

SUCCESS STORIES

Empowerment through self-knowledge

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Having to take care of his sick son, running the farm with debts and living in a rural area became a situation that became a barrier for him to the point that he felt he could not cope or manage. However, thanks to finding the right people he started to attend therapy sessions. This supported him to work on his negative thoughts and helped him to reorganise a life for which he felt he had not been fully prepared.

Name of the interviewed	Promoter 1
Type of farming activity	Olive Grove
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety and Depression.</p> <p>The main factors that led to this situation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity uncertainty. • Extreme dedication to the activity. • Indebtedness. • Living in a rural area. • Family reconciliation: family life and activity.

What is your story?

This case is about a farm worker who had the opportunity to buy a farm in the Sierra de Segura area. He decided to leave his job and move with his family from Jaén (Capital of the Province) to Segura (rural area). To do this he got a loan, leaving him with a serious debt with the financial institution. For him it was to fulfil his dream of being independent and becoming a businessman. At the same time as he began to take over his new farm, he also had the opportunity to work as an employee on another farm as a foreman. This job would complement his family's income, so he decided to accept this opportunity.

A few years after starting this process, his son began to develop a liver disease, and after many visits to the doctor, it was decided that a transplant was necessary. The farmer had to devote time to his sick son and began to have problems in the company where he worked, as well as continuing to manage his farm. The situation became so complicated and demanding that he had to stop working as an employee. He had to continue caring for his son while managing his farm. The farmer is in debt for the purchase of his farm and cannot give up farming.

This situation ended up undermining the couple's relationship, his wife often complained that she feels alone in looking after the child and the trips they have to make to the doctor far from their hometown. He cannot always go with them to the doctors or stay for long periods in hospital. This situation becomes entrenched until his partner decides that she wants to separate because she has met someone else.

After the separation, the farmer finds himself with the responsibility for the farm and his son, which leads to anxiety and frustration crises, he feels tied to the farm and the municipality where he has moved to, which does not offer him solutions to manage a situation in which he feels trapped..

He feels useless, in his difficult situation, without solutions or resources to cope with the situation, and experiencing depression and anguish. He stated

"I am not able to manage my day-to-day life".

The opportunity to receive help and to attend therapy sessions arose through the schoolteacher who identified that the son is depressed. After talking to the farmer and identifying the situation that father and son are going through, the school teacher gives them the opportunity to attend a Psychologist with whom the school usually works,

Handling the situation

As the work began, several signs of a mental health problem were identified. Phrases such as, "I am not responding as I used to", were common. Other signs associated with this condition are behavioural change and emotional change. If anger is more present (very connected with anxiety), or I am frustrated, more irritable (I get angry often), changes in sleep patterns, or changes in eating (I eat more or less). These are all warning signs that something is wrong. Frustration (I can't) or negative emotions can be a sign (I can't, I'm tired, I can't stand it,..). Another sign is to stop doing things such as going out, not meeting friends, not tolerating noise, avoiding effort, and voluntary isolation. Being aware of these signs can help a person to realise that something is not right.

When a person is in the middle of the problem or difficult situation it is not easy to identify these changes, so social support from family or friends can help to identify these changes. The environment and the people that live in it can recognise the emerging difficulties and alert the person to it and be supportive.

Symptoms: Lack of attention, distractions. Saying things like I am NOT capable, I can't, I am frustrated, I am not the same as before. With limiting thinking, all or nothing, I will never do well in life.

For this type of anxiety-depression, and specifically for this case, several support initiatives have been developed that try to provide solutions to the problems that cause it:

- Doing physical sports activities can help to release neurotransmitters such as endorphins, dopamine that generates joy and satisfaction. Sport helps these processes. For depressions it is also recommended, since depression leads to apathy and not wanting to do anything, sport takes away this predisposition. With activity we get people moving and help them to get out of a phase of inertia and passivity.
- Do pleasurable activities, reproduce stimulating activities that we know they like, or encourage them to do new things that they might like.
- It is important to take care of the diet and nutrition. In the case of anxiety, psychoactive substances such as sugar, caffeine, chocolate, should be eliminated.
- It is very important to control and manage thoughts, in particular irrational thoughts (all or nothing, everything goes wrong,..), using positive mental messages and emotional reasoning. It is necessary to work on such thoughts and feelings to avoid depressive symptoms.
- Muscle relaxation and breathing for anxiety, a way of creating positive mindful moments..
- Generating routines and finding solutions to problems.
- Psychotherapy.
- Psychopharmacology.

Based on this, with this case, we started by generating a list of his needs, trying to ask for help from social work, looking for extracurricular activities for the child, and hiring a support person in the mornings to help him with the child to go to school and prepare meals. Teaching him to adapt to a new situation with the difficulties of being in a rural area.

We had to overcome the negative thoughts after the separation, she had to go through her grieving phase for the loss of her partner and help him to accept his son's illness, generating a therapy for the child's treatment.

Conclusion and tips

In this case, the predisposition of "I can't" has been changed to the realisation that "I am capable, and I can do this", and the tools have been generated that make him feel capable of facing any situation. In addition to controlling the situation, he has created a social network of new friends. He sees himself as capable of doing what he sets out to do. He has the capabilities and only has to put his energy into achieving his goals.

Tips to other farmers

"Farmers are people".

"Self-assessment is fundamental".

"Only by asking ourselves how do I feel? We will know if we are doing well or not".

Farmers tend not to show weakness, they believe they should not show vulnerability. Like everyone else they have insecurities, frustration, and they have fears. They need to evaluate themselves and analyse their attitude to their work situations. They need to get away from the roland perception of the hard farmer, they need to normalise self-analysis and how changes affect their behaviour and emotions.

This case is closely related to some of the factors identified in the Summary Report as factors that can affect farmers' mental health:

- The uncertainties of an activity that sometimes generates indebtedness that ties up the farming enterprise
- The extreme dedication required by the farming enterprise often making it difficult to reconcile and balance work and family life.
- Belonging to a rural community where it is sometimes not easy to find psychological or service support.

But this is compounded by a serious episode that affects the health of his son, generating a situation that is difficult to manage and for which one is not always prepared. This situation put his relationship with his partner to the test, ending in a divorce which was the turning point that plunged the farmer into a situation of grief, guilt, frustration, denial, and blockage.

As our promoter says, identifying the signs, self-assessing and being aware that something has changed in behaviour or emotions can alert us to the fact that we are in the early stages of a mental health problem.

This self-assessment is the best tool for prevention, if we add to this tool for controlling our thoughts, and if we are prepared to recognise whether or not we need help, we will be able to overcome many of the situations that may present themselves to us as farmers. But it is also important to have a social environment that helps us to identify a significant change in our behaviour or emotions.

We have seen how doing sport, pleasurable activities, taking care of our diet, creating routines and planning can help us in stressful and anxious situations. Identifying our needs and defining a route to satisfy them can be a solution, as in this case. For this we can always count on professionals to help us when we feel unable to do so and when we find ourselves blocked.

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A Farmer's Journey: The Greatest Challenge