

FARMER SUICIDE IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Farmer suicide in India is the intentional ending of one's life by a person dependent on farming as their primary source of livelihood. In 2012, the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 13,754 farmer suicides. The farmer's suicide rate in India has ranged between 1.4 to 1.8 per 100,000 total populations, over a 10-year period through 2005.

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.

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 to 1940s.^{[10][11]} However starvation related deaths far exceeded those by suicide, the latter being officially classified under "injuries". Death rate classified under "injuries", in 1897, was 79 per 100,000 people in Central Provinces of India and 37 per 100,000 people in Bombay Presidency.

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 population. Reddy, in 1993, reviewed high rates of farmer suicides in Andhra Pradesh and its relationship to farm size and productivity.^[17]

Reporting in popular press about farmers' suicides in India began in mid-1990s, particularly by Palagummi Sainath .In 2000s, the issue gained international attention and a variety of Indian government initiatives.

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 farmer's suicide statistics from 1995.

REASONS

Reasons for farm suicides. [¶] (in 2002)	Percent (of suicides)
Habits like drinking, gambling, etc.	20.35
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

Various reasons have been offered to explain why farmers commit suicide in India, including: drought, 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. Panagariya states, "farm-related reasons get cited only approximately 25 percent of the time as reasons for suicide", and, "studies do consistently show greater debt burden and greater reliance on informal sources of credit" amongst farmers who commit suicide.¹

A study conducted in 2014 found that there are three specific characteristics associated with high risk farmers: "those that grow cash crops such as coffee and cotton; those with 'marginal' farms of less than one hectare; and those with debts of 300 Rupees or more." The study also found that the Indian states in which these three characteristics are most common had the highest suicide rates and also accounted for "almost 75% of the variability in state-level suicides."

A 2012 study did a regional survey on farmer's suicide in rural Vidarbha (Maharashtra) and applied a Smith's Saliency method to qualitatively rank the expressed causes among farming families who had lost someone to suicide. The expressed reasons in order of importance behind farmer suicides were – debt, alcohol addiction, environment, low produce prices, stress and family responsibilities, apathy, poor irrigation, increased cost of cultivation, private money lenders, use of chemical fertilizers and crop failure.¹ In other words debt to stress and family responsibilities were rated as significantly higher than fertilizers and crop failure. In a different study in the same region in 2006, indebtedness (87%) and deterioration in the economic status (74%) were found to be major risk factors for 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 counselling 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."

An Indian study conducted in 2002 indicated an association between victims engaging in entrepreneurial activities (such as venturing into new crops, cash crops, and following market trends) and their failure in meeting expected goals due a range of constraints

DROUGHT

As much as 80% 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.

GM CROPS

A number of social activist groups and studies proposed a link between GM crops and farmer suicides. BT 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). The moneylender was claimed to collect his dues at harvest time, by compelling farmers to sell their cotton to him at a price lower than it fetches on the market. According to activists, this created a source of debt and economic stress, ultimately suicides, among farmers.

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 most common cause for suicide in India's south are a combination of social issues, such as interpersonal and family problems, financial difficulties, and pre-existing mental illness. Suicidal ideation is as culturally accepted in south India as in some high-income countries. 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 farmer's 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

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 13,754 were farmers (11.2%).¹ 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)

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.¹

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 farmers 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*):

Farmers' suicides in the state of Maharashtra 1995-2013

Year	Maharashtra farm suicides
1995	1083
1996	1981
1997	1917
1998	2409
1999	2423

2000	3022
2001	3536
2002	3695
2003	3836
Total 1995-2003	23,902
2004	4147
2005	3926
2006	4453
2007	4238
2008	3802
2009	2872
2010	3141
2011	3337
2012	3786
2013	3146

Total 2004-2013	36848
Total 1995-2013	60,750

Maharashtra	Andhra Pradesh	Karnataka	Madhya Pradesh+ Chhattisgarh*	Yearly Total for Big 5	Yearly Total All-India Farm Suicides	Big 5 FS as % of all farm suicides
1063	1196	2490	1239	6008	10720	56.04
1981	1706	2011	1809	7507	13729	54.68
1917	1097	1832	2390	7236	13622	53.12
2409	1813	1883	2278	8383	16015	52.34
2423	1974	2379	2654	9430	16082	58.64
3022	1525	2630	2660	9837	16603	59.25
3536	1509	2505	2824	10374	16485	63.20
3695	1896	2340	2578	10509	17971	58.48
20066	12716	18070	18432	69284	121157	57.19
3836	1800	2678	2511	10825	17164	63.07
4147	2666	1963	3033	11809	18241	64.74
3926	2490	1883	2660	10959	17131	63.97
4453	2607	1720	2858	11638	17060	68.22
4238	1797	2135	2856	11026	16632	66.29
3802	2105	1737	3152	10796	16196	66.66
2872	2414	2282	3197	10765	17368	61.98
3141	2525	2585	2363	10614	15964	66.49
3337	2206	2100	1326**	8969	14027	63.94
33752	20610	19083	23956	97401	149783	65.03
53818	33326	37153	42388	166685	270940	61.52
include Chhattisgarh's 2011 figure not as 'zero' but as 1555 based on the preceding year average.						
3337	2206	2100	2881	10524	15582	67.54
33752	20610	19083	25511	98956	151338	65.39
53818	33326	37153	49943	168240	272495	61.74

Tables derived from National Crime Records Bureau reports from 1995 to 2011
 * if possible to disaggregate MP and Chhattisgarh data for the years they were an undivided
 ** their numbers are taken together here.
 Chhattisgarh figure is 0
 Chhattisgarh figure taken as average of 2006 to 2010 period which is 1555.

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