

THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES IN RURAL AREAS: THE CASE OF IZMIR PROVINCE, TURKIYE

Buket KARATURHAN¹, Özlem YILDIZ¹, Seçil INCI², Melike Zeynep TANINMIŞ³

¹Ege University, Faculty of Agriculture Department of Agricultural Economics, Bornova, İzmir - Türkiye, E-mails: buket.karaturhan@ege.edu.tr, ozlem.yildiz@ege.edu.tr

²İzmir Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, Kazim Dirik District, 34, Sanayi Street 35100 Bornova, İzmir, Türkiye, E-mail: secil.inci@tarimorman.gov.tr

³Narlıdere District Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, Huzur Mah. 477/A Mithatpasa Street. Narlıdere, İzmir – Türkiye, E-mail: melikezeyneptaninmis@tarimorman.gov.tr

Corresponding author: ozlem.yildiz@ege.edu.tr

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the relationship of women who are members of agricultural development cooperatives with their cooperatives, as well as to examine their life satisfaction and assessments of the cooperatives' work. A total of 83 female members, who were actively involved in the three cooperatives, were interviewed. The study employed binary logistic regression to ascertain the characteristics that influence the life satisfaction of women members following their membership in a cooperative. Based on the research findings, it was observed that women who possessed lower levels of education, were in their middle age, lacked prior work experience outside of the home and family business, and resided in rural areas adhering to traditional social norms exhibited higher levels of life satisfaction and cooperative involvement compared to their younger counterparts. Considering the impact and importance of cooperatives for the socio-economic development of rural women, the improvement of the basic characteristics of rural society and the reduction of gender inequalities, these cooperatives should continue to exist and continue their activities.

Key words: rural women, rural development, agricultural development cooperative, life satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Cooperatives are highly adaptable, inclusive, and community-oriented organizations that bring together producers and consumers to foster mutual growth. They serve as an ideal framework for economic progress, embodying values such as voluntary collaboration, accountability, self-reliance, democracy, fairness, equality, and unity. On the other hand, women's cooperatives are seen as an opportunity for women in the informal economy, particularly those in rural regions, to generate income, gain employment opportunities, access training and services, and enhance their social connections [12]. Women's cooperatives play a crucial role in empowering women and fostering economic, social, and cultural development. They also contribute to promoting gender equality and building a conscious and organized society [1]. In Turkey, the establishment of women's cooperatives dates back to 1999. However, it

wasn't until 2012 that they were officially recognized and included in the Law on Cooperatives. While women's cooperatives share similarities with other cooperatives in terms of their formation, legal status, and characteristics, they hold a greater importance in terms of empowering women in society. They play a crucial role in enhancing women's social, cultural, and economic standing, as well as contributing to the national economy and socio-cultural structure [6].

Women-owned agricultural development cooperatives have a significant impact on the development of the region and country where they operate. They contribute to the achievement of United Nations sustainable development goals, including the protection and balanced use of natural resources in rural areas, reducing inequalities between regions, empowering women and reducing gender inequality in rural areas, eliminating hunger and poverty, ensuring food security, and creating sustainable living spaces.

The study sought to investigate the link between women who are part of agricultural development cooperatives and their cooperatives. It also aimed to assess their opinions on the cooperatives' initiatives, identify any challenges faced, and measure their overall life satisfaction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the selection of the development cooperatives included in the study, agricultural development cooperatives where women are active were identified through interviews with subject matter experts at the Izmir Provincial Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and three cooperatives that agreed to participate in the study were interviewed. It was planned to conduct a complete census by interviewing all women who were members of the cooperatives, but due to time and financial constraints, 83 active women members who agreed to participate in the survey were interviewed. Accordingly, 40 women members of Bayındır Natural Products Agricultural Development Cooperative, 32 women members of Balıklıova Village Agricultural Development Cooperative and 11 women members of Foça Fokoop Natural Products Agricultural Development Cooperative were interviewed (Table 1).

Table 1. Data on the cooperatives surveyed

Cooperative Name	Number of Partners	Number of Female Partners	Number of Women Partners Interviewed
S.S. Bayındır Natural Products Agricultural Development Cooperative	127	126	40
S.S. Balıklıova Village Agricultural Development Cooperative	86	51	32
S.S. Foça Fokoop Natural Products Agricultural Development Cooperative	39	21	11
Total	252	198	83

Source: İzmir Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023 [5].

While the ratio of female members of the three cooperatives included in the scope was 78.6%, the ratio of female members who participated in the survey from the three cooperatives was calculated as 41.9%. Averages and percentages were used to analyze the data.

The suitability of the variables for normal distribution was determined by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine whether there was a difference between two groups for continuous variables that did not show normal distribution, and Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine whether there was a difference between three or more groups. Factor analysis was used to determine the factors influencing women to become cooperative members.

The Life Satisfaction Scale [2] was used to determine the life satisfaction of women members. Binary logistic regression was used to determine the factors affecting life satisfaction after cooperative membership. In the analysis, the dependent variable was whether life satisfaction increased after cooperative membership, and the independent variables were age, having a high school education or higher, average life satisfaction, and rating the cooperative's work as successful. In binary logistic regression, the dependent variable is categorical and the independent variables can be continuous or categorical [7].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The survey included 83 women, spanning from 32 to 79 years old, with an average age of 49.12. On average, women receive an education for 9.28 years. The average family size is 3.99 people.

They have been involved in farming for an average of 20.36 years. The typical amount of land they work with is 18.49 decares.

Out of the female partners, a significant majority of 78 (93.98%) engage in cultivating their own land.

Table 2. General Information About Members

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard Deviation
Age	32	79	49.12	10.173
Duration of Education (Year)	4	19	9.28	3.657
Number of Individuals in the Family	2	7	3.99	1.076
Agricultural Experience (Years)	3	50	20.36	13.604
Total cultivated area (da)	1	86	18.49	13.230

Source: Own calculation.

However, it is worth noting that there are only 5 women who do not possess any land, as indicated in Table 2.

Women play a significant role in crop production. Out of the partners surveyed, 61 focus solely on crop production, 23 are involved in both crop and animal production, and one is involved in all three branches of production. 28.9% of the women surveyed earn income from sources other than agriculture. Furthermore, a significant portion of individuals express contentment with their earnings, with 34.9% reporting satisfaction. It is evident that women play a significant role in making decisions regarding agricultural activities within the family. Among women, a majority of 55.4% participate in joint decision-making with their husbands regarding agricultural matters. On the other hand, 22.9% follow the decisions made by their husbands or family elders, while 21.6% make independent decisions.

Cooperative Organization Status of Women Members

Female members have participated in cooperative activities for an average of 3.94 years. The woman who has been a cooperative member for the longest period has been with the Bayındır Natural Products Agricultural Development Cooperative for 12 years. The recent establishment of the cooperatives in the districts of Balıkköy and Foça is the main factor contributing to the lack of longevity. Almost all of the women members (96.4%) received strong support from their families throughout their cooperative membership process.

Among female members, 56.6% are affiliated with the Chamber of Agriculture. Furthermore, a significant portion of the members, 50.6%, are also affiliated with various other cooperatives such as the Agricultural Credit Cooperative, Irrigation Cooperative, Tarış, Cattle Breeders' Union, and more.

The overwhelming majority of the members expressed that being part of a cooperative where women play a prominent role had a highly beneficial effect on them and served as a source of motivation.

Over two-thirds of members have participated in cooperative education. The articles of

association of a cooperative are a crucial document that encompasses decisions regarding economic and managerial matters [3, 11]. Approximately 53.0% of the interviewed members had familiarized themselves with the articles of association of the cooperative (Table 3). A study conducted in Izmir province in 2018 focused on agricultural development cooperatives that process and collect milk. The findings revealed that only 42.3% of the members actually read the articles of association [11].

Women who played a role in the formation of cooperatives made up 24.1% of the women surveyed. This percentage indicates that the survey was carried out among active members, and the high percentage can be attributed to the recent establishment of the cooperatives (Table 3).

Table 3. Key Indicators Related to Cooperatives

Indicators	Yes		No.	
	Number	Ratio	Number	Ratio
Cooperative education	57	68,7	26	31,3
Reading the articles of association	44	53,0	39	47,0
Taking part in the establishment phase of the cooperative	20	24,1	63	75,9

Source: Own calculation.

The regular annual meeting of the cooperative is held at least once a year [7]. Out of the women interviewed, a small percentage of 10.8% had never participated in voting during the general assembly of the cooperative, while the majority of 89.2% had exercised their voting rights. Women play a significant role in the cooperative's operations. In a study conducted in Izmir, 60.0% of members from the Agricultural Development Cooperative participated in general assembly meetings, as reported by Yercan and Kınıklı in 2018 [11]. Similarly, Everest [3] found that 50% of members from the Agricultural Credit Cooperative attended general assembly meetings in another study. Out of the women interviewed, 9.6% occupied a role in cooperative management.

Factors Influencing the Success of a Cooperative

A succeeding cooperative should benefit its members in the production and marketing process, while also promoting the growth of

the community [4]. Women members emphasize that strong management skills and a sense of solidarity among members are crucial for the success of cooperatives.

These were followed by understanding of laws, utilization of government assistance, and collaboration between cooperatives (Table 4).

Table 4. Factors Affecting the Success of the Cooperatives

Factors Affecting Success	Average	Standard Deviation
Skill/honesty of the manager	4.87	0.453
Solidarity between partners	4.79	0.553
To have a good command of the legislation related to cooperatives	4.44	0.872
State support	4.41	0.843
Cooperation between cooperatives	4.22	0.920

Source: Own calculation.

Effective Factors in Becoming a Cooperative Partner

To analyze the factors that influence women's decision to become a cooperative partner, a factor analysis was conducted using 17 statements that could potentially impact their decision. After conducting the analysis, we were able to identify three distinct factor groups: economic, social, and cultural statements. These groups were comprised of ten statements that collectively accounted for 67.219% of the variability, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Factor groups influencing women to become cooperative members (Factor Analysis)

Groups	Variables	Factor Weights
Economic	I wanted easier access to the tools and machinery used in production	0.815
	I asked for technical support during the production phase	0.810
	I wanted to make high profits	0.762
	I wanted to contribute to household income	0.743
	I wanted to benefit from support more easily	0.735
Social	Farmers around me guided me	0.861
	I became a member through the work of cooperative members / management	0.845
	Chamber of Agriculture. District Directorates of Agriculture. etc. institutions directed to partnership	0.780
Cultural	I continue the family habit of partnership	0.732
	I believe in organizing and acting together	0.702
Explained Variability: 67.219		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin: 0.716 Sig: 0.000		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: 334.522		

Cronbach's Alpha: 0.780

Source: Own calculation.

The presence of female members in the cooperative had a significant impact on women's decision to join (4.54). Several factors played a significant role in facilitating the process.

These included the willingness to act in a coordinated and efficient manner, a strong sense of trust and closeness to the managers, prioritizing activities that benefited the members, ensuring fair and democratic management practices, and implementing a robust audit and control mechanism.

Surprisingly, contrary to expectations, having prior cooperative experience did not have a positive impact on the process of becoming a cooperative member (2.67) (Table 6).

Table 6. Factors Affecting Women in Becoming a Member

Factors Affecting Women	Average	Standard Deviation
Having women partners	4.54	0.754
Willingness to act in an organized manner	4.46	0.611
Managers are familiar and trustworthy	4.35	0.903
The cooperative operates in the interests of its members	4.29	0.891
Fair and democratic governance	4.10	1.043
Well-functioning audit and control mechanism	4.05	1.092
Past experiences with cooperatives	2.67	1.407

Source: Own calculation.

Table 7. Evaluation on Cooperative Activities

Cooperative Work Evaluations	Average	Standard Deviation
In general, I find the cooperative's work successful	4.53	0.591
I will continue my partnership in the future	4.49	0.632
I recommend partnership to my circle	4.49	0.651
Managers are open-minded, consistent and honest	4.27	0.828
I participate in cooperative meetings and decisions taken	4.22	0.827
Cooperative work meets my expectations	4.12	0.722
I may consider joining the management in the future	2.98	1.370

Source: Own calculation.

Members expressed strong satisfaction with the cooperative's activities, indicating their intention to remain members in the future and recommending cooperative membership to others. Members generally have a positive perception of the managers, considering them to be open-minded, consistent, and honest (4.27). They appreciate the managers' active participation in the cooperative's meetings and decision-making processes (4.22) and feel that

the cooperative's activities consistently meet their expectations (4.12). However, there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm among members when it comes to pursuing management positions in the future (2.98) (Table 7).

Problems in Cooperatives

The partners are facing significant challenges such as insufficient promotion and marketing, inadequate tools, equipment, and machinery, and ineffective financial management. However, it is worth mentioning that these issues have a moderate level of involvement. Among the other challenges faced by the partners, there are issues such as lack of interest and insufficient training activities, as well as a lack of information on legislation and technical matters.

Table 8. Main Problems Experienced in the Cooperative

Key Challenges	Average	Standard Deviation
Lack of promotion and marketing	3.64	1.111
Lack of tools, equipment and machinery	3.60	1.081
Inadequate financial management	3.14	1.049
Lack of interest of partners	3.05	1.125
Inadequacy of training activities	2.94	0.992
Lack of knowledge and implementation of legislation	2.63	0.972
Management is not sufficiently technically knowledgeable	2.48	1.052
Lack of competition	2.46	1.004
Lack of technical knowledge	2.42	1.001
Management apathy	2.39	1.080
Disagreement between partners	2.36	1.031
Disagreements at the management level	2.34	1.015

Source: Own calculation.

Additionally, there is a lack of competition and interest from the management, along with disagreements between the management and the partners, which result in lower participation (Table 8).

Women living in rural areas often encounter challenges such as limited financial resources, limited market access, and the added responsibilities of domestic life. Some women believe they face certain disadvantages in agricultural activities when compared to men. As a result, women may be more cautious when it comes to taking risks, possibly due to concerns about the adequacy of their education and experience. Furthermore, it was noted that rural life presents an additional challenge due

to its strong cultural structure within a patriarchal order (Table 9).

Table 9. Problems Faced by Women Members

Key Challenges	Average	Standard Deviation
Lack of capital	4.42	0.964
Difficulty reaching the market	4.30	0.972
Responsibilities assumed in home life	3.89	1.158
Being disadvantaged compared to men in production/sales/marketing	3.86	1.299
Women's risk-taking anxiety	3.83	1.351
Women's lack of education and experience	3.82	1.117
Rural life functioning in a more patriarchal order	3.57	1.416
A more closed and resilient culture	3.35	1.329

Source: Own calculation.

Women Partners' Satisfaction with Their Lives

Life satisfaction is used in the sense of an individual's evaluation of his/her life as a whole [9, 10, 2]. According to the results of the Life Satisfaction Survey conducted by TurkStat, while the proportion of women who stated that they were happy was 61.0% in 2003, twenty years later, the happiness level of women decreased by 8.3% to 52.7% [10].

Life satisfaction refers to how individuals assess their overall life experience [9, 10, 2]. Based on the findings of the Life Satisfaction Survey carried out by TurkStat, it was observed that the percentage of women expressing happiness was 61.0% in 2003. However, over the course of two decades, there has been a decline in the happiness level of women, with a decrease of 8.3% to 52.7% [10].

Table 10. Life Satisfaction of Interviewed Women

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
I am satisfied with my life	3.45	1.281
So far, I have got the important things I wanted from life	3.23	1.193
If I were born again, I would change almost nothing in my life	3.13	1.207
I have a life close to my ideals	3.08	1.181
My living conditions are excellent	2.67	1.127
Satisfaction Average	3.11	1.029

Source: Own calculation.

The study utilized the Life Satisfaction Scale developed by Diener et al. [2], which is widely recognized and employed. Based on the scale, women expressed a moderate level of agreement with various statements regarding their satisfaction with life (3.45), the importance of their life goals (3.23), their

contentment with their current lives (3.13), and their alignment with their personal ideals (3.08). However, they believe that their living conditions are less than ideal (2.67). Overall, women's satisfaction with their lives is moderately rated at 3.11, as shown in Table 10. When considering educational attainment, individuals with a high school education or higher expressed greater satisfaction with their lives compared to those with lower levels of education. Furthermore, the life satisfaction of women in management surpasses that of other female partners (Table 11).

The study revealed that being part of a cooperative and engaging in its activities had a significant positive effect on the overall life satisfaction of women. Women expressed a heightened sense of usefulness (4.36) and empowerment (4.34) following their involvement in cooperative membership. They experienced a greater sense of fulfillment in their lives, a heightened sense of worth, and increased financial autonomy. They also mentioned an improvement in their knowledge and skills, an increase in the value placed on their opinions, and a decrease in the challenges they encountered in their business endeavors. In general, it can be concluded that their overall life satisfaction has increased since joining the cooperative (Table 12).

Table 11. Life satisfaction according to education and participation in cooperative management

	Groups	No.	Rank Mean	Row Total	Mann-Whitney U	Z Value	P Value
Education status	Up to 8 years	65	37.85	2,460.50	315.500	-2.988	0.003***
	9 years and above	18	56.97	1,025.50			
Taking part in management	No mission	75	39.97	2,997.50	147.500	-2.361	0.018***
	Mission	8	61.06	488.50			

Significance value: *** $\alpha < 0,05$

Source: Own calculation.

The surveyed group of 83 women had an average age of 49.12 years, as shown in Table 1. Out of the total number of members, 45 were below the age of 49 while 38 were 49 years of age or above. A comparison of the satisfaction levels between younger and older members revealed that the older members expressed higher levels of contentment with their lives following their cooperative membership, as indicated in Table 13.

Table 12. Women's Satisfaction with Their Lives After Cooperative Membership

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
I feel more useful through cooperative work	4.36	0.655
Being a cooperative member made me feel individually strong	4.34	0.737
My life satisfaction increased after joining a women's cooperative	4.27	0.813
I felt more valuable after cooperative membership	4.22	0.925
I felt more economically independent after cooperative membership	4.22	0.842
My knowledge and skills increased after cooperative partnership	4.17	0.867
After the cooperative partnership, my ideas started to be given more importance in my social circle	4.11	0.911
Cooperative work has reduced the difficulties I face in business life	4.05	0.764
Satisfaction with Life After Partnership	4.21	0.681

Source: Own calculation.

Table 13. Satisfaction with the Cooperative by Age Groups

Age Range	Number	Rank Mean	Row Total	Mann-Whitney U	Z Value	P Value
Up to 49	45	35.23	1,585.50	550.500	-2.815	0.005***
49 and above	38	50.01	1,900.50			

Significance value: *** $\alpha < 0,05$

Source: Own calculation.

An analysis using binary logistic regression was conducted to identify the factors that influence the life satisfaction of women who have joined cooperatives. As age, perception of the cooperative's work as successful, and life satisfaction increased, women experienced a boost in their overall satisfaction after joining the cooperative (Table 14).

Table 14. Factors affecting life satisfaction following cooperative membership (Binary Logistic Regression)

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Fixed	-10.660	2.806	14.431	1	0.000	0.000		
Age (years)	0.096	0.030	10.202	1	0.001	1.100	1.038	1.167
Finding the cooperative's work successful (5-point Likert)	0.997	0.448	4.945	1	0.026	2.709	1.126	6.520
Life satisfaction (Scale mean)	0.514	0.274	3.509	1	0.061	1.672	0.977	2.862

Source: Own calculation.

CONCLUSIONS

In rural areas, women play a crucial role in managing domestic responsibilities to support their families, while also making significant contributions to labor-intensive agricultural

production. Just like in any other field, women play a crucial role as unpaid family laborers in the agricultural sector. Their empowerment through cooperatives is vital for enhancing their quality of life and fostering regional development.

Cooperatives that focus on agricultural development and include women members play a crucial role in boosting economic growth and stabilizing the income of individual women involved in agriculture. These cooperatives also help prevent unemployment, foster personal growth, and promote socialization among women.

Based on interviews conducted with women members of agricultural development cooperatives in Izmir province, it was found that older women, particularly those aged 49 and above, who have limited education, no prior work experience outside the home or family business, reduced domestic responsibilities, and who adhere to traditional social norms in rural areas, express higher levels of satisfaction with their lives and cooperatives compared to younger members.

Upon analyzing the reasons behind this situation, it was discovered that the elderly members enjoyed a steady income due to their involvement in cooperative activities. This not only contributed to their household income, but also garnered them a sense of respect within their community. Furthermore, their participation in cooperatives made them feel stronger and provided opportunities for socialization outside of their homes.

On the other hand, the younger members of the cooperative have a different perspective compared to the older members. They are more educated and tend to be more critical of the cooperative's activities. Their satisfaction with the cooperative is lower because they feel that the facilities and services provided by the cooperative are inadequate. Additionally, they face various challenges and disruptions due to living in rural areas, which ultimately affect the cooperative's operations. Nevertheless, the younger generation's discerning perspective on the cooperative could serve as a catalyst for future advancements and enhancements in cooperative activities.

Considering the significant role that cooperatives play in promoting the socio-economic development of rural women, enhancing the fundamental aspects of rural society, and addressing gender disparities, it is crucial to ensure the continuity and ongoing operations of these cooperatives.

REFERENCES

- [1]Aksoy, A. D., Günay, G., 2018, Women cooperatives in Türkiye, Third Sector Social Economic Review, 53 (1), 77-90. In Turkish, <https://doi.org/10.15659/3.sektor-sosyal-ekonomi.18.02.865>.
- [2]Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., Griffin, S., 1985, The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1):71-75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13.
- [3]Everest, B., 2015, A research on the perception of cooperative principles and analysis of factors affecting member participation in the cooperative management of agricultural credit cooperatives: Case of Regional Union of agricultural credit cooperative in Balıkesir, PhD. Thesis, In Turkish, 200 p.
- [4]Everest, B., Yavaş, A.G., Tatar, E., Çakar, F., Acar, İ., 2019, Factors affecting farmers' desire to receive cooperative education: The example of Çanakkale Province. *Anadolu Journal of Agricultural Sciences*, 34(1), 40-46. In Turkish, <https://doi.org/10.7161/omuanajas.408742>.
- [5]İzmir Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023, Unpublished Agricultural Cooperative data of Izmir 2022.
- [6]KEİG, 2018, Women's Cooperatives Guide, Women's Labour and Employment Initiative Platform Publication Series, In Turkish, https://www.keig.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/kooperatif_kilavuz_keigWeb.pdf, Accessed on 10.03.2024, 32p.
- [7]Pallant, J., 2010, SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis Using SPSS, 4th Edition, McGraw-Hill International.
- [8]Official Journal, 1969, Cooperatives Law No.1163, 10 May 1969, No:13195.
- [9]Sağlam, F., 2023, Life satisfaction and future expectations of farmers living in the rural areas: Çorum Province, Kargı District Example, Ondokuz Mayıs University Graduate Education Institute, Department of Agricultural Economics, Master's Thesis, 61 p., Samsun, In Turkish.
- [10]TÜİK, 2022, Life Satisfaction Research 2022, Publication No: 4680, Ankara, 73p., In Turkish, https://www.tuik.gov.tr/media/announcements/yasam_memnuniyeti_arastirmasi.pdf, Accessed on 10.03.2024.
- [11]Yercan, M., Kınıklı, F., 2018, A research on the analysis of factors affecting the participation of partners in management of agricultural cooperatives: The example of dairy cooperatives in Izmir Province.

Turkish Journal of Agricultural Economics. 24(2), 159-173.

[12]Yıldırım, P. D., 2022, Changes created by women's cooperatives in Women's Economic and Social Lives: Western Mediterranean Example, Kocaeli University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Labor Economics, Department of Social Policy, PhD. Thesis, In Turkish, 238 p.