

“PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT ONLY
PUTS OUT FIRES.”
.....

Farmers' Accounts of Health, Responsibility, and Well-Being in Post-1991 Slovenia

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BACKGROUND

“Changes in Agriculture Through the Farmers’ Eyes and Bodies.”(2020-2024)



On understanding ag sustainability (2013)

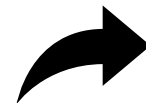
1. The farm’s economic endurance
2. Stewardship of the soil, nature, and the living environment
3. The pursuit of quality over a quantitative growth
4. Openness to adaptation, innovation, and continual renewal
5. Physical strain and farmer health
6. Successor and retaining young people on farms
7. Learning, education, and the intergenerational circulation of experience
8. Building networks, cooperative ties, and shared paths to the market
9. Nourishing local communities through direct sales and short food chains
10. Sustaining rural settlement, cultivated landscapes, and the life of the countryside
11. Living with uncertainty and finding ways to withstand risk
12. Questioning agricultural policy, legal frameworks, and bureaucratic constraints



WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

SOURCES OF FARMER NOT BEING WELL

A non-medical approach



Social suffering
Ordinary ethics



40 participants from 24 farms

Psychological support



Reflections on the
causes of farmer
distress

Thematic analysis



Emerging
themes

RESULTS

“MEN WON’T GO.”

“Do not acknowledge mental health issues,”
“keep them to themselves,”
“awkward to talk about,”
“stigma.”



Depend on “character,” “generation,”
conditions (“if they were free,”..)

“Psychological help is necessary, but it only
puts out fires.” (He, 47)

Gendered expressions of distress ..

RESULTS

“A FARMER MUST BE HEALTHY!”

However,
Work comes first!
Ailments are normalised.
Serious illness is managed
around labour.



Health is not only personal wellbeing; it is tied to the
survival and moral value of farm work.

RESULTS

**“WE WORK TOO MUCH! EVERYTHING ON
THE FARM CAN BE DANGEROUS.”**

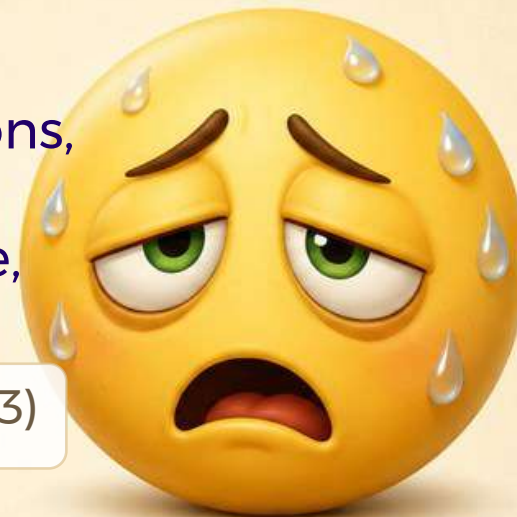
Work as virtue — yet *“We work too much!”*
Mechanisation brought also higher expectations,
investment, debt and pressure.
Farm finances kept labour constant: insurance,
repairs and repeated loans.

“Jesus, twenty [loans], for sure.” (Retired woman, 63)

Routine tasks are risky:

“Everything on the farm can be dangerous.” (Farmworker, 41)

Recovery and safety became secondary to getting
the work done.



RESULTS

“WHY CAN WE NOT SLEEP?”



The illustration shows a person's face in bed, looking distressed. Surrounding the face are several thought bubbles: a family of three, a medical cross, a clock, a bar chart with a downward arrow, a stack of bills labeled 'BILLS' and 'DEBT', and a storm cloud with rain and a lightning bolt. The background is a dark night sky with a crescent moon and stars.

- Compressed timeframes**
“Not even the machines can keep up.”
- Economic insecurity**
“A price crash – that is the worst thing for a farmer”
- Family, health, social security, and anticipated disappointment**
Compound the above pressures.

RESULTS

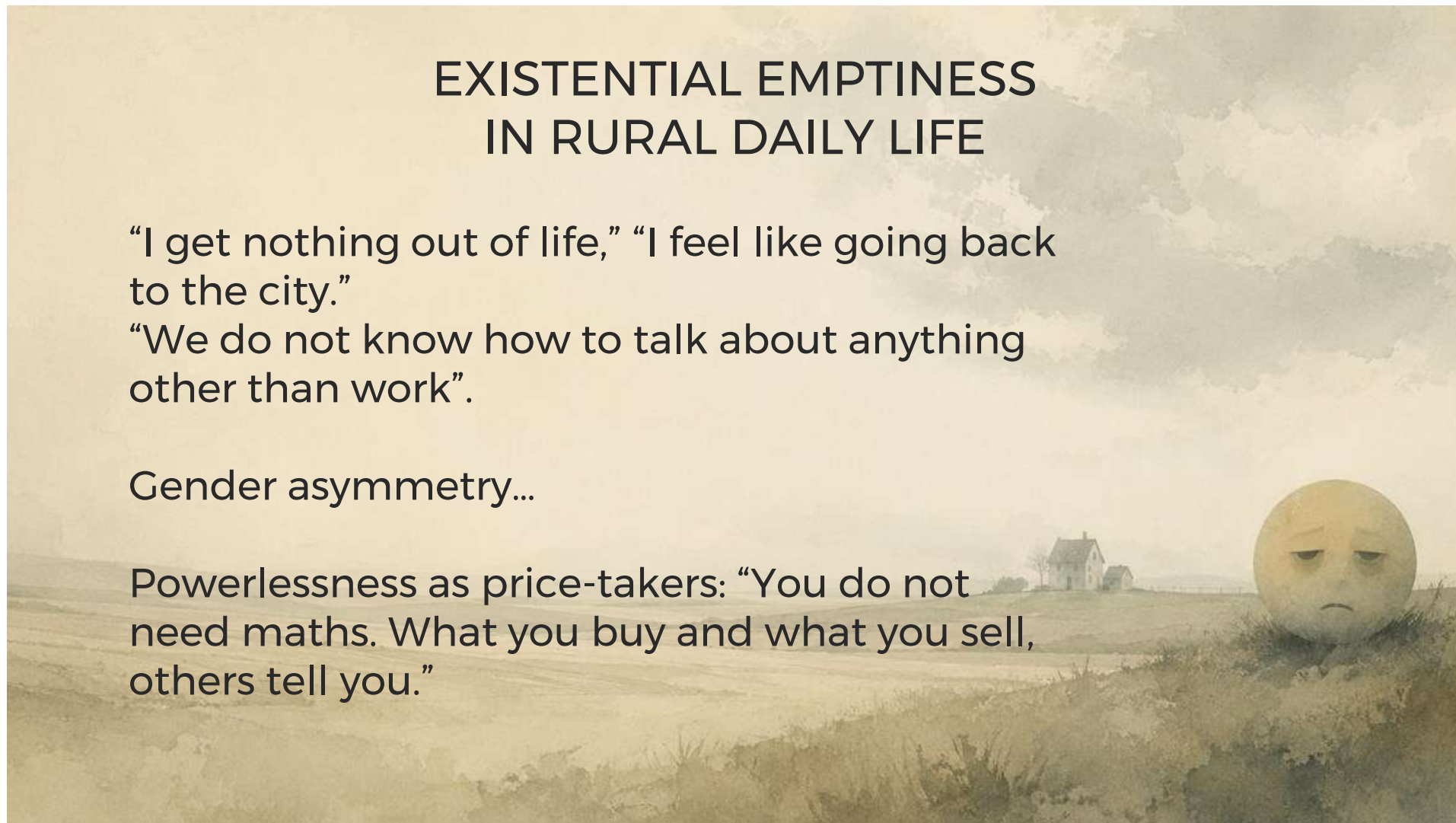
EXISTENTIAL EMPTINESS IN RURAL DAILY LIFE

“I get nothing out of life,” “I feel like going back to the city.”

“We do not know how to talk about anything other than work”.

Gender asymmetry...

Powerlessness as price-takers: “You do not need maths. What you buy and what you sell, others tell you.”



RESULTS

GUILT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE HORIZON OF SOLUTIONS

“True farmer” vs. “fake farmer”

Health as a prerequisite for being a “good farmer”

Distress due to “welfare” and “unfair prices”

Welfare abusers, fake farmers, and an inactive State
are **morally culpable** for their distress.

Knežević Hočevar, D., Slovinc Grasselli, M. Farmers on the reasons for their embodied anxieties in post-1991 Slovenia. Anthropological notebooks, 2023, vol. 29, issue 2, pp. 101-127.
<https://anthropological-notebooks.zrc-sazu.si/Notebooks/article/view/617/479>.

Knežević Hočevar, D. Farmer distress through ordinary ethics: “Abolish the social support and give us fairer prices!”
L' Uomo società tradizione sviluppo. 2024, vol. 14, n. 1, str. 41-64.
<https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/uomo/article/view/19008/17964>



CONCLUSION

SOCIAL SUFFERING

Farmers' ill-being is shaped within a **moral farming community** ..

EVERYDAY ETHICS

Themes reveal gender differences, imperatives of health and continuous work, body and mind strain, structural inequalities .. feelings of responsibility, guilt, and the **ethical search for solutions**.

Farmers often do not speak the language of aid, but **the language of justice**.

Psychological support must not be used to shift responsibility for systemic pressures onto individuals.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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