



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Sociology

CAUSES FOR PREVALENCE OF FARMER'S SUICIDE IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

KEY WORDS: Agriculture, Water resources, Socio-economic conditions, Livelihood, Suicide.

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is the backbone of India, 54.6 per cent of the Indian population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities and it contributes around 18% to the Gross Domestic Product of India. The rates of growth of agriculture in the last decade have been poor and are a major cause of rural distress. The farming is increasingly becoming an unviable activity, in recent years agriculture sector has undergone many changes. Depletion of water resources and land made a great impact on farmer's livelihood. Especially the socio-economic condition of farmers is the major factor for increasing farmer's suicide in our country due to poor income. This paper attempts to examine the causes for prevalence of farmer's suicide in India.

1.1 Introduction

Agriculture plays a vital role in Indian economy, 2011, 54.6 per cent of the population engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The Majority of India's poor population (i.e 70%) found in rural areas. India is the second largest producer of rice, wheat, sugarcane and vegetables etc. The World Bank report depicts India has 195M ha under cultivation of which some 63 per cent are rain fed and 37 per cent are irrigated.

The phenomenon of suicide by farmers has in recent years tended to dominate the discourse on rural India. Between 1995 and 2014 more than 3, 00,000 farmers have committed suicide in the country. India is a land of small farmers. Agricultural census reveals there were an estimated 98 million small and marginal holdings out of around 120 million total land households in the country. The share of marginal and small farmers accounted for around 81 per cent of operational holdings in 2002-03 as compared to about 62 per cent in 1960-61. Similarly, the area operated by small and marginal farmers has increased from about 19 per cent to 44 per cent during the same period. Moreover, tens of thousands of farmers in different states of India have committed suicide. It is shocking to note the figures on farmers' suicides in the country given out by the Central Home Ministry in the parliament. Accordingly between 1995 and 2003, 9.26 lakh farmers have lost their lives in the country. Therefore, this paper examines the socio-economic status of farmers influence to farmer's suicide in India.

1.2 Causes for farmers suicide

Farmers are thus exposed to a high rate of stress, physical stressors and hazards of the farm environment are compounded by regulatory framework and economic dynamics of managing farm business.

These operate in the context of declining trends of trade for agricultural produce, volatile commodity markets, limited availability of off-farm employment, growing cost of machinery and production and loss of farm or livelihood due to crop failures.

The countries like Sri Lanka, USA, Canada, England and Australia have identified farming as one of the most dangerous industries associated with a high suicide rate than in general population. In India, farmers' suicides had been reported from various states, viz. Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and various other states with varied cultural practices and farming patterns. In Maharashtra had associated indebtedness (i.e 87%) and deterioration in the economic status (i.e 74%) as major risk factors for suicide, the age-adjusted suicide mortality rate for male farmers had trebled from 17 in 1995 to 53 in 2004.

However, water is one of the crucial inputs to enhance agricultural production. Crop yields depend critically on the amount of water available to crops at different stages of their growth. Rainfall alone is an inadequate and undependable source of moisture to sustain

high productivity of agriculture in India. In India, greater part of the year is practically dry. The available rainfall during the monsoon is often inadequate and highly viable in its distribution. While some regions have excess rainfall often resulting in floods, others suffer drought. These are among the principal reasons for the low level of yields in Indian agriculture; under these conditions irrigation plays a crucial role in supplementing rainfall.

The Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) depicts 18 states among 5,000 farm households found that majority of the farmers wish to take up some other work due to poor income and stress. This study also reveals that 61 per cent of farmers prefer to get employment in cities for getting better education and health and 70 per cent of farmers reported that due to unseasonal rains, drought and floods their crops were destroyed. Further, the National Crime Records Bureau reported that 6867 farm suicides from five states such as Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

Madhya Pradesh: In Madhya Pradesh every five hours farmer is committing suicide. From February 2016 to mid-February 2017 1982 farmers and farm labourers committed suicide in this state.

Karnataka: In 2015-16 Karnataka 1,478 farm suicides were recorded due to severe drought, this put farmers in distress. They did not get desired prices for their produce, there are 87 per cent of the people depended on agriculture and high rate of suicide found among middle age farmers.

Telangana: In 2014, cotton farmers switched to chilli due to cotton price crashed this made farmers in a worsen condition. In 2016 alone there were 2,500 farmer suicides in Telangana State.

Maharashtra: In Maharashtra's Bt cotton fields are witness to some of the largest number of suicides by farmers. In 2012, the state found with 3,786 farmers' suicides. Until, October 2015, 800 farm suicides were reported in Marathwada District of Maharashtra.

1.3 Factors influencing farmer's suicide

Irrigation Management: Agriculture is accountable for the largest extraction of water and thus considered the chief 'culprit' under conditions of local absolute scarceness. The demand for the world's increasingly scarce water supply is rising rapidly, challenging its availability for food production and putting global food security at risk. Agriculture, upon which a burgeoning population depends for food, is competing with industrial, household and environmental uses for this scarce water supply. Even as demand for water by all users grows, ground water is being depleted, other water eco systems are becoming polluted and degraded and developing new sources of water is getting more costly.

Table 1 Per capita Water Availability in India 1951-2050

Year	Population (in Million)	Per capita water Availability (in cubic meters)
1951	361	5177
1955	395	4732
1991	846	2209
2001	1027	1820
2025	1394(projected)	1341
2050	1640(projected)	1140

Source: Ministry of Water resource, GOI.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), reported that 62.6 million households spending more than they earn and had land holdings of hectare or less. Only, 0.35 million (i.e 0.39%) households owning more than 10 hectares of land and their monthly income is Rs 41,338 and consumption expenditure is Rs 14,447. India Spend Report pointed about 85% of all operational farm holdings are less than two hectares in India. The per capita availability of land has been declined from 0.5 hectares to 0.15 hectares in 2011.

Socio-cultural factors: Farmers lack good health care services and their families have to face huge expenses related to medical care. The farmers also get debts for other expenses like children's education and daughter's marriage. So, farmers take loan for high interest from private money lenders, when they could not repay the debt they commit suicide.

Indebtedness: Indebtedness is the major cause for suicide in Punjab across India the trust on money lenders had increased from 18 per cent to 27 per cent of credit between 1991 and 2002. The states with most indebted agricultural households indicates, the highly indebted agricultural households are in Andrapradesh (i.e 92.9 %), followed by telungana (89.1 %), Tamilnadu (82.5 %), Kerela (77.7 %) and Karnataka (77.3 %), the farmers suicide rate is also high in above mentioned states.

1.4 Conclusion

It could be concluded from above discussion that India is a developing country with large population that mainly consists of small scale and marginal farmers. Agriculture is the major source of income in the country where 49% of the total workforce contributed by the agriculture sector. Therefore this sector as well as the rural population that earn livelihood through this sector are crucial in the development of the country. But unfortunately suicide rate among the farmers are high. Among the ten most important causes of suicides, debt burden was major cause for taking the extreme step of committing suicide. However, this primary causes the manifestation of secondary effects like crop failure, non-remunerative prices for their produce etc. In 2011, a total of 135,585 people committed suicide, of which 14,207 were farmers. In 2010, 15,963 farmers in India committed suicide. In conclusion, there is high rate of suicide among Indian farmers and the rate is observed to be increased in 21st century although there are plenty of choices and remedial measures could be taken. On the basis of above finding the following suggestions are made to reduce the farmers suicides

- From a sociological perspective there is need to organize non-political, non-profit, non-governmental voluntary associations.
- Awareness should be created to farmers regarding their rights.
- NGOs could provide other income generating opportunities to farmers, this provision could positively bring reduction in number of farmer suicide cases.

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