

PERCEPTION OF RURAL YOUTH TOWARDS AGRICULTURE AS AN OCCUPATION**Parth Nandania¹, B. N. Kalsariya² and V. B. Paradva³**

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Rural youth's enthusiasm, openness to new ideas and capacity for innovation position them as key drivers of rural transformation. Yet, recent trends show a steady decline in their engagement with agriculture. This declining connection threatens the resilience and continuity of India's agriculture. Against this backdrop, the present study was undertaken to examine perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. It also explores association of characteristics with perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. The investigation employed an ex-post facto research design and was purposively conducted in three districts of Gujarat's Saurashtra region to examine the perception of 180 respondents. For data analysis, suitable statistical methods were applied. The results revealed that a majority (61.67 per cent) of the rural youth had a moderate level of perception towards agriculture as an occupation. Variables such as land holding, annual income, socio-economic status, risk orientation, innovativeness and sources of information were found to have a positive and highly significant association with perception while farming experience, family's main occupation, economic motivation and achievement motivation showed a positive and significant relationship with perception. Conversely, education showed a negative and significant link with perception, whereas factors like age, family size, livestock holding, marital status and social participation were not significantly related to perception.

Keywords: rural youth, perception, agriculture, occupation, socio-economic factors

INTRDOCUTION

Around 70.00 per cent of the total population lives in rural areas in India and rural youth are the most important segment of the country. Thus, to make our country agriculturally prosperous, it becomes quite essential that the energies and potential of the rural youth are properly moulded and utilized. It solves the problem of underemployment and another is that the youth respondents are innovative and accept new farm technology earlier than old ones. So, there is a huge scope to use potential of rural youth in agriculture to achieve our target of food production and sustainable development.

Despite its critical role, there has been a noticeable decline in the interest of rural youth in pursuing agriculture as a primary occupation. They are now turning to be "Job seekers". This picture is quite disgusting and not hopeful for future as they are shifting away from farming due to various socio-economic, psychological and structural challenges. The key challenges in retaining rural youth in agriculture is their perception towards the sector are labour-intensive, low-income and risk-prone occupation compared to jobs in urban and industrial sectors. Additionally, the social stigma, Family expectations and peer influences discourages youth from

considering agriculture as a long-term livelihood.

This situation necessitates studying the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. Further, it would also be worthwhile to study the different characteristics of rural youth and their association with perception, so that the characteristics which play important role in shaping favourable attitude and perception among rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation can be identified and moulded appropriately.

The findings are expected to meet the national strategy for growth and reduction of poverty and to achieve economic and social development. Therefore, if the government was to largely focus on agriculture, it is significant to explore perception towards agricultural activities. It has been globally accepted that the perception of an individual plays a pivotal role in influencing his/her behaviour. Hence, the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation was studied.

OBJECTIVE

To know perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the districts namely Junagadh, Rajkot and Gir-Somnath in Gujarat, chosen for their convenient accessibility through Junagadh Agricultural University. To carry out this investigation, an ex-post facto research design was utilized, as this design enables a thorough empirical analysis when the researcher has no direct control over independent variables, which naturally occur or cannot be manipulated due to practical constraints (Kerlinger, 1969). The sampling process combined multistage random sampling with purposive selection. Specifically, three districts namely Junagadh, Gir-Somnath and Rajkot from the Saurashtra region were purposively identified for the study. Within each district, two talukas were randomly selected using simple random sampling, resulting in six talukas in total. From each chosen village, ten respondents were randomly picked. In this way, a total of 180 rural youth was randomly selected from eighteen villages spread across the six talukas for the study.

The dependent variables undertaken in this study was perception of rural youth about agriculture as an occupation. Scale developed by Preethi (2015) was used for measuring the perception. The independent variables were measured by using suitable scales and procedures adopted by various researchers with suitable modifications. The interview schedule was prepared in Gujarati language in light of the objectives of the study and was pre-tested. Suitable modifications on the basis of pre-testing were incorporated in the final schedule. The data of this study were collected by arranging personal interview with all 180 rural youth. The data so collected were classified, tabulated and analysed in order to make the findings meaningful. The statistical measures such as mean, percentage, standard deviation, arbitrary method and coefficient of correlation were used in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation

Perception is the process by which an individual selects, organizes and interprets sensory information to give meaning to their environment. It is a cognitive process that helps individuals make sense of the world around them. Perceptions are subjective and may vary from person to person, depending on their experiences, beliefs and socio-cultural background. Measuring perception through well-designed tools enables researchers to assess how individuals interpret and react to specific situations or phenomena. Perception of a person towards any occupation, including agriculture, plays a vital role in shaping their intentions and

choices. The perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation under investigation is presented in Table 1 and illustrated in Fig. 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the rural youth according to their level of perception

(n=180)

Sr. No.	Perception	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very low (18.00-32.40 scores)	00	00
2	Low (32.40-46.80 scores)	30	16.66
3	Medium (46.80-61.20 scores)	111	61.67
4	High (61.20-75.60 scores)	37	20.56
5	Very high (75.60-90.00 scores)	02	01.11

The data presented in Table 1 expressed that more than three-fifth (61.67 per cent) of the rural youth possessed a medium level of perception, followed by 20.56 per cent of the rural youth with a high level of perception and 16.66 per cent of the rural youth with a low level of perception. A few (01.11 per cent) of them had a very high level of perception while none fell into the very low level of perception category. It can be concluded that majority (82.23 per cent) of rural youth had medium to high perception toward agriculture, indicating that the majority of rural youth view agriculture as a viable and respectable occupation.

The possible reason for the majority of rural youth having a medium level of perception toward agriculture as an occupation may be due to their balanced understanding of both the opportunities and limitations within the agricultural sector. On one hand, rural youth recognize agriculture as a readily available and inherited means of livelihood that offers independence and food security. On the other hand, they are also aware of the challenges such as unpredictable income, climatic risks, lack of modern infrastructure and limited market access, which make agriculture less attractive as a sustainable and profitable career. Their moderate access to information, average farming experience and education level contribute to a practical and optimistic view.

They may view agriculture as a viable option when supported by allied activities, government schemes or modern techniques, but may not perceive it as their first choice unless it is made more lucrative and secure. This study is in line with Bisen (2020), Vihari *et al.* (2020), Mubeena *et al.* (2021), Bora *et al.* (2023), Devi and Bariya (2022) and Kshirsagar and Kadam (2024).

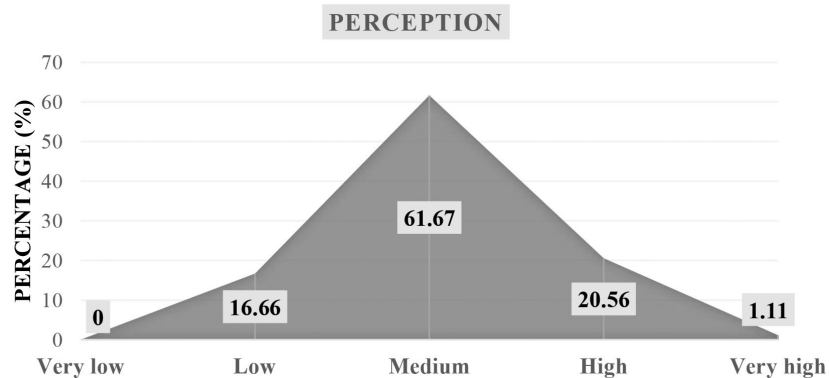


Fig. 1 Distribution of the rural youth according to their level of perception

Association between selected characteristics of the rural youth and their perception towards agriculture as an occupation

In order to ascertain the relationship between the effectiveness (dependent variable) of the farmers and their selected characteristics (independent variables), the coefficient of correlation ('r') were calculated. The empirical hypotheses were stated for testing the relationship and its significance of correlation are given in Table 2.

Table 2 : Correlation between perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation and their profile (n=180)

Sr. No.	Name of the independent variables	'r' value
X ₁	Age	0.102 ^{NS}
X ₂	Education	-0.155*
X ₃	Farming experience	0.171*
X ₄	Size of family	-0.014 ^{NS}
X ₅	Livestock holding	0.014 ^{NS}
X ₆	Family main occupation	0.167*
X ₇	Land holding	0.329**
X ₈	Marital status	-0.023 ^{NS}
X ₉	Annual income	0.302**
X ₁₀	Socio-economic status	0.285**
X ₁₁	Risk orientation	0.396**
X ₁₂	Economic motivation	0.175*
X ₁₃	Achievement motivation	0.172*
X ₁₄	Innovativeness	0.349**
X ₁₅	Social participation	-0.027 ^{NS}
X ₁₆	Source of information	0.213**

* = significant at 5% level, ** = significant at 1% level, NS = non-significant

Age and perception

Age was found to be positive but non-significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This outcome implies that rural

youth, regardless of whether they belong to the lower or upper age group, tend to perceive agriculture in a similar manner. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Mohite (2016).

Education and perception

Education was found to be had negative and significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This implies that as the level of education increases, the perception of agriculture as a viable occupation tends to decline among rural youth.

Farming experience and perception

Farming experience was found to be had positive and significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This finding implies that those with more farming experience tend to develop a better understanding of the opportunities, challenges and practices involved in agriculture. These findings are in line with the observations made by Douglas *et al.* (2017) and Sarmah *et al.* (2024).

Size of family and perception

Size of family was found to be had negative and non-significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This result suggests that whether a rural youth belongs to a small or large family does not notably impact how they perceive agriculture. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Devi and Bariya (2022), Sarmah *et al.* (2024) and Kshirsagar and Kadam (2024).

Livestock holding and perception

Livestock holding was found to be had positive but non-significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This outcome implies that the number of livestock a youth owns does not

substantially affect their view of agriculture as a career or livelihood. These findings are not aligned with the research conducted by Ghasura and Bhatt (2023).

Family main occupation and perception

Family main occupation was found to be had positive and significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This result suggests that rural youth, whose families rely on agriculture as their main occupation tend to have a more favourable perception of agriculture as a career. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Ghasura and Bhatt (2023) and Kshirsagar and Kadam (2024).

Land holding and perception

Land holding was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Bodake (2016), Bisen (2020) and Devi and Bariya (2022).

Marital status and perception

Marital status was found to be had negative and non-significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This outcome suggests that whether a rural youth is married or unmarried does not substantially affect their perception of agriculture as a career. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Preethi *et al.* (2017) and Ghasura and Bhatt (2023).

Annual income and perception

Annual income was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This outcome implies that rural youth with higher annual income are more likely to have a favourable perception of agriculture as a career choice. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Preethi *et al.* (2017), Devi and Bariya (2022) and Sarmah *et al.* (2024).

Socio-economic status and perception

Socio-economic status was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This finding suggests that youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to have a more positive perception of agriculture as a career option.

Risk orientation and perception

Risk orientation was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth

towards agriculture as an occupation. This result implies that youth with a higher risk orientation towards taking calculated risks tend to view agriculture more positively as a profession.

These findings are supported by the research conducted by Preethi *et al.* (2017), Devi and Bariya (2022), Kaviya (2022) and Kshirsagar and Kadam (2024).

Economic motivation and perception

Economic motivation was found to be had positive and significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This result implies that youth who are more driven by economic gains are likely to hold a more favourable perception of agriculture as an occupation. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Vihari *et al.* (2020).

Achievement motivation and perception

Achievement motivation was found to be had positive and significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This result indicates that youth with a higher drive to achieve personal and professional success tend to perceive agriculture more positively. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Vihari *et al.* (2020).

Innovativeness and perception

Innovativeness was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Preethi *et al.* (2017) and Kshirsagar and Kadam (2024).

Social participation and perception

Social participation was found to be had negative and non-significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This outcome suggests that being socially active does not necessarily translate into a favourable or unfavourable view of agriculture as an occupation. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Bodake (2016).

Source of information and perception

Source of information was found to be had positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of rural youth towards agriculture as an occupation. This result implies that youth who actively utilize agricultural information from various sources such as extension services, media, progressive farmers and online platforms, tend to have a more positive and informed perception of agriculture as a viable occupation. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Ayinde *et al.* (2016).

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that more than three-fifth (61.67 per cent) of the rural youth possessed a medium level of perception, followed by 20.56 per cent of the rural youth with a high level of perception and 16.66 per cent with a low level of perception towards agriculture as an occupation. A very small proportion (1.11 per cent) of them had a very high level of perception. The characteristics of the rural youth like; land holding, annual income, socio-economic status, risk orientation, innovativeness and source of information had positive and highly significant relationship with their perception towards agriculture as an occupation. While, farming experience, family main occupation, economic motivation and achievement motivation had positive and significant relationship with their perception towards agriculture as an occupation. Education has negative and significant relationship with their attitude towards agriculture as an occupation. Remaining variables like age, size of family, livestock holding, marital status and social participation had non-significant relationship with their perception towards agriculture as an occupation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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