



Understanding Agriculture Distress Among Farmers: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture Sector of Indian Economy is one of the most significant parts of India. Agriculture is the only means of living for almost two-thirds of the employed class in India. Agriculture sector of India has occupied almost 43 percent of India's geographical area. Agriculture also plays a significant role in the growth of socio-economic sector in India. Farmer suicide in India is the intentional ending of one's life by a person dependent on farming as their primary source of livelihood. In 2012, the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 13,754 farmer suicides. The farmer's suicide rate in India has ranged between 1.4 to 1.8 per 100,000 total populations, over a 10-year period through 2005. India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India. Activists and scholars have offered a number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, government policies, public mental health, personal issues and family problems. These problems create distress among the farmers and when distress becomes unbearable for them, they commit suicide. It is being observed that farmers face many problems. The most important are marketing problems, technical, financial problems, legal problems as well as various HR issues.

KEYWORDS

Agrarian, Distress, Suicides, Farmers, Punjab

INTRODUCTION:

Distress, an integral part of the human existence, is said to have an immense influence over the lives of individuals and the organizations. In the present era, the nature and intensity of distress is so turbulent that the present age has been named as 'Age of Anxiety, Distress and Depression' (Pestonjee, 1992; Horwitz, 2010).

Distress can affect all aspects of life, including emotions, behaviours, thinking ability, and physical health. No part of the body is immune. But, because people handle distress differently, symptoms of distress can vary. Signs of distress may be cognitive, emotional, physical, or behavioural as indicated in the Table 1 below:

Table No.-1: Distress Symptoms

Cognitive symptoms	Physical symptoms	Behavioural symptoms	Emotional symptoms
Memory problems	Tension, headaches	Sleep problems	Moodiness
Inability to concentrate	Neck aches, Back pain	Nervous habits, such as finger or foot tapping	Depression
Poor judgment	stammering	Increased frustration and irritability	Sense of loneliness and isolation
Pessimistic approach	Trembling of lips or hands	Increased alcohol use	Feeling overwhelmed
Nightmares	Gritting or grinding of teeth, Jaw pain	Weight gain or loss without diet	Anxiety, worry, nervousness
Trouble learning new information	Muscle tenseness, bracing, and aches	Overreaction to small things	Increased anger and frustration

Source: Nathan Ronald. G., Rosch Paul J. "The Doctor's

Guide to Instant Stress Relief: A Psychological and Medical System" (2007) <http://www.healthylife.com/online/stress/StateOf-Michigan/symptoms-of-distress.html> retrieved on 2 December, 2015

The agrarian economy of Punjab has been under distress since 1980s. In the early years of the present decade, prices of major crops have witnessed wild fluctuations with sharp fall in successive years (Subramanian, 2007). This has brought in high degree of instability in farm incomes. Rural areas of Punjab experienced a general spurt in their prosperity after green revolution in the mid 1960s. The potentials of green of revolution technology began to be exhausted in the 1980s generating pressure of economic stress among poor strata of peasantry and agricultural labourers. The impact of economic distress and decline of traditional social support system Based on community support made the poor people helpless and unable to fend for themselves as individual families and persons. The non-existence of formal and informal social support mechanisms caused many poor peasants and agricultural labourers to break under economic and social stress and to commit suicides. The phenomenon of suicides under economic distress has been observed in rural Punjab since mid 1980 (S.S.Gill, 2007).

The phenomenon of suicides of poor farmers and agricultural labourers has been observed in other states of India also especially where agriculture is highly commercialized. The other states where suicides among farmers are regularly reported include Andra Pradesh (Reddy.et.al.1998) and Karnataka (Assadi, 1998, Deshpande, 2002).

Punjab is a 'little big state' of India, little because the state occupies only 1.5 per cent of the geographical area of the country and big because around two-third of the food grains procured annually in the country come from this state. Further over 95 per cent of the food grains that are moved interstate

to feed deficit areas through the public distribution system are the stocks procured from this state. The historical region of Punjab is considered to be one of the most fertile regions on Earth. Both east and west Punjab produce a relatively high proportion of India and Pakistan's food output respectively. The region has been used for extensive wheat farming in addition rice, cotton, sugarcane, fruit and vegetables are also grown (Government of Punjab, 2015)

The large farmers do not face many problems as they have enough sources (land and money) to earn their living, but the small farmers are still suffering. Most of them are under debt and are not able to manage the modern technology, costly seeds and pesticides. Many farmers in Punjab opt for land leases because the size of landholding has been shrinking all these years. With the monsoon playing truant for two years in a row and prices of farm produce fluctuating wildly, the financial position of such farmers is going to worsen in the coming months. According to official data, 65 per cent of farmers in Punjab own 1-4 hectares (1 hectare = 2.471 acre) of land. Only seven per cent own 10 or more hectares of land. Taking land on lease is increasingly becoming a necessity. Incidentally, the percentage of rural households in Punjab without land at nearly 65 per cent is one of the highest in the country, according to the socio-economic and caste census (Business-Standard, 2015).

Most of the farmers own less than 5 acres of land. Given the yield and average price of output in the last few years, they hope to make more by adding land to what they own. It is not viable to cultivate leased land. It cannot be hoped that even if farmers manage to save Rs 2,000 an acre, it is extra income; the most a farmer can make by cultivating an acre of land is Rs 50,000 in a year. Higher prices of a particular crop make them believe they can earn more. Experts say there is another reason for farmers leasing land. Most farmers in Punjab are heavily in debt. Having exhausted all limits from the formal banking channel, they turn to local money lenders. They have to show they are cultivating more land and are in a position to pay the lender back. Most of what farmers borrow from banks is spent on household expenses. They need working capital. After a while it becomes a vicious cycle. They borrow from one to pay the other and end up in a debt trap. According to reports, the average debt of a farmer in Punjab is Rs 3.32 lakh and rising. The growth in priority sector lending in the state was 23 per cent in 2013-14 and nearly 30 per cent in 2012-13. What has added to farmers' woes is low growth in farm productivity in Punjab for the last 15 years. The average yield of rice in the state has grown marginally from 3,506 kg a hectare in 2000-01 to 3,952 kg in 2013-14. In the case of wheat, the growth has been from 4,563 kg a hectare to 5,017 kg in the same period.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Agriculture has been the backbone of many economies. In the developing economies this sector has, for a long time, been the largest employer. Thus many studies have been conducted on this sector in India and abroad. The more important of them have been discussed as below:

Nair, K.N., Vinod, C.Pand Menon, Vineetha (2007) studied major causes of agrarian distress in the study area is the ecological degradation and fall in crops income. Land continues to be the most important asset determining livelihood outcomes. The livelihood strategies have been investigated in relation to land, education, housing pattern, investments & credit facilities, and participation in organizational activities. The livelihood strategies adopted by farmers in the wake of agrarian crisis includes diversification of agriculture, share cropping, organic farming, self-help group activities, cattle rearing, migration and exchange of labour. Livelihood strategies varied across socio-economic groups as farmers owning better landholdings diversified cropping patterns while poor households participated in the activities of SHGs. Mitigation of agrarian distress requires public provision of education, health and other social safety measures.

Mishra, Srijit (2007) discussed about poor returns to cultivation and absence of non-farm opportunities is indicative of the larger socio-economic malaise in rural India. This is accentuated by the multiple risks that the farmer faces – yield, price, input, technology and credit among others. The increasing incidence of farmers' suicides is symptomatic of a larger crisis, which is much more widespread. Risk mitigation strategies should go beyond credit. Long term strategies requires more stable income from agriculture, and more importantly, from non-farm sources. Private credit and input markets need to be regulated. A challenge for the technological and financial gurus is to provide innovative products that reduce costs while increasing returns. The institutional vacuum of organising farmers needs to be addressed through a federation of self-help groups (SHGs) or alternative structures.

Gill, Sucha S (2007) examined that suicides by cultivators and agricultural labourers has been reported in Punjab since the mid 1980s. This paper argued that the unprecedented phenomenon is caused by a multidimensional crisis of the rural economy in the past green revolution phase of agricultural development. A combination of economic factors such as, economic hardship of the peasant households, crop failure, unemployment and indebtedness has paused the victims to end their lives. This is happening in wake of decline of community sense/support mechanism as result of the emergence of new production relations. This phenomenon can be checked through appropriate policy measure such as debt moratorium of the debt trapped households and creation of safety nets for marginalized rural households.

Ramesh, A.S and Madhavi, C (2009) found that during the last 25 years, agricultural sector has gone through lot of changes and it also found to be one of the potential areas for stress. Greater use of automation technology, more use of organic production, decrease price for agricultural products and new complicated legislations have made the life of farmers more stressful one. In this study, an attempt was made to find out the potential factors which cause stress and made the life of farming community more miserable. Results had indicated that the occupation farming leads to stress due to financial, weather, work overload, social interaction and farm hassles. It is inferred that all the dimensions are producing either high or medium level of stress to farming people. It was also found that stress due to financial factors is found to be slightly higher than other stressors.

Iravani, Mohammad Reza (2011) analysed effective cultural, social economical factors of work place stress among workers in Mobarakeh Steel Complex. For the purpose of study a sample of 100 workers was randomly selected. In this study a questionnaire was used for gathering information containing 20 questions relating to 5 assumptions. Its purpose was measurement of workers' view about causes of work stress. Findings show that level of income, religious opinions, stress base, education level and training were most important effective factors on stress of working people in Mobarakeh Steel Complex.

Sangalad, Purnanand N. (2012) focused on the Socio-Economic profile and its impact on suicidal tendencies among farmers of Karnataka State who have committed suicide. The respondents in this sample mainly included the farm victim's family members/the persons who attempted for suicide in the 30 Districts of Karnataka state. 150 households of suicide victims were chosen and 150 control cases neighbouring these households in the same village were selected randomly for comparison. It was observed that suicide is an act that snowballs over the life of the victim through different 'events', 'actions', and 'triggers'. Family tensions and discords with spouse happened to be one of the important causes to victim's farm families, and more often this originates from the breakaway of the joint family.

Obiero Edward Oduor (2013) observed that the purpose of the study was to establish how social economic factors af-

fect farm yield in Siaya District, Siaya County in Kenya. This research followed the descriptive method and qualitative and quantitative approach was used. The target population was the households in Siaya District where stratified sampling method was used. The sample included 378 respondents. The findings showed that there was a positive relationship between family labour and farm yield. There is a negative relationship between farmer's experience and farm yield. The study also showed that there was a negative relationship between the farmer's education and the farm yield. There is a positive and significant relationship between the farmers' income and the farm yield. This showed that sufficient investments in the farming sector would give better yields.

Mustapha, S.B.et al. (2013) examined the determinants of climate change deforestation among farming households in Kaga Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. Interview schedules were administered to 216 respondents who were selected through multi-stage random sampling technique. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study showed that the mitigation strategy employed by majority (57%) of the respondents was avoidance of bush burning. The chi-square results indicated that age, years of formal education, farming experience and farmland ownership, were statistically significant at p 0.05 level of significance. The most important constraint to mitigation of deforestation was lack of alternative sources of energy.

Boniphace, Nobeji S., Fengyin Nie and Chen Fang (2014) analyzed the determinants of market participation for smallholder rice farmers in the five major rice producing regions in Tanzania. The results showed that age of the household head does not directly affect the volume of sales, household consumption, land cultivated, livestock owned and dummy for rural areas indicated a positive significant relationship while non-farm income, dummy region for Mbeya region and Tabora region indicates that, a negative and significant relationship with market participation. Further, low rice production, underdeveloped transport infrastructure and lack of reliable markets closer to higher rice producing were found to be the main problems associated with smallholder farmers in the study area.

Jalalzadeh, Mohammad, Hedayatollah Seyed, Zamanabadi Nouri & Kalantari Khalil (2014) investigated the Marketing Channels of Agricultural Crops in West Azerbaijan Province, Iran, the authors saw the major problems of agricultural economy in . The existence of many brokers and intermediaries in the transfer of goods from the producer to the consumer Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as: percentage, frequency, t-test, Mann-Whitney (u-test), Eta test and One-way ANOVA. . Eight main marketing channels were recognized. The author found the most appropriate channel as well as the least appropriate channel for the farmers to sell their crops.

Matsane, S.H, and Oyekale, A.S (2014) identified and analysed factors affecting (constraints) marketing of vegetables among small-scale farmers. Data were collected with structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and regression analysis. Results showed that prominent constraints of marketing vegetables among the small-scale farmers were: lack of access to credit, lack of access to storage facilities, lack of market information, lack of finance for farming, poorly developed village markets, poor producer prices, high perish ability of produce, low patronage, inadequate access roads, small size of transport and high transportation costs

Singh, Sukhpal ,Bhagal, Shruti, and Singh, Randeep (2014) examined the magnitude and determinants of Indebtedness among Farmers in Punjab: The agrarian crisis in Punjab is becoming a centre stage issue as the farmers are reeling under debt arising from stagnant productivity and low profitability. This study is based on the primary data from the sample households which was collected on specially structured schedule through personal interview method. It was being found

that the peasantry is heavily indebted to the tune of Rs. 2.18 lakh per household. A major proportion of the total debt was taken for productive purposes like purchase of farm machinery, inputs and agricultural land (57.4 per cent). Around one-fifth of the total debt was owned to non-institutional sources like arhtiyas.

From the literature review, the features of the current agrarian distress are briefly elaborated as follows-

First, there has been a decline in the trend growth rate of production as well as productivity for almost all crops from the mid-nineties. Further, the value of output from agriculture has been declining from late nineties.

Second, there is an excessive dependence of a large section of the population on agriculture. This also indicates that rural non-farm employment opportunities are limited.

Third, with declining size-class of holding and an increasing preponderance of marginal holdings along with poor returns from cultivation indicates that income for farm households is very low.

Fourth, the much talked about green revolution had a greater focus on rice and wheat.

Fifth, the neglect of agriculture in plan resource allocation has led to a decline of public investments in irrigation and other related infrastructure.

Sixth, supply of credit from formal sources to the agricultural sector is inadequate leading to greater reliance on informal sources at higher interest burden.

Last, but not the least, with changing technology and market conditions the farmer is increasingly being exposed to the uncertainties of the product as well as factor market.

One of the serious and unrelenting problems faced by the Punjab farmer households has been indebtedness. There are many reasons for the persistence of indebtedness among the farmer households in Punjab. The agricultural activities are typically seasonal which ultimately affects the repaying capacity of the farmers. Number of farmers still relies on non-institutional sources of credit where the rate of interest is very high and the terms and conditions of the loan are often exploitative. Majority of the farmers also take loans for consumption as well as for a variety of social obligations, which are unproductive and do not help to generate income. As the surplus income generated through crop cultivation is not assured and often are inadequate, the farmers are unable to repay the loan in time and the burden of debt goes on increasing. As a result, many farmers commit suicide, and number of these suicides are increasing day by day.

DISCUSSION:

From the above review, various reasons of agrarian distress have been found. Economic causes include debt burden, poor financial position, higher dependency ratio, crop failure, unviable land holding, and high cost of production, falling profit and unavailability of easy credit. In social cause's social stigma, pressure of bank officials/money lenders, court cases, consumerism, and expenditure on social events, wide spread dependence on drugs are included. Psychological causes include depression, non-cordial marital relations and property disputes. Along with indebtedness other socio-economic and psychological factors cannot be ignored.

The farmer continues to use fertilizer and pesticide excessively and indiscriminately despite the fact that the cost of these inputs is abnormally high. The awareness of the farmers regarding the scientific use of fertilizers is very low.

Technical knowledge of the farmers is also very low regarding most of the agricultural production, particularly soils, nutrient

status, suitability of soils and weather conditions to different crops, agronomic practices, fertiliser types and doses for different crops, crop pests and diseases and control measures, suitability of crop varieties, etc.

The condition of farmers at the present time, especially the small and marginal farmers, is very critical. There is an urgent need to look into this problem seriously with greater care. Farmer suicide are increasing day by day, farmers are under stress. They are facing various problems. It is a serious matter which is to taken into consideration by the Government urgently.

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