

# Relevance of Women Empowerment in Food Processing Industry: A Case Study of Prayagraj District

Adil Khan\*, Arun Kumar Singh

Department of Economics, Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University, Uttar Pradesh, India

## Research Article

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**\*For Correspondence:** Adil Khan, Department of Economics, Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University, Uttar Pradesh, India

**E-mail:** pratiksinghgg@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

The research article is concerned with the importance and performance of food processing industry in generating sufficient employment opportunities for female workers. A case study on a specific district brings out crucial aspects related to working conditions and struggles faced by women in these industries. The data collection and analysis are based upon the overall number of women employed. They are further categorized as per the type of employment offered to them under different kinds of industries. The findings show that the share of women in employment is much lower as compared to men. Various forms of gender discrimination are found at industrial workplaces. The lack of government support coupled with an adverse social mindset against working women is also observed in the region. The scope of entrepreneurship development is limited to SHGs. Nevertheless, FPIs could be a way forward to shift surplus women engaged in agricultural activities or construction sites to a better source of income generation while raising social status.

## INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is termed to enable a woman to choose her own path of living, level of education, job and career related opportunities, so that women can be treated similarly to males in social, economic, and political spheres. It is crucial for a nation's overall development. Women who are empowered feel more self-assured as a result of having better decision-making abilities. As per World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022, India ranks 135 out of 146 countries and Female entrepreneurship index, which covers 77 countries, ranks India in that position. The world outlook portrays the dismal situation of women in India. Women in our nation frequently experience harassment, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, rapes, workplace discrimination, etc. That is why, empowering women is a potent instrument for building a society that is progressive and sustainable [1-3]. Several forms of empowerment, such as social, economic, educational, political, and psychological empowerment, are

capable of assisting women in defending themselves against injustices. All Indian people are accorded equal fundamental rights under the constitution. It declares that discrimination based on gender is prohibited. According to Article 39 of the Indian Constitution, both men and women must have access to appropriate means of subsistence. Every citizen is required by Article 51A to abandon behaviors that are demeaning to women's dignity. Equal remuneration for equivalent effort is mandated. Additionally, the state has been instructed to take specific measures to safeguard the interests of weaker sections of society, women and children. The need to secure the goal of women's empowerment has received special focus in every Five Year Plan. However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, women had very low status and position. It began to rise during the 20th century. Since 1991, women have entered practically every field. Despite being around half of the country's population, they continue to represent the greatest untapped resources. The prime concern behind constructing the paper is to look for the contributions made by Food Processing Industries (FPIs) in the lives of working women with the aim of unearthing the problems and challenges faced by them in the work environment. A case study of specific district Prayagraj is presented and generalizations of findings are made thereafter. The type of research is an inductive one.

### Literature review

Women are mainly employed in unorganized sectors due to their low bargaining power, low skill level, willingness to work at low wages and lack of union organization. Most of them engage in a variety of unorganized sectors such as agriculture, pottery, cotton and tea harvesting, construction, hand weaving, domestic work and domestic work. These unorganized workers often perform temporary and uneven work at very low wages, known as casual work. These people have no social safety cover or security of employment. They have experienced longer working hours, exploitation and health hazards in the workplace. In India, men have an absolute advantage in the job market as they do not have to bear responsibility for household work. Women's unrecognized and unpaid contributions to numerous economic activities as well as social reproduction are the major reasons behind gender stereotypes. The burden of children has grown in India over time, lowering the women's productivity at work. Over time, employment in organized sectors rises at a slower rate than total employment due to the strong increase in employment in unorganized sectors. As a result, employment has become increasingly informal over time [4-6]. The informal nature of employment is particularly noticeable among female workers, and overall, 96% of women are found in unorganized sectors compared to 91% male workers. In big cities, almost 65%-70% of overall women workers in unorganized sectors are living in poverty. Nearly 50% need training and skill up gradation. Younger women required physical strength to do manual tasks in the factory. Older women are unable to come up with the stress of physical labour. The status of women as workers is the lowest in society. Most of them are usually working for more than 3 years and the working conditions vary depending on the type of work, whether it is permanent, temporary or seasonal. The main reason behind the difficulty in choosing other professions is the lack of education. They have to work for 8 to 12 hours a day [7-10]. The majority of working women do not take weekly days off. The mean income of women is less than 8000 rupees per month. About 99% of working women are self-employed, and about one-third among them are unpaid family helpers. These women are primarily partners of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and co-operatives, managing directors, proprietors or co-workers, even if most of their business is limited to food processing or textile manufacturing. A significant proportion of self-employed women also found to be engaged in outsourced work by manufacturing firms. These jobs are characterized by low wages, long working hours and lack of social security.

## Objective

The purpose of study is to delve into the status and condition of women working in FPIs located in Prayagraj District. The ultimate motive is to look over whether these FPIs are positively contributing towards women economic and social upliftment [11,12].

## METHODOLOGY

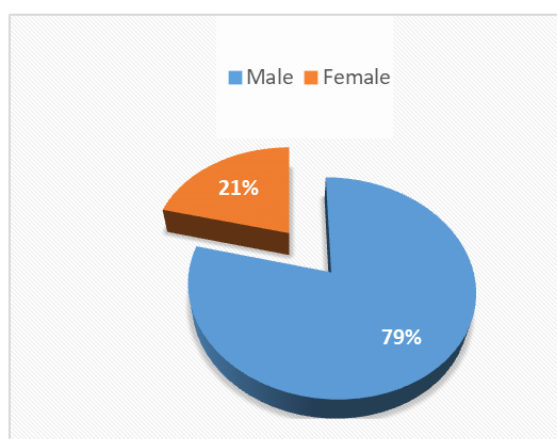
The importance of women in the workforce is emphasized through the observation made in 40 food processing firms located in Prayagraj District belonging to bakery products, milk and dairy products, edible oil, dried snack, spice and beverage manufacturing industries. In this descriptive type of research, inter-industry and intra-industry comparison is studied with the help of pie charts, bar diagrams etc. The sample universe consists of respondents belonging to age group 18-60 years, that includes both workers and owners or proprietors engaged within industry. A low level of stratification is found among sample as most of the women workers are concentrated in clusters of 12 to 15 persons, more or less sharing similar characteristics. Oral conversations are found more useful than providing questionnaires to the workers. Interview schedules are functional with self-employed women and few female employees at higher job positions in firms (Table 1 and Figure 1).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Gender-wise workers in FPIs.

Food processing industry	Male	Female	Total
Bakery product	308	82	390
Milk and dairy product	415	88	503
Edible oil	371	48	419
Dried snack	118	66	184
Spice	190	93	283
Beverage	206	51	257
Total	1608	428	2036

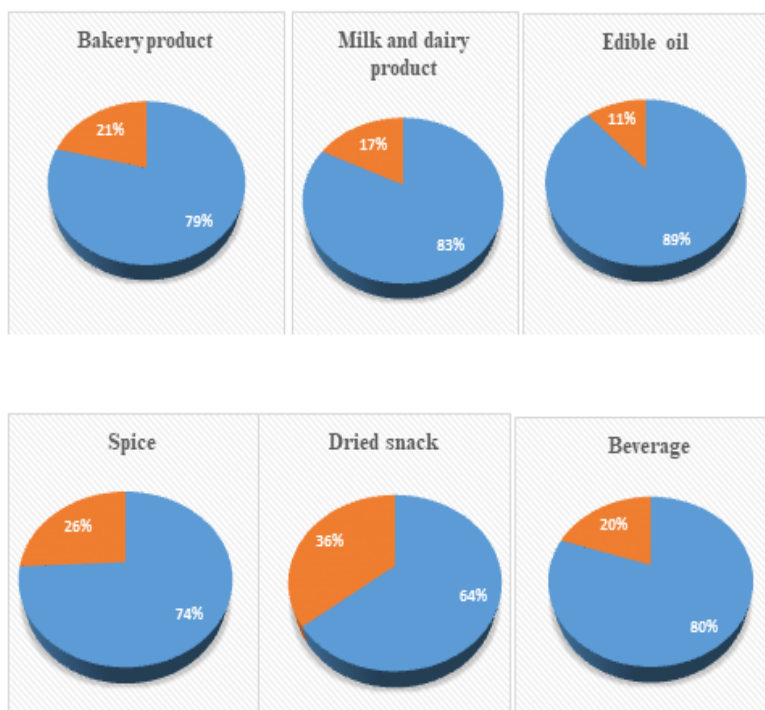
**Figure 1.** Gender-wise workers in FPIs combined. **Note:** (■): Male; (■): Female.



The massive growth in the industrial sector has created numerous opportunities for women to advance their careers and realize their full potential. In this regard, small scale industry has provided a much needed platform for women. The FPIs located in the district have assimilated a substantial portion of the women's workforce supplied in

the market. Women get easily recruited and hired for various kinds of tasks performed related to food processing. The handling of raw materials and packaging of finished products is mainly done by women workers. But the quantitative analysis diminishes the claim made in person by the respondents. The data presented shows that female participation is merely around 21% in the FPIs found in the study area (Figure 2). The reasons behind such low aggregates of women are gender stereotypes, traditional conservative family structures, and the presence of non-technically educated or untrained women [13-15].

Figure 2. Gender-wise workers in different FPIs. Note: (■): Male; (■): Female

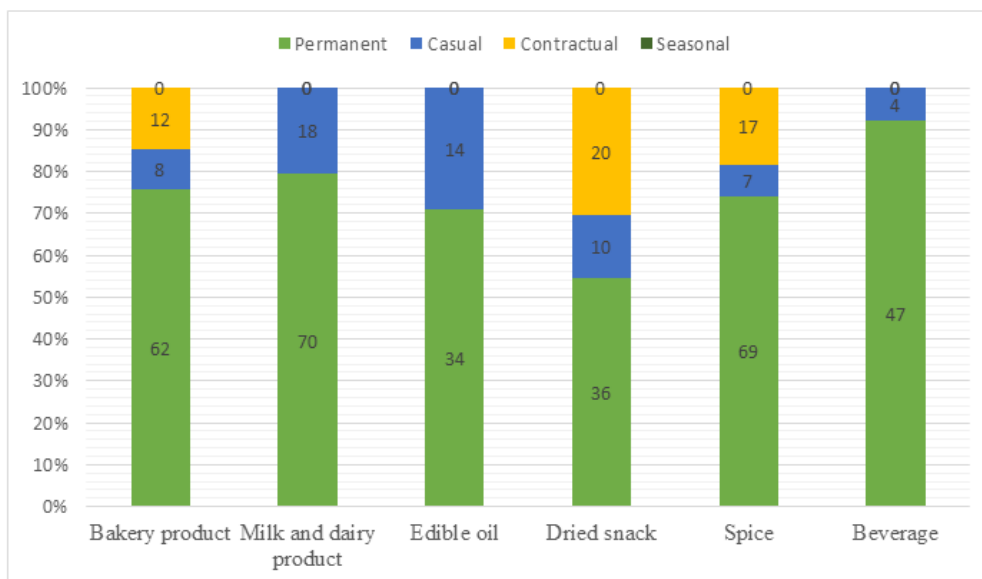


Most women are found in those kinds of jobs that are based on manual labour because women residing locally are predominantly low-skilled. The dried snack industry has the highest percentage of female participation (36%) due to the versatility of manufactured products such as potato chips, noodles, rice puffed snacks, besan namkeen, and so on, which are less tiring and performed at a lower risk. The higher level of efficiency is also perceived in spice manufacturing, where women are utilizing traditional knowledge and work culture in the preparation of turmeric, chili powder, and pickles. Edible oil manufacturing employs the fewest women (11%), as only technical jobs are typically performed there (Table 2 and Figures 3,4).

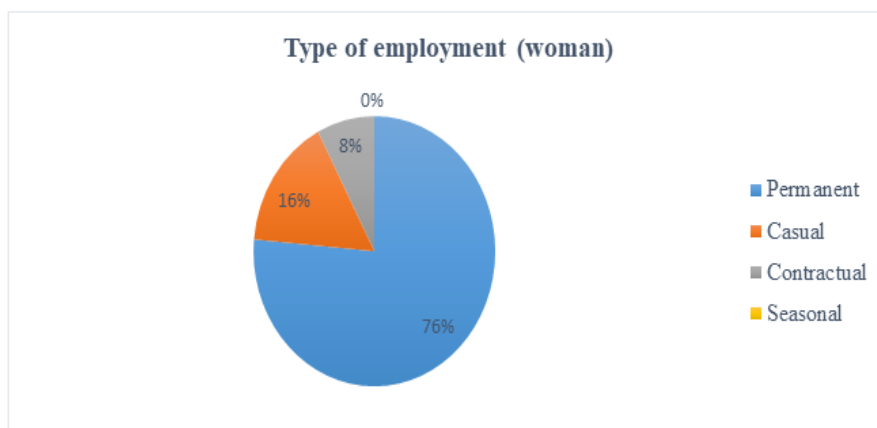
Table 2. Type of employment (woman) in different FPIs.

S.no.	Food processing industry	Permanent	Casual	Contractual	Seasonal	Total
1	Bakery product	62	8	12	0	82
2	Milk and dairy product	70	18	0	0	88
3	Edible oil	34	14	0	0	48
4	Dried snack	36	10	20	0	66
5	Spice	69	7	17	0	93
6	Beverage	47	4	0	0	51
Total		327	68	33	0	428

**Figure 3.** Type of employment (woman) in different FPIs. **Note:** (■): Permanent; (■): Casual; (■): Contractual; (■): Seasonal.



**Figure 4.** Type of employment (woman) in FPIs combined. **Note:** (■): Permanent; (■): Casual; (■): Contractual; (■): Seasonal.



The majority of women (76%) work full-time throughout the year. However, benefits such as provident fund, gratuity, paid sick leave, and paid maternity leave are largely unavailable. Their conditions are more or less like those of daily wage workers. A poor level of sanitation and an unhealthy working atmosphere are also observed. A small amount of casual employment (16%) is found in the lower income segment, such as scrap collectors, peons, and manual labour, most commonly in times of manpower shortage. Women working on a contractual basis (8%) are chiefly concentrated in the dried snack and spice manufacturing industries. Their wages are fixed on the basis of the number of packets prepared to be sold in the market. An agreement-based work structure is also observed in the bakery sector, where wages are tied up with the amount of bread, biscuits, toasts sold in the market. No seasonal type of employment is found in the above industries. However, when the firm processes a large number of sales orders, working hours and shifts are frequently increased.

The subjective approach brings light to other facets of the variables relevant for the appraisal of the establishment of FPIs in the context of women's empowerment. Almost all the respondents denied being the victims of sexual and

verbal abuse at their workplace at any point of time since their joining. A small number of the respondents are registered in either the Atal Pension Scheme or the New Pension Scheme. Medical facilities at the workplace or accidental safety measures are nominally present. The other benefits, such as the occasional bonus and maternity benefit, are not provided in small factories. Other grievances include low wages as compared to male workers, less break time, and continuous working hours. Self-employment is the predominant source of employment for women, but here women are found involved in family-run businesses as unpaid family helpers. They work from within the household premises, without having any fixed workplace. The social fragmentation entrenches patriarchal social norms that hinder women's mobility and freedom to work, as well as their entrepreneurship skills and abilities. This is the reason why women as sole proprietors are not found in the study. In many cases, rising household incomes create a disincentive for women to earn. Gendered occupational segregation has left very few opportunities for women in industrial work. There is a small section of women workers who possess the required skills and educational qualifications. They are placed in the posts of accountant, supervisor, and quality testing manager or customer relationship manager. Despite the fact that they earn less than their male counterparts, it is also observed that women from the lower strata of society are dominating the female workforce. The major revelations come from the migratory workers, where contractors bring them with their families from distant states. They do not have written job contracts, are not eligible for any paid leave, and are not entitled to any social security benefits. This ensures their absolute dependence on the contractor for survival. Many of these workers cannot speak the local language and are unable to communicate their problems to local authorities, trade unions, or social workers. However, most of the women in the region have proper access to financial institutions, but they are struggling with economic factors such as unsteady earnings due to the non-contractual informal nature of work. Their excessive dependency upon informal sources of credit due to the presence of a cash economy is further deteriorating their economic condition.

### CONCLUSION

The FPIs have played a constructive role in empowering women in society, particularly with regard to economic integration. However, FPIs remain a secondary source of livelihood as most of the women rely upon their husband and other male members of the family. In consideration of several hindrances and obstacles posed by our society, a welfare state ought to promote the notion of women's empowerment while encouraging workers to participate in and contribute to nation building. The conditions of industrial workers are more or less similar when we look upon them in the context of women's participation in the workforce. The heavy concentration of FPIs in the unorganized sector is proving detrimental to their overall career growth, progress and future prospects. The provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act (1976) are not properly followed in recruitment and promotion, as well as the directives given under Article 39 of the constitution for securing equal pay for equal work for both men and women are often overlooked by employers. The women's welfare schemes such as TREAD, Udyogini, Udyam Sakhi portal, and Stree Sakti package are to be made much more robust to encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship among women.

### Competing interest

Authors declare that no competing interest exists.

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