# Personal, Situational and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Cotton Growers in Distress Areas of Andhra Pradesh

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## ABSTRACT

Cotton was considered as 'white gold' in the initial years of its introduction. Later, failure of the same was attributed to suicides of farmers. An attempt has been made in this study to look in detail the personal, situational and socio-economic profile of cotton farmers in distress areas of Guntur and Warangal districts, where in considerable number of farmers suicides had occurred. About 46 per cent of the respondents belong to small farmers category are below 35 years where as about 41 per cent of the big farmers category are middle aged (36-50 years). Majority of the respondents had primary to high school education. Great majority (more than 80 %) of the respondents have the occupation of agriculture + labour. Nuclear family is predominant among the respondents contributing to more than 80 percent of the respondents. About 68 per cent of the small farmers and 28 per cent of the big farmers incurred losses. Majority had more than 10 years of farming experience. No abnormalities were found with regard to the situational and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. There is no striking feature (except losses realized by 49 per cent of the farmers and the negative mean income with small farmers and resulting indebtedness) which can be attributed as an important reason for the suicides in the study area.

**Key words :** Cotton, Growers, Situational, Socio-economic.

Cotton is under in cultivation in about 10 lakh hectares in Andhra Pradesh. As per the report (2006-07) prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture & Co-operation, Govt. of India, 11782 farmers have committed suicides in the country during last five years. Most of these suicides have been reported from cotton growing areas of Maharasthra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and other states. The report further states that cotton growers could not able to get the remunerative prices to their produce coupled with continuous crop failure due to drought resulted in defaulters with the banks. The frustration and humiliation thus developed is leading to the ultimate state of suicide. Several other reports on farmers suicides prepared by Dr. M S Swaminathan Committee, Planning Commission, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Indira Gandhi Institute of Developmental Studies, Mumbai also reported that the failure of cotton crop, failure of mansoon, improper marketing and indebtedness are the major reasons for farmers' suicides. Crop failure and indebtedness can explain some of the variance but there are other important antecedents of suicides like perceived financial condition, quality of life, expenditure pattern, contingencies, Govt. policies, family problem, social isolation, social support etc., (Nagaraj, 2008). These may lead to alienation from land resulting in depression and suicide. However, suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live. They are just unable to see alternatives to their problems. Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a bread earner to family, and may themselves be at higher risks for suicide and emotional problem. The "phenomenon of suicide as a result of an individual's inability to cope with sudden and cataclysmic change in socio-economic conditions" (Sridhar, 2006). In the case of the Indian farmer, indebtedness from repeated crop losses and a fall in social status due to loss of income and the inability to maintain the same level of expenditure are characteristic indicators leading to anomic suicide. This, coupled with hopelessness regarding any possible improvement in the situation, plays a role in encouraging suicide as the only possible way to redeem oneself from social disgrace (Guillaume *etal*, 2008) Small peasants without capital were trapped in a vicious cycle of debt and some ended up committing suicide (Vandana Shiva, 2008). There is no single explanation or even consistent explanations across reported cases. However, one leading factor seems to connect several causes particularly related to agriculture: the heavy indebtedness of farm households (Nagaraj, 2008).

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents according to their age.

| Sr. No. | Category | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Young (Upto 35) | 46.00 | 38.00 |
| 2. | Middle (36 to 50) | 32.00 | 41.00 |
| 3. | Old (51 and above) | 22.00 | 21.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their education

| Sr. No. | Category | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Illiterate | 32.00 | 28.00 |
| 2. | Primary education (Upto 5) | 25.00 | 23.00 |
| 3. | High school (6 to 10) | 30.00 | 37.00 |
| 4. | College education (Above 11) | 13.00 | 12.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

An attempt has been made in this study to look at the phenomenon of cotton growers' suicides through socio-psychological perspective which treats suicide as a deviant behavior.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Out of 22 rural districts in Andhra Pradesh, sixteen districts has been identified as high farmer's suicides prone districts and declared as distressed districts. Among these sixteen districts, two districts namely Guntur and Warangal districts were selected purposively where in considerable number of farmers suicides had occurred and considering as major cotton growing areas. From the selected Districts, four mandals having larger area under cotton cultivation and where comparatively larger number of farmer suicides had reported were selected purposively. Thus eight mandals were selected for the study. Based on comparatively larger area under cotton cultivation, 20 villages from each district, comprising five villages from each mandal were selected making 40 villages in total. From the selected villages, a comprehensive list of cotton growers was obtained. The listed cotton growers were grouped into two strata on the basis of size of land holding viz. up to 2.00 ha (small farmers) and 2.01 to 4.00 ha (big farmers). Taking into consideration the continuance of cotton farming since five years, 100 growers from each stratum were selected by proportionate random sampling i.e. five farmers from each village making a total of 200 respondents for the study. Exploratory design of social research was used. Data was collected from the respondents through personal interview method with the help of structured schedule. In addition, the secondary sources were utilized to obtain other relevant data. Appropriate statistical methods were used to draw meaningful results.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It could be observed from the table 1, that majority of the respondents in small category are young aged followed by middle aged whereas it is vice versa in case of big category. In total only 21

per cent of the respondents are old aged. It gives good sign that about 42 per cent of the respondents are young aged who are the hope of future agriculture.

The findings from the table 2 reveals that the respondents are distributed in illiterate, primary education, high school educated categories in both the size groups. High school and above education pursued by about 41 per cent of the respondents, in total.

It was clear from the table. 3 that great majority of respondents getting their livelihood from agriculture and labour. The difference is very negligible in this case with regard to both the categories of respondents. The percentage of respondents who have income from other sources is hovering around 10 only.

Findings from the table 4 clearly indicate that joint families are no more a feature of villages. A great majority of the respondents had nucleus families.

It could be observed from the Table 5 that majority (68 %) of the respondents under small category perceived their annual economy is under loss while about 16 per cent of them had upto Rs. 25,000/- and 9 per cent had upto Rs. 50,000/- annual income. Contrary, the respondents under big farmers category 28 per cent of them perceived annual income is under loss, 24 per cent had upto Rs. 25,000/-, 20 per cent had Rs. 25,000/- to 50,000/- annual income. Even, 10 per cent of them are realizing more than Rs1,00,000/- annual income.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their Occupation

| Sr. No. | Occupation | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Agriculture + Labour | 88.00 | 86.00 |
| 2. | Agriculture (Farming) | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 3. | Agriculture + allied occupation (Goat Farming/Poultry/ Apiculture/Sericulture) | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| 4. | Agriculture + business (Professional/ non professional) | 8.00 | 5.00 |
| 5. | Agriculture + Service (Job with monthly salary) | 3.00 | 4.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to their Family Type

| Sr. No. | Occupation | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Joint | 16.00 | 18.00 |
| 2. | Nuclear | 84.00 | 82.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to their Annual Income

| Sr.No. | Occupation | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Loss | 68.00 | 28.00 |
| 2. | Up to Rs. 25,000/- | 16.00 | 24.00 |
| 3. | Rs. 25,001/- to Rs. 50,000/- | 9.00 | 20.00 |
| 4. | Rs. 50,001/- to Rs. 75,000/- | 3.00 | 13.00 |
| 5. | Rs. 75,001/- to Rs. 1,00,000/- | 1.00 | 5.00 |
| | Above Rs. 1,00,000/- | 3.00 | 10.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 6. Distribution of respondents according to their Farming Experience

| Sr. No. | Farming Experience | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Up to 5 years | 18.00 | 6.00 |
| 2. | 6 to 10 years | 28.00 | 23.00 |
| 3. | 11 to 15 years | 16.00 | 19.00 |
| 4. | More than 15 years | 38.00 | 52.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Farming experience of the respondents gives different picture that (Table 6) about 46 per cent of small farmers had less than 10 years where as, more than 50 per cent of the respondents under big farmers category had more than 15 years service. It clearly indicates that the families with more income tried to settle their children in other occupation rather than continuing agriculture.

A cursory look at the table 7 indicates that about three fourths of the respondents in both the categories had the irrigation facility. But the irrigation have not been using for cotton cultivation. About one quarter of the respondents do not have irrigation facility.

It was clear from the findings presented in the table 8 that vast majority of the respondents had soils which are moderately deep.

Among the total respondents 15.5 per cent of them purchased new farm land and at the same time 7.5 per cent sold their land (Table 9). Regarding house plots, 6 per cent purchased house plots where as only 1.5 per cent sold. In case of farm implements 5 per cent purchased but only one person sold the implements. Purchase of animals was done by 11.5 per cent of the respondents where as sold by 5 per cent.

The respondents expressed that, 4 per cent of them sold to purchase more productive animals and 8 per cent of them sold due non availability of labour on yearly basis.

In total about 20 per cent of the respondents only is old aged. It gives good sign that about 37 per cent of the respondents are young aged who are the hope of future agriculture. High school and

above education pursued by about 41 per cent of the respondents. Great majority of respondents getting their livelihood from agriculture and labour. The percentage of respondents who have income from other sources is around 10 only. Joint families are no more a feature of villages. Majority (68 %) of the respondents under upto 2ha (small farmers) category perceived their annual economy is under loss while about 16 per cent of them had upto Rs. 25,000/- and 9 per cent had upto Rs. 50,000/- annual income. Contrary, the respondents under more than 2 ha (big farmers) category 28 per cent of them perceived annual income is under loss, 24 per cent had upto Rs. 25,000/-, 20 per cent had Rs. 25,000/- to 50,000/- annual income. Even 10 per cent of them more than Rs. 1,00,000/- annual income. It clearly indicates the families with more income tried to settle their children in other occupation rather than continuing agriculture. Among the total respondents 15.5 per cent of them purchased new farm land and at the same time 7.5 per cent of sold their land. Purchasing of animals was done by 11.5 per cent of the respondents and sold by 5 per cent only. It was observed that they sold to purchase more productive animals and some of them sold due to non availability of labour on yearly basis.

It can be inferred that cotton cultivation is being practiced in the study area under normal situation as it could be seen in the other places. No abnormalities were found with regard to the situational and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. There is no striking feature except losses realized by 49 per cent of the farmers and the negative mean income realized by the small group farmers which, can be shown as an important reason for the suicides in the study area. Indebtedness from repeated crop losses and a fall in social status due to loss of income and the inability to maintain the same level of expenditure are characteristic indicators which can be attributed as the reasons for suicide of the cotton farmers in the study area.

Table 7. Distribution of respondents according to their Sources of Irrigation

| Sr. No. | Sources of Irrigation | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | No | 25.00 | 22.00 |
| 2. | River | 1.00 | 4.00 |
| 3. | Well/ Tube well | 44.00 | 39.00 |
| 4. | Canal | 22.00 | 28.00 |
| 5. | More than 2 sources | 8.00 | 7.00 |
| | `Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 8. Distribution of respondents according to their Type of soils

| Sr. No. | Type of Soils | % age of Small farmers (up to 2 ha) | % age of Big farmers(> 2 ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Very deep | 0.00 | 1.00 |
| 2. | Deep | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 3. | Moderately deep | 91.00 | 94.00 |
| 4. | Shallow | 9.00 | 5.00 |
| 5. | Very shallow | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | Total | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Table 9: Distribution of respondents according to their sale or purchase of any property

(n=200)

| Sr. No. | Items | Purchased by % age of respondents | Total Cost in Rupees | Sold by % age of respondents | % age Price received in Rs. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Farm | 15.5 | 5243000 | 7.5 | 2414500 |
| 2 | Housing plot | 6.0 | 440000 | 1.5 | 164500 |
| 3 | Farm implements | 5.0 | 504750 | 0.5 | 8000 |
| 4 | Animals | 11.5 | 283500 | 5.0 | 179700 |
| 5 | Any other major items | 1.0 | 95500 | 0.0 | 0 |

Table 10. Distribution of respondents according to reasons for sale of any property

(n=200)

| Sr. | Reason of sale (list common reasons) | % age of respondents |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | To purchase more productive animals | 8 |
| 2 | Because of non availability of labour on yearly basis | 16 |

**LITERATURE CITED**

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