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FARMERS SUICIDE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF FAMILY

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Abstract

Farmer's suicide is a global phenomenon. Outside India, studies in Sri Lanka, USA, Canada, England and Australia have identified farming as a high stress profession that is associated with a higher suicide rate than the general population. This is particularly true among small scale farmers and after periods of economic distress (Fraser et al.,). Similarly, after a review of 52 scholarly publications, conclude that farming populations in the developed nations claims a wide range of reasons. Farmer's suicide globally including mental health issues, physical environment, family problems, economic stress and uncertainties.

India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India. Activists and scholars have offered a number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, genetically modified crops, government policies, public mental health, personal issues and family problems.

In 2014, the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 5,650 farmer suicides. The highest numbers of farmer suicides were recorded in 2004 when 18,241 farmers committed suicide. The farmer's suicide rate in India has ranged between 1.4 to 1.8 per 100,000 total population, over a 10-year period through 2005.

In this connection the author is interested to bring out many hidden causes and consequences into lime light. In this study is an attempt to list out the problems and stating the suggestions, the way in which government has to take immediate action to be executed.

Key words: *demographic, global, stress profession, economic stress,*

Farmers' suicide and socio-economic and emotional issues of family

INTRODUCTION

India is an agrarian country with around 60% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India. Activists and scholars have offered a number of conflicting reasons for farmer suicides, such as monsoon failure, high debt burdens, genetically modified crops, government policies, public mental health, personal issues and family problems. There is also accusation of states fudging the data on farmer suicides.

Ganapathi and Venkoba Rao analyzed suicides in parts of Tamil Nadu in 1966. They recommended that the distribution of agricultural organo-phosphorus compounds be restricted. Similarly, Nandi et al. in 1979 noted the role of freely available agricultural insecticides in suicides in rural West Bengal and suggested that their availability be regulated.

Hegde studied rural suicides in villages of northern Karnataka over 1962 to 1970, and stated the suicide incidence rate to be 5.7 per 100,000 populations. Reddy, in 1993, reviewed high rates of farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh and its relationship to farm size and productivity. The farmers suicide rate in India had ranged between 1.4 and 1.8 per 100,000 to total population, over a 10-year period through 2005, however the figures in 2017 and 2018 showed an average of more than 10 suicides daily. ... Farmer suicides account for 11.2% of all suicides in India.

Objectives

To bring out the hidden causes and consequences into lime light and also this study is an attempt to stating the suggestions, the way in which government has to take immediate action.

Methodology

The study is conducted on the Farmer suicide and demographic change in India based on the data gathered from secondary sources. Secondary data has been collected from the records, books, journals and websites. The relevant information and data have been organized, classified, tabulated and graphed using simple statistical methods.

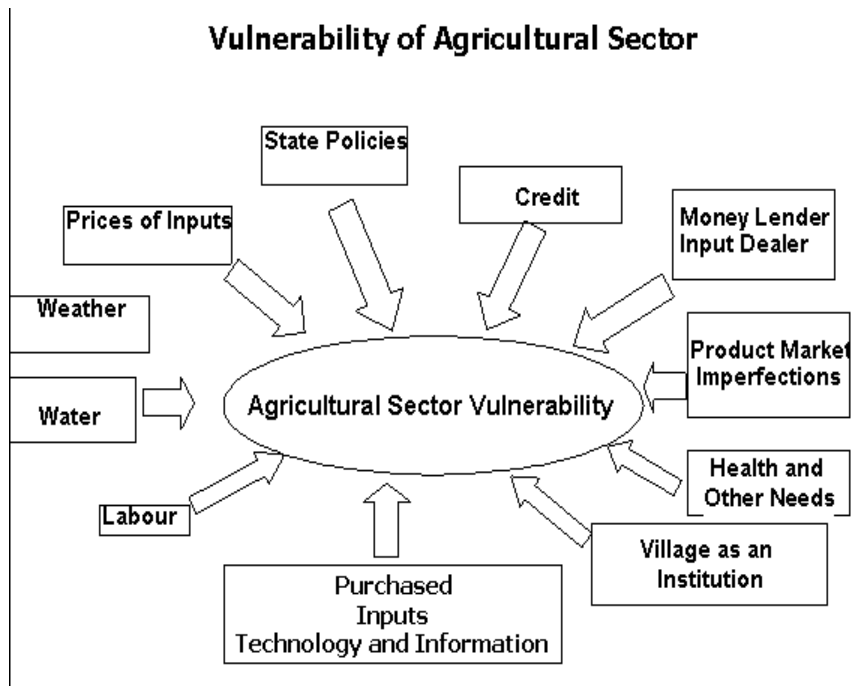
History

Historical records relating to frustration, revolts and high mortality rates among farmers in India, particularly cash crop farmers, date back to the 19th century. The high land taxes of 1870s, payable in cash regardless of the effects of frequent famines on farm output or productivity, combined with colonial protection of usury, money lenders and landowner rights, contributed to widespread penury and frustration among cotton and other farmers, ultimately leading to Deccan Riots of 1875-1877. The British government enacted the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act in 1879, to limit the interest rate charged by money lenders to Deccan cotton farmers, but applied it selectively to areas that served British cotton trading interests. Rural mortality rates, in predominantly agrarian British India, were very high between 1850 and 1940s.

Reasons

Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers commit suicide in India, including: floods, drought, and debt, use of genetically modified seed, public health and government economic policies. There is no consensus on what the main causes might be but studies show suicide victims are motivated by more than one cause, on average three or more causes for committing suicide.

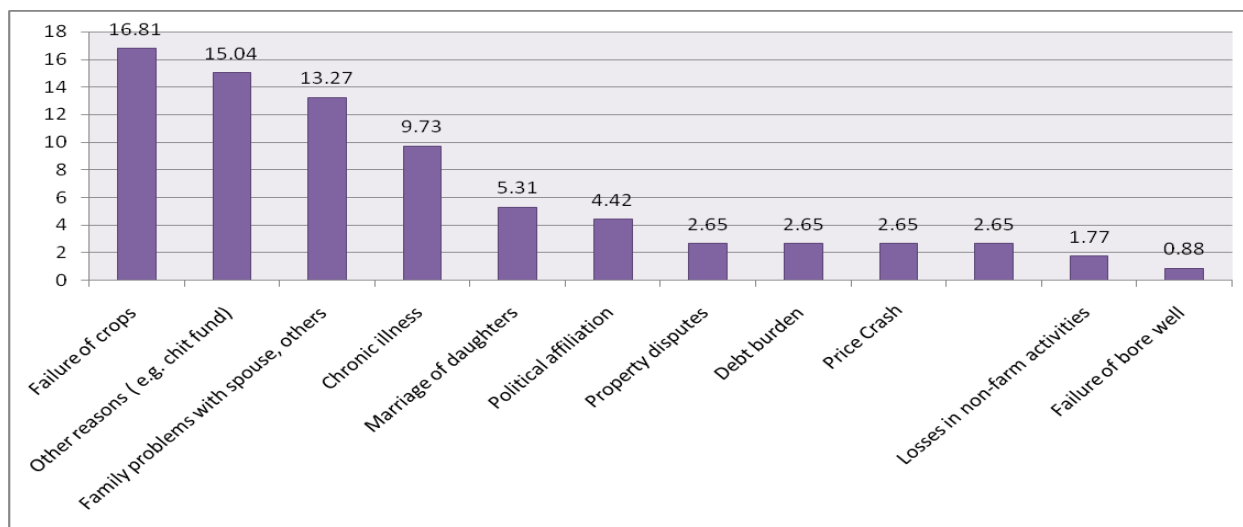
Studies dated 2004 through 2006 identified several causes for farmers suicide, such as insufficient or risky credit systems, the difficulty of farming semi-arid regions, poor agricultural income, absence of alternative income opportunities, a downturn in the urban economy which forced non-farmers into farming, and the absence of suitable counseling services. In 2004, in response to a request from the All India Biodynamic and Organic Farming Association, the Mumbai High Court required the Tata Institute to produce a report on farmer suicides in Maharashtra, and the institute submitted its report in March 2005. The survey cited "government apathy, the absence of a safety net for farmers, and lack of access to information related to agriculture as the chief causes for the desperate condition of farmers in the state."



Following are the important Reasons for farmers suicides (in%-2014)

Failure of crops	16.81
Other reasons (e.g. chit fund)	15.04
Family problems with spouse, others	13.27
Chronic illness	9.73
Marriage of daughters	5.31
Political affiliation	4.42
Property disputes	2.65
Debt burden	2.65
Price Crash	2.65
Borrowing too much (e.g. for house construction)	2.65
Losses in non-farm activities	1.77
Failure of bore well	0.88

Note: "Reasons were given by close relatives and friends. There are multiple reasons for suicides. Not even one case was given only one reason."



Drought

As much as 79.5% of India's farmland relies on flooding during monsoon season, so inadequate rainfall can cause droughts, making crop failure more common. In regions that have experienced droughts, crop yields have declined, and food for cattle has become scarcer. Agricultural regions that have been affected by droughts have subsequently seen their suicide rates increase.

New Economic Policy

Left leaning economists like Utsa Patnaik, Jayati Ghosh and Prabhat Patnaik suggest that structural changes in the macro-economic policy of Indian Government that favoured privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation is the root cause of farmer suicides. Others dispute such views.

GM crops

A number of social activist groups and studies proposed a link between GM (genetically modified) crops and farmer suicides. BT cotton (*Bacillus thuringiensis* cotton) was claimed to be responsible for farmer suicides. The BT cotton seeds cost nearly twice as much as ordinary ones. The higher costs forced many farmers into taking ever larger loans, often from private moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates (60% a year). According to activists, this created a source of debt and economic stress, ultimately suicides, among farmers. Scholars claim that this BT cotton theory made certain assumptions and ignored field reality.

Suicide ideation

Patel et al. find that southern Indian states have ten times higher rates of suicides than some northern states. This difference, they claim, is not because of misclassification of a person's death, for example as homicide, but because of regional causes. The high suicide rates in southern states of India may be, suggest Patel et al., in part because of social acceptance of suicide as a method to deal with difficulties.

State government field surveys

The Government of Maharashtra, concerned about the highest total number of farmer suicides among its rural populations, commissioned its own study into reasons. At its behest, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research in Mumbai did field research and found the top causes of farmers suicides to be: debt, low income and crop failure, family issues such as illness and inability to pay celebration expenses for daughter's marriage, lack of secondary income occupations and lack of value-added opportunities.

Statistics

Nowadays the problem of farmers' suicides is one of the vital concerns that need to be addressed by the Government. Considering the paramount importance of this issue National Crime Records Bureau, an office of the Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India, has been collecting and publishing suicide statistics for India since the 1950s, as annual Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India reports. It started separately collecting and publishing farmers suicide statistics from 1995.

A total of 5,650 farmers have committed suicides during 2014, accounting for 4.3% of total suicides victims in the country. Incidence of Farmers' Suicides and Percentage Share to Total Suicides during 2014

Total number of Farmers' Suicides	Total number of Suicides	Percentage Share of Farmers' Suicides to Total Suicides
5,650	1,31,666	4.3

A total of 5,178 male farmers and 472 female farmers have committed suicides, accounting for 91.6% and 8.4% of total farmers' suicides. 31.1%, 29.2%, 14.1% and 11.0% of female farmers' suicides, were reported in Telangana (147 out of 472 suicides), Madhya Pradesh (138 suicides), Maharashtra (70 suicides) and Chhattisgarh (52 suicides) respectively. A total of 2,568 farmers' suicides were reported in Maharashtra followed by 898 such suicides in Telangana and 826 suicides in Madhya Pradesh, accounting for 45.5%, 15.9% and 14.6% respectively of total farmer suicides during 2014. Chhattisgarh (443 suicides) and Karnataka (321 suicides) accounted for 7.8% and 5.7% respectively of the total farmer suicides reported in the country. These 5 States together accounted for 89.5% of the total farmer suicides (5,056 out of 5,650) reported in the country during 2014.

In India the highest number of farmer suicides were recorded in 2004 when 18,241 farmers committed suicide. The farmers suicide rate in India has ranged between 1.4 to 1.8 per 100,000 population, over a 10-year period through 2005.

From January 1, 2015 to August 31, 2015, Karnataka has seen 400 farmer suicides, a seven-fold jump from last year. From January 1, 2015 to July 31, 2015, Maharashtra has seen 1600 farmer suicides, a 66% jump from last year.

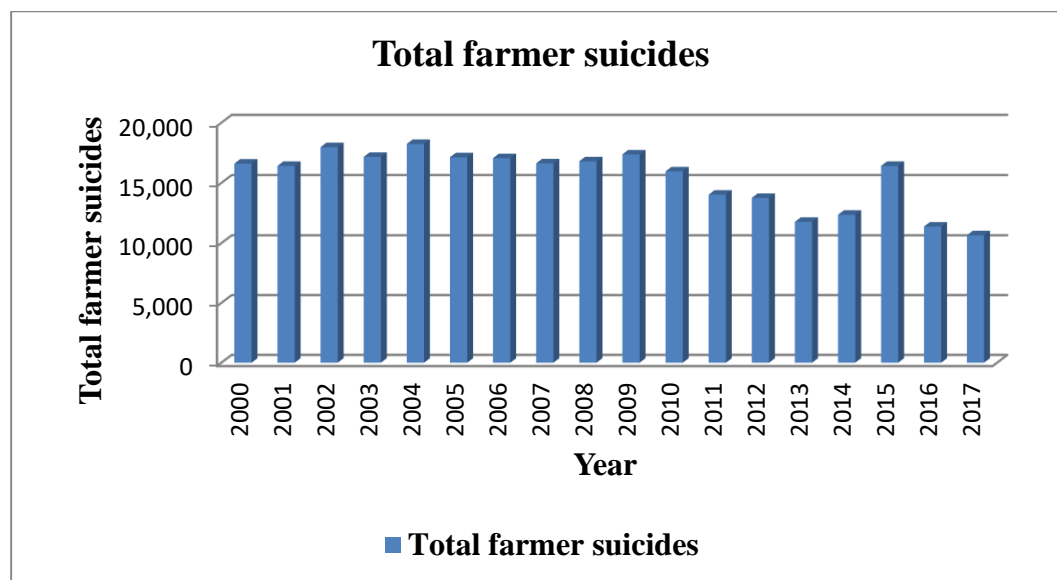
Farmers and total suicide rates per 100,000 people in India. The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported in its 2012 annual report that 135,445 people committed suicide in India, of which 13,755 were farmers (11.2%). Of these, 5 out of 29 states accounted for 10,486 farmers suicides (76%) – Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala.

In 2011, a total of 135,585 people committed suicide, of which 14,207 were farmers. In 2010, 15,963 farmers in India committed suicide, while total suicides were 134,599.

In 2012, the state of Maharashtra, with 3,786 farmers' suicides, accounted for about a quarter of the all India's farmer suicides total (13,754). From 1995 to 2013, a total of 296,438 Indian farmers committed suicide. During the same period, about 9.5 million people died per year in India from other causes including malnutrition, diseases and suicides that were non-farming related, or about 171 million deaths from 1995 to 2013.

Farmer suicides rates in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – two large states of India by size and population – have been about 10 times lower than Maharashtra, Kerala and Pondicherry. In 2012, there were 745 farmer suicides in Uttar Pradesh, a state with an estimated population of 205.43 million. In 2014 there were eight farmer suicides in Uttar Pradesh

All India figures for Farmer suicides as per NCRB	
Year	Total farmer suicides (Not normalized for different populations of different states)
2000	16,603
2001	16,415
2002	17,971
2003	17,164
2004	18,241
2005	17,131
2006	17,060
2007	16,632
2008	16,796
2009	17,368
2010	15,964
2011	14,027
2012	13,754
2013	11,772
2014	12,360
2015	16,415
2016	11,379
2017	10,655
2018	10,349
2019	10,281



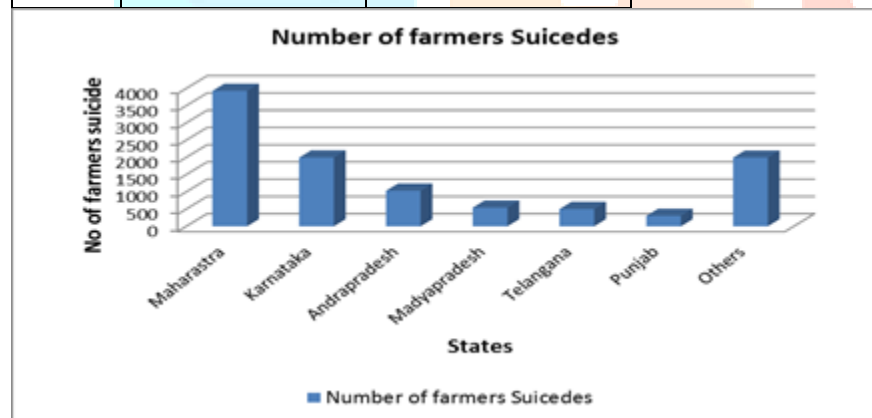
According to IFFRI study number of suicides during 2005–2009 in Gujarat 387, Kerala 905, Punjab 75 and Tamil Nadu 26. While 1802 farmers committed suicide in Chhattisgarh in 2009 and 1126 in 2010, its farmer's suicide dropped to zero in 2011, leading to accusations of data manipulation.

According to the 2012 statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau, the farmer suicides statistics are as follows (Note: The NCRB lists suicides in the different employment categories, but it is not necessary that farming or crop-failure is the cause of the suicides listed in the "farmer" category)

As per National Crime Records Bureau, the number of suicides by farmers and farm labourers increased to 12,360 in 2014 against 11,772 in 2013. It was further increased to 16,415 in 2015. Then considerable number of decrease is noticed during 2016 (11,379). From 2017 the suicide cases are decreasing very thinly. That was 10,655 (2017), 10,349(2018) and 10,281(2019) respectively.

Suicides in Indian states in 2019

Sl.No	States	Farmers
1.	Maharastra	3927
2.	Karnataka	1992
3.	Andrapradesh	1029
4.	Madyapradesh	541
5.	Telangana	499
6.	Punjab	302
7.	Others	1991



Responses to farmers' suicides

The government appointed a number of inquiries to look into the causes of farmers suicide and farm related distress in general. Krishak Ayog (National Farmer Commission) visited all suicide prone farming regions of India, then in 2006 published three reports with its recommendations. Subsequently former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Vidarbha in 2006 and promised a package of ₹110 billion (about \$2.4 billion). The families of farmers who had committed suicide were also offered an ex gratia grant of ₹100,000 (about \$2,000) by the government, though this amount was changed several times.

2006 relief package

In 2006, the Government of India identified 31 districts in the four states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala with high relative incidence of farmers suicides. A special rehabilitation package was launched to mitigate the distress of these farmers. The package provided debt relief to farmers, improved supply of institutional credit, improved irrigation facilities, employed experts and social service personnel to provide

farming support services, and introduced subsidiary income opportunities through horticulture, livestock, dairying and fisheries. The Government of India also announced ex-gratia cash assistance from Prime Ministers National Relief Fund to the farmers. Additionally, among other things, the Government of India announced.

The Government created a special credit vehicle for Vidarbha farmer, to the tune of ₹12.75 billion (US\$190 million). Special teams comprising NABARD and banks were deputed to ensure fresh credit starts flowing to all farmers of the region.

An allocation of ₹21.77 billion (US\$330 million) was made to improve the irrigation infrastructure so that the farmers of Vidarbha region had assured irrigation facilities in the future.

Agricultural debt waiver and debt relief scheme, 2008

The Government of India next implemented the Agricultural debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme in 2008 to benefit over 36 million farmers at a cost of ₹653 billion (US\$9.7 billion). This spending was aimed at writing off part of loan principal as well as the interest owed by the farmers. Direct agricultural loan by stressed farmers under so-called Kisan Credit Card were also to be covered under this Scheme.

Regional initiatives

Various state governments in India have launched their own initiatives to help prevent farmer suicides. The government of Maharashtra set up a dedicated group to deal with farm distress in 2006 known as the Vasantrao Naik Sheti Swavlamban Mission, based in Amravati. A group to study the Farmers Suicides was also constituted by the Government of Karnataka under the Chairmanship of Dr Veeresh, Former Vice-Chancellor of Agricultural University and Prof Deshpande as member.

Bank of Maharashtra Launches Soil and Water Health Card for Farmers 2015

MUMBAI: In a bid to help farmers increase soil productivity by appropriate use of fertilizers, Bank of Maharashtra has launched a soil and water health card which will help them ascertain the nutrient status of their farm lands.

"It will give farmers the level of nutrients available in their farm land so that they can administer correct dosage of fertilizers. This will help improve soil fertility and crop yield," bank's executive director RK Gupta told PTI.

The effort comes as lakhs of farmers in Maharashtra stare at a massive drought this year.

Maharashtra Bill to regulate farmer loan terms, 2008

The State government of Maharashtra, one of the most farmer suicide affected states, passed the Money Lending (Regulation) Act, 2008 to regulate all private money lending to farmers. The bill set maximum legally allowed interest rates on any loans to farmers, setting it to be slightly above the money lending rate by Reserve Bank of India, and it also covered pending loans.

Maharashtra relief package, 2010

The State Government of Maharashtra made it illegal, in 2010, for non-licensed moneylenders from seeking loan repayment. The State Government also announced that it will form Village Farmer Self Help Groups, that will disburse government financed loans, a low rate Crop Insurance program whose premium will be paid 50% by farmer and 50% by government, launch of alternate income opportunities such as poultry, dairy and sericulture for farmers in high suicide prone districts. The government further announced that it will finance a marriage fund under its Samudaik Lagna with ₹10 million (US\$150,000) per year per district, for community marriage celebrations, where many couples get married at the same time to help minimize the cost of marriage celebrations – a cause of suicides among farmers as identified by its own study.

Kerala Farmers' Debt Relief Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2012

Kerala, in 2012, amended the Kerala Farmers' Debt Relief Commission Act, 2006 to extend benefits to all distressed farmers with loans through 2011. It cited continuing farmer suicides as a motivation.

2013 diversify income sources package

In 2013, the Government of India launched a Special Livestock Sector and Fisheries Package for farmers suicide-prone regions of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. The package was aimed to diversify income sources of farmers. The total welfare package consisted of ₹912 million (US\$14 million).

Effectiveness of government response

The government's response and relief packages have generally been ineffective, misdirected and flawed, states Surinder Sud. It has focused on credit and loan, rather than income, productivity and farmer prosperity. Assistance in paying off outstanding principal and interest helps the money lenders, but has failed to create reliable and good sources of income for the farmer going forward. The usurious moneylenders continue to offer loans at interest rates between 24 to 50 percent, while income generating potential of the land the farmer works on has remained low and subject to weather conditions.

Sud states that the government has failed to understand that debt relief just postpones the problem and a more lasting answer to farmer distress can only come from reliable income sources, higher crop yields per hectare, irrigation and other infrastructure security.

Golait, in a Reserve Bank of India paper, acknowledged the positive role of crop diversification initiative announced in government's response to reports of farmer suicides. Golait added, "Indian agriculture still suffers from: i) poor productivity, ii) falling water levels, iii) expensive credit, iv) a distorted market, v) many middlemen and intermediaries who increase cost but do not add much value, vi) laws that stifle private investment, vii) controlled prices, viii) poor infrastructure, and ix) inappropriate research. Thus the approach with mere emphasis on credit in isolation from the above factors will not help agriculture". Furthermore, recommended Golait, a more pro-active role in creating and maintaining reliable irrigation and other agriculture infrastructure is necessary to address farmer distress in India.

International comparison

Farmers suicide is a global phenomenon. Outside India, studies in Sri Lanka, USA, Canada, England and Australia have identified farming as a high stress profession that is associated with a higher suicide rate than the general population. This is particularly true among small scale farmers and after periods of economic distress. Fraser et al., similarly, after a review of 52 scholarly publications, conclude that farming populations in the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States have the highest rates of suicide of any industry and there is growing evidence that those involved in farming are at higher risk of developing mental health problems. Their review claims a wide range of reasons behind farmers suicide globally including mental health issues, physical environment, family problems, economic stress and uncertainties. Significantly higher suicide rate among farmers than general population have been reported in developed countries such as the UK and the US. Children of the victims had left the school and went for wage earning.

Consequences

- Households dislocation and dissolution (particularly victims' wife)
- Anxiety and stress which leads to mental instability / Illness of family members
- Lowered the income of family
- Due to compensation received, Conflict created / developed in family
- There is depletion of ground water, indebtedness by farmers is growing, and youngsters do not take up to agriculture looking to the present fate of farmers. As a result there is distress in agriculture sector.

Solutions

- Rejuvenation of the cooperative credit
- Marketing and processing system
- Storage /cold storage
- Strengthening of the agricultural extension services
- Sympathetic administration
- Alternative source of livelihood such as dairy, fisheries & poultry
- Education about crops, loans ,social evils etc
- Support price, scientific support,
- Loan assistance by banks and co-operative , self-help groups
- Encouraging simple marriage
- Providing good health facilities including psychiatric help
- Crop insurance
- Calamity relief mechanism
- Organic farming/ agriculture security/ creating jobs

Urgent and Permanent solutions

Government has to appoint a supervisor for all the villages so that they are able to find out the ground situation/reality/ problems facing by the FARMER and make sure that it is the duty of that supervisor he/she has to take care of all the individuals of that village. It is his/her responsibility to give report to the government (local/state) which provides all sort of infrastructural facilities to that village. So that he/she can provide major contribution to the overall development of that village. So that we can definitely achieve high standard of living, automatic restriction/minimize/stop migration towards cities and an individual can avail optimum satisfaction at the place of origin itself. It is his/her responsibility to see that there should not be a single farmer's/any individuals **SUICIDE** in that village.

At present government is providing enough funds for rural development. Here in this case village representative must have to spend all the money to the particular work/village or else every individual of the village will have the right to enquire the supervisor. If the supervisor is provided a good remuneration he/she will not go for bribe/corruption

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