

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Peer-reviewed | Open Access

Rural Youth Migration from Farming in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh India

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

RECEIVED: 15-Aug-26

REVISED: 23-Sep-26

ACCEPTED: 01-Oct-26

PUBLISHED: 15-Oct-26

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Citation: Sai Malluri, Ajay Kumar Prusty, Chitrasena Padhy, Nibedita Mishra and Sai Kumar Periginji (2026). Rural Youth Migration from Farming in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh India. Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res. 8 (S), 117–125. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2026.v8.nS.id1400.p117>



ABSTRACT

This investigation examined how rural youth view agriculture, the extent and drivers of their migration, and support necessary to remain in farming in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh. An ex-post-facto design was adopted, and information was obtained from 180 rural youth through a multistage random sampling procedure. Agricultural attitudes were concentrated in the medium and high categories, whereas migration behaviour was largely medium or high, indicating that favourable views of farming did not necessarily translate into continued participation. Education, economic motivation, self-reliance, farm size, and duration of residence emerged among the strongest correlates. Monotony of farm work, limited employment prospects, and repeated crop failure were prominent push factors. Inadequate remunerative prices, weak marketing connections, and insufficient market information were major constraints. The findings point to youth-focused extension, practical skill development, and enabling agricultural policies for improving the attractiveness and long-term demographic sustainability of farming.

Keywords: Attitude towards Agriculture, Empowerment needs, Market Linkage, Migration behaviour, Push-pull factors, Rural youth

1. INTRODUCTION

Young people throughout history have been on the leading edge of social and economic change, residing between the childhood and adulthood worlds, and experiencing greater social and economic independence in their lives (Bennell, 2007). The 2011 Census data shows

that around 130 million young people (or one-third) of the Indian population (aged between 15-29) were migrants with the primary reasons being employment, education and marriage (Census of India, 2011). In Andhra Pradesh, the migrant population rose from 25.2 million in 2001 to 38.36 million in 2011, with young people forming an

important component of this movement (Madhu and Uma, 2014). India is still a young country with more than half of its population aged below 25 years, and more than 65 per cent below 35 years of age (Census of India, 2011) and should be expected to reach a peak around the year 2030. However, millions of young people around the world, including India, are unable to find decent jobs, and youth unemployment has been on the increase in the last two decades (International Labour Organisation, 2012).

In this context, Indian agriculture is undergoing a rapid demographic transition. The numbers of farmers in the country have dropped by about 15 million since 1991, and it is reported that more than 2,000 farmers leave the profession every day, while a National Sample Survey Organisation poll revealed more than 40 per cent of farmers were willing to leave their profession if provided with an alternate livelihood (Sainath, 2013). Across successive survey periods in Andhra Pradesh, youth mobility has included both rural-to-urban and rural-to-rural streams, alongside a progressive diversification away from exclusively farm-based livelihoods towards non-farm and other non-agricultural sources of work (Madhu & Uma, 2014). Evidence from India further suggests that a sizeable share of rural youth in Andhra Pradesh contemplate urban migration in response to low agricultural productivity, inadequate educational and health services, and deficiencies in rural infrastructure (Radhakrishnan and Arunachalam, 2017).

This departure has a significant impact on the agricultural industry: loss of farm labour, loss of farm knowledge/skills because people don't come back to farming and weakening of rural communities because families are split up (Mbah et al., 2016; Naing et al., 2020). The problem of unemployment is also a greater concern among educated young population of the rural areas in comparison to that of the urban areas in the country as 13.9 per cent of educated rural youth were reported to be unemployed whereas educated urban youth were reported to be 7.6 per cent (Ministry of Labour and Employment, as cited in the source thesis). Economic diversification has also helped to increase employment opportunities in non-farm sectors, though at the same time it has increased the rural-urban migration of labour towards non-farm sectors, which may have consequences for agriculture and food security (Sharma and Bhaduri, 2005; DARE, 2012).

It is therefore important to understand the reasons why young people are moving out of farming and what conditions might make it more attractive to stay or come back into farming in order to ensure the continuity of Indian agriculture. Farm conditions, such as fluctuating farm income and frequent crop losses, and off-farm opportunities, such as greater employment opportunities,

higher wages and better living conditions (Kimaro et al., 2015; Bednarikova et al., 2016) influence migration decisions. Meanwhile, many of the rural youth have positive perspectives of agriculture, meaning technical capacity building, market linkages and improved infrastructure on the farm could further boost their commitment to the sector (Gangwar and Kameswari, 2016; Chachere et al., 2018). The evidence that has been gathered to date that connects the agricultural attitude with the migration behaviour, with the requirement for empowerment is limited, especially in AP North Coastal districts (Sujeetha and Anamica, 2017).

In this regard the study was focused on Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh and the three objectives of the study were: (1) to gauge the attitude of the rural youths towards farming, (2) to analyse the migratory pattern of the youths, and (3) to identify the modality of empowerment needed to promote their stay on or return to the agriculture sector. The results will guide youth-focused extension activities, agricultural policy and rural development planning that will help address the farm population's decline.

2. Materials and Methods

The investigation was conducted in two districts of the North Coastal region of Andhra Pradesh, namely Srikakulam and Vizianagaram. This explanatory characteristic had been observed and could not be controlled as an experimental variable and therefore an ex post facto design was used, following the recommendations of Kerlinger (1976). The sampling was done in a series of phases. Two mandals in each district – Amadalavalasa and Hiramandalam (Srikakulam) and Saluru and Dattirajuru (Vizianagaram) were selected first. In consultation with Department of Agriculture officials, six Gram Panchayats were identified – Korlakota in Amadalavalasa, Kothavalasa in Amadalavalasa, Tallapadu and Bugavalasa in Hiramandalam, Maripalle in Saluru, and Maradam in Dattirajuru. Then, rural youth aged 18-29 years were selected randomly in these panchayats. The final sample comprised 180 respondents, equally divided between the two districts, with 30 respondents from each of the six panchayats. Information was collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured schedule that had been pre-tested before the survey.

Selection of explanatory variables was guided by previous literature and expert consultation. The eighteen characteristics included age, education, occupation, farm size, farm-skill possession, farming experience, non-farm-skill possession, length of residence in the native place, distance or proximity to towns and cities, previous migration experience, annual income, economic motivation, achievement motivation, risk orientation,

self-reliance, self-confidence, income expectancy, and comfort expectancy. Three outcome domains were examined. Agricultural attitude was assessed with ten statements rated on a five-point response continuum and subsequently grouped into low, medium, and high categories by the cumulative-frequency approach. Migration behaviour was represented by a fourteen-component Migration Behaviour Index. Seven components described observed or direct aspects of migration - nature of migration, type of work, workplace distance, decision-making, migration network, family migration norm, and intention to remigrate - while seven captured perceptual dimensions, namely aspiration, creativity, occupational mobility, migration intention, social embeddedness, parental and peer influence, and remittances. Empowerment needs in agriculture were recorded through a checklist covering training and infrastructure requirements.

The coded and tabulated information from the survey was analysed descriptively and inferentially. The mean, median, range, standard deviation and coefficient of variation were used to present the distributional characteristics. The associations of each of the eighteen profile variables with the two main outcomes (attitude towards agriculture and migration behaviour) were tested using Pearson's product-moment correlation at the 5% and 1% significance levels. The effects of the explanatory variables, as well as their interactions, were then estimated with multiple linear regression ($Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \dots + \beta_nX_n + U$), and responses to migration push-pull factors, agricultural constraints, and empowerment needs were dichotomously codified and summarized in frequencies and percentages.

3. Results and Discussion

The results are discussed according to the study's goals starting with the respondent characteristics and then the agricultural attitude, migration behaviour and empowerment needs for continued involvement in agriculture.

3.1 Profile of rural youth

Respondents aged 21-25 years formed the largest group (55%), followed by those aged 26-30 years (30%) and 16-20 years (15%). The concentration in the younger age categories indicates that the decision on migration is particularly important at the time when people become more independent in their lives and activities. Similarly, Naing et al. (2020) found a high number of migrants aged 22-26 in their study. The level of education was also comparatively high with 64.4 per cent having college education, 18.9 per cent intermediate and 8.3 per cent higher education. This is a general trend that is similar

to that reported by Naing et al. (2020) who found that graduates made up a large proportion of migrants in their study.

Despite the fact that parents or other family members were still farming, there was a strong focus on wage work and other non-agricultural activities. Income gained from migration thus became a supplementary livelihood source for households. Similarly, Radhakrishnan and Arunachalam (2017) also observed that 61.66 per cent of the migrant youths were engaged in a range of occupations at the destination places. As to land, 42.6 per cent owned 0-1 acre, 34.4 per cent reported holdings of over 5 acres, and 30.6 per cent didn't have any land. Limited or inadequate access to cultivable land thus may push farmers into non-farm employment as means of livelihood to keep their household income, as reported by Mbah et al. (2016) on livelihood pressures related to fragmented holdings.

Of those who responded with skills acquired, 57.2% indicated they had acquired skills other than those associated with the farm, representing continued exposure to skills associated with home farming; 51.7% of respondents indicated they had acquired skills related to the farm. The current level of non-farm skill acquisition is higher than Sharma (2007) reported, indicating a higher level of occupational diversification for the current generation of rural youth. Experience in farming was limited, with 37.2 per cent who reported that they had no experience in farming, a situation generally consistent with a decrease in exposure to farming as noted by Bhuyasi Sarmah (2023). In addition, 59.4 per cent had lived in their native place for 11-14 years and 55.6 per cent reported that their villages were close to towns or cities. Such proximity can improve access to non-farm opportunities and may facilitate partial or complete

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the rural youth surveyed in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age: 21-25 years	99	55.0
Age: 26-30 years	54	30.0
Education: College	116	64.4
Education: Intermediate	34	18.9
Occupation: Housewife	9	42.8*
Occupation: Working/labour	22	27.8*
Farm size: 0-1 acre	46	42.6
Farm skill: Possessed	93	51.7
Non-farm skill: Possessed	103	57.2
Years of stay in native: 11-14 years	107	59.4
Prior migration experience: Above 6 years	72	40.0
Annual income: ₹1-2 lakh	72	40.0

withdrawal from agriculture (Sharma, 2007). Previous migration was also common; 40 per cent had more than six years of migration experience. De Jong (2000) likewise observed that earlier migration can support subsequent mobility through the networks and experience accumulated by migrants.

With respect to psychological and motivational traits, economic motivation was predominantly medium (36.1%), achievement motivation predominantly low (35.6%), risk orientation predominantly low (36.1%), self-reliance predominantly low (37.8%), income expectancy predominantly high (38.9%), and comfort expectancy predominantly medium (38.3%). A combination of the motivational profiles indicates that rural youth want to earn more money, but at the same time they are not very risky, not very self-reliant, and this mix may be the reason for the presence of positive attitudes towards farming and the persistence of migration.

3.2 Attitude of rural youth towards agriculture

Agricultural attitude was assessed with the ten-item scale, after which respondents were grouped into low, medium, and high categories using the cumulative-frequency procedure. The medium category contained 37.8 per cent of respondents, 33.3 per cent were in the high category, and 28.9 per cent were in the low category. Thus, more than two-thirds of the sample exhibited medium-to-high favourability towards agriculture as a livelihood. This shows that overall, there is an existing positive attitude towards agriculture, but it is not likely to be translated into sustained participation unless there is a reduction in the major structural and economic constraints.

The economic motivation ($r = 0.568$, 1% level), education ($r = 0.451$, 1% level) and self-reliance ($r = 0.391$, 1% level) showed the strongest positive association with agricultural attitude. Length of residence in the native place ($r = 0.350$, 1%), non-farm skill ($r = 0.312$, 1%), and farming experience ($r = 0.305$, 1%) were also positively related. The variables age, occupation, farm size, farm skill, distance to towns/cities, migration experience, annual income, achievement motivation, self-confidence and income expectancy were significant at the 5 per cent level. No significant relationships were found for the risk

orientation ($r = 0.037$) or comfort expectancy ($r = 0.127$). The regression model with all eighteen explanatory variables explained 57.6 per cent of the variation in attitude ($R^2 = 0.576$), and particularly farm skill, economic motivation and education made very important positive contributions. This result is broadly comparable with Gangwar and Kameswari (2016) and Chachere et al. (2018), whose findings also linked educational and economic characteristics with favourable orientations towards agriculture and agricultural employment.

3.3 Migration behaviour of rural youth

A fourteen-component Migration Behaviour Index was used to represent respondents' migration behaviour. Seven components described direct aspects - migration type, work performed after migration, workplace distance, migration decision-making, migration network, family migration norm, and intention to remigrate. The other seven represented perceptual dimensions: aspiration, creativity, occupational mobility, intention to migrate, social embeddedness, parental influence, peer influence, and remittance behaviour. Among the direct measures, remigration intention recorded the highest mean score (3.02), followed by workplace distance (2.83) and migration network (2.48), whereas nature of work in the migrated area had the lowest mean (1.55). Within the perception measures, creativity (2.05) and remittances (2.02) obtained the highest mean scores, while parental and peer influence showed the lowest score (1.94).

The overall migration behaviour was characterized as medium (38.9 per cent), high (35.0 per cent) or low (26.1 per cent) migration propensity, with a substantially large share (73.9 per cent) showing medium to high migration propensity despite generally favourable attitudes towards agriculture, indicating that there are structural and economic factors that are influencing choice of migration, in addition to attitude. In the case of attitudes and behaviour pattern, Srikakulam showed relatively high positive attitudes and behaviour pattern (12%) as compared with the other study area Vizianagaram (9%).

Migration behaviour showed significant positive relationships with economic motivation ($r = 0.471$, 1%), education ($r = 0.424$, 1%), farm skill ($r = 0.411$, 1%), farm size ($r = 0.387$, 1%), and achievement motivation ($r =$

Table 2. Rural youths classified by level of attitude towards agriculture (n = 180)

Attitude category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	< 93.7	52	28.9
Medium	93.7 - 101.7	68	37.8
High	> 101.7	60	33.3

Table 3. Classification of respondents by overall level of migration behaviour (n = 180)

Migration behaviour category	Score range	Percentage
Low	< 27.6	26.1
Medium	27.6 - 29.1	38.9
High	> 29.1	35.0

Table 4. Most frequently reported push factors associated with rural youths' movement away from agriculture (n = 180)

Push factor	Respondents	Percentage
Monotony in agriculture	107	57.7
Lesser employment	102	56.6
Frequent crop failure	98	54.4
Small landholdings	96	53.3
Social discrimination	95	52.7
Lack of social amenities	95	52.7
Peer pressure	94	52.2
Unstable income	81	45.0

0.378, 1%). Age, farming experience, annual income, self-reliance, and self-confidence were significant at the 5 per cent level, whereas non-farm skill, risk orientation, and comfort expectancy were not significantly associated with migration behaviour. When the eighteen predictors were considered jointly, the regression model explained 63.9 per cent of the variation in migration behaviour ($R^2 = 0.639$). Farm size, farm skill, economic motivation, achievement motivation, income expectancy, and comfort expectancy were significant predictors in the model. The overall pattern is consistent with Danejo et al. (2015) and Tripathi et al. (2018), who emphasised socio-economic conditions, education, and economic motivation in rural-urban youth migration, and with Bednarikova et al. (2016), who identified agricultural education and economic aspirations as important migration motivations.

3.4 Push and pull factors influencing migration

Among factors pushing youth away from farming, monotony of agricultural work was reported most often (57.7%), followed by limited employment opportunities (56.6%) and recurring crop failure (54.4%). Debt (46.1%) and unstable income (45.0%) were also reported by substantial proportions of respondents. In contrast, the strongest attractions outside agriculture were better employment opportunities (53.3%), improved living standards (52.7%), and work involving less drudgery (52.7%). Better infrastructure (52.2%) and opportunities to acquire skills (50.5%) were also influential. These results are comparable with Kimaro et al. (2015) and Ampadu (2012), who highlighted the combined influence of low perceived status and arduous farm work on the one hand, and the attraction of wage employment outside agriculture on the other.

3.5 Empowerment priorities for retaining and re-engaging rural youth in agriculture

The constraints most commonly reported by respondents were insufficiently remunerative prices for

Table 5. Priority training and empowerment requirements reported by rural youth for continued engagement in agriculture (n = 180)

Empowerment need	Respondents	Percentage
Training on farm mechanisation	101	56.2
Training on access to agricultural marketing information	100	55.6
Training on market linkages	99	55.0
Training on farm diversification	95	52.3
Training on agricultural technologies	97	53.8
Training on effective farm management	92	51.1
Training on post-harvest technologies	84	46.6
Training on skill development	82	45.6

farm output (52.8%), weak marketing linkages (52.8%), inadequate market information (52.7%), limited storage facilities (51.7%), and lack of finance (52.3%). The answers suggest that it is not just a lack of interest in farming activities, but rather market access, infrastructure and institutional support that are the key factors preventing youth from being involved in agriculture on a consistent basis. Regarding capacity-building priorities, farm mechanisation training ranked highest (56.2%), followed by training to obtain agricultural market information (55.6%) and training related to market linkages (55.0%). Farm diversification (52.3%) and effective farm management (51.1%) were also identified as important areas for training.

These findings align closely with Sujeetha and Anamica (2017), who similarly identified training on mechanisation, marketing, and farm management as the highest-priority empowerment needs for retaining migrant rural youth in agriculture, and with Nnadi et al. (2012), who emphasised that comprehensive rural youth empowerment - encompassing skill development, market access, and infrastructure - is essential to reversing rural-urban drift. There is a consistency in the constraints identified and training needs prioritised by respondents which would suggest that a more well targeted and market-oriented extension strategy would have the potential to significantly help boost youth retention within the sector (Kitturmath et al., 2014; Rathod et al., 2017).

4. Conclusion

The results show that rural youth in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh generally hold medium-to-high favourable views of agriculture, yet a similarly strong tendency to migrate persists. Positive attitude, therefore, is not by itself sufficient to ensure continued engagement in farming. Education, farm size, farm skills, duration of residence in the native area, and economic motivation

were among the most important factors associated with the outcomes examined, while the regression models explained 57.6 per cent of the variance in attitude and 63.9 per cent of the variance in migration behaviour. The observed inclination to migrate appears to reflect dissatisfaction with the repetitive and uncertain character of farm livelihoods together with the attraction of more reliable employment and improved living conditions elsewhere, rather than a complete rejection of farming. Structural and institutional constraints were the most frequently mentioned ones by the respondents, such as low or non-remunerative prices, poor marketing linkages, lack of market information, and lack of storage. The trend indicates that unwillingness to engage in farming could be more related to the way farming is carried out than to a lack of motivation. These are the areas of intervention that are indicated by the accompanying demand for training of young people, particularly on mechanization, market information and market linkage. Extension services, skill-developing programmes, better market infrastructure and policies that directly focus young farmers' needs can then help to reinforce youth retention and also retain the knowledge base and demographic continuity of farming communities. Improved market-information services and direct marketing arrangements to enhance price realization, practical mechanisation skills, diversification of farming activities to lower reliance on a single crop, as well as youth clubs and field demonstrations for making agriculture visible as a viable career should be the main focus of policy and extension action. Future studies can be made on a larger sample size spread across a greater geographical region in the North Coastal Andhra Pradesh. However, longitudinal research is required to investigate the effects of migration on migrants and farm households and to determine the success of youth-oriented extension and skill-building programs for maintaining youth involvement in farming.

Acknowledgements

The authors sincerely thank all individuals and institutions who supported this research study.

Funding

No funding was received for this research.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors have not used generative AI or AI-assisted

technologies. The authors independently developed the conceptual framework and scholarly arguments and remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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