Neighbourhood cohesion among middle-aged women: the influence of psychosocial factors

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**Background:** Neighbourhood cohesion is positively associated with mental health and compared to city dwellers, regional residents experience higher levels of both. Neighbourhood disadvantage and individual demographic factors are also associated with both neighbourhood cohesion and mental health, and the interplay between them appears to affect women more so than men. The contribution of psychosocial factors such as social support, life satisfaction and stress to these relationships hasn’t been explored in the context of neighbourhood cohesion.

**Aims:** We determined whether there were differences in neighbourhood cohesion in middle-aged Australian women living in remote/very remote, outer regional, inner regional and major city locations, and the extent to which these differences were associated with psychosocial factors.

**Methods:** Cross-sectional data from 11,220 participants of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health, aged 50–55 years were used. Women were randomly selected from the 1996 Medicare database, with oversampling of regional and remote residents. ARIA Plus was used to categorise geographic location of residence as remote/very remote, outer regional, inner regional and major city. Associations between psychosocial variables (SF-36 mental component score, CES-D depression, life satisfaction, perceived control, perceived stress and social support) and neighbourhood cohesion (neighbourhood safety, connections and attachment and trust) were examined using multivariable regression models with adjustment for area disadvantage and individual demographics.

**Results:** Women living in remote/very remote, outer regional and inner regional locations reported better neighbourhood safety and connection compared to women living in major cities. Women living in outer regional and inner regional locations, but not remote/very remote areas, reported better neighbourhood attachment and trust compared to women living in major cities. Adding mental health, depression, life satisfaction, perceived control, stress and social support to the models did not greatly change the regression estimates, and the associations between geographic location and neighbourhood safety, connection and attachment and trust scores remained statistically significant.

**Conclusion:** These findings suggest that the differences in neighbourhood cohesion across geographic locations are not explained solely by demographic and psychosocial factors. Among middle-aged women, it appears that other factors, perhaps related to community resources or the physical environment make regional residents feel safer, more connected and experience greater neighbourhood attachment and trust than those residing in major cities.