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“A STUDY OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL-ECONOMIC SITUATIONS OF THE WIVES SURVIVORS OF THE SUICIDE FARMERS”

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ABSTRACT:

Number of farmers committing suicide in Marathwada Region is increasing. When farmers end his life it naturally leaves the survivors in distress on several fronts. Especially the wives of the farmers have to shoulder the agricultural and domestic responsibility. In addition to that they have to struggle for the survival. Objectives of the study are to find out reasons behind farmers suicides, psycho-social-economic situations of the wives of the farmers who have committed the suicides and different services required for the rehabilitation and relief of the family. The study covers 23 wives mainly from 21 villages of Phulambri block in Aurangabad District. This study puts forth the importance of psychological counseling as a part of solace for the survivors.



KEYWORDS: *farmers committing suicide, agricultural and domestic responsibility.*

INTRODUCTION:

Act of Suicide is very painful and unfortunate in human life. This act occurs due to various reasons. At present suicide of farmers in different parts of India has been on the rise for the last decades. This poses a severe challenge to the government not only in providing for the relief and rehabilitation of the victims' families, but also in preventing the very phenomenon of farmer suicides.

Aurangabad division registers the second highest amount of farmer suicide in the state Maharashtra. Officials say the region is

facing a potent combination of three types of drought. "The poor rain points to meteorological drought, ground water depletion signals hydrological drought and the drop in yield means agricultural drought as well. The farmer is facing low yield because of uneven rains, frequent droughts to which is added the high cultivation cost and low price for the crop. These all make it difficult for a farmer to survive. The following are the main reasons for the increase in farmer suicides: Decline in the agriculture income, traditional cultivation methods, lack of knowledge of improved farm technology and livelihood options other than agriculture, natural calamities,

crop failure, indebtedness, family problems, financial difficulties and pre-existing mental stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, lack of support systems etc.

When a farmer ends his life it naturally leaves the survivors in distress on several fronts-economic, social and psychological. The entire burden of running the households falls on the shoulders of the wife of the deceased farmer. While suffering psychological trauma caused by the loss of life partner, she has to solely bear the brunt of humiliation from the creditors and at the same time struggle for sheer survival of the family. Similarly, the children and other dependents of the victims would

also be subject to social humiliation.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Aurangabad is one of the 36 districts of Maharashtra state in western India. The district has nine blocks. The data reflects that the district covers most of the rural area where still agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the people. Crop failure due to continuous uneven rains since last 4 years, increase in cost of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as low price of agricultural produce are the reasons observed in the district as for the increase in number of farmer suicides. As stated above Aurangabad division has the second highest farmer suicide cases and considering the seriousness of the issues of survivors, it was decided to conduct a study to analyze the present psychological and socio-economic situation of the wives of farmers who committed suicide.

STUDY AREA:

In all, 23 wives were included in the study mainly from Phulambri block by covering 21 different villages.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To know the reasons behind farmers suicides.
- To know the psycho-social-economic conditions of the survivors, particularly victim's wife.
- To identify the needs for the families of victim.
- To analyze the different services required for the rehabilitation and relief of the family of the victim.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The study does not go into deep on sources and the amount of debt of each family.
- The study is based on talk held between the victim's wife, her mother-in-law and interviewer.
- The study only emphasizes the present situation and future strategies for rehabilitation and relief.

TOOLS OF INFORMATION COLLECTION

- Home visits
- Personal interaction with wife survivor
- Structured questionnaire

PSYCHO-SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE WIFE SURVIVOR

- 21% of wife survivors are of the age between 20-30 years. The conditions of these women are very pathetic because they lose their husbands at this tender age and quickly have to shoulder all responsibilities for the family. They are finding it difficult to cope with the situation. The pale faces of these women clearly indicate their physical weakness, due to mental stress and anxiety, and which does not allow them to take proper food. 50% of wife survivors are between 30-40 years of age and their children are quite young and provide them moral support. Around 29% of wife survivors are between 40 and 55 years. They have grown children, but losing the partner at this age makes them helpless, hopeless and restless.
- 36% of wife survivors are illiterate, 29% passed middle standard, 21% passed primary and 14% cleared education up to 10th standard. Though 21% of wife survivors have a primary education, their understanding about legal aspects can be considered nil. In all, 57% of wife survivors' illiteracy and lower education can prove a hurdle in their rehabilitation. Less education increases the possibility of their exploitation. There is a serious issue observed regarding transferring the victim's land in the name of wife survivor.

- In 43% of families, the victim's wife lives with her three children. In one case, the victim's wife lives with her five daughters, and in one case the victim's wife is living with her two children and her mother-in-law presently take care of them as the wife is not in a condition to do even household works. In 21% of families wife survivors live with their sons, daughter-in-laws and grandchildren. 100% of families are nuclear families and in 79%, wife survivors are the single bread winner and have take care of their children, mother and father-in-law.
- 60% of survivors live in thatched houses which are generally made of cotton-plant's dry sticks, tin and mud and which are not conducive to life under extreme weather conditions and are hardly sustainable in storm. But at the same time with the lack of proper safety, risks such as snake-bites and insect bites develop more. In the lack of even intact road instant help also becomes impossible.
- 79% of wife survivors got compensation of Rs. 1 lakh from government. Due to 70% of the amount staying as fixed deposit, the government's help in the rehabilitation and relief of the victim's family proved minimal and not very meaningful. 21% of the wife survivors have not received any compensation as their cases do not qualify under the farmer suicide criteria. In some cases land is not in the name of the victim, and in other cases the victim had not taken loans from legal financial institutions. The condition of these wife survivors is very miserable due to not getting any type of support from government.
- 100% the wives' sources of livelihood are agriculture and agriculture based labour work. None of the victims' wives have had any type of vocational training. They are familiar with cow and goat rearing activities. For supportive livelihood activities they depend on only agriculture-based activities. Only 1 wife survivor cooks khichdi in Aanganwadi Centre which is her supportive source of income.
- 48% of the victim families' children is studying in middle/higher school or intermediate. In only one Chincholi-nakib village, a victim's two children (sons) have received sponsorship for education from an NGO. The rest are studying in nearby villages and reach them by walking or riding their bicycles. In 15% of families children are studying in primary school. The remainder of the children are married and helping the surviving wife with agriculture. The wife survivor has to look after the educational needs of the children. As mentioned earlier 86% of family's fall under the marginal farmer's category and own between 1 and 2 acres of land. Most farmers have rainfed land where they mainly grow cotton, maize and green gram (askharif) crops. Depending on a single crop and labor on the farm puts a big question mark before wife survivor on how they will satisfy their children's needs. They have the same problem which their husband used to bear. They are tackling the same situation, or rather a more challenging situation, than their husbands and alone.
- In 34% cases, the agricultural land is transferred to the wife of the victim. In the rest of the cases land is yet to be transferred in the name of wife survivors. This reflects an alarming ignorance about legal formalities. Wife survivors have their own social binding which makes them resist asking for help from their relatives in transferring the land in her name. More than that, their psychological condition also prevents them from thinking about such formalities although they are highly essential to secure their family's future.
- 91% of wives live in their husbands' house presently and have not shifted to their parents' home. 9% of the wives are getting help from their parents.
- 75% wives survivors are socially isolated and people generally avoid them or not inviting them for any social function such as bhajan kirtan, bhandara, public meeting etc. though a few are getting support from the husband's family. They are attending family programmes with the relatives like chautha, terahvi, death anniversary which are emotionally negative and heavy events. The functions like house warming ceremonies, birthdays, and engagements they generally don't attend. They attend marriage functions but they are not treated as welcomed or wanted guests. Invitation to marriages are mostly mere formalities. The teenage children of

these families feel guilty and isolated as their father did prior to suicide and face the same psychological trauma as their mother. To help their mother they have matured before the end of their childhood. They are helping their mother in agriculture and doing work outside home. 36% of the wife survivors' children are grown up and married. Thus, they don't feel socially isolated. Older children have social contacts, and the support they give their mothers makes them feel less socially isolated and more respected compared to surviving wives with young children.

The findings based on observation and data reveal the psycho-socio-economic condition of wife survivors of the farmers who committed suicide. The condition of wife is full of future challenges in facing physical, mental, emotional and economic exclusion in day to day life. The mental and emotional violence is much more, according to them, and the humiliation is greater than the pain of the husband's suicide. The village social system has many pitfalls for such women. Because of widowhood the wives' quality of life and capabilities have worsened. They have to stand up mentally and physically as they are the sole supporter of their children, however miserable they may feel.

To make the wife survivor mentally and physically strong, and for the rehabilitation and relief of the family, some actions need to be taken, so that families can be protected from humiliation and wife survivors can live with their children with respect and dignity, as a person equally important as others in society.

SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY:

- **Immediate psychological support:** Due to nuclear family the support system of the survivor is lost. Financial difficulties, challenges in future, marriages of daughters have made the situation worst. On this background, there is a strong need for continuous counseling by an expert psychologist to bring the wife survivor out from grief and stress. She should feel that someone is there with her to tackle her difficult situation.
- **Health check-up:** To render the family responsibility well, the wife survivor should be psychologically and physically fit and healthy. Due to her husband's shocking death it can become difficult for her to take care of herself. This severely affects her health and she becomes too weak to undertake her regular duties. Regular check-up of wife survivor will help her in maintaining her psychological and physical health which is very important to work at home as well as on the farm.
- **Livelihood support:** It is very difficult for wife survivors to meet family needs on small rainfed agricultural land. There should be some financial support required so that they can generate supplementary source of income which does not require much skill and knowledge. Based on the survivor's interest and capacity for selective income generation activities, financial support to them should be given to her. This will also help the wife to develop self-confidence.
- **Formation and capacity building of wife survivors "Support Group" at block level:** Wife survivors' network will be useful in confidence and knowledge building. Legal assistance and knowledge about present farming practices to the needy will be provided through the network. The basic objectives behind the formation of the network is to provide a group to the survivor where they will find women like them who are tackling the same situation and going through the same trauma. Sharing experiences will develop the morale of the survivors. Efforts for accessing help of government's different schemes will be done through the "support group".
- **Financial support for safe shelter:** Minimum financial support should be provided to the families of victims to shelter.
- **Moral support through telephonic counseling/ Help line:** The wives of the survivor live under the pressure of family customs, traditions, social norm etc. They can't express their pains, emotions, difficulties to their in laws. Their suppressed feelings disturb their mind set. If helpline service for survivors is provided, they can get outlet to express themselves freely so that their

burden can be reduced up to certain extent. Instant help and sharing will be useful for increasing their morale and confidence.

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