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Personal, socio-economic and psychological characteristics of distress farmers' of Osmanabad district of Marathawada region, Maharashtra

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Abstract

The present study was conducted in Osmanabad district of Marathawada region during 2017-18 where the maximum number of farmers suicides occurred in last two years. From Osmanabad two talukas viz. Osmanabad and Tulajapur were selected purposively as there was maximum farmers suicides in these areas. Similarly, four villages from each taluk were selected purposively. From each village ten respondents were selected. The study was conducted using the Ex-post-facto research design. The data was collected using the pretested structured interview schedule and it was tabulated and analyzed using the frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, mean and total score. It was observed from the study that, Majority of the farmers were from middle age (63.75%) and medium farming experience (62.50%), annual income (86.25%), education of farmer had secondary school (45.00%), SC/ST/NT and OBC castes of the respondents are (22.50%), majority of marginal farmers land holding (47.50%), medium size of family (71.25%), nuclear family type (82.50%), no source of irrigation facility (62.50%), majority of the farmer low level social participation is (47.50%). The majority of the farmer extension contact low (41.25%), majority of the farmer asset possession low (68.75%), medium level of cropping intensity (83.75%), medium levels of economic motivation (72.50%), deferred gratification were found (77.50%) in middle category, management orientation of the farmer is middle level (78.75%), farmers found in middle level of the indebtedness (81.25%), majority of the farmer engaged in farming and farm labors (87.50%).

Keywords: Distress farmers, personal characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, psychological characteristics and Osmanabad district

1. Introduction

The growth of agriculture and allied sectors is still a critical factor in the overall performance of the Indian economy. As per the 2010-11 advance estimates released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on 07.02.2011, the agriculture and allied sector accounted for 14.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), at constant 2004-05 prices. In 2009-10, it accounted for 14.6 per cent of the GDP compared to 15.7 per cent in 2008-09 and 19.0 per cent in 2004-05. Its share in GDP has thus declined rapidly in the recent past. This is explained by the fact that whereas, overall GDP has grown by an average of 8.62 per cent during 2004-05 to 2010-11, agricultural sector GDP has increased by only 3.46 per cent during the same period. The role of the agriculture sector, however, remains critical as it accounts for about 58 per cent of employment in the country as per 2001 census (Anonymous, 2011) [2]. Non-remunerative prices for crops, indebtedness and crop failures due to frequent droughts are by and large identified as the core reasons for farming distress. The problem is compounded by the fact that the farm holdings in the country are shrinking in size, production costs are rising and the resource drain from the farm sector is mounting in recent decades. Earlier, farmers in distress might have become dacoits or rebels, but never did we hear that they committed suicides. Rao *et al.* (2007) stated that for the first time in the known history of India, farmers are taking recourse to suicide as a way out of agrarian distress. If farm ecology and economics go wrong nothing else will go right. This is the principal message of the agrarian crisis. The issue of farmers' 'distress' is a vexed one. 'Distress' is the result of a complex interplay of a myriad issues and risks. Therefore, it will not be prudent to address the issue in isolation of the causative factors. Farmers' 'distress' is not due to indebtedness alone. There are several other factors such as social, psychological, and family related developments that contribute significantly to this. Among the economic causes for farmers' distress, credit related issues normally play a prominent role. It has also been observed that mostly the small and marginal

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farmers, as well as, tenant farmers and farm labourers bear the brunt of crop failures. With this background the present study is taken up with this objective. "Distressed farmer is one, who has suffered psychological shocks due to failure of investment, weather, crop production or markets and which has crippled his ability to meet his financial and other family obligations; and feels humiliated by the castigations of the lenders and, in the absence of coping mechanisms, contemplates/takes the extreme step of voluntarily ending his life" (Anonymous, 2007)^[1].

Farmers' suicides are seen in diverse areas such as Marathwada and Vidarbha in Maharashtra, drought prone areas of Northern Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, etc. where one could clearly identify the basic causes of distress is due to the mismatch between available natural endowments and the aspirational levels of agriculturists, the reasons could also be due to consumerism-led indebtedness leading to distress as is the case in Punjab and Kerala. Thus, it would be difficult to isolate the cause of distress to just backwardness of a region. Incidents of farmers committing suicide in certain parts of India have been a matter of serious concern. In order to address this problem in distressed areas. Recent happenings in the agricultural sector clearly indicate the manifestation of distress in the form of farmers' suicides. However, it is important to recognize the fact that this is the ultimate unfortunate step that a farmer takes. The household possibly goes through extreme stress before the event gets triggered. However, there might be several households where the suicide might not have happened, but still they might be in a precarious position. Farmers suicides are only one extreme symptom of the larger crisis looming over the agriculture sector in India in general and Marathwada in particular. Distress in the farm sector is increasing at an alarming rate. Hence understanding of the personal, social, economic and psychological characteristics of the distress farmers would be of immense help for the extension workers, policy makers to bring them out of distress and to prevent them from committing suicides and to develop strategies to overcome the distress and crisis situations faced by the farmers.

2. Methodology

The present study was conducted in Osmanabad district of Marathwada region during 2017-18 where the maximum number of farmers suicides occurred in last two years. From Osmanabad two talukas viz. Osmanabad and Tulajapur were selected purposively as there was maximum farmers suicides in these areas during last 5 years (i.e, 2011-12 & 2016-17). Similarly, four villages from each taluk were selected purposively. From each village ten respondents were selected. The respondents (distress farmers) selection was made by consultation with village leaders/ key informant by which we got the list of distressed farmers in that area. The study was conducted using the Ex-post-facto research design. Totally 7 personal variables, 4 social variables, 3 economic variables and 4 psychological variables were identified in consultation with the experts in the field of extension education and by reviewing the relevant literature. The data was collected using the pretested structured interview schedule. The data collected was tabulated and analyzed using the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Personal characteristics of distress farmers

3.1.1 Age

It was observed from the Table 1 that, the majority 63.75 per cent of the respondents belonged to 'middle' age category;

while 20.00 per cent were in 'old' category and 16.25 per cent were in 'young' category. Majority of respondents were under middle age category followed old age category. The probable reason for majority of the respondents being under middle age category might be due to the fact that most of the young people are not interested in farming and are looking for better livelihood options in urban area. Another reason may be middle aged are enthusiastic and have more work efficiency than the older or younger ones. Individual may not be ready to accept the responsibility in the young age itself. Individuals in middle age group have physical vigor and also more responsibility towards family than the younger ones. As they become middle aged, they will be taking more responsibility for the family. Further, due to increase in nuclear family system, it is natural to find a greater number of middle age group to take up the responsibilities of head of the family. This finding of this study is in conformity with the Kale (2008)^[7].

Table 1: Personal Characteristics of distress farmers N= 80

Sr. No.		Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Age	Young (Up to 30 years)	13	16.25
		Middle (31 to 53 years)	51	63.75
		Old (54 years and above)	16	20.00
2	Farming Experience	Low (Up to 15 years)	17	21.25
		Medium (16 to 27years)	50	62.50
		High (28 years and above)	13	16.25
3	Annual Income	Low (Up to 21154 Rs)	04	05.00
		Medium (21155 to 71117 Rs)	69	86.25
		High (71118 Rs and above)	07	08.75
4	Education	Illiterate	20	25.00
		Can read and write	01	01.25
		Primary school	12	15.00
		Secondary school	36	45.00
		Higher Secondary	04	05.00
		Graduation	07	08.75
5	Landholding	Marginal farmers (Up to 1.00)	38	47.50
		Small farmers (1.01 to 2.00)	27	33.75
		Semi medium (2.01 to 4.00)	13	16.25
		Medium (4.01 to 10.00)	02	02.50
		Big farmer (10.1 and above)	00	00.00
6	Family size	Small (Up to 3)	19	23.75
		Medium (4 to 7)	57	71.25
		Big (8 and above)	04	05.00
7	Family type	Nuclear	66	82.50
		Joint	14	17.50

3.1.2 Farming Experience

It was also observed from Table 1 that, nearly 62.50 per cent of the respondents had 'medium' experience in crop cultivation/farming, while remaining 21.25 per cent of the respondents had 'low' and 16.25 per cent of the respondents had 'high' experience in farming/ crop cultivation. The study

showed that majority of the respondents had satisfactory experience in farming/ crop cultivation. Through this experience, they might have due to the reason that with the increasing age, the farming experience also increases. The findings of this study are in congruence with the findings of Parande (2011)^[9].

3.1.3 Annual income

It was evident from above Table 1 that, majority of respondents belonged to medium 86.25 per cent annual income group. Followed by high 08.75per cent & low 05.00 per cent annual income respectively. The reason might be that income of the family is most important factor in fulfilling individual and their family needs. The annual income of the respondents directly influences the economic viability, stability and rational behaviour of an individual and hence the decrease in the income levels increases the farming distress orientation level that is quite natural. Similar findings are reported by Hanchinal (1999)^[4] and Parande (2011)^[9].

3.1.4 Education

It could be noticed from Table 6 that, Osmanabad district maximum number of respondents had 'Secondary school' 45.00 per cent education, followed by 'Illiterate' 25.00 per cent 'Primary school' 15.00 per cent 'Graduation' 08.75 per cent 'Higher secondary' 05.00per cent 'Can Read & Write' 01.25per cent, no one was found from 'Post Graduation' 00.00per cent.

The possible reasons for this trend are attributed to advantages of education to individual for acquisition of knowledge, broadening the vision and motivating towards higher accomplishment. A farmer when educated learns how to acquire, analyse, synthesise, evaluate, understand and communicate knowledge and information and develop the skills that will respond to changing nature of agriculture. Literate farmers are able to locate, understand, interpret, evaluate, and use information in an appropriate way. The findings are in line with the findings of Surya Prakasa Rao Gedela (2008)^[10] and Parande (2011)^[9].

3.1.5 Land Holding

It was seen from Table 1 that 47.50 per cent of the distress farmers possesses marginal land holding, followed by those with small 33.75 per cent, semi-medium 16.25 per cent, medium 02.50per cent and no one was found in big category of land holding in Osmanabad district. An overall view, depicts that majority per cent of the respondents were falling under marginal farmers followed by small and semi medium landholding categories. The findings were supported by the Surya Prakasa Rao Gedela (2008)^[10]

3.1.6 Family size

The Table 1 revealed that around 71.25 per cent of the respondents had medium family size followed by small and big family size with 23.75 per cent and 05.00 per cent, respectively. It also indicated that majority of medium farmers and considerable percentage of middle level farmers had medium family size. Overall, more than 60.00 per cent of the respondents had medium family size.

The probable reasons behind these findings could be that young and middle age people would prefer to live in nuclear families and old age people prefer joint family. The findings are similar with the findings of Kale (2008)^[7] and Parande (2011)^[9]

3.1.7 Family Type

Table 1 indicated that, majority 82.50 per cent of the respondents belonged to nuclear family followed by 17.50 per cent to the joint family. From Table 10, it was revealed that majority of distress farmers belonged to nuclear family whereas, majority of distress farmers belonged to joint family. The results revealed that majority of the respondents belonged to nuclear family.

The present trend in the society is having a small family size so that they could concentrate much better for the welfare of their family and this could be the possible reason for majority of the respondents having nuclear family. Further, the majority farmers belonged to joint family as old age people prefer joint family compared to farmers having medium age category. The findings are in line with the findings of Kale and Mankar (2010)^[6] and Parande (2011)^[9].

3.2 Social characteristics of distress farmers

3.2.1 Caste

From the Table 2, it is observed that about 55.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to General castes followed by equal 22.50 per cent of Scheduled Castes (SCs)/ Scheduled Tribes (STs)/ Nomadic Tribes (NTs) and 22.50 per cent Other Backward Castes (OBCs). It was seen from the Table 2 that, considerable percentage of distress farmers belonged to General castes whereas; distress farmers belonged to SC/ST/NT castes and OBC castes. The findings revealed that higher percentage of the respondents belonged to General castes. This might be due to more respondents are under General castes which is true at State level also.

3.2.2 Social participation

The table 2 indicates that majority (47.50) of the distress farmers belongs to the low-level social participation group followed by medium level with 40.00 per cent and high level with 12.50 per cent of social participation respectively. The pooled data from Table 2 indicated that more than two fourth of the respondents had low social participation. The findings further revealed that majority of respondents had medium social participation compared to large farmers who had high level of social participation. This might be due to large farmers having more exposure to social activities and extension participation compared to medium and high-level respondents. The findings are in conformity with findings of Nadre (2000)^[8] and Parande (2011)^[9].

3.2.3 Extension contact

It was noticed from table 2 that, majority (41.25 %) of the respondents had low level of extension contact followed by medium level with 40.00 per cent and only 18.75 per cent of respondents falls under high level extension contact category. It also brought to the notice that majority of respondents had considerable percentage of low extension contact. Results revealed that more than two-fourth of the respondents had low extension contact.

Extension contact results in purposeful action which is largely contingent upon an individual's belief in his ability to perform that action effectively and thus he frequently contacts various departmental officials to seek more information and to clarify the doubts pertaining to the current cropping system. The other reason for this could be the fact that farmers, who were highly educated and more aged due to their vast experience in cultivation, naturally had low interest in contacting extension personnel. The reason for low extension contact can be attributed to low extension participation.

Table 2: Social characteristics of distress farmers N=80

Sr. No.		Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Caste	General	44	55.00
		OBC	18	22.50
		SC/ST/NT	18	22.50
2	Social participation	Low	38	47.50
		Medium	32	40.00
		High	10	12.50
3.	Extension contact	Low	33	41.25
		Medium	32	40.00
		High	15	18.75
4.	Subsidiary occupation	Farming + farming labour	70	87.50
		Only farming	05	06.25
		Farming + allied occupation	05	06.25
		Farming + business	00	00.00
		Farming + service / pension	00	00.00

3.2.4 Subsidiary occupation

It is observed from table 2 that, majority of respondents (87.50 %) were engaged in farm labour for wages earning as a subsidiary occupation to farming followed by 06.25 per cent respondents were have only farming, whereas 06.25 per cent of respondents had only agriculture as an main occupation along with allied occupation no one was found from agriculture as an main occupation along with business and service, respectively. Thus, it could be concluded that the majority of respondents were small and marginal farmers keeping in view the holding it was not possible to depend solely agriculture, so majority of them had work as farm labour as an additional source of income.

3.3 Economic characteristics of distress farmers

3.3.1 Irrigation Facility

The Table 3 indicates that, majority (62.50 %) of the respondents had no source of irrigation. About 35.00 per cent of the respondents were having only open well or tube well as irrigation source. The results also revealed that only 02.50 per cent of respondents had river as irrigation source and none of the respondents had canal and other source of irrigation in Osamanabad district. It was observed that majority of respondents were having no source of irrigation. However, majority of respondents were having open well or tube well as source of irrigation. The results revealed that majority of the respondents were having no access to any source of irrigation. This may be because many of the respondents are from dry land areas not having sufficient water bodies. The findings are

in agreement with findings of Kale (2008) [7] and Kale and Mankar (2010) [6].

3.3.2 Asset Possession

Table 3 indicates that, majority of (68.75 %) of the respondents were possessing low level of assets followed by medium and high level of assets with 20.00 per cent and 11.25 per cent, respectively. The pooled data revealed that majority of the respondents were possessing low level of assets. The results could be attributed to their annual income, size of the landholding and requirement of assets. Respondents possessed low assets this may be there was requirement as they had small size of landholding and no the ability to purchase the particular asset.

3.3.3 Cropping Intensity

It was observed from Table 3 that, majority of the respondents 83.75 per cent had cropping intensity in between 137 to 202 per cent followed by 16.25 per cent cropping intensity up to 136 per cent and no one was found from more than 203 per cent cropping intensity. It was also evident from the Table 3 that majority of respondents had cropping intensity above 137 to 202 per cent belonging to medium level. This trend of results was because of medium landholdings among the lower farmers compared to large farmers. Another reason was that large farmers face the severity of labour problem. The findings are in agreement with the findings of Jambhale (2007) [5] and Parande (2011) [9].

Table 3: Economic characteristics of distress farmers N=80

Sr No.		Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Irrigation facility	No sources	50	62.50
		River	02	02.50
		Well / Tube well	28	35.00
		Canal	00	00.00
		Other	00	00.00
2	Asset Possession	Low	55	68.75
		Medium	16	20.00
		High	09	11.25
3	Cropping Intensity	Low	13	16.25
		Medium	67	83.75
		High	00	00.00
4	Indebtedness	Low	02	02.50
		Medium	65	81.25
		High	13	16.25

3.3.4 Indebtedness

The table 3 brought to the focus that great majority (81.25 %) percentage of the respondents found under medium level of indebtedness followed by high and low level of indebtedness with 16.25 per cent and 02.50 per cent, respectively. Results revealed that majority of the respondents found under medium level of indebtedness because of the following reasons such as low annual income, mismatch between expenditure and return and high cost of cultivation.

3.4 Psychological characteristics of distress farmers

3.4.1 Economic Motivation

From Table 4 it was evident that, majority of (72.50 %) percentage of the distress farmers/respondents belonged to medium level of economic motivation, followed by high level with 16.25 per cent and low level with 11.25 per cent of economic motivation respectively. Overall, majority of the respondents belonged to medium level of economic motivation due to the farmers aspiration for high returns from farming to attain a high standard of living and economic status in society. The other reasons be that farmers are becoming more and more market oriented to have a more profit. The findings are similar with the findings of Hanchinal (1999)^[4] and Parande (2011)^[9].

Table 4: Psychological characteristics of distress farmers N=80

Sr. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	09	11.25
	Medium	58	72.50
	High	13	16.25
2	Low	10	12.50
	Medium	62	77.50
	High	08	10.00
3	Low	15	18.75
	Medium	63	78.75
	High	02	02.50

3.4.2 Deferred Gratification

From Table 4 it was observed that, more than 77.50 per cent of distressed farmers fall under middle category of deferred gratification followed by low category with 12.50 per cent and high category with only 10.00 per cent respectively. The findings revealed that higher percentage of the respondents had medium deferred gratification because of the reason that deferred gratification helps to overcome unforeseen circumstances, as farming people have to manage drought situations, pest and disease outbreak, market gluts, price fluctuations and other situations.

3.4.3 Management Orientation

The results revealed that more three fourth of the distress farmers i.e., 78.75 per cent of the respondents belonged to medium level of management orientation followed by low level with 18.75 per cent and with only 02.50 per cent of respondents in high level management orientation.

The results revealed that the respondents belonged to medium level of management orientation. The medium level of management orientation of farmers can be substantiated by stating that farmers often face new and complex situations, with little resemblance to past or present situations because of the ever-changing environment and changing nature of agriculture. A major role of farmers as managers is to manage the specific situations faced by them and hence the derived

result. These results are in accordance with the Dandekar *et al.*, (2005)^[3]

4. Conclusion

In present study it was seen that major causes for farmer distress was failure of crop, increased indebtedness, lack of non-farm employment opportunities and lack of subsidiary occupations. The issue of farming distress is a vexed one. It is the result of a complex interplay of a myriad issues and risks. Therefore, it will not be prudent to address the issue in isolation of the causative factors. Farming distress is not due to indebtedness alone. There are several other factors such as social, psychological, genetic and family related developments that contribute significantly to this. The study has brought out very important picture of the socio-economic situation of the farmers. The situation reflects typical trend of livelihood, it is characterized by heavy dependence on uncertain price and labour, rainfed farming, lack of non-farm employment opportunities and lack of subsidiary occupations. Farming distress orientation among farmers can be increased by diversifying the agriculture and with fulfillment of basic requirements such as remunerative price, irrigation facilities and a comprehensive policy for the farmers.

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