

Understanding the Aspirations and Profile of the Skilled Rural Youth to Promote Occupational Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Skill development through vocational programmes contribute to the process of aspiration formation. Understanding the aspirations is vital to plan occupational opportunities for the skilled rural youth. The present study was conducted with the participants of skill development programmes organized by Krishi Vigyan Kendras in Karnataka and Kerala. The most prominent aspiration of the skill trained rural youth was to 'start a new enterprise', expressed by 72.49 per cent of the participants in Karnataka and 88.81 per cent of the participants in Kerala. The strength of aspirations for the given occupational choices were different for the participants of both the states. For Kerala participants, 'getting job in government / recognised institutions' was the strongest desire whereas, for Karnataka participants, it was highest for 'expanding the present enterprise'. The occupational choices indicated by the participants serve as valuable feedback for nurturing such dreams with appropriate employment or self-employment related support. Profile characteristics of the participants revealed many similarities with respect to educational level, marital status, type of family and the family size in both the states. However, the two states differed significantly on the gender composition of the participants, average income and land holding status. Age, number of male children in the family, land holding and vehicle possession were negatively and significantly correlated with occupational aspirations. Regression analysis indicated that marital status of the participants had a positive and significant influence on occupational aspirations, but, age of the participants and the occupation status of the spouse had negative and significant influence on the occupational aspirations of the participants.

Keywords : Employment opportunities, Skill development; Occupational aspirations, Socio-economic profile, Rural youth

INDIA continues to live in rural areas with a population of 833.5 million accounting for 68.9 per cent of the total population (2011 census). The median age of the India's population is 28.4 years and thus the country has the advantage of demographic dividend which is likely to last till 2040. Predominant section of this young population shall be seeking employment, but at present, India faces paucity of skilled workforce. Less than five per cent of the total workforce in India has formal skill training (Anonymous, 2015). In order to get the benefit of the demographic dividend, the working age group must be skilled (Mehrotra *et al.*, 2013) on profitable and employable skill areas. Skill development through vocational education contribute to the process of aspiration formation. Aspirations, which are forward-looking goals (Locke and Latham,

2002), evolve over time in response to life experience and circumstances (Bernard *et al.*, 2014). As India moves progressively towards becoming a global knowledge economy, the skill development programmes try to meet the rising aspirations (Anonymous, 2015). The National Policy for Skill Development envisages that mentorship support to scale and create sustainable models for skill development in Green jobs (agriculture, horticulture, renewable energy, recycling, eco-tourism, etc.), Grey collar jobs (informal manufacturing and services) and local trades especially in rural India through Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs). Besides the national level skill development initiatives, the State Governments have Additional Skill Acquisition Programmes to augment the skill development process. In Kerala, this

programme has improved the employability of educated youth in the state (Davis, 2018).

Understanding aspirations is the key to plan occupational opportunities for the skilled rural youth. Occupational aspirations of high school seniors in Iowa was studied by Bajema *et al.* (2002) through an open ended question 'What job do you want to have when you are 30 years old?'. Lee (2010) measured career aspirations by asking the participants to indicate the job they expected to have at the age of 30 years from a listing of occupational categories. Marlene *et al.* (2018) asked whether students had specific goals for the future when completing their studies. Most of the studies on aspirations focused on 'distant' opportunity space to assess the aspirations of students who are still pursuing their education. Aspirations of participants of vocational education, particularly agriculture related vocational education, who are on the lookout for immediate employment opportunities, are rarely studied. Considering the importance being given to skill development in India, this study was undertaken with following objectives:

1. To assess the number of aspirants and the aspirational strength for different occupational choices
2. To understand the differences in the occupational aspirations and profile of the participants in Karnataka and Kerala
3. To analyse the relationship with and influence of the profile characteristics on the occupational aspirations of the participants

METHODOLGY

Participants of skill development programmes organized during 2018-19 by Krishi Vigyan Kendras in Karnataka and Kerala served as respondents for the study. All the skill development programmes organized by the KVKs during the year were considered for the study. The sample size of 815 participants included 538 participants from 16 districts of Karnataka and 277 participants from nine districts of Kerala. Age, gender and marital

status was ascertained as per the prevailing practice. Education was measured in terms of number of completed years of schooling / education. It included the standard passed for those who attended up to the school level. Post-school education was quantified with completed years of education as 12 for higher secondary / PUC / Polytechnic, 15 for graduates, 16 for professional degree, 17 for post-graduation in general degree and 18 for post-graduation in professional courses. Occupation status of the participants was categorised into unemployed, daily wage workers, farming / homemakers, skill workers, business and employed, with a score of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively. Family size was measured in terms of number of family members living together at the time of data elicitation. Family type was measured based on the number of married couple living together. Nuclear family consisting of one couple living with or without unmarried children was given a score of one. More than one married couple living together with or without parents and children is categorized as joint family and was given a score of two. Family income was measured in terms of annual income (Rs.) from all sources. Land holding was measured in terms of acres with or without irrigation. Vehicle possession was quantified by giving a score of one for bicycle, two for two-wheeler, three for car / tractor and four for commercial vehicle.

The present study assessed the aspirations of people who were the participants of vocational training programmes. The trainees were asked to indicate the desired occupational choice after the skill development. The given choices were (a) Start a new enterprise, (b) Expand the present enterprise, (c) Earn more salary / wages in the present job, (d) Find a job in the local area and (e) Get job in government / recognized institutions. Data was collected on three-point continuum 'strongly desired', 'desired' and 'not desired', with a score of 2, 1 and 0, respectively. Respondents expressed multiple occupational choices and hence the strength of aspiration was calculated using the formula;

$$A_{so} = \frac{\sum A_o}{A_p \times N_o} \times 100$$

Where,

A_{so} = Strength of aspiration for the occupational choice 'o'

$\sum A_o$ = Sum total of aspiration score for all the responses for the occupational choice 'o'

A_p = Maximum possible aspiration score (2) for each response

N_o = No. of responses for the occupational choice 'o'

The data was analysed using frequency, ranking, chi-square, correlation and regression using SPSS version 20.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile characteristics of the participants of skill development programmes in Karnataka and Kerala revealed many similarities (Table 1). The average age of the aspirants was 34.16 years in Karnataka and 36.12 years in Kerala. Average education of the participants was about 12 years of schooling, in both the states, Majority of the skill aspirants in both the states were married and continued to stay in joint families and the average family size was five in both the states. However, the two states differed significantly on the gender

TABLE 1

Profile characteristics of the skill development participants in Karnataka and Kerala

Profile characteristics	Karnataka (n=538)	Kerala (n=277)
Age (years) of the participants	34.16	36.12
Education (years of schooling)	11.70	11.98
Male participants (%)	89.41	55.23
Female participants (%)	10.59	44.77
Married participants (%)	59.85	62.32
Joint Family (%)	62.45	60.14
Average Family Size (no.)	5.63	4.90
Family Income (Rs/year)	71959	65267
Family Land Holding (acres)	4.77	0.74

composition of the participants, average income and land holding status. Female participants were less in Karnataka as male participants constituted nearly 90 per cent, whereas in Kerala, female participants constituted about 45 per cent. Annual income was higher in Karnataka with Rs.71959 as compared to Rs.65267 in Kerala. The average landholding of the participants was much less in Kerala (0.74 acres) compared to Karnataka (4.77 acres).

The statistical significance for the differences in the selected profile characteristics of the participants in Karnataka and Kerala is presented in Table 2. More participants (58.29%) in Karnataka represented young age group, whereas participants from Kerala were almost equally distributed in the two age

TABLE 2

Differences in the age, education, gender, marital status and landholding of the participants in Karnataka and Kerala

Profile Characteristic	Categories	Karnataka		Kerala		X ² Value
		(No.)	(%)	(No.)	(%)	
Age						
	Youth (<35 year)	313	58.29	140	50.72	4.23 *
	Adults	224	41.71	136	49.28	
	Total	537	100.00	276	100.00	
Education						
	School educated	221	41.54	108	39.27	0.39 NS
	College educated	311	58.46	167	60.73	
	Total	532	100.00	275	100.00	
Gender						
	Men	481	89.41	153	55.23	123.58 **
	Women	57	10.59	124	44.77	
	Total	538	100.00	277	100.00	
Marital Status						
	Married	322	59.85	172	62.32	0.47 NS
	Unmarried	216	40.15	104	37.68	
	Total	538	100.00	276	100.00	
Land holding status						
	Landless	55	10.22	45	16.25	67.25 **
	Small (< 2 ha)	357	66.36	228	82.31	
	Large	126	23.42	4	1.44	
	Total	538	100.00	277	100.00	

NS=Not significant ; *Significant at 0.05 level ;
** Significant at 0.01 level

categories. The chi-square test of association was significant at 0.05 level for different age categories of the participants of the two states. Majority of the participants had received college education in both the states and thus, the test of association was not significant for the different categories of education among the participants of the two states. Proportion of married participants was almost similar in both the states, 59.85 per cent in Karnataka and 62.32 per cent in Kerala. Hence, the chi-square value indicated non-significant association with respect to the marital status of the participants in the two states. The test of association was significant at 0.01 level for the gender distribution as the proportion of women participants was higher in Kerala (44.77%) than in Karnataka (10.59%). Majority of the participants were landholders in both the states, but the landless participants were more in Kerala (16.25%) and there were very few large landholders (1.44%). The test of association was significant at 0.01 level for the different categories of land holding status of the participants in the two states.

The occupational status of the participants and their spouses at the time of their skill development are given in Table 3. The participants were mostly the farmers/homemakers in Karnataka (70.63%) whereas, majority were unemployed in Kerala (46.93%). The number of employed participants were less than two per cent

in Karnataka and in Kerala it was 4.33 per cent. About seven per cent of the participants in both the states were daily wage earners. The occupational status of the participants' spouses at the time of skill development depicted a different scenario in Karnataka mainly because of the gender composition of the participants. Majority of the participants' spouses were unemployed (47.77 %) and practicing farmers or homemakers (46.65%) in Karnataka. Participants spouses who were employed (1.30%) or engaged in daily wage work (1.86%) were also less in Karnataka. On the other hand, more number of spouses were employed in Kerala (10.46%) than in Karnataka. Skilled workers among the participants (8.66%) as well as the participants' spouses (7.94%) were also more in Kerala.

The number of aspirants for different occupational choices in the two states is presented in Table 4. The most prominent aspiration for the participants was to 'start a new enterprise', as expressed by 72.49 per cent of the participants in Karnataka and 88.81 per cent in Kerala. The next prominent aspiration was to 'expand the existing enterprise' for 70.07 per cent participants in Karnataka. But in Kerala, the second most important aspiration was to 'get job in government / recognised institution' which was aspired by 78.70 per cent of the participants. For Karnataka

TABLE 3
Occupational status of the participants and their spouses in Karnataka and Kerala

Occupational Status	Participants (%)		Participant's spouses (%)	
	Karnataka (n= 538)	Kerala (n= 277)	Karnataka (n= 322)	Kerala (n= 172)
Un-employed	13.01	46.93	47.77	49.81
Daily wage worker	6.87	6.85	1.86	6.13
Agriculture/ Homemaker	70.63	28.88	46.65	24.18
Agriculture + Skill worker	5.20	8.66	1.86	7.94
Business	2.78	4.33	0.56	1.44
Employed	1.48	4.33	1.30	10.46

TABLE 4
Number of aspirants for different occupational choices in Karnataka and Kerala

Occupational Choice	Karnataka (n= 538)			Kerala (n= 277)		
	(No.)	(%)	Rank	(No.)	(%)	Rank
Start a new enterprise	390	72.49	I	246	88.81	I
Expand the present enterprise	377	70.07	II	200	72.20	IV
Earn more salary/ wages in the present job	368	68.40	III	198	71.48	V
Find a job in the local area	269	50.00	IV	214	77.26	III
Get job in government / recognized institutions	268	49.81	V	218	78.70	II

participants 'earning more salary / wages in the present job' was the third important aspiration, whereas finding a job in local area was the third ranked aspiration for the participants in Kerala. To 'find a job in local area' and to 'get job in government / recognised institution' were least desired by the participants of Karnataka. For Kerala participants, the least desired aspirations were to 'expand the existing enterprise' and 'earn more salary / wages in the present job'.

The strength of aspirations for the given occupational choices were different for both the states (Table 5). Aspirations were more pronounced by Kerala participants as indicated by higher strength of aspirations ranging from 91.50 to 96.50, compared to participants from Karnataka, which ranged from 85.32 to 89.52. For Kerala participants, aspirational strength for 'getting job in government / recognised institutions' was the highest (96.50) followed by to get a 'job in the local area' (96.00). It implied that, Kerala participants were more desirous towards seeking employment. Aspiration to 'get employed' was stronger than becoming self-employed in Kerala, which is in line with the results of previous studies (Paul, 2013; Hari *et al.*, 2013; Sarkar and Sarkar, 2018 and Das *et al.*, 2019). For Karnataka participants, the strength of aspiration was highest for 'expanding the present enterprise' (89.52) and least for 'finding a job in the local area' (85.32).

The National Skill Development Mission desires that every individual have to be equipped in such a manner that they can earn their livelihood and thereby contribute towards the economy. The results appeared to be in line with the ambitious target of the Skill Development Mission, as reflected by the aspirations to start an enterprise and become self-employed to earn a livelihood. As India moves progressively towards becoming a global knowledge economy, the skill development programmes try to meet the rising aspirations (Anonymous, 2015). The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship aims at skill up-gradation and building of new skills for not only existing jobs but also jobs that are to be created. The Ministry also aims at large scale skilling with speed and high standards to achieve a 'Skilled India'. With the skills acquired after undergoing the long duration capacity development, the participants expressed desire to 'earn more salary / wages in the present job' as the third most prominent choice. The Government of India's aim for removal of disconnect between demand and supply of skilled manpower was evident with the participants who expressed aspiration to 'find a job in the local area'.

The relationship between the profile characteristics of the participants with their occupational aspiration and the influence of these factors on the aspirations are given in Table 6. Age, number of male children in the family, land holding and vehicle possession were negatively and significantly correlated with occupational aspirations. These profile characteristics reflected on the relatively stable livelihood status of the participants and thus had negative effect on the aspirations. The occupational profile of the participants indicated that about 80 per cent were practicing farmers with agriculture and allied activities and thus would have influenced them to have moderate levels of aspirations. The parents with more number of male children did not aspire much for themselves as indicated by negative association with aspirations. Male children are traditionally considered to be the 'hope of the future' and 'the family bread-earners'. It might have resulted in lesser pressure on the participants to aspire for better livelihood opportunities. Similarly, the participants who

TABLE 5
Strength of aspirations for different occupational choices in Karnataka and Kerala

Occupational Choice	Karnataka (n= 538)		Kerala (n= 277)	
	Aspiration strength	Rank	Aspiration strength	Rank
Expand the present enterprise	89.52	I	93.00	IV
Get job in government / recognized institutions	87.69	II	96.50	I
Start a new enterprise	87.44	III	94.00	III
Earn more salary/ wages in the present job	87.36	IV	91.50	V
Find a job in the local area	85.32	V	96.00	II

TABLE 6

Relationship and contribution of the profile characteristics with the occupational aspirations of the skill development participants

N = 815

Profile Characteristics	Correlation		Regression		
	r values	Reg. Coeff. B	Std error	t Value	Sig
Age	-0.132 **	-0.043 **	0.016	2.763	0.006
Education	-0.015	0.024	0.048	0.492	0.623
Gender	0.034	-0.018	0.327	0.055	0.956
Participants' occupation status	-0.009	0.109	0.110	0.995	0.320
Participants' marital status	-0.039	1.388 **	0.513	2.708	0.007
No. of male children	-0.073 *	-0.135	0.218	0.618	0.537
No. of female children	-0.067	-0.128	0.212	0.604	0.546
Spouse' occupation status	-0.055	-0.288 *	0.134	2.153	0.032
Family type	0.037	0.237	0.332	0.714	0.475
Family income	-0.065	0.001	0.000	0.714	0.476
Land holding	-0.079 *	-0.018	0.023	0.768	0.443
Vehicle possession	-0.093 **	-0.088	0.061	1.445	0.149

*Significant at 0.05 level ; ** Significant at 0.01 level

possessed larger landholdings and more vehicles exhibited lower occupational aspirations. It points to the fact that participants from the less resource-endowed families aspired for better livelihood opportunities.

The regression analysis indicated that age of the participants had negatively influenced the occupational aspiration. Ageing may burn down the aspirations, due to narrowing opportunities, lower energy levels and / or demotivation out of failed attempts in the past. It is always advisable to adopt 'catch them young' approach so that more serious and interested aspirants are attracted to the skill development programmes. Spouse occupation had an equally negative and significant influence on the aspirational values of the participants. Livelihood security for a family is possible with at least one of the spouses engaged in a profitable

occupation. To that extent, the pressure on family livelihood decreases and thus might have had negative influence on the aspiration of the other spouse. A positive contributing factor is the marital status of the participants, which had a significant influence on the aspirations. Marriage brings in a sense of urgency and responsibility to earn a decent livelihood and hence boosts aspirational levels. Combination of young, married and having an unemployed spouse as profile characteristic might be an indicator for higher level of occupational aspirations.

Occupational aspirations in the past mostly focused on students undergoing formal education, whereas the present study focuses on the occupational aspirations of the participants of skill development programmes. The respondents represented all the major agro-climatic as well as socio-cultural situations in Karnataka and Kerala. Thus, the study provides a comprehensive insight for planning rural employment opportunities. The occupational aspirations of the participants reflected the desire for becoming agri-entrepreneurs either by starting a new enterprise or through expanding the current enterprise, which are also the ambitious goals of skill India and Make in India. The skill training has infused new level of confidence among the rural population as evident from their increased desire to get a 'job in government / recognised institutions'. The occupational choices indicated by the participants serve as valuable feedback to the development agencies for nurturing such dreams with appropriate employment or self-employment related back-end and front-end support. While choosing the participants for the skill development, the programme organizers and institutions must keep in mind the profile characteristics of the participants that influence the occupational aspirations. Young, unemployed, married and small holders need to be given priority while targeting skill development of the rural population.

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