

A Theoretical Perspective on Commercialization in Agriculture, Psychological Resilience, and Rural Suicide in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

The issue of farmer suicides in Punjab is a critical socio-economic and public health concern driven by a complex interplay of factors such as indebtedness, crop failures, fluctuating market prices, and the long-term impacts of the Green Revolution. This study explores these factors, highlighting the psychological toll and inadequate government support mechanisms. It underscores the necessity for multi-faceted interventions, including economic relief, agricultural reforms, mental health services, and policy integration. Addressing this crisis requires comprehensive strategies to promote financial stability, mental health, and sustainable farming practices, ensuring the long-term well-being of Punjab's farming community.

Keywords: *Farmer suicides, Punjab, indebtedness, Green Revolution, agricultural commercialization, mental health, economic distress, rural development, sustainable farming, policy integration*

The deliberate taking of one's own life, known as suicide, is a serious public health issue that results from a complex interaction of psychological, social, and economic variables (WHO, 2020). In India, especially in the province of Punjab, farmer suicides have become a major socioeconomic problem. 10,281 farmer suicides were reported in India in 2019, a significant portion of which took place in Punjab, where agriculture provides the majority of the population's livelihood (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020).

Punjab, known as the "Granary of India," has experienced profound agricultural transformation over the decades, particularly with the advent of the Green Revolution in the 1960s. While this revolution brought initial prosperity, it also introduced a range of new challenges. The commercialization of agriculture has led to increased production and income for some, but it has also resulted in heightened economic vulnerability, indebtedness, and stress for many farmers. This stress is often exacerbated by fluctuating market prices, crop failures, and the burden of loans, creating a perilous situation for those unable to cope with these pressures.

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The Green Revolution's technological advancements, which initially increased agricultural productivity, have also led to significant environmental degradation, soil depletion, and water scarcity, further compounding the challenges faced by farmers (Pingali, 2001). Additionally, the social fabric of rural communities has been strained, with traditional support systems eroding under the pressures of modernization and commercialization (Gill, 2005).

It is necessary to look at both non-economic and economic variables in order to fully comprehend the complex nature of farmer suicides in Punjab. Research indicates that one of the main causes of farmer suicides in the area is indebtedness, which is made worse by high-interest loans and wasteful social spending (Kaur & Kaur, 2016). Moreover, a major contributing factor to the mental health crisis among farmers is the psychological cost of ongoing stress, social shame, and falling short of social expectations (Khanna, 2019). Addressing this issue necessitates comprehensive policy interventions that not only provide financial relief but also foster sustainable agricultural practices, strengthen social support systems, and improve access to mental health resources (Majumder, 2021). The need for a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and psychological dimensions is imperative to mitigate the crisis and ensure the well-being of Punjab's agrarian community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Agricultural Commercialization and Rural Suicide in Punjab

- **Gill (2005)** examines the alarming trend of farmer suicides in rural Punjab, which began in the mid-1980s. This crisis is attributed to the multi-dimensional economic distress following the Green Revolution. Factors such as economic hardship, crop failure, unemployment, and indebtedness have driven many farmers and agricultural labourers to suicide. The erosion of traditional community support systems, replaced by new production relations, has exacerbated the situation. Despite initial prosperity from the Green Revolution, by the 1980s, its benefits waned, leaving poorer farmers under severe economic pressure. Gill suggests that policy measures like debt moratoriums and safety nets for marginalized households are essential to address this crisis. The study highlights that while the phenomenon is widespread in Punjab, it is not uniformly distributed across the state. Similar patterns are observed in other Indian states with commercialized agriculture, such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.
- **Kaur (2009)** investigates the economic and social dimensions of farmers' suicides in Punjab, focusing on Sangrur district. The study highlights that frequent crop failures, reliance on diesel-powered irrigation, high non-institutional loans, and low repayment capacities are significant economic factors. Social issues include low literacy rates and poor education quality. The research shows that most victims were middle-aged and heavily indebted, often facing unremunerative crop prices, market imperfections, and delayed payments. Consumption of poison was the most common method of suicide. The study suggests a multifaceted approach involving government, banking institutions, NGOs, and research organizations to address this crisis.
- **Kaur and Kaur (2016)** analyze the agricultural crisis in Punjab, which stemmed from the introduction of Green Revolution technology in the 1960s and subsequent resource depletion and technological stagnation. This led to increased costs, declining productivity, and economic distress, culminating in widespread farmers' suicides, particularly between 2001 and 2010. The study highlights the role of

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indebtedness, exacerbated by high-interest crop loans, as a key factor driving suicides. The researchers suggest that addressing these economic challenges requires comprehensive extension strategies to mitigate farmers' distress and reduce the incidence of suicides.

- **Singh et al. (2021)** examines the severe agrarian crisis in Punjab. It reveals that the capitalisation of agricultural production has reduced employment opportunities and wages, pushing agricultural laborers into debt and resulting in 7,303 suicides from 2000-2018. The study highlights the need for policy measures including financial compensation, debt waivers, healthcare, education for victims' families, and safeguarding legal entitlements to address this crisis.

Agricultural Commercialization and Psychological Resilience

- **Harris et al. (2021)** this study explores the long-term interplay between psychological resilience, psychosis, distress, and suicidal thoughts/behaviours in individuals with non-affective psychosis. Over three months, it used moderated mediation analysis to examine how defeat/entrapment and hopelessness influence suicidal thoughts/behaviours and the moderating roles of psychosis, distress, and resilience. Findings showed that suicidal thoughts/behaviours decreased over time, with defeat/entrapment predicting these outcomes when psychosis and distress were moderate to high, and resilience was low. The results suggest incorporating psychosis, distress, and resilience into interventions to reduce suicidal experiences in this population.

Agrarian Distress and Indebtedness

- **Majumder (2021)** reviews the correlates associated with farmer suicides in India, highlighting the significant role of agriculture in the nation's economy and the severe impact of economic distress on farmers. The study identifies key factors contributing to farmer suicides, including high levels of debt, drought, lack of irrigation facilities, and reliance on private money lenders. The literature review reveals that indebtedness is the predominant risk factor leading to farmer suicides. Majumder emphasizes the need for government intervention through the establishment of exclusive agricultural zones, improved irrigation, modern farming techniques, and comprehensive crop insurance policies to mitigate this crisis.
- **Sajjad and Chauhan (2012)** analyze agrarian distress and indebtedness among Indian farmers using data from the NSSO's 59th round survey (2002-2003). The study identifies instability in food grain yield, high cultivation costs, and low net returns as key factors driving farmer indebtedness. It highlights that states with higher agricultural development exhibit higher indebtedness, affecting mostly small and marginal farmers. However, in highly commercialized states, semi-medium and medium farmers also face significant debt. The authors call for urgent government intervention to reform the agricultural credit system and stabilize crop prices to prevent farmer suicides and boost the agricultural economy.
- **Merriott (2016)** examines the factors associated with the farmer suicide crisis in India, highlighting that approximately 16,000 farmers die by suicide annually, with rates significantly higher than the general population. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study identifies socioeconomic factors, particularly increased indebtedness, as the predominant risk factors, rather than mental health issues. The agrarian crisis exacerbates these factors, marked by insufficient agricultural

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investment, inadequate irrigation, reliance on cash crops, noninstitutional credit sources, and reduced trade barriers. The study finds Bt cotton to be an unlikely major factor and notes a lack of significant mental health problems among farmers. Merriott calls for further large-scale assessments to deepen understanding and address the crisis effectively.

- **Gaur (2014)** explores the paradox of Punjab's agricultural prosperity and its high rate of farmer suicides due to indebtedness. Despite being a key player in India's Green Revolution and having a low poverty rate, Punjab's agricultural sector faces high production costs and commercialization pressures. These factors, combined with unproductive social expenditures, have plunged many farmers into severe debt. The study highlights that rural indebtedness has led to extreme poverty, landlessness, and social issues like bonded labor. For sustainable development, Punjab must implement policies ensuring both economic and social growth for its farmers.

Mental Health Systems and Farmer Suicides

- **Fraser et al. (2005)** investigate the mental health issues prevalent among farming populations in various regions, including the UK, Europe, Australia, Canada, and the US. The study highlights that farmers face one of the highest suicide rates compared to other industries, with growing evidence suggesting they are at higher risk for mental health problems. Through a comprehensive literature review, the researchers identified 52 relevant papers, with the majority focusing on stress and coping mechanisms. The study found that farmers and their families face numerous stressors related to the physical environment, family structure, and economic uncertainties, which negatively impact their mental health. Although higher suicide rates are noted among certain farmer groups, the data on overall mental health problems compared to the non-farming population is inconclusive. The study calls for further research to address the unique mental health challenges faced by farmers.
- **Khanna (2019)** Researchers have begun examining farmer suicides in India from behavioral and psychological perspectives, moving beyond economic and agricultural factors. A study conducted under the National Agricultural Science Fund of ICAR across Punjab, Telangana, and Maharashtra has identified depression as a significant cause of suicidal intent. The study employs peer support volunteers trained to address depressive ruminations and other stressors. Developed models like '7D' and '7R' aim to identify triggering factors and suggest preventive measures. The PAU developed a '7D' model of triggering and confounding factors and a '7R' model of preventive and protecting factors to deal with the problem of farmer suicides. The '7D' model encapsulates drugs, debt, disease, disputes, depression, disrepute and death. The '7R' model looks at prevention of suicides. It consists: remunerative agriculture, resilience building, rational expenditure, reassurance through connectivity, righteous conduct, religious support and responsible reporting. The findings emphasize the need for motivation and mental health support for farmers, alongside financial aid.
- **Kottai (2021)** critically examines the ongoing farmers' protests in India, linking the agrarian crisis to broader socio-economic policies and the role of the neoliberal state in perpetuating farmers' distress. The study highlights how mental health discourses often reduce the issue to a need for increased access to psychopharmaceuticals, neglecting the socio-structural determinants of farmers' mental health. By analyzing articles in major Indian clinical psychology and psychiatry journals, Kottai argues

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that the mental health system tends to ignore the broader socio-political context, thereby obscuring the real causes of farmers' suffering and suicides.

- **Kannuri's (2015)** thesis explores the impact of global and national policies on rural distress and mental health among cotton farmers in Telangana, India. Using medical anthropology and cultural psychiatry, it examines the socio-cultural contexts of farmer suicides and how these issues mediate mental distress in cotton farming. The research highlights the psycho-social consequences for survivors and emphasizes the transformation of rural landscapes into toxic terrains due to Bt cotton. The study argues for a recalibration of healthcare systems, emphasizing culturally sensitive interdisciplinary approaches to address rural distress and improve farmer well-being. Additionally, the film "Peepli Live" portrays the plight of Indian farmers facing economic distress and the sensationalism of media surrounding farmer suicides, providing a stark depiction of the socio-economic challenges that exacerbate rural mental health issues.
- **Hounsom et al. (2011)** examine the psychological morbidity among UK farmers compared to the non-farming population. Using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) administered through face-to-face interviews with 784 attendees of agricultural shows, the study found that farmers and their partners/spouses exhibited significantly higher GHQ-12 scores ($P < 0.001$), indicating greater psychological morbidity. Approximately 35% of farmers had scores of 12 or higher, the threshold for psychiatric disorders, compared to 27% of non-farmers. Higher morbidity was particularly noted among male farmers, those aged 45-64, self-employed or unemployed individuals, and those in non-supervisory roles living in rural areas.

Social and Economic Impacts of Agricultural Practices

- **Kaur (2010)** addresses the paradox of rising farmer suicides in Punjab, India's "bread basket," despite the region's significant contribution to the country's economy through the Green Revolution. This paradox highlights extremely rural insecurity and continued dependence on unsustainable agrarian practices, leading to high debt accumulation among small and marginal farmers. The study critiques the Central Indian Government's inattention, exacerbating social inequalities and agrarian anxiety. Kaur emphasizes the urgent need for policy interventions to create equitable and lasting rural human security, focusing on the impact of predominantly male suicides on women and children.
- **Pingali (2001)** explores the environmental consequences of agricultural commercialization in Asia, highlighting both positive and negative impacts. Commercialization leads to greater market orientation and the use of purchased inputs over non-traded ones, affecting traditional farming systems. It can increase reliance on herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides, raising environmental and health risks. However, it can also bring environmental benefits, such as reduced salinity buildup and groundwater depletion, if supported by effective macroeconomic and microeconomic policy reforms. The balance of these effects depends on how agricultural policies are integrated and rationalized globally.
- **Gill and Johal (2024)** explore the ecological and economic repercussions of the Green Revolution in Punjab, highlighting how resource-intensive, high-yield crop cultivation has led to unsustainable agricultural practices. They emphasize the challenge of balancing food security and environmental conservation amidst declining natural resources and insufficient incentives for farmers. The study

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introduces real-life socio-economic and ecological issues and discusses the conflicting policy options between conventional and organic farming. The analysis underscores the importance of diverse stakeholder perspectives in shaping sustainable agricultural policies.

- **Sangha (2014)** evaluates the socio-economic and ecological impacts of modern agricultural practices introduced during the Green Revolution in Punjab, India. While the Green Revolution significantly boosted food production and economic returns, it also led to adverse effects such as land and water resource misuse, biodiversity loss, and breakdown of socio-cultural fabric. The study highlights serious issues faced by rural agricultural communities, including farmer suicides, health problems, and loss of cultural identity. By applying an integrated approach, the study assesses the costs and benefits of current agricultural systems and suggests innovative solutions for these problems.

Sociological Dimensions of Farmer Suicides

- **Singh (2020)** explores the sociological dimensions of farmers' suicides and the agrarian crisis in Punjab. While economic factors, particularly debt, are often cited as primary causes, this study applies Durkheim's sociological theories to argue that these suicides are also deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of Punjab. Singh highlights that the culture of consumerism exacerbates the crisis, suggesting that the agrarian crisis is multifaceted, involving both economic and social factors. The study provides a nuanced understanding of how these elements interact, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions.

Policy Measures and Interventions

- **Chaudhary and Shourie (2019)** investigated the economic dilemmas and suicide among farmers in Punjab by surveying 230 farmers. The survey comprised nine questions addressing debt acquisition, high suicide rates, loan purposes, repayment issues, and current major problems faced by farmers. Responses, primarily yes/no or multiple-choice, were analyzed and represented via pie charts. The study found significant economic distress among farmers, contributing to high suicide rates. Based on the findings, the authors provided recommendations to address these issues.
- **Behere and Bhise (2010)** explore the rising trend of farmer suicides in Central Rural India, particularly post-independence. Initially, Gandhi envisioned villages as the focus of development; however, agriculture, despite its significant role in India's economy, has faced neglect from policymakers, leading to severe distress among farmers. The study highlights that between 1997 and 2006, about 200,000 farmers committed suicide, with the highest rates in states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. Economic hardships, crop failures, debt, and lack of government support are major contributing factors. The authors argue for comprehensive policies, including financial aid beyond debt relief and psychological support, to address this multifaceted crisis. They emphasize that mere financial help is insufficient, advocating for a national suicide prevention policy and better socio-economic support systems for farmers to mitigate the distress leading to suicides.

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Cultural and Psychological Dimensions

- **Kannuri's (2015)** thesis, "Cultivating Distress: Farmer Suicides and Local Mental Health in Telangana, India," explores the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of farmer suicides. Conducting 12 months of ethnographic research in Warangal, Telangana, Kannuri examines the impact of global and local forces on rural distress. The thesis argues that the use of Bt cotton exacerbates environmental and cultural toxicity, leading to social defeat and marginalization among farmers. It emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary, culturally sensitive approach to transform these "toxic" landscapes into healing ones, suggesting a recalibration of healthcare systems and mental health pedagogy.
- **Meijerink and Roza (2007)** examine the pivotal role of agriculture in economic development, focusing on market dynamics, value chains, and sustainability. The study discusses how agricultural advancements can drive broader economic growth, particularly in developing regions. The authors emphasize the importance of integrating smallholder farmers into markets to enhance their income and livelihoods. The paper also addresses policy measures needed to support sustainable agricultural development, advocating for investments in infrastructure, technology, and education to bolster agricultural productivity and sustainability.
- **Taki et al. (2021)** The study "Suicide in rural Punjab, India: implications for ensuring farmer rights" examines the relationship between economic burden and suicides among farmers in Punjab. Data from 2,473 suicides in five districts were analyzed, revealing a significant increase in suicides among agricultural workers from 1980 to 2016. These workers, mainly agricultural laborers and landowners, predominantly used poisoning as a method. The median age of suicide victims was lower among agricultural workers compared to other occupations. The increase in suicides was strongly correlated with rising debt and land holdings, suggesting the need for policies to protect farmers' economic security and limit access to hazardous chemicals.
- **Irengbam (2012)** investigates the increasing suicide rates among agricultural laborers, marginal, and small farmers in Punjab. Despite the region's agricultural success, it faces high unemployment and declining farmer livelihoods. The study highlights the environmental, economic, and labor challenges contributing to this crisis. The high rate of farmer suicides has transformed into a significant public issue, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive studies and interventions to address the multifaceted causes of these tragic events.
- **Singh et al. (2021)** analyze the factors contributing to farmers' suicides in Punjab, highlighting high indebtedness, harassment by institutional and non-institutional lenders, and crop failures. The study uses a Structural Equation Model with a sample size of 200, split between farmers who had committed suicide and a control group. The research suggests that while indebtedness alone does not directly cause suicides, the associated economic pressures and inability to repay loans make agriculture unremunerative, leading farmers to take extreme measures.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was collected from secondary sources available on Google, Google Scholar, and Pub Med. The search terms included "farmer suicides in India," "agrarian distress," "Green Revolution impact," "Punjab farmer indebtedness," and related keywords. The inclusion criteria for selecting studies were:

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- Peer-reviewed articles
- Focused on farmer suicides, agrarian distress, and related socio-economic factors in India

Sources of data

The study is non-empirical in nature; therefore, the secondary sources are employed to collect information and construct the theoretical framework of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Farmer suicides in Punjab, despite the state's agricultural prosperity, highlight severe socio-economic distress linked to indebtedness, environmental challenges, and psychological stress, necessitating a comprehensive understanding and targeted interventions.

Objectives of the Study

- Analyze the economic, social, and environmental factors contributing to farmer suicides in Punjab.
- Investigate the psychological stress and mental health issues faced by indebted farmers.
- Evaluate existing government policies and interventions aimed at alleviating farmer distress and preventing suicides.
- Propose holistic and sustainable strategies to address the multi-dimensional issues underlying farmer suicides.

Findings of the Study

The research delves into the multi-faceted phenomenon of farmer suicides in Punjab, exploring socio-economic, psychological, and policy-related dimensions. The following sections outline the key findings from various studies on this critical issue.

1. Socio-Economic Factors

- **Indebtedness and Financial Distress:** Indebtedness emerges as a predominant factor driving farmer suicides in Punjab. Studies such as those by Kaur (2009) and Singh et al. (2021) highlight that high levels of debt, often exacerbated by non-institutional loans with exorbitant interest rates, create insurmountable financial pressures for farmers. These debts are frequently incurred due to the high costs of agricultural inputs, machinery, and seeds, coupled with low returns on produce due to market volatility and inadequate pricing mechanisms.
- **Crop Failures and Market Fluctuations:** Repeated crop failures, driven by environmental factors such as erratic rainfall, soil degradation, and pest infestations, significantly contribute to farmers' distress. This is compounded by fluctuating market prices which undermine the financial stability of farmers, making it difficult for them to recover production costs, as discussed by Gill (2005) and Kaur and Kaur (2016). The inability to secure fair prices for their produce often leaves farmers with insufficient income to meet their daily needs and repay debts.
- **Impact of Green Revolution:** While the Green Revolution initially boosted agricultural productivity in Punjab, its long-term consequences have been detrimental. Kaur (2010) and Sangha (2014) emphasize that the intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has led to environmental degradation, reduced soil fertility, and increased costs of cultivation. These factors have rendered agriculture

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less sustainable and more financially burdensome for farmers, particularly small and marginal ones.

- **Social Expenditures and Cultural Pressures:** Social obligations and cultural practices also play a crucial role in exacerbating the financial woes of farmers. Gaur (2014) points out that expenditures on weddings, religious ceremonies, and other social events often lead to additional borrowing, increasing the debt burden. The societal pressure to maintain social status and fulfill cultural norms further compounds the financial strain on already struggling farmers.

2. Psychological Impact

- **Mental Health Issues and Suicide Triggers** The psychological impact of financial distress and social pressures on farmers is profound. Studies by Fraser et al. (2005) and Khanna (2019) reveal that depression, anxiety, and hopelessness are prevalent among indebted farmers. The stigma associated with financial failure and the lack of adequate mental health support exacerbate these conditions, leading to suicidal ideation and actions.
- **Cultural and Social Isolation** The erosion of traditional community support systems, as noted by Gill (2005), has left many farmers isolated. The shift from communal to individualistic farming practices has reduced the social cohesion that once provided emotional and practical support. This isolation, coupled with the burden of debt and crop failures, contributes to a sense of helplessness and despair among farmers.
- **Gendered Impact** The impact of farmer suicides extends to the families left behind, particularly affecting women and children. Kaur (2010) highlights that the suicides of male farmers often result in severe socio-economic challenges for their widows and children, including loss of livelihood, social stigma, and increased vulnerability to exploitation. These families frequently face significant hurdles in accessing financial aid and support services.

3. Policy and Institutional Factors

- **Inadequate Government Support** Despite various government schemes aimed at alleviating farmer distress, the effectiveness of these interventions remains questionable. Studies by Majumder (2021) and Kaur and Kaur (2016) suggest that many farmers either lack awareness of these programs or find the application processes too cumbersome. Additionally, the benefits provided often fall short of addressing the underlying issues of indebtedness and economic instability.
- **Need for Comprehensive Policy Interventions** Researchers like Behere and Bhise (2010) and Singh (2020) argue for a multi-faceted approach to address the crisis. They propose measures such as debt moratoriums, crop insurance schemes, and improved market access to ensure fair prices for produce. Furthermore, there is a call for policies that enhance mental health support, provide financial literacy training, and promote sustainable agricultural practices to mitigate the long-term impacts of the agrarian crisis.
- **Structural Reforms in Agriculture** The findings underscore the need for structural reforms in the agricultural sector. Kaur (2009) and Gill and Johal (2024) advocate for policies that reduce dependency on high-cost inputs and promote organic farming practices. Strengthening the agricultural credit system to provide more accessible and affordable loans to farmers is also crucial. These reforms should aim to create a more

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resilient and sustainable agricultural economy that can withstand environmental and market fluctuations.

4. Social and Economic Impacts

- **Economic Decline and Landlessness** The economic decline resulting from continuous financial losses and debt has led to an increase in landlessness among farmers. As noted by Gaur (2014), many small and marginal farmers are forced to sell their land to repay debts, resulting in a shift from landowners to agricultural laborers. This not only reduces their income potential but also increases their vulnerability to exploitation and poverty.
- **Rural-Urban Migration** The socio-economic distress in rural areas has driven significant rural-urban migration. Many farmers, unable to sustain their livelihoods through agriculture, migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities. This migration, however, often leads to the proliferation of informal settlements and increased pressure on urban infrastructure and services, as highlighted by Merriott (2016).
- **Cultural and Social Disintegration** The socio-economic challenges faced by farmers have also led to the disintegration of rural communities. The traditional agrarian lifestyle, which was once the backbone of rural Punjab, is under threat. The loss of cultural identity and community cohesion has further deepened the sense of alienation and distress among farmers, as discussed by Kottai (2021).

The findings of the study paint a complex and multifaceted picture of the agrarian crisis and farmer suicides in Punjab. The interplay of socio-economic, psychological, and policy-related factors creates a vicious cycle of distress that drives many farmers to take their own lives. Addressing this crisis requires a holistic approach that includes economic reforms, social support systems, and mental health interventions. Sustainable agricultural practices, comprehensive policy measures, and community-based support systems are essential to mitigate the impacts of this crisis and improve the well-being of Punjab's farming communities.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The phenomenon of farmer suicides in Punjab is a multifaceted issue rooted in a complex interplay of socio-economic, psychological, and policy-related factors. This study highlights that indebtedness, crop failures, fluctuating market prices, and the long-term impacts of the Green Revolution are primary contributors to the crisis. The psychological toll of financial stress and social isolation further exacerbates the situation, leading to high rates of depression and suicidal ideation among farmers. Additionally, the existing government support mechanisms are often inadequate and fail to address the root causes of distress.

The findings underscore the need for comprehensive and multi-pronged strategies to mitigate the crisis. Effective intervention requires addressing both immediate economic needs and long-term structural issues within the agricultural sector. There is a critical need for policies that promote financial stability, mental health support, and sustainable farming practices.

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Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are proposed to address the issue of farmer suicides in Punjab:

1. Economic Interventions

- **Debt Relief Programs:** Implement comprehensive debt relief programs to alleviate the financial burden on farmers. This could include waiving existing debts and providing low-interest loans.
- **Fair Pricing Mechanisms:** Establish mechanisms to ensure fair and stable prices for agricultural produce, protecting farmers from market volatility.
- **Subsidies and Financial Aid:** Increase subsidies for agricultural inputs and provide direct financial aid to support small and marginal farmers.

2. Agricultural Reforms

- **Sustainable Farming Practices:** Promote sustainable and organic farming practices to reduce dependency on costly chemical inputs and improve soil health.
- **Diversification of Crops:** Encourage crop diversification to reduce the risks associated with monoculture and improve income stability.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in agricultural infrastructure, including irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks, to enhance productivity and reduce post-harvest losses.

3. Mental Health and Social Support

- **Mental Health Services:** Establish dedicated mental health services for farmers, including counseling, support groups, and helplines. Integrate mental health awareness programs within rural communities.
- **Community Support Systems:** Revitalize traditional community support systems to provide emotional and practical support to farmers. Encourage community-based initiatives that foster social cohesion and collective resilience.
- **Training and Education:** Offer training programs to improve financial literacy, stress management, and coping strategies among farmers.

4. Policy and Institutional Reforms

- **Policy Integration:** Ensure that agricultural policies are integrated with broader socio-economic policies to address the multifaceted nature of farmer distress. This includes aligning agricultural development with rural development and social welfare policies.
- **Access to Credit:** Reform the agricultural credit system to make it more accessible and farmer-friendly. Simplify the application process and provide education on financial management.
- **Legal and Institutional Support:** Strengthen legal frameworks to protect farmers from exploitative lending practices and ensure their rights and entitlements are upheld.

5. Research and Monitoring

- **Ongoing Research:** Conduct ongoing research to monitor the effectiveness of implemented policies and interventions. Use data-driven approaches to continually assess and address emerging issues within the agricultural sector.
- **Impact Assessment:** Implement regular impact assessments of agricultural policies and programs to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

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Addressing the crisis of farmer suicides in Punjab requires a holistic approach that considers economic, social, and psychological dimensions. By implementing comprehensive and targeted interventions, it is possible to alleviate the distress faced by farmers and create a more resilient and sustainable agricultural sector. Policymakers, researchers, and community stakeholders must collaborate to develop and implement strategies that not only address immediate needs but also promote long-term stability and well-being for farmers and their families.

Limitations of the Research Study

This study, being based on secondary data, presents several limitations. Firstly, the reliance on existing data sources means the research is confined to the scope, accuracy, and timeliness of those datasets. This can lead to potential biases and incomplete representations of the current scenario. The secondary data used may not capture recent trends or emerging issues within the agrarian community, as they are often historical or dated. Additionally, the lack of primary data collection means there is no opportunity to delve deeper into individual experiences or context-specific nuances that might influence farmers' decisions to commit suicide.

Furthermore, secondary data may not encompass all relevant variables or factors affecting farmer suicides, potentially overlooking critical elements like mental health conditions, social dynamics, or local environmental conditions. The data aggregation at a state or district level might also mask regional disparities and micro-level variations.

Lastly, there is a dependency on the quality and consistency of data reported by different sources, which might vary significantly. These limitations suggest the need for future research incorporating primary data collection, longitudinal studies, and mixed-method approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issue of farmer suicides in Punjab.

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Conflict of Interest

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