

## Help-seeking and support after suicide and accidental death in farming communities

**Alison Kennedy**<sup>1,2</sup>, **Myfanwy Maple**<sup>1</sup>, **Kathy McKay**<sup>1</sup>, **Susan Brumby**<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of New England, NSW; <sup>2</sup>National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, VIC; <sup>3</sup>School of Medicine, Deakin University, VIC

**Aims:** The aim of this research was to explore and compare factors that influence adverse affects and resilience within farming families exposed to suicide and/or accidental death.

**Methods:** Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore the lived experience of 24 adult members of Australian farming families bereaved by suicide and/or accidental death.

**Relevance:** Australia's rural farming communities are exposed to higher rates of suicide and accidental death than both rural people generally and those living in major cities, yet little is known about how this affects those bereaved by these deaths. Expanding knowledge in this area will assist with the development of both appropriate and acceptable responses when tragedy occurs in a rural farming community and work towards breaking the cycle of ongoing suicide risk.

**Results:** This paper reports on the bereaved research participants' patterns of help-seeking. This includes the perceived and actual avenues of physical and emotional support available to and utilised by (or not) members of farming families in the wake of suicide and/or accidental death. The tendency for members of farming families to volunteer support rather than ask for it, was also reflected in the response to bereavement. Not all participants required or readily accepted support, although offers of practical support were frequently forthcoming. Amongst participants requiring emotional support, access was restricted to those with appropriate social networks and an ability to express emotional vulnerability in a context of established trust, shared experience and shared interests.

**Conclusions:** The impact of exposure to traumatic death is heavily influenced by the unique psychological, geographical and social context in which farming family members frequently live and work. Exploring how behaviour is shaped and regulated within this unique context improves our understanding of bereavement even further. Recommendations are made for both appropriate and acceptable modes of support drawing on the lived experience of adult members of farming families bereaved by suicide and/or accidental death.