

The Effects of Globalisation on the Mental Health
of Rural Australian Women:

Some Questions

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I am a social worker employed as a community support worker at Aspire, and when it comes to the causes of stress which can lead to mental illness I don't have many answers. But I do believe in the old social work adage that the personal is political, and I have a lot of questions about some of things that effect the mental health and wellbeing of rural women.

I would like to pose some of those questions to you today.

How does globalisation effect the mental health of rural Australian women? How do they feel about bank branch closures in their small towns, and how do such closures impact on their lives? How do women respond (after standing in a queue in their bank for 25 minutes of their 30-minute lunch break) to teller operators who advise them to use internet banking- when they don't own a computer? How do women feel when they try to phone a government department or a public or private service provider, and an automated machine voice responds to their call?

How do rising fuel prices restrict women's freedom of movement within and outside their communities? How does public transport compensate for this?

How are rural women effected by the vast increase in information available over the internet? How do they sort through all the rubbish to find what they really need or want? What impact does on-line communication with another person, a relative, friend or stranger on the other side of the state or the other side of the

world have on their sense of connectedness? How connected does a rural woman without access to a computer feel? Is typing on a computer in a chatroom the same as chatting to someone face to face?

How do rural women feel when they watch the share prices and the all ordinaries index on the news every night when they don't have a home, a car, or enough money for food or for the kids' new school shoes? What about the delivery of their television news and current affairs by either a pretty, thin, anglo, stylised woman (or a rather ordinary looking middle aged man), how does that effect women?

How do women respond to the latest renovators or backyard makeover program- where wealthy celebrities are often chosen to have work done on their homes, free of charge? How relevant or interesting is this to women when the rent is overdue and the roof is leaking?

How do the sterilised images of victims of war, famine, earthquake, terrorism and other disastrous world events leave women feeling? Do they feel any better after taking their recommended dose of prescribed tranquilliser?

What are the effects on women's mental health of giving birth today, amid the marvellous array of numbing drugs, and the expertise of predominantly male obstetricians? How do newborn mothers feel about the strong encouragement

of breastfeeding from their midwives and maternal and child health nurses when breastfeeding is nowhere to be seen in the public domain (with the exception of Kirsty Marshall of course)? What effect does sleep deprivation have on new mothers who are disconnected from partners and the support of extended family? How do women make the transition to motherhood when their own experience of being mothered is one featuring abuse or neglect? How are women able to embrace the intrinsic invaluable qualities of this amazing role, when it is completely unrecognised by the currency of our material system?

How do women express their unique identity and celebrate their creativity within their own home by purchasing matching beige furniture and accessories on 12 months interest free credit from multinational owned department stores? How do skyrocketing credit card interest rates and subsequent debt effect the mental health of rural Australian women? How do women nurture and nourish themselves and their families when the food they purchase from the nearest Safeway is mostly pre-packaged and processed beyond recognition from its natural state? What effect do artificial colours and flavours have on women's energy and motivation levels? How disempowered do women feel as consumers when they are made to wait for hours in supermarket checkout queues while companies cut staffing costs in order to maximise shareholder profit?

How do rural mothers respond when their children (once medicated with sedatives in response to their diagnosis of ADHD) are unable to find employment

in their own town (or anywhere for that matter) due to the decline in local manufacturing industries? How does a woman's own struggle to gain fulfilling and reasonably paid employment, which enables her to meet the many other unpaid work commitments, effect her?

How do we, as mental health workers, operate within a mental health system that continues to overlook the many subtle and not so subtle contributing stressors on the lives of rural Australian women and men, a system that instead prefers to uses medication and behavioural therapy to subdue individuals? What options do we have for using the answers we know, to transform current practice trends in mental health care for rural Australian women? How would adopting a more universal and responsive approach in our own practise improve our own mental health and wellbeing?

And my final question for today: Why is there an increasing prevalence of mental illness in our global village?