

NEW ZEALAND DAIRY FARMER STRESS

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

Methodology

Findings

Discussion



INTRODUCTION

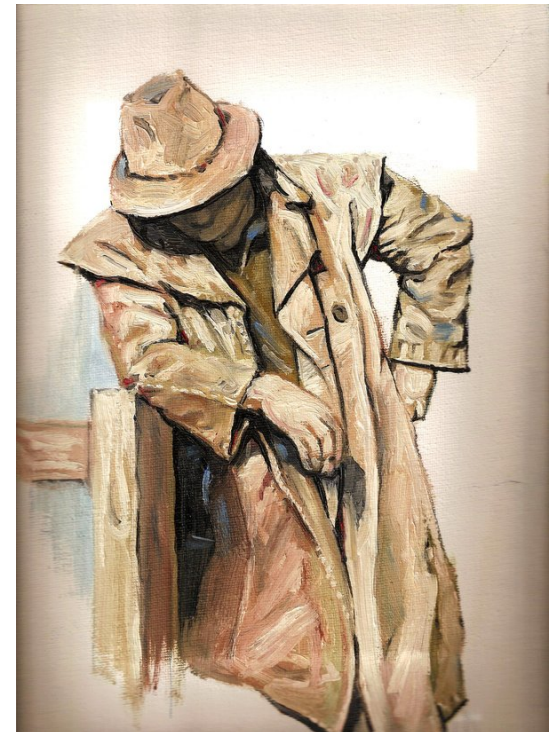
Farmers are more important than cows and grass

Industry recognition

Dairy Farmer Wellness and Wellbeing Programme (7 years)

Physical and mental health

Evidence based



METHODOLOGY - RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How stressed are dairy farmers emotionally?
- How well do farmers say they are currently coping with stress?
- What are the main factors that cause them stress?
- Is their age impacting their stress levels, substance use, specific mood issues and ability to cope with stress?
- Do they seek help when they are stressed?
- Is there a mood issue risk for them? (i.e. depression and anxiety)
- Are there issues with alcohol use?



METHODOLOGY - COMMENTS

Links between distress and mental health

Label of research

- Stress, mental illness, mental disorder, mental unwellness, mental distress, madness
- We used “emotional or social wellness”
- Personally – not an “illness” or “disorder” perspective

False positives and labelling



METHODOLOGY – DATA COLLECTION

Health Pit Stop stands at various dairy events nationally

Medical information

Social wellness information (social researchers)

Approach, engage, assess, refer

Upbeat atmosphere

Good natured humour and banter

541 interviews



SCREENING INSTRUMENT

Tested, adapted then used

Five main areas:

- Causes
- Risk factors
- Help seeking behaviours
- Potential mood issues (i.e. depression and anxiety) (PHQ-4)
- Alcohol use



FINDINGS

98% said they were coping okay or very well

17% screened positive for emotional unwellness (depression/anxiety)

CAUSES:

Relationships (25-44 age band)

Challenges associated with dairy farming (all ages)

Finances

Health

Clusters of causes were more common than single causes

39% concerned about not being able to keep up with farming -physical demands , energy levels, body strength, mental abilities

FINDINGS

Older farmers (65-84) more at risk of depression

Two out of five sought help when they needed it

Drug use – very low

81% drank alcohol

2.3% of them could not go without it for more than a week

41% had drunk more than they meant to in the last year

26% of them wanted to cut down



FINDINGS

Age band 15-24

- Associated more with alcohol use
- Drinking more than intended
- Wanting to cut down
- More likely to claim to be able to go without for more than a week



DISCUSSION

Prevalence of emotional unwellness comparable to national data

Considered high for time of year (quiet)

Underreporting of emotional unwellness – men?

Male depression often undiagnosed

Day to day grind of dairy farming bothered all

40 - 49 percent work more than 60 hours per week

Dairy farming is often seen by young people as hard, dirty work with long, unsociable hours (Tipples et al, 2010: 6)



DISCUSSION

Institute of alcohol studies

Reasons for use – to feel better, to relieve stress, cheer oneself up etc.

Strong relationships between suicide, depression and drinking may be restricted to extreme patterns of consumption (clinical populations)

Evidence of binge drinking – people may not know they are doing it

Coping mechanisms – drinking and talking (other unknown)

DISCUSSION

Australian depression research:

Australians prefer self-help strategies

Over 6 month period 55% over took alcohol to relax



55% took pain relievers

50% became involved in physical activity

35% consulted a GP

20% took antidepressants

4% received psychotherapy

Alcohol use a poor coping mechanism

Challenge:

Getting help early

Distance, isolation and poor GP availability in rural areas

KEY MESSAGE

Many dairy farmers who are distressed may not acknowledge it and may not seek help even when it becomes serious

