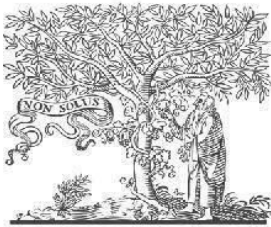


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EMPOWERING WOMEN MANAGERS IN RETAIL: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the topic of women's empowerment in retail management, specifically looking at the possibilities and threats that women encounter in rural and urban settings. The study's overarching goal is to shed light on the tactics that may empower women in retail management positions by identifying the elements that impact their involvement in such positions. This research quantifies and qualitatively examines the current state of women in retail management, the challenges they face, and the opportunities for advancement in this field. The results highlight large gaps between urban and rural regions and provide suggestions for how politicians and business moguls might advance gender parity.

Keywords: Rural, Urban, Women, Retail Sector, Opportunities.

I. INTRODUCTION

With millions of jobs available all over the globe, retail is an essential part of any economy's infrastructure. A large percentage of retail employees in several locations are women. Nevertheless, women still don't make up nearly enough of the management team, especially at the executive level, even if they're plentiful in entry and mid-level jobs. When comparing rural and urban areas, this difference becomes much more apparent. Systemic gender prejudice and socio-cultural constraints are just two of the many obstacles that women in retail management positions confront. The retail industry is one of the last to provide women equal opportunity, particularly in managerial positions, despite progress toward gender equality in other sectors. Focusing on the different dynamics in rural and urban environments, this article aims to analyze the unique problems and possibilities encountered by women managers in the retail industry.

Historically, women have played a significant role in the expansion of consumer-driven businesses, such as retail. Unfortunately, few women have been able to rise to leadership positions due to the persistence of conventional gender norms and expectations. There has long been an assumption that males predominate in retail management because of the unique blend of leadership, strategy, and people skills required in the position. Systemic obstacles have prevented women from reaching the top levels of management, in contrast to the common practice of promoting males to executive positions. Lack of education, little possibilities for professional advancement, and long-standing gender stereotypes are major causes of this inequality, but the exact causes differ among areas.

Women shop managers face especially severe obstacles in rural locations. Traditional, patriarchal civilizations that limit women to home domains are commonly found in rural places. When women in these fields try to advance in their professions, particularly to managerial

positions, they may encounter pushback from members of their families and communities. On top of that, education and training programs, which are essential for management success, are not always easily accessible to rural women. Women have even greater obstacles in rural retail management due to a lack of support systems, tools, and professional connections. Women in rural areas typically have the double burden of caring for children and their careers, without the same resources that women in metropolitan areas enjoy, such as affordable child care or more flexible work schedules.

While city life may be more progressive overall, women nonetheless face unique obstacles in the role of store manager. Despite more educational and professional development options, urban women still face substantial obstacles when trying to advance in their careers. Many women still see their male coworkers promoted at the expense of themselves because of persistent gender prejudice in the workplace. Managing a retail company may be demanding, and women in metropolitan areas typically struggle to find a balance between work and family life. Even with all these obstacles, women managers still have a lot of opportunity in metropolitan contexts. The resources that women need to climb the corporate ladder may be found via professional groups, mentoring programs, and networking events.

There is an economic and gender equity necessity for women to be promoted to managerial positions in retail. Companies with more female executives had better financial results, according to the research. When it comes to leadership, women generally put an emphasis on teamwork, open dialogue, and the happiness of their employees. Better customer relations, more staff happiness, and better company results may result from having women in managerial positions in the retail sector, an area where team dynamics and customer service are vital to success. Moreover, by fostering equality in both the professional and personal realms, and by questioning old gender conventions, enabling women managers may act as a catalyst for social change.

Women can and should assume managerial positions in retail, but this can only happen with concerted effort from a variety of groups, including community members, legislators, and company owners. The gender gap in leadership may be filled and rural and urban women's needs met via targeted training and development initiatives. Aspiring women managers might benefit greatly from mentorship programs that pair them with more seasoned workers. Equal compensation, flexible hours, and defined career paths are just a few examples of how businesses may improve workplace equity for women. To ensure that women may succeed in managerial roles, it is crucial to provide a welcoming and safe workplace.

Empowering women managers in retail has distinct hurdles due to the rural-urban gap. Efforts to empower women in rural regions need to take into account the unique socio-cultural circumstances and tackle the obstacles that women encounter. To change people's minds, community outreach activities should stress how important it is for women to work. In addition, empowering women via microfinancing and other entrepreneurial possibilities may help them build economic independence and leadership abilities through the launch and management of their own retail companies. Companies in metropolitan locations should prioritize promoting

inclusive cultures and developing fair promotion policies for women, even if they may have better access to resources overall. Opportunities for women in retail to network, exchange stories, and fight for change abound at events and groups specifically for this demographic.

Retail empowerment is about more than just women; it's about the whole community. Inspiring younger women to seek out retail jobs and strive for leadership positions, women managers may act as mentors and role models. Gender parity in the workplace may be achieved if society does its part to remove obstacles and provide chances for women to work in retail management. Additionally, there may be a domino effect that improves economic circumstances for whole communities if women are empowered to operate retail outlets in both urban and rural areas. Women who achieve positions of leadership are more likely to put money back into their neighborhoods, patronize small companies, and help their areas' economies grow.

There are a lot of people who need to pay attention to the complicated but critical topic of women's empowerment in retail management. Despite certain differences, women in rural and urban areas confront similar obstacles to success. The retail sector may be made more welcoming and equal if these issues are addressed via specialized training, mentoring, and legislative initiatives. In addition to being the right thing to do from a social justice standpoint, promoting gender parity in management positions is smart business that can strengthen companies and their bottom lines. There will be less discrimination against women and greater opportunities for diversity and inclusion in the workplace if more women take on leadership roles in retail now.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Behera, Hruday et al., (2024) In order to promote economic growth and social empowerment in rural areas, it is widely acknowledged that women play a crucial role in rural marketing. In order to help policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders in the fight for gender equality and inclusive development, this research looks at the ways women in rural marketing have been empowered, the economic contributions they have made, the problems they have faced, and where they see their careers going in the future. Women do a wide variety of tasks at many points in the value chain in rural regions, and rural marketing aims to promote and distribute these products and services to these communities. Even if they have a big impact, women in rural marketing still encounter a lot of obstacles that prevent them from being fully involved and empowered. In order to overcome these obstacles, comprehensive programs are needed that support gender equality, increase women's access to resources, and enable them to actively engage in economic activity. Women's involvement in rural marketing promotes empowerment in several ways.

Nhleko, Mary-Ann et al., (2023) Finding out what stops women-owned companies in rural South Africa from growing is the main goal of this research. Data for the study came from a quantitative research approach. Hluhluwe, Ulundi, and Eshowe are rural settlements in northern KZN, and the research focused on 250 female business owners from those areas. According to the research, insufficient infrastructure, low levels of education, and limited funding are the three biggest problems facing rural women-owned companies trying to grow.

Despite this, women company entrepreneurs in rural South Africa may overcome these challenges. By removing these roadblocks, rural communities would be able to support more female entrepreneurs, which would boost economic development, alleviate poverty, and raise living standards for everyone. In light of these results, the research suggests a number of initiatives that might help rural women-owned businesses thrive, including new forms of funding, more focused educational opportunities, and improved infrastructure. Additional barriers to women-owned enterprises in rural locations should be investigated in future studies. These include social and cultural obstacles, limited access to information and markets, and legal and regulatory constraints.

Mundhe, Eknath. (2021) Examining the current situation of women's empowerment in India and illuminating its obstacles and issues is the aim of this research. These days, advancing women's rights is high on the list of priorities for this new millennium. There has been a slow but steady shift in their standing since the turn of the century. Despite the government's best efforts, the survey indicated that women in India remain considerably behind males in terms of development. When it comes to education and work, there are gender disparities. Depending on factors such as age, education level, and work position, women's mobility and decision-making authority at home might differ substantially. Evidence suggests that women's complacency in upholding gender inequality persists in today's culture. Domestic abuse is more common among rural women than to metropolitan ones. When it comes to political engagement, there is a significant gender divide as well. While people's views on gender equality greatly impact the emphasis on goal accomplishment, the research finds that education and career opportunities are the only enabling elements.

Tembhre, Manju. (2018) While India's illustrious past does much to celebrate women, it also reflects the unique obstacles women encounter as compared to males in fields such as academia, business, and politics. In all areas of society, women are not treated with the same respect as males. Despite making up over half of the global population, women do it on precarious footing. Although development efforts have benefitted a small percentage of women, the perception that women's contributions to progress and other economic activities are growing is a common one. Observing the progress of a small number of women provides a glimpse of women's empowerment. The opposite is true: a billion women in our society still lack access to basic rights, which puts them in a pitiful position and undermines their influence. Seventy percent of women live in poverty, women make up around 80% of the world's refugees, and women make up two-thirds of the world's illiterate population, according to Global Canvas. Uneven earnings and gender inequality, as well as domestic violence, female femicide, rape, molestation, and eve teasing, are worldwide realities that impede women's empowerment. In order to address the problem of women's empowerment, it is crucial for women to come together and make their voices heard in the process of creating and enforcing public policies and legislation that would guarantee economic empowerment and gender parity.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate the pros and cons of empowering women managers in the retail industry in both urban and rural settings. We gathered quantitative and qualitative data to make sure we understood the challenges well. The quantitative part included a survey of 230 female retail managers from both urban and rural areas to find out what they had in common in terms of job satisfaction, opportunities for professional development, and work-life balance. In addition, in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with chosen participants to glean information on their perspectives, attitudes, and experiences related to empowerment in their specific settings. In order to put the results into perspective, we also reviewed secondary data from industry publications, case studies, and pertinent literature. This methodology permits a comparison between urban and rural areas and guarantees a comprehensive analysis of the variables impacting the empowerment of women managers.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Urban women had more options for training and development compared to rural women in retail management, according to the data. On the other hand, issues of work-life balance and gender prejudice affect both categories. Women managers in both contexts would benefit from individualized interventions, as has been pointed out in the debate.

Table 1: Age of the Respondents

Particular	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	120	52.17%
26-35	50	21.74%
36-45	40	17.39%
46 and above	20	8.70%
Total	230	100%

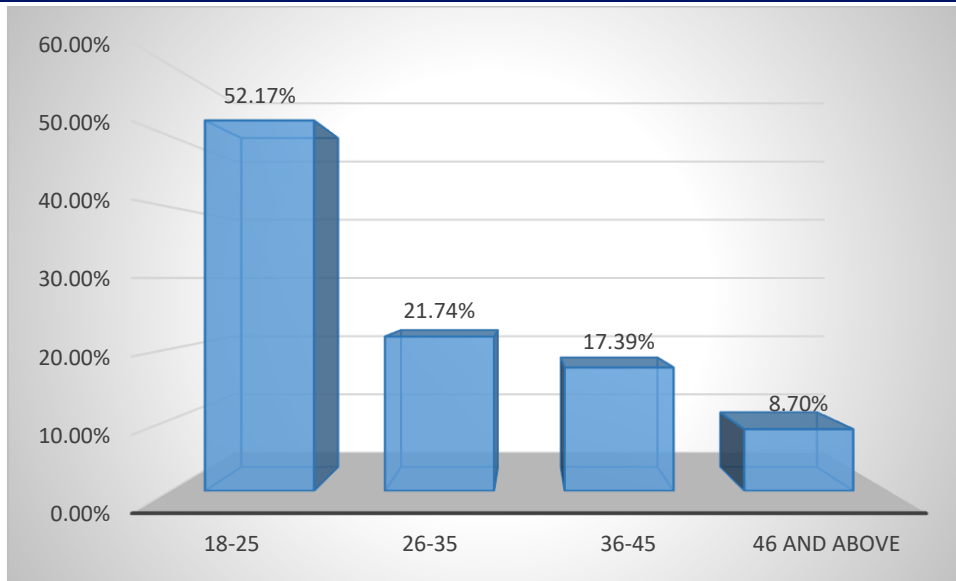


Figure 1: Age of the Respondents

The data shows that 52.17 percent of the respondents are in the 18–25 age bracket, which is the largest demographic. This is indicative of a large youth presence in the retail industry. There is a notable presence of early-career professionals in the 26-35 age bracket, which comes in second with 21.74%. Participants with higher experience in the middle years make up 17.39% of the total. Last but not least, there are fewer people in the sample who are 46 and older (8.70%). In general, the data shows that younger generations are more numerous in the workforce, whereas older generations are less numerous.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by Women Managers in Retail

Challenge	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Gender Bias	75%	50%
Work-Life Balance	65%	60%
Limited Access to Resources	70%	40%
Lack of Mentorship	60%	45%
Financial Constraints	80%	30%

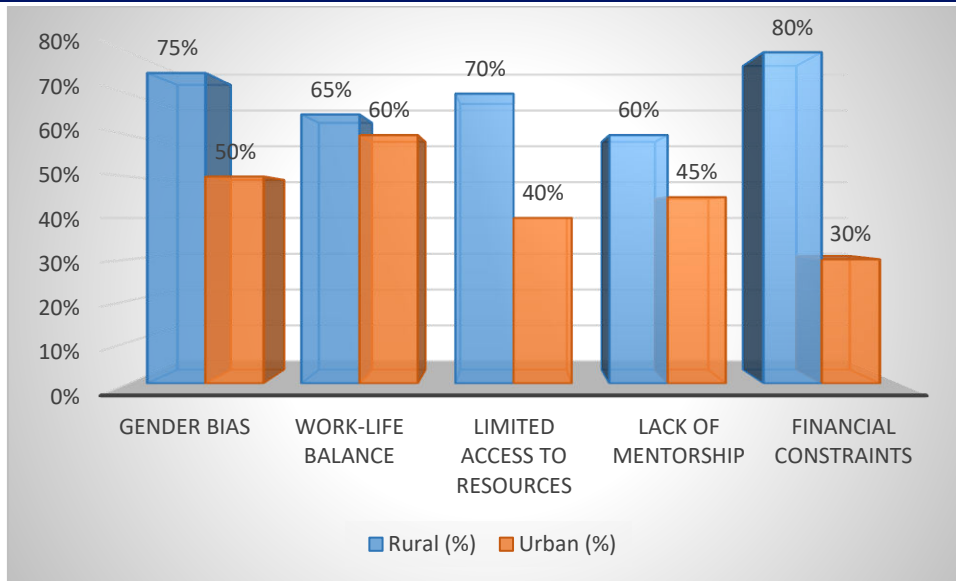


Figure 2: Challenges Faced by Women Managers in Retail

The chart shows that women in managerial roles in retail have different obstacles in urban and rural areas. While only 50% of women in metropolitan areas report experiencing gender prejudice, that number rises to 75% in rural regions. Sixty-five percent of women in urban areas and 65 percent of women in rural areas still struggle with work-life balance. Seventy percent of rural women, compared to forty percent of urban women, report having limited access to resources. Another challenge is that 60% of women in rural areas and 45% of women in urban areas do not have a mentor. In contrast to the 30% of urban women who express financial difficulties, 80% of rural women face this difficulty. It is clear from these numbers that women working in retail management in rural areas have more obstacles than their urban counterparts.

Table 3: Opportunities for Women Managers

Opportunity	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Access to Training Programs	45%	70%
Networking Events	30%	65%
Flexible Work Arrangements	50%	55%
Supportive Policies	40%	75%
Mentorship Programs	25%	60%

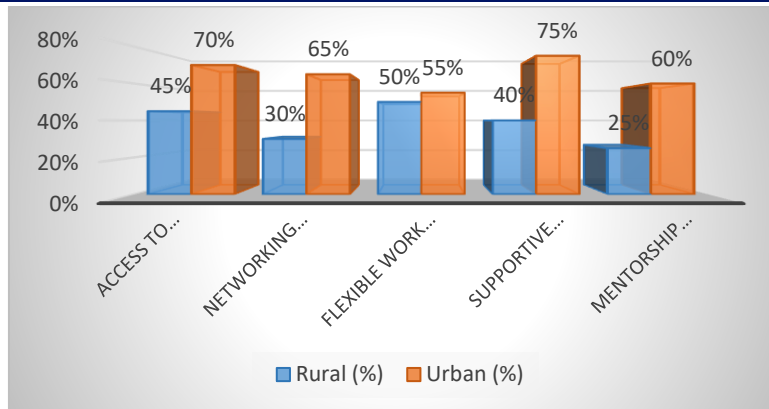


Figure 3: Opportunities for Women Managers

In both urban and rural retail settings, women managers might find opportunity in the table. In metropolitan areas, 70% of women participate in training programs, but just 45% of women in rural areas do so. Moreover, although 65% of women in cities take part in networking activities, only 30% of rural women can say the same. Half of the women in rural areas and 55 percent of the women in urban areas have access to some kind of flexible employment arrangement. While only 40% of women in rural regions have encountered supportive policies, 75% of women in metropolitan areas have. Lastly, there is a marked difference in the amount of professional assistance accessible to women in rural areas compared to urban areas; although 60% of urban women have access to mentoring programs, just 25% of rural women do.

V. CONCLUSION

Whether in an urban or rural setting, there is tremendous room for improvement in the current state of affairs when it comes to the empowerment of women managers in retail. Systemic obstacles, such as gender prejudice and a lack of professional development opportunities, affect women equally in urban and rural areas, despite the fact that women in the former have more educational and occupational opportunities. Training, mentoring, and gender equality policies may provide the tailored assistance needed to tackle these difficulties. In addition to improving organizational performance, empowering women managers promotes social development by helping to create communities that are more inclusive and egalitarian. The next step is to make it easier for women to take the lead in retail.

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