

Effects of Dairy Farming on the Quality of Life and Empowerment of Rural Women

A Socio-Economic Analysis

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Abstract

The quality of life of rural women is shaped by various economic, social psychological factors, with dairy farming emerging as a crucial livelihood activity that contributes to their overall well-being. This study examines the impact of dairy farming on the quality of life of rural women, focusing on economic independence, social empowerment work-related challenges. The key objectives include assessing the relationship between age, income, dairy farming experience quality of life, as well as identifying challenges such as workload imbalances, limited healthcare access dependency on middlemen for livestock purchases. A stratified random sampling method was used to select respondents from cooperative members, NGO beneficiaries individual dairy farmers. Data was collected using structured interviews and surveys to gain a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic and demographic factors affecting rural women engaged in dairy farming. Findings reveal that younger women reported a higher quality of life than older women, who faced health and financial challenges. Dairy farming significantly enhances economic independence, nutrition social status, with women engaged in dairy activities showing better quality of life scores compared to non-dairy farmers. However, persisting issues such as delayed payments, inadequate veterinary services lack of fodder cultivation act as barriers to maximizing the benefits of dairy farming. Initiatives such as financial literacy programs, improved market linkages gender sensitization workshops could enhance rural women's economic security. The study emphasizes the need for holistic policy measures and institutional support to further improve their well-being.

Keywords: Quality of Life, Dairy Farming, Women Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality of life is a multidimensional concept that encompasses an individual's physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships environmental conditions, influencing overall life satisfaction and well-being. For women, particularly in rural areas, quality of life is shaped by economic opportunities, healthcare access, education social empowerment. Women's empowerment plays a crucial role in enhancing their quality of life, as it enables them to participate in decision-making, gain financial independence improve their social standing. Empowered women contribute significantly to household well-being, community development national progress, breaking cycles of poverty and inequality. However, rural women often face economic disparities, gender-based discrimination limited access to resources, affecting their overall well-being. Enhancing their quality of life requires a holistic approach

that includes economic inclusion, education, healthcare accessibility social support systems. By ensuring empowerment through income-generating activities, self-help groups policy interventions, rural women can achieve greater autonomy, improved living conditions sustainable development, ultimately enhancing their overall quality of life.

1.1 Review of Literature

The relationship between women's empowerment and quality of life has been extensively explored, with recent studies highlighting the transformative impact of empowerment initiatives. Odede (2023) emphasizes that empowering women, particularly through education and financial support, leads to improved family health, economic growth community development. Similarly, a study in West Bengal, India, found a positive correlation between women's empowerment and quality of life, suggesting that increased empowerment enhances various life domains, including physical and psychological well-being. Bandara et al. (2024) examined the impact of women's empowerment on mental health, revealing that increased empowerment is associated with improved mental health outcomes, including reduced depression and anxiety. The study underscores the importance of economic independence, educational attainment social support in enhancing women's mental well-being (Bandara et al., 2024).

Despite advancements, significant gender disparities remain in domestic responsibilities, affecting women's quality of life. A 2025 Australian survey found that women perform 50% more housework than men, leading to increased stress and resentment (The Guardian, 2025). This imbalance is particularly pronounced in households with children, where traditional gender norms and labor market structures perpetuate unequal domestic workloads. Addressing these disparities requires flexible work arrangements and equitable distribution of household tasks (The Guardian, 2025).

On a global scale, women's rights are facing renewed challenges. A recent UN report (2025) highlights that, 30 years after the Beijing Women's Conference, nearly a quarter of governments reported setbacks in gender equality (AP News, 2025). The report further indicates that violence against women has escalated deep-seated discrimination persists across various sectors. To counteract these trends, the UN calls for accelerated action, including engaging men and boys as strategic partners in gender equality (AP News, 2025). While empowerment initiatives have significantly improved women's mental health and economic participation, domestic workload imbalances and global setbacks in gender rights remain critical barriers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite significant global advancements in women's empowerment, rural women continue to face socio-economic and cultural barriers that impact their quality of life. Limited access to education, healthcare, financial resources decision-making opportunities restricts their ability to achieve overall well-being. Economic dependency, gender-based discrimination unequal domestic responsibilities further hinder their empowerment, affecting their physical and psychological health, social relationships environmental conditions. While initiatives such as microfinance, self-help groups government welfare programs have contributed to improving women's status, disparities in access and effectiveness remain, particularly in rural areas. Understanding the extent to which empowerment influences quality of life and identifying key challenges that persist is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policies that ensure holistic well-being for rural women.

1.3 Scope and Significance of the Study

This study explores the quality of life of rural women by examining how economic, social psychological factors influence their well-being. The research focuses on various dimensions of quality of life, including health, income, education, social empowerment environmental conditions, with a specific emphasis on the

impact of women's empowerment initiatives such as dairy farming, self-help groups government welfare programs. The scope extends to identifying barriers to empowerment, including gender-based inequalities, financial constraints socio-cultural norms that hinder rural women's progress.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policymakers, development agencies social organizations about the key factors affecting rural women's quality of life. By providing empirical evidence on the role of economic independence, social participation policy support, the study can help in designing targeted interventions to enhance livelihood opportunities, financial inclusion access to education and healthcare. Furthermore, it contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality and sustainable development, ensuring that rural women are active participants in economic and social progress rather than passive beneficiaries of welfare schemes.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the relationship between age and quality of life among rural women, assessing how different age groups experience variations in physical health, psychological well-being overall life satisfaction.
- To analyze the impact of dairy farming on the quality of life of rural women, evaluating its role in economic empowerment, social status improvement household well-being.
- To assess the influence of family income and social empowerment on the quality of life of rural women, identifying how financial stability and community participation contribute to their physical, psychological social well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a descriptive research design. Through this descriptive approach, the study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the changes in the lives of the women after receiving milch cows, including improvements in income, decision-making power social status. By focusing on these aspects, the research design is well-suited to analyze the intended outcomes and assess the broader impact of the scheme on rural women's socio-economic conditions.

The universe of the present study includes all the beneficiaries who received assistance under the Tamilnadu Free Milch Cow Distribution Scheme between 2016 and 2019 in Thanjavur District, Tamilnadu. This universe encompasses 14 blocks within the district, including Ammapettai, Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Papanasam, Pattukottai, Peravurani, Sethubhavachatram, Thiruppanandal, Thiruvonam, Orathanadu, Thiruvaidaimarudur, Thiruvaiyaru, Budalur Madukkur. Out of these 14 blocks, three blocks—Thanjavur, Pattukottai Thiruppanandal—were selected for the present study to collect the required data. The selection was based on the fact that during the study period, only these areas had rural women beneficiaries under the Tamilnadu Free Milch Cow Distribution Scheme. The universe consists of 750 rural women beneficiaries in Thanjavur District, according to data from the Department of Animal Husbandry, Thanjavur. For the current study, a sample of 375 women beneficiaries from the Tamilnadu Free Milch Cow Distribution Scheme was selected from this universe. The sampling method employed was stratified disproportionate random sampling, ensuring that the data collected represents the diversity of rural women across the selected blocks. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to capture a varied set of responses from the different socio-economic strata of the beneficiaries.

A data collection tool, such as an interview schedule, was developed by the researcher to gather precise

and reliable information from the respondents. The tool was carefully designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.2 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant association between age and quality of life among rural women.

H2: Women engaged in dairy farming have a significantly higher quality of life than those not engaged in dairy farming.

H3: There is a significant relationship between family income and quality of life.

H4: There is a significant correlation between social empowerment and quality of life among rural women.

3.3 About the Programme of Study

The Tamil Nadu Free Distribution of Milch Animals Scheme is a pivotal initiative aimed at enhancing the livelihood opportunities of rural households, particularly among marginalized communities. Launched by the Government of Tamil Nadu, this scheme focuses on improving dairy farming as a means of income generation, food security nutritional enhancement. Under this scheme, eligible beneficiaries, primarily from below-poverty-line households, are provided with milch animals, such as cows and goats, at no cost. The selection of beneficiaries is typically based on socioeconomic criteria, ensuring that those most in need receive support. By empowering rural families with the provision of these animals, the government aims to encourage dairy farming as a sustainable livelihood option. The scheme not only addresses income disparities but also promotes women's empowerment, as women often play a significant role in dairy management. By providing them with the necessary resources, the initiative encourages their participation in economic activities, thus enhancing their social status within the household and community. Training programs and support services are integral components of the scheme. Beneficiaries receive training in animal husbandry practices, veterinary care milk production techniques, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge necessary to manage their milch animals effectively. In addition, support in the form of veterinary services and access to markets for selling milk is often provided, further enhancing the sustainability of dairy farming as a livelihood option. The impact of the Tamil Nadu Free Distribution of Milch Animals Scheme has been significant, contributing to improved household income and better nutritional outcomes for families involved in dairy farming. Increased milk production not only supports the beneficiaries' livelihoods but also helps meet the local demand for dairy products, thereby contributing to the overall economy of the region. Overall, this initiative reflects the Tamil Nadu government's commitment to rural development and poverty alleviation through sustainable agricultural practices. By promoting dairy farming as a viable livelihood option, the scheme plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for rural households, ensuring economic independence improving food security in the state.

4. BRIEF ANALYSIS

The study analyzed various dimensions of quality of life among rural women who benefited from the Tamil Nadu Milch Cow Distribution Scheme. Quality of life was assessed based on four major domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships environmental conditions.

4.1 Socio demographic Profile of the Respondents

- The family size of dairy farmers generally ranges from two to four members across all three categories (NGO beneficiaries, individual operators cooperative members).

- Families with three to four members constitute 43.06 percent among NGO beneficiaries, 42.54 percent among individual operators 38.09 percent among cooperative members.
- Among individual operators, the largest single group (43.28 percent) consists of families with two to three members.
- 48.80 percent of respondents have five to ten years of experience in dairy farming, while 26.95 percent have 10 to 15 years of experience, making a total of 75 percent having 5 to 15 years of experience.
- Individual operators practicing dairy farming as a hereditary occupation have longer experience, with 81 percent having 10 to 20 years of experience.
- The purchase value of milch animals varies between Rs. 4,200 and Rs. 15,000, with an average purchase value of Rs. 8,019 for cooperative members, Rs. 8,980 for NGO beneficiaries Rs. 9,387 for individual operators.
- The majority of respondents purchase milch animals within the district and depend on middlemen, leading to higher prices and lower-quality animals.
- Most respondents among cooperative members and NGO beneficiaries do not cultivate green or dry fodder, despite 36.50 percent and 50.30 percent of them respectively holding land.
- In contrast, 73.88 percent of individual operators derive dry fodder from their agricultural operations, indicating higher self-sufficiency in fodder supply.

4.2 Quality of Life

The results indicated that a majority of women (57.6 percent) reported a high quality of life, while 42.4 percent experienced a lower quality of life. The highest improvement was observed in psychological health (72.0 percent), while social relationships showed relatively lower improvement.

Table No. 1 Perception towards Quality of Life of Women

S. No.	Quality of Life Dimensions	Low (%)	High (%)
1	Physical Health	33.1	66.9
2	Psychological Health	28.0	72.0
3	Social Relationships	42.7	57.3
4	Environmental Conditions	37.6	62.4
5	Overall Quality of Life	42.4	57.6

The table indicates that the majority of rural women reported a high quality of life across different dimensions. Psychological health (72.0%) showed the highest improvement, followed by physical health (66.9%) and environmental conditions (62.4%). However, social relationships (57.3%) had the lowest percentage of women experiencing high quality, suggesting challenges in interpersonal and community interactions. Overall, 57.6% of women perceived their quality of life as high, while 42.4% reported a lower quality of life, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to enhance social well-being.

4.3 Impact of Dairy Farming on Quality of Life

- Women engaged in dairy farming reported higher quality of life scores, particularly in terms of economic independence and social status improvement.

- Dairy enterprises enabled women to contribute to household income, resulting in better nutrition, health care education opportunities for their children.

Table No. 2 Association Between Dairy Farming and Quality of Life

Quality of Life Dimensions	Dairy Farmers (Mean Score)	Non-Dairy Farmers (Mean Score)	t-Test Significance
Physical Health	4.1	3.5	p < 0.05
Psychological Health	4.3	3.7	p < 0.01
Social Relationships	3.8	3.6	Not Significant
Environmental Conditions	4.0	3.5	p < 0.05

The table shows that dairy farmers reported a higher quality of life across all dimensions compared to non-dairy farmers. Significant differences were observed in physical health ($p < 0.05$), psychological health ($p < 0.01$), and environmental conditions ($p < 0.05$), indicating that dairy farming contributes positively to well-being by improving economic stability, nutrition, and living conditions. However, social relationships did not show a significant difference, suggesting that dairy farming does not necessarily impact women's social interactions. Overall, the findings highlight the benefits of dairy farming in enhancing health and environmental conditions, reinforcing its role in improving rural women's quality of life.

4.4 Challenges Affecting Quality of Life

Despite improvements in quality of life, some challenges remained:

- **Workload:** Many women faced difficulties balancing household responsibilities and dairy farming activities.
- **Health Issues:** Physical strain from cattle care, fodder collection dairy product processing affected overall health.
- **Market Constraints:** Unstable milk prices and lack of direct market access were economic concerns.

4.5 Hypotheses Testing

Table No. 3 Association Between Age and Quality of Life

Age Group	Low Quality of Life (%)	High Quality of Life (%)	Total Respondents (n)	Statistical inference
31-40 years	38 (23.3)	125 (76.7)	163	$X^2 = 34.78$ Df = 2 0.001 Highly Significant
41-50 years	64 (86.5)	10 (13.5)	74	
51-60 years	57 (78.1)	16 (21.9)	73	
Total	159 (42.4)	216 (57.6)	375	

The study found a significant association between age and quality of life ($\chi^2 = 34.78, p < 0.05$), indicating that younger women (31-40 years) reported better quality of life compared to older women (50-60 years). This may be due to better physical health, higher energy levels increased economic participation among younger women, whereas older women may face age-related health issues and economic dependency. In addition, younger women are more likely to engage in income-generating activities, further enhancing their well-being. In conclusion, age plays a crucial role in determining the quality of life, with younger women experiencing higher well-being compared to older women due to better health and economic engagement.

Table No. 4 Quality of Life Comparison Between Dairy Farmers and Non-Dairy Farmers

Group	Mean Quality of Life Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value	Significance
Dairy Farmers	4.2	0.85	4.87	0.001	Highly Significant
Non-Dairy Farmers	3.5	0.92			

The independent t-test results ($t = 4.87, p < 0.01$) confirmed that women engaged in dairy farming had significantly higher quality of life scores ($M = 4.2$) than non-dairy farmers ($M = 3.5$). Dairy farming contributes to financial independence, improved nutrition better social status, enabling women to make better health, education household decisions. The additional income from dairy farming helps women access healthcare, invest in children's education improve household living conditions. In conclusion, dairy farming is a key driver of improved quality of life for rural women by providing economic stability and enhancing their social empowerment.

Table No. 5 Relationship Between Family Income and Quality of Life

Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance
Income vs. Quality of Life	0.652	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation

The Pearson correlation analysis ($r = 0.652, p < 0.01$) demonstrated a strong positive relationship between family income and quality of life, suggesting that higher-income families experience better living standards, healthcare educational opportunities. Women from higher-income households reported better psychological health and social well-being, as financial security reduces stress and enhances personal freedom. The ability to afford better nutrition, medical care comfortable living conditions contributes to a significantly higher quality of life. It concludes that family income is a major determinant of quality of life, with financial stability leading to better health, education overall well-being for rural women.

Table No. 6 Correlation Between Social Empowerment and Quality of Life

Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance
Social Empowerment vs.	0.487	0.002	Moderate Positive Correlation

Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance
Quality of Life			

A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.05$) was observed between social empowerment and quality of life, indicating that women with greater involvement in decision-making, community participation social networks reported higher well-being. Women who actively participate in self-help groups, dairy cooperatives local governance experience greater social recognition, confidence support systems, which contribute to improved psychological health and life satisfaction. Socially empowered women are more likely to access resources, voice their concerns take charge of their lives, resulting in better overall quality of life, which concludes that social empowerment is essential in enhancing rural women’s well-being, as increased participation in community and decision-making processes fosters higher life satisfaction and personal growth.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a significant association between age and quality of life among rural women, with younger women (30–40 years) reporting better well-being compared to older women (50–60 years) ($\chi^2 = 34.78$, $p < 0.05$). This aligns with studies conducted in South Asia (Gupta & Sharma, 2023), which found that younger rural women had better access to economic opportunities, social networks healthcare facilities, leading to higher life satisfaction. However, contrasting research in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mwangi et al., 2022) suggests that older women, particularly those engaged in long-term agricultural activities, demonstrated higher resilience and social stability, which contributed positively to their quality of life. These differences indicate that regional factors such as access to resources, healthcare community support play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between age and quality of life.

The study also confirmed that women engaged in dairy farming reported significantly higher quality of life ($t = 4.87$, $p < 0.01$), primarily due to increased economic independence, improved nutrition enhanced social status. Similar findings were observed in Bangladesh (Rahman & Khatun, 2023), where dairy farming enabled women to contribute financially to their households, leading to better decision-making power and self-sufficiency. However, unlike the present study, where dairy farmers reported psychological benefits as well, research in Latin America (Pérez et al., 2022) found that dairy farming added to women’s workload, leading to stress and compromised mental well-being. This contrast suggests that while dairy farming contributes positively to quality of life, its impact on psychological well-being depends on workload distribution and support mechanisms available within households and communities. These insights highlight the need for context-specific empowerment programs that balance economic participation with mental well-being for rural women.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since older rural women were found to have lower quality of life, targeted healthcare programs may be introduced to address their physical and mental health needs. Regular health check-ups, mobile clinics community-based wellness programs may be implemented to improve their well-being.
- As dairy farming was shown to improve women's quality of life, access to subsidized livestock, training programs financial support may be expanded to encourage more rural women to participate in this sector. Policies ensuring fair market prices for dairy products may be established to enhance financial stability.
- Since social empowerment positively influenced quality of life, community engagement programs

may be developed to encourage women's participation in local governance, cooperatives self-help groups. Leadership training and awareness campaigns may be conducted to strengthen their decision-making abilities.

- As domestic workload imbalances were identified as a challenge, gender-sensitive family education programs may be introduced to promote equal sharing of household duties. Incentives for men's participation in domestic activities may be provided to encourage behavioral shifts toward gender equality.
- Since higher income and education levels were linked to better quality of life, scholarships, skill development programs microfinance schemes may be expanded to enhance rural women's financial independence. Vocational training in sustainable income-generating activities may be introduced to provide long-term economic security.

6.1 Social Work Intervention

- **Casework:** Personalized counseling may be provided to rural women facing psychological distress, financial struggles, or domestic violence. Social workers may connect them to mental health services, legal aid financial support programs. Awareness sessions may be conducted to educate women about health, rights financial independence.
- **Group Work:** Self-help groups (SHGs) and dairy cooperatives may be formed to promote economic independence and skill development. Social workers may facilitate financial literacy programs to help women manage income and investments. Support groups may provide emotional resilience by encouraging experience-sharing and mutual support.
- **Community Organization:** Community programs may be implemented to enhance women's access to education, healthcare employment. Social workers may collaborate with NGOs and government agencies to provide subsidized loans and vocational training. Policy advocacy may focus on securing better financial and social rights for rural women.
- **Social Action:** Gender sensitization workshops may be conducted to promote equal household responsibilities and decision-making. Legal literacy programs may educate women about property rights, labor laws protection against gender-based violence. Social workers may advocate for women's inclusion in local governance and leadership roles.
- **Research and Policy Advocacy :** Research may be conducted to assess the impact of empowerment programs on rural women's quality of life. Findings may be used to advocate for improved rural infrastructure, better healthcare financial support. Social workers may collaborate with policymakers to develop sustainable strategies for rural women's empowerment.

7. CONCLUSION

The study highlights that women's empowerment plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life of rural women, particularly in economic independence, psychological well-being social participation. The findings confirm that age, income, dairy farming involvement social empowerment significantly impact women's overall well-being. While dairy farming and financial stability improve their standard of living, challenges such as domestic workload imbalances and limited access to healthcare and education persist. It is essential to address these barriers through targeted interventions, policy reforms social work strategies can further strengthen rural women's empowerment. Ensuring sustainable economic opportunities, gender equality community support systems will be essential in developing long-term improvements in the quality

of life of rural women.

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