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Socio-Personal Characteristics of Field Extension Functionaries of Dairy Development Department

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ABSTRACT

The study conducted in Kerala during 2021–2022 aimed to analyze the socio-personal characteristics of field extension functionaries (FEFs) from the Dairy Development Department (DDD). Employing an exploratory research design, a sample of 120 respondents, comprising 60 Dairy Extension Officers (DEOs) and 60 Dairy Farm Instructors (DFIs), were selected using non-proportionate stratified random sampling. Data was collected through structured interviews. The findings revealed a predominantly middle-aged (31-50y), well-educated workforce (undergraduate and above) with a notable representation of women (70%), mostly married (86.7%). Many respondents had limited service experience (below 10 years) and had undergone minimal training. Additionally, a majority lived with their families near their place of work (55%). Addressing socio-personal characteristics of FEFs is essential for a skilled, motivated, and productive dairy workforce, contributing to industry growth and sustainability in Kerala. Improving skills and knowledge among new recruits in the dairy sector is vital, especially through targeted training in new technologies, dairy management, and leadership. Tailored programs, suited to individuals' experience, are key for skill enhancement and career progression. Implementing interventions based on these findings is essential to enhance the effectiveness of FEFs in Kerala. Strategies to attract and retain young talent, promote work-life balance, and support family needs are crucial for sustaining the dairy workforce. Initiatives promoting gender inclusivity and leadership opportunities can create a supportive work environment, ensuring organizational success.

Key Words: Socio-personal , Field extension functionaries, Dairy Development.

INTRODUCTION

Dairying plays a vital role in the economic growth of Kerala's rural population. Kerala ranks 14th though the state produces just 1.5 per cent of the total milk production in India (Anonymous, 2022). Milk procurement by Kerala Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Limited increased dramatically from 52000 l/d in 1983 to 15.2 lakh l/d in 2021-22 and the average milk sale per day for 2021-22 was 14.29 lakh liters (Anonymous, 2022). During the financial year 2019-20, the milk production in the state was around 25.42 lakh MT and 6.75 lakh MT of milk was procured by dairy cooperatives, thus contributing to about 26.5 per cent. The procurement status in the financial year 2020-21 was around 7.12 lakh MT (DDD, 2021). Per capita availability of milk in the state during the yes 2019-2020 has been 198 g/day (Anonymous, 2020).

The field extension functionaries (FEFs) within the department have significantly contributed to enhancing the dairy cooperative sector through various tasks such as implementing dairy and fodder development programs, advising

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Table 1. Distribution of FEFs based on their socio-personal profile

Parameter	Frequency	Per cent
Age (in years)		
Young (< 30)	24	20.00
Middle age (31-50)	61	50.83
Old (> 50)	35	29.17
Cadre		
Dairy Extension Officer (DEO)	60	50.00
Dairy Farm Instructor (DFI)	60	50.00
Education		
Under graduate (UG)	49	40.84
UG with Diploma	30	25.00
Post graduate (PG)	35	29.16
Doctorate	6	5.00
Gender		
Male	36	30.00
Female	84	70.00
Service experience (in years)		
Low (< 10 y)	71	59.20
Medium (10-20 y)	43	35.80
High (> 20 y)	6	5.00
Training received		
0	13	10.80
1	42	35.00
2	28	23.30
3	18	15.00
4	5	4.20
5	14	11.70
Marital status		
Married	104	86.70
Unmarried	16	13.30
Placement of family		
At the place of posting	66	55.00
Elsewhere	54	45.00

on milk production quality, and fostering connections with other stakeholders. Each employee's competence and performance are crucial for organizational success, especially in dairy organizations vital for economic and social development. Training and guidance provided to trainees have played prime role in influent technological change, besides management orientation (Agrawat and Kumar, 2012). Therefore, evaluating the socio-personal characteristics of FEFs is essential was these traits can influence their perceived performance. This study aimed to assess field extension functionary's socio-personal profiles, encompassing variables like age, experience, training, education, gender, marital status, and family placement, to better understand their roles.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Kerala State during 2021-2022, with a total of 120 FEFs chosen at random from the Dairy Development Department. An exploratory research design was adopted. Non-proportionate stratified random sampling was used for this study. DDD categorized the block panchayats of the State into four strata based on their average dairy milk production. Thus, from each stratum, 15 DEOs and 15 DFIs were selected. The total sample comprised of 60 DEOs and 60 DFIs. The interview schedule was developed with all of the items needed to elicit sufficient information in accordance with the study objectives in mind and it was pre-tested with 30 respondents from the non-sample area of the Thrissur district. The structured interview schedule was personally delivered to respondents during monthly conferences and workplace visits. When necessary, Google forms and telephone interviews were used. Secondary data was gathered from reliable sources such as annual reports and government official websites. The data were analysed using appropriate statistical procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data (Table 1) indicated that a significant portion of the respondents were middle-aged (50.83%), with older respondents comprising 29.17% and younger respondents (20%). This trend may be attributed to the fact that many individuals entered the workforce in their late twenties. These findings were similar to the results of Patel (2015), and Obabire *et al* (2019), who stated that most of the respondents in their organisational study belong to the middle age group. These findings contradict those of Suweidu (2019), who found that majority of the respondents in his study are young. Half of the respondents selected (50%) comprised DEOs with the remaining half (50%) being DFIs. It was found that 40.84% of the FEFs held graduate degrees, while 29.16% possessed postgraduate degrees, and 25% held undergraduate degrees with diplomas. Only 5% held doctorate degrees. Both DEOs (requiring a B Tech in Dairy Science) and DFIs (requiring pre-degree in science subjects along with a valid degree in any subject) necessitate graduation as a mandatory qualification for entry. Additionally, to be promoted from DFI to DEO, a diploma in dairy science is obligatory. Remarkably, 40% of respondents possessed only undergraduate degrees, indicating that many FEFs were highly educated, surpassing the academic requirements of their respective positions. Most of the respondents held undergraduate degree, according to Ratnayake (2012), Das and Borua (2017), whose findings were similar with the current research.

It was evident (Table 1) that 70 per cent of the respondents were female and 30 per cent were male. Majority of the respondents were females. This might be indicative of women empowerment in the department. These findings conflict with those of Patel (2015), Obabire *et al* (2019) and Suweidu (2019), who reported that most of the respondents were male in their organisational research study. Observations indicate that 59.20% of the FEFs possessed low service experience, defined as less than 10 years, while 35.80% had medium experience ranging from 10 to 20 years, and 5% had high experience exceeding 20 years. Service experience plays a pivotal role in career advancement, enabling employees to shoulder greater responsibilities and achieve organizational objectives. The prevalence of low service experience among the majority of FEFs may stem from recent appointments made by the department, as corroborated by senior opinions and secondary data. These findings align with Goyal's (2013) study, which similarly noted a predominance of low service experience. However, they contrast with Patel's (2015) findings, which highlighted a majority with medium work experience.

Further, 35% of respondents underwent one training, followed by 23.30%, 15%, 11.70%, and 4.20% who received two, three, five, and four trainings, respectively. Additionally, 10.80% had no training. Most FEFs had undergone one or two trainings, with 10% receiving none. Pre-entry training for DFIs lasts eight months, while DEOs undergo internship training as part of their undergraduate curriculum, potentially explaining why new recruits may lack training, supported by

their low service experience. Introducing more training sessions could enhance FEFs' understanding of current technologies and performance. The majority (86.70%) were married, possibly reflecting their middle-aged status. 55% stayed with families near their workplace, the agricultural scientists residing with their families showed significantly ($p<0.01$) more job performance in comparison to those who were not residing with their families as reported by Yadav *et al* (2012).

CONCLUSION

The socio-personal makeup of FEFs in Kerala's DDD reflects a predominantly middle-aged, educated workforce, with notable female representation. Many enter the workforce in their late 20s and advance gradually. A significant portion has limited service experience, likely due to recent appointments. Most are graduates, some with postgraduate degrees, indicating a highly educated dairy sector workforce. Many possess qualifications exceeding job requirements, highlighting their dedication to education and career growth. The department exhibits significant female representation, signaling progress in women's empowerment. Most FEFs are married and reside near their workplace, potentially impacting their work-life balance. A considerable number have received minimal training, revealing room for improvement in continuous professional development. Additional training opportunities, particularly in new technologies and leadership, could benefit new recruits. Targeted interventions and policies are needed to enhance FEF effectiveness, along with efforts to attract and retain young talent for a sustainable workforce. Encouraging work-life balance and supporting family needs could enhance job satisfaction and retention. Initiatives promoting gender inclusivity and leadership opportunities for women should be implemented, fostering a supportive workplace for all employees. Understanding and addressing FEFs' socio-personal characteristics can lead to a more skilled, motivated, and productive workforce, driving growth and sustainability in Kerala's dairy industry.

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