Indian Farmers Protest and its Impact on the Mental Health of the Farmers

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Abstract

The challenges faced by Indian farmers have been a topic of conversation in the media for the last couple of decades. This is not the first time when the farmers have protested or revolted against the government policies. While these protests tend to disrupt the life of a farmer, their impact is experienced nationwide. The present study aimed at understanding the impact of the Indian Farmers' Protest against the three newly introduced Farm Bills on the mental health of the agronomists from the states of Haryana and Punjab. The objective of the study was to understand the impact on the mental and emotional wellbeing of the farmers from a psycho- socio- political lens. Holistic interviews, tapping the domains of social, financial, psychological as well as taking into account the views on sanitation, hygiene facilities were conducted with farmers across the three borders - Tikri Border, Singhu Border and Ghazipur Border. The interviews consisted of detailed demographics and were video recorded with the participants' consent. Findings revealed that processes like motivation, attribution and locus of control promoted certain elements. These very elements acted as pillars that encouraged hope, perseverance, self-efficacy, self-directedness and resilience, in the participants.

Keywords: Indian Farmers; Protest; Politics; Mental Health; Collective Bonding; Trauma

Introduction

The year 2020 has certainly been a challenging one for India. Several riots, protests and systemic changes shifted the lens with which we view mental health in the present. A socio- political change or movement brings with itself a multitude of changes that could be skewed on either side of the spectrum. While some of these might unite the community as they stand strong against the odds as a team, the rest may bring with themselves a potential of adverse consequences for both the people involved as well as the community as a whole in some way or another. This also holds for changes that are expected, hoped to be beneficial, or are considered as a win by the people [30-34]. These socio-political shifts continue to remain an iconoclast in Indian history that have either resulted in a traumatic experience or strengthened solidarity.

The 2020 - 2021 Indian Farmers' Protest is one of a kind. Farmers have revolted several times before this massive protest. The protests started in August 2020 in the state of Punjab, India further escalated to the farmers in Haryana. The outbreak took place when the parliament passed the Farm Bills in August 2020. Also known as the "anti-farm laws' 'by the agronomists, the protests took place specifically for three acts in the bill, namely: The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act and The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act. On being turned a deaf ear, thousands of farmers trudged to Delhi and laid the protest sites by blocking several borders, including the Singhu Border, Tikri Border and Ghazipur Border. The protest remains ongoing to date despite the pandemic and weather conditions.

Regarding the demands of the farmers livemint reported (Mint, 26th January,2021) "Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at several Delhi border points since 26 November last year, demanding a repeal of three farm laws - Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; the Farmers Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and farm Services Act 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. They also demanded a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for their crops.

Farmer unions in Punjab and Haryana said the recent laws enacted at the Centre will dismantle the minimum support price (MSP) system. Over time big corporate houses will dictate terms and farmers will end up getting less for their crops, they argue. Farmers fear that with the virtual disbanding of the mandi system, they will not get an assured price for their crops and the "arthiyas" -commission agents who also pitch in with loans for them - will be out of business. Their demands: The key demand is the withdrawal of the three laws which deregulate the sale of their crops. The farmer unions could also settle for a legal assurance that the MSP system will continue, ideally through an amendment to the laws.

They also wanted the government to withdraw the proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020, fearing it will lead to an end to subsidised electricity. Farmers say rules against stubble burning should also not apply to them."

Oftentimes, when revolts and outbreaks take place at a large scale involving people across the globe, such as the Indian Farmers' Protest, it leaves a scar on the entire community. On the healthy side, it acts as a catalyst and motivates people to use their voices to stand strong in the face of adversities. On the other end, it may end up leaving the community as a whole, scattered. The purpose of this study thus was to understand the impact of the protest on the mental health of Indian farmers, which has been uninterrupted since August 2020. As per our research, no study to date has been conducted to study the mental health of the protesting farmers. This will be the first study of its kind that focuses on the mental health of the farmers from a socio- psycho-political perspective.

Mental health and collective identity as processes

Social movements are primarily non-institutionalized forms of collective political activity aimed at achieving political and/or social change. Several models have been proposed to predict collective action participation and the results suggest diverse outcomes which can unfold. While the focus of most of these studies is the socio-political shift, the impact of these movements on psychology - the thoughts, emotions and behaviors of individuals participating - is ancillary. The social psychology of movement participation explores various dynamics of thoughts, feelings and actions and how these are influenced by social context associated with individual and collective experience, which makes it a process. The notion of a 'process' is primarily concerned with shared meanings, feelings, and reciprocal emotional bonds as experienced by movement actors through their interactions with one another. The factors that facilitate the process of a social movement are:

Collective identity

Collective identity has long been recognised as one of the most fundamental drivers of collective action in social movement literature. Fominaya (2010: 393) defined collective identity as "the emotional connection to a broader community, generated and created between individuals who share a sense of shared consciousness, collective agency and 'oneness' or 'we-ness.'" While a complete alignment of ideologies, beliefs, interests, or purpose is not required for collective identity, it is anchored in shared experiences (such as repression) and perceptions of shared interests (such as opposition to a government law) among those who make up a collectivity. It also requires a network of active relationships that distinguishes the collective from other groups, which creates barriers to entry to outsiders and which creates a boundary that allows it to be recognized by out-groups as distinct [11-16].

A central characteristic component of building collective identity is social capital. Social capital refers to "the norms and networks that create the necessary trust for people to cooperate to solve collective action problems" [4-6]. Through access to resources such as information, knowledge, people, money, and power, as well as psychological support that promotes trust and reciprocity, the relationships embedded in these social networks and an individual's position within them provide people with a larger abundance of resources and power than they would usually hold. Social capital is developed over time through close physical encounters amongst activists and gives direct access to community resources that can be converted or used to enable and maintain collective action and community protest. A protest may also tap into broader community networks that are not actively involved in the demonstration but are critical in providing access to resources.

Efficacy

Efficacy refers to the individual's expectation that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through protest [7-10]. The more effective a person believes protesting is, the more likely he or she is to participate. According to Mummendey and colleagues (1999), protest participation is predicted by collective efficacy rather than personal efficacy. Efficacious and inefficacious people, on the other hand, pursue distinct paths to social change: while normative forms of protest, such as petitioning and demonstrations, tend to draw highly effective people, non-normative modes of protest tend to draw less efficacious people.

Social identity

The social identity theory developed by Henry Tajfel's focuses on three important components, which are social categorization, social identification and social comparison. The theory is deeply rooted in the multicultural perspective to gain insight into the processes of developing and maintaining social identities and groups. Social identity perspectives indicate how the above mentioned three elements play a crucial role in cultivating a sense of belongingness, solidarity that motivates the community to take a movement forward.

Collective identity, efficacy and social identity theory lay the foundation on the socio-political movements in turn affirming that mental health is political.

The psycho-socio-political impact: collective trauma or bonding?

Political movements like the Indian Farmers Protest, are collectivistic, which means that the community as a whole is undergoing and surviving the impact and consequences of this movement. Such movements either instil a sense of bonding or may result in being traumatic at a communal level.

Collective trauma

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as "an emotional response employed to deal with an extremely negative event." Traumatic experiences thuscan be defined as one or multiple events that involve direct or indirect exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to emotional and physical integrity. A collective trauma experience - a psychological response, which impacts our thoughts, emotions and behaviours, an experience that is shared by a group of people or a community as a whole. In their observations, Pennebaker and Harber (1993) highlight that going through a collective traumatic experience can cause severe emotional and psychological distress for individuals. Additionally, such experiences may lead to mental rumination, social withdrawal and emotional disturbances.

Nation-wide protests such as the Indian Farmers Protest can cause mayhem leading to an existential crisis. Protests, riots and revolutions have long been a part of Indian history yet their impact on mental health remains largely unknown, especially when it comes to the primary sector of the Indian economy.

Collective bonding

Collective bonding is relational. It is a collective bond when two or more people come together to live a shared experience. During challenging times, like the Indian Farmers Protest, wherein thousands of farmers are undergoing challenges not as an individual but a group as a whole. Hence, as important as it becomes to study the individual, studying the individual as a part of a group is a crucial factor in determining the impact of such upheavals. Collective bonding then focuses on how individuals going through a similar experience become a pillar of strength and support for each other. Some theories that work around this concept of collective bonding are:

Social cohesion

It is one of the integral aspects of collective bonding. Le Bon conducted extensive work on collective behaviour and the theory of social cohesion was later developed by Emile Durkheim in 1897. Social cohesion taps four domains, namely social relations, task relations, perceived unity and emotions. The theory focuses on reducing socio-economic disparities and skewness, in turn enabling harmony through shared experiences and support. Durkheim focuses on two important aspects of the social cohesion theory - the absence of latent social conflict (any conflict based on e.g. wealth, ethnicity, race, and gender) and the presence of strong social bonds (e.g. civic society, responsive democracy, and impartial law enforcement) [1-3].

Community resilience

It is defined as positive collective functioning after experiencing a mass stressor, such as a natural or human-made disaster [22]. Like individual resilience, community resilience has been described as a process, not a trait or an end product [23-26]. However, similar to individual resilience, certain emotional orientations, characteristics and resources appear to develop community resilience, such as emotional orientations of collective senses of hope, agency, altruism, trust, and patterns of interdependence; community characteristics, for instance in their examination of community resilience in Lebanon following the 2006 war with Israel, researchers concluded that a sense of collective identity and community cohesion, as well as hardiness borne of prior experience with wars, contributed to community resilience (231); resources within communities, particularly social capital and physical and organizational infrastructure and communal proactive coping strategies such as developing new groups and networks to research and manage mental health problems, forging common goals, gathering shared resources, and building new organisations and networks.

Bottom-up impact and collective experiences

Ekman defines "Emotions as a process, a particular kind of automatic appraisal influenced by our evolutionary and personal past, in which sense that something important to our welfare is occurring, and a set of physiological changes and emotional behaviors begins to

deal with the situation". In essence, emotions help us deal with matters of what is important to us and set us up to respond to our environment.

Psychological aspects, such as values, motivations and emotions, are important triggers of political activism. Psychological forces also mediate the effects of other determining people's political participation. Social and political movements play a prominent role in the mobilization of these emotions, values and opinions. Recently, research on social movements and collective action started to focus on the role played by emotions of anger or frustration for involvement in political action [17-21] and framing of emotions and feelings in the recruitment of mobilizing actors and their communication about political problems [27-29]. Emotion mobilizes and immobilizes a social movement while the movement itself impacts people's emotions - whichever way, the impact is huge!

Large-scale disasters often induce a chain of psychological phenomena that have a direct impact on a person's physiological condition, psychological state, functional capacity, interpersonal relationships, communal involvement and spiritual beliefs. Psychological knowledge about the emotional experience, process and impact of responding to a national-scale traumatic event such as the devastating earthquakes, floods, fires, viral outbreaks and terrorist attacks over the globe is often confusing if not overwhelming. Chang (2017) provided a Framework for Understanding the Process of Recovery from Collective Trauma. When extreme external stimuli trigger the collection of sensory inputs and activate neuropsychological information processing and organization, vital mental processes can kick start the protective physiological and emotional reactions. Correspondingly, when a person reaches the Coping Skills phase, the recurring healing activities and relational support systems can play a significant role at this stage. When the sense of one's post-trauma identity can be affirmed and reconnected, for some survivors the quest for an explanation of life events or disrupted values about world orders may eventually surface, sometimes even years afterwards. The natural quest of making existential meaning out of the seemingly impossible situation of rebuilding one's life is a continuous effort of regaining and/or redefining the sense of psychological safety and predictability.

Stürmer and Simon (2009) examined the role of feelings of group-based anger as an additional path. Study 1, a field study in the context of students' protest in Germany and provided evidence for a unique effect of anger. A laboratory experiment examined the desire to release aggressive tension as a psychological process underlying this effect. As hypothesized, analyses confirmed that anger affected participants' willingness to protest only to the extent that this behaviour provided the opportunity of cathartic reduction in aggressive tensions. The dual-pathway model of collective action proposes two motivational pathways to collective protest, one is based on cost-benefit calculations and another is based on collective identification.

A collective experience thus can lead to several emotional fluctuations. This may include stress reactions, hatred, hostility, loathing, solidarity, loyalty, suspicion, trust, respect (affective); anger, grief, sorrow, loss, shame (reactive); compassion, sympathy, cynicism, depression, defiance, enthusiasm, pride, joy, hope coupled with curiosity and willingness to stand strong in the face of adversities.

The objective of the present study

The present research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of collective action participation/protest/socio-political movement participation on the mental health of the Farmers protesting across three borders of Delhi (Ghazipur, Singhu and Tikri) against the Farm Bills passed by the Parliament in August 2020. The objective of this research is to unearth and bring together the various aspects of these farmers' protests as a collective action- ranging from facilitating such mass action to the psycho-social-political impact of the same. Our research also aims to provide insightful evidence on the Indian socio-cultural and political context and its impact on Farmers (their mental health and well-being) as a significant working population, along with understanding the tenets of social movement participation in the Indian context.

Methodology

Population

The population of the study consisted of Indian farmers from the regions of Punjab and Haryana. Participants of the present study were farmers protesting at the three borders of Delhi NCR - Ghazipur, Tikri and Singhu Border. According to estimates by the Haryana Police (The Indian Express, March 2021), around 40,000 farmers were protesting at the Tikri and Singhu borders. A total of 25 ($n = 25$) were interviewed for the purpose of our study. Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 85 years. 9 (36%) participants were females and 16 (64%) were male, hailing from the states of Uttrakhand, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. 80% of the participants were at the border sites since November-December, 2020. Their professional background ranged from Farmers, Doctor, Teachers and Homemakers.

Sampling

Lakhs of Indian farmers took part in the protests. The biggest demonstrations were held at Tikri border, Singhu border and Ghaziabad border surrounding Delhi. Demonstrations also took place in other states of India such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha. The sample used for the study was taken from Tikri, Singhu and Ghazipur border. The sample size is 25 ($n = 25$). The sampling procedure employed for the study was random sampling. Participants were asked for their due consent and voluntary participation, post which the interviews were conducted (recorded either in video or written form).

Research design

The present research is a Qualitative study that implies Thematic Analysis as a method to examine the impact of the Indian Farmers Protest on the mental and emotional health of the participants from a psycho-socio-political lens. The qualitative research approach helps explore the 'lived experiences' of the research participants (the Indian Farmers) and understand the impact of collective participation on their well-being through their first-hand accounts.

Translation

The interviews were taken in Hindi, English or Punjabi depending on the participant's preference. The interviews in Hindi and Punjabi were later translated into English.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview schedule was followed for conducting the interviews. The questions are given in the appendix section of the paper.

Data analysis procedure

The farmers at the protest site were approached and were interviewed, after taking due consent. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to streamline the broader aspects to be covered (political concerns, financial concerns, psychological concerns, hygiene and sanitation), however through detailed one-to-one narratives. The interviews were conducted in majorly three languages (English, Hindi and Punjabi), depending upon the participants' lingual interest. Interviews were taped with due consent from the participant. Following the interview conduction, the notes were transcribed into full written accounts.

Following the guidelines of Thematic analysis, the interview data were analysed by: (a)reading the notes for each participant to identify specific themes and reevaluating them as new themes were raised, (b) organizing themes conceptually to facilitate the emergence

of broader themes,(c) collating the thematic points raised across participants, and (d) identifying the overarching themes that provided more general insights into the farmers' overall experience. This analysis was conducted and reviewed by each author separately to look for any discrepancies in the interpretation and build a consistent narrative.

Results

The present study was conducted to explore the impact on the mental health of protestors, protesting against new farm laws at the borders of Delhi and elsewhere in India. A total of 25 participants were interviewed from all the three protest sites ($n = 25$). The study was initiated with the assumption that the protests would have extreme effects on the mental health of people protesting. Especially while interviews were initiated the participants had already been protesting for an average of 4 months. The data collected showed that this was not the case and there were strong outcomes like resilience and hope. Despite stressors like a financial burden and inconveniences like being on the road, the participants displayed resilience, which is hinging on self-efficacy, cohesion and self-directed purpose. A sense of camaraderie was perpetuated and observed in their use of common terminologies, such as describing the three laws as a black law (Kala kanoon). Confidence was shown by the farmers in their conviction that the process of repealing these farm laws will begin through their collective action. The protestors are resolute, to stay on for months or as long as it takes and their groundwork shows their future-oriented mindset.

The 7 building blocks of resilience

Due to the collective action in progress, individuals built a human system and structure. These systems and structures have different characteristics and attributes. In our research, we saw that the system created at the protest enhanced certain attributes that resulted in resilience. In figure 1 we can see that resilience is a structure that is an outcome of the combination of certain building blocks. The building blocks of resilience are:-
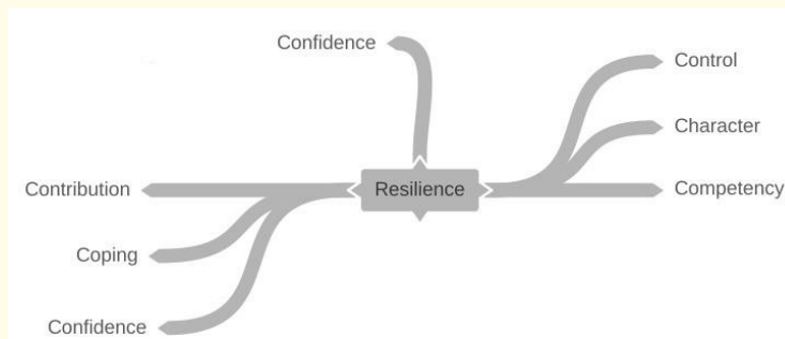

Figure 1: Building blocks of resilience.

Competency

Competency is shown by the farmers as they can effectively deal with the situations they have to face as a result of protesting. They have managed their financial needs, developed working relationships with people they met in the protests and developed temporary houses, toilets for their needs.

Confidence

Confidence is shown by the farmers in their belief that their protest will be successful and the government will have to repeal the laws.

Character

The character of the farmers is seen in them giving credence to fighting for their rights and the rights of fellow farmers. They are standing up to protect their values and are ready to make required sacrifices.

Contribution

A strong sense of purpose was present among the farmers, as there were ample opportunities for a meaningful contribution towards the protest and the wellbeing of members. They believed that the protests will benefit their community

Coping

The farmers have successfully coped with the challenges of protesting at borders. They have managed their shelter, financial, food and security needs. They also managed to cope while maintaining participation remains constant by planning rotational movement to and from the protest site.

Control

The farmers believed in their ability to control and displayed it as well. They mobilized into action as they concluded that the laws are harmful to their community and trusted their control over the outcomes that the government will have to back down. They also utilized their internal locus of control to focus on the fact that they have tried to make this protest as peaceful as possible by controlling and diverting their emotional expression.

Inclusion

Diversity based on geographical areas of living, religion and caste were present but the unified disapproval of the government and the laws brought them together. There was inclusion through responsibility-taking and opportunities to display their own skill sets through multiple roles. For example, Some work at langers (community kitchens), others work for the welfare and functioning of the libraries set up there, some work to maintain hygiene and sanitation. Some provide leadership and guidance roles by organising meetings and others peer support.

As their voices were disregarded by the government, the protest gave them the freedom for open communication and a platform to express their dissatisfaction with the new laws. There was open communication. Participation in common programs also gave them a validation of membership.

Along with unity, the characteristics of the group was the foundation. Proximity, regular interaction, the common goal of repealing the laws, the protestors interdependence on each other and their huge numbers are their greatest strength.

The 3 processes at play

Individual thought accumulates to become a collective thought. Cognitive processes - the locus of control, attribution and motivation, and their patterns are at play here which can be seen in figure 2. Participant's common behaviour, thought, language etc revealed the influ-

ence of these processes on the group. The interplay of motivation, locus of control and attribution, not only enhances the collective system but strengthens the individual's self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-directedness (Figure 3).
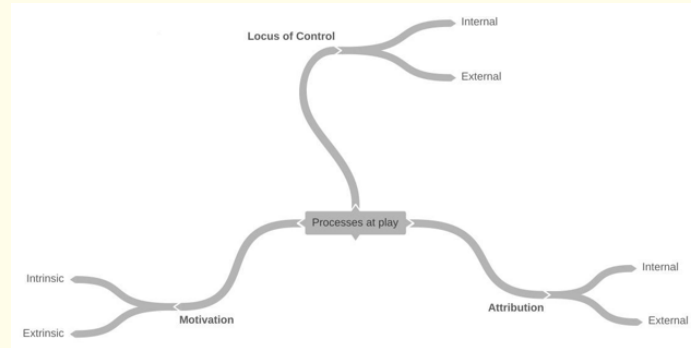

Figure 2: Cognitive processes at play.

Figure 3: The interplay of cognitive processes enhanced collective systems and individual agency.

Attribution

External attribution

The Red Fort incident where on India's Republic day a group of farmers breached the security at the red fort and "seized" the national monument. This incident was attributed to the government's tactics by the interviewed farmers. "There is a sense of disappointment, fear because of the government tactics at the Red Fort." The law was seen as negative and harmful to the farming community. This was attrib-

uted to the government acting in inhumane and dictatorial ways. "This is a fraudulent law" One of them was that the government's law and their violent response to the protests brought the people together. "The government has done a huge favour in uniting us" Internal Attribution. The protests were attributed to (by the farmers) as the fight for their rights. The unity among the different groups of farmers was attributed to the farmer's shared moral, and civil cause. "The protest has resulted in overcoming a lot of discrimination by/of people and communities (based on caste, religion, region, economic superiority, roles). Due to the intermingling and interdependence, these barriers were broken down. We are happy about that."

Motivation

Extrinsic motivation

The major extrinsic motivation which is also the basis of the protest was the abolition of the controversial laws. This was repeatedly mentioned by the farmers "the government will have to take back these kaale kanoons sooner or later, there is no other way because we are not bowing out" Intrinsic motivation. Farmers' motivation seems to be strongly sourced from intrinsics as well. The intrinsic factors were as follows.

Meaning and purpose

One source of the motivation was identification with freedom fighters of India and resonating with their fight against oppression and their rightful claims. "The protest has become the kind of community Bhagat Singh envisioned; community living: do what you can for the community, and take what you need; the protest has resulted in overcoming a lot of discrimination by/of people and communities (based on religion, caste, state etc.) everyone eats together, and we are happy here because of this."

The rights of farmers was another source of intrinsic motivation. The demand for recognition of their rights motivated them.

"'Hail farmer's unity'; we all are one, farmers, labours - are equal"

The farmers also drew inspiration from their religious beliefs and said God is on their side. Their faith acted as a motivator. "firmly believe the government will have to repeal them (the laws); this will happen because we have god's blessing;"

Challenge

The sense of purpose and meaning of life got fuelled further and the motivation further soared as the government challenged the farmer's collective action through retaliation. The only way to claim what they believe to be their rights is through competing with the government using persistence as a way to compete with the government to see who gives in to the demands first.

"If we get shot so be it, if we get beaten by sticks we will handle it. What will happen? We all have to dieoneday" "We aren't afraid of any force; we remember the learnings of our leaders, about the inevitably of death: we aren't afraid to die supporting this cause." "We will live our head held high; want to live a life with dignity" "We don't want to live a life filled with fear, there is no choice but to face our fears".

Cohesiveness/Relatedness

One potential reason why the farmers did not experience large scale trauma as the researchers expected them to be was the cohesiveness among them. Multiple features of cohesive groups were found among the farmers. The strongest one is the common goal of repealing the farm laws in which they firmly believed.

Farmers had taken up multiple roles, engaged in and completed work collaboratively and contributed to the protest in different ways. Cooperation among farmers belonging to different areas, communities and religions resulted in the presence of social support and acted as a motivator. This unity was seen as a means to make the government take back the laws, they feel that the government has done a huge favour in uniting them.

"Till now we were divided, no one knew anyone else... I didn't know this gentleman. We have a brotherhood. Our brotherhood has become a brotherhood of all of India" "We are one(hum ekhai)" "This is a strength the government has given us; firmly believe that this sanghathan (union) is the only way to defeat the government - this will be our victory."

Leadership and transparency between these leaders ensured cohesion among the smaller assembly within the group.

Control/Autonomy

The farmers had autonomy and were present at the protest sites through their own will and could leave if they wished to. They mentioned that they are all voluntarily participating in the attainment of justice.

The characteristics of the group, gave an avenue for meaning-making, relatedness and build character and strengthen belief in one's capacity to bring about purposeful change

Locus of control

In his 1985 book, Psychology and Life Philip Zimbardo explained locus of control as, "A locus of control orientation is a belief about whether the outcomes of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation),"

Internal locus of control

Despite the central government having repeatedly said that the new laws will benefit the farmers, the farmers' opinion that these laws will harm them did not change. The farmers have a strong sense that they will decide their destiny and successfully force the government to repeal the laws. This shows a high level of self-efficacy among the farmers. The farmers have taken the responsibility to uphold their rights in their own hands by protesting.

Though they've taken up a very big challenge of overturning the farm laws, they remain confident that they will be able to achieve this goal. The farmers' commitment towards the cause and hard work to make the life of fellow protestors easier is a sign of an internal locus of control.

Trust in one's control over one's character, contribution and environment also gave rise to confidence and self-directedness.

External locus of control

The farmers attribute the government to the protests. They are of the view that the protests were caused because of the new laws brought by the government. They feel if the laws are implemented they would be left helpless.

The next section discussed the results found in this area.

Discussion

The research shows resilience as an outcome of the interaction between the variables present in the scenario. Even though the quality and quantity of the stress in this scenario was extreme and chronic, certain variables acted as protection to shield the individuals who are part of this collective action.

Common grievances (reforms impacting earnings) brought the agricultural workforce together into a group. However, there is within-group heterogeneity and fractionalization of the group is based on caste, religion, language, economic inequality, role etc. Propinquity and common grievances could mobilize and initiate engagement, but cannot expunge the possibilities of conflict inherent in such groups. It is the structured purposive actions and behaviours of this group that has contributed to making the group cohesive despite all of this. The Group's habit of a division of work, collaborative work, open communication and social persuasion, built an environment of support, inclusion, autonomy, cooperation and coordination. There was a preponderance of a certain narrative due to the rituals and ceremonies which in turn unified member identity and aligned the goal. The support structures also included tangible infrastructures and logistics, and a plan of rotational participation, preserving the original enthusiasm and sense of safety of the collective. They are essential for the performance quality of the collective action, as chronic stress is being experienced in the backdrop of a global pandemic, away from their familiar safe space.

Identity, goal, as well as the hope of lasting inclusion, has steered their contributions towards larger group benefit, at the cost of personal sacrifices. This protest has also given its members opportunities for meaningful contribution, a sense of purpose as well as vicarious experiences to enhance their beliefs of self-efficacy. The narratives helped members identify with freedom fighters, their struggle and confidence to challenge authority. They also act as representatives to fight for the rights of the common man/middle class/citizen of the democratic country. The peaceful approach adds to the legitimacy of the collective action, and members seem to identify with the greater purpose of rights, freedom, fairness and justice.

The need for relatedness encouraged participation and built competencies, which further established autonomy. Motivation evolved from being activated by extrinsic factors, to self- directed action and persistence due to intrinsic factors. The psychological function of Religion to impart hope also played an important role in sustaining their consistent efforts, while the future of the duration and result of the collective action seemed uncertain.

There is disappointment and anticipatory fear, due to the one-sided regulatory reforms and retaliatory actions of the government. The protestors attribute this to the partisan view of the government in favour of private distributors and disregarding the adverse impact on the agricultural workers. Protesters also recognize that the government has the power to enforce or scrap these bills. However, their confidence in their collective strength to necessitate the repealing of this law, moves the locus of control, inwardly. They attribute to characteristics like self-efficacy, cohesion and purpose, which has made the protest smooth, inclusive and without any loss or damage to the general public.

Despite all the risk factors of trauma, a divergent pool of people, uncertainty and opposition from the authorities, resilience seems to be the outcome of the protective presence for the members participating in the protest.

Limitations

The number of people who took part in the protest was in lakhs. The sample size of the study was compact in comparison to this volume of protestors. This small size of participants was caused mainly due to the second Covid-19 outbreak India faced in Feb-May. Thus, the study lacks generalizability.

The interviews were taken at the Tikri border, Singhu border and Ghaziabad border. Though the biggest demonstrations were held in these areas, demonstrations also took place in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha among other states. These protests were not included in the study. Thus, the study is not pan-India.

The Indian media reported cases of suicides and mental health issues at the protest sites. While the impact of suicides on other protestors was recorded. The sample did not include people who themselves suffered from mental health issues due to the protests.

Scope and Application of the Present Study

The study can be used to explain what characteristics of large scale groups help protect individuals of that group from trauma and/or other mental health issues. Secondly, it can be used to explain features that make a collective mass movement gain strength and support from the general public and which help a movement to gain not only a voice but stability as well. Personality characteristics that individuals brought to the group that helped the group become more inclusive, open-minded, tolerant and resilient are explained. Additionally, the study can also be insightful into features of movements that lead to social reform. The findings can be used to examine what helps a group and its members regulate and constructively express one's emotional tensions. Insights that protect members of a group from facing trauma in extremely stressful situations are also present in the study.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify and investigate the impact on the mental health of protesting farmers participating in the Indian farm protests that started in August 2020. The researchers found a presence of resilience in the protesting groups. Characteristics such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, a common goal, mutual support and community well being were found in the group. The presence of these characteristics led to resilience being formed in the protesting farmers.

Future Scope of the Research

Further studies can be conducted investigating factors that lead to trauma in groups leading collective movements and factors which protect the group from trauma and other mental health issues. Comparative research on how protests that are peaceful/largely peaceful differ from violent protests. Studying the impact of the nature of protest on the group, motivations of the group members, resilience levels, nature of protest as a mediating factor in the influence of members on each other within a group etc. Leadership styles that lead to social movements, characteristics of resilience, hope, inclusivity etc and leadership styles that fail to do so can also be investigated.

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