

A Helpful, Trusted Resource: Extension's Role in the Rural Mental Health Crisis

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION
(FISHBEIN & AZJEN, 1975)

THIS STUDY SOUGHT TO
UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF
EXTENSION IN ADDRESSING
THE RURAL MENTAL
HEALTH CRISIS.

TEXAS AG PRODUCERS:

LIKELIHOOD TO SEEK HELP IN
TIMES OF DISTRESS

LEVEL OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

SOCIAL CONTACT(S) THEY
WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO
TURN TO FOR HELP

Introduction

In rural, agrarian communities, depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses slowly, and often silently, claim lives at a rate of almost two times that of the general working-age population (Peterson et al., 2018). This crisis threatens the two basic needs of any vibrant, resilient community—the health and human capital of community members (Roberts et al., 2016). Using results from this study, we aimed to develop recommendations for Extension education and programming to increase awareness for rural mental health and improve health behaviors of Texas agricultural producers.

Methodology

- » Dillman et al.'s (2014) tailored design method for survey research design.
- » Purposive sample of Texas agricultural producers (18–89) in predominantly rural designated counties in Texas, using databases from Texas AgriLife Extension Service.
- » Utilized PSCS, GHSQ to measure social capital, help-seeking behavior.
- » Distributed instrument to 5,045 producers and received an 8.50% response rate ($n=429$); No statistically significant difference between early and late respondents (Linder et al., 2001).
- » PSCS ($\alpha = .94$) and GHSQ ($\alpha = .89$); Ex-post facto.
- » Descriptive statistics, grand means for each construct and individual items.

Results

- » **Personal Social Capital** ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.56$).
- » Top help-seeking source for personal and emotional problems, suicide ideation; **Intimate Partner** ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.85$).
- » Personal or emotional problems; *Unlikely* to seek help directly from Extension.
- » Suicide ideation; Least likely to seek help from agents ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.61$), specialists ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.54$).
- » Producers recognized Extension agents ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.11$) and specialists ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.23$) as **trusted, dependable sources**.

PSCS (1 = All, 5 = None)

GHSQ (1 = Extremely Unlikely, 7 = Extremely Likely)

KEY INSIGHT

RATHER THAN PLACING EXTENSION
IN CRISIS RESPONSE ROLES, THE
FOCUS SHOULD BE ON RESOURCE
PROVISION & SERVICE ACTIVATION.

Conclusions & Recommendations

AgriLife Extension may be viewed as a credible, indirect resource for struggling producers (Catty et al., 2007).

Capitalize on Texas producers' healthy social capital, driven heavily by family or close loved ones.

- » Development of customized intervention and referral training to spouses and immediate family members; Self-help, support resources.

Recognize social overlap; develop community-level programming.

Future research | Perceived barriers, motivators of help-seeking; preferred mental health resources; appropriate communication channels; identification of mental health support opportunities via Extension in other states.

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