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A Study on Stress of Women and Children in the Deceased Farm Families and their Coping Mechanism

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ABSTRACT

A study on suicidal stress and coping strategies among the farm families of Dharwad districts is conducted during the year 2016-17 with the objective to analyze the socioeconomic status, stress and coping strategies of the deceased farm families. The sample of the study comprises of 50 deceased farm families. The data was collected from the respondents by using pre-tested structured interview schedule, perceived stress scale and stress index questionnaire. Appropriate statistical techniques like correlation was used to depict the results. The results revealed that majority of the respondents belonged to middle age group, living in joint families, possessed small land holdings with an annual income upto Rs. 25,000/- and fell under lower middle socio economic status. Due to sudden death of the family head they were under high stress. To overcome from the stress majority of them talked with others and engaged in one or other work.

Key words: *Deceased, Stress, Farm families, Coping mechanism.*

INTRODUCTION

The spectre of farmers' suicides across India compounds the plight of the agricultural population already suffering from impoverishment and destitution. The bitter struggle for survival by women in these families is fraught with obstacles of an unprecedented nature. Dependent on the hetero-patriarchal structures of marriage and family, women are left fending for themselves, their children, the elderly, as well as dealing with the wrath and harassment of bank and commission agents. In addition, they are coping with crop failures, negative rates of return from farming, meeting essential expenses (for instance, school fees of their children), illnesses and other emergencies, as also, various chores, like tending to livestock. The end of life can come by many means. But suicide is the most complicated for those left behind. The loss of a loved one to death is widely recognized as a challenging stressor event, one that increases risk for the development of many psychiatric conditions. One key risk factor is the mode of death.

Impact of Suicide

The impact of suicide by the bread earner is experienced by all members of the family and also those who had close acquaintances with him/her. The sudden, unexpected death of a close person often shocks his family, friends and other known people. The act of suicide is over for the person who dies, but survivors are left with many questions. With suicide, the problem, pain, suffering and trauma is merely transferred to those who survive and is experienced by everyone in the society[5]. Lands are confiscated due to inability to pay back high interest loans. The corrupt money lenders will harass the family members. Children sometimes will lose both parents, leave their education in between and they will work in order to meet their needs. The families will move from farm labor to permanent labor. Sometimes this may also leads to child labor.

Objectives of the study

1. To ascertain the Socio-economic profile of the respondents.
2. To analyze the stress of the women after the death of the family head and
3. To study coping strategies of the respondents.

Brief review of literature

Cerel *et al.*[2] studied on the impact of suicide on the family. The study revealed that the women whose husbands had died by suicide experienced more guilt than those who lost their husband in an accident. Families with minor children tend to experience a great deal of chronic turmoil such as divorces, legal consequences and domestic violence prior to the suicide of the parent. In developing societies it is likely that suicides stigma has defamed the families leading to distress for many survivors. Among surviving family members of the suicide of an older adult committing suicide data revealed that practically there is no significant difference in the mental health and grief reactions within the first 8 weeks after the death. The authors also speculated that the greater distress was reported beyond 6 months among the suicide survivors.

Lindqvist *et al.*[7] conducted research on aftermath of teenage suicide: a qualitative study of the psychosocial consequences for the surviving family members. The results revealed that teenager suicide is a devastating for the surviving family and the lack of sustainable explanations for the suicide is a predominant issue in the grief process. The prolonged social and psychological isolation of the families in grief should be challenged. The bereaved family members were still profoundly affected by the loss but all had returned to an ostensibly normal life. Post suicide support was often badly timed and insufficient especially for younger siblings.

Sharma and Mishra[8] assessed stress among single parent and parenthood in Lucknow city with the sample of 50. The study revealed that majority of the respondents had stress and there was non-significant difference between both parent and parenthood.

Choudhary and Dayal[3] analyzed the effect of environmental stress among rural women. The study revealed that psychological factors of stress were identified major cause as an environmental factor which affected the stress among rural women. Less than 30 years of age were suffering from more stress as compared to old age group. Most of the respondents who suffered from stress belong to joint family, as the income decreases; the level of stress also increases among rural women.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Dharwad district of Karnataka. Purposive sampling procedure was followed to select the villages and respondents for the study. A total of 50 deceased farm families were selected. Self structured interview schedule was used to collect the data on demographic profile of the

respondents. Data on socio-economic profile was collected by using the scale developed by Aggarwal *et al.*[1], data on The general stress index of the respondents was assessed by using Inancevich and Malteson scale. Perceived stress was assesed by using Cohen[4] perceived stress scale. The appropriate statistical tools like frequency, percentages, correlation was used analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the selected respondents

Table 1 presents socio-personal characteristics of the respondents.

The age wise classification depicted that 38.00 per cent of the respondents belonged to middle age group (36-50 yrs) followed by 36 per cent belonging to young age group (upto 35 yrs) and 26 per cent belonging to old age group (above 50 yrs).

Level of education as indicated in Table 1 revealed that maximum percentage (62.00 %) of respondents were illiterate followed by studying upto middle school (28.00 %) and high school (6.00 %). Only 2.00 per cent of the respondents were educated upto primary school and higher secondary school.

With respect to caste category presented in Table 1, it shows that majority of the respondents (78.00 %) belonged to OBC (other backward caste) category followed by scheduled tribe (12.00 %) and other castes like muslim, jain and lingayat (10.00 %).

The data on family size depicts that, 52 per cent of the respondents have medium family size of 4-6 members followed by small family (30.00 %) having upto 3 members, large family (14.00 %) with 7-9 members and very large (4.00 %) with more than 9 members.

Result on type of family reveals that 60.00 per cent of the families are joint families followed by nuclear family (40.00 %) as presented in table 1.

The data depicted on land holding in the Table 1 indicated that 44 per cent of the respondents own small land holding of 2.50 to 5 acres followed by marginal land holding category of less than 2.50 acres (30.00 %), semi medium land holding category of 5 to 10 acres (20.00 %), medium land holding category (4.00 %). Only 2 per cent of the respondents have big land holding of more than 25 acres.

Annual income of the family depicts that half of the respondents have an annual income of upto Rs. 25,000 followed by 34 per cent having income between Rs 25,001/- to 50,000 /- , less than 10 per cent families belonged to Rs 75,001/- to 1,00,000/- income group followed by Rs. 50,000/- to 75,000/- annual income group (6.00 %). Only 2 per cent of the respondents have annual income of more than one lakh rupees. Similar observations are made by Kale *et al.*[1] in his study.

The socio–economic status of the selected deceased farm families was further studied by using the Aggarwal *et al.*[1] scale and is presented in Table 2. The detailed information on the components of socio-economic status is presented in appendix I. It is clear from the table that majority of the deceased families (70.00 %) belonged to the lower middle class category Because of the lower economic status of the family the farmers were committed suicide. The study conducted by Rathod and Pawar revealed that majority of the victim farmers were from medium socio economic status. Followed by equal per cent of the deceased families (12.00 %) belonged to upper middle and poor category respectively. Only 6 per cent of the families were under high socio economic status category.

Table1: Socio- personal characteristics of the respondents selected for the study

N=50

Sl. No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
I	**Age of the respondent(yrs)**		
	Young (upto 35)	18	36.0
	Middle (36-50)	19	38.0
	Old (above 50)	13	26.0
II	**Education level of the Respondent**		
	Illiterate	31	62.0
	Primary school	01	2.0
	Middle school	14	28.0
	High school	03	6.0
	Higher secondary school	01	2.0
III	**Caste category**		
	Scheduled tribe	06	12.0
	Other backward class	39	78.0
	Other (muslim, jain, lingayat)	05	10.0
IV	**Family size**		
	Small (upto 3)	15	30.0
	Medium (4-6)	26	52.0
	Large(7-9)	7	14.0
	Very large (above 9)	2	04.0
V	**Family type**		
	Nuclear	20	40.0
	Joint	30	60.0
VI	**Land holding**		
	Marginal (< 2.50 acre)	15	30.0
	Small (2.50-5 acre)	22	44.0
	Semi medium (5-10 acre)	10	20.0
	Medium (10-25acre)	2	04.0
	Large (above 25 acre)	1	02.0
VII	**Annual income**		
	Upto Rs 25,000	25	50.0
	Rs 25,001 to 50,000	17	34.0
	Rs 50,001 to 75,000	3	06.0
	Rs 75,001 to 1,00,000	4	08.0
	More than Rs 1,00,000	1	02.0

Table 2: Socio economic status of the deceased families

SES level	Frequency	Percentage
Upper high(>76)	-	-
High(61-75)	3	6.0
Upper middle (46-60)	6	12.0
Lower middle (31-45)	35	70.0
Poor (16-30)	6	12.0
Very poor (<16)	-	-

General Stress Index

The general stress index of the respondents was assessed by using Inancevich and Malteson scale and represented in the table 3. All the respondents have high stress index by answering yes to 6-20 questions. Because, of the death of the family head, the whole responsibility of the family rests on women so she felt more stress.

Table: 3 General stress index of the selected respondents of the deceased family

N=50

Sl. No.	Stress index (no. of yes answers)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (0-2)	-	-
2	Medium (3-5)	-	-
3	High (6-20)	50	100.0

The perceived stress of the respondents after the suicide was assessed by using Cohen perceived stress [4] scale and presented in table 4 (a).

The table 4 (a) shows that 40 per cent of the respondents have got upset fairly often due to suicide of the farmer followed by very often (34.00 %), almost never (16.00 %)and sometimes (10.00 %). Majority of the respondents felt that they were unable to control the important things in their life fairly often followed by very often (26.00 %), sometimes (24.00 %), almost never (10.00 %) and never (2.00 %). Nervousness and stress was felt by 44 per cent of the respondents fairly often followed by very often (28.00 %), sometimes (16.00 %), almost never (8.00 %) and never (4.00 %). Sometimes 36 per cent of the respondents were confident about their ability to handle their personal problems followed by equal per cent (26.00 %) opined that they were confident about their ability to handle their personal problems almost never and fairly often. Only 6 per cent of them have opined very often and never. Majority of the respondents (36.00 %) sometimes felt that the things were not going on their way followed by fairly often (28.00 %), never (14.00 %), very often (12.00 %) and almost never (10.00

%). Majority of the respondents (42.00 %) fairly often felt that they could not cope up with all the things that they have to do followed by sometimes (34.00 %), very often (14.00 %) almost never (8.00 %) and never (2.00 %). Nearly one third of the respondents fairly often felt that they had been able to control the irritations in their life followed by sometimes (26.00 %), almost never (24.00 %), never (8.00 %) and very often (6.00 %). Maximum number of the respondents fairly often felt they were on top of the things followed by sometimes (24.00 %), almost never (20.00 %), very often (18.00 %) and never (6.00 %). Majority of the respondents were angered fairly often because of the things that were outside of their control followed by sometimes (24.00 %), almost never (20.00 %), very often (16.00 %) and never (2.00 %). Half of the respondents fairly often felt that the difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them followed by very often (22.00 %), sometimes (14.00 %), almost never (10.00 %) and never (4.00 %).

Table: 4 (a) Perceived stress of the respondents soon after the suicide of the farmer

N=50

Sl. No.	Statements	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
1	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?.	-	8 (16.0)	5 (10.0)	20 (40.0)	17 (34.0)
2	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	1 (2.0)	5 (10.0)	12 (24.0)	19 (38.0)	13 (26.0)
3	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	2 (4.0)	4 (8.0)	8 (16.0)	22 (44.0)	14 (28.0)
4	In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	3 (6.0)	13 (26.0)	18 (36.0)	13 (26.0)	3 (6.0)
5	In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	7 (14.0)	5 (10.0)	18 (36.0)	14 (28.0)	6 (12.0)
6	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	1 (2.0)	4 (8.0)	17 (34.0)	21 (42.0)	7 (14.0)
7	In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	4 (8.0)	12 (24.0)	13 (26.0)	18 (36.0)	3 (6.0)
8	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things	3 (6.0)	10 (20.0)	12 (24.0)	16 (32.0)	9 (18.0)
9	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	1 (2.0)	10 (20.0)	12 (24.0)	19 (38.0)	8 (16.0)
10	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	2 (4.0)	5 (10.0)	7 (14.0)	25 (50.0)	11 (22.0)

Table 4 (b) shows that 86 per cent of the respondents have high perceived stress level followed by low (8.00 %) and medium (6.00

%). This is because of unexpected and sudden death of the family head will add responsibility on the women.

Table: 4 (b) Perceived stress level of the respondents due to suicide of the farmer

N=50

Sl. No.	Perceived stress level	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low (<13)	4	8.00
2	Medium (13-21)	3	6.00
3	High(>21)	43	86.0

The relation between the independent variables and perceived stress of the respondents were measured by using Karl Parsons Correlation coefficient and depicted in table 5. The independent variable age is significantly correlated with the perceived stress. Whereas education and family size are positively correlated but income and land holding are negatively correlated with the perceived stress of the respondents which says that decrease in income and land holding will lead to increase the stress of the respondents. As the age increases perceived stress also increases due to the physical and emotional weakness.

Table : 5 Relationship between independent variables of the respondents with their perceived stress

N=50

Independent variable	'r' value
Age	0.323*
Education	0.122
Family size	0.059
Income	-0.068
Land holding	-0.075

*significant at the 0.05 level

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies followed by the respondents to overcome from stress were represented in the table 6. It shows that equal per cent of the respondents talk to others and get engaged in some work (92.00 %) to overcome from stress followed by spending time with children (82.00 %). Nearly one third of the respondents said that they control finances, 14 per cent of the respondents said that they control their anger. Only 6 per cent of the respondents will do meditation to come out from stress. During stress sharing of feelings will add relaxation on one's life. Getting engaged in some work will divert the mind of the person from stress and anxiety towards the work.

Table: 6 Coping strategies followed by respondents to overcome stress by selected respondents

N=50

Sl. No.	Strategies followed	Frequency	Percentage
I.	Talk out/conversation	46	92.0
II.	Meditation	3	6.0
III.	Overcome anger	7	14.0
IV.	Be in control of finances	16	32.0
V.	Engaged in some work	46	92.0
VI.	Spend time with children	41	82.0

Note: Multiple Responses

CONCLUSION

Majority of the respondents belonged to middle age group (36-50 yrs), maximum per cent of the samples were illiterates, belonged to other backward caste (OBC) group, living in medium sized joint family type and possess small land holding with the annual income upto Rs. 25,000/-. Higher numbers of families were in lower middle socio economic status as per the Aggarwal[1] scale.

Majority of the respondents were under high stress. Due to stress they were under confusion, depression, sleep disturbance and loss of appetite. To overcome the stress majority talked with others and engaged in one or other work to divert their mind from stress.

Implications and recommendations

Farmers Counseling Centers should be established at 'Panchayat' level with the appointment of trained personnel comprising of a Social Worker, Psychologist, Agricultural scientist, Doctor and elected representative of the Panchayat to help the farmers in distress.

It is also necessary to build up the psychology of family members of the deceased families who are in stress by motivating them through yoga and meditation.

There is a need to strengthen the National Mental Health Programme at primary health centre level to offer support and counseling to the vulnerable members of farm families in rural areas.

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