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Original Article

A Scoping Review on Causes and Consequences of Farmer Suicides in India

[1]T. Amol, [2]Dr. D. Satyanarayana, [3]Dr. K. Srivani
[1]*Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Satavahana University, Karimnagar, Telangana.*
[2,3]*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Satavahana University, Karimnagar, Telangana.*

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Abstract: *A variety of circumstances can induce suicide, and there is empirical data that suggests that farmers in India may be committing copycat suicides, thereby spreading the phenomenon. An increase in farmer suicides is attributed to the unpredictable monsoon, unpaid debt, low crop yields, a poor agricultural procurement rate, and consecutive crop failures. Natural events, including floods, droughts, hailstorms, and uneven rainfall, negatively impact crop production. At the same time, post-yield losses are caused by man-made factors, including price policies and insufficient marketing infrastructure. The repercussions of rural debt are catastrophic. According to the all-India report "Spate of Cases of Suicide by Farmers," government assistance programs are ineffective because they fail to address the predicament of farmers who borrow from private moneylenders. Economically, rural debt has led to the extreme poverty of farmers, particularly those who are marginal or small-scale. Farmers usually suffer losses regardless of the favorable or unfavourable conditions. Since this situation persists, the federal and state governments have not taken adequate action to safeguard farmers and assist them in overcoming these obstacles. Due to the overwhelming strain of repaying their debts and other family obligations, the majority of them went bankrupt and ultimately took their own lives. It also recommends that farmers develop additional revenue streams from non-farming pursuits, such as dairy, poultry, and fishing. In India, farmers are known to have high suicide rates; between 1995 and 2018, 400,000 farmers lost their lives to suicide. Government policy-level measures have followed; however, it's unclear how effective they were. This study examines the body of knowledge regarding the causes and consequences of farmer suicides in India. Used a scoping review to look for empirically supported papers on farmer suicide in India in the literature published between 2000 and 2023. Governments' spending on agricultural infrastructure and flood management, as well as policies that provide farmers with credit, have been linked to a decrease in farmer suicides. The most often mentioned policy-modifiable factors were cash crops, poverty, debt, small farms, low salaries, water and irrigation, and illiteracy. Although numerous regulations have been put in place to combat farmer suicide in India, there is a dearth of evidence proving their efficacy. Further study is required.*

Keywords: *Agriculture, Farming, Farmer, Suicides, Causes, Recommendations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the most significant economic sector and a major contributor to India's overall socioeconomic development. Small-scale and marginal farmers make up over 80% of the farmers in this industry. They rely on loans from commercial institutions or private money lenders to cultivate their land. For their family's expenses, children's education, and marriage, they rely on agricultural income. India's agriculture sector is in crisis, and farmers in various states are being affected. The GDP from fisheries, forestry, and agriculture in 2015–16 was 13.7%, according to the Union Finance Minister. India experiences erratic rains. A failed monsoon causes crop failure. Farmers are facing an intolerable debt load as a result of the globalization-related drop in agricultural finance, rising production costs, and declining farm prices. Farmers are being driven to commit suicide by this burden. Indian agriculture is known as the "Gamble of Monsoon" as a result.

India's farmer suicide epidemic is concerning. Numerous causes contribute to suicide, and there is empirical data that suggests this tendency may be spreading in India, where farmers are killing themselves in imitation. The unpredictable monsoon, unpaid debts, mounting debt, low crop yield, slow crop procurement, and consecutive crop failures are all contributing factors to an increase in farmer suicides.

While natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, hailstorms, and uneven rainfall, have a negative impact on crop production, man-made issues, including poor pricing strategies and insufficient marketing resources, also cause post-yield losses. The majority became bankrupt, and the stress of paying off debt and other family obligations drove them to end their lives. The present study's precise goals were to: i. To examine farmer suicides in India, ii. To determine the cause of farmer suicides, and iii. To provide suggestions for reducing farmer suicides.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The majority of the data gathered for this research work comprises data and records available from NCRB Reports, magazines, journals, data published in various national and vernacular newspapers, and government websites.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Farming has been identified as a high-risk occupation for suicides worldwide. India and China alone are responsible for half of the estimated 84% of suicides that take place in middle- and low-income nations. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), 1,31,008 suicides were recorded nationwide in 2016. The suicide rate among farmers in these states is significantly greater than the suicide rate among non-farmers. Farmers are more likely than the general population to attempt suicide for a variety of reasons, including agricultural loss, interpersonal issues, financial hardships, and relatively easy access to pesticides.

According to research from South India, the most common cause of suicide for both men and women was poisoning from pesticides used in agriculture, primarily organic phosphorus compounds. Hanging was the second most common cause of death for those in the most economically productive age group (15–44 years old) and the second leading cause of death for those aged 15–19. Despite the fact that numerous studies have been conducted on the reasons, risk factors, and even the problem of farmer suicides, a thorough and methodical investigation that gathers data on the ground and connects it with the current policy framework has not yet been completed. Although suicide among farmers has garnered a lot of media attention in India, little research has been done on the subject. The purpose of this study was to investigate the characteristics of suicide victims, particularly gender differences, methods of suicide, and causes among the farming community in Karimnagar District, Telangana State, South India.

In India, farmer suicides are on the rise and have turned into a socioeconomic issue. Telangana and Maharashtra have ranked first and second in the nation, respectively. The rural economy and agricultural industry will suffer if farmers experience problems. As a result, the country has challenges related to food security. The state administrations and the Government of India (GOI) are having difficulty eradicating this economic ill. Several plans are in place to assist farmers in overcoming this challenge.

These families' post-suicide images show their extremely pitiful and impoverished circumstances, such as their lack of safety and means of subsistence and the cessation of their children's upbringing and schooling. They humbly request assistance in the form of prompt institutional credit, drilling borewells and locating groundwater with government financial and technical support, as well as loans from institutional sources to tenants and marginal and small farmers at reduced interest rates. Employment creation is sought in non-farm and related agricultural activities.

A) Indian Farmer Suicides

Although there have been documented instances of farmer suicide in India since the 19th century, there are historical records of dissatisfaction, uprisings, and high mortality rates among farmers, especially cash crop producers.

Ganapathi and Venkoba Rao examined suicides in various regions of Tamil Nadu in 1966. They suggested limiting the spread of agricultural organophosphorus chemicals. Likewise, Nandi et al. (1979) observed that suicides in rural West Bengal were caused by easily accessible agricultural pesticides and recommended that their availability be controlled. According to Hegde's 1962–1970 study, the suicide incidence rate in northern Karnataka villages was 5.7 per 100,000 people.

More than 2,16,000 farmers have killed themselves in India over the past 15 months, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The states with the greatest suicide rates are those that are either in a dry zone or have rainfed agriculture. With two-thirds (68.4%) of farmer suicides reported from these states, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh are the main states. Nonetheless, according to NCRB data spanning 18 years, at least 2,84,694 Indian farmers have committed suicide since 1995.

Over 18 years, the average number of farmers who commit suicide each year is 15,369. Approximately one out of every twelve suicides in the US between 1997 and 2002 was committed by farmers in the Big Five states. It accounted for almost one out of every ten from 2003 to 2008. From 1995 to 2003, India experienced 1,38,321 farm suicides, at an average of 15,369 each year. At a significantly higher yearly average of 16,264, the figure is 14,66,373 over the 2004–12 period. Maharashtra had the greatest yearly average number of farmer suicides between 1995 and 2002 (2,508), followed by Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (2,304) and Karnataka (2,259).

B) India's Farmer Suicide Causes

According to the analysis and interpretation of the data, as mentioned earlier, there was a significant rise in farmer suicides in India throughout the specified time frame. A specialist in agriculture claims that India had the highest rate of farmer suicides worldwide during the same time period. The following causes of farmer suicide were the main focus of the data analysis above.

a. Financial issues:

Since India is an agrarian economy, more than 60% of its people are employed in agriculture and related fields. However, capital is needed to manage agriculture and related industries successfully. Over 80% of Indian farmers are economically disadvantaged and only possess a small portion of the land. As a result, they are having financial difficulties managing their agricultural operations successfully. Banks that have been nationalized are also reluctant to lend money to farmers since there is no guarantee that they will repay it. Since they have no mortgages other than their land, even private money lenders do not lend them money.

b. Natural Disasters:

Natural disasters cause farmer suicides in addition to financial ones. The main factor influencing efficient agricultural production is favorable weather. Natural conditions have worsened due to global warming, deforestation, and other human-caused factors, including heavy rainfall, floods, droughts, intense cyclones, and delays in rainfall. Farmers are also unable to obtain both qualitative and quantitative outputs from their farms due to man-made factors such as fires, accidents, and reduced subsidies.

c. An increase in production costs:

In addition to the causes mentioned earlier, rising production costs also prompt farmers to consider ending their lives. India's agricultural industry requires a significant amount of labour for tasks such as ploughing, excavating, and maintaining the soil, among others. Additionally, funds are needed for herbicides, insecticides, cutting, product transportation, and sales. Furthermore, hybrid seeds are necessary for high-quality and high-quantity products, but they are exceedingly expensive and out of reach for India's marginal and impoverished farmers.

d. Traditions, Culture, and Illiteracy:

Apart from the issues mentioned above, farmers are also compelled to commit suicide due to illiteracy, tradition, and culture. Due to their limited literacy and understanding, farmers often do not consider education to be important. Insufficient education and decision-making abilities. Due to a lack of funds and perspective, they resort to Orthodox rights and rituals, as well as other religious pursuits, which also require additional funding. And occasionally, they employ large loans with exorbitant interest rates from private money lenders to carry out these activities.

e. Debt in India's Rural Areas:

In the majority of pertinent policy assessments that have taken this issue seriously, debt has been identified as the main factor contributing to farmer suicide.

C) Repercussions of Suicide by Farmers

a. Financial Assistance:

To prevent farmer suicides, the Indian government and relevant state governments are required to provide farmers with subsidies. Small and marginal farmers must be given preference when these subsidies are being delivered.

b. Loan schemes that work effectively:

When lending money to farmers, the government should establish a distinct procedure. In order to give farmers timely and appropriate loans, all nationalized and cooperative banks, including agriculture co-operative credit societies, must put up this system in their establishments. Low interest rates should be offered for loans simultaneously, so that creditors and private moneylenders do not discriminate against or take advantage of farmers.

c. Irrigation facilities:

Indian farmers are having irrigation issues. Every region of India has a different geographic condition. Some areas are prone to drought, while others struggle with excessive rainfall. Areas that experience severe rainfall and drought are also having trouble with irrigation during both rainy and dry seasons, such as summer, due to poor water management.

Indian agriculture policymakers purposefully overlooked this crucial information. Traditional irrigation techniques used by Indian farmers often use more water than is actually needed. During dry spells and droughts, farmers struggle to obtain the water they need for irrigation.

d. Alternative Approaches:

The Government of India and all concerned state governments must support farmers in developing related agricultural activities and small-scale, farmer-oriented companies that produce agricultural products in addition to the steps mentioned earlier. Their basic, secure, and prestigious needs are met, their standard of living is raised, and financial issues are resolved.

IV. SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE SUICIDES AMONG FARMERS

- To prevent or reduce the expense of fertilisers and pesticides, organic farming should be encouraged.
- Production must be based on biodiversity to reduce market and climate vulnerability.
- The farmers' institutionalized credit system needs to be made simpler.
- It is necessary to penalize moneylenders who charge excessive interest rates.
- Gram Panchayats must develop a system to assist farmers who are in debt and at risk of suicide in resolving their problems.

V. CONCLUSION

The money that was invested in crops, seeds, and fertilizers has not been returned to Indian farmers. Seeds, phoney pests, corruption, and other factors are the causes of farmer suicide. To stop farmer suicides, state governments have instituted agricultural debt waiver programs. These programs were unable to assist small and marginal farmers. Only by implementing the Swaminathan Committee Report's recommendations can the government save the lives of farmers. The government should give farmers immediate access to its subsidies and farmer welfare programs. At that point, the only industry that will pay farmers well is agriculture. Farmers commit suicide as a result of corruption and intermediaries who make more money than farmers do.

Even the money that farmers spend on agricultural activities, such as fertiliser and seed purchases, is not returned to them.

With 80% of the suicides in the current study region being tied to farming, crop failure, and limited access to irrigation are major factors in farming-related suicides. The "failure of rainfall/drought" and "natural calamities" are seen to be entirely responsible, and the inability to locate a borewell on the farm has resulted in significant debt for small and marginal farmers. The ‘Higher output’ and the ‘Higher prices’ report 88% of the influence on the incidence of suicides.

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