



Women & Social Connectedness



Introduction

Social connectedness refers to the level of engagement and trust an individual has with others in their community and the community as a whole. People can feel part of and valued by their community through roles they take on, through friendships and through participation in activities.

Society has created differences in expectations of women and men, resulting in different kinds of community participation, different exposures to health risks, and differential treatment. Social connectedness should be considered through a gender lens because gender influences the roles women and men are encouraged to take on.

Gender influences roles – roles influence social connectedness – social connectedness influences health.

Gender Influences

- Childbearing and rearing is becoming increasingly private, conducted in isolation with a lack of support.
- Women are much more likely than men to be carers, to be a sole parent with unreliable housing, and to live in poverty. The primary source of female financial disadvantage is child rearing.
- 83% of sole parents in Australia are women; single mothers particularly express feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- Violence against women affects community participation. The impacts of violence on community connectedness can range from women not wanting to go out alone or at night due to general safety concerns, to women being restricted by a partner from leaving the house.
- The effect of isolating people with mental illness is worsened for women who have children and face enormous challenges without social support.
- Women are more vulnerable than men to the effects of reduced social support.
- Because they live longer, women are more likely to survive partners which can result in social isolation and lead to poor health outcomes.



Women living in rural regions experience unique problems with social connectedness. Because rural regions tend to have lower population density, people here have more acquaintances. This can lead to emotional disconnection for women because there is less anonymity without more intimate relationships. Gossip can be perceived as a means of social control. There is a link between small-town gossip, the expectation of conventional behaviour and social isolation. The 2005 figures from SANE Australia's national help line, showed that almost half of the 16,000 calls came from rural/remote areas, where only 14% of the population live.

Implications for the Future

Social connectedness is experienced differently by women and men, by city and country people, and by different minority groups. Policy development, implementation and evaluation in the area of social connectedness must be based on an understanding of gender differences, rurality and diversity.

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