

# Impact of Stress within Rural and Agricultural Communities

## WHAT IS STRESS?

Body's response to physical, mental or emotional pressure.

Life can be stressful – you may feel stressed about change (e.g., new job, getting married, kids leaving home, etc.), a performance at school/deadline at work, a natural disaster.

Stress is a normal reaction to everyday pressures but can be unhealthy when it upsets your day-to-day functioning.

## PREVALENCE OF TRAUMA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Rural residents have an increased risk of traumatic injuries and deaths (1)
  - At least 60% of all trauma deaths occur in areas of the U.S. where only 25% of the population lives (2)
- There is a higher risk of suicide in rural communities
  - Nearly twice as many suicides in most rural counties compared to urban
  - Mental health services are limited in rural areas
- There is a greater occurrence of adverse community level events, including severe environmental adversity such as drought, floods and bushfires (3)
- Rural women experience higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) and severity of physical abuse (coupled with limited access to services) (4)
- Rural children are almost twice as likely to experience maltreatment such as overall abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect (5)

1. [https://secure.in.gov/health/files/Rural\\_Health\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://secure.in.gov/health/files/Rural_Health_Fact_Sheet.pdf)  
2. [https://www.ruralhealth.us/NRHA/media/Emerge\\_NRHA/Advocacy/Policy%20documents/NRHA-Mental-health-in-rural-areas-policy-brief-2022.pdf](https://www.ruralhealth.us/NRHA/media/Emerge_NRHA/Advocacy/Policy%20documents/NRHA-Mental-health-in-rural-areas-policy-brief-2022.pdf)  
3. McFarlane AC. Predictors of post-traumatic stress disorder after major injury. Aust N Z J Surg. 2008;78:533–4. doi: 10.1111/j.1445-2197.2008.04566.  
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3216064/>  
5. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/violence-and-abuse>

## UNIQUE SOURCES OF STRESS IN AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

- Rising production expenses and falling farm income levels
- Shrinking agricultural land base and rising land costs
- Limited farm labor coupled with labor-intensive production due to high numbers of specialty crop farms and other high-labor production methods that adversely impact profit margins
- Access to credit and farm transition resources for beginning farmers
- Erosion of regional processors and distributors
- Hastening climate disruption
- Acculturation stress for migrant workers

## SIGNS OF CHRONIC, PROLONGED STRESS

### Physical Stress

- Headaches
- Ulcers
- Backaches
- Eating problems
- Sleeping problems
- Frequent sickness
- Exhaustion

### Emotional Stress

- Sadness
- Depression
- Bitterness
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Loss of Spirit
- Loss of Sense of Humor

### Behavioral Stress

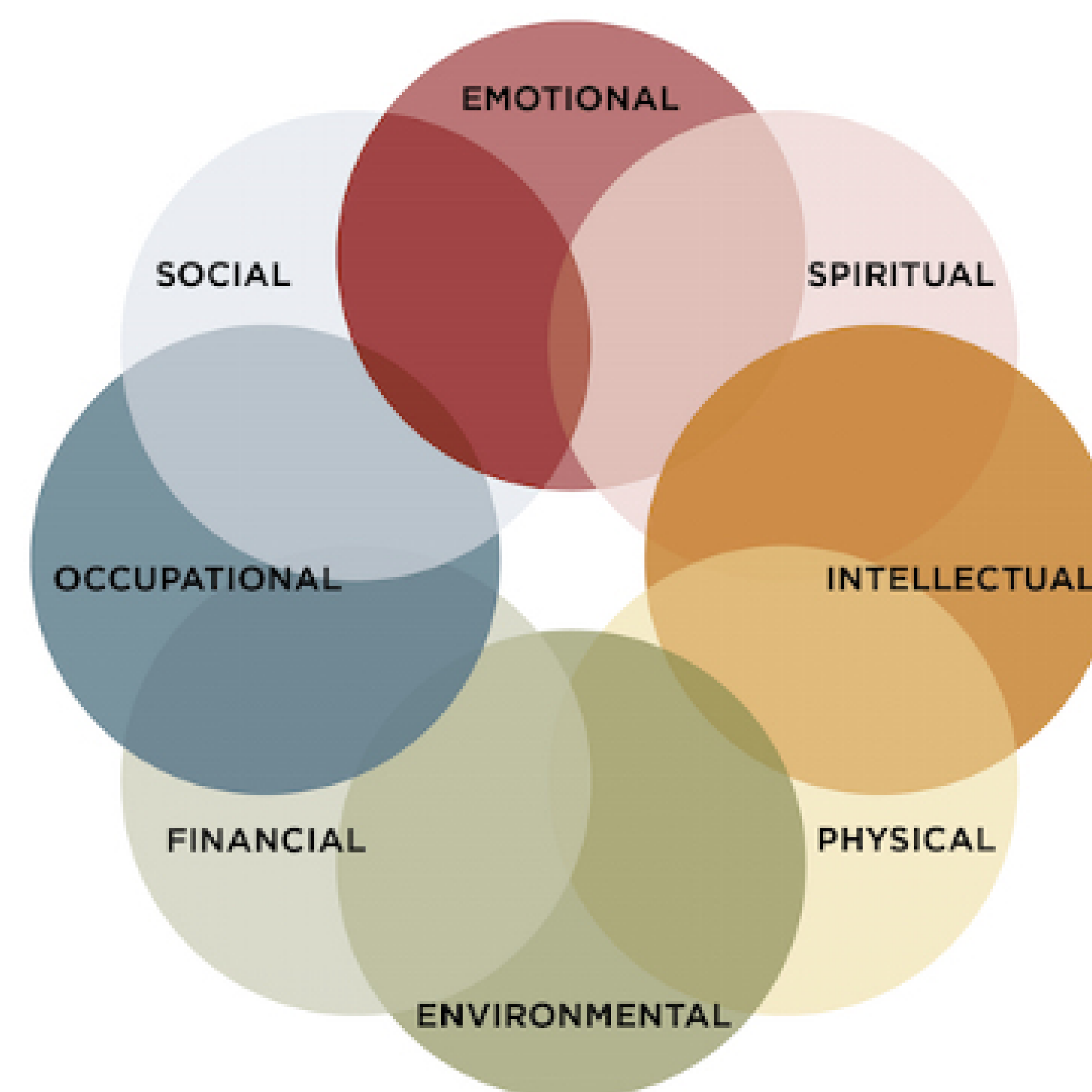
- Irritability
- Acting out
- Passive-aggressiveness
- Anger
- Increased substance use
- Isolation
- Violence

### Cognitive Stress

- Memory loss
- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty w/decisions

### Self-Worth Stress

- Feeling like a failure
- Can't do anything right
- **Inability** to fix things



## EIGHT (8) DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

Emotional: creating satisfying relationships  
Environmental: surroundings that support well-being  
Financial: sense of current and future security  
Intellectual: recognizing creative abilities  
Occupational: satisfaction/enrichment from work  
Physical: active and healthy daily routine  
Social: sense of connection and belonging  
Spiritual: sense of purpose and meaning in life

## HEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS

Try to eliminate the stressors  
Cultivate social support  
Seek good nutrition  
Relax your muscles  
Meditate  
Protect your sleep  
Get physical  
Take a moment in nature  
Keep your pleasurable activities  
Reframe your thinking  
Seek help

# Substance Use as a Coping Mechanism

- A coping mechanism is a method of dealing with unhappiness, stress, or other issues
- Someone living with chronic stress—and who lacks healthy coping mechanisms—may turn to drugs or alcohol as a method of managing it
- Some substances depress or slow down the central nervous system (alcohol, marijuana, opioids), while others speed up (stimulants such as cocaine, methamphetamine) the central nervous system, but the “numbing/relaxing” effects of these substances are only temporary

## PERCEIVED SOLUTIONS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Over half (57%) of rural adults know little about resources for dealing with opioid misuse (and substance use more broadly) in their local community
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) believe that increasing access to behavioral health treatment would be effective in helping to solve the opioid crisis
- 75% of rural adults say the messages that people can recover from OUD/SUD would be effective in decreasing the associated stigma
- Education has been the only consistent, significant predictor of willingness among rural residents to seek support