

## **A STUDY ON FARMERS SUICIDES IN WAYANAD WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SULTAHN BATHERY TALUK**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Farmer suicides have turned out to be a major socioeconomic concern in India that has resulted in profound implications on the quality life of farmers. The prominent causes recognized for farmer suicides were bankruptcy or indebtedness, family problems, farming related issues, illness and drug abuse/alcohol addiction. The study examines the factors leading to the farm crisis, the rise in indebtedness and various dimensions of farmer suicides. This may be due to the squeezing of income sources under the pressure of increasing cost of cultivation and higher cash needs for the households. This is further aggravated by the climatic factors, low productivity and market failures both in factor and product markets. But among these, the farm indebtedness was considered as the major triggering factor by analysts. The study is based on the primary data obtained from the victim's family members and secondary data obtained from Department of Agriculture and related departments of the states. Data for understanding the post suicide situation of family was also collected. Social causes, farming crisis and credit inadequacy was encountered by victims and also the impact being faced by victim households after death of victim.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Farmer Suicides, Socioeconomic Concern, Low Productivity, Farming Crisis.*

### **Introduction**

A suicide is the "conscious art of self-induced annihilation best Understood as a Multinational Malaise, in a needful individual who defines an issue for which the act is perceived as the best solution". Over one million people commit suicides every year the world over, more people are dying by suicide than in all the attempted suicide carry a huge social and economic cost for the individual family, friends and society. Mounting suicides and crisis in agricultural sector: the Indian peasantry the largest surviving body of small farmers in the world is currently facing an epidemic of suicide "farmers suicides have to be viewed as a national disaster "the statement of the Prime minister of India, himself a distinguished economist open our eyes to the agrarian crisis that haunt our country today. The crisis has stemmed from a number of hardships which have led to the irreversible indebtedness of small and marginal farmers from even the most historically productive region of the country. It is a paradox that Wayanad one of the prosperous district of the state has a record of large number of farmers suicide. Since 1999, farmer's suicide rocked Wayanad especially in the Sulthan Bathery region. Since then the tragedies of suicide by farmers in Wayanad have caught the attention of state Govt, state legislature and the press.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- Find out the major causes which pushed them to suicide.
- To identify the present economic condition of the family members of the victims after their suicide.
- To study extent of indebtedness and pattern of capital use.

### **Scope of the Study**

For the past couple of years, farmer's suicides become a major crisis in the society. The government appointed various committees to study this problem, but they failed to check the horrendous situation. The present study covers the Sultan Bathery taluk of Wayanad district. Sultan Bathery taluk of has reported the highest farmer suicide in Wayanad. The present study is based on both primary and

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secondary data. Primary data was collected during 2018-2019. It was collected from 30 households of suicide victims with the help of well-structured schedule, specially developed for the purpose. The data collected from the respondents include general information about suicide, land holding, cropping pattern, debt condition, source of income, source of credit, purpose of credit, etc. The method of personal interview was adopted to ensure that the data obtained from the respondents were relevant, comprehensive and reasonably correct and precise, because the family members of victims cannot recover from the tragic death of their beloved. Secondary data were used for getting a macro picture of farmer suicides. Data on numbers of farmer suicides cases in the district were collected from district collectorate and agricultural office in Wayanad.

### Review of Literature

Any scientific analysis begins with the process of browsing, understanding and critically analysing the past literature available on the problem. In this chapter a brief review of past studies is presented, which are very useful for the background for the present study.

**P.D. Jerome (2007)** mentioned that, the experience of Kerala during the past decades show how and to what extent a traditional export oriented agricultural sector in a small rural economy can suffer due to trade liberalization sans any nets and comprehensive restructuring program with a decline in export, rise in import and a consequent drop in price coupled with frequent drought, stagnant production and productivity, farm income declined drastically and increased the indebtedness of farmers. A sad manifestation of the severity of the situation was the widespread suicide by the farmers in the state.

**A.R. Vasavi (1999)** found that, the spate of agriculturist in Karnataka was largely the result of ecological, economic and social crisis in the region. The situation calls attention to the problem of commercial agriculture in the region and to the role of the state in including such condition. Internal social complexities such as the growth of local usury and the increasing individualization of agriculture also compound such distress.

**E.A.S. Sharma (2004)** found that farmer's suicides represent only the tip of the iceberg. To attribute the rural crisis entirely to poverty and drought would be an over simplification of the situation and the several ways in which village economy is under stress today. Hastily announced relief package do not address this complex situation.

**Mohankumar.S, Sharma.R.K (2006)** reveals that three districts of Maharashtra through crop losses, indebtedness and market imperfection causes economic hardship to farmer's social factors are also at work, which leads in some cases to their suicides.

**Savithri.T.M (1999)** mentioned that analysis of prices of agricultural commodities in Kerala conducted that there is a strong price integration existing in the agricultural markets in Kerala. Coconut, tea, rubber, turmeric, arecanut and pepper are good example of agricultural commodities having short run markets calibration.

**Singh and Sharma (1990)**, while studying the agricultural finance and management opined that the cost of loan was one of the important basic characteristics of a good loan and should be at a reasonable cost which involves not only interest rate but also fees for documents and services associated with grant of loan.

**Pouchepparadjou (1992)** found that the cost of credit was more in the case of money lender than the commercial banks because of exorbitant rate of interest charged by him. Farmer was happier with the commercial banks credit even through the non interest cost was more.

**Banakar and Suryaprakash (1987)** studied the supply and utilization of crops production credit in Karnataka and concluded that the small and medium farmers received a lower proportion of total loans compared to their numerical strength in the total number of borrowers, while the larger received a fairly larger share.

**Singh and Tyagi (1995)** mentioned that the co-operatives a, by providing adequate and timely credit could create a favorable impact on agricultural development even in a backward region. The study was conducted in vikramjot block of Basik district of Uttarpradesh.

### Farmer Suicide an Overview

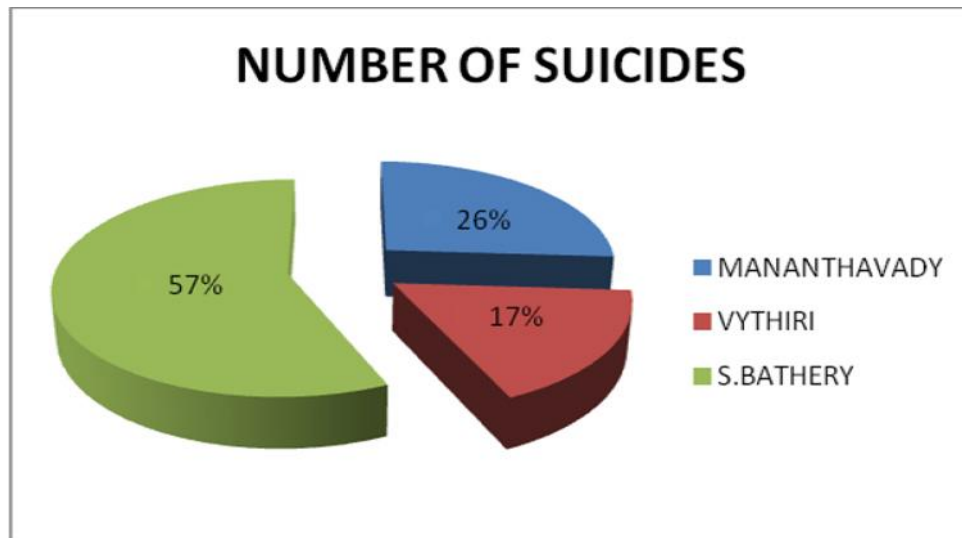
"Rates of growth of agriculture in the last decades have been poor and are a major cause of rural distress. Farming is increasingly becoming an unviable activity. "Commercialization of agriculture has led to the indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides, deteriorating soil quality and fertility,

reducing ground water levels making it difficult to sustain regular agricultural output from land. Also, with the cost of agricultural inputs increasing with each passing year, farmers have been forced to take credit from institutional and non-institutional sources. The rise in agricultural cost of Production is not supported by or accompanied by rise in agricultural prices. Local prices for agricultural produce do not even cover the cost of production. The policies of the government have rendered the farmers more vulnerable than before, but the government on its part has not instated checks and balances to protect the interests of the farmers. Farmers across the globe succumb to suicides when they face distress conditions. Although suicide is universal phenomenon, its nature and rate vary from country to country. Studies in USSR attributed disintegration of USSR to high suicide rate in Russia and Eastern Europe. China is also one of the suicide prone countries. Similarly Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh have reported cases of farmer's suicides. Srilanka notoriously reports highest suicides rates especially among the farming communities. In India farmer suicide has been reported from various states, viz, Punjab, Maharashtra, Andra Pradesh, Kerala and various other states with varied cultural practice and farming pattern. A study in Vidharbha region of Maharashtra has associated indebtedness (87%) and deterioration in the economic status (74%) as a major risk factor for suicide (Mishra's, 2006) Earlier it was held that only mental illness particularly depression has been the single most influencing factor related to farmer suicide. But the range of stress like indebtedness of farmer households, burden of running a business subject to changing agricultural policy, deterioration of economic status and crop failure were found important socio-economic stresses for the farmers (Mohanty 2005, Mishra 2006) some of the factors are as follow;

- Inadequate institutional finance of late due to modernization of agriculture.
- Inadequate support price
- Increasing input utilization, cost of cultivation and low productivity rates.
- Climate adversity and repeated crop failure.
- Poor cultivation.
- Imperfect market for input and output.
- Unskilled labour force.
- Negative externalities arising from land and water management.

The number of suicide cases surveyed in the district of Wayanad is 317. There are 6 multiple suicides occurred in this district. There are 286 males and 31 female suicides occurred in this district. 167 events occurred in Sultan Bathery Taluk, 86 in Manathavady Taluk and 53 in Vythiri Taluk. Among the suicides 197 persons committed suicide by acing poison 108 by hanging 10 by other method and the method of suicide of other case were not reported. Of the 306 suicides, 196 of them suicides were due to the indebtedness, 27 of the due to disease, 19 by some family problem, 43 by crop damage. The reasons behind other suicides were not available. These families had outstanding liabilities of Rs.3135117. Successive droughts and untimely rains have seriously affected farmers for the past three four years. However nature's fury exploitation of the markets and negligence on the authorities compiled the farmers and agriculturist to do away with extensive cultivation. In recent years the noble profession of agriculture has become non profitable to farmers. There are various economic, social, political, individual and environmental causes of farmer's suicide in wayanad. The causes of this crisis are complex and manifold; they are dominantly related to public policy and economic strategy.

- Absence of adequate social support infrastructure at the level of village.
- Uncertainty of agricultural enterprise.
- Indebtedness of farmers. Rising cost of cultivation.
- Lack of credit availability for small farmers. There has been minimal financial support from the government for small farmers.
- Lack of irrigation facilities.
- Lack of Government Vision and clarity of intention to benefit the poor and small farmers.
- Reduction of agriculture subsidies.
- Lack of increasing in the prices of agricultural products compare to agricultural inputs. The drinking habit, which atrophies the productivity of the farmer.



#### Analysis and Interpretation

##### Family Size

Categories	Percentage
Male	35.29
Female	43.14
Children	21.57
Total	100

Source: primary data

##### Interpretation

The above table show that out of 102 family members 44 are belongs to females, 35.29% are belonging to the male category and the remaining 21.57 belongs to the children.

##### Occupational Pattern of the Family Members

Occupation	Number of Members	Percentage
Coolie	34	33.33
Driver	17	16.67
Business	2	1.96
Nil	22	21.57
Others	27	26.47
Total	102	100

Source: primary data

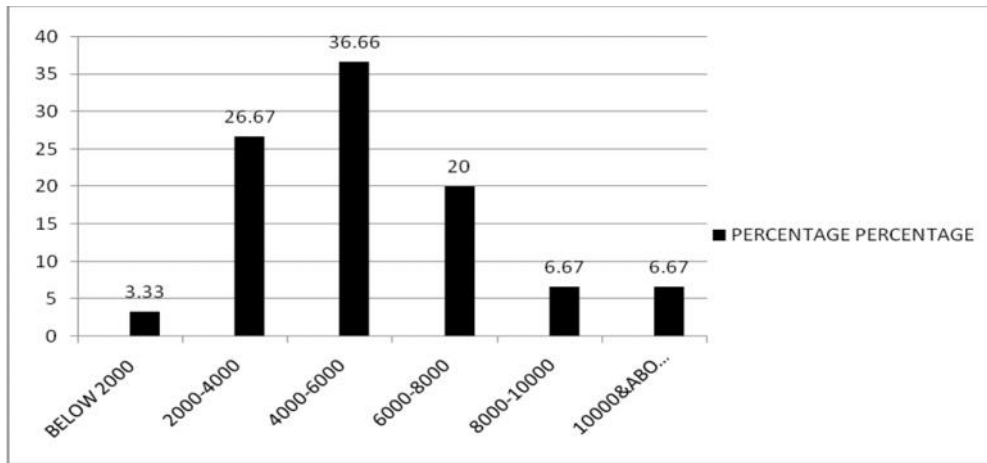
##### Interpretation

From the table out of 102 family members 33.33% are coolies, 16.67% are drivers, 1.96% is businessman, 26.47% are doing other jobs, and 21.57% are jobless persons.

##### Annual Income of the Family

Annual income	Number of Persons	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
Below 2000	1	3.33	1000	0.47
2000-4000	8	26.67	24200	11.38
4000-6000	11	36.66	53400	25.12
6000-8000	6	20	38000	17.87
8000-10000	2	6.67	76000	35.75
10000 & Above	2	6.67	20000	9.41
Total	30	100	212600	100

Source: primary data



#### Interpretation

The table shows that 3.33% of the sample population belongs to the income level of below 2000, 26.67% are come under the group of 2000-4000 income .Majority of the population (36.66%) comes under the group of 4000-6000, 20% are belongs to 6000-8000 of income, and 8000-10000 and 10000&above have consist only 2 persons respectively.

#### Gender Ratio of the Victims

Gender	Number of Persons	Percentage
Male	28	93.33
Female	2	6.67
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



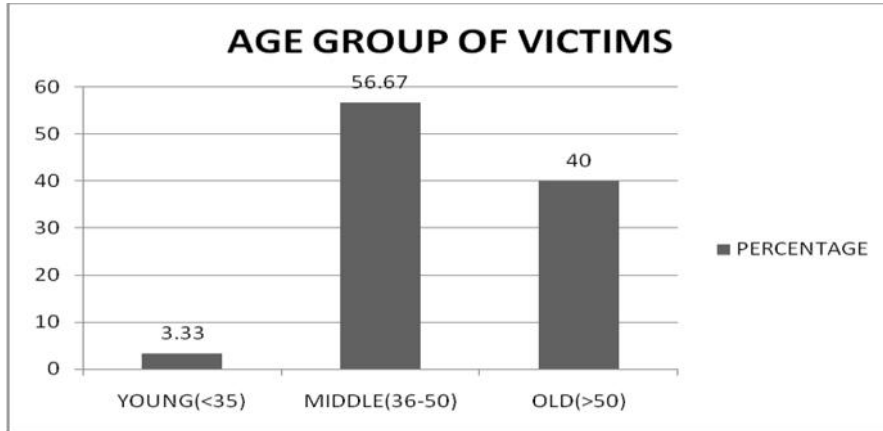
#### Interpretation

Above table shows that, total sample consist of 30 persons among them 28 (93.33%) are male, only remaining 2 (6.67%) are female.

#### Age Group of the Victims

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Young (<35)	1	3.33
Middle (36-50)	17	56.67
Old (>50)	12	40
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



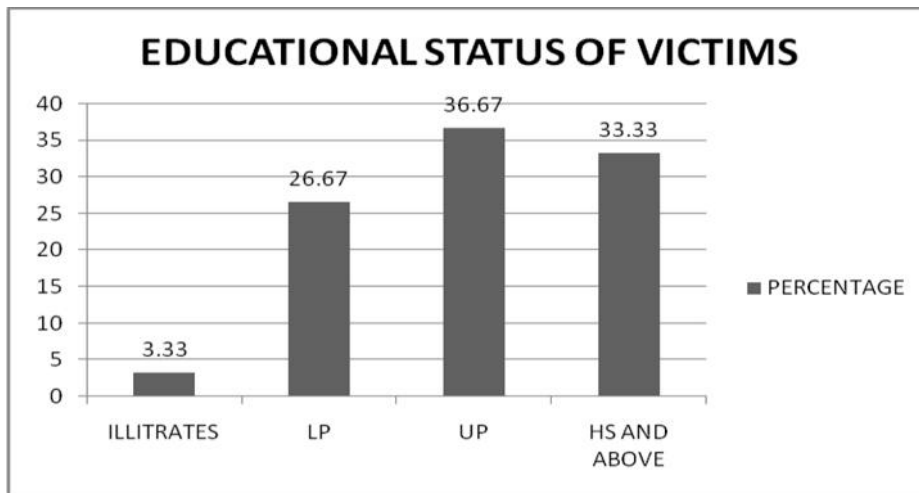
**Interpretation**

Table shows that out of 30 members 3.33% are belongs to young age group, majority 56.67% are middle aged persons and the remain 40% are belongs to old group.

**Educational Status of the Victims**

Education	Number of Persons	Percentage
Illitrates	1	3.33
LP	8	26.67
UP	11	36.67
HS and Above	10	33.33
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



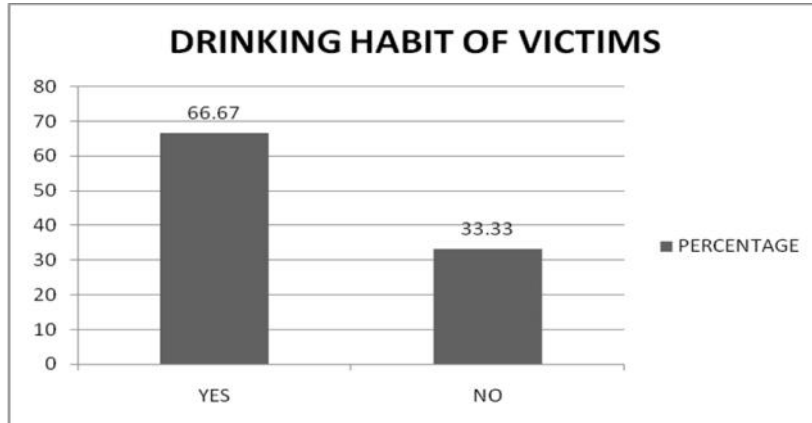
**Interpretation**

Among 30 of sample 3.33 % are illiterates, 26.67% are with lower primary education, 36.67% are with upper primary education, and the remaining 33.33 % are high school and above educated.

**Drinking Habit of the Victims**

Response	Number of Persons	Percentage
Yes	20	66.67
No	10	33.33
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



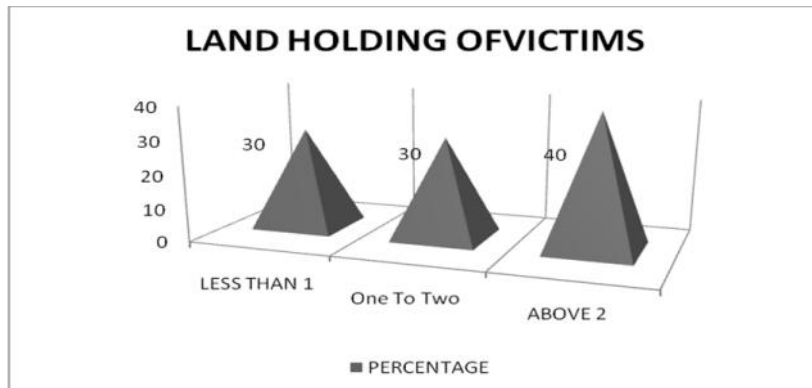
**Interpretation**

Above table reveals that 66.67% of respondents have drinking habit, remaining 33.33% are not drinking habit.

**Land Holding**

Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1	9	30
1-2	9	30
Above 2	12	40
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



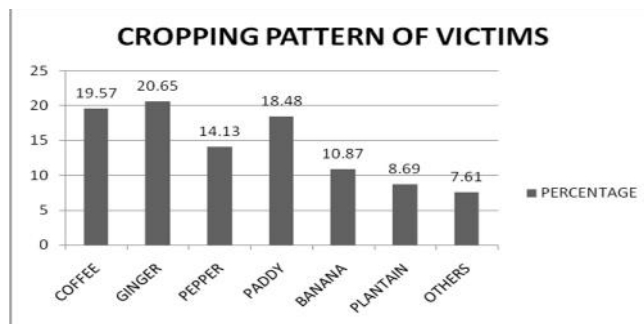
**Interpretation**

Above table reveals that out of 30 sample 30% are possessed less than 1 acres of land, 30% own 1-2 acres of land and the remaining or the majority are possessed above 2 acres of land.

**Cropping Pattern**

Crops	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Coffee	18	19.57
Ginger	19	20.65
Pepper	13	14.13
Paddy	17	18.48
Banana	10	10.87
Plantain	8	8.69
Others	7	7.61
Total	92	100

Source: primary data



**Interpretation**

The cropping pattern of the sample population show that major share of the crops are ginger 20.65%, coffee cover 19.57% ,pepper cover 14.13%,paddy cover 18.48%,banana covers 10.87%,plantain covers 8.69% and the remaining 7.61 % are covers other crops.

**Source of Family Income**

Source	Number of Persons	Percentage
Agriculture	9	20.93
Employment	29	67.44
Trade	2	4.65
Gulf	1	2.33
Others	2	4.65
Total	43	100

Source: primary data

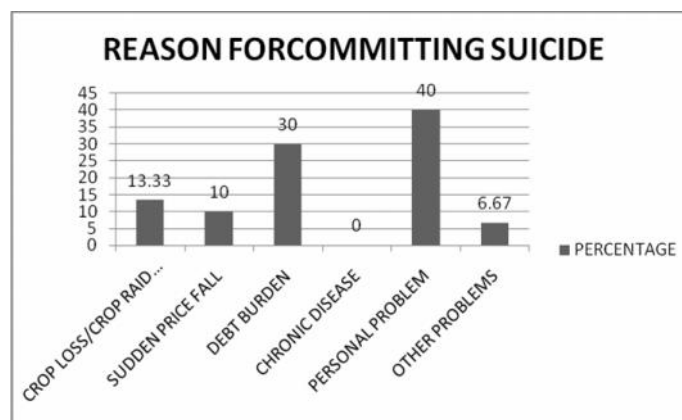
**Interpretation**

Above table shows that majority of the family income comes from employment 67.44%,20.93% of income comes from agriculture,4.65% of income comes from trade,2.33% comes from gulf and the remaining 4.65% of income comes from other sources.

**Reason for Committing Suicide**

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Crop Loss/Crop Raid by Animals	4	13.33
Sudden Price Fall	3	10
Debt Burden	9	30
Chronic Disease	0	-
Personal Problem	12	40
Other Problems	2	6.67
Total	30	100

Source: primary data





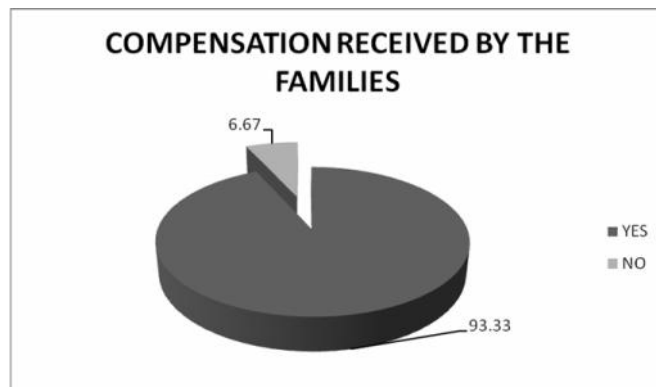
### Interpretation

Above table shows that out of 30 sample 13.33% of farmers suicide because of crop loss/crop raid by animals, 10% suicide because of sudden price fall, and 30% of debt burden. Reason of chronic disease no one suicide, majority of the suicide reported personal problems that is 40%, 2% of the sample suicide for other reasons.

### Compensation Received by the Victims' Families

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	28	93.33
No	2	6.67
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



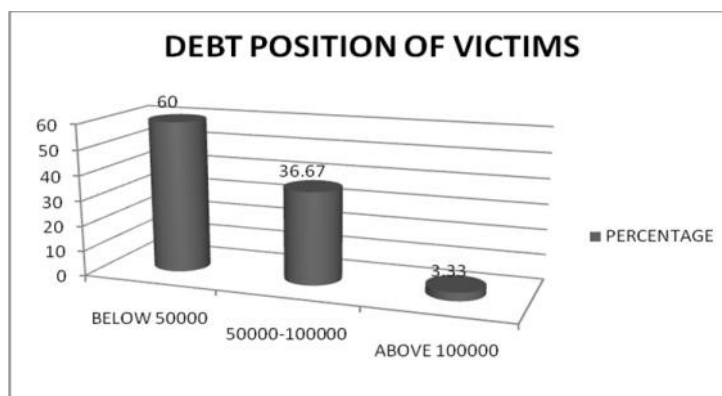
### Interpretation

The above table reveals that 93.33% of farmer families received compensation from Govt, but the remaining 6.67% are not received any compensation.

### Debt Position of the Victims

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below 50000	18	60
50000-100000	11	36.67
Above 100000	1	3.33
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



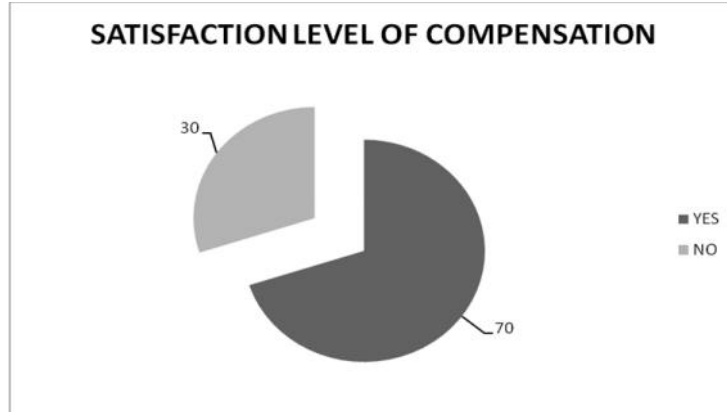
### Interpretation

Above table shows that majority of suicide farmers have (60%) only below 50000 of debt, 36.67% of farmers have 50000-100000 of debt and remaining 3.33% of the farmers have above 100000 of debt.

**Satisfaction of Compensation Received from Govt**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	21	70
No	9	30
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



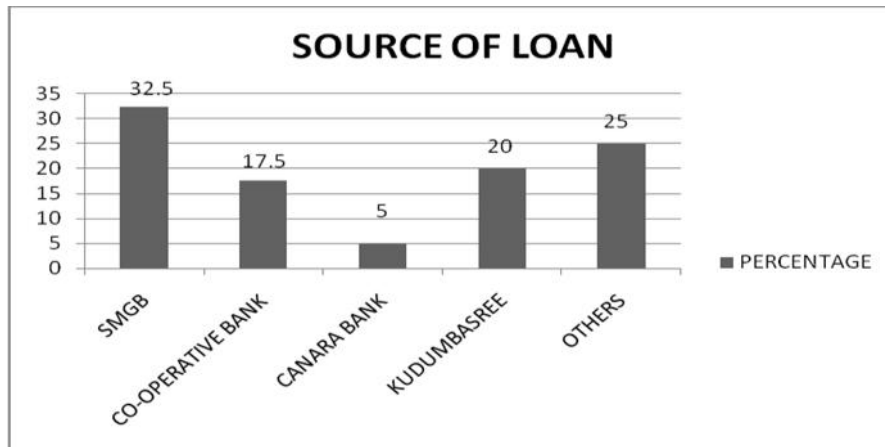
**Interpretation**

Table reveals that 70% of the families satisfied with the compensation received from Govt, remaining 30% of families are not satisfied with this compensation.

**Source of Loan**

Source	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Smgb	13	32.5
Co-operative Bank	7	17.5
Canara bank	2	5
Kudumbasree	8	20
Others	10	25
Total	40	100

Source: primary data



**Interpretation**

Above table shows that majority of the suicide farmers (32.5) borrowed fund from SMGB(South Malabar Gramin Bank),17.5% of farmers borrowed from Cooperative bank,20% are borrowed from kudumbasree unit .5% of the suicide farmers borrowed from Canara bank and the remaining 25% of farmers borrowed from other sources

**Type of Loan Available**

Loan	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Short Term	24	80
Long Term	6	20
Total	30	100

Source: primary data

**Interpretation**

Above table shows that 80% of the suicide farmers have availed short term loans, remaining 20% of farmers availed long term loans.

**Reason for Availing Loan**

Purpose	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Self	10	33.33
Agricultural	19	63.33
Others	1	3.34
Total	30	100

Source: primary data

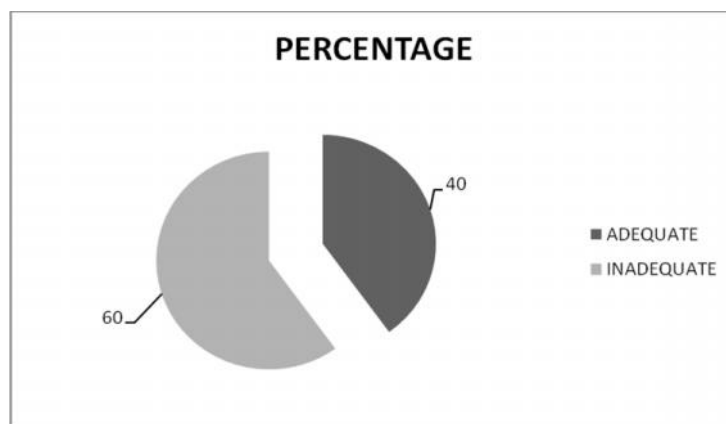
**Interpretation**

Table shows that 33.33% of the farmers borrowed fund for personal purpose, 63.33% borrowed for agricultural purpose and the remaining 3.34% borrowed for other purposes.

**Loan Sanctioned is Adequate/Inadequate**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Adequate	12	40
Inadequate	18	60
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



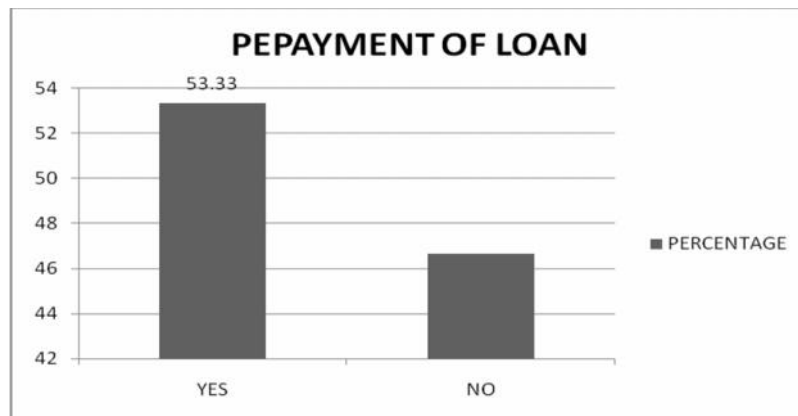
**Interpretation**

Above table shows that out of 30 sample 40% of families' opinion that loan sanctioned them is adequate for completing their work, remaining 60 % are the opinion that loan is inadequate for completing their work.

**Repayment of Loan**

Opinion	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	16	53.33
No	14	46.67
Total	30	100

Source: primary data



**Interpretation**

Table shows that 53.33% of farmers repaid the loan by instalments but the remaining 46.67% of farmers not repaid by the loan by instalment.

**Insurance Coverage**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	2	6.67
No	28	93.33
Total	30	100

Source: primary data

**Interpretation**

Table shows that 93.33% have no insurance coverage and only the remaining 6.67% have the insurance coverage.

**Conclusion**

Wayanad district also agricultural sector depict the real scenario that challenge the conventional glory of our past agriculture. Today farmers find it difficult to raise sufficient recourses to meet their requirements. Since the return from agriculture is insufficient. The cost of cultivation increased and income earned from agriculture conform them miserable solution. The farmers forced to continue the agricultural activities. Since they do not have any alternative and they are in vicious circle of indebtedness, all cases are not like this, there are social obligations to farmer like any other member of the society. These include marriages in family, socio-religious obligations and also majority of the Farmers are suicide because of their personal problems. Majority of the farmers forced to avail loan from bank and other institutions for various reasons self, agricultural etc., which make them bankrupt and force them to escape from the miserable situation by committing suicide. Alcoholism is also a major reason for this problem. But reality behind this as it is being surrounded by myth and misunderstandings. The failure of preventing farmer suicides speaks failure of previous packages declared by the state Govt or central Govt. Since many of the govt sponsored packages have not brought required rate of success and therefore Govt should act quickly to declare income generation programs, instead of declaring compensation to the families who committed suicide.

### Consequences

The government must amend laws that are governing the farmers in the agricultural sector. If the government does not make any urgent recommendations or legal provisions to offer relief to the trend of farmer suicide in the affected states, the whole country will suffer the consequences. Some of these are given below:

- National disaster as farmer suicides increase every day.
- Food productivity will be hit badly.
- Food inflation will rise at an alarming rate.
- Severe food crisis.
- The intensity of unemployment problem will be increase.
- Family problems, Social problems, Physiological problems.

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