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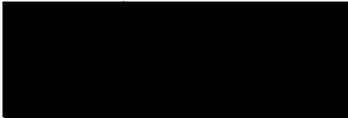
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Dated: 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2013

Exploring Wellbeing in Older Male Farmers in Western Australia

Jessica L. McKee

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Award of Bachelor of Science (Psychology) Honours

Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science,

Edith Cowan University.

Submitted October, 2013

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## Table of Contents

Title Page .....	i
Copyright and Access Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
<b>Literature Review: Older Male Farmers in Australia and Wellbeing.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Farming in Australia .....	4
Strengths-Based Research.....	6
Theoretical Perspectives on Wellbeing.....	7
Theoretical Perspectives on Ageing Well.....	8
Older Male Farmers and Wellbeing.....	10
Connectedness .....	10
Farming Work .....	13
The Land.....	15
Health and Wellbeing.....	17
Summary and Conclusions.....	21
References.....	23
<b>Research Report: Exploring Wellbeing in Older Male Farmers in Western Australia.....</b>	<b>37</b>
Abstract.....	38
Introduction.....	39
Research Design.....	49
Epistemology and Theoretical Framework.....	49
Methodology.....	49
Materials .....	50
Rigour .....	51
Method.....	52
Participants.....	52
Recruitment.....	53
Data Collection .....	55
Data Analysis.....	59
Findings and Interpretations.....	62
Theme 1: Connectedness .....	63
Theme 2: The way a farmer thinks .....	68
Theme 3: Wellbeing after farming.....	75

Theme 4: Mental illness, services and the industry .....	80
Conclusion .....	85
References .....	90
Appendices.....	103
Appendix A: Recruitment Notice .....	103
Appendix B: Brief Recruitment Notice .....	104
Appendix C: Information Letter .....	105
Appendix D: Consent Form.....	106
Appendix E: List of Support Services .....	107
Appendix F: Interview Protocol.....	108
Guidelines for Contributions by Authors (Research Report Only).....	110

Literature Review

Older Male Farmers in Australia and Wellbeing

Jessica L. McKee

Edith Cowan University

## Older Male Farmers in Australia and Wellbeing

## Abstract

In the context of an ageing population it has become increasingly important to identify the determinants of wellbeing in older adulthood. A review of the literature relevant to wellbeing and strengths relevant to older male farmers in Australia was conducted. This body of knowledge was identified to be sparse. Existing literature on farming primarily had a deficits focus, and only a small number of qualitative studies were specific to older male farmers. Four broad, overlapping areas representing the meaning of wellbeing were identified as potentially important: farming work; connectedness; the land; health and wellbeing. The inter-connected nature of farming life was identified as presenting a unique set of circumstances for ageing well. Specifically, it was suggested that maintaining self-integrity within farming life may be important. In light of the depth provided by qualitative studies into the lived experiences of older male farmers in the state of New South Wales, it was concluded that further research of this nature was required in other states of Australia.

Researcher: Jessica L. McKee

Supervisor: Doctor Eyal Gringart

28<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013

## Older Male Farmers in Australia and Wellbeing:

### A Review of the Literature

Australia's population is ageing. In 2007, around 12% of Australians were over the age of 65, and by 2056, this proportion is predicted to have doubled (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008). A stereotypical view of ageing is that it is exclusively a time of physical, social and psychological decline (Erber, 2005). However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that older adulthood may also be a period associated with strengths and wellbeing (Giblin, 2011; Shallcross, Ford, Floerke, & Mauss, 2013; Springer, Pudrovskaya, & Hauser, 2011; Villar, 2012). Research and interventions which seek to understand and promote wellbeing in older adulthood are now explicit objectives of local and global mental health policies (Boudiny, 2013; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2012; Howat, Boldy, & Horner, 2004; Williamson, 2008; World Health Organization [WHO], 2005). Key to achieving these aims, however, is to understand how older adults age well with regards to living in their unique social and individual contexts (Gilleard & Higgs, 2008). Being an older male farmer in the context of a deteriorating Australian farming industry presents a set of unique and challenging circumstances (Berry, Hogan, Owen, Rickwood, & Fragar, 2011; Hart, Berry, & Tonna, 2011; Hossain, Eley, Coutts, & Gorman, 2008; Polain, Berry, & Hoskin, 2011). Therefore, in the context of existing literature on what it means to age well generally, the current paper sought to review that relevant to older male farmers in Australia and wellbeing.

In general, the farming literature was found to be sparse, and very few studies were specific to older male farmers. A major focus in the body of knowledge had been to highlight an extraordinary range of factors placing farmers generally at risk of compromised wellbeing (e.g., Berry et al., 2011; Hart et al., 2011). However, along with a small body of strengths-based literature and four in-depth, qualitative studies, four main areas of wellbeing relevant

to older male farmers were identified. These were connectedness (e.g., Wythes & Lyons, 2006), farming work (e.g., Foskey, 2005); a life lived on the land (e.g., Gullifer & Thompson, 2006), and health and wellbeing (e.g., Polain et al., 2012). Alongside existing literature on ageing well, these areas of wellbeing in older male farmers are reviewed in turn. In order to frame the review, a description of Australian farming and many threats to wellbeing faced by farmers is provided first. This is followed directly by a discussion of the relevance of a strengths-based approach to researching older male farmers and a description of relevant theories on wellbeing and ageing well. A critical discussion of the available literature supports the notion that older male farmers are a unique sub-population when it comes to ageing well. More in-depth, qualitative studies across Australia are needed to provide greater depth on a vastly under-researched topic.

### **Farming in Australia**

In 2011, there were 35,000 farm operations and 157,000 farmers in Australia (ABS, 2010-11 as cited in ABS, 2012). Australian farms are predominantly family-owned and operated, and more than 70% of farmers are male (ABS, 2012). Farming enterprises produce primarily beef-cattle, sheep, grains, or a combination of these (ABS, 2012). A smaller proportion of farms specialise in other areas, such as dairy cattle, grapes, goats, or bees (ABS, 2012).

Farming has historically been a major part of the nation's identity, and as an export industry it is still growing (ABS, 2012). However, remaining viable and profitable is becoming increasingly difficult with the effects of climate change and adverse weather compounding the existing pressures of trading on global markets, significant debts, and copious rules and regulations (Berry et al., 2011; Berry, Hogan, Ng, & Parkinson, 2011; Gunn, Kettler, Skaczkowski, & Turnbull, 2012; Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2005; Hossain et al., 2008; Polain et al., 2011). Additionally, and related to the difficulties affecting the industry,

rural communities are affected by social and cultural isolation (Cheung, Spittal, Pirkis, & Yip, 2012; Hossain et al., 2008; Phillips, 2009; White et al., 2011). Perhaps as a result of these factors, the number of farmers and farms in Australia has been steadily declining for the past ten years (ABS, 2012). Furthermore, farming is associated with elevated rates of completed suicide compared to other occupations in Australia (Fraser et al., 2005).

Accordingly, the focus in the farming and rural literature has been on identifying how to address the issue of suicide. The above factors have been linked to various forms of psychological distress (Brumby, Chandrasekara, McCoombe, Kremer, & Lewandowski, 2012; Gunn et al., 2012; Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2005; Stain et al., 2011). Whilst there has been a limited focus specifically on older male farmers, the situation in the farming industry may represent an exceptional risk for older farmers, who without a younger generation to succeed them, are ageing on their farms (ABS, 2012; Hart et al., 2011; Hossain et al., 2008; Polain et al., 2011). There is recent evidence that these factors have led to the symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, increased alcohol use, loss, grief, and despair among older farmers (Hart et al., 2011; Hossain et al., 2008; Polain et al., 2011). Furthermore, male farmers generally are at a heightened risk of suicide, and neither men farmers nor older farmers readily utilise mental health services (Alston, 2012; Alston & Kent, 2008; Guiney, 2012; Murray et al., 2008).

It is important not to understate the many threats to wellbeing faced by older male farmers in the context of a review on strengths. However, it is also necessary to identify their strengths so these may be utilised to enhance wellbeing (e.g. Allan, 2010; McEwan, Bowers, & Saal, 2008). With these issues in mind, a description of the strengths-based approach to research is outlined below.

### **Strengths-Based Research**

Strengths-based research is contained within the paradigm of positive psychology (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). It seeks to extend psychological science beyond its traditional deficits focus and explore the determinants of positive psychological functioning (Duckworth et al., 2005). Strengths can be broadly described as individual and contextual factors which contribute to optimal functioning (Duckworth et al., 2005). However, strengths also enhance resilience – or the ability of an individual or group to thrive, despite adversity (Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle, & Hardie, 2004). Pertinently, strengths are significant to wellbeing, and are thus well suited to informing policies and interventions to address wellbeing (Linley, 2013; Pettigrew, Donovan, Pescud, Newton, & Boldy, 2012).

Conducting strengths-based research has been seen as an ethical duty, especially where vulnerable populations are concerned (Farnworth, 2009). One reason for this is that highlighting strengths may enable and empower individual members of these populations to live in ways which are meaningful to them (Linley, 2013). With regards to ageing populations, identifying strengths could also serve to counter the negative stereotypes on ageing which prevail in society (Matringe, 2009).

However, in the context of the outlined threats to wellbeing affecting older male farmers, it is also an ethical duty to ensure that strengths are not conveyed in research as attainable ideals (Farnworth, 2009; Ryff, 1989). This point is an important one for farmers, who may be prone to internal attributions of failure (Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2005). The study of wellbeing and strengths among older male farmers therefore requires careful consideration and sensitivity. However, as identifying strengths has the potential to benefit older male farmers, it is an appropriate and ethical approach to the research of this sub-population. Relevant theory on wellbeing is now provided.

### Theoretical Perspectives on Wellbeing

The construct of wellbeing has been inconsistently defined, measured and referred to throughout the literature (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). For example, it is often used interchangeably with terms such as *health*, *mental health*, *positive mental health*, *quality of life* and *life satisfaction* (Jayawickreme et al., 2012; Manderscheid et al, 2010; OBrien, Berry, & Hogan, 2012; Pettigrew et al., 2012). Encapsulating the complexity in defining and conceiving of wellbeing is the WHO's definition of mental health:

...a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2011).

It is beyond the scope of the current paper to provide a comprehensive review of the theory and literature on wellbeing. However, the interested reader see for example: Deci and Ryan (2008); Diener (1984), Diener and Emmons (1984); Huppert and So (2013), Josefsson et al. (2011), Keyes (1998), Manderscheid et al. (2010), Ryan and Deci (2001), Ryff (1989), Schueller and Seligman (2010), Seligman (2011), and Westerhof and Keyes (2010).

Relevant to the current review are the following points. Wellbeing is not merely the absence of psychopathology, distress, and negative emotion (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). There are qualitatively distinct aspects to wellbeing, which are referred to in the literature as *hedonic*, and include positive emotions and moods such as happiness, joy, pleasure and satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988). However, in a psychological sense, wellbeing is also *eudaimonic* (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This refers to the theory that it is not only about feeling well, but about the meaning in individual experiences of

living well (Jayawickreme et al., 2012). Important aspects of psychological wellbeing include motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008), autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989), self-acceptance, mastery, a sense of growth over time (Ryff, 1989), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Positive relationships and social functioning are also viewed as integral to wellbeing (Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Schueller & Seligman, 2010; WHO, 2011). More recently, being in a state of physical or mental engagement has been found to be important (Seligman, 2011).

Key to conceiving of wellbeing is that does not exist in a vacuum, and it is not akin to a list of elements which, in sum, equal positive experience. Rather, it is dynamic, evolving and symbolic of the inherent meaning in individual experiences in an internal and external world (Diener, 1984; Jayawickreme et al., 2012). In order to identify how the experiences of ageing may influence the experience of wellbeing in older male farmers, relevant theory on ageing is covered next.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Ageing Well**

Like wellbeing, *ageing* and *older adulthood* are difficult constructs to define. For example, an individual's *subjective age* – or how old they feel - may not reflect their chronological age, and ageing is a biological process which begins at birth (Erber, 2005). However, in the field of gerontological research, *older adulthood* refers to the ageing processes occurring in the period of maturity from the age of 65 onwards (Belsky, 1999; Erber, 2005).

The ageing processes associated with older adulthood and how they affect wellbeing are many and varied. Traditionally, this period of life has been viewed almost exclusively in terms declines – such as in physical functioning, health, memory, response time, and youthful appearance (Erber, 2005). It has also been viewed as a time of dwindling social connections and social withdrawal (Cumming & Henry, 1961;

Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1968). However, whilst it is true that ageing will inevitably result in deterioration in some areas, viewing it as exclusively negative is stereotypical and ill-informed (Belsky, 1999; Erber, 2005; WHO, 2005). Illustrating this point is that psychological wellbeing has been found to be equally prominent among older adults as it is among younger adults (Springer et al., 2011).

It is beyond the scope of the current review to provide an exhaustive theoretical account of ageing well. The interested reader can see for example: Atchley (1971); Atchley (1994); Baltes (1998); Baltes and Carstensen (2003); Baltes, Smith, and Staudinger (1992); Bandura (1977); Belsky (1999); Erber (2005); Erikson (1963); Markus and Nurius (1986); McAdams (1996); McAdams, de St. Aubin, and Logan (1993); Novak and Campbell (2006), Pillemer and Suitor (1991); Rowe and Kahn (1987); and Ryff (1991).

Relevant to the current review is the point that as with wellbeing at any age, the individual experience of ageing is rich in subjective meaning. For example, although they have fewer social contacts overall, older adults choose and maximise those relationships they value the most (Baltes & Cartensen, 2003). Also, whilst older adults may respond relatively slowly on general cognitive tasks, they may possess wisdom in relation to many or specific domains of life (Baltes et al., 1992). A contextual, life-span view of older adulthood can highlight important areas of meaning in individual experience, and therefore may be suited to research on ageing well (Baltes, 1998). This approach is discussed next.

According to Erikson's influential theory of psychosocial development (1963 as cited in Belsky, 1999), individuals strive to develop a meaningful sense of self in eight progressive stages over the life-span. During the second-last stage - which may be relevant to middle-aged as well as older adults (McAdams et al., 1993; Villar, 2012) –

individuals become most concerned with achieving generativity over stagnation. This refers to needing to contribute something of lasting value to the world, and often manifests in the drive to be successful as a parent or in a career (Erikson, 1963 as cited in Belsky, 1999). Following either the negative or the positive resolution of generativity, older adults become focussed on maintaining a meaningful sense of self – or self-integrity – over despair (Erikson, 1963 as cited in Erber, 2005). This may entail reflecting on one's life journey and relationships and constructing a coherent story of the self (McAdams, 1996).

Ageing well as a male farmer, then, may manifest as the aspects of life and self that are prominent and rich in meaning in older adulthood (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1993; Markus & Herzog, 1991). For example, staying physically strong and fit may be meaningful in the context of continued work on the farm in ageing. Related to this, it has been found previously that a loss of self-esteem can arise when an older man perceives his body is losing functionality (Baker & Gringart, 2009). Specific literature relevant to older male farmers and wellbeing is now reviewed, commencing with the importance of connectedness.

### **Older Male Farmers and Wellbeing**

#### **Connectedness**

Social connectedness is a prominent feature of farming and rural life in Australia (ABS, 2012; Caldwell & Boyd, 2009). It has also been found to be a prominent aspect of overall wellbeing in Australian farmers generally (OBrien et al., 2012). One approach to understanding connectedness in older male farmers could be to take a life-span view of Australian family farming. Typically, farming men succeed their fathers and even their grandfathers in the management of the farm (ABS, 2012; Foskey, 2005; Wythes & Lyons, 2006). Then, for the duration of their working lives, farming is their means of providing

financial security, sustenance, a home, and a future for a wife and family (Foskey, 2005; Polain et al., 2011). The family in turn provide emotional and practical support to the farmer (Hoodless, Herrin, Joyce, Simpson, & Turnbull, 1995). Finally, following retirement, the farm traditionally remains in the family as the next generation succeed their fathers in its management (Wythes & Lyons, 2006).

However, farming life is also about community connectedness. Caldwell and Boyd (2009) explored how farmers and their families coped with drought-related stress in a region of rural New South Wales (NSW). An important part of participants' coping was derived from the social support offered by others in the community. For example, farmers played sport in the community to relax and escape from the stress of farm work, and they also received practical and emotional support from other farmers (Caldwell & Boyd, 2009). Perceived social support has also been shown to protect men farmers generally from suicidal ideation (McLaren & Challis, 2009). However, another protective aspect of connectedness was the feeling that they belonged (McLaren & Challis, 2009). Also relevant to men farmers generally was an earlier finding by Millar and Curtis (1997). Being able to contribute and take part in group learning sessions with other farmers contributed to an enhanced sense of belonging and self-worth for participants in that study (Millar & Curtis, 1997).

Whilst none of these findings have been specific to older male farmers, gerontological literature points to some important aspects of connectedness during older adulthood. It has been found for example, that engaging regularly with family, friends, and acquaintances is highly valued among older adults as a way of reducing loneliness (Boldy & Grenade, 2011; Broome, Worrall, McKenna, & Boldy, 2010; Pettigrew & Roberts, 2008; Steed, Boldy, Grenade, & Iredell, 2007). Specifically, older adults report increased wellbeing when they feel valued by the people they care about. This may be facilitated by volunteering in the community or by helping younger family members (Horner & Boldy, 2008; Matringe, 2009;

Pettigrew & Roberts, 2008). It may be particularly important to have a *confidant*, such as a spouse or close friend in whom one can regularly confide (Steed et al., 2007). The meaning of these central relationships may be linked to self-integrity in older age (Baltes and Cartensen, 2003; Huxhold, Fiori, & Windsor, 2013).

In light of the fact that social functioning and positive relationships are key aspects of wellbeing at any age (Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Seligman; 2011; WHO, 2011), the literature specific to older male farmers appears sparse. According to Bryant and Pini (2009) however, older male farmers may be among the most esteemed members of rural communities. Thus, being an older male farmer may in itself be a strength in terms of connectedness.

One strengths-based study has provided depth on the subjective meaning of connectedness to older farming men. Wythes and Lyons (2006) explored the retirement experiences of male farmers in north-eastern NSW, and found that connectedness had been an important part of life on the farm. The men in the study reflected upon strong partnerships with their wives working the farm, and furthermore, that the decision to retire was based on mutual priorities. Participants also derived a sense of wellbeing from knowing their wives were happy. “Being together” (Wythes & Lyons, 2006, p. 9) was meaningful in itself, and a valuable part of surviving retirement. However, the meaning of connectedness in retirement was also to be in regular contact with other family members, and friends with whom they shared a farming background.

According to the findings of an in-depth study by Polain et al. (2011), the meaning of connectedness in farming runs deep for older farmers. Whilst partnerships with wives and a sense of belonging are generally viewed as strengths, financial hardship in farming can disintegrate families. When older farmers from across drought-affected NSW (most of whom were male) participated in focus groups, they spoke of feeling as if they had failed their families, and also a valued family farming tradition. Polain et al. noted a pervasive sense of

loss as wives and families moved away and a sense of connectedness deteriorated. In a related finding by Hart et al. (2011), older farmers who had been able to pass on their farms to their children felt grief as they watched them struggle with increasing adversity.

In sum, although studies specific to older farming men were sparse, wellbeing may be linked to the connected life farming has to offer. Specifically, a strong sense of meaning may be derived from fulfilling the role of family provider, and being able to maintain a valued family tradition. Necessarily, successful farming is the precursor to this. Literature highlighting the meaning in farming work itself is reviewed next.

### **Farming Work**

Farming work is meaningful work. It is the farmer's life's work as well as the sustenance of an entire family, and as such, forms the basis of a strong sense of self (e.g., Polain et al., 2011). This has serious implications for wellbeing when a farmer struggles to remain profitable in the face of compounding stressors such as drought, the growing competitiveness of global trading and advances in technology, as well as having to comply with increasing governmental rules and regulations (Fragar, Kelly, Peters, Henderson & Tonna, 2008). According to Fragar et al. (2008), the increasing pressures faced by farmers lead them to lose a sense of control and efficacy, which are fundamental to wellbeing. Thus, in addressing wellbeing, they recommended that government provide training to farmers - in adapting to climate change, business and financial matters, and in complying with an ever-increasing set of rules and regulations (Fragar et al., 2008).

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy – or the belief in one's own ability to succeed in a task - is a fundamental need and driver of action throughout the life-span. Among Australian farmers ( $N = 500$ ) efficacy has been found to be an over-arching predictor of wellbeing, along with connectedness (O'Brien et al., 2012). Older farming men in Polain et al.'s (2011) study validated these and Fragar et al.'s (2008) findings, when they suggested of

their own accord that training and practical assistance in their farming work would have profound effects on their mental health. Their feelings of failure and despair when they were unable to be successful farmers were a further indication of the importance of this construct to wellbeing (Polain et al., 2011).

The subjective meaning of efficacy in farming has also been explored in-depth from a strengths-based perspective. In Gullifer and Thompson's (2006) study, it emerged that for older farming men in a western area of NSW, efficacy was linked to a positive sense of self as being useful and productive. Specifically, the men – aged 65 to 80 years - equated wellbeing with being able to continue working the farm as they aged and having the physical as well as the mental strength to do so. As well as fostering efficacy and a sense of being productive however, these men also valued working the farm as a meaningful source of daily engagement, and something they had been doing for a life-time (Gullifer & Thompson, 2006).

This fits generally with other gerontological literature suggesting that among many older adults, retiring from a life-time of work can represent a threat to wellbeing (e.g., Quine, Wells, de Vaus, & Kendig, 2007). The transition may be difficult as work is strongly linked to identity and meaning, and therefore, the generative task of making a productive contribution (Belsky, 1999; Kahana, Bhatta, Lovegreen, Kahana, & Midlarsky, 2013; Matringe, 2009; Schueller & Seligman, 2010). However, it has also been suggested that farming may be a unique context when it comes to work, retirement and wellbeing (Reed, Rayens, Conley, Westneat, & Adkins, 2012; Wythes & Lyons, 2006).

In a report on older farmers and retirement, Foskey (2005) provided insight into the unique working context that is farming. As well as fostering independence, autonomy, and a sense of daily purpose, farming is a satisfying career, business venture, and the sustenance of an entire family. For an older farmer, working the farm has become a symbol of identity,

wellbeing, and of life itself. Given that sense of self is so tightly bound in the complete life the farm has had to offer, retirement poses a substantial threat to self-integrity (Foskey, 2005). This was illustrated in another in-depth, qualitative study in NSW by Wythes and Lyons (2006). Older men who had retired from farming expressed a feeling of having lost not only a job and a career, but a valued activity and interest (Wythes & Lyons, 2006).

On this point, Gullifer and Thompson (2006) suggested that in continuing to work on the farm, the older men in their study were maintaining their sense of self as a productive, useful farmer. In relation to this, their years of experience in farming amounted to a strength in ageing – despite slowing down somewhat with age, they had the skills and experience to adjust their farming practices and continue farming as before.

Therefore, wellbeing among older male farmers appears to be linked to a positive self-concept based on being productive, feeling useful, strong, and capable and a sense of being in control of the farm. Whilst some farmers do want to retire, it may be that retirement in itself is a threat to wellbeing as it undermines self-integrity. With farming representing an older male farmer's life and family, farming work becomes synonymous with wellbeing. Being able to remain in the job through using farming wisdom developed over a life-time may amount to a strength in ageing for these men.

### **The Land**

For older male farmers, the land may be a meaningful symbol of farming, connectedness and wellbeing. In Gullifer and Thompson's (2006) study, participants expressed feeling attached to both the place of farming, and the experiences associated with it. The farm and the land generally provided them a place of refuge, comfort and security. However, the men's love of the land was also reminiscent of the love for a human being. They spoke of working in harmony with the land over a life-time. In this way, the land may also represent sense of self (Gullifer & Thompson, 2006).

Wythes and Lyons (2006) noted similar themes to these. Retiring and leaving the land was like losing a loved one, and the men expressed a sense of loss at this experience. They specifically referred to open spaces, animals and the bush, as well as working the land in connection with machinery. Like Gullifer and Thompson (2006), Wythes and Lyons suggested that this attachment to the land was a manifestation of the farming and connectedness sense of self, and something which had grown stronger over time.

Whilst not specific to male farmers, a qualitative study by de la Rue and Coulson (2003) provided further depth on the links between a life lived on the land and wellbeing. For their participants – widows who remained on the land as they aged - the meaning of wellbeing was intrinsically connected to the land. These women described health and wellbeing in terms of continuing to engage in various activities on the land. The meaning of the land was furthermore embedded in the memories these women had of a life lived with their husbands on the farm. de la Rue and Coulson's theme of the embeddedness of experiences in the land itself has also been seen cross-culturally. Out of Farnworth's (2009) exploration into the lived experience of organic farmers in Madagascar, the land represented life itself. Wellbeing was living in an intimate relationship with the land, which had nourished ancestors, provided sustenance for current farmers and their families, and in turn, would continue to nourish and support generations to come (Farnworth, 2009).

The significance of the meaning of a life lived on the land reflects the literature's viewpoint on ageing and attachment to place (Perkins Taylor, 2001). Specifically, having lived and constructed a meaningful sense of self in connection with a place – such as the land – that place begins to be a symbol or extension of the self (Perkins Taylor, 2001; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003). In Australia, there is much discussion in the gerontological literature about the concept of *ageing in place* (Boldy, Grenade, Lewin, Karol, & Burton, 2011; de Jonge, Jones, Phillips, & Chung, 2011). According to this literature, a meaningful

place of ageing may be a home or environment which represents an emotional connection and a history with important social ties (de Jonge et al., 2011). Specifically, ageing in place refers to a home in which an older adult considers living out the remainder of his or her life. As such, considerations are that the home fosters independence and autonomy (Boldy et al., 2011), and supports continued engagement in a wider social context (Broome et al., 2010; de Jonge et al., 2011; Pettigrew & Roberts, 2008).

The meaning of a life lived on the land, however, is distinct from that in the general gerontological literature on ageing in place in an important way. The latter is focussed primarily on decisions made by older adults with regards a place in which they choose to live out the remainder of their lives (e.g., Boldy et al., 2011). In contrast, when older farming men talk about the meaning in living on the land, it emerges as a connection well beyond a decision made in ageing. For them, place is a life-long symbol of the self, the relationships and work in farming, and continued engagement in these allows health and wellbeing (de la Rue and Coulson, 2003; Gullifer and Thompson, 2006). Research into the physical health of farmers and how it may more generally relate to wellbeing is reviewed below.

### **Health and Wellbeing**

Health is objectively linked to wellbeing at any age (WHO, 2011). Among older adults, health is linked to a lower likelihood of being lonely (Grenade & Boldy, 2008), and also to increased independence (Ryburn, Wells, & Foreman, 2009). Particularly for men, a well-functioning body contributes to a positive body image and self-esteem (Baker & Gringart, 2009). Furthermore, interventions based on physical activity improve life satisfaction (Mhaoláin et al., 2012), general wellbeing (Windle, Hughes, Linck, Russell, & Woods, 2010), vitality for life, and they also reduce depressive symptomatology among older adults (Singh et al., 2005). In light of this evidence and the finding that farmers are at risk of poor health, a focus has been to intervene to improve wellbeing by improving general health

indicators in farming communities (Blackburn, Brumby, Willder, & McKnight, 2009; Brumby et al., 2011; Brumby et al. 2012).

On the issue of poor health and distress in farming communities, it has been suggested that farmers do not consider or make decisions around their health and wellbeing (Brumby et al., 2012; Lindner, 2004). Specifically, male farmers of any age are argued not to utilise mental health services due to a masculine culture of stoicism, self-reliance and vulnerability to stigma around mental illness (e.g., Alston, 2012; Alston & Kent, 2008; Murray et al, 2008). Given that the mental health sector will undoubtedly play a role in assisting older male farmers to age well, this is a concerning finding. However, there is evidence to suggest that older farmers do value their health and wellbeing, and furthermore, are active in maintaining it.

In Gullifer and Thompson's (2006) study, health was an important theme. The men spoke of the changes in their physical health with age, and the importance of being physically and mentally strong in continued farming – which equated to wellbeing for them. For men in Wythes and Lyons' (2006) study also, health was a pivotal factor. The men made retirement decisions based on their own or their wives' health. They also made a concerted effort to maintain their own health and wellbeing following the transition to retirement (Wythes & Lyons, 2006).

As well as the subjective meaning attributed to health among older male farmers, there is evidence to suggest that the broader community of farmers are active in caring for their own mental health. Staniford, Dollard, and Guerin (2009) found that farmers in a region of Victoria (VIC) used deliberate strategies to look after their wellbeing in times of stress. These included seeking social support and distractions, problem-solving and the framing of problems in a positive light when they were experiencing stress. Caldwell and Boyd (2009) found similar themes, in that farmers experiencing drought stress were proactive in seeking

emotional and practical support from others in the community. However, whilst this is evidence that farmers do value health and wellbeing, an important element of understanding wellbeing is to ask people themselves what it means to them (Farnworth, 2009; Pettigrew et al., 2012; Ryff, 1989).

Strengths-based gerontological literature has revealed that older adults provide diverse and in-depth perspectives on their own wellbeing. For example, thriving Australians over the age of 80 attributed their experiences of wellbeing to deliberately staying physically and mentally fit (Beyond Blue, n.d.). This approach has been a recent focus in the state of Western Australia (WA), where Pettigrew et al. (2012) found that older adults linked wellbeing to healthy behaviours such as exercise and eating well. In another study by Donovan et al. (2007), physical, mental and cognitive health were important. Specifically, both older and younger adults cited meaningful occupations, efficacy, positive relationships, resilience, alertness and zest, positive emotion and self-confidence as important to wellbeing (Donovan et al., 2007). In earlier research by Ryff (1989b) on psychological wellbeing, older adults highlighted the importance of being able to accept change.

Only one study was found which specifically explored the subjective meaning of health and wellbeing in a farming sample. According to the widows in de la Rue and Coulson's (2003) in-depth exploration on these topics, health was seen as both necessary for and resulting from the engagement in much loved activities on the land. Health related to not having a sickness, bodily aches or physical injuries and to generally feeling good. It was expressed as something to look after, and a controllable part of wellbeing. However, wellbeing was ultimately viewed as distinct from health. Overall, health enabled the women to be able to stay on the land, engaged in the activities they loved. Although the participants were not men, de la Rue and Coulson's study provided valuable insight into how health and wellbeing may be perceived by older adults generally on the land.

The depth afforded by qualitative studies on the meaning of health and wellbeing may also provide suggestions for interventions which may be more positively received by older male farmers. Whilst the men in Polain et al.'s (2011) study were not asked about the meaning of health and wellbeing from a strengths-based perspective, they were asked about how mental health services could better serve their needs. Not only did the men demonstrate that they had carefully considered their own mental health, they also showed a willingness to confront the issue by coming to an interview and sharing their ideas. As had been previously suggested (e.g., Murray et al., 2008), the men did appear stoic, self-reliant and affected by stigma, and these were barriers to seeking professional psychological support in times of stress (Polain et al., 2011). However, pertinently, the men cited significant practical barriers to service utilisation – including not knowing if any services existed in their area and waiting times for general practitioners (GPs), which were more than one month. These men suggested that more education on the issues of mental health and increased availability of culturally competent practitioners were important in addressing mental health in their communities. Furthermore, they felt that mental health could be protected in farmers if more governmental support was provided in the form of training on business, financial and succession planning issues (Polain et al., 2011). Thus, older male farmers give much consideration to their own wellbeing.

The outlined evidence suggests that health and wellbeing are inherently meaningful among older male farmers. They reflect on the issues affecting their wellbeing, and they also act to maintain it. However, health and wellbeing are intrinsically connected to the meaning of a life lived in farming, connections with other people, and engagement with the land. Thus, it has been suggested that interventions which empower farmers in these domains – such as by fostering a sense of efficacy and a sense of belonging – may be more positively received

(Brumby, Willder, & Martin, 2009; Staniford et al., 2009; Taylor, Jones, O'Reilly, Oldfield, & Blackburn, 2010).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of the current paper was to review the literature relevant to strengths and wellbeing in older male farmers in Australia. The literature specific to older male farmers was noted to be sparse, and few studies overall had a focus on strengths in farming populations. Evidence was found to suggest that wellbeing in Australian farmers generally manifests in four inter-connected domains representing farming life: connectedness, farming work, the land, and health and wellbeing.

Firstly, farming is a connected life. Farming as an occupation is a family tradition, and the means by which a farmer supports his own family. Families and communities rely upon each other for support, and a sense of connectedness, social support and belonging were shown to be important in wellbeing among farmers generally. The land is a symbol of all this, and the meaning of health and wellbeing is to be able to thrive and prosper, successfully farming the land and providing for a family. When the farm is threatened, a farmer's sense of self and wellbeing are similarly threatened. Policy decisions which directly affect farming activities will therefore affect the wellbeing of farmers.

A small body of qualitative evidence has suggested that the inter-connected nature of farming makes the meaning of ageing well unique for older male farmers. After a long and rugged life farming the land and nurturing meaningful family ties, an older male farmer's self-integrity may be defined by continued existence in this unique and inter-connected life. Specifically, ageing well is to be capable, successful and productive, in place, on the land, for as long as possible.

A related finding was that older male farmers in NSW were open in sharing their views on the topic of mental health as well as service utilisation. Together with more general

evidence that farmers are active in coping with stress, this suggested that older male farmers do value and consider their own health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the information these men provided could be valuable in informing the future development of meaningful and empowering interventions assisting this sub-population to age well.

In light of the depth provided by a small number of qualitative studies on this under-researched but important area, it is concluded that more strengths-based and in-depth approaches are required. In particular, as the major body of the farming literature was conducted in NSW, it is suggested that these in-depth studies are conducted across other states of Australia. As Berry et al., (2011) argued, farmers are a heterogeneous population. There may be many idiosyncrasies in how older male farmers across different parts of the country ascribe meaning to a lived experience of wellbeing.

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Research Report

Exploring Wellbeing in Older Male Farmers in Western Australia

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## Exploring Wellbeing in Older Male Farmers in Western Australia

## Abstract

With population ageing, an increasing local and global focus is on wellbeing in older adulthood. The area of wellbeing in older male farmers in Australia was identified as an under researched, yet uniquely challenging ageing context. In light of the paucity of research specific to older male farmers, a need for in-depth, qualitative studies in the state of Western Australia (WA) was identified. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (IPA), a study of this nature explored the subjective lived experience of wellbeing in older male farmers in the Great-Southern / Wheatbelt agricultural region of WA. An additional aim of the study was to explore the farmers' experiences and perspectives on mental health service provision. Eight participants aged between 58 and 69 years participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. From the data, four major themes emerged as meaningful aspects of wellbeing: connectedness; the way a farmer thinks; wellbeing after farming; mental illness, services, and the industry. Congruent with previous literature on older male farmers, wellbeing was strongly influenced by the meaning in living a connected life in farming. Farming work was intrinsically connected to the meaning in family, the land, and the community. Specifically, older male farmers derived a meaningful sense of self from efficacy, autonomy, being engaged in farming work, and in producing something to sustain a family and a life on the land. Congruent with previous studies based, ageing well was about maintaining self-integrity. However, the current findings extended existing literature in that integrity was primarily related to continued contribution to farming itself. Interventions providing an opportunity for older male farmers to fulfil the role of 'farm elder' may be an empowering method of addressing wellbeing in these communities.

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## Exploring Wellbeing in Older Male Farmers in Western Australia

### Introduction

By 2056 the proportion of Australians over the age of 65 is expected to have doubled to nearly 25 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2008). The ageing of Australia's population is reflective of a worldwide trend with decreasing birth-rates and increasing life-span (Howat, Boldy and Horner 2004). Ageing has traditionally been viewed as a time of decay as well as ill-health, and negative stereotypes about older people prevail (Erber 2005). However, research has shown that there are also strengths associated with older adulthood and that many adults are 'ageing well' (Giblin 2011; Shallcross *et al.* 2013; Springer, Pudrovskaya and Hauser 2011; Villar 2012). The positive mental health – or wellbeing – of older adults is now an explicit goal of research, policies and interventions around the world (Boudiny 2013; Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2012; Howat, Boldy and Horner 2004; Williamson 2008; World Health Organization [WHO] 2005). These strengths-based approaches have the potential to break down negative stereotypes about ageing (Matringe 2009), and to empower vulnerable older adults in the community (e.g. Farnworth 2009; Linley 2013). However, it is also paramount that research and policy address the wellbeing needs of older adults in unique contexts (Baltes 1998).

Older male farmers in Australia are a particularly vulnerable group of ageing Australians for whom strengths-based research on wellbeing may be timely (Allan 2010; McEwan, Bowers and Saal 2009). In a deteriorating farming industry, many are under extreme financial pressure and are reported to be ageing on their farms (Berry *et al.* 2011; Hart, Berry and Tonna 2011; Hossain *et al.* 2008; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). Additionally, despite being at an elevated risk of psychological distress and suicide, older male farmers are reported to be difficult to reach via traditional means – the delivery of mental health services (Alston 2012; Fraser *et al.* 2005; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). The

aims of the current paper were thus to review the existing literature relevant to strengths and wellbeing in older male farmers generally in Australia, and to report on an in-depth, qualitative study conducted in Western Australia (WA). A summary of pertinent theory on wellbeing and how it relates to ageing is first provided.

### *Wellbeing and ageing*

The study of wellbeing is the study of positive psychological experience, distinct from psychopathology (Huppert and So 2013; Keyes 2002; Linley 2013; Ruini *et al.* 2003; Seligman 2011). It is a multidimensional and multidirectional construct (Jayawickreme *et al.* 2012). Key dimensions include positive emotion (Diener 1984; Ryan and Deci 2001; Watson, Clark and Carey 1988), physical and mental engagement (Seligman 2011), social connectedness (Deci and Ryan 2008; Keyes 1998; Ryff 1989; Seligman 2011), self-acceptance (Ryff 1989); a sense of competence (Deci and Ryan 2008) or self-efficacy (Bandura 1977), mastery (Ryff 1989) or achievement (Seligman 2011), as well as perceiving that life has a purpose (Ryff 1989; Seligman 2011).

These dimensions of wellbeing have been found to be equally relevant for younger and older adults (Springer, Pudrovskaya and Hauser 2011). However, the study of wellbeing in older adulthood must also be the study of how the individual derives meaning in his or her life-span context (Baltes 1998; Erikson 1963 as cited in Belsky 1999; Markus and Herzog 1991). Specifically, older adults may be concerned with the developmental tasks of generativity (making a lasting contribution in life) and self-integrity (maintaining a coherent and meaningful sense of self over time; McAdams, de St. Aubin and Logan 1993). Related to this, central domains of life become increasingly important (Baltes and Cartensen 2003). Older men particularly may be coping with lower self-esteem as they perceive their bodies becoming less functional (Baker and Gringart 2009). However, they may also experience gains in wisdom and problem-solving across many domains of living (Baltes, Smith and

Staudinger 1992). Relevant to the current paper is the meaning of ageing well in the context of being an older male farmer in Australia.

A review of the literature relevant to older male farmers in Australia and wellbeing was conducted. Overall, the farming literature was noted to be lacking. Few studies explored wellbeing or strengths, and even fewer were exclusive to older male farmers. However, together the body of knowledge pointed to the farming life as presenting a unique context for ageing well. Four broad, overlapping areas of meaning were identified: farming work (e.g. Gullifer and Thompson 2006); connectedness (e.g. Foskey 2005); the land (e.g. de la Rue and Coulson 2003); health and wellbeing (e.g. Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). These are reviewed in turn.

#### *Farming work*

Faced with insurmountable debts, adverse weather, increasing regulations, and the uncertainty of global markets, farming work may represent a threat to older farmers' wellbeing (Berry *et al.* 2011). Specifically, their sense of efficacy and control may be seriously compromised (Fragar *et al.* 2008; O'Brien, Berry and Hogan 2012). Whilst it is important not to understate the threats faced by many older farmers, qualitative evidence has allowed for further depth on the meaning of farming work and wellbeing. For example, Gullifer and Thompson (2006) found that when successful farming was possible, older farming men may wish to continue doing it as they age. In an in-depth, qualitative study of farming men aged 65 to 80 years in New South Wales (NSW), the meaning of wellbeing was in staying productive, strong and useful in farming work (Gullifer and Thompson 2006). These views were substantiated from the perspectives of retired farming men, who were also based in NSW. Retiring from farming was losing not only a career, but a valued activity and interest (Wythes and Lyons 2006).

Feeling a sense of efficacy or competence is integral to a positive sense of self across the life-span (Bandura 1977; Deci and Ryan 2008; Jacelon 2007). As work may foster these aspects of wellbeing, many older adults have difficulty coping with the loss meaning in daily life following retirement (Kahana *et al.* 2013; Mountain and Craig 2010; Quine *et al.* 2007; Villar 2012). However, according to the findings of a report prepared for the Australian Government, older male farmers may find the retirement experience particularly challenging.

Foskey (2005) drew attention to the fact that after a life-time on the farm in a strong, productive, masculine role, these aspects of farming define an older male farmer's sense of self. Ageing well is about self-integrity, and as such, maintaining the sense of being capable, successful, autonomous, productive and occupied in challenging work on the farm (Foskey 2005). Foskey did suggest however, that wellbeing after farming was possible, and that it may be fostered by developing other sources of meaningful activity – such as belonging to a community organisation. Wythes and Lyons (2006) provided support for this notion, as among retired farming men, those who had a range of other sources of meaningful activity in their lives reported a more positive transition to retirement.

In terms of the men who chose to continue on in farming, and were thus active in maintaining their sense of self-integrity, Gullifer and Thompson (2006) identified another strength in ageing well: wisdom. After a life-time's worth of work on the farm, Gullifer and Thompson's participants utilised their farming wisdom to be flexible enough in their farming practices that they could continue farming even as their bodies slowed down with age.

Although this is only a small body of literature, it presents a case for the notion that being able to do farming work in itself may be strong factor in an older male farmer's wellbeing. However, there is evidence that farming contributes more than a sense of efficacy and achievement to wellbeing. A farming life is a 'connected' life (Foskey 2005; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011), and evidence for this is reviewed next.

### *Connectedness*

Australian farming is made up of predominantly family businesses (ABS 2012). Farming men work in partnership with their wives in running this business (Wythes and Lyons 2006), and families support each other during difficult times – such as through drought (Caldwell and Boyd 2009). Community connectedness is also a positive aspect of farming life, with farmers turning to fellow community members for both practical and emotional support, and a chance to relax (Caldwell and Boyd 2009; Staniford, Dollard and Guerin 2009). The broader community of farmers feeling satisfied with connectedness have also been reported to be more likely to experience efficacy and overall wellbeing (OBrien *et al.* 2012). However this was also found to be true of a general community sample of Australians (OBrien *et al.* 2012). One way in which connectedness may be a strength in older farming men is as a protective factor. McLaren and Challis (2009) found that male farmers of mixed age experiencing depression were less likely to also experience suicidal ideation if they perceived they had either or both social support and a sense of belonging. These findings highlight the importance of connectedness in farming communities and wellbeing generally, but are not specific to older male farmers.

Literature in the field of gerontology has highlighted how connectedness may be particularly meaningful in ageing well. For example, older adults speak of the importance in remaining regularly in contact with other people, feeling valued by others, and in particular, having a close relationship in which one can confide (Boldy and Grenade 2011; Moxey *et al.* 2011; Pettigrew and Roberts 2008). It may be important for older men specifically to foster ties with other older men who have had similar experiences in ageing (Gleibs *et al.* 2013). Whilst the evidence specific to older male farmers is scarce, Foskey's (2005) report and a further qualitative study based in NSW have provided more depth.

Foskey (2005) highlighted that a productive life working the farm was inextricably linked to providing for family. This could manifest as the continuation of a valued family tradition, but was also to succeed at nourishing a wife and family (Foskey 2005). In accord with this assertion, the need to make a productive contribution to family through farming was a prominent theme to emerge from a study by Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011). Following years of financial hardship due to drought and economic uncertainty, wives and adult children left the farms, and older male farmers felt as if they had failed in their family role (Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). Loss and despair were themes in the men's discourses, highlighting the seriousness of threats to the family farming business in terms of an older farmer's wellbeing. Thus, the meaning of farming productively is not only about feeling useful and in control, but also central relationships and meaningful social roles.

Wythes and Lyons' (2006) retired farmers provided further insight on the meaning in connectedness and farming. The men reflected on having worked alongside their wives through their farming years, and this partnership remained central in wellbeing after retirement. However it was also during retirement that other close family members and friends who shared a farming background with the men became valuable (Wythes and Lyons 2006). Fostering central relationships is another way in which older adults have been reported to achieve a sense self-integrity as they age (Baltes and Cartensen 2003; Dezutter *et al.* 2013; Huxhold, Fiori and Windsor 2013). However, farming life may present a unique context for self-integrity in ageing. With home, work, family and community inextricable from one another, meaningful relationships may be so due to their links to other domains of farming life (Foskey, 2005; Wythes and Lyons 2006). Literature on the attachment to the land experienced by older farmers may be a particularly good example of this point (de la Rue and Coulson 2003). Three relevant studies are reviewed below.

*The land*

Attachment to place is a phenomenon that affects younger and older adults alike (de Jonge *et al.* 2011; Pierce, Kostova and Dirks 2003). According to the literature on attachment to place, sense of self becomes embedded in the physical and ethereal surroundings of a place (Cook *et al.* 2007; Perkins Taylor 2001). However, after many years of a connected life farming the land, this attachment may be particularly strong (de la Rue and Coulson 2003; Gullifer and Thompson 2006).

In both Gullifer and Thompson's (2006) and Wythes and Lyons' (2006) NSW studies, older farming men reflected on the diverse ways in which a life lived on the land was a meaningful part of themselves. Animals, plants, the space and the fresh air were important, and overall, the land had become a beloved place of comfort and security (Wythes and Lyons 2006). For Gullifer and Thompson's participants it emerged that a positive sense of self developed in an ongoing, nurturing relationship with the land was meaningful to the point of being 'spiritual'. However, attachment to place was also to the community and the people with whom older male farmers had shared a life-time farming (Wythes and Lyons 2006).

Further depth on attachment to the land was provided by de la Rue and Coulson (2003), who found that older farm widows saw the land as synonymous with their own wellbeing. The women reflected on how the land represented a life-time's worth of memories with their husbands, and how continuing to remain active and engaged with the land fostered health, wellbeing and the continuation of life as they knew it (de la Rue and Coulson 2003). Whilst not specific to older farming men, de la Rue and Coulson's study provided the only explicit link between the subjective meaning in a life on the land and wellbeing. However, it also highlighted another area in which ageing well may manifest for older farmers generally – health. This and related evidence suggesting that health and wellbeing are meaningful areas in themselves for older farmers are outlined next.

*Health and wellbeing*

The farming population of Australia is reported to be at risk of poor physical and mental health, and men in particular are portrayed as unwilling to consider these domains of their lives (Alston 2012; Brumby *et al.* 2012; Lindner 2004; Murray *et al.* 2008). The related finding that male farmers are unlikely to utilise mental health services (e.g. Murray *et al.* 2008) is concerning, given that these will inevitably play a role in the delivery of strengths-based interventions for older male farmers. The perspectives of older adults themselves on health and wellbeing are seen as important in this regard (Farnworth 2009; Pettigrew *et al.* 2012; Ryff 1989). Pertinently, older adults are similarly unlikely to seek professional psychological support (Erber 2005). However, they consider their physical, mental and cognitive health when they think of wellbeing, and cite eating well, exercising, and keeping their minds active as important for wellbeing (Donovan *et al.* 2007; Matringe 2009; Pettigrew *et al.* 2012). Additionally, in a study based in WA, Pettigrew *et al.* (2012) found that older adults had more positive connotations to the term 'mentally healthy' as opposed to 'mental health'.

Although studies have not specifically explored the subjective meaning of health and wellbeing among older male farmers, the evidence provided by Gullifer and Thompson (2006) and Wythes and Lyons (2006) may once again be relevant. For example, upon reflection on the meaning of ageing, older male farmers referred to physical declines and the importance of keeping both physically and mentally strong (Gullifer and Thompson 2006). Wythes and Lyons' participants cited health considerations as being among the main reasons they and their wives had left farming. Thus, health may be seen as an important factor enabling continued wellbeing through farming, but also in and of itself.

de la Rue and Coulson's (2003) study of farm widows has shown how asking older adults in the farming community explicitly about wellbeing and health may reveal it as

profoundly meaningful. When they asked older farm widows about the meaning of health and wellbeing, it emerged that both were felt to be intrinsically connected to staying active on the land. The women saw health as controllable, and related to physical fitness as well as lack of illness. On the other hand, wellbeing was an over-arching feeling deriving partly from health, but was ultimately separate (de la Rue and Coulson 2003).

Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011) provided depth on the meaning of wellbeing for older farming men, however the focus of their study was on threats to mental health and how mental health services could better address these issues. In contrast to the view that older male farmers do not consider their own health and wellbeing, they were interested in both topics and provided meaningful reflections on how the issues could be addressed in their communities. They suggested that farmers could be protected from mental illness – with more training on farming issues, that more culturally sensitive services and education were provided to the community on mental illness to combat stigma (Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). Together these studies suggest that older male farmers do indeed value and consider their own health and wellbeing. Specifically, health and wellbeing may be intrinsically linked to a connected life in farming – to the work, the land, and to social connections in the local community. A summary of the reviewed evidence and the rationale for a study in WA is provided below.

### **Limitations of existing literature and the rationale for the current study**

In light of the evidence reviewed thus far, older male farmers may be a unique sub-population when it comes to ageing well. Whilst older adulthood generally is associated with maintaining self-integrity, the inter-connected context of a farming life may make this issue a more salient one for older male farmers. Wellbeing may be derived from the definition of self in farming work, family and community, and how these manifest symbolically in the land. Health and wellbeing are suggested to both result from and contribute to an integrated sense

of self in farming. Specifically, there is preliminary evidence to suggest that for older male farmers, ageing well may mean to remain successfully farming the land for as long as possible.

There were limitations noted in this body of knowledge. The farming literature was sparse overall, and existing studies primarily had a deficits focus. Of the small body of strengths-based literature, only a few qualitative studies focussed specifically on older farming men, and these were based almost entirely in the state of NSW. However, in light of the depth afforded by these studies on an under-researched and vulnerable population, a need to conduct similarly in-depth studies in different parts of Australia was identified. The current study sought to address this gap by conducting an in-depth, qualitative study in a small region of WA. As the largest and most sparsely-populated state in Australia (White *et al.* 2011), rural areas of WA may have distinct social and environmental characteristics.

Based on the reviewed evidence, the current study had two major objectives. In light of the depth of responses provided by farm widows in de la Rue and Coulson's (2003) study, the current study aimed to explore the subjective meaning of wellbeing as it was experienced by older male farmers in WA. Second, given the inevitable role to be played by the mental health sector in assisting older male farmers to age well, a further objective of the current study was to extend the work of Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011). As such, it also aimed to explore the perspectives of the farmers on mental health service provision. The Great-Southern / Wheatbelt agricultural region of WA (GSW) was the chosen area for the current research (Department of Regional Development and Lands, 2013). The research questions were:

1. What is the subjective lived experience of wellbeing in older male farmers in the GSW?
2. What are the perspectives and / or subjective experiences of older male farmers in the GSW relating to mental health service provision?

The study is described below.

## **Research design**

### *Epistemology and theoretical framework*

A constructionist approach guided exploration of the research questions. This philosophy holds that there is no objective reality, only subjective experiences of a socially constructed world (Crotty 1998). As the study aimed to explore subjective experience of particular aspects of this reality, it was guided by a phenomenological theoretical framework (Crotty 1998). Applied to the current study, this framework would suggest that older male farmers from the GSW construct and experience a subjective reality in relation to the phenomena of wellbeing as well as mental health service provision (Streubert Speziale and Carpenter 2007). The theoretical framework of phenomenology informs various methodological approaches which seek to discover these realities (Crotty 1998). Given its acknowledgement of the key role played by the researcher in the interpretations of these lived experiences, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered to be the most appropriate for the current research situation (Patton 1990). Specifically, in order to produce a meaningful account of the subjective realities of a group of older farming men, it was important to acknowledge as well as consider the influence of a young, female psychology student from the city as researcher (Langdridge 2007; Patton 1990). This is further addressed in the sections about reflexivity and final discussion.

### *Methodology*

The objectives of the current study were to explore and report on the subjective lived experiences of older male farmers in relation to wellbeing and mental health service provision in the GSW. The methods employed to realise these objectives were underscored by the methodological principles of IPA. The first of these is that IPA is an idiographic approach (Smith 2004). As such, the research processes aimed to explore and understand the

richness of human experience as it for the farmers themselves (Smith 2004). However, IPA also recognises that to convey a lived experience, participants first have to make sense of – or interpret - their own subjective world (Smith 2004). In turn, the researcher makes sense of not only the participants' interpretation, but also the underlying ways in which they ascribe meaning to their subjective experience (Smith 2004). Enabling these processes to occur, the research methods of IPA foster a dynamic and interactive approach (Langdrige 2007), which ultimately produces an overall interpretation of the participants' subjective reality (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008; Farnworth 2009). Finally, IPA is well-suited to situating individual experiences within a broader psychological knowledge base (Langdrige 2007; Smith 2004). The current study was founded on these guiding methodological principles so as to rigorously construct a meaningful interpretation of the rich lived experiences of older male farmers in the GSW (Langdrige 2007). Specifically, it aimed to explore how they ascribed meaning to their subjective experiences in relation to wellbeing and mental health service provision.

### *Materials*

A research notice (see Appendix A) was emailed to a community centre in the region. The community centre had agreed to assist with the practical aspects of the research process, and forward the research notice on to an extensive database of farmers and community members in the wider GSW region. They also posted it on their public-display noticeboard in the local town. Additionally, a briefer version of the notice (see Appendix B) was posted by the researcher in three local newspapers. Participants were emailed a copy of the information letter (see Appendix C), which was provided again at the time of interviewing in hard-copy. Accompanying this was the consent form (see Appendix D), and a form listing various support services available to participants (see Appendix E). Brochures for the ECU Clinic,

Perth, Men's Sheds Australia, and a counselling service in the region were also available for participants to take on the day of interviewing.

The researcher utilised an evolving interview protocol (see Appendix F) to guide semi-structured interviews on the broad topics of farming, wellbeing, and mental health service provision. In line with the IPA methods of open-ended participant-led research, this protocol served only to prompt the researcher and was not prescriptive (Streubert Speziale and Carpenter 2007). Other materials used were an audio device to record the interviews, note-taking materials and a reflexivity journal.

### *Rigour*

Older male farmers constitute a vulnerable population (e.g. Berry *et al.* 2011). Additionally, at any age they have been reported to hold negative attitudes around the concepts of mental illness and health (Alston 2012; Alston and Kent 2008; Murray *et al.* 2008). These factors suggest that it may be difficult to both establish contact with and recruit the participation of older male farmers in the GSW for a study in the field of mental health. Accordingly, the researcher achieved methodological and evaluative rigour by engaging in careful consideration and planning around practical, social, and ethical issues (Antle and Regehr 2003; Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008). Also, given the sparse population density of country areas in WA, confidentiality was a salient issue. It was recognised that what would not ordinarily be considered identifying information may be so in country areas. Thus, in the interests of protecting participants' rights to confidentiality, details such as town and community centre names are with-held. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the School of Psychology and Social Science Ethics Sub-Committee at Edith Cowan University (ECU), Perth.

## Method

### *Participants*

IPA seeks to explore the meaning of lived experience as it is shared by members of small and relatively homogeneous groups (Langdridge 2007). Accordingly, participants were a purposive sample based on their sharing of the lived experience of being an older male farmer in the GSW. In the theories of ageing, what is meant by *older* can have biological, social, or subjective origins (Erber 2005). Whilst it is common to refer to *older adults* as being over the age of 65 years (Belsky 1999; Erber 2005), some ageing studies also take an interest in adults in their 40s and 50s (e.g. Pettigrew *et al.* 2010). The age of 55 years was selected as a minimum age in the current study based on the statistic that as half of the farming population is over the age of 55, they are an ageing population (ABS 2012). However, due to the inconsistencies in defining ageing, it was acknowledged that a different age-group may emerge following the initial stage of recruitment.

The resulting sample of participants consisted of eight men from farms situated across the GSW region. They were between the ages of 58 and 69 years, and self-identified as 'older farmers'. All eight participants were second or third-generation farmers, and had grown up and spent their working lives farming the region. They shared the experience of being dry-land agricultural farmers and of being dependent on their farming enterprise whilst aged over 55 years. Farming enterprises varied from predominantly cropping to predominantly cattle or sheep, or a mixture of these. Each of the participants had owned a farm in the region, however four had completed or were going through the farm's succession. All participants continued to work actively at the time of interviewing. Seven were still relying on farming, and one had retired fully from farming, but worked part-time in other capacities in a local town. For two participants, income was currently derived from managing the farms of other

people; seven were or had been sustained by their own farms. Each participated in an in-depth, semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher.

### *Recruitment*

Initially the researcher consulted informally with family members and friends who had lived in farming or rural communities in other areas of Australia. She also informed herself on the current issues affecting rural communities, by staying abreast of relevant media coverage. Being able to show awareness of issues relevant to farmers was considered to be an important way of developing rapport with participants. From these exercises it emerged that a culturally sensitive and appropriate way of reaching older male farming community would be to develop rapport with a local community centre. The researcher then established contact with a particular community centre, who indicated that they would be a valuable and culturally acceptable resource in accessing and recruiting farmers. They also agreed to provide the venue at which the interviews would take place. Overall, staff at the centre welcomed the study, embracing it as part of their own wider interest in supporting the local community.

The research notice advertising the need for participants was emailed to the community centre, who then forwarded it on (without any editing) to an extensive database of farmers and community members from the wider GSW region. They also posted a copy of the notice outside their building in the town. It was established by the researcher, prior to this, that no farmer would be obliged to respond to these forms of contact from the community centre. This was an important ethical consideration of the farmers' rights not to be coerced or induced to participate in the study (Antle and Regehr 2003). To maximise the possibility of accessing key informants on the phenomena under investigation, triangulated methods of recruitment were utilised (Creswell 2007). The researcher had a brief version of the recruitment notice advertised in three local newspapers, which are not named for

confidentiality reasons. Additionally, people who read either of the two notices were invited to pass it on to anyone they knew of who fit the criteria of being a male farmer of 55 years and older in the region.

After reading a research notice, interested participants established contact with the researcher by telephone. The researcher used this conversation to inform potential participants of the purpose of the study and what their involvement would entail. It was also used to build rapport and as an opportunity for the researcher to establish the suitability of potential participants in terms of the sampling criteria of being over the age of 55 as well as reliant upon farming. A snowballing technique was also employed in order to reach further key informants on the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007). Callers were invited to contact older male farmers they knew in the region, tell them about the study, and invite them in turn to contact the researcher directly should they be interested in participating. Then, if the caller expressed a desire to participate, a suitable email address was provided, to which the researcher sent the first copy of the information letter. Following receipt, reading and reflection on the information letter, potential participants were asked to re-establish contact with the researcher to ask any further questions and to set up a date and a time for an interview at the community centre.

*Informed consent.* Establishing informed consent from this vulnerable population required careful consideration. Key to maintaining the study's methodological and evaluative rigour, was ensuring that the men made a meaningful and autonomous choice to participate (Antle and Regehr 2003). The researcher took triangulated approaches to ensuring that this was the case. Firstly, initial conversations were utilised as a gauge of the men's capacity to supply informed consent (Antle and Regehr 2003). If the men could express themselves coherently, showed evidence of their understanding of an information letter, and could arrange a mutually convenient time for an interview, they were considered to be capable of making a

meaningful and informed decision at that time. Secondly, the information letter itself was written in plain English, and provided enough information regarding risk and benefit such that the choice to participate or withdraw at any time was meaningful (Antle and Regehr 2003). Third, after reading the information letter which was emailed to them, the men were strongly encouraged to reflect for a few days before re-establishing contact of their own accord if they still wished to take part in the study. During this scheduling stage, they were invited to ask questions on any matter that needed clarifying, or any part of the research process. Finally, after having read it in the days or weeks preceding, participants re-read a printed version of the information letter directly prior to the interview in front of the researcher, and asked any further questions before signing a consent form.

#### *Data collection*

In order to address the research questions of the current study, which was grounded in an IPA methodology, semi-structured interviews were the chosen data collection method (Langdridge 2007). This was because semi-structured interviews are well-suited to strengths-based research (Duckworth *et al.* 2005). In particular, they can promote a genuine interaction between researcher and participant and thereby enable an in-depth exploration of the meaning in the participant's lived experience (Langdridge 2007). Thus, this approach was well-suited to achieving the specific objectives of the current study – that is, to explore the lived experiences of older male farmers in the GSW in relation to the phenomena of wellbeing and mental health service provision.

Individual interviews for seven of the eight participants took place at the specified community centre over three consecutive days. The eighth participant enquired later on in the data collection phase, and was interviewed some weeks later at ECU (Joondalup campus), Perth. Before the first interview at the community centre, the researcher allowed time to meet with centre staff and build rapport. This time was also used to go through a risk management

procedure, which was in place to protect the participants, researcher and centre staff from unlikely but possible risk and harm (Antle and Regehr 2003). The researcher also took time before each interview to create a comfortable and relaxed environment in the interviewing room. This step was a vital aspect in establishing and building rapport, and thus, a positive interaction with participants (Langdridge 2007). Biscuits and water were set up on the table, and participants were offered tea or coffee on arrival. Upon meeting participants, the researcher allowed time for an informal conversation and developing rapport. Sitting down at the table, participants re-read the information letter and were invited to ask any questions they may have had. At this time, the researcher highlighted both the voluntary nature of participation in the study, and the strict confidentiality measures that were in place. Informed consent was established subsequent to the men's confirmation that they did not require any further information, and their signing of a consent form, which was then handed to the researcher and kept securely. Attached to the information letter was a list of support services, and these two documents were kept by each participant. Arranged discreetly, but visibly on the desk, brochures detailing other support services (ECU Clinic, Perth; Men's Sheds, Australia; and a counselling service in the region), were free for participants to take.

Following these procedures, the interviews commenced by establishing an open-ended and relaxed conversation, which was essentially a continuation of the pre-interview 'chat'. This style of interviewing was used as it was considered most conducive to participants revealing their personal experiences in a genuine way (Streubert Speziale and Carpenter 2007). The audio device was switched on, and the researcher assumed an open, and interactive seating position in relation to the participant (Langdridge 2007). Throughout the interview, the researcher was conscious of responding to participants with warm and empathic body language (Langdridge 2007). She utilised the Square Open Lean Eye-contact Reflect (SOLER) principles to maintain rapport and foster a positive, open communication

style with participants (Egan, 1990). If at any point during the interview participants became upset, the researcher provided a break from recording, and the opportunity to terminate the interview. At this point, and as appropriate, the researcher drew attention to the brochures and phone-numbers on the support services list. The interviews lasted between 45 and 110 minutes.

A simple interview protocol which evolved over subsequent interviews was utilised. It included the research questions, and the three key areas to be explored: farming, wellbeing, and mental health service provision. Participants were firstly encouraged to talk about their background in farming and their history in the area. This was considered important as it allowed more time for participants to relax and become used to talking about their lives with the researcher. It also enabled the researcher to explore participant characteristics (age, family history, type of farming), which were drawn upon throughout the interview to stimulate further exploration on key topics. The interviews then sensitively explored the subjective meaning of wellbeing. If necessary, the researcher prompted participants to elaborate on their responses to encourage depth and reflection. Prompts such as: “...*can you tell me more about that from your perspective?*” were used to elicit further depth in meaningful areas. Reflective paraphrasing such as: “... *so [issue] is important for you*” were also used. Once it became clear that the conversation on wellbeing had been exhausted, the researcher sensitively probed for experiences and perspectives around mental health service provision. During some interviews, these topics emerged naturally in a different order, as a result of the interviews being participant-led, and of the researcher's reception to digressions (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008; Langdridge 2007). After the eighth interview, it became evident that data saturation had occurred, as new information was no longer contributing new meaning to the data (Liamputtong 2009).

Following completion of the interviews, the audio device was switched off and participants were thanked for their participation. Some of the men commented further on particular topics that had been raised during the interviews. Although the audio device had been switched off, the men stated that these latter comments should be included in their views. Accordingly, the researcher noted these, along with reflective notes and spontaneous insights, which had emerged during the interviewing process (Creswell 2007; Langdrige 2007). Before departing, participants were also asked if they would be interested in being contacted at a later date to check the researcher's emerging analysis. All participants expressed a willingness to be involved in this way, hence the path to member checking was laid.

*Reflexivity.* During the data collection phase, the researcher gave further consideration to reflexivity, as suggested by Langdrige (2007). Specifically, she considered how the research processes and ultimately, the findings might impact upon participants' lives. Three factors stood out as being positive at this time. The first was that the subjective experiences of participants strongly supported the rationale for the study, as presented in the existing literature. That is, they felt 'left out' of much of what occurred in mainstream Australia – and they were enthusiastic about contributing to knowledge in the field of wellbeing and mental health (e.g. Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). The second factor referred to the researcher's explicit acknowledgement that her social position – as a city-based university student - may have represented a power imbalance or a lack of credibility from the perspectives of older farming men (Antle and Regehr 2003). This could have resulted in an unwillingness to reveal meaningful information about lived experiences relating to the sensitive topic of wellbeing. However, participants shared their stories, and explored their meaning with the researcher in great depth during the interviews. The rich and copious data which resulted suggested that the men had been engaged successfully by the researcher, and

moreover, that the data were meaningful (Langdridge 2007). A final note of reflexivity was made by the researcher following the completion of the first seven interviews. She felt a profound sense of empathy, warmth and responsibility toward the participants. The meaningful and personal stories they shared were seen by the researcher as worthy of being represented accurately, and deserved to be heard by the rest of Australia. These considerations of beneficence and non-maleficence (Antle and Regehr 2003) toward the participants were central to the development of subsequent analyses in the next phase.

#### *Data analysis*

Langdridge's (2007) approach to thematic analysis in IPA was utilised to guide data analysis in the current study. Given the study's objective to explore participants' interpretative descriptions of the meaning in their experiences around wellbeing as well as mental health service provision, and that the researcher would play a key role in the development of these (Creswell 2007), IPA was considered an appropriate method of analysis.

Following completion of the data collection phase, interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. During this phase, the researcher was immersed in the interviews and the related sense of responsibility and empathy toward the participants this evoked. Further insights and interpretations on participants' discourses were noted and reflected upon (Creswell 2007). Following this, transcripts were read and re-read as a means of increasing familiarity with the text. The thematic analysis of IPA was an iterative and cyclical approach (Langdridge 2007). Initial ideas and interpretations developed with the first case, and were then influenced by subsequent cases, and refined accordingly (Langdridge 2007). The researcher remained flexible and continually returned to the transcripts, her notes, and her reflexivity journal to stay close to the participants' experiences, as lived by them, in their context (Langdridge 2007).

Following transcription and the initial development of ideas with the reading and re-reading of the text, each case was analysed in turn (Langdridge 2007). Beginning with the first interview transcript, the researcher made mainly descriptive notes in the left-hand margin to summarise each section (Langdridge 2007). Upon re-reading the transcript with reference to these notes, initial interpretations and insights linking the data to the psychological literature were made in the right-hand margin (Langdridge 2007). Poignant quotes were highlighted as potentially illustrative of these emerging interpretations (Langdridge 2007). Subsequent to this stage, the emerged themes were listed on a separate page, and tentative links were made between these (Langdridge 2007). These were then examined against the transcript to ensure the emerging themes did not depart from the true essence of the data (Langdridge 2007). At this stage, both confirming and disconfirming data were explored in order to consolidate the development of themes and their inter-relationships (Langdridge 2007). Finally, themes were arranged in a meaningful and hierarchical order, with illustrative quotes originating from the data grouped under each theme (Langdridge 2007). This process led to the development of a master table of themes, which was then used to guide analysis in subsequent cases (Langdridge 2007). After all eight interviews were analysed in this way, a single table of common themes and sub-themes was produced and linked to specific quotes, so as to convey the richness of the lived experiences of participants (Langdridge 2007).

Following the extraction of themes and sub-themes from the data, the researcher took a triangulated approach to validating her interpretations (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008). The first was to examine whether the analysis was congruent with notes made throughout the research process (Langdridge 2007). Then, the researcher and her supervisor consulted and reflected upon the themes, sub-themes and examples together. This was an opportunity to minimise subjectivity and bias on the part of the researcher (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich

2008). It also enabled a greater degree of nuanced interpretation to develop in relation to the relevant psychological literature (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008). Finally, themes, sub-themes and a summary written in plain English were provided to participants for member checking (Langdridge 2007). This method of validation meant that participants were able to examine a summary of the findings, and point out any aspects of it which did not accurately represent them (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008). As Langdridge (2007) noted, this process can be problematic, as it may be difficult for participants to 'step back' from their own lived experiences and critique them from an academic perspective. However, this population was a vulnerable one, and the researcher had explicitly acknowledged that she had a responsibility to ensure the findings accurately represented the farmers' true lived experience. As such, participant validation was considered to be critical to upholding reflexivity and evaluative rigour in the current study (Kitto, Chesters and Grbich 2008; Langdridge 2007). Participants expressed satisfaction that the summary represented their views and experiences, thus no amendments were required.

Throughout data collection and analysis, all electronic, printed, and hand-written data were kept securely by the researcher and were not accessible to other individuals. Identifying material such as names and places were deleted or replaced by pseudonyms on the printed transcripts to preserve the participants' rights to confidentiality and privacy. Upon completion of the study, electronic recordings of the interviews and the researcher's notes were permanently destroyed. Interview transcripts were transferred to secure storage at ECU, where they are to be kept for a seven year data preservation period.

*Reflexivity.* During data analysis, the researcher recognised that the issues of confidentiality and privacy were salient ones in the current research context. As such, great care was taken when deciding which quotes could be used in the data analysis.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

Four over-arching themes were identified: connectedness; the way a farmer thinks; wellbeing after farming; mental illness, services and the industry. These themes encompassed the ways in which older male farmers of the GSW region of WA ascribed meaning to their subjective lived experiences of wellbeing, and of mental health service provision. As shown in Table 1, several sub-themes emerged to highlight the nuanced meaning in lived experience within each theme. These themes and sub-themes have been distinguished for the interpretative purposes of conducting meaningful research. However, it is important to note that in reality, these diverse and meaningful experiences were tightly intertwined, and thus exist as a whole rather than separately. Furthermore, a single, common thread of experience appeared to define life for these men: Farming is a life. With reference to existing literature, an interpretation of themes and sub-themes, along with illustrative quotes from the interviews, is provided next.

Table 1

*The meaning of wellbeing and mental health service provision in the lived experience of older male farmers of the GSW: Themes and sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
Connectedness	Sense of Belonging
	Meaningful Relationships
	Social Support
The Way a Farmer Thinks	Meaning in Success
	Autonomy and Independence
	Challenges and Crises in Farming
	Meaning in Personal Resources
Wellbeing after Farming	Psychological Reflection
	Engagement and Health
	Productive Contribution
Mental Illness, Services and the Industry	Perceptions and Experience
	Current and Future Utility of Services

### *Connectedness*

Connectedness is reported to be a prominent aspect and strength of farming life in Australia (Caldwell and Boyd 2009; Gullifer and Thompson 2006; Hart, Berry and Tonna 2011). The current study extended existing literature by providing depth on the meaning of connectedness specifically for older male farmers. A statement made by one of the men of “wellbeing” conveyed the essence of this theme: “*It's the family and the farm*”. However, as

well as in the sense of the family, the meaning in connectedness was ascribed to the land, the community, and to farming itself. Three sub-themes emerged to represent the different ways in which meaning was ascribed to connectedness and wellbeing: sense of belonging; meaningful relationships; social support.

*Sense of belonging.* Wellbeing meant having a strong sense of belonging. As more than one of the men said, it was being: *“happy with your place in the world”*.

Participants in the current study expressed a strong sense of belonging to the land and the natural surroundings of their area. This was described in terms of love and attachment to objects in the physical environment, which grew stronger after a life-time of living there. As a 61-year-old farmer explained of the local eucalyptus trees: *“...because we've lived there all our life, you just get to love those things”*. Other parts of life on the land to which the men felt connected were: *“the peace and quiet, the lack of people”*, and *“the fresh air and the sunshine”*.

Another way in which sense of belonging manifested for men in the current study, was in the meaning of belonging in a country life-style. This became clear in the way that participants communicated feeling uncomfortable in the city: *“I really didn't know how to handle myself in the city”*. Being part of a rural community was meaningful to the men, and in turn, they felt valued by these communities. One of the 58-year-old farmers described this phenomenon as follows:

*...my community, you know... brought up, sport, social... everything there... We built tennis courts, basket-ball courts, swimming pools... you develop a fair bit of pride in being part of that sorta thing...*

For another participant, belonging in his community played a major role in his retirement decisions: *“why would you want to go and start a complete new lifestyle... when the lifestyle's being part of a community?”*.

Life on the land and a feeling of belonging on the land and in a local community emerged as similarly meaningful to older farming men in NSW (Gullifer and Thompson 2006; Wythes and Lyons 2006). However, for participants in the current study, the sense of belonging and being valued in the local community emerged as setting them apart from their peers in NSW.

Sense of belonging was also in feeling connected to the farming job. Farming was described as being “*in the blood*”, and the kind of job which they belonged in. Related to belonging in farming was belonging within a long family farming tradition. The men frequently compared their own farming experiences to those of their fathers, uncles, and even their grandfathers before them. For one farmer interviewed, belonging in this context manifested as a sense of sorrow and loss when he decided to sell his farm: “*You think, oh, to be selling up after what they've gone through...*”.

According to the literature on 'attachment to place', the land and social environment can become a powerful way in which older adults experience themselves over a life-time of engaging in that space (Cook *et al.* 2007; de Jonge *et al.* 2011; Perkins Taylor 2001; Pierce, Kostova and Dirks 2003).

*Meaningful relationships.* Connectedness also referred to the various levels of meaning ascribed to different relationships in the men's lives. It was common for them to use the word “*we*” in place of “*I*”, when talking about lived experiences on the farm.

As noted in previous research (Wythes and Lyons 2006), it emerged from the current research that relationships with wives were central. As one man said, smiling fondly: “*she's a very nice lady*”. All participants were married after a life lived on the farm together. Not only were wives cherished companions of the men, they were the other half of a meaningful partnership in farming, family, and in life. As a 68-year-old man still running his own farm pointed out, this partnership could be essential in the running of the business: “*My wife does*

*the computing side of things... I never really got into it*". It was also important to participants that their wives supported and accepted their farming decisions. Relating to this, one participant stressed that his own wellbeing was strongly affected by his wife's: *"If she was miserable all the time, you wouldn't feel... quite so happy"*.

The "we" in farming also referred to other family relationships on the farm. Another participant spoke of a life-time of working with his brother: *"We worked together all our lives... got to the stage where one couldn't do something without the other to some extent..."*. For others, farming in collaboration with a son or son-in-law was a meaningful extension of a positive 'father-son' relationship. As one participant proudly declared: *"I've got one son, and we work together... and we never have an argument! There's no boss between the two of us"*.

This collaboration was also a major strength in the men's own wellbeing, which they derived through farming. The physical slowing down with age was reluctantly acknowledged to eventually lead to slowing down in farming work. However, having a son or son-in-law to succeed them in the business also meant having a working partner, which in turn meant the older men could continue farming for much longer. One 58-year-old participant reflected: *"I was very fortunate. [My son] wanted to be a farmer since the day he came out..."*.

In this way, he may have been fulfilling an important developmental need – to achieve self-integrity (McAdams 1996). However, it appeared that the innate meaning in these relationships was valued over and above the need for self-integrity. One 64-year-old farmer reflected that he did not want to pressure his son-in-law into taking over the farm: *"If it wasn't gonna work he was just going to back away from it"*.

Another of the participants did not have any children on the farm with him. For him, maintaining meaningful relationships with his adult children was primarily about taking an active interest in their lives, and to be regularly in contact with them: *"Family's most important to me... we have a fairly close relationship with all of the kids"*.

Friendship was also meaningful in wellbeing for many of the participants. A valued aspect of friendship was that it provided opportunities for positive social interaction. One of the participants drew attention to this, saying: “*Friends you can have a good time with...*”. Another talked about “*long-term friends*”, and the enjoyment in regularly spending time with them. For him, the meaning in these relationships was linked to shared understanding and experience.

*Social support.* Having access to social support was also a meaningful dimension to connectedness and wellbeing. One of the participants spoke of this being a valued dimension of genuine friendships: “*...friends'll help each other out*”. However, social support also emerged as having: “*social contact*” generally. Beneficial social contact could be playing sport, attending special-interest groups, Men's Sheds, or catching up regularly with other farmers. The meaning in social support could be as simple as: “*getting out*” and away from the farm, and was valuable in reducing a sense of isolation and stress from “*work, work, work*”. Social support could also help the men with emotional and practical difficulties they had in their farming. One participant mentioned: “*Companionship in a way... yeah. The world's not quite so bad, if you're struggling*”.

In the context of research on ageing well generally, social support has similarly been found to be related to wellbeing (Gleibs *et al.* 2011; Huxhold, Fiori and Windsor 2013; Moxey *et al.* 2011). Farming families in particular have been found to rely on social support in times of difficulty (Caldwell and Boyd 2009). The findings of the current study support and extend this literature by showing that not only do older farming men actively seek social support, they are proactive in providing support to others. Therefore, the need to make a productive contribution in life may be partially fulfilled in community for these men. Illustrating this was one participant's description of a farmer group who met regularly to discuss farming issues in a relaxed, social context:

*You think - geez I stuffed this one up, I did wrong here - and then we're driving around and you look at someone who said... oh well I did this too - you're not the only one - in a casual way... when we go to someone's place to have a look, part of the rule is we have to see a stuff-up as much as... good stuff. Cos you learn from your mistakes you see...*

### *The way a farmer thinks*

To use the phrase of one 61-year-old participant: “*the way a farmer thinks*” can be telling of how meaning is ascribed to wellbeing. Three sub-themes emerged as key to illustrating the way a farmer thinks, and therefore, the subjective meaning in wellbeing: meaning in success; autonomy and independence; challenges and crises in farming; meaning in personal resources. However, the following quote from one of the older participants on 'wellbeing' reflects how connectedness and the way a farmer thinks are in reality, inseparable:

*...still able to run the farm, and have it profitably run, and that everybody around you is satisfied with what's happening... as in family, yeah, my daughters and son-in-laws... they're not saying, oh, poor old bugger's lost it... and my wife as well!*

*Meaning in success.* Research has previously highlighted that the farm's profitability means not only an income, but a home, lifestyle, and the survival of an entire family (Foskey 2005). According to Erikson's (1963 as cited in Belsky 1999) theory of psychosocial development, the farm may thus represent a powerful manifestation of a middle to older age adult's need to make a productive contribution in the form of a lasting legacy. Supporting this assertion, participants in the current study described the innate sense of meaning in: “*producing something*”. This was articulated by one of the men as a cycle of production reinforcing the meaning in the work: “*You know, in the end you sow the seed and reap the harvest and you've actually got... something to show for your work...*”.

The meaning in success also manifested as the participants' reflections of the daily achievements involved in running the farm. They talked about the “*relief*” of finding that the farm was running as it should be each morning when the day's work commenced. On a larger scale, the men reflected upon a life-time's worth of achievements on the farm. For one participant, this manifested in the meaning of the growth of his business over the years: “*It's exciting... the changes... I never would've thought in my 30s and 40s, that [we] would ever be croppin' [xxx acres], never in my wildest dreams*”.

It also emerged that for the older farmers in the current study, the meaning in success was linked to a positive sense of efficacy. Although he felt that others might see him as an 'old' farmer, one of the men spoke of his achievements in farming as evidence that he was not 'too old': “*I'm still here, I haven't gone broke*”. Another participant reflected on the satisfaction he derived from having overcome endless challenges as part of his everyday life in farming:

*Necessity's the mother of invention, you know... like you can do an awful lot by yourself that looked like almost impossible... by proppin' it up with a stick... leaning over... you can do it!*

As Gullifer and Thompson (2006) suggested, productive farming may be an important aspect of maintaining a positive self-concept of a strong and capable farming man in ageing.

*Autonomy and independence.* Autonomy is considered to be a fundamental aspect of psychological wellbeing (Deci and Ryan 2008; Ryff 1989). Among older adults, maintaining autonomy, independence, and thus, a sense of control has been similarly found to be critical (Boldy *et al.* 2011; Callaghan and Towers 2013; Heckhausen and Schulz 1993; Jacelon 2007). Substantiating these findings, retaining autonomy and independence was important among the older male farmers in the current study.

Farming was viewed as a real challenge, requiring real efforts, and with meaningful outcomes: *“you do something and... there's a consequence.”* This contributed to a sense of autonomy and freedom for the men. Two ways of expressing this were: *“You're not workin' to a clock, um, if you wanna take a day off you take a day off, you can”*, and: *“the main thing... why you love it, is that you are... in control of your own destiny”*. For the seven men who were still farming actively but slowing down with age, the experience was considerably more positive when they maintained that sense of freedom and autonomy. Illustrating this point, one of the men, who had sold his farm but continued working on other farms, communicated a stronger sense of freedom now that he felt less personal responsibility for the outcomes: *“I'm not particularly patient anymore. If you can't take a flock and make it better, I just don't wanna know...”*. For others who were working in a reduced capacity due to the assistance of a son or son-in-law, finding that balance between support and independence was important. One of the men revealed how he had managed this challenge by keeping his half of the business a separate entity from the half owned by his daughter and son-in-law: *“We work together only at harvest time, and the rest of the time we're doin' our own thing... independent”*.

*Challenges and crises in farming.* Related to the innate meaning the men found in farming success were the many challenges they faced to achieve it. The existence of many, varied and significant challenges faced by Australia's farmers is well-documented (Alston 2012; Berry *et al.* 2011; Gunn *et al.* 2012; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). The findings of the current study support and extend these to a sample of older male farmers in WA. However, the depth afforded by the current investigation highlights that it is important to explore differences in the subjective meaning of such challenges.

The men agreed with one another on that a considerable influence on their thinking and wellbeing was: *“Mother Nature”*. As one participant suggested: *“You'll find most farmers*

*round here are fairly happy at the moment... cos we're havin' good season". Even a single weather event can devastate a farm, and the farmer with it: "...takes its toll at times, yeah. When you see what could've been, and one cold night... it can just take the whole lot away from ya".*

In addition to the inherent challenges in relying on the weather to farm successfully, the participants drew attention to large-scale changes in the farming industry, which were making successful farming ever more difficult. As participants in Foskey's (2005) study had noted, these men said that farming had become: "*a very narrow-margin business*", and was no longer just a "*lifestyle*". One participant summed up the differences in the way farmers have to think nowadays compared to when their fathers were farming:

*Dad would go fishing for a couple of weeks, and we'd pick stumps and do a bit of work, and it'd rain, and we'd harvest and it was all good! But nowadays... you can't afford to have failures so you gotta get it right... you just gotta be on the ball.*

A considerable challenge was having to market and sell their produce in a global economy. This entailed constantly watching international share-markets, and immense risk in selling based on a "*good price*" and anticipated produce for the year - before the season had even begun. For some participants this was described as challenging but rewarding. Others highlighted it as a considerable threat to wellbeing. As one 64-year-old farmer said: "*So many people have got into trouble, because they've actually sold wheat that they haven't been able to produce*".

However, in addition to having to make economic decisions based on uncertainty and dealing with adverse weather, advances in the technology of farm machinery and tools meant there was a need to upgrade equipment regularly. For the farmers predominantly involved in cropping, this meant: "*...huge tractors... huge cost*". To justify these costs, the way a farmer thinks is to expand the business - to acquire more land and become more efficient. However,

this means going into more debt, which also means higher interest rates for farmers. One of the men reported seeing interest rates of around 15 per cent, which was in sharp contrast to the average national interest rates of around five per cent. Related to these increasing pressures on the farm, the older farmers lamented the disintegration of rural culture in their communities.

Many participants referred to these issues as a “*rural crisis*”. Even amongst those who were more upbeat, there was a strong sense of not being valued by government, or by the wider Australian community. One participant reflected on this in few but telling words: “*We're on our own a bit. We've gotta fight our own battles*”. Others spoke of it with frustration and despair, and drew attention to recent events which had severely compromised the wellbeing of farmers in the state of WA:

*We're an isolated minority, easily marginalised... we got people interfering with our life. Someone's gotta fight back, and unfortunately, we're not a race of people that fight our own battles... and our political bodies are very quiet in condemning things like that... no-one ever commits suicide over one single action, but it was enough - when they banned that live cattle trade - there were people that took their own lives. It was a straw that broke the camel's back.*

The findings of the current study support and extend previous literature outlining how the deterioration of the Australian farming industry and a lack of real support and protection for farmers may pose a substantial threat to wellbeing (Berry *et al.* 2011; Halpin and Guilfoyle 2005; Hart, Berry and Tonna 2011; Hossain *et al.* 2008; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). Given that successful farming may be a powerful manifestation of the need to make a productive contribution in life (Erikson 1963 as cited in Belsky 1999), threats to successful farming amount to threats to a meaningful sense of self, and thus, to wellbeing.

*Meaning in personal resources.* For the older men in the current study, thinking like a farmer also meant a focus on the meaning in personal resources. Despite the challenges these men had articulated, they ultimately had faith in their abilities to farm well. Furthermore, like the younger farmers in Caldwell and Boyd's (2009) and Staniford, Dollard and Guerin's (2009) studies, they actively drew upon a range of resources in order to do this, and at the same time, cared for their own wellbeing.

An all-important resource for successful farming was health. *“Health's your main thing”*. The farmers' reliance on being fit and healthy in order to farm successfully was highlighted by one of the men as follows: *“I can't reiterate that enough I suppose... if you're not fit, it's not gonna work... and if... you're not doin' it properly, well there's no point being there”*.

These findings regarding the inherent meaning in health extend de la Rue and Coulson's (2003) findings on health and wellbeing to a sample of older Western Australian farming men. In so doing, they contradicted the view of male farmers as being reluctant to consider their own health (e.g. Alston and Kent 2008; Lindner 2004).

Other meaningful personal resources were seen as innate qualities, such as not getting stressed easily and staying calm and patient. For example, one participant attributed his positive experiences in farming to being relaxed generally: *“I'm not one to worry, or stress out...”*. Another spoke of his strong sense of self-confidence: *“Oh, I basically know what I like, and what returns I'm happy with”*.

A common theme in the way a farmer thinks was that loving the job, in itself, was an important personal resource. This aspect of wellbeing may be viewed as related to the sense of belonging to a farming identity discussed earlier. Two quotes: *“I've got an interest in the farm”*, and *“I'm happy doing what I'm doing”*, illustrated this point.

As well as personal strengths and health, participants made the point (using humour) that success on the farm came from: *“a lot of hard work”*. Staying on top of debt and keeping the farm profitable were in this way sources of motivation, and gave a sense of purpose to the work: *“The fact that we got, huge land... and... we gotta pay it off... so, that's what drives you to keep going in some ways”*. However, other practical strategies were deemed to be important too. One participant talked about the need to utilise advisors, such as agronomists and financial counsellors: *“You pay these people to advise us, and get it right. You gotta get it right. You spend the same money growing a bad crop as you do growing a good one”*. The importance of receiving and implementing professional advice in farming was similarly reported by older farmers across rural NSW (Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011).

However, as well as seeking professional advice, the men acknowledged the importance of seeking social support. As the phenomena of social support was discussed under the 'connectedness' theme, it is necessary to say here only that the older men took an active approach to seeking social support in their everyday lives in farming.

Furthermore, as did farmers of mixed ages in Staniford, Dollard and Guerin's (2009) study, the older farming men in the current study presented as advocates for the use of adaptive psychological strategies in their everyday farming. One such strategy was to embrace the challenges of the future, and accept set-backs in the past: *“You just gotta start lookin' for the next year... the next challenge...”*. Another strategy deemed important was the positive framing of debt: *“Bought land is just opportunities arisen... learning to live with debt's another thing... it's only a number nowadays”*.

An interesting finding was that for some participants it was counter-productive to focus too much on the challenges and crises in farming. Although he experienced sympathy for farmers more severely affected than he, one man felt that the negative message being

portrayed was not representative of his own experience, and furthermore, could undermine his own wellbeing:

*Every day... you hear people get on [the radio] and they say they're speaking for farmers... how the grain industry's in trouble and this one's in trouble and that one... I'm so sorry to hear it, but you gotta turn it off, you know? Too many negative thoughts in there about how bad things are when they're not... don't speak for me!*

To date, few studies had focussed on the strengths and personal resources of older farming men specifically. However, the current findings highlight that these may be worthy of investigating further, in terms of how they relate to efficacy, mastery and sense of self in farming, and therefore, to wellbeing.

#### *Wellbeing after farming*

The inter-connected nature of farming life – and the farmer within it – meant that wellbeing after farming was a difficult concept for older farming men in the GSW. This is congruent with a general finding in older adulthood, maintaining self-integrity has a considerable influence on wellbeing (Dezutter *et al.* 2013; Giblin 2011; McAdams 1996; O'Rourke, Cappeliez and Claxton 2011). It also fits with findings regarding older male farmers in the state of NSW (Gullifer and Thompson 2006; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011; Wythes and Lyons 2006). However, the findings of the current study extend this literature by providing depth on the subjective meaning of wellbeing in terms of self-integrity after farming. Furthermore, they provide a Western Australian focus on these phenomena. A deeply insightful reflection from one of the participants articulated the ways in which meaning was ascribed to the challenge of wellbeing and integrity after farming:

*When you've run it for thirty years or something... you're the one making it happen, and then suddenly you... it's a hard thing I think for anyone, even if they are open minded about it...*

Three sub-themes illustrate key considerations of the men regarding this theme:

psychological reflection; engagement and health; productive contribution.

*Psychological reflection.* It emerged that wellbeing after farming may be derived from psychological reflection on a life lived in farming. This echoes McAdam's (1996) finding that a major positive task for older adults is to reconstruct their sense of self in a coherent life story. With regards older farming men in the GSW, this entailed positive reminiscence on a life lived on the family farm, as well as on their accrued farming knowledge and wisdom: *"Somebody could run in a mob of sheep, into the yards... it might be fifty, it might be a thousand... but every one of them's an individual to me"*. In general, the men reminisced on having had satisfying and fulfilling careers: *"It has been kind to us"*, was one way of expressing this.

However, reminiscing could also be about framing life after farming as a welcome, positive change. *"Slowing down"* in farming was expressed by a 64 year-old participant as a chance to be able to spend more time with his wife: *"just more time together. You know like, [my wife's] in town and I go out to the farm... there's a gap, you know?"*. For the only participant fully retired from farming, the strategy of acceptance in a spiritual sense was critical in maintaining wellbeing after retirement: *"I'm a Christian, and I've never felt so secure"*.

*Engagement and health.* Physical health and slowing down with age were salient features of lived experience for the participants. As participants in Gullifer and Thompson's (2006) study had revealed, health was what enabled continued farming, and thus, afforded the men continued wellbeing as they aged. However, in the current study it was also recognised that

the reverse was true – continued physical and mental engagement through farming fostered all-round health. A 61-year-old participant who was thinking about his impending retirement and ceasing farming altogether explained this predicament: *“At the moment I'm forced to be physically active, so... it worries me a little bit... I'll have to motivate myself to still do something to get fit”*. For one of the men, the meaning in continued engagement in farming work was that it maintained both his physical and mental health. With particular reference to his fear of cognitive decline in older age, he said: *“that's one of the reasons I still enjoy farming, cos it's keepin' my mind busy”*.

Another important aspect of farming work which had been noted among older farming men previously (Wythes and Lyons 2006), was that it was simply important to be: *“doing something... being physically and mentally engaged”*. However, upon further reflection, being physically and mentally engaged was seen as needing to have a real purpose. In this regard, farming work was valued above other forms of engagement. One man articulated its value as follows:

*I love doing productive work... being able to stand back... and say - wow, I've really achieved something. I hate doing useless work. Hobbies hold no appeal for me at all.*

One participant summed up the overall sentiment regarding ageing and engagement, health and farming: *“I don't wanna go to a home or anything like that when I do get too dottery... I'd prefer to die with my boots on... out on the farm”*.

*Productive contribution.* As the meaning in farming work related to connectedness, mastery, efficacy, autonomy, and doing something with a real challenge, it emerged as an all-consuming mission in life to produce and to provide. Thus, whilst it is seen as an important developmental task for middle-aged adults generally to make a productive contribution to something that will out-live oneself (Erikson 1963 as cited in Belsky 1999), the productive contribution enabled by farming may extend far beyond a mid-life developmental transition.

In the current study, the meaning in making a productive contribution specifically involved farming.

For participants, the main way this was achieved was by continuing to farm actively. For five of the eight participants, being succeeded by a son or son-in-law in the business fostered this. As a 64-year-old man noted: *“I can... go out the back corner outta the way and... fix a fence or burn up a log or somethin'... I can always be associated without bein' underfoot”*.

However, it also emerged that many of the older farmers were continuing to make a productive contribution to farming which was separate from their actual farming work. After many years of accrued knowledge and wisdom in farming, they were able to mentor younger farmers. As one of the men reflected, this was a positive experience:

*Just on the production that we used to get... the number of people who've come to me for advice, and asked me to mentor them.. it's sort of quite complimentary...*

For another participant, the meaning in making a productive contribution to the next generation included fostering his son-in-law's autonomy on the farm:

*It's getting to that stage, and it's nice I think, that [son-in-law's] got the freedom to be able to operate without... an older age-group person overseein' everything...*

This last point highlighted another important domain in which older farming men found meaning in productive contribution – in their relationships. The wellbeing of their adult children, as well as their grandchildren, was of paramount importance to the men: *“It's that demand that they be healthy and good”*, as one participant reflected. The wellbeing of grandchildren – a source of joy and pride for the men – also emerged as important. However, having grandchildren also appeared to highlight to participants that they were nearing the end of their own lives. For one participant this meant having to leave his grandchildren to grow

up in a deteriorating and increasingly challenging world: *“Four grandchildren, and you start to think... where are they goin' in this world, what's this world got to offer for them?”*.

The importance of having made a productive contribution to one's children was also evident in the distress experienced by participants when it was perceived not to have occurred. More than one of the men expressed despair at being unable to protect or prevent an adult child from living difficulties – such as mental illness or poor financial decisions. This was articulated by one man, who reflected: *“...I've never been good on uncertainties. I like pigeon-holing and I like to see something done and then you move onto the next problem”*. The phenomenon of parenting an adult child perceived to be struggling in life has been found to be a significant source of distress generally in older adulthood (Pillemar and Sutor 1991). Related to this, was the pressure of writing a will and arranging for the succession of the farm. Another participant stated that his concerns over how to be fair to each of his children when only one of them could inherit the family business often kept him awake at night.

Given the importance of continued productive contribution in farming, contributing to the wider farming community emerged as a strength for some of the men. There was a strong sense that as older guys, they were: *“holding [the community] together”*, and there was an identified need to: *“...get the younger ones involved”*. However, primarily the men communicated their role as simply responding to a need: *“...needed doin', so I did it”*. A part of meaningfully contributing to the community for some participants was to provide the social support for other farmers, that they too had relied upon. One man found meaning in his and his wife's willingness to be available to others in times of need: *“We had a bit of an open door... if anybody was in strife, they're quite welcome to contact us any hour of the day or night”*.

The crop group participated in by a 58 year-old farmer emerged as an exceptional example of how older farming men may continue to make a productive contribution to farming, even after ceasing to work on the farm. This group fulfilled the needs of the community, as well as younger and older farmers alike. Firstly, like-minded individuals (farmers), could share information about their farming, as well as receive and give emotional support to those in difficulty. Secondly, with an influx of younger farmers, the older men were able to pass on their wisdom: *“A few of us oldies enjoyed the fact that some of the younger ones were asking questions and wanted to know...”*. Then, organisations and advisory groups from the local and wider community benefited from being able to participate in the group sessions, and promote their products directly to potential buyers.

One final note on this sub-theme, is that attending the current interview on wellbeing appeared to be, in itself, a way to make a productive contribution to the farming community. These men were speaking up about their lives and sharing their stories, for the benefit of other farmers, their communities, and their children alike. In this way, the findings of the current study furthered those of Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011), where older farmers had likewise provided carefully considered reflections on the topics of mental health and wellbeing. As one participant put it: *“I think that the survey, this study, is a good one to have. Because I think it possibly contributes to our wellbeing, in a way”*.

#### *Mental illness, services and the industry*

This theme emerged as a related yet distinct aspect in the meaning of lived experience of wellbeing. For some participants, it emerged in its own right, and for others, it was intertwined with wellbeing. Of note, participants did not primarily have an 'illness connotation' when discussing wellbeing. However, when asked about 'mental health services' they thought primarily of mental illness. This finding extends that of Pettigrew *et al.* (2012), who noted in a sample of urban Western Australian adults that discussing 'mental health'

elicited illness connotations. Two sub-themes were identified as key to articulating the meaning in this final theme: perceptions and experience; current and future utility of services. *Perceptions and experience*. Participants had varying degrees of experience around the topic of mental health concerns. However, experience did not appear to lead to predictable perspectives on the broader topic, suggesting that the meaning in this theme is highly subjective.

Generally, the men were aware of depression, stress, mental breakdown, and suicide. Perceptions of services varied. One man spoke of “*city psychs*”, and another of the differences between the quality of the private and the public systems. Others vaguely referred to mental health nurses, or said that they did not know what kinds of services were available, and, if there were any, what they would do. Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011) similarly noted this, with older farmers generally being unaware if there were any services available to them. These findings together provide a real-life perspective on the very real problem of limited access to essential services in rural areas of Australia (e.g. Berry *et al.* 2011; Cheung *et al.* 2012; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011; Taylor *et al.* 2010).

Like a broader community sample of farmers in Staniford, Dollard and Guerin's (2009) study of 'help-seeking', many of the participants described the experience of feeling “*down*”, or doing: “*a bit of deep thinking*”, as opposed to depression. This was something which: “*after a few days... tends to sort of dissipate and things improve*”. A common sentiment was that depression and stress were something experienced by others. One of the men talked about how with the increasing pressures of farming, there was a growing necessity for modern farmers to: “*unburden themselves*”, by going to Men's Sheds for example. He further highlighted how farming men themselves were active in their own mental health and wellbeing, as they had come together to form groups such as Men's Sheds.

For some of the men it was difficult to articulate what mental illnesses were. One participant said of depression: *“I could never fully understand it... with a bit of medication, you solve it... that sort of blew me away a bit...”*. Another thought primarily of dementia, and although he seemed uncomfortable talking about mental illness generally, he highlighted the fear he had of this particular illness: *“Dementia. Well, that's... shocking. That would be the mental side of it that'd worry me the most”*.

Other perceptions around mental illness, services and the industry replicated those noted by Polain, Berry and Hoskin (2011) in older male farmers in NSW: Awareness and education were valuable to both individual farmers and the community. One participant spoke of the importance in having knowledge for empowerment. He felt that being equipped with knowledge was vital for those close to someone affected, but that it could also be painful:

*I think the circumstances of having it - the knowledge - forced on you is regrettable, cos it means that people close to you have suffered it... Clearly, if you've got someone close to ya , you need all the knowledge you can get... plus.*

Regarding access to information about mental illness and services generally, participants felt that awareness was very good in the community, with organisations such as One Life and Beyond Blue prolific in campaigning. It was felt that this approach may eventually reduce stigma. However, some participants were frustrated with the degree to which: *“they push it all the time”*. There was also an element of distrust in the awareness campaigns and the mental health industry. For example, participants cited personal experiences which suggested that mental health campaigns were: *“over-simplifying it”*. Additionally, they felt the industry stereotyped them as being *“macho”* or *“Aussie tough blokes that think the same way”*. These men came voluntarily to an interview on the topic of wellbeing and mental health, and they provided rich accounts of the meaning in these issues for them. Thus, it appears that

generalisations about masculinity and a stoic farming culture (e.g. Alston 2012; Lindner 2004) may not be entirely accurate. Furthermore, they may be counter-productive in that mainstream messages about mental health may not be seen as credible by their target audience.

Related to these feelings of distrust was the common sentiment that the real problems for farmers are in their having to survive an unsupported and unprotected farming industry. The men were frustrated and upset by the inattention given to the farming industry, and too much attention given to mental health campaigns:

*...they're not getting to the crux of the problem. And the problem is that people are... having bad seasons, poor financial advice previously... [mental health] is just creating... another level of bureaucracy.*

*Current and future utility of services.* The meaning in mental health services now, and into the future, was articulated in a number of different ways.

Some of the men had been to a local GP, or knew of people who had, but it was felt that: *“local GPs aren't good enough. They don't understand that there's... different things you have to look for [in farmers]”*. In addition to this was the perception that clinicians assisting farmers needed to be aware of the many and varied issues affecting farmers and their health. It was important they: *“listen with knowledge... not education”*, and *“ask the right questions”*.

Even if services were available, there was a general consensus among the men that they would find it difficult to admit to anyone – let alone a professional – that they needed mental health support: *“I would most probably think it was... that I was admitting some sort of failure”*. However, the majority did not feel that they had needed to at any point in their lives, and so were not entirely sure how they would react in the situation: *“I don't think I've ever been in a position where I've felt as though I needed to”*. A common perspective was to question the utility of having mental health service in the town in the future. This was

because it would be near impossible to attend an appointment without someone in such a small community finding out. Essentially, admitting you were having difficulties serious enough to warrant professional help, would be to admit this to everybody you knew.

The older farming men who participated in the current study demonstrated having carefully thought about how best to support older farming men and farmers in general. A common theme was to encourage men to talk to someone they could trust: “*Everybody out there is... on their own, until they find somewhere to go to... just talk to...*”. This person could be a wife, a long-time friend, or even an acquaintance in the community. This is congruent with prior evidence that perceived social support protected depressed farming men from suicidal ideation (McLaren and Challis 2009), and that farmers in general may cope by deliberately using social support (Caldwell and Boyd 2009; Staniford, Dollard and Guerin 2009). However, the current study adds depth to earlier findings by showing that older farming men in particular may value sharing their difficulties with a close companion.

Others talked about using the strengths they had discussed earlier on in the interview, such as optimism, acceptance, and utilising advisors in financial and farming issues. For some participants, going on holidays with their wives was a valued method of escaping the pressure at home. Those who had been involved considerably in the local community stressed that this was a profoundly positive part of their lives, and that it may be important in fostering wellbeing among older male farmers.

However, it was further stressed that of paramount importance in addressing the mental health needs of the farming community was to change the conditions in the industry under which they worked, as well as altering the cultural misconceptions of farmers. One participant suggested simply: “*guarantee the price of wheat!*”. He elaborated by saying that rather than relying on mental health services, farming as an industry should be made: “*a*

*climate where people can actually handle it themselves... a heck of a lot better than trying to use band-aid methods”.*

These findings support and extend previous research in the field of farmers and mental health service provision generally (e.g. Blackburn *et al.* 2009; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011; Staniford, Dollard and Guerin 2009). They also lend further insight to a deficits focus in the literature which views male farmers as holding negative attitudes toward mental health service utilisation (Alston 2012; Polain, Berry and Hoskin 2011). Rather, the perspectives of older male farmers in the current study show that although they may not be receptive to current approaches to mental health service provision, there are many valid reasons for these, including that they perceive they are being stereotyped in mainstream awareness campaigns.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the current study was to explore how older male farmers in the GSW region of WA ascribed meaning to their lived experiences of wellbeing. Out of this investigation it emerged that for the men, the meaning of wellbeing was inextricable from a 'farming' sense of self. Participants provided rich and detailed accounts of the meaning in farming life and their place within it. In line with previous literature, they described farming life as a connected life. Farming was inextricable from the meaning in family ties, and providing for the next generation. Wellbeing was living on the land, and belonging there with family and community. However, first and foremost, the men were farmers. They valued being physically and mentally engaged, the freedom in farming, and the reward in producing something real. A life in farming meant that efficacy and productive work had become inherently meaningful. Having the skills, knowledge and wisdom to overcome the many and varied challenges in farming were valued aspects of being an older male farmer.

A unique finding of the current study was related to the men's strong orientation as farmers. It had been noted previously in the literature that retirement may pose a threat to an older male farmer's sense of self. The current findings concurred with those previously in that the older farmers were focussed on continuing to farm for as long as possible until they were 'forced' to slow down with age. However, in previous studies it had been suggested that retirement may be more positive if alternative sources of meaning and engagement were developed. In the current study, whilst many men were slowing down with age and found meaning in being part of the community, their activities were still primarily rooted in farming itself. For example, volunteering in the community was seen as a way of sustaining the social framework underpinning farming life, and some of the men found meaning in being able to mentor younger farmers. Of note, participating in the current study relevant to farmers and wellbeing appeared to be seen by participants as another way to contribute in meaningful way to farming.

A further objective of the current study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of the men on mental health service provision. The depth with which they responded on this topic furthered existing evidence that older male farmers do value and consider their mental health and wellbeing. However, it also emerged that while mental illness was perceived to be a real and serious issue facing rural communities and that it needed to be addressed, both the causes and the solutions relating to these issues may be experienced as incongruent with a sense of self in farming, and farming life in itself.

When the men spoke about mental illness and services, they equated it with not being able to farm profitably, and a loss in efficacy. Specifically, the threat of mental illness was seen largely as coming about due to the increasing unsustainability of the farming industry. Thus, it is suggested that protecting the wellbeing and mental health of farmers would start by addressing the economic uncertainty in farming, and investing in the infrastructure of rural

communities. Relating to this, a major barrier to utilising mental health services was that there were very few services available in the region. Many men were not aware even if there were any services, and were not certain of what they would offer. However, given that efficacy and the autonomy in being productive on the farm were central to sense of self, even if services were available, it is suggested that the admission of 'not coping' in itself would undermine wellbeing. Rather, the men's suggestions regarding how best to address the wellbeing needs of older male farmers and farmers generally echoed their descriptions of what wellbeing meant – to exist, integrated within farming life, being a part of a valued family and community network, and continuing to derive a sense of efficacy and achievement as a productive farmer.

In addition to the identified need for comprehensive improvements in the farming industry, the findings of the current study suggest that addressing wellbeing in older male farmers in the GSW in an empowering way would mean supporting their need for self-integrity. Interventions seeking to foster wellbeing in these communities, and likewise, to treat mental illness should be designed in such a way as to promote a sense of belonging, feeling productive, capable, and engaged in meaningful activities. Taken together, the current findings suggest that providing older farmers the opportunity of a continued role in farming as a 'farm elder' (e.g. Reed *et al.* 2012) may be an intrinsically positive way of fostering self-integrity and wellbeing in ageing. This speaks to a traditional view of the older members of hunter-gatherer or agricultural societies. In these contexts, when older adults were no longer physically useful, their wisdom continued to be valuable in the transmission of knowledge to younger members of society (Novak and Campbell 2006). With the aim of informing the development of relevant and empowering interventions for older farming men, it is therefore a recommendation of the current study that the notion of the farm elder is further explored in subsequent research.

A limitation of the current study lay in its definition of 'older' farmer. It is possible that although the men self-identified as older farmers by participating in the study, there may be variation among older farmers overall. The oldest participant was 69 years of age at the time of interviewing, and as such, it is not known whether the current findings could be generalised to farmers older than this. Future studies could seek to provide clarity on this matter by recruiting within more specific age-groups of farmers. For example, it would be interesting to explore the meaning of wellbeing from the perspectives of older farmers over the age of 70.

Another possible limitation was that the men who participated in the current study may have represented a thriving population of older farmers. This was highlighted in their discourses when the men referred to farmers in neighbouring agricultural areas, who, in contrast to the current participants, were affected by such severe drought and resulting financial hardship that they had recently been forced to abandon their farms. However, this may have also represented a strength in the current study. Thriving older farmers are well-placed to be able to provide insight on the experience of wellbeing.

Another strength of the current study was that it extended what is only a small body of evidence specific to older farming men in Australia to the state of WA. To the researcher's knowledge, it was the first to explore the subjective lived experiences of Western Australian older male farmers in relation to their strengths and wellbeing. There may be important differences in how different sub-populations of older farming men ascribe meaning to wellbeing. It is thus suggested that future research seeks to extend the current findings' transferability to other farming men in the state of WA.

In conclusion, older male farmers of the GSW region of WA emerged as active, engaged, wise and compassionate people. They were motivated to participate in life, and on the topics of wellbeing as it related to themselves and to the younger generation of farmers

now in the job. More attention in research and policy needs to be given to the voices of this under heard and under-represented group.

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Appendix A  
Recruitment Notice

# Blokes on the Farm... Your Story.

For a group of blokes who contribute so much to our country your voices are mostly unheard on what matters to you. What is life like on the farm – past and present? What do you think about mental health? How do things change as you get older?

If you are over 55 years of age, dependent upon (or retired from) farming and you live in the Great Southern-Wheatbelt area it would be greatly appreciated if you came to Wagin for an interview (30 to 90 mins).

Understanding your experiences, values, needs and concerns will allow greater appreciation of how farming men across the country may be supported.

The focus of this research is your personal story and perspectives.

To express your interest or to find out more about the study and your potential participation, please contact:

Jess McKee (honours student)

Edith Cowan University

[jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au)

045\*\*\*\*20

**\* If you are not a farmer aged 55 years and over , do you know someone who is?**

Appendix B  
Brief Recruitment Notice

## WELLBEING STUDY

### Blokes on the Farm...Your Story.

If you are over 55 years of age,  
own or operate a farm (or are retired from doing so),  
and live in the Great Southern-Wheatbelt area,  
it would be greatly appreciated if you came to Wagin for an interview on one  
of the days between 26-29 June.

Understanding your experiences and perspectives  
will allow greater appreciation of how farming men across the country  
may be supported.

To express your interest or to find out more about the study  
and your potential participation, please contact:

Jess McKee (honours student)  
Edith Cowan University  
045\*\*\*\*\*20  
[jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au)

\* If you are not a farmer aged 55 years and over ,  
do you know someone who is?\*

Appendix C  
Information Letter

**Information Letter:**  
**Exploring wellbeing in older male farmers in Western Australia**



JOONDALUP CAMPUS  
270 Joondalup Drive,  
Joondalup  
Western Australia 6027  
Telephone 134 328  
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257  
CRICOS 00279B  
ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear Farmers,

Thank you for your interest in my research into wellbeing in older farming men. This letter is designed to give you information on the study, your participation and how I will be collecting data. I am interested in your experiences, feelings and thoughts about life on the farm.

The study forms part of the requirements toward my honours year in psychology at Edith Cowan University. It aims to improve our understanding of wellbeing in older male farmers. Knowledge on this issue is important to older adults in general, and may inform better mental health policies for farmers in the future. This study has approval from the *School of Psychology and Social Science Ethics Sub-Committee* at the university.

To participate in the study, you should be over the age of 55, and dependent on (or retired from) farming in the Great Southern-Wheatbelt agricultural region of WA. The interviews will take place at the Wagin Community Resource Centre (CRC) between Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Interviews are expected to last up to 90 minutes. They will be recorded on an audio device, and transcribed verbatim at a later date. No identifying information will be included in the transcripts or the study write-up. All documents will be coded so as to preserve your privacy and confidentiality. If you would like to obtain a copy of the study's results please let me know at a later date.

I am aware that the topic of mental health is a sensitive one. Should you wish not to answer particular questions, or to withdraw your participation, you may do so at anytime without any penalty. You are also welcome to contact the honours co-ordinator, who is an independent contact, not involved in the study (details below) to discuss any difficulties or questions you may have regarding the process. If you feel any distress

following the interview and would like to talk to someone for support, I would recommend either of the following two phone-lines:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 (*24 hours, 7 days*)

Rurallink WA: 1800 552 002 (*4.30pm – 8.30am Mon – Fri; 24 hrs Sat/Sun*)

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor if any aspects of the research process are not clear to you, or even if you would just like to find out a bit more. If you would like to participate in an interview, please contact me to arrange a suitable date and time.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica McKee  
Primary Researcher  
M. 045\* \*\*\* \*20  
E. [jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au)

Dr. Eyal Gringart  
Research Supervisor  
P. 6304 5631  
E. [e.gringart@ecu.edu.au](mailto:e.gringart@ecu.edu.au)

\* If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact the Honours in Psychology Coordinator at Edith Cowan University:

Dr Bronwyn Harman  
P. 6304 5021  
E. [b.harman@ecu.edu.au](mailto:b.harman@ecu.edu.au)  
School of Psychology and Social Science

C/O: Building 30, Room 30.214C  
Edith Cowan University  
270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA, 6027

Appendix D  
Consent Form

# Exploring wellbeing in older male farmers in Western Australia

## Consent Form



JOONDALUP CAMPUS

270 Joondalup Drive,  
Joondalup  
Western Australia 6027  
Telephone 134 328  
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257  
CRICOS 00279B

ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear

Please sign this form and hand it back to me (the researcher and interviewer) if you have read and understood the information letter on the previous page and if you agree to participate in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica McKee  
primary researcher  
M. 045\* \*\*\* \*20  
E. [jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:jlmckee@our.ecu.edu.au)

Dr. Eyal Gringart  
Research Supervisor  
P. 6304 5631  
E. [e.gringart@ecu.edu.au](mailto:e.gringart@ecu.edu.au)

If you have any concerns about the project, please don't hesitate to contact me or my supervisor (details above).

If you would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact the Honours Co-ordinator at Edith Cowan University:

Dr Bronwyn Harman  
P. 6304 5021  
E. [b.harman@ecu.edu.au](mailto:b.harman@ecu.edu.au)  
School of Psychology and Social Science  
Edith Cowan University

I, \_\_\_\_\_ give my informed consent to participate in an interview of up to 90 minutes, and thereby contribute to knowledge in the field of farming, wellbeing and mental health service provision. Any and all questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that the results of the study may be published and that I will not be identifiable. I understand that I can withdraw this consent at any time and at any stage in the research process without disadvantage or penalty.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix E  
List of Support Services

# Support Services

## Counselling / General Support

### **Men's Sheds**

*Community Groups*

Darkan / Dumbleyung / Kattanning /  
Kojonup / Narrogin + *many more*

**Ph.** 0414 950 902

**E.** admin@wamsa.org.au

### **Southern AgCare**

*Counselling Service*  
*(brochure available)*

Margaret Cole: 0427 441 459

Ellie Cameron: 0488 548 588

### **Lyn Davey**

*Private Psychologist*

**Ph.** 0427 195 250 or 0428 192 155

### **Edith Cowan University Clinic, Perth**

*Counselling Service*  
*(brochure available)*

**Ph.** 08 9301 0011

### **Sonya Harcourt-Smith**

*Rural Financial Counsellor*

**Ph.** 0427 986 282

## Immediate Assistance

### **Lifeline**

*24 hours*

**Ph.** 13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### **Crisis Care WA**

*24 hours*

**Ph.** 08 9223 1111

**Freecall (STD).** 1800 199 008

**TTY.** 08 9325 1232

### **Rural Link WA**

*After hours (Mon – Fri)*

*24 hours (weekends)*

**Ph.** 1800 552 002

### **Mental Health**

**Emergency Response Line**

**Ph.** 1300 555 788

**Rural.** 1800 676 822

Appendix F  
Interview Protocol

## Evolving Interview Protocol

**Research Questions:**

1. What is the subjective lived experience of wellbeing in older male farmers in the GSW?
2. What are the perspectives and/or subjective experiences relating to mental health service provision of older male farmers in the GSW?

**Establish rapport; relaxed form of interviewing; background information**

- Can you start by telling me a bit about your background in farming, and your history in the area?

*Prompt for:* still farming or retired / type of farming / farming and family history / age / children / marital status / health / other interests and pursuits

**Elicit wellbeing themes**

Note and reflect on topics that relate to wellbeing:

- How important would you say this was / is to you in your life?
- Where do you see yourself going with the farming side of things in the future?

Follow digressions until topic is saturated; move on to wellbeing:

- If I say the word 'wellbeing', what does that mean to you?
- What is important for you to have wellbeing?

*Probe for:* feelings / thoughts / activities / people / career / the land / past, present, future

Follow digressions; allow the move toward mental health services:

**Elicit mental health service provision themes**

Continue on from wellbeing:

- What would it mean if you weren't feeling wellbeing?
- Can you share some of the ways you try to feel better?

Follow digressions until topic is saturated; move on to mental health services:

- If I say the word 'mental health services', what does that mean to you?

**Interview wrap up**

Thank participants; ask if they would be able to check a draft version of my data analysis; remind them to contact me if any questions come up.



Guidelines for Contributions by Authors:

For Research Report Only

(Ageing and Society)

## **Ageing & Society**

### **Submission**

Ageing and Society is an interdisciplinary and international journal devoted to the understanding of human ageing and the circumstances of older people in their social and cultural contexts. We invite original contributions that fall within this broad remit and which have empirical, theoretical, methodological or policy relevance. All submissions, regardless of category, are subject to blind peer-review. Authors are reminded of the requirement to avoid ageist and other inappropriate language and to avoid the stereotypical representation of individuals or groups.

### **Article categories:**

#### **Research articles**

Research articles must contain between 3,000 and 9,000 words, excluding the abstract and references. Most papers usually have the following sections in sequence: Title page, Abstract (200-300 words), Keywords (three to eight), Main text, Statement of ethical approval as appropriate, Statement of funding, Declaration of contribution of authors, Statement of conflict of interest, Acknowledgements, Notes, References, Correspondence address for corresponding author. However authors have the flexibility to organise the main text of article into the format that best suits the topic under consideration.

#### **Submission requirements**

Submission of the article to Ageing & Society is taken to imply that it has not been published elsewhere nor is it being considered for publication elsewhere. Authors will be required to confirm on submission of their article that the manuscript has been submitted solely to this journal and is not published, in press, or submitted elsewhere. Where the submitted manuscript is based on a working paper (or similar draft document published online), the working paper should be acknowledged and the author should include a statement with the submitted manuscript explaining how it differs from the working paper. Articles which are identical to a working paper or similar draft document published online will not be accepted for publication in Ageing & Society.

Papers with more than one author must designate a corresponding author. The corresponding author should be the person with full responsibility for the work and/or the conduct of the study, had access to the data, and controlled the decision to publish. The corresponding author must confirm that co-authors have read the paper and are aware of its submission. Full contact details for all co-authors should be submitted via Manuscript Central.

All named authors for an article must have made a substantial contribution to: (a) the conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of data; (b) the drafting of the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content and (c) approval of the version to be published. All these conditions must all be met. Participation solely in the acquisition of funding or the collection of data does not, of itself, justify authorship

The corresponding author should prepare (a) a complete text and (b) complete text minus the title page, acknowledgements, and any running headers of author names, to allow blinded review. References to previous papers of the authors must not be blinded, neither in the text nor in the list of references.

Where the paper reports original research, confirmation must be given that ethical guidelines have been met, including adherence to the legal requirements of the study country. For empirical work conducted with human subjects authors must provide evidence that the study was subject to the appropriate level of ethical review (e.g. university, hospital etc.) or provide a statement indicating that it was not required. Authors must state the full name of the body providing the favourable ethical review and reference number as appropriate.

A declaration of sources of funding must be provided if appropriate. Authors must state the full official name of the funding body and grant numbers specified. Authors must specify what role, if any, their financial sponsors played in the design, execution, analysis and interpretation of data, or writing of the study. If they played no role this should be stated. Authors are requested to bear in mind the multi-disciplinary and international nature of the readership when writing their contribution. Care must be taken to draw out the implications of the analysis for readers in other fields, other countries, and other disciplines. Papers that report empirical findings must detail the research methodology.

The stereotypical presentation of individuals or social groupings, including the use of ageist language, must be avoided.

Papers are peer-reviewed. Authors may be asked to submit a revised version of the original paper. In any revised submission, we prefer you to indicate these revisions using track changes where appropriate. An accompanying letter from the corresponding author should outline your changes, and comments on advice that you have chosen not to accept. The corresponding author should confirm that co-authors have agreed to any changes made. Contributors of articles or reviews accepted for publication will be asked to assign copyright, on certain conditions, to Cambridge University Press.

### *Preparation of manuscripts*

All contributions (articles, reviews and all types of review articles) should be typed double-spaced with at least one-inch or two-centimetre margins throughout (including notes and the list of references).

Most research articles usually have the following sections in sequence: Title page, Abstract (200-300 words), Keywords (three to eight), Main text, Statement of ethical approval as appropriate, Statement of funding, Declaration of contribution of authors, Statement of conflict of interest, Acknowledgements, Notes, References, Correspondence address for corresponding author.

The title page should give the title of the article and the author(s)' names, affiliations and postal and email addresses. When composing the title of your article, please give consideration to how the title would be shortened to appear as a running head in final version of the Journal.

The tables and figures should be presented one to a page in sequence at the end of the paper. In particular, please note the following:

Use the British variants of English-language spelling, so 'ageing', not 'aging'.

**First level headers are in bold, sentence case and left justified**

*Second level headers are in italic (not bold), sentence case and left justified*

Do not number paragraphs or sections. Avoid very short (particularly one sentence) paragraphs.

Do not use **bold text** in the text at all. For emphasis, use italic.

In the main text, the numbers one to ten should be written as words, but for higher numbers the numerals (e.g. 11, 23, 364) should be used.

All acronyms must be expanded on first use, even EU, USA, UK or UN, for those which are commonplace in one country are not in others.

Do not use footnotes. Endnotes are permitted for technical and information details (including arrays of test statistics) that distract from the main argument. Endnote superscripts should be placed outside, not inside a punctuation mark (so.3 not4.).

Write per cent (not %) except in illustrative brackets.

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Contributors may follow either the standard conventions: (a) in-text citation of sources (author/date system); or (b) citations in notes.

(a) *In-text citation*. Give author's surname, date of publication and page references (if any) in parentheses in the body of the text, e.g. (Cole 1992: 251). For references with one to three authors, all authors should be named (Black, Green and Brown 2003). For references with four or more authors, the following form is required: (Brown *et al.* 2003). Note that all authors must be named in the list of references, and *et al.* is not permitted in the list. A complete list of references cited, arranged alphabetically by authors' surname, should be typed double-spaced at the end of the article in the form:

Cole, T. 1992. *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Elder, G.H. and Clipp, E.C. 1988. Wartime losses and social bonding: influences across 40 years in men's lives. *Psychiatry*, **51**, 1, 177-98.

Ruth, J.-E. and Oberg, P. 1996. Ways of life: old age in life history perspective. In Birren, J.E., Kenyon, G., Ruth, J.-E., Schroots, J.F.F. and Svensson, T.(eds), *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development..* Springer, New York, 167-86.

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Please use (eds) and (ed.) where required (no capitals, full stop after truncated ed. but not compressed eds).

### **Citation of Internet pages or publications that are available online**

Give authors, date, title, publisher (or name of host website) as for a printed publication. Then follow with ... Available online at ... full Internet address [Accessed date].

### **Tables and figures**

There should never be more than ten tables and figures in aggregate, and only in exceptional circumstances more than eight. Please do not use Boxes or Appendices. Present all illustrative material as tables or figures. Please indicate in the text where approximately the Table and Figures should appear using the device < Insert Table 1 about here > on its own line. For figures generated by Excel, please send the original file (rather than a 'picture' version) so that the figures can be copy-edited.

Tables and figures should be clearly laid out on separate pages, numbered consecutively, and designed to fit a printed page of 228 x 152 mm (actual text area 184 x 114 mm). Titles should be typed above the body of the table, with an initial capital only for the first word and proper names and italicised or underlined (for italics). Vertical lines should not be used and horizontal lines should be used only at the top and bottom of the table and below column headings. Authors are asked to give particular attention to the title and to column and row labels (they are often poorly selected, incomprehensible or inadequate). All multiple word labels should be in sentence case. Short titles that concentrate on the subject of the table are recommended. Technical or methodological details (such as sample size or type of statistic) should be described in the labels or in table notes. Spurious accuracy should be avoided: most statistics justify or require only one decimal place.

Figures should also be provided on separate pages and numbered consecutively. For each figure, the caption should be below and in sentence case. Separate lists of captions are not required.

*Last Updated: 29/10/2012*