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Antecedents of Women Empowerment and Livelihood Among Rural Area - with Special Reference to the Chengalpattu District

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ABSTRACT

The term "empowerment" has become a key concept within development agencies, including international organisations and the United Nations, and has gained broader acceptance as a goal of development projects and programs since the 1990s. In India, the empowerment of women, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, has emerged as a primary focus of development initiatives. Women hold a pivotal position in society, playing critical roles not only in matriarchal communities but also in predominantly patriarchal societies. The well-being and future of children largely depend on their mothers, who often remain at home to oversee their health and education. This study stands out by focusing on the socio-economic conditions and empowerment of rural women labourers in Chengalpattu District. The research is empirical and employs a survey method, with primary data collected from rural workers in the district.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to the ability of women to take control of their resources and have access to opportunities for learning, skill development, and travel, as well as contribute to and benefit from the outcomes of their work. It also involves recognising and valuing unpaid housework and promoting the equitable sharing of responsibilities in a genuine spirit of partnership. The concept of empowerment has become integral to the language of development agencies, including international organisations and the United Nations, gaining widespread acceptance as a goal of development projects and programs since the 1990s. In India, women's empowerment, especially for economically disadvantaged women, has become a central focus of development efforts.

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Empowerment is a process that involves raising awareness, building capacity, increasing participation, enhancing decision-making power, and fostering transformative actions. Despite India's rapid economic growth, poverty remains prevalent, particularly in rural areas where rain-fed agriculture serves as the primary livelihood. Factors such as unequal access to productive resources like land, water, advanced inputs and technologies, and microfinance, combined with challenges such as droughts and natural disasters, exacerbate poverty. Additionally, low literacy and skill levels contribute to persistent poverty by limiting individuals' ability to claim their fundamental rights or engage in income-generating activities or asset-building efforts.

1.1 Review of Literature

Gupta *et al.* (2024) conducted a noteworthy study to explore the gaps in women's empowerment in rural areas, with a particular focus on the alignment between skill development and job creation. The researchers utilised information from various sources to examine the current state of women's empowerment, skill development, and employment opportunities in rural regions. The findings revealed that the lack of job opportunities, coupled with the absence of industrial and commercial infrastructure in rural areas, significantly hampers the potential benefits of skill development. The study further recommended a thorough analysis of diverse data formats to understand better the existing landscape of women's empowerment, skill development, and job creation in rural settings.

Mboutchouang Kountchou *et al.* (2023) conducted a scientific investigation to examine the impact of Islamic finance on women's empowerment in Africa from 1975 to 2021. The study utilised secondary data from 27 African countries sourced from the World Development Indicators, World Population Review, and Varieties of Democracy databases. The findings highlight the need for policies to be supported by complementary measures, such as eliminating social norms that restrict women's participation in decision-making. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of focusing on women's political, economic, and social empowerment in Africa while noting a nonsignificant impact on empowerment within the home.

Khan *et al.* (2023) conducted an empirical study to analyse the scientific research progress in the field of "Rural Livelihood" from 1991 to 2022. The researchers retrieved 122 documents from the Web of Science Core Collection using the keywords "Rural Livelihood" OR "Rural Livelihoods" in the "Title-Abstract-Keyword" field. The findings reveal that rural livelihood research has been extensively explored across various dimensions, including agriculture, management, conservation, climate change, households, policy, and biodiversity. The study provides valuable insights into global research trends, recent advancements, key issues, prominent topics, and the thematic evolution of rural livelihood research over the past 31 years.

Mashapure *et al.* (2023) conducted a study to examine the factors affecting the development of rural women entrepreneurship and sustainable rural livelihoods in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. Using a quantitative research approach, data were gathered through structured questionnaires from 400 women entrepreneurs across various sectors. The findings indicate that women's entrepreneurship is influenced by financial, environmental, psychological, and sociological factors, all of which contribute to sustainable rural livelihoods. The researchers emphasised that unless the identified challenges are addressed, achieving sustainability in women's entrepreneurship will remain unattainable.

Bharti (2021) conducted a qualitative study to explore how cooperatives contribute to women's empowerment by enhancing their livelihoods and providing financial independence. The researcher carried out an extensive literature review using the Scopus database to investigate the role of cooperatives in promoting women's empowerment. The findings suggest the development of a framework for women's empowerment through cooperatives, supported by field experiences. The study also emphasises that the theory of economic modernity is applicable to women's empowerment, as financial independence achieved through cooperatives has enabled women to gain control over resources, fostering their empowerment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Women hold a vital place in society, contributing significantly even in patriarchal systems beyond their roles in matriarchal societies. In many cases, especially in countries like India, where traditional and spiritual values continue to shape lives, mothers play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their children by focusing on their health and education, often from within the home. While the advancement of women's status has long been a global issue, it is now widely acknowledged as a critical factor in national development. Moreover, addressing poverty is increasingly seen as inseparable from creating opportunities for women to engage in productive employment.

1.3 Research Gap

In India, the present studies on "women in agriculture and women entrepreneurial intention, livelihood through self-help groups and entrepreneurship" are only analysed. So far, little attempt has been made to investigate women's empowerment in rural areas. The current study is unique as it concentrates on rural areas' women's socio-economic conditions and empowerment in Chengalpattu District.

1.4 Objective of the Study

1) To identify the personal profile of the rural workers in Chengalpattu District.
2) To examine the underlying dimensions and Fiscal Factor (FF), Psychological Factor (PF), Environmental Factor (EF), Sociological Factor (SF), Women Empowerment Factor (WEF) and Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF).
3) To explore the key determinants of Fiscal Factor (FF) and Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF) in the study area.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is empirical and based on a survey method. The primary data was gathered from the rural workers in Chengalpattu District. In this present study, the researcher adopted the convenient sampling method, and the study's sample size is limited to 350 respondents. Books, journals, magazines, periodicals, and websites were used to gather secondary data. The tools and techniques used are percentage analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), regression analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and SEM.

2.1 Questionnaire Design

Table 1

Questionnaire Design

Section	Particulars	Nominal Scale	5-point Likert Scale	Total
I	Personal Profile	6	-	6
II	Women Empowerment Rural Livelihood (WERL)	-	38	38
	Total	6	38	44

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile (N = 350)	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 25 Yrs	149	42.6
	25-30 Yrs	125	35.7
	30-40 Yrs	48	13.7
	Above 40 Yrs	28	8.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	83	23.7
	Married	241	68.9
	Widow	19	5.4
	Divorced	7	2.0
Education	Illiterate	123	35.1
	Primary School	54	15.4
	SSLC	36	10.3
	HSC	18	5.1
	Others	19	5.4
Type of family	Nuclear family	247	70.6
	Joint family	103	29.4
House	Own	347	99.1
	Rent	3	0.9
Family income	Less than ₹10,000	88	25.1
	₹10,000 - ₹20,000	154	44.0
	₹20,000 - ₹25,000	62	17.7
	More than ₹25,000	46	13.1

Table *2* indicates that the majority of the respondents are below 25 years old (42.6%), the majority of the respondents are married (68.9%), the majority of the respondents are (35.1%), the majority of the respondents are nuclear families (70.6%), the majority of the respondents are own (99.1%), and the majority of the respondents are ₹10,000 - ₹20,000 (44.0%).

Table 3

Exploratory Factor Analysis of WERL Factors

WERL	Mean	SD	Communalities	MSA
WERL (01)	4.191	0.787	0.568	0.818
WERL (02)	4.091	0.891	0.485	0.905
WERL (03)	4.114	0.929	0.567	0.940
WERL (04)	4.123	0.911	0.659	0.879
WERL (05)	4.117	0.893	0.708	0.893
WERL (06)	4.077	0.817	0.458	0.895
WERL (07)	4.103	0.860	0.497	0.918
WERL (08)	4.094	0.927	0.447	0.918
WERL (09)	4.120	0.929	0.500	0.853
WERL (10)	4.243	0.896	0.541	0.911
WERL (11)	4.137	0.898	0.362	0.889
WERL (12)	4.171	0.917	0.386	0.929
WERL (13)	4.143	0.844	0.451	0.942
WERL (14)	4.191	0.833	0.496	0.899
WERL (15)	4.109	0.860	0.398	0.953
WERL (16)	4.134	0.864	0.370	0.939
WERL (17)	4.006	0.899	0.482	0.934
WERL (18)	4.046	0.862	0.518	0.944
WERL (19)	4.194	0.979	0.503	0.874
WERL (20)	4.163	0.905	0.498	0.941
WERL (21)	4.014	1.000	0.455	0.912
WERL (22)	4.160	0.885	0.494	0.938
WERL (23)	4.194	0.944	0.436	0.925
WERL (24)	4.271	0.875	0.539	0.934
WERL (25)	4.103	0.769	0.392	0.941
WERL (26)	4.180	0.895	0.593	0.842
WERL (27)	4.046	0.926	0.547	0.906
WERL (28)	3.991	1.045	0.495	0.919
WERL (29)	4.091	0.989	0.605	0.921
WERL (30)	4.000	0.958	0.612	0.941

WERL (31)	4.046	0.907	0.610	0.930
WERL (32)	4.006	0.930	0.603	0.901
WERL (33)	4.086	0.856	0.487	0.906
WERL (34)	4.069	0.918	0.411	0.933
WERL (35)	4.089	0.899	0.529	0.930
WERL (36)	4.177	0.926	0.502	0.917
WERL (37)	4.191	0.787	0.492	0.925
WERL (38)	4.091	0.891	0.427	0.912

Table *3* indicates the high mean value of Women Empowerment Rural Livelihood (WERL) among the rural public. The standard deviation values are very low. WERL (24) Mean = (4.271), SD = (0.875); followed by WERL (10) Mean = (4.243), SD = (0.896); WERL (19) Mean = (4.194), SD = (0.979); WERL (23) Mean = (4.194), SD = (0.944); WERL (01) Mean = (4.191), SD = (0.787); WERL (14) Mean = (4.191), SD = (0.833); WERL (37) Mean = (4.191), SD = (0.787); WERL (26) Mean = (4.180), SD = (0.895); WERL (36) Mean = (4.177), SD = (0.926); WERL (12) Mean = (4.171), SD = (0.917); WERL (20) Mean = (4.163), SD = (0.905); WERL (22) Mean = (4.160), SD = (0.885); WERL (13) Mean = (4.143), SD = (0.844); WERL (11) Mean = (4.137), SD = (0.898); WERL (16) Mean = (4.134), SD = (0.864); WERL (04) Mean = (4.123), SD = (0.911); WERL (09) Mean = (4.120), SD = (0.929); WERL (05) Mean = (4.117), SD = (0.893); WERL (03) Mean = (4.114), SD = (0.929); WERL (15) Mean = (4.109), SD = (0.860); WERL (07) Mean = (4.103), SD = (0.860); WERL (25) Mean = (4.103), SD = (0.769); WERL (08) Mean = (4.094), SD = (0.927); WERL (02) Mean = (4.091), SD = (0.891); WERL (29) Mean = (4.091), SD = (0.989); WERL (38) Mean = (4.091), SD = (0.891); WERL (35) Mean = (4.089), SD = (0.899); WERL (33) Mean = (4.086), SD = (0.856); WERL (06) Mean = (4.077), SD = (0.817); WERL (34) Mean = (4.069), SD = (0.918); WERL (18) Mean = (4.046), SD = (0.862); WERL (27) Mean = (4.046), SD = (0.926); WERL (31) Mean = (4.046), SD = (0.907); WERL (21) Mean = (4.014), SD = (1.000); WERL (17) Mean = (4.006), SD = (0.899); WERL (32) Mean = (4.006), SD = (0.930); WERL (30) Mean = (4.000), SD = (0.958) and WERL (28) Mean = (3.991), SD = (1.045).

Table 4

Reliability Analysis of WERL Factors

WERL	Alpha Value	No of Variables
Fiscal Factor (FF)	0.866	9
Psychological Factor (PF)	0.827	9
Environmental Factor (EF)	0.753	6
Sociological Factor (SF)	0.804	6
Women Empowerment Factor (WEF)	0.644	4
Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF)	0.640	4
Total (WERL)	0.937	38

Table *4* indicates that the variables in Fiscal Factor (FF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.866, Psychological Factor (PF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.827, Environmental Factor (EF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.753, Sociological Factor (SF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.804, Women Empowerment Factor (WEF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.644 and Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF) have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.640. The overall Cronbach's Alpha of all WERL variables is 0.937. It can be inferred that the WERL Construct scale is reliable.

Table 5

KMO and Bartlett's Test of WERL

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.917
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5219.015
	df	703
	P value	0.000

Table *5* reveals that Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, at the five per cent significance level, has an approximate chi-square value of 5219.015, df = 703, and p = 0.000. The value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy Measure is 0.917.

Table 6

Total Variance Explained in WERL Variables

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	*% of Variance*	*Cumulative %*
1	4.441	11.688	11.688
2	3.928	10.337	22.025
3	3.353	8.824	30.849
4	3.189	8.391	39.240
5	2.192	5.767	45.007
6	2.021	5.318	50.325

Table *6* shows that each component in WERL variables explains the total variance. Using factor analysis, the thirty-eight variables are reduced into six factors, which account for 50.325 % of the total variance.

Table 7

Factor Loading of Fiscal Factor (FF)

Sl. No.	FF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
FF01	WERL (31)	0.709	4.441	11.688
FF02	WERL (29)	0.693		

FF03	WERL (32)	0.691
FF04	WERL (30)	0.672
FF05	WERL (28)	0.570
FF06	WERL (33)	0.560
FF07	WERL (37)	0.488
FF08	WERL (38)	0.479
FF09	WERL (34)	0.428

Table *7* shows that FF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL. It consists of nine statements with factor loading: WERL (31), WERL (29), WERL (32), WERL (30), WERL (28), WERL (33), WERL (37), WERL (38), and WERL (34). It has been labelled as a "Fiscal Factor (FF)."

Table 8

Factor Loading of Psychological Factor (PF)

Sl. No.	PF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
PF01	WERL (22)	0.604	3.928	10.337
PF02	WERL (24)	0.595		
PF03	WERL (14)	0.573		
PF04	WERL (21)	0.549		
PF05	WERL (13)	0.523		
PF06	WERL (36)	0.502		
PF07	WERL (25)	0.468		
PF08	WERL (23)	0.436		
PF09	WERL (15)	0.416		

Table *8* shows that PF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL, consisting of nine statements with factor loading: WERL (22), WERL (24), WERL (14), WERL (21), WERL (13), WERL (36), WERL (25), WERL (23) and WERL (15). It has been labelled as a "Psychological Factor (PF)."

Table 9

Factor Loading of Environmental Factor (EF)

Sl. No.	EF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
EF01	WERL (19)	0.657	3.353	8.824
EF02	WERL (17)	0.618		
EF03	WERL (18)	0.563		
EF04	WERL (20)	0.537		

EF05	WERL (11)	0.503
EF06	WERL (16)	0.501

Table *9* shows that EF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL, consisting of six statements with factor loading: WERL (19), WERL (17), WERL (18), WERL (20), WERL (11) and WERL (16). It has been labelled as an "Environmental Factor (EF)."

Table 10

Factor Loading of Sociological Factor (SF)

Sl. No	SF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
SF01	WERL (05)	0.768	3.189	8.391
SF02	WERL (04)	0.755		
SF03	WERL (03)	0.625		
SF04	WERL (02)	0.514		
SF05	WERL (06)	0.503		
SF06	WERL (07)	0.447		

Table *10* shows that SF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL, consisting of six statements with factor loading: WERL (05), WERL (04), WERL (03), WERL (02), WERL (06), and WERL (07). It has been labelled as a "Sociological Factor (SF)."

Table 11

Factor Loading of Women Empowerment Factor (WEF)

Sl. No.	WEF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
WEF01	WERL (12)	0.599	2.192	5.767
WEF02	WERL (08)	0.594		
WEF03	WERL (09)	0.593		
WEF04	WERL (10)	0.489		

Table *11* shows that WEF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL, consisting of four statements with factor loading: WERL (12), WERL (08), WERL (09) and WERL (10). It has been labelled as an "Empowerment Factor (WEF)."

Table 12

Factor Loading of Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF)

Sl. No.	SRLF relating to WERL Variables	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance Explained
SRLF01	WERL (26)	0.690	2.021	5.318

SRLF02	WERL (01)	0.597
SRLF03	WERL (27)	0.576
SRLF04	WERL (35)	0.439

Table *12* shows that SRLF is the predominant and most important factor of WERL, consisting of four statements with factor loading: WERL (26), WERL (01), WERL (27) and WERL (35). It has been labelled as "Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF)."

Table 13

Regression Analysis of WERL

Dependent Variable	Significant Predictors	Mean (SD)	F-Value	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	β (t-Value)	Sig.
FF		36.594 (5.743)	109.221	0.783	0.613	0.607		
	PF	37.245 (5.375)					0.400 (7.506)	0.000*
	EF	24.605 (3.510)					0.150 (3.114)	0.002
	SF	24.942 (3.656)					0.084 (1.864)	0.063
	WEF	16.517 (2.437)					0.079 (1.794)	0.074
	SRLF	16.831 (2.266)					0.251 (6.392)	0.000*

P Value of >0.05* - (PF, EF and SRLF are all Factors significantly influencing the FF)

Notes: *Significant @ 5% Level.

Table *13* displays in are R = 0.783, R Square = 0.613, and R Square Adjusted = 0.607. This indicates that the dependent factor, the FF of consumers towards WERL users, is influenced by the independent variables, such as the PF, EF, SF, WEF, and SRLF. F = 109.221 and P = 0.000 are statistically significant at the 5% level, according to the above table. Thus, it could be argued that an exploratory analysis of the public's FF is supported by sufficient information about independent variables. A strong regression fit suggests the presence of individual impact over the dependent components. Therefore, when it comes to WERL, it can be said that Fiscal Factor (FF), Psychological Factor (PF), Environmental Factor (EF), Sociological Factor (SF), Women Empowerment Factor (WEF) and Sustainable Rural Livelihood Factors (SRLF).

3.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis - (WERL)

The construct validity of the WERL scale is tested using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) with the Structure Equation Model (SEM). In other words, the CFA model tests the hypothesis that there is a link between the variables that are observed and the pre-defined latent construct(s) of WERL that underlie them.

Figure 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Chart for WERL

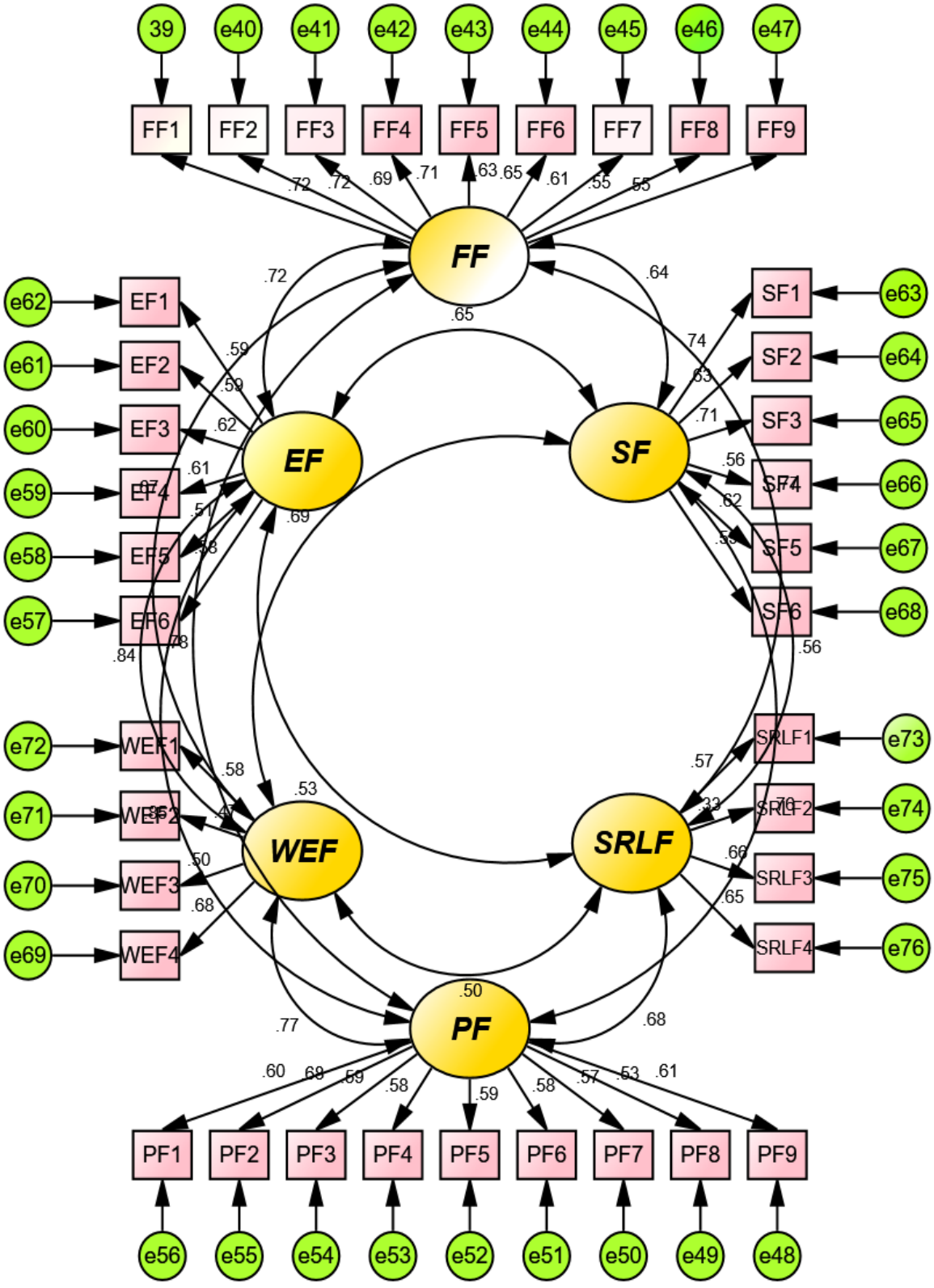

Figure *1* shows a visualisation of the CFA chart for WERL. It reveals that all model fit statistics such as CMIN/DF 7.271), CFI (0.980), GFI (0.987), RMSEA (0.134), and PClose (0.012). Except for the

Chi-square fit statistic ($\chi^2 = 14.543$, DF = 2, $p < 0.001$), they are highly significant at a 1 per cent level. The priory seven-factor structure of WERL is a good fit model as per the chi-square statistic as well, and based on relative chi-square, all fit indices related to fit indices support a good model fit. Hence, it is found that the CFA model for WERL with six factors is acceptable.

Table 14

Regression Weights of WERL

ITEM DESCRIPTION			SW	USW	S.E.	C.R.
WERL31	<---	FF	0.717	1.000		
WERL29	<---	FF	0.720	0.940	0.074	12.730**
WERL32	<---	FF	0.689	0.930	0.076	12.184**
WERL30	<---	FF	0.714	1.052	0.083	12.622**
WERL28	<---	FF	0.631	0.796	0.071	11.162**
WERL33	<---	FF	0.649	0.830	0.072	11.481**
WERL37	<---	FF	0.606	0.769	0.072	10.727**
WERL38	<---	FF	0.549	0.716	0.074	9.712**
WERL34	<---	FF	0.553	0.726	0.074	9.796**
WERL15	<---	PF	0.610	1.000		
WERL23	<---	PF	0.528	1.025	0.121	8.467**
WERL25	<---	PF	0.568	1.040	0.116	8.981**
WERL36	<---	PF	0.577	1.029	0.113	9.100**
WERL13	<---	PF	0.592	1.032	0.111	9.287**
WERL21	<---	PF	0.578	1.099	0.121	9.111**
WERL14	<---	PF	0.592	1.053	0.114	9.279**
WERL24	<---	PF	0.675	1.159	0.113	10.266**
WERL22	<---	PF	0.603	1.058	0.112	9.416**
WERL16	<---	EF	0.579	1.000		
WERL11	<---	EF	0.506	0.974	0.127	7.694**
WERL20	<---	EF	0.607	1.084	0.123	8.803**
WERL18	<---	EF	0.620	1.111	0.124	8.933**
WERL17	<---	EF	0.590	1.051	0.122	8.628**
WERL19	<---	EF	0.592	1.103	0.128	8.648**
WERL05	<---	SF	0.738	1.000		
WERL04	<---	SF	0.630	0.819	0.075	10.891**
WERL03	<---	SF	0.712	0.817	0.067	12.263**
WERL02	<---	SF	0.561	0.581	0.060	9.690**
WERL06	<---	SF	0.624	0.829	0.077	10.788**

WERL07	<---	SF	0.587	0.764	0.075	10.140**
WERL10	<---	WEF	0.678	1.000		
WERL09	<---	WEF	0.503	0.689	0.087	7.921**
WERL08	<---	WEF	0.467	0.608	0.082	7.419**
WERL12	<---	WEF	0.580	0.827	0.092	8.956**
WERL26	<---	SRLF	0.567	1.000		
WERL01	<---	SRLF	0.329	.507	0.101	5.026**
WERL27	<---	SRLF	0.664	1.029	0.123	8.399**
WERL35	<---	SRLF	0.651	1.122	0.135	8.312**

3.2 Structure Equation Model (SEM)

Hence, the SEM model has six variables: two unobserved variables, two exogenous variables, and four endogenous variables.

Figure 2

Standardised Estimates

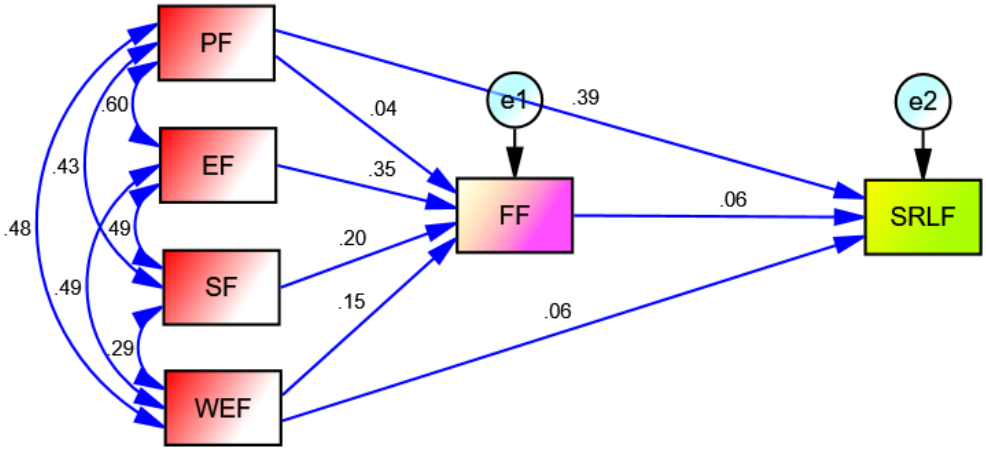

Figure 3

Unstandardised Estimates

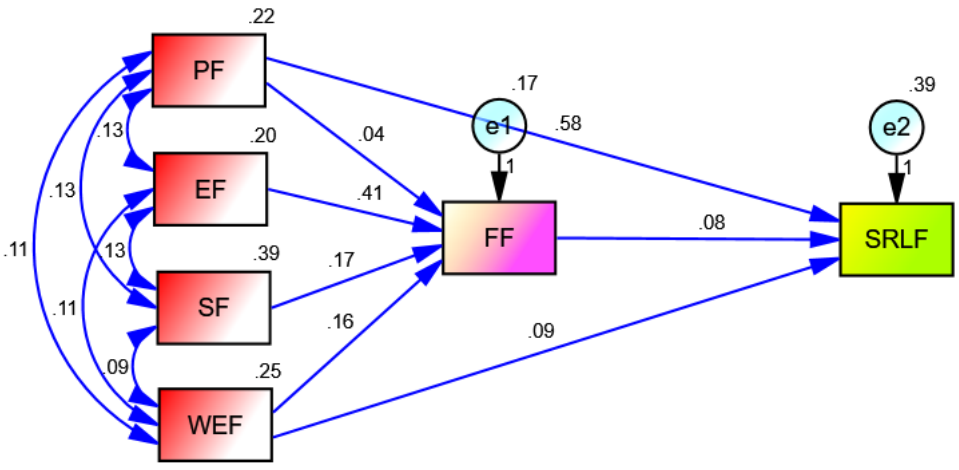

Table 15

Regression Weight for WERL

Measured Variables		Latent Variable	SW	USW	S.E.	C.R.
FF	<---	PF	0.040	0.044	0.063	0.712
FF	<---	EF	0.350	0.412	0.069	5.958**
FF	<---	WEF	0.150	0.156	0.053	2.946**
FF	<---	SF	0.204	0.171	0.042	4.066**
SRLF	<---	FF	0.058	0.079	0.073	1.081
SRLF	<---	PF	0.394	0.584	0.084	6.982**
SRLF	<---	WEF	0.065	0.091	0.079	1.155

Table *15* shows that the coefficient value for the impact of FF on EF public is 0.298, which implies that the partial effect over EF in holding other variables is constant. t value 5.958, 2.946, 4.066, 6.982 with a P value of 0.000 shows that there is significance.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas, is both a critical challenge and an indispensable necessity for sustainable development. This study, with its focus on rural women labourers in the Chengalpattu District, underscores the multifaceted nature of empowerment, encompassing fiscal, psychological, environmental, and sociological dimensions, as well as their interplay with sustainable rural livelihoods. The findings demonstrate that fiscal factors are most significant in influencing women's empowerment and livelihood, supported by psychological and environmental contributors. These insights reaffirm the necessity of a holistic approach that integrates economic independence, social equity, and access to resources for fostering empowerment.

Despite advancements, the study reveals enduring gaps in infrastructure, skill development opportunities, and sociocultural support systems, all of which impede the realisation of complete empowerment. Policies aimed at addressing these barriers must emphasise capacity-building, participatory decision-making, and equitable resource distribution, ensuring that rural women can transcend traditional roles and contribute meaningfully to societal progress.

By highlighting the socio-economic realities and aspirations of rural women, this research not only advances theoretical understanding but also serves as a practical guide for policymakers, development practitioners, and local stakeholders. Moving forward, an inclusive development paradigm that centres on empowering women as agents of change will be pivotal in achieving broader goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

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