

INFORMATION NEEDS ON RURAL WOMEN: A STUDY OF TAMIL NADU, INDIA

S. Thanuskodi and P. Pandiselvi

Department of Library and Information Science
Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India .

Abstract:

The present age has been rightly called as an Information Age. Information has become the most important element for progress in society. According to Kemp "information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter". Everyone needs information about everything even in his day to day life.

KEYWORDS:

Rural Women, Information Needs, society.

INTRODUCTION

The information needs; demands and wants have been used interchangeably, although they may not be identical. Information need involves a cognitive process which may operate on different levels of consciousness and, hence, may not be clear even to the inquirer him/her. People in different situations require information on a subject in different forms and with different emphasis and different depth of explanation. Even the same person seeks information in different ways and forms on various occasions depending on his/her knowledge of the subject and the reasons for wanting the information. So the information need is very difficult to define and categorize.

WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The Indian society like a number of classical societies was patriarchal. Patriarchal values regulating sexuality, reproduction and social production prevailed and were expressed through specific cultural metaphors. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But more subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self-sacrificing pure image of women and through the ritual practices which day in and day out emphasized the dominant role of a women as a faithful wife and devout mother.

There are a number of images of Indian women, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory. She is revered as a Goddess; but at the same time, her birth is not much preferred. She is considered as an embodiment of Sakthi, but at the same time she is considered as one to be protected all through in her life-by father, husband and son respectively. She is worshipped as a Goddess but instances of treating her as slave are not unknown. She is honoured as a mother and loved as a child. But as a wife and of one's own age group, for example, a friend or a colleague, the attitude is not always positive or friendly. At times, general comments on entire women-folk irrespective of age and accomplishments are not unknown. While the reverential feelings exist at ideological level, she is socially treated as inferior and is assigned discriminatory values.

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.

Women, form about half of the population of the country, but their situation has been grim. For centuries, they have been deliberately denied opportunities of growth in the name of religion and socio-cultural practices. Before independence, women were prey to many abhorrent customs, traditional rigidities and vices due to which their status in the society touched its nadir and their situation was all-round bleak. At the personal social plan, women were victims of widespread illiteracy.

They are the recipients of an iniquitously small share of development opportunities. Their access to education, nutrition, health care, skill formation, jobs and decision making is very limited. Many customs cause them harassment. Wage discrimination and gender bias are both visible and widespread. Generally they are employed in low paid, low producing sectors, despite a lot of laws enacted for conceptualizing the equal status of women. After Independence many steps have been taken to improve the lot of women. Many laws have also been passed. A National Commission on Women was setup to act as a watchdog on the matters concerning women in 1992. Many Programmes in the areas of education, health and employment have been initiated for development of women, rural as well as urban.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Harande observes that rural areas of Nigeria are still not developed and the quality of life of people in the rural areas continues to deteriorate throughout all tiers of government of both politicians and the military regimes. The rural communities' accessibility to pertinent information becomes extremely difficult and impractical. Effective information service in the rural community enhances development.

Raju outlines the various needs of rural people and identifies those information needs that would improve the quality of life and sustain it. In the light of the processes that are leading to the democratic decentralization to empower the local people to increase their participation in planning and development, the kind of activities the local governments at various levels are scheduled to take up, are outlined. The role of Community Information Centres in fulfilling the articulated needs of the village community and how these centres can be conceived as dynamic institutions, integrating information generated at various levels, transforming into readily usable material, and the various databases to be developed depending upon the needs of the rural community are discussed. Suggests the need to bring this communication revolution to the doorsteps of the people. Then there is a possibility that information available on the super highway would also be made available in a repackaged format in an intelligible and usable format to the rural people.

Tadasad and Yallappa report, the results of a study conducted to know the information needs and gathering habits of rural community for identifying the role of rural libraries based on the interviews conducted using structured interview schedules with one hundred and seventy-eight people of Kusanoor village, Gulbarga district, The study identifies the awareness of various types of information, types of information sought, reasons for wanting information, preferred sources and preference for obtaining information in the past and future, importance of information for exercising citizenship rights, awareness and importance of Right to Information, preferred methods for gathering information, methods used to express the feelings in public, methods used for obtaining information, awareness and utilization of rural library services. Identifies different roles of the rural libraries – supplementary role, coordinators role, role of a friend, and role of input provider to the Government. Suggests that the awareness of rural libraries has to be created through various outreach programs, the Department of Public Libraries, Government of Karnataka has to take vigorous and integrated programs jointly with NGOs in developing multipurpose rural library system.

Singh and Agarwal list number of problems. The first problem is: we don't exactly know the information needs and information seeking behavior of the rural populace; second: we still haven't found an appropriate mechanism, system to deliver this information. A Aqua (almost all questions answered) a multilingual multimedia question answer system is a project at Media Lab Asia , IIT Bombay, which is a step forward in attempting to solve this problem. A Aqua a multilingual communication system connects the farmer's question with the expert's answers.

Anwar and Supaat present an analysis based on the findings of a study of the information needs of the population of a cluster of 3 Malaysian villages with no library service. Out of 300 households 108 individuals were interviewed during Feb 1996. Results emphasize that the needs of the rural population must be investigated when planning rural library services.

Thanuskodi revealed in his study indicates the sex distribution of respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 260 respondents, majority of the respondents (66.92%) belong to the male group and the rest of them (33.08%) are females. It is concluded that male respondents constitute more in number than female respondents.

Mooko investigates the information needs and information-seeking behavior of rural women residing in three non-urban villages in Botswana. The total population of the study was divided into two groups, opinion leaders and women residing in the three villages. The women residing in the villages were either single heads of households or married. The family situations that led them to seek information included health, agriculture, employment, family violence, and basic needs for the family. In addition, the women needed information on government aided funding, welfare subsidies and policies, and training. The sources of information used included village nurses, community welfare officers, and traditional doctors, other women in the villages, village chiefs, and agricultural demonstrators.

Young examines women's information needs and information seeking behaviour and to develop more effective delivery methods for government information. Women play a major information-seeker role. Women's information seeking experiences and preferences are diverse. Women from low socio-economic backgrounds and minority groups are disadvantaged in information seeking.

Chatterjee notices that lack of sufficient information support is hampering the rural development work in the country although rural information kiosks have been set up in different states for providing information needed by the rural folk. These are functioning independent of local public libraries, which is not a good trend. Moreover, such facilities developed so far are quite inadequate considering the vastness of the country. Hence it is suggested for the development of appropriate information products and services and a good information dissemination mechanism. A scheme should be taken

up for creation of area specific databases and information kiosks should be set up in all villages. As far as possible, local public libraries should be given the responsibility of running these kiosks. Further, local information dissemination centers should be networked to facilitate information exchange and sharing and an information system for rural development should be developed for catering to the needs of policy maker, scientists and extension worker.

Thanuskodi revealed in his study indicates the gender distribution of respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 320 respondents, majority of the respondents (54.68%) belong to the male group and the rest of them (45.32%) are females. It is concluded that male respondents constitute more in number than female respondents, indicating the presence of male domination in medical profession in Tamil Nadu.

Mahajan highlights the importance of information support for the rural development with special reference to the state of Panjab by discussing the role of institutions located at Chandigarh that are playing an important role for the rural upliftment in north-west India.

Cho and Eun describe Women's Development center established by a local government in Korea - Gyeonggi Women's Development Center to empower women's socio-economic activities. This study lists various lessons Koreans have learned through the center, which is dedicated to encouraging women's leadership roles in various informational fields, to contribute to the empowerment of all women in the world.

Ganapathy, Malathi and Anbumalar conducted a study on the role of SHGs in women empowerment in the Erode district of Tamilnadu. The study was in descriptive in nature. There are 2400 SHGs are functioning in Erode district. Out of these, 24 are selected by using systematic sampling technique. Interview schedule was used for data collection. The percentage analysis and chi-square tests have been adopted to get crystal clear findings from the study. The study found that higher education is playing a crucial role in bringing women to SHGs for different purposes. The study also found that SHGs have given a platform to women not only for sharing their views but also, more importantly, to save money to help ease critical situations.

Usha and Monica conducted a study on the role of micro-finance in empowering women entrepreneurs in rural India by using secondary data. The study states that micro credit and microfinance are not the answer to all problems of poverty in developing countries but it is indeed an inducer to a great many actions that can lead to a better quality of life for the low income groups. Traditionally women have been marginalized, a high percentage of women are among the poorest of the poor. Micro finance activities can give rural women a means to climb out of their poverty. Micro finance could be a solution to help them to extend their horizon and offer them social recognition and empowerment.

Sivakami and Kulkarni examined whether women from economically, socially, and educationally weaker sections of the society receive adequate maternal health care. Though most women in Tamil Nadu receive antenatal care, many do not get institutional and professional care at delivery. Logic regression analysis shows that in both rural and urban areas only the economic factor, and not the social and educational factors, has a significant net effect on the ability to secure institutional delivery care.

Thanuskodi reports India has significant advantages in the 21st century knowledge race. It has a large higher education sector – the third largest in the world in student numbers, after China and the United States. Next to China, India is the most populated country in the world. The purpose of education is well-rounded development. Students need a combination of arts, computer science, science, and humanities or literature courses to achieve this kind of development. A well-equipped and well-managed library is the foundation of modern educational structure. It is said that education without library services is like a body without soul, a vehicle without an engine, and building with bricks but no cement. The library is the chief instrument for accumulating and using our intellectual heritage. The situation in academic libraries in India is the same as that of academic libraries the world over; however, Indian libraries must provide maximum information with limited resources.

Nakabugu by considering Uganda as an area of reference notes that it is confronted with a number of developmental challenges. However there is a major challenge to have food security because of the growing population and this can only be done by promoting agriculture and rural development. Uganda's approach to agricultural development is enshrined in its modernisation of agriculture plan, which calls for a shift from traditional agriculture to a technologically based scope. Also with elements of diversifying cash crop production and ensuring food security. The challenge government faces in achieving this goal centrally lies in its communication strategy as a denominator to cause change. This calls for communication approaches that target and involve the communities. One such approach is rural radio.

Malagar during 2006-07 in Belum district of Karnataka state. Sample consisted of 200 rural women pre-tested interview schedule was used for collection of information. Radio and Television programmes were classified into four categories namely farm, home, community and any other programmes. Any other programme included news, quiz, cinema and its songs, employment, crime, entertainment, astrology, serials, philosophical, educational programmes, etc. Amongst all these programmes majority of the respondents had listened and viewed only entertainment programmes. Highest time was spent on listening to any other programmes followed by home programmes, farm programmes and community programmes. With respect to television highest time was spent on entertainment programmes followed by home programmes, community programmes and farm programmes. Rural women strongly agreed that radio and television programmes are in simple language and helpful for adoption of technologies and give more information.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are evolved for the purpose of the present study:

- 1.to identify the information needs of rural women in Karaikudi;
- 2.to find out their information seeking behavior;

3.to identify their sources of information; and
 4.to examine their satisfaction of using the available sources of information

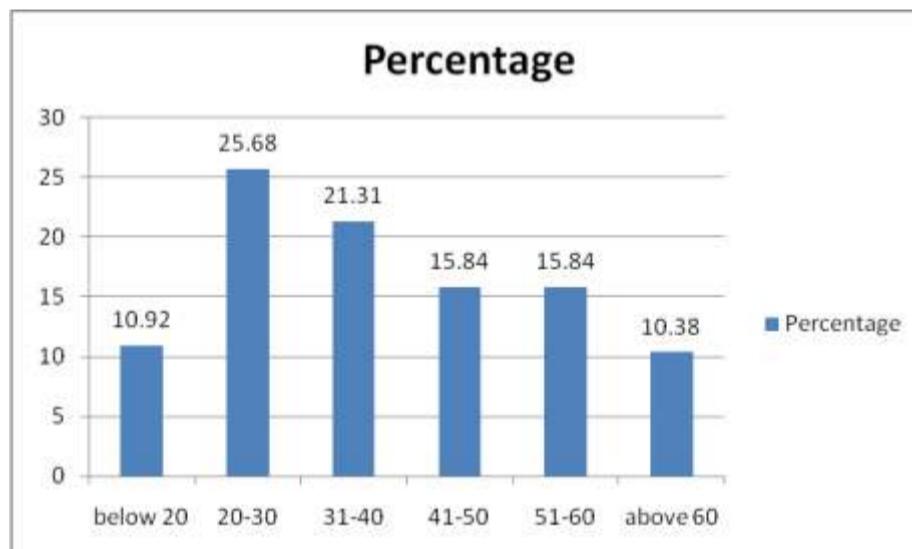
Research Methodology

The study used a questionnaire, with 20 questions spread over the following areas General profile of the respondent, awareness of Family health, awareness of Children Education, Satisfaction in Using the Sources of Information. The researcher has employed a well structured questionnaire for collecting the data from the rural women in Karaikudi. The questionnaire has been prepared in such a way that the respondents could easily understand the items. A total number of 220 questionnaires were distributed among the rural women. They are personally requested to fill up the questionnaire at their earliest convenience in order to help the investigator to collect the same during his next visit. The investigator has to make second, third and fourth visits to the college for collecting the filled-in-questionnaires from the rural women. During these visits, the investigator could collect questionnaires from only 183 out of 220 rural women among whom the questionnaires were distributed. This constitutes 83.18% (183/220) of the total response. While selecting sample, random sampling method has been adopted.

DATAANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Age wise distribution of respondents

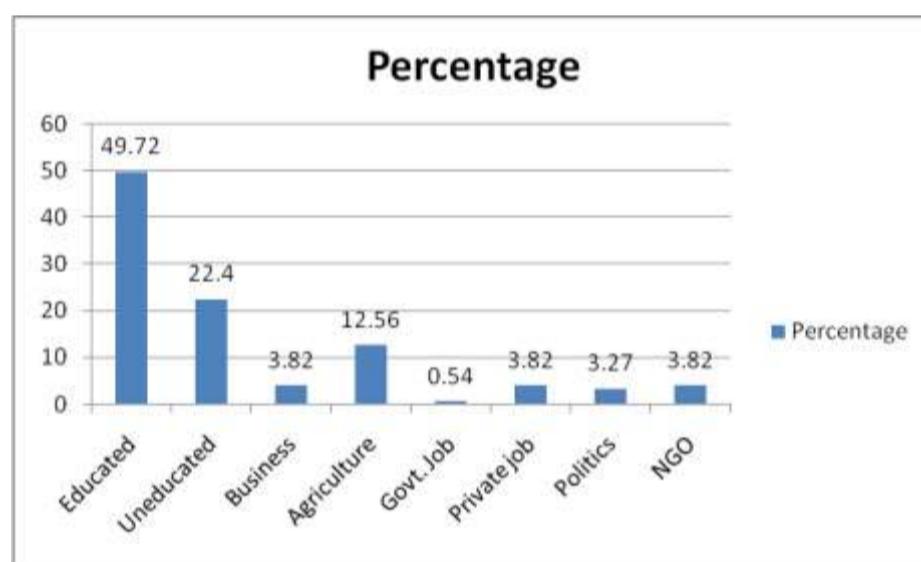
S.No	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	below 20	20	10.92
2	20-30	47	25.68
3	31-40	39	21.31
4	41-50	29	15.84
5	51-60	29	15.84
6	above 60	19	10.38
Total		183	100



The table 1 shows that the respondents of this study were from different age groups. The highest percentage of respondents were from the age group of 20-30, the figure was about 47 only 10.38 percentage of the respondents were more than above 60 years old. It can be observed that most of the respondents 58% were less than 40 years.

Table 2: Family background of the respondents

S.No	Family Background	Frequency	Percentage
1	Educated	91	49.72
2	Uneducated	41	22.4
3	Business	7	3.82
4	Agriculture	23	12.56
5	Govt. Job	1	0.54
6	Private job	7	3.82
7	Politics	6	3.27
8	NGO	7	3.82
Total		183	100



A study of data in table 2: indicates the family background of respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 183 respondents 49.27% of them are educated, 22.4% of them are uneducated, and 12.56% of them are agriculture background then next followed by business, private job and NGOs are respectively 3.82%, 3.27% of them are politics and only 0.54% of them are government job family background.

Table 3: Profession of the respondents

S.No	Profession	Frequency	Percentage
1	Student	21	11.47
2	Teacher	18	9.83
3	Agriculture	26	14.20
4	Business	8	4.37
5	Housewife	91	49.72
6	Govt. job	6	3.27
7	Self employee	5	2.73
8	Private job	8	4.37
		183	100

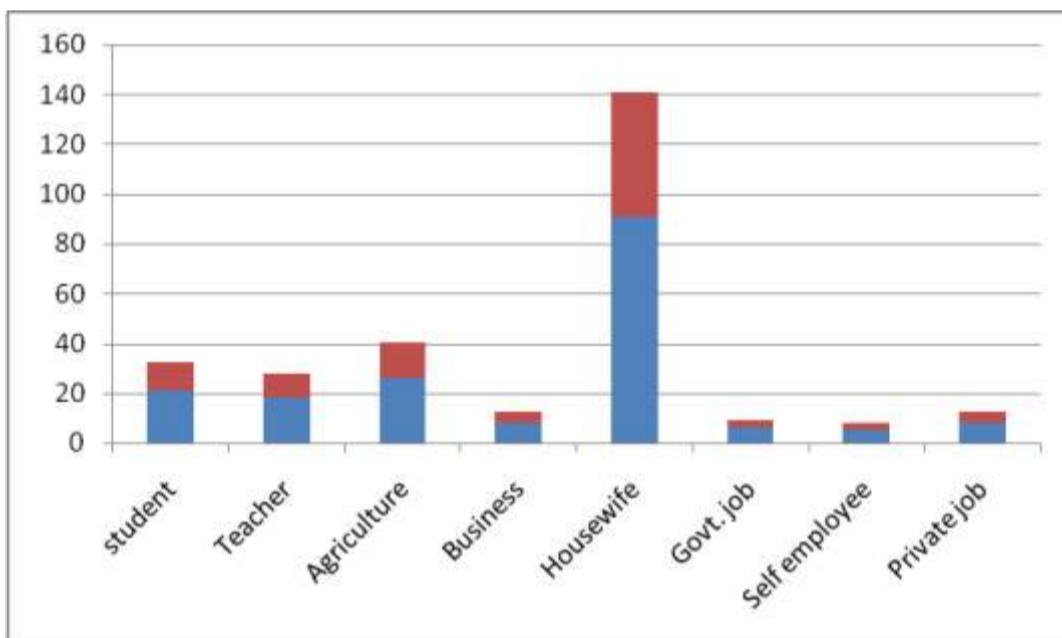


Table 3 indicates that in this study the maximum percentage of the respondents 50% was house wife, while about 14% of the respondents were agriculture, 11% of the respondents were students, 10% of the respondents who were involved in teaching profession, 4% of the respondents were engaged in business and private job, 6% of the respondents were worked in government jobs. It was observed 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...

Table 4: Information needs for rural women

S.No	Information needs	Frequency	Percentage
1	Education	92	50.27
2	Employment	28	15.30
3	Agriculture	42	22.95
4	Livestock	19	10.38
5	Health	21	11.48
6	Food nutrition	11	6.01
7	Loan	17	9.29
8	Politics	17	9.29
9	Religion	6	3.28
10	Family planning	4	2.19
11	Entertainment	11	6.01
12	Others	47	25.68

(Percentage is more than 100 because multiple choice questions.)

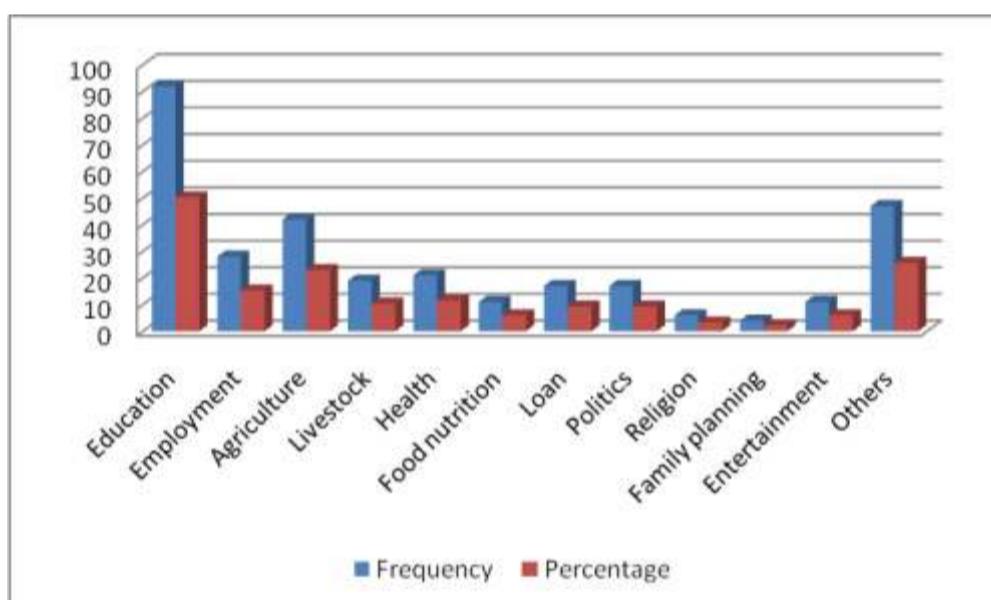


Table 4 shows that the investigator asked to the respondent the areas of information which require for the day to day activity. As evident from above table 50.27% majority of the women need information on education information, followed by information on others respectively 25.68%, agriculture information 22.95%, employment information 15.30% , health care information 11.48%, loan and politics information 9.29%, food nutrition, entertainment information respectively 6.01%, the lowest 3.28% of the respondents needed information on religion. It can be observed that most of the rural Women needed information on education and others.

Table 5: Reading habit of the respondents

S.No	Reading Habits	Frequency	Percentage
1	Books	81	44.26
2	Newspaper	106	57.92
3	Magazine	38	20.77
4	Nothing	56	30.6

(Percentage is more than 100 because multiple choice questions.)

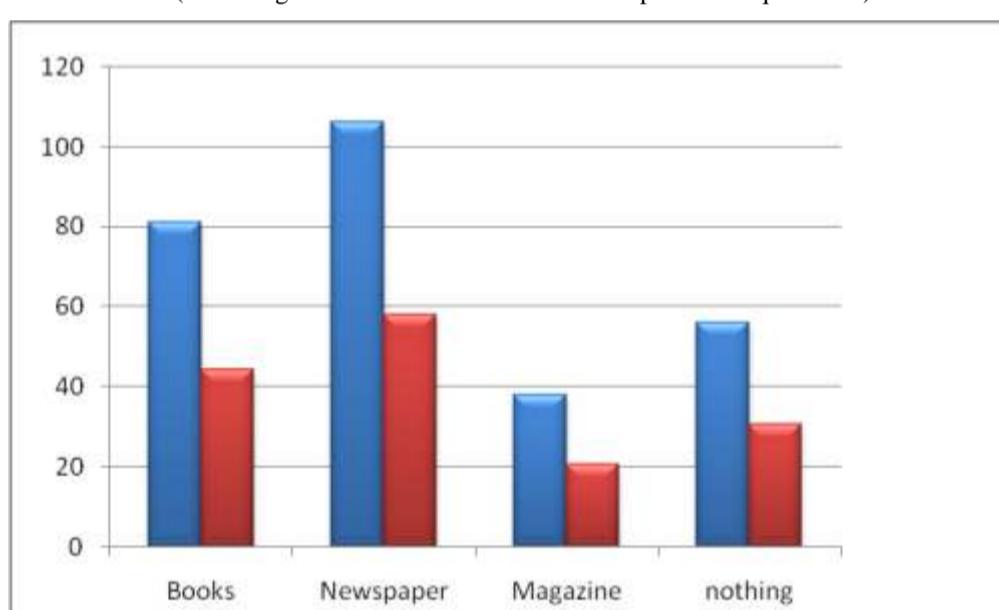
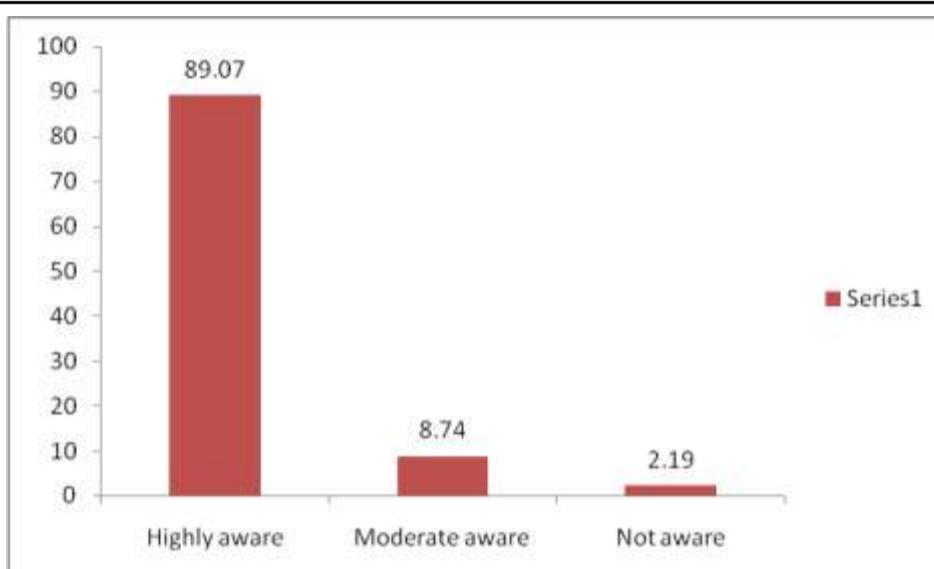


Table 5 shows the study showed that 57.92% of the respondents were used to read paper, 44.26% of the respondents read books, 20.77% of the respondents read magazines, it is note worthy that the rest of the respondents 30.6% did not any reading.

Table 6: Awareness of Family Planning

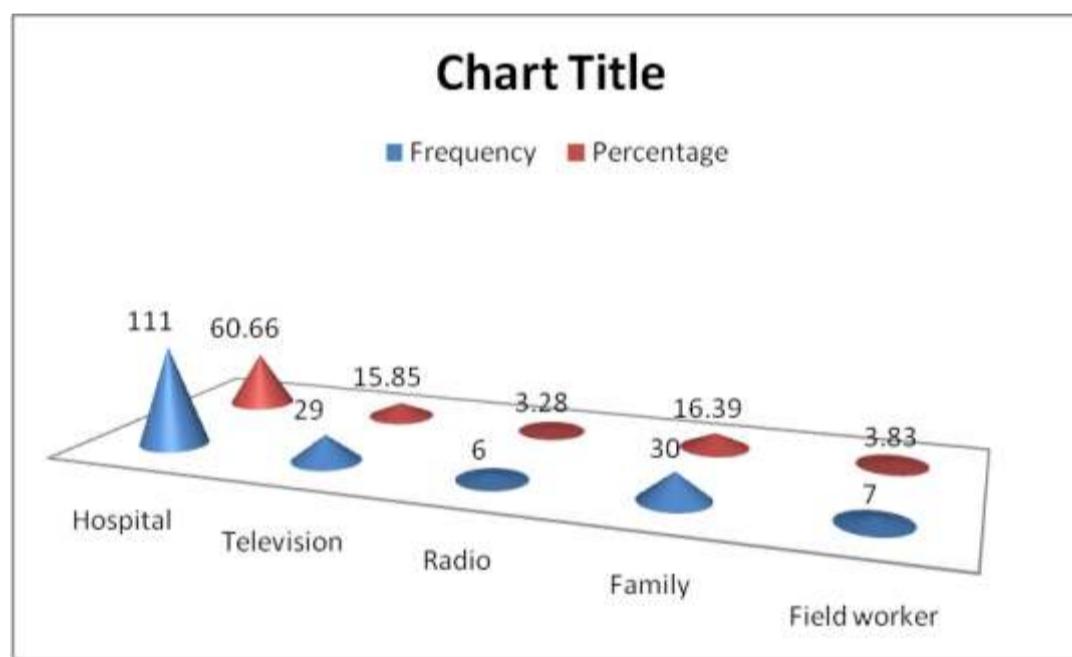
S.No	Family Planning	Frequency	Percentage
1	Highly aware	163	89.07
2	Moderate aware	16	8.74
3	Not aware	4	2.19
		183	100



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 data collected revealed that 89% of the women were highly aware of family planning, and 8.9% of the respondents were moderately aware of it, 2% of the rural women were completely ignorant about family planning.

Table 7: Source of information for Family Planning

S.No	Source of Information	Frequency	Percentage
1	Hospital	111	60.66
2	Television	29	15.85
3	Radio	6	3.28
4	Family	30	16.39
5	Field worker	7	3.83
		183	100



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 60% of the women were hospital as a main source of information, 16.39% of the women who used family as a main source of information, 15.85% of the women used mass media, followed by 3.28% were radio and 3.83% were field workers as a source of information for family planning.

FINDINGS, SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The main research findings drawn from the statistical analysis of the data have been summed up as follows: The highest percentage of respondents was from the age group of 20-30. It could be noted that out of the total 183 respondents 49.27% of them are educated, 22.4% of them are uneducated, and 12.56% of them are agriculture background then next followed by business, private job and NGOs are respectively 3.82%, 3.27% of them are politics and only 0.54% of them are government job family background. The data collected revealed that 89% of the women were highly aware of family planning, and 8.9% of the respondents were moderately aware of it, 2% of the rural women were completely ignorant about family planning.

SUGGESTIONS

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. 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 Karaikudi, 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 Tamil Nadu 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. As most of the people of Sivagangai District 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 Karaikudi highly depend on their friends and neighbors for the information they need in their day to day activities. Government of Tamil Nadu should concentrate on establishing public libraries 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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