

## Information need and Seeking Behavior of Rural Women: A Survey of Soon Valley

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to checkup/recognizes the information needs and seeking behavior of the rural women living in the most underprivileged area of Pakistan named Soon Valley. The rationale behind this was to identify the purposes of seeking information and preferred information channels and sources. Furthermore to explore the satisfactory level of rural women from the services offered to them and problems faced by them in finding the needed information and to suggest solutions/recommendations for improvement in the resources and services.

In-order to get a broader understanding, structured questionnaire based survey of Soon valley was conducted. Soon Valley consists of about 32 villages. Twenty villages of soon valley were the population. A purposive sampling technique is used to collect the required data. Data was collected from ten women by randomly selected from each village of soon valley. The research design were quantitative and consist of statistical analysis of questionnaires, Total no of 176 questionnaires were filled out of 200. It is the first type of study on information seeking behavior that is conducted in soon valley and particularly on rural women of Pakistan.

**Keyword(s):** Female; Rural; Barrier; Pakistan; Soon Valley.

### **Introduction**

Information is an imperative resource for growth and survival of any society as it enabled individuals, communities and peoples in stimulating their development and refining their quality of life. The growth of societies and individuals depends mostly on the right kind of information at the right time. Businessman needs information to be able to develop his business or specialist needs information to remain up-to-date and well informed in his specific field and the women of rural area require information for their needs and quality of life. If information is important, it must be used properly and also made it available for the people who need it after assessing their information needs and information seeking behavior.

The main objective of any society is to empower all segment of society as much as possible and this is possible through access and use of information, but in Pakistan, circumstances are different and the rural women are faraway than other from these opportunities where as the women of rural area required information for their needs and quality of life.

King (1995) described the shortage of studies on women's information needs and information uses in such areas like information for the home assignments, traditional women's subjects such as Sewing and cooking. The Women residing in villages and their information related issues have been neglected. There are relatively few studies on the information behavior of citizens in developing countries and many of them concentrated in the urban population, but some studies have been founded on the people living in rural areas..

The information needs of women can be classified into those related to daily survival, work, legal and health issues (Chatman, 1987a, 1992; Harris, 1988; Leckie, 1996).

## **Background**

Pakistan is in South Asia, shares an eastern border with India and northeastern border with China. The country has a total area of 796,095 square kilometers with 18 million people and more than 70 % of the population lives in rural areas.

This paper is attempted to know the information need and seeking behavior of villager women belongs to the villages of Soon Valley or Soon Sakesar that is situated in North West of Khushab in central Punjab province of Pakistan. Its population is more than 12 million. People are connected with professions like education, business, transportation etc. Agriculture is the main source of income of the people.

The lack of understanding of the information needs of rural communities is a major barrier in the design of rural information services

## **Literature Review**

Information-seeking behavior is an important researchable issue as it contributes in developments of information literacy that is the way of improvement of any society and individuals as well.

Kuhlthau (1993) information need in the discipline of information science is defined as the evolution from vague awareness of something missing. She says that when a user recognizes a need for information, he / she shall consult system information, and library sources or personal satisfaction from his / her need.

Nasreen (2006) psychologists divide human needs into three categories, physiological needs such as food water and shelter, psychological or affective needs or need for attainment, dominance and security etc and finally cognitive needs such as need to plan or to learn a skill etc. These needs are interrelated to each other.

Mooko (2005) said for rural women do not have the specific information you need, rather like doctors and farmers, they have individually different information based on the needs of their business activities. The family incidence of rural women to obtain information included health, agriculture, labor and domestic violence, and the basic needs of the family.

Bakar (2011) is of the view that if women can carry out their roles and responsibilities in the family and society, there will be a generation of quality. Of course, in order to ensure that a sufficient amount of information is a necessity.

Hossain, A., & Islam, S. (2012). Bangladesh Rural women need information on agriculture, food and nutrition, livestock, health, family planning, child education, etc. However, they have very limited and conventional types of information sources. And women in rural areas of Bangladesh are highly dependent on their friends and neighbors to get the information they need in their daily lives. Like most rural women in Bangladesh are engaged in agriculture, directly or indirectly, must be equipped with timely and relevant information to the steady growth of agricultural production.

Saleh, A. G., & Lasisi, F. I. (2011). Women make up the largest percentage of the rural population in Nigeria, are hard work and the resource group, if well used can provide the impetus for the government to achieve its Integrated Rural Development Programme. To achieve this, however, there is a need to develop awareness of information of rural women through the establishment of mechanisms for formal information delivery efficient, effective and reliable.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to achieve are:-

- To identify the information needs of rural women
- To identify their sources of information

- To find out the barriers in information seeking
- To examine their information seeking behavior
- To give recommendation for betterment of rural women information seeking process.

### Methodology

A survey method was adopted for the study. Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection, while oral interview was used to clarify some aspects of the questionnaire found unclear. As few literate women were able to complete the questionnaire on their own, most had to be interviewed and their responses were used to complete the questionnaires. Questionnaire was developed after reviewing relevant literature. Before final data collection, the instrument was pilot tested.

During data collection, the researchers had the opportunity to observe rural women in their natural environment, working in the field and performing household chores

The population of the study is made up of all the 32 Villages of Soon Valley. However the sampled population is drawn from 20 villages on convenient basis. The population is also consistent with close cultural and historical ties. This facilitated the development of a reliable questionnaire resulted in the response rate of 88%.

### Data Analysis

Data analyzed and interpreted through using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 20.0).

Variables used are shown in tables or graphs for easy understanding

#### *Age Group*

Table 1 shows the demographic information about the ages of the women residing in the village. The collected data revealed that amongst 176 respondents, most of them were of 21 to 30 years of age (33 percent), while 30 percent of the respondents have a marital age of 1 to 20 years and from 30 to 40, 41 to 50 and 51 to onwards have 15 percent, 15 percent and 7 percent respectively. It means the young generation has more contribution in this study, further almost all age group has participated in this survey.

*Table 1*  
*Age Group*

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
21-30	58	33
Below 20	52	30
31-40	27	15
41-50	27	15
51 and above	12	07
Total	176	100.0

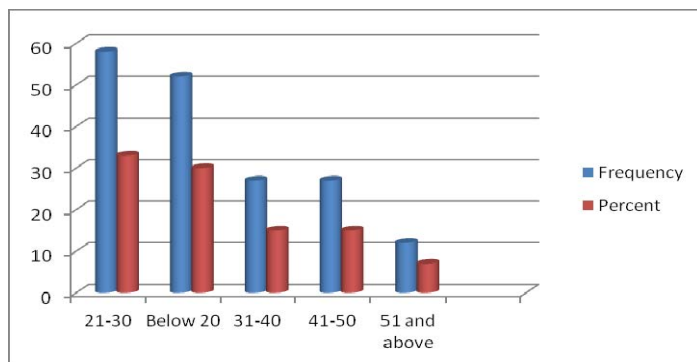


Fig. 1  
Age Group

**Level of Education**

Table 2 indicates education of the women, majority of the women are matriculate, 53 women are matriculate out of 176, it means that more than 30 percent are matriculate. 32 out of 176 are FA, 29 are BA, 22 are of elementary level, 19 and 16 out of 176 are of Master and secondary level respectively. There are also 3 respondents who have only Islamic education and 1 has non-formal education.

Table 2  
Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency	Percent
Matriculate	53	30
F.A.	32	18
B.A.	29	17
Elementary	23	13
Master	19	11
Primary	16	09
Only Islamic	03	06
Non Formal	01	02
Total	176	100

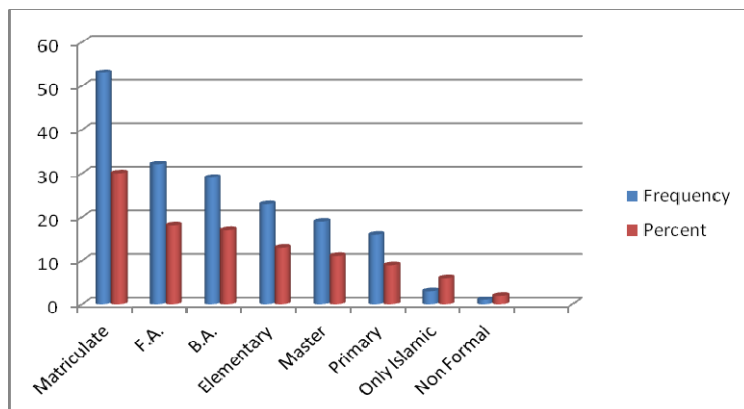


Fig. 2  
Level of Education

**Job Status**

Table 3 shows that most of the women are not doing jobs. 125 out of 176 are not job holders, while 51 out of 176 are doing jobs in Government as well as Private sector. As Soon Valley is a rural area, there are not enough job opportunities, also there is no culture of female jobs, but still sufficient women are doing jobs.

Table 3  
*Job Status*

<b>Job Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No	125	71
Yes	51	29
Total	176	100

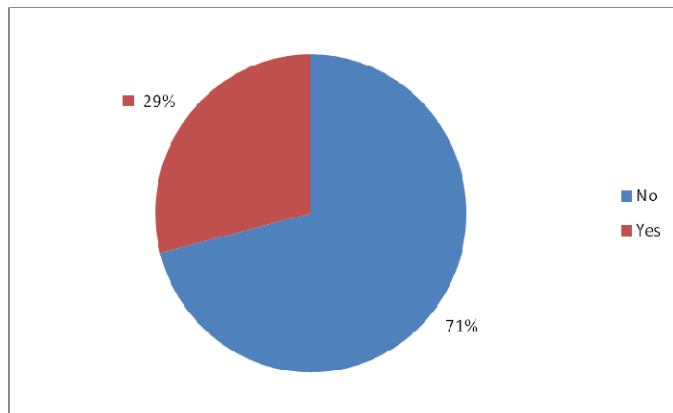


Fig. 3  
*Job Status*

**Nature of Job**

Table 4 Indicate the nature of women’s job who took part in the questionnaire most of the women are helping hand with their male counterparts. They are mostly related to teaching profession i.e. 22, and also from others sectors like health, Agriculture, NGOs etc. Education is dominated profession due to good educational policy of government by hiring educators in different phases.

Table 4  
*Nature of Job*

<b>Nature of Job</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
None	125	70
Teachers	23	13
Government Job	11	6
LHV	07	4
NGO	04	3
Private	03	2
Agriculture	02	1
Doctor	01	1
Total	176	100

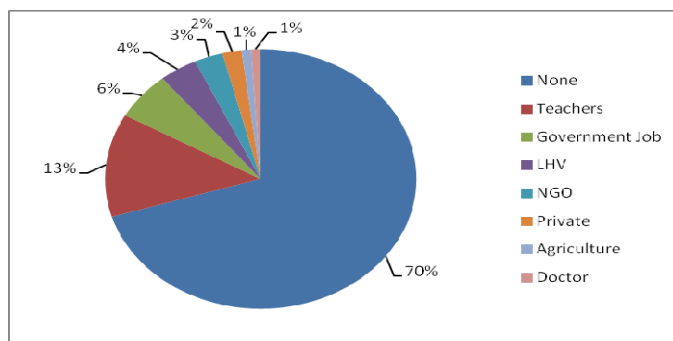


Fig. 4  
Nature of Job

**Common Tasks**

The research showed that the Cooking and Home look after are on the top, then there are washing and sewing, Child care and their education is also priority of married women, there is also focus on caring of In Laws, as normally there is combine family system prevailing in the villages, so women are also very keen to take good care of their In laws.

Table 5  
Common Tasks.

Common Tasks	Percent
Cooking	84
Home Look After	75
Washing	72
Sewing	70
Home Organization	68
Child Care	46
Child Education	44
Husband & family in Laws look after	42
Shopping	19
Job	17
Finance Delivery and management	05

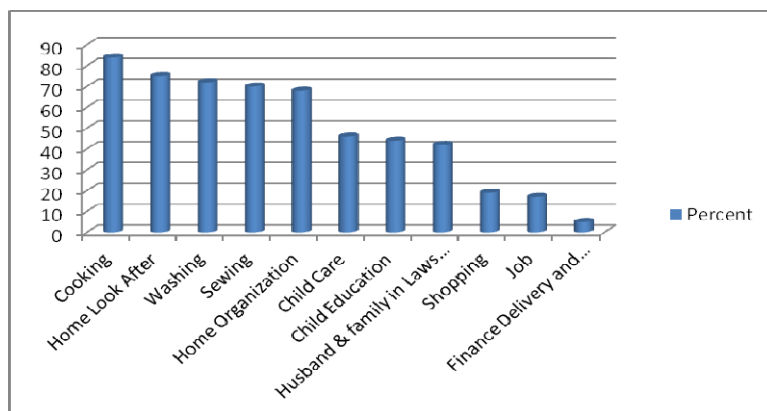


Fig. 5  
Common Tasks

**Information Needs**

Saleh and Lasisi (2011) categorized the information needs of rural women in Nigeria into agriculture, education, economy, health, political and others. The research showed the information needs of women, and top on the rank is information needs about cooking, health, information 84 percent, 76 percent and 74 respectively, there is also information need about agriculture as women in rural areas or villages are not behind the men, but they work with men.

Table 6

*Information Needs*

<b>Information Needs</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Cooking	84
Health	76.
Fashion and Trends	74
Sewing	69
House management	67
Child Care	45
Child Education	43
Family Matters	28.
Finance & Economy	18
Agricultural	17

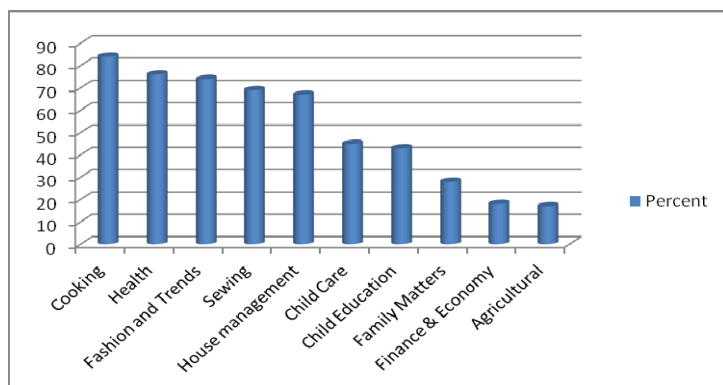


Fig. 6

*Information Needs*

**Purpose of Information Seeking**

Table 7 shows the purpose of information seeking, mostly respondents seeks information to improve their knowledge and polish their routine matters that is 72% and 61% respectively. They also seek information for the sake of entertainment and to get earning.

Table 7

*Purpose of Information Seeking.*

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Improve Knowledge	72	41
To Polish routine matters	61	35
For routine home works	17	9
To get more earning	12	7
Entertainment	11	6
No response	03	2
Total	176	100

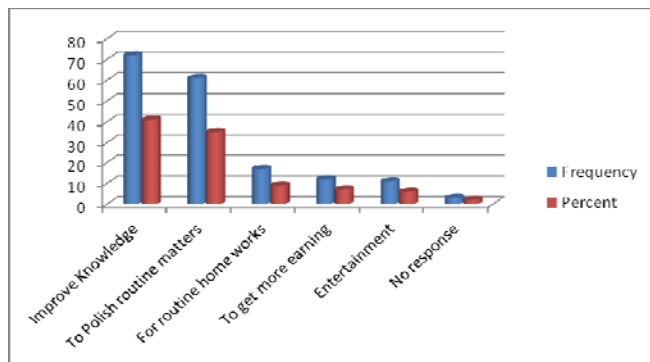


Fig. 7  
Purpose of Information Seeking

**Formal Sources**

Finding information is a multi-faceted information and communication activities that require access to a variety of information sources to address personal and social problems and work-related problems (Spink and Cole, 2001).

Table 8 reveals different mode of information, a large number of women acquire information through T.V., they are 122 out of 176 and considerable women like to acquire information through internet and newspaper is 3rd famous source of information. As data shows that majority of the women are not doing jobs, so they spend more time in their houses, so TV is major source of information. There are very few 14 percent of women who use internet due to their language barrier as well as proper facilities or connections of internet are not available to them. Very alarming situation of books, only 5 percent use books as their source of information, as there is no single public library existed in the valley.

Table 8  
Formal Sources

Formal Sources	Frequency	Percent
TV	124	71
Internet	25	14
Newspapers	12	7
Books, Magazines	09	5
Classes or courses	04	2
Radio	02	1
Total	176	100

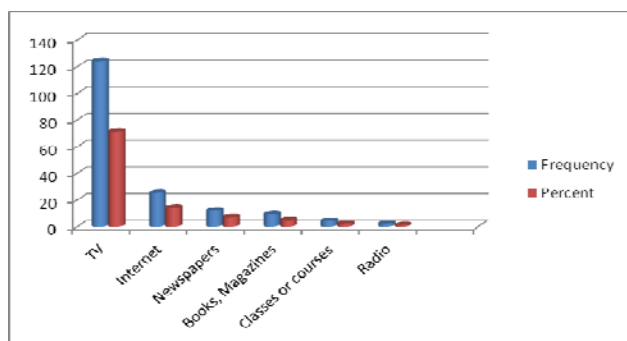


Fig. 8  
Formal Sources

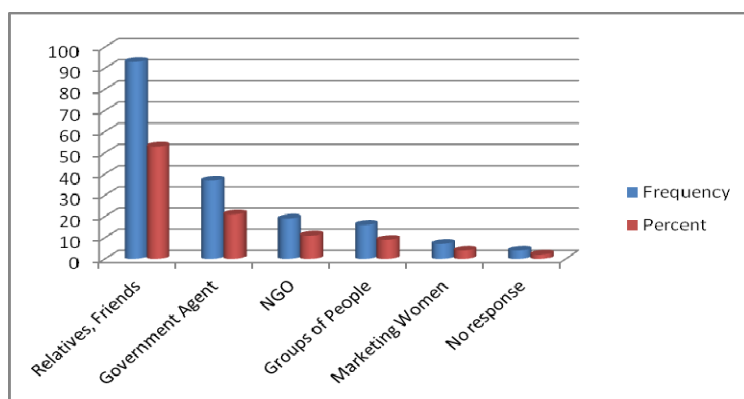


**Informal Sources**

Table 9 shows informal sources of information, so far as informal resources are concerned 92 out of 176 acquire information through relatives and friends, second informal source is Government agent and third one is group of people.

*Table 9*  
*Informal sources*

Informal Sources	Frequency	Percent
Relatives, Friends	93	53
Government Agent	37	21
NGO	19	11
Groups of People	16	9
Marketing Women	07	4
No response	04	2
Total	176	100



*Fig. 9*  
*Informal sources*

**Level of Difficulty**

Table 10 reveals the level of difficulty when seeking the information needed. It is difficult to access some women; they are 49 out of 176. 45 out of 176 have no difficulties, 18 percent faced very difficult and 17 % remained neutral.

*Table 10*  
*Level of Difficulty*

Difficulty	Frequency	Percent
Difficult	49	28
Not Difficult	45	26
Very Difficult	32	18
Neutral	30	17
Easy to Access	20	11
Total	176	100

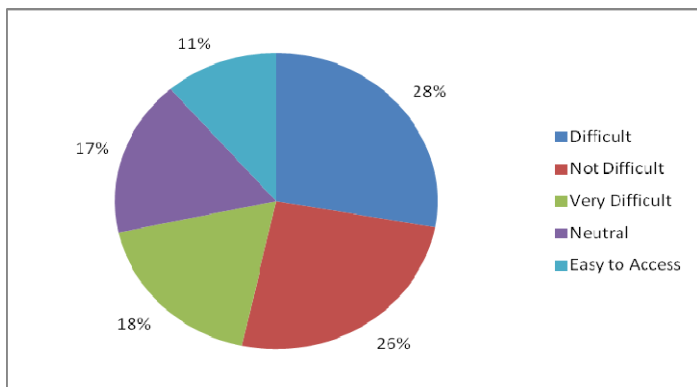


Fig. 10  
Level of Difficulty

**Language Preference**

Table 11 shows the language which preferred by different women 94 out of 176 women liked Urdu as medium of communication while 79 out 176 loved to communicate in their native language i.e. Punjabi. Because Punjabi is their native language and Urdu is national language.

Table 11  
Language preference

Language Preference	Frequency	Percent
Urdu	95	54
Punjab	79	45
English	02	1
Total	176	100

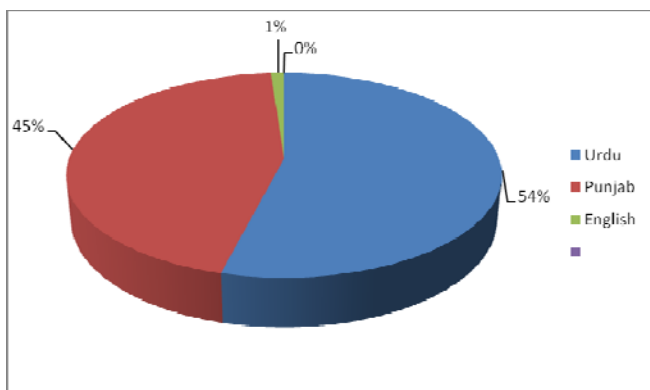


Fig. 11  
Language preference

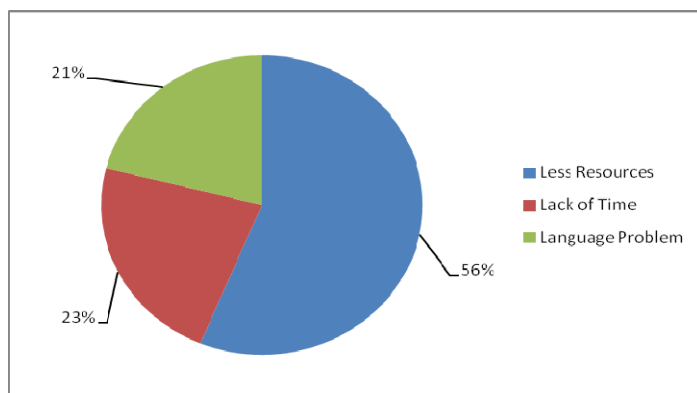
**Barriers in Information Seeking**

Table 12 shows the barriers in information seeking, less resource is the biggest barrier, as there is not a single public library in that area, lack of time is also barrier even though most of the women are not doing job, but still they take care of their family and other household work and further mostly

books and magazines related to women activities like child health, fashion etc. are in English language, so there is need to provide material in Urdu to women of rural areas and the second one is lack of time 40 out of 176 women are facing this problem.

*Table 12*  
*Barriers in Information Seeking*

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less Resources	99	56
Lack of Time	40	23
Language Problem	37	21



*Fig. 12*  
*Barriers in Information Seeking*

### Suggestions

Table 13 reveals that most of the respondents 51 percent did not responded or their response not relevant to this study, so only relevant suggestions are included. Most of the respondents are of the view that in their area there is neither a single Public Library existed nor the school or college libraries are meeting the requirements of the users. So there should be focused on their establishment as well as on improvement.

Women are also of the view that there should be proper access and facilities of internet, Most of the packages that are available in the big cities are not working in rural areas, they stress that at least DSL system should be developed and promoted for internet facility.

They also suggested that there should be more vocational and training centers for soon Valley women in their villages.

*Table 13*  
*Suggestions*

<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No answer	90	51
Public Library	32	18
Internet Facility	20	11
Books in national language	18	10
Vocational and training centers	10	6
Job opportunities	06	4
Total	176	100

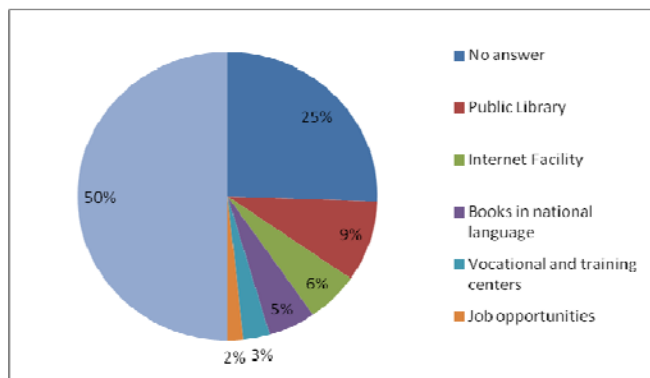


Fig. 13  
Suggestions

### Discussions and Conclusion

The research found that women of all the ages participated in the study but majority of them are from 21 to 30 years of age. Most women in soon valley are educated as matriculate and higher, that shows that women are not only educated but some have higher education. 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.

Women are found to be concerned with information needs related to cooking, home look after and health. TV is the major source of information from formal sources because this facility is available almost in all homes and most female spent their more time in home so that is their best source of information and entertainment.

The main purpose of their information seeking is to improve knowledge and to polish routine matters. It also indicates that they feel difficulties in seeking the information as most of literature related to female tasks like cooking, health, fashion etc. is available in English language and also material available on internet is mostly in English language. Further they prefer Urdu as language in information seeking as it is the national language.

The major barrier or problem in learning and understating what you want is less resources, due to non-availability of Public Library, language problem and no proper internet facilities.

According to the Punjab Government Constitutional amendments there would be compulsory education to children of the group of five and sixteen years. Other initiatives, such as the empowerment of women, such as increased participation in parliament, gender equality in education, female employment, increased social and legal protection, etc. However, the government has no initiative to meet the information needs of rural women.

Since most people live in rural areas, the government should collect data for rural and urban areas separately, so that the current scenario of rural women can be revealed. To empower rural women, knowledge of the information needs and information sources should be created between them. (Hossain, A., & Islam, S. 2012).

There should be at least one public library and academic schools and colleges should be developed and strengthened with the provision of infrastructure and professional staff, adequate internet facilities in all villages of Soon Valley should be provided. There should be more vocational training centers which can learn the technical knowledge and the arts.

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