

## Mental health leading cause of farmer suicide in India, not indebtedness from buying GMO seeds

For over a decade, farmer suicides in India has been a serious public policy concern. More recently, this has led to a shrill media outcry and much politicking. The government response to the crisis of farmer suicide has mostly been simplistic and sometimes aggravating. We study the data from the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) of India and disaggregate across demographics and leading causes of suicides.

We begin with farmer suicides and the state of Maharashtra, which had the largest number of farmer suicides for decades. We find that 76 per cent of all suicides there are concentrated within six districts, and nearly 60 per cent of the farmers who committed suicide own more than four acres of land. Indebtedness has been highlighted as the prime cause and leading public intellectuals have called for an end to the “debt deaths”. The National Sample Survey data suggests that the debt burden, measured as the debt-to-asset ratio, declines with increase in asset-holding. So poorer households have a higher debt burden. However, the suicide data reported by the state government indicates that the incidence of suicide is much higher for households with larger land holdings. Nearly 86 percent of all farmer suicides in Maharashtra are committed by those with more than two acres of land.

Most policy interventions have been limited to forgiving institutional debt, so we study the leading causes for suicides. Approximately 30 percent of all suicides in Andhra-Maharashtra are farmer suicides, while only 5 percent of all suicides are due to debt or bankruptcy. In stark contrast, poor health (mental and physical) accounted for approximately 30 percent of all suicides in these states. It is worth noting that even for the country as a whole, poor health leads to more than seven times as many suicides as compared to debt or bankruptcy. So health reform, particularly in rural areas, is likely to have far greater impact on distress and suicides than forgiving institutional loans.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [India's suicide problem](#)**