

Original Research Article

WOMEN AGRIPRENEURS AND COVID 19: A STUDY ON UNVEILING THE CONSTRAINTS

ABSTRACT

COVID 19 is a humanitarian crisis that has created both a supply and demand shock to the global economic system. As most women's businesses are younger and smaller, it has also disproportionately created a strong impact on women businesses. While other businesses were seizing new opportunities and reducing risks, this situation is especially difficult for women entrepreneurs, whose businesses are concentrated in the agriculture sector most severely affected by the economic shutdown. The present article tries to address the constraints faced by women agripreneurs during the COVID 19 pandemic. The study was carried out using a structured interview schedule with a total of 140 women agripreneurs in the Western and North Western zones of Tamil Nadu. The findings revealed that the COVID 19 pandemic has had a devastating influence on women-owned businesses, and that women compensated for the loss of hours spent at work by working at home and also caring for family members. This article not only tries to provide policy recommendations indicating women entrepreneurship but also address larger questions on reducing gendered issues across social groups and building a sustained market participation for women.

Keywords: *COVID 19; Women agripreneurs; Women-owned business; Gender issues; Challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The global commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 focus on poverty, tackling inequality and injustice, setting different targets including the economic empowerment and the wellbeing of women. As a consequence of increasing industry and urbanization, as well as social laws, the position of women in India has been shifting since the 21st century. Over the course of the year, an increasing number of women have enrolled in higher education, technical education and professional education, and their share of the workforce has risen as well. Women's entrepreneurship is growing at a rapid pace, giving them a distinctive role and a favorable influence on overall household consumption and welfare. Also women can gain economic stability, a platform for self-expression and fulfillment, and personal empowerment through entrepreneurship. Even the government has emphasized the importance of providing specific entrepreneurial training programmes for women in order to help them launch their

businesses. Financial institutions and banks have also established dedicated cells to support women entrepreneurs in the economic landscape in recent years, despite the fact that women's entrepreneurship firms remains a greatly ignored area. Women's entrepreneurship is particularly difficult in developing countries due to lack of opportunity, limited resources and specific hurdles. Due to the strongly established traditional mindset and rigorous ideals of Indian society, however, there are significant barriers such as work life balance, handling patriarchal societies and gender discrimination for women to engage into and manage company ownership. Variations exist between men and women entrepreneurs, and the rate of women entrepreneurship also varies across nations due to heterogeneity in structural characteristics. While the number of female entrepreneurs has grown globally, it is still far fewer than of their male counterparts.

The COVID 19 pandemic crisis has had a significant influence on people's health, economics and public services, including social services, work patterns and everyday living practices all across the world. Women in developing countries are particularly vulnerable, as women's anticipated exposure as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic will almost certainly be exacerbated. Change in scope, style and organization of business in most small and medium firms, including those owned and managed by women, have been impacted by COVID 19 to limit health risks. Travel and business were severely restricted as a result of the epidemic and consequent shutdown. Women entrepreneurship is an area that requires special attention in the midst of COVID 19 epidemic, since self-employed people and small and medium businesses are at heart of the current difficulties. From the initial stages of pandemic till now, several studies on the influence of COVID 19 on various sectors have been done leaving besides women agripreneurs. This paper focuses on how the pandemic has affected women agripreneurs and how to reconcile business and family duties for women agripreneurs in these new conditions. The goal of the study is to obtain insight into the impacts of the pandemic on women owned agro based companies as well as constraints in the altered conditions, based on prior research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rebecca Mbuh DeLancey (2014) found that woman's contributions towards the nation were prevented due to traditional cultural barriers resulting in glass ceiling issues. In regard with rural women entrepreneurs, the business success is specific to socio-cultural context.

Anna Nikina et al. (2015) evaluated gender specific constraints like pattern of dominance between the husband and wife, gender role ideologies that are faced by women entrepreneurs.

In a study by **Ravinder Jit and Anju Bharti (2016)**, they mentioned obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in regard with psycho-social factors, legal and policy framework, financial support, training, knowledge in technology, information dissemination, product production, marketing and distribution, sales promotion, working capital, market competitors and support from family and from Government.

Suman Goel (2018) found that women usually get support only through informal sources during the initial stages. Only very small percentage of women gets assistance from formal institutions like Government schemes and programmes.

Wang (2019) examined that both family roles and work responsibilities are the major hindrances to the development of women entrepreneurship. Strategic negotiation can be adopted to overcome these multiple role barriers. Furthermore, this study facilitates understanding unbiased growth, societal growth and urban planning under the fast development of immigration.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the socio-economic characters of women agripreneurs in Western zone of Tamil Nadu.
- To assess the constraints faced by women agripreneurs during COVID 19 pandemic in Western zone of Tamil Nadu.

METHODOLOGY

Research design: The study follows exploratory as well as descriptive research design. The study describes the challenges faced by women agripreneurs during COVID 19 pandemic.

Sample unit: Women agripreneurs who have taken entrepreneurship on agro-based sectors and registered themselves in District Industries Center in the districts of Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode, Karur, Namakkal, Salem and Krishnagiri were taken for the study.

Sampling method: The registered women agripreneurs in District Industries Centers were chosen for the primary data collection. Using random sampling technique, 20 agripreneurs from each district were selected for the study.

Data Collection Tool: A well-structured interview schedule was used for primary data collection. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 agripreneurs from Coimbatore district and again modified by excluding irrelevant questions and inclusion of relevant ones.

Statistical tools: The data collected from the respondents are categorized into two aspects: Socio-economic characteristics and challenges faced by women agripreneurs during COVID 19. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze socio-economic characteristics and principal component analysis was used for analyzing the constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussions highlight the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the various problems and constraints faced by women agripreneurs during COVID 19.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-economic profile of women agripreneurs are presented below in table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Profile of Women Agripreneurs

Characteristics		No. of Respondents (n)	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Age (in years)	26 - 35	67	47.85
	36 - 45	52	37.14
	> 45	21	15.00
Marital Status	Married	102	72.85
	Unmarried	23	16.42
	Divorced	12	8.57
	Widow	3	2.14
Family Type	Joint Family	93	66.42
	Nuclear Family	47	30.00
Educational Status	Post Graduate	35	25.00
	Graduate	82	58.57
	Diploma	19	13.57
	Secondary	4	2.85
Nature of the Product	On-farm Activities	23	16.43
	Manufacturing	17	12.14
	Processing & Value Addition	91	65.00
	Consultancy	9	6.43
Previous Occupation	Student	18	12.86
	Housewife	25	17.86
	Employee	59	42.14
	Unemployed	38	27.14
Previous Entrepreneurial Experience	Yes	23	16.43
	No	117	83.57

From the above table, it is inferred that 47.85 per cent of women agripreneurs belong to the age group of 26 - 35, followed by 37.14 per cent of respondents between the age of 36 - 45 and 15 per cent having age of more than 45. In regard with the marital status, majority (72.85

%) of respondents is married and 16.42 per cent of respondents are unmarried. Among these respondents, 66.42 per cent belongs to joint family structure and only 30.00 per cent are under nuclear family structure.

On considering the educational status of women agripreneurs, most of the respondents (58.57 %) are graduated and around 25 per cent have completed their post graduation. When asked about their previous occupation before getting into entrepreneurship, 42.14 per cent of respondents were employees under different sectors like IT companies, banking sector and corporate companies. Only 17.86 per cent of respondents have turned themselves from being a housewife to entrepreneurs. Around 27.14 per cent of respondents have initiated their start-ups without any previous work experiences. Regarding the nature of product produced by the respondents, 65 per cent of agripreneurs are involved in processing and value addition like extracting pulp from mangoes, cold-pressed oils, masala and spice powder, health-mix powder for babies, cosmetics, etc., And 16.43 per cent of respondents are into on-farm activities like production of food grains for commercial purposes, organically grown vegetables and nursery. Around 12.14 per cent of respondents are manufacturing tableware from arecanut and clothes for babies made out of eco-friendly sustainable materials. Only 6.43 per cent of respondents are involved in consultancy activities.

Constraints Faced by Women Agripreneurs during COVID 19

Women agripreneurs undergoes a series of problems from seasonal changes, price fluctuations, till the enterprise functions. Based on the previous studies, constraints faced by women agripreneurs are categorized as financial problems, marketing problems, social problems, problems related to production, labour problems and technical problems. Every problems categorized in this study are analyzed under different components. The sampling adequacy through KMO measure was 0.945 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity being significant ($p < 0.05$) specifies factor analysis should be used to process the data. Using principal component analysis, components having Eigen values greater than one were extracted from each factor. These values also represent the amount of variance accounted for by each factor. The table 2 shows the output of number of components extracted in descending order for further analysis.

Table 2. Principal Component Analysis for Constraints Faced by Women Agripreneurs

Component	Initial Eigen Values			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of	Cumulative	Total	% of	Cumulative

		Variance	%		Variance	%
FINANCIAL PROBLEMS						
Unawareness about the source of borrowing	2.069	29.557	29.557	2.021	28.871	28.871
Fear of taking more loan	1.548	22.114	51.671	1.588	22.685	51.557
Complicated & length procedures for loan sanctioning	1.364	19.485	71.157	1.372	19.6	21.157
MARKETING PROBLEMS						
Lack of travelling mobility	2.295	38.25	38.25	2.142	35.7	35.7
Fluctuation in the demand of product / service	1.626	27.1	65.35	1.701	28.35	64.05
Exploitation by middlemen	1.052	17.533	82.883	1.13	18.833	82.883
SOCIAL PROBLEMS						
Dual duties	2.358	39.3	39.3	2.358	39.3	39.3
Limited liberty to women	1.172	19.533	58.833	1.172	19.533	58.833
PROBLEMS REALTED TO PRODUCTION						
Raw material availability	1.526	50.867	50.867	1.525	50.867	50.867
LABOUR PROBLEMS						
Absenteeism	1.764	29.4	29.4	1.749	29.150	29.150
Non availability of skilled and experienced personnel	1.378	22.967	52.367	1.391	23.183	52.333
High salary demand	1.104	18.4	70.767	1.106	18.433	70.767
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS						

Difficulty in repair and maintenance	1.464	36.600	36.600	1.439	35.975	35.975
Lack of technical know-how involved	1.351	33.775	70.375	1.376	34.400	70.375

The Extraction Method of Principal Component Analysis and the Rotation Method of Varimax with Kaiser Normalization were used to factor the 14 variables. The variable with the highest variation in opinion was noticed among 'dual duties' in social problems. Most respondents felt that managing their work roles and taking care of family during the pandemic was the difficult task when compared to others.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix

Components	Rotated Factor Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Unawareness about the source of borrowing	.746					
Fear of taking more loan	.729					
Complicated & length procedures for loan sanctioning	.658					
Lack of travelling mobility		.837				
Fluctuation in the demand of product / service		.716				
Exploitation by middlemen		.692				
Dual duties			.844			
Limited liberty to women			.544			
Raw material availability				.651		
Absenteeism					.761	
Non availability of skilled and experienced personnel					.692	
High salary demand					.551	
Difficulty in repair and maintenance						.637
Lack of technical know-how involved						.519

Further, this study made an attempt to study the effect of socio-economic characteristics like educational background, nature of family, previous entrepreneurial experience, previous occupation and nature of the product to identify the variables that plays a major significance towards constraints. Among the various constraints mentioned in the study, educational background plays a major significance towards technical problems with the highest mean score of 3.275. Also, the nature of the product plays a significant role in production and marketing related problems with a mean score of 3.11 and 3.08. Market competitions, middlemen intervention, fluctuations in product demand are some constraints faced by respondents working towards value addition and processing. Agripreneurs involved in on-farm activities also have significant influence towards constraints like seasonal changes, price fluctuations, fear of taking loan and labor shortages.

Conclusion

Thus, it is evident from the findings that major hindrance for the growth of women agripreneurs emerges through social issues. Having the responsibility of managing work and family, handling societal pressure, lack of support from family and society are considered the major barriers during COVID 19 pandemic. Besides these societal and other issues, women have taken up entrepreneurship to augment their family income in amongst difficult times, enhance their social standing, eliminate unemployment and obtain social prestige. Increased competitiveness encourages other women to consider the options accessible to them as well. As a result, initiatives like granting special advantages, creating specialized corridors for women's empowerment, and so on, which are already suggested by researchers, must be rigorously implemented to enhance their living during such pandemic times.

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