

"Farmers' Suicides in Karnataka: The Spatial-Temporal Analysis

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Abstract:

Southe Indian states, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu, are heavily indebted, with a significant percentage of agricultural mens facing debt. This study examines farmer suicides in Karnataka, revealing higher rates in developed districts like Haveri, Madya, Mysore, and Belagavi, contrary to lower rates in drought-prone areas. Farmer suicides, calculated per hectare and per farming family, are driven by factors beyond monsoon failures, including debt, bankruptcy, and market challenges. Solutions proposed include psychological counseling, increased crop loans, technological adaptation, changes in farming methods, and enforcing minimum support prices (MSP).

Introduction:

With 70% of India's population dependent on agriculture, farmer suicides have exposed public policy failures, gaining media and political attention. Government responses have been reactionary, with simplistic measures like farm loan waivers and MSP increases. Suicides often result from long-term hardships and mental health issues, necessitating responsible media reporting, mental health support, and proper insurance. Between 2016 and 2017, over 3000 farmer suicides occurred, driven by crop failures, unfair pricing, and debt. Agriculture, despite being a primary livelihood for over 55% of the population, contributes only 14% to GDP, hindered by small landholdings, dependence on monsoons, inadequate irrigation, and poor credit and insurance access. This study aims to analyze and address the incidence, causes, and solutions for farmer suicides in Karnataka.

Methodology

The study utilizes NCRB reports and data from the Government of Karnataka's agriculture department to analyze farmer suicides at the national and state levels. Statistical and GIS software are used for data analysis and visualization to identify hotspots and propose recommendations.

Quantitative Analysis:

70% of India's 90 million agricultural men face debt, primarily driving farmer suicides. The NCRB, in collaboration with agricultural ministries, started collecting specific data on farmer suicides in 2019, including those of farmers and agricultural laborers. The analysis shows economic struggles, worsened by additional health-related loans, reducing farming investments.

Year	Suicides in farming Sector	Total Suicides	% Share
2118 @	11,772	1,34,799	8.70%
2019	12,360	1,31,666	9.40%
2020	12,602	1,33,623	9.40%
Percentage Change	2.00%	1.50%	

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2020 report, "Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India," revealed that 12,602 individuals in the farming sector (8,007 farmers/cultivators and 4,595 agricultural laborers) committed suicide, making up 9.4% of the total 133,623 suicides in India. Among the 8,007 farmers/cultivators, 7,566 were male and 441 were female. The highest number of farming-related suicides occurred in Maharashtra (4,291), followed by Karnataka (1,569), Telangana (1,400), Madhya Pradesh (1,290), Chhattisgarh (954), Andhra Pradesh (916), and Tamil Nadu (606), accounting for 87.5% of such suicides. Maharashtra led with 3,030 farmer suicides, followed by Telangana (1,358) and Karnataka (1,197), representing 37.8%, 17.0%, and 14.9% of farmer suicides, respectively. Chhattisgarh (854), Madhya Pradesh (581), and Andhra Pradesh (516) made up 24.4%, with these six states collectively reporting 94.1% of total farmer suicides in 2020. Table – 2:

Top Five State-wise Incidence of Farmers' Suicides and Percentage Share during 2019-20, India

State	Number of Suicides in 2019	% of farmer Suicides to all India	Number of suicides in 2020	% of farmer Suicides to all India
		total in 2019		total in 2020
Maharashtra	2,568	45.5	3030	37.8
Telangana	898	15.9	1358	17
Madhya Pradesh	826	14.6	581	7.3
Chhattisgarh	443	7.8	854	10.7
Karnataka	321	5.7	1197	14.9
Total	5056	89.5	7020	87.7

Source: NCRB report: 2020 & 2020, GoI

2005 of Table 2:

In 2019, Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka were consistently the top five states with the highest farmer/cultivator suicide cases, making up 89.5% and 87.7% of all farmer suicides in India, respectively. In 2020, the primary causes of these suicides were bankruptcy or indebtedness (38.7%) and family problems (11.7%). Other significant causes included farming-related issues (19.5%), crop failure (19.4%), and illness (10.5%).

For male farmers/cultivators, the leading causes were bankruptcy or indebtedness (39.4%) and farming-related issues (19.7%). For female farmers/cultivators, the leading causes were bankruptcy or indebtedness (27.0%), family problems (18.1%), illness (15.4%), and farming-related issues.

In 2020, 79.0% of farmer suicides in Karnataka and 42.7% in Maharashtra were due to bankruptcy or indebtedness. Additionally, 26.2% of farmer suicides in Maharashtra were due to farming-related issues, particularly crop failure. Farmers/cultivators aged 30-60 years

accounted for 71.6% of total suicides, while only 9.0% were aged 60 and above. Among agricultural laborers, family problems (40.1%) and illness (19.0%) were the leading causes of suicide.

Karnataka Scenario:

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has been the authentic source for state-wise farmer suicide data since 1967. However, it started recording suicides in the agricultural sector (farmers and agricultural laborers) only from 2005. From 2020 onwards, NCRB's publications began presenting separate data for suicides of agricultural laborers and farmers, which is crucial for analyzing farmers' suicides over the last seventeen years.

Table – 3: Suicides reported in Agricultural Sector, Karnataka

Year	Farmers' Suicide	Year	Farmers' Suicide
2005	2630	2014	2280
2006	2510	2015	2590
2007	2340	2016	2100
2008	2680	2017	1880
2009	1960	2018	1400
2010	1880	2019	770
2011	1880	2020	1569
2012	1720	2021	1490
2013	2140	-	-
		Total	33819

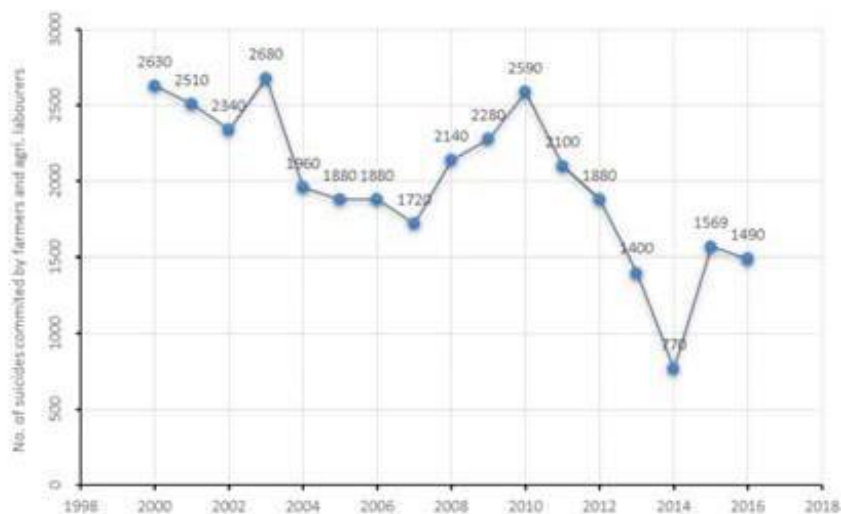
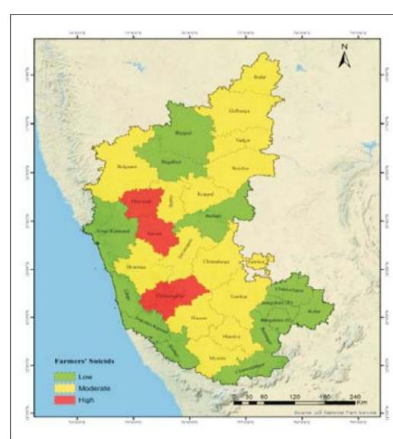
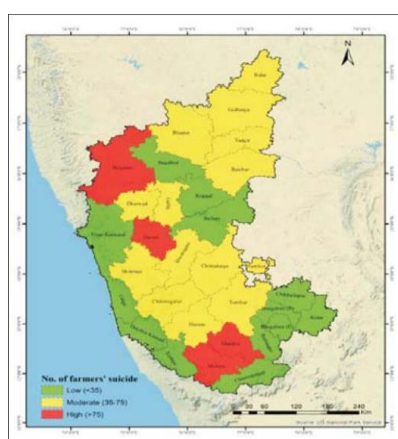


Fig. 1: Reported Farmer's Suicide in Karnataka, 2013 -16

Between 2005 and 2016, Karnataka experienced 33,819 suicides in the agricultural sector. Although there was a declining trend from 2005 to 2017, annual suicides remained above 1,800. In 2019, suicides dropped to 770 but spiked to 1,569 in 2020 and 1,490 in 2016. Five districts—Haveri, Mandya, Mysore, Belgaum, and Kalaburagi—accounted for nearly 37% of the state's farmer suicides from 2016 to 2020. On average, 15 farmers per lakh hectare of net sown area, 12 per lakh hectare of gross cropped area, and 19 per lakh farming families committed suicide in Karnataka during this period.

Geographically, 50% of these suicides occurred in North Karnataka, 48% in South Karnataka, and 2% in Coastal Karnataka. Equal numbers of suicides were seen in both dry North and rainy South regions. Farmers in dry areas often adapted by diversifying into allied practices like poultry and dairy, while those in resource-rich areas faced more significant impacts from crop failures due to inadequate irrigation and changing environmental conditions, especially with mono-crops like sugarcane and paddy.

The primary causes of these suicides included bankruptcy or indebtedness (38.7%), family problems (11.7%), farming-related issues (19.5%), crop failure (19.4%), and illness (10.5%). Indebtedness was exacerbated by reliance on non-institutional credit and the diversion of crop loans for education, healthcare, and marriages. Major contributors to the high suicide rates included lack of access to irrigation, monsoon failures, and financial liabilities from indebtedness.



Recommendations

1. Mental Health Support: Providing psychological counseling to farmers to address mental health issues and reduce suicide rates.
2. Increased Crop Loans: Offering higher crop loans through banks to lessen farmers' reliance

Fig. 2: Districtwise Farmer's Suicide in Karnataka, July 2020 -June, 2016	Fig. 3: No. Of Farmer's Suicide/'00,000 Farming Families in Karnataka, July 2020 -June, 2016
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on village traders and money lenders.

3. Technical Adaptation: Encouraging farmers, especially in rainy and resource-rich areas, to adapt to changing seasons and implement new farming methods to reduce crop failure.
4. Alcoholism Reduction: Reducing alcohol consumption to mitigate related issues such as family disputes, financial mismanagement, and land sales.
5. Minimum Support Price (MSP): Ensuring the MSP covers the cost of cultivation to provide financial stability to farmers.

Conclusion: Addressing agricultural failure requires a holistic risk management approach, including improving water availability, diversifying cropping patterns, and increasing non-farm employment. Regulating private credit and input markets, revitalizing the rural credit market, and matching technological changes with appropriate agricultural extension services

are essential. Comprehensive and wise policy decisions are needed to prevent further farmer suicides and ensure the sustainability of the agriculture sector.

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