

AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS IN RURAL AREAS

Dr. H. B. Mahantesh

Associate Professor of Sociology

Government First Grade College, Kaladagi

Tq. & Dist: Bagalkote

Karnataka

hbmahantesh@gmail.com

Abstract : *In India, half of the world's labour force is in agriculture and an estimated 1.3 billion workers are engaged in agricultural production world wide. The share of the agricultural labour force in the very economically active population is under 10 per cent in the developed countries and accounts for 59 per cent of workers in the less developed regions (International Labour Conference (ILC) 2000). Compared to workers in other sectors, agricultural workers are under protected. They suffer from sever health problems. In most of the countries, including India, agricultural workers are excluded from any employment injury benefit or insurance scheme. Farmers in India are rarely covered by any schemes. Only if they contribute individually to insurance schemes, they get social security benefits. In agriculture, the most vulnerable groups are daily wage labourers, women workers, and child labourers most of them are very poor. They are the one who are exposed to occupational hazards. In India agricultural work is carried out mostly in rural environment where there is no clean-cut distinction between working and living conditions. Most agricultural work is carried out in the open air and farmers depend on weather to perform their agricultural activities. Uneven weather further aggravates health conditions of the people and influence their working conditions.*

Keywords : Agricultural Practices, Health Problems, Rural areas.

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most hazardous sectors in both the developing as well as industrialized countries. It is ranked one of the three most hazardous occupations together with mining and construction. Excessive used machinery in developed countries and pesticides and agro-chemicals in developing countries have affected the health factors of people engaged in agriculture. Exposure to pesticides and other agro-chemicals constitute major occupational hazards that may result in poisoning and death and in certain cases, work related cancer and reproductive impairments.

No doubt, the introduction to machinery and chemicals in agriculture has made a significant contribution to the increase of food production in India and in the world. But, technology in agriculture has not been accompanied by investment in the production and improvement of workers' safety and health. "Though technological change has brought a reduction in the physical drudgery of agricultural work, it has also introduced new risks hitherto unknown to the sector. Such as, an increasing

number of occupational accidents and serious injuries; a rise in incidence of deaths at work due to agricultural machinery and the destabilization of the eco-system.

The application of safety and health measures in agricultural work and agricultural workplaces is more difficult to achieve. Many agricultural works involve multiple tasks and different localities. Some of the agricultural work, which may cause negatively to the health of the people are,

- a. Most of the tasks are carried out in open area
- b. The seasonal nature of the work
- c. Variety of tasks performed by the same person
- d. Contact with animals and plants, thus exposing workers to bites, poisoning, infections, diseases, allergies and other health problems
- e. Use of chemicals and biological products.

Objectives

1. To understand agricultural factors and health problems in rural areas.
2. It aims at understanding the nature of occupation and health problems in rural areas.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Ramdurg taluk of Belagavi district. I have selected 4 villages which are having gram panchayats and primary health centers. From these 4 villages the researcher selected 40 respondents as sample for the study.

Limitations of the study

From each gram panchayat the researcher selected only one village for the study, each village covering only 10 respondents out of large population. It covers only one taluka of Belagavi district. With this background an attempt has been made to find out the health status of the rural people who are involved in agriculture. An attempt has also been made to understand use of chemicals, pesticides and effects of pesticides etc.

Labourers in agricultural sector are facing various problems. As most of them are poor and pay little attention towards their health.

Table 1 : Occupational background of the respondents

Sl. No.	Occupation	Nos.	%
1.	Agricultural labourers	18	45.00
2.	Agriculture	20	50.00
3.	Not applicable*	2	5.00
	Total	40	100.00

* N.A. = Those who are artisans, private service etc.,

The above table indicated that 95.00% respondents have engaged in agriculture either directly or indirectly.

Table 2 : Use of chemical fertilizers used by the respondents

Sl. No.	Fertilizers used	Nos.	%
1.	Organic	06	30.00
2.	Chemical	14	70.00
	Total	20	100.0

Nearly three quarters of a million chemicals and chemical compounds are in use in agriculture throughout the world and several thousand new ones appear on the scene every year (ILC, 2000). However, the use of chemicals has adverse effects on health of the people and environment. Workers work in the field is the worst sufferers of these chemicals. In this background we asked the respondents to state the type of chemical fertilizers they use in their cultivation.

Indiscriminate and excessive application of pesticides damages not only the environment and agriculture, but will also enter into the food, thereby affect the health. The main intention of the introduction of pesticides is to protect and control insects, pests and diseases in the field crops. Initially it was essential to control insects and crop diseases. Some of the pesticides are liquids, wettabale powder, imulsifiable

concentrates and dusts, etc. While application of chemical fertilizers is largely restricted to irrigated areas, chemical pesticides are used under both wet and dry land agricultural systems.

The routes of entry of pesticide in the human body are mainly through respiratory tracts, mouth and eyes. The way in which pesticides are applied has a strong bearing on the health. Workers usually carry spraying equipment on their backs. Therefore, they will be very close to the source of exposure. Changes in the wind direction during spraying may result in absorption by the respiratory tract, and leakages from joints in the equipment cause workers to come into direct skin contact with large amount of pesticide. Both men and women workers are being affected by the use of pesticides. In rural areas, it is common to find even pregnant women helping their male members in agricultural activities. These pregnant women can be exposed to more health hazards not only themselves but also foetus into womb. Pesticides use can cause mutation, coughing, vomiting, diarrhoea, back pain, headache, etc.

Safety in the use of pesticides

Workers should take precautions before they apply pesticides to their crops, because most of them work in open space. They are exposed to wind, heat, rain, cold, etc. Therefore, we asked those respondents who use pesticides to state whether they take safety measures before they apply pesticides. It is disheartening to note that more than two-thirds (65.00%) of them do not use safety measures while using pesticides.

Table 3 : Awareness of the respondents about the safe use of pesticides

Sl. No.	Awareness	Nos.	%
1.	Yes	07	35.00
2.	No	13	65.00
	Total	20	100.0

* Agricultural labourers, those who use pesticides

Impact of pesticides

Further an attempt is made to understand is there any relationship between use of pesticides and its impact on their health. 62.50% respondents stated that they fell ill

due to pesticides. However, 7.5% respondents have not replied. Remaining 30.00% respondents said that along with pesticides other factors also leading to our ill-health.

Table 4 : Impact of pesticide on respondents

Sl. No.	Opinion	Nos.	%
1.	Yes	25	62.50
2.	No	12	30.00
3.	Don't know	3	7.5
	Total	40	100.0

Whether visited hospitals

Those respondents who affected by the use pesticides are asked whether they visited hospitals for treatment or not. It is surprising to note that majority of the respondents are not visiting hospitals for the treatment.

Further it is tried to know why people are not visiting hospitals for the treatment.

Table 5 : Reasons for not visiting hospitals

Sl. No.	Reasons	Nos.	%
1.	Not necessary	6	50.00
2.	Lack of time	2	16.66
3.	Loss of wage	3	25.00
4.	It is common	1	8.33
	Total	12	100.0

The data provided in the above table indicated that majority of the respondents are not going for treatment because of their poverty. Some of them not visiting due to lack of time and feel that it is common, hence it is not necessary to visit the hospital.

Thus most of the people in rural areas, who are engaged in agriculture face health problems. They do not take any precautions while applying pesticides and chemicals. Even though they fall sick due to agricultural factors, most of them were reluctant to visit hospitals and most of them were fear of loosing their wages.

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