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Socio - Economic status of deceased agrarian farmers: A study in Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

The growth of Ananthapuramu agriculture depends to a large extent on the potential of rainfed agriculture, which has not been harnessed effectively so far. This characteristic among others has resulted in grave economic fallouts for the farmers leading them to commit suicides. The economic and social problems related to dry land agriculture are numerous, but it appears that the greatest concerns today are the issues of declining livelihood conditions, which manifest into various forms and with varied and complex results leading to social implications also.

In spite of the policies and programmes that are being implemented over the years, the factors and processes underlying the agrarian distress among dry land farmers have found to be unaddressed. Inspite of huge investments in dry land regions agricultural yields are more unstable in rainfed areas than those in the areas where incretion is assured. Hence, incomes of the farmers are unstable in rainfed areas. These areas are characterized by higher poverty than that in irrigated areas. The measures taken by the government have not helped to raise the income of the farmers and have not reduced the poverty much.

This paper is attempted to examine social profile of the members of farmers' suicides families, economic, social characteristics, and reasons for their suicides. This study primarily based on the field based. The data are presented, interpreted and discussed meaningfully, logically and critically.

1.0 Sampling design and analysis

For the purpose of this study, the data were collected from both primary and secondary sources of information and data. Secondary data includes season and crop reports, statistical abstracts of Andhra Pradesh, National Crime Records of Bureau (NCRB), published and unpublished works of scholars, reports and monographs published by Andhra Pradesh State Government and Central Government.

Primary data and information are collected from the respondents who happen to be close members of the deceased farmers. The data are collected by adopting personal interview method through a pre-tested schedule specially designed for the purpose. Focused Group Discussions (FGD) are also held with the members of the victims' families and the villagers as well to solicit general information and their impressions, views and suggestions pertaining to the issues.

As stated already Ananthapuramu district is selected purposively for the study. Twenty-Two Mandals are selected in five Revenue divisions, namely Ananthapuramu, Dharmavaram, Penukonda, Kalyanadurgam and Kadiri are selected for a focused study. Further, from each Mandal, five or more suicidal farmers were selected from 2019 to 2024 which 170 farmers in Ananthapuramu district.

1.1 Average Size of the Land Holding

TABLE 1.1

Size Class of Land Holding among Suicidal Farmers

S.No.	Size Class of Land (Area in acres)	No. of Suicidal Farmers	Percentage	Mean	SD
1	Marginal (0 to 2.5)	16	9.41	1.35	0.37
2	Small (2.5 to 5.0)	43	25.29	1.46	0.86
3	Medium (5.0 to 10.0)	62	36.47	1.53	1.04
4	Large (above 10.0)	49	28.82	1.48	0.93
Total		**170**	**100**	**1.46**	**0.80**

Source: Field Survey.

1.2 Caste composition of the deceased farmers

Caste in the Indian society is a reality. This caste system is prevailing in the country for centuries. Caste plays an important role in the life of the people of the country. Caste dictates not only social relations but also various forms of exploitation, domination and violence against the SCs, STs and Backward Caste people. The people belonging to lower castes in the society are suffering in several ways especially in rural areas. This shows that the farmers of weaker sections suffered the most from insults, insulations, threats and violence which led to their suicides. Whether we like it or not, farmers' suicides have happened due to caste factor also.

TABLE 1.2

Caste composition of the deceased farmers

S.No.	Category	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Backward Class (BC)	8	4.71	27	15.88	40	23.53	16	9.41	91	53.53
2	Forward castes (OC)	2	1.18	12	7.06	20	11.76	33	19.41	67	39.41
3	Schedule Caste (SC)	3	1.76	2	1.18	2	1.18	0	0.00	7	4.12
4	Schedule Tribe (ST)	3	1.76	2	1.18	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	2.94
Total		**16**	**9.41**	**43**	**25.29**	**62**	**36.47**	**49**	**28.82**	**170**	**100**

Source: Field Survey.

The particulars of caste-wise distribution of deceased farmers are presented in Table 1.2. Among 170 deceased farmers, it is observed that 53.53 per cent of farmers committing suicides were in the group of Backward Classes like Boya, Kuruba and Gollas. These backward classes' farmers owed predominantly small holdings, and they were marginal and small farmers. It can also notice that Backward Classes were mainly from artisan castes with traditional Jajmani obligations and over generation they could buy land and became marginal and small farmers.

There are about 39.41 per cent committing suicides was in the group of forward castes like mostly Reddy's, Kammas and Balijas. These castes which were once Sudras, attained economic power through acquiring land from other communities. Ownership of arable land gives one pride and power in rural India. They also had lower levels of literacy and they have captured political power in the grass root level. These castes are dominant castes in the rural areas. There were also 4.12 per cent of Schedule Caste like Mala and Madiga group of farmers committing with suicides and 2.94 per cent of Schedule Tribes, mainly from Sugali and Yerukula tribe farmers who committed suicide in Ananthapuramu district.

From the table 1.2.1, it is found that the chi-square values for the caste composition of the deceased farmer's castes are Backward Class (BC) and Forward castes (OC) 84.86 and 62.24 respectively which is more than the table value of 16.82 at 5 per cent level of significance, and hence the values are significant. So, the overall computed values of suicidal farmer's castes are different than the values of the above two series.

TABLE 1.2.1

Containing the chi-square test results on Caste composition of the deceased farmers

S.No.	Caste	Values of x^2	d.f	Table Value at 0.05 level of significance (P0.05)	Significances s/ns
1	Backward Class (BC)	84.86.	(4-1) 3	16.82	S
2	Forward castes (OC)	62.24			S
3	Schedule Caste (SC)	12.15			Ns
4	Schedule Tribe (ST)	8.04			Ns

1.3 Age of the deceased farmers

Age plays an important role in the farming activities. It is generally believed that the farmers of middle-aged groups are more dynamic and also experienced in taking up farming activities. Age influences the thinking of the farmers many times. Usually, the younger farmers are better off in understanding the problems and facing depression and suffering. However, the middle-aged people do not have adequate mental strength and courage to face the losses and suffering. Generally, they lose their hope on the future. People above 60 years are also mentally week, peevish and cowardly. The farmers are grouped into five categories. The first category consists of farmers below 25 years and the second group between 26 and 40 years, the third between 41 and 55 years and the fourth between 56 years and above.

TABLE 1.3

Age of the deceased farmers

S.No.	Age Category	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Below 25	4	2.35	8	4.71	6	3.53	8	4.71	26	15.29
2	26 to 40	4	2.35	12	7.06	36	21.18	28	16.47	80	47.06
3	41 to 55	8	4.71	21	12.35	16	9.41	6	3.53	51	30.00
4	Above 55	0	0.00	2	1.18	4	2.35	7	4.12	13	7.65
Total		**16**	**9.41**	**43**	**25.29**	**62**	**36.47**	**49**	**28.82**	**170**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey.

The age wise distribution of farmers is presented in Table 1.3 depicts that at the overall level, 62.35 per cent of the farmers under 40 years old, which means they have died in very young age at the most productive part of their lives and 37.65 per cent were above 40 years old. 15.29 per cent of the farmers' community suicides are below 25 years, while 47.06 per cent of the farmers in the age group of 26 to 40 years. About 30 per cent of them are in the age group of 41 to 55 years and 7.65 per cent of the farmers in the age group of 55 years above.

1.4 Type of the Family belongs to the selected farmers' households

TABLE 1.4

Type of the Family belongs to the selected farmers' households

S.No.	Category	Nuclear		Joint		Total		Mean	SD
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1	Marginal	12	7.06	4	2.35	16	9.41	1.35	0.37
2	Small	36	21.18	7	4.12	43	25.29	1.46	0.86
3	Medium	53	31.18	9	5.29	62	36.47	1.53	1.04
4	Large	44	25.88	5	2.94	49	28.82	1.48	0.93
Total		**145**	**85.29**	**25**	**14.71**	**170**	**100**	**1.46**	**0.80**

Source: Field Survey

The data in table 1.4 shows that type of family holding by the farm victims and Control farm family. Of the 170 victims 145 (85.29%) farm victims were belonging to nuclear families and only 25 (14.71%) cases were living in the joint families. There is an emotional and physical security to each of the members in the joint family system. More number of farm suicides in nuclear families is an indication that the nuclear family system has 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. And the total mean value is 1.46 on size class of land holding among suicidal farmers.

1.5 Marital Status of Suicidal Farmers

TABLE 1.5

Marital Status of Suicidal Farmers

S.No.	Category	Married		Unmarried		Widow (er)		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Marginal	12	7.06	4	2.35	0	0.00	16	9.41

2	Small	36	21.18	7	4.12	0	0.00	43	25.29
3	Medium	51	30.00	9	5.29	2	1.18	62	36.47
4	Large	39	22.94	5	2.94	5	2.94	49	28.82
Total		**138**	**81.18**	**25**	**14.71**	**7**	**4.12**	**170**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey.

Marital status of suicidal farmers data presented in table 1.5. Of the 170 suicidal farmers, 138 (81.18 per cent) farmers were married, 25 (14.71 per cent) farmers were unmarried and 7 (4.12 per cent) farmers widowers. Majority of the farm victims were married and had the family responsibility.

TABLE 1.6

Family size of the selected farmers' households

S.No.	**Family Size**	**Marginal**		**Small**		**Medium**		**Large**		**Total**	
		No.	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**	**No.**	**%**
1	Below 4	2	1.18	10	5.88	16	9.41	13	7.65	41	24.12
2	4 to 6	8	4.71	18	10.59	23	13.53	22	12.94	71	41.76
3	6 to 8	4	2.35	9	5.29	11	6.47	9	5.29	33	19.41
4	8 to 10	2	1.18	6	3.53	12	7.06	5	2.94	25	14.71
5	Above 10	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total		**16**	**9.41**	**43**	**25.29**	**62**	**36.47**	**49**	**28.82**	**170**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey.

The size of the family among deceased farmers presented in table 1.6 shows that most of the families (41.76%) size of 4 to 6 members per family, which means they have not planned to be small families. In the present study it could be seen that in the case of 24.12 per cent of the respondent's family size is 4 and less than four members in the family. Rest of 19.41 per cent of the respondents where family size is 6 to 8 and 14.71 per cent of the farmers were family size is 8 to 10 so, their living with joint family. No one farmer greater than 10 members in the family.

1.7 Education Level of the Farm Households

Level of education is one of the important factors to awareness of farmers about agricultural practices and modern farm technology. An educated farmer has more exposure to the latest information on farm technologies through magazines, leaflets, books, and other literature. And, therefore, his agricultural practices may be more scientific. Education plays an important role in the life of a person. It gives him awareness and knowledge in his own profession and also confidence to face calamities.

TABLE 1.7

Education Levels of the deceased farmers

S.No.	Category	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Primary	4	2.35	21	12.35	36	21.18	28	16.47	89	52.35
2	Secondary	8	4.71	12	7.06	16	9.41	16	9.41	52	30.59
3	Intermediate	4	2.35	8	4.71	8	4.71	5	2.94	25	14.71
4	Graduate	0	0.00	2	1.18	2	1.18	0	0.00	4	2.35
Total		**16**	**9.41**	**43**	**25.29**	**62**	**36.47**	**49**	**28.82**	**170**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey.

The data in table 1.7 reveals that 52.35 per cent of heads of the deceased farmers have primary education. Of the remaining suicidal farmers, 30.59 per cent of the farmers have secondary education, 14.71 per cent of the farmers have intermediate level education and only 2.35 per cent of the deceased farmers have got graduation.

1.8 Farmers Possessing Live stock

Table- 1.8

Particulars of farmers possessing livestock

S.No.	Category	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Bullocks	4	2.35	12	7.06	16	9.41	16	9.41	48	28.24
2	Buffalos	9	5.29	17	10.00	34	20.00	26	15.29	86	50.59

3	Cows	3	1.76	8	4.71	8	4.71	5	2.94	24	14.12
4	Sheep/Goat	0	0.00	6	3.53	2	1.18	2	1.18	10	5.88
5	Others	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.18	0	0.00	2	1.18
Total		**16**	**9.41**	**43**	**25.29**	**62**	**36.47**	**49**	**28.82**	**170**	**100**

Source: Filed Survey.

Live stock wealth among the selected farmers appears to be marginal. It is only 48 out of only 170 farmers own bullocks. It means that many of the farmers do not possess bullocks at all. Buffalos and Cows are also owned by 86 and 24 farmers respectively. Sheep/goats and others i.e. poultry do not matter much in this area. Farmers do not depend more on bullocks for the cultivation and they may depend on tractors and etc. the cost of cultivation has been growing ever since the technological changes. Even for peeling off groundnuts the farmers have started to use machinery. Some of them may hire bullock pairs. Since much private milk collection centers are operating in the big villages, the milk production and sales activities are increasing.

1.9 Reasons for Farmers Suicides

An inquiry reveals that crop failure and debt burden appear to be primary reasons for suicide deaths. There are “other factors’ which contributed for suicide deaths. “Other factors” include social functions, ill health, children’s education, loss in petty business and family affairs etc. On the basis of the responses of the deceased households, for purpose of analysis the reasons are grouped into three categories. 1) Crop failure 2) debt burden and crop failure 3) debt burden, crop failure and others. About one- fourth of suicide deaths are due to crop failures. These years miserable failure of not only groundnut crop but also other crops have thrown these farmers into a crisis. Most of the loans are made for meeting the farm expenditure in one or two years. About 45 per cent cases refer debt burden and crop failures together to be the main reasons. For them, part of the debt has been existing over the years and hereditary debt also forms a minute part of it. The partial failures of the crops on account of irrigation and pest in the last two or three years have resulted in erosion of their ability to pay the current loans and ultimate accumulation of debt. In the third category, one-third of the farmers reported that apart from these two reasons, the other factors also added to the debt burden. Among other factors, marriages and social functions occupy predominant position. Nallacheruvu, Tanakal, Kudair and Kambadur mandal cases are certain examples where performance of daughter’s/son’s marriages contributed substantially to the total debt.

TABLE 1.9

Reasons of Suicides as given by the Victim's Family Members

S.No.	Reasons	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Failure Crop's	3	1.76	14	8.24	16	9.41	10	5.88	**43**	**25.29**
2	Debt Burden	8	4.71	17	10.00	32	18.82	21	12.35	**78**	**45.88**
3	Family Problems	3	1.76	6	3.53	5	2.94	0	0.00	**14**	**8.24**
4	Marriage of daughters/Son	0	0.00	3	1.76	2	1.18	5	2.94	**10**	**5.88**
5	Failure of Bore wells	2	1.18	3	1.76	7	4.12	13	7.65	**25**	**14.71**
6	Various habits like alcohol, gambling & etc.	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	**0**	**0.00**
Total		16	9.41	43	25.29	62	36.47	49	28.82	**170**	**100**

The causes for farm suicides as given by the victims and control family members have been given in table 1.9. Six causes have been broadly listed for suicide. Based on the causes listed; the victim's and control family members were asked to list out the possible causes which drove the farmer to suicides. Out of the 170 victim's cases, compare to the control farm family majority of respondents (45.88 Per cent) opined that debt burden is the main reason for suicides. Followed by failure crops (25.29 per cent), failure of bore wells (14.71 per cent), and less than 15 % of the farmer's suicide among the reasons of family problems and marriage of daughters/son. No one farmer suicide with various habits like alcohol, gambling & etc.

However, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between one reason and the other for the reason that each will have an inter-connected relationship. For instance, the reasons for crop failures are plenty. Failure of irrigation, periodic occurrence of drought, changes in weather condition, mono culture, pest problems, deteriorating soil structure, lack of adequate knowledge of cultivation practices etc., are all behind the crop failures. Series of crop failures will no doubt add to the debt burden. The practice of social customs and practices are contributing to the debt burden. Ultimately, all these factors are reflecting in the high debt burden, some times more than their assets pushing them into social and economic crisis and frustration. Further the figure 5.8 represents the percentage of the reasons for farmer's suicide in the four different categories of farmers of Ananthapuramu district in the form of column diagram for instant comparison.

1.10 Suicidal Farmers Debt Burden

The study shows all the 170 deceased families are under debt. But almost farmers were in debt. The average debt amount per family works out to be Rs.1,25,000/-. The debt limits vary between the lowest of Rs.1,00,000 to a maximum or Rs.5,00.000/- and above. However, 44.71 per cent of the farmers concentrate in debt size groups of Rs.2,50,000/- to Rs.5,00,000/-and 33.53 per cent of the farmers have debt from Rs.1,00,000/- to Rs.2,50,000/-. About 12.94 per cent cases, the debt level is below Rs.1,00,000/-. As majority of the deceased persons fall in the small size category, the debt burden is quite serious. In the literature it is clearly brought out that debt burden is inversely related to farm size.

TABLE 1.10

Indebtedness of Suicidal Farmer's

S.No.	Debt in Rs.	Marginal		Small		Medium		Large		Total	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	Below 1,00,000	3	1.76	9	5.29	4	2.35	6	3.53	**22**	**12.94**
2	1,00,000 to 2,50,000	4	2.35	10	5.88	23	13.53	20	11.76	**57**	**33.53**
3	2,50,000 to 5,00,000	7	4.12	21	12.35	29	17.06	19	11.18	**76**	**44.71**
4	Above 5,00,000	2	1.18	3	1.76	6	3.53	4	2.35	**15**	**8.82**
Total		16	9.41	43	25.29	62	36.47	49	28.82	**170**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey.

1.11 Old and Current Debts

The total debt is further categorized into old debts and current debts. Old debts refer to the debt existing till the end of 2008. Whereas the current debt refers to the borrowings made in end of each selected farmer live.

TABLE 1.11

Types of Debts by Suicidal Farmer's

S.No.	Indebtedness	Old		Current		Total		Chi – Square
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1	Marginal	12	7.06	4	2.35	16	9.41	$\chi2$ = 6.369 (p= 0.041) df= 3 T.V = 5.99 significant at .05 per cent level
2	Small	28	16.47	15	8.82	43	25.29	
3	Medium	39	22.94	23	13.53	62	36.47	
4	Large	34	20.00	15	8.82	49	28.82	
Total		**113**	**66.47**	**57**	**33.53**	**170**	**100.00**	

Source: Field Survey.

Table 1.11, details regarding the distribution of suicidal famer's old and current debts are given. Old debts comprise about 66.47 per cent. The remaining comes under current debt. Among the Old debts investments made on irrigation development, digging of bore wells, purchase of small land, bullocks and other farm equipment constitute the major component. Apart from these hereditary debts, crop losses over the years and marriages and other social expenditure have also formed into the old debts. On the other hand, in the current debts loans made for the purpose of meeting short-term credit needs in the form of fertilizers, pesticides have formed important component. The other significant factor is the debt taken for well development by way of deepening well, laying in well bores, replacement of old pump sets with new etc.

Further, it is also clear from the table that there is significant difference between old and current indebtedness of farmers as indicated by Chi-Square value which is significant at 0.05 level with three degrees of freedom.