



Perceived Social Empowerment Status of the Medicinal Plant Growers

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author NS designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author NS managed the analyses of the study. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The indigenous systems of medicine in India are Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani which is practised from ancient times. India and China are the two major countries having 40 per cent of the global diversity and are known as the house of medicinal plants. Most of the medicinal plants are gathered from the forest areas to meet the demand of the medicinal profession, which becomes exhaustible if overused and sustainable when used with care and wisdom. Hence, it is important to take efforts to grow them as commercial crops. Several theoretical concepts to measure empowerment of farmers have been identified and proposed world wide, very few studies have been conducted to measure their empowerment. This paper presents the Perceived Social Empowerment status of medicinal plant growers.

Keywords: Medicinal plants; social; empowerment; demand.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, there has been considerable interest in the use of herbal medicines [1]. Approximately one-third of the pharmaceuticals are of plant origin. India is known for the cultivation of medicinal plants, and its rich collection of medicinal plants is utilized to prepare drugs [2,3,4]. The Indian farmer is presently in a quite difficult economic tangle situation and the majority of the farmers are looking for options to shift towards other crops that have potential returns (NSSO, 59th round) [5]. Farm household today is constrained by shrinking net income, increased the cost of cultivation and uncertainty in prices [6], hence this had forced the farmers to switch over to horticulture, agroforestry and sericulture. Hence, in this backdrop, cultivation of medicinal plants is a new venture. Keeping this in mind the perceived social empowerment level in terms of improvement in the social status of the respondents as a result of medicinal plant cultivation was assessed.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Salem and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu during the year 2012. Out of the 31 districts in Tamil Nadu, Salem and Dindigul districts of has been selected purposively for the study due to its area under cultivation of medicinal plants is more in these two districts while comparing other districts of Tamil Nadu.

In Tamil Nadu, medicinal plants namely *Coleus forskholii* (Coleus), *Gloriosa superba* (Glory lily), *Cassia angustifolia* (senna), *Catharanthus roseus* (Periwinkle) are cultivated widely. For the study, it has been decided to select the medicinal plants that are cultivated in more than 1000 acres. Consequently, the medicinal plants Coleus and Glory lily were selected for the study purpose. Hence these, two districts were purposively selected for the study. There are twenty blocks in Salem district and fourteen blocks in Dindigul district, one block from each district namely, Attur and Thoppampatti was selected, because of the reason that these blocks had the maximum area under Coleus and Glory lily cultivation respectively. Out of 24 revenue villages of each block namely Attur and Thoppampatti, four villages from each of the two blocks were selected. It was decided to have a sample size of 150, 75 respondents were selected from each district. Respondents were

selected by using proportionate random sampling method.

The information to study the objective was collected by using the well-structured interview schedule. A pilot study was conducted in the non-sample area to pretest the schedule to test and verify the applicability of the schedule. By using the cumulative frequency, their overall the Perceived Social Empowerment status of medicinal plant growers was classified into low, medium, high. Percentage analysis was used for making the simple comparison for calculating percentages for different items regarding their Perceived Social Empowerment status.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Sudan [7] empowerment is a process of transition from a state of powerless to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny and environment. It is a transition from a passive situation to a more active situation of control. According to him, it is a process through which people learn to take on socially valuable roles, to exercise social skills, to exert interpersonal influence, to develop commitment, to take responsibility and to acquire political efficacy.

The perceived social empowerment level in terms of improvement in the social status of the respondents as a result of medicinal plant cultivation. Social empowerment can build up social awareness among them. The findings are presented in Table 1.

It can be noted from Table 1 that, more than half (53.00%) of medicinal plant growers had a medium level of perceived social empowerment followed by high (33.00%) and low (14.00%) levels of perceived social empowerment. The majority (60.00%) of the Coleus growers had a medium level of perceived social empowerment followed by high (32.00%) and low (8.00%) levels perceived social empowerment respectively. Less than half (47.00%) of the Glory lily respondents had a medium level of perceived social empowerment followed by high (33.00%) and low (4.00%) levels of perceived social empowerment.

The contributing reasons for medium to the high level of perceived social empowerment among Coleus growers might be their membership in contract farming and increased awareness of the development programmes. And the reasons for medium to the high level of perceived social empowerment among Glory lily growers might be

their wide contact with brokers and traders, contesting in elections to take up a leadership position and frequent visit to the banks. The non-growers have come close to both the respondents in clearing their queries about the cultivation of both the crops; this clearly shows the improvement in their social status. The results are in agreement with the findings of Sailaja [8].

The category-wise distribution of the perceived empowerment of both the growers is presented in Table 2.

From the Table 2, it could be inferred that it is noteworthy to observe that 95.00 per cent and 91.00 per cent of the medicinal plant growers

were aware of the development programmes and schemes and the social status is improved because majority (89.00%.) of the growers had good contact with traders, 84.00 per cent of the growers involved themselves in deciding on farm-related activities. More than three-fourth (77.00%) of the growers contested in the election to take up a leadership position and more than half (53.00%) took part in the meetings and exhibitions conducted outside the villages. More than half (65.00%) of the growers actively involved in solving community problems like providing protected water, link roads, housing, electrification of houses, etc. The results inferred their perceived social empowerment level.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their perceived Social Empowerment (n=150)

S.No	Category	Coleus growers (n=75)		Glory lily growers (n=75)		Total(n=150)	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1.	Low	6	8.00	15	20.00	21	14.00
2.	Medium	45	60.00	35	47.00	80	53.00
3.	High	24	32.00	25	33.00	49	33.00
	Total	75	100.00	75	100.00	150	100.00

Table 2. Category wise distribution of respondents on their perceived social empowerment

S.No	Perceived social empowerment	Yes		No	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Increased exposure to media or present talks related to agriculture in the media	5	3.00	145	97.00
2.	Participation in events outside the village	79	53.00	71	47.00
	a. Attending training				
	b. Exhibition				
3.	Contesting in the election and taking the leadership position	115	77.00	35	23.00
4.	Status in society improves	137	91.00	13	9.00
5.	Involvement in decision making in farm activities	126	84.00	24	16.00
6.	Emerged as a contact farmer	41	27.00	109	73.00
7.	Participation in other local institution, parent-teacher association, farmers association, FDG's etc	73	49.00	77	51.00
8.	Increase in awareness about development programmes and schemes	143	95.00	7	5.00
9.	Able to negotiate the price of the produce	-	-	150	100.00
10.	Active involvement in solving community problems like providing protected water, link roads, housing, electrification of houses, etc.	52	35.00	98	65.00
11.	Frequent contact with Extension workers, SAU's, NGO's other private agencies and traders office	134	89.00	16	11.00

*multiple responses

4. CONCLUSION

World Bank [9] defines empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Perceived empowerment level refers to the understanding of an individual about the growth and attainment by realizing their innate potentials, sensitizing their rights and privileges, aware of supply and services available by the government and other agencies and striving for development economically, psychologically and socially with adequate accessibility and moving towards empowerment. The overall perceived social empowerment status of medicinal plant growers was medium. The non-growers have come close to both the respondents in clearing their queries about the cultivation of both the crops; this clearly shows the improvement in their social status. The results are in agreement with the findings of Sailaja [8]. Hence there is a wider scope for cultivation of medicinal plants leading to social empowerment.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by the personal efforts of the authors.

CONSENT

It is not applicable.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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