

Socio-economic Profile of Heads of Agricultural Labourer Suicide Victim Households in Punjab: Post Suicides



Gurpreet Singh

Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Economics,
Shri Guru Granth Sahib World
University,
Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

Abstract

This research paper analyses the socio-economic conditions of heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Punjab, post suicides. After the suicide committed by the bread winner, the survivors of the victim households have to cope with aftermaths. Post suicides, heads of victim households have to shoulder the heavy responsibilities for the survival of family. Beside this, they have to bear the harassment by the money lenders and bank officials for the repayment of loans. The majority of household heads of suicide victim households are females or old parents. Moreover, their educational level and employability is very low. Thus, it is quite significance to assess the socio-economic competences of the household heads of suicide victim households, post suicides. Accordingly, in this paper an attempt has been made to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the heads of the victim households post suicide.

Keywords: Agricultural Labourer, heads of Suicide Victim Households.

Introduction

The development experience of almost all the developed countries shows that with the economic growth of the country, the share of agriculture sector in GDP goes downward and the workforce shifts from agriculture sector to other sectors. In India, the share of agriculture sector in GDP has decreased to 15.7 per cent in 2018 (Economic survey of India). While, the majority of work force is still engaged in agricultural sector due to lack of education, technical skills among workers and due to lack of adequate employment opportunities in non-farm sectors. Almost the frozen minimum support prices (MSP) and productivity of main crops, increasing prices of agricultural inputs, over mechanisation of agriculture, fragmentation of land holdings, diminishing water table has deepened the agrarian crisis. 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). Besides this, demand for agricultural workforce has been decreased due to over mechanisation of 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 led to heavy amount of debt on agricultural labourers and consequently resulted as large number of labourer suicides in Punjab. Post suicides, heads of the victim households have to face the many problems like the survival of family, education of the children, health issues, marriages of their children and moreover to manage funds for the repayments of borrowings. Thus, it is significant to know the competencies of the heads of victim households, post suicides.

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the heads of the victim households post suicides. Furthermore, to assess the capabilities of household heads to cope with aftermaths of suicides was also the objective of this study. As after the suicides committed by victims the responsibility of survival of the family members was on the shoulders of these household heads.

Methodology of the Study

The study is mainly based on primary data source. The data on farmer and agricultural labourer 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 1757 farmers (984 in district Sangrur and 773 in district Bathinda) and 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. To study the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourer victim households, out of total 1133 households 100 victim households were selected for the study.

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.

Out of total 100 agricultural labourer victim households, 57 and 43 households were selected by proportionate random sampling from Sangrur and Bathinda districts, respectively. Likewise, in district Sangrur, out of total of 57 labourer victim households, 35 and 22 households were selected from both the categories of suicides due to indebtedness and others, respectively, by proportionate random sampling. In district Bathinda, out of total of 43 labourer victim households, 25 households were selected from the category of suicides due to indebtedness and 18 households were selected from the category of suicide due to other than debt, by proportionate sampling. Hence, out of total selected 100 agricultural labourer suicide victim households, 60 and 40 households were selected from the categories of suicides due to indebtedness and reasons other than debt, respectively.

Table 1: Classification of household heads (post suicides) according to their relations with agricultural labourer suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab

Relation of HH with suicide victim	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Wife	10 (28.57)	11 (50.00)	21 (36.84)	8 (32.00)	7 (38.89)	15 (34.88)	18 (30.00)	18 (45.00)	36 (36.00)
Husband	1 (2.86)	6 (27.27)	7 (12.28)	1 (4.00)	2 (11.11)	3 (6.98)	2 (3.33)	8 (20.00)	10 (10.00)
Father	6 (17.14)	3 (13.64)	9 (15.79)	4 (16.00)	3 (16.67)	7 (16.28)	10 (16.67)	6 (15.00)	16 (16.00)
Mother	5 (14.29)	2 (9.09)	7 (12.28)	3 (12.00)	5 (27.78)	8 (18.60)	8 (13.33)	7 (17.50)	15 (15.00)
Son	8 (22.86)	0 (0.00)	8 (14.04)	4 (16.00)	1 (5.56)	5 (11.63)	12 (20.00)	1 (2.50)	13 (13.00)

Review of the literature

Gill (2006) highlighted the phenomena of farmers' suicides. The author made a review of some studies regarding prosperity and crisis of agricultural sector of Punjab. Further, she gave some suggestions for relief measures to improve the conditions of the family members of suicide victims. Study pointed out that the main causes of agricultural crisis are misuse of loan borrowed by farmers, lack of formal credit and over dependence of work force on agricultural sector while the incentive for use of modern machinery decreased the demand for labour in agriculture. On the other hand other sectors of economy are unable to absorb the increasing workforce in the state.

Padhi (2009) described that wives and other family members of the suicide victim households are facing social and economic complications. The restrictions on the women's mobility, checks them from taking work on wage and on the other side, dowry system also adds more to their problems. In the social milieu, most of the wives of suicide victims are not free to take decisions. In the case of pertaining to land, hiring labour, leasing-out land, fresh loans and future of their children, the husband's brother or father are taking decisions even as the land has been transferred to the woman or her son. This study also finds out that the children of victim households are more serious and obedient.

Singh and Bhogal (2014) pointed out that the total workforce has increased over the time, while the proportion of workforce engaged in agriculture has not been falling. On the other side non-farm sector of economy is unable to absorb this increased workforce. Hence, there exists a large "reserve army of labour" in the state's economy.

Post Suicide Social Profile of Household Heads

Social profile of household heads gives facts on their relationship with suicide victims, age, gender, educational attainment and occupation of the household heads, post suicides. Table 1 reveals the post suicide relationship of household heads of victim households to the suicide victims in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. It indicates that out of total 100 victim household heads, 36.00 per cent are wives and 15.00 per cent are mothers of suicide victims. Thus, more than 50 per cent household heads are females, post suicides.

Brother	2 (5.71)	0 (0.00)	2 (3.51)	3 (12.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (6.98)	5 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (5.00)
Children living with relatives	3 (8.57)	0 (0.00)	3 (5.26)	2 (8.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (4.65)	5 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (5.00)
Total Households	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) HHs: household heads.

Moreover, 16.00 per cent, 13.00 per cent and 5.00 per cent household heads are husbands, fathers, sons and brothers of suicide victims, respectively. In 5.00 per cent households children have lost both of their parents and are living with relatives.

Among the overall suicides due to indebtedness, out of total 60 household heads 30.00 per cent, 3.33 per cent, 16.67 per cent, 13.33 per cent, 20.00 per cent and 8.33 per cent are wives, husbands, fathers, mothers, sons and brothers of suicide victims, respectively. In this category of suicides, in 8.33 per cent households, children are living with their relatives.

Post suicide, among overall 100 agricultural labourer suicide victim households, 67.00 per cent household heads are wives and parents of suicide victims. It is, thus clear from the data that across the districts and reasons for suicides, young wives and old parents of victims have to shoulder the responsibility for the survival of family. They are facing severe distress as on one side they are under pressure to repay debt by victims and for the survival of family on the other.

Table 2 expresses the age wise classification of household heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab.

Table 2: Age wise classification of heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, at the time of survey

Age Group	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Below-15	3 (8.57)	0 (0.00)	3 (5.26)	2 (8.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (4.65)	5 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	5 (5.00)
15-25	5 (14.29)	0 (0.00)	5 (8.77)	3 (12.00)	1 (5.56)	4 (9.30)	8 (13.33)	1 (2.50)	9 (9.00)
26-35	5 (14.29)	10 (45.45)	15 (26.32)	4 (16.00)	4 (22.22)	8 (18.60)	9 (15.00)	14 (35.00)	23 (23.00)
36-45	11 (31.43)	5 (22.73)	16 (28.07)	5 (20.00)	4 (22.22)	9 (20.93)	16 (26.67)	9 (22.50)	25 (25.00)
46-55	1 (2.86)	1 (4.55)	2 (3.51)	4 (16.00)	1 (5.56)	5 (11.63)	5 (8.33)	2 (5.00)	7 (7.00)
56-65	7 (20.00)	6 (27.27)	13 (22.81)	5 (20.00)	7 (38.89)	12 (27.91)	12 (20.00)	13 (32.50)	25 (25.00)
Above-65	3 (8.57)	0 (0.00)	3 (5.26)	2 (8.00)	1 (5.56)	3 (6.98)	5 (8.33)	1 (2.50)	6 (6.00)
Total HHs	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) HHs: Households

It shows that among overall 100 victim households a vast majority of household heads are above 26 years of age. Significantly, 48 per cent HHs were in the age group of 26 to 45 years. Moreover, 31 per cent household heads are above the 56 years of age; of course in old age.

In the case of overall suicides due to indebtedness, 13.33 per cent household heads are between 15 to 25 years, 15.00 per cent are between 26 to 35 years, 26.67 per cent are between 36 to 45

years, 8.33 per cent are between 46 to 55 years, nearly 20.00 per cent are between 56 to 65 years and 8.33 per cent are above 65 years. Furthermore, in this category of suicides, 8.33 per cent household heads are below 15 years.

While, among the cases of suicides due to other reasons, none of the household head is below 15 years. In this category of suicides, 2.50 per cent household heads are between 15 to 25 years, 35.00 per cent are between 26 to 35 years, 22.50 per cent

are between 36 to 45 years, 5.00 per cent are between 46 to 55 years, 32.50 per cent are between 56 to 65 years and only 2.50 per cent are above 65 years.

Table 3 reveals literacy level of household heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. It indicates that a majority of (47.00 per cent) household heads are illiterate.

Table 3: Educational attainment by household heads of sampled agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, at the time of survey

Educational Attainment	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Illiterate	19 (54.29)	9 (40.91)	28 (49.12)	11 (44.00)	8 (44.44)	19 (44.19)	30 (50.00)	17 (42.50)	47 (47.00)
Primary	13 (37.14)	7 (31.82)	20 (35.09)	10 (40.00)	6 (33.33)	16 (37.21)	23 (38.33)	13 (32.50)	36 (36.00)
Middle	3 (8.57)	4 (18.18)	7 (12.28)	3 (12.00)	2 (11.11)	5 (11.63)	6 (10.00)	6 (15.00)	12 (12.00)
Secondary	0 (0.00)	2 (9.09)	2 (3.51)	1 (4.00)	1 (5.56)	2 (4.65)	11 (1.67)	3 (7.50)	4 (4.00)
Sen. secondary	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (5.56)	1 (2.33)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.50)	1 (1.00)
Total households	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.

Moreover, 36.00 per cent household heads are educated up to primary level. While only 12.00 per cent, 4.00 per cent and 1.00 per cent household heads are educated up to middle, secondary and higher secondary levels, respectively. Not even a single household head has attained education up to graduation level. It is significant to note that among overall suicides, 99.00 per cent household heads are either illiterate or below matric.

Among overall suicides due to indebtedness, out of total 60 household heads, 50.00 per cent are illiterate. Moreover, 38.33 per cent, 10.00 per cent,

1.67 per cent household heads in this category of suicides have attained education up to primary, middle, secondary level, respectively. It is interesting to note that in this category of suicides; not even a single household head has attained education up to senior secondary level. Besides, the proportion of household heads having education up to secondary level is very low.

Thus, it is clear from the forgoing analysis that whatever was the cause of suicide, after suicides the heads of victim households have very low literacy level. It increases their woes for survival their families.

Table 4: Occupation wise classification of household heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, at the time of survey

Occupation	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Casual labour	18 (51.43)	12 (54.55)	30 (52.63)	15 (60.00)	9 (50.00)	24 (55.81)	33 (55.00)	21 (52.50)	54 (54.00)
Attached labour	3 (8.57)	4 (18.18)	7 (12.28)	1 (4.00)	3 (16.67)	6 (13.95)	4 (6.67)	7 (17.50)	11 (11.00)
Pvt. job	1 (2.86)	2 (9.09)	3 (5.26)	4 (16.00)	1 (5.56)	5 (11.63)	5 (8.33)	3 (7.50)	8 (8.00)
Govt. job	1 (2.86)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.75)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.67)	0 (0.00)	1 (1.00)
Self employed	1 (2.86)	1 (4.55)	2 (3.51)	1 (4.00)	1 (5.56)	2 (4.65)	2 (3.33)	2 (5.00)	4 (4.00)
Student	3 (8.57)	0 (0.00)	3 (5.26)	1 (4.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (2.33)	4 (6.67)	0 (0.00)	4 (4.00)
None	8 (22.86)	3 (13.64)	11 (19.30)	3 (12.00)	4 (22.22)	5 (11.63)	11 (18.33)	7 (17.50)	18 (18.00)
Total households	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. Households in None category are unable to do work either due to old age or due to illness.

3. Private Job: jobs on various shops especially in cities, on patrol pump, truck/tractor/dumper driver, security guard in- marriage palaces/rice shellers, workshops, etc.

Table 4 highlights the occupation of heads of agricultural labourer suicide victim households, post

suicides. Out of total 100 victim household heads, 54.00 per cent are engaged in casual labourers. Furthermore, 11.00 per cent HHs are working as attached labourer, 8.00 per cent are reliant on private job, and 4.00 per cent HHs are self-employed. Besides this, 4.00 per cent HHs are school going children and are dependent on their relatives. It is significant to note that 18.00 per cent HHs are unable to do work either due to old age or due to chronic illness.

The household heads working in private jobs are working on patrol pumps, as security guard in marriage palaces/ in rice mills/ in factories, on karyana stores, and as tractor/truck/combine/school bus drivers or on workshops. Only one household head is employed as Aganwarri teacher. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, 55.00 per cent household heads are doing casual labour. The 6.67 per cent household heads are working as attached labourer. About 8 per cent are in private job. Moreover, 1.67 per cent, 3.33 per cent, 6.67 per cent households in this category of suicides are government employees, self-employed and student, respectively. Among overall cases of suicides due to indebtedness, 18.33 per cent household heads are

unable to do work either due to chronic illness or due to old age.

Thus, it is clear from the forgoing discussion that majority of household heads are casual labourers. The second largest proportion is of those household heads that are not able to do work. Besides, a few household heads are employed in private and government job or engaged in self-business.

Table 7 depicts gender wise classifications of family members of agricultural labourer suicide victim's households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, after suicides. It shows that among total there are total 354 persons. Out of them, 45.76 per cent are male and 54.24 per cent are female. Moreover, among overall cases of suicides 62.15 per cent family members are adults.

In the case of suicides due to indebtedness out of total 200 family members, 47.00 per cent are males and 53.00 per cent are females. Likewise, among the case of suicides due to other reasons, the proportion of female members is greater than male members. Out of total 154 family members, 55.84 per cent are females.

Table 7: Gender wise composition of family members of agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, post suicides.

Gender/ Person	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Male	54 (46.96)	34 (40.48)	88 (44.22)	40 (47.06)	34 (48.57)	74 (47.74)	94 (47.00)	68 (44.16)	162 (45.76)
Female	61 (53.04)	50 (59.52)	111 (55.78)	45 (52.94)	36 (51.43)	81 (52.26)	106 (53.00)	86 (55.84)	192 (54.24)
Adult	66 (57.39)	52 (61.90)	118 (59.30)	55 (64.71)	47 (67.14)	102 (65.81)	121 (60.50)	99 (64.29)	220 (62.15)
Total persons	115	84	199	85	70	155	200	154	354

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate column wise percentage share.

Thus, across the districts and reasons for suicides, the proportion of female family members is greater than male members. In the case of suicide due to indebtedness, 53.04 per cent family members

in district Sangrur and 52.94 per cent family members in district Bathinda are females. However, among both the cases of suicides, the proportion of adult members is almost 60.00 per cent.

Table 8: Dependency Ratio among sampled agricultural labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab, at the time of survey

Population	Sangrur			Bathinda			Grand Total		
	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total	Debt	Other	Total
Young Dependent & Dependency Ratio (0-14 years)	36 (52.17)	26 (52.00)	62 (52.10)	22 (40.74)	17 (36.96)	39 (39.00)	58 (47.15)	43 (44.79)	101 (46.12)
Elder Dependent & Dependency Ratio (above 64 years)	10 (14.49)	8 (16.00)	18 (15.13)	9 (16.67)	7 (15.22)	16 (16.00)	19 (15.45)	15 (15.63)	34 (15.53)
Total Dependent & Dependency Ratio	46 (66.67)	34 (68.00)	80 (67.23)	31 (57.41)	24 (52.17)	55 (55.00)	77 (62.60)	58 (60.42)	135 (61.64)
Total working persons	56	33	89	46	27	73	102	60	162
Total working age persons (15-64 year)	69	50	119	54	46	100	123	96	219
Work Participation Rate	81	66	75	85	59	73	83	63	74
Total Population	115	84	199	85	70	155	200	154	354

Source: Field Survey, 2013-14.

Notes:

1. Figures in parentheses in first, second and third row indicate young, elder and total dependency ratio, respectively.
2. Dependency Ratio: The Penguin Dictionary of Economics.
3. Work Participation Rate =

$$\frac{\text{Total working persons}}{\text{Total working age population}} * 100$$

Table 8 describes dependency ratio among labourer suicide victim households in Sangrur and Bathinda districts of Punjab. Dependency ratio gives insight in to the amount of people of non-working age compared to the number of those of working age. The data shows that 61.64 per cent family members are dependents on working age population. Out of total 61.64 per cent dependents, 46.12 per cent are young dependents whose age is up to 14 years.

While, above 64 years of age are 15.53 per cent. Higher dependency ratio denotes more burden on working age population. Among overall suicide victim households, the work participation rate is 0.74. It is thus clear from the data that the children and old parent of the labourer suicide victims are also working for the survival of family. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, dependency ratio (62.60 per cent) is slightly higher as compared to dependency ratio (61.64 per cent) among the cases of suicides due to other reasons. District wise analysis of dependency ratio shows that it is higher (67.23 per cent) in Sangrur as compared to (55.00 per cent) in Bathinda district. In the case of suicides due to indebtedness, the work participate rate is higher (83 per cent) than in

the case of suicides due to other reasons (63 per cent).

Thus it is clear from the forgoing analysis that heads of the suicide victim household are facing hardness of the aftermaths of suicides. Low level of education, technical skills, low employability and overdependence of family members on household heads are major bottlenecks to the income of these victim households. Accordingly, government should provide at least single job to the kin of farmer suicides. Besides this, entire debt of these victim households should be waived off.

References

1. Ghuman, Ranjit Singh (2015), "Swaminathan MSP Solution to Agrarian Crisis and Farmers' Distress?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. 33, pp. 20-23.
2. Ghuman, Ranjit Singh, Inderjeet Singh and Lakhwinder Singh (2007), "Status of Local Agricultural Labour in Punjab", *The Punjab State Farmers Commission, Government of Punjab*.
3. Gill, Anita (2006), "The Punjab Peasant: He Too Dies in Dept.", *Mainstream*, June 2-8, pp. 19-24.
4. Padhi, Ranjana (2009), "On Women Surviving Farmer Suicides in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May-9, Vol. XLIV, No. 19, pp. 53-59.
5. Singh, Sukhpal and Bhogal Shruti (2014), "Punjab's Small Peasantry Thriving or Deteriorating?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May-9 Vol. XLIX, Nos.26&27, pp. 95-100.
6. PAU (2009), "Farmers and Agricultural Labours' Suicides due to Indebtedness in the Punjab State : Pilot Survey in Bathinda and Sangrur Districts."