

Summary - Needs Assessment of In- Person Counselling For the Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line

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Background

Hazards Common to Farming

- Livestock management; machinery operation; handling dangerous chemicals.
- Farming documented internationally as most dangerous occupation – injuries and fatalities.
- Farming ranks as third most hazardous occupation in Canada – fatal injury rate.
- Canadian Census of Agriculture (2006);
- 13, 801 farm reported farm-related injuries.

Overlooked Hazard - STRESS

- Multiple causes; most frequently linked to unstable and adversative economic conditions associated with agriculture.
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- Unpredictable weather.
- Pests.
- Increasing market prices; fluctuating interest rates.
- Long work hours; isolation.
- Multiple work roles on and off farm, etc.

Agriculture + Economic Adversity = Stress

Steady international decline in number of family owned farms.

In Canada – steady decline since 1941; drastic drop of 10.7% between 1996-2001 (Statistics Canada: The Daily, 2007).

Of the ten provinces, MB ranked third with a significant 9.6% drop in farm numbers (Statistics Canada: The Daily, 2007).

Agriculture + Economic Adversity = Stress

- Increase in failure to pay farm debts.
- Rise in farm failures and bankruptcy.
- In 2006, 216 Canadian farmers file for bankruptcy; 36 from MB.

Outlook for Many Farmers

- Increased feelings of pessimism.
- Perceived loss of control over their lives.
- Isolation.
- Perception that the general public have no understanding or empathy for the farmer.

Research

- *CASA* (2005) and other stress related
- Suicide
- Farm safety

Research

There is a limited amount of literature that documents the extent and experience of mental and emotional issues related to farm stress, and their consequent physical effects, in the Canadian farming population. Moreover, the data that exists related to farm-related stress is insufficient in terms of documenting the unique nature and degree of the stress. Much of the data is anecdotal however there is some evidence that proposes that many farm family members are in fact experiencing mental and emotional problems related to stress (CASA, 2005, Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry 1993, Thurston, Blundell-Gosselin, & Rose, 2003).

Mental, Emotional, Behavioural Symptoms of Stress

Depression, inability to concentrate, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, loss of temper, emotional outbursts, inability to relax, mental confusion, sleep disturbances, substance abuse, reduced productivity, marital breakdown and other relationship problems, family violence and frequent arguments with family and friends (Walker, J.L. & Walker, 1988).

Other Stress Symptoms

- Physical manifestations - cardiovascular problems, digestive problems, chronic fatigue, headaches and backaches.
- Children and adolescents concerned and preoccupied about their parents torment (Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 1993).

Available Services - MB

- Many farmers are reluctant to seek help for mental, emotional, and behavioural health issues.
- Many farmers utilize effective personal coping strategies and social support networks.
- Telephone stress line.
- CMHA offers free counselling.
- Other organizations ie. Mood Disorders Association; Schizophrenia Society; self help groups.

MB study – Ryan-Nicholls et al., 2003

- Conducted with mental health care and allied service providers revealed that providers themselves recognize that there is a deficit in available, appropriate, and acceptable mental health services for rural citizens (Ryan-Nicholls, Racher, & Robinson, 2003).
- The study suggested that response times for referrals to mental health services, wait-times for clients, and length of time between appointments were on the rise in conjunction with mental health workers increasing case loads (Ryan-Nicholls et al., 2003).

Canadian Programs For Farmers

- Ontario pilot project (AgResolve) – combination existing farm crisis help line with in-person counselling.
- AgResolve has only modest success.
- Why?

Manitoba

Currently, Manitoba does not have a specialized in-person counselling service created specifically for the unique needs of the farming population.

Needs Assessment Objectives

- To examine existing MFRSL farm related records to determine if callers to the stress line identify a need for MFRSL to create an in-person counselling program for Manitoba farmers and their families.
- To examine the same records for the three most dominant themes found in existing farm stress related literature with a view to creating an in-person counselling program that would best meet the specific needs of Manitoba farmers.

Three Themes

- Identification of the physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural health symptoms that result from farm related stress.
- The coping mechanisms used by farmers and their family members.
- The availability, appropriateness, and acceptability of mental health services; and the perceived barriers to those services, both internal and external to the farmers.

PRECEED-PROCEED Framework

- The planning model provides a comprehensive framework for assessing health issues and quality of life from an ecological perspective. Further, the model offers a systematic means for designing, implementing, and evaluating health programming (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 34).

PRECEDE

- *PRECEDE is an acronym for Predisposing, Reinforcing, and Enabling Constructs in Educational Diagnosis and Evaluation* (Green & Kreuter, 1999, p. 34).
- Provides a diagnostic action plan for the development of effective behavioural interventions.

In Other Words...

- The framework offers a way to organize the literature review and provide an ordered means of applying theory to explain the behaviour choices of farmers and farm family members.
- When we understand the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors that influence an individual farmer's behaviour, we can create an in-person counselling program that meets the specific needs of farmers.

Theories

- Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).
- Stress and Coping.
- Community Organization (Social Networks and Social Support).
- Health Belief Model (HBM).
- Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

Literature Review + MFRSL Encounter Forms

- The writer looked for comparisons between the existing literature and the encounter forms.
- The information was used to offer tangible evidence as to why the MFRSL would be in a unique position to offer in-person counselling to farmers.
- Acts as a potential template for future programs.

PRECEDE-PROCEDE

Phase One – Social Assessment

- The writer looked for comparisons between the existing literature and the encounter forms related to the agricultural issues that cause stress for farmers and their family members, and negatively affect quality of life. In turn, this information will be used to focus on creating an in-person counselling program that includes elements that will address the most salient and frequently cited causes of farm stress.

PRECEED – PROCEED

Phase Two – Epidemiological

Assessment

- Used to evaluate similarities between the existing literature and the MFRSL encounter forms related to theme one and the identification of physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural health symptoms related to farm stress.
- Comparable data found in the MFRSL encounter forms will be critical in terms of providing compelling evidence related to the importance and necessity of creating an in-person counselling program for Manitoban farmers and their family members.

Phase Three – Behavioural/Educational Assessment

- Have the greatest impact on help seeking behaviours by producers for farm stress issues. The writer will be assessing the MFRSL encounter forms for comparative data related to theme two and three in terms of the coping mechanisms used by farmers and their family members, and the perceived barriers to help-seeking.
- Only the most potentially successful behavioural and environmental factors, as they relate to increasing the chances that individual farmers will seek help for mental health issues, will be fully explored in the Educational and Ecological Assessment Phase and during planning of the in-person counselling program (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- In comparing the existing literature with the MFRSL encounter forms, the writer will be looking for analogous predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors that affect the choice by farmers to seek help for farm-stress related health symptoms.

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- The writer will be evaluating the MFRSL encounter forms for evidence of predisposing factors that are related to the internal values held by producers such as pride, independence and the reluctance to burden others; and the external factors related to a lack of knowledge about mental health issues and a distrust of outsiders who lack agricultural knowledge (CASA, 2005; Martinez-Brawley & Blundall, 1989; Rosmann, 2001).

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- Enabling factors that impact the decision to seek outside help for mental health issues include health providers that lack agricultural knowledge and are unapproachable in their demeanour, the stigma attached to mental illness, and transportation and cost issues (CASA, 2005; Martinez_Brawley & Blundall, 1989; Rosmann, 2001; 2005).

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- Reinforcing factors are less critical in the assessment and planning stages of a program, however the existing research suggests that certain elements are essential to program success. Research suggests that the most successful programs that address farm-stress related issues have included in-person counselling and telephone hotlines staffed by professional counsellors who also possess agricultural knowledge and experience, prevention and education workshops, community outreach efforts, and the dissemination of related literature (CASA, 2005; Martinez_Brawley & Blundall, 1989; Rosmann, 2001; 2005; Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 1993).

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- The literature in this section will be used to examine issues related to theme three regarding the acceptability of mental health services; and the perceived barriers to those services, both internal and external to the farmer.

Precede-Proceed Phase Four – Educational and Ecological Assessment

- Information regarding the predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors will be instrumental in the evaluation of the two main objectives of the needs assessment.

Methodology - Subjects

- Not a true representative sample of the agricultural population of Manitoba.
- A non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized because not all calls to the MFRSL are related to farming.
- Time frame - thirteen farm related calls were recorded on encounter forms between the periods June 01, 2008 – to July 31, 2008.

Qualitative Study

- Although the interview instrument was designed to elicit primarily qualitative data around the identified themes of interest, there are several critical variable groups that are often identified by callers to the MFRSL.

Variables

- Demographic and farm related variables of age, gender, marital status, farming region, and off-farm employment (Appendix A).
- Counsellor provides information, referrals, support, and/or counselling. This data was also a variable of interest when reviewing the types of services most likely to be requested from an in-person counselling program for farmers and farm family members.

Variables

- Farm Operation variables such as role on the farm, number of employees, percentage of total family income from farming, off-farm employment, and principle commodity may also impact interpretation of the research questions (Thurston, 2003).

Instrument Design

The guidelines of the MFRSL encounter forms were predisposed to extrapolating information that approximated one or more of the three main themes identified in the literature review.

A directed content analysis of the encounter forms would assist in identifying thematic patterns in the text of each individual farm related telephone call.

A data sheet with seven questions that approximate the three themes of interest, identified during the literature review, was designed to facilitate the documentation analysis of each farm call in the time frame (See Appendix B).

Coding

- Coding of text written by an MFRSL staff member from each encounter form onto the data sheet, under the appropriate question heading.
- The data that is included under each question heading is quoted directly from the hand written documentation of MFRSL staff, and may include direct quotes and/or paraphrasing (MFRSL Encounter Form, Appendix C).

Reliability

- Qualitative methods often research items through several methods in order to increase reliability.
- The needs assessment and development of the data analysis instrument, has been guided by a thorough literature review in order to corroborate the proposed themes of interest and enhance reliability.
- Internal consistency enhances reliability and was accomplished through the use of multiple observers during the content analysis of the existing encounter forms.

Validity

- Validity is enhanced through the justification of the appropriateness of the method utilized for the study at hand (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this case, the thorough examination of the existing literature confirming the themes of this research provided the context with which to interpret the data generated by the existing MFRSL encounter forms.
- In terms of validity, qualitative research does not generally produce broadly generalizable research. Validity is enhanced when research is transferable to other contexts and setting (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).
- Through the description of the research context and the duplication of the central assumptions and themes of the research, the transferability of this study further enhances validity.

Results

Seven research questions formed the basis of this study. Two unexplored subjects arose during analysis of the encounter forms, and are also recorded.

Text from the encounter forms was extrapolated and grouped as themes under one of the seven research questions. This was done for each encounter form separately, and then the themes of each research question were combined.

Summary of Research Question 1

Quality of Life Factors

- Primary source of stress - financial issues related to increasing market prices, interest rates, and input costs.
- Contributing factors - unpredictable weather and agricultural disasters; in particular BSE.
- Family and relationship conflicts.
- Difficulty managing work roles on and off the farm (female callers).

Summary of Research Question Two

Health Symptoms

- Physical symptoms - only one female complained about a change in sleep patterns.
- Four reports of males presenting with physical symptoms such as, physical exhaustion, high blood pressure, cold sweats, and sleep disturbances. This is typical of men in general, who tend to seek help for, and report, physical symptoms.

Summary of Research Question Two

Health Symptoms

- Mental health symptoms - three female callers identified their male spouses as suffering from depression and anxiety symptoms. All three men had been diagnosed by a health provider and prescribed medication, however none had pursued counselling or other support services.
- Four male callers to the MFRSL - depression and anxiety related to farm issues.
- Two male callers mentioned feelings of stress and difficulty coping with their circumstances on the farm.

Behavioural Issues

- Relationship conflict, frequent arguments between spouses, and family dysfunction were mentioned most often.
- All calls made by female farm spouses were in regard to their male partners and subsequent issues.
- One of the female subjects identified her husband as a positive support.
- Six female callers cited contact with outside supports, both formal and informal, as critical to their ability to cope with farm stress related issues.
- One female subject contacted MFRSL for support - husband's demonstrations of anger and frustration towards herself and their two young children.

Summary of Research Questions

Three/Four

- Provide information about the behavioural intentions of the subjects, based on the stated perceived internal and external barriers to seeking help for farm stress related issues.
- Provide data about predisposing, enabling, and reinforcing factors that influence the subjects' behaviours related to seeking help for farm stress related issues.

PRECEDE

- Predisposing factors -intrinsic factors that determine whether a person will engage in a particular behaviour.
- Reinforcing factors -internal or external to the individual; influence whether a person will engage in certain behaviours.
- Enabling factors - resources, services, and assistance available to the individual.

Predisposing Factors

- The values of pride and independence.
- Distrust of outsiders and a lack of knowledge about mental illness and treatment options.
- Related to the values of pride and independence - farmer`s willingness to seek help for farm stress issues may be compromised by a belief that peers may not approve, and professionals may lack understanding.

Predisposing Factors

- Reluctance to access help - perception that the barriers outweighed the benefits.
- One caller stated a lack of knowledge regarding the types of services provided by the MFRSL; this was also a factor stated by the subject as a reason for hesitation regarding making initial contact with the help line.
- Increased self-efficacy = increased access to help.

Predisposing Factors

- Reluctance to burden family and friends with problems related to the farm.
- The support of a spouse, other family member, friends, and neighbours were seen as an important source of social support to the majority of callers.
- MFRSL contacted due to inadequacy of informal supports (see above).

Enabling Factors

- The conditions most likely to be successfully altered in order to create an in-person counselling program that reflects the needs of farmers.
- The circumstances mentioned most often by the study group as impacting decisions to seek outside help for mental health issues included, health providers that lack agricultural knowledge, the stigma attached to mental illness, and transportation and cost issues.

Other Enabling Factors

- Professionals in a position of power; hold all the decision making ability = intimidation.
- Can be almost completely eliminated if the professional has agricultural knowledge and experience.

Reinforcing Factors

- Become more significant once a health program has been initiated .
- These would include factors and conditions that encourage farmers and farm family members to continue to access the MFRSL for in-person counselling, as well as the existing services. In addition, reinforcing factors may include referrals by the MFRSL to other support services, thereby initiating new social linkages.

Reinforcing Factors

- Research question five revealed that nine of the 13 subjects would be interested in personally utilizing an in-person counselling service provided by the MFRSL.
- Answers to research question six demonstrated once again that it was of the utmost importance that farmers could access a counsellor that has agricultural knowledge.

Topics of Counselling Sessions

- Based on data gathered from research question seven, seven callers would be interested in exploring general farm stress issues and two would like to discuss farm transitioning during in-person counselling sessions.

Farmers respond best to mental health services that include the following:

- In-person counselling from professional counsellors with farming backgrounds; indigenous helpers and volunteers; services that meet the unique geographical, transportation, and time related needs of farmers such as, telephone hotlines that include evening hours; provide education through workshops and presentations related to agricultural and farm stress related issues; perform outreach to the farming population through community events; and provide information by disseminating agricultural related articles and press releases.

Predisposing and Enabling Factors

- **Predisposing**/Internal barriers - the MFRSL is limited in its ability to influence internal barriers that prevent farmers from reaching out for assistance.
- **Enabling**/Social and environmental factors that are impeding help-seeking behaviours can be altered to better suit the mental health needs of farmers.

Issues to Consider

- Refer clients who required long term counselling, or who demonstrated significant mental health and/or substance use concerns, to outside agencies.
- In-person counselling services for farmers and farm family members have a long gestation period, and are slow to be accepted by agricultural communities.

Moving from PRECEDE TO PROCEED

- Utilization of the remaining phases of the Precede-Proceed framework is recommended to fully develop the program and provide opportunities for process and outcome evaluation.
- Phase seven begins the PROCEED portion of the framework and is utilized to assess administrative and business activities. Measuring whether there are adequate materials, facilities, personnel and equipment to run the program are functions of process evaluation (Green & Kreuter, 1999).
- Phase eight is conducted immediately following program administration/implementation completion in order to measure the programs impact on knowledge, attitudes, intentions, values, and beliefs (Green & Kreuter, 1999).
- Phase Nine represents the outcome evaluation that generally occurs following the intervention (1-25years or more) and assesses any measurable improvement in behaviours, by looking at quality of life as perceived by the target population (Green & Kreuter, 1999).

Future/Evaluation

- Conduct focus groups consisting of key informants from agricultural and health related organizations, as well as producers throughout Manitoba.
- Identification of CMHW's, and counsellors from supplementary organizations throughout Manitoba, who also possess agricultural knowledge will aid the MFRSL in providing the most effective and efficient services to farmers.
- Research suggestions – stress and the changing context of farming in Canada.
- Viability and efficacy of the various existing farm stress programs.