

Fact sheet on women from farm suicide affected households

Fact sheet prepared by Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM)

As per official data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), about 3.82 lakh farm suicides have taken place in India between 1995 and 2021. With 87% of these being of men it means that more than 3.2 lakh women in these households have been suddenly left to fend for themselves, and manage the home and the farm. These official numbers are of course quite under-reported and conveniently-manipulated, compared to what might be the real situation out there.

Invisibilisation of women as farmers has also meant that the very high number of suicides that are recorded as 'suicides of housewives' go unrecorded as female farm suicides since there is no rural urban categorization in the NCRB's Annual Report on Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI). While the matter of reportage of incidence and prevalence of farm suicides is a matter of contention, with government agencies accused of manipulating the data, the matter of **female farmer suicides** is also very contentious and is hardly articulated. This is all the more so given that women are simply classified as 'housewives', especially in an unpaid work setup, which many women farmers are caught in. Women farmers are not recognized as farmers even in their death by suicide, given that they are often landless or the household's land is not in their name.

But for those who have been left behind, the struggle for survival and dignity continues..

Surviving stigma and debt: Those that are left behind are left to face stigma and debt. It is often seen that the woman farmer has to bear the brunt of accusations that she might have triggered the suicide by the spouse. Along with dealing with a personal loss, she has to also deal with the financial liabilities and the outstanding loans.

Poor social security support from the state: Delays in extending paltry ex-gratia payments, sanctioning of widow pensions, extending food security benefits, support for children's education and health care are some of the major concerns reported by women from these households.

Violence and sexual harassment: Whether it is to access social welfare benefits for which they are eligible or to claim their rights over property, women have consistently reported sexual harassment and violence meted out to them to avail of their entitlements.

Denial of land rights: The process of transfer of land titles in the name of widows has been extremely lethargic. While families resist transferring titles in the name of the widow, especially a childless one or one without a male heir, the state on its part is not proactive in ensuring that land titles are transferred, debts are cleared in order to enable the woman to get back to being able to support herself and the family.

Continuing with the same unsustainable farming paradigm: Most of these women are rendered as wage labourers either on their family farms or outside. With no land in their names, they are unable to continue farming. The family on the other hand often continues with the same unsustainable paradigm of farming, in the absence of any state support.

MAKAAM calls for one comprehensive overarching policy for women from farm suicide affected households that provides for social security and support for ecological agriculture

MAKAAM Secretariat:

Gramya Resource Centre for Women, 12-13-440, Street No. 1, Tarnaka, Secunderabad 500 017

SOPPECOM 16, Kale Park, Someshwarwadi Road, Pashan, Pune, Maharashtra 411008

Email: mahilakisan.makaam@gmail.com Website: www.makaam.in