

Farmers and Stressful Farming: The Conflict and Chaos

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Abstract

Indian farmers, especially the owners of marginal and fragmented holdings, are running and reeling under incessant stress and drudgery. The stressors are dwindling and uncertain income, insurmountable debt trap and unpredictable climate. When costs are simmering, returns are extremely stoic; the farmers are being thrown into a hell of chaos. The sociology of Indian farming steers down the pathway of chaos and entropy; farmers' suicides are the shocking indicator to measure the unfathomable agony and distress.

Keywords: Stress; Chaos; Entropy; Conflict; Indicator; Suicides.

Introduction

The word 'stress' has variable resonance to farmers as it is suspected that the word might have mantled from studies of white-collar professionals. While some researchers have regarded it as shorthand for anxiety, depression, frustration or worry, others have gone with failure, being unable to cope and making them distanced from difficulties of their circumstances. Stress has different forms and effects, from its acute and devastating impulse to more chronic and long-term impacts. To understand a comparatively holistic aspect of stress and to develop a complex depiction of how stressors fit together and change over time, intense observation on farmers are needed.

People from non-farm occupations often consider farming as a stress-free and risk-free occupation and assume that farming communities are living joyful life along with natural beauty, enjoying their work at farm on day and coming back to home. But reality is something different. Farming communities are facing lots of stress to survive. They are under influence of physical, financial, weather, over work load stress and unable to get rid of these due to various circumstances. This community is engulfed

by different kind of stressors. In general, every people work with positive energy and self-confidence for achieving ultimate goal but in distress they are incompetent to remove the burden with limited ability. These crucial conditions arise due to change in opportunities, demand, climate, environment, threat, constrains and old farming practices.

Adam Butler explained, the context of stress was often crucial whether it was perceived as 'good' or 'bad' stress; he also associated unmanageable stress with uncontrollable circumstances:

"But the trouble is, a challenge is also a stress. So today's challenge is tomorrow's stress."

There are various mental health risk factors of farmers. Farmers have to work for long hours often in isolation. Till now research has highly focused on farmers' experience and less concentrated on how stress affects farming communities more widely, or on the relationship between work-related and extrinsic causes of stress.

Objectives

- i) To study the stress level of farm community.
- ii) To analyze the different stressors and their impact on farmers.

- iii) To study the division of labor and gender discrimination in agriculture.

Methodology

- i) Concept building and frame working
- ii) Literature review and citations
- iii) Analysis and resolution
- iv) Bibliographic support

Farming: From blessings to burden

During the last few decades, agriculture has gone through a lot of changes and it has also become a potential area of stress. Greater use of technology, random use of organic cultivation, declined price of agricultural products, complicated legislation and paperwork have made the life of farmers more stressful. There are several signs or symptoms of stress, when a person may need help. These symptoms can be observed by family members, friends, neighbors or health and human service workers. There are daily issues regarding balanced budgets, family life, keeping up with development in the area and planning for future. Social isolation and working for long hours can increase stress. The extra pressure of managing a farm during natural disasters, climatic extremes and market fluctuation can be unbearable (Chitrasena Padhy et al., December 2018). Since many years Indian farming community, especially farmers from drought prone areas have been under constant occupational stress. Basically farmers are experiencing unpredictable weather and financial problems as major stress factors. Small farmers are most susceptible to stress. So, agricultural scientists, marketing and financial experts, policy makers should create a suitable environment for farmers to overcome the stressors (Javed Sabbir Kureshi et al., April 2018). Some researchers have used Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) to measure anxiety and depression symptoms. Both male and female farmers have high level of depression than the general working population but the levels of anxiety symptoms don't differ. The differences between farmers and the general-working population in depression symptom levels have increased with age (Magnhild Oust Torske et al., February 2016).

The Indian farming consists of 225 million workforces which covers 140 million hectares of cultivated land. In spite of rapid farm mechanization (149 million farm machinery), the vast resource-poor farming families have primary dependence

on traditional methods (520 million hand tools and 37 million animal-drawn implements are in operation). Drudgery due to work, traumatic accidents and injuries are the major concerns for ergonomics intervention and betterment of work in crop production activities. In four regions of the country, tractor accidents (falling from the tractor, overturning etc.) were highest (27.7%), followed by thresher (14.6%), sprayer/duster (12.2%), sugarcane crusher (8.1%) and chaff cutter (7.8%) accidents. Most of the fatal accidents have caused from the powered machinery with the annual fatality rate of 22 per 100000 farmers. In spite of the enactment of legislation, the shortcomings in monitoring of the machinery in field use are responsible for the high rate of accidents (42 thresher accidents/1000 mechanical threshers/year in southern India) (Pranab Kumar Nag and Anjali Nag, February 17, 2004).

Cancer has been skyrocketed in Punjab, which was a pioneer state in success of Green Revolution. A study of Punjab University in 2008. Paul, S. (30 October, 2012) Depicted a high rate of genetic damage among farmers, which was attributed to pesticide use. The widespread chemical pollution in communities by herbicides and pesticides is creating public health issues, which has disproportionately impacted farm women. Farm occupation leads to stress due to finance, weather, work overload, farm hassles and social interaction, though financial factors are found to be slightly higher than other factors as they don't have separate budget for health issues, occasions, entertainment etc.

Agricultural spot markets are being replaced by the contract-farming and the vertical coordination systems around the world (Hendrikse and Bijman, 2002) and there are a large number of publications focusing on contract farming (Allen and Leuck 1995; Bolwig et al. 2009; Hellin et al. 2009). In 1998, World Bank's structural adjustment policies forced India to open up its seed sector to global corporations like Cargill, Monsanto and Syngenta. The global corporations had changed the input economy overnight. Farm saved seeds were replaced by corporate seeds which need more fertilizers and chemical pesticides and this policy had created conflicts among small farmers (Shiva and Jalees). Globalization, policy change and increased competition in the domestic market are together putting pressure on agricultural cooperatives to make an efficient contract for vertical coordination with their member-farmers. The share of the cooperatives' profit is a crucial issue of conflict in the long-term sustainability of marketing (Wang et al., 2011).

In spite of several government schemes to boost income of farmers, their situation is terrific till date. Farm production is fully dependent on climate and weather. Due to weather fluctuation, natural calamities (flood, drought, hailstorm etc) and climate change, sometimes production is impeded and farmers face severe losses. In 2014 & 2015, two successive years of draught in several states in India basically in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat has made the situation of farmers' worst. In 2017-18, unseasonal rain and floods in many states have also added to the farmers' woes. As most of the farmers are not covered by insurance and do not receive relief for crop damage, sometimes the stress becomes so intense that they take the path of self-destruction.

As per a study conducted in 2002, 16.84 percent of farmers' suicide took place due to crop failure. Farmers' suicide has become a national catastrophe since 1990 mostly due to their inability to repay loans. In 2014, more than 60000 suicides had taken place only in Maharashtra. (Sainath, P. (21 July, 2014). According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, a total 296438 Indian farmers had committed suicide since 1995. States with loose financial and entry regulations like Maharashtra, Odisha, Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh are in leading position in case of farmers' suicide.(NCRB report-farmers suicides. Government of India). The core problems of rapid population growth, growing

inequality, rising unemployment and widespread poverty have find their origin in stagnation and retrogression of economy in rural areas. Under these circumstances it is not a surprise that a considerable number of farmers had committed suicide in the second half of the 1990s (Shiva and Jalees). Few years ago a British study had shown that farmers had a lower prevalence of psychiatric morbidity than the other population, but they were more likely to think that life was not worth living. Dr. Mohan Issac, a professor of psychiatry at NIMHANS believes that farmers' suicides are multifactored; several factors have been acting in a cumulative manner. In many cases, end comes due to losing the last straw. (Shiva V, Jalees K. Farmers Suicides in India).

Prof. M. D. Nanjundaswamy blames free imports, falling prices and lack of social security of farmers for this situation. He also believes that sometimes compensation for farmers committing suicide acts as an incentive.(Shiva V, Jalees K. Farmers Suicides in India)

Farming is facing severe threats due to price collapsing of farm commodities. In spite of huge pulse production in 2016-17, imports of about 6.6 million tons was arrived which made problem in national market. Again in successive year, another 5.6 million tons pulse crop was imported which devastatingly depressed domestic prices. According to NITI AYOOG, maximum farmers don't realize remunerative prices due to limited reach of Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and agricultural

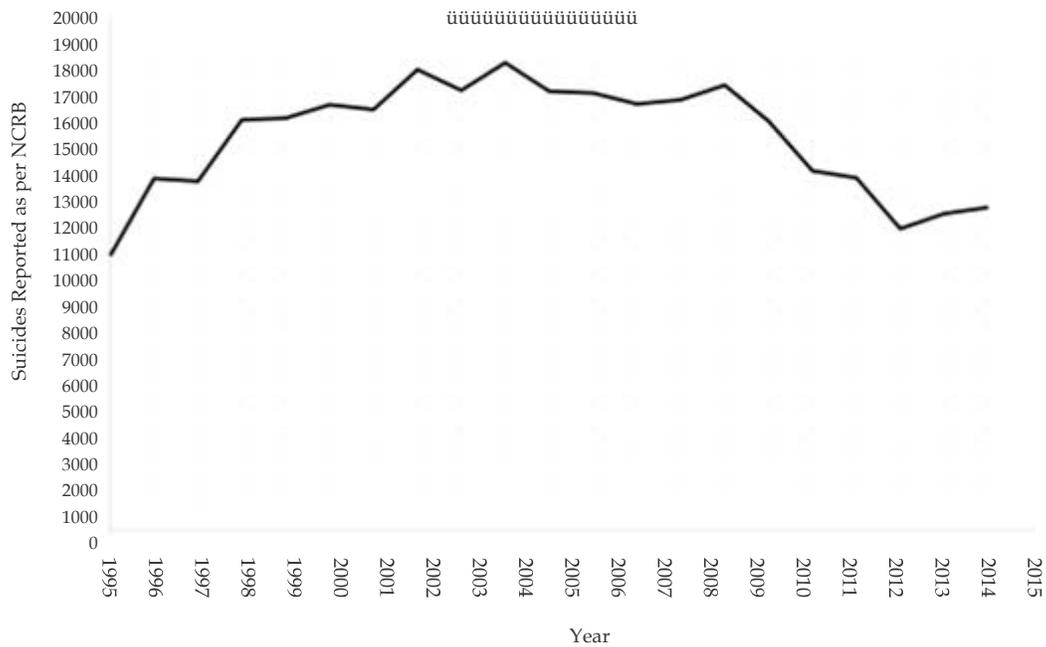


Fig. 1: NCRB report-farmers suicides. Government of India.

marketing system which delivers only a small fraction of final price to the actual farmers. NITI AYOJ has also stated that marketing potential is neglected by farm sector. (Gupta, S. (13 December, 2018).

On the other hand, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana was launched in 2016 to provide financial support and insurance in case of crop failure due to natural calamities, disease and pest infestation. But this scheme has seen lower enrolments due to high premiums and lack of innovations by insurance firms. Though the central government sanctioned Rs.40000 crore long-term irrigation funds for 99 large irrigation projects all over country through National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), but bureaucratic delay and slow implementation have hindered the progress.

Linked to the stigma of mental illness, many farmers are displeased to discuss about the ways in which farming is affecting their mental health. The Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), (Sood, J. (12 March, 2018). a pioneer social science research institute has stated that the country is going through a deep farming crisis. According to their survey, 76 percent farmers want to give up farming due to low income, stress and health breakdown. Farmers are lacking motivation nowadays. Many farmers are not in farming by their choice but because it is the only way for them to earn bread butter. Many farmers have no knowledge of recent agricultural innovations and still depend on the knowledge passed over their ancestors. Sometimes farmers do have knowledge about any innovation but they don't want to try any new crop because they think what if the new innovation turns out bad. They don't want to take any risk. Small farmers don't even afford risk. The average inflation in our country in 2014-15 was 6.37% but for the same time period MSP (minimum support price) of wheat was increased by only 3.07% which means that same amount of things which a farmer had bought for rupees 100 in 2013, he/she had to pay rupees 106.37 in 2014-15 but he/she had only 103.07 rupees. This is also ensuring decrease in farmers' interest in farming.

In case of farm women, their access is limited to less skilled job like sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, which fit well within the framework of domestic work and child-rearing. They are also used as unpaid subsistence laborer. Globally more than 400 million women engage in farming, but they always lack equal rights in land ownership

in more than 90 countries. According to a study of Oxfam (2013), ((16 October, 2013). Around 80 percent of farm work has been done by women in this country but they possess only 13 percent of the land. Another statistics released by University of Maryland and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) Pachauri, S. (19 February, 2019). In 2018 stated that in India women constitute over 42 percent of the agricultural labor force but own less than two percent of land. Farm women are affected by lack of official recognition as female agricultural worker and exclusion from rights and entitlements, such as institutional credit, pension etc.

A woman cultivator or woman labor works for 14 hours in and outside the home. During peak season she has to work for more than 16 hours a day. A female labor or cultivator has to do household activities, child care, buying and selling of agricultural commodities at the same time in which involvement of male members of the family is very low (M. R. Ravichandran, 2014). A study conducted in Haryana revealed that farm women can't decide any farm operation independently and can dominate only decisions related to home sphere such as storage of farm produce, purchase or sale of animal and credit etc. Now, why the women's role in Indian economy is not recognized and is given such an inferior position must be a matter of concern.

Gender disparity in wages in agriculture is a widely documented phenomenon. In developing countries, wage differences between male and female agricultural laborers are a very common problem. The standard wage discrimination analysis suggests that gender wage gap variation among different countries is due to cross-country variation in 'explainable' differences in observed characteristics and the variation in 'unexplained' differences attribute to wage discrimination.

People often talk about women empowerment i.e. women should have powers to determine their own activities; women should have an authority to make decisions and guide their own destiny. This power in decision making can be acquired only if they have a thorough and clear knowledge about the plans and programmes, current issues, basic human development and social policies.

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