

2-2012

Information Needs of Rural Women: A Study of Three Villages of Bangladesh

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Library Philosophy and Practice 2012

ISSN 1522-0222

Information Needs of Rural Women: A Study of Three Villages of Bangladesh

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Introduction

The information society is where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life (Olorunda, 2004). The main objective of information society is to empower all the people through access to and use of information, but there is concern that some people, including women, are more distant than others from the opportunities presented by the changes being created by ICTs.

Women's education and empowerment have been important social, economic, and political issues in the developing countries like Bangladesh and over the past three decades Bangladesh has made impressive gains in these areas. Women of Bangladesh are now participating in family decision making as well as in national and international socio-economic and political development. Women, irrespective of location, need information on family health, food and nutrition, family planning and child education, but rural women also need information regarding agriculture and animal husbandry for their involvement in socio-economic growth. However, the women who live in villages have lack of access to information resources and inability to have access to Information and Communication Technology. The rural women are remained as unexploited national resources and the whole nation would be benefited if they are properly involved in the development activities in a planned way (Agriculture Information Service [AIS], 2004). Library or information centers can mitigate information needs of rural women through access to relevant information and can enable rural women of Bangladesh participating in the national economic development.

Background

Bangladesh is bordered by India on the east, west and north and by the Bay of Bengal on the south. There is also a small strip of frontier with Myanmar on the south-eastern edge. Bangladesh has an area of 147,570 sq. km. with an estimated population of 158,570,535 (July 2011) (The World Factbook, 2011). More than 75% of the population live in rural areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

This study was carried out in three villages of Ghoraghat thana of Dinajpur district in Bangladesh. The villages are Ahiura, Balahar and Kashigari. These villages were selected mostly because of the similarity in their socio-

economic and demographic characteristics. A brief description of the demographic information of these villages provides the background and context of the study.

Dinajpur District

Dinajpur is a large district at the northern part of Bangladesh having many historical places and famous for the production of rice and litchi. The district of 3437.98 square kilometers area is comprises of 13 upazilas (sub-district) which have 2143 villages. At the time of this survey, the total population of the district was 2642850, of which 2271986 lived in villages and about half of those people were female. Only 46% people (40% women) of this district were literate. About 80% of the people depended on agriculture, 7% people were businessman and only 2% people were engaged with service, and the rest of the people were involved with other professions (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Ghoraghat Upazila

Ghoraghat is a small upazila (148.67 Sq. Km.) of Dinajpur district which included 4 unions and 112 villages. The total number of households in the upazila at the time of this survey was 24489, of which 23407 were in rural areas. When the data were collected for this study, the total population of this upazila was 103119, of which 98565 people lived in villages and only 4554 people lived in urban areas. The main source of income of the inhabitants of this upazila was agriculture, only a very few people were involved with business or service (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Ahiura

Ahiura is a very small village of 280 acres area. The total number of households in the village at the time of this survey was 182, in which 733 people lived. The literacy rate of this village was 28%, and the female literacy rate was only 25%. The source of income of 52% households of Ahiura was agricultural labour, about 34% households were depended on agriculture, forestry or livestock, and only 5% were involved with business. About half of the total population did not have their own agriculture land. More than 96% of the households used tube well as sources of drinking water, only 9% of the households used sanitary latrine, and only 32% household had electricity connection (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Balahar

Balahar is a village of 186 households, in which 805 people lived when the data were collected. The total area of this village is only 164 acres, but the literacy rate of this village was comparatively high, it was more than 55%. Almost all the people of this village drunk tube well water, only 15% households had sanitary toilet facility, but about 62% households had other types of toilet facility. Only 44% of the households had electricity connection. More than 80% households were directly depended on agriculture, about 10% on business, and only 2% on service. About 58% people had their own agriculture land (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Kashigari

Kashigari is a large village of Dinajpur district, the total area is 434 acres. At the time of this survey, the total number of households in the village was 452, in which 2078 people lived. Only 45% people of the village were literate, but about 25% of the households were mainly depended on business, and about 13% were on service. Although 45% people had their own agriculture land, only 30% households were using agriculture as main source of income. About 93% households used tube well as source of drinking water, more than 78% households had sanitary latrine, and more than 26% had electricity connection (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

Research Method

A survey method was adopted to conduct the study. A questionnaire, containing 51 questions, was used to collect data for this survey. Sixty women, who were at least 15 years old, were selected randomly from three villages of Ghoraghat thana of Dinajpur district in Bangladesh. A few literate women were able to complete the questionnaire on their own, the majority had to be interviewed and their responses were used to complete the questionnaires.

During the data collection in three villages, the researchers got the opportunity to observe the rural women in their natural environment, working in the field and carrying out their household duties.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to identify the information needs of rural women in Bangladesh;
- to find out their information seeking behavior;
- to identify their sources of information; and
- to examine their satisfaction of using the available sources of information

Literature Review

An important cause of poverty in Bangladesh is that the poor have limited access to information and are victims of misinformation (General Economic Division [GED], 2008). Appropriate information empowers people towards actions that can transform lives, and allows for a greater sense of independence (Mchombu, 2000). As all powers of the People's Republic of Bangladesh belong to the people, it is necessary to ensure right to information for the empowerment of the people (Ministry of Law, justice and parliamentary Affairs, 2009). Everyone should have access to information for their own social, economic, political, and cultural development (Goulding, 2002).

In Bangladesh, women constitute nearly half of the total population and 80% of them live in the rural areas (AIS, 2004). Bangladesh has achieved in recent years impressive progress in the area of gender equality and empowerment. However, traditional socio-cultural practices limit their opportunities in education, skills development, employment and participation in the overall development process (GED, 2008). Undoubtedly, women can play a vital role if they are properly involved in agricultural production system and other income generating activities as well as decision making process (AIS, 2004). If women can perform their roles and responsibilities in families and societies, a quality generation will be produced. Of course in order to achieve that, a sufficient amount of information is a necessity (Bakar, 2011).

The information needs of women should be of concern to most because women are the foundation of any society (Olorunda, 2004). The information needs of people depend on various factors such as education, profession, age, gender, region, socio-economic condition, religion, even weather. Ukachi (n.d.) stated that information needs of an individual or group of individual's depends highly on the work activities of such an individual or group of individuals, e.g., doctors need information on the treatment of sicknesses, while farmers need information on agriculture. However, the rural women do not have specific information need like doctors and farmers rather, they individually have different information needs based on their work activities. The family situations led rural women to seek information included health, agriculture, employment, family violence, and basic needs for the family (Mooko, 2005). Women's information needs on personal, religious, social, domestic, professional or medical are an important factor in determining the quality of life they live, their output professionally or socially, at home and to the world generally (Olorunda, 2004). Momodu (2002) carried out a study on information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in Nigeria. He identified women information needs. The women particularly needed information on pre and post natal care and current immunization facilities for their children and themselves.

Rural women of Bangladesh need information on agriculture, food and nutrition, animal husbandry, health, family planning, child education, etc. However, they have very limited and conventional types of sources of information.

Data Analysis

Age

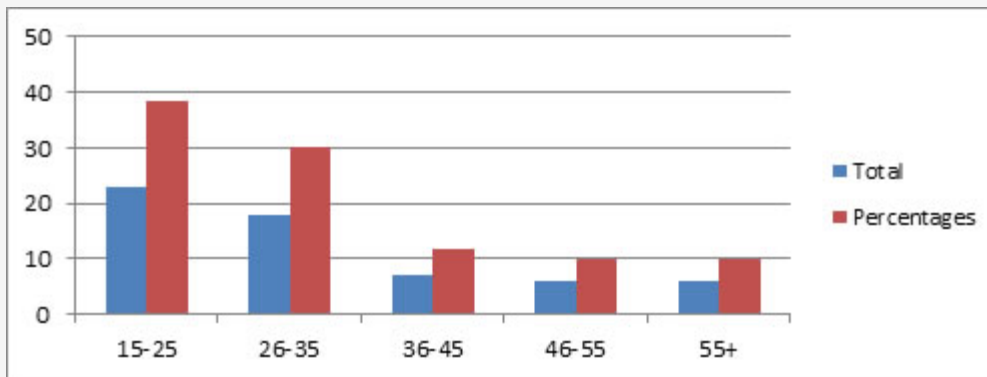
The respondents of this study were from different age groups. The highest percentages of respondents were from the age group of 15 to 25, the figure was about 38. Only 20% of the respondents were more than 45 years old. It can be observed that most of the respondents (68%) were less than 36 years old.

Table 1: Age group of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
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15-25 Years	23	38.33
26-35 Years	18	30
36-45 Years	7	11.66
46-55 Years	6	10
55 to above	6	10
N=	60	100

Figure 1: Age group of the respondents



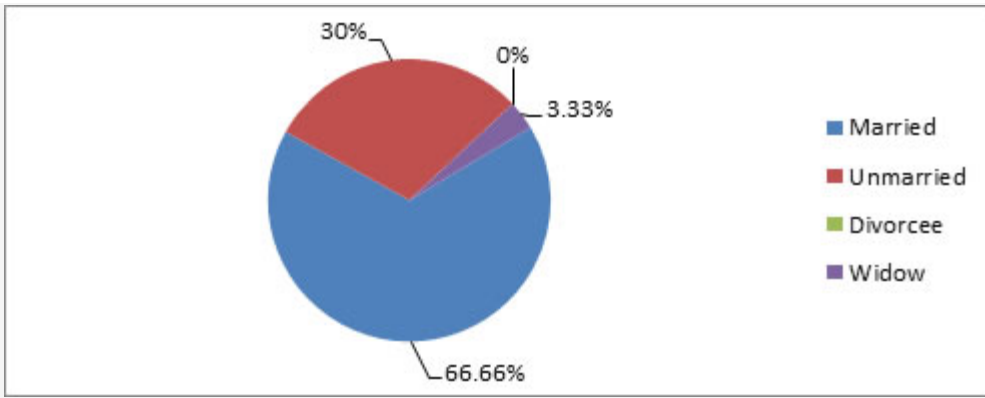
Marital Status

Marital status can influence information need of people. In this study about 67% of the respondents were married. There was no divorcee, and only 2 respondents were widow. The rest of the respondents (30%) were unmarried.

Table 2: Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	40	66.66
Unmarried	18	30
Divorcee	0	0
Widow	2	3.33
N=	60	100

Figure 2: Marital status of the respondents



Education

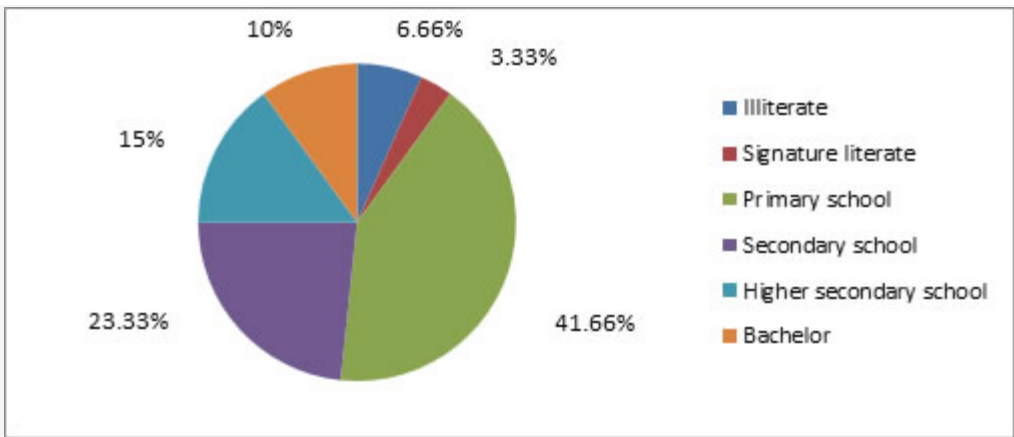
Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2009b) showed that the net enrollment rate of girls in primary education was 94.7% in 2007. Bangladesh exceeded its target of ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education; the figures were 1.03 and 1.17 respectively in 2009. Moreover, in the same year, the ratio of women to men in tertiary education was 0.80, the target of this indicator is 1 by 2015.

It was found that, about 42% respondents had primary education, while about 7% respondents were illiterate. About 23% of women had secondary school education and 15% had higher secondary education. The percentage of rural women who had bachelor degree was 10. However, more than 3% of the participants were signature literate. It was observed that, 90% of the respondents had at least primary education.

Table 3: Academic qualification of the respondents

Academic qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	4	6.66
Signature literate	2	3.33
Primary school	25	41.66
Secondary school	14	23.33
Higher secondary school	9	15
Bachelor	6	10
N=	60	100

Figure 3: Academic qualification of the respondents



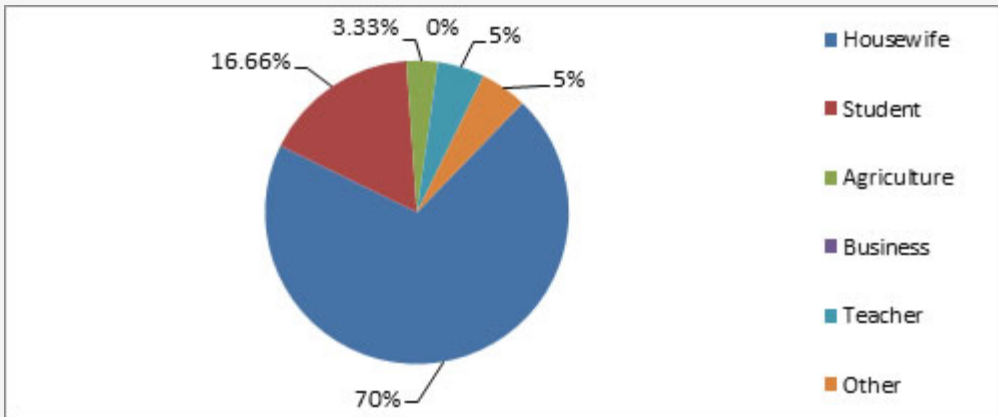
Occupation

The rural women are directly and indirectly involved in all phases of agricultural activities with major participation in post harvest activities, homestead gardening, food and nutrition affairs etc. (AIS, 2004). In this study, the maximum percentage of the respondents (75%) was housewife, while about 17% of the total respondents were students. The percentage of the respondents who were involved in teaching was 5%. Moreover, more than 3% of the respondents were involved in agriculture. No respondents were engaged in business.

Table 4: Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Housewife	42	70
Student	10	16.66
Agriculture	2	3.33
Business	0	0
Teacher	3	5
Other	3	5
N=	60	100

Figure 4: Occupation of the respondents



Awareness of Information

The respondents were asked, do they know what the information is? One fifth of them answered that, they do not have any idea about information. Of the sixty participants, 80% were aware about information, while 20% of the respondents were not aware about it.

Table 5: Awareness of Information of the respondents

Awareness of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	80
No	12	20
N=	60	100

Types of Information Needs

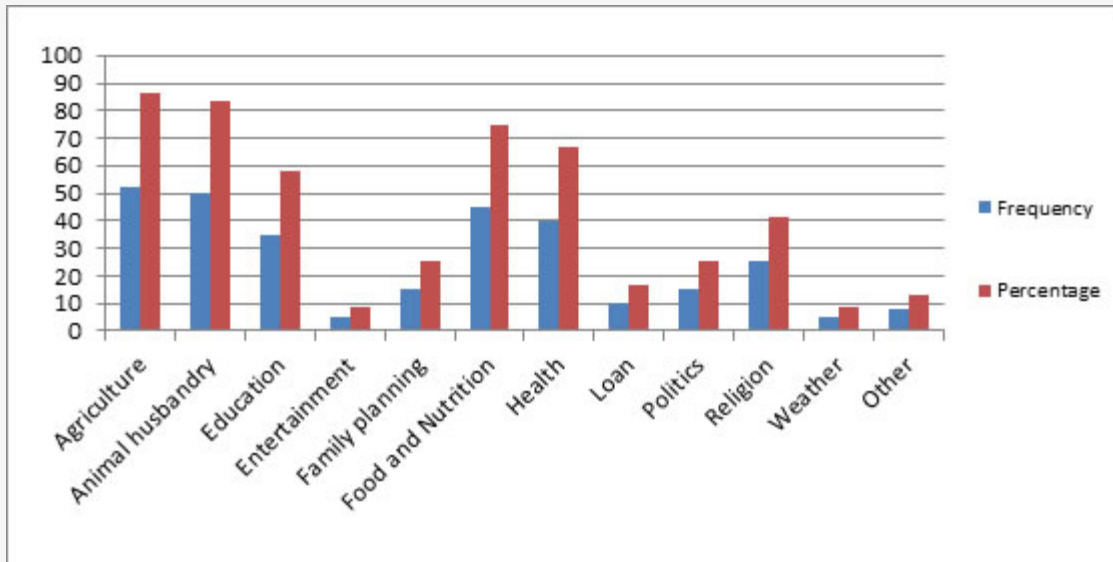
Saleh and Lasisi (2011) categorized the information needs of rural women in Nigeria into agriculture, education, economy, health, political and others. Rural women in Bangladesh need agricultural, educational, health, economic and social information in their daily lives. The research showed that highest percentage of the respondents (86.66%) needed agricultural information, followed by information on animal husbandry (83.33%), food and nutrition (75%), health (75%), education (58.33%), religion (41.66), politics (25%), family planning (25%), loan (16.66%). The lowest percentage (8.33%) of the respondents needed information on both weather, and entertainment. It can be observed that, although very few (3.33%) women were directly involved with agriculture, most of the women needed information on agriculture and animal husbandry.

Table 6: Types of Information needs of the rural women (Multiple responses)

Subject/ Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	52	86.66
Animal husbandry	50	83.33
Education	35	58.33
Entertainment	5	8.33
Family planning	15	25
Food and Nutrition	45	75
Health	40	66.66
Loan	10	16.66
Politics	15	25
Religion	25	41.66
Weather	5	8.33

Other	8	13.13
N=	60	100

Figure 5: Types of Information needs of the rural women



Sources of Information

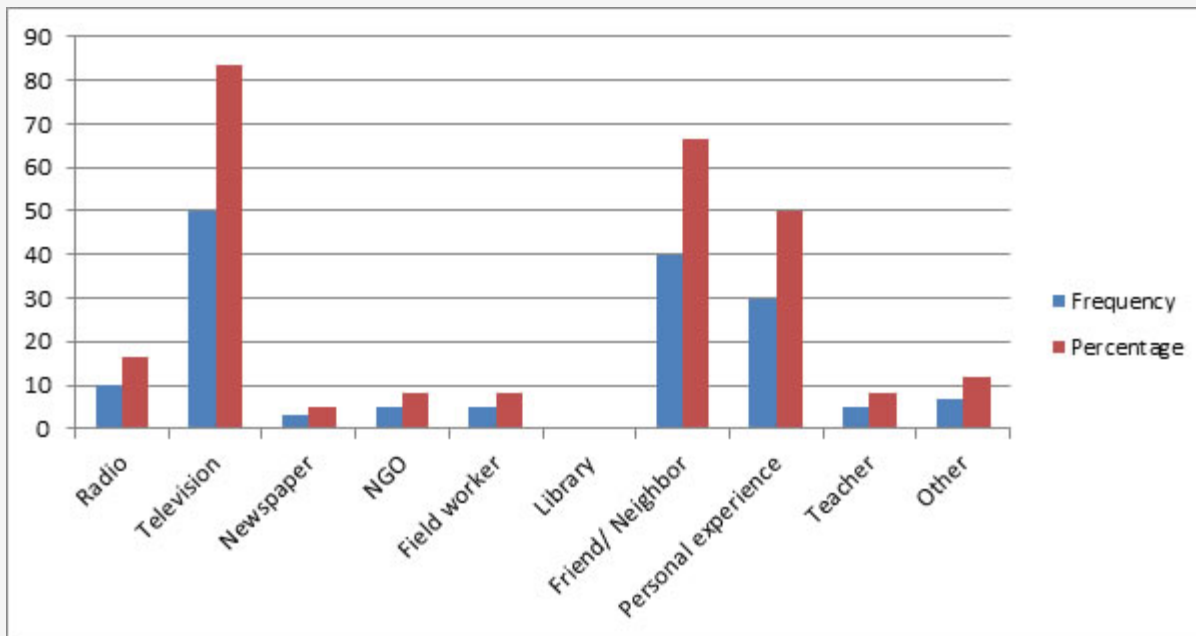
Information seeking is a complex information and communication activity requiring access to diverse of sources of information to deal with personal, social and work-related problems (Spink and Cole, 2001). Radio and television are available in almost all houses in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The rural women use these media for entertainment as well as important sources of information. 55 respondents of the study had television in their house, and only 5 respondents did not have their own television. More than 83% of the respondents used Television as a source of information, while about 17% used radio to meet their information needs. On the other hand, about 67% of the respondents took information from their friends or neighbors, and half of the total respondents used personal experience as a source of information. It is interesting that, there was no women who went to library to meet their information need, only 5% of the respondents read newspaper for information.

Table 7: Sources of Information the Rural Women Use (Multiple responses)

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	10	16.66
Television	50	83.33
Newspaper	3	5
NGO	5	8.33
Field worker	5	8.33
Library	0	0
Friend/ Neighbor	40	66.66
Personal experience	30	50

Teacher	5	8.33
Other	7	11.66
N=	60	100

Figure 6: Sources of Information the Rural Women Use



Causes to Use the Sources of Information

The women were asked why they had used these sources to meet their information need. 80% of the respondents told that they used these sources of information because these were easily available to them, while 85% of the women used the above sources of information to meet their information need because they knew about these sources earlier. Moreover, few respondents (18%) told that someone had advised them to use these sources for accurate information.

Table 8: Causes to Use the Sources of Information (Multiple responses)

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Someone has advised	11	18.33
Prior knowledge	51	85
Easily available	48	80
N=	60	100

Satisfaction of Using the Sources of Information

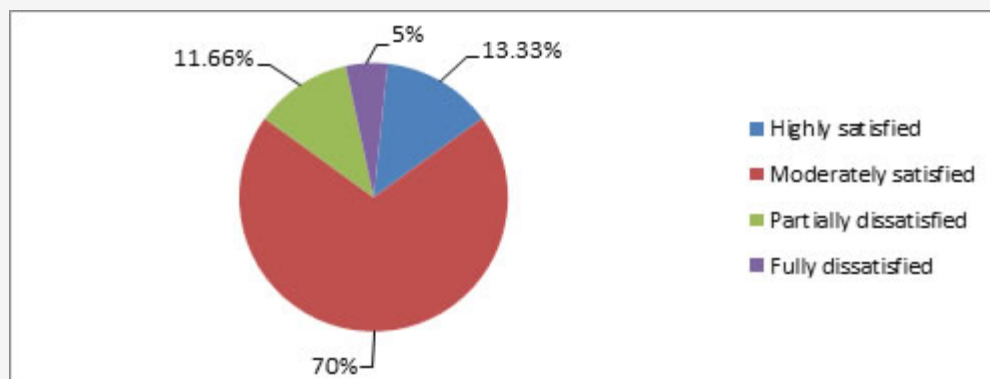
Lack of information has kept rural dwellers backward and ignorant of modern trends, and this situation persist because there are no information service which really satisfy the information needs of rural people (Nwagha, 1992). In this study, most of the rural women (70%) were moderately satisfied with the present sources of information available to them. However, very few women (13.33%) were highly satisfied with the conventional sources of information. Moreover, about 12% of the respondents were partially dissatisfied, and only 5%

respondents were fully dissatisfied with these sources of information.

Table 9: Level of Satisfaction in Using the Sources of Information

Satisfaction level	Frequency	Percentage
Highly satisfied	8	13.33
Moderately satisfied	42	70
Partially dissatisfied	7	11.66
Fully dissatisfied	3	5
N=	60	100

Figure 7: Level of Satisfaction in Using the Sources of Information



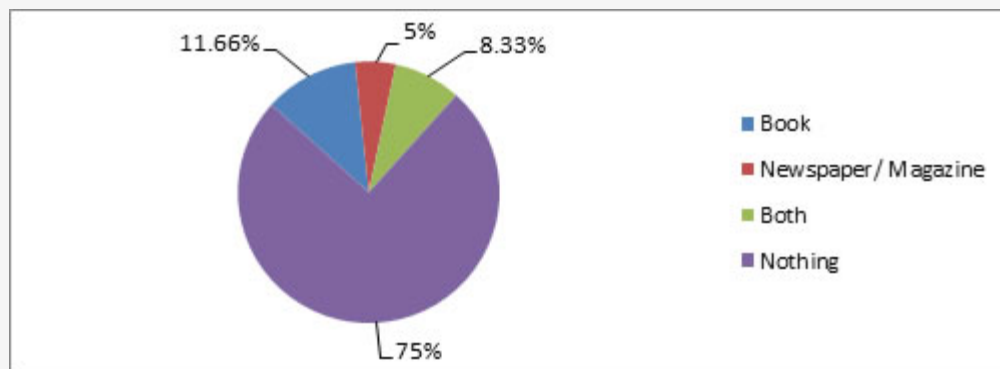
Reading Habit of the Respondents

Neither a subsistence farmer nor a graduate chemist can fulfill his or her potential without the cognitive growth that comes from reading widely and people will not read further than their immediate needs if they are not given the reading habit (Phillip, n.d.). The importance of literacy and the development of strong reading habits cannot be overstated in their importance to overall human development, especially as it regards women (Dent, 2007). The study showed that only 11.66% of the respondents were used to read books, 5% respondents read newspapers or magazines, and 8.33% respondents read both books and newspapers or magazines. It is note worthy that the rest of the respondents (75%) did not read anything.

Table 10: Reading habit of the respondents

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Book	7	11.66
Newspaper/ Magazine	3	5
Both	5	8.33
Nothing	45	75
N=	60	100

Figure 8: Reading habit of the respondents



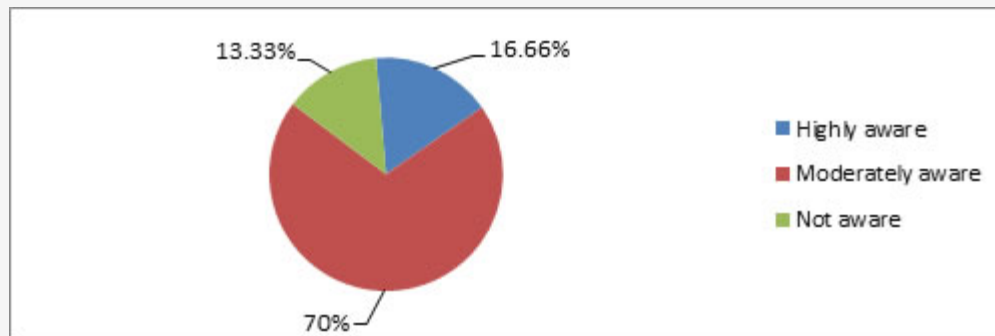
Awareness of Family Planning

Family planning allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the spacing and timing of their births. It is achieved through use of contraceptive methods and the treatment of involuntary infertility. A woman's ability to space and limit her pregnancies has a direct impact on her health and well-being as well as on the outcome of each pregnancy (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011). The widespread adoption of family planning, in a society, is an integral component of modern development and is essential for the integration of women into social and economic life (Mustafa, Afreen and Hashmi, 2008). The data collected revealed that only 16.55% of the women were highly aware of family planning, and 70% of the respondents were moderately aware of it. More than 13% of the rural women were completely ignorant about family planning.

Table 11: Awareness of Family Planning

Level of awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Highly aware	10	16.66
Moderately aware	42	70
Not aware	8	13.33
N=	60	100

Figure 9: Awareness of Family Planning



Sources of Information for Family Planning

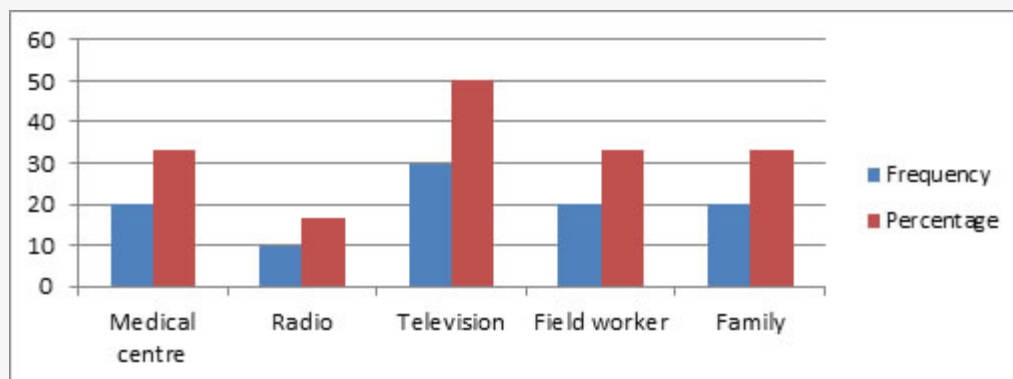
Mustafa et al. (2008) revealed that the women of Pakistan used three sources of information for family planning- Mass media, Health personnel and Social circle. In this study, half of the women (50%) used television as a source of information for family planning, radio had been used by only 16.66% of the respondents. On the other hand, the percentages of the women who used medical centre, field worker & family as sources of information for family planning were the same, the figure was 33.33. Most of the women used more than one sources for family

planning information.

Table 12: Sources of Information for Family Planning (Multiple responses)

Sources of Information for family planning	Frequency	Percentage
Medical centre	20	33.33
Radio	10	16.66
Television	30	50
Field worker	20	33.33
Family	20	33.33
N=	60	100

Figure 10: Sources of Information for Family Planning



Willingness to Know about Education of Children/Child Education

Rural women in Bangladesh are now conscious about their child education, even some are aware about Early Childhood Education. They have willingness to know about education of their children, because most of them have at least primary education. As a result, the net enrolment in Primary school was 91.9% in 2008 (General Economic Division [GED], 2009). Out of the 60 respondents, a large percentage (75%) of the rural women was aware of their child education, and the rest of the respondents (25%) were not aware about it.

Table 13: Willingness to Know about Children Education

Willingness	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	45	75
No	15	25
N=	60	100

Awareness of Family Health

Regardless of location, however, women tend to be the primary seekers of information for their children and other family members, as well as for themselves (Warner and Procaccino, as cited in Bakar, 2011). Women are by

nature caring about their family health, especially about their children's health. As most of the Bangladeshi rural women are housewife and take care of their children by themselves they need information about their family health. Most rural women are aware about their health during pregnancy, health of their children, as well as of other family members. The respondents were asked whether they are aware of their family health or not. About 67% rural women were answered they are aware of their family health, and about 33% of the women answered that they are not aware about it.

Table 14: Awareness of Family Health

Aware of family health	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	33.33
No	40	66.66
N=	60	100

Involvement with NGOs

Most of the women in rural areas are now involved with Non Government Organizations (NGOs), whether it is large or small. The data collected revealed that, two third of the respondents have involvement with NGO, and the rest do not have engagement with such kind of organizations.

Table 15: Number of women involved with NGOs

Involvement with NGOs	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	33.33
No	40	66.66
N=	60	100

Discussion

The research found that most of the women of the rural areas in Bangladesh are literate, but almost all of them are housewives. Although only a little number of women is directly involved with agriculture, most of the rural women need information on agriculture and animal husbandry. Almost all families at villages have some cows, goats, sheep, buffalos, ducks, hens etc. Women, who live in villages, are normally responsible for taking care of these animals, so they need information on animal husbandry as well as their treatment. In recent years, few women in villages produce eggs and meats at their home- based poultry farms. A large number of women are involved with homestead gardening, and produce vegetables to meet their daily family needs of vegetable and nutrition; they also earn money by selling vegetables at home or nearest market. As maximum numbers of women have at least primary education, they are conscious and need information on health, food and nutrition, family planning, as well as their child education.

However, they do not have authentic and modern sources of information to meet their information needs. Television and radio are available to the rural people because these are comparatively cheap and affordable for them. Actually, rural people use television and radio for entertainment; in addition, they get information for other purposes from these sources. When they need quick information, they usually ask their friends or neighbors, sometimes they use personal experience, which can be erroneous. There are no libraries or information centers in these three villages, so people are not used to go to library and seek information. NGOs and Field workers have very limited contribution to provide information to the rural women.

The research revealed that most of the rural women are moderately satisfied with the sources of information they

are presently using because these are easily available to them and they are familiar with these sources. They are not well known with the modern Information and Communication Technologies, only a few women of rural part ever heard the name of internet. Literacy rate has been increased among the rural women in Bangladesh, but there are no libraries in the villages so that the reading habit of the women can be grown. As a result, a large proportion of the rural women depend on friends, neighbors, or experienced people for their needed information.

Government of Bangladesh has taken some initiatives for the empowerment of women, such as increasing participation in parliament, gender equality in education, women employment, increasing social and legal protection, etc. However, government does not have any initiative to meet the information needs of the rural women. As most of the people of Bangladesh live in rural parts, government should collect data for rural and urban area separately, so that the actual scenario of the rural women can be revealed. In order to empower rural women, awareness of information needs and information sources should be created among them.

In addition to establish libraries or information centers in the rural areas for the development of knowledge base of the women, Information and Communication Technologies should be introduced to them, so that they can use the modern technologies to meet their information needs.

Conclusion

If we consider a family, or an industry, or an organization, or a country as a machine, and education as a training by which one can operate a machine successfully; then information is like a fuel that will run the machine. Information is needed everywhere and for everybody, but in a different way. Availability of information enables the individuals or groups to make rationale decision and reduce their level of uncertainty. However, women at the rural parts in Bangladesh highly depend on their friends and neighbors for the information they need in their day to day activities.

The study showed that although Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has taken many initiatives for women education, it has overlooked the information need of women. As most of the rural women in Bangladesh are engaged with agriculture directly or indirectly, they need to be equipped with timely and relevant information for the consistent growth in agricultural production. Government of Bangladesh (GoB) should concentrate on establishing public libraries and information centers in the rural areas. Academic libraries can also be established along with schools and colleges which will provide the necessary information for the individual development of the rural women as well as their family. Training on use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be arranged in schools and colleges as well as in public libraries, especially for the women of rural area so that they can get access to quick and accurate information regarding every aspect of their daily lives.

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