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Informal and formal social support available to injured and ill farmers

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Understanding behaviours for safer farming

Introduction

Statistics (e.g., ILO 2010, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics USA, 2019; HSH - Agriculture, forestry and fishing statistics in Great Britain 2022, EU OSH 2021, Eurostat 2022) and a growing body of **research on farm safety and health** have **confirmed the vulnerability and hazardous nature of the farming profession** (e.g. Trichopoulos et al 2004, Merisalu et al. 2019, Ramos et al 2020, Jones et al. 2020).

However, little research has been done on how farmers cope with these experiences, **what happens to the farm and the lives of its members after the injuries and illnesses occur.**

Studies of the experiences of injured or ill farmers/farm workers or of the experiences and consequences for **their family members** have been conducted primarily in the **United States, Australia, and Canada** (Kennedy 2015; Friesen et al. 2010a, 2010b; Kaminski 2005; Reed and Claunch 2002; Scheerer and Brandt 2001; Kubik 1996; Rosenblatt and Karis 1994).





The aim of the study

Research on social support in general dates back to the 1970s, while research on social support in the workplace dates back to the 1980s and 1990s. However, **little attention** has been paid to this topic in rural/agricultural studies.

The following **research questions** in the study '*Response of farming families to the consequences of accidents at work and occupational diseases*' (2020-2022) shed light on the focus on informal and formal social support for sick and injured farmers:

- **Who can sick/injured farmers turn to in order to continue farming?**
- **What do farmers think of the idea of establishing farm labour assistance services as a possible form of support when farmers are unable to work due to injury or illness?**





Theoretical background

Characteristics of labour relations in family farms: labour is mainly provided by **the family members** (Brandth and Haugen, 2007; Small, 2005; De Haan, 1993; Gasson and Errington, 1993; Loyns and Kraut, 1992)

An advantage of the labour of cohabiting family members is in **sharing “implicit contracts”** i.e. informal understandings of obligations of the relationships pertaining to high moral economy ethics; it contains low transaction costs connected to finding, supervising and motivating workers for accomplishing quality work (Netting 1993, Gasson & Errington 1993, Gasson 1979)

The help of **neighbouring** farmers, in the form of informal **exchange relationships** that encompass durable reciprocal obligations, is/was also **an important source of labour** for the farm families, chiefly in seasonal peaks, but also **an effective ‘insurance company’** in crises that made happen by accidents or illnesses (Netting 1993; Hill 1993, Sieder 1991).

Since 1980, capital-intensive agricultural technologies and economies of scale have led to a decline in the number of family farms in most European countries, as well as **reduced availability of family farm labour** and **unpaid labour from the neighbours** (Maucorps et al. 2019; Calus and Van Huylenbroeck 2010).





Theoretical background

Farmers' willingness to change (adapt) their everyday practices depends on how they perceive their **benefits**, as shown by rural studies based on Bourdieu's conceptualisation, i.e., whether these practices contribute to **the growth of their capital**, especially the **symbolic capital** (pride and recognition) associated with the concept of the „**good farmer**“ (e.g. Glover 2015, 2008; Glover & Reay 2013; Sutherland and Darnhofer 2012; Sutherland & Burton 2011).

Lovelock's (2012) study of New Zealand farmers' perceptions of their own bodies and (non)acceptance of safety measures highlighted **the image of an independent, sustainable, uncompromising "good farmer"** who is able to **endure pain** and also **refuse or not seek help** except in extremely difficult circumstances.

Previous studies of the 'good farmer' have disproportionately represented the **male perspective** and have not mentioned women and youth. As Riley (2016) and Burton et al. (2021) suggest, more research is needed **to assess the intersecting roles of all members of the farm household**, including spouses.





Theoretical background

Rare **studies of informal and formal support and care for the injured and ill on farms** conducted in Canada, Australia, and the United States (Kaminski 2005; Molyneaux-Smith et al 2003; Reed & Claunch 2002) revealed that **farm families rely more on themselves than on prepared support programs** when their members are ill or injured.

The way this group **receives support and care** depends on certain **cultural expectations** and **norms** of independence and autonomy, which is reflected in a **strong reluctance to use formal social services**. Seeking help outside the family, such as care for the elderly, is often seen as an admission of failure, as caring for family members is **a matter of pride** for them (Friesen et al. 2010a, 2010b; Heenan, 2000a, 2000b; Johansson 1991).

Research on the **burden of illness** (e.g., dementia) **on family caregivers** also shows that family members **adjust their daily routines** to provide assistance and care, largely **abandoning their own needs and daily activities**. **Relationships** between family members **also change** (for better or worse) as a result of the illness/disability (Balducci et al. 2008, Häusler et al. 2016).



Data and their analysis

Employing thematic analysis, **two sets of empirical data** are employed:

60 structured interviews conducted during the winter of 2018-2019,

15 semi-structured interviews conducted during the winter of 2021-2022.

Research participants were **farm household members** of **both genders** and **various ages** from Slovenia.





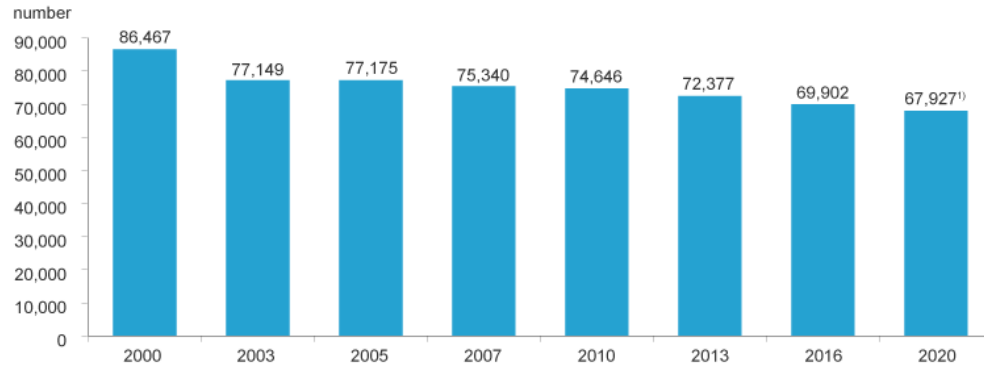
Some facts about agriculture in Slovenia





Some facts about agriculture in Slovenia

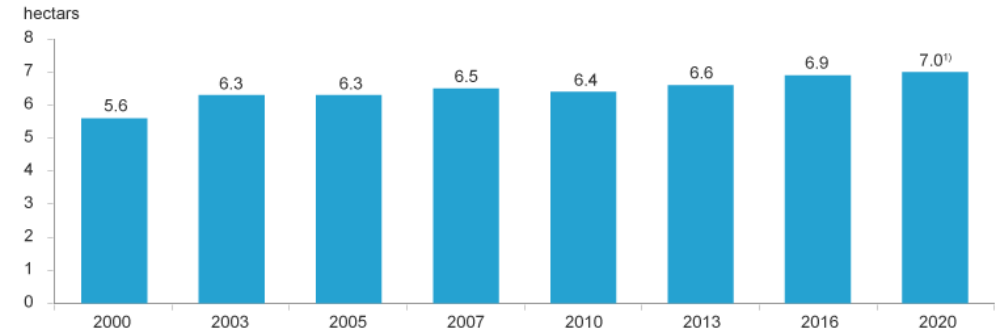
Number of agricultural holdings, Slovenia, 2000–2020



1) Provisional data
Source: SURS

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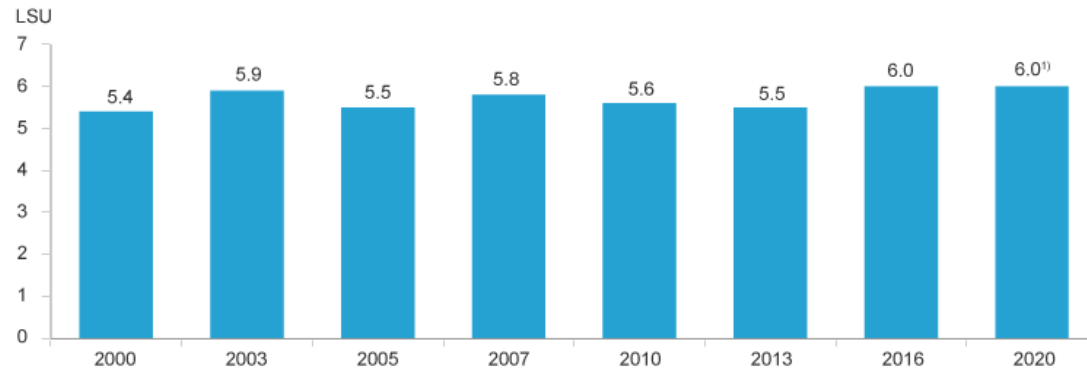
Average utilized agricultural area (UAA) per agricultural holding, Slovenia, 2000–2020



1) Provisional data
Source: SURS

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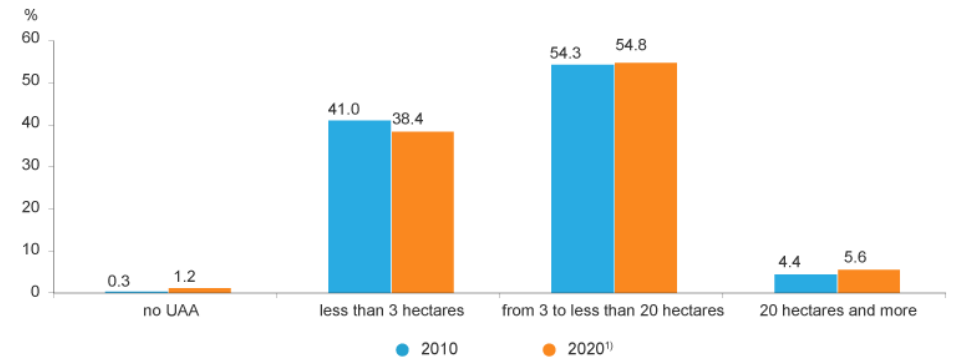
Average number of livestock units (LSU) per agricultural holding, Slovenia, 2000–2020



1) Provisional data
Source: SURS

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Percentage of agricultural holdings by utilized agricultural area (UAA) size class, Slovenia, 2010–2020



1) Provisional data
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Results

Close family members are the **first to provide assistance/support**, and to a lesser extent other relatives, as well as the agricultural extension service, various associations and organisations, most of which are humanitarian in nature.

Help from family members is expected and taken for granted and not an issue on farm households with a larger number of members. A **strong moral pressure** to help each other in difficult times prevails which is consistent with the customary order, the **'rules of the game' in farming habitus** and reflect an obligation to **fulfil the 'implicit contract'** between members of the farming household.

The gender or age of the family member who replaces the sick or injured person at work **does not matter**, as confirmed by the testimonies of our research participants (RP), because what matters is that **the work is done on time**, by whatever means. In this case, this leads to **a change in** the established rules of **the division of labour** between the **genders** and generations.

Some RPs mentioned **the challenges or difficulties** that illness or injury can **bring to family relationships** (ambivalence, conflict); due to the **increased burden** on other family members, especially spouses. However, the testimonies also confirmed that male and female farmers rarely seek help from non-family members in case of injury/illness.





Results

Neighbourly help was much more widespread in the past than it is today. Larger farm families enabled the exchange of labour between neighbouring farmers. Today, however, this form of help is constrained by **labour shortages**, i.e., **off-farm work, bigger and specialised farms**, and **farmers' higher expectations** for knowledge and skills in using machinery (importance of cultural and symbolic capital in the use of neighbourly help (e.g., Sutherland and Burton 2011)).

Farmers of both genders find **different ways to deal with the consequences** of accidents and diseases (mobilisation of savings, sale of land, reduction of herds, abandonment of farming). The **lack of labour** in the family circle (small/medium size farms) and in the community (only a few farms in the community), as well as a **strong work ethic**, usually cause them to **work sick and injured** or to **end their medical treatment** and recovery **prematurely**.

Farmers in our study were **not familiar with formal farm labour support services** that exist in other European countries. Some farmers expressed **considerable distrust of nonfamily labour**, fearing that its presence would be detrimental to the farm. Others emphasised **the need for such services**, but pointed to the **chronic labour shortage** in finding suitable replacements and the issue of **payment** for such a service.



Conclusions

Shortage of labour - with fewer family members on farms, less help from neighbours, and no formal substitutes for labour, farmers are increasingly working alone, isolated, lonely, and on their own in times of crisis, making them even **more vulnerable** to excessive stress, burnout, accidents, and illness. Consequentially, **farming occupation is less attractive**.

Despite structural and demographic changes, **farmers still expect and depend** on the help/support of **informal social networks**, while **formal social support is not recognised** by many as a possible/necessary complement to sustain farming and is consequently not developed.

Agricultural and social policies should take this **particularities of farming habitus** into account when designing appropriate measures at the level of **the support system for farmers**, e.g. by **evaluating existing** and **exploring new forms of labour support** in farming context.



NUDIM - POTREBUJEM POMOČ na kmetiji

Tukaj si, her želiš pomagati ali pa potrebuješ pomoč pri delu in življenju na kmetiji.

Obrazec je **prednostno namenjen solidarnostni pomoči s krmo**.
Po sistemu **NUDIM - POTREBUJEM KRMO!**

Prosimo vas, da skrbno izpolnite ta spletni obrazec glede na to, ali pomoč nudite o jo potrebujete. **Ekipa KGZS-JSKS skupaj z zadrugami in drugimi ponudniki storitev prevoza** bo na podlagi zbranih podatkov v čim krajšem času pričela z organizacijo povezovanja in prevozov krme znotraj in med regijami.

Ker pa številne kmetije potrebujejo še drugačne oblike pomoči in verjamemo, da številni kmetje želite pomagati še na kakšen drug način, smo del obrazca namenili tudi zbiranju podatkov glede ostalih materialnih potreb in potreb po fizični pomoči (čiščenje travnikov, hlevov, dvorišč,...).

Za nadaljevanje in izpolnitev obrazca hihnite naprej ali next.

Čas je, da si medsebojno pomagamo!

KGZS, SKS, ZKS, ZSPM in ZKS



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Thank you for your attention

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