



Agrarian Crisis - Steps to Meet it Out

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ABSTRACT

Indian agriculture today is under large crisis. Since 1995, more than 253,000 farmers had been reported to commit suicides in India, making the largest suicides in India. An attempt has been made in this paper to address the issue of farmers' plight leading to suicide and measures to address the issue. The study was conducted in Delta region of Tamil Nadu. Case study approach was adopted to conduct the study. The results revealed that most of the victims owned land less than 2 ha. The absence of formal rural financial market had also led to the dependence on informal sources of credit with a greater interest burden. Heavy indebtedness had been leading to many social, economic and psychological problems among the farmers. There is widespread increase in frustration, depression, anxiety, irritability and social withdrawal among the farmers. Due to all this, the farmers were took extreme step of committing suicide. For upliftment of farmers there is a need for joint initiative by State Government, Central Government and financial institutions. Encouraging the farmers to adopt allied activities like dairy, fishery and poultry etc., with farming activities, arrangement of marketing/ forward linkages/ contract farming to sell their produce at remunerative price were the suggestions offered to prevent farmers from committing suicide.

Keywords: Agrarian crisis, Factors, Farmers Suicide.

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the back bone of Indian economy as well as a 'way of life'. Still after the 66th year of independence more than 60 per cent rural population depended upon agriculture for their livelihood. India is going through an agrarian crisis and the farmers who have been involved in one of the most meaningful livelihoods on earth are struggling to make ends meet. Farmer's suicide is a regularly occurring and tragic phenomenon in India. Since 1995, more than 253,000 farmers have been reported to commit suicides in India, making the largest suicides in India. In a country of 70 million farmers, it is 10 in every 100,000 farmers committing suicide. This is higher than the total national suicide rate. The number of farmers committing suicide in India is more than twice of the total number of suicides being committed in the top 100 countries on the suicide list! This indeed is worrying factor (NCRB, 2010) [1]. The country has seen over a quarter of a million farmers' suicides between 1995 and 2010. An attempt has been made in this paper to address the issue of farmers' plight leading to suicide and measures to address the issue. The Cauvery delta was once a place of prosperity but has been facing many challenges now. The last year had seen severe problems in agriculture with insufficient water due to truant monsoons and Cauvery water sharing issues. Farmers in the Delta region went for the direct paddy sowing as there was delay in arrival of canal water and since the direct paddy sowing allows the crop to survive for 20 to 30 days with little or no water. But when the crops were young, rains and Cyclone Nilam destroyed the crops and a lot of farmers had to opt for re-sowing again. Most farmers were completely dependent on the Cauvery water for irrigation and the crop is again going through a stress as rivers and canals had started drying up after the stoppage of water release [2].

2. OBJECTIVES

- To examine the socio-economic profile of suicide victims.
- To find out the factors responsible for the farmers to commit suicide.
- To propose remedial measures to solve the malady

3. METHODOLOGY

This study involved identifying the farmers who committed suicide in Tamil Nadu during 2012 from various media reports. Newspaper and media reported that there were a total of 13 farmers who had committed suicide over the last year (2012) in the Delta regions of Tamil Nadu. From this sampling frame, 10 victims were purposively selected from Tanjavur, Nagapatinam, Pudukottai districts of Tamil Nadu. For the qualitative analysis of the data, case study approach was applied. Case histories were studied through their families, neighbours and other individuals through semi structured interview. The data were statistically analysed using percentage analysis. The salient findings of the study are given as follows.

In present study of it was assumed that those who had committed suicide in Cauvery Delta region, their social and psychological web were not sustainable. They might have many social and psychological problems. These problems might have created an adverse impact on their well being and impaired the quality of life. 'Socio-psycho risk factors' is the dependent variable in present research endeavour. Operationally, socio-psycho risk factors of suicide refer to the aggregation of different socio-psychological risk factors / circumstances coexisted with an individual victim externally during last five years of incidence. For identification of different socio-psychological risk factors with an individual victim, a comprehensive schedule was developed with the help of review of literature, resource material available related to assessment of suicide risk [3], experts in the fields of Extension Education and professionals in the field of Psychiatry. After development of schedule, responses were collected from the family members with detailed discussion on time line historical perspectives of the victim, neighbours, and key informants, by making group discussions with other farmers of that village and by self observations made by researcher and identified different socio-psychological risk factors that are associated with an individual victim externally. For every identified risk factor, one score was allotted. Thus, according to total risk factors identified with each victim indicated the total socio-psycho risk factor score of victim.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

Suicide is a complex social and psychological phenomenon. Psychologically, the suicide prone person experiences mental distress because of certain crisis situation. In this study socio-psycho risk factors refers to the aggregation of different socio-psychological risk factors coexisted with an individual respondent externally. The same has been studied and the data have been presented below the Table.

Socio-economic Strata

The following conclusions can be drawn about the socio-economic strata of the farmers who have committed suicide.

4.1. Age

Age would reveal the mental maturity of an individual to take decisions for achieving his needs.

**Table1. Distribution of suicide victims based on their Age
 (n=10)**

Category	Number	Percent
Young (up to 35 years)	4	40.00
Middle (35 to 45 years)	3	30.00
Old (above 45 years)	3	30.00
Total	10	100.00

It could be seen from the Table 1 that 40.00 per cent of the victims belonged to young age group followed by 30.00 per cent in middle aged group and old aged group. The majority of suicides (40.00%) were attempted by those below the age of 35 years. The fact that 70% of suicides were committed by persons below the age of 45 years imposes a huge social, emotional and economic burden on our society. This is the age when family responsibilities increase and many household decisions have to be taken by an individual. In India, the high rate of suicide among young adult farmers can be associated with greater socioeconomic stressors that have followed the liberalization of the economy and privatization leading to the loss of job security, huge disparities in incomes and the inability to meet role obligations in the new socially changed environment. The breakdown of the joint family system that had previously provided emotional support and stability is also seen as an important causal factor commitment of suicides.

4.2. Marital Status

The findings relating to the marital status of the suicide victims are presented in Table 2

**Table 2. Distribution of Suicide Victims based on their Marital Status
 (n=10)**

Status	Number	Percent
Married	9	90.00
Unmarried	1	10.00
Total	10	100.00

Table 2 reveals that 90.00 per cent of the respondents who committed suicide were married people. In farming families it is mainly the bread-earning men who had committed suicide. Because married people have many roles and responsibilities rather than unmarried people.

4.3. Educational Status

Education is the process of bringing about desirable changes in human behaviour. Educational status of an individual plays a vital role in enhancing his knowledge level by motivating him towards knowing new things and understanding the things learnt.

**Table 3. Distribution of suicide victims based on their educational status
 (n = 10)**

Sl. No.	Category	Number	Per cent
1.	Illiterate	4	40.00
2.	Functionally literate	2	20.00
3.	Primary education	2	20.00
4.	Middle education	1	10.00
5.	Secondary education	-	-
6.	Collegiate education	1	10.00
	Total	10	100.00

Table 3 revealed that more than one-third of the suicide victims (40.00%) were illiterates followed by equal number of suicide victims were functionally literate (20.00%) and educated up to primary education (20.00%). Remaining equal number of suicide victims (10.00%) belonged to middle and collegiate education.

4.4. Type of Family

The findings relating to the type of the family of the suicide victims are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Suicide Victims Based on their Type of Family
(n=10)

Types of family	Number	Percent
Nuclear family	7	70.00
Joint family	3	30.00
Total	10	100.00

It could be seen from the Table 4 that majority of the suicide victims (70.00%) belonged to nuclear family. Now-a-days joint families are converted into nuclear families. In joint family, there is an emotional and physical security to each of the members in the family. More number of farm suicides in nuclear families is an indication that the nuclear family system had failed to provide the necessary security to its members in the fight against the personal destruction. The sense of insecurity drives the farmers' to suicide.

4.5. Size of Land Holding Pattern

Size of the farm may influence the decision of the farmer in selection of crops and selection of buyers. Also, it was considered to be one of the most effective factors responsible for farmer's suicides as per earlier studies. The data generated are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of suicide Victims based on Their Size of Land Holding Pattern
(n=10)

Type of land holding	Number	Percent
Marginal (<1ha)	7	70.00
Small (1ha)	2	20.00
Medium (1-2ha)	1	10.00
Large (>2ha)	-	-
Total	10	100.00

It could be observed from the Table 5, that 70.00 per cent of suicide victims belonged to marginal farmers who possessed less than 1ha of land followed by small farmers (20.00%) and remaining 10.00 per cent of the farmers were belonged to medium size land holder category. Hence small and marginal farmers are worst hit by afflict agriculture.

4.6. Occupational status

Study on occupational status helps to decide the intensity and extent of involvement of farmers in farm operations. If an individual has agriculture as full time profession, he/she is bound to allocate more time in farming.

Table 6. Distribution of suicide victims based on their occupational status

(n = 10)

Sl. No.	Category	Number	Per cent
1.	Agriculture as their main occupation	10	100.00
2.	Agriculture as their subsidiary occupation	-	-
	Total	10	100.00

It could be seen from the Table-6 that cent per cent of the respondents were fully dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The reason for agriculture being the primary occupation among many of the suicide victims could be due to the fact that the study area is irrigated by Cauvery river reservoir. Hence, many farmers in the study area raised two to three crops in a year. In addition to that, paddy is a high labour intensive crop. So the farmers have to spend much of their time for its cultivation and had no time to take up any other secondary occupation.

4.7. Social Participation

Participation in social organization would naturally help respondents to have opportunity for interaction with fellow respondents. It makes the participant to have good relationship with other members of his social system and help him to gather new ideas and information related to his occupation. Thus it may lead to have high level of knowledge and adoption. To know the trend in this factor, the collected data have been presented in Table 7

Table 7. Distribution of Suicide Victims Based on their Social Participation Status

(n=10)

Sl. No.	Category	Number	Per cent
1.	Low	10	100.00
2.	Medium	-	-
3.	High	-	-
	Total	10	100.00

It could be seen from the Table 7 that all the suicide victims had low level of social participation in their society. The reason behind this low level of participation was due to their multiple roles in farm and home activities, lack of leisure time available to participate in organisational activities.

4.8. Mode of Death

The findings relating to the marital status of the suicide victims are presented in Table 8

Table 8. Distribution of suicide victims based on their mode of death

(n=10)

Mode of death	Number	Percent
Hanging	3	30.00
Consuming pesticide	5	50.00
Heart Attack	2	20.00
Total	10	100.00

Half of the studied victims committed suicide mainly by consuming pesticide (50.00 per cent) followed by hanging 30.00 per cent and heart attack (20.00%). It could be seen from the Table 7 large number of suicide victims consumed pesticide (50.00%). This observation is supported by Madhavan *et al* (1998) [4]. In the commercial farming, farmers have got easy accessibility to pesticides and when farmer is in most distressed condition he makes use of the means on which he

could lay his hand easily. When, these are not available and the distressed period take longer time he resorts to jumping into well or hanging.

4.9. Type of Person

Suicide is a complex social and psychological phenomenon. Psychologically, the suicide prone person experiences mental distress because of certain crisis situation. It adds frustration in those who were not able to fulfill the responsibility of taking care for an ailing parent / spouse / child.

**Table 9. Distribution of respondents based on their type of person
(n=10)**

Type of person	Number	Percent
Introverts	9	90.00
Extroverts	1	10.00
Total	10	100.00

The study revealed that largest group of farmers (90.00%) who committed suicide belonged to introverts followed by extraverts (10.00%). Introvert personality they did not discuss or share their problems with other family members, that leads to adds more frustration. This also indicates that the victims tended to suffer within themselves the problems whether economic or social in nature. In the absence of these supporting institutions and individuals the deep unguarded feeling ulcerated with the increased economic problem which in itself is a cause for the abnormal trend of culmination of the distress in to self-destruction.

4.10. Mass Media Exposure

Mass media plays an important role in transfer of technology from technocrats to farmers. Particularly, when a farmer is unable to contact change agents frequently, media comes to rescue to some extent by taking the role of bringing the timely information to the cultivators. The more the exposure to mass media by a farmer, the more would be the gain in knowledge and information. Hence, it becomes necessary to be conversant as to how for the respondents utilize the mass media. The collected data on this aspect is presented in Table 10.

**Table 10. Distribution of suicide victims based on their mass media exposure
(n = 10)**

Sl. No.	Category	Number	Per cent
1.	Low	7	70.00
2.	Medium	2	20.00
3.	High	1	10.00
	Total	10	100.00

It is apparent from the Table-10 that seventy per cent (70.00%) of the respondents had a low level of exposure to mass media sources, followed by 20 per cent of the respondents with medium level of mass media exposure and just 10 per cent of the respondents with high level of media exposure.

In general it could be stated that majority of (70.00 per cent) of the respondents were low to medium level users of mass media sources of information.

Different media would have been sought by the respondents for getting information on agricultural aspects. Now-a-days, in each and every house we can see mass media like radio, television, newspaper *etc.*, but the coverage of agricultural related programmes by these sources is very, very

limited, when compared to other entertainment programmes. Again, though most of the respondents were illiterates, limited availability of magazines, journals and periodicals related to agriculture and the problems on their subscription were acting as the limiting factors for gathering agricultural information from these sources too.

4.11. Determinants of Farmer's Suicide

There are many factors responsible for farmers suicides are given below table 11

Table 11. Factors responsible for suicides

(n=10)		
Factors	Frequency	Percent
<i>Single factor</i>		
Repeated crop failure	1	10.00
Monsoon failure	-	-
Lack of irrigation facilities	-	-
Indebttness	1	10.00
Family burden	-	-
Total (single risk factors)	2	20.00
<i>Double factors</i>		
Lack of irrigation facilities+ high interest rate	1	10.00
Crop failure + Indebttness	3	30.00
Lack of irrigation facilities +Indebttness	1	10.00
Total (double risk factors)	5	50.00
<i>Triple factors</i>		
Crop failure+ Indebttness + Daughter's/Sister's marriageable age +Lack of irrigation facilities	2	20.00
Crop failure+ Indebttness + Lack of irrigation facilities	1	20.00
Total (triple risk factors)	3	30.00
Total	10	100.00

The study revealed that majority of the suicide victims (50.00%) who committed suicide had faced double risk factors followed by triple risk factors (30.00%) and remaining twenty per cent of suicide victims were affected by single factor. The results revealed that most of the suicide victims own land less than 2 hectares. The absence of formal rural financial market had also lead to the dependence on informal sources of credit with a greater interest burden. The marginal and small farmers were however willing to experiment and take risk. However, the farmers are not able to visualize that a bad monsoon has lead to crop failure or a glut in the market can push him into indebtedness and crash his dreams. Heavy indebtedness has been leading to many social, economic and psychological problems among the farmers. There is widespread increase in frustration, depression, anxiety, irritability and social withdrawal among the farmers. Due to all this, the farmers were taking extreme step of committing suicide.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that agriculture related issues have played a major role for most of these deaths. The study has been carried out based on the observations; the following recommendations are made for solving the malady faced by the farmers.

- All the families definitely require a lot of support to rebuild their lives. The farmers who had committed suicide did so as they thought that it was impossible to settle their loans and lead a life with dignity. But unfortunately, their suicides have now shifted the entire burden to their wife, brothers, sisters and children who are younger and in most cases less skilled. Hence it is requested to the state government to provide the families of all farmers who have committed suicide in Tamil Nadu due to agriculture issues with a suitable relief and rehabilitation package. Apart from this, the government should also seriously consider ways of support to sustain their family in the long run.
- There should be a complete rethinking of the prevailing cropping pattern in Cauvery Delta regions of Tamil Nadu. It would be necessary to develop and introduce a 'New Formula' based on the specific agro-climatic conditions in different regions of the State rather than using the same old technology and methods in the same old manner.
- Owning land should not be considered a criterion for benefits rendered to a farmer including cooperative society loans for crop cultivation. Anyone who cultivates should be eligible for all benefits. In many cases, even farmers who own land did not have the land registered in their name. Tenancy farmers should be treated on par with land owning farmers for any benefits given. All the tenancy farmers should also be given farmer tenant card.
- The state should also look at devising and providing better crop insurance policies that calculates crop losses at individual farmer level/ atleast village level in case of damages due to drought, winds and floods as none of the farmers whose crops got affected by Cyclone Nilam and rains were compensated
- The Central Government announces the Minimum Support Prices (MSPs). However, the MSPs announced by the Central Government were only upto a maximum 70 per cent of the production costs suggested by the State Government (sugarcane being the only exception). Some of the costs incurred by the farmers are not fully covered in the production costs.
- The Government should take initiative in projects of soil conservation, construction of farm bunds, farm-lakes and wells for the benefit of farmers using the Employment Guarantee Scheme. This Scheme could also be used for soil conservation, watershed development, rainwater harvesting, etc. So that the quality of the soil is preserved.
- A life insurance cover should be made available to distressed farmers and their families. A Cent Percent Insurance Inclusion Scheme may be implemented with the co operation from banks and Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).
- Moneylenders charging the exorbitant rate of interest must be punished.
- Farmers Counselling Centers should be established in the block level with the appointment of trained personnel comprising of a Social Worker, Psychologist, Agricultural scientist, Doctor and elected representative of Panchayat President.
- Proper training should be given to the farmers by Agricultural Assistants regarding use of pesticides and fertilizers.

- Awareness should be created among farmers regarding scientific farming of different crops to get better yield and good price for their products.
- An Advisory Council should be formed for the farmers' suicide prevention at the District and State level to advise and supervise the members of the Counselling Centers.
- It should be made mandatory to the college level NSS units to organize camps in the villages and create awareness in the farming community about the effect of suicide and its impact on other members of the family.
- Encourage the farmers to adopt the allied activities like dairy, poultry etc along with farming activities.
- Encouragement of networks of relatives, friends, neighbours and members of the faith community to decrease isolation, which is one of the strongest risk factors for suicides.

6. CONCLUSION

It was observed that suicide is an act that snowballs over the life of the victim through different 'events', 'actions', and 'triggers'. Therefore, there are multiple reasons for an individual to commit suicide by farmers. Many times these reasons transcend between social- economic, behavioral and personal factors. The breaking of joint family has reduced the moral and physical support that they derived in its existence. Societal support and public participation always averts such incidence because of the assurance that an individual derives from the society. Similarly, the intra-family close knit relationship also instills confidence in the individual and dissuades the person from talking such is an extreme step. Therefore, socio-economic profile of the victims and control families household tells a lot of about the circumstance under which the individual lived and interacted with the society. This also helps to draw inference about the failure of the traditional institutional as well as the mindset of the individual at the time of the victim incidence. A large number of family members of the victims have reported the introvert characteristics of the victims. This also indicates that the victims tended to suffer within themselves the problems whether economic or social in nature. In the absence of these supporting institutions and individuals the deep unguarded feeling ulcerated with the increased economic problem which in itself is a cause for the abnormal trend of culmination of the distress in to self-destruction. For upliftment of farmers there is a need for joint initiative by State Government, Central Government and financial institutions. Encouraging the farmers to adopt allied activities like dairy, fishery and poultry etc., with farming activities, arrangement of marketing/ forward linkages/ contract farming to sell their produce at remunerative price were the suggestions offered to prevent farmers from committing suicide.

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