Social, Economic and Farming Characteristics Affecting Perception of Rural Youths Regarding the Appropriateness of a Career in Production Agriculture

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Abstract: The main objective of this article is to present the results of a study done about analysis the social, economic and farming characteristics affecting on perception of rural youths of Shoushtar Township, Khouzestan Province of Iran regarding the appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. The research design was a descriptive method. Rural youths of Shoushtar Township were the target population for this study. A random Sample of rural youths selected (n=360). Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical procedures for description (frequencies, percent, means, and standard deviations and spearman coefficient of correlation) were used. The main result of the study revealed that overall rural youths tended to disagree and strongly disagree about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture and there exist correlation between the crop yield, income, land ownership, and mechanization with level of perception of rural youths of Shoushtar Township regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture were significantly positive. Income, Social participation, Mechanization level, Perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to agricultural practices and Crop yield may well explain for 79% changes (R²=0.790) in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.

Key word: Rural youths, Perception, appropriateness of a career in production agriculture, Agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread belief that rural youths have vital role to agricultural and rural development (Malatest, 2002; Odhiambo, 2001; Gameren and Hinojosa, ND; Ommani and Chizari, 2006). The identify factors affecting on migration youths to urban centers is very important to rural program development. For develop strategies that attract and keep youth in rural communities, reasons youth migrate to urban centers must be closely examined and identified (Malatest and Associates Ltd, 2002). Youths working in agriculture often encounter with important factors such as loss of educational conditions, difficult living, poverty, low income and low social characteristics (Samardick et al., 2000). According to Fajans et al., (ND), rural youths have less chances for participation in formal education than their urban counterparts.

As Ommani (2006) point out, there are many factors that cause to migration of young people from rural communities to urban centers. The important factors include: abundant employment opportunities, social and economical welfare, promenade and educational opportunities. He explained,…Youth are attracted to urban for job, continue their education and living with. According to Cartmel and Furlong (2000) in rural areas relatively few quality jobs were available for young people. Firms tended to be relatively small and few employers employed large numbers of young people. As Malatest and Associates Ltd (2002) points out, rural youths did not have access to training. They explained,’…Considerable data indicate that rural youth have significantly fewer economic opportunities than do their urban counterparts. For example, just over 30% of workers aged 20 to 29 years were employed full-time in rural communities in 1996, as compared to the 50% average in urban areas’ (Malatest and Associates Ltd, 2002, P. 22).

One of the main factors affecting young people’s success to employment in agricultural practices was their connection with local informal networks. Informal networks provided young people with information about opportunities or personal recommendations for jobs (Cartmel and Furlong, 2000). Although youth migration has been a popular subject in recent years, little research has focused on the migration between rural and urban areas. According Ommani and Chizari (2006) Extension educators can extend the opportunities in youth development issues. They have the ability to help youth develop in different ways. In addition, efforts should be made to help youth develop the capacity to voice their needs within the cultural, social, and political framework. Ommani (2006) indicate goals of effective extension programs regarding rural youths. He explained important goals include: 1) Creation of necessary skills for employment, 2) Creation and development of leadership moral, 3) Improvement civic responsibility and identity, 4) Emphasize on creation social groups, 5) Development of skills and knowledge of rural youths regarding agriculture and 6) Assessment of educational needs.

Agriculture is a vital sector of the economy of Iran. Currently, about one-fourth of the nation’s Gross National Product, one-third of the work force, more than four-fifths of the nation’s food needs, one-third of non-
oil exports, and nine-tenths of industry is dependent on agriculture (Naeemi, 1999; Ommani, 2006). Rural youth of Iran have vital role to agriculture sector, specially in livestock husbandry (Ommani, 2006). Among the activities of the agriculture sector, livestock husbandry has an important and special role. It not only provides the protein needs of the people, but eighty-five percent of the work force in the agriculture sector is involved, full or part-time, in livestock production. A greater understanding of this sector is needed as Iran addresses its goal of self-sufficiency in the production of food and fiber products (Chizari, Bahmani, and Lindner, 2001; Chizari, Lindner, and Lashkarara, 2001).

In this paper, we analyzed the social, economic and farming characteristics affecting perception of rural youths of Shoushtar Township, Khuzestan Province of Iran regarding the appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.

Objectives:
Specific objectives of this study were to:
1. Describe rural youths by demographic characteristics.
2. Determine perception of rural youths of Shoushtar Township regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.
3. Identify social, economic and farming characteristics affecting on perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.
4. Describe perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to production agriculture.
5. Identify activities, strategies or policies that could be implemented by government agencies, the private sector or other organizations to support the economic and social conditions conducive to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities.

Methods and Procedure:
The research design was a descriptive method. The population consisted of 360 rural youths of Shoushtar Township, Khuzestan Province of Iran (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). From a review of the literature, the researchers developed an instrument to collect data (Samardick, 2000; Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2002; Cartmel & Furlong, 2000; Odhiambo, 2001; Valentine et al, 2005). The questionnaire covered four areas:
1) Demographic characteristics such as age, and levels of education; 2) Social, economic and farming characteristics of rural youths; 3) Perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture (measured on a five-point, Likert scale which ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); and 4) Perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to agricultural practices. Face and content validity of the questionnaire was established using a panel of experts consisting of faculty in the Department of Agricultural at Islamic Azad University- Shoushtar Branch, Iran. A pilot test was conducted with 15 youths. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Reliability for the overall instrument was .83. Data were collected through a structured interview and a questionnaire with youths at their rural. The response rate was 97%. According to Lindner, Murphy, and Briers (2001), nonresponse error is not a threat to external validity of a study when an 85% response rate is achieved. Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Appropriate statistical procedures for description (percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used.

Findings:
The following section present finding by objective:

Objective 1:
The first objective was to describe rural youths in Shoushtar Township, Khuzestan Province of Iran by demographic characteristics. Youths who participated in the study ranged in age from 15 to 25 years. Approximately 45% of respondents between 18 to 21 year. Rural youths were asked to report their highest level of education: 34% of youths had an elementary education; 16% were illiterate; 35% had high school diploma; and 15% had post high school education.

Objective 2:
The second objective was to determine perception of rural youths of Shoushtar Township regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. Overall rural youths tended to disagree and strongly disagree about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. As shown in Table 1, approximately 30% of rural youths disagreed about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture and approximately 16% of rural youths strongly disagreed about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.
**Objective 3:**
The third objective was to identify relationship between social, economic and farming characteristics with perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. As shown in Table 2, the spearman coefficient of correlation was used to explore the correlations between some selected respondents’ characteristics with use of information technology.

![Table 1: Perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.](image)

According to the correlation analysis, there was a significant relationship between perception of rural youths’ awareness with respect to production agriculture, crop yield, income, land ownership, and mechanization with level of perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture were significantly positive.

**Objective 4:**
The fourth objective was to describe perception of rural youths’ awareness with respect to production agriculture. Overall (M = 1.51; SD.81) rural youths tended to low awareness or have moderate levels of awareness with respect to production agriculture.

As shown in Table 3, approximately 45% of rural youths have low awareness about farming practices. Forty seven percent of rural youth have moderate awareness about horticulture practices and forty six percent of rural youth have low awareness about animal husbandry practices and seventy nine of rural youth have low awareness about fishery practices.

![Table 2: Correlation between some characteristics with perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.](image)

![Table 3: Rural youths' awareness with respect to production agriculture.](image)

In continue used liner regression for predict changes in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. Income, Social participation, Mechanization level, Perception of rural youths’ awareness with respect to agricultural practices and Crop yield may well explain for 79% changes ($R^2 = .790$) in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. This relationship is described in the following formula:

$$Y = 7.863 + 0.225X_1 + 0.353X_2 + 0.469X_3 + 0.396X_4 + 0.546X_5$$

**Objective 5:**
The fifth objective was to identify activities, strategies or policies that could be implemented by government agencies, the private sector or other organizations to support the economic and social conditions conducive to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities.
For identify activities, strategies or policies of respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 0 (Not important) to 4 (Extremely important), factors that require for increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities. The data presented in Table 5 reveals that the top five strategies or policies were:

1. Improve career opportunities.
2. Promote technical/trades training to rural youth.
3. Encourage employers to provide apprenticeship opportunities for rural youth.
4. Provide government subsidies to local employers to encourage participation.
5. Have government agencies promote entrepreneurship training strategies that focus on rural youth.

**Table 4:** Liner regression for predict changes in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income (x₁)</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>2.351</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social participation (x₂)</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>3.452</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanization level (x₃)</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>3.496</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to agricultural practices (x₄)</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>4.329</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop yield (x₅)</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.627</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>4.326</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F= 89.126  R²=0.790  Sig F =0.000

**Table 5:** Activities, strategies or policies to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities, strategies or policies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve career opportunities.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote technical/trades training to rural youth.</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage employers to provide apprenticeship opportunities for rural youth.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide government subsidies to local employers to encourage participation.</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have government agencies promote entrepreneurship training strategies that focus on rural youth.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of youth advisory committees.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage local governments/communities to work together to develop strategies to engage rural youth.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage employers in rural communities to establish “work experience” programs to encourage job seekers to acquire work experience/familiarization in rural communities.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry in rural areas need to promote the advantages of a rural lifestyle to attract young employees.</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote youth involvement in community decision-making.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for social activities.</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a local youth action plan.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve opportunities for education after high School.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 0)Not important; 1)Little important; 2) Somewhat important; 3)Very important; 4) Extremely important.

**Conclusions:**

The results presented here show that rural youths have low level of perception regarding production agriculture. They did not have access to training, education or other youth entrepreneurship support programs in their community. The results show approximately 16% of rural youths strongly disagreed about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture and approximately 30% of rural youths disagreed about appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. The results also showed that according to the correlation analysis, there was a significant relationship between perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to production agriculture, crop yield, income, land ownership, and mechanization with level of perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture were significantly positive. According to result, rural youths tended to low awareness or have moderate levels of awareness with respect to production agriculture. Approximately 45% of rural youths have low awareness about farming practices. Forty seven percent of rural youth have moderate awareness about horticulture practices and forty six percent of rural youth have low awareness about animal husbandry practices and seventy nine of rural youth have low awareness about fishery practices. Agricultural extension training courses could be useful to teach rural youth in this regard. In continue used liner regression for predict changes in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. Income, Social participation, Mechanization level, Perception of rural youths' awareness with respect to agricultural practices and Crop yield may well explain for 79% changes in perception of rural youths regarding appropriateness of a career in production agriculture. For identify activities, strategies or policies that could be implemented by government agencies, the private sector or other organizations to support the economic and social conditions conducive to increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities of respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 0 (Not important) to 4 (Extremely important), factors that require for increasing the desire of rural youth to remain in and/or return to rural communities. The results also showed that top five strategies were: 1) Improve career opportunities, 2) Promote technical/trades training to rural youth, 3) Encourage employers to provide apprenticeship opportunities for rural youth, 4) Provide government subsidies to local employers to encourage participation, 5) Have government agencies promote entrepreneurship training strategies that focus on rural youth.
REFERENCES


