



# We Need to Get Our Hands Dirty (Literally)

Author: **Ruth Spiteri**

**A**ttent għax taqa u taqşam rasek!  
(Careful, you'll fall and hit your head!)

'Wahdek se tkun? Ara jaħftek xi hadd!'  
(You're going to be alone? Be careful or someone might kidnap you!)

'Xogħol tal-qamel ikollok jekk ma tmurx l-università.'  
(You won't find a good job unless you go to university.)

Do these phrases sound familiar to you?

A recent global study carried out by US analytics company Gallup and featured on Times of Malta ranks us as the 3rd angriest population in Europe and also the most anxious population in Europe.

While there are arguably several reasons for this, one way this anxiety might manifest is through our parents. While helicopter parenting might stem from good intentions, research suggests a correlation between helicopter parenting and children who develop depression and anxiety. It rears up in the drama our parents make if we want to travel, in the conflict we experience if we don't want to pursue a traditional university education, and in our aversion to all things sports.

Our risk aversion and anxiety is also fueled by the increasing global hysteria towards any form of dirt and disease. Our lives are becoming increasingly occupied by a diverse range of beliefs, routines, and compulsions that focus on eradicating disease. We keep our environments as clean as possible until they look dull, we sterilise our hands until they're dry, and we rush to the doctor and pop pills at the slightest sign of discomfort.

We are hesitant to experiment or try something new; we try to play everything safe. As a consequence of this, we've become more alienated from nature and our own bodies

by the year, leading sedentary and technology-centred lives which fuel medical complications like heart problems, chronic pain, and treatment-resistant super-bacteria.

Is it any wonder then why we feel so angry and anxious? So alienated from ourselves and the world?

Fortunately, there is a solution to this: we need to get our hands dirty. Literally.

Research conducted by the University of Tehran in 2010 shows that kinesthetic activities like sports and the process of overcoming hurdles in those activities make it easier to bounce back from psychological discomfort. Sprinkle in a little contact with nature for some de-stressing, and you have the perfect plan for resilience against pain and misfortune.

So go get your hands dirty. Plant some trees, touch the soil, and get elbow-deep in that dirt. Go hiking and swimming. Explore new places. Become more aware of your body through sports and meditation. Embrace nature instead of trying to keep it at a distance. Find ways to get back in touch with that curiosity and sportiveness you had as a child before it was repressed and snuffed out.

Most importantly: take meaningful and calculated risks. You won't be young forever. Ideally, there should be many moments in your life when your feet are dirty, your hair messy, and your eyes sparkling. **T**

## Further Reading:

**Hosseini, S., & Besharat, M. (2010). Relation of resilience with sport achievement and mental health in a sample of athletes. *Procedia - Social And Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 633-638. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.156**