

Theme: Impact of agrarian crisis on mental health of farmers

The story

Mental health is one of the biggest fall outs of climate change, something I've [read about](#), but also noticed first hand while reporting on India's [climate change hotspots](#) for [IndiaSpend](#) – a data journalism wire service.

In the years ahead events like droughts and floods are likely to become frequent and intense, according to the October 2018 [report](#) by the UN body for assessing the science related to climate change – [The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#).

India's agrarian crisis, worsened by climate change, already has pushed up suicide rates among the farmers.

[Studies](#) have documented that as rising temperatures damage crops, farmer suicides rise in India. A [similar trend](#) has been found in US and Mexico as well. Long-term droughts, like the ones seen in Marathwada and Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, have been linked to the rise in mood disorders as well as intimate partner violence by some [studies](#).

It is against this backdrop that I want to investigate the mental health impact of agrarian crisis in India. I propose to do a two-part series on the subject:

1) In the first part I want to investigate if there is any rise in mental health disorders, including suicide due to drought and repeated crop failure. Scientific research, combined with data and ground reporting will be at the core of the story.

2) Another aspect that I would like to investigate is whether the women are bearing the brunt of this mental health crisis by investigating the rise (if any) in intimate partner violence.

The stories would be multimedia – using images, data and videos – along with narrative long form journalism to tell these stories. This investigation would also look at the available data on farmer suicides, and highlight the gaps.

Using qualitative interviews and story-telling I want to understand if there are mental health fallouts of long-term drought among the farming community who tend to have an emotional attachment to their lands. I want to understand if farmers are feeling a sense of bereavement as crop yields fail and if that is having an impact on their ability to form social connections, and take care of themselves and their families.

P Sainath calls India's agrarian crisis a crisis of our civilization for it has shown our apathy to the issue. I want to investigate the toll the farm crisis, worsened by climate change, is taking on the individuals.

Travel plan and duration

I propose to travel to rural Maharashtra and Telangana, the two states that have seen a large number of farmer suicides, for the series. The reports would be published in

IndiaSpend – a wire service subscribed to by Business Standard, Scroll and BloombergQuint, among others in India.

I plan to report on the subject full-time for a three-month period starting in December 2019, since I have prior commitments at IndiaSpend to wrap up before that. I am also a part of the team [NOAH](#) that developed a [tool](#) to track changes in surface water across the world that is extensively being used in India to report on farmer distress. I will use that data, as well as draw on my experience of reporting on climate change in India over the past seven months, to highlight the psychological toll of the agrarian distress.

What makes me qualified to tell this story?

I am a strong candidate for this grant because of my experience of reporting on both public health as well as climate change. My training at the Columbia University, where I took classes to understand this intersection better, has equipped me with the background information essential to pull off this reporting.

I have travelled extensively in rural and tribal areas of India and have undertaken extensive ground reporting before this. I also can speak conversational Marathi which should help the reporting process in Maharashtra.

Possible Impact

The large number of farmer suicides, apart from being a political issue, is also a public health crisis. Highlighting that the changing patterns of rainfall are also linked to the larger issue of climate change, and stressing on the need for India to be more proactive at the international level to find a solution, is an important gap in this global story that needs focus.

India continues to withhold data about farmer suicides and is yet to frame a policy on climate change. A few months after I started my reporting on India's climate change hotspots, the government [commissioned](#) a detailed study on the impact of climate change in India from researchers at IISc. In the coming year I expect several policy decisions to be taken and my reporting (should I get the grant) on this subject, I hope, would help drive this policy change.

IndiaSpend is extensively read by policy makers and my ground reporting will reach the right audiences with this publication. Considering that it is a wire service, the stories stand to reach a wider audience, as they will be republished by multiple publications.

May 22, 2019

Subject: Letter of support for Disha Shetty for Thakur Foundation Grant 2019

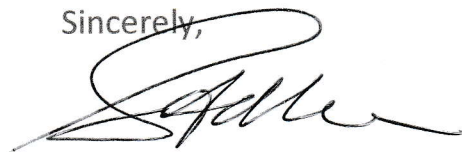
The Thakur Foundation Grant Selection Committee 2019

Disha Shetty is a reporting fellow with **IndiaSpend**, a nonprofit focused on date-driven, public-interest journalism. Our stories are distributed to mainstream-media subscribers and directly to the general public over social media.

Ms Shetty has written extensively on public health and climate change for us. For the Thakur Foundation Grant, she proposes to investigate thousands of suicides by Indian farmers with a specific focus on the role that climate change may play on public health. Should she get the grant, we are happy to publish the stories.

Please consider her proposal, and please feel free to get in touch, should you need any clarifications.

Sincerely,



Samar Halarnkar

Editor

Education

Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, New York August 2017 - May 2018

MA in Science, Environment and Medicine Journalism

Trained in long form narrative writing with special focus on covering science, environment and public health. Took courses on intersection of climate change and public health at the Mailman School of Public Health. Reported on gaps in India's public health system leading to infant deaths for MA thesis.

Asian College of Journalism

July 2012 - May 2013

Post-Graduate Diploma in Television Journalism

Trained in writing for TV, editing news shows and reporting. Took courses in Health & Environment Journalism. Wrote a 5,000 – word dissertation on Matrilineal Societies in South India.

SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce

July 2008 - May 2011

Bachelor in Mass Media

Studied different aspects of media including journalism and public relations. Freelanced for leading national newspapers and magazines during the course.

Work Experience

Reporting Fellow – IndiaSpend

October 2018 - Till date

Reporting on climate change hotspots across India as well as the intersection between climate change and public health for India's only data journalism venture.

Independent Science Journalist

May 2018 – October 2018

Published pieces on public health & science in [Vice](#), [The Wire](#) and [Scroll](#) and [News Deeply](#) among others.

Senior Health Correspondent at DNA, Mumbai

June 2016 - August 2017

Produced at least 6-7 news and feature stories per week basis at one of India's leading dailies. Reported breaking health news stories, live tweeted from events and tracked developments in health.

Assistant-Manager for Digital Content at Zee Digital, Mumbai October 2014 - June 2016

Wrote and edited feature stories for hyper-local news section of one of India's leading media houses which is also the parent company of DNA newspaper. Gave story ideas to the team of reporters as well as planned news reporting campaigns.

Desk Reporter - Times Now, Mumbai

May 2013 - September 2014

Wrote news for bulletins, produced news shows and news capsules as a part of the editorial team for India's leading English language news channel.

Consulting writer - Bizxchange and Home Trends (Times Group) June 2011 - May 2012

Wrote feature stories on start-ups and interviewed entrepreneurs at *Bizxchange*, a business website of *Times of India*. Did a short stint with architecture magazine *Home Trends* which was a joint venture between the *BBC World Wide* and *Times of India* where I interviewed architects & home owners.

Fellowships and awards

- Global Health Reporting Contest Award 2018 by ICFJ
- Best Journalism Editorial Award 2018 by Columbia Graduate School of Journalism
- SCARF Mental Health Award 2018 by SCARF-India

References

Jonathan Weiner, Maxwell M. Geffen Professor at Columbia, jw2345@columbia.edu, 212 854 4099

Marguerite Holloway, Director, Science Journalism at Columbia, myh7@columbia.edu, 646 228 7468

Samar Halarnkar, Editor, IndiaSpend, samar@indiaspend.org, +91 998 024 4194

Recently published work

India's climate change hotspots (Series)

<https://www.indiaspend.com/category/indias-climate-change-hotspots/>

India's Public-Health Failures That PM's Insurance Scheme Won't Plug: The Story Of Arti And Kailash

<https://www.indiaspend.com/indias-public-health-failures-that-pms-insurance-scheme-wont-plug-the-story-of-arti-and-kailash-18001/>

Where Doctors Won't Go, Pregnant Women Are Deserted and Aadhaar Causes Hunger

<https://thewire.in/health/where-doctors-wont-go-pregnant-women-are-deserted-and-aadhaar-causes-hunger>

Thoothukudi's Villages Are Paying a Price That No One Is Counting

<https://thewire.in/health/thoothukudis-villages-are-paying-a-price-that-no-one-is-counting>