



Farmers suicide in Marathwada region of Maharashtra state

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted in Parbhani and Beed districts of Maharashtra. The sample constituted 12 victims. The suicide cases were interviewed with the help of pre-tested interview schedule. The findings revealed that near about three fourth (70 %) victims had low education level and exactly half (50 %) cases were from nuclear type of families. All victims were indebted and there was no subsidiary occupation to them. All victims had responsibilities like daughter's marriage, children education, health treatment of family members etc. One fourth (25 %) of the victims had quarrel with relatives and bank's people. Development of discredit in society, loss of interest in work, stopping of children education and hopelessness was the major consequences arisen in family after suicide of the farmer.

INTRODUCTION

India consisting of 17 per cent of world's population sustains only on 2.4 % of land to the resource. Agriculture sector is the only livelihood to the two third of its population which gives employment to the 52 per cent of work force and is a raw material source to large number of industries. Despite of portrayal of farming as healthy and happy way of life, agriculture sector experiences one of the highest numbers of suicides than any other industry. In 1990, India woke up to a spate of suicide among farmers community with particular reference to Vidarbha region.

Sainath (2007) stated that nearly 29,000 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra between 1997 and 2005, official data show no other state comes close to that total. This means that of the roughly 1.5 lakh farmers who killed themselves across the country in that period almost every fifth one was from Maharashtra. More than 19,000 farmers suicides occurred from 2001 onwards.

According to National Crime Record Bureau it proves that in country 46 farmers make suicide daily. In year 2007 there are 16,632 suicides in which 2369 suicide is of women, among this 14 % farmer's committed suicide. In Maharashtra state during last eight years the incidence of farmers' suicide is

increases tremendously since from 41 suicide in year 2001 to 4578 suicide at end of year 2008. In year 2008 from 1st January to 31st December, 640 farmers choose the way of suicide and its intensity was more in Vidarbha region. In Maharashtra from 1995 to 2002 total 20,066 farmers committed suicide and from 2003 to 2010 total 30,415 farmers committed suicide.

Suri (2007) pointed out that according to economist, social activities and advocacy groups who have studied farmer's suicide have pointed out several structural and social factors responsible for the present agrarian crisis. These are the changed pattern of land holdings; changed cropping pattern due to shift away from light crops to cash crops, liberalization policies which prematurely pushed Indian agriculture into the global markets without a level playing field, heavy dependence on high cost paid out inputs; growing costs of cultivation; volatility of crop output; market vagaries; lack of remunerative prices; indebtedness; neglect of agriculture by the government; decline of public investment in agriculture; break of joint families; individualization of agricultural operations; so on and so forth. Some of the reports and studies have argued that agrarian distress is the result of the policies pursued by the Government over the years.

The economic survey 2006-07 enlisted some of the structural weaknesses of the agricultural sector, which includes

low level of public investment, exhaustion of the yield potential of new high yielding varieties of wheat and rice, unbalanced fertilizer use, low seed replacement rate and low yield per unit area across almost all crops. Agricultural growth has become lackluster, as rainfed areas still constitute about 65 % of the total net sown area. The diminishing size of land holding, degradation in land quality and soil health due to improper nutrient application, the looming threats of global warming and climate change, emergence of new pest and disease production, losses due to biotic and abiotic causes, weak linkage between research and extension, limited credit access at reasonable rate of interest, non remunerative prices, inadequate market access, poor rural infrastructure and insufficient post harvest infrastructure such as warehousing, cold chains, and agro processing facilities are other features playing our agricultural production environment.

Present study was carried out with the following objectives to study personal, socio-economic, psychological and situational characteristics of the selected victims and to study the consequences of suicide on the victims family.

METHODS

Locale of study:

The study was undertaken in Parbhani and Beed district of Marathwada region of Maharashtra state, as these are suicide hit districts in Marathwada region during last five years and as such type of study was not conducted so far in this districts.

Research design:

The present study was based on case study research design.

Case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subject themselves. A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only in that specific context.

Sample and sampling plan:

The present investigation was carried out in Parbhani and Beed district of Marathwada region. The data about suicide cases for year 2007 to 2009 was collected. Among these three years, 2007 was selected in which maximum suicides occurred. Accordingly six respondents from each district, (Thus total twelve suicidal farmers) were selected by random method of sampling, who committed suicide during 1st January 2007 to 31st December 2007 and had declared as a legal victims by district level committee headed by collector of the Parbhani and Beed district for allotting compensation of Rs. 1 lakh and their family members had got Rs. 1 lakh. In this study,

respondents were the households of selected victims.

Development of Interview schedule:

Interview schedule was prepared in local language Marathi with a great caution so that it becomes perfect as per the objectives set in for the investigation. Every case regarding construction of statement, purpose, content and sequence was considered while preparing it. Available literature was collected and studied, experts in the field of extension education in the department of Extension Education of the post graduate Institute was consulted before finalization of the interview schedule. The present research study was based on case study research design of social research, hence researcher had collected detailed information about various aspects about selected victims.

Pre-testing of interview schedule:

Considering all the aspects of working objectives, interview schedule was pre-tested with three households who lost their family head and who were belonging to other than selected samples. The difficult questions were modified and unwanted were dropped from it as per the experience of pre-test. In this way interview schedule was finalized.

Collection of data:

As suicide is a sensitive social issue, the investigation has to be made with very guarded and careful manner and without hurting the sentiments of the family. Data were collected by personal interview method with the help of structured interview schedule. Interview was conducted at residence of respondent so as to review overall situation of the family by researcher.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads:

Personal, socio-economic, psychological and situational characteristics of the victims:

Out of twelve victims, six were young (up to 35 years) and remaining six were middle aged (36-50 years). All were male and married except one victim. Only two victims were found to reach educational standard above higher secondary level. 2 were illiterates and remaining having education up to 10th standard. Majority nine victims were from open (Maratha) caste and eleven suicides concentrated in medium size family. Exactly half of the victims were living in nuclear family. Seven victims had farming experience between 11 to 20 years and had no social participation. While five victims had up to 10 years of farming experience.

Out of twelve victims exactly half were living in mud

wall and thatched type of house and majority *i.e.* eight victims were living in the house of two rooms only. Six victims were small farmer (1.01 to 2 ha) and two were marginal land holder (up to 1 ha), while remaining four victim were having semi medium and medium land holding. The annual income ranges from Rs. 10,800/- to Rs. 90,000/-. Farming was the main livelihood source with majority of the deceased farmers except one victim who was engaged in farm labour for wages earning in addition to farming. Seven victims possessed only one or two dairy animals and they were using milk only for home consumption. There was no any subsidiary occupation to majority of the victims.

More than half of the victims were having medium type of land and nearly half of the respondents possessed well as irrigation source but water from well was not sufficient to irrigate all land during winter and summer season. Two victims were solely depend on manson rains. Majority nine victims had no or very less availability of infrastructure facilities for agriculture. *Kharif* jowar, soybean, cotton and sugarcane crop dominated the cropping pattern of selected victims. The total area under *Kharif* crop was more than area under rabi crop during 200-07. The average productivity of all crops during 2006-07 was very low as compare to the local productivity. All victims were indebted and had debt of both institutional and non-institutional sources. Majority in nine victims, their expenditure on various items was more than their annual income and there was negative gap observed between income and expenditure. All victims had various responsibilities like children education, daughter marriage, health treatment of family members, house construction etc.

Two victims were alcoholic, four having habit of tobacco chewing and remaining were free from bad habits. All victims were free from health problems but few of them had responsibility of ill family member. Two victims had dispute with family members while one having quarrel with bank's people before his suicide.

The suicide were observed irrespective of family types (either joint or nuclear), land holding (either marginal or large), annual income (either low or high), irrigation facility (either exists or not) and bad habits(either prevails or not).

Consequences of suicide:

Suicide is a social phenomenon, it creates several personal, social and economic consequences with family. The farmers who committed suicide were mostly the family heads and the main bread earners of the family members. Due o the sudden death of family head some consequences were occurred in family like land left fallow, children education stopped, daughters marriage prolonged, interest increased on loan taken, medical treatment of family members stopped, family members had to sell their animal, development of discredit in society, braking of relations with relatives and neighbours,

creation of problem in daughters marriage, depression development of disappointnes, anxiety/stress about future life and loss of interest in work etc. were the common consequences observed with all family members of the victim.

These findings are in accordance with the findings of Jacob (2006) and Kale (2008).

Conclusion:

The finding of this case study lead to conclude as follows:

- Majority 70% victims had low education level. In selected cases 50% victims were small farmers having land up to 2 ha.
- Nearly half of the suicide cases were from nuclear type of families.
- All victims annual income were below 1 lakh rupees.
- Farming was the main livelihood source with majority of the deceased farmers.
- There was no any subsidiary occupation to majority of the victims.
- All victims were indebted and there was negative gap observed between income and expenditure.
- All victims had responsibilities like children education, daughter's marriage, health treatment of family members, house construction etc.
- Two victims had dispute with family members while one having quarrel with bank's people before his suicide.
- Fallowing of land, stopping of children education, development of discredit in society, creation of problem in daughter's marriage, depression, development of anxiety/stress about future life and loss of interest in work were the major consequences occurred in all families.

Implications

- Creation of subsidiary occupation to the farmers.
- For improving the productivity and production there is need to bring the more land under irrigation by completing ongoing irrigation project increasing network of canals, tanks, wells etc.
- It implies that when crops fail continuous for two seasons (*Kharif-Rabi*), then Government should give free inputs and complete waiving of interest on old crop loan to farmers in study area.
- There is necessity to motivate the farmers for taking benefit of mass marriage scheme of Government. It will definitely help to reduce huge expenses on marriages and other related social functions. NGO's can play important role in this regard.
- There is urgent need to declare immediately remunerative prices for all crops of farmers in consonance with the cost of cultivation.
- To avoid the problem of labour shortage, government must stop the MNREGA scheme at least during rainy season

or harvesting period so there will be availability of labour for agriculture.

– Formation of Self Help Groups will definitely help to get escape from private money lenders and it will also help to improve their socio-economic condition. NGO's can play important role in this regard.

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