



## Understanding Stressors Affecting Women in Agriculture

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### Introduction

The Economic Survey of 2017–2018 highlighted a significant trend: the increasing migration of men from rural to urban areas. This shift has led to a greater involvement of women in agriculture; a phenomenon often termed the *feminization of agriculture*. Women are increasingly engaged as cultivators, labourers, and entrepreneurs within the farming sector. However, this increased participation is often linked to distress rather than empowerment.

Distress, in this context, signifies the adverse effects of chronic stress, which can negatively impact physical and mental well-being. Many women in agriculture experience stress due to the simultaneous management of farm and household responsibilities. Despite their growing contributions, the specific stressors faced by women in agricultural settings remain under-researched. Stress can manifest in physical, psychological, and social forms, influenced by individual circumstances. This article delves into existing literature to identify the primary stressors affecting women in farming.

### Literature Review: Key Stressors Identified

Several studies have shed light on the unique challenges faced by women in agriculture:

*Meyer and Lobao (1994)*: Indicated that farm women experience more social and psychological stress than men, largely due to juggling multiple roles. They emphasized *time-related stress* as a critical factor.

*Findeis and Swaminathan (2003)*: Highlighted *time pressure* as a significant contributor to stress among farm women, stemming from the need to balance farm work with family responsibilities.

*Hamermesh and Lee (2003)*: Observed that women working on farms often have limited free time, and increased workloads do not always result in sufficient income to offset household chores.

### Methodology

This review involved a comprehensive search of academic journals, government publications, and online databases. Information was sourced from various departments of the Government of India, including, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Labour and Employment. Peer-reviewed articles were also analysed to support findings related to the stressors experienced by women in the agricultural workforce.



## Key Findings: Sources of Stress for Women Farmers

Insights from the Women Farmer Stress Inventory (Journal of Rural Health, 2023) revealed the following major stressors:

*Time Pressure and Workload:* The primary stressor identified is time pressure and workload. This encompasses the challenge of managing numerous daily tasks alongside inadequate time to properly complete farm activities. The lack of sufficient time also extends to family care, resulting in an excessive workload. Ultimately, this leads to the neglect of personal health as individuals struggle to balance their responsibilities.

*Environmental Challenges:* Environmental challenges rank as the second major stressor. This includes concerns about water pollution and declining water quality, as well as soil erosion and reduced fertility. Farmers also face the increasing frequency of droughts and floods, along with exposure to pesticides and chemicals. Unpredictable weather patterns, driven by climate change, further exacerbate these environmental stressors.

*External Pressures:* External pressures constitute another significant source of stress. These pressures include market price fluctuations and the risk of making poor marketing decisions. Regulatory burdens and policy uncertainty add to the challenges, as does pressure from advocacy groups. Profitability concerns and difficulties in accessing sufficient land further compound these external stressors.

*Lack of Rural Infrastructure:* The lack of adequate rural infrastructure also contributes significantly to stress. This includes limited access to essential services and shops, as well as weak community support systems. Furthermore, poor availability of quality education and child care adds to the burden. Inadequate healthcare services in nearby areas also compound the challenges faced by individuals in rural communities.

*Interpersonal Conflicts:* Interpersonal conflicts represent a notable source of stress, stemming from disagreements over farm inheritance and financial and legal concerns. Tensions with family or neighbours, as well as conflict in decision-making, also contribute to relational stress. Strained relationships with farm workers or tenants can further exacerbate these interpersonal conflicts, creating additional challenges.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that *time-related stress* and *workload* are the most significant challenges for women in agriculture, followed by environmental issues and external pressures.

To address these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

*Promote Gender Equality:* Challenge traditional roles to foster a more equitable distribution of responsibilities at home and in the community.

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*Develop Women-Friendly Technologies:* Encourage the creation and adoption of affordable technologies that reduce the physical demands of farming, such as weeding, harvesting, and transporting loads.

*Strengthen Support Systems:* Enhance social networks and peer support to help women manage stress effectively.

