

BURNOUT AMONG NZ DAIRY FARMERS: RESULTS FROM TWO STUDIES

NEELS BOTHA AND TONI WHITE



Paper presented at “Sowing the seeds of famer health”
conference, 17th – 19th September, Hamilton
Performing Arts Centre, Hamilton, Victoria.

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Burnout

The studies and findings

Conclusions



INTRODUCTION

The NZ dairy sector provides 26% of New Zealand's total goods exports.

New Zealand Dairy Statistics 2010/11:

- Herd size increase continues - the trend for the past 30 seasons.
- Average effective hectares increasing (140 ha)
- More cows per area.

Pressure on dairy farmers increases.



BURNOUT

Burnout (Schaufeli & Enzmann 1998: 36):

- Is a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind.
- Occurs in 'normal' individuals.
- Is primarily characterised by exhaustion, linked to
 - Distress
 - Reduced effectiveness
 - Loss of motivation
 - Negative attitudes and behaviours
- Develops gradually (unnoticed for a long time by individual).
- It results from a difference between job expectations and reality.
- Is self-perpetuating because of inadequate associated coping strategies.



MEASURING BURNOUT: OLDBERG BURNOUT INVENTORY (OLBI)

An inventory measuring total burnout using two dimensions

1. Exhaustion (emotional and physical)
2. Disengagement

16-item self-assessment instrument (8 for each dimension)

Four-point Likert scales [1 = “strongly agree” to 4 = “strongly disagree”]

Averages are calculated for each subscale with higher scores indicating higher burnout.

The OLBI exhibited good test–retest reliability and internal reliability ($\alpha > .80$) for both subscales

(Demerouti et al., 2002, 2003)



STUDY 1 – TELEPHONE SURVEY

Dairy Farmer Health PitStops (N = 520)

Follow up telephone interviews – (87) farmers who screened positive for depression and anxiety

Purpose – find out:

- the impact of health pitstops
- if farmers were seeking support
- preferences for farmer support
- willingness to participate in a community of interest
- whether the OLBI questions were suitable

Response rate 69% (n = 52; 24 males, 28 females).



STUDY 1 – LIMITATIONS AND FINDINGS

Exploratory study

Extrapolating the findings inappropriate

No farmer burnout studies

We chose cut off scores for the OLBI based on international literature and the Maslach Burnout Inventory.



STUDY 1 - FINDINGS

| Score cut off points (max score = 4) | | Number of respondents (%) | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| | | Exhaustion score | Disengagement score | Total burnout score |
| Very low | <1.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Low | 1.0 -1.5 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Average | >1.5 - <2.5 | 30 | 11 | 16 (33%) |
| High | 2.5 - 3.0 | 14 (28%) | 23 (47%) | 26 (53%) |
| Very high | >3.0 | 4 (8%) | 14 (28%) | 6 (12%) |
| TOTAL | | 49 | 49 | 49 |

STUDY 1 - FINDINGS

Disengagement from work (farming) was a bigger issue than exhaustion

75% High / very high levels of disengagement

Disengagement is primarily related to

- **satiation** (which is a sense that work/farming has lost its meaning to the individual)
- the experience of **monotony** (Demerouti et al, 2002).

65% respondents had a high / very high burnout score

Burnout was a big issue in this particular sample

There is a correlation between depression, anxiety and burnout (Shirom & Ezrachi, 2003).



STUDY 2 – DAIRY FARMER HEALTH PITSTOPS (2011-12)

Interviews during Health Pitstops (N = 523)

Used the OLBI to assess burnout

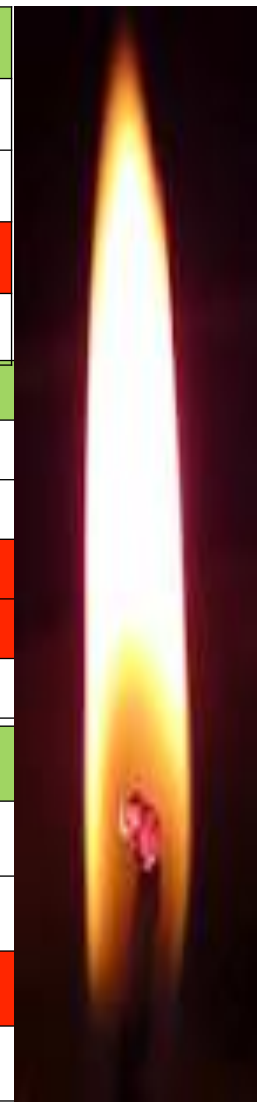
Limitations

- Respondents are self-selected
- Certain characteristics could be over-represented because they correlate with willingness to be included

Results of this survey provide a picture of a particular type of dairy farmer



| Disengagement category | Number of respondents (%) |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Low | 13 (2%) |
| Average | 458 (88%) |
| High | 52 (10%) |
| TOTAL | 523 (100%) |
| Exhaustion category | Number of respondents (%) |
| Low | 6 (1%) |
| Average | 395 (76%) |
| High | 115 (22%) |
| Very high | 7 (1%) |
| TOTAL | 523 (100%) |
| Burnout category | Number of respondents (%) |
| Low | 3 (1%) |
| Average | 452 (86%) |
| High | 68 (13%) |
| TOTAL | 523 |



STUDY 2 - FINDINGS

10% scored high / very high on disengagement

23% scored high / very high on exhaustion

13% scored high on burnout

In this sample exhaustion seems to be a more prevalent issue than disengagement



CONCLUSIONS

It is plausible that burnout is an issue on 10-15% New Zealand dairy farms.

There clearly is an interplay between burnout (disengagement and exhaustion), anxiousness and depression.

OLBI seems to work with dairy farmers.

