

134 *SOCIAL CAPITAL AND WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH*

---

There is a marked gender inequity in the distribution of common mental health problems in Australia, including depression and anxiety disorders, with women experiencing higher rates. This paper considers how the concept of social capital can contribute towards an understanding of the social factors which determine women's mental health outcomes. As part of a broader study, qualitative research was conducted to explore women's experiences of social participation and accounts of their own mental health. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 women in two case study areas in metropolitan Adelaide. One case study area is an affluent neighbourhood, the other relatively disadvantaged. Participants' social capital was explored by focusing upon their experiences of involvement in Civil Society Groups (CSGs), such as voluntary clubs and organisations, and the individual outcomes of this involvement. Interviews were conducted with 15 women in each location. The findings indicated that women's participation in CSGs was organised in highly gendered ways. The degree of individual women's participation in CSGs, the type of participation, and participation outcomes all varied according to the local neighbourhood and individual socioeconomic factors. Participants' involvement in CSGs and the outcomes of this involvement were perceived as having both positive and negative consequences for mental health. These findings lend support to the notion that individual social capital is differentially distributed according to features of the wider societal context. The potential for the concept of social capital to contribute towards promotion of gender equitable mental health outcomes is discussed.