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Social capital and ecological sustainability: Broken Hill

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Abstract

A recent study into community capacity building in a remote Australian community used a social capital survey instrument. The results indicate that women, often under-represented in decision-making and unrecognised as influential and powerful, form a major plank of the social capital strength in the community and demonstrate high commitment to environmental sustainability. The results for older women are particularly interesting. Findings have implications for community analysis, funding decisions and planning for promotion and development of programs on environmental sustainability.

In 2002 a group of volunteers, mostly women, assisted with research into social capital. The women were drawn from the community through their attendance at community roundtable gatherings and community markets where the stall about the research had been set up and brochures placed in sample bags. Most people who expressed interest in being on the research team were women. Some were employed, others were retired or unemployed. The research team was headed by Jenny Onyx from the University of Technology Sydney who with Paul Bullen developed the survey instrument now validated in Australia and being tested overseas to accurately measure social capital (2000). The research team used the Onyx and Bullen survey instrument on social capital in the community of Broken Hill. The volunteers included specific questions about life in the town. One group of questions focused on attitudes towards environmental issues.

In another paper (Onyx, Osburn and Bullen 2004) the link between social capital and concern for issues of ecological sustainability has been established. That is, the way people think and act towards other people within the community and the way they think and act towards the environment seem to be connected. This paper reports on the strength of the link we found between the two concepts of social capital and ecological sustainability. Moreover, the survey found that it was women more than men who have not only higher social capital and community connectivity but also had stronger commitment to ecological sustainability. These links have particular relevance for women and for those people planning programs to raise environmental awareness or activities to encourage ecological sustainability.

The contribution of this paper is not to theory as such, but to how the effective application of an instrument which measures social capital can lead us to uncover where to position our energies in a community. The results of this research indicate that in this particular town, efforts and messages to promote ecological sustainability will find fertile ground if directed towards women and women's networks of connectivity.

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As Jenny Onyx and Anne Dale (2005) have observed both concepts, sustainability and social capital, are in themselves highly contested. Both concepts are 'fuzzy' but nonetheless important starting points for any debate about the future of our planet. Many of the differences arise from the different disciplinary approaches taken, as well as different political/value positions adopted. For us, sustainability is about reconciling three imperatives:

the *ecological imperative* to live within global biophysical carrying capacity and maintain biodiversity;

the *social imperative* to ensure the development of democratic systems of governance to effectively propagate and sustain the values that people wish to live by; and

the *economic imperative* to ensure that basic needs are met worldwide.

Equitable access to these three resources—ecological, social and economic, is fundamental to its realisation (Dale 2001).

Dale goes on to say that this definition assumes that increasing stocks of economic or human capital cannot reduce or replace social capital. Sustainability refers to a fundamental reconciliation of the three imperatives of which the ecological imperative is primordial, as it is the foundation of life. Issues about the biophysical carrying capacity of the planet are not just issues of science and technological processing; they are also social issues. Ordinary people are becoming increasingly concerned with ecological issues and expressing this concern. As a result the actions of civil society, whether formally organised or not, have begun to shape key environmental outcomes.

The 'social', as Dale (2001) uses it, incorporates both social and human capital. Human capital refers to the sum of human capacity including the knowledge and skills that can be used in the production of wealth, and that form the basis of any collective and purposive human endeavour. A democratic system of governance, one that respects and considers the citizens, is one fortunate outcome of the appropriate use of social capital. Social capital is more than this.

Social capital is a complex and multilayered concept. Within the broad scope of social capital there are probably some elements that are core and others that are effects of the core. We are not yet in a position to delineate the boundaries of the concept with clarity. Bourdieu (1985:248; 1980) defined the concept as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition'. Further, Bourdieu (in Portes, 1998:4) argued that social networks are not a natural given and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalisation of group relations, usable as a reliable source of benefits. This approach locates the social capital in the networks individuals have and which they can use for their strategic advantage.

Other definitions are more explicitly social in orientation. Social capital is located within the social structures, the space between people, and not within the individual. Coleman (1988) defines social capital by its function as 'a variety of entities with two elements in common: they consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure' (Coleman 1988:598).

Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti provide the most commonly used definition, one that clearly locates social capital *within* social structures. Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1993:167) define social capital as 'those features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. Nevertheless, the consensus is growing in the literature that social capital stands for the ability of actors (both group and individual) to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures (Portes 1998).

Osburn (1999) takes this further when she found that power exists in not only the obvious places, it also exists in the nature of the interaction between people in a field or circumstance. Power, she says, exists *between* the structures and between the relationships that exist in any field (1999:254). This is why the qualities and characteristics of those relationships (like trust and safety) and the nature of the field itself (the historical and cultural experience of the people) are important to uncover through research.

Research methodology

The research team and volunteers used the social capital questionnaire developed by Onyx and Bullen (2000). By using this standard instrument the team could gain a reliable, comparative measure of Broken Hill's social capital against four other rural and urban communities. Additional relevant questions were on attitude to environmental issues, the problems people have in Broken Hill (crime, transport), issues of citizenship (power and decision-making and perceived community divisions) and demographic variables. The questionnaire used a four point Likert Scale. The four point Likert scale does not allow a middle position but requires a forced choice from the respondent. We discussed this with the community members indicating that a midpoint was helpful on the survey. They advised us that in this town regular citizens do not wish to register strong opinions primarily because the town is small, remote, people have to rely on each other so they may (especially women) seek to keep the peace by moderating their opinions. A four point Likert scale sets up a forced choice so that people can indicate which side of the midline they stand on any issue.

The questionnaire was pilot tested at the Broken Hill Show using a random method of asking people who walked by a community information stall. It was then implemented within the town precinct by the survey team approaching people directly in the street, local shops, clubs, churches and associations. In this way the team achieved an almost perfect return rate.

One woman travelled on the mail truck to an outlying town (four hours away for which Broken Hill is the central hub) and surveyed people who came in from their properties. Women on the team drove 100 kilometres to nearby towns that use Broken Hill as their primary service centre. In this way the voice of the pastoralists was also heard.

Some team members door knocked businesses especially those employing men to ensure that the voice of men was heard. The researchers were able to include Indigenous participants by actively seeking out Indigenous people, asking permission and waiting until they were available. While the process of implementation of the survey was not completely random, every attempt was made to have the survey population reflect the adult population profile of the area based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics community profile compiled after the most recent national census (ABS 2000).

Six hundred and thirty questionnaires were completed and analysed, representing three percent of the area's population. No-one under fifteen completed the questionnaire. Within the sample seven percent were Indigenous which is a higher proportion compared to the population of four percent. This means that Indigenous people were adequately represented. Therefore, we can have considerable confidence that the results are valid and reliable for the area of Broken Hill.

The questionnaire was self-administered but for people who had difficulty with print-based materials the volunteer read the questions. The researchers trained the volunteers to do this ethically (respectfully and without bias). Volunteers also entered the data using a data entry format constructed by one of the researchers using *Microsoft Access*. Researchers used *Statistica* for factor analysis and analysis of variance.

Analysis

Table 1 sets out the overall factor scores for social capital, based on the scoring developed by Onyx and Bullen (2000). Seven factors are included: community, proactivity, trust, neighbourhood, family/friends, tolerance, value of life as well as the total, general social capital factor score. Therefore, the overall social capital score is developed from measuring each of the seven factors. The single social capital score represents a consideration of the multi-layered nature of social capital. These scores are provided for Broken Hill, as well as for five other communities in NSW for purposes of comparison. Two of these, Deniliquin and West Wyalong, are rural centres. The others are urban areas around Sydney. Pymont is inner urban, Greenacre is a western suburb with primarily low-income residents and Narellan is a hinterland area which is undergoing significant housing growth and development.

These results set the social capital scores of Broken Hill into context. It is clear that Broken Hill residents demonstrate relatively high levels of community participation. However, overall Broken Hill scores less well than other rural centres, and only slightly better than inner city Sydney. This is surprising considering that rural centres generally score significantly higher than urban ones on all factors except 'Proactivity' (social agency) and 'Tolerance of Diversity' (Leonard & Onyx 2004; Onyx & Bullen 2000). Broken Hill demonstrates high levels of 'Community Participation', but relatively low levels of 'Trust' and 'Neighbourhood Connections'.

Table 1: Social capital factor scores

| Factor | Pymont | Narellan | Greenacre | Deniliquin | W.Wyalong | Broken Hill |
|----------------|--------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Community | 11.7 | 12.6 | 11.0 | 14.3 | 15.5 | 15.9 |
| Proactivity | 15.8 | 15.8 | 14.9 | 14.3 | 15.0 | 15.2 |
| Trust | 12.2 | 13.0 | 10.6 | 13.0 | 16.1 | 13.7 |
| Neighbourhood | 11.8 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 15.0 | 15.2 | 14.4 |
| Family/Friends | 9.7 | 9.4 | 9.0 | 9.4 | 9.1 | 9.0 |
| Tolerance | 6.4 | 5.4 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 4.8 | 5.7 |
| Value of Life | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 6.2 | 5.9 |
| General SC | 79.7 | 82.6 | 76.7 | 84.0 | 88.2 | 80.0 |
| N | 247 | 233 | 256 | 266 | 209 | 600 |

Table 2 below sets out the overall responses to each of the environmental questions for the sample as a whole in relation to social capital[†]. In general, the citizens of Broken Hill appear to be very concerned with these issues of sustainability. With the exception of the item concerning composting, all items score a mean that indicates strong support for the position. So respondents believe that it is important to plant many more trees in Broken Hill. They definitely do not believe that recycling is a waste of time. They think that Broken Hill is definitely in a good position to develop alternative energy sources. They do not believe that Broken Hill is dependent on the mines for its existence, and they believe that Broken Hill's clean environment is an important reason to stay in Broken Hill.

[†] These figures are different from those reported in Table Two of Onyx, Osburn and Bullen 2004. These figures are from the factor analysis of social capital and environmental questions. The earlier table covered only the factor analysis of the environmental questions. The earlier paper establishes the link between social capital and ecological sustainability. This paper builds on that finding.

Table 2: Response to ecological sustainability

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation | N | Factor loading |
|---|------|--------------------|-----|----------------|
| Important to grow more trees in BH | 3.66 | 0.69 | 621 | 0.495 |
| Has a compost in back yard | 2.15 | 1.21 | 624 | 0.25 |
| Thinks recycling is waste of time* | 3.69 | 0.79 | 625 | 0.595 |
| Thinks BH in good position to develop renewable energy like solar or wind | 3.67 | 0.67 | 614 | 0.567 |
| Thinks once mines are closed BH will die* | 3.45 | 0.93 | 626 | 0.654 |
| Clean environment is important reason to stay in BH | 3.51 | 0.82 | 613 | 0.527 |

* reverse coding

A factor analysis of all the social capital questions and all the ecological questions was undertaken. The ecological questions grouped into a separate factor from the social capital questions. The factor loadings for the ecological factor are in Table 2. What is particularly important is that the factor loadings, again with the exception of the composting item, indicate that these items form a coherent cluster. This suggests that it is meaningful to talk about a generalised response to the environment. Furthermore the factor loadings clearly separate these items from the social capital items discussed above.

A hierarchical factor analysis was undertaken. It showed the questions in the ecological factor (except the item concerning recycling) loaded on the general social capital factor. The loadings with the general social capital factor are in the range 0.26 to 0.32. This suggests that 'response to the environment' is not the same as, but is related to, levels of social capital in the community.

The response to the environmental items varied according to demographic characteristics. Gender (Table 3) was significantly related to the response to the environment scale as a whole, such that women have more positive attitudes than men ($F=13.12$, $p<.000$). This was most significant on items concerning growing trees, recycling, Broken Hill being not dependent on the mines, and clean environment.

Table 3: Responses by gender overall

| Scale | Mean Male | Mean Female | F score | Probability |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| FACommunity | 15.40 | 16.23 | 3.52 | ns (0.06) |
| FB Proactivity | 14.90 | 15.37 | 3.65 | ns (0.06) |
| FC Trust | 14.03 | 13.44 | 5.67 | .018 |
| FD Neighbours | 14.16 | 14.50 | 1.69 | ns (0.19) |
| FE Family/friends | 8.62 | 9.29 | 15.52 | .000 |
| FF Tolerance | 5.42 | 5.91 | 10.97 | .001 |
| FG Value | 5.75 | 6.07 | 6.84 | .009 |
| Social Capital total | 78.05 | 81.15 | 7.33 | .007 |
| Sustainability | 17.69 | 18.37 | 13.11 | .000 |

The specific responses by women to the sustainability questions are in Table 4 as are the answers to the question, 'are your issues being taken seriously and heard'.

Women tended to score higher on the social capital scores than men. However, this pattern varied by age and length of residence. For instance, the gender differences were greatest for those who were young and had lived in Broken Hill for less than 20 years, but also among those who were

older and had lived in Broken Hill for more than 30 years. There was very little gender difference among those recent arrivals who were older.

Age was also significantly related overall such that older people had more positive attitudes than younger people, especially for items dealing with alternative energy, Broken Hill being not dependent on the mines, and clean environment ($F=22.55, p<.000$). The issue of younger people will be addressed later.

There was no significant relationship when considering Aboriginality, education and income level in relation to the total sustainability scores for the five environmental questions. However, there were some differences to specific questions, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people surveyed are more positive about Broken Hill's future after the mines close than are non Indigenous people.

These social capital scores clustered in three distinct age groups which were easy to identify: those under 35, 35 to 55 and 56 and over. There were very strong age differences in social capital scores, both overall, and for factors concerned with Community Participation, with Proactivity (this is the largest difference of all), Trust, Neighbourhood Connections, and Value of Life. In all these cases the older respondents scored consistently higher (Chart 1).[‡] People aged 56 and over had the highest scores on proactivity, neighbours and value of life. Their social capital scores overall were the highest in any other cluster.

Table 4: Responses by gender to sustainability questions

| Item | Question | % Women 'Yes definitely' | % Men 'Yes definitely' |
|--|--|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 38 | Do you think it is important to grow more trees in Broken Hill? | 78 | 72 |
| 39 | Do you have a compost in your backyard? | 21 | 22 |
| 40* | Do you think that recycling is a waste of time? | 88 | 80 |
| 41 | Broken Hill is in a good position to develop renewable energy sources like solar or wind energy. Do you agree? | 77 | 77 |
| 42* | Once the mines are closed, that's it for Broken Hill. Do you agree? | 73 | 65 |
| 50 | Clean environment | 72 | 63 |
| If there is a major local issue that you feel strongly about, do you think your issues and ideas are taken seriously by: | | | |
| 51 | Local Council? | 8 | 13 |
| 52 | The Industry development Board/ transition 2010? | 9 | 10 |
| 53 | Your local members of Parliament? | 12 | 16 |
| 54 | Community Inc Roundtable? | 17 | 17 |

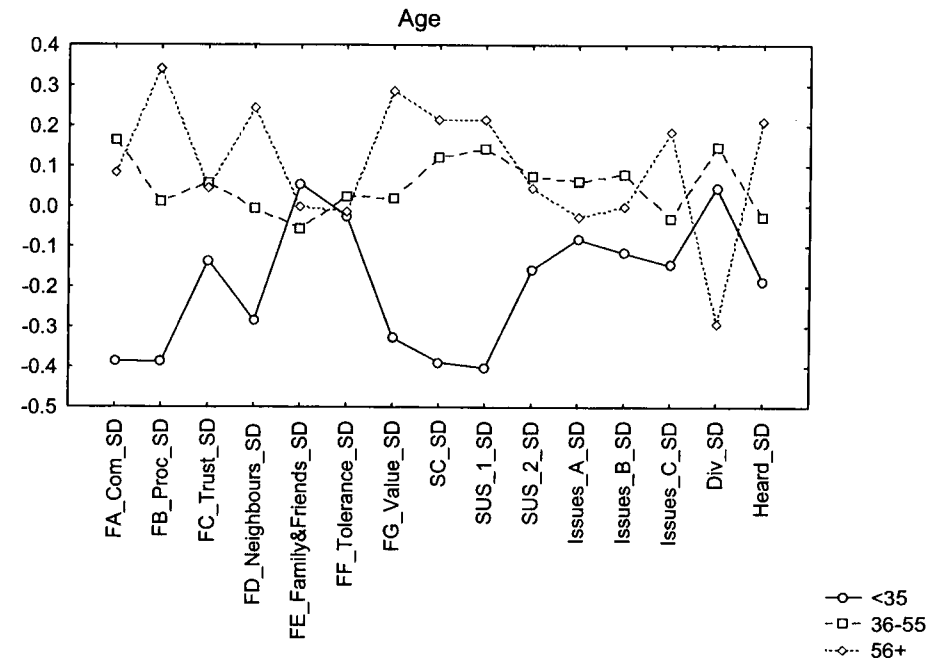
* reversed

Length of stay in Broken Hill also had significant effects on some scales including Proactivity ($F=3.42, p<.005$) and Value of Life ($F=5.28, p<.000$). However, there was no consistent linear pattern to the differences found.

[‡] Please note that Issues A, B and C, Divisions in the Community and Heard, which are the last four items on the chart are being included in another paper.

The results tell us that older people in Broken Hill have high social capital scores and high commitment to ecological sustainability and that it is older women who have the highest social capital scores and have higher commitment to ecological sustainability than any other group. Therefore it makes sense to include older women and in fact to actively involve and target older women in planning and implementing activities and programs surrounding environmental issues. While it is tempting to focus on youth, the people who are most interested and committed to the community and ecological sustainability are in fact women and especially women aged 56 and over.

Chart 1
Age clusters, social capital factors (F AtoG) and sustainability (SUS 1 & 2)[§]



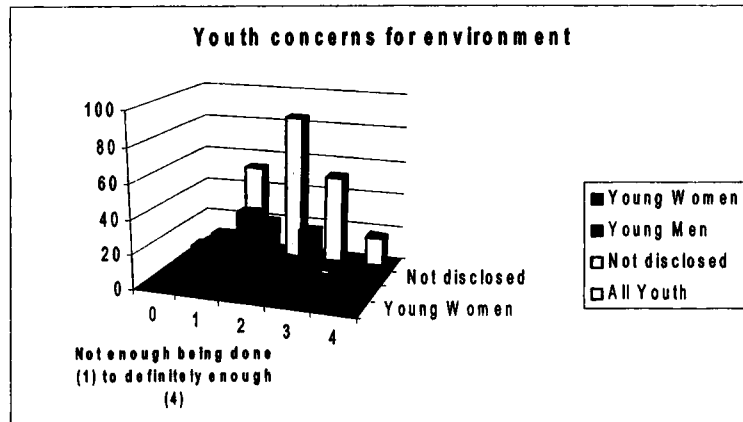
Problems with the study

This study only looked at adult residents in Broken Hill and surrounds. The survey instrument did not engage people less than eighteen years of age. In another part of the larger study a group of active and self-selecting young people re-wrote the instrument using language and terminology that was comprehensible and relevant. The researchers guided and a small group of supportive adults assisted. The development team took care to ensure that key questions in the social capital instrument were maintained to ensure that the results from both instruments (youth and adult) could be reliably compared. A detailed report on this process and the results was presented at the International Rural Sociology Association Congress in Trondheim, Norway, July, 2004.

[§] Issues (Issues A to C), Divisions (DIV) and Are you being Heard? (Heard) are not covered in this paper.

The youth results from this other part of the research enterprise (Chart 2) showed that overall young women (76 percent) were more concerned with environmental issues than young men (60 percent) were. However, a closer look at the result revealed a more interesting picture. Young Aboriginal males are the next highest score 67 percent. This of course implies that if we removed the score for the young Aboriginal males from the calculations, the overall score for young men's concerns about environmental issues would be lower than 60 percent. The social capital scores for young people are still being analysed. These interim results give us occasion to rethink how we engage with community on questions of ecological sustainability and what is the best way to engage young people.

Chart 2: Youth and ecological sustainability in Broken Hill



Discussion and conclusion

Broken Hill is located in a barren, largely treeless, arid semi-desert area. Water is scarce and comes to the town through 100 kilometres of pipe from the Darling River. The land is stark though beautiful for those with eyes to see. Furthermore, Broken Hill for most of its history has been entirely dependent on mining for its existence. Mining as an industry is not generally economically sustainable in the long term and the majority of the core or body has now been depleted. Where Broken Hill supported a population of 40,000 the downturn in mining has led to shedding of approximately half its population in for the last ten years.

The people of Broken Hill hold pro environmental attitudes that appear to be at least as strong as those encountered in the International Social Science Survey (1994). In this survey, 65 percent of Australians in general agreed that government should pass laws to make ordinary people protect the environment even if it interferes with people's individual freedom, and 76 percent believed that governments should do the same for business. In addition, 69 percent often or always make a special effort to sort material for recycling. Similarly, the people of Broken Hill value the clean, unpolluted air, the wide spaces. They are adamant that alternative futures not dependent on mining are possible. The potential for alternative, renewable energy sources is strong.

However, what is most interesting is that not all people are equally concerned with the environment. Those with high levels of social capital overall, and particularly those with strong neighbourhood connections and strong capacity for proactivity, or social agency, are the most likely to show concern for the environment. Strong local networks and the capacity to initiate action together appear to be the key to future action to protect the environment. It appears that in

this community at least concern for the environment and social capital are conceptually distinct but empirically linked.

A closer look at the community reveals that the people most interested in environmental issues and who have the strongest social capital are women over 50. These people connect socially, have firm relationships and are interested in attending to the reconciliation of the three imperatives: ecological, social and economic. They are already acting quietly and individually. The next group of people are young women and the third are young Aboriginal men. There is a case here for actively engaging with older women, including them in programs directed towards environmental issues and in the process consider including young women and young Aboriginal men. If, as the evidence currently shows that concerns for environmental outcomes are associated with high social capital, then we can predict that active involvement in activities promoting environmental outcomes can build and sustain social capital through enhancing its factors: community, proactivity, trust, neighbourhood, family/friends, tolerance and value of life. It seems logical that focusing on people who are more likely to trust others, to be tolerant and connected and engaging them in environmental activities for which they already express an interest is more likely to be successful and may, over time, set up a social environment where the other people feel able to join in and be included.

The continued wellbeing of older women in Broken Hill and their active engagement in projects centred on issues of ecological sustainability might be the key to reconciling the three imperatives of sustainability, for building and developing an inclusive community. Given that their higher levels of social capital include trust, tolerance of diversity, community, proactivity and value for life their involvement could be a major plank in the insurance policy for Broken Hill's future and continuance.

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Dirt, drought and drudge: Australian women's experience of drought

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Abstract

Australia is emerging from one of the worst droughts in over 100 years. Yet we know little about the experiences of the people most affected - the members of farm families. Research conducted in 2003 with people in three case study sites in rural New South Wales indicates that drought is a gendered experience. Women enter agriculture largely through marriage and patrilineal inheritance practices dominate farm transfer arrangements in Australia. For many farm families this results in differential task allocation for men and women. Women are more likely to work off-farm and to be responsible for household and care tasks and to be the farm financial managers. Data emerging from the study reveals that the drought has also increased women's workload on farms. What the study also indicates is that women's increased and multi-faceted workload has impacted on their health status. This paper examines women's experiences of the drought, and in particular, focuses on the health consequences for women.

Drought is defined by Botterill and Fisher (2003:3) as a 'mismatch between the water available and the demands of human activities'. Such a mismatch characterises the drought of the early years of the twenty-first century in Australia which has been widespread, enduring and intense. Described by the Prime Minister as the worst drought in 100 years¹ it is the scale of the drought and its manifestations over an extended time period that has made it such a significant event. Yet since the mid 1990s drought is no longer viewed as a natural disaster at least by those shaping policy at a distance from those most likely to be affected. In the policy environment it is viewed as a business risk to be managed by the businesses affected (Botterill 2003). Consequently the focus of national political and media attention on economic fallout and environmental consequences has overshadowed the impacts of the drought on the people most affected, rural dwellers in communities dependent on agriculture. It is arguable that these people do not share the notion of a one in one hundred year drought being labelled a manageable business risk.

Spurred by the lack of attention to the social consequences of drought the writers undertook a study in New South Wales (NSW) in 2003 analysing the social impacts of drought in three disparate geographical regions of the State. One of the most significant themes to emerge from this study is the confirmation that drought is a gendered experience for farm family members (Stehlik, Gray & Lawrence 1999; Stehlik, Lawrence & Gray 2000). Stehlik (2003:91 and 105) notes that their study conducted in NSW and Queensland in 1996-8 found that families are the first line of defence against drought, men and women experience drought differently and their communities should not be taken for granted. Further she notes that

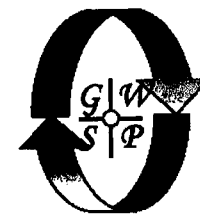
¹ Prime Minister John Howard, media release 9th December 2002, www.pm.gov.au/news/media_releases/2002/media_release2025.htm

WOW
Wellbeing of Women

Conference Proceedings

Research and Practice

Edited by
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The Wellbeing of Women conference is one of the first initiatives of the Gender, Women and Social Policy Community of Scholars at Charles Sturt University. The Community of Scholars is a group of female academics working on various projects associated with gender issues and group members are located on Wagga Wagga and Bathurst campuses. Funding received in 2003 and 2004 allowed the group to be established more formally with its own identity and to employ a part-time research assistant, Jo Pincott, to work with the group.

Very quickly it became clear that the Community of Scholars had much to gain through an engagement with women living in the rural communities served by the university. The idea of the Wellbeing of Women seminar arose from the group's desire to, firstly, introduce their work and ideas to women in the communities and, secondly, to begin a dialogue with community women about issues of concern that might form the basis for an ongoing research agenda. The Wellbeing of Women seminar grew from the initial notion of a small gathering of academics and co-located rural women to a much larger conference in response to interest within the community. Buoyed by our own growing sense of collegiality and an evident community enthusiasm, the group took advantage of the opportunity the seminar provided to invite two international speakers, Jane Ursel and Mary Carroll, and to invite Philippa Hall from the New South Wales Department for Women. At the last moment we realised that we would have to change our venue - the one we had was not going to be large enough!

The papers in this volume represent the combined work of members of our community of scholars and of our invited speakers. What we have not been able to adequately capture are the rich discussions and ongoing collaborations that this seminar produced. We remain committed to this ongoing dialogue and have worked since the seminar through focus groups and the development of a survey to ensure that the issues of most concern to women in rural areas are not lost in a national discourse dominated by fear and aggression. We are also committed to pursuing an international collaboration with Jane Ursel's Centre for Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse, in Canada. It is evident to us that her group has moved further along the research and community collaboration road, and we are keen to benefit from her expertise.

We present this volume as the first of many. The Gender, Women and Social Policy Community of Scholars is committed to publishing and highlighting the issues that so grossly and intimately affect the quality of life of rural women.

Papers in this volume are presented in two sections - the first are the keynote papers that have been edited by the authors. The second are the collection of refereed papers from members of the Community of Scholars. Peer review was conducted on all of these papers (not just the abstract). Each complete paper was sent to two independent reviewers (a list of reviewers is included with the acknowledgments). All names and identifiers were removed from the papers before being sent for review. Returned comments from referees were then forwarded to authors and the editors checked the final revisions to ensure that the final manuscript reflected the referee's comments.

Professor Margaret Alston
Director, Centre for Rural Social Research
Charles Sturt University
New South Wales, Australia

It was a great honour to be invited to participate in the first seminar sponsored by the Gender, Women and Social Policy Community of Scholars group. As I listened to the presentations and lively discussions throughout the day, I was struck by how similar the issues and concerns in your community are to the issues and concerns in mine. Both Wagga Wagga and Winnipeg, my home town, are central agricultural areas with a multitude of challenges from sparse populations distributed over large distances, to gender equity and family violence. While many of these problems are not unique to our communities, our essentially rural location gives us a particular perspective on these issues. I am also keenly aware that our communities are not only similar in their concerns but similar in their strengths. We are resourceful people, willing to take on the challenges our location and our weather presents. A rural history fosters the spirit of co-operation, pragmatism and joint venture which is clearly articulated in our two Centres' desire to conduct pragmatic, policy related research in partnership with the community.

The papers presented in this volume reflect the diversity of talent and concerns that unite women from the university with women in the community to ensure that as local, regional and national policies are developed the voices of local women are heard and the concerns of people living in rural and remote areas are not overlooked. Charles Sturt University is particularly well placed to foster this perspective and nurture this organisation. I am excited about the possibilities of our two Centres becoming sister Centres exchanging visiting students and academics, sharing ideas and undertaking joint research projects.

My year in Australia has been extremely rewarding. I have learned a great deal from my colleagues 'down under' and I am bringing back to Canada a number of policy and program ideas initiated in Australia which I believe will be of great benefit to Canadians. It is my hope that an exchange of students, service providers and academics from your community to mine may be similarly rewarding to people associated with the Gender, Women and Social Policy group. My participation in the Wellbeing of Women seminar and my inclusion in this wonderful first publication of the Community of Scholars group is a promising indication of our future collaboration.

Professor Jane Ursel
Director – Centre for Research and Education for Solutions to Violence and Abuse
University of Manitoba
Manitoba, Canada

WOW Wellbeing of Women Conference

Charles Sturt University Wagga Wagga, NSW,
10 December, 2003

Acknowledgments

The Wellbeing of Women (WOW) conference was an initiative of a group of Charles Sturt University scholars whose research focus is Gender, Women and Social Policy. The conference aimed to encourage conversation between researchers and the community about shared concerns and interests affecting women's wellbeing. For scholars of a regional, multi-campus University, common research interests don't readily translate into collaborative research activity, as geographic distance can impair this. Thus, the group's formation and this conference would not have occurred without Community of Scholars (COS) seed funding having been provided through the University Office of Research and Graduate Scholarships. Some financial sponsorship of the conference was provided by local representatives of the Australian and New Zealand bank, Elders Rural Bank and Hore and Davies Real Estate.

The conference was held at the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre of the University's Wagga Wagga campus. Located on land of the Wiradjuri nation, the proceedings opened with an Indigenous welcome. Participants were generous in their contributions, and included individual local women and practitioners of women's services. Some travelled from smaller nearby towns.

Guest speakers accepted our invitation to join us in a spirit of goodwill, enthusiasm and generosity. International guests, Jane Ursel, from Canada and Mary Carroll, from Ireland, extended the reach of our conversation, providing perspectives on common issues from the viewpoint of uninvolved and impartial outsiders. Other guests, Robyn Holder, from the Australian Capital Territory government and Philippa Hall from New South Wales Department for Women, through their keynote addresses, delivered important information about other Australian initiatives. The enthusiasm and goodwill of these visitors was matched by the welcome into local homes that was extended for their visit.

Funding introduces new possibilities, and Professor Margaret Alston's role in mentoring the group toward their successful grant application was an important foundation, testimony to the fact that it is both the funding and the people who can make or break an effort. Foundation members were able to build on their success in obtaining funds to facilitate their work, through the fortunate appointment of Joanna Pincott, Project Co-ordinator, whose motivation and initiative turned their ideas into reality, both in organising the conference and the production of this publication. Her location, within the Centre for Rural Social Research (CRSR) added strength to the group, as staff and researchers generously accommodated the group's activities.

The editorial process was assisted by many people. Group members, Dr Lynelle Osburn and Elaine West assisted the review process. Reviewers, drawn from within the group, and external reviewers listed below, provided valuable comment and guidance on the submitted papers. Marion Bannister, Editor of *Rural Society*, the journal of CRSR, helped to provide a review framework and access to some external reviewers. Beverly Laughton's transcript expertise, which she volunteered, was highly valued by our keynote speakers. Dr Nancy Blacklow has proof read the drafts, providing advice and attention to detail within the inevitable short time frame. As

always, ultimately the responsibility for any omissions, errors or shortcomings in the publication must remain with myself as Editor.

Finally, the spirit of collegiality and passion, which could never be fully reflected in a publication such as this, marked the group's planning and conduct of the conference. The invaluable and less visible assistance of colleagues who are not published here and have not previously been mentioned must also be acknowledged. Sue Wood, Dr Christine Jennett, Dr Elaine Dietsch and Dr Dimitrios Giorgas all made unique and valuable contributions toward the conference and thus to this publication. Of course, this spirit of cooperation extended further, to others within the University whose contributions were acknowledged along the way.

Elizabeth Moore
September 2004

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Note: Keynote papers were not reviewed, all other papers, included here as Refereed, were peer reviewed.