

INTERGENERATIONAL ROLES AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN FARMERS

Cristina Isabel Amaro da Costa

''Escola Superior Agrária de Viseu'', Viseu
ORCID: 0000-0001-8625-2206

Ana Rosa Jesus Ribeiro

''Unidade de Cuidados Continuados Integrados de Vouzela'', Viseu
ORCID: 0000-0003-4780-0286

Ana Rita Ribeiro Monteiro

''Hospital Garcia da Orta'', Lisboa
ORCID: 0000-0001-8262-229X

Ana Sofia Oliveira Andrade

''Centro Hospitalar Universitário de São João'', Porto
ORCID: 0000-0002-6966-9891

Catarina de Fátima dos Santos Belchior

''EMS; Le Carillon'', Sierre (Switzerland)
ORCID: 0000-0002-1012-8177

Daniele Monteiro do Carmo Silva

''Lar Residência Professor José Ceia Moreira Campos'', Viseu
ORCID: 0000-0002-0767-1443

Emília de Carvalho Coutinho

''Escola Superior de Saúde de Viseu'', Viseu
ORCID: 0000-0002-9506-4626

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Abstract: Introduction: Women play an important role in agricultural activities; however, their contribution is little recognized by society. **Objectives:** To understand the experiences and different roles of women farmers in the rural community in families with three generations linked to agriculture, with the aim of identifying ways to make them visible. **Methods:** Qualitative research study, using the life stories method. 11 participants were selected from four Portuguese families linked to agriculture, eight women and three men. The data collected was subject to thematic analysis supported by the Nvivo® software version 12. Ethical principles were respected, informed consent and approval by an ethics committee were obtained. **Results:** In the transmission of agricultural knowledge, learning from parents stands out. In the experience lived by women in agriculture, the feeling of appreciation for the family and happiness stands out, and the greatest difficulty is agricultural work during pregnancy. There are differences between women and men in agriculture, which leads to the idea that men have more strength, but women are more active and can do everything equally or even better than men. In the affirmation of women in the rural community, the role of women in organizing harvesting activities, such as harvesting, harvesting and defoliation, is highlighted. **Conclusions:** Women have an active participation in the organization of agricultural activities, which they essentially learn from their parents. Despite reporting happiness in experiencing agricultural life, she mentions working in agriculture during pregnancy as her main difficulty. There are differences between women and men when carrying out agricultural activities.

Keywords: rural territories; gender equity; visibility of women farmers; intergenerationally; rural work

INTRODUCTION

Family farming represents a type of agriculture of high importance for society as it produces around 80% of the world's food (considered healthier) and represents more than 90% of world agriculture, which promotes the development and increase of the rural economy through the creation of new opportunities and jobs (FAO & IFAD, 2019). It is recognized for its profound contribution to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, as it uses production procedures that are very close to nature's cycles and transmitted over generations.

Women have always played an important role in the process of economic and socio-cultural development of rural territories, particularly in the agricultural sector. This importance is not limited to participation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities, but is also deeply associated with existing customs, traditions and values (Faria et al., 2019)

With the aim of contributing to increasing the visibility of women farmers in rural territories, where rural abandonment is increasing and women increasingly assume the leading role of guardians of knowledge traditions and economic activities, the "MAIs" project was implemented - Women Farmers in Inland Territories", based on the Theory of Change and where a set of participatory instruments were developed and used, from the diagnosis phase, to intervention and evaluation. Through these activities, we sought to increase the civic and associative participation of women farmers in the interior regions, through their training, contributing to greater visibility of their social role and increasing equality between men and women.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women farmers play a crucial role, not only in the rural community, but throughout society. “They actively contribute to the maintenance, conservation and development of rural areas, in economic and social terms. They produce, sell, care for, transmit knowledge and traditions, among others” (Madeira, 2022, p.22).

Women farmers represent more than a quarter of the world’s population. In Europe, 30.1% of agricultural holdings are managed by women farmers and 47% of the 26.7 million people who work in agriculture in the European Union are women, where they perform various tasks from production to marketing (Doss, 2014; Ferreira, 2017). However, women have less access than men to agricultural-related goods, products and services. Their participation in agriculture has increased agricultural production in developing countries by 2.5 to 4%. Unlike men, women are involved in a wide range of agricultural activities, combining them with domestic tasks (Patil & Babus, 2018).

Despite working and producing as much or more than men, and with a higher quality of production, women receive less support and assistance: “Women in many settings are less visible because support programs are mainly designed for men and therefore men with leadership roles. Only 15% of agricultural extension workers globally are women. Only 10% of agricultural aid goes to women” (Black et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a significant percentage of women farmers who do not identify themselves professionally as women active in the agricultural sector, which results in insufficient accounting for statistics and less social protection and support.

In this context, it is urgent to empower women farmers, so that they realize their value and importance in the rural community,

as well as the high quality of their agricultural production, through knowledge and training for a better understanding and management of rural businesses, financing, support, profitability, costs and expenses, the greater your production, earnings and financial independence will be, as well as there will be greater visibility of your work in this professional area (Zuse, 2022).

In this sense, we sought to understand the experiences and different roles of women farmers in the rural community in families with three generations linked to agriculture, with the aim of identifying ways that could facilitate the promotion of its value and its visibility.

METHODS

The present study is the result of a qualitative investigation, using the life stories methodology. This is a qualitative biographical methodology, in which the researcher “listens”, through “several non-directive interviews, recorded or not, to the account of someone’s life story that is told to them (Nogueira et al., 2017, p. 468). The life story method consists of “an account by a narrator about his existence through time, trying to reconstruct the events he experienced and transmit the experience he acquired” (Ferrazza & Antonello, 2017, p. 24).

At the end, the collected material is transcribed and analyzed between the person interviewed and the researcher. After this step, the information is analyzed to identify registration units that answer the research questions.

PARTICIPANTS

In this study, 25 participants from six families of three generations were interviewed, among which 11 members (eight women and three men), from four families, have their main or partial activity in agriculture. Participants were selected using the snowball method, which consists of finding a first participant who meets the inclusion criteria, who is asked to indicate another participant who meets the same criteria, and so on (Gonçalves et al., 2021).

The inclusion criteria include belonging to a family with three generations, with experience in agriculture. Families that, despite having three generations, were not linked to agricultural activity were excluded.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

As a data collection method, a semi-structured interview guide was used, preceded by a data collection protocol for sociodemographic, obstetric, newborn characterization and family relationships. The interview guide is made up of several questions associated with motherhood/fatherhood, family and its relationships, children's education and important moments in life, among which information associated with agriculture emerged, the results of which will be presented in the present study.

The interviews took place in March and April 2021, and lasted an average of forty-five minutes. After consent from the participants, the interviews were recorded.

DATA ANALYSIS

Taking into consideration, the outlined objectives, after transcribing and transposing the verbatim of the interviews into the Nvivo® version 12 software, qualitative analysis of the data and their categorical and thematic construction were carried out, guided by the narratives constructed by the participants.

When presenting the results obtained, the acronym UR refers to the identified registration units, where the numbers correspond to the frequency with which a certain idea appears in the participants' voices; the letter n represents the number of participants. When the gender of the participants is not mentioned, it means that they contain results from both genders.

Study approved by the Ethics Committee of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (IPV). The confidentiality of the study participants was guaranteed and assured, as well as the confidentiality of the data during its analysis. The audio of the interviews was stored on a dedicated computer with a blocking system. All data were coded by assigning a letter and a number to the respective participant, making it impossible to identify them with the source.

RESULTS

From the analysis of life stories, several related categories and subcategories emerged that are decisive in the experiences of women and men in agriculture, namely land ownership, transmission of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation, experience lived by men and women in agriculture, differences between male and female farmers depending on the generations and women's affirmation in the rural community.

The 25 participants in this study constitute six families, with six participants from the 1st generation (women – grandparents), eight participants from the 2nd generation (six women – mothers, two men – fathers) and eleven participants from the 3rd generation (six women – daughters), five men – children).

Of these, eight women and three men belonging to four families have their main or partial activity linked to agriculture (Table 1).

Regarding 'ownership of land' and, therefore, of agricultural holdings, it is observed that in the older generation, only four of the six women interviewed own their agricultural holdings. In the 2nd generation, the proportion of women who own their land is smaller (two in six women), while men all own the agricultural holding. In the 3rd generation, the proportion of female owners is one in six women and two in five males interviewed (Table 2). In total, it appears that 39% of women are owners, while in the case of men this number increases to 57%.

Regarding the 'transmission of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation', contributions were obtained from 11 participants, through 42 registration units (RU), in identifying the "people who ensured the sharing of knowledge about agriculture" (particularly the parents), the "reasons for the transmission of agricultural knowledge to descendants" (especially due to the taste of the descendants themselves), as well as the "reasons for not transmitting agricultural knowledge to descendants" (their children being young or the children not being able to interested in agricultural activity) (Table 3).

Brief extracts of some testimonies relating to the transmission of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation are presented.

"...I learned when I was little. I learned to do everything from my parents. I went to the lands with them. Sow corn, beans and potatoes. I learned everything from my parents" (2.1F).

"Everything I learned [about agriculture] was from my maternal grandmother, planting and harvesting, everything" (6.3F).

"I passed on everything [about agriculture] to my children, when I went to work [in the fields] I took them all with me" (3.1F).

"I learned [the knowledge of agriculture] from my wife" (6.2M).

"When I came from there to here [from Switzerland to Portugal] I inherited a field from my mother and turned it all into vineyards, I took a tractor and agricultural machinery course, I built the vineyards and then I learned how to remove the buds from the vines" (6.2F).

The category 'experience lived by men and women in agriculture' is highlighted by 11 participants, with 90 UR. With regard to women's experience in agriculture, the feelings they experience emerge, with emphasis on the appreciation they feel from their family; the difficulties she experienced in farming and the recognition that it is a hard life; the benefits she enjoys, with emphasis on the fact that with agriculture she is able to support her family; and the realization that agriculture exists permanently in women's lives. Regarding the man's experience in agriculture, the appreciation and recognition he feels from his family stands out (Table 4).

Some extracts from the participants' testimonies are presented, expressing the category 'experience lived by men and women in agriculture'.

"...I'm happy... even if our land is small, being in the field is always therapy, being there without thinking about anything, touching what's ours, we always give another value" (6.3F).

"I've always liked it and... I love agriculture, I'm able to go to the field from morning until night with a hoe in my hand" (6.2F).

"The life of a farmer, even if it's not full-time, is hard... we have to work in the sun, in the cold... and sometimes it's tiring. But it has to be..." (2.2F).

"To be a woman, wife, mother, daughter in the countryside, linked to agriculture is difficult [we have excess work]" (3.1F).

"The difficulties in agriculture... it's difficult in the vineyards when the drought comes and we work and don't produce" (6.2F).

	1 ^a generation		2 ^a generation		3 ^a generation	
Gender	M	H	M	H	M	H
Number of participants	4	0	3	1	1	2
Average age by generation (years)	84 years		60 years		38 years	
Literary abilities						
The person knows how to read and write	50%					
Elementary school	50%		50%		33%	
High school			50%		33%	
University level					33%	

M – woman, H – man

	1 ^a generation		2 ^a generation		3 ^a generation	
Gender	M	H	M	H	M	H
Total number of participants	6	-	6	2	6	5
Ownership of Agricultural Exploration	4	-	2	2	1	2

Table 2: Ownership of agricultural holding

M – woman, H – man

<i>Transmission of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation</i>	Registration Units (UR)
<i>People who ensured the sharing of knowledge about agriculture</i>	23
Parents	18
Grandparents	2
Wife	1
Mother	1
Husband	1
<i>Reasons for transmitting agricultural knowledge to descendants</i>	10
Descendants enjoy agriculture	5
To continue work in agriculture	2
Agricultural knowledge passed from generation to generation	1
To want children to know that the land can be productive	1
To value contact with nature	1
<i>Reasons for not transmitting agricultural knowledge to descendants</i>	7
Children are still too young to understand agriculture	4
Descendants' lack of interest in agriculture	3
Total	41

Table 3: Transmission of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation

<i>Experience in agriculture</i>	Registration Units (UR)
<i>Women's experience in agriculture</i>	83
Feelings experienced by women in agriculture	34
To feel valued by family	10
Happiness	8
Satisfaction	8
Joy	5
Ambivalence	2

To feel supported by family	1
Difficulties experienced by women in agriculture	31
The life of a farmer is hard	11
To have to work in agriculture even though you are pregnant	7
It was difficult to work in agriculture during pregnancy	5
To spend your life working	3
To feel that with age you have lost your physical ability to cultivate the land	2
To feel wronged by the payment demanded by land owners	2
To work and sometimes not being productive	1
Benefits of women who work in agriculture	14
To be able to support the family through agriculture	8
To be able to eat what you produce and know that it has quality	2
To be able to enjoy a month without working in agriculture after giving birth	1
To be able to enjoy the fresh air of rural areas	1
To be helped with land work by friends and neighbors during pregnancy	1
To have some help from your children in farming	1
Agriculture permanently in women's lives	4
Man's experience in agriculture	7
To be recognized by family	3
Happy with life linked to agriculture	2
To start working in agriculture after marriage	2
Total	90

Table 4: Experience lived by men and women in agriculture

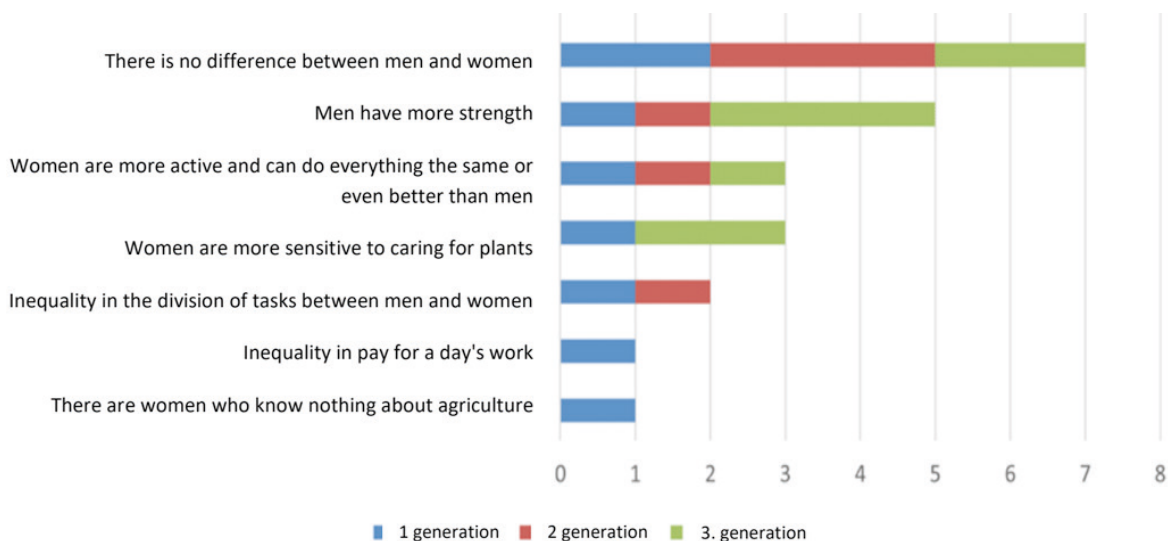


Figure 1: Differences between women and men farmers according to Generations

“Agriculture... is necessary. Where do we eat from? It has to be planted so we can eat” (6.1F).

The category ‘differences between women farmers and men farmers’ was answered by 11 participants (24 UR). In both the first and second generations, the most referenced subcategory was “there is no difference between men and women in agriculture”. In the third generation, the most referenced subcategory was “men have more strength” but “women have more sensitivity when dealing with plants” (Figure 1).

Some extracts from the narratives expressed in the category differences between women and men farmers according to generations are presented.

“For me there is no difference [between a female farmer and a male farmer], their hands are the same” (6.2M).

“This question...does not even arise, because what a man does [in agriculture] also does a woman” (6.3F).

“I think it’s the same, what a man and a woman do in agriculture. As long as the person has knowledge in agriculture, I think it doesn’t matter if a man or woman sows, plants...” (2.2F).

“Women have more sensitivity when dealing with plants” (3.1F).

“I think the only thing different [between a female farmer and a male farmer] is the strength, for example, to get a bag of fertilizer, to pick up the machines” (6.3F).

The category ‘affirmation of women in the rural community’ highlights women organizing harvests, mowing and leaf-picking, but also obtaining a driving license and how this aspect was notable in the rural community (Table 5).

Affirmation of women in the rural community	UR
The woman organizing the harvest	2
The woman organizing the harvests	1
The woman organizing the peelings	1
To be the second woman in the village to have a driving license	1
Total	
	5

Table 5: Women’s affirmation in the rural community

Some extracts from the interviews are presented that express the category of women’s affirmation in the rural community.

“I organize the harvests and the concertinas, it’s a party, there are a lot of people who volunteer for the harvest and I’ve never had any staff failures” (6.2F).

“I used to participate when I was with my grandmother organizing the harvests” (6.3F).

“I don’t organize anything, my wife organizes it, but when there is [when she organizes] I participate [in the harvest]” (6.2M).

“I was the second woman in this village to have a car driving license” (6.2F).

DISCUSSION

Land ownership, the way in which agricultural knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, the different experiences in agriculture, the perception of differences between male and female farmers depending on the generations and the affirmation of women in the rural community were the categories that emerged from the life stories collected.

The proportion of women farmers who own their farm is lower than that of men. This issue may be associated with the fact that, in inheritance and sharing processes, it has been traditional among family farmers for the land to be passed on to the male child, who will thus be designated as successor and ensurer of the continuity of agricultural production and exploitation (Oliveira et al., 2016). The reason

given for women not being heirs to land is associated with the belief that women will marry men who will also receive inheritances from their families.

This thinking takes away women's independence and autonomy in this aspect and makes them more dependent on marriage to have access to land and agricultural holdings.

In relation to the people who ensure the sharing of knowledge in agriculture, in the present study, there is a high emphasis on parents, in any generation, and in particular on information and knowledge related to agriculture. The reason mentioned for the transmission of agricultural knowledge to descendants occurs mainly when younger generations demonstrate a taste for agriculture and with the aim of continuing the legacy and work carried out on agricultural land.

In the context of family farming, the importance of the family as the privileged place for the transmission of knowledge between generations is recognized (Sauer & Borges, 2020), which is also associated with the need and desire to ensure the family farmer's permanence on the farm (Nascimento et al., 2017; Sauer & Borges, 2020).

In terms of women's experience in agriculture, regarding the feelings experienced, there is an emphasis on the woman's feeling of feeling valued by her family. It is also worth mentioning, as feelings experienced by women in agriculture, happiness, satisfaction and joy. Swendener (2021) highlights the importance of control and satisfaction with life in agriculture for the mental health of female farmers.

In relation to the difficulties experienced by women in agriculture, the harshness of life in agriculture and the fact of having to work during pregnancy and the difficulty that this situation entails were mentioned. Some authors corroborate these statements, highlighting the strength and ability of women

to fulfill their roles not only as mothers, wives, caregivers, but also as farmers (Millondaga, 2018; O'Hara, 1997; Thompson, 2022).

Regarding the benefits of women who work in agriculture, there is greater emphasis on supporting the family from this activity and the fact of being able to eat what is produced, with the certainty of the quality of the products harvested. This fact is in line with several other studies, which refer to the importance of agriculture in producing enough food to feed the family (Gustaman et al., 2021; Swendener, 2021; Vercillo, 2020).

Regarding the differences between women and men in agriculture, some participants reported that there were no differences between the two genders. However, there are participants who mention that, if on the one hand men have more strength, which can be an advantage in agricultural activity, on the other hand, there are participants who mention that women have greater sensitivity when dealing with plants. Other studies reinforce that, in many circumstances, women's work in agriculture is seen as a "kind of help" and not work in itself, in which women are considered property of the male gender and, even if they perform the same tasks, women's work is not as valued as men's (Hepp, 2022). In other words, the majority of tasks carried out by women farmers, whether rural or domestic, remain invisible (Gomes, 2022; Gomes et al., 2022). On the other hand, several references associate women farmers with cultivation for the purpose of family subsistence, while men appear associated with farms with economic and business objectives (Vercillo, 2020).

Finally, in relation to women's affirmation in the rural community, their role in organizing harvesting tasks was highlighted, in many cases associated with work with other elements of the community. Women's participation in the development and strengthening of the community/society is considered an

important path to their empowerment and civic participation (Vieira et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

The experiences of women and men in agriculture are different depending on generations and gender. Women have a predominant and active role in organizing rural activities, where, from an early age, they learned to work the land, mainly from their parents. She feels happy carrying out agricultural work, but reports serious difficulties in carrying out this activity during pregnancy. The difference between men and women in this activity, where on the one hand they say that there are no differences between the two genders in the activity linked to agriculture, on the other hand, there are those who say that women have more sensitivity when dealing with plants, but men have more strength, which can be an advantage in this professional sector.

Regarding the experiences of women and men in agriculture, the transmission

of agricultural knowledge from generation to generation stands out, which allows knowledge to remain and be transmitted over time.

It is important to note that some limitations were found in the present study, namely the difficulty in finding several families with three generations who have experienced the activity linked to agriculture and with the capacity/cognitive health to share their life story, particularly people from the first and second generations. male gender. It is also worth highlighting the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has conditioned/ influenced the communication established with the participants, given the need to use masks and maintain a safe physical distance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work is funded by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., within the scope of the project Ref^a. UIDB/00742/2020.

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