

## “AGRICULTURAL DISTRESS AND FARMERS SUICIDE IN INDIA”

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### **Abstract**

India is an agrarian country with around 50% of its people directly or indirectly depends 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 leading to a series of droughts, lack of better prices, exploitation by Middlemen, all of which have led to a series of suicides committed by farmers across India. There is a wide array of factors that has led to the increasing spate of farmer suicides in India. The lands are not as productive as before, the markets are failing, the debts are piling up, and the pests cannot be kept at bay. More than an economic problem, this has now assumed political and humanitarian dimensions, especially since the past decade. Hence nowadays the suicidal tendency among farmers' who are supposed to be the back bone of Indian society is the subject of concern. Considering the paramount importance of this issue, the NCRB (National Crime Record Bureau), for the first time in 2014, has collected detailed data on farmers' suicides. With this backdrop the present study going to make an analysis of the farmers' suicide in India. This paper examines the causes of farmers' suicide in India from different perspectives and the results have some policy implications.

**Key words: Agriculture, Agricultural Distress, Farmers' Suicide, Small Farmers.**

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## 1. Introduction

India is mainly an agricultural country. Agriculture is the most important occupation for most of the Indian families. In India, agriculture contributes about thirteen percent (13.8%) of total GDP and ten percent (10%) of total exports. Over 60 % of India's land area is arable making it the second largest country in terms of total arable land. Agricultural products of significant economic value include rice, wheat, potato, tomato, onion, mangoes, sugar-cane, beans, cotton, etc. Unfortunately due to uncertainty of monsoon, non-availability of credit, increasing prices of seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, agriculture has become a most critical industry and farmers are suffering due to economic distress and they are committing suicide on large scale in different provinces of the country. A large number of farmers' suicides in various parts of the country are perhaps a most distressing phenomenon observed in India over the last two decade. These suicides, reached almost epidemic proportions in certain pockets of the country. Since the mid 1990s, large section of the farm households has been facing a distress as a consequence of decline in agricultural income, declined repaying capacity and thereby increased debt burden. The agrarian crisis in India has both the long term structural and institutional as well as, short term manifestation. The long term structural features are sharp decline in the share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accompanied by very low rate of labour force diversification away from agriculture.

India is an agrarian country with around 48.9% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. 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, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), for the first time (2014), has collected detailed data on farmers' suicides. Farmers include those who own and work on field (viz. cultivators) as well as those who employ or hire workers for field work or farming activities. It excludes agricultural labourers. A total of 5,650 farmers have committed suicides during 2014, accounting for 4.3% of total suicides victims in the country.

## 2. Objectives

- To analyze the trends of farmers' suicide in India.
- To examine the causes for farmers' suicide in India.

- To study the state wise and gender wise distribution of farmers' suicides.

### 3. Methodology

The present study made use of the secondary data from the National Crime Records Bureau Reports, NABARD annual reports and others. The data collected for the research are analyzed with the help of simple statistical techniques such as AGR, CAGR, percentage and graphs to come to meaningful conclusions.

### 4. Results and Discussions

The Indian peasantry, the largest body of surviving small farmers in the world, today faces a crisis of extinction. For the past couple of years, farmers' suicide has become a major issue in India. Hence there is an urgent need to study the causes for farmers' suicide and to suggest some remedial measures to this problem. With this relevance the present study is going to discuss various issues related to farmers' suicide.

**Table: 1 Trends in suicide Reported under Farming and Agricultural Activity**

Year	Males	Females	Persons	Male as % of total	AGR
1995	8295	2425	10720	77.37	-
1996	10897	2832	13729	79.37	28.069
1997	11229	2393	13622	82.43	-0.779
1998	12986	3029	16015	81.08	17.567
1999	13278	2804	16082	82.56	0.4184
2000	13501	3102	16603	81.31	3.2396
2001	13829	2586	16415	84.24	-1.132
2002	15308	2663	17971	85.18	9.4791
2003	14680	2463	17143	85.63	-4.607
2004	15929	2312	18241	87.32	6.4049
2005	14973	2158	17131	87.40	-6.085

2006	14664	2396	17060	85.95	-0.414
2007	14509	2123	16632	87.23	-2.509
2008	14145	2051	16196	87.33	-2.621
2009	14951	2417	17368	86.08	7.2364
2010	13592	2372	15964	85.14	-8.084
2011	12071	1956	14027	86.05	-12.13
2012	11951	1803	13754	86.89	-1.946
2013	10489	1283	11772	89.10	-14.41
2014	10889	1471	12360	88.09	4.9949

Source: ADSI report 2014

The above table 1 revealed the gender composition of Farm suicides, according to the data, the male farmers' suicide higher than females. Considering the period 1995-2014 as a whole, about 85 per cent of all farm suicides were by male farmers. As farmers' suicides were concentrated among males, the pattern of growth of male suicides determined the overall pattern of farm suicides. They reached a peak in 2004, when 15,929 male farmers committed suicide. The highest growth rate in farmers' suicide recorded in the year of 1996.

**Table: 2 States & UTs Wise Distribution of Farmers' Suicides by Gender – 2014**

STATE/UT	Male	Female	Transgender	Total
Andhra Pradesh	157	3	0	160
Arunachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0
Assam	21	0	0	21
Bihar	0	0	0	0
Chhattisgarh	391	52	0	443
Goa	0	0	0	0
Gujarat	31	14	0	45
Haryana	14	0	0	14

Himachal Pradesh	28	4	0	32
Jammu & Kashmir	7	5	0	12
Jharkhand	0	0	0	0
Karnataka	297	24	0	321
Kerala	107	0	0	107
Madhya Pradesh	688	138	0	826
Maharashtra	2498	70	0	2568
Manipur	0	0	0	0
Meghalaya	0	0	0	0
Mizoram	0	0	0	0
Nagaland	0	0	0	0
Odisha	5	0	0	5
Punjab	21	3	0	24
Rajasthan	0	0	0	0
Sikkim	33	2	0	35
Tamilnadu	63	5	0	68
Telangana	751	147	0	898
Tripura	0	0	0	0
Uttar Pradesh	59	4	0	63
Uttarakhand	0	0	0	0
West Bengal	0	0	0	0
A&N	7	1	0	8
Chandigarh	0	0	0	0
Dadar And Haveli	0	0	0	0
Daman Diu	0	0	0	0
Delhi	0	0	0	0
Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0

Puducherry	0	0	0	0
(All India) Total	5178	472	0	5650

Source: ADSI report 2014

The state wise and gender wise analysis of farmers' suicide explained in the above table 2, out of 5650 farmers' suicide in India in 2014 around 50% (2568) suicides committed in the Maharashtra state only. In Chattishgarh, Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh also there were large number of farmers committed suicide. In the total suicides more than 85 % male farmers lost their lives. Among UTs in Andaman & Nicobar, 8 farmers lost their life, while in other UTs there were no any cases registered.

**Table: 3 Incidence of Age wise Farmers' Suicides during 2014**

sex/age	below18	18-30	30-60	60 above	total
Male	35	1,131	3,480	532	5,178
Female	24	169	232	47	472
Transgender	0	0	0	0	0
Total	59	1,300	3712	579	5,650
%Share	1.00%	23.00%	65.70%	10.20%	100%

Source: ADSI report 2014

Age group wise and sex wise data is presented in the above table 3. Majority of victims belong to the age group of above 30 years and below 60 years of age group accounting for 65.7% of total farmers' suicides during 2014. A total of 59 farmers (below 18 years of age) have committed suicides during 2014. 10.2% of farmers who have committed suicides were senior citizens.

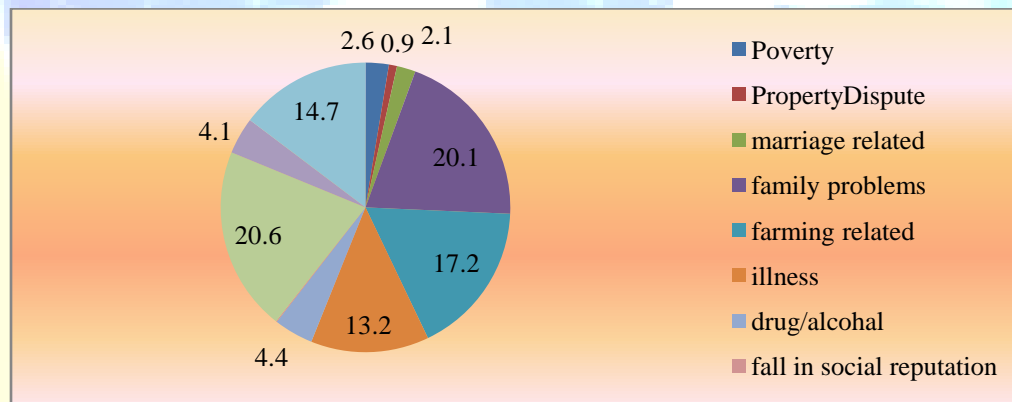
**Table: 4 Share of Major Causes of Farmers Suicides during 2014**

Cause	Male	Female	Transgender	Total	% share
Poverty	140	9	0	149	2.6
Property Dispute	52	0	0	52	0.9

marriage related	63	58	0	121	2.1
family problems	1038	97	0	1135	20.1
<b>farming related</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>17.2</b>
illness	682	63	0	745	13.2
drug/alcohol	250	0	0	250	4.4
fall in social reputation	6	1	0	7	0.1
Bankruptcy	1112	51	0	1163	20.6
causes unknown	208	23	0	231	4.1
other causes	759	69	0	828	14.7
total	5178	472	0	5650	100

Source: ADSI report 2014

**Figure: 1 Percentage Share of Major Causes of Farmers Suicides during 2014**

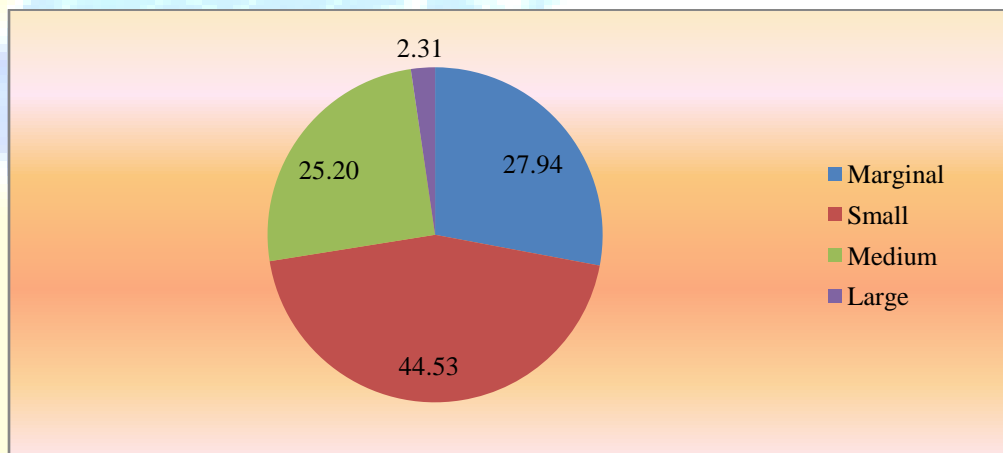


The above table 4 and figure 1 showed bankruptcy and family problems are major causes of suicides, accounting for 20.6% and 20.1% respectively of total farmers' suicides during 2014. The other prominent causes of farmers' suicides were farming related issues (17.2%), Illness (13.2%) and drug or alcoholic addiction (4.4%). During 2014, major causes of suicides among male farmers were bankruptcy and family problems, which accounted for 21.5% and 20.0% respectively of total male farmers' suicides. Whereas, in female farmers' suicides, farming related issues followed by family problems, accounting 101 out of 472 suicides and 97 suicides respectively during 2014.

**Table: 5 Share of Farmers' Suicides by Land Holding Status during 2014**

	Male	Female	transgender	Total
Marginal Farmers	1425	154	0	1579
Small Farmers	2364	152	0	2516
Medium Farmers	1274	150	0	1424
Large Farmers	115	16	0	131
Total	5178	472	0	5650

Source: ADSI report 2014

**Figure: 2 Percentage Share of Farmers' Suicides by Land Holding Status during 2014**

As per land holding status, farmers have been classified in four categories namely marginal farmers (having less than 1 hectare of land), small farmers (having 1 hectare to below 2 hectare of land), medium farmers (having 2 hectare to below 10 hectare of land) and large farmers (having more than 10 hectare of land). This classification is meant for statistical purpose only. The land holding status of farmers who have committed suicides is presented in the above table 5 and figure 2. Land holding status of farmers who committed suicide revealed that 44.5% and 27.9% of victims were small farmers and marginal farmers respectively, they together accounted for 72.4% total farmer suicides. This is because of large section of this farm households has been



facing a distress as a consequence of decline in agricultural income, declined repaying capacity and thereby increased debt burden than others.

## 5. Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

The overall conclusion emerging from the analysis of the agricultural distress and farmers' suicide in India is that majority of victims belong to the age group of above 30 years and below 60 years group accounting for 65.7% of total farmers' suicides during 2014 and the percentage of farmers' suicide was very high under male category. As the study revealed bankruptcy and family problems are major causes of suicides, accounting for 20.6% and 20.1% respectively of total farmers' suicides during 2014. Further, the study revealed that 17.2% of farmers' suicide caused by farming related issues. Hence in reducing the agricultural distress there is a need to give much importance to agriculture in policy formulation. The percentage share of small and marginal farmers in total farmers' suicide accounted more than 70%, it clearly explained decline in agricultural income, declined repaying capacity and thereby increased debt burden made small and marginal farmers to commit to suicide. With this few remarks this study suggests that in framing the policies policy makers should give importance to uplift the small and marginal farmers. Further, there is a need for meaningful crop insurance policies and small farmers should be encouraged to develop alternative sources of income and the government should take up the responsibility for providing training to the farmers to acquire new skills. Facilitating national weather risk management system that alerts farmers when there is a danger of extreme weather would go a long way in reducing losses in agriculture and there is a need to address the debt problem facing by farmers by the government.

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