

Socio-economic Status of Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims in Punjab



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Abstract

In this research paper an attempt has been made to analyses the socio-economic status of agricultural labourer suicide victims, who have committed suicides either due to indebtedness or due to some other reasons. The social and economic conditions of agricultural labourers has also been affected by the economic distress in agricultural sector. A majority of the agricultural labourer suicide victims have very low level of education, technical skills, employability and thus low level of income. Consequently, they have to incur loans for their social and religion ceremonies, illness, and even for day to day home expenditures. On the other hand, due to lack of financial securities they have to incur loans from non-institutional sources. Non-institutional sources charge very high rate of interest. A large number of suicides by agricultural labourers in Punjab and across other agricultural states of India is a consequence of indebted among labourers. Thus, to secure the economic interests of agricultural labourers, special economic remedies should be provided by the State and Union Governments. Cottage and small scale industry should be strengthened to generate employment in non-farming sector. On the other side, agricultural allied activities are considerably required to provide employment to the increasing workforce. The workforce can play a positive role in the development of any developing economy. With the improvement in educational level, technical skills and health status, the productivity of workers can be increased. Hence, government should provide quality education, health facilities and job opportunities on priority basis.

Keywords: Agricultural, Labour Suicide in Punjab, Socio-economic Status of Suicide Victims.

Introduction

Suicides by a large number of farmers and agricultural labourers during the last two decades or so, along with the high incidence of indebtedness among them, are a clear indicator of emerging agrarian crisis and farmers' distress (Ghuman, 2015). Majority of the studies on farmer and agricultural labourer suicides (Kumar et. al., 1998; AFDR, 2000; Iyer and Manick, 2000; PAU, 2009; Sidhu and Jaijee, 2011; Singh et. al., 2016) have also associated these suicides mainly with economic distress. A very low growth rate of agriculture, increasing cost of agricultural inputs, frozen MSP of main crops has declined the real income of cultivators. This situation has led to heavy amount of debt on peasants. Thus, Agriculture is not being a profitable occupation from a long time. The deep agrarian crisis in Punjab has also depressed the economic condition of agricultural labourer households. As the majority of the workforce in rural areas is reliant on agriculture due to low availability of work in other sectors of the economy or due to lack of skills. On the other hand, over mechanization of agriculture has also resulted in shrinking man days of employment for labourers in agriculture. A study by Ghuman et al., (2007) shows that within agriculture, 32.00 per cent labourers get work only for 8 to 10 days in a month and about 67 per cent labourers in agriculture get work for 10 to 20 days in a month. This scenario has led to heavy amount of debt on agricultural labourers and consequently resulted as large number of labourer suicides in Punjab.

Research Methodology

The study is mainly based on primary data source. The data on suicides from Sangrur and Bathinda districts, during 2000 to 2008 (collected by Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana in its census survey in 2009) is the universe of this study. As per the report 1133 agricultural labourers (650 & 483 in Sangrur and Bathinda districts, respectively)

committed suicides during 2000-2008. Out of total of 650 agricultural labourer suicide victims of Sangrur district, 394 and 256 committed suicide due to indebtedness and for reasons other than debt, respectively. Out of total of 483 agricultural labourer suicide victims in district Bathinda, 277 committed suicide due to indebtedness and 206 labourers committed suicide due to reasons other than debt. A sample of 100 suicide victim households (nearly 10 per cent of 1133) was drawn for this study. Out of total 100 labourer suicide victims 60 committed suicides due to indebtedness and 40 victims committed suicide due to other reasons. In this study, a comparison has been made among suicide victims who committed suicide due to indebtedness and due to some other reasons.

The study covers 30 villages of 6 blocks from both the selected districts. The selected blocks and villages have highest incidences of suicides as per PAU report, 2009. The number of female suicide victims was also highest in the selected blocks. Three blocks, namely, Rampura, Bathinda and Talwandi Sabo were selected from district Bathinda. Further, 5 villages were selected from each of the selected block. Thus, 15 villages were selected from three blocks of Bathinda district. In the same way, three blocks namely, Lehra Gaga, Sunam and Andana were selected from Sangrur district which had highest number of suicides. Further, 5 villages were selected from each selected block and thus, in total 15 villages from Sangrur district were selected for the study. The proportionate random sampling has been used for the selection of victim households from the selected villages.

Aim of the Study

The prime purpose of this study is to analyse the socio-economic status of agricultural labourer suicide victims in Punjab. Besides this, to make a comparison of socio-economic status of agricultural labourer suicide victims who committed suicides due to indebtedness and due to some other social reasons was also the objective of this study. Another objective of the study is to analyse the extent of indebtedness and to suggest measures to improve the conditions of agricultural labourers.

Review of Literature

A good number of studies are available on agrarian distress but the literature on peasants and agricultural labourer suicides is available in a limited sense. As regards empirical studies related to this phenomenon, they are rather few. Nevertheless some of the relevant studies have been reviewed here.

Manjunatha and Ramappa (2017) conducted a study on farmer suicides with a sample of 528 suicide victim households from 13 states of India. These states were Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Karnataka, UP, Kerala, WB, Haryana, Punjab, TN and Gujarat. The study reveals that out of total 528 victims, 76.00 per cent suicide victims were small and marginal farmers. It also indicates that 94.00 per cent suicide victims were male, 75.00 per cent were between 30 to 60 years of age. Educational attainment level was very low as 33 per cent suicide

victims were illiterate and 56.00 per cent victims were educated only up to matriculation. The study found that 48.00 per cent and 43.00 per cent suicide victims committed suicides by consuming pesticides and by hanging, respectively. The average operational land holdings of victim households was 3.4 acres and out of total operational land holding only 55.00 per cent was irrigated by ground water.

The annual average income of victim households was Rs. 73142 and its 72.00 per cent share was derived from agriculture and allied agricultural activities. Moreover, all the victim households incurred heavy loans and the average outstanding loan of Rs. 1.55 lakh and Rs. 1.70 was incurred from institutional and non-institutional sources, respectively. Although, there was not any single reason behind suicides, but the indebtedness was the prominent reason behind suicides. The study also focused on the impact of suicides on victim households. It indicates that 36.00 per cent victim households reported that there was not even a single male earner left in the house. Sale of agricultural land to repay debt, social insecurity and problem in marriage of daughters were also some adverse impacts of suicides.

Study suggests that Government should provide economic relief to the victim households and waive off their loans. Farmers should be aware about the scientific cultivation. The victim families should be given preference in availing benefits of various development schemes of government.

Singh Inderjit et. al., (2017) submitted a report to Punjab Government on farmer and agricultural labourer suicides in seven districts of Punjab. The study reported 737 cases of suicides among the districts Faridkot, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Patiala, Rupnagar, SAS Nagar and Shri Mukatsar Sahib during 2013 to 2016. It depicts that out of total 737 suicide victims, 340 (46.13 per cent) were farmers and 397 (53.87 per cent) were agricultural labourers. Furthermore, 90.23 per cent committed suicides due to mounting debt and remaining 9.77 committed suicide due to other reasons. A majority of the farmer suicide victims (65.00 per cent) were small and marginal farmers. Educational level of suicide victims was very low. A vast majority of the suicide victims either illiterate or have education up to primary. A large number of victim households were younger or were in middle age. Moreover, consumption of pesticides was the prominent mode of suicide. An average farm household and agricultural labour household was indebted to the extent of Rs. 5.76 lakh and Rs. 1.15 lakh respectively, at the time of suicide.

The study suggests that families of suicide victims need many types of support – financial, emotional, social, psychological, etc. State Government should provide Rs. 10 lakh as financial assistance to the victim households within one week of suicide. Moreover, entire outstanding loan of suicide victim households should be waived off and at least one kin of suicide victim should be provided a gainful job. Regular counselling is required in villages

for the awareness that suicide is not the solution of the problem.

Singh et. al. (2016) has conducted a detailed study to find out the reasons that why some farmers and agricultural labourers commit suicide and how the other farmers and labourers in the same category are surviving. Study also focused on the socio-economic analysis of suicide victim households and controlled groups (households in which nobody has committed suicide) along with the causes of agrarian crisis and farmer suicides. For this purpose 1020 farmers and 372 labourer households were taken from three districts, namely, Bathinda, Sangrur and Mansa.

Study has found that there are so many causes of agrarian distress but indebtedness and indebtedness-related factors are the major reasons of rural distress and farmers' suicides. Other contributing factors to agrarian crisis are described as; successive crop failures consistently lower prices of agricultural produce disproportionate to price of farm input, non-availability and inferior quality of inputs, failure of research and extension services, mounting indebtedness from both the institutional and non-institutional sources resulting in a debt trap and exploitation of farmers by informal lenders. As regarding to socio-economic profile of suicide victims and controlled groups study has found that a large number of suicide victims were young. Lack of education was the prominent feature of suicide victims and controlled groups. Majority of the victims were small & marginal farmers and belonged to Jat Sikh (general) community. Study has also found that low income from agriculture, crop failures and wide spread indebtedness were the basic reasons to limit the capacity of repayment of borrowings by suicide victims and controlled groups.

Sidhu and Jaijee (2011) pointed out the main causes and extent of farmer and agricultural labourer suicides in Punjab. The study also focused on the history of state disputes with other states for irrigation water. Besides, geographical and cultural profile of southern Punjab (area with high intensity of suicides) is also revealed in the study. Authors revealed that

the diversion of Punjab river waters to other states, unfavourable price structure for crops and inputs, restriction on trade, land ceiling, inadequate availability of credit at affordable interest rates, lack of direct subsidies to farmers, lack of agricultural research/extension, reduction in government investment in agriculture, failure of government to provide education, lack of crop insurance and centralisation of power are the main reasons behind agrarian distress and farm suicides. Study reveals the number of farmer suicides recorded/projected by various governmental and non-governmental organisations. Authors described that the number recorded by the governmental agencies is quite low as compared to the number recorded by NGOs and Kissan Unions.

Social Profile of Labourer Suicide Victims

In the social profile, age wise classification, educational attainment, gender composition, marital status, quarrels within home and outside of home, drug addiction by the agriculture labourer suicide victims has been analyzed. Whereas, the occupation and extent and sources of outstanding loan at the time of suicide of the agricultural labourer suicide victims have been analyzed in the economic profile.

Age-Wise Classification of Labourer Suicide Victims

Suicide victims are classified into various age groups to analyze their focal level of age. Table 1 expresses age wise classification of agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. The sample includes 100 suicide victims; 57 from Sangrur and 43 from Bathinda. Out of total 100 suicide victims among both the districts, 60 victims committed suicide due to indebtedness and 40 victims committed suicide due to other reasons than debt. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, 85.01 per cent victims were between 18 to 45 years of age. In the case of suicides due to other reasons, 92.50 per cent victims were between 18 to 45 years of age. The corresponding proportions in Bathinda were 80 per cent and 88.89 per cent, respectively.

Table 1: Age Wise Classification of Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Age Group (years)	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
18-25	10 (28.57)	5 (22.73)	15 (26.32)	6 (24.00)	5 (27.78)	11 (25.58)	16 (26.67)	10 (25.00)	26 (26.00)
26-35	11 (31.43)	13 (59.09)	24 (42.11)	5 (20.00)	7 (38.89)	12 (27.91)	16 (26.67)	20 (50.00)	36 (36.00)
36-45	10 (28.57)	3 (13.64)	13 (22.81)	9 (36.00)	4 (22.22)	13 (30.23)	19 (31.67)	7 (17.50)	26 (26.00)
46-55	3 (8.57)	1 (4.55)	4 (7.02)	3 (12.00)	2 (11.11)	5 (11.63)	6 (10.00)	3 (7.50)	9 (9.00)
56-65	1 (2.86)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.75)	2 (8.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (4.65)	3 (5.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (3.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share.

Thus, across the districts and reasons for suicides, a vast majority of suicide victims were between 18 to 45 years of age. This is the age group in which they are supposed to shoulder the heavy family responsibilities. However, majority of agricultural labourer suicide victims were unable to fulfill daily household expenses due to low level of income. Heavy debt burden due low availability of employment and low wage rate in rural Punjab resulted in suicides among agricultural labourers.

Educational attainment of labourer suicide victims

The earning level of the family depends upon the educational level and skills of the family members. Table 2 reveals educational attainment of sampled agricultural labourer suicide victims of Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. It indicates

that a vast majority of suicide victims were having a very low level of education. Notably, as high as 41.00 per cent out of total 100 suicide victims were illiterate, 35.00 per cent attained education up to primary level, 14.00 per cent up to middle, 8.00 per cent up to secondary and only 2.00 per cent had attained education up to higher secondary level. Not even a single suicide victim was graduate, postgraduate or professionally qualified. It is also significant to note that among overall suicides, 88.00 per cent suicide victims were either illiterate or below matric. These results corroborate with the results of a large study (Ghuman, et al, 2007), that revealed that nearly 90 per cent of the agricultural labourers do not have any member with matriculation.

Table 2: Educational Attainment Wise Classification of Sampled Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Educational Attainment	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Illiterate	17 (48.57)	9 (40.91)	26 (45.61)	10 (40.00)	5 (27.78)	15 (34.88)	27 (45.00)	14 (35.00)	41 (41.00)
Primary	14 (40.00)	8 (36.36)	22 (38.60)	8 (32.00)	5 (27.78)	13 (30.23)	22 (36.67)	13 (32.50)	35 (35.00)
Middle	3 (8.57)	2 (9.09)	5 (8.77)	5 (20.00)	4 (22.22)	9 (20.93)	8 (13.33)	6 (15.00)	14 (14.00)
Secondary	1 (2.86)	2 (9.09)	3 (5.26)	2 (8.00)	3 (16.67)	5 (11.63)	3 (5.00)	5 (12.50)	8 (8.00)
Sen. secondary	0 (0.00)	1 (4.55)	1 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.56)	1 (2.33)	0 (0.00)	2 (5.00)	2 (2.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share

Table also indicates that among overall 60 cases of suicides due to indebtedness, 45.00 per cent suicide victims were illiterate. Another, 36.67 per cent, 13.33 per cent and 5.00 per cent had attained education up to primary, middle and secondary level, respectively. In the case of suicides due to debt burden there was no suicide victim educated up to senior secondary level.

In the case of suicides due to indebtedness in Sangrur district, about 50.00 per cent victims were illiterate. While, 40.00 per cent had attained education merely up to primary level. In this category of suicides in Sangrur district only one victim studied up to matriculation. The literacy level is little better in the case of suicides due to debt burden in Bathinda as

compared to Sangrur district. As 60.00 per cent suicide victims (due debt burden) in Bathinda district were educated. Thus, it is clear from the foregoing discussion that either the suicides were due to debt burden or due to any other reason, lack of education emerges as a prominent feature of social background of suicide victims. In fact, uneducated and unskilled work force is forced to stay within agriculture sector as they are unable to find work in other sectors of economy.

Gender composition of labourer suicide victims

The gender composition of the suicide victims reveals that in the rural society still the males are the main earners in the family. They have to bear the economic burden of the family.

Table 3: Gender Wise Classification of Sampled Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Gender	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Male	32 (91.43)	16 (72.73)	48 (84.21)	23 (92.00)	14 (77.78)	37 (86.05)	55 (91.67)	30 (75.00)	85 (85.00)
Female	3 (8.57)	6 (27.27)	9 (15.79)	2 (8.00)	4 (22.22)	6 (13.95)	5 (8.33)	10 (25.00)	15 (15.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share.

Table 3 indicates gender wise classification of sampled agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. Among overall 100 cases of suicides, 85.00 per cent agricultural labourer suicide victims were male whereas the remaining 15 per cent were females. Among overall 60 suicides due to indebtedness, the percentage share of male suicide victims (91.67 per cent) was higher as compared to (75.00 per cent) in the case of overall 40 suicides due to other reasons. Across the districts, in the case of suicides due to debt burden, the percentage share of male victims is

greater than 90.00 per cent. This scenario clearly indicates that the sensitivity to economic burden is much higher in males than in females.

Marital Status of Labourer Suicide Victims

Table 4 shows that out of total 100 suicide victims, 85.00 per cent were married. Among both the cases of suicides due to debt burden and other reasons, the scenario of marital status of victims is almost same. Across the districts and reasons for suicides, the percentage share of married suicide victims is more than 80.00 per cent.

Table 4: District Wise Classification of Marital Status of Sampled Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims in Selected Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Marital Status	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Married	29 (82.86)	21 (95.45)	50 (87.72)	20 (80.00)	15 (83.33)	35 (81.40)	49 (81.67)	36 (90.00)	85 (85.00)
Un-married	6 (17.14)	1 (4.55)	7 (12.28)	5 (20.00)	3 (16.67)	8 (18.60)	11 (18.33)	4 (10.00)	15 (15.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share

Thus, it is clear from the forgoing analysis that the incidence of suicides is quite high among married persons. A married person has to bear a heavy family responsibility. It has been also noticed that majority of these married suicide victims have 2 or 3 daughters. Given the social scenario, there are so many social and economic difficulties to arrange the marriage of a daughter.

Quarrel Within or Outside the Family

A good number of suicide victims had quarreled within or outside the family. Table 5 gives the classification of agricultural labourer suicide victims who had some conflict within or out-side family for a long period, before committing suicide. Out of total 100 agricultural labourer suicide victims, 63.00 per cent victims had

some quarrel either within or out-side family. The data show that among overall suicides, out of total having conflict suicide victims, 66.67 per cent had some quarrel within the family. While, 33.33 per cent deceased victims had conflict out-side family. Majority of the victims expressed irritation due to persisting quarrel and expressed desire to commit suicide.

It is interesting to note that among suicides due to indebtedness, out of total 60 agricultural labourer suicide victims, 56.67 per cent had some conflict within or out-side family. Whereas, in the case of suicides due to other reasons, out of total 40 suicide victims, 72.50 per cent victims had some conflict within or out-side family.

Table 5: Classification of Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims Who Had Quarrel within or Outside Family in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Conflict	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Within Family	14 (77.78)	9 (56.25)	23 (67.65)	10 (62.50)	9 (69.23)	19 (65.52)	24 (70.59)	18 (62.07)	42 (66.67)
out-side family	4 (22.22)	7 (43.75)	11 (32.35)	6 (37.50)	4 (30.77)	10 (34.48)	10 (29.41)	11 (37.93)	21 (33.33)
Total	18 (51.43)	16 (72.73)	34 (59.65)	16 (64.00)	13 (72.22)	29 (67.44)	34 (56.67)	29 (72.50)	63 (63.00)
Total suicide victims	35	22	57	25	18	43	60	40	100

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share.

Across the districts and reason of suicides, the percentage share of deceased victims having some conflict was higher in the case of suicides due to other reasons as compared to debt burden. Furthermore, majority of suicide victims had some quarrel within family. Thus, it is clear from the forgoing analysis that majority of agricultural labourer suicide victims were having a quarrel either within the family

or outside the family. There were both economic and social reasons behind such conflicts. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, respondents of victim households reported that the disputes within family were mainly due to day to day economic needs, such as expenses for health, education, repayment of debt and incidence of drugs, etc. Indebtedness was the main cause behind irritation, mental tension and

social discard of victims. Thus, in the case of suicides due to debt burden, at the root-cause of suicide, was poverty.

Incidence of Drug Addiction among the Labourer Suicide Victims

Table 6 reveals drug abuse wise classification of agricultural labourer suicide victims in

Table 6: Classification of Sampled Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victims Who Were Addicted To Drugs in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Drug addiction	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Yes	17 (48.57)	12 (54.55)	29 (50.88)	14 (56.00)	10 (55.56)	24 (55.81)	31 (51.67)	22 (55.00)	53 (53.00)
No	18 (51.43)	10 (45.45)	28 (49.12)	11 (44.00)	8 (44.44)	19 (44.19)	29 (48.33)	18 (45.00)	47 (47.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share.

In Sangrur district, in the cases of suicides due to indebtedness, 48.57 per cent and in the case of suicides due to other reasons, 54.55 per cent suicide victims were addicted to drugs. In district Bathinda, 56.00 per cent and 55.56 per cent suicide victims were addicted to drugs in the cases of suicides due to indebtedness and due to other reasons, respectively. Thus, across the districts and

Table 7: Occupation wise classification of sampled agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, during 2000-2008

Occupation	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Casual Labour	14 (40.00)	14 (63.64)	28 (49.12)	11 (44.00)	11 (61.11)	22 (51.16)	25 (41.67)	25 (62.50)	50 (50.00)
Attached Labour	19 (54.29)	6 (27.27)	25 (43.86)	10 (40.00)	4 (22.22)	14 (32.56)	29 (48.33)	10 (25.00)	39 (39.00)
Private Job	0 (0.00)	1 (4.55)	1 (1.75)	1 (4.00)	1 (5.56)	2 (4.65)	1 (1.67)	2 (5.00)	3 (3.00)
Self employed	2 (5.71)	0 (0.00)	2 (3.51)	3 (12.00)	1 (5.56)	4 (9.30)	5 (8.33)	1 (2.50)	6 (6.00)
Student	0 (0.00)	1 (4.55)	1 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.56)	1 (2.33)	0 (0.00)	2 (5.00)	2 (2.00)
Total suicide victims	35 (100.00)	22 (100.00)	57 (100.00)	25 (100.00)	18 (100.00)	43 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	40 (100.00)	100 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Notes: 1) Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share

2) Labour under MGNREGS is included in casual labour (the majority of suicide victims did not benefited from MGNREGS as the scheme was started in 2005)

Table 7 depicts occupational background of agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. Among overall 100 suicide victims, 50.00 per cent, 39.00 per cent, 3.00 per cent and 6.00 per cent were dependent on casual labour in farm and non-farm sector, attached labour in farm sector, private job and self-employed, respectively. Across the districts and the reasons for suicides, none of the suicide victim was government employee.

In the case of suicides due to other reasons 2 victims were students who committed suicide due to social reasons. In the category of private job, victims were working at karyana shops, workshops and as a driver on school bus, tractor, truck, etc. In the

Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. It indicates that 53.00 per cent agricultural labourer suicide victims were addicted to drugs. In the case of overall 60 suicides due to indebtedness, 51.67 per cent victims were addicted to drugs. While, in the case of suicides due to other reasons, 55.00 per cent victims were addicted to drugs.

reason of suicides, more than 50.00 per cent suicide victims were addicted to drugs, on an average. Whereas, drug is vital cause of indebtedness, on the side it also plays major role in social quarrels.

Economic profile of labourer victims:

The week economic profile of victims also exposes the labourer to a tendency of suicides.

category of self-employment, victims were working as milk-vendors, floor grander, karyana shop, plumber, mason, and painter. However, the proportion of such suicide victims among overall victims is very low. While, a vast majority of suicide victims were working as casual and attached labourer at the time of suicides.

It is interesting to note that among overall suicides due to indebtedness, the proportion of suicide victims engaged in attached labour (48.33 per cent) was greater than casual labour (41.67 per cent). Whereas, among overall suicides due to other reasons, the proportion of casual labourer suicide victims (62.50 per cent) is significantly high as compared to (25.00 per cent) attached labourer

suicide victims. Attached labourers borrow money from zamidars in advance. This leads to indebtedness and further to suicides. This is because in the case of suicides due to debt burden majority of suicide victims had borrowed from zamidars.

The long term dynamics of growth and historical experience of other countries clearly indicate that, as an economy grows the share of agriculture in GDP and employment goes down.

Extent and Sources of Outstanding Loan at the Time of Suicide

Table 8 highlights the average amount of outstanding loan on agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. The data shows that the average amount of outstanding loan on labourer suicide victim households was Rs. 49169 at the time of suicide.

Table 8: Average Amount of Outstanding Loan on Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victim Households in Sangrur and Bathinda Districts of Punjab, at the Time of Suicides

(In rupees)

Sources of loan	Sangrur			Bathinda			Both districts (Sangrur & Bathinda)		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Commercial banks (institutional-loan)	13057	2500	8982	12024	2223	7921	12627	2375	8526
Zamidars	37543	9791	26832	37760	12166	27047	37632	10860	26924
Relatives/ friends & shops	12571	1750	8395	10520	1667	6814	11717	1713	7715
Private employer	9040	2032	6335	8420	1600	5565	8782	1837	6004
Sub total (non-institutional loan)	59154	13573	41562	56700	15433	39426	58131	14410	40643
Grand Total Average	72211	16073	50544	68724	17656	47347	70758	16785	49169

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14

In overall cases of suicides, out of Rs. 49169 of outstanding loan, Rs. 8526, Rs. 26924, Rs. 7715 and Rs. 6004 was from commercial banks, zamidars, relatives/friends & shops and employers, respectively. Among the overall cases of suicides due to indebtedness, out of Rs. 70758 of outstanding loan, Rs. 12627 was from commercial banks. Further, Rs. 37632, Rs. 11717 and Rs. 8782 were from zamidars, relatives/friends & shops and employers, respectively. The data reveals that the average amount of outstanding loan on labourer suicide victims was higher in the case of suicides due to indebtedness as compared to the cases of suicides due to other reasons. Besides, among both of the cases of suicides, the average amount of outstanding loan from zamidars was higher as compared to other sources. Some of the victims or family members of victims were engaged in private job. Thus, they also borrow from those sources.

Thus, the study has found that a majority of agricultural labourer suicide victims were belonged to 18 to 45 years of age, having a very low level of education and Married males. It also shows that in rural Punjab weaker sections of all communities are facing severe economic distress. A vast majority of agricultural labourer suicide victims were having a quarrel either within the family or outside the family. Among both of the cases of suicides, more than 50.00 per cent suicide victims were drug addicted.

The average amount of outstanding loan was higher in the case of suicides due to indebtedness as compared to in the case of suicides due to reasons other than debt. It was Rs. 70758 and Rs. 16785 in the case of suicides due to indebtedness and other reasons, respectively. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness in district Sangrur, Rs. 72211 was average amount of outstanding loan on agricultural labourer suicide victims. It was Rs. 16073 in the case of suicides due to other reasons. However, among overall cases of suicides in this district, average amount of outstanding loan on labourer suicide victims was Rs. 50544. The average amount of outstanding loan on labourer suicide victims in Bathinda district was Rs. 47347. It was Rs. 68724 and Rs. 17656, in the cases of suicides due to indebtedness and other reasons, respectively.

Occupation wise analysis of the victim households has found that a vast majority of the victim households were casual and attached workers in agriculture. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, the outstanding loan on victim households was Rs. 70758 higher as compare to Rs. 16785 in the case of suicides due to other reasons. There are large number of studies on suicides among farmers in India.

The social and economic condition of agricultural labourer has also been affected by the economic distress in agriculture sector. Hence, to secure the economic interests of peasants and agricultural labourers, special remedy by the government is required. Cottage and Small scale industry (especially labour oriented) should be strengthened to increase employment in non-farming sector. On the other side allied agricultural activities are considerably required to provide employment to the increasing workforce. Workforce may be liability or a productive asset for the development of economy. It depends up on the educational and skill level of workers and their employability. Accordingly, government should provide employment, health and educational facilities.

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