

Major new study shows 'concerning' levels of physical and mental health problems among farmers and agricultural workers

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A major new study shows "concerning" levels of physical and mental health problems among farmers and agricultural workers.

The survey of thousands of people living and working in farming shows a higher proportion are experiencing pain, [mobility problems](#) and anxiety and depression than the wider population.

Experts say their research is "compelling evidence" of the need to tackle physical and mental health issues in the [agricultural industry](#) to ensure better well-being and ensure the future sustainability of UK food production.

They surveyed 15,296 people living and working in agriculture in England and Wales about their health and well-being.

A total of 24 per cent of respondents reported problems with mobility, 21 per cent reported problems with performing their usual activities; 52 per cent reported moderate or extreme problems with pain/discomfort; and 31 per cent reported problems with anxiety/depression.

Women reported fewer problems with mobility, [self-care](#), performing usual activities and pain/discomfort than men, but more problems with anxiety/depression.

A total of 64 per cent of respondents said that they had experienced farm-related 'pain in muscles/joints etc.', and 16 per cent had sustained a non-fatal injury, in the past five years.

The research, by Rebecca Wheeler and Matt Lobley from the University of Exeter, is published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

Dr. Wheeler said: "Clearly we surveyed people during the pandemic and coronavirus has had an impact, but this doesn't account for all of the disparities we found. This is part of a growing body of evidence about the significant mental and physical health problems among farmers and the link with personal, family and business-related challenges commonly

faced by members of this community.

"The high levels of self-reported anxiety/depression among working-aged people in our sample might be explained by the numerous drivers of farm and business-related stress reported by respondents, including those associated with workload, regulatory demands and paperwork, [bad weather](#), disease, social isolation and maintaining economic viability."

Respondents reported fewer problems with mobility and self-care than the wider population, particularly in the older age groups. This could suggest that farm work positively contributes to [physical fitness](#) later in life but it could also be a consequence of the requirement for a certain level of fitness in order to stay in agriculture.

Professor Lobley said: "This particular piece of research forms part of a larger body of work conducted by the CRPR in recent years and provides further compelling evidence of the need to understand and address both physical and [mental health issues](#) among people living and working in agriculture. The results should be seen as an imperative for action as, ultimately, a sustainable and resilient food system requires a healthy agricultural workforce able to maintain and improve production without detriment to themselves and their families."

More information: Rebecca Wheeler et al, Health-related quality of life within agriculture in England and Wales: results from a EQ-5D-3L self-report questionnaire, *BMC Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-022-13790-w](#)

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