



# UNDERSTANDING BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCE AT FAIR PRICE SHOPS UNDER PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM: EVIDENCE FROM HARYANA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the performance of Fair Price Shops (FPS) and experience of beneficiaries with the Public Distribution System (PDS) working in Haryana. The FPSs are the last-mile delivery points of PDS which are important for food security and effective service delivery for the beneficiary households. Despite several reforms such as digitisation and ePoS-based distribution, there is limited empirical evidence available on the performance of the FPS system in Haryana from a comparative rural-urban perspective. This study is based on primary survey data collected from 384 beneficiary households in Haryana. The findings show clear rural-urban differences in performance of FPS and beneficiaries experience. Distance-related challenges were relatively more evident in rural areas, whereas urban beneficiaries faced challenges like longer waiting times, greater crowding and more frequent visits to FPS. Technical issues related to biometric authentication and connectivity affected beneficiaries in both rural and urban areas. Despite these challenges, most respondents perceived FPS locations as convenient and reported positive experiences regarding staff behaviour and service. The study emphasizes the need for improving operational efficiency, building digital infrastructure, and minimizing accessibility-related barriers to improve the service delivery of FPS in Haryana.*

**KEYWORDS:** Fair Price Shop, PDS, Beneficiary Experience, Rural-Urban Comparison, NFSA.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is most important food based social protection programmes in India which is designed to provide food security to economically disadvantaged households by supplying subsidized foodgrains and other essential commodities. Over the years, the PDS has evolved as a major welfare programme to improve food access and alleviate household food insecurity, especially for the poor. It is a system that offers subsidised food support to over 800 million beneficiaries across the country under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.

The PDS is a joint responsibility of the State and Central Governments. The Central Government is responsible for procurement, storage and allocation of foodgrains, while the State Governments are responsible for identification of beneficiaries, distribution and monitoring of delivery mechanisms. The last mile distribution points of PDS are the FPS which are widely available across the country for the final delivery of foodgrains to beneficiaries. These shops are government approved and provide essential commodities like wheat, rice, sugar and other state-specific items to the ration card holders. As the final interface between policy design and beneficiary access, FPS play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of the PDS.

The importance of FPS lies in the fact that they represent the point at which systemic policy design meets beneficiary reality. Even if the overall process of procurement, storage and allotment is efficient on a higher administrative level, the efficiency of the PDS will be dependent on the efficiency of FPS at the ground level. Operational and accessibility issues at FPS including long distance travelling, long waiting time, irregular availability of foodgrains, poor service, overcharging and discrimination affects the beneficiaries ability to access subsidised foodgrains and the overall effectiveness of the system. Hence, it is important to understand the beneficiaries' perspectives on the FPS performance to enhance the service delivery and effective implementation of the PDS.

Haryana is one of the economic advanced states of India, with third highest per capita income, but still a significant percentage of the population in the state still depend on welfare for their basic food needs. The per capita income was estimated to be around ₹3.25 lakh in Haryana in 2023-24 (The Print, 2025). Meanwhile, according to data from the state's Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP), there are almost 2.10 crore people or about 75 per cent of the state population who have been categorized as Below Poverty Line (BPL) as per the state's eligibility criteria (The Print, 2025). This reflects the persistence of income inequality and economic vulnerability across households. In such a situation, the PDS plays a major role in ensuring food security for vulnerable households in Haryana.

Haryana has a large and extensive FPS network with around 9,297 FPSs operating and distributing essential commodities to eligible households under the PDS (GoH, 2026). The state has also implemented a number of reforms, such as digitisation and ePoS based distribution to increase transparency and efficiency in service delivery. These changes are likely to improve the delivery of PDS but



there is a limited amount of empirical evidence on how FPS actually works at ground level and the experience of the beneficiaries in Haryana. In this context, it is important to consider the FPS performance, to determine the extent whether operational and accessibility-related challenges continue to affect service delivery and beneficiary satisfaction in the state.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Accessibility and efficiency of FPSs play an important role in the effectiveness of the PDS as they directly affect the beneficiaries' ability to access the benefits of PDS and consequently satisfaction. Issues such as long distance to ration shops, long waiting time and repeated visits often lead to high transaction costs which significantly affect beneficiaries ability to collect ration, particularly in rural and remote areas (Khera, 2011; Jha et al., 2013). Other operational inefficiencies at the FPS level including irregular shop timings, long queues, delayed supply, stock shortages and poor service quality further weaken service delivery and adversely affect beneficiary experience (Chhatterjee, 2014; Ghumaan & Dhiman, 2016; Mahalingam & Akash, 2016; Dhanaraj & Gade, 2016; Hundal & Chaudhary, 2020). The geographical access to urban FPS tends to be easier, however, there are also relative high exclusion errors due to migration and residence-related issues (Puri, 2012).

The literature also highlights concerns about quantity fraud and information asymmetry between beneficiaries and FPS dealers. The quality issues such as presence of foreign matter, broken undamaged grains by insects or low quality taste and etc. make the open market an attractive choice over the PDS for many households (Khera, 2011; Panigrahi & Pathak, 2018). In many cases, beneficiaries possess limited knowledge regarding their entitlements and digital transaction records which creates opportunities for dealers to exploit this information gap by distributing lower quantities than prescribed. This not only allows for loss of confidence in the PDS system but also reduces efficiency of the system.

The role of the FPS dealers has been identified as one of the key elements that affect the working and credibility of the PDS. Previous research has shown that the performance of FPS is not determined only by the problems facing the beneficiaries, but also by the problems facing the dealers. FPS dealers often face challenges such as low commission margins, limited profitability, inadequate storage, poor infrastructure, stock shortages, delayed supply and administrative constraints, all of which can negatively affect service delivery and overall efficiency of the PDS (Ghumaan & Dhiman, 2016; Hazarika & Kushwaha, 2025; Mujawar & Shinde, 2025). Drèze and Khera (2013) described FPS dealers as the weakest link in the PDS supply chain, where malpractices such as diversion, short weighing, and adulteration are most likely to occur. Weak accountability mechanisms and profit-related pressures further increase incentives for exploitative practices (Ray & Ray, 2011).

In recent years, several technology-driven reforms under the PDS were introduced such as digitization, Aadhaar linkage, and ePoS implementation which have significantly influenced FPS operations and service delivery. Drèze and Khera (2015) observed that end-to-end computerization and digital reforms improved transparency and strengthened delivery mechanisms. However, implementation remains challenging in rural areas where connectivity issues, hardware failures and biometric authentication problems often cause delays and sometimes prevent beneficiaries from accessing their ration entitlements (Drèze et al., 2017; Hundal & Chaudhary, 2020). Vulnerable groups like elderly persons, widows, persons with disabilities, migrant households are more likely to be excluded from the PDS due to these challenges (Mahalingam et al., 2016).

Although several studies have examined the functioning of the PDS in India, there is little empirical evidence on the performance of FPS in Haryana from a comparative rural-urban perspective. In this background, the current study is undertaken to address this gap and to assess the performance of FPS on the ground level in rural and urban areas in Haryana.

## 2. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Haryana using primary survey data collected using a multi-stage stratified random sampling method. Firstly, four districts were selected based on the number of NFSA cardholders: Hisar and Faridabad with the highest, and Panchkula and Charkhi Dadri with the lowest. Then, within each selected district, one block and one town were selected randomly, followed by the selection of two villages and two wards randomly. Only areas served by operational FPS were included in the survey.

One FPS was selected from each village and ward, and 24 beneficiary households (22 BPL and 2 AAY) were randomly selected from each FPS. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of 384 households, comprising 192 rural and 192 urban households. However, for FPS-related analysis, only households that reported accessing at least one PDS ration item during the last 30 days were considered. Thus, the effective sample for the present analysis comprises 370 households, including 188 rural and 182 urban households.

## 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section examines the performance of FPS and beneficiary experiences in rural and urban Haryana. The findings are presented across various dimensions, including accessibility, operational efficiency, service delivery and beneficiary satisfaction.

**Table 1: Distance of Respondents Residence from the FPS**

| Distance from FPS | Rural HHs (n=188) | Urban HHs (n=182) | All HHs (N=370)  |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Less than 1 km    | 56 (29.8)         | 42 (23.1)         | 98 (26.5)        |
| 1-3 km            | 82 (43.6)         | 104 (57.1)        | 186 (50.3)       |
| More than 3 km    | 50 (26.6)         | 36 (19.8)         | 86 (23.2)        |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>188 (100)</b>  | <b>182 (100)</b>  | <b>370 (100)</b> |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages

Table 1 shows the distance between respondents' residences and the FPS in rural and urban areas of Haryana. The results indicate that overall 50.3 percent of respondents lived within 1-3 km of their nearest FPS, indicating moderate physical accessibility for most beneficiaries. About 26.5 percent of households reported living within 1 km from the FPS, while 23.2 percent lived more than 3 km away.

A comparison between rural and urban households shows clear differences in access to FPS. Among rural households, 43.6 percent reported that the FPS was located within 1-3 km range, 29.8 percent lived less than 1 km away, and 26.6 percent lived more than 3 km away. This may be because households in rural areas are spread over a larger area and have limited transportation options. In comparison, 57.1 percent of urban households reported that the FPS was located within 1-3 km, 23.1 percent lived less than 1 km away, and only 19.8 percent lived more than 3 km away. Better access in urban areas may be due to the higher number of FPS shops and better road connectivity.

**Table 2: Time Spent Waiting at Fair Price Shops to Collect PDS Items by the Respondent**

| Waiting Time         | Rural (n = 188)  | Urban (n = 182)  | All (N = 370)    |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| No waiting time      | 8 (4.3)          | 4 (2.2)          | 12 (3.2)         |
| Less than 15 minutes | 28 (14.9)        | 14 (7.7)         | 42 (11.4)        |
| 15-30 minutes        | 36 (19.1)        | 24 (13.2)        | 60 (16.2)        |
| 30-45 minutes        | 42 (22.3)        | 38 (20.9)        | 80 (21.6)        |
| 45-60 minutes        | 30 (16.0)        | 36 (19.8)        | 66 (17.8)        |
| More than 1 hour     | 44 (23.4)        | 66 (36.3)        | 110 (29.7)       |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>188 (100)</b> | <b>182 (100)</b> | <b>370 (100)</b> |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages

Table 2 shows the time spent waiting by beneficiaries to get PDS goods at FPS in rural and urban areas in Haryana. The results indicate that waiting time was a common problem reported by 96.8 percent of beneficiaries, while only 3.2 percent reported no waiting. The majority of the respondents waited from 30 minutes to more than 1 hour at the FPS. In total, the highest percentage of respondents (29.7 per cent) waited for more than 1 hour.

The waiting time patterns are somewhat different for rural and urban areas. The most obvious difference is the longer waiting times. 36.3 percent of the urban respondents said they waited for longer than an hour in comparison to 23.4 percent of the rural respondents. A larger number of rural respondents reported shorter waiting times compared to urban respondents. For example, 14.9 percent of rural respondents waited for less than 15 minutes compared to 7.7 percent of urban respondents, whereas 19.1 percent of rural respondents waited for 15-30 minutes compared to 13.2 percent of urban respondents. This may be because some rural FPS shops serve fewer beneficiaries at a time which leads to shorter queues and less waiting times.

However, there is little difference between rural and urban respondents in the 30-45 minute and 45-60 minute waiting time groups. About 22.3 percent of rural respondents and 20.9 percent of urban respondents reported waiting for 30-45 minutes. Similarly, 16.0 percent of rural respondents and 19.8 percent of urban respondents reported waiting for 45-60 minutes. These small differences suggest that moderate waiting times were common across both rural and urban areas. Overall, the issue of long waiting time was more common in urban areas compared to rural areas.

**Table 3: Reasons for Long Waiting Time at Fair Price Shops (Beneficiaries Waiting 30 Minutes or More)**

| Reason                         | Rural (n=116) | Urban (n=140) | All (n=256) |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Rush in the shop               | 62 (53.4)     | 92 (65.7)     | 154 (60.2)  |
| Giving preference to others    | 10 (8.6)      | 12 (8.6)      | 22 (8.6)    |
| Technical issues               | 48 (41.4)     | 42 (30.0)     | 90 (35.2)   |
| Irregular / Insufficient stock | 40 (34.5)     | 38 (27.1)     | 78 (30.5)   |
| Other                          | 6 (5.2)       | 8 (5.7)       | 14 (5.5)    |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages; Multiple responses were allowed therefore percentages do not add up to 100 percent. Table 3 presents the major reasons for long waiting time at FPS among beneficiaries who reported waiting for 30 minutes or more. The highest proportion of respondents (60.2 percent) identified rush at the FPS as the reason for the long waiting time. The issue

was more serious in urban areas (65.7 percent) than in rural areas (53.4 percent) which indicate that urban FPS outlets have high density of population and high transaction load.

Technical issues such as POS machine failures, biometric authentication errors, and connectivity problems were the second major causes for delay as reported by 35.2 percent of total respondents. Rural households were more likely to face technical problems (41.4 percent) than urban households (30.0 percent). It may be due to electricity disruptions, unstable internet connectivity and biometric authentication failures in rural areas.

Other major reason reported was irregular or insufficient stock by 30.5 per cent of all respondents. This issue was higher in rural areas (34.5 per cent) than in urban areas (27.1 per cent) indicating issues of supply side and stock replenishment challenges in rural FPS operations. Only a small proportion of respondents reported giving preference to others (8.6 percent) as a reason for longer waiting. Similarly, responses under the 'Other' category (5.5 percent) were relatively limited and included occasional issues such as delayed opening of FPS, temporary staff unavailability and interruptions in distribution due to administrative or operational reasons. Overall, the findings suggest that while urban beneficiaries primarily faced waiting delays due to crowding and rush, rural beneficiaries also experienced delays mainly because of technical issues and stock-related constraints.

**Table 4: Frequency of Visits to FPS per Month**

| Visit Frequency to FPS | Rural HHs (n=188) | Urban HHs (n=182) | Total HHs (N=370) |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Once                   | 50 (26.6)         | 32 (17.6)         | 82 (22.2)         |
| 2-3 Times              | 102 (54.3)        | 108 (59.3)        | 210 (56.8)        |
| More than 3 Times      | 22 (11.7)         | 26 (14.3)         | 48 (13.0)         |
| It Varies / Irregular  | 14 (7.4)          | 16 (8.8)          | 30 (8.1)          |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>188 (100)</b>  | <b>182 (100)</b>  | <b>370 (100)</b>  |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages

Table 4 shows that the majority of beneficiary households reported visiting the FPS two to three times per month in both rural (54.3%) and urban (59.3%) areas to collect their ration. During the survey, it was observed that repeated visits were often because the full ration was not available at one time, delayed stock availability, crowding and biometric or network issues. A comparatively higher proportion of rural households (26.6%) reported collecting their ration in a single visit compared to urban households (17.6%). In contrast, urban households were slightly more likely to visit the FPS more than three visits and irregular visit categories which may be due to increased crowding, longer waiting times, and time constraints due to longer working hours and traffic problem.

**Table 5: Profile of Person Who Usually Collects Ration from FPS**

| Person Collecting Ration | Rural HHs (n=188) | Urban HHs (n=182) | Total HHs (N=370) |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Adult Male               | 88 (46.8)         | 72 (39.6)         | 160 (43.2)        |
| Adult Female             | 74 (39.4)         | 84 (46.2)         | 158 (42.7)        |
| Elderly Male             | 14 (7.4)          | 10 (5.5)          | 24 (6.5)          |
| Elderly Female           | 8 (4.3)           | 10 (5.5)          | 18 (4.9)          |
| Child                    | 2 (1.1)           | 3 (1.6)           | 5 (1.4)           |
| Other                    | 2 (1.1)           | 3 (1.6)           | 5 (1.4)           |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>188 (100)</b>  | <b>182 (100)</b>  | <b>370 (100)</b>  |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages

Table 5 presents the profile of the household member who usually collects ration from the FPS in rural and urban areas. The findings indicate that ration collection was mainly carried out by adult household members in both rural and urban areas. Together, adult males and females constituted over 85% of ration collectors in both rural and urban households. Rural households were more likely to depend on adult males for collecting ration, while in urban areas adult females were more frequently involved in collecting ration. The participation of elderly members in ration collection remained limited. It was particularly in households where working-age adults were unavailable during FPS operating hours or where the elderly lived alone and managed the responsibility themselves. While children and other household members accounted for only a negligible share.

**Table 6: Rating of FPS Location Convenience by Respondents**

| FPS Location Convenience | Rural HHs (n=188) | Urban HHs (n=182) | Total HHs (N=370) |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Very Convenient          | 34 (18.1)         | 24 (13.2)         | 58 (15.7)         |
| Convenient               | 78 (41.5)         | 68 (37.4)         | 146 (39.5)        |
| Neutral                  | 44 (23.4)         | 48 (26.4)         | 92 (24.9)         |
| Inconvenient             | 24 (12.8)         | 30 (16.5)         | 54 (14.6)         |
| Very Inconvenient        | 8 (4.3)           | 12 (6.6)          | 20 (5.4)          |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>188 (100)</b>  | <b>182 (100)</b>  | <b>370 (100)</b>  |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages



As shown in the table 6, most of the beneficiaries felt that the location of the FPS was either convenient or very convenient to collect ration. Nearly 60% of the respondents in rural areas had a favourable opinion about the location, with 18.1% rating it very convenient and 41.5% as convenient. In urban areas, 13.2% rated the location as very convenient and 37.4% as convenient which shows that around half of the urban respondents were satisfied with FPS accessibility. However, a significant number of respondents in both rural and urban areas reported neutral or negative opinions regarding convenience of shop.

The slightly higher convenience reported in rural areas may be because FPS outlets are usually located within or near villages, making them easier for people to access. Rural households often have shorter and more familiar routes to these shops. On the other hand, urban households may face problems such as traffic, overcrowding and longer travel distances which can make reaching FPS outlets more difficult. This explains why urban respondents reported higher inconvenience compared to rural respondents. Overall, the findings indicate that FPS locations are generally accessible, but there is still need to improve accessibility, especially in urban areas.

**Table 7: Rating of Behaviour and Service of FPS Staff by the Respondents**

| Response     | Rural HHs (n=188) | Urban HHs (n=182) | All HHs (N=370)   |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Excellent    | 54 (28.7%)        | 57 (31.3%)        | 111 (30.0%)       |
| Good         | 93 (49.5%)        | 85 (46.7%)        | 178 (48.1%)       |
| Neutral      | 24 (12.8%)        | 27 (14.8%)        | 51 (13.8%)        |
| Poor         | 12 (6.4%)         | 9 (4.9%)          | 21 (5.7%)         |
| Very Poor    | 5 (2.7%)          | 4 (2.2%)          | 9 (2.4%)          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>188 (100%)</b> | <b>182 (100%)</b> | <b>370 (100%)</b> |

Source: Primary Survey

Note: Figures in parentheses show percentages

Table 7 shows the ratings given by the respondents to the behaviour and service of FPS staff at both rural and urban areas of Haryana. The results show that a great majority of the beneficiaries had favourable views regarding the attitude and services provided by the FPS staff. Nearly half of the respondents (48.1 percent) rated the service as good, while 30.0 percent rated it as excellent. Overall, this indicates that a majority of beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the behaviour and service provided by FPS staff.

A comparison between rural and urban areas shows only minor differences in perception. Rural respondents were slightly more likely to rate staff behaviour as good (49.5 percent), whereas urban respondents reported a slightly higher share in the excellent category (31.3 percent). Only a small proportion of respondents rated the behaviour and service as poor or very poor in both areas. Overall, the findings suggest that FPS staff behaviour and service were viewed positively by most beneficiaries in both rural and urban areas, although a small section of respondents remained dissatisfied.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study compared the performance of FPS in the PDS across rural and urban areas of Haryana. The findings suggest that although FPSs play an important role in ensuring food security for beneficiaries, several operational and accessibility-related challenges continue to affect service delivery. The study reveals clear rural-urban differences in FPS performance. Distance-related challenges, technical issues and stock-related problems were relatively more common in rural areas, indicating continued accessibility and supply-side constraints. These findings highlight the need to improve the accessibility of FPSs, particularly in remote areas, through better infrastructure and location planning to reduce the travel burden on beneficiaries.

In contrast, urban beneficiaries reported longer waiting times, higher crowding and more frequent visits to FPSs, reflecting higher transaction loads and operational delays. These issues indicate the need for fixed distribution schedules, timely restocking of foodgrains and improved queue and stock management practices to reduce waiting time and enhance service efficiency.

Despite these challenges, the overall perception of FPS performance was moderately positive. Most beneficiaries reported that FPS locations were convenient and expressed satisfaction with the behaviour and services provided by FPS staff. This indicates that while service delivery has improved in several aspects, issues related to accessibility, operational efficiency and distribution management still persist. To address these concerns, strengthening digital infrastructure, ensuring uninterrupted electricity and internet connectivity, and improving the functioning of electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices are essential, particularly in rural areas where technical disruptions were more frequent.

Overall, rural beneficiaries experienced poorer FPS performance than their urban counterparts across most indicators examined. Therefore, greater transparency and accountability in FPS operations should be ensured through regular monitoring of stock availability, effective grievance redressal mechanisms and continued emphasis on courteous behaviour by FPS staff. Implementing these measures can significantly improve the efficiency, accessibility and reliability of the PDS, thereby enhancing beneficiary satisfaction and strengthening food security in Haryana.



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