

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on Career Aspirations of Agricultural Students in India

M. Shanmukh Raju¹ and L. Devarani²

1. Ph. D Scholar,
2. Asso. Professor,
Deptt. of Agril. Ext., CPGS
(CAU, Imphal), Umiam,
Meghalaya, India.
Corresponding author e-mail:
shanmukhrajju.ext@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Agricultural students in India have a wide range of choices in their career aspiration spectrum. Career aspiration is a way that an individual wishes to continue to design his/her future life and way of life. The present study is based on primary research covering 508 students from different universities of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) of India, which comprise 199 Undergraduates, 194 Post-graduates and 115 students pursuing their Ph.D. An exploratory research design was employed for the study. The data were collected using a pre-tested and structured online questionnaire. The study found that most respondents were pursuing undergraduate degrees (39.17%), female (51.57%), OBC social category (39.76%), ambiverts (50.20%), rural background (41.73%), from nuclear families (80.91%), and had a destitute annual income (43.11%). The findings also revealed that the majority (43.90%) of the respondents preferred to secure a job in academics as a career aspiration, followed by the public sector (35.04%), agri-business (10.04%), private sector (9.84%) and farming (1.18%). It was also found that the level of education, social category, gender and personality type of the respondents were found to be positively significant and associated with career aspirations. The policy-makers in agriculture and allied education and government should formulate and implement suitable strategies to improve the competency of students and motivate/guide them to develop an appropriate career aspiration.

Key words: Career Aspiration; Preference; Job, Occupation; Agriculture; Students.

Career aspiration is a path that an individual wishes to follow in order to plan her/ his future life and lifestyle. It refers to the choice and preference of an individual for seeking a job after completing their education. It is, therefore one of the crucial decisions that students have to make in their life. At some point in time, during the student phase of life, every individual will encounter various career-related questions, viz. What do I want to be when I grow up? What is the best career for me? (Niranjan et al., 2018). The education system is a mechanism for training youth to perform well in a complex, interdependent and highly organized occupational system (Das and Chowdhury, 2014). Agricultural education today has become highly complex and specialized, and offer ample opportunities to plan and choose a variety of career by its recipients. The primary objective of establishing agricultural universities and colleges is to train and educate the students so that they can engage

in their careers in the farm sector, carry out various activities in a scientific manner and thereby boost production and productivity (Arunachalam et al., 2020). Further, the students are also regularly guided to explore better career opportunities by the concerned placement cell staff members in universities. Despite all of these systematic efforts, there is still a greater variation in the settlement pattern of the students. After attainment of specific educational qualifications by using their hard intellectual labour, the students will have some plans to settle down in a specific career. The students aspire for various remunerative job opportunities or career avenues based on their intent, professional aspirations and personal liking or disliking. However, most students used to settle themselves in readily available public or private sector jobs in the field of agriculture or choose to pursue higher education. Agricultural graduates lack awareness about the opportunities in emerging markets. Modak et al.

(2018) reported that agriculture postgraduate students had moderate levels of entrepreneurial competencies, and the lack of those competencies constrained them to take up entrepreneurship as a career opportunity. *Kobba et al. (2020)* stated that creating an entrepreneurship climate and enabling environment will ignite the spirit of entrepreneurship at a young age. There are shreds of evidence from many sources that youth are showing disinterest in the agricultural sector (*Uttej et al., 2022*). But, without the involvement of youth in the agriculture field, the development will not occur (*Dhakre, 2014*). *Vineel and Rachana (2018)* reported that agriculture graduate career aspirations mostly concentrate on getting a government job or working in agriculture input companies. Career aspirations have a positive and significant relationship with family educational status, students' academic performance, parents' annual income, parents' occupation, achievement motivation and mass media exposure (*Ansari and Ansari, 2019*). It is very unclear what sort of career aspirations; the agricultural students have and what bearing the social and psychological variables have on the career aspirations of agriculture students. Keeping in view of the above, the current study was undertaken to develop an insight into the career aspirations of agriculture students in India and the association of their career aspirations with socio-psychological variables. The findings of this study will be helpful for agriculture policymakers, higher agriculture educationists, and planners to understand the nature and extent of career aspirations so that accordingly they can devise suitable policies.

METHODOLOGY

The study is a cross-sectional survey, carried out as an anonymous online survey administered through Google Forms in 2021. An exploratory research design and non-probability snowball sampling strategy were employed for the study. Agricultural graduates were chosen as the respondents for this study as agriculture is the most diverse subject that includes subjects ranging from life sciences to social sciences where students work from lab to land. The respondents include 508 agricultural graduates from different universities of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) across the country, which comprise 199 Undergraduates, 194 Postgraduates, and 115 students pursuing their Ph.D. Internet and social media were used for the recruitment of respondents. Sampling procedures in this study have

shown to be effective and time-efficient by reaching inaccessible potential participants from different regions of the country by eliminating any geographical boundaries disadvantage. The online survey was disseminated to the contacts, using WhatsApp and e-mail with a request for participation and further dissemination among their contacts. The first webpage of the survey provided detailed information about the survey (including inclusion and exclusion criteria). Participants were expected to check if they could participate in the study and provide consent. They were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary. Participation in the study is implied as a consent and agreement to analyse their responses and they can withdraw from the study at any time if they do not wish to participate. No personally identifiable information was requested from any of the participants. It took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey. The instructions clearly indicated that there was no time limit for answering and that there were no correct or wrong answers. The participants were included if they were agricultural students, aged 18 years or above, of any gender, residents of India who had access to the internet and could read/understand English, and if they were willing to give consent for participation. The career aspirations were listed into 5 categories *viz.* Farming, Agri-business, Academics (Scientists, Assistant Professors *etc.*), Public Sector (Public Service Commission, Banking, Agricultural department *etc.*), and Private Sector (R&D in private companies/jobs in private companies). Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) were used to analyse the data. Simple statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, and chi-square tests were applied to analyse the data and report the results as per the objectives framed for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic profile of respondents

Educational level: A detailed analysis of Table 1 reveals that the majority of the respondents were pursuing an undergraduate level of education (39.17%) followed by post-graduate (38.19%) and doctorate (22.64%) level of education. The results are in line with the findings of *Meinam et al. (2023)* and *Gora et al. (2022)*.

Gender: A cursory look at Table 1 depicted that 51.57 per cent of the respondents belonged to the female category, followed by the male (48.43%) gender category. The results are in line with the findings of

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on their socio-economic characteristics (N=508)

Variable	No.	%
<i>Educational level</i>		
UG	199	39.17
PG	194	38.19
PhD	115	22.64
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	246	48.43
Female	262	51.57
<i>Social category</i>		
General	169	33.27
OBC	202	39.76
SC	57	11.22
ST	80	15.75
<i>Personality type</i>		
Introvert	164	32.28
Ambivert	255	50.20
Extrovert	89	17.52
<i>Family background</i>		
Rural	212	41.73
Semi-urban	164	32.28
Urban	132	25.98
<i>Family type</i>		
Nuclear	411	80.91
Joint	87	17.13
Extended	10	1.97
<i>Annual income</i>		
Destitute	219	43.11
Aspirer	70	13.77
Middle class	216	42.51
Rich	3	0.005

Meinam et al. (2023) and Ahire et al. (2017).

Social category: Results furnished in Table 1 indicate that 39.76 per cent of the respondents belonged to the OBC category, followed by General (33.27%), ST (15.75%), and SC (11.22%) social categories. The results are in accordance with the findings of Gora et al. (2022)

Personality type: It could be noticed from Table 1 that the majority of the respondents were ambiverts (50.20%) followed by introverts (32.28%) and extroverts (17.52%). The results are in accordance with the findings of Semwal et al. (2014).

Family Background: Table 1 highlights that 41.73 per cent of the respondents had a rural family background, followed by semi-urban (32.28%) and urban (25.98%) family background. The results are in line with the findings of Asha et al. (2023), Gora et al. (2022) and Ahire et al. (2017). The results are contradictory to those findings reported by Meinam et al. (2023).

Family type: It could be comprehended from Table 1 that the majority of respondents belonged to the nuclear family (80.91%), followed by joint (17.13%) and extended (1.97%) family types. The results are in accordance with the findings of Gora et al. (2022).

Annual income of the family: The data in Table 1 reveals the distribution of respondents' annual family income into different categories: 43.11 per cent are in the destitute category (<₹1,25,000), 42.51 per cent in the middle-class category (₹1,25,000 to ₹5,00,000), 13.77 per cent in the aspirer category (₹5,00,000 to ₹30,00,000), and only 0.005 per cent in the rich category (>₹30,00,000). These findings are consistent with the studies by Asha et al. (2023), Gora et al. (2022), and Ahire et al. (2017), suggesting agreement with previous research on income distribution among respondents.

Career aspirations of the respondents : The data on the classification of overall sample respondents according to their career aspirations is given in Table 2. It could be observed from Table 2, that the majority (43.90%) of the respondents preferred to secure a job in academics as a career aspiration and were ranked I followed by the public sector (35.04 per cent, rank II), agri-business (10.04 per cent, rank III), private sector (9.84 per cent, rank IV) and farming (1.18 per cent, rank V). The respondents were found in a wide range of the career aspiration spectrum, viz. farming, agri-business, public sector, academics, and private sector. However, the aspirations are predominantly centered on a few career options such as academics, government sector jobs, and private sector jobs (Mishra et al., 2014). It may be because a majority of respondents hailing from rural areas where low income is common backwardness might have developed a dream to get a government job which is considered as an elevator in their social status (Ramesh et al., 2018). The lowest proportion was found in the farming career aspiration category. Due to a lack of financial security (Bhaskar et al., 2022), instability in regular income (Dayalan et al., 2018), lack of family support, lack of recognition

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their career aspirations (N=508)

Career aspiration	No. (%)	Rank
Farming	6 (1.18)	V
Agri-business	51 (10.04)	III
Public sector	178 (35.04)	II
Academics	223 (43.90)	I
Private sector	50 (9.84)	IV

from society when compared to white-collar jobs and lack of agricultural land, the agricultural students keep themselves away from adopting farming as a career aspiration and profession (Narain *et al.*, 2016).

The results of the study also clearly showed that the majority of the respondents aspire to their careers in government organizations despite the dwindling employment opportunities in the public sector (Ramesh *et al.*, 2018). Entrepreneurship and agriculture farming are the very least career aspirations of respondents. Another reason is that, our agriculture and allied education prepares students to cater to the needs of state agriculture and allied departments. Reddy and Chandawat (2021) highlighted significant challenges encountered by postgraduate students when considering a career in entrepreneurship. These challenges encompassed limited practical knowledge concerning entrepreneurship, deficiency in cultivating a positive entrepreneurial mindset for establishing individual agricultural enterprises, and the cumbersome procedures involved in obtaining bank loans. The policy-makers in agriculture and allied education and government should formulate and implement suitable strategies to improve the competency of students and motivate/guide them to develop an appropriate career aspiration. Such efforts will help the undergraduates of agriculture and allied streams to develop themselves and contribute to the betterment of society (Amoah *et al.*, 2015). While universities and governments employ enormous resources and effort into preparing students and turning them into successful professionals, the entire process fails to reach them on a personal level, as students only value their degrees as additions to their CVs. The findings are in accordance with the studies reported by Hari *et al.* (2013), Vineel and Rachana (2018), Vinodkumar and Seema (2021), Mridula and Sakeer (2020), Bora and Barman (2022), Ahire *et al.* (2017) and Gora *et al.* (2022).

A perusal of data presented in Table 3 reveals that the level of education ($\chi^2 = 129.49$) and social category ($\chi^2 = 32.65$) of the respondents were found to be positively significant and associated with career aspiration at a 1 per cent level of significance and each had very strong (Cramer's V= 0.35) and moderate (Cramer's V= 0.14) size of effect respectively. Gender and personality type were found to be positively significant and associated with career aspiration at a 5 per cent level of significance, each having strong (Cramer's V= 0.15) and moderate (Cramer's V= 0.12)

Table 3. Association between the profile of the respondents and their career aspirations (N=509)

Personal variable	Career aspiration	
	χ^2	Cramer's V (Size of effect)
Educational level	124.49**	0.35 (VS)
Gender	11.70*	0.15 (S)
Social category	32.65**	0.14 (M)
Type of personality	16.89*	0.12 (M)
Family background	11.33 ^{NS}	0.10 (M)
Type of family	3.73 ^{NS}	0.06 (W)
Annual family income	12.42 ^{NS}	0.09 (W)

VS- Very Strong; S- Strong; M- Moderate; W- Weak

**Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). NS- Non-significant

size effect, respectively. Family background, family type, and annual income of the family were found to have non-significant associations with the career aspirations of the respondents. The findings imply that the respondent's career aspiration was affected by the level of education, gender, social category, and personality type. Other personal variables such as family background, annual income of the family, and type of family did not have a significant association with their career aspirations. This finding differs from the finding of Lekshmi and Dineshababu (2011), wherein it was observed that the family type had a positive and high association with the level of aspiration. The results were also contrary to the findings of Chinchmalatpure and Tekale (2019) and Jitumoni and Nithyashree (2016), wherein it was observed that annual income had a significant positive relationship with the career aspirations of respondents. Rahim and Nataraju (2012), while studying factors influencing the occupational aspirations of students studying at the University of Agriculture Sciences, Bangalore, reported that gender and family background had negative but non-significant associations with agricultural students' career aspirations. Dhakre (2014) reported that the aspiration of students towards agriculture enterprise was positively and significantly associated with family size. The findings are partially in accordance with Jena and Kumari (2023).

CONCLUSION

The respondents were observed in a wide range of the career aspiration spectrum, *viz.* farming, agri-business, public sector, academics, and private sector. However, the aspirations predominantly centered

around a few options, such as academics and government sector jobs. It is a good signal that many students have career aspirations in the public sector, like cracking public service commissions and entering into high-profile jobs. The lowest proportion was found in the farming career aspiration category. The students were also reluctant to initiate their own enterprises and secure a job in the private sector. The level of education, social category, gender, and personality type of the respondents were found to be positively associated with the career aspirations of the respondents. In a country like India, a lot of human capital is needed to tackle various problems in the agriculture sector. So, policymakers should focus on nurturing the students at the undergraduate level so that they can have business skills, and critical thinking abilities and undertake agri-preneurship as their career choice. The universities should create awareness among agriculture students on various available career opportunities in agribusiness, farming, and the private sector in addition to academic career opportunities and that of the public sector. Further, career development programmes, proper mentoring and guidance, grooming, personality development training for enhancing soft skills, workshops for enhancing practical skills, internship programmes, and campus placement programmes should be widely organized to enhance students' employability.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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