

Characteristics and Contextual Stressors in Farmers and Agricultural Worker Suicides in Georgia, 2008-2015

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Based on a paper by Scheyett, Bayakly, & Whitaker (2019).
Journal of Rural Mental Health.



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Advocates for positive social change

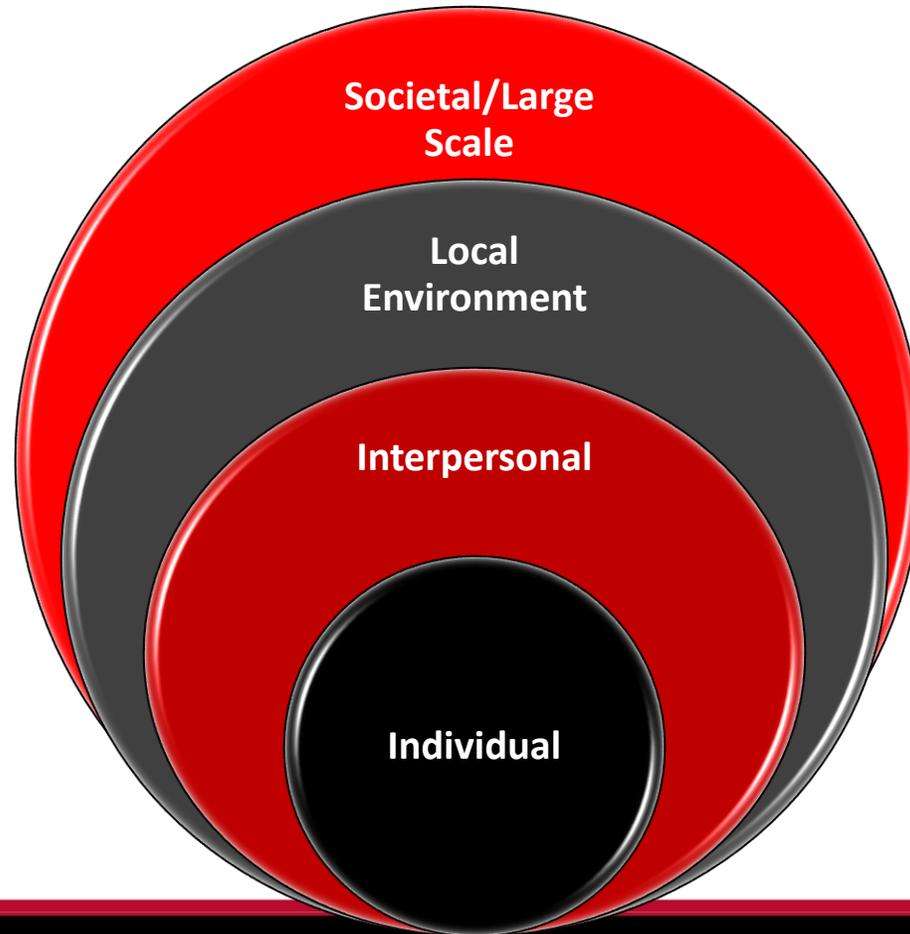
A Crisis in Farmer Well-Being

- CDC study revealed Farming, Fishing, Forestry had 3rd highest suicide rate of any occupation (CDC, 2018)
- In Georgia, rate was nearly 51 per 100,000, compared with 14.9 per 100,000 for overall population of workers (Lavender et al., 2016)



How do we Conceptualize This?

Social Ecological Framework



Individual Factors Identified in the Literature

- Depression and mental illness may be elevated in farmers
- Health challenges and injuries
- Stress
- Demographic risk factors: age and gender
- Challenges to identity



Interpersonal Factors

- Social isolation
- Increased dependence on smaller network of relationships
- Stress impacts in couple relationships



Local Environmental Factors

- Cultural
 - Pride in independence
 - Stigma in help-seeking
 - Lack of awareness of mental health issues
- Physical
 - Ease of access to firearms
 - Link between depression and pesticide exposure
 - Lack of adequate health/behavioral health services

Societal/Large Scale Factors



- Weather
- Fluctuation in crop prices
- Changing regulations
- Changes in policy and legislation

This Study: What is happening in Georgia?

- Bulk of research done outside the US
- Patterns vary geographically
- Findings are statistical, or interviewing those with suicidal ideation
- *What are the characteristics of farming individuals who have died by suicide in Georgia, and what factors are associated with these deaths?*

Method

- Used GA VDRS data from 2008-2015
- Extracted all cases positive for variable Suicide
- Reviewed all cases containing the terms “farm,” “farmer” or “agriculture” and extracted all cases with indication that the individual was an agricultural worker or farmer. N=106 out of 9175
- Quantitative: Demographics, means of death, presence of substance
- Qualitative: thematic analysis of coroner/ME report and law enforcement report summaries

Results: Demographics

- Male 97.2%
- White 89.6%
- Non-Hispanic 91.5%
- Mean age years 53.6
- Marital Status
 - Married 40.6%
 - Never married 30.2%
 - Divorced 18.0%
 - Widowed 4.7%
- Education
 - < 9th grade 6.6%
 - 9-12th grade 9.4%
 - High School/GED 33.0%
 - Some college 4.7%
 - Bachelors or more 6.6%
 - Unknown 39.4%
- Presence of Substances
 - Yes 11%
 - No 13%
 - No information 76%

Results: Means of Suicide

Gunshot Wound	n	%
to Head	62	57.58%
to Chest	14	13.21%
to Other	7	6.60%
Hanging	17	16.04%
Poison	2	1.89%
Jump from Window	1	0.94%
Stabbing	1	0.94%
In Front of Car	1	0.94%
Disconnect Medical Device	1	0.94%

Results: Factors Associated with Suicide (C/ME or LE)

Factors	n	%
Relationship Issues	27	25.50%
Health Issues	26	24.53%
Suicidal Threats	22	20.80%
Mental Health Issues	15	14.20%
Financial Problems	13	12.30%
Signs and Behaviors	8	7.60%
"Recently depressed"	7	6.60%
Criminal Justice Involved	5	4.70%
Missing/Factors Unknown	38	36%

Relationship Issues

- Conflicts with wife/girlfriend

“Victim and his [primary relationship] were fighting about Victim’s heavy drinking, [with the primary relationship] wanting Victim to get help for his drinking...[primary relationship]stated that they cooked dinner and they were still fighting about his drinking and the Victim stated he would just kill himself...then heard the gun go off.”

- Conflict with other family

- Loss

“The Victim was upset because his [primary relationship] was placed in an out-of-state assisted living home.”



ary

Health Struggles

- Chronic health problems and lost of functioning

Victim with a history of diabetes and cardiac problems reportedly told his family he was “tired of being a burden to them” because of his need for personal care assistance.

- New diagnosis

“[the] Victim was agitated about his condition and started talking suicide after his lung surgery [which revealed cancer].”

- Chronic pain

“The Victim’s [close relative] advised that the decedent was depressed and voiced suicidal ideation in the past month because he was ‘hurting so badly and did not want to live anymore’...The Victim’s medical history included cardiovascular issues, chronic pain, degenerative arthritis, knee replacement, shoulder surgery, and ostomy due to colitis.”

Suicidal Threats and Signs

- Prior suicidal threats

“Law enforcement had been called to the residence numerous times for past suicide attempts by the Victim.”

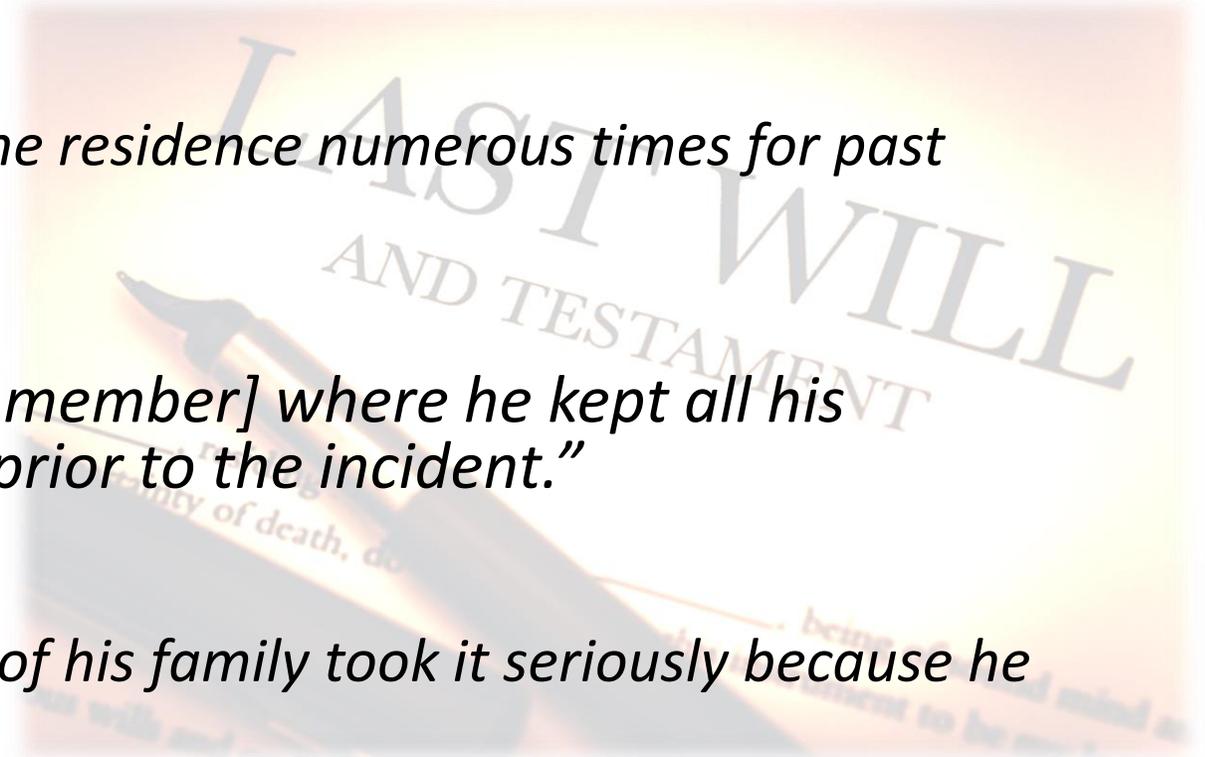
- Behavioral signs

“[the] Victim showed [a close family member] where he kept all his important papers and will the night prior to the incident.”

- Family dismissal

“He threatened to kill himself but none of his family took it seriously because he had made similar threats in the past.”

In 14 cases family was aware of prior threats; in only 3 of these was it noted the individual was taken for mental health services.



Financial Stress

- Loss of job

“Victim was out of work and couldn’t support his family.”

- Financial problems linked with health problems

“Victim was depressed because of financial problems & declining health. Victim had a heart attack 3 months prior. V[ictim]’s [primary relationship] had lost her job and there were hospital bills.”

In over a third of the cases multiple factors, such as health and finances, were present.



Discussion and Implications

- Health and the inability to work as a precipitant
- Financial stress less frequent than expected (but must remember this data set ended in 2015)
- Suicidal threats and family (in)action
- Relationship problems a common factor, but actually less frequent than in the general population of those who die by suicide (26% vs 42%)

Future Directions

- Need to know much more
 - National data
 - MISSING DATA, esp. related to substances and C/ME reports
- Targets for intervention
 - Health: primary MD and rural health clinics
 - Relationships and loss: faith leaders, divorce lawyers, assisted living facilities, funeral homes
 - Financial stress: banks, extension agents



Conclusion

- Farmers and agricultural workers demonstrate strength and resilience in the face of many challenges and hardships.
- Recent events—weather, tariffs, trade issues—exacerbate the stress this population feels.
- There are multiple points of leverage in rural communities that can be used to prevent death by suicide among the farmers and agricultural workers who work to feed our country and the world.