

Community group participation and health among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women living in urban Adelaide

Katy Osborne, Anna Ziersch, Fran Baum, Gilbert Gallaher, Dana Shen
Southgate Institute for Health, Society & Equity
Flinders University



6th Australian Women's Health Conference
Hobart, Tasmania, 18-21 May 2010



inspiring achievement

Overview

- Background: Social capital, community group participation and health
- Research Questions
- Method: 2 South Australian research studies
- Findings
- Summary and Implications

Social capital and community group participation

Social capital:

- Social *relationships* and *connections* between people
- Actual or potential *resources* that can be gained from these connections
- Importance of involvement in 'civil society' as a positive way of creating social capital

Social capital, community group participation and health

- Social capital – directs attention on how health is influenced by social environment
- Building social capital through community group involvement:
 - Psychosocial benefits for individuals
 - Access to resources
 - Cohesive, socially connected groups and communities: can act together to achieve outcomes
- Participation: potential for negative impact upon health

Women and community group participation

- Gender: influences nature and type of social capital available to men and women
- Gendered patterns of community participation - Women more involved:
 - Parenting and childcare-based social activities
 - Community welfare, health and education organisations
- Women's community group involvement: both negative and positive links with health and wellbeing

Community group participation and Aboriginal Australians

- Indicators of social capital: associated with positive mental health among Aboriginal Australians
- Important for health promotion:
 - Involvement in Aboriginal community organisations
 - Cohesive social connections between Aboriginal people
- Participation may not have beneficial health effects :
 - Offset by: experiences of racism, discrimination
 - Lower levels of economic and material resources

Research questions

- What are the levels of community group participation among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women living in urban Adelaide?
- What are the types of community group participation that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women are involved in?
- How is community group participation perceived by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women to be relevant for their health and wellbeing?
- Findings from 2 Adelaide research studies

ULSCH study: Method

- Urban Location, Social Capital and Health (ULSCH) study
- Social capital and health in four contrasting locations:
 - Postal survey: 1708 women respondents
 - In-depth interviews: 30 women interviewed
 - Others: ‘photo voice’ interviews, community group survey

AATSIH study: Method

- Adelaide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (AATSIH) study:
 - Experiences of Aboriginal people living in urban areas
 - Focus on social capital and health
- Recruitment - snowballing techniques:
 - Consultation with study Advisory Group
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- Project manager and interviewing staff: Aboriginal
- Semi-structured interview with closed and open questions
- 153 individuals interviewed in total: 93 women

Measures in both studies

Quantitative:

- Community group participation
- Frequency of participation
- Self-rated health

Qualitative:

- Types of group involvement
- Reasons for being involved
- Perceived impact of participation upon health

Quantitative findings: Health and community group participation

- Health rated 'Fair / Poor':
 - 16% women ULSCH study
 - 43% women AATSIH study
- Participation in community group in past 12 months:
 - 74% women in both AATSIH and ULSCH studies
- Weekly / Monthly group participation:
 - 62% women AATSIH study
 - 58% women ULSCH study

Involvement in social clubs/groups

- AATSIH study: many participants involved in social groups, arts/crafts groups run by Aboriginal community organisations and services:

I'm involved with [Aboriginal organisation] ... they have lunch every Thursday which I attend most time.... with friends ...and my family... some of the ladies that live in this area, Aboriginal ladies, we all meet ... and have lunch on Thursdays. (Joyce, 71yo, AATSIH)

- Some participants involved in these groups as volunteers, to assist others:

I do voluntary work here with [Aboriginal Organisation] ...I just like doing voluntary work down here...because there's a few Elders down here and we have our women's groups ...I just like helping me own mobwe've all got our own little different stories to tell ... it's deadly (Teresa, 37yo, AATSIH)

Recreational / sporting involvement

I got involved in netball because I've always played netball ...I've been involved in a few clubs and I coached junior teams as well... Tuesday nights I have netball ...Thursdays is training for my junior team... the weekends are pretty much booked out. My son has soccer, my daughter has netball and I have netball (Shakira, 54yo, AATSIH)

I have a mahjong group ... once a fortnight. ...tennis I play Wednesday morning and Sunday morning. Wednesday is all girls and Sunday is mixed. (Melanie, 72yo, ULSCH)

The kids have surfing comps on Sundays... time is just taken up with their stuff really... Saturday Surf Lifesaving. Sunday surfing. ... Monday we try to rest. Tuesday is usually in some sort of sport training ...Wednesday night I guess often surfing training and Thursday there is surfboard training again (Jennifer, 40yo, ULSCH)

Perceived links with health and wellbeing: positive

If you're busy, you're in contact with people you're doing things you know, keeps your mind and your body active ...If I'm involved in things...I'm happy you know what I mean, it keeps me busy ...So I don't think there'd be any negatives about it (Linda, 50yo, AATSIH).

I feel comfortable around my own people, you know, the Nunga language which I love doin' you know yeah ... we have a joke and a yarn about what's been happenin' (Megan, 42yo, AATSIH).

I think it is positive because you are like minded people you are sharing an interest and everybody goes there because they want to be there... I find it a very positive thing (Margaret, 68yo, ULSCH).

Perceived links with health and wellbeing: Negative

Well I was part of the charter group that formed the Aboriginal Lions Club...It just, it closed, well we folded last year.

Interviewer: So would you like to have been more involved in any types of groups or organisations?

No, no I was at a stage where I had enough going on....Like I had to decrease my commitments. Yes I had to because my health started to suffer and that sort of stuff (Danielle, 27yo, AATSIH)

I'm sort of a habitual volunteer and so I get into terrible strife for volunteering to do too many things... things around the school or one of the kids' sporting clubs ... you see that it needs to be done and so nobody else will volunteer so you end up doing it. .. So, yeah, so I've tried to sort of wind back (Samantha, 45yo, ULSCH)

Summary

- Women in both studies: similar levels of involvement in community groups
- Similar types of involvement in both studies
- Both studies - women's gender roles shaped participation:
 - Childcare/parenting based participation
 - Voluntary participation to help others
- Positives and negatives for wellbeing in both studies

Qualitative insights: AATSIH study

- Cohesive social connections between women based upon shared Aboriginal identity: positive
- Role of Aboriginal community organisations and services: developing health promoting social capital among Aboriginal women
- Important that organisations: well-resourced to run community-based groups and activities

Implications: Community group participation and women's health

Community group participation to build positive social capital:

- Potential to be a positive health promotion strategy
- Not appropriate in all contexts to increase community group participation among women
- Potential for negative health impacts
- Insufficient to address health inequities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women

Acknowledgements

- Participants
- Study Advisory Groups
- NHMRC funding for both studies