



Safety behaviour and mental health in farmers: trends and implications

Jane Harte^{1,2}, Scott Kitchener^{1,2}, Janani Pinidiyapathirage¹, Susan Brumby³

¹Agricultural Health & Medicine Research Group, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

²Queensland Rural Medical Education, Toowoomba.

³National Centre for Farmer Health, Hamilton.

Introduction

Intentional and unintentional mortality is higher among agricultural communities within Australia compared to other industries. Agriculture ranks as one of the most dangerous industries in Australia, with vehicles, farm equipment and animals contributing to the high work-related injury rate, moderated by lesser occupational health standards and performance. This poster overviews our investigation of the overlap of psychological distress with safety behaviours among agricultural workers.

Approach

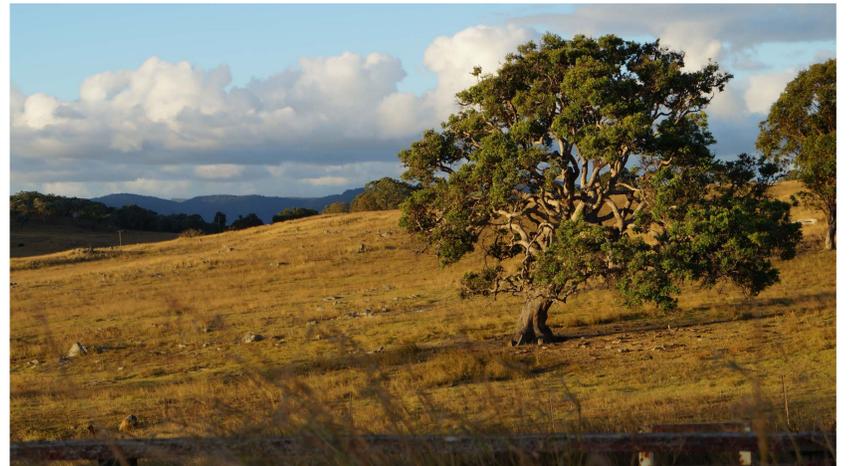
Self-identified farm workers (n=391) and others (n=300) were recruited at agricultural field days held in Kingaroy, Kingsthorpe, Warwick and Charleville (Queensland) between 2013-15. Consenting participants completed a health and lifestyle assessment. The overall assessment tool initially developed by the National Centre for Farmer Health was modified to include locally-relevant health issues and a training module for delivery by medical students. The assessment process was supervised by rural medical practitioners, nurses and a psychologist with experience in agricultural health and medicine. Alcohol consumption patterns were measured using selected questions from the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) toolⁱ and mental health screening was undertaken using the validated Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)ⁱⁱ. Specifically we looked at the use of personal protective equipment [PPE] and the relationship between reported psychological distress.



References

ⁱAustralian Institute of Health and Welfare. National Drug Strategy Household Survey detailed report 2013. Drug statistics series no. 28. Cat. no. PHE 183. Canberra: AIHW. 2014.

ⁱⁱKessler RC, Barker PR, Colpe LJ, Epstein JF, Gfroerer JC, Hiripi E, et al. Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. Archives of General Psychiatry 2003; 60: 184-9.



Results

We found overall low level of reported compliance with PPE among the agricultural workers related to:

handling chemicals, using machinery, on-farm seat belt and helmet use, and sun exposure.

- Notably, compliance with these safety measures was poorest among those reporting greater psychological distress.
- An association between physical activity and lesser reported psychological distress was found with a modest effect.

Implications

- We don't know whether psychological distress causes poor safety behavior or vice versa so this needs to be further investigated.
- Accident rates on farms and larger properties could be decreased with adequate education of people working in agriculture, targeting entire families about the risks.
- Our future work will be looking into the design, application and outcomes of such interventions to date with the view to assessing whether a more coordinated approach into the future might be more appropriate.