

Attitude of Rural Youth in Al-Talyaa District Babylon Province- Iraq Towards Agriculture

Bassim Haleem Kshash^{1,*}

Hayat Kadhum Oda²

¹ College of Agriculture, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon, Iraq

ORCID ID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2553-2762>

² College of Food Science, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon- Iraq

E-mail: hay1963@fosci.uoqasim.edu.iq

***correspondence:** Bassim Haleem Kshash, College of Agriculture, Al-Qasim Green University, Babylon, Iraq.

E-mail: bassim@agre.uoqasim.edu.iq

Abstract

Youth constitute the main labor force in agricultural production. Attitude is one of the most important determinants of an individual's achievement of the work assigned to him. The study was conducted in Al-Talyaa district Babylon Province, Iraq; to analysis attitudes of rural youth towards agriculture. Three hundred of rural youth were randomly selected. About three – quarters of the rural youth had an favorable attitude towards agriculture. Rural youth attitude toward agriculture becomes more favorable with increasing of age, educational level, family annual income and cultivated area. An effective agricultural extension strategy is needed to form a favorable attitudes among rural youth towards agriculture.

Keywords: attitudes; farming; occupation; perception; rural youth.

Introduction

Agriculture is considered as a primary source of livelihood for many rural families (provide the source) . Traditional agricultural work, especially in Iraq, depends on family members. Youth represent the main agricultural labour force. The older farmers are familiar with traditional methods of farming, and will therefore be reluctant to adopt e new agricultural technologies (Singh and Singh, 2017; Vare et al., 2021). Subsequently, fostering youth involvement in agriculture remains vital to economic development in most developing countries (Mthi et al., 2021). There are many factors that affect the extent to which young people are motivated to work and accomplish the tasks assigned to them. The most important one is the attitude towards work (Lohela et al., 2022). Attitude towards works are the feelings that the workers have toward different aspects of the work environment (Abun et al., 2021). The attitudes of rural youth toward agriculture in different regions of the world has been

studied (Douglas et al., 2017; Nag et al., 2017; Chachere et al., 2018; Pakhmode et al.,2018; Tripathi et al., 2018; Bodake et al., 2019; Kavinila and Murugan, 2019; Kavya et al., 2020; Uttej et al., 2020; Maurya et al., 2021; Podh, 2021; Farooq et al., 2022). These studies concluded that most respondents had less favorable attitude towards agriculture.

In Iraq, agriculture suffers from many problems, the most important of which is low production and productivity (IOM, 2022; FAO,2021a, b), which is due to environmental, technical and social reasons. The biggest role in these remains for the human element, in terms of experience, skill and attitude towards work.

The study was undertaken to determine the attitude of rural youth toward agriculture and to determine the differences in youths attitude based on some of their socio-economic characteristics.

Understanding the attitudes of rural youth towards agriculture and the factors affecting these attitudes is the important concern which

depend on it to design deliberate policies that help the involvement of rural youth in agriculture. However, there are very few studies that dealt with this in Iraq in general and in the research area in particular . Therefore, there is a need to know about attitudes of rural youth towards agriculture, what attitudes do they have, what are the factors affecting their attitudes?. The study was undertaken with the following objectives: 1)determine the attitudes of rural youth towards agriculture; 2) determine the socio-economic characteristics of rural youth; 3) determine factors affecting rural youth attitudes.

Material and Methods

The study was carried out in AL-Taleyaa District in Babylon Province, located in south central Iraq, between 32.7° and 33.8° N and 43.42° and 45.50° E. Babylon Province is located in the Middle of Euphrates provinces, a second province in terms of arable area (CSO, 2022) and fifth in terms of population (CSO, 2021).

The population of Al-Talyaa district is 40,567, the majority, 79% of whom (31,941) live in rural areas, in four villages. Males constitute 47% (15011) of the population of rural areas , 40% of whom (6005) are youth with ages between 15-45 years (CSO, 2021). From each village, 0.05 of the youth were randomly selected, so that the total sample selected was 300 youth, which respond to the questionnaire by personal interview from 1-20 February 2023..

The instrument used was a two-part questionnaire comprising socio-economic characteristics and an attitude scale. The socio-economic characteristics included age, education level, family annual income, and cultivated area.

The final attitude scale comprised of 22 statements, out of which were 11 positive and 11 negative statements measured on a five-point continuum viz., strongly agree (SA), dependence on manual labor.

agree (A), undecided (UD), disagree(DA) and strongly disagree (SDA) with 5,4,3,2 and 1 for positive statements and scoring was reversed for negative statements.

Content validity of the questionnaire was established by a panel of experts in the fields of agricultural extension. A pilot study was conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha (a reliability coefficient of 0.96) was established, indicating the instrument used was reliable and valid.

The total attitude score for each respondent ranged from (22 to 110). Respondents were classified into five categories viz., Highly Unfavorable(HU) (22 to 39), Moderately Unfavorable (MU) (40 to 57), Neutral (N) (58 to 75), Moderately Favorable (MF) (76 to 93), Highly Favorable (HF) (94 to 111).

Each statement had a mean score ranger from (1-5),so, the statements will classified in three categories; low statement(1-2.3), moderate statement(2.4- 3.7), high statement (3.8- 5).

Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage; mean (M), standard deviation (SD), Chi test, using SPSS ver. 22,

Results and Discussion

Rural Youth Attitudes Toward Agriculture

Analysis of rural youth attitudes toward agriculture (Table 1) shows that above half of the respondents (59%) had moderat unfavourable attitudes, followed by (20 %) with neutral and (15%) had highly unfavourable attitudes. While (5%) of rural youth had moderately favourable and (1%) with highly favourable attitudes. The mean score of respondents' attitudes (51.7) was within moderately unfavourable category.

As a whole, most rural youth had unfavourable attitudes toward agriculture, this could be due to the deterioration of agriculture in Iraq that caused by soil salinity, water shortage, and Competition from imported crops (kshash, 2022; kshash,2019a, b)... In addition to that, hard work is due to

Table1: Distribution of rural youth according their attitudes toward agriculture

Attitude category	%(n=300)	M	S.D
Highly Unfavorable (22-39)	15		
Moderately Unfavorable (40 – 57)	59		
Neutral (58 – 75)	20		
Moderately favorable (76 – 93)	5		
Highly favorable (94 – 111)	1		
Total (22 – 111)	100	51.7	23.1

Rural Youth Attitudes Towards Agriculture

All attitude scale statements were presented in Table2, and ranked in order according to the arithmetic mean score. It is clear from Table 2 that 45% of the statements were with the moderate category, while the remaining 55% of the statements were within the low category.

The positive statement (Farmers are well-respected in society) had the highest score (3.13), which means that rural youth feels by society's respect for workers in agricultural production. The second-ranked statement was (agriculture is a traditional rather than scientific activity), it is a negative. Rural youth always tend to non-traditional businesses and activities (EAFRD, 2022; IFAD, 2021), but agriculture in Iraq is still traditional (ILO, 2022; FAO, 2021b).

Rural youth feel sorry for being a member of the farm family, this statement had a (3.0) mean score, and comes third. The reason for this feeling is due to low standard of living for rural families in Iraq. Iraqi rural families are increasingly vulnerable to poverty and people in rural areas are more likely to be poor (SIDA, 2022), ratio of poverty in a rural area in Iraq was 55% (Muhammed and Al Hiyali, 2018).

It seems that agriculture as a profession no longer meets the aspirations of rural youth, so we find them alienate from it and believed that; only people of the lower stratum of society will take up farming, this negative statement had an average score of (2.87).

Modern agriculture has become dependent on science, knowledge, and investment of capital (ADB, 2018; FAO, 2017), agriculture as a profession is suitable for people of all social classes.

Young people are always looking for professions that have a clear future and are directed towards success rather than failure (ILO, 2021).In Iraq, rural youth feel that agriculture as a profession has a bleak future, this negative statement had a (2.80) mean score. Agriculture in Iraq faced many challenges (FAO, 2021b; kshash, 2022; kshash, 2019a, b), and some of these problems make farming a risky profession in the future. Undoubtedly, there is a relationship between agriculture as a profession and mental health (FMC, 2019).The positive statement (Agriculture guarantees physical health and mental peace) had a (2.76) mean score. Agricultural work is done away from noise and work pressures (Williams et al., 2015), especially in Iraq, where farmers work on their own farms and the use of mechanization is at a medium or weak level.

One of the manifestations of the negative attitude of rural youth towards agriculture is the conviction of some of them that ; staying without work is better than choose farming, this negative statement had a (2.73) mean score. Despite the lack of non-agricultural employment opportunities in the rural area, rural youth prefer to remain unemployed or work in non-agricultural activities outside their areas(Baloyi et al.,2023; Giuliani et al.,2017; Njeru, 2017).

female youth's preferred any occupation rather than agriculture as a choice of livelihood (Samaraweera et al., 2022), which means that she prefers men who are engaged in non-farm activities. This is what drives rural youth to take a negative attitude towards agriculture which represents their agreement to the negative statement: no girl will accept that her husband is a farmer, which got a high average score of (2.67) .

Despite their negative attitude towards agriculture, rural youth are aware of the

importance of agriculture in economic and social development, so, they agreed with the positive statement; greater economic prosperity could be achieved in agriculture, with a(2.50) mean score.

Any people, especially youth, search for prestige in the community, there are many determinants of this prestige, the most prominent of which is his occupation. Rural youth in Iraq see that; agriculture does not give prestige to farm youth, this negative statement had an average score of (2.43).

Table 2 : Statement wise analysis of rural youth attitudes towards agriculture

Statement	M	SD
Farming is for the educated people	1.70	0.813
I will prepare my children for farming	1.74	0.825
I will not encourage my children to be in farming	1.90	0.832
Farming is cumbersome compared to other occupations	2.30	1.244
I prefer to be a farmer than as an employee	2.01	1.106
I can overcome any type of hardships in farming	2.20	1.178
A young farmer can fulfil his desire through farming	2.05	1.110
I feel sorry of being a member of farm family	3.00	1.345
Farmers are well-respected in the society	3.13	1.356
Agriculture is a dominated by adults and youth have no say in it	1.83	0.883
No girl will accept that her husband is a farmer	2.67	1.276
Youth involved in farming have old and unattractive lifestyle	1.57	0.712
Farming as a profession has bleak future in the country	2.80	1.256
Only people of the lower stratum of society will take up farming	2.87	1.261
staying without work is better than choose farming	2.73	1.267
I am willing to seek for further knowledge and skills in farming	2.35	1.211
Greater economic prosperity could be achieved in agriculture	2.50	1.234
Agriculture is a traditional rather than scientific activity	3.10	1.355
Practicing agriculture leads to economic upliftment of farmers	1.97	1.875
Agriculture guarantees physical health and mental peace	2.76	1.258
Agriculture is a profitable occupation	2.12	1.159
Agriculture does not give prestige to farm youth	2.43	1.233

Factors Affecting Rural Youth Attitudes Toward Agriculture

Table 3 shows a significant differences between youth attitudes according to age, educational level, family annual income and cultivated area. The largest number of respondents with a favourable attitude was in

the third category of age, educational level, family annual income and cultivated area. This means that the rural youth's attitude toward agriculture becomes more favourable with increasing of age, educational level, family annual income and cultivated area.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to characteristics and attitude

Characteristic and description		Attitude category**					Total	Chi square
		HU	MU	N	MF	HF		
		F	F	F	F	F	F	
Age (years)	15 – 24	30	90	7	0	0	127	160.6*
	25 – 34	15	87	25	4	0	131	
	35 - 44	0	0	28	11	3	42	
	total	45	177	60	15	3	300	
Educational level	< Secondary	37	42	0	0	0	79	222.9*
	Secondary	8	113	10	3	0	134	
	University	0	22	50	12	3	87	
	Total	45	177	60	15	3	300	
Family annual income (million IQD)	<2	15	74	10	2	0	101	72.8*
	2 - 4	20	85	6	6	1	118	
	> 4	10	18	44	7	2	81	
	Total	45	177	60	15	3	300	
Cultivated area (ha)	< 5	12	56	22	4	1	95	23.4*
	5 – 8	23	91	20	2	1	137	
	> 8	10	30	18	9	1	68	
	Total	45	177	60	15	3	300	

*significant at 0.05 level of chi square.

**Attitude category: HU(Highly Unfavourable); MU(Moderately Unfavourable; N(Natural) ; MF (Moderately Favourable); HF(Highly Favourable)

Conclusion and Recommendation

Rural youth have a negative attitudes towards agriculture, this attitude is affected by the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The largest number of rural youth with negative attitude are among the youngest ages and the middle category in terms of educational level, annual income and cultivated area.

Special efforts should be taken to reach rural youth and convince them to involvement in agriculture.

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