



FARMERS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

Stress is a multifaceted experience that differs significantly among individuals. It can be provoked by more than just negative circumstances and doesn't always fade during positive ones. Essentially, stress occurs when the body's natural balance is disrupted, leading to a physical and psychological response. Although stress is a natural aspect of life, prolonged excessive stress can cause harmful effects on the body over time.

In addition to affecting our physical health, stress can also impact our mental well-being. Managing stress is key to living a healthy and happy life, and individuals can learn to do so by practicing relaxation techniques and embracing enjoyable activities. While it is not always possible to prevent stress altogether, reducing stress and simplifying our lives can go a long way in promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Major stress faced by the farmers

- 1) Finance
- 2) Time pressure
- 3) Policy and procedure
- 4) Geographical isolation
- 5) Unpredictable factors
- 6) Community issues

Stress leads to farmer's suicide

Farmers are highly susceptible to stress, which can be a major contributing factor to suicide. Long-term exposure to predisposing factors can create chronic stress and make them more susceptible to physical and psychological risks, such as depression. Additionally, farmers who lack protective factors and are exposed to unexpected precipitating factors are at an increased risk of contemplating or committing suicide.

Factors contributing to farmer stress

1. Predisposition to risk factors

These factors are underlying conditions or circumstances that heighten the risk of suicide among farmers. These factors can cause prolonged psychological stress, making farmers more vulnerable to suicidal behavior. Among the key predisposing factors are genetic and biological influences, social and demographic characteristics, family dynamics, and early life experiences. Socio-economic challenges, mental health disorders such as depression and mood disorders, substance abuse, and psychological traits like impulsivity, aggressiveness, and a loss of control also contribute to the risk.

Additional contributing factors include a history of suicide attempts, exposure to multiple stressful events, extended working hours, conflicts between work and family responsibilities, limited access to healthcare, social isolation, and a lack of social support. External pressures, such as regulatory and industry changes beyond the farmer's control, further exacerbate the risk. Furthermore, long periods of climate variability, including heat stress and drought, can significantly increase the likelihood of suicide among farmers.

2. Precipitating factors

These factors are stressful situations that can provoke a suicidal crisis in individuals who are already vulnerable. These events may trigger the onset of a disorder, illness, accident, or a behavioral response. For farmers, several precipitating factors may lead to suicidal thoughts or actions, including sudden crop failures, excessive job demands, family relationship breakdowns, financial difficulties, prolonged illness or pain, business or political failures, feelings of hopelessness, loss of social standing, unmet market expectations, and unexpected disasters or climatic changes. These overwhelming factors can intensify existing psychological and social stressors, thereby increasing the risk of suicide among farmers.

3. Protective factors to prevent farmers stress

These are elements that lower the likelihood of a negative outcome, even when significant risks are present. For farmer suicides, several protective factors include:

- ✓ Family and social support
- ✓ Social resources

- ✓ Religious beliefs
- ✓ Peer support
- ✓ Positive Personality traits
- ✓ Effective Coping skills and
- ✓ A strong sense of belonging

Strategies for extension services to prevent farmer suicides

In countries like the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, extension services are essential in assisting producers with stress management. These services offer a range of support to alleviate farm-related stress, including:

- Providing information and organizing campaigns focused on stress management in farming
- Offering suicide prevention hotlines for immediate assistance
- Facilitating agricultural mediation services to resolve conflicts and reduce stress
- Conducting Skills development programs focused on crisis, hazard, and stress management, as well as suicide prevention
- Create a one stop system focused on managing farmers' health needs
- Establishing society-driven suicide risk reduction initiatives

Education and awareness campaigns on farm stress management

This initiative aims to inform farmers about the causes and signs of farm-related stress, as well as effective strategies for coping with it. It also connects farmers with local, state, and national resources for distress and suicide prevention. Furthermore, extension services run awareness campaigns to educate farmers on managing stress and preventing suicide.

Through these efforts, the service aims to empower farmers to recognize and manage stress effectively, reduce the risk of suicide, and promote overall well-being in the farming community.

Suicide prevention hotline

Through this service, farmers have the opportunity to discuss their farm-related problems that induce stress and receive support via telephone or one-to-one counseling. The service offers stress counseling, advice on stress-related queries via telephone, assistance in managing legal issues related to farming, and help in coping with stress during crisis situations. By providing farmers with a secure and confidential area to share their problems and access professional support, the service aims to help farmers manage stress more effectively, reduce the risk of suicide, and promote well-being in the farming community.

Mediation services in agriculture

The extension agency provides voluntary mediation to help resolve farm-related conflicts without resorting to legal proceedings. This service is essential in alleviating the stress that often accompanies disputes among farmers. By providing a neutral and supportive environment for farmers to discuss their concerns and find mutually agreeable solutions, the service helps to prevent conflicts from escalating and potentially leading to further stress or harm. Through this service, the extension agency contributes to promoting a more peaceful and supportive farming community, where disputes are resolved amicably and stress is minimized.

Skills development in crisis, hazard, and stress management, and suicide prevention

In the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, extension services deliver various capacity-building initiatives to equip stakeholders with the tools to manage stress and prevent suicides. These initiatives encompass both academic and ongoing education programs, designed to arm farmers, their families, and the broader farming community with the essential knowledge, skills, and resources for effective stress management and suicide prevention.

By offering a range of training and education opportunities, extension services are helping to build a more resilient and supportive farming community that is better equipped to cope with the challenges and pressures of farming life.

One stop system for farmers' health management

The specialized agencies shaped for farmers' health management offer a comprehensive range of services, including counseling, education on stress and suicide prevention, capacity building, workshops, and research on farmers' health and safety. These agencies also offer certificate programs on farmer health to train manpower for ground-level interventions. Through this system, farmers have access to a comprehensive range of services designed to promote their physical and psychological health and wellness.

By providing specialized support and training to farmers and other members of the farming community, these agencies are contributing to the enhancement of a more

robust and supportive farming sector that is more capable to cope with the challenges of modern agriculture.

Community-centered suicide prevention programs

These programs are designed to empower communities to create and implement interventions that reduce farm-related stress and prevent suicidal behaviors, ultimately enhancing the health of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. They offer financial assistance in the form of allowances, contributions, and financial aid to help establish infrastructure and facilities that foster skills in stress reduction and suicide intervention within the community. Additionally, they provide peer assistance and counseling support.

Conclusion

Farmers face various stressors such as financial constraints, time pressure, policy and procedure changes, geographical isolation, unpredictable factors like climate change, and community issues. These stressors can have a significant impact on farmers' psychological and physical well-being, resulting in depression and suicidal tendencies. Therefore, policymakers, agricultural scientists, and experts must work together to create a supportive environment and provide strategies to help farmers overcome these stressors. This can include financial and mental health support, access to resources and information, and community-based initiatives to promote well-being and prevent suicides.

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