

Media Release

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Leisure adds life to rural women

Delegates of the 7th National Rural Health Conference will be urged to recognise the importance of leisure time in promoting health and well-being in middle-aged rural women.

Leisure provides women with a chance to relax and recover from the stress and fatigue of everyday life. It also provides a creative outlet and an important opportunity to establish and maintain social networks.

Dr Penny Warner-Smith investigated the relationship between leisure patterns and well-being in rural women aged 45-50 years. The study is part of the broader Women's Health Australia Longitudinal Study, which is tracking the health of 40,000 Australian women over a 20-year period.

Only 35% of the middle-aged women interviewed were happy with the amount of time available to them for leisure. Dr Warner-Smith suggests this result is very concerning. "Satisfaction with leisure is strongly associated with both physical and mental health," said Dr Warner-Smith.

Participation in leisure activities was curtailed by financial constraints, distance barriers, family commitments and social isolation. Many respondents particularly lamented the lack of cultural activities in rural areas. One woman commented that when she did visit cities and larger towns she effectively 'binged' on cultural activities, even sitting through four movies, just to get her 'fix'.

Another respondent remarked that leisure was not only about 'time out' but also about 'getting out'. For a truly relaxing break, she had to physically remove herself from the town.

Despite the various constraints on leisure opportunities, rural women were quick to point out the many advantages of a rural lifestyle. Isolation can lead to loneliness, for example, but the sense of space and freedom it brings can also be very rejuvenating.

"If I've had a hard day I ride my horse and the stress goes away, I get back on track. If I had to live in an apartment in the city I would find that very difficult, I need that space," said one respondent.

Dr Warner-Smith will present the findings of the research at the 7th National Rural Health Conference, which will be held at the Grand Chancellor Hotel in Hobart from March 1-4. Her presentation will be made at 10am in the Ballroom South Meeting Room on Tuesday March 4, 2003.

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7th National Rural Health Conference, 1 – 4 March 2003, Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart
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