

# Causes of Suicide among Farmers of Punjab



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## Abstract

In response to the increasing rate of suicide among farmers the investigator conducted a study to explore the causes of committing suicide by them and making suggestions on the basis of the findings. 38 Case studies of the farmers who had committed suicide were conducted and information was collected from the families concerned. The findings revealed numerous causes which can be grouped as illiteracy, society, family personal, economic and farming. It is suggested to have different Awareness Programmes, educational programmes and informational programmes for illiterate farmers that may help to reduce the rate of suicide among them.

**Keywords:** Suicide, Farmers, Debt, Illiteracy

## Introduction

The most tragic event in the history of India is the phenomenon of suicide among farmers. On the one hand technology has transformed economic status of people, but on the other hand the farmers are under high economic pressure. The rate of suicide committed by farmers is increasing day by day. With no exception to Punjab the small farmers are suffering a bad condition which is getting worse due to numerous reasons. Suicide rate of farmers in India is 10.4 (per lakh), whereas Punjab is one of the states having suicide rate of 1.48 (per lakh). Lot of research has been conducted to explore the problems of farmers committing suicide. Parsad (1999); PAU (2003); Sainath (2004); Satish (2006); Shah (2006); Rao & Suri (2006); Kumar, Sharma & Varinder (2006) and Sridhar (2006) reported that Punjab, even most prosperous region in India, has very poor economic status of farmers. Due to ecological, economic and social crisis, the rate of suicide among farmers is increasing. The crop failure, high production cost, indebtedness and illiteracy have been highlighted as strong reasons of committing suicide by the farmers. Owing to the above significant reasons the investigator aimed at:

1. Examining incidences of suicide among farmers to find out the causes.
2. To identify the socio-economic profile of suicide victims.
3. To propose remedial measures to solve the problem of suicide.

The investigator collected the list of 556 farmers who have committed suicide from the sarpanches of the villages of Sangrur, Mansa and Bathinda districts of Punjab using purposive sampling technique. From this sampling frame, 38 cases of farmers who have committed suicide were randomly selected from the list, on whom the study was conducted. For the qualitative analysis of the data, case study method was applied. To find out causes of committing suicide by the farmers, their case histories were studied through the information provided by their families, neighbours and other individuals from the village. 38 case studies were taken as the sample of the study.

The investigator personally visited each family of the farmers who committed suicide. The investigator spent maximum time in being compatible emotionally to the family of the victim farmers, so that expected information could be drawn out. Interview technique was used to collect information from the family of the victim. After establishing congenial rapport the desired questions regarding the study was asked to extract the needed information. The information thus collected was used in preparing the case history. During interview many people found reluctant in providing information. So to make the information more authentic, the information was collected from the other family members of the victim and the people living in the neighbourhood of the victim. Case studies then analysed for finding out the causes of suicide among illiterate farmers of Punjab. The discussion about some selected cases after analysing has been presented below:

The 'A' family had eleven acres of land. They had taken loan for agricultural purposes as for purchasing pesticides, fertilizers etc.

But due to crop failure, lack of irrigation, they could not return the loan. The family had to sell six acres of fertile land. The family then left with five acres of barren land but the loan was still standing. The bankers, commission agents started visiting their house for the payment of loan and due to this humiliation, Baldev Singh committed suicide. The root cause of suicide seemed to be crop failure, improper irrigation, and high cost of pesticides, fertilizers and economic indebtedness and pressure for returning loan from the bank and commission agent.

The 'B' family faced crop loss because of the attack of American Bull Worm. Hence, they had to get loan to run their livelihood. They had total debt of Rs. 3.72/- lac but no source of income. This created tension in the family as family had to sell three acres of land. Crop failure, indebtedness and conflict in the family might have pressurized Kulwant Singh to take the hard step of suicide.

The condition of 'C' family was very miserable because three members of the family committed suicide. The family had a huge amount of loan yet to be paid and have minor sources of income. Economic indebtedness might have cause mental trauma in the members of the family. Even their crop was taken over by the commission agent without any payment given to them. Jagrup Singh's two brothers had already committed suicide; he also followed his brothers' path and committed suicide. It had seems that mental burden pressurized Jagrup Singh to choose self-death.

The 'D' Family had mortgaged land for buying tractor, for tube well and for other agricultural and family purposes. Their outstanding loan was nearly eight lakh. They also need money for the marriage of two daughters. All these things put mental pressure on Gurjant Singh. Moreover, the majority of members in the family were illiterate. Mental pressure might have forced Gurjant Singh to commit suicide.

The cause of suicide committed in the 'E' family seems to be because of the fraud committed by commission agent, as the victim was illiterate, the commission agent took loan on the name of the victim and did not pay the amount back. The burden of loan fell on the shoulders of Mithu Singh. Because of this fraud, the victim seemed to choose the path of suicide.

Kapur Singh, brother of the victim, narrated the incident happened in the family 'F'. The family was big in size and had sum total of Rs. 7.5 lakhs as loan. Kapur Singh narrated that they had to pay big amount of loan but their income was not sufficient. Moreover, there were many members in the family and most of them were illiterate. Their illiteracy became a hurdle in establishing any other business. But the things narrated by the victim's brother did not seem to be true because as there were many members in the family and they could opt any other occupation which did not required any kind of formal education. The researcher also found that other members of the family did not seem to be worried about the loan and the suicide committed by Gurjant Singh. The cause of suicide might be conflict between the members of the family or split of relationships.

Victim's son Sukhjivan Singh who was the breadwinner of the family 'G' told about the incidence of

suicide committed by his father, Sohan Singh. He told that his mother died because of snake bite and hence, his father had to manage the whole family and occupational affairs. They have 2½ acres of land and loan of Rs. 2.20 lakh. Sukhjivan Singh told that his father choose suicide because he was worried about the indebtedness. But the researcher found that the reason of suicide could be indebtedness but the major reason for such a step might have been loss of family member, which put mental strain on the victim.

The family 'H' had nine acres of land but almost whole of the land was unirrigated, hence, the yield was very very low. Members of the family were illiterate and did not have knowledge about subsidies on fertilizers, pesticides, seed etc. They got loan for agricultural purposes but unable to pay the amount of the loan back as they have very low income from the land. The researcher found that the suicide committed by Jagtar Singh might have caused by economic indebtedness and illiteracy.

There were nine members in the family 'I' and all were illiterate. Agriculture land was just 1.26 acre, which was insufficient to fulfill the basic needs of the family. The facts presented by the members of the family seem to be authentic to the researcher because the poor economic condition of the family was explained by the shabby condition of the house. One of the members of the family started working as agricultural labourer to support the family but even his aid could not help the family to repay the amount of the loans, which they had taken to support their lives. It had seemed that economic poverty of the home claimed the life of the victim.

The fact explained by the members of the family 'J' did not seem to be true because the researcher came to know that the family had taken loan of just 35 thousand and had paid it back. So, reason of committing suicide by Darshan Singh does not seem to be economic burden. The reason of the suicide committed by the victim might be family dispute or conflict in relationships, as the neighbours witnessed the daily clashes with in the family before victim's death.

In the family 'K', Sukhdev Singh had very small area of land and very big amount of loan. The land was not fertile. It seemed that infertility of land and inability to return the loan amount might be the causes of suicide committed by the victim.

The family 'L' had two young girls yet to be married and had accumulated debt which they were unable to pay because of their less economic income. The researcher found that pressure of marriage of girls and tension about paying off the loan could have forced Chamkaur Singh to choose suicide.

This family 'M' had been living in a miserable condition as both the sons of family committed suicide in very young age. The family had just three (3) acres of land and according to Ranjeet Kaur they had debt of Rs. 50,000/-, which they have taken from commission agent, and another debt of Rs. 60,000/-, which they have taken from commercial bank. Both the brothers could have committed suicide under the pressure of returning loan, which they have taken, but they did not have any source of income.

After analyzing the case studies of farmers' suicide, the causes which emerged have been given below:

**Causes related to Illiteracy**

Fraud by commission agents, Lack of Off-farm employment opportunities, Large Family Size, Unawareness of crop rotation, Unawareness about techniques of cultivation, Unawareness about economic facilities (subsidies) provided by government and Lack of knowledge about good quality seeds may be the causes of committing suicide.

**Causes related to Society**

Social Obligation towards Marriage, Difficulty in maintaining social status and Humiliation suffered from the hands of Commission Agents may have forced the farmers to commit suicide.

**Causes related to Family**

Family Dispute, Large Family Size, conflicting relationships and Loss of family member might have compelled the farmers to commit suicide.

**Personal Causes**

Physical inability and mental disorders are the prominent causes of committing suicide.

**Economic Causes**

Fraud by commission Agent, Illiteracy, Indebtedness, Liabilities and Inflation rate might have put pressure on the farmers which led to suicide.

**Causes related to Farming**

Crop Failure, Barren Land, Deepening of Bore wells, High Cultivation Cost, Lack of proper irrigation, Decreasing Fertility of Land, Decreasing area of Land and Agricultural Stagnation might have depressed the farmers and one of the significant reason to commit suicide.

**Suggestions**

Different types of educational and awareness programmes should be initiated for different problems

like cultivation, irrigation system, seeds, pesticides and fertilizers. Awareness programmes should also be conducted for providing information about different types of subsidies available to farmers and regarding economic facilities available to farmers. There should be arrangement for economic security i.e., compensation or insurance against crop failure.

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