



Mental Well-Being for Agricultural Workers Dealing with Drought

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Some notes on well-being, mental health, & mental illness





MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVE SHIFTS

Old Narrative

- Mental illness is exclusively a brain disorder
- “Mental health” is the same as “mental illness”
- The only treatment is medical treatment
- Mental illness represents a character flaw
- Mental health is the same as “happiness”
- Mental well-being is a choice
- Mental well-being is optional

Credit: Cari Michaels, UMN Extension

MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVE SHIFTS

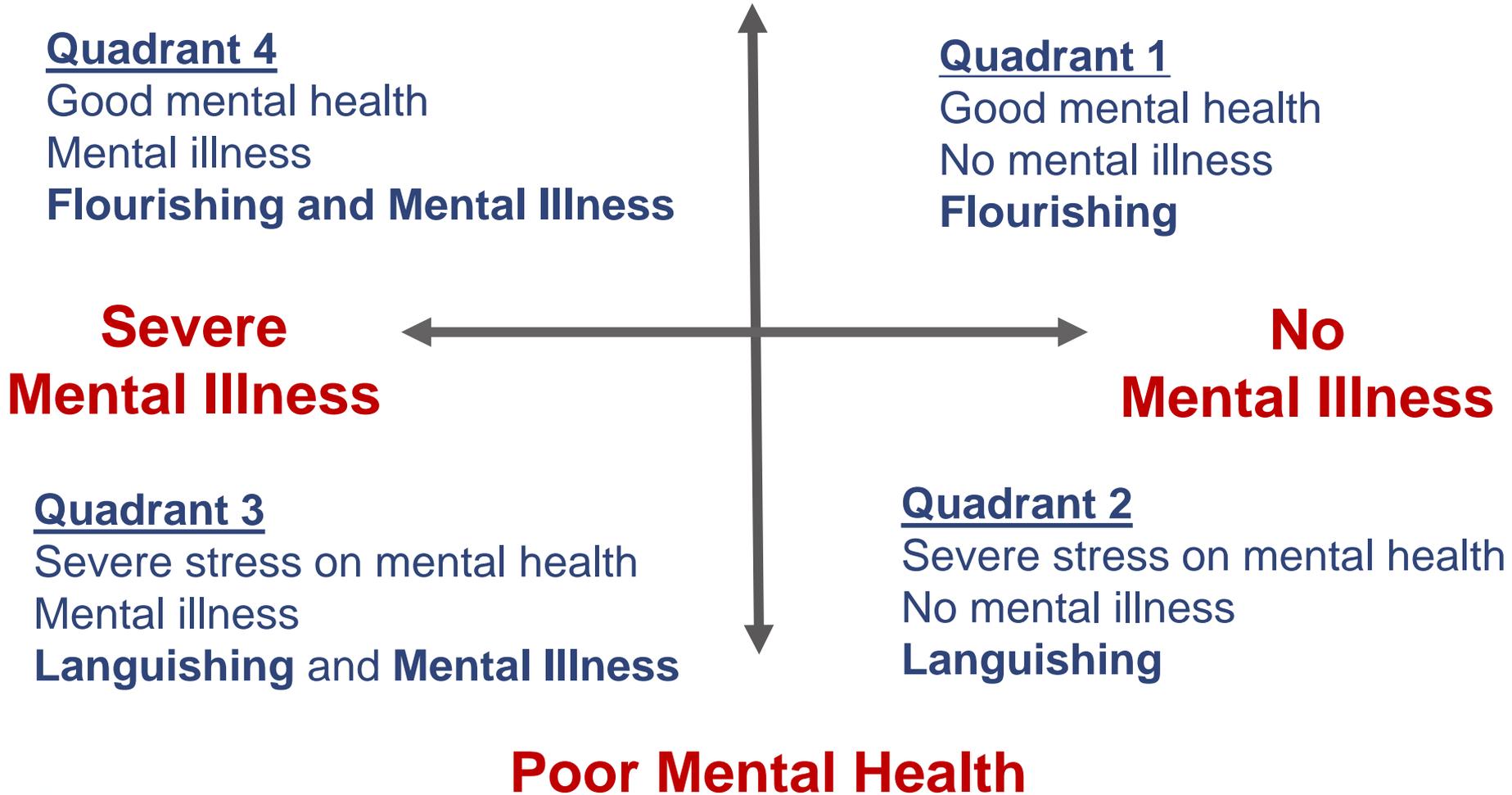
New Narrative

- Brains are built through experience
- Fear, trauma, chronic stress negatively impact MH
- Where we live, learn, work, play impacts MH
- Resilience is not enough in the face of oppression
- Physical health and mental health are intertwined
- Culture shapes definitions and understanding of MH
- Positive relationships are central to MH
- MH happens in and through community
- MH requires a sense of purpose and power
- Everyone has role and responsibility

Credit: Cari Michaels, UMN Extension



Optimal Mental Health



Keyes, C. (2014). Mental health as a complete state: How the solutogenic perspectives completes the picture. In G.F. Bauer & O. Hammig (Eds.), Bridging occupational, organizational, and public health: A transdisciplinary approach. New York: Springer Publishing.

The nature of farmer stress



STRESSORS IMPACTING FARMERS

- High interest rates
- Large debt loads
- Commodity prices
- Weather/disaster
- Gov't regulations
- Long work hours
- Livestock illness
- Crop yield
- Machinery breakdown
- Illness/injury
- Relationships
- Barriers to help

THE AGRARIAN IMPERATIVE

“To farmers, ‘the land is everything.’ Ownership of a family farm is the triumphant result of the struggles of multiple generations. Losing the family farm is the ultimate loss – bringing shame to the generation that has let down their forbearers and dashing the hopes for successors.”

Rosmann, 2003

STRESSORS UNIQUE TO DROUGHT

- Uncertainty of crop condition/yield
- Uncertainty of livestock feed inventory
- Competition for scarce resources
- Lack of work
- Lack of income
- Lack of purpose

A brief on the farm economy



RURAL STRESS AND FARMING

A photograph of two men standing in a vast field of golden-brown crops, likely soybeans. The man on the left is wearing a grey polo shirt and blue jeans, and is pointing his right hand towards the horizon. The man on the right is wearing a pink and blue striped shirt and blue jeans, and is looking in the same direction. The field stretches far into the distance under a clear sky.

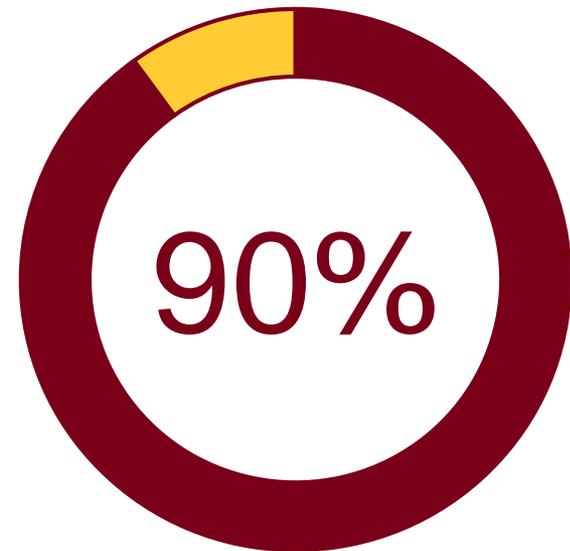
For the sixth year in a row, low commodity prices and low profitability. Median net farm income was **\$26,055.**

(University of Minnesota Extension FinBin and the Minnesota State College and University System, 2019)

RURAL STRESS AND FARMING

In a recent survey,
90% of agricultural
respondents
experienced
occupational stress.

(Roberts & Mold, 2019)





8% decline
of herds

Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 2019

RURAL STRESS AND FARMING

Although profits are low, farmers must still buy products and services, employ workers, and pay bills; each farm generates substantial business activity. When farms are hurting, it impacts other parts of our rural economy.



(University of Minnesota Extension FinBin and the Minnesota State College and University System, 2019).

Identifying stress

RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF STRESS

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral	Cognitive	Self-worth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Ulcers • Backaches • Eating problems • Sleeping problems • Frequent sickness • Exhaustion • Poor hygiene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness • Depression • Bitterness • Anger • Anxiety • Loss of spirit • Loss of sense of humor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability • Acting out • Passive-aggressive behavior • Anger • Increased drinking • Taking drugs • Isolation • Violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory loss • Lack of concentration • Difficulty with simple decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel like a failure • Can't do anything right • Not being able to fix things

SIGNS OF PROLONGED STRESS

- Previously identified signs have not improved or have multiplied
- Change in routine
- Appearance of farmstead declines
- Increase in illness
- Increase in farm accidents
- Family members show signs of stress

Adjust your own oxygen mask



SELF CARE

- You can't pour from an empty cup
- Practice intentional well-being

WAYS OF COPING WITH STRESS

- Deep breathing
- Meditation/Reflection
- Positive self-talk
- Physical Activity
- Hobbies
- Connect with people in your social network
- Speaking with a mental health professional

Resources for Farm Stress



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Questions?

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