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Consequences of Farmers Suicide and Suggestions Perceived from Victim's Households to Prevent Suicides in Vidarbha Region

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Abstract- The present research study was carried out with an exploratory design of social research in suicide hit six districts of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. These districts were Yavatmal, Washim, Buldana, Akola, Amravati and Wardha. Researcher had selected 200 victims by proportionate method of random sampling and data was collected from victim's households by conducting detail interview. Interview was conducted at residence of respondent so as to review over all situation of the family by researcher. In addition to personal interview, RRA technique, time line study for historical perspectives, observations, discussions with family members and discussions with key informants (Police Patil, Sarpanch, local leaders, other farmers of that village), reviewing victims' actual records of institutional debts etc. were some important methods used for data collection. Findings of the study revealed that the economic consequences of suicides are fatal for the family of the incumbent- includes loss of income, asset depletion and deterioration of human capital among others. The above mentioned consequences faced by the family members need to be taken into consideration by various government and non-government organizations and social workers for planning various measures for survival, rehabilitation and future of the victims' families. Majority of the victims' family members suggested for remunerative prices to their farm produce and provision/ creation of irrigation facilities for their farming as the important measures to be taken to prevent the recurrence of suicide tragedies. All these suggestions should also be considered by the policy makers to prevent the suicidal tendency by farmers in distress prone districts of Vidarbha.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan” – Lal Bahadur Shastri, this slogan of a visionary Late. Prime Minister has lost its potential over the time. After independence, according to Gandhiji's vision of Gram-Swaraj, villages and specially farmers were to be the main focus of any development plan of India. As years pass by, agriculture as an industry lost its importance for

policy makers of India. This over the time caused severe distress among the farmers leading to recent dramatic rise in the number of suicides among farmer community. Every day in newspaper invariably there is news related to farmer's suicide.

Government of India had declared 31 districts as distressed district where the Prime Minister's special rehabilitation package is being implemented. In these 31 districts there are six districts from Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. (Anonymous, 2006). In Vidarbha particularly in six districts namely Yavatmal, Amravati, Buldana, Washim, Akola and Wardha, the incidence of suicide of farmers has increased tremendously. Since January 2001 to August 2014, total 10,451 farmers committed suicide (Anonymous, 2014).

This is what we have been hearing from Vidarbha and other part of the country over the last thirteen years. This is now the researchable issue. This research paper deals with various consequences within family after suicidal death of family head or victim farmer in due course of time and for taking suggestions from victim's households, for avoiding this tragic phenomenon, so that in future, we can overcome important root causes by applying various planning and developmental measures in agriculture and with the families of suicide farmers.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study was based on exploratory design of social research and carried out in suicide hit six districts of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. These districts were Yavatmal, Washim, Buldana, Akola, Amravati and Wardha. In this study respondents were the households of selected victim who committed suicide during 1st January 2006 to 31st December 2006 and had declared as a legal victims by district level committee headed by Collector of the respective district, for allotting compensation of Rs. 1 lakh and had got Rs. 1 lakh compensation. The time period 1st January to 31st December 2006 was selected purposively as in this period maximum numbers of suicides were occurred in selected districts of Vidarbha. Before sampling researcher had contacted personally to the collector

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offices of these selected districts, and obtained the complete list of farmers those who committed suicide during 1st January to 31st December 2006. In all, there were 1448 total suicide cases in selected six districts, out of which 874 cases were declared as illegal and 574 cases were declared as legal victims. From the list of 574 legal suicide cases, researcher had selected 200 victims by proportionate method of random sampling. It covers 178 villages and 34 *tahsils* / *talukas* of six districts.

As suicide is a sensitive social issue and thus the investigation has to be made with very guarded and careful manner, and without hurting the sentiments of the family. Data were collected by personal interview method with the help of structured and unstructured interview schedule. Interview was conducted at residence of respondent so as to review over all situation of the family by researcher. In addition to personal interview, RRA technique, time line study for historical perspectives, observations, discussions with family members and discussions with key informants (*Police Patil, Sarpanch*, local leaders, other farmers of that village), reviewing victims' actual records of institutional debts etc. were some important methods used for data collection.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) Consequences

Conceptually, a consequence is defined as the result or effect of an action. Operationally, in present study of farmers' suicide consequences refers to the changes that occurred within the family after suicidal death of family head or victim farmer in due course of time. The changes occurred within family and that also recognized by the family members have been ascertained. While discussing the issue, with victim's households, the different consequences that are presented by family members and also probed by researcher are collected and noted in interview schedule time to time before forgetting the things or leaving the place.

Suicide is a social phenomenon; it creates severe personal, social and economic consequences within family (Jacob 2006). The Vidarbha farmers, who

committed suicide, were mostly the family heads and the main bread earner of the family members. The chronically brood agrarian crisis is wholly responsible for their spate of suicides and these suicides have happened, by and large, due to low income level of the households and their deteriorating socio-economic status in the society. Though family head left the severe agrarian crisis, it is very difficult for his family members to survive/ lives in the worst hit zone of Vidarbha. The present field survey has identified various severe consequences or changes that occurred after death of family head within the family and are recognized and perceived by family members. The data pertaining to the identified consequences are presented in four main heads as mentioned in Table 1.

i. Family disturbance

In Vidarbha, majority of the farmers, who committed suicide, were from the economically and socially disabled groups. After death of family head by suicide in younger age, whole family was disturbed and faced so many consequences. In over one fourth (25.50%) victims' households, poor economic condition compelled their children's to leave the school and go for wage earning for sharing the consumption expenditure of family.

In 9.00 per cent cases, after death of husband in younger age, widow spouse of victim had left the victim's home and went to live with support of her father and mother (Parents). Impediments of marriages of family members was reported in 5.50 per cent cases, while very less proportion of families (3.50%) children were sent to live with relatives either for education or for wage earning.

ii. Psychological impact

After sudden and confidential act of suicide by family head or young member of family, severe psychological impact was observed on other family members. In majority of victims' households (45.50%), due to death of family head, severe anxiety and stress was developing about future life, which leads to mental instability. In 13.50 per cent households; some family members became sick after death of family head and in 4.50 per cent cases sense of hopelessness was reported.

Table 1 : Distribution of victims' household according to their consequences

Sr. No.	Consequences	Number	Percentage
A	Family disturbance		
1	Children of the victims had left the school and went for wage earning	51	25.50
2	Households dislocation and dissolution (particularly victims' wife)	18	9.00
3	Impediments of marriages of family members	11	5.50
4	Children were sent to live with relatives	07	3.50

B	Psychological impact		
1	Develop an anxiety and stress which leads to mental instability	91	45.50
2	Illness of family members	27	13.50
3	Developed a sense of hopelessness	09	4.50
C	Effect on working		
1	Lowered the income of family	113	56.50
2	Loss of interest in work	24	12.00
D	Due to compensation received		
1	Conflict created / developed in family	5	2.50

iii. *Effect on working*

Over half (56.50%) of the households recognized that their family income was lowered after death of family head and 12.00 per cent families expressed loss of interest in farming work.

iv. *Due to compensation received*

For the present study, only the cases those who got the compensation of Rs. 1 lakh were selected, but in meagre cases (2.50%) conflict were created among the spouse of the victims and other older family members. The probable reason is that deceased was the only major income earner for all family members. But while providing Government help, particularly spouse of victim was considered for receiving compensation and not the older family members. But in few cases, spouse of the victim had left the deceased home and went for living with support of her father and mother or living separately. In such cases, conflict was created among the older family members and spouse of

the victims due to demand of half compensation from victim's spouse by older family members and due to increasing survival vulnerability of the old family members. These findings are confirmed by the finding of Anonymous (2008) that conflict was created between the victims' spouse and old father of the victim after receiving compensation from Government in Jamb village of Akola District in Vidarbha.

b) *Suggestions*

Suggestions are one of the important aspects of any research study in social sciences. It refers to the opinion of family members about what action should be taken for avoiding recurrence of suicides, which can help to some extent for finding out ground realities of suicides and help to suggest different measures to solve farmers' distress in Vidarbha region. The responses received from the family members of the deceased farmers were noted and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Suggestions to prevent suicide as perceived by the family members of the deceased farmers

Sr.No	Suggestions to prevent suicide	Frequency	Percentage
1	Remunerative prices to farm produce.	188	94.00
2	Provision/ creation of irrigation facilities.	142	71.00
3	Complete ban on alcohol and gambling	62	31.00
4	Family counseling for increasing self-confidence through local leaders/ social workers.	62	31.00
5	Abundant electric supply for farming.	60	30.00
6	Complete waiving of old loans.	58	29.00
7	Provision of easy, timely and sufficient credit at low interest rate.	55	27.50
8	Creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources.	45	22.50
9	Crop insurance	32	16.00
10	Availability of information about agricultural technology.	30	15.00
11	Mass marriage system should be encouraged in society.	28	14.00
12	Timely employment by creating non-farm employment opportunities.	26	13.00
13	Strict vigil on the quality of inputs in the market.	20	10.00
14	Immediate government help in natural calamities and in losses by wild animals.	20	10.00
15	Compensation of Rs. one lakh should be stopped.	04	2.00

It is clear from Table 2 that majority (94.00%) family members of the deceased farmers suggested for remunerative prices to their farm produce and provision/

creation of irrigation facilities (71.00%) as the important measures to be taken to prevent the recurrence of suicide tragedies.

Sizable family members of the deceased farmers suggested for complete ban on alcohol and gambling (31.00%), family counseling for increasing self-confidence through local leaders/ social workers (31.00%), abundant electric supply for farming (30.00%), complete waiving of old loans (29.00%), provision of easy, timely and sufficient credit at low interest rate (27.50%), creation of subsidiary occupations and other income sources (22.50%), crop insurance (16.00%), availability of information about agricultural technology (15.00%), mass marriage system should be encouraged in society (14.00%), timely employment by creating non-farm employment opportunities (13.00%), strict vigil on the quality of inputs in the market (10.00%), immediate government help in natural calamities and in losses by wild animals (10.00%), and compensation of rupees one lakh should be stopped (2.00%) were the measures suggested by family members of the deceased farmers to solve farmers' distress in Vidarbha region.

IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

For many victims' spouse or many widows and their family members, suicide is not about the dead, it is about the living and for them they soldiers on. Every moment of life has been a struggle for them. The above mentioned consequences faced by the family members need to be taken into consideration by various government and non-government organizations and social workers for planning various measures for survival, rehabilitation and future of the victims' families. Majority of the victims' family members suggested for remunerative prices to their farm produce and provision/ creation of irrigation facilities for their farming as the important measures to be taken to prevent the recurrence of suicide tragedies.

Farmers' suicides are the result of the agrarian crisis, which cannot be solved only with firefighting techniques. A well thought concerted strategy for both the short and long term is needed. While planning short and long term measures, the government should to focus on above suggestions made by the family members of deceased farmers. But immediately in short term measures there is an urgent need to declare the remunerative prices for all crops on the basis of cost of cultivation and secondly, in long term measures, the government should focus more on increasing rural infrastructure particularly irrigation facilities in Vidarbha region, because irrigation and other infrastructure facilities are very poor in Vidarbha region. This will definitely help in increasing crop production, productivity, and change in cropping pattern, cropping intensity, and increase in the allied occupations in study area. These things are necessary not only for uphold the farmers economically but also for sustaining them socio-psychologically.

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