

SUCCESS STORIES

A Farmer's Journey: The Greatest Challenge

This case narrates the experience of a farmer who manages a large family farm, including leasing land from third parties and providing services to other farmers. His separation from his wife, having to manage their family environment with two children in custody and suffering from a degenerative illness, all these situations have contributed to him feeling overwhelmed.

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This case narrates the experience of a farmer who manages a large family farm, including leasing land from third parties and providing services to other farmers. His separation from his wife, having to manage their family environment with two children in custody and suffering from a degenerative illness, all these situations have contributed to him feeling overwhelmed.

The farmer initially came for consultation to overcome the grief of the loss of his wife, and with the aim of organising his new family structure and work situations. But after a short time, his degenerative disease got increasingly worse, resulting in him not being able to work. Also he has to reduce his farm investment and lease his land to other family members.

Knowing that his illness was getting worse, he had to maintain constant treatment. With this worry about his illness he also had to overcome his fear of death, rebuild his emotional life, plan the future for his daughters and fight against thoughts of incapacity and frustration, building upon the idea and the thought of living his life to the fullest.

Name of the interviewed	Vanessa Pérez (Psychologist)
Type of farming activity	Olive Grove
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety and Depression.</p> <p>The main factors that lead to this situation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of family relationships. • Degenerative illness that incapacitates him. • Activity as a constraint to escape from the rural world. • Lack of fulfilment in the activity. • Feelings of not being socially valued.

What is your story?

The Farmer with two daughters in the process of a divorce by mutual consent. He decided to attend consultation sessions because his marriage has failed, he feels frustrated and unable to take joint custody of the two girls, and his rural environment located in a very small village makes him feel restricted. "I have no one to go out with and distract me" and the farmer has a degenerative disease.

We started working with the issue of routines to learn how to manage household activities, farming activity and having his daughters. In order to help the girls who have not adapted well to the changes brought on by the divorce proceedings, an agreement is reached between the parents to include them in their legal consultations.

Despite this situation and his degenerative illness, the farmer continues to run his farm, which is a large property that provides him with a comfortable economic situation.

Initially, work began on adapting to the new situation, but after the first few months in which everything was going quite well, he underwent a medical check-up and it was found that there had been an upturn in his degenerative process, which resulted in the total loss of sight in one eye and partial loss of sight in the other. This led to the recognition by the medical authorities of a permanent incapacity for work.

As a result, he is divorced, must manage a large property, has two daughters aged 6 and 10 and is permanently disabled as a result of a degenerative disease. This represents a radical change in his life, saying "what am I doing with my life", "I feel evicted": socially, because he feels that his friends have left the village, familiarly, because he feels alone after the separation, physically, because of his degenerative illness and the disability he has been recognised as having.

He recognises that he must give up work, cancelling the leases he had, he stops doing work for third parties and has to rent his property to a relative. He went from being an active and self-employed farmer with plans and objectives to a person with physical limitations that prevented him from working. His professional opportunities are very limited, he said "what's left for me to sell coupons at the age of 40", he wants to feel active "I can't be unemployed". He has gone from being an active person to being passive by obligation.

In this case, having his legacy in the countryside obliges him to remain in a rural environment. In this case, even as a farmer, he does not feel satisfied, he does not feel gratified by the contact with other people, he does not find satisfaction in the work he has done.

Handling the situation

Everything began with a process of mourning after the separation and divorce, going through the normal phases of denial, and not accepting what has happened, then moving into a phase of rage, which ended in a depression when he realises that his wife will not return to his life. Added to this is his degenerative illness, the limitations he encounters, generates an anxiety crisis, mainly due to the fear and frustration of the future that awaits him.

We focused on resolving his problems with his ex-wife and to make plans for custody arrangements for their daughters and we encouraged him to rebuild his emotional life by helping him to find a new partner. He met a lady from London, and they began a relationship regularly, seeing each other.

Faced with his feelings of frustration at going from being an active person to being disabled, he considers taking a training course in key competencies in search of a job opportunity, but he considers that the opportunities that may arise are temporary and that at any moment he could have a relapse that could incapacitate him even more. This makes him feel frustrated because he does not feel fulfilled.

However, the farmer knows that the status of his health is going to become increasingly worse, and that sooner or later he will end up in an assisted bed or in a hospital, with little chance of seeing his daughters and probably dying alone. Therefore, as time goes by, he requires continuous treatment, as he relapses into negative thoughts from time to time, which is why he needs regular support.

The development of the therapy is based on these activities:

- Active maintenance of family and social support (friends).
- He feels that his daughters will be married when he is gone.
- Management of fear of death and how to die.
- Reducing his anxiety with relaxation, pleasurable activities.
- Distract the mind and activate the body with exercise.
- Setting short-term goals, making plans with his family and girlfriend.
- Cognitive therapy to manage thoughts and reduce symptoms.

These initiatives help to manage thoughts of "my life is slipping away", "I am going to die", "I am worthless", "I have no way out", "how my daughters are going to manage my estate when I die". But there is a need for continued support in the daily fight against the disease, and in supporting the idea of a full life and that he has created a legacy to offer to their daughters in the future.

Conclusion and tips

Initially the therapy was very positive with clinical discharge, allowing her to manage the situation after separation. However, the evolution of his illness generates relapses, with negative thinking.

The predisposition to depression in these conditions is likely to lead to periodic relapses. Therefore, even if we have improvements, we know that the treatment is permanent.

For a permanent situation, it is necessary to set short-term goals that get them fulfilled and recognised by their community or society. Farmers are not aware of the importance of their work as food providers.

Tips to other farmers

"We have to focus our lives on the thought that we are satisfied with what we are doing, all jobs have their good and bad sides". Being a farmer has positive aspects such as autonomy and independence that should be valued. It is a physical job that allows farmers to maintain a healthy state, in a pleasant environment that connects them with nature.

"In the case of illness, it is very important to prepare one's thoughts to overcome adversity, to have a permanent fighting attitude, to have short-term goals. "It is important to be prepared for what is to come, to predispose the attitudinal strategy with which we will face whatever the future holds".

Here we can see some factors described in the national reports:

- Lack of social recognition sometimes implies a lack of fulfilment on the part of farmers.
- Life in rural areas can mean a lack of access to support services for dependency.
- Farming life requires the farmer to be in the field, making it impossible to seek out alternative outlets.
- Lack of work-life balance and problems in maintaining stable family relationship.

In this case we have seen the case of a farmer from a large farm, who suffers a marriage break-up, finds himself alone with his two daughters and with a degenerative illness that makes him unable to work as a farmer. Divesting and renting out his land are the only option left to him, making him feel less useful, a person who does not feel fulfilled, and whose expectations for the future lead to anxiety and depression.

In these cases, the help of a professional is essential, knowing that your life is going to be limited by an illness generates constant frustration and therefore the control of negative thoughts must be managed with continuous and permanent support.

Active family support, having a social environment, planning for the future, rebuilding your love life, doing activities, having small short-term goals and feeling that you have a full life in spite of the circumstances, is essential to take your mind off these negative thoughts.

It is important for farmers to find satisfaction in their activity, and to connect with the social function they perform in order to generate an awareness of recognition, beyond the tasks they carry out, for the impact of their work on the life of the society to which they belong. Autonomous work, freedom and connection with a natural environment are also factors to value as a farmer.

In this case, personal attitude is fundamental, maintaining a permanent resilient and fighting spirit, finding satisfaction in daily tasks, exercise and pleasurable activities are core elements to face the future.

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