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Suicide of farmer and farm workers amid COVID-19 in India

Dr. Raghavendra RH* Anil Kumar R**and Shakunthala H ***

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*Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Government First Grade College Shiralakoppa 577428, Shikaripura Tq, Shimoga Dist, Karnataka
**Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Economics, Government First Grade College Shiralakoppa 577428, Shikaripura Tq, Shimoga Dist, Karnataka
***Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Government First Grade College for Women, Chitradurga Dist, Karnataka

Correspondence author mail id: raghavpondiuni@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine the current scenario of farmers' suicide in India. Farmer suicides in India refer to the national catastrophe of farmers committing suicide since the 1990s. The farmers' suicide rate in India had ranged between 1.4 and 1.8 per 100,000 total population, over a 10-year period through 2005, however the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has impacted not only physical health but also mental health and wellbeing globally. These impacts can be critically higher among marginalized individuals and populations like farmers and agricultural laborers in India. While most of them live in poor socioeconomic conditions, recent psychosocial challenges due to the COVID-19 lockdown had brought endless suffering in their lives. In this way, present study depicts about farmers and farm workers suicide amind COVID 19 India has been discussed.

Keywords: Farmer's suicide, Agrarian Distress, Sustainable Development, Irrigation, Agrarian crisis

COVID-19 IN INDIA

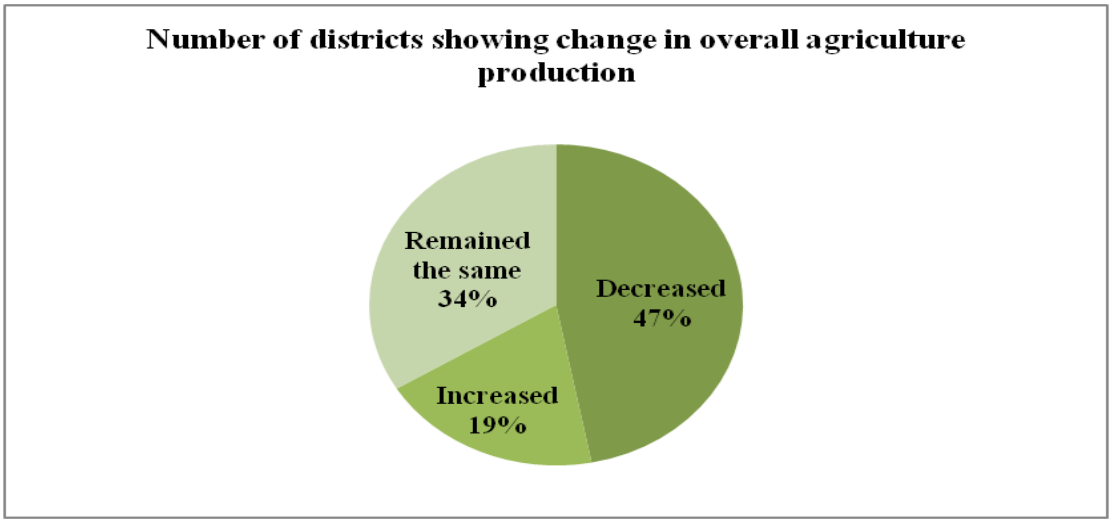
The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest global humanitarian challenge the world has faced since World War II. The virus has spread widely, and the number of cases is rising daily as governments work to slow its spread. India had moved swiftly, implementing a proactive, nationwide, lockdown, with the goal of flattening the curve and using the time to plan and resource responses adequately. India's effort to combat COVID-19 virus has been praised over the globe. However, the lockdown came with an economic cost and cascading impact on all the sections of society. The Covid-19 induced lockdown in India was a huge economic shock. It started across the country on 24 March 2020 and is still ongoing with restrictions in one form or other. It stalled the economy with complete closure imposed on enterprises across all sectors. Even though agricultural activities were exempted, in the initial phases of the lockdown the agriculture value chain also faced large-scale disruptions. This had a serious detrimental effect on the farmers..

Why Agriculture Sector Matters?

The agricultural & allied sector carries immense importance for the Indian economy. It contributes nearly one-sixth to the Indian national income and provides employment to nearly 50% of the workforce. It is fundamental for ensuring food security of the nation and also influences the growth of secondary and tertiary sector of the economy through its forward and backward linkages. Agricultural growth reduces poverty directly, by raising farm incomes, and indirectly, through generating employment and reducing food prices. In other words, a thriving agricultural sector is a boon for most sectors of the Indian economy.

IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON FARMERS AND FARM WORKERS

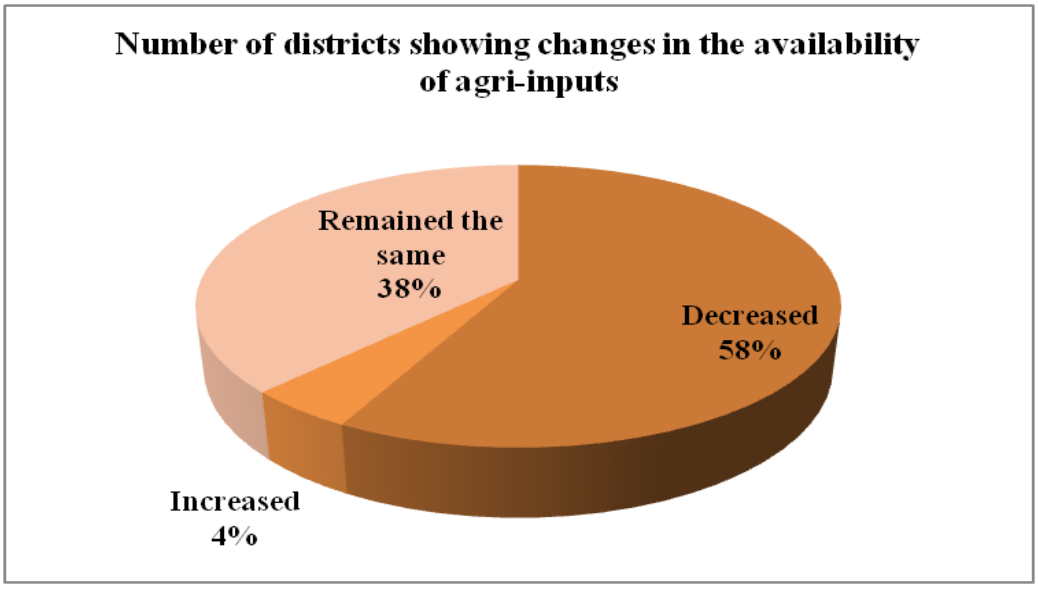
a) Figure 1: Impact on Agriculture Production:



Source: NABARD Survey on Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Indian Agriculture and Rural Economy, 2020

Figure 1 shows the impact of lockdown imposed in the entire country owing to COVID-19 on the overall production levels in the agricultural and allied sector has been significant with overall production levels in the agriculture and allied sector declining in 47% of the sample districts. (Fig 1). However, 19% of the districts have also reported an increase in the overall level of production in the sector and 34% of the districts have shown no change in the levels of production in the agriculture and the allied sector. Some of the reasons for decline in agricultural activities include lack of availability of labour and machines, need for social distancing, and restrictions on free movement of men and machineries..

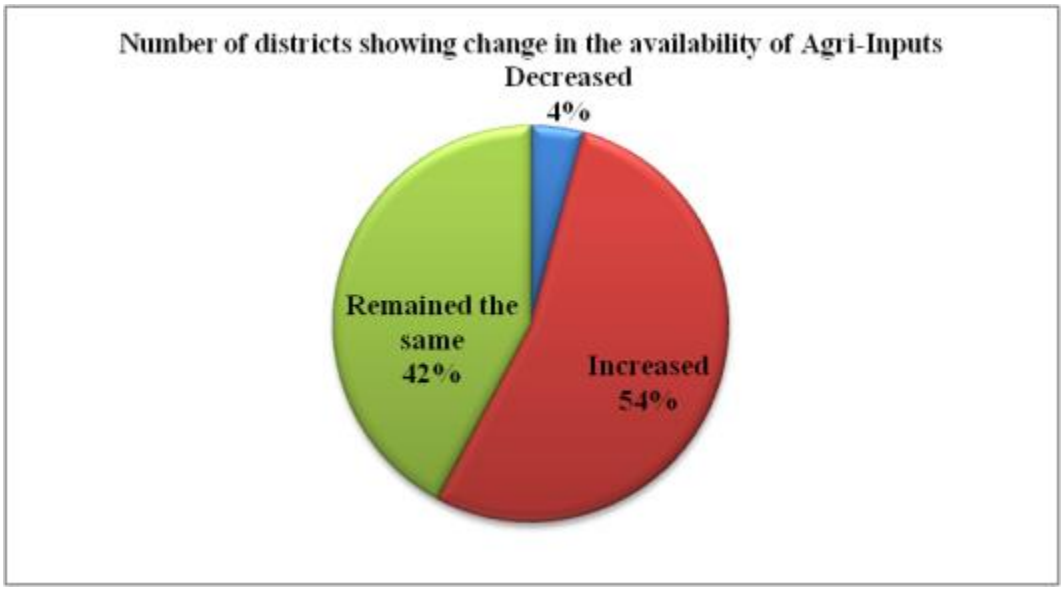
b) **Figure 2 Impact of COVID-19 on availability of Agri-inputs**



Source: NABARD Survey on Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Indian Agriculture and Rural Economy, 2020

Figure 2 shows the impact of COVID 19 on the availability of agri inputs during the lockdown period has been discussed in the following paragraphs. The overall availability of agriinputs was reported to have declined in 58% of the sample districts and 38% of the total districts surveyed reported no change in the availability of agri-inputs, whereas only 4% districts reported an increase in the availability of Agri-inputs (Fig 2). The feedback on availability and prices of various agri-inputs viz. seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, rentals agricultural machinery, fodder/cattle feed, etc. were obtained to gain greater insights into the agriculture sector during the lockdown period.

c) Figure 3 :Impact on the Prices of Agri-inputs



Source: NABARD Survey on Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Indian Agriculture and Rural Economy, 2020

Figure 3 shows the availability of agri-inputs had declined both at the all-India level and across the States. Theoretically, lower availability is expected to result in higher prices. The survey results also reflected a similar picture. The overall prices of agri-inputs showed an increase in 300 sample districts (54%) while 236 districts (42%) reported no impact of COVID-19 on the price levels of agri inputs and 24 (4%) districts reported a decline in the overall price levels of Agri-inputs (Fig 3).

d) Impact on Marketing of Agricultural Produce:

a.Transporting Harvested Produce to APMCs/Mandis through Road Transport:

The marketing of the harvested produce had been impacted adversely due to limitations of road transportation in many regions of India. Nearly 74 % of the all-India sample districts reported adverse impact on farmers' ability to haul their goods to APMCs/Mandis through road transport. The government had exempted (with initial restriction for 4-5 days) movement of essential goods from the restrictions imposed during the lockdown, thereby reducing the extent of adverse impact on ability of farmers to take the harvested produce to APMCs/Mandis through roads. In terms of the proportion of districts affected adversely, the impact was higher in the states of Kerala (100%), Jharkhand (95%) and Maharashtra (88%) than allIndia average.

b.Collection of Harvested Produce by Private Agencies:

Collection of harvested produce by private agencies had been impacted adversely in nearly 81% of the sample districts. Although movement of essential goods was exempted from the restrictions imposed during the lockdown, private transporters may have faced restrictions while traveling from cities to rural areas, thereby leading to a higher adverse impact on collection of harvested produce by private agencies. In terms of the proportion of districts reporting adverse impact, some of the smaller states had been severely impacted, with states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya and Manipur reporting adverse impact in almost all their districts. Among other major states, Odisha (95%), West Bengal (94%), Kerala (92%) and Maharashtra (91%) were the states reporting higher proportion of districts with adverse impact.

c. Organising Local Markets/Haats:

At all-India level, nearly 87% of the districts had reported an adverse impact on organisation of local rural weekly markets/haats. A large proportion of districts were affected adversely due to a complete ban on opening of rural haats by the local authorities. Several north-eastern states including Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura had reported adverse impact in all of their sample districts. While organisation of weekly rural haats/markets was impacted adversely in only 17% of the districts in Kerala as against other major states reporting higher proportion of districts with adverse impact viz. Assam (100%), Chhattisgarh (100%), Odisha (100%), Rajasthan (95%) and Maharashtra (94%).

COVID-19 AND SUICIDE OF A FARMER AND FARM WORKERS IN INDIA

Randhir Singh was already deeply in debt when the coronavirus pandemic struck. Looking out at his paltry cotton field by the side of a railway track, he walked in circles, hopeless. In early May, he killed himself by lying on the same track. “This is what we feared,” “The lockdown killed my father.” said Rashpal Singh, Mr. Singh’s 22-year-old son, choking back tears in his family home in Sirsiwala, a small village in the northern Indian state of Punjab.

Mr. Singh is trapped under a punishing debt of $20,000 that he accumulated over the years to keep his farm running. But farming, he said, is more unprofitable than ever. On a sweltering June afternoon, he walked gingerly through his parched fields. “Have you ever heard of a politician or an industrialist committing suicide?” he asked. “It’s always a farmer or a laborer.” (The NewYork Times, Sept, 2020)

COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving pandemic, with many rural and urban areas across the globe effectively shut down for most commerce and transport. Border closures, quarantines, and value chain disruptions are restricting food access, while shortfalls of inputs and the financial means to purchase them are jeopardizing production capabilities. Productivity is further threatened by emerging shortages of

agricultural labour in some regions that may disrupt planting, harvest, and other farming operations.

India has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. In 2019, a total of 10,281 farmers and farm laborers died by suicide across the country, according to statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau. Taking one's own life is still a crime in India, and experts have said for years that the actual numbers are far higher because most people fear the stigma of reporting.

Figure 4 Percentage Distribution of Suicide Victims by Profession during 2020 (All India)

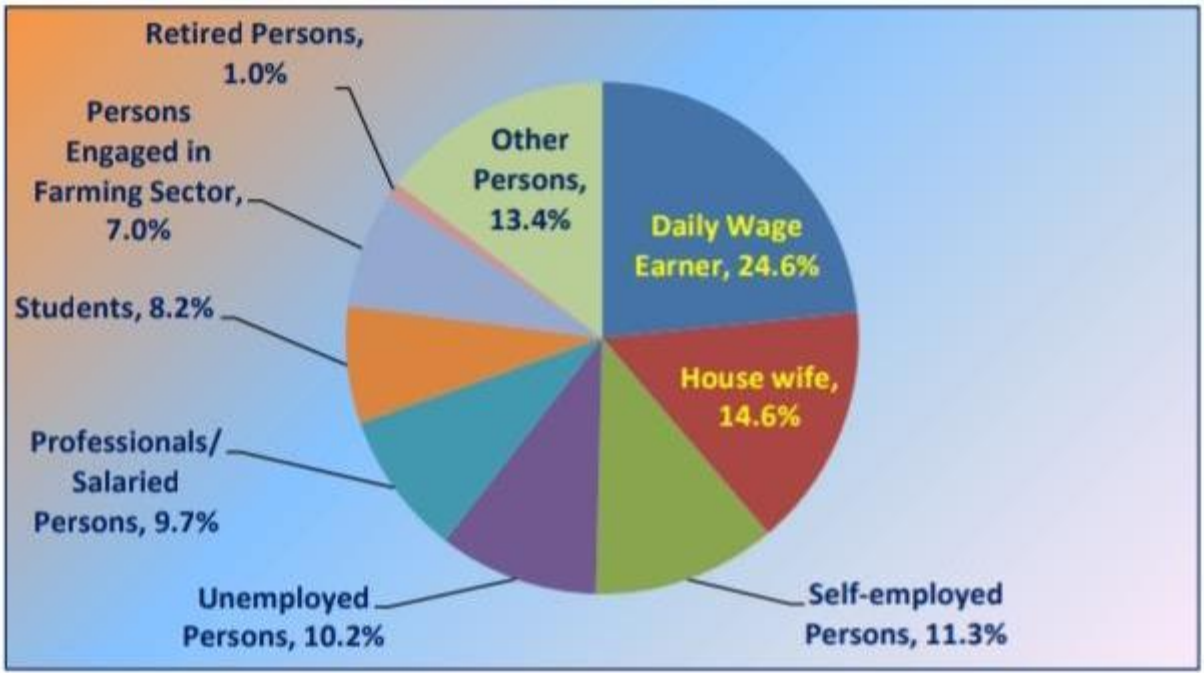


Table 1 Persons Engaged in Farming Sector Suicides during 2020 (All India)

Profession	Male	Female	Transgender	Total	Percentage Share
Persons engaged in farming sector	**9956**	**721**	**0**	**10677**	**7.0**
1. Farmers/Cultivators	**5335**	**244**	**0**	**5579**	**3.6**
a) who cultivate their own land with or without assistance of agricultural labourers	4737	203	**0**	4940	3.2
b) who cultivate on leased land/work on lease/on	598	41	**0**	639	0.4

other's land (known by different nomenclature) with or without assistance of agricultural labourers					
2.Agricultural Labourers	**4621**	**477**	**0**	**5098**	**3.3**
Total	**9956**	**721**	**0**	**10677**	**7.0**

Source: Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, 2020 Report

Figure 4 and Table 1 shows the majority of suicide victims engaged in farming sector were reported in Maharashtra (37.5%), Karnataka (18.9%), Andhra Pradesh (8.3%), Madhya Pradesh (6.9%) and Chhattisgarh (5.0%). A total of 10,677 persons involved in farming sector (consisting of 5,579 farmers/cultivators and 5,098 agricultural labourers) have committed suicides during 2020, accounting for 7.0% of total suicides victims (1,53,052) in the country. Out of 5,579 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 5,335 were male and 244 were female. Out of 5,098 suicides committed by agricultural labourers during 2020, 4,621 were male and 477 were female.

Table 2: Farmers Suicides during 2020 (State & UT - wise)

	STATES	**Male**	**Female**	**Trasnsgender**	**Total**
1	ANDHRA PRADESH	805	84	0	**889**
2	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	07	00	0	**7**
3	ASSAM	117	0	0	**117**
4	BIHAR	0	0	0	**0**
5	CHHATTISGARH	499	38	0	**537**
6	GOA	01	0	0	**01**
7	GUJARAT	121	5	0	**126**
8	HARYANA	276	04	0	**280**
9	HIMACHAL PRADESH	24	0	0	**24**
10	JHARKHAND	13	04	0	**17**

11	KARNATAKA	1893	123	0	**2016**
12	KERALA	380	18	0	**398**
13	MADHYA PRADESH	704	31	0	**735**
14	MAHARASHTRA	3760	246	0	**4006**
15	MANIPUR	1	0	0	**1**
16	MEGHALAYA	3	2	0	**5**
17	MIZORAM	4	0	0	**04**
18	NAGALAND	0	0	0	**0**
19	ODISHA	5	2	0	**7**
20	PUNJAB	245	12	0	**257**
21	RAJASTHAN	87	14	0	**101**
22	SIKKIM	16	0	0	**16**
23	TAMIL NADU	401	76	0	**477**
24	TELANGANA	423	48	0	**471**
25	TRIPURA	0	0	0	**0**
26	UTTAR PRADESH	158	14	0	**172**
27	UTTARAKHAND	0	0	0	**0**
28	WEST BENGAL	0	0	0	**0**
	TOTAL (STATES)	**9517**	**821**	**0**	**10338**
	UNION TERRITORIES				
29	A & N ISLANDS	6	0	0	**6**
30	CHANDIGARH	0	0	0	**0**
31	D & N HAVELI	6	0	0	**6**
32	DAMAN & DIU	0	0	0	**0**
33	DELHI (UT)	0	0	0	**0**
34	LAKSHADWEEP	0	0	0	**0**

35	PUDUCHERRY	0	0	0	**0**
36	Jammu and Kashmir	1	0	0	**1**
	TOTAL (UTs)	**11**	**0**	**0**	**11**
	TOTAL (ALL INDIA)	**9956**	**721**	**0**	**10677**

Source: ADSI report, 2020

The rising spate of farmer suicides in different parts of India is not a new phenomenon. According to the recently released Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) report, 10,677 farmers committed suicide in 2020, accounting for 7 per cent of the total number of suicides in the country. Many states and union territories have reported nil data on suicides by farmers, cultivators and farm labourers.

Majority of suicides were reported in Maharashtra (4006) followed by Karnataka (2016), Telangana (471), Andhra Pradesh (889) and Madhya Pradesh (735) respectively. In other words Maharashtra accounted for the highest share in farm-related suicides at 37.5%, followed by Karnataka at 18.9%, Andhra Pradesh 8.3% and Madhya Pradesh at 6.9%, data showed. West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Goa and Union territories, including Delhi, reported zero suicides by farmers/cultivators and agricultural labourers.

CONCLUSION

India is an agrarian country with around 70% of its people depending directly or indirectly upon agriculture. Farmer suicides are an unfortunate result of the agrarian distress plaguing the rural economy of many states of the country. There are many reasons found on farmers' suicide, apart from COVID-19 and other factors, it is also found that climate change causes bad weather and erratic monsoon triggering more suicides in last 30 years. Thus, the problem needs to be tackled by helping agriculturists in suicide-prone areas in a way that would build productive and marketing capabilities. Also Adequate attention on yield, price, credit, as well as weather, health, life, crop and cattle insurance, besides improving water availability, rural electrification and timely intervention of a procurement mechanism needs to arresting the suicide death toll among farmers.

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