iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 7 **Issue:** VI **Month of publication:** June 2019

DOI: http://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2019.6461

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.177
Volume 7 Issue VI, June 2019- Available at www.ijraset.com

Psychological Problems Faced by Farmers and Suggested Remedies

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Abstract: ***It is a general belief that farmers lead a peaceful and healthy way of life. But nowadays modern day intensive agriculture has led to abnormal stresses and consequent depression and instability in the lives of farmers. Suicides among farmers are now common universally and occur more than in several other professions. Studies across the globe have found that farming is one of the most risky and dangerous professions. Farming includes a wide range of physical, biological, and chemical hazards that are similar across all cultures. Indian agriculture is going through a series of crises since 1990s and it is of concern that farmers are ending their lives. When money is tight, farm equipments may not be properly maintained, which increases the rate of work related accidents. The most common reasons for farmer suicides are poor returns from farming, increased cultivation costs, inadequate institutional credit, indebtedness, imperfect and high fluctuations in market prices, and financial worries. Inadequate and unpredictable rainfall, crop damage by insect pests and diseases, and livestock diseases and deaths, all contribute to the anxiety of farmers. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations should counsel farmers to deal successfully with stresses, develop positive attitude, organize rural social events for fun and frolic to promote companionship, provide off-season employment, and train farmers in skills to earn supplemental income, agricultural extension workers should help farmers to plan in advance to minimize risks and avoid large undertakings which are disproportionate to their resource base.***

Keywords: Depression, farmers, farmer suicides, financial worries, indebtedness psychological problems, stress.

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is mainly a physical response. Under stress we consider that we are under attack and switch to fight or flight mode, releasing a mix of complex hormones and chemicals such as adrenaline and cortisol to prepare the body for physical action. Stress may be physiological, psychological, or social and can originate from any situation depending upon the person. Stress can at times be beneficial. Many behavioural and medical theories suggest that every human being needs a certain amount of stress that essentially translates into motivation. Positive stress is referred to as eustress, which gives one an advantage in competition related activities. Distress is negative stress, such as constant worry that can be harmful physically or psychologically. It is harmful if ignored. Farmers know how to take care of their animals and crops and to take steps to ensure their safety. However, they ignore their own health care and monitoring and managing their mental and physical stress and fatigue. Financial worries, unpredictable weather, plant pests, livestock diseases, and isolation, all contribute to farmers' anxiety. Severe depression and suicidal thoughts are very common in present day and age. Stress becomes mainly palpable when commodity prices are low. In highly stressful conditions, it is very important to take care of physical and mental health. A reluctance to ask for help can exacerbate the problems caused by dementia in farming communities, as per research at Plymouth University(January 2017)

II. FARMERS' SUICIDES: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), at least 2.7 lakhs farmers have taken their lives since 1995 at an average rate of 46 farmers per day. In France, there is a farmer suicide every two days. In the mid-west of the U.S, the suicide rates among male farmers are twice that of the general population. In Britain, there is at least one farmer's suicide every week. Between 1997 and 2005, one farmer in India committed suicide every 32 minutes. Australia reports one farmer suicide every four days. The causes of farmer suicides may be due to any of three factors - economic, social, and physical. Increased indebtedness is the predominant factor in farmer stress. Research suggests that agrarian crisis affects the most vulnerable farmers. The major agrarian problems include a lack of agricultural investment and irrigation improvement, use of cash crops, increased use of non-institutional credit sources, and the reduction of trade barriers, accumulated burden of debt, absence of proper crop planning, and unsatisfactory agricultural credit. The second important factor is social. Farming in India is mainly an isolated occupation with a small close-knit

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community of co-workers and family. These communities are highly pressurised and affected by the social norms. The disgrace attached to mental illnesses is common across the globe. A farmer who talks about his depression is often labeled as bizarre and fallacious by fellow farmers. The curable mental illnesses like depression are left untreated. The maldistribution of psychologists and psychiatrists among the rural and urban population is a common problem. The lack of education among the farmers plays an important role in bottlenecking the outlook and career scope for farmers. These factors lead to high stress levels. If farmers do not get any support they opt for options such as suicide. The third factor is physical environment. Farming environment encompasses a broad range of biological, physical, and chemical hazards that are similar across all cultures. The increase in number of pesticides has a detrimental effect on health of farmers. There is a correlation between genetically modified crops and suicide rates among farmers. Factors like declining water levels, falling levels of soil nutrients, and climate change affect farming negatively.

III. PROBLEMS OF INDIAN AGRICULTURE

A. Agriculture Is An Unorganized Activity

Indian agriculture is largely an unorganized sector due to the small scale of operations. There is no standard price for agricultural produce. Today the tomato price is Rs 10/kg, tomorrow it may be Rs 80/kg. The minimum purchase price fixed by the Government does not reach the poorest farmers. There is no assured job security for agricultural labourers. There is high proportion of migration of farmers due to untimely rainfall, water scarcity, and poor prices.

B. Most Farms Are Small And Economically Not Feasible

More than half of Indian farmers have small holdings and they do not produce enough to dictate the price of their products. The farmers are not even the owners of the land in many cases. So, it makes profitable cultivation impossible. A significant proportion of the earnings go towards the payment of lease for the land.

C. Middlemen and Economic Exploitation of Farmers

In the distribution of produce from farm to fork, there is a multilayered system of middlemen involved. A crop cultivated by a farmer in a far-flung village runs through as many as four intermediaries before reaching the local vegetable market in a semi-urban or urban area. Exploitation by the middlemen is the reason for not getting the best price for the produce of the agriculturists. The Government should promote a plan called Farmers Market, where the farmers can sell directly sell their products at reasonable price to the consumers.

D. Poor Availability of Quality Inputs

Farmers are always facing the unavailability of quality seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides which results in low productivity. Seed replacement need for better and quality production is out of focus in Government Priorities

E. Poor Infrastructure in Rural Areas

Rural poverty is often a product of poor infrastructure that restricts development and mobility. Rural areas are lacking sufficient roads that would increase access to agricultural inputs and markets. The rural poor are cut off from emerging markets and technological development in urban areas Poor access to education, health services are discouraging factors. There is no electricity to the farm. If one wants to draw electric lines, one has to incur heavy cost. It is not a guarantee of uninterrupted electric supply. If it fails, it may take a week to month for repair. The farmer may loose crucial time during irrigation.

F. High Indebtedness and Exorbitant Interest Rates

Traditional money lenders have been better versed with farmers credit needs and provide hassle-free credit; they exploit their vulnerabilities by charging usurious interest rates. Lack of credit at reasonable rates is a continuous problem. The main cause of farmers taking their lives is the increase in their indebtedness and debt burden.

IV. INTERPRETATIVE STUDY

Eberhardt and Pooyan in 1990 tested the factorial structure, reliability, and validity of a 28-item farm stress review. It resulted six interpretable and reliable factors, geographic location, economic, time pressures, climatic conditions, and hazardous working conditions. Economic items can be divided into two separate factors, one is personal financial situation, another one is general economic conditions and national policies, factors for life satisfaction, emotional strain, and illness frequency. Climatic conditions

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and geographic locations also reached significance with these factors. Hazardous working condition was related to emotional strain and illness frequency while general economic condition was related to only emotional strain.

Naional Crime Record Bureau, an office of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, has been publishing suicides, stabbings, and accidental deaths for India since 1950. It started separately collecting and publishing farmers' suicide statistics from 1995 (J, Hardikar). The first suicides were reported in Maharashtra with particular reference to Vidarbha region.

Armstrong and Schulman (1990) studied the financial strain, perception of economic hardship, and personal control play in the etiology of depression in farm families. In the study 595 North Carolina farm operators were taken. The authors found that differential resilience to objective economic problems is a more important determinant of social psychological depression than differential exposure to these problems. So depression is not only determined by the occurrence of stressful events like financial strain but also personality and perceptions that are important mediators of this relationship.

Belyea and Lobao (1990) found out how economic transformation of agriculture is linked to the Social-Psychological well being of producers in a randomly selected stratified sample of 503 Ohio farmers. Their study addresses the linkage between economic vulnerability, perception of economic hardship and stress and depression using Lazarus and Folkmans Stress Appraisal Model(1984) as a theoretical guideline. Telephonic interviews regarding basic economic and household data were completed during the spring of 1987. Two months later a mail-out survey focusing on social issues, such as farm attitudes and personal and family well being was sent out two months later. The largest determinant of depression was perceived economic hardship with greater feelings of economic hardship related to more severe depression. Belyea and Lobao conclude that link between economic hardship on farm and depression proneness poses implication for the mental health needs of farmers and their communities. The results are confined to the perceptions and behavior of self-designated farm operators, 98% of whom were male, Gerrard(1992) developed a Rural quality of life program based on the needs assessment conducted in 1990.Some of the themes were expressed by farm families: a sense of individualism and isolation which led to feelings of individual failure if the things were not going well, paternalism and lack of empowerment, lack of trust, a need for hope and fear of stigma. Farmers and service providers described five major categories of farm needs: education, support groups, individual clinical works, general information and advocacy. By doing this research Gerrad developed the four main objectives of Rural quality of life programme (1) On Site education,(2) Group facilitation(3) Community Organising (4)resource base such as videos and written material. The programme is based on how best to allocate resources in order to effectively deliver mental health service to rural people based on their exigencies. Gerrard studied that rural people do not use traditional mental health service models of one-on-one counseling because of stigma, fear, about lacking of confidentiality and individualism that one to one counseling engenders. According to a study by Moolgard and Miller in 1996, farm women may experience additional stress. Along with working as full time partner in business activity, many have full responsibility for home and family matters. She faces very difficult demands in addition to becoming the nurturer of the rest of the family. The main stream research on stress response shows that the typical response to stress is flight or fight response in which people face stress or avoid it. But 90% of research tested men only(Berkowitz, 2002).In recent days research has found that a hormone in women named oxytocin acts to calm women in stress. It is still believed that women as well as men experience the fight or flight reaction, an additional behaviour pattern referred to as tend or befriend may enable women to deal with stress.(Taylor et al, 2000).Tending involves quieting and caring for offspring during stressful times and befriending involves engaging in the social network for help in responding stress with which many women are familiar. Suicides among female farmers are on the rise. Studies on women in farming have found high levels of stress, fatigue and depression as studied by E Gallagher and U Delworth in 2003. Farmer suicides had been reported from various states in India, viz. Andhra Pradesh, Punjab Karnataka and Odisha. Maharashtra, one of India's most prosperous states is currently facing an epidemic of farmer suicides especially in the Vidarbha region. Studies in India, Sri Lanka, Canada, England and Australia have identified farming as one of the most high-risk industries when it comes to having a suicide rate higher than in the general population. As per a study by S Mishra in 2006, studies in India, Srilanka, USA, Canada, England, Australia have identified farming as one of the most dangerous industries associated with a high suicide rate than in general population. Farmers suicides in India have been reported from various states like Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and various other states with varied farming patterns and cultural practices. A study in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra had indicated indebtedness (87%) and deterioration in the economic status (74%) as major risk factors for suicide. Age adjusted suicide mortality rate for male farmers had increased from 17 in 1995 to 53 in 2004. According to Manmohan Singh.2007, rates of growth of agriculture in the last decade have been poor and a major cause of rural distress. Farming is increasingly becoming an unviable activity. In Wales and England, fire arms were the most frequently used by male farmers, followed by hanging and carbon monoxide poisoning. Farmers who commit suicide tend to use methods to which they have easy access because of their occupation.Due to easy availability of pesticide in India, and lack of education and efforts on the part of system to train farmers in

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safe use of it, pesticide consumption is the most common method of suicide as per study by AN Chaudhury and S Banerjee in 2007. Among modes of suicide in India, poisoning was the most prevalent followed by jumping and hanging from a height as studied by PB Behere and M Rathod in 2006. Farming, as it is being less profitable, women are talking on and off farm work to supplement the family income. In this position farming women often become stressed and fatigued due to multiple tasks and the conflict between their traditional roles as a house maker and the need for off farm income. Apart from farming the female farmers have an additional burden of performing household chores. This makes farm women a high risk category of suicide. England,Australia and now India had reported suicide among this gender as studied by P B Behere. As per study by PB Behere, MC Bhise in (2009), In India farmers suicides had been reported from various states like Andhra Pradesh, Punjab,Karnataka and Odisha. As per a data in Agriland September 18,2015, farmers are least likely people to talk about stress or depression. A major new study reveals Irish farmers rarely discuss personal problems like stress or depression. The research was carried out on Behaviours and attitude on behalf of the Irish association of Counselling and Psychotherapy(IACP).It showed that 25% of respondents of the farming community said that they are facing difficulty discussing their personal problems. This is considerably higher as compared to urban areas where it is 14%.The IACPs spokesman Shane Kelly said that the IACP is particularly concerned about these results as they come at a time when more and more adults are experiencing stress in Ireland. Kelly expressed concern that farmers belonging to 7% of the respondents who said they have no one to discuss their problems with. For overcoming this difficulty, Kelly said that family and friends in the farming community needed to look out for one another. According to Independent.ie 2016, in Ireland, stress and late diagnosis are the silent killers for farmers. As per statement by Mr Gleeson, the factors for on-farm dangers are the time pressures, bureaucracy, tightening finance availability and decreasing social 1All these issues if endured for a long period of time can lead to mental fatigue and depression. Social support was critical in tackling the problems, which are emerging from rural isolation and one of the best way to address them was to talk.

V. REMEDIAL MEASURES FOR THE PROBLEMS OF FARMERS

A. Multiple Crops

Cultivation of multiple crops like pine apple, turmeric, coconut, banana, papaya, ginger will give profitable results to the farmers.

B. There Should Be Reduction On The Dependency Of Agriculture On Nature

Effective management of water during seasons of good monsoons is required. The primary aim of the Government should be the prevention of crop failure. In maximum of the cases, it is not the lack of water, but the lack of proper management on the part of Government causes water shortage. Inter-state cooperation is required for more effective management of water ,where surplus water from perennial rivers can be diverted to those regions facing drought, as it is frequently seen in India that where in state there is severe drought, another state has to face worst floods. Such type of regional imbalances can be effectively managed by utilization of water resources throughout the country.

C. Modernization of Agriculture Essential

By introducing farm techniques which guarantee a definite success, an increase in youth participation on agricultural field is economically possible. It can be attained only by implementing new technologies. Research efforts should be carried out for the production of crops with better resistance to pests and higher yield potential. Technological progress should be passed down to the small farmers.

D. Educating The Farmers

Maximum of the farmers in India are not aware of crop rotation. The Education in rural area is ignored. So farmers are not aware of the various schemes provided by the Government.

E. Mingling With Small Fields May Help

Several small farmers may join together and combine all small fields into one large chunk. This may help in variety of ways,

F. Doing institutional finances available to every farmer is one important solution to save the farmers from debt traps of money lenders. Institutional finances should be easily accessible to the poorest farmers.

G. Requirement For Meaningful Crop Insurance Policies

Crop Insurance is must required and claim should be settled easily under the supervision of the District Collectors.

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H. Alternative Source of Income

Small farmers should be encouraged to create alternative source of income and the Government should take the steps for providing training to the farmers for acquiring new skills. In drought affected areas, the Government should start alternative employment generation programme to reduce the dependency on agriculture as main source of income.

I. Relief packages should be provided as an advantage to farmers to enable them to sustain their livelihood rather than as a relief to families of farmers who commit suicide.

J. Delivery of Extension Services

The transmission of technology package generated by the Agricultural Universities to the farmers is essential to improve the rate of adoption of technology and productivity of agriculture. More demonstrations should be arranged on farmers' fields to convince them about the needs of new technology so that they may adopt the same.

K. Counseling To Farmers

Only Economic help will not solve the problem, Social and spiritual interventions are needed so that the farmers realize that suicide is not the way out. They should develop self confidence.

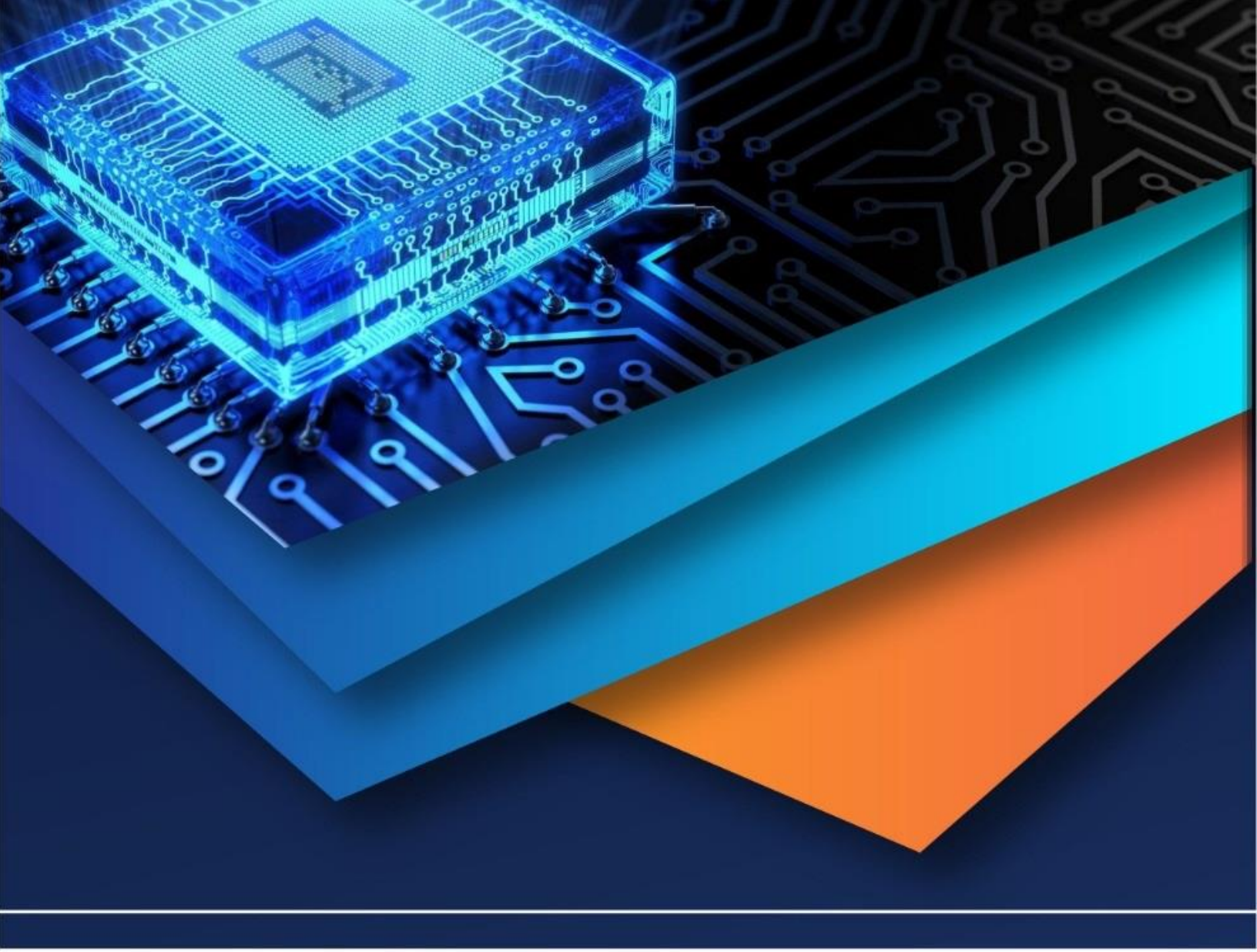
VI. CONCLUSION

Social support provides a buffering effect for stress. The greater support individuals and families will get from friends, family, local communities, national policies, societies as a whole will reduce their tension substantially. Everyone who eats has a stakeholder in small farmers well being. It is essential for Governments and NGOs to work together on local, national, Global basis to address and solve these critical issues. Unity and compassion on a Global level is required. It is necessary to implement income generating activities which may reduce the farmer suicide. It is necessary to encourage farmers to adopt allied activities like Dairy, Poultry, Goatery, Fishery etc with farming activities. Active participation of Government is required to address the real issues of the farmers that are tending them towards suicides. An integrated approach is necessary to solve the problem of farmers' suicide.

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