

THE EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT AMONG SLOVENIAN FARMERS AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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The article presents findings from qualitative research conducted within the project Well-being on the Farm: Strengthening Resources and Knowledge (PoljaMoči), which addresses mental health challenges among the farming population arising from the specific conditions of farm life and work.

Between February and June 2025, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore Slovenian farmers' subjective experiences of burnout and the resources available to support recovery. The study included seven participants from rural areas (five men and two women) who live and work on farms. They were selected through purposive sampling. The average age was 35, ranging from 23 to 47 years.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and recurring patterns. Three of the seven interviewees had experienced physician-diagnosed burnout, which manifested as persistent fatigue, listlessness, sleep disturbances ("You are tired during the day, and you cannot sleep at night"), and inability to work. A major challenge during recovery was the lack of understanding from extended family members, while partners were generally supportive. Participants often felt unable to take time off from farm work, making full recovery difficult.

Those affected sought professional support, including psychotherapy and thematic workshops. Informal resources also played an important role, such as conversations with friends, reading, music, faith, and physical activity. In one case, seeking therapy was encouraged by a partner, and returning to sports helped reduce stress.

All interviewees identified similar stressors related to farming life: financial pressures (loans and access to non-repayable funds), administrative burdens and complex tender procedures, unpredictable weather, inability to postpone work, outdated machinery, adapting to new technologies, intergenerational conflicts and succession issues, strained relationships within the agricultural community (e.g., envy and lack of solidarity), continuous work without rest, and difficulties balancing multiple life roles.

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of burnout within the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Slovenian farming. By foregrounding personal experiences and subjective interpretations, it highlights the value of qualitative approaches in researching mental health. The findings provide a basis for further research, the development of targeted support programmes and preventive measures, and for raising awareness among professionals and the wider public about the pressures faced by farmers.

Keywords: occupational burnout; farming population; thematic analysis; recovery resources; Slovenia