

Benefits and Problems Experienced by Spouses of Vocational Agriculture Teachers in West Virginia

Michael T. Coughlin, Graduate Student
Layle D. Lawrence, Professor
Stacey A. Gartin, Assistant Professor
Agricultural Education

Mary E. Templeton, Professor
Agricultural Economics
West Virginia University

Accepted for Publication September 1987

Professional obligations of the vocational agriculture teacher are myriad. The importance of classroom, laboratory, FFA and supervision activities in program quality is well known. Little information, however, is available regarding the influence of variables unrelated to the contractual agreement on teacher success.

Attitudes of one's spouse have been shown to directly or indirectly influence an individual's job performance. Yet, few studies have been conducted to ascertain the attitudes of spouses regarding the work involvement of their mates. Boggess (1985), in studying major problems of female vocational agriculture teachers, found that time spent teaching vocational agriculture conflicts with personal and family life. A study conducted by Mlozi (1982) also indicated that time spent in supervision of occupational experience programs conflicts with family involvement. Cooper and Nelson (1981) reported that 5% of the vocational agriculture teachers who changed professions claimed that the change was due to home and family distress. In a study of spouses of New Mexico vocational agriculture teachers (Straquadine, 1985), two-thirds of the spouses indicated that the amount of time their mates spent on the job has a negative effect on marital satisfaction. An Arizona study (Mattox, 1974) identified spouse dissatisfaction with the job as one of the major factors for teachers to leave the profession. This study was designed to explore the perceived benefits and problems experienced in being the spouse of a vocational agriculture teacher.

Objectives

Specific objectives of this study were:

1. To identify major benefits spouses receive in being the husband or wife of a vocational agriculture teacher.
2. To identify major problems spouses experience in being the husband or wife of a vocational agriculture teacher.

Method

The descriptive method of research was used in this study. In order to develop a valid survey instrument, a letter of introduction and explanation was mailed to all spouses (N = 96) of vocational agriculture teachers in West Virginia along with a request that each spouse identify the two major benefits and the two major problems experienced in being the mate of a vocational agriculture teacher. A followup letter, sent two weeks later, encouraged cooperation of those who had not yet responded.

A review committee, composed of two graduate students and a faculty member, then reviewed, sorted and combined comments received and, whenever necessary, edited statements without changing the meanings.

A questionnaire consisting of 37 benefits and 40 problems was developed from the returned survey instruments. Methodology employed to identify benefits and problems ensured that each statement included in the questionnaire was considered by at least one respondent as a major benefit or a major problem in being the spouse of a vocational agriculture teacher. These statements were sent to the original population with a request to rate each item according to a Likert-type scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important. Overall means and standard deviations were determined for each statement. The analysis of variance statistical test ($p < .05$) was applied to determine differences in mean perceptions based on demographic characteristics. The population was assumed to be a sample of spouses at a point in time, thus permitting the use of inferential statistics.

The original request and followup letter two weeks later resulted in the return of 60 questionnaires, a 62% response rate. Nonresponse bias tests were performed to compare opinions and characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents of the second questionnaire. Data were analyzed by the chi-square statistical procedure, with significance established a priori at the .05 level. Twelve of the 30 nonrespondents were randomly selected, as were 10 of the 77 statements, by using a table of random numbers. The 12 nonrespondents were then telephoned and asked to answer the 10 selected questionnaire items. Data were also collected concerning 5 of the 6 demographic factors in the study. Data were then compiled and analyzed to determine if significant differences existed between respondents of the two groups. No significant differences were found.

Post hoc reliability tests using Cronbach's alpha resulted in coefficients of .95 for items rated according to the importance of benefits and .96 for items rated according to the importance of identified problems.

Findings

The most important benefits of being the spouse of a vocational agriculture teacher (mean ratings of 3.0 and above) as perceived by spouses of vocational agriculture teachers are shown in Table 1. Of the 37 benefits identified, 16 received mean ratings of 3.0 and above. Job security and spouse's wide range of skills and knowledge were perceived to be the most important benefits, with mean ratings of 3.67 and 3.61, respectively. Standard deviations of these two items were the lowest of all items rated (0.53), indicating close agreement by respondents. Four of the major benefits identified were directly related to job characteristics. They were: job security, benefits and insurance, pay and extended employment. Another 10 of the benefits rated with means of 3.0 and above described vicarious satisfactions, i.e., benefits enjoyed by virtue of sharing the spouse's successful experiences as a teacher and FFA adviser. The remaining benefits were concerned with skills and knowledge of the spouse and the environment in which the spouse's employment was located.

The most important perceived problems identified by spouses of vocational agriculture teachers (mean ratings of 3.0 or above) are listed in Table 2. Of the 40 problems identified, 10 received mean ratings of 3.0 and above. By far the greatest problem identified, with a mean rating of 3.53, was the tremendous number of extra hours which

Table 1

Perceived Benefits of Being the Spouse of a Vocational Agriculture Teacher, With Mean Ratings of 3.0 and Above

| Rank | Statement | Overall Mean (N=60) | SD |
|------|---|---------------------|------|
| 1. | Job security | 3.69 | 0.53 |
| 2. | Spouse's wide range of skills and knowledge | 3.61 | 0.53 |
| 3. | Seeing the excitement in my spouse's and student's behavior when they succeed | 3.57 | 0.56 |
| 3. | Good benefits and insurance | 3.57 | 0.59 |
| 5. | Seeing the enthusiasm and dedication of your spouse to be an excellent educator | 3.53 | 0.57 |
| 6. | Satisfaction of watching your spouse help mold and shape the lives of young people | 3.47 | 0.70 |
| 7. | Higher paid teaching field | 3.40 | 0.72 |
| 8. | Seeing a student learn he/she can be somebody | 3.37 | 0.69 |
| 9. | Twelve month employment | 3.32 | 0.88 |
| 10. | Seeing the FFA youth at their best | 3.25 | 0.73 |
| 11. | Realizing the end result of a well balanced program | 3.22 | 0.75 |
| 12. | Seeing my spouse teach one of the finest subjects in the school system | 3.19 | 0.75 |
| 13. | Spouse's pride in former students starting their own business | 3.18 | 0.65 |
| 14. | Healthful environment to raise children | 3.16 | 0.70 |
| 15. | Former students tell me what they have learned by my spouse teaching vocational agriculture | 3.15 | 0.73 |
| 16. | Vocational agriculture is respected and looked up to in the county | 3.14 | 0.81 |

Note. Rating scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important.

are devoted to school work with no extra remuneration. Three additional items were related to the extra time and effort expended by the teaching spouses. They were: overloaded with work certain times of the year; many hours my spouse spends away from home and on the road; and extra activities and events after school and on weekends with students. Two items expressed additional concern with pay (pay is not high enough; discrimination against teachers in pay), and two were concerned with administrative recognition of vocational agriculture's value and importance (lack of concern and appreciation shown by the administration of the school; vocational agriculture seems less important than other programs in the school).

Mean ratings of benefit and problem statements were remarkably similar when responses were categorized by vocational agriculture department size, years married, number of years spouse had taught vocational agriculture, spouse's job, and if children were at home. Few significant differences were detected by the analysis of variance statistical test. When data were categorized according to number of years the spouse had taught vocational agriculture, uncertainty of schedule and

Table 2

Perceived Problems of Being the Spouse of a Vocational Agriculture Teacher, With Mean Ratings of 3.0 and Above

| Rank | Statement | Overall Mean (N=60) | SD |
|------|--|------------------------|------|
| 1. | Tremendous number of extra hours which are devoted to school work with no extra remuneration | 3.53 | 0.77 |
| 2. | Overloaded with work certain times of the year | 3.25 | 0.76 |
| 3. | Miss spouse's companionship | 3.20 | 0.89 |
| 3. | Many hours my spouse spends away from home and on the road | 3.20 | 0.78 |
| 5. | Stress and fatigue on family as well as himself/herself | 3.17 | 0.93 |
| 6. | Pay is not high enough | 3.16 | 0.91 |
| 7. | Discrimination against teachers in pay | 3.09 | 1.11 |
| 8. | The extra activities and events after school and on weekends with students | 3.03 | 1.01 |
| 9. | Lack of concern and appreciation shown by the administration of the school | 3.02 | 1.09 |
| 9. | Vocational agriculture seems less important than other programs in the school | 3.02 | 1.07 |

Note. Rating scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important.

location of spouse on farm visits was considered of significantly greater importance by respondents whose spouses had taught fewer years. Being involved in the extra-curricular vocational agriculture activities and being known by local community residents were considered benefits of greater importance by those whose spouses teach in traditional production agriculture programs, whereas clothing stains and burns was considered a greater problem by those whose spouses teach in specialized agricultural programs. Since only two respondents were males, responses were not analyzed by gender.

Conclusions

Spouses of vocational agriculture teachers believe their husbands/wives spend more time and effort on their jobs than they are rewarded for. Spouses of vocational agriculture teachers believe that successfully teaching vocational agriculture involves a time commitment beyond the "normal" working hours. Spouses of vocational agriculture teachers also believe teaching obligations and expectations require teachers to spend many hours away from home and family.

Many of the benefits important to spouses are linked to the satisfaction and/or worth they feel as a result of their mates' success as vocational agriculture teachers. Spouses of vocational agriculture teachers appreciate the job security, fringe benefits and extended employment inherent in their mates' positions.

Recommendations

This study was conducted to identify the benefits and problems of being the spouse of a vocational agriculture teacher. Based on the review of literature and data reported in this investigation, the following recommendations are made.

Preservice and inservice teachers of vocational agriculture should be made aware of problems and benefits spouses may experience. Awareness may improve satisfaction of both the teacher and the spouse with the job.

To the extent possible, the vocational agriculture teacher should include his/her spouse in the various meetings, events and activities which are part of the teacher's job.

Teachers should schedule and organize their visits and activities to take full advantage of available time. Time management principles should be stressed in preservice and inservice classes and workshops.

Vocational agriculture teachers should delegate responsibilities to students, aides, and adult class members to relieve excessive work loads.

A study of the relationship between job satisfaction of the teaching spouse and the marital satisfaction of the non-teaching spouse should be conducted.

References

- Bennett, J. D. (1983). A study to determine how the West Virginia vocational agriculture teacher uses his time. Unpublished master's thesis, West Virginia University, Morgantown.
- Bogges, J. K. (1985). Major problems encountered in teaching vocational agriculture as perceived by women vocational agriculture teachers. Unpublished master's thesis, West Virginia University, Morgantown.
- Cooper, E. L., & Nelson, C. (1981, July). Professionalism; spouse and house. The Agricultural Education Magazine, 54(1), 17-18.
- Mattox, K. E. (1974, December). Why teachers quit. The Agricultural Education Magazine, 47(6), 140-142.
- Mlozi, M. R. S. (1982). Factors influencing supervision and success of students' occupational experience programs as perceived by vocational agriculture teachers. Unpublished master's thesis, West Virginia University, Morgantown.
- Straquadine, G. S. (1985). Marital satisfaction as perceived by the spouses of vocational agricultures in New Mexico. Unpublished master's thesis, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.