'It's all a bit "wishy-washy"': **the challenge of building partnerships for effective mental health promotion program evaluation**

Greer Lamaro
Associate Lecturer
School of Health and Social Development
Deakin University

Background

> Well established link between mental wellbeing and social connectedness (Glover et al.1998; Berkman and Glass 2000; Kawachi and Berkman 2001; Uschino 2004)

> Metal wellbeing and social connectedness (MWSC) an emerging health priority (AIHW 2003; DHS 2003; VicHealth 2005)

> Increasing interventions

> Limited evaluation literature

Background (cont'd)

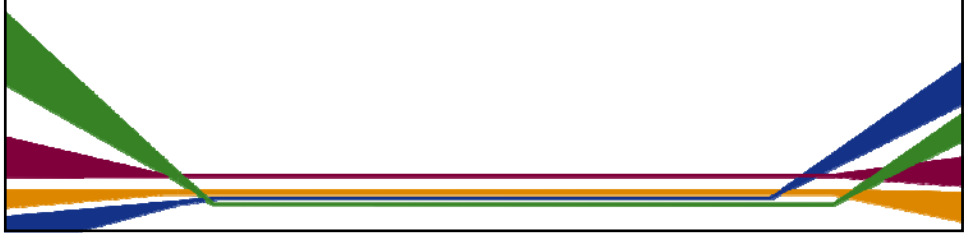
- Increasing emphasis on evaluation in health promotion (HP)
- Identified need to enhance HP practitioners evaluation capacity (AIHW 2005; DHS 2003; DHS 2004a)
- Identified need to enhance outcome measurement in mental health promotion (AHM 2003)
- Increasing intervention to enhance HP practitioners general evaluation skills (Marshall and Round 2005; Round et al. 2005)

Aims

- To explore the current state of evaluation around community based mental wellbeing and social connectedness interventions;
- To explore the capacity of health promotion practitioners in Primary Care Partnerships to evaluate effectively in this area;
- To identify barriers and needs for effective evaluation practice.

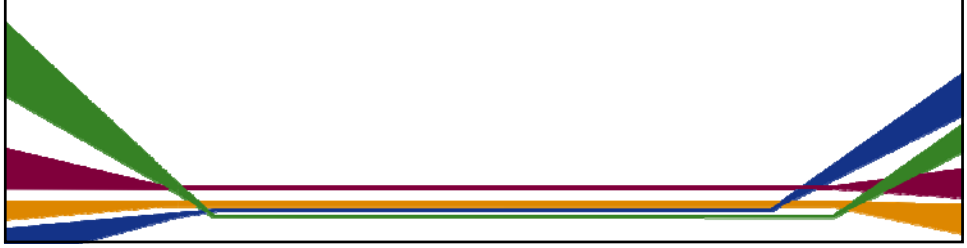
Sample

> Sampling frame/participants
  > Health promotion practitioners in Primary Care Partnerships (PCP's) in Victoria
  > Agency managers/line managers
  > Other key HP peak body stakeholders



Sample

> Sampling method
  > Invitation distributed through PCP network
  > Purposeful for other key stakeholders
  > Snowballing

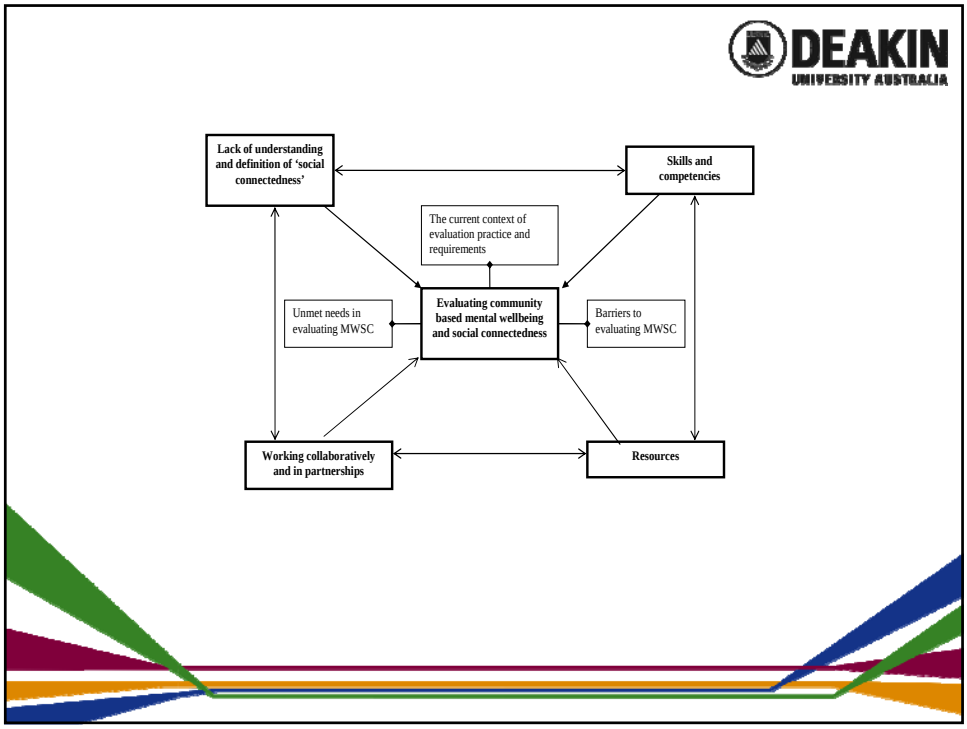


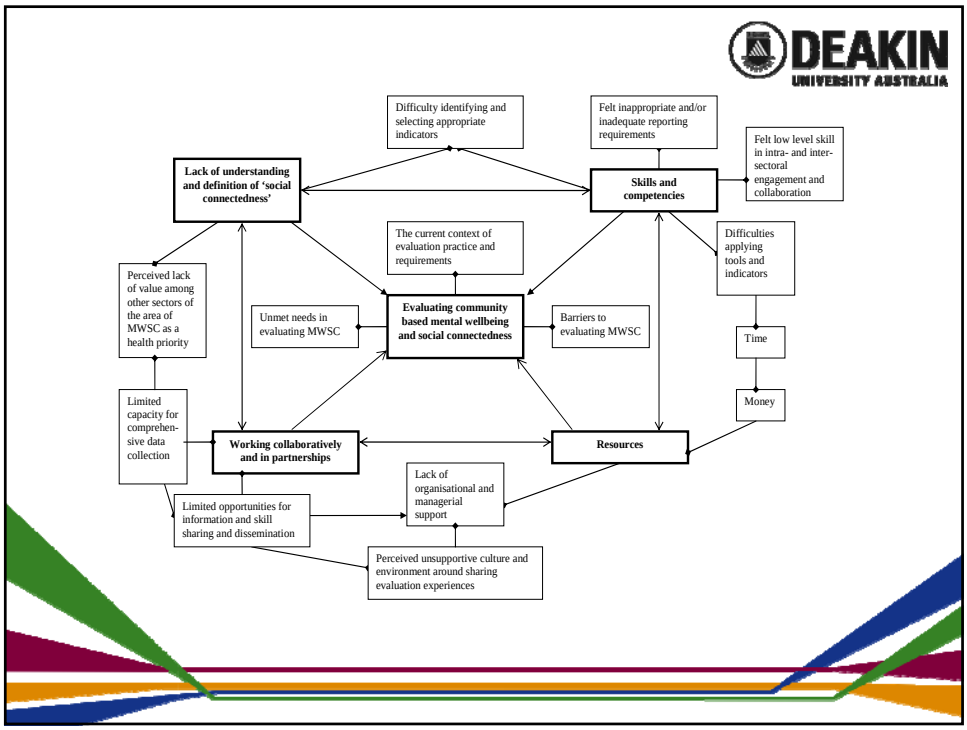
Methods

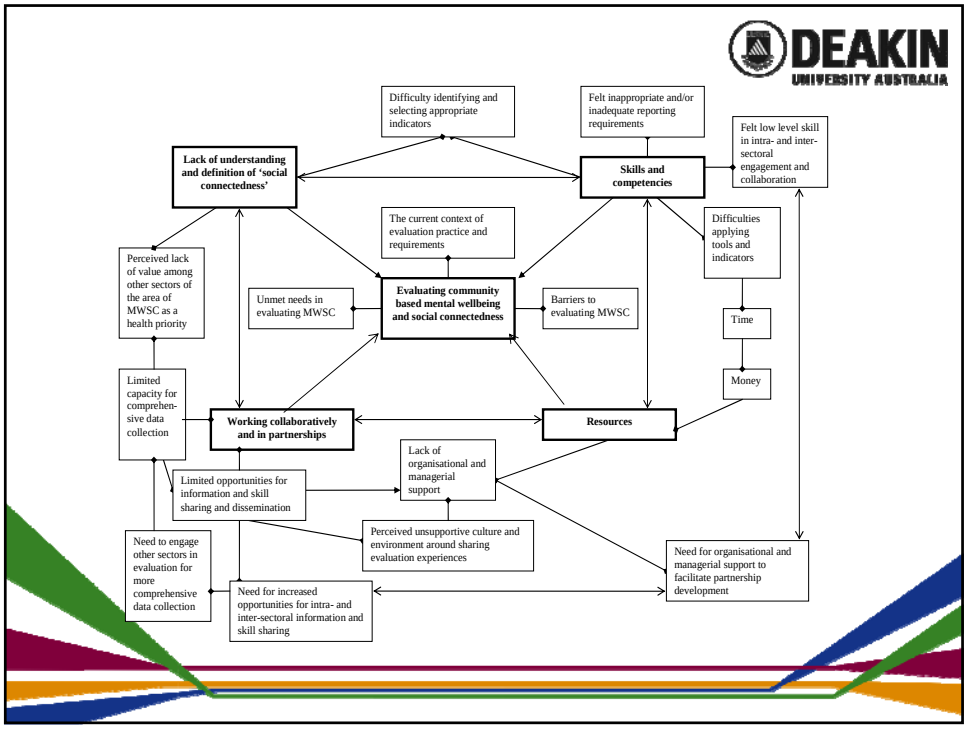
- > Qualitative methods
  - > Literature review and document analysis
    - > Policy documents and PCP community health plans
  - > Semi-structured interviews
  - > Document analysis
    - > PCP and agency evaluation plans, reporting requirements/templates, completed evaluation reports.

Analysis

- > Extrapolated and grouped according to research question
  - > Inductive coding
    - >Constant comparison
      - >Emergent key themes identified
        - >Triangulation
        - >Concept mapping


DEAKIN
UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA
Lack of understanding and definition of 'social connectedness'
Skills and competencies
The current context of evaluation practice and requirements
Unmet needs in evaluating MWSC
Evaluating community based mental wellbeing and social connectedness
Barriers to evaluating MWSC
Working collaboratively and in partnerships
Resources


DEAKIN
UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA
Difficulty identifying and selecting appropriate indicators
Felt inappropriate and/or inadequate reporting requirements
Felt low level skill in intra- and inter-sectoral engagement and collaboration
Lack of understanding and definition of 'social connectedness'
Skills and competencies
The current context of evaluation practice and requirements
Difficulties applying tools and indicators
Perceived lack of value among other sectors of the area of MWSC as a health priority
Unmet needs in evaluating MWSC
Evaluating community based mental wellbeing and social connectedness
Barriers to evaluating MWSC
Time
Money
Limited capacity for comprehen-sive data collection
Working collaboratively and in partnerships
Resources
Lack of organisational and managerial support
Limited opportunities for information and skill sharing and dissemination
Perceived unsupportive culture and environment around sharing evaluation experiences



Partnerships

> Issues of partnerships were central to each of the three key research areas:
  > Evaluation context
  > Evaluation capacity
  > Evaluation needs

Issues of partnerships in current evaluation context

- > Required for comprehensive data collection
- > Currently low levels of inter- and intra- sectoral partnerships in evaluation
- > Dissatisfaction with current level of support for building partnerships
- > Perception that MWSC is under valued
  - > "perceived as 'wishy-washy'"

Partnerships and evaluation capacity

- > Would enhance capacity for undertaking deeper level evaluation
  - > Opportunities for sharing skills, knowledge and experiences
- > Barriers
  - > Intra- and inter- sectoral culture and values
  - > Resources
  - > Skills and confidence

Partnerships and evaluation needs

> Specific areas and mechanisms logically derived from issues in current context and capacity
  > More supportive culture
  > Greater opportunities for info dissemination and partnership building
  > Increased managerial support and leadership
  > Increased capacity building for practitioners to initiate and maintain partnerships

Partnerships summary

> For:
  > Collecting comprehensive, appropriate information
  > Sharing current evaluation skills and knowledge
  > Developing evaluation capacity, skills and knowledge
  > Building dissemination networks
  > Enhancing best practice

Summary of challenges in building partnerships

- Difficulties in initiating and maintaining, both inter-sectorally
  - Interaction of issues of limited understandings and value of MWSC, resources and skills
  - Other sector culture and perceptions
    - "not-valued"
    - "perceived as 'wishy-washy'"
    - "don't want to step on other peoples toes" by 'hijacking' programs

Limitations

- Small sample size
  - Limited geographic distribution of PCP's
- Limited and selective triangulation

Conclusion

> Issues of resources, organisational culture not new

> Need for partnerships not unique

> Does highlight complexity of effective evaluation in emerging areas

> Contributed knowledge to an emerging unit of evidence

> Timely, given National Mental Health Plan

Recommendations

> Agenda for quality and innovation in MH workforce

> Development of supportive evaluation culture
  > Provision of resources for evaluation
  > Leadership
  > Capacity building opportunities

> Further research!
  > Practice based research - Mechanisms of *how* to do this effectively
  > Studies that extend beyond practitioners and stakeholders in the health sector

Acknowledgements

> **Funding:** School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University

> **Supervision and research guidance:** Mr. Bernie Marshall; Dr. Melissa Graham

> **Contributors:** Participants from PCP's and peak health bodies who took part in interviews or provided documents for analysis.

References

> Australian Health Ministers (AHM) (2003) *National Mental Health Plan 2003-2009*; Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

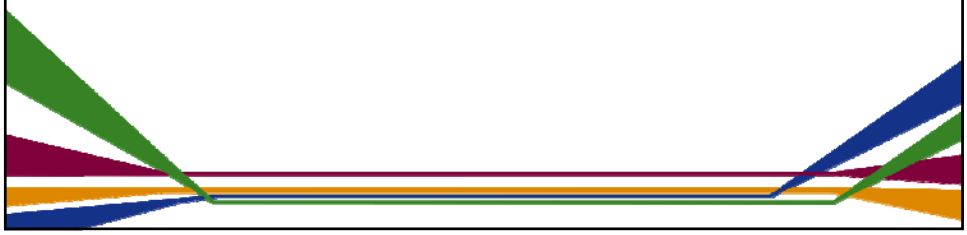
> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2005) *Mental Healt*h, Canberra: AIHW

> Berkman, L. and Glass, T. (2000) Social integration, social networks, social support and health, in L. Berkman and I. Kawachi (eds.) *Social Epidemiology*, New York: Oxford University Press

> Department of Human Services (DHS) (2003) *Integrated Health Promotion Resource Kit*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Public and Community Health Branch

> Department of Human Services (DHS) (2004) *Measuring consumer health outcomes in public mental health services in Victoria,* Melbourne: Victorian Government Mental Health Branch

> Glover, S., Burns, J., Butler, H. and Patton, G. (1998) Social environments and the emotional well being of young people, *Family Matters,* 49:11-6.

References (cont'd)

- Kawachi, I. and Berkman , L. (2001) Social ties and mental health, *Journal of Urban Health*, 78(3): 458-467.
- Marshall, B. and Round, R. (2004) *ISEPICH Evaluation Skills Development*, Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- Round, R., Marshall, B. and Horton, K. (2005) *Planning for effective health promotion evaluation*, Melbourne: Victorian Department of Human Services.
- Uschino , B.(2004) *Social support and physical health*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- VicHealth (2005) *Priority Health Issues,* Carlton: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.