



Attitudes of the Rural People towards Social Entrepreneurship in the Punjab Province, Pakistan

**Hazem S. Kassem^{1,2*}, Fahad Aldosari¹, Muhammad Muddassir^{1*}
and Ashar Sultan Kayani³**

¹*Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Society, College of Food and Agriculture Sciences, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia.*

²*Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Society, Faculty of Agriculture, Mansoura University, Egypt.*

³*Department of Economics, Arid Agriculture University, Pakistan.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author HSK performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author FA wrote the protocol and designed the study. Author MM managed the literature searches. Author ASK collected the field data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Currently, there is much debate concerning the role of social entrepreneurship in sustainable development, as well as the environmental factors important to the emergence and implementation of social initiatives. This study was conducted to determine the attitudes of rural people toward social entrepreneurship in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. The cluster sampling technique was employed to select 112 rural respondents from 3 villages. The primary data was collected by the use of pre-tested interview schedule during the period from March to May 2017. The study findings revealed that 52.7% of the rural population had positive attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. Results of the Pearson correlation test indicated that the education level of the rural population was

*Corresponding author: E-mail: hskassem@ksu.edu.sa, zubairbeyondfree@gmail.com;

found to be significantly correlated with attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. The study recommended that governments create an environment conducive to the fostering of positive attitudes toward social entrepreneurship among rural populations of the study area.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship; attitude; rural people; Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship involves a series of practices (i.e., searching for and evaluating opportunities, as well as gathering and organising available resources to develop viable business). The importance of entrepreneurship has increased on an international scale to enhance the general living standards of rural communities, which ultimately improves rural security [1]. Entrepreneurship holds a crucial position in contributing to national economic growth through the launching of small and medium-sized ventures. Entrepreneurs typically start small and medium-sized ventures in local regions to which they belong and thus have a better understanding of local conditions [2]. Entrepreneurship reduces social problems by providing development opportunities for economic growth in rural areas [3]. In Ghana, the development of small enterprises significantly reduced unemployment for youth in rural areas [4].

Social entrepreneurship has been defined in various ways according to the discipline, including those of the social economy [5], activist movement [6], environmental movement [7], and the sustainable economy [8]. Social entrepreneurship is related to new ventures that create employment opportunities designed to reduce social problems and involves new ideas about traditional and commercial entrepreneurship [9]. It creates a positive interaction between commerce and kindness and supports society's unemployed and tries to reduce joblessness in the community [10,11]. Social Entrepreneurship (SE) is the construction, evaluation, and pursuit of opportunities for transformative social change carried out by the visionary, passionately dedicated individuals [10]. Social entrepreneurship has a positive impact on society but does not generate income for the minimisation of poverty [12]. Therefore, it is preferable to operate social enterprises on a profit basis when they become functionally stable [13]. Social enterprise requires a matured business. That is, its goals can only be achieved based on financial position [14]. With social ventures that take place directly under a commercial enterprise, the economic system can

exploit the available resources essential for sustainable life due to centralisation [15]. There are numerous forms of social entrepreneurship, including community enterprises, cooperatives, non-governmental organisations, and social purpose business [16].

The relationship between social entrepreneurship and environmental sustainability is another key area of research interest. Lack of compliance with environmental regulations is one of the main constraints that social entrepreneurs encounter when implementing social actions [17]. Thereby, environmental factors are very important for creating a business model based on meeting the social values of stakeholders while also creating environmentally friendly opportunities that the public or private sectors have failed to address [18]. The literature on this subject has mainly focused on various institutional factors (formal and informal) that could influence social entrepreneurship. Formal factors include the role of formal institutions in public spending, barriers to finance access, the target group's level of education, and capital requirements [19-22]. Moreover, informal factors play key roles in creating the motivation to foster social capital initiatives that can achieve social missions. The most informal factors include entrepreneurial attitudes, self-perceived capabilities, innovativeness, and social orientation [23-25].

As indicated by a survey conducted in Pakistan by [26], understanding and awareness of social enterprise were found as one of the main barriers to the mainstream growth of social entrepreneurship. The other barriers were lack of access to support and advisory services, a shortage of technical skills, cash flow, capital (i.e., debt/equity), and obtaining grant funding. Despite having numerous positive aspects and multifarious benefits for farming communities, the attitudes of these communities toward social entrepreneurship might be still neutral or negative. The attitudes of rural people towards SE have not been studied before in Jhang District. So, the results generated from this study may have many implications for policymakers in exploring resistance to change should be reduced, and suspicion should be dispelled. It is also important that governments take an active

part in managing change by sharing information and provide training to rural people. These actions could help them to build an understanding, and to recognise the potential benefits of SE.

The main objectives of this study were as follows: (a) to identify the attitudes of rural people toward social entrepreneurship and (b) explore the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and attitudes toward social entrepreneurship.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the lack of a unifying model to study social entrepreneurship, different scholars depend on the sociological and economic theory of entrepreneurship to examine this phenomenon [27]. The main advocates of this theory were [28,29]. They were of the view that socio-cultural attributes and role expectations influence the decision to become social entrepreneurship. Social actions occur in subordinated groups which are alienated from society and thus attempt to assert themselves through an enterprise [30]. More specifically, there is a need to explore a precondition that motivates people to act as a social entrepreneur [31]. According to [32], analysis of attitudes of people gives an objective of their motivation to perform or not certain behaviour. Thus, the current study tends to study the relationship between socio-economic variables and attitudes of the respondents towards SE.

The first factor considered in this empirical analysis is age. Age is an important factor influencing entrepreneurs' decisions [33]. Studies conducted in several countries show that individuals are sensitive to age in their decision to take entrepreneurial positions [5]. In the current literature, there is no significant relationship between the individual's age and attitude towards social entrepreneurship [34]. However, some scholars highlight the existence of specific barriers relating older people to carry out their social actions [35]. Hence, many non-profit organisations encourage youth to be involved in their activities to facilitate social change [36]. Therefore, we suggest that younger people will positively promote the emergence of new social enterprises. In this context, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Age is positively related to attitude towards social entrepreneurship.

The second factor analyzed in this review is education. The literature referred that individual's behaviour can be interpreted by their educational status. Specifically, empirical evidence in the field of social showed that a higher level of education has a positive effect on the likelihood of an individual starting a business [37]. According to [38], universities can prepare their students as innovators by creating prosperity through research and development, and by promoting culture. This trend has been encouraged by different governments worldwide to form networks with universities to build their capacity to engage and to help communities over the long term [39]. Thus, the current level of knowledge and skills of social entrepreneurs is critical to change his attitude to launch a social enterprise. Therefore, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2: Education is positively related to attitude towards social entrepreneurship.

According to previous studies, annual income is identified as an important factor which has an effect on social entrepreneurship [40]. The availability of capital determines individuals' decisions to start a new social organisation [41]. High-income individuals have a low degree of risk aversion and a high probability of becoming entrepreneurs [42]. According to [11], there is no relationship between the importance of access to funding and attitudes towards social entrepreneurship. At the same line, attitudes of social entrepreneurs could be affected by the fear of bankruptcy and personal failure [42]. Hence, people should cope and overcome financial constraints in order to carry out successful social enterprises [43]. Therefore, studying annual income will be a good indicator to measure the readiness of people to involve in social activities. Accordingly, we hypothesise the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Annual income is positively related to attitude towards social entrepreneurship.

The farmer-entrepreneur is always looking for new opportunities and knows that what is possible is determined by the market [44]. The variable of the farm size cultivated significantly effect on the available opportunities to maximise farmer's profit [45]. Specifically, the literature on social entrepreneurship states that individual's behaviour is usually determined by their farm assets [46]. In this sense, small-scale farmers have low motivation for undertaking social

entrepreneurial activities [44]. However, [47] confirm that a sufficient set of management skills is a determinant to overcome barriers of small-scale to all those who want to start any entrepreneurial initiative. In this context, [48] point out that the socio-cultural capabilities of farm entrepreneurs can affect the growth of entrepreneurship. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Ownership of agricultural land is positively related to attitude towards social entrepreneurship.

Hypothesis 5: The cultivated area is positively related to attitude towards social entrepreneurship.

Previous studies confirm the influence of gender as one of the most important socio-economic factors on acquiring positive attitudes toward SE [49]. This factor was excluded in our study regarding the difficulty of conducting a structural interview with women. Prevailing customs and traditions in the rural areas of Punjab affect on obtaining the needed information.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Jhang District, Punjab province of Pakistan. The neighbour districts are Chiniot, Faisalabad, Multan, Sarghoda, Layyah, and Sahiwal. According to the census report of Pakistan, the district's population in 2017 was 4.42 million. Of this total, 27% lived in the urban area, which covers an area of 8,809 km². Almost all of this area is cultivable, with the exception of a small portion of rocky terrain. There are 47 Union Councils (UCs) in Jhang Tehsil (16 urban and 31 rural), which is a subdivision of Jhang District.

Each UC contains approximately six villages. One village was randomly selected from three rural UCs. The population of these three villages totalled 2,291. A sample of 112 rural people was selected, which represented approximately 5% of the studied village societies. The cluster sampling technique was used to obtain cross-sectional data for this study. This type of sampling ensures that each group is proportionately represented within each population of the different union councils.

In order to collect the required information and data from the respondents, a questionnaire was developed, pretested, and validated. Questions

were asked in the local language for interviewees to obtain the required information with maximum accuracy during the period from March to May 2017. The statements of attitudes towards SE were obtained from a review of the literature [27,41,42]. The index consists of three main areas; the role of SE in rural development (3 statements), a collaboration between social entrepreneurship and society (4 statements), the scope of interest regarding social entrepreneurship (3 statements). This index was reviewed by ten professors at the Agricultural Extension Department, King Saud University. The experts have expressed the degree of approval of each item (perfectly OK, OK, to some extent, not OK), with the ability to modify and add amendments or delete items that it deemed inappropriate. This resulted in 10 statements representing the index of attitudes towards SE. The instrument was pre-tested in a pilot study for its reliability using ten randomly selected rural people. Their responses to research questions helped to identify items that were confusing and ambiguous. The unclear items/statements were modified accordingly. Reliability of attitudes scale was tested by calculating the Cronbach's Alpha test ($\alpha=0.81$).

The data were analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS ver.22) software. The frequency distribution, means, standard deviation, t-test, and Spearman correlation were used for presenting the results.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Awareness of Social Entrepreneurship

Table 1, indicated that only 18.7% of the respondents had no knowledge of social entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, this result supported the research in discovering socioeconomic characteristics and the attitudes of respondents toward social entrepreneurship. These findings are in line with [50] who examined the knowledge and understanding of young Indonesians regarding social entrepreneurship in Semarang, Central Java. He commented that only 33% of respondents were aware of what social entrepreneurship meant.

4.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents who were aware of social entrepreneurship were asked to report their

socioeconomic characteristics. Table 2 shows that (96%) were economically active and in the age group between 26-35 years, more than one-quarter (28%) had completed intermediate school. Only 9.9% of respondents had graduated from universities. As for sources of income, 53.8% were involved in agriculture-related businesses, while 35.2% had income from other sources. The majority of respondents (94.5%) lived in rural areas. More than one-third (38.5%) owned less than seven acres of land, while 30.8% owned between 8-11 acres. The land-ownership situation differed regarding cultivated land area as compared to total land area. Most respondents (61.5%) cultivated in areas less than five acres, followed by 18.7% who cultivated in areas ranging from six to seven acres.

Table 1. The distribution of the respondents depending on their knowledge of social entrepreneurship

Perception	N	%
Yes	91	81.3
No	21	18.7
Total	112	100

Source: Field data

4.3 Attitudes toward Social Entrepreneurship

Data in Table 3 indicate that (58.2%) rural respondents agreed that social entrepreneurship could reduce economic problems, while (35.2%) commented that social entrepreneurship was helpful for farming communities in acquiring easy access to business, and more than one-third

(36.3%) indicated that social entrepreneurship promotes business interest among farmers. In this regard, social entrepreneurship plays a vital role in community participation and national economic development [51]. As well as, providing opportunities for new businesses to achieve economic empowerment [52].

Data in the table also indicate that (42.9%) rural respondents strongly agreed that collaboration between social entrepreneurship and society was necessary for the farming society, (44%) indicated that government institutes work effectively regarding social entrepreneurship, (42.9%) commented that NGOs were playing positive roles in their society's social entrepreneurship, and (34.1%) disagreed that the government sector facilitated social entrepreneurship better than the private sector. According to the literature, a weak association between government institutes and social entrepreneurship hindered donations and sponsorship from other institutes [53]. The government could support social entrepreneurship by holding monitoring programs, training sessions, and seminars about social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship faces many problems, such as private sector competition, lack of funding, and the need for information about social entrepreneurship [54]. In Latvia, the lack of government support was considered a key constraint that prevented the progress of social entrepreneurship. Researchers also indicated that the government needed to establish a legal institutional framework for social entrepreneurship [55]. Different researchers have revealed that NGOs

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents according to their socioeconomic characteristics

Attributes	N	%	Attributes	N	%
Age			Housing location		
26- 35 years	58	63.7	Rural area	86	94.5
36-45	30	33.0	Urban area	2	2.2
46-55	3	3.3	Peri-urban	3	3.3
Education level			Land ownership		
Illiterate	26	28.6	Less than 7 acres	35	38.5
Primary	18	19.8	8-11 acres	28	30.8
Secondary	10	11.0	12-15 acres	12	13.2
Intermediate	28	30.8	16-19 acres	14	15.4
Higher education	9	9.9	More than 20 acres	2	2.2
Source of income			Cultivated Area		
From agriculture	49	53.8	Less than 5 acres	56	61.5
Other than agriculture	32	35.2	6-7 acres	17	18.7
Agriculture and other business	10	11.0	8-9 acres	8	8.8
			More than 10 acres	10	11.0

Source: Field data

Table 3. The attitudes of rural people toward social entrepreneurship

No.	Statements	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Social entrepreneurship could reduce economic problems	1	1.1	5	5.5	7	7.7	53	58.2	25	27.5
Mean = 4.05; SD = 0.82; t = 13.7**											
2	Social entrepreneurship is helpful for farming communities in acquiring easy access to business	5	5.5	5	5.5	26	28.6	32	35.2	23	25.3
Mean =3.69; SD = 1.08; t = 6.8**											
3	Social entrepreneurship increased business interest among farmers	4	4.4	13	14.3	16	17.6	33	36.3	25	27.5
Mean =3.68; SD = 1.15; t = 5.4**											
4	Collaboration between social entrepreneurship and society is necessary for farming society	4	4.4	4	4.4	12	13.2	32	35.2	39	42.9
Mean = 4.07; SD =1.06 ; t = 10.5**											
5	Government institutes work effectively regarding social entrepreneurship	9	9.9	15	16.5	14	15.4	40	44	13	14.3
Mean = 3.36; SD =1.2; t = 3.5**											
6	NGOs are playing positive roles in the social entrepreneurship of society	1	1.1	4	4.4	14	15.4	39	42.9	33	36.3
Mean = 4.08; SD =0.89; t = 12.6**											
7	The government sector facilitates social entrepreneurship better than the private sector	2	2.2	31	34.1	21	23.1	25	27.5	12	13.2
Mean = 3.15; SD =1.1; t = 0.47											
8	Social entrepreneurship is more highly focused on rural areas compared to urban	23	25.3	24	26.4	16	17.6	17	18.7	11	12.1
Mean =2.65; SD =1.35; t = -2.2*											
9	Social entrepreneurship is highly focused on value generation	4	4.4	7	7.7	20	22	31	34.1	29	31.9
Mean =3.81; SD =1.1; t = 7.3**											
10	Social entrepreneurship is focused on value capturing	1	1.1	11	12.1	32	35.2	32	35.2	15	16.5
Mean =3.5; SD =0.94; t = 5.1**											

Source: Field data

(**) significant at 0.01 level (*) significant at 0.05 level

has been playing a critical role in the reduction of the economic problems experienced by the farming society. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) was established in Bangladesh in 1972. It was the world's largest NGO and focused on poor societies. In particular, BRAC developed poultry

farming within a society to reduce economic problems [54]. Networking and collaboration among government sectors, educational institutes, and entrepreneurs is vital to promote the economic growth of social communities. Formal and informal institutes are important for improving social entrepreneurship [42].

According to Urbano D [55], informal institutes support entrepreneurial attitudes, while formal institutes improve the application of social entrepreneurship skills.

Concerning the scope of interest regarding social entrepreneurship, the findings in Table 3 show that (26.4%) of respondents disagreed that social entrepreneurship was more highly focused on rural areas compared to urban. About (34.1%) of respondents had positive attitudes, and agreed with the statement, “social entrepreneurship is highly focused on value generation,” while (35.2%) of respondents had positive attitudes toward social entrepreneurship that was focused on value capture. It has been argued that social entrepreneurship that is focused on value generation through innovativeness for fundraising is very important for growth under competitive conditions [56]. Rising interest rates could be good for entrepreneurs to percept value added. There are two forces that drive entrepreneurs. The first involves entrepreneurship opportunities and the likeliness to develop them, while the second involves necessity entrepreneurship, in which the entrepreneur has no alternate income for their source of revenue [57].

The differences between rural people who agreed and those who disagreed about social entrepreneurship were examined by using a t-test, as indicated in Table 3. The findings showed significant differences regarding the responses of rural people who had positive and those who had negative attitudes in response to nine statements. These results reflect the positive attitudes of respondents toward creating social action. Results also indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups concerning the statement, “The government sector facilitates social entrepreneurship better than the private sector” ($t=0.47$, $p> 0.05$). This finding confirms that rural people still require educational support to raise their awareness of the roles different actors play in supporting social entrepreneurship.

The findings in Table 4 revealed that 52.7% of rural people had a positive attitude; 38% had a neutral attitude, and only 5.5% had a negative attitude. Many factors (e.g., lack of awareness, low education, and low interest) could contribute to the negative attitudes of some respondents toward social entrepreneurship. These results highly contradicted with a research study

conducted in Sicily, Italy, in which 64% of farmers participated in Alternative Food Networks (AFN) driven by social entrepreneurship [58]. In this study, 36% of farmers' behaviour was geared toward commercial entrepreneurship rather than social entrepreneurship.

Table 4. The distribution of respondents depending on attitude type

Attitude type	F.	%	Mean	S.D.
Negative	5	5.5		
Neutral	38	41.8	2.47	0.6
Positive	48	52.7		

Source: Field data

4.4 The Relationship between the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Rural People and Their Attitudes toward Social Entrepreneurship

The findings in Table 5 show that education is significantly correlated with attitudes toward social entrepreneurship at 0.01 level ($r= 0.268$). It was posited that educated respondents would have access to more reliable information and increased awareness of social entrepreneurship. Continuing social entrepreneurship education may be able to encourage stakeholders to engage in social entrepreneurship [59]. This also in line with the study of [60], which used databases from the World Value Survey (WVS) and the World Bank (WB) to find the relevance of education to attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. The findings also mentioned that there were no significant correlations between attitudes toward social entrepreneurship and other socioeconomic characteristics (i.e., age, annual income, agricultural land, and cultivated land) at 0.05 level. I was noticed that awareness of SE was not influenced depending on the different age groups of rural people or heterogeneous economic status in terms of the nature of working in agriculture. This result was consistent with the study of [61], which confirmed that the size of land is not a significant factor on SE behaviour. On the other hand, the same study was inconsistent with our study regarding the positive effect of age on SE behaviour. The literature on the effect of socio-economic factors affecting entrepreneurship development revealed of other important variables not included in the current study. According to [62], the religion, family type, legal status were the most prominent antecedent of social entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 5. Correlation between the attitude of rural people toward social entrepreneurship and their socioeconomic attributes

	Age	Education	Annual income	Agricultural land	Cultivated area	Overall attitude toward social entrepreneurship
Age	1.00					
Education	-0.05	1.00				
Annual income	0.113	0.371**	1.00			
Agricultural land	0.064	0.293**	0.407**	1.00		
Cultivated area	-0.08	0.401**	0.375**	0.615**	1.00	
Overall attitude toward social entrepreneurship	0.038	0.268**	0.004	-0.174	-0.194	1.00

** Significant at 0.01 level
Source: Field data

5. CONCLUSIONS

Generally, there is no single definition of social entrepreneurship universally accepted. The concept mainly is related to new ventures that create employment opportunities designed to reduce social problems and also involves new ideas about traditional and commercial entrepreneurship. It creates a positive interaction between commerce, kindness and promotes cooperation to meet mutual interests. It is, therefore social entrepreneurship supports society's unemployed and tries to reduce joblessness in the community. Thus, entrepreneurship usually enhances the general living standards of rural communities and make the rural areas more attractive secure. In this regard, social entrepreneurship considered as an effective tool for rural community development and transformation, as it assists to create new job opportunities.

This study was conducted to assess the attitudes of rural people toward social entrepreneurship in the Punjab Province of Pakistan. The study findings revealed that about (96%) of respondents are economically active and in the age group between 26-35 years, 53.8% were involved in agriculture-related businesses as the main source of income, (94.5%) lived in rural areas. More than half of the respondents (52.7%) had positive attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. Results of the Pearson correlation test indicated that the education level of the rural population was found to be significantly correlated with attitudes toward social entrepreneurship. Thus, this study recommends that agricultural extension services develop an educational program to overcome the effects of a lack of education among rural people.

The program should address the following steps: helping rural people to establish clear goals, performing self-evaluations to point out which social enterprises require development and to convince the rural people that positive attitude toward social entrepreneurship will affect their lives.

Certain limitations of this study are notable for future research. First, this study is limited to a small sample size. Second, the selection of the sample may have resulted in recall bias and do not represent the overall population in different districts of the province. Third, this instrument depends on personal attributes for measuring their relationship with the attitudes towards SE; however, cultural indicators like trust and self-confidence were crucial for investigation. Future research is needed to explore the role of attitude as a mediating factor between cultural attributes and social entrepreneurial behaviour.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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