beyondblue
Men’s Social Connectedness
Overview

Why social connectedness?

The profile of social connection

Triggers and barriers

The segmentation

Opportunities

Next steps
Brief methodology overview

1. Knowledge audit
   - 45 documents from five countries, seven stakeholder interviews

2. Qualitative phase
   - 11 group discussions with men aged between 30 and 65 and 3 group discussions with women of the same age

3. Quantitative phase
   - with 3750 men aged between 30 and 65 across Australia

4. Ethnographic exploration
   - 13 ethnographic case studies to explore and bring to life the segments
   - Online bulletin boards with trans*, intersex, and vulnerable individuals
Why social connectedness?
This research confirmed the relationship between social connectedness and psychological distress.
But the relationship is often perceived to be more complex

“Sadly I cannot work due to anxiety, social panic attacks. I have suffered from Depression for a long time... because of what has happened it has made me anti-social and not want to be around people...”

“Struggle badly with depression and anxiety... at home by myself most of the time (wife works) and feel very alone and worthless these days.”

“A major suicide attempt on my part cost me many (about 70%) of my friends and made family members hostile”
The profile of social connectedness
The study provides strong evidence that social support dips in the middle years.

Mean DSSI Score
Base: 30-65 year olds, n=3750  *18-29 year olds unweighted n=300
Given the link to mental health, it is concerning...

... over one in three men are not satisfied with the quality of their relationships.

D13. How satisfied are you with...? Base: All respondents, n=3750
Dissatisfaction also extends further...

Up to 45% are not satisfied with the **number of friends and acquaintances** they have.

Up to 59% are not satisfied with the extent to which they **feel like a member of the community**.

*D13. How satisfied are you with...? Base: All respondents, n=3750*
Two main reasons for poor satisfaction

79%  
My friends wouldn’t be able to help me deal with personal issues I might be facing so I would be unlikely to bring it up

76%  
I don’t feel that I’m emotionally supported

67%  
I know my friends would be uncomfortable talking about personal issues if I brought it up

66%  
I don’t feel valued by family or friends

63%  
I don’t feel that I share interests with friends

D15. Which of the following describe why you are not satisfied with the quality of relationships you have with friends/family? Base: Respondent who are not satisfied with the quality of relationships with friends/family, n=689
Almost one in four men in their middle years score low on the Duke Social Support Scale and may be at risk of isolation.
Despite this, men see social connectedness as a relatively unimportant issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Average ranking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Violence</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Suicide</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Depression/Mental health issues</td>
<td>6.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Alcohol/drug addiction</td>
<td>5.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Unemployment</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Physical health issues</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<td>7 Discrimination</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<td>8 Gambling</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<td>9 Stress</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Lack of social support/loneliness</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Erosion of masculinity</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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C1. Below are some of the things other people have said are important social issues. Please rate them from 0 to 10 where 10 is the most important and 0 the least important issue. Base: All respondents, n=3750
Triggers and barriers
A complex issue...

Underlying predispositions

Situational triggers

POOR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
Low emotional openness with fathers an issue

“I never remember talking about feelings with my father or my brothers”

“Dad never talked really. Not even to me.”

“I can’t talk to my dad about what’s upsetting me... he’s a hard man... Sometimes I’m hard with my kids”
Self-stigma and help-seeking attitudes may be preventing men from reaching out

Problems are part of life; they’re just something you have to deal with

70%

59%
I wouldn’t want to overreact to a problem that wasn’t serious

48%
I’d just rather not dwell on my problems

46%
I don’t like other people telling me what to do

H5. Imagine that you had a particular problem you weren’t sure what to do about. Below are several reasons why you might choose NOT to seek help. Please read each reason and decide how likely each would be in keeping you from seeking help. Base: All respondents, n=3750
Life events also impact on connectedness

“A lot of your mates are married to your wife’s mates. It’s a bit of a crisis to find out who your mates really are... No one.” (divorced)

“I have no contact with my friends, and I feel that they would have 'moved on'. I don't want to resume contact, as most of them are heavy drinkers. I have given up alcohol in recent years, and it would be difficult for me to re-connect with them.”

“‘You become inner focused [when you lose your job], and you lose your skills [interacting with others] if you aren’t practising at work.”
Blokes tend to have barriers to more emotionally satisfying male-male relationships

70%
My friends can rely on me for social support

48%
I am able to rely on my close friends for emotional support

G3. Please read the following statements and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree:
Base: All respondents, n=3750
They also have many barriers to forming new connections

39%  
I wouldn’t feel comfortable fronting up the first time on my own

32%  
I wouldn’t feel that I would fit in

32%  
I wouldn’t know where to start

12. If you were feeling a bit lonely and unsatisfied with your level and quality of friendships, what, if anything, would prevent you from taking part in these types of activities and groups?  
Base: Respondents who would consider at least one of the suggested group activities, n=3528
Social connectedness segments
Segmentation profiles

1. Detrimentally Disengaged
   The most socially disconnected... but unlikely to want to change; it's what they're accustomed to and the thought of increased social interaction makes them anxious
   20%

2. Quiet & Content
   Limited social network but satisfied. Focus on a few emotionally rewarding relationships rather than acquaintances
   21%

3. Relaxed Charismatics
   The segment with the strongest social networks. Also have no barriers to opening up emotionally to their friends or asking for help
   17%

4. Loose Connectors
   Socially active and constantly striving to initiate new friendships rather than deepening them, with some barriers to opening up emotionally
   13%

5. Social Strivers
   Low satisfaction. While they want to change this, they aren’t sure how to. Also more likely to be affected by health and financial barriers
   15%

6. Whateverers
   Tend to relate to less social connections outside of family and work but a richer social it is not a priority for them
   14%
Satisfied with social connectedness

Don’t want to change social connectedness

Quiet and Content

Relaxed Charismatics

Whateverers

Detrimentally Disengaged

Want to change social connectedness

Loose Connectors

Social Strivers

Satisfied with social connectedness

Not satisfied with social connectedness
In their own words...

1. Detrimentally Disengaged
2. Quiet & Content
3. Relaxed Charismatics
4. Loose Connectors
5. Social Strivers
6. Whateverers
Opportunities and next steps...
Opportunities

Helping others/volunteering

Promoting community involvement

Building resilience in men

Online tools for initiating and providing emotional support and for joining groups

A group facilitator role

Broadening the base for Men’s Sheds members
Next steps

A leadership role, collaborating with other organisations to raise awareness

Framing social connectedness as a protective factor against psychological distress, rather than as a pathway to isolation and depression and anxiety
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