

Farmers Suicides in Maharashtra: Causes & Measures

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Abstract

India is an agrarian economy with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Agriculture in India is often attributed as gambling with monsoons because of its almost exclusive dependency on precipitation from monsoons. The causes of this crisis are complex and manifold; they are dominantly related to public policy and economic strategy. Apart from this, there is a need to strengthen the National Mental Health Program at primary health care level to offer support and counselling to vulnerable farmers in rural area.

Keywords: Farmers, Suicides, middleman, government etc.

i) Introduction

India is an agrarian economy with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Agriculture in India is often attributed as gambling with monsoons because of its almost exclusive dependency on precipitation from monsoons. The failure of these monsoons can lead to a series of droughts, lack of better prices, and exploitation of the farmers by middlemen, all of which have led to a series of suicides committed by farmers across India. In India, farmer suicides had been reported from various states, viz. Andhra Pradesh, Punjab Karnataka and Orissa.¹ Maharashtra, one of India's most prosperous states is currently facing an epidemic of farmer suicides especially in the Vidarbha region.

ii) Objectives of the Study:

The present paper discuss the farmers suicides in Maharashtra with the following objectives-

1. To study the present position of farmers suicides in Maharashtra.
2. To study causes of farmers suicides in Maharashtra.
3. To suggest the measures to overcome of farmers suicides in Maharashtra.

iii) Sources of Data:

The present research paper is totally depended upon secondary data sources. The secondary data is collected from books, journals and related websites etc.

Table No.1 Number & Rate of farmers Suicides for Farmers and Rest of Population

NUMBER AND RATE OF SUICIDES FOR FARMERS AND REST OF POPULATION IN THE MAJOR FARM CRISIS STATES IN 2011							
State	No. of Suicides, 2011		Farmers' Suicides as a percent of all suicides, 2011	Suicide Rate (per 100,000 members) 2001 & 2011 comparison			
	Farmers	Rest of population		Farmers (Main Cultivators)		Rest of population	
				2001	2011	2001	2011
Chhattisgarh	1567	5189	23.2	41.6	51.6	15.6	24.1
Maharashtra	3337	12610	20.9	34.7	29.1	13.0	12.6
Karnataka	2100	10522	16.6	40.5	34.8	20.4	19.3
Andhra Pradesh	2206	12871	14.6	20.4	36.2	13.2	16.5
Madhya Pradesh	1326	7933	14.3	15.4	16.1	11.1	12.6
India	15652	121558	11.4	15.8	16.3	10.2	11.1

Note: * In 2011, Chhattisgarh reported 'zero' suicides amongst farmers. So number of farm suicides for Chhattisgarh here and its percentage to all suicides is an average of **TE 2010, i.e. average of 2008, 2009 and 2010**. Figures given for India are adjusted to Chhattisgarh triennium average.

Source: 1) *Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, 2011: National Crime Records Bureau* 2) *Census of India, 2011 and 2001*. 3) *Nagaraj, K. Farmers suicides in India: Magnitudes, Trends and Spatial Patterns. www.macrosan.com (March 2008)* Table Credit: Mr. Gopinath of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

The five States with the largest share of the quarter-of-a-million farm suicides recorded in India over the past 16 years are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. While the total number of farmers who took their own life in 2010 showed a dip from the preceding year, the share of the Big 5, in fact, rose to 66.49 per cent of all farm suicides in 2010. It was 62 per cent in 2009. Three of the Big 5 States have shown significant increases over 2009: Maharashtra Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Nationally, the last eight years have seen on average, farmers killing themselves at a rate of one every 30 minutes.

iv) Causes of farmers suicides in Maharashtra:

There are various economic, social, political, individual and environmental causes of farmer's suicide in India. The causes of this crisis are complex and manifold; they are dominantly related to public policy and economic strategy. Following are the some basic causes for the farmers' suicides in Maharashtra.

1. Farmers perceived debt addiction,
2. environmental problems,
3. poor prices for farm produce,
4. stress and family responsibilities,
5. government apathy,
6. poor irrigation,
7. increased cost of cultivation,
8. private money lenders,

9. Use of chemical fertilizers and crop failure as the reasons for farmers' suicides.

Table No.2
Farmers suicides in Maharashtra 1997-2006

Sr. No.	Year	Number of Farm Suicides	Proportion to total No. of Suicide in State (%)	Proportion to total No. of Farm Suicide in Country (%)	No. of Male Farmers Suicide	No. of female Farmers Suicide
1	1997	1917	15.2	14.1	1600	317
2	1998	2409	17.6	15.0	1938	471
3	1999	2423	17.8	15.1	2050	373
4	2000	3022	21.6	18.2	2492	530
5	2001	3536	24.2	21.5	2945	591
6	2002	3695	25.4	20.6	3155	540
7	2003	3836	26.0	22.3	3381	455
8	2004	4147	28.2	22.7	3799	348
9	2005	3926	27.2	22.9	3638	288
10	2006	4453	28.7	26.1	4111	342
Gross total		33364	26.3	20.1	29109	4255

Source: K NagraMIDS,2008

The data on suicides indicate that, the problem of farmers suicides is acute and distressing in the state of Maharashtra. Over the ten years i.e. between 1997 and 2006, the number of farm suicides in the state has more than doubled from 1917 to 4453. It gives an annual compound growth rate of an exceedingly high figure of 9.8 per cent for farm suicides, here a rate at which the number would double every 7-8 years. Considering the period 1997-2006 as a whole, every fifth farm suicide committed in the country occurred in the state of Maharashtra. The problem of farmers suicides became more acute after the year 2003 and mostly the Cotton growing farmers were found in to the trap. The entry of private traders in Cotton procurement was the major reason of the distress among the Cotton growing farmers. Hereafter the gap between cost of cultivation and income 243 has widened. And also the functioning of the government procurement became poor during that period. The private traders have their hold over these centers. The picture of male farm suicides in the state is even blacker. The male farmers suicides substantially increased than female in the mentioned period. It clears that the stress among the male farmers was severe than women.

v) Measures:

Important measures suggested by the study group to address the issue includes following:

- Design and delivery system of credit should be strengthened.

- Rescheduling of loans and waiving of interest up to two years where farmers are affected by natural calamities in rain fed areas.
- Creation of 'Moneylenders Debt Redemption Fund'. Timely and hassle free delivery of credit by reducing transaction costs.
- Increase in deployment of Rural Infrastructure Development Fund. (RIDF)
- Government should make efforts to facilitate the Formation of Federation of SHGs of small and marginal farmers.
- Allocation for expenditure on health of distress farmers and their family members.
- Health Insurance Scheme 'for the benefit of farmer's livelihood.
- Better monitoring and implementation of the existing package of relief.
- self-reliance and capacity building among farmers, a monitoring and support system for vulnerable farmers,
- support and counseling services
- A village-level, transparent system for the disbursement of relief packages.

vi) Conclusions:

Farmers' suicides in Vidarbha are caused by the complex interplay of social, political and environmental constraints. Hence, a comprehensive intervention to ensure self reliance and capacity building among farmers in modern farming techniques, monitoring and support system for vulnerable farmers, a village-level, transparent system for disbursement of relief packages is required to prevent farmer suicides in the near future. Apart from this, there is a need to strengthen the National Mental Health Program at primary health care level to offer support and counseling to vulnerable farmers in rural area.

vii) References:

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