

George W. Doherty, MS, LPC



Crisis In The American Heartland —  
Disasters & Mental Health  
In Rural Environments:  
An Introduction  
(Volume 1)

## **Praise for Disaster Mental Health books by George W. Doherty**

“Mr. Doherty has produced an invaluable reference volume for everyone involved in disaster response/disaster preparedness field. It is a must for your library! His attention to detail, breadth of scope, depth of knowledge and readable writing style, reflect the work of an eminent scholar in his field and one who has paid his dues on the frontlines. It represents the ultimate A to Z ‘How to Do It’ manual in this difficult, complicated field. From the sensitive discussion of clinical issues to the organizational planning details, the clarity and thoroughness of this volume are outstanding. This book should be required reading for everyone involved in this critical field.”

John G. Jones, Ph.D. ABPP ATR-BC Licensed Psychologist

“Disasters happen—and someone has to be there to help the victims. George W. Doherty discusses training practices for mental health professional whose task it is to assist victims of disaster-related stress and trauma, giving advice and tips about dealing with various disasters whether they be the product of man or nature. His books are recommended to anyone whose career may take them into this type of profession and for any community library social science shelf.”

—*Midwest Library Review*

“As a certified first responder with the City of Austin Emergency Measures Office I was delighted to find more information to add to my training. (The City of Austin provided training as a result of 9/11 in the event Austin, Texas, experiences a disaster from terrorists or other incidents of major concern.) George W. Doherty’s book certainly presents a concise and informative addition to the library of a first responder, either beginner or one that is experienced. The information is well-researched and appropriate. Furthermore, I believe his books could be used by trainers when creating first responder to disaster training courses and be part of the study material.”

—Irene Watson, Managing Editor, *Reader Views*

“This is an information-packed book about disasters and crises, the psychological impact of such events upon people, from the victims to the disaster workers, and also a psychological explanation of those who create crises, such as terrorists. Anyone who is considering being a disaster worker of any type, whether it is working for an organization like FEMA or even being an EMT, police officer, or volunteer fireman will find value in this book as it lays out various situations and what the disaster worker should know and be prepared to handle since an emergency or crisis could happen unexpectedly at any time.”

—Tyler R. Tichelaar, PhD

“Awareness of how crises affect various people-groups, thinking through the important role disaster workers play in re-establishing normalcy in people's shaken lives, and planning immediate and long-term approaches to help traumatized people recapture mental equilibrium are vital aspects of a crisis intervention program. This is a beneficial and informative tool to raise awareness and plan levelheaded crisis intervention.”

—Michael Philliber, PhD, for *Reberras Reads*

“It is extremely important for health practitioners and emergency workers to be prepared for emergencies, natural disasters, terroristic attacks and times of war. When dealing with traumatic incidents such as these, everyone is affected, including the victim, their family members and health care professionals. By being prepared to deal with these issues, research has shown that early intervention can reduce the chances of PTSD, acute anxiety, and depression. Ways to be prepared for these situations are discussed and a variety of other factors are identified that can increase the likelihood that disorders will occur. Having an operational emergency plan prepared ahead of time can make a huge difference in the ability to be prepared for the crisis.

“I found *Return to Equilibrium* to be very informative and necessary for mental health practitioners. As a person who works with disabled students in the community college setting, I also believe that this information is pertinent to college counselors and instructors. The better our understanding, the better we can serve their needs and help them reestablish equilibrium.”

—Paige Lovitt, for *Reader Views*

# **Crisis in the American Heartland:**

**Disasters & Mental Health in Rural Environments**

## **Introduction (Volume 1)**

**George W. Doherty, MS, LPC**

**Foreword by Thomas Mitchell, MS LPC**

Crisis in the American Heartland: Disasters & Mental Health in Rural Environments

An Introduction (Volume 1)

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## **Objectives**

Following completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe how disasters affect people in rural environments.
- Identify, explain and discuss cross-cultural considerations in rural environments.
- Describe mental health services provided by mental health professionals in rural areas.
- Identify how rural communities work together to prepare for response and recovery from critical incidents, crises, and disasters.
- Identify and describe the background and factors affecting farm and ranching crises.
- Describe and explain the factors affecting and causing stress on farms and ranches in the western US and other rural environments.
- Describe and identify stress, anxiety, and cross-cultural variables in rural areas.
- Identify problems associated with trauma situations in rural areas.
- Describe cultural competency and its importance in rural environments.
- Identify special populations present in rural areas.
- Explain the importance of rural culture, ethnicity and cultural values in responding to critical incidents, crises and disasters in rural populations.
- Explain how rural practice differs from urban environments.
- Describe mental health approaches to disasters in rural environments.
- Identify types of disasters and their impacts that affect rural areas.
- Identify and describe the phases of disaster and how they affect rural areas.

- Identify and describe support networks and resources in rural environments available for disaster responses.
- Identify and describe symptoms of psychological trauma.
- Explain BASIC-ID and how this multi-modal approach is used to help identify areas of concern for assessment following disaster and critical incident traumas.
- Identify and describe the challenges associated with mental health responses in rural areas and how to meet them.
- Identify and describe the roles of country doctors and rural mental health professionals and paraprofessionals.

## Foreword

When I wandered out into the high plains of eastern Wyoming as a newly minted mental health professional, I experienced a period of culture shock. Many of the services needed for individuals and families were often not available in the rural area I worked and, when available, would often be underutilized. People in the farming and ranching communities had their own way of dealing with the vicissitudes of life and were more likely to “cowboy up” than take steps to resolve problems or seek help when needed.

After a few years, my employer sent me out to obtain some training in disaster mental health. I met George Doherty at a training held on the campus of the University of Wyoming. The result for me was fortuitous as not only did I have access to training resources through George’s Rocky Mountain Region Disaster Mental Health Institute, but the added opportunity to learn a few things about rural mental health and how to better serve Wyoming’s rural and agricultural-oriented population. George has been a practitioner in rural settings for more years than he prefers to acknowledge and has developed many insights into serving rural populations.

Rural people across the world are both similar to and very different from their urban neighbors. Oftentimes the realities of rural living create a need to develop skills in self-sufficiency that, when combined with an attitude of “rugged individualism,” can make it difficult for rural individuals to reach out for help when warranted. Resources are fewer and often geographically separated by hundreds of miles. Crises in rural settings may not be newsworthy to the extent that a similar crisis in an urban setting would be. As a result the extent of a disaster might not become apparent for many days. Any response requiring human services and material supports can be delayed, and hampered by minimal or absent infrastructure, further hampering recovery efforts.

George’s *Crisis in the American Heartland: Disasters & Mental Health in Rural Environments* was written for a broad audience of planners, health and mental health professionals. The following chapters summarize the character of rural

residents and the challenges of rural living, rural economy, challenges of rural life, and a number of hazards or disasters that have or can occur in rural settings. Georges devotes a section to review the unique vulnerabilities to stress as well as the impact of crisis in rural settings. He includes brief reviews of the components of Critical Incident Stress Management. He concludes with a section on preparation for crisis and assembling appropriate staff for the occasions when a concerted response to crisis is needed.

Thomas Mitchell, MS LPC  
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# 1

## **Introduction to Crises in Rural Areas: Background and Overview**

A review of the current literature reveals a number of published studies and articles that deal with a broad cross-section of topics on crisis intervention and related areas (CISM, Trauma, Disaster) in rural environments. These include CISM services in rural settings (Seebold, 2003); Telehealth services (Dimmick, Burgiss, Robbins, Black, Jarnagin & Anders, 2003); stress in rural areas (Cowen, 2001); suicide intervention (Aoun & Johnson, 2001); rural elderly (Neese, Abraham, & Buckwalter, 1999; Snustad, Thompson-Heisterman, Neese & Abraham, 1993); responses in rural communities following natural disasters (Sundet & Mermelstein, 1996); community action for abusive men (Hanson & Whitman, 1995); litigation in rural practice (Bushy & Rauh, 1993); rural crisis intervention teams (Silver & Goldstein, 1992); childhood depression (Cecchini, 1998); rural psychiatry in hospital emergency rooms (Morris, 1997); intervention with at-risk adolescents (Rose-Gold, 1991); Guidance in small schools (Dinkmeyer, 1990); cultural aspects (Paulsen, 1988a; Paulsen, 1988b); responses of rural ministers to natural disasters (Echterling, Bradfield, Wylie, 1988); the farm crisis (Mermelstein, 1987; Thompson & McCubbin, 1987; Hargrove, 1986); rural sexual abuse prevention (Johnson, 1987); short-term interventions with families and children following tornadoes (McRee, Corder, Deitz, Silverstein, et al., 1985-1986); disasters in small communities (Farberow, 1985); crisis intervention in rural schools (Wise & Smead, 1985; Harper, 1984; Beare, 1981); rural psychiatric training (Bassuk & Cote, 1983); use of paraprofessionals in rural populations (Shybut, 1982; Marshall, 1971); working with rural families (Anderson, 1976); and approaches to drug

prevention and treatment in rural areas (Bourne, 1974). A literature search revealed a total of 37 articles published on these topics since 1974. While this is probably not inclusive of all the work done on crisis intervention in rural areas, it does suggest a lack of dissemination of such information to mental health and related professionals.

Paulsen (1988) discussed the economic crisis affecting rural America in terms of its impact on the individual and his or her community. She outlined three themes: (1) rural communities are in a state of chronic crisis, (2) rural individuals are members of a distinctly unique culture, and (3) the rural crisis warrants a unique response from mental health professionals. All three of these provide insights into rural crises and all three deserve further study.

Harper (1984) discussed crisis intervention and management techniques in rural or remote areas, focusing on rural Alaska, and suggested guidelines for successful interventions which highlighted the importance of understanding cultural differences. These are important considerations in most rural areas in the United States as rural areas tend to follow cultural traditions more than urban areas, in general.

Telephone crisis lines are one method that has been used in both rural and urban areas. Shybut (1978) found that underutilization, especially by males and by the elderly of both sexes, was the initial problem on a crisis intervention telephone service used in a rural area. Telecounseling and other forms of counseling, including online counseling on the internet, are areas that present potential for covering large geographic areas common in the rural west.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a crisis in many farming communities as the face of agriculture in the country has changed. Many family farms were lost or sold with attendant stressors on those involved. Hargrove (1986) examined the myth of rural communities uniting under stress, and suggests clinical and community activities for mental health workers during farm crises. In his article, he maintained that a model for understanding human response to natural disasters is useful for understanding response to such crises. He offered recommendations at the community level and suggested that the clinical/advocate model developed by G. B. Melton (1983; see also PA, Vol. 61: 9256) provides a useful perspective from which to operate.

## **Farm and Ranching Crises**

Treatment approaches to such crises vary. For example, Jurich & Russell (1987) evaluated 15 farm families that underwent therapy at the Kansas State University

Family Center, using a model of family adaptation to stress developed by H. I. McCubbin et al. (see record 1981-30250-001). Major interventions included reframing, mobilizing resources, and utilizing less indirect means of intervention. Subjects (Ss) showed a greater increase in well-being at three months than did a general sample of clients. However, stress levels were not lowered as much as the general sample, and life satisfaction was lower at follow-up than the general population. Thompson & McCubbin (1987) outline some resource materials available to help educators, counselors, and others to support rural families in crises and to facilitate decision making, long-range planning, and problem solving. Counseling programs, workshops, publications, support groups for coping with stress, and computerized decision aids are reviewed.

In another approach, Paulsen (1988) asserts that rural crises create new numbers of rural individuals who are in need of assistance as they cope with the stress of economic dislocation and the overwhelming difficulties that occur after the loss of a farm or business. She discusses individual, family, and community treatment aspects within the thematic context of a culture in crisis. An urban-based regional family service agency, Farmers Helping Farmers, is presented as an example of a systems response to the rural crisis. The proposed treatment involves a multilevel community response that includes self-help support groups, instruction of adaptive coping skills, and sharing information in rural communities. Mental health professionals are challenged to further their understanding of rural crises and to adopt more flexible treatment strategies to encompass a multilevel system's response.

In the current times of crisis, nationally and internationally, with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and concern about terrorism, it is critical that mental health professionals in rural areas become aware of recent research, training and approaches to crisis intervention, traumatology, compassion fatigue, disaster mental health, critical incident stress management, post-traumatic stress, and related areas.

Waterfield (1986) covered the growing economic and cultural split between rural and urban America. In his book *Conflict and Crises in Rural America*, he addressed many of the major issues impacting rural areas. These include such issues as: the "rural-urban wars" over land use, control of water, cheap food policy, trade, the use of chemicals and pesticides, animal rights, the biases in urban-dominated media, corruption in food marketing and distribution, what is happening to the land, and who the largest landowners are. Waterfield suggests that rural America's share of national wealth is declining and that America is the world's best hope for solving the problems of hunger and rural poverty.

Through a long-term (1982-1989) study of 156 farm families in Dodge County, Georgia, Barlett (1993) discusses the damage from a decade of crisis, and provides a critical look at trends in American farming, their impact on rural community vitality, and the effects of federal farm legislation. This was a study of family farms in Dodge County, Georgia. It examined the social and economic factors that determine success in farming today. Bartlett, a professor of anthropology at Emory University, presents an agrarian history of Dodge County and its changes and transformations from frontier times through the present. The key period of her study was the boom-and-bust decade of the 1980's when the nation was in the grip of a farm crisis.

Using data derived from interviews and personal observations of 124 small and medium-scale farm families, Bartlett describes in detail the coping strategies and management approaches of those who were determined to stay in farming and those who left. She explores family histories, personal aspirations, and attitudes about farming as a livelihood. Her interviews with farm women reveal a variety of role definitions and spousal relationships that enable farm families to remain intact. The aftermath of the crisis and its impacts on farm size, resource conservation, and management style offer insights for family farm survival in other communities.

Rural psychology has very few major studies concerning practice in rural environments and small communities. Practitioners face some very different problems from their more urban counterparts. Rural practice presents important yet challenging issues for psychology, especially given the North American and international distribution of the population, levels of need for psychological services in rural settings, limited availability of rural services, and migration of rural residents to urban centers. Direct service issues include the need to accommodate a wide variety of mental health difficulties, issues related to client privacy and boundaries, and practical challenges. Indirect service issues include the greater need for diverse professional activities, including collaborative work with professionals having different orientations and beliefs, program development and evaluation, and conducting research with few mentors or peer collaborators. Professional training and development issues include lack of specialized relevant courses and placements, and such personal issues as limited opportunities for recreation and culture, and lack of privacy. Psychology will need to address more fully these complex issues if rural residents are to receive equitable treatment and services (Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003).

Recent concerns in agriculture have caused people to take a look at where their food comes from. The crisis in the cattle industry as a result of concerns surrounding Mad Cow Disease and, in the Far East, concerns about “Bird Flu” in chickens contribute to stressors not only in the general public, but also among farmers and ranchers who strive to keep the population fed.

The US farm crisis in the 1980s refocused national attention on the plight of rural areas. Data indicate that, relative to urban areas, rural America suffers from the double burden of (a) high levels of poverty, disability, and impairment, and (b) inadequate health and human services. Wagenfeld (1988) introduced a special issue of the *Journal of Rural Community Psychology* that presented a status report on the mental health problems in rural areas during that period. Topics discussed included the social ecology of inpatient mental health services, the response of community mental health centers to the farm crisis, innovative mental health services, policy approaches to improving mental health services, and a research agenda for rural community psychology.

Ramirez-Ferrero (2002) challenges interpretations of the ongoing restructuring of the American agricultural sector as simply an economic phenomenon with psychological consequences. Ramirez-Ferrero argues that male farmers’ responses to the farms’ financial crisis are not strictly psychological, individual, or idiosyncratic, but cultural. Subjects’ actions and beliefs are a consequence of a multiplicity of cultural discourses. It is their socially-constructed sense of self or subjectivity (mediated by cultural processes of power) that determines which ones they internalize, consider, and act upon. Rural northwest Oklahoma served as the locus of this study. Research was conducted with farm families and included the collection of life histories from 13 couples, periodic participant-observation on a farm, unstructured and structured interviews with health professionals, and focus group research. This study incorporated farmers’ life stories, particularly those of crisis, to understand local notions of gender, kinship, land, farming styles, familial and farm goals, and community. Informants’ life stories are presented in the context of broader discussions of the history of northwest Oklahoma, agricultural economics, corporate, and capitalist processes, and Christianity to understand the social construction of the emotion of pride, an emotion that is critical in understanding men’s responses to the farm crisis. Ramirez-Ferrero suggests that emotions are culturally mediated, embodied thoughts that are necessarily evaluative, and therefore challenges the common understanding of emotions as biological and psychological phenomena. Because the patriarchal foundation of farming

communities is being eroded by industrial values, men experience the devaluation of cultural ideas that supported their subjectivity, specifically, the emotion of pride. This devaluation, in turn, leads men to actions and inactions that are often negative, destructive, and tragic.

Stein (1984) explored the cultural ethos and psychodynamics underlying a duality in the Midwestern/Southwestern US male character, which is encapsulated in the image of the steadfastly, sedentary farmer and that of the adventuresome vagabond cowboy—both at war with one another in the same person. This duality is considered primarily within the context of Oklahoma's wheat-farming and cattle-ranching families, but it is in fact a variation upon a regional Midwestern / Southwestern US identity. Stein argues that the psychologically primitive qualities attributed and allocated to the Midwest/Southwest by the larger national group keep the unstable regional masculine character “stirred up” and, thereby, available to the rest of the nation as both negative example and positive source for the current national nostalgia, and as support for political “conservatism” and international militarism.

As things change in rural areas, the need for appropriate social services also changes. Martinez-Brawley & Blundall (1991) interviewed 44 farm families in Iowa and Pennsylvania concerning beliefs and attitudes about need and social services. Families in Iowa had been severely affected by an agricultural crisis and were more likely to have had contact with organized social services. Seeking assistance appeared more acceptable in Iowa than in Pennsylvania. Among the families, there was a sense that success and failure had little to do with deservingness. The perception that the world is unfair was overwhelming in Iowa. Families did not view themselves as needing special help as a class of people; yet they did voice concerns about not being understood by outside systems. Services that were found to be the least acceptable in both Iowa and Pennsylvania were those closely associated with depression indicators (e.g. problems with spouse, increased dependency on school, feelings of anxiety or isolation).

Schulman & Armstrong (1990) analyzed interview data from statewide surveys of 670 farm operators, collected during a period of economic and ecological crisis, to examine relationships among perceived stress, social support, and survival in agriculture. While the level of perceived stress had no relationship with survival, social support had a significant impact on both social psychological and behavioral dimensions of survival in agriculture. Perceived social support increased plans to remain in agriculture and increased the probability of a person continuing farming.

Using data from a statewide survey of 725 North Carolina farm operators collected during a period of economic and ecological crisis in 1986, Schulman & Armstrong (1989) analyzed the relationships between perceived social psychological distress, social support, and demographic, farm structure, and socioeconomic characteristics. Younger operators showed higher distress levels, and age and social support interacted so that social support lowered distress levels more for younger than for older operators. Results also suggested that total family income had a curvilinear relationship with perceived distress. Low and high income farm operators manifested higher levels of distress than middle income operators. Results have implications for policy intervention and farm crisis support programs.

Cook, John R. & Tyler (1989) examined the attitudes of 34 North Dakota farm couples toward receiving help for a personal problem. Statistical significances (Ss) were assigned to groups according to the level of financial coping with respect to the possible loss of their farm (stable, declining, and out of business). Ss who were out of business or declining were more open to receiving help from educational sources than Ss whose farms were stable. Female Ss were open to receiving help regardless of their level of financial coping while their husbands were as receptive to help only at times of financial crisis. Ss showed reluctance in making use of outside resources of any kind.

### **Leaving the Farm or Ranch**

Early on, Lamarche (1960) suggested that rural crises are created by the movement to the city, especially on the part of the young, and abandonment of the land. Rapid social evolution without any preparation can have undesirable psychological effects.

In the 1980s, there was a high level of interest in retirement of farmers because of an aging farm population and concern that the “farm crisis” may have disrupted succession patterns. Keating & Munro (1989) described the process of exit from farm businesses of a group of older farmers and determined the relationship between goals of family succession and behaviors in the exit phase. A sequence of exit from work, management, and ownership was found. Farmers (aged 50+ yrs), who value continuity, were most likely to involve sons in management of the operation. Keating & Munro suggested that programs for two-generation farm families may be useful in the early part of the exit phase while estate planning information and programs may be more appropriate to those in the latter part of the process.

## **Stress on the Farm and on the Range**

Carson, Araquistain, & Ide (1994) examined the relationship between potential family vulnerability factors (stressors and strains), manifestations of maladaptation (family discord and distress), family strengths (hardiness), and measures of bonadaptation (quality of life) as reported by 188 men and women representing 100 Idaho farm and ranch families. Ss completed a battery of tests, including the Farm/Ranch Stress Scale, a demographic questionnaire, and four measures from the Family Invulnerability Test. Family strains and stressors unique to farming and ranching were positively associated with family discord and distress but negatively associated with hardiness and quality of life. Greater family hardiness, as reported by both wives and husbands, was positively correlated with their perceptions of family's quality of life.

Plunkett, Henry , & Knaub (1999) studied 77 adolescents in farm and ranch families to examine the relationship of demographic variables, family stressor events, and family coping strategies to adolescent adaptation. Results indicated that adolescent age and family transitions were positively related to individual stress. Males reported less family stress than did females. Seeking spiritual support was negatively related to family stress, while the perceived impact of the farm crisis was positively related to family stress. Family support was positively related, and family substance use issues were negatively related, to adolescent satisfaction with family life.

Swisher, Elder, & Lorenz (1998) examined how the occupation of farming structures the stress experiences of individuals through the timing and placement of actions. They showed how occupations have effects that spillover into family and friendship relationships. The sample came from the Iowa Youth and Families Project, a longitudinal study of siblings and parents in the aftermath of the farm crisis of the 1980s, and included 424 married couples who had one child in the 7th grade and another child within four years of age of the first child. Results show that farming affects both exposure and vulnerability to stressors. Specifically, farm men are more exposed to financial and job-related stressors, while less prone to marital conflict, than non-farmers. Given the importance of cohesion in farm family operations, farm men are more vulnerable to such conflict when it occurs. However, farm men are unaffected, if not consoled, by knowledge of undesirable events in the lives of their friends. It was concluded that farm men use downward social comparisons to cope with the high levels of uncertainty characteristic of

farming in the aftermath of the 1980s' farm crisis. The lives of rural families who suffered economic hardship and economic pressure caused many to face difficult choices in response to hardship. Multiple adjustments created significant pain for many of these families. This was evidenced by the extreme emotional distress among families who lost a farm as a result of the crisis.

Rettig, Danes, & Bauer (1991) describes a resource exchange theory that outlines the dimensions of life quality and presents a multidimensional scale measure of personal evaluations of family life quality based on this theory. The scale includes items representing love, status, services, information, goods, and money resources received from the family. It is suggested that receipt of these resources satisfied personal needs for (1) love and affection, (2) respect and esteem, (3) comfort and assistance, (4) shared meaning, (5) personal things, and (6) money for personal use.

Van Hook (1990) interviewed 49 adolescents (mean age 16.8 yrs) during the farm crisis. In 66% of the families, there was an increase in parental work responsibilities outside the family farm or business. Family tensions increased in response to the economic uncertainties and change in family roles. The farm crisis was an anxious time for Ss, who described major gaps in family and community information systems. Feelings of personal responsibility for family economic problems were found in 63% of the Ss. The determination of Ss to prepare to cope with an uncertain and unfair world may involve the shift from farming to other occupations. Increased levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide attempts make this a high-risk population during difficult times.

Cecil (1998) describes the development and implementation of *Stress: Country Style*, an Illinois program designed as a response to stress problems among farm families created by an economic downturn. The program involved a crisis line, outreach counseling, and community education about stress. The relationship between the program and community mental health centers is also addressed. Successes and failures of the program are considered.

Walker & Walker (1998) studied the self-reported incidence of stress-related symptoms in 476 male and 341 female farmers, and 70 male and 39 female urban residents. Close to 50% of the farmers reported the frequent to constant occurrence of the symptoms of trouble relaxing, loss of temper, and fatigue; over 30% reported similar occurrence rates for 6 additional symptoms. Self-reported symptom rates were significantly higher in farm women than in farm men, higher in younger farmers, higher in mixed farming operations, and higher in farmers who were holding off-farm employment. Symptom scores were significantly higher in the

farmers compared with the urban Ss. Scores on five symptoms distinguished farm and urban Ss. Walker & Walker suggest that the chronic stress associated with the farm financial crisis may have caused a high self-reported incidence of symptoms among farmers.

Loeb & Dvorak (1987) discuss the high level of stress experienced by many of today's farm families. They suggest that health professionals should be aware of the current situation to deal effectively with the farm family as a unit. Therapists must be well-versed in farm family dynamics before they can understand the impact of external factors. The following topics are of importance: the economics of farming, the farm family (husband, wife, in-laws, adult children), communication in farm families, and health issues. Loeb & Dvorak conclude that there is no end in sight to the farm crisis and that many more families will need support from trained experts in the future.

Hargrove (1986) examined the myth of rural communities uniting under stress and suggests clinical and community activities for mental health workers during farm crises. A model for understanding human reaction to natural disasters is useful for understanding response, recovery and community cohesiveness following such crises. Hargrove suggests that the clinical/advocate model developed by G. B. Melton (1983; see also PA, Vol. 61:9256) provides a useful perspective from which to operate.

Olson & Schellenberg (1986) examined stressors in farm environments, using data from questionnaire surveys of general, familial, and extrafamilial farm stressors. General stressors include problems such as machinery breakdown and harvests, while familial stressors involve role incongruence and conflict. The discussion of extra-familial stressors emphasizes financial stressors and farm financial crises. Olson & Schellenberg suggest that financial stressors are becoming more intense relative to familial factors because of farm crises. They consider directions for community psychology in terms of four types of programs aimed at preventing or alleviating farm financial stress:

- General education/socialization
- Individual skill training
- Development of supportive social agencies
- Political action

They also note the importance of a multiple program approach emphasizing early detection of farm financial stress.

Farmer (1986) suggests that farmers who have failed in the farm crisis of the 1980s blame themselves, although even top producers and managers had been affected. The prevalence of depression is not surprising considering the severity of the losses, the prolonged nature of the stress, and the minimal control farmers have in overcoming their problems. Participation in farm support groups may be effective for families working through a fairly predictable grief cycle involving denial, anxiety, guilt, anger, hostility, confusion, and depression.

Internal and external threats could soon squeeze some ranch and farm families out of business. To assist ranch families with these threats and with amiably transferring the operation to the next generation, Zimmerman (1984) offers a six-step Consensus Management Model that combines strategic planning with psycho-education/family therapy. A pilot test with an intergenerational ranch family indicated improvements in family functioning, including reduced stress and depression, and improved self-esteem and family coping levels.

### **Mental Health, Stress, Anxiety, and Cross-Cultural Variables in Rural Areas of the Western United States**

There has been increasing interest worldwide in recent years in the development of comprehensive mental health programs. In a pluralistic society like the United States, successful intervention will quite often depend on how well the therapist knows and understands the client's cultural or ethnic group. Rural areas of the western United States add still another dimension with sometimes large geographical areas populated with diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

The American west has been portrayed in song, story, speech, myth, legend, and films. From the classic tales of Mark Twain to the legends of Butch Cassidy to Native Americans to films about western women, schoolmarm, and prostitutes to the major epic dramas of United States history, the American west has held a fascination for people from many cultures. The west, though, has a reality of its own. The myths and legends were created, but the reality doesn't always fit the myth or legend — or even the general concept of what the west may be like. The modern west is changing as man seeks to use and/or change the environment.

The physical aspects of our environment are a large part of an individual's experience. They have an impact on the individual and the amount of stress and anxiety experienced. One aspect of the physical environment, i.e. population

density, appears to have negative effects on feelings of personal security and on affiliative and other social responses to individuals or groups.

There has been relatively little research on crowding which has focused on individual and cross-cultural differences. Evans (1978) found evidence that young children may be more adversely affected by crowding than older persons. However, this may only be indicative of western cultures. Children in Kung society (Draper, 1974) apparently do not suffer any ill effects from crowding. Studies of crowding in Chicago (Galle, Gove, and MacPherson, 1972) support the hypothesis that pathology tends to increase as the population density increases. This relationship appears to work the other way in the Netherlands (Levy and Herzog, 1974). In a study done in Hong Kong, no adverse effects were found as the result of high population density (Mitchell, 1971).

The environment is the source of many stressors which can initiate a variety of reactions. These reactions may range from endocrine secretions to such things as complicated appraisals and evaluations of the sources. These reactions to stressors may be physiological (Selye, 1956) and/or psychological (Lazarus, Opton, & Tomita, 1966). Few investigators have attempted to study all aspects of the stress process simultaneously.

Stressful responses can be evoked by the changes and challenges that one experiences in daily life. They can be caused by the disruption of one's habits (e.g. unpredictable noise or crowding). Malfunctioning of social systems which place obstacles in one's path — deprivation, losses, and culturally-governed mores — may also contribute to stressful responses. Stressors may be intrusive, physical, and universally threatening (e.g. natural disasters). Others may be more culturally determined, less universal, and more psychosocial in nature. Aiello and Thompson (1980) found that varying intensities of crowding and proximities in spatial invasion are specific to cultural norms and meanings.

The obvious lack of relative crowding and the presence of generous open space in western rural areas would seem to offer escape from the stressors generally associated with urban areas. The lessening of noise factors, crowding, and other variables associated with stress production would seem to enhance the quality of life. In fact, these have been some of the traditional reasons why people have sought out rural areas for rest, relaxation, and vacations.

Ranchers and farmers have tended to form small close communities which have supported their way of life and provided for mutual support. Depending on their cultural heritage, they have developed and maintained values and attitudes

congruent with their way of life. Other groups (e.g. Mexican Americans) have been generally successful in preserving their cultural heritages while attempting to adapt and adjust to changes in the United States' society. Others (e.g. Native American groups) have maintained their culture in varying degrees and, in many cases, in relative isolation from the mainstream of the U.S. society.

Much of the history of the United States is concerned with the westward expansion of a civilization that had its beginnings on the eastern shores of the North American continent. The Spaniards were the first men of European origins to penetrate the vast regions between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. As late as the 1820s, very little exploring had been done in the far west. In many cases, the terrain was found to be rough and rugged, and resources were scarce in the beginning. Communities were separated by great distances and travel was difficult, at best, by today's standards (Hulse, 1990).

Today, in many areas of the western United States, rural towns and communities may be separated by as much as 100 miles or more. Many of these towns are farm and ranch centers or mining towns. There is often a shortage of physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists, as well as other mental health related services and trained personnel. An increase in population in a number of areas within the past 15–20 years has placed a tremendous strain on many local resources. The need for effective community counseling programs in rural areas of the western United States has been increasing. This is, at least partially, due to stressors placed on old timers and newcomers alike. The rapid growth in some areas is exacerbated by rapidly fluctuating economic changes. As more people enter an area, they tend to overwhelm old timers who, quite often, are left bewildered and lost in a community which once was theirs. Newcomers have difficulties dealing with scarce or non-existent services and resources as well as a lack of adequate housing. Tensions develop over these areas as well as from a clash of values. There is a need for adequate and effective community counseling centers to address these problem areas.

Human services in any community cover a broad area. In addition to mental health services, such services may include law enforcement, legal services, social services, public health, recreation, youth services, local government, educational services, and services for senior citizens. These services have generally been provided informally or through institutions. When rapid community growth occurs, the size of the local population may increase at a rate which causes people's problems to increase tremendously with a resultant strain on existing community resources.

In areas of rapid development, there tends to be a rapidly developing shortage of adequate and reasonably-priced housing. Rentals become high and crowding develops (Uhlmann, Doherty, and Hill, 1977). Recreation presents other problems. Citizens of rural communities in the west have traditionally engaged in recreational activities such as camping, fishing, and hunting. Newcomers tend to have a different set of interests (e.g. bowling alleys, theaters, swimming pools, and handball courts). Communities which can't provide these types of activities may find newcomers taking advantage of more easily available diversions such as drinking, gambling, and prostitution (Uhlmann, 1977).

Uhlmann (1977) pointed out a number of significant problem areas in her analysis of the delivery of human services in Wyoming boom towns. A review of her report points out the potential sources of stress and other mental health related problems encountered in western rural communities experiencing rapid growth. She found that mental health problems in rapidly developing communities include an increased incidence of depression among women and a rising rate of alcoholism among males. She also found an increase in family crises and that children and adolescents are at risk for an increased incidence of behavior disorders and social maladjustments. Newly arrived young adults (18–26) were found to face problems as a result of few, if any, solid interpersonal relationships. They frequently became involved in drug and alcohol abuse. Uhlmann found that public assistance through social services was drastically reduced and that there was frequently a lack of adequate medical personnel. She found that schools experienced difficulties as a result of a rapid growth in student population. At the high school level, the drop-out rate tended to increase as young people were attracted and drawn off by employment opportunities in the area.

Uhlmann suggested that law enforcement personnel in rapidly developing communities may have to deal with problems they have not encountered before and may be hampered by inadequate training, low salaries, and a high turnover of personnel. Poor and/or inadequate facilities (e.g. jails, juvenile detention, and foster homes) were seen as making the job of law enforcement more difficult.

Uhlmann has also suggested that local governments in small rural communities may not have the administrative structure necessary to deal with the new and critical demands placed on them by a rapidly growing population.

In the past, rural communities in the western United States were frequently characterized by a large population of senior citizens. Uhlmann suggests this occurred because young people left the community to seek better employment

elsewhere. However, it seems that when a rapid increase in population due to development occurs, this process is partially reversed. Senior citizens may be forced to leave the community due to a rising cost of living. Such a process of demographic change was observed in three Wyoming communities (Uhlmann, Kimble, and Throgmorton, 1976; Uhlmann, Doherty, and Hill, 1977).

Other problems associated with rapid population growth include a sense of a decreasing “quality of life”. Rapid growth brings rapid change. Many impacted communities have stressed decline and loss. The negative effects such accounts point out usually include: a speeded-up pace of life, congestion and overcrowding, inflation in prices, fear of change in life style for present residents, lack of activities and sense of belonging for newcomer families, alcoholism and mental health problems (*HUD Program Guide*, 1976). Increased incidents of severe depressions and alienation of both old-timers and newcomers may result in “we-they” conflicts.

Traditional agencies and persons who have dealt with the above problem areas may not even exist in such communities. Many of these small rural communities have long been used to everyone taking care of themselves. Existing agencies may find their caseloads overwhelming. Communities which are impacted need help in defining future problems, predicting the magnitude of such problems, and designing and implementing programs and mechanisms to alleviate the problems.

Uhlmann (1977) suggested that most of these problems develop because communities don't have the time to develop financial resource bases and local attitudinal support for needed services. She also suggested that problems occur due to the changing composition of local populations. She pointed out that all of the factors reviewed above bring about increased demands for human services in impacted communities.

### **Stress and Rural Areas**

Stress in rural areas is often overlooked due to smaller populations. For example, Nevada has a history of boom and bust dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century (Hulse, 1990). As a state, it has managed to grow and expand its interests. Although geographically rugged and sparsely populated, it has maintained a rich culture and a pluralistic society. Basque shepherders in the north, cattle ranchers, miners, Mexican Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Shoshone, Washo, and Paiute Indians, and many other groups add to the color and richness of Nevada culture.

Over the years, an expanded effort has been made to develop and maintain mental health services in rural areas (Doherty, 1984). Fluctuations in the economy have stressful effects on the small rural communities. Growth and decline of communities have a psychological impact on those directly affected. People experience this stress and anxiety differently, depending on a number of factors.

One method of studying perceived stress and anxiety is to use a self-report indicator such as Spielberger's (1970) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Spielberger (1970) states that Trait anxiety tends to be relatively stable and indicates a tendency to respond to situations perceived as threatening with elevations on the State scale. McClelland & Atkinson (2000) suggest that trait anxiety has the characteristics of a class of constructs which they term "motives". They define these as dispositions which remain latent until they are activated by cues in different situations. Campbell (See Spielberger & Bale, 1970) calls these "acquired behavioral dispositions". According to him, they involve residues of past experiences which tend to predispose individuals to view the world in a particular way. They also tend to predispose an individual to manifest what he calls "object consistent" response tendencies.

In other words, trait anxiety is like potential energy. It suggests differences between people in the disposition to respond to stressful situations with varying amounts of state anxiety (Spielberger & Bale, 1970). Persons with high levels of trait anxiety tend to be more likely to respond with an increase in state anxiety intensity in situations that hold a threat to their self-esteem (Spielberger & Bale, 1970). Whether persons who differ in trait anxiety differ in a similar way for state anxiety depends on the extent to which they perceive a specific situation as threatening or dangerous. This is strongly influenced by their past experiences.

Attitudes toward the sources of stress tend to mediate the responses. If an individual or a group believes that a stressor will cause no permanent harm, the response will probably be less extreme than if the danger poses the threat of lasting harm. Psychologically, the perceptions of control, social support, and other characteristics of individuals exposed to stressors will affect their evaluation of different stressors. Perceived control can be a powerful mediator of stress. That is, it can provide the individual, or group, with a sense of being able to cope more effectively.

Adequate needs assessments, community planning, and allocation of available human resources can help prevent and alleviate potential problems and stressors associated with rapidly growing rural communities. Such activities can give

communities perceived and actual control over their futures and can contribute to the well-being and mental health of the whole community.

### **Changing Roles**

In a longitudinal study, using preferences for living near family and in the local community obtained in the 8th and 11th grades, Elder, King, & Conger (1996) modeled the social and developmental pathways by which adolescents approach decisions to leave home and settle in other parts of the country. Data come from 351 two-parent families in the Iowa Youth and Family Project, launched in 1989 to investigate the economic stresses and family consequences of the farm crisis. Lack of socioeconomic opportunity; relatively weak and declining ties to parents, kin, and the religious community, and strong educational prospects emerged as strong sources of a declining preference for living near family and in the local community among boys and girls. Whether coupled with family attachments or not, plans to settle elsewhere after education were linked to more elevated feelings of depression and unhappiness about life.

Conger, Elder, & Lorenz (1994) examined the plight of several hundred rural families who lived through the years of economic hardship in the mid-1980s. The participants in the Iowa Youth and Families Project included farmers, people from small towns, and those who lost farms and other businesses as a result of the “farm crisis.” Conger et al traced the influence of economic hardship on the emotions, behavior, and relationships of parents, children, siblings, husbands, and wives. They interviewed four members in each of 451 rural families. All of the families in the study included a seventh-grade adolescent, when they were interviewed in 1989. In addition to this target adolescent, both parents of the seventh-grader and a sibling within four years of age participated in the study. They were particularly concerned with the quality of social relationships, both within and outside the family, that might affect the various linkages in their theoretical model of family economic stress.

Cook & Heppner (1997) investigated the role of coping strategies, perceived control, and problem-solving appraisal in farmers' career transition processes. The sample, examined previously by P. P. Heppner et al (1991), included 79 male and female farmers (aged 39.2 and 41.6, respectively) who were participating in career transition workshops. Relationships among the three variables and an outcome variable, depressive symptomatology, were examined. Significant correlations were found between problem-solving appraisal and all other variables in this study.

Coping strategies were found to be related to depressive symptomatology. In a regression equation, only coping strategies contributed significantly, and no significant interaction was found between coping strategies and perceived control as hypothesized.

McInnes (2000) focused on the complex dynamics related to the family farm and their effect on the rural couple's relationship. The typical relationship examined was where the man is from a farming background and the woman from the city, or, if originally from the land, has lived or studied away from the district and been independent. The challenge for the counselor is to work with the two levels the couple bring:

- The couple's 'individual' story
- The larger context, including the man's family of origin, the family farm, the rural community, and the rural crisis nationally.

A case study of the typical couple's process and outcome in counseling was provided. It was concluded that the traditional stories about men, women, and relationships that once ordered the lives of couples on the land are no longer valid in times of enormous social and political change.

In life course theory, the principle of human agency states that "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the constraints and opportunities of history and social circumstances." Elder & Russell (2000) explore the implications of this principle, drawing upon three other principles of life course study:

- The location of individual lives in historical time and place.
- The differential timing of lives through events and experiences.
- Linked lives.

They focus on two historical periods in which adolescence was shaped by the agency of young people and their opportunities and constraints: the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the Great Farm Crisis and rural decline of the 1980s and 1990s. The resulting portrait is documented by research on lives in changing times over three decades. Within these historical eras, Elder & Russell view the agency of youth in terms defined by specific historical times and places. World War II played a major role in structuring pathways out of Depression disadvantage. Fifty years later, migration to urban areas of economic prosperity provided a general escape route for youth in the disadvantaged rural Midwest of the US. In each era,

societal changes left their mark on the expression of human agency in youth's "negotiation of adolescence".

Conger, Rueter, & Conger (2000) present research from the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYFP), a longitudinal study of Iowa families who were living in small towns and on farms during the farm crisis of the 1980s. The research was designed to assess how the macrosocial change and economic upheaval that occurred across the US during the 1980s influenced family functioning and the well-being of parents and their children. It describes the empirical and theoretical foundations for the Family Stress Model. The sections that follow summarize findings from the IYFP and other studies relevant to the various processes and mechanisms proposed in the Family Stress Model. They also consider research on hypothesized protective mechanisms or dimensions of vulnerability that may moderate the causal linkages proposed in the theoretical model. After reviewing the possible applied significance of this work, they close with a discussion of conclusions that can be drawn from the research conducted thus far and the implications of these findings for future investigations of family economic stress.

In another example, the crisis in the farming industry in the Netherlands has had far-reaching negative consequences for the well-being of farm-families. Based on identity-theory, Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn (1999) hypothesized that job-involvement (the psychological importance of the professional role) would intensify the negative relationship between role-relevant stressors and well-being. Specifically, 107 Dutch, self-employed dairy farm-couples (mean age 52 yrs for husbands and 49 yrs for wives) participated in a study that examined whether job-involvement exacerbates the negative effects of three role-relevant stressors (potential threats to business continuity, restrictions on autonomy as a self-employed person, and financial problems) on two indicators of well-being (job-related worrying and mental health complaints). Gender differences were also explored. Results show partial support for the hypotheses derived from identity-theory in that job-involvement only exacerbates the positive relationship between financial problems and job-related worrying for both spouses. No other moderating effects of job-involvement were found. Although husbands were more involved in farming than wives, the direct effect of the three role-relevant stressors on the two indicators of well-being were similar for both spouses.

During economic downturns, traditional gender allocations of labor have been considered to vary more than in prosperous times. While most studies have examined the division of labor in the household or in paid employment, Lobao &

Meyer (1995) examined it where both intersect, in family-owned and family-operated enterprises in the farm sector of the 1980s. This context, combining crisis conditions and the agency of economic actors, should be related to greater flexibility in labor allocations, leading to the feminization of farming. However, a contrasting perspective argues for rigidity of gender roles in farming. Lobao & Meyer use data from a twelve-state midwestern sample and a more detailed Ohio study. The results failed to support the flexibility thesis. The rigidity of production roles was further translated into different factors related to women's and men's stress.

DeFrain & Schroff (1991) examined how city life and country life differences influence parents in their efforts to rear children as well as endeavor to paint a more realistic picture of rural life. They begin with a section on the impact of urbanization on fathers and mothers in the United States, discussing the pluralistic nature of the city, the increased leisure of urban youth as compared to rural youth, the power of the youth peer group in urban areas, the impersonality and anonymity of the city, the pervasive nature of the urban mass media, and the urban ghetto. They focus on the positive aspects of urbanization: the advantages urban organization offers families and the relative affluence of the city compared to the country. They discuss special problems of rural fathers and mothers in the United States, including the dramatic decline in the farm population, the most recent wave of the continuing farm crisis, agricultural fundamentalism, resettlement, the impact of urbanization on farm parents and their children, the fact that the farm parents often find themselves preparing their children for an urban-industrial world that they themselves do not fully understand, the difficult realities of the rural economy today, and rural social class barriers farm families face.

Willson (1928) deals with the education of farm children and the relation of education to the migration of farmers to non-farming occupations. It is based upon original research of the author for Western North Dakota (N. Dak. Agr. Exper. Sta. Bull. 214, 1928) during the agricultural depression of 1920–1926. The data show that improved agricultural conditions and better financial returns from farming result in improved educational facilities and increased grade and high school attendance by farm children. A decrease in the number of farms did not operate to deprive the children of grade school education. The amount of high school education is decreased as distance from secondary schools and the proportion of foreign-born—especially the Russians—within the community are increased. The percentage of farm children in high schools is increasing. The percentage of farm

children entering non-farming occupations increased directly with the amount of education they received. A point demonstrated in this study is the relationship between the ability to survive the agricultural crisis and type of family organization. The married individuals, who had children, survived the depression best of all.

### **Some Different Approaches**

Peeks (1989) posits that school counselors must be ready to work with children of farm families in crisis to direct solutions to the presenting problems and provide the family with hope for the future. She notes that the problem of the student from a farm family can be viewed as a metaphor (mirroring the parents' own fears about the future and feelings of hopelessness) and a form of protection (diverting parental attention toward a solvable problem).

Mermelstein & Sundet (1998) focused on the decision criteria that influenced 118 directors of rural community mental health centers (CMHCs) as to whether to adopt innovative programming with regard to the crisis among farmers. Five criteria were postulated as independent variables:

- Compatibility with the director's values
- Relative advantage
- Observability
- Feasibility
- Trial-ability of the innovation

The dependent variables were the amount and type of farm crisis programming and the date of introduction into the Community Mental Health Center (CMHC). Findings demonstrate the widespread failure of CMHCs to respond effectively to mental health concerns arising from massive environmental stress. Impediments to innovation appear to be a real or perceived paucity of resources and a mentality favoring existing programs.

Peeks (1989) reviewed the transitions faced by adults from farm families whose farms have failed in the agriculture crisis, including career transition, relocating, a redefined lifestyle, and refocusing on future goals. Students' school problems are discussed as behavioral metaphors for the family's crisis, and a school-based strategy for counselors to help students, whose problems are related to the family transitions, is described. Six strategic interventions are presented for solving student problems by inviting the parents to school and focusing on positive problem-solving.

Paulsen (1988) asserts that the rural crisis is creating new numbers of rural individuals who are in need of assistance as they cope with the stress of economic dislocation and the overwhelming difficulties that occur after the loss of a farm or business. Individual, family, and community treatment aspects are discussed within the thematic context of a culture in crisis. An urban-based regional family service agency, Farmers Helping Farmers, is presented as an example of a system's response to the rural crisis. The proposed treatment involves a multilevel community response that includes self-help support groups, instruction of adaptive coping skills, and sharing information in rural communities. Mental health professionals are challenged to further their understanding of the rural crisis and to adopt more flexible treatment strategies to encompass a multilevel system's response.

Jurich & Russell (1987) evaluated 15 farm families, who underwent therapy at the Kansas State University Family Center, using a model of family adaptation to stress by H. I. McCubbin et al (see record 1981-30250-001). Major interventions included reframing, mobilizing resources, and utilizing less indirect means of intervention. Ss showed a greater increase in well-being at three months than did a general sample of clients. However, stress levels were not lowered as much as the general sample and life satisfaction was lower at follow-up than the general population.

Davis-Brown & Salamon (1987) argue that families' responses to the loss of their farm due to the agricultural crisis depend on whether shared agricultural goals originate primarily from financial or familial motivations. Salamon's (1985) farm management style types are combined with a family stress model by McCubbin and Patterson (1983) to develop a framework for identifying contrasting capabilities and definitions possessed by families holding divergent agricultural goals. An instrument based on the application of stress concepts to farm family research is presented for use in counseling families who lose their farms.

Rosenblatt (1990) offers testimony from 42 adults in 24 Minnesota farm couples that were caught in the farm crisis. They speak of how they struggled economically, what they understood and felt about their economic situation, and how their relationships within the family and outside of it were affected by the economic difficulties. The purpose was to go beneath the statistics, to record people's experiences, feelings, and reflections in their own words, and to understand what happened to them as individuals and families. That understanding has implications for policy, service delivery, and community action. Extensive face-to-face interviews were carried out in 1986 by three graduate students in the Department of Family

Social Science at the University of Minnesota. Telephone follow-up interviews were carried out in the latter half of 1987 and early part of 1988 with adults in 23 of the 24 households. Interviews were wide-ranging but focused mainly on the history of the farm operation, what happened in family and community relationships as economic difficulties developed, problems with lenders and creditors, and personal feelings and reflections as things happened. People were also asked to fill out a checklist of feelings, personal reactions, and aspects of family relationships that might be influenced by the crisis.

Ferguson & Engels (1989) discussed the 1980s farm crisis that had large numbers of farmers and their families abandoning farming due to new and frequently unmanageable economic realities. Selected issues were discussed with regard to farmers who:

- Were then working and living on family farms
- Were being or had been forced to pursue other occupations

Ferguson & Engels note that farmers are at a geographical disadvantage for receiving mental health and career counseling services, and most traditional support services are centered in keeping farmers in agriculture. Counselors and state and national counseling organizations need to consider pro bono and sponsored approaches for working with farm families. Farmers might benefit from modification of programs aimed at adult education, career development, retirement, and separation and grief.

Van Hook (1987) used the ABCX family-crisis model developed by Hill (1949) to identify needs and design intervention strategies while long-term solutions to the crisis are being developed. Basic to the model is the concept that each event has not only an external reality but an internally experienced reality as well. Van Hook suggested that focusing on the family unit strengthens both individual and family resources. Because many farm families have considerable strengths, relatively small intervention efforts may be needed to enable them to mobilize for survival.

## **Telecounseling**

Counseling by telephone further lends itself well to disaster and traumatic response. Because victims may be overwhelmed by immediate on-site counselor response and may need time to grieve or otherwise react, providing the means to follow up by telephone at one's convenience as needed has strong appeal. A system of referral through such methods as distributing business-sized cards at the site with

an 800 number to call when needed and in which the client initiates the process is both responsive and unobtrusive.

Despite all the challenges involved, a counselor-staffed telephone-response system to disaster and trauma offers supports long after the crisis. Such telecounseling offers them support immediately, when the victim is in crisis, conveniently, and anonymously. It cuts through distance, class, appearances, and resistances to therapy. It is a lifeline to engaging the victim at any point.

Telephone counseling additionally presents itself well to disaster and traumatic response since victims may initially be overwhelmed by their experiences and be resistant to using treatment; yet may later need to access counseling services. Through telephone contact, this can be done in a non-threatening way as their grieving and symptoms unfold. As a result, telephone counseling is both responsive to the victim and can be an effective point of access to the therapeutic process.

To summarize, it is important that the mental health profession be aware of the factors involved in rural crises—socially, economically, community-wide, and on other related variables. Providing appropriate responses, approaches, methods, and programs that are individualized for communities and individuals is important in these times of change and increased levels of stress.

## **Rural Trauma**

### **Background and the Problems**

Within one year, in the early 1990s, a small rural American town experienced a series of traumatic events. A number of individuals put in much time and effort toward a crisis plan, known as the *Trauma Intervention Plan*, which ultimately failed. Taplitz-Levy (2002) explored the factors that added to and detracted from the success of the specific school-based collaborative intervention and research project. The attitudes of crisis team members toward the crisis plans, collaborative work, and research were examined using a series of qualitative research methods. Through qualitative analysis of the data, results show that the Trauma Intervention Plan was hindered by poor communication, a lack of trust, and poor historical relationships between the school team and the out-of-school consultants. Taplitz-Levy's study gives compelling reasons for school personnel and local community mental health staff to develop positive relationships.

In June 1981, southeastern Kentucky experienced serious and widespread flooding. In May 1984, a storm system brought tornadoes, strong winds, and

severe, extensive flooding to this same area. Norris, Phifer, & Kaniasty (1994) studied the psychosocial impact of these events. Their study had three features that hold particular promise for increasing what we know about the effects of disaster:

- The study's prospective and longitudinal design
- Its consideration of both individual and collective aspects of disaster exposure
- Its focus on older people (age 55 or older)

This study addressed the following questions:

- What impact did these two floods have upon the mental, physical, and social functioning of the rural Appalachian victims?
- Were these individuals able to take these events "in stride" or did they present a serious challenge to their ability to cope?
- Did these floods leave a lasting impact on the mental and physical well-being of these individuals or did they only result in relatively minor and short-lived emotional upset?
- Were some people more affected than others?
- Were these communities able to "rally around" their members or were they shattered and split apart?

In September 1991, in the small rural town of Hamlet, NC, a fryer exploded at a chicken processing plant, killing 25 employees and injuring many more. This disaster stirred national attention, influenced state law and inspection policies, and profoundly affected the entire community. Derosa (1995) examined the relationship between PTSD and the survivors' subjective experiences of the trauma, their search for meaning, and their perceptions of self, of others, and of the world around them. They attempted to capture the survivors' experiences of themes such as rage, grief, and a belief in a benevolent world, in conjunction with clinical diagnosis of PTSD (using the SCID interview) in order to assess the buffering or exacerbating influence of the subjective experience. Seventy-eight subjects included the plant's employees, relatives of employees, rescue personnel, and relatives of fire/rescue personnel. They examined several categories of variables:

- Unresolved trauma themes
- 'Pre-fire' variables including neuroticism
- History of traumatic experiences

- Previous psychiatric treatment
- “Peri-traumatic” variables including dissociation injury, and , fear of level of exposure to the fire
- Types of social support
- Demographics

The most robust variables contributing to lifetime diagnosis of PTSD after the fire were having lower socio-economic status, being female, feeling little social support, fearing death/injury, and dissociating during the fire. The only significant contribution to the model for chronic PTSD was the number of unresolved trauma themes. The degree to which the trauma themes remained maladaptive varied by the severity of diagnosis. Exploratory cluster analyses of patterns of unresolved themes among survivors and their families suggested that in addition to the number of unresolved themes, the pattern of thematic resolution is associated with diagnosis.

In 1992, El Salvador ended a twelve-year civil war which caused tremendous social upheaval. Approximately 50,000 civilians were killed, 500,000 displaced, and 750,000 to one million left the country (Lundgren and Lang, 1994). The impact of the violence left many survivors with traumatic emotional problems. Oakes (1998) studied three rural communities in El Salvador. She examined the emotional reactions of eighty respondents to war, analyzing the data from the point of view of respondents. Respondents included those who had only indirect war experiences, those who experienced occasional traumatic events during the war, and those who lived in a war zone and had continuous and extreme experiences during the war. Respondents reacted to everyday events, violence, and war with an escalating pattern of emotions. This pattern began with worries often connected to everyday events, then fears often related to violence, and then to emotional states including “ataques de nervios” and affliction, and finally to sadness caused by loss. Some physical reactions related specifically to war, such as jumping at noise; while others, such as headaches, were experienced by all, regardless of the amount or type of war experience. Past war experiences often affected how respondents reacted emotionally to everyday events in the present, especially when those events were linked to danger or violence. Respondents who had only indirect exposure to war reacted to present and future events only occasionally and mildly through the standpoint of past events in war, while individuals who had prolonged and extreme war experiences reacted to present and future events much more intensely and regularly through the viewpoint of war. In an additional analysis of a small group

of respondents who had lived through extreme warfare, Oakes reported that they had few emotional reactions to normal events that they did not relate to war. She suggested that the sum of many people's emotional reactions, therefore, may cause such configurations of people to have reactions to events that are not based on present reality.

Since 1994, lethal violence toward people suspected of witchcraft has escalated in rural communities in South Africa. Hundreds of older people believed to be witches have been burned to death and thousands, who escaped death, have taken refuge in government established camps. Hill (2000) examined a group counseling approach that promotes "sustainable reconciliation" with traumatized individuals in communities divided by violence due to witchcraft persecution. Specifically, Hill examined a single case sample of a group counseling session aimed at reconciliation. Fifteen group members included individuals from conflictual parties from geographic areas in South Africa where there are witch burnings. Beyond the 15 group members, 11 other participants rated the group session and its potential for fostering sustainable reconciliation. These 11 individuals were divided into two groups:

- American student raters (N = 3)
- South African observers (N = 8).

This study was constructed as a 10-step process of data gathering and a "constant comparison" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) of data categorized by all participants. As defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the Grounded Theory methodology allowed for an emergence of common themes across raters that could be related to theories for sustainable reconciliation, trauma counseling, group process, and witchcraft persecution. The results of this study suggest that sustainable peace is possible using the "reconciliation group counseling" approach. With these specific types of groups, special consideration must be given to leadership style, building safety, and including the entire community that has been affected by witch persecution. However, according to participants, reconciliation groups will fail if the fundamental reasons for the violence continue to go unattended (e.g., poverty, unemployment, etc). Such fundamental issues perpetuate feelings of fear and hopelessness in community members, which fosters an unstable environment. These results suggest that therapists must understand the context of such violence, attend to the trauma symptoms of individuals, and perhaps play a supportive role in the group. The South African observers suggested that successive

counseling groups, with public admittance of behavior and retribution for losses, would be necessary before sustainable peace could be possible.

The above studies have identified variables, approaches, and interventions, and make suggestions for a variety of events that produced trauma in rural areas. The following section presents results of studies involving the effects of various trauma-producing events on children, parents, and families.

Baden (1998) discusses how newspapers seem to be telling us that every cornfield is threatened by a Dairy Queen restaurant. This media barrage about the crisis of our “shrinking” farmland is traced to the 1979 publication of “Where Have All the Farmlands Gone?” by the National Agricultural Lands (NALS) Study. The NALS report, to which eleven federal agencies contributed, argued that land-use planning and control must be employed to protect valuable farmland from “urban sprawl”.

Baden’s edited book, a collection of essays by a distinguished group of economists including Theodore W. Schulz, Julian L. Simon, and Pierre Crosson, takes issue with the belief that croplands need governmental protection. In opposition, the collection as a whole supports two theses:

- Shrinking farm acreage is not a serious problem
- Individual choices by landowners in a market setting result in better organized land use than would governmental land-use planning and regulation

Throughout, large parts of the developing world’s rural livelihoods are in crisis (Bernstein, Crow, and Johnson, 1992). Even in those parts of the third world where there has been growth of food output, that growth has rarely been translated into a commensurate expansion of livelihoods. Bernstein et al (1992) examined how people in developing countries survive and how their lives have been affected by the great changes since the World War II. They examined the diverse human implications of rural change, the various crises of rural livelihoods which arise from change, and the survival strategies of individuals and households. They describe the great processes of agrarian transformation which have fundamentally altered rural livelihoods in developing countries, identifying some of the dilemmas for public action which arise from agrarian transformation and the crises of rural livelihoods. The contributors draw on a range of disciplinary approaches to the subject—including anthropology, sociology, economics, political economy, agricultural science, and development studies.

Not only does the culture of rurality have differences from urban areas, but rural cross-cultural differences are also important in understanding and providing appropriate responses and services to residents of rural environments. Further attention and study of these areas as well as the awareness of what is already known is needed to inform mental health and other professionals working in these areas.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence and poverty are interwoven. Poverty makes it difficult to deal with domestic violence and undermines financial stability and possible strategies for effective change. Significant numbers of low-income women in the rural western US are battered, and the violence they experience can make their climb out of poverty impossible. Poverty, in turn, makes it more difficult to end domestic violence and heal its effects. Without long-term financial stability, reducing the risk of physical violence does not make battered women and their children safe. While focusing on physically separating the battered woman and her children from the abusive partner, most criminal justice interventions overlook basic needs: a roof over their heads, food on their table, or available health care.

Partner violence is a serious mental and physical health concern leading to debilitating physical injury in women. Significant psychological sequelae are associated with battering. However, only recent investigations have begun to delineate the different types of psychological distress. The diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been useful in characterizing the symptoms associated with victims of severe trauma. The DSM-IV criteria for PTSD include re-experiencing trauma, avoidance responses, and heightened arousal. Given the characteristics shared between battered women and other victims of violent crime, Presty (1996) predicted that battered women develop primary features of PTSD. The second hypothesis was that other women would meet DSM-IV criteria for Acute Stress Disorder (ASD). She also performed exploratory analyses to examine relationships between the frequency and severity of abuse and diagnostic categories. The results confirmed the two hypotheses. First, 65.6% of the sample was PTSD positive, with 5% meeting criteria for ASD. Other anxiety disorders accounted for 13.1%. The prevalence rate of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) was 70.5%. The comorbidity of depression with PTSD was 84.6%. Physical abuse significantly predicted PTSD development, explaining 11.4% of the total variance. Verbal abuse significantly predicted MDD. Dissociation was predicted by both verbal and

physical abuse. Exploratory cluster analysis revealed three typologies of battered women:

- Cluster 1 reflected young, poorly educated women, who experienced the greatest physical and sexual abuse. They had the highest levels of PTSD, moderate depression, and the poorest level of functioning.
- Cluster 2 women were the oldest, had the most children, and had the longest relationship duration. They experienced more verbal than physical abuse, and had the highest degree of depression, with modest PTSD severity.
- Cluster 3 reflected the youngest, most educated group, with the least number of children, and shortest relationship duration.

Wendt, Taylor, & Kennedy (2002) provide a critique of the Australian research into rural domestic violence. Research to date has focused on the factors that keep rural women trapped in violent relationships. While this research has been useful in developing policy to address rural domestic violence, it has not yet provided information about women's understandings of their rural contexts. Research into domestic violence is moving toward acknowledging and recognizing the complexities and differences between people's experiences. Wendt et al suggest that it is time to explore the differences between various rural regions and to move away from the assumption that there is one rural culture. They suggest that a move towards feminist post-structural perspectives has strengths in that it enables a focus on the meanings of rural cultures from the perspectives of women, who experience, and men, who perpetrate domestic violence. If these meanings become apparent, it may enable local solutions to be implemented and contribute knowledge and new ideas.

Although it has been suggested frequently that certain aspects of rural culture present barriers to women escaping domestic violence, research has not yet focused on how rural culture affects women's experiences. Wendt & Cheers (2002) report a study that explored how 14 rural women experiencing domestic violence perceived local cultural beliefs and values, the extent to which they had internalized these, and how they believed rural culture affected them in their situations. Components of their local rural cultures that they identified as impacting on their experiences of domestic violence included: belief in the sanctity and permanence of marriage, the importance and privacy of the nuclear family, Christian doctrine, and preservation of intergenerational property transfer. Each woman's story shows that, while rural culture gave them strength to endure the violence, it also created internal conflicts

between wanting to escape and the cultural beliefs and values that they had internalized. Also, they were afraid of community reactions in case they left. Consequently, they did not disclose their violent situation and persevered in them far longer than they thought they would have in a different cultural context.

### **Youth Violence**

Slovak (2000, 2001, 2002) addressed gaps in the youth violence literature by exploring the types and levels of children's exposure to violence in a rural setting. She also examined the psychological trauma associated with exposure to violence. Her initial study (Slovak, 2000) was a secondary data analysis which utilized the rural sample (N=549) from a larger study. The larger study had conducted a 45 minute questionnaire with students in grades 3 through 8. The questionnaire was designed to tap into children's present and past exposure to violence as a victim and witness across the home, school, and neighborhood. This questionnaire also assessed children's trauma symptoms.

Slovak found that children in the rural sample were exposed to high amounts of violence as both a victim and witness within and prior to the past year. In general, more boys reported being victims or witnesses to an at-least-sometimes violent event within the past year compared to girls, except for the act of being touched in a private place. In addition, more students in the lower grades reported being the victims and witnesses of violent acts compared to students in upper grades. Students reported that home was the place where they were most likely to be victims of violence, with the school being the next most likely place to be victimized, at least sometimes. The neighborhood was reported as the least likely place for students to be victims of violence, at least sometimes within the past year. Students reported a different trend for witnessing violence. They reported that school was the most likely place to witness violence, with the neighborhood being second. The home was the site reported as the least likely place to witness violence, at least sometimes within the past year. Slovak also found that exposure to violence variables explained a significant amount of variance in anxiety, anger, dissociation, depression, PTSD, and total trauma score above demographic variables. This is consistent with the literature examining the association of trauma and exposure to violence. These findings can be utilized to inform policy, practice, and research conducted in rural areas. In addition, the documentation of children's exposure to violence in a rural setting can help banish the stereotype that rural communities are safe havens from violence.

Peltzer (1999) identified exposure to experiences such as violence and the consequences for health in children in a rural South African community. The stratified random sample included 68 (46%) boys and 80 (54%) girls in the age range of 6–16 years. Their ethnicity was Northern Sotho. The interviews included the Children's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Inventory and the Reporting Questionnaire for Children. They grouped experiences into either traumatic or other events. 99 (67%) had directly or vicariously experienced a traumatic event which included witnessing someone killed or seriously injured, a serious accident, a violent or very unexpected death or suicide of a loved one, sexual abuse or rape of a relative or friend, violent crime, child abuse, and other life-threatening situations. Scores on the Children's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Inventory of 17 (8.4%) fulfilled the criterion for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). 71% had more than one score and 53% had more than four scores on the Reporting Questionnaire for Children. Posttraumatic stress symptoms were significantly related to age and experiences such as those mentioned above.

### **Gun Violence**

Slovak and Singer (2001) compared rural youth (Grades 3-8) exposed to gun violence and rural youth not exposed to gun violence on a number of variables: anger, anxiety, dissociation, depression, posttraumatic stress, total trauma, violent behavior, parental monitoring, and levels of violence in the home, school, and community. One-fourth (25%) of the 549 subjects reported having been exposed to gun violence at least once. Youth exposed to gun violence reported significantly more anger, dissociation, posttraumatic stress, and total trauma. In addition, youth exposed to the violence of guns reported significantly higher levels of violent behaviors and exposure to violence in other settings and also reported lower levels of parental monitoring. This study contributed to the growing body of literature addressing the stereotype that rural communities are not immune to the violence of firearms. This stereotype can act as a barrier to mental health practice, research, and policy issues in rural communities.

Slovak (2002) investigated the relationship between access to firearms and parental monitoring on rural youths' exposure to gun violence and examined the effect of gun violence exposure on the mental health of these youths. She administered a survey to 162 students (mean age 14.3 years) who participated in a student assistance program that provided in-school support groups for students in grades 6 through 12. Her results show that a substantial number were exposed to

gun violence and exposure was significantly related to firearm access and parental monitoring. Furthermore, gun violence exposure was significantly associated with trauma among the youths. Implications for mental health workers include advising high-risk clients and their families on gun removal and safe storage practices.

### **Suicide/Murder in Rural Areas**

Suicide can occur as a response to increased perceived stress and can also be a response to a severe loss. Treatments for suicidal ideation in rural areas are very limited. Dimmick, Burgiss, & Robbins (2003) assessed the impact of a suicide intervention program from a consumer perspective. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to consumers who had been referred to a suicide intervention counselor in the two-year period of the program in rural southwest Western Australia. 35 patients completed and returned the questionnaire. Three-quarters of respondents were positive about their experience with the service, with half of the respondents no longer having thoughts of suicide and only 20% of all respondents reporting having attempted deliberate self-harm post-counseling. Reported suicidal ideation and attempted self-harm were much higher in the dissatisfied group. Dissatisfaction of respondents stemmed from the history of their treatment and “the hassle created by the many systems for them to access care”. However, the overall outcome of this study is that, from the consumers’ perspective, a high-intensity approach to suicide intervention resolved or improved the presenting problem and their ability to deal with it.

Ragland & Berman (1990-1991) examined the relationship between the farm economic crisis and farmer suicide rates, using data from 15 states in the US from 1980 to 1985. Suicide frequencies for farmers and two control occupations (forestry and transportation workers) were obtained. The 1980 US Census occupational population data were used to convert these frequencies into suicide rates. Suicide rates for farmers were greater than rates for transportation workers (truck drivers), but no different from rates for forestry workers. A significant positive correlation between the declining farm economy and increasing state suicide rates was also found.

## Social Science: Disasters & Disaster Relief

Crisis In The American Heartland – Disasters & Mental Health In Rural Environments:  
An Introduction (Volume 1)



Rural practice presents important yet challenging issues for psychology, especially given uneven population distribution, high levels of need, limited availability of rural services, and ongoing migration to urban centers. It is critical that mental health professionals and first responders in rural areas become aware of recent research, training and approaches to crisis intervention, traumatology, compassion fatigue, disaster mental health, critical incident stress management, post-traumatic stress and related areas in rural environments.

Critical issues facing rural areas include:

- Physical issues such as land, air, and water resources, cheap food policy, chemicals and pesticides, animal rights, corruption in food marketing and distribution, and land appropriation for energy development.
- Quality of life issues such as rural America's declining share of national wealth, problems of hunger, education, and rural poverty among rural populations of farmers and ranchers.
- Direct service issues include the need to accommodate a wide variety of mental health difficulties, client privacy and boundaries, and practical challenges.
- Indirect service issues include the greater need for diverse professional activities, collaborative work with professionals having different orientations and beliefs, program development and evaluation, and conducting research with few mentors or peer collaborators.
- Professional training and development issues include lack of specialized relevant courses and placements.
- Personal issues include limited opportunities for recreation, culture, and lack of privacy.



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