

Original Research Article

Perceived Causes of Vulnerable Employment among Rural Youth in Agricultural Endeavors: Insights and Recommendations

ABSTRACT

The current investigation aimed to understand the factors contributing to the precarious nature of employment as perceived by rural youth engaged in farming activities. The study took place in eight villages spanning four taluks in Karnataka, involving a sample of 120 rural youth. Data collection involved the use of a structured interview schedule, with the primary objective of documenting the reasons behind the employment vulnerability experienced by rural youth in agriculture. The rationale behind this research lies in the challenging circumstances faced by youth in agriculture, characterized by low incomes, high risks, and insufficient gains relative to the effort invested. This makes agriculture a particularly vulnerable and unattractive prospect for many young individuals. A comprehensive list of 22 reasons was compiled, and data were collected on each factor. The analysis utilized frequency, percentage, and the five components of livelihood capitals to categorize the reasons identified by the selected rural youth. The predominant reasons highlighted by the rural youth included: 1) Low remunerative prices and price fluctuations (Rank I), 2) Complex procedures for accessing credit (Rank II), 3) Lack of storage facilities (Rank III), and 4) Pervasive distress stemming from the lack of profitability in agriculture and allied sectors (Rank IV). Additionally, the study provides recommendations to address the challenges associated with the vulnerable employment of rural youth in agriculture.

Keywords: Rural youth; reasons; vulnerable employment; Farm activities.

INTRODUCTION

Youth, constituting a vital segment of human resources, hold the potential to propel development, particularly in the realm of agriculture. Addressing the working conditions of youth is imperative, as their status could become a risk factor for both economic and political stability globally (Geza *et al.*, 2021). Despite their strength and aspirations, youth often find themselves navigating precarious employment situations, which can lead to swift physical, financial, social, and emotional instabilities (FAO, 2014). Remarkably, recent studies indicate that Indian youth are particularly susceptible to vulnerable employment conditions. In the past few years, there has been a noticeable decline in the participation of rural youth in agriculture (Stecklov & Menashe-Oren, 2019). This decline is not incidental but is attributed to the mounting vulnerability within farming occupations. This study thus endeavors to unravel the intricacies of the factors contributing to the increasing vulnerability in farm activities, recognizing the urgency of understanding challenges that hinder the active involvement of youth.

The significance of youth in agriculture lies in their potential to shape the future of the country. Their dynamism and aspirations could drive innovation and sustainable practices in farming (Leavy & Hossain, 2014). However, the existing conditions in the agricultural sector seem to be pushing them away. The agricultural landscape, once considered the backbone of many economies, now faces the challenge of retaining and attracting youth involvement. It is crucial to identify and address the root causes of this vulnerability (Alila & Atieno, 2006). Low remunerative prices, complex credit access procedures, inadequate storage facilities, and the overall distress stemming from a lack of profitability in agriculture emerge as key challenges. Recognizing these issues is the first step towards formulating effective strategies to make agriculture a viable and attractive option for the youth. By doing so, we not only secure the future of agriculture but also empower the youth to be active contributors to the broader socio-economic development of the nation.

MATERIAL & METHODS

The selection of Mandya and Ramanagara districts in Karnataka for this study was purposeful. Within these districts, four talukas were chosen randomly. From each of these four talukas, eight villages were selected randomly. Within each village, 15 rural youths were identified using a random sampling method, resulting in a total of 120 respondents. Data collection primarily involved interviews conducted with a well-structured interview schedule.

The term "Causes" in this context pertains to circumstances leading to vulnerable employment for rural youth in diverse situations. Respondents were asked to articulate their perspectives on the factors contributing to employment vulnerability. The collected responses regarding these reasons were aggregated and subsequently converted into frequency and percentage metrics. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the varied views on the causes of employment vulnerability among rural youth in the selected regions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The data presented in Table 1 shed light on the primary reasons identified by youth regarding their vulnerable employment in the agricultural sector. These factors, ranked in order of significance, provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by rural youth in pursuing sustainable and profitable livelihoods in farming.

At the forefront of concerns, low remunerative prices and price fluctuations emerged as the most pressing issue (Rank I). This underscores the economic challenges faced by rural youth, highlighting the need for price stability and fair compensation for their agricultural efforts. The complex procedures for accessing credit were identified as the second major concern (Rank II), emphasizing the critical role of streamlined financial support systems in promoting sustainable agricultural practices among youth. Lack of storage facilities (Rank III) and the distress stemming from the overall lack of profits in agriculture and allied sectors (Rank IV) were also prominent issues. These challenges underscore the importance of infrastructure development and profitability enhancement measures to make agriculture a more attractive and viable option for rural youth.

Issues such as inadequate credit support (Rank V), untimely supply of inputs (Rank VI), and high input costs (Rank VII) further contribute to the vulnerability of youth in agriculture. Addressing these concerns necessitates comprehensive policy measures, including improved credit accessibility, timely provision of inputs, and mechanisms to mitigate input costs. The study also revealed challenges related to the accessibility of extension agencies for technical guidance (Rank VIII), indicating the need for better outreach and support mechanisms for farmers. Additionally, factors like lack of resource conservation knowledge (Rank IX) and insufficient training in improved agricultural technologies (Rank X) highlight the importance of capacity-building initiatives to enhance the skillset of rural youth. The results also underscore the impact of non-economic factors, such as the lack of irrigation facilities (Rank XII) and the perceived lack of value and dignity in farming (Rank XIII), contributing to the overall vulnerability of youth in agriculture. Social factors, including patriarchy by local leaders (Rank XIV) and insufficient skill-oriented trainings (Rank XV), further compound the challenges faced by rural youth. The lack of transportation facilities (Rank XVI) and environmental factors like erratic rainfall and monsoon vagaries (Rank XVII) also emerged as significant concerns. Furthermore, the study identified issues related to personal protection when using agrochemicals (Rank XVIII), awareness about subsidiary occupations (Rank XIX), the entrepreneurial culture (Rank XX), and the role of parental advice (Rank XXI). These factors underscore the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by rural youth in agriculture.

In response to these challenges, a majority of the respondents put forth noteworthy suggestions (Table 2). Foremost among these recommendations was the call for the government to make institutional credit more accessible while avoiding procedural delays (Rank I). The second most suggested measure was widening the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all farm produce to mitigate high price fluctuations (Rank II). Additionally, respondents emphasized the need for government investment in local village infrastructure (Rank III) and the timely supply of good-quality inputs, including seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides (Rank IV). The respondents highlighted the importance of institutional support for mechanization in agriculture (Rank V) and the improvement of backward linkages in the supply chain (Rank VI) as crucial measures. Ensuring irrigation facilities (Rank VII) and enhancing direct benefit transfers under financial support schemes (Rank VIII) were also deemed essential. Other significant recommendations included facilitating conversations between scientists/extensionists and rural youth regarding occupational advancement (Rank IX). The need for organizing training programs on subsidiary occupations and alternative enterprises by agricultural universities and departments of agriculture was also emphasized (Rank X). Augmenting the rural healthcare system and ensuring its frequent accessibility (Rank XI) and organizing awareness programs for the rational use of community natural resources (Rank XII) were additional measures proposed by the respondents.

The comprehensive findings elucidate the intricate network of factors contributing to the vulnerability of rural youth in agriculture. Effectively addressing these challenges necessitates a holistic approach that spans economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Policymakers, stakeholders, and extension services can leverage these insights to design targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the resilience and sustainability of youth engagement in agriculture. In response to these challenges, farmers have put forth three key solutions: advocating for higher minimum support prices (MSPs) or better remunerative

prices, enhancing the health system, and providing direct income or investment support. These proposed solutions underscore the critical importance of fair pricing mechanisms, improved healthcare facilities, and targeted financial support to fortify the resilience of farmers and elevate the appeal of agriculture as a viable and sustainable livelihood option.

CONCLUSION

Rural youth engaged in agriculture express frustration over the lack of profitability in their hard work, particularly when compared to the gains made by traders in the marketing of farm produce. The substantial gap between farm gate prices and consumer prices emerges as a major contributor to the perceived vulnerability in their occupation. Poor marketing strategies, inadequate storage facilities, and the involvement of numerous middlemen further exacerbate the challenges, diminishing the value of their produce. As a response to these concerns, three noteworthy solutions have been proposed to address vulnerable employment: advocating for higher minimum support prices (MSPs) or more remunerative prices, improving the health system, and providing direct income or investment support. These proposed solutions underscore the need for fair pricing mechanisms, an enhanced healthcare infrastructure, and targeted financial support to mitigate the challenges faced by rural youth, ultimately striving to make agriculture a more profitable and attractive livelihood option for them.

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Table 1: Causes elicited by respondents for their vulnerable employment in Agricultural Domain

S.No	Reasons	<i>f</i>	%	Ranks
A	Related to Human capital			
1	Lack of awareness about the subsidiary occupation	68	56.67	XIX
2	Lack of resource conservation knowledge	82	68.33	IX
3	Lack of entrepreneurial culture	67	55.83	XX
4	Lack of skill-oriented trainings	75	62.50	XV
5	No training regarding improved technology	80	66.67	X
B	Related to Physical capital			
6	Inadequate and untimely supply of inputs like seeds, fertilisers, plant materials	92	76.67	VI
7	Lack of transportation facility	74	61.67	XVI
8	Lack of storage facility	97	80.83	III
9	Lack of personal protection equipment when the application of agrochemical's	69	57.50	XVIII
10	Lack of sufficient extension staff in Agri-allied sectors	79	65.83	XI
C	Related to Financial capital			
11	Complex procedure for credit avail	101	84.17	II

12	Low remunerative prices and price fluctuations	105	87.50	I
13	High cost of inputs	90	75.00	VII
14	Lack of credit support	93	77.50	V
D	Related to Natural capital			
15	Lack of irrigation facility	78	65.00	XII
16	Erratic rainfall and cumulative draught/monsoon variations	72	60.00	XVII
17	Frequent external constraints like pest, disease	65	54.17	XXII
E	Related to Social capital			
18	No value and dignity in farming	77	64.17	XIII
19	Partiality by local leaders to avail social benefits	76	63.33	XIV
20	Lack of proper advice from the parents regarding their work	66	55.00	XXI
21	Preponderance of distress due to lack of profits in agriculture and allied sectors	94	78.33	IV
22	Poor accessibility of extension agencies for technical guidance	83	69.17	VIII

Table 2: Suggestions elicited by respondents to overcome their vulnerable employment in Agricultural Domain

S.No	Suggestions	<i>f</i>	%	Ranks
1	The government should make available the institutional credit and avoid procedural delay in obtaining farm loans	102	85.00	I
2	The government should widen the MSP for all farm produce and avoid high price fluctuation	92	76.67	II
3	The government should enhance the direct benefit transfer under the financial support scheme	81	67.50	VIII

4	Supply of timely and good quality of inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals availability	90	75.00	IV
5	Trainings should be organized about the subsidiary occupations/alternative enterprises by the agricultural universities/department of agriculture	75	62.50	X
6	The government should provide the irrigation facilities	83	69.17	VII
7	Ensure the scientist/extensionist and rural youth conversation regarding their occupational advancement	77	64.17	IX

8	Institutional support regarding mechanization in the agricultural sector	89	74.17	V
9	The government should invest in local infrastructure	91	75.83	III
10	The government should improve backward linking in the supply chain	88	73.33	VI
11	Augmenting the rural health care system and should be made it frequently working and easily accessible	73	60.83	XI
12	Awareness programmes should be organized to the rational use of community resources	72	60.00	XII