

A Content Analysis of North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center Resources

Quentin Carlyle
124 Gentry Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211
(573) 427-9095
Qr2cfb@mail.missouri.edu

Rebecca Mott
123 Gentry Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211
(573) 881-0749
mottr@missouri.edu

Kimberly Keller
210 Gentry Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211
(573) 356-6280
kellerkj@missouri.edu

Abigail Loesing
124 Gentry Hall
Columbia, Missouri, 65211
arlfyf@missouri.edu

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Introduction

Farmers regularly deal with stressors that are beyond their control such as unexpected weather, unpredictable economic conditions, and extreme work hours (Thelin & Donham, 2016). They also experience higher levels of psychological distress (Yazd et al., 2019) and a higher suicide rate than the general population (Peterson et al., 2020). The North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center (NCFRSAC) aims to create and expand mental health resources for agricultural producers and those who support agricultural producers. The center includes collaborators from 12 states in the North Central region. This content analysis research describes NCFRSAC resources in relation to the Farm and Farm Family Risk and Resilience Socio-Ecological Model (Ketterman et al., 2020). This research helps to address the American Association for Agricultural Education National Research Priority 6: Vibrant, Resilient Communities. Particularly, it informs Research Question 1: *How do agricultural leadership, education, and communication teaching, research, and extension programs impact local communities* (Roberts et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Previous literature around farm and ranch health and wellness has used the socioecological model as a theoretical framework (Lee, et al., 2017; Mott et al., 2017). For this study, we relied on an expanded version of the socioecological model: the Farm and Farm Family Risk and Resilience Socio-Ecological Model (Ketterman et al., 2020). This model is unique because it places the farm between interpersonal environments and community environments, reinforcing the importance for educators and practitioners to implement a holistic approach to mental health in a way that is relevant to farmers (Ketterman et al., 2020).

The purpose of this content analysis, which is part of a larger study, is to describe the current NCFRSAC resources in relation to the Farm and Farm Family Risk and Socio-Ecological Model (Ketterman et al., 2020). This research contributes to an ongoing national discussion about farmer and rancher mental health. Our team of faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student researchers analyzed data using a quantitative, conceptual content analysis. This approach seeks to identify the existence of concepts in a text (White & Marsh, 2006). At least two team members coded each item to promote reliability. Additionally, each team member made reflective notes throughout the data analysis process, adding to the study's transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Of the 149 resources developed in years one and two of the NCFRSAC, 79 were aimed at the individual level of the socio-ecological model. Twenty-nine targeted the interpersonal level and only 8 were aimed at the farm level. Four resources were aimed at the community level and 3 targeted the organizational level. For 26 resources we either could not access the resource to determine which level of the model it was targeted toward, or it was unclear to whom the resource was targeted.

Table 1*Number of resources by socio-ecologic model level by year created*

Socio-ecological level	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Individual	29	50	79
Interpersonal	14	15	29
Farm	4	4	8
Community	2	2	4
Organizational	2	1	3
Policy	0	0	0
Unknown	18	8	26

Conclusions and Implications

The accuracy and detail of each state's reporting procedures is a limitation to the research. There are resources in the study's scope that were not adequately captured or accurately analyzed. However, we can clearly see that the majority of resources reported in years one and two of the NCFRSAC target the individual and interpersonal levels of the Farm and Farm Family Risk and Socio-Ecological Model (Ketterman et.al, 2020). Supporting the mental health of producers and their immediate families is critical. However, we should not underestimate how providing resources that strengthen mental health literacy to those who interact with farmers in businesses, communities, and organizations can strengthen a mental health safety net (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). While resources assisting at the individual level are meaningful, Cramer and Kapusta propose that addressing each level of the socio-ecologic model is influential in suicide prevention efforts (Cramer & Kapusta, 2017). This content analysis suggests there is room for more resources to be designed supporting the farm, community, organizational, and policy levels of the model.

The results of this content analysis can help guide researchers and practitioners to gaps in resources and services. This analysis can lead to a more informed approach to future work in addressing mental health and wellness of farmers and ranchers in the North Central region of the United States. We recommend that those working to address farmer and rancher stress utilize the Farm and Farm Family Risk and Resilience Socio-Ecological Model to help them consider their own resources and identify potential gaps in service.

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