

# Chapter 17

## The Intricacies of Women's Involvement in Rural Family Businesses: A Focus on Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs)

**Koppala Venugopal**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3472-1477>

*Aditya Institute of Technology and Management, India*

**Astha Sharma**

*Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, India*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this study was to investigate factors influencing women's participation in rural family businesses in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh, employing a descriptive design with mixed methods. Primary data was gathered through a convenience sampling approach using a cross-sectional survey method, utilizing a 5-Scale Likert questionnaire. Machine learning techniques including classification, clustering, PCA, and rank analysis were applied for comprehensive data analysis. Results highlighted significant influences such as gender roles, family support, financial constraints, cultural norms, and health issues affecting women's absenteeism in business activities. Based on these findings, recommendations include fostering supportive policies, enhancing financial accessibility, challenging cultural stereotypes, and promoting health awareness among rural women entrepreneurs. Addressing these factors can potentially enhance women's involvement and mitigate absenteeism, contributing to the economic empowerment and sustainable development of rural communities.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Women's participation in family businesses, especially in rural settings and Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), is a significant yet understudied research area. Globally, family businesses are vital to economies, contributing to job creation, local development, and economic stability (IFC, 2020). In rural

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areas, these businesses provide essential goods and services, supporting livelihoods and community resilience (World Bank, 2018).

Despite their importance, women in rural family businesses face unique challenges affecting their involvement and decision-making power. These challenges arise from social, economic, cultural, and personal factors. Socially, traditional gender roles may restrict women's participation in business activities outside household duties (Dwyer et al., 2018). Economically, women often struggle to access capital, markets, and networks, crucial for business growth (World Economic Forum, 2021). Culturally, norms in rural communities can either support or hinder women's entrepreneurial aspirations and leadership in family businesses (Kabeer, 2018). Personal factors such as education, skills, and health also influence women's ability to participate effectively in business operations (OECD, 2019).

In the context of MSEs, which dominate rural economies, women's involvement is further complicated by operational scale, resource limitations, and restricted access to formal support systems (UNDP, 2017). These enterprises often operate within informal structures, where family dynamics significantly influence business operations and succession planning (UNCTAD, 2020).

Research on women in family businesses has generally focused on larger enterprises in urban settings, overlooking the specific challenges and opportunities in rural MSEs. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how social, economic, cultural, and personal factors shape women's roles in rural family businesses. By examining these factors, the study seeks to identify barriers to women's participation, explore ways to overcome these barriers, and propose policy recommendations to support women's empowerment and entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Using a qualitative case study approach with methods such as purposive sampling, interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation, this research will collect rich, contextualized data from various regions. This comprehensive analysis will enhance academic literature and support practical interventions to foster inclusive economic growth and sustainable development in rural communities.

Women's roles in rural family businesses, especially in MSEs, are shaped by complex interactions of social, economic, cultural, and personal factors. These factors affect their roles, decision-making authority, and overall business contribution. Despite women's critical roles in these enterprises, there remains a significant research gap regarding the specific challenges they face and the opportunities available, particularly in rural settings.

In rural areas, family businesses are crucial to local economies, providing employment, sustaining livelihoods, and supporting community development (World Bank, 2018). However, women's involvement is often limited by traditional gender roles, economic barriers, and cultural norms. Women in rural MSEs frequently face challenges such as limited access to capital, educational and training opportunities, and economic dependence on male family members (Kabeer, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2021). These challenges are further influenced by family dynamics and cultural expectations, which can support or limit their participation and decision-making (OECD, 2019).

The literature primarily focuses on women's roles in family businesses in urban or larger enterprise contexts, creating a research gap regarding rural MSEs (IFC, 2020; UNCTAD, 2020). There is a lack of studies exploring the various factors affecting women's involvement in these businesses, particularly in rural settings. This gap limits the development of targeted policies and interventions to support women entrepreneurs in rural regions.

Moreover, existing studies often overlook the personal factors affecting women's participation, such as self-efficacy, confidence, and health (Dwyer et al., 2018). The interaction between these personal factors and the broader social, economic, and cultural environment remains underexplored. Additionally, little

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