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Title of the thesis : **‘ROLE STRESS OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE – AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE’**

Degree to which it is submitted : DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HOME SCIENCE

Faculty :HOME SCIENCE

Major field : HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

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Year of submission : 2004

ABSTRACT

Women constitute almost half of the world's population, account for 60 percent of the working hours, contribute up to 30 percent of the official labour force, yet receive only ten percent of the income and own less than one percent of the world's property (Anon, 1980; Rao, 2001; Yadav, 2001). It is believed by historians that it was women who first initiated farming by domesticating crop plants. While men went out for hunting, women started gathering the seeds of plants and began cultivating them to meet their food, fibre and fuel needs (Swaminathan, 1985). The problem of role stress in women, particularly farm women is an important aspect of the process of social change in India. The role stress experienced by the women is multi dimensional and needs deep probing. Emerging studies suggest that if the role stress is not properly coped with, it affects the performance in a dysfunctional style resulting in exhaustion, irritation, ineffectiveness and inaction. To understand the exact role of farm women it would be appropriate to study the women in process- person context model or ecological model in relation to time and space.

Recent studies highlight that increasing number of rural women in India are not simply housewives, but are in fact farmers (Vandana, 1991). The rural farm women have multifarious roles which demand more time and effort. The present study makes an attempt to analyse the role stress of farm women in an ecological perspective. The total

sample of the study comprised of 240 farm women drawn purposively by Quota sampling method from 12 different villages of 4 mandals from 2 districts (Guntur & Kurnool) of Andhra Pradesh. Keeping the role stress as dependent variable, the independent variables viz., personality (self-efficacy, self esteem, locus of control, physical health and gender role orientation), family process (family size, family type and family environment), coping (coping strategies and support system) and the demographic variables (age, education, caste, income, land holding, socio economic status, farming experience, age at marriage, marital status and number of children) were considered for the study. The percentages, means, correlations, multiple regressions and path analysis were the different statistical procedures adopted for present study.

To study the role stress of farm women, a scale on role stress has been developed by the investigator. Demographic variables were studied through a general information schedule. The self-efficacy, self esteem, locus of control, family environment, coping and support scales were used to measure respective psychological traits. The profile analysis of farm women with respect to the demographic characteristics revealed that a majority of the farm women were middle aged, illiterates, had low income, belonged to small farmer category, had low material possession with low socio-economic status, medium family size, nuclear families, married earlier, with a high farming experience.

Regarding personality traits, a majority of the farmwomen had low self-efficacy, low self-esteem, high femininity and chance control as their locus of control trait. The results of the study indicated that the farm women had low physical health, low reproductive health and moderate physiological health. The farmwomen had high femininity, cohesion, expression, conflicts, acceptance and caring as the components of family environment. The results indicated that the farm women had high avoidance coping behaviour compared to the approach strategies.

The farm women had low instrumental, informational and service support with high socio emotional support. They perceived high role stress in micro, exo and macro sub systems, where as in the meso system, moderate stress was observed. They had higher role overload with moderate role expectation conflict, inter role distance, role erosion, role conflicts and low role stagnation & self-role distance.

Significant differences were observed between educated and uneducated sample of the women with regard to self-efficacy, self-esteem, locus of control, androgyny, logical thinking, positive appraisal, micro system role stress, exo system role stress, and macro system role stress. Descriptive analysis in the dimensions of self-efficacy, locus of control and androgyny and coping strategies of cultivators and wage workers shows substantial differences. The cultivators significantly differed with labourers in all the role stress aspects of micro, meso, exo and macro sub systems with labourers having higher role stress.

Among all the demographic factors, education, income, caste, socio economic status, number of children and land holding were significantly and negatively correlated with role stress. The personality variables self-efficacy, locus of Control (IC), health, and androgyny were found to have significant and negative correlation whereas femininity had a positive correlation with the role stress. Family processes; cohesion, expressiveness, acceptance and caring and the total family environment had a negative and significant correlation. Almost half of the selected variables have shown significant

correlations with the role stress. All the subsystems were well correlated with each other in the process of role stress.

It is interesting to note that the demographic variables in the micro system did explain about a substantial amount of 50 percent variation in role stress of micro system, where, maximum contribution was explained by the variables education, income, socio-economic status. The personality variables in the micro-system had contributed a maximum amount of 58 percent variation in the micro- system, in which the coping, support and self-efficacy had exerted maximum influence on the role stress.

In meso-system, the demographic variables explained only 4 percent of variation whereas personality variables explained about 28 percent variation. The variables socio-economic status, self-efficacy, masculinity, androgyny, expressiveness and support were found to exert impact on the role stress dimension.

Among exo-system, the demographic variables explained 52 percent of the variation. Caste, Socio-economic status, marital status and family size were found to be maximum contributing variables. The personality variables in the exo-system did explain about a maximum amount of 62 percent variation. The variables self-efficacy, self-esteem, androgyny, coping and support were found to exert maximum impact on role stress of exo-system.

In macro-system the variation of 42 percent was observed by demographic variables where education, caste, land holding, SES and family type have significant regression coefficients. The personality variables in the macro-system did explain about an amount of 21 percent variation in the macro- system, where the self-efficacy, self-esteem, femininity, coping and support were found to contribute substantially.

Overall systemic role stress variables explained 27 percent of variation by demographic variables, where education, caste, land holding and SES were found to contribute to a large extent. The personality variables in the overall systems did explain about a maximum amount 33 percent variation in the overall systems, where the self-efficacy, self-esteem, cohesion, coping and support were found dominant. The demographic variables explained at about 13 percent variation of the role conflicts. Education, Family type, age at marriage, number of children were dominant demographic variables contributing to role stress. The personality variables of role conflicts explained about 16 percent variation in the micro- system, where the self-efficacy, self-esteem, femininity, expressiveness and acceptance & caring were found to play the major role in reducing the stress component.

It is fascinating to note that coping and support were drastically reducing the role stress of farm women among all the sub-systems. More over, each subset of the variables is interrelated and intra-related leading to a common factor, role stress. A change in the independent variables may have a tremendous impact on the role stress.

The present study opens avenues to sociologists and extension workers in the society in recognizing the exact role of farm women, their capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, working conditions and role stress from a systemic point of view. The study paves way for researchers and policy makers to plan and design women friendly environment, free from gender atrocities, enriched with resources in the context of socio economic scenario.
