

## WILLINGNESS OF RURAL WOMEN TO BECOME FARMER PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS

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### **Abstract**

Although there is growing awareness of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) as tools of empowerment for rural women, significant barriers continue to hinder their active participation. Socio-cultural constraints, financial risks, and gender-based exclusion are major challenges faced by women in rural India. This study surveyed 250 rural women in Tirupattur District, Tamil Nadu, to identify key obstacles to their involvement in FPOs. The findings reveal that family approval, fear of gender-based violence, and social stigma significantly influence women's willingness to participate. Additionally, practical issues such as lack of financial security and increasing domestic responsibilities further exacerbate these challenges. The study highlights the need for policies to adapt to the local socio-cultural context. It recommends targeted facilitation measures, such as creating safe spaces, providing financial management training, and fostering leadership skills, to enhance women's participation. Such interventions can maximize the potential of FPOs, promoting both social and economic empowerment for rural women.

**Key Words:** Rural Women, Women Empowerment and Farmer Producer Organization.

### **Introduction**

Many barriers limit the participation of rural women in collective economic initiatives, including socio-cultural constraints, limited access to resources, and gender-based discrimination (Kumar & Sharma, 2023). However, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) offer opportunities for empowerment, income generation, and social capital development, which can help counter these challenges. This study adopts a quantitative research approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 150 rural women in the region using convenience sampling and analysed using SPSS. Ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality, were followed throughout the research process. The expected outcome of this study is to enhance understanding of the key motivators and deterrents influencing rural women's participation in FPOs. Based on the findings, recommendations will be made at both the policy and community intervention levels. The study aims to explore factors contributing to rural women's reluctance to engage in FPOs and identify strategies to address these barriers.

### **Review of Literature**

Women Farmers' Producer Organizations (FPOs) are cooperative structures formed by small-scale women farmers to collectively manage agricultural production and gain better access to markets, finance, and technology. These organizations serve as a collective action mechanism, enabling women to overcome patriarchal constraints, resource limitations, and a lack of recognition in agriculture (Saha & Singh, 2022). The primary role of Women FPOs is to empower rural women economically through resource pooling, knowledge sharing, and collective bargaining power in agricultural supply chains (Chauhan & Yadav, 2021). They aim to increase productivity and profitability by promoting access to modern agricultural practices, inputs, and extension services (Kaur & Mehra, 2023).

Beyond economic benefits, Women FPOs contribute to women's empowerment by fostering leadership, building self-confidence, and enhancing social cohesion among rural women (Sahu & Rath, 2020). They also help dismantle traditional gender barriers and promote women's participation in decision-making

and community leadership (Vijayan & Ravi, 2022). Additionally, these organizations enhance women's socio-political status, encouraging involvement in policy advocacy and community governance (Bhatia, 2022). Access to financial resources, particularly credit, plays a vital role in fostering entrepreneurship and socio-economic development (Patel, 2023).

Pandey (2024), in the study *Increasing Women's Participation in FPOs*, explored factors affecting women's involvement and strategies to enhance leadership roles. Using qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, the study revealed that while 90% of FPOs have gender-inclusive missions, only 22% provide gender training for leadership. Key barriers identified included societal norms, lack of financial autonomy, and inadequate policy interventions. Pandey recommended targeted affirmative action, stronger linkages with women-led self-help groups, and the integration of gender-friendly agricultural practices to boost participation.

Ramachandran & Suresh (2023), in their study *Gender Dynamics in Agricultural Collectives*, examined the social and economic effects of women's involvement in agricultural collectives. They found that financial dependence and limited mobility restricted women's participation in FPOs. Women primarily engaged in labor activities with minimal profit control, while decision-making was dominated by men. The study emphasized the need for gender-sensitive policies, agricultural literacy, and access to financial resources to empower women. Women with higher literacy and financial independence were more likely to assume leadership roles.

Sharma (2022), in the study *Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Women in FPOs*, identified key constraints such as lack of confidence, restricted access to market information, and limited leadership roles. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and focus group discussions, Sharma recommended gender-sensitive training programs, improved market access, and policy interventions to promote inclusive membership and gender equity in decision-making.

Singh & Kumar (2021), in their study *Empowerment through Farmer Producer Organisations*, explored the link between women's empowerment and agricultural decision-making through FPOs. They found that FPOs with higher female participation levels led to improved financial and social outcomes for women. The study highlighted the importance of gender-specific policies to address imbalances in leadership positions.

## Method

The study was conducted among 250 rural women in Tirupattur District, Tamil Nadu, using a quantitative research approach with a descriptive design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire to address the research objectives. Convenience sampling was employed to facilitate practical participant selection within the rural setting. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, ensuring efficient handling and interpretation. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to, safeguarding participants' rights and maintaining research integrity. This approach aligns with previous studies on rural women's empowerment (Pandey, 2024; Sharma, 2022) and follows standard procedures for rural sector surveys (Singh & Kumar, 2021). The study primarily focuses on qualitative data from selected regions, which may not reflect the situation in other parts of India. It does not delve into political or environmental factors affecting FPOs. Limitations include potential biases in case study selection and the absence of longitudinal data, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Additionally, external factors such as government policies, market access, and rural infrastructure were not fully considered but are critical for the success of women's empowerment through FPOs.

## Results

Table 1: Demographic Details

Age of the Respondents (Years)	Frequency	Percent (%)
18-25	69	27.6
26-35	72	28.8
36-45	73	29.2
46-65	36	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Monthly Family Income (Rs)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Low Income (2000-10,000)	107	42.8
Middle Income (11,000-20,000)	107	42.8
Upper Middle Income (21,000-50,000)	43	17.2
High Income (51,000 and above)	3	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Educational Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
No Formal	43	17.2
Primary	35	14
Middle	61	24.4
Hr. Sec	79	31.6
Diploma/ITI	5	2
UG	20	8
PG	7	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Husband's Education Status	Frequency	Percent (%)
No Formal	42	16.8
Primary	47	18.8
Middle	82	32.8
Hr. Sec	51	20.4
Diploma/ITI	15	6
UG	10	4
PG	2	0.8
M.Phil and Ph.D	1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>
Type of Families	Frequency	Percent (%)
Joint	77	30.8
Nuclear	173	69.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

The demographic profile of the respondents highlights diversity across various parameters. Age-wise, a significant proportion falls between 26 and 45 years, with 28.8% in the 26-35 age group and 29.2% in the 36-45 age group. Income-wise, most respondents belong to low to middle-income categories,

with 42.8% earning between Rs 2,000-10,000 and another 42.8% earning between Rs 11,000-20,000. Education-wise, 31.6% have completed higher secondary education, while 17.2% have no formal education. A similar trend is seen in the education levels of husbands, where 32.8% have completed middle school. Regarding family type, nuclear families are predominant, accounting for 69.2%, compared to 30.8% living in joint families.

**Table 2: Willingness of Rural Women to Join Women Farmer Producer Organizations**

<b>Willingness to Join Women FPO</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Highly Willing	37	14.8
Willing	38	15.2
Not Willing	93	37.2
Not at all Willing	82	32.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

The data reveals that approximately one-third (30%) of the respondents expressed interest in joining a Women FPO, while nearly three-fourths (70%) were unwilling, indicating significant resistance. This reluctance may stem from factors such as lack of awareness, distrust, or perceived lack of benefits. The findings underscore the need for targeted outreach and educational initiatives to boost participation. Understanding the reasons behind this hesitation can aid in designing more effective and context-specific interventions to address these barriers. Willingness to join FPO was found to be different by the education status of the women at 0.03 level, where the women with higher education are willing to become FPO. There no difference found by the age, income, husband's education and type of family.

**Table 3: Reasons of Rural Women for the Unwillingness to Join Former Producer Organizations**

Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Non-approval from family	174	69.60
Possibility for Gender Based Violence (GBV)	166	66.40
Women may not come together	163	65.20
Criticism from neighbours and relatives	163	65.20
Fear of financial loss	162	64.80
Would lead to family conflicts	162	64.80
Would reduce time for family	162	64.80
Unnecessary responsibilities	161	64.40
Constraints in mobility (transport)	161	64.40
No necessity to earn extra income	159	63.60

The table highlights significant barriers preventing rural women from joining FPOs. Key deterrents include lack of family approval (69.6%), fear of gender-based violence (66.4%), and social stigma, such as criticism from neighbours (65.2%). Additional barriers include financial concerns, increased responsibilities and family conflicts (64.8%), and mobility constraints (64.4%). These findings underscore the need for addressing both social and logistical challenges to foster greater participation in FPOs.

### Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study highlight significant barriers preventing rural women from joining Women Farmers' Producer Organizations (FPOs). A large proportion of respondents (70%) expressed reluctance to participate, with key reasons being non-approval from family (69.6%), fear of gender-based violence (66.4%), and social stigma (65.2%). These challenges are further compounded by concerns over financial risks, family conflicts, and increased responsibilities. The influence of family approval underscores the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms shaping women's decisions, emphasizing the need for family-focused interventions. Additionally, concerns about safety and mobility constraints suggest the necessity of targeted programs addressing these practical and emotional barriers (Sharma, 2022; Pandey, 2024).

The reluctance to engage with FPOs has significant implications for policy and community interventions. A one-size-fits-all approach to empowerment may not be effective. Policies must consider the local socio-cultural context and work to transform familial and community attitudes toward women's collective action (Ramachandran & Suresh, 2023). Programs that provide safe spaces for collaboration, offer financial literacy and leadership training, and raise awareness about the benefits of FPOs can help mitigate perceived risks and increase participation (Singh & Kumar, 2021). Addressing practical barriers such as mobility and time constraints can also create a more enabling environment for rural women to engage in economic initiatives. These initiatives have the potential to empower women both socially and economically (Kaur & Mehra, 2023). Overall, this study calls for a multi-faceted approach to overcoming social and logistical barriers to FPO participation, ensuring women fully benefit from empowerment opportunities.

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