The lockdown imposed by the government during March 2020 had created many problems like shortage of labour, harvesting equipment, fertilizers and pesticides. Women farmers also faced difficulty in selling their crop produce, difficulty due to closed markets, difficulty in finding farm wage employment, lack of transportation and market facilities etc. The present study was conducted to study the impact of mass media exposure on coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers of Telangana state. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study and purposive sampling was adopted for the selection of districts and mandals, whereas villages and respondents were selected randomly. A total of 120 sample were taken for the study from three districts *i.e.* Rangareddy, Medchal-Malkajgiri and Karimnagar. The findings showed that majority of the respondents (50.83%) belonged to middle age group, 65.00 percent of the respondents were illiterates, 55.00 percent of the respondents belonged to medium family income group and 67.50 percent of the respondents had low mass media exposure. Cent percent (100%) of the respondents had adopted medium coping mechanisms and none of them fell in low and high categories. There was a significant relation between the mass media exposure and coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic ($r = 0.304^{**}$). During Covid-19 pandemic mass media played an important role in disseminating the current news updates to the public. It also informed the public about Covid-19 protocols which were given by the government. In order to strengthen their coping mechanisms, women farmers can be capacitated to overcome present problems and to able to mitigate such situations in future.

Keywords: Women farmers, mass media exposure, coping mechanisms, Covid-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic is the greatest ongoing global challenge that the world has ever faced. India has taken early action to limit the spread of Covid-19, ordering a 21-day nationwide lockdown from March 25th 2020 to April 14th 2020. In the year 2021, the novel coronavirus had spread widely in India when compared to other countries. However, as Covid-19 cases increased fastly day after day, there was a great concern about the spread of disease and its impact. Cumulatively, Telangana state had accounted for 1.84 percent of the total cases in the country. Overall, the state of Telangana had performed well in minimizing the loss of life due to Covid-19 pandemic (Telangana Socio Economic Outlook, 2022).

Every year, Indian farmers are facing risks such as low rainfall, pricevolatility and rising debts. But risks from

Covid-19 pandemic had put new challenges in front of this sector threatening livelihoods and also food security. The lockdown created shortage of labor and equipment as migrant labour moved to their hometowns during the pandemic and most of the women farmers preferred hiring of harvesting equipment from their friends or relatives because this was cheaper than purchasing it (Deepa, 2020).

Coping acts as a stabilizing factor that help the women farmers to maintain psychological adaptation during stressful period. Coping mechanisms are defined as the action taken by the women farmers in agriculture to soothe oneself during Covid-19 pandemic. It focuses on practical, emotional and the avoidance aspects which were linked to a crisis. People differ greatly in their ability to deal with stressful life events, and few coping mechanisms are more effective than others when faced

with selected life changing events. Effective coping leads the women farmers to attain better life satisfaction (Javed and Parveen 2021).

Mass media became the major source of information about the novel coronavirus. It informed the public about the government support programmes which supported the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic. Media also played a worldwide role in getting current news updates, number of death cases and Covid-19 positive cases. It also created awareness and educated the public to follow Covid-19 guidelines during pandemic (Anwar *et al*, 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Telangana state. Purposive sampling was adopted for selection of districts and mandals based on the highest incidence rates of Covid-19 pandemic. In Telangana State, three districts *i.e.* Rangareddy, Medchal-Malkajgiri and Karimnagar were selected purposively, based on presence of highest incidence rates of Covid-19 pandemic. From each selected mandal, four villages were selected randomly. From each village, 10 women farmers were selected randomly. Thus, a total sample size of 120 women farmers were selected for the study.

Objective of the study. To study the impact of mass media exposure on coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic in Telangana state.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in the Table 1 revealed that, the respondents were categorized into three age groups such as young (20-34 years), middle (35-50 years) and old (above 50 years). Results indicated that majority (50.83%) of the respondents belonged to middle age group, followed by old age group (43.33%) and a very few from young age group (5.83%). This was because middle aged respondents were more responsible, enthusiastic, work efficient, had more energy levels, their family needs were more and they were more interested in carrying out agricultural activities followed by old age and young aged women. Another reason might be that the younger generation did not show much interest towards agriculture as they felt it as drudgery work and done by illiterates in rural areas. Kumari (2018) conducted a study on role of farm women in agriculture and their involvement in decision making revealed that majority (65.92%) of farm women were belonged to middle aged category followed by young and old aged categories.

Table 1: Profile characteristics of women farmers (n=120).

Sr. No.	Profile characteristics	F	%
1.	Age		
	Young (20-34)	07	5.83
	Middle (35-50)	61	50.83
	Old (Above 50)	52	43.33
2.	Education		
	Illiterate	78	65.00
	Primary education	03	2.50
	Middle school	19	15.83
	High school	17	14.17
	Intermediate	01	0.83
3.	Family income (per Annum)		
	Low (Below Rs.50,000)	44	36.67
	Medium (Rs.51,000-1,01,000)	66	55.00
	High (Above Rs.1,01,000)	10	8.33
4.	Mass media exposure		
	Low (7-11)	81	67.50
	Medium (12-16)	39	32.50
	High (17-21)	0	0.00

The educational level of the respondents, was classified into six categories namely illiterate, primary school, middle school, high school, intermediate, graduation and above. Table 1 indicated that majority (65.00%) of the respondents were illiterates followed by middle school (15.83%), high school (14.17%), primary education (2.50%), graduation and above (1.67%) and intermediate education (0.83%). Overall, majority (65.00%) of the respondents were illiterate due to lack of encouragement from elders, lack of knowledge and awareness about importance of education among women farmers, orthodox families, poor educational and infrastructure facilities in rural areas, not affording to pay school and college fees and low economic status

etc. The data also revealed that majority of the respondents were not sent to higher education due to non-availability of schools and colleges in villages. The above reasons made the respondents to remain in farming. Kajal (2016) conducted a study on empowerment of farm women in Khordha district found that percentage of uneducated women were more because of increased school dropouts, social and cultural taboos and other economic causes.

On the basis of family income, the respondents were classified into three groups namely low, medium and high income groups. Table 1 clearly indicated that more than half (55.00%) of the respondents belonged to medium family income group followed by 36.67

percent of the respondents belonged to low family income group and 8.33 percent of the respondents belonged to high family income group. The probable reason for less number of respondents in higher family income category might be because majority of the respondents were involved in agricultural activities and labour work where they were not getting much profit. Another reason could be that majority of the women farmers were small and marginal farmers. Lack of self-employment opportunities, lower wages than normal times, lower demand for crops, income loss during Covid-19 pandemic were other reasons for less number of respondents in higher family income category. Kajal (2016) conducted a study on empowerment of farm women in Khordha district observed that very few number of respondents belonged to high income group due to poor economic conditions and various agricultural problems like distress in sale of produce, low productivity, lack of marketability, uneven rainfall and irrigation problem etc.

The mass media exposure of the respondents indicated that majority (67.50%) of the respondents had low mass media exposure followed by medium mass media exposure (32.50%) and none of the respondents had high mass media exposure. The majority of the respondents had low mass media exposure because most of the women farmers were frequently watching the television followed by mobile phones usage and internet. Other findings revealed that majority of the women farmers were rarely watching radio, farm magazines, social media networks and newspapers because most of the women farmers were illiterate and didn't want to buy the newspaper due to fear of Covid-19 news and death cases because of wide publicity through mass media and social media. Chouhan (2014) conducted a study on role of farm women in decision making on vegetable cultivation indicated that majority (58.33%) of the respondents had low mass media exposure followed by medium and high mass media exposures.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their coping mechanisms adopted during Covid-19 pandemic (n=120).

Sr. No.	Coping mechanisms	F	%
1.	Low (51-85)	0	0.00
2.	Medium (86-120)	120	100.00
3.	High (121-153)	0	0.00
Total		120	100.00

Table 2 indicated that the respondents were classified into three categories namely low, medium and high. Results indicated that cent percent (100%) of the respondents had adopted medium coping mechanisms and none of the respondents had adopted low and high coping mechanisms. The probable reason might be that such a situation never occurred before and the pandemic was totally unanticipated, sudden and new to everyone. Most of the women farmers had less knowledge on this situation as they were neither trained formally nor informally to face such a situation. The findings could be accounted for lack of preparedness of farmers for the unanticipated pandemic. The results

were coinciding with the results of Channal and Rayangoudar (2021) studied on coping strategies of farm women during Corona pandemic in North Karnataka. The study pointed that women farmers need to be educated to strengthen their health by following the instructions given by the government.

Table 3: Correlation analysis of Mass media exposure with coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic (n=120).

Sr. No	Independent variable	Correlation coefficient (r) value
1.	Mass media exposure	0.304**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level of probability

In order to study the relation between the mass media exposure and coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic, r value was computed and value was presented in Table 3. The relation between the mass media exposure and coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic were tested by relevant null and empirical hypothesis.

Table 3 revealed that there was a significant and positive relation between the coping mechanisms during Covid-19 pandemic and mass media exposure. The coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic was significantly and positively correlated at 1% level of significance with mass media exposure ($r = 0.304^{**}$).

The results indicated that, as the mass media exposure increases coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers also increases. The reason might be that mass media had created fear of Covid-19 news and death cases but it also provides useful information, knowledge and experiences of successful farmers on TV, radio and newspapers, mobile phones, internet etc. Increased mass media exposure helped the women farmers to acquire more useful information on maintaining hygiene, seeking medical help if symptoms occur, following Covid-19 protocols, following government issued advices, avoiding going out and avoiding eating outside food during lockdown or Covid-19 pandemic helped the women farmers to cope up with Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Results indicated that the majority (67.50%) of the respondents had low mass media exposure and remaining (32.50%) had medium mass media exposure. All the respondents (cent percent) adopted medium coping mechanisms. The correlation between the mass media exposure and coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers during Covid-19 pandemic was positive and significant. Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing global crisis that had spread throughout the world. Due to this pandemic many farming families were affected. Most of the women farmers belonged to middle age group, illiterates and were neither trained formally nor informally in order to face such sudden situation. Hence, mass media worked as information platform to many women farmers and promoted positive environment during Covid-19

pandemic. Media had simultaneously kept the viewers informed about current events and not to forward any misleading information related to pandemic. Media also motivated the public to follow the safety measures in order to cope up with the Covid-19 pandemic.

FUTURE SCOPE

Future research can be done on various dimensions like farm, general and adaptive coping mechanisms during Covid-19 pandemic and also a comparative study can be done on coping mechanisms adopted by the women farmers before and during Covid-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgement. The first author is thankful to co-authors Dr. M. Preethi, Dr. R. Geetha Reddy, Aparna Kuna for continuous guidance, motivation, support and grateful to Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University for offering M.Sc. programme in Department of Extension Education and Communication Management, College of Community Science, Hyderabad and also for providing financial assistance during the programme.

Conflict of Interest. None.

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How to cite this article: K. Sonali, M. Preethi, R. Geetha Reddy and Aparna Kuna (2022). Impact of Mass Media Exposure on coping Mechanisms Adopted by the Women Farmers during Covid-19 Pandemic in Telangana State. *Biological Forum – An International Journal*, *14(4)*: 898-901.