

Helping farming families affected by a traumatic death

June 2013

Researchers at the University of New England and the National Centre for Farmer Health are talking to adult members of farming families about their experience of loss through a death by external causes (suicide, accidental death, homicide and other deaths of unknown cause or intent).

By gaining an understanding of their experience, the researchers hope to develop a framework for understanding similarly bereaved farming families in future, and to help inform Government policy and procedure for use in health and community services to assist community members when a tragedy occurs.

Mrs Alison Kennedy, Associate Professor Myfanwy Maple and Dr Kathy McKay from UNE's Collaborative Research Network, and Associate Professor Susan Brumby from the National Centre for Farmer Health are seeking male and female adult members of farming families, who would be willing to share their experiences of the death of someone close to them through either suicide, accidental death, homicide or a death through unknown cause or intent.

Mrs Kennedy, a behavioural scientist, will be conducting questionnaires and interviews with participants as part of her Doctoral research. "Farming families work and live in a unique environment. Those closely affected by externally caused deaths are able to offer exceptional insight into the occurrence and impact of such loss within this context," she said, "allowing us to challenge assumptions, develop more appropriate prevention strategies, and understand the phenomenon more broadly. As externally caused deaths are unlikely to cease entirely, it is vital that we understand the experiences of those most closely affected, whose lives are changed forever."

Associate Professor Maple has conducted award-winning research over the past ten years that is helping to support those who have been bereaved through a death by external causes. "This project" she said, "is encouraging farming families to talk about their grief, and how the death of someone close to them has affected their lives. To date, responses to externally caused death in farming communities have primarily focused on prevention," she explained. "While preventative work is vital, such a focus ignores the experiences of those most intimately affected by a tragic death."

This research also has the personal support of Jock Laurie, the former head of the National Farmers Federation. In his role as NFF President, and formerly as President of NSW Farmers during

the height of the drought, Jock has seen firsthand the effect of prolonged drought, isolation and the lack of access to medical services on the farming community. He has witnessed the devastation that the loss of a family member - be it by suicide or an on-farm accident - causes families and rural communities. Jock believes research into this area is essential to help inform and shape policy development in this important area, and to ensure farmers and their families continue to receive the support and assistance they need.

Participation in this research involves the completion of an online survey questionnaire and an in-depth interview, which will be possible via email, telephone or, where suitable, face-to face.

The researchers said that all participants, and any information they provided to the research project, would be treated confidentially.

For more information on the project, or to discuss the possibility of participating in the questionnaire in another format, please phone Alison Kennedy on 0499 752 130 or at the National Centre for Farmer Health on (03) 5551 8587 or email akenne31@myune.edu.au

Other researchers involved in this project can also be contacted:

Associate Professor Myfanwy Maple at UNE on (02) 6773 3661

Dr Kathy McKay at UNE on (02) 6773 3443

Associate Professor Susan Brumby at NCFH on (03) 5551 8460

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No.HE13-047, Valid to 13/06/2014).



collaborative research network

mental health and well-being in rural and regional communities

