

Learning Through Uncertainty: Emotional Coping Practices of Mangosteen Farmers as Informal Education Processes

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Abstract

This study examines emotional coping strategies among mangosteen farmers who face persistent uncertainty due to climate variability, unstable market prices, and long production cycles. Emotional coping is conceptualized as a set of internal processes that enable farmers to regulate stress, maintain psychological stability, and sustain their livelihoods. Using a qualitative approach, the study identifies four dominant coping patterns: acceptance, spiritual coping, social emotional support, and cognitive reframing. Each strategy is analyzed in depth to understand its function, process, and impact on resilience. The findings reveal that emotional coping is not passive but constitutes an active adaptive mechanism that allows farmers to endure uncertainty over time. The study contributes by providing a detailed conceptualization of emotional coping in agricultural contexts, highlighting its central role in sustaining farmer resilience.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is widely recognized as one of the most uncertainty-prone sectors, particularly in tropical regions where ecological variability intersects with volatile economic structures. Smallholder farmers, including mangosteen cultivators, operate within complex systems shaped by climate instability, fluctuating commodity prices, and asymmetrical market relations (Murray, 2016). In this context, uncertainty is not an episodic condition but a persistent structural reality embedded in everyday agricultural life. Mangosteen farming presents a particularly acute case of prolonged uncertainty. The crop requires a long maturation period, often spanning several years before yielding economically viable harvests. This temporal delay intensifies vulnerability, as farmers must sustain livelihoods without immediate returns.

Furthermore, mangosteen production is highly sensitive to climatic disruptions, including irregular rainfall patterns and extreme weather events, which can significantly affect both yield and quality (Canton, 2021). At the same time, farmers remain dependent on export-oriented market systems characterized by price volatility and limited bargaining power. These intersecting pressures situate farmers within a condition of chronic uncertainty that extends beyond economic risk into the realm of psychosocial strain. Existing literature has predominantly framed farmer adaptation in terms of technical adjustments and economic strategies, such as crop diversification, input management, and market integration. While these approaches are important, they tend to reduce farmers to rational economic actors and overlook the subjective dimensions of how uncertainty is experienced and managed.

In reality, farmers are not merely decision-makers responding to external constraints but individuals embedded within social relationships, cultural norms, and emotional worlds

that shape their responses to adversity. From a social perspective, the experience of uncertainty is deeply relational. Farmers' emotional responses are influenced by family expectations, community norms, and collective experiences of risk. In many rural contexts, the burden of agricultural failure is not only individual but also social, affecting household stability and social status within the community. As a result, managing emotions becomes a crucial aspect of sustaining not only economic activity but also social identity and relational continuity. Emotional coping, therefore, emerges as a critical yet underexplored dimension of agricultural resilience. Rather than being a passive reaction to stress, emotional coping can be understood as an active process through which farmers interpret, negotiate, and endure uncertainty.

These processes include acceptance of uncontrollable conditions, reliance on spiritual beliefs, engagement with social support networks, and the reinterpretation of negative experiences into meaningful narratives. Such strategies enable farmers to maintain psychological stability while continuing to participate in inherently risky agricultural systems. Despite its importance, emotional coping has received limited attention in agrarian studies, which have traditionally prioritized material and institutional factors. This gap is significant because the sustainability of agricultural livelihoods depends not only on external resources but also on the internal capacities of farmers to withstand prolonged stress, (Freeman, 2021).

Ignoring these emotional dimensions risks producing an incomplete understanding of resilience. This study addresses this gap by focusing exclusively on emotional coping strategies among mangosteen farmers. By isolating the emotional dimension, the research seeks to provide a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of how farmers manage uncertainty at the psychological and social levels. The novelty of this study lies in repositioning emotional coping as a primary adaptive system rather than a secondary or residual response. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze and elaborate the forms, processes, and functions of emotional coping among mangosteen farmers, with particular attention to

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design to explore farmers lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with mangosteen farmers who have experienced repeated agricultural uncertainty.

The research procedure involved three stages: data collection, data reduction, and thematic analysis. Interviews were transcribed and coded to identify recurring emotional coping patterns.

The analysis followed a thematic approach, focusing on how farmers interpret stress and regulate their emotions. This method allows for a detailed understanding of internal coping processes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identifies four major emotional coping strategies employed by mangosteen farmers in responding to prolonged agricultural uncertainty. These strategies are not isolated mechanisms but interconnected process that collectively sustain psychological resilience and social functioning.

a. Acceptance as Emotional Stabilization

Acceptance emerges as the most foundational coping strategy among mangosteen farmers. Rather than attempting to control unpredictable elements such as climate variability or fluctuating market prices, farmers consciously acknowledge these conditions as inherent aspects of agricultural life (Folkman, 1984).

Importantly, acceptance should not be interpreted as passive resignation. Instead, it reflects an active cognitive-emotional adjustment through which farmers recalibrate

their expectations and redefine the boundaries of control (Berry et al., 2018). 1. By recognizing the limits of their agency, farmers reduce the intensity of frustration, disappointment, and emotional distress.

From a social perspective, acceptance is also shaped by shared cultural narratives that normalize uncertainty as a common experience among farmers. This collective understanding reduces individual self-blame and reinforces emotional stability. In this sense, acceptance functions not only at the individual level but also as a socially reinforced coping mechanism that maintains psychological equilibrium over time (Mishra et al., 2021).

b. Spiritual Coping as Meaning-Making Process

Spiritual coping emerges as a central mechanism through which mangosteen farmers interpret, negotiate, and endure prolonged uncertainty. Unlike purely cognitive strategies, spiritual coping operates at the intersection of emotion, belief, and social meaning, enabling farmers to transform unpredictable and often uncontrollable circumstances into experiences that are psychologically manageable and existentially meaningful.

In the context of mangosteen farming, uncertainty is not merely experienced as economic risk but as a condition that challenges farmers' sense of stability, purpose, and control. Spiritual frameworks provide an interpretive structure through which these challenges can be understood. Farmers frequently perceive agricultural hardships—such as crop failure, pest outbreaks, or declining prices not as random or meaningless events but as part of a broader moral or divine order. This interpretive shift is critical, as it reduces the emotional intensity of uncertainty by embedding it within a larger narrative of meaning (Mishra et al., 2021).

Rather than perceiving loss as a purely negative outcome, farmers often reconstruct such experiences as forms of testing, patience-building, or life processes that carry implicit value. This meaning-making process allows individuals to maintain emotional coherence in situations where material outcomes are unfavorable (Reed et al., 2017). In this sense, spiritual coping functions as a cognitive-emotional bridge that connects adversity with purpose, thereby preventing the fragmentation of psychological stability.

Importantly, spiritual coping is not an isolated individual practice but is deeply embedded within social and cultural contexts. Shared religious beliefs, communal rituals, and collective expressions of faith reinforce the legitimacy of spiritual interpretations. Activities such as communal prayer, religious gatherings, and informal spiritual discussions create spaces where emotional distress can be collectively processed and normalized. Through these interactions, individual experiences of uncertainty are transformed into shared narratives, strengthening both emotional resilience and social cohesion.

Furthermore, spiritual coping contributes to temporal endurance by encouraging a long-term perspective. By framing present difficulties as temporary or divinely ordained, farmers are able to sustain hope and delay emotional reactions to immediate losses (Mortazavi et al., 2022). This temporal reframing is particularly important in mangosteen farming, where long production cycles inherently require patience and sustained commitment.

However, it is important to critically note that spiritual coping does not eliminate structural vulnerability. While it effectively regulates emotional responses, it may also contribute to the normalization of hardship, potentially reducing the urgency to challenge unequal market structures or systemic constraints. Despite this limitation, within the lived reality of farmers, spiritual coping remains a crucial adaptive

mechanism that enables continued participation in agriculture under conditions of uncertainty.

Thus, spiritual coping should be understood not merely as a personal belief system but as a socially embedded process of meaning-making that plays a fundamental role in sustaining emotional resilience among mangosteen farmers.

c. Social Emotional Support as Collective Buffer

Social emotional support constitutes a critical coping mechanism through which mangosteen farmers regulate emotional stress in the face of prolonged uncertainty. Unlike individual-centered coping strategies, this form of coping is inherently relational, emerging from continuous interactions within family units, peer networks, and broader rural communities.

In the everyday realities of farming, uncertainty is rarely experienced in isolation. Economic losses, crop failures, and market instability often carry social consequences that extend beyond the individual farmer, affecting household well-being and community standing (Bryant et al., 2019). As a result, emotional responses to stress are deeply embedded within social relationships. Farmers actively seek out interactions with spouses, extended family members, and fellow farmers to share concerns, express frustrations, and gain reassurance.

These interactions create what can be conceptualized as a “collective emotional space,” where distress is articulated, validated, and normalized (Gupta, 2020). Within this space, individual experiences of hardship are reframed as shared conditions rather than personal failures. This process is crucial in reducing self-blame and mitigating feelings of inadequacy, which are common in contexts of repeated agricultural uncertainty.

Furthermore, the collective dimension of emotional support functions as a mechanism for redistributing emotional burden. Rather than internalizing stress, farmers externalize their experiences through storytelling, informal discussions, and mutual exchanges of empathy. This redistribution prevents the accumulation of psychological pressure at the individual level, thereby reducing the risk of emotional exhaustion.

Social emotional support also operates as an informal regulatory system that sustains motivation and persistence. Encouragement from peers, shared narratives of survival, and mutual recognition of struggle contribute to maintaining a sense of continuity in farming practices. In many cases, observing that others face similar challenges reinforces a sense of solidarity and collective resilience.

Importantly, this form of coping is shaped by cultural norms that emphasize mutual support, reciprocity, and communal belonging. In rural settings, social ties are not merely optional resources but fundamental structures that organize daily life. The expectation to support and be supported creates a stable network through which emotional regulation can occur continuously.

However, it is also important to recognize that reliance on social support may have limitations. Social networks can sometimes reproduce shared anxieties or normalize hardship without addressing underlying structural problems. Despite this, within the lived experiences of farmers, social emotional support remains an indispensable coping mechanism that buffers stress and sustains psychological well-being.

Thus, social emotional support should be understood as a collective process of emotional regulation, where resilience is not located solely within individuals but is co-produced through ongoing social interaction and shared experience.

d. Cognitive Reframing as Adaptive Interpretation

Cognitive reframing represents a reflective and interpretive form of emotional coping through which mangosteen farmers actively reconstruct the meaning of adverse

experiences. Rather than accepting negative outcomes such as crop failure, pest infestation, or declining market prices—as definitive losses, farmers engage in a process of reinterpretation that allows these events to be understood in more constructive and manageable ways.

At its core, cognitive reframing involves a shift in perspective from outcome-oriented evaluation to process-oriented understanding. Failures are not perceived as final endpoints but as part of an ongoing learning trajectory embedded within agricultural practice (Reed et al., 2017). Farmers frequently interpret unfavorable outcomes as opportunities to refine cultivation techniques, adjust timing strategies, or better anticipate environmental variability. This interpretive shift transforms uncertainty from a purely threatening condition into a source of experiential knowledge.

Importantly, this process is not merely cognitive but also deeply emotional. By redefining the meaning of failure, farmers are able to regulate negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration, and self-doubt. Instead of internalizing failure as a personal inadequacy, they attribute it to external, often uncontrollable conditions. This attributional shift plays a critical role in protecting self-esteem and sustaining psychological stability.

From a social perspective, cognitive reframing is reinforced through shared narratives and collective learning processes (Mortazavi et al., 2022). Farmers exchange experiences, compare outcomes, and discuss strategies within their communities. Through these interactions, individual setbacks are contextualized within broader patterns of shared uncertainty. This collective reinterpretation reduces the stigma of failure and promotes a culture of adaptive learning rather than blame.

Furthermore, cognitive reframing contributes to the maintenance of a future-oriented outlook. In the context of mangosteen farming—where long production cycles require sustained commitment—this forward-looking perspective is essential. By focusing on potential improvement rather than past loss, farmers are able to preserve motivation and continue investing time and resources into their agricultural activities.

However, it is important to critically acknowledge that cognitive reframing may also have limitations. While it effectively supports emotional regulation, it can sometimes lead to the normalization of repeated losses, potentially obscuring structural issues such as unequal market access or systemic vulnerabilities. Despite this, within the lived realities of farmers, cognitive reframing remains a vital adaptive mechanism that enables continuity in the face of persistent uncertainty.

Thus, cognitive reframing should be understood as a dynamic process of adaptive interpretation, through which farmers transform adversity into knowledge, sustain motivation, and maintain engagement with agricultural livelihoods over time.

4. CONCLUSION

Emotional coping strategies constitute a critical and often underrecognized mechanism through which mangosteen farmers manage prolonged exposure to agricultural uncertainty. In contexts where environmental variability, market instability, and long production cycles create continuous pressure, farmers rely not only on technical or economic adjustments but also on internal emotional processes to sustain their livelihoods. This study demonstrates that emotional coping is not a passive reaction but an active and dynamic system that shapes how farmers interpret stress, regulate emotional responses, and maintain engagement in farming activities over time.

The findings indicate that acceptance, spiritual coping, social emotional support, and cognitive reframing function as interrelated strategies that collectively stabilize psychological conditions. Acceptance enables farmers to redefine the limits of control,

reducing frustration and emotional exhaustion. Spiritual coping provides a framework of meaning that transforms uncertainty into experiences that are more tolerable and purposeful. Social emotional support distributes emotional burdens across relational networks, reinforcing a sense of shared experience and collective resilience. Meanwhile, cognitive reframing allows farmers to reinterpret adversity as a source of learning and adaptation, sustaining motivation despite repeated challenges. Together, these strategies form a coherent coping system that supports both emotional stability and long-term persistence in agricultural livelihoods.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating emotional dimensions into the analysis of agricultural resilience. Existing approaches that focus primarily on material, technical, or institutional factors risk overlooking the internal capacities that enable farmers to endure uncertainty on a daily basis. Emotional coping should therefore be recognized as a central component in understanding how resilience is constructed and maintained in rural contexts.

Furthermore, the study suggests that future research and policy interventions must move beyond narrowly defined productivity-oriented frameworks. Supporting farmers requires not only improving access to resources and technologies but also acknowledging and strengthening their emotional and psychosocial capacities. Incorporating emotional coping into research agendas and rural development policies can provide a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of how farmers sustain their livelihoods under persistent uncertainty.

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