

# LISTENING TO WOMEN

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DECISION MAKING

WOMEN'S PLANNING NETWORK VIC (INC)



**collaborations**



**~WPN Research Project 2002~  
Women's Participation in  
Local Decision-making**

**Final Report**

**collaborations: planning with your community pty ltd  
in association with Auspoll  
for the Women's Planning Network Victoria Inc.**

30 May 2002

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## 1. Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research conducted on behalf of the Women's Planning Network Victoria Inc. (WPN) to explore the ways in which women take part in policy and decision-making at the local level. It is anticipated that an understanding of women's current participation patterns in local decision-making can be used to increase the effectiveness and equity of participation in the future.

### Approach

The primary research tool was a telephone survey of just over 400 women across four diverse local government areas. These areas have been categorised for the purposes of the research as:

- a Rural Regional Hub
- an Industrial Regional Centre
- a Metropolitan Growth Corridor
- an Inner Urban Municipality.

### What is the research telling us?

It is positive that the research shows an overwhelming majority of women (88 per cent) who do get involved in local policy and planning processes feel that their input has led to a better decisions. In addition, 72 per cent of participants believe that decision-makers listen to community input all or some of the time.

In analysing the results of the telephone survey, a number of opportunities can be identified to enhance the participation of women in local decision-making processes:

- ❑ improve the targeting and promotion of consultation and research to engage women's interest and participation
- ❑ utilise a wider range of techniques with an emphasis on face-to-face techniques where possible
- ❑ reduce reliance on written feedback as a primary tool
- ❑ be innovative about how and when women are consulted to enable those with competing commitments to take part
- ❑ consider the accessibility of information including language issues and information formats
- ❑ provide clear parameters for involvement so participants can assess what they will be able to achieve by participating, and so participants will be able to make an informed decision about the results different levels of participation are likely to produce (that is, the return on time and effort invested)
- ❑ provide feedback on consultation outcomes.

### Who gets involved?

The responses to the telephone survey indicate some interesting trends with regard to who participates in decision-making at the local level and how they prefer to be involved.

Significantly, the most likely indicators of participation were that higher income and higher education are associated with higher participation rates, that couples with no children are more likely to participate, and that the highest participation rates were by middle-aged and older women. Further points of interest are:

- ❑ overall participation by 30 per cent of those surveyed
- ❑ participation by employed and retired people higher than unemployed and home duties
- ❑ higher for inner urban and remote rural — metro fringe the lowest
- ❑ lowest levels of involvement for 18—25 year olds

- ❑ ethnicity not a significant influence but language spoken at home is (English spoken at home (30 per cent participation) language other than English (11 per cent participation)).

<b><i>Likely profile of a participant</i></b>	<b><i>Likely profile of a non-participant</i></b>
Over 45 years old	Between 18–25 years old
Living in inner Melbourne or regional Victoria	Living in outer metropolitan Melbourne
Retired or employed on a full-time basis	Most likely unemployed or involved in home duties, part-time work or study
Earning above average income	Highest level of education, primary level or trade certificate
Speaking English as their first language	Household income under \$60,000 a year
Completed a tertiary qualification	Living in a two-parent family or as part of a group household
A single parent or part of a couple without children living at home	

### **How do women participate?**

The survey examined women's preference for particular research and consultation techniques. What are the ways women participate in local decision-making?

- ❑ Majority of participants had been involved in the past six months, for the remote regional area this was as high as 61 per cent.
- ❑ Involvement in workshops and committee was highest, followed by surveys and local interest groups.
- ❑ Of those who had participated, 39 per cent had provided written feedback.
- ❑ Lobbying individuals was the least favoured type of participation.
- ❑ Participants were most satisfied by their involvement where face-to-face techniques were involved.
- ❑ The majority of participants thought that decision-makers sometimes listened and responded to community input; 19 per cent though this rarely occurred.

What supports women to participate?

- ❑ More than 70 per cent of respondents wanted to see more structured opportunities for participation and feedback (set times, clear guidelines for involvement, feedback from involvement).
- ❑ Other popular types of support included special assistance and childcare.
- ❑ Use of daytime meeting was not identified as important.

Why don't women get involved?

- ❑ Main reasons for non-involvement:
 

Competing commitments (kids, work, child care)	23 per cent
Lack of time	15 per cent
Lack of interest	14 per cent
Lack of opportunity	11 per cent

Who would like to be involved?

- ❑ Strongest interest in future involvement was expressed by younger age groups.
- ❑ Those on higher incomes were most likely to want to be more involved.
- ❑ There was little variation in interest across the different locations.

## 2. Background and project brief

The WPN was established in 1994 to promote the role of women in all aspects of the town planning and land development process. The WPN aims to raise the awareness of women's perspectives on specific issues related to planning, and it advocates gender balance in decision-making processes, particularly at the local government level.

The WPN is committed to undertaking regular research projects which address planning issues, particularly those affecting women's aspirations and needs. The WPN Research Project for 2002 was initiated to explore the ways in which women take part in policy and decision-making at the local level. Current planning legislation identifies written submissions as the primary mechanism for community input into planning decisions, however a wider range of techniques are used at the local level, particularly in relation to strategic planning processes. The project acknowledges that this participation can take a number of forms from very active involvement in local steering committees and lobby groups to a more passive and ad hoc involvement through responding to telephone surveys or making written submissions. The project has not attempted to examine women's participation in the electoral process at the local level as other work through the Municipal Association of Victoria is addressing this issue.

In March 2002, the WPN commissioned **collaborations: planning with your community pty ltd** (in conjunction with Auspoll Pty Ltd) to design and apply a survey tool to capture patterns of women's participation in local decision-making in Victoria. This report presents the results of this research and an analysis of some of the implications of the findings for enhancing the involvement of women in planning processes at the local level.

### 3. Approach

The brief required the application of a telephone survey to capture the views of women in east/west metropolitan areas, as well as in a mix of regional/urban/suburban municipalities. To this end, it was decided that the sampling should be targeted to four municipalities to enable a comparison of the results from different geographic areas. The municipal areas were selected to represent some of the diversity in local government. This report refers to the areas sampled by generic titles in acknowledgement of the types of municipalities/shires they represent.

The four areas surveyed represent:

- a Rural Regional Hub
- an Industrial Regional Centre
- a Metropolitan Growth Corridor
- an Inner Urban Municipality.

A sample size of 100 was achieved for each municipality, attaining a total of 400 surveys which meets the social science –5 per cent standard error. The surveys were completed in the week prior to Easter, 2002.

The eight-minute survey looked at several key questions around women's participation in community consultation. The questions included a mix of closed- and open-ended inquiry, as well as the capacity for respondents to rate their preference or satisfaction levels on a sliding scale. Primarily, the survey investigated:

- frequency of women's participation in local decision-making
- types of consultation participated in
- satisfaction with different consultation methodologies
- preferences for different consultation methodologies
- ideas around what might improve participation levels
- preference for receiving information
- level of community connectedness beyond consultation participation.

In addition, the survey sought a detailed level of socioeconomic information about the survey sample, asking for age bracket, employment status, income level (personal and household), country of origin, language spoken at home, cultural/ethnic background, education level and household structure. This level of socioeconomic data-gathering was designed to enable a useful degree of later cross-referencing of data.

The survey tool used is attached to this report as an appendix.

## 4. Research context

This section of the report provides an overview of each of the local areas that were the subject of the survey. It identifies key sociodemographic factors and provides an overview of the local policy context for consultation and participation in planning processes.

### 4.1 Case Study A: Rural Regional Hub

- The character of the Rural Regional Hub arises from its diversity and remote location. It covers a wide geographic region and the urban area supports and is surrounded by several satellite townships. The urban area is a major service centre, with well-developed transport, education, medical, commercial and retailing networks.
- Unlike many regional towns, the Rural Regional Hub is growing strongly, and its population (around 50,000) is characterised by a high number of young families. The median age is 34, and the largest population group is aged between 35—49 (20 per cent of the community)
- 87.4 per cent of residents are Australian-born, and 88.8 per cent of residents speak English as their primary language.
- The Rural Regional Hub has a higher proportion of residents leaving school at a younger age than Victoria as a whole. The majority of residents (19.2 per cent) left school at age 14 or younger.
- The median weekly income in the Rural Regional Hub at the time of the 1996 Census was \$487.00, and the unemployment rate was 11.3 per cent.
- The Rural Regional Hub Council has several pieces of consultation policy. The Community Consultation Policy was adopted in June 2001, and the Community Participation Action Strategy in November 2001. Both are scheduled for review later in 2002.
- Several pieces of consultation have been undertaken in the Rural Regional Hub by council during the preceding 12 months. These include a Community Satisfaction Survey and a variety of methods under the Community Participation Action Strategy.
- Council believes that its consultation strategies generally have highlighted the need to ensure a gathering of views of the aged, youth and residents in the Rural Regional Hub community. Also identified has been a need to increase the numbers of male participation in local decision-making processes.

## **4.2 Case Study B: Industrial Regional Centre**

- The Industrial Regional Centre incorporates a population of around 200,000.
- The Industrial Regional Centre faces significant changes in its population profile over the next 20 years. Key changes will be a reduction in the numbers of children and adolescents aged 0—19, and a significant increase in the overall age of the population.
- 79.1 per cent of the population of Industrial Regional Centre were born in Australia, including an Indigenous population of 830 people. Nationalities which have a greater representation in the Industrial Regional Centre compared with the combined rest of Australia include people from China (excluding Taiwan), Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and, in particular, Vietnam.
- The Industrial Regional Centre City Plan 2001—04 is a macro strategy which aims to improve basic services while pursuing economic development for the city. Developing and implementing an effective community communication and consultation framework that connects citizens to their council is a key part of the macro strategy.
- In keeping with this aim, the Industrial Regional Centre Council is currently in the process of developing a Community Consultation Policy, and a draft had just been completed at the time of writing this report in May 2002.

## **4.3 Case Study C: Metro Growth Corridor**

- The Metro Growth Corridor LGA is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Australia. In the next few decades, the Metro Growth Corridor is expected to emerge as one of the country's top-five most-populated municipalities, with an anticipated population of more than 300,000.
- Council reports that, on average, 40 families move into the Metro Growth Corridor each week.
- 60 per cent of households include children, 70 per cent of the population is aged 40 or under, and 12 per cent of the population is aged five or younger.
- The Metro Growth Corridor has no formal consultation policy at this stage, but supports the Best Value Victoria initiatives which were introduced by the State Government in December 1999 to guide the provision of services by local governments in Victoria.

## **4.4 Case Study D: Inner Urban Municipality**

- The Inner Urban Municipality is located close to Melbourne's CBD, and is one of Melbourne's most populous municipalities (pop. around 140,000).
- This is an ageing population; the median age is 34 years, and the share of the Inner Urban Municipality's population aged 65 or older rose nearly 2 per cent between 1991 and 1996.
- The Inner Urban Municipality has an ethnically and culturally diverse population. More than 36 per cent of residents were born overseas; 45 per cent of residents (aged five years

or more) speak a language other than English at home, compared to 26 per cent of all Melbourne residents.

- Consultation is considered by the Inner Urban Municipality council to be a critical part of democratic governance, and is seen as a key step towards enhanced decision-making.
- Issues flagged as relevant for consultation include: site-specific consultation; area improvement; service planning; policy development; major projects/strategic issues; and strategic plans.
- The Inner Urban Municipality council currently embraces a wide range of consultation techniques. These include: personalised information letters to households, surveys, letterbox drops, council newsletters, special publications, advertisements, media, via community leaders, personal briefings, focus groups, community meetings and public meetings.

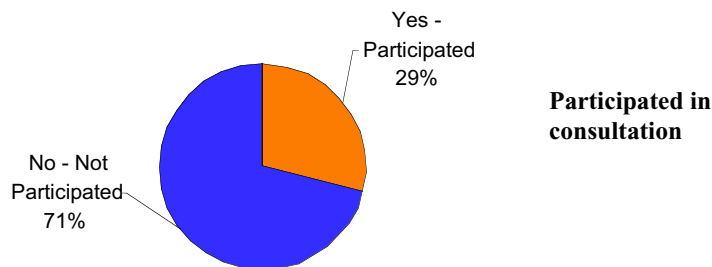
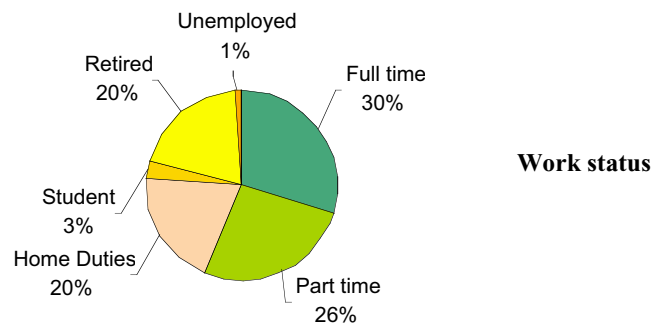
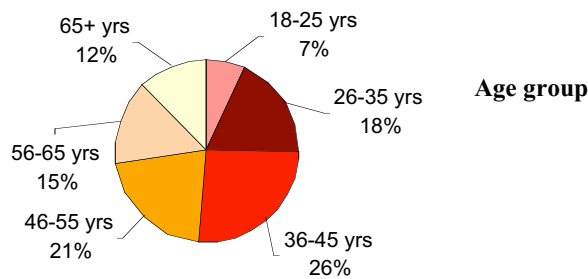
## 5. Data analysis

This section of the report presents the results of the telephone survey of 405 women across four local government areas.

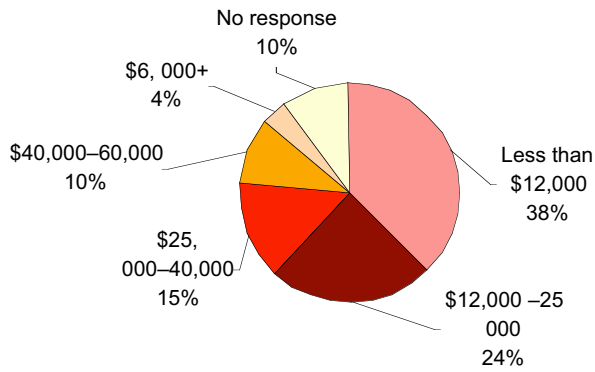
### 5.1 Survey sample

The overall sample comprised 405 respondents across the four municipalities of Rural Regional Hub, Industrial Regional Centre, Metro Growth Corridor and Inner Urban. Interviewing was conducted during the evenings of Monday, 25 March 2002 to Thursday, 28 March 2002.

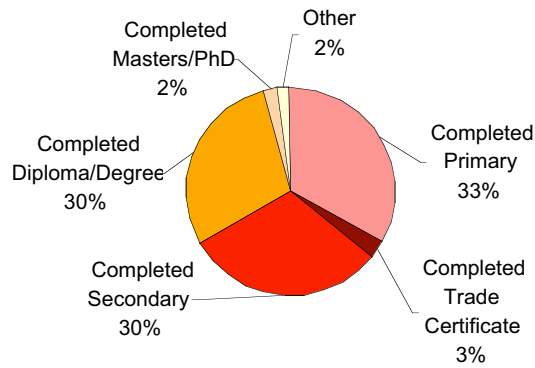
The pie charts below illustrate some aspects of the composition of the survey sample:



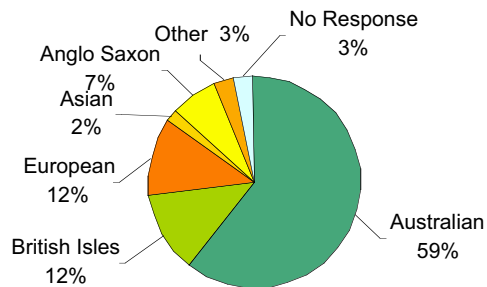
**Personal income**



**Education**



**Cultural/Ethnic Background**



## 5.2 Summary of key findings

Presented here is a summary of the key findings of the research project. Included is an analysis of the sociodemographic factors as well as an examination of the different patterning that can be observed amongst the four different municipalities selected for review.

### Participation in local decision-making

When asked whether they had participated in any form of local decision-making, just under one-third of respondents (29 per cent) indicated they had done so. Participation rates were higher for women aged between 46—55 and the over-65s. Participation rates were lowest for the 18—35 age group (only 18 per cent participated).

Respondents in the higher income levels were more likely to have participated in local decision-making than those with lower income levels. This pattern was seen in both the personal income and household income groupings.

Involvement levels also tended to increase with the level of education achieved. Respondents who had completed primary school recorded an involvement of 23 per cent, and this ranged up to the 60 per cent involvement from those who had completed a Masters/PhD.

Respondents from non-English-speaking households were much less likely to be involved than those from English-speaking households; and accordingly Australian, British Isles or Anglo Saxon respondents were also more likely to be involved.

Inner-urban respondents recorded the highest level of participation in local decision-making, with 39 per cent indicating some involvement. This was followed by Rural Regional Hub (34 per cent), Industrial Regional Centre (23 per cent) and Metro Growth Corridor (21 per cent).

The main reasons given for non-participation in local decision-making were given as *Due to other commitments* (23 per cent), *Lack of time* (15 per cent) and *Lack of interest* (14 per cent). This was not uniform across the sample, with the sector of least participation (18—25s) indicating they were *new to the area* or *don't know/no response*. *Commitments* was the most common reason given for non-participation in the 36—45 and 46—55 age groups, as it was for respondents from two-parent families. The reason most commonly given for non-participation by 65+ aged respondents was due to being *elderly/disabled*.

While the *commitments* reason was the most common across all municipalities, residents in the Metro Growth Corridor also recorded high levels of *don't have time* and *not interested*. While the *don't know/no response* was generally less than 10 per cent, the Regional Rural Hub showed a slightly higher count at 15 per cent.

#### Have you been involved in any form of local decision-making?

Yes	29%
No	71%

#### What are the main reasons you have not participated in local decision-making?

'I don't have a babysitter—which makes it hard to attend meetings'

'I work odd hours'

'I'm not interested because I don't speak good English'

'No-one asked me'

'It is too much for me at 81'

'I've just moved, not involved in the community'

'Don't know that there has been anything to decide besides voting'

Of those respondents involved in local decision-making, just under 70 per cent indicated they had done so within the past year. Overall the majority of respondents in all age groups who had participated in consultation had done so within the past six months.

Across the municipalities, 61 per cent of the Rural Regional Hub respondents indicated they had participated *last month*. This is reflected in the discussion of recent consultation initiatives implemented in this municipality. Respondents from the Industrial Regional Centre were least likely to have been involved within the *past month* and the *last year*.

### Consultation methods participation and satisfaction

The participation methods which recorded the highest level of respondents involvement were: *Involvement in local committees* (19 per cent) and *Attending workshop/meetings* (18 per cent). *Written feedback* recorded the lowest level of involvement overall.

The majority of respondents indicated they were either *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with all consultation methods. The highest rating participation type was involvement in *local committees*, which attracted a *very satisfied* rate of 55 per cent.

Residents in the different municipalities showed different usage patterns for various consultation methods. This may reflect community character and preference, as well as the consultation habits and policies of the different local governments concerned.

Respondents in the Inner Urban Municipality recorded the highest level of participation in *face-to-face surveys or interviews*, as they were for *phone surveys or interview*. Respondents in the Rural Regional Hub also recorded high levels of participation in these methods, and the highest level of participation in *lobbying individuals*.

Across all municipalities, participation in *written feedback* mechanisms was largely influenced by income and education. Women with personal incomes over \$40,000 were considerably more likely to provide written feedback than those on lower incomes, and the higher the education, the higher was the likelihood of women providing written feedback. Respondents whose main language was not English reported no participation in written feedback.

When questioned about how effective they thought participation in local decision-making might be, 72 per cent of respondents thought that decision-makers listened to community input all or some of the time. Of respondents who have been involved in local decision-making, 88 per cent believe that their involvement helps to create better decisions for the community.

#### When was the last time you participated in community consultation?

In the past year 70 per cent had participated

#### Have you participated in any of the following types of consultation?

Highest level of participation overall was in *involvement in Local Committees*

#### Was this undertaken in the last 12 months?

The majority said yes.

#### How would you rate your satisfaction with this consultation?

The majority of respondents were either *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*

#### Do you think that your involvement in local decision-making helps to create better decisions for the community?

Yes	88%
No	9%
Don't know	3%

#### Do you think that decision-makers listen and respond to community input?

Yes all the time	4%
Yes sometimes	68%
Rarely	19%
No not at all	8%
Don't know	1%

There was little variation across localities, with the bulk of the responses falling into the *sometimes* option. The highest *all the time* response came from participants in the Rural Regional Hub (7 per cent), and the lowest was from the Industrial Rural Centre (1 per cent).

When queried about preferences for greater involvement in local decision-making, respondents were divided fairly evenly each way. Respondents in the older age groups were slightly less likely to want to become more involved, with 32 per cent in the 56—65 age group and 28 per cent of the 65+ age group indicating a they would like more involvement.

Participants who had already participated were more likely to indicate an interest in further involvement (58 per cent, compared with 43 per cent from those who had not participated).

Willingness to become more involved tended to increase with the level of personal and household income. However there was little variation across the four municipalities.

When asked to rate the importance of various consultation methods, *involvement with local interest groups* attracted the highest overall importance of the nine options. The next-most important methods nominated were *involvement in local committees*, *providing written feedback*, *face-to-face survey/interview* and *attending workshops/meetings*.

Across all consultation types, respondents from the Rural Regional Hub consistently attributed a higher importance rating that did the other municipalities, except where responses were more uniformly high as they were for *involvement in local committees* and *involvement in local interest groups*. The overall mean importance scores were in the moderate range for the Industrial Regional Centre (3.18) and Metro Growth Corridor (3.18), moderate to high for residents of the Inner Urban municipality (3.31), and high to very high for residents of the Rural Regional Hub (3.74).

### Influences on participation

In trying to distil some of the motivations behind respondents participation rates, the survey asked about a number of factors designed to make participation more possible. When asked to nominate the importance of these factors, respondents ranked the top two aspects as: *Feedback from input* and *Set start and finish times*. The two next-most important factors named were *Set roles/guidelines for participation* and *Providers of special assistance (that is, interpreters)*, with *Ability to influence decision* closely following. *Day meetings* recorded the lowest importance rate overall.

Respondents were then invited to suggest factors which may increase their participation rates in local decision-making processes. Five responses in particular emerged from this open-ended questioning: *Nothing*, *More information*, *If I had more time*, *If it was a relevant topic to me*, and *Community input*.

#### Do you want to become more involved in government decisions that affect you?

Yes	48%
No	50%
Don't know	3%

#### How would you rate the following methods of participation on a scale of 1 to 5?

Top two responses:
Involvement with local interest group (mean 3.69)
Involvement in local committee (mean 3.63)

#### Thinking about participation in local decision-making, how important is each of the following factors for you?

Of respondents, 70 per cent place high importance on having *feedback from input* as well as *set start and finish*

With 50 per cent of responses falling into the *Nothing* category, however, a more qualitative exploration of the possible improvements to consultative approaches would be beneficial in order to achieve a greater degree of insight.

The survey also asked how women preferred to be informed about local issues. More than one response was possible, and the *Local newspaper* was the most popular response for the sample in total. Residents in the Industrial Regional Centre indicated a higher preference for the *Local newspaper*, while residents of the Rural Regional Hub preferred the *Radio* and the *National newspaper*. Residents of the Inner Urban Municipality were more likely to nominate *Mail-outs*.

When respondents were asked where they would usually go to get involved in local decision-making, most nominated *council* or *Community Centre/Library/Town Hall*. Respondents living in an English-speaking household were more likely to indicate *council*, whereas residents from a non-English-speaking background were more likely to seek information via a *Community Centre/Library/Town Hall*.

The survey also took interest in how connected respondents were to their community in general. 38 per cent reported being a member of a local community club or organisation. Respondents who had previously participated in community consultation were more likely to be members of a local club (55 per cent) compared to non-participants (31 per cent)

**Is there anything else that would increase your participation in local decision-making?**

"Nothing would increase my participation"

"Nothing comes to mind"

"A better understanding of how things work"

"More information sent out and notification"

"Another 10 hours in each day"

"If something directly affected me that I feel strongly about"

"If other people are listening and are really willing to participate"

**How would you like to be informed about local issues?**

Local newspaper 61%

**If you wanted to get involved in decisions which affect your local community, where would you go?**

Council offices 61%

"I would ring the council first and then get my directions from them"

**Are you currently a member of any local community clubs or organisations?**

Yes 38%

No 62%

## 6. Opportunities for improved participation

The research indicates some interesting trends regarding who participates in local decision-making and how women prefer to be involved. This project has not set out to provide solutions or establish any particular targets regarding the involvement of women, rather it aims to provide a picture of the way women are currently involved. From this enhanced understanding of the way things are, we can draw some lessons about what is working well and where participatory processes could be improved. This section of the report identified some of these opportunities.

### 6.1 Who participates — opportunities for broadening the input of women in local decision-making.

The results of the research indicate that approximately 30 per cent of women take part in influencing local decisions that effect their lives. What is the significance of this figure? It is difficult to benchmark voluntary involvement at the local level. In countries where voting is not compulsory participation rates vary widely between 30—70 per cent of the adult population. The WPN research targets an area of decision-making that is highly localised and often issue-based, which would lead to a narrower field of interest or potential participants in the first place (for example, closure of a childcare centre, open space policy development, or a planning application on a specific property). The more significant issue raised by the research is perhaps the nature of *who* participates in local decision-making.

The research identifies some key factors which appear to influence who gets involved in local decision-making. Age, education and income have a significant impact on participation, suggesting that participation is uneven across the female population and some key groups of women are not getting as involved as others. The selective nature of this participation is a critical factor if the aim of a consultative process is to seek broad-based input into decision-making.

<i>Likely profile of a participant</i>	<i>Likely profile of a non-participant</i>
Over 45 years old Lives in inner Melbourne or regional Victoria Retired or employed on a full-time basis Earns an above-average income Speaks English as their first language Completed a tertiary qualification A single parent or part of a couple without children living at home	Between 18–25 years old Living in outer metropolitan Melbourne Most likely unemployed or involved in home duties, part-time work or study Highest level of education, primary level or trade certificate Household income under \$60,000 a year Living in a two-parent family or as part of a group household

Without assuming that people with like sociodemographic characteristics share values and views, the nature of these hypothetical profiles indicates that the views of key sections of the population are potentially not being included. This raises the question as to how representative current local government consultation processes actually are. Where participation is voluntary, the nature of the involvement is not likely to be representative of the broad range of interests. This suggests the need to better target participatory process to ensure a broader range of views are captured, or at least to be aware that the same women will be excluded from decision-making unless processes are specifically designed to encourage their involvement.

The differences in participation levels between the four municipalities may be due to a number of factors. These *may* include a greater sense of community in regional communities (the Rural Regional Hub), a lack of opportunities to participate (Industrial Regional Centre) or other commitments and responsibilities which make it harder to participate (Metro Growth Corridor). It is interesting to note that in those municipalities where specific policies or recent projects have taken a proactive approach to community involvement, participation rates were higher (Rural Regional Hub, Inner Urban Municipality)

The research also explores barriers to participation, with competing commitments and lack of time being the most frequently given reasons. Local government is rarely in a position to remove the structural barriers that may see women unable to find the time to become more involved at the local level. However, aligning opportunities for participation with other interests offers an efficient way of seeking the views of those with competing commitments (for example, consultation with a school parents committee, displays and surveys in the local shopping centre).

The survey responses indicate that language barriers will be a natural impediment to participation in any local decision-making if a proactive approach is not taken to address this on a regular basis. A significant number of respondents also indicated that they hadn't been involved because the opportunity had not presented itself or they weren't interested. How do we engage with this group of people to make participatory processes meaningful and accessible to a broader range of women?

## 6.2 How women participate enhancing the quality of the participatory experience

The research offers the positive finding that 88 per cent of those who had been involved in local consultation and research processes felt that their participation helped to improve the quality of local decision-making. This figure provides a good starting point for enhancing the involvement of women in planning and policy making at the local level. Nearly three-quarters of the total survey sample believed that decision-makers listen and respond to community input, which is not the picture often portrayed in the media of jaded and disenfranchised constituencies. This affirmation of the potential of participatory processes creates a context for reflection on some of the ways in which the quality of the participatory experience could be enhanced.

The first of these reflects the low use of written feedback versus face-to-face techniques in consultation. Satisfaction was highest with verbal participation methods such as workshops and involvement in local committees; and written feedback recorded the lowest level of involvement overall. This is significant when viewed alongside the requirements of many planning mechanisms to provide community input via *written* submissions. In addition, respondents whose main language was not English reported no participation in written feedback. For women's participation to be enhanced across all spheres of local decision-making, therefore, a **mix of verbal and written feedback mechanisms** need to be made available as part of a whole menu of consultation options.

Setting **clear parameters for involvement** is another factor which is also clearly indicated as desirable by participants. Aspects of participation such as feedback from input, set start and finish times and set roles/guidelines for participation were all flagged as important aspects of making involvement more appealing. This suggests that local governments could immediately boost participation of women in their consultative processes by making this kind of information and assistance available from the outset. What is clear here is a desire for consultative processes to fit in with existing time constraints, as well as a high degree of

relevance and background information and a genuine community and government commitment to a participatory process.

The reasons given for non-participation ( other commitments , lack of time , lack of interest ) indicate that participation rates by women can be best improved by **fitting in with existing commitments** (that is, supporting needs for consultation after hours, and provision of child-care, etc.), as well as **improving motivation to take part** in local decision-making processes. Improving motivation might be achieved with a mix of two strategies: increasing the sense of community ownership of local issues (via long-term community-building strategies) and increasing the level of information around how consultation outcomes might have a tangible effect on life in a particular area. With 88 per cent of participants reporting they felt their involvement helped create positive change, there is clear opportunity for local governments to build on existing optimism.

There is clear preference for the **distribution of information** to occur via local newspapers, with secondary preferences for the radio/national newspaper in the Rural Regional Hub and for mail-outs in the Inner Urban Municipality. However, in terms of participants seeking their own information on local decision-making options, those from a non-English-speaking household were most likely to go to a Community Centre, the Library or the Town Hall, indicating one of two things: that newspaper notification could better cater for language needs, and that Community Centres/Libraries/Town Halls could be used even more pro-actively to reach people from **culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**.

Another key opportunity for expanding the diversity of those involved in local decision-making processes is in **improving participation rates for younger women** (between 18 to 35 year olds). With only an 18 per cent participation rate, four out of five younger women are reporting no participation in local decision-making a significant sector of the community to be missed by consultation. The most common reasons given by the 18—25 age group for non-participation was that they were new to the area or don't know, while the 26—35 age bracket were more likely to say they don't have time. There is opportunity here to more closely match consultation preference with methodologies; 26—35 year olds, for example, were more likely to have used written feedback than women in other age categories. It may be that with a high degree of internet use among young people that online consultation may increase the participation rates of the 18—25 year olds.

Also clear from the survey is that the majority (70 per cent) of respondents felt that **feedback from input** was an important factor in participation in local decision-making. This is a factor which local governments can affect directly, by improving communication with the community to ensure participants are informed about the extent of their effectiveness. Being *heard* in a consultative process is crucial to participant satisfaction, and if this satisfaction is high there is more likelihood of participation in the future.

## Attachment 1. Survey tool

Good afternoon/evening my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from Auspoll and tonight we are conducting a survey on women's participation in local decision-making. I'd like to speak to a female in the household over the age of 18 years. I have some questions that should take about 8 to 10 minutes. **Repeat Intro if required** **Thank you**

Q1 Have you been involved in any form of local decision-making? 1. Yes (if yes go to 2) 2. No (if no go to Q1.1)

Q1.1 What are the main reasons why you have not participated in local decision-making? PROBE

GO TO Q5

Q2 When was the last time you participated in community consultation?

1. In the last month 2. In the past six months 3. In the past year 4. In the past 2–3 years 5. More than three years ago

Q3 Have you participated in any of the following types of consultation? **Interviewer, read out list below. Where a respondent answers 'yes', ask: Was this undertaken in the last 12 months? and, How would you rate your satisfaction with this consultation?**

	<i>Methods of consultation</i>	<i>Yes only</i>	Was this undertaken in the past 12 months YES/NO		Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1	Face-to-face survey or interview	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
2	Phone survey or interview	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
3	Written feedback	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
4	Attending workshop/meeting	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
5	Involvement in local committee	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
6	Involvement with local interest group	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
7	Lobbying individuals	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
8	Other (Specify)	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4

Q4 Do you think that your involvement in local decision-making helps to create better decisions for the community?  
1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know (don't offer)

Q5 Do you think that decision-makers listen and respond to community input?

1. Yes all the time 2. Yes Sometimes 3. Rarely 4. No Not at all 9. Don't Know (don't offer)

Q6 Do you want to become more involved in government decisions that affect you?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't Know (don't offer)

Q7 How would you rate the importance of the following participation options on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very low and 5 is very high in importance?

		Probe for: High/Very high			OR		Low/Very low	
PARTICIPATION OPTIONS		Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	Don't Know (don't offer)	
1	Government meetings (for example, council meetings)	5	4	3	2	1	9	
2	Drop-in info session	5	4	3	2	1	9	
3	Face-to-face survey, interview or discussion	5	4	3	2	1	9	
4	Telephone survey or interview	5	4	3	2	1	9	
5	Written feedback	5	4	3	2	1	9	
6	Attending workshop/meeting	5	4	3	2	1	9	
7	Involvement in local committee	5	4	3	2	1	9	
8	Involvement with local interest group	5	4	3	2	1	9	
9	Lobbying individuals	5	4	3	2	1	9	
10	Other (Specify)	5	4	3	2	1	9	

Q8 Thinking about participation in local decision-making, how important is each of the following factors for you?

ISSUE	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE					
	Very high importance	High importance	Moderate importance	Low importance	Very low importance	Don't know (don't offer)
8.1 Day meetings	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.2 Child care provided	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.3 Ability to influence decisions	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.4 Set start and finish times	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.5 Small group discussions	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.6 Feedback from input	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.7 Set roles/Guidelines for participation	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.8 Providers of special assistance (that is, interpreters)	5	4	3	2	1	9

Q8.1 Is there anything else that would increase your participation in local decision-making? PROBE

---

Q9 How would you like to be informed about local issues? Interviewer – ask as open question, but circle responses below. More than one response is possible. ONLY write out responses which do not have a category.

---

1	Local newspaper	5	Radio	9	Email
2	National newspaper	6	Pamphlets/Handouts	10	Web sites (Internet)
3	Word of mouth	7	Community noticeboards	11	Public forums with councillors
4	Community group updates	8	Mail-outs	12	Occasional newsletters

Q10 If you wanted to get involved in decisions which affect your local community where would you go?

---

Q11 Are you currently a member of any local community clubs or organisations?

1. Yes please specify \_\_\_\_\_ 2. No

Q12 To help us analyse the results, could I ask you which of the following age groups is appropriate to you?

1	18–25	2	26–30	3	31–35	4	36–40	5	41–45	6	46–50	7	51–55	8	56–60	9	61–65	10	Over 65
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Q13 Are you:

1 Working full time	2 Working part time	3 Home duties	4 A student	5 Retired	6 Unemployed
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Q14 Which of the following categories best describes your personal income?

1	Less than 12,000	2	12 to 25,000	3	25 to 40,000	4	40 to 60,000	5	60,000 +
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Q15 Which of the following categories best describes your household income?

1	Up to \$20 000	2	\$21 000 to \$40 000	3	\$41 000 to \$60 000	4	\$61 000 to \$80 000
5	\$81 000 to \$100 000	6	\$101 000+				

Q16 Where were you born? 1. Australia 2 Overseas [Specify] \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 What is the main language spoken at home? 1 English 2 Other [Specify] \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 How would you describe your cultural or ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_

Q19 What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

1.	completed primary	2.	completed trade certificate	3.	completed secondary
4.	completed diploma/degree	5.	Completed masters/PhD.	6.	Other, specify

Q20 Is your household structure?

1.	Two parent family	2.	Couple, no children	3.	Single parent family
4.	Single person household	5.	Group household	6.	Other, specify

As I said earlier, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from Auspoll. To enable my Supervisor to verify that this survey has been conducted, I need to ask your first name. NAME \_\_\_\_\_ **Thank you for your participation**

## **Attachment 2. Survey data**

**See separate document:** Report to Women s Planning Network Quantitative Research, April 2002  
Auspoll Pty Ltd.

**collaborations**



**~WPN Research Project 2002~  
'Women's Participation in  
Local Decision-making'**

**Final Report**

**collaborations: planning with your community pty ltd  
in association with Auspoll  
for the Women's Planning Network of Victoria**

30 May 2002

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## 1. Executive summary

This report presents the findings of research conducted on behalf of the Women's Planning Network (WPN) to explore the ways in which women take part in policy and decision-making at the local level. It is anticipated that an understanding of women's current participation patterns in local decision-making can be used to increase the effectiveness and equity of participation in the future.

### Approach

The primary research tool was a telephone survey of just over 400 women across four diverse local government areas. These areas have been categorised for the purposes of the research as:

- a Rural Regional Hub
- an Industrial Regional Centre
- a Metropolitan Growth Corridor
- an Inner Urban Municipality.

### What is the research telling us?

It is positive that the research shows an overwhelming majority of women (88 per cent) who do get involved in local policy and planning processes feel that their input has led to a 'better decisions'. In addition, 72 per cent of participants believe that decision-makers listen to community input 'all' or 'some' of the time.

In analysing the results of the telephone survey, a number of opportunities can be identified to enhance the participation of women in local decision-making processes:

- improve the targeting and promotion of consultation and research to engage women's interest and participation
- utilise a wider range of techniques with an emphasis on face-to-face techniques where possible
- reduce reliance on written feedback as a primary tool
- be innovative about how and when women are consulted to enable those with competing commitments to take part
- consider the accessibility of information including language issues and information formats
- provide clear parameters for involvement so participants can assess what they will be able to achieve by participating, and so participants will be able to make an informed decision about the results different levels of participation are likely to produce (that is, the return on time and effort invested)
- provide feedback on consultation outcomes.

### Who gets involved?

The responses to the telephone survey indicate some interesting trends with regard to who participates in decision-making at the local level and how they prefer to be involved.

Significantly, the most likely indicators of participation were that higher income and higher education are associated with higher participation rates, that couples with no children are more likely to participate, and that the highest participation rates were by middle-aged and older women. Further points of interest are:

- overall participation by 30 per cent of those surveyed
- participation by employed and retired people higher than unemployed and home duties
- higher for inner urban and remote rural – metro fringe the lowest
- lowest levels of involvement for 18–25 year olds
- ethnicity not a significant influence but language spoken at home is (English spoken at home (30 per cent participation) language other than English (11 per cent participation)).

<b>Likely profile of a participant</b>	<b>Likely profile of a non-participant</b>
Over 45 years old	Between 18–25 years old
Living in inner Melbourne or regional Victoria	Living in outer metropolitan Melbourne
Retired or employed on a full-time basis	Most likely unemployed or involved in home duties, part-time work or study
Earning above average income	Highest level of education, primary level or trade certificate
Speaking English as their first language	Household income under \$60,000 a year
Completed a tertiary qualification	Living in a two-parent family or as part of a group household
A single parent or part of a couple without children living at home	

**How do women participate?**

The survey examined women's preference for particular research and consultation techniques. What are the ways women participate in local decision-making?

- Majority of participants had been involved in the past six months, for the remote regional area this was as high as 61 per cent.
- Involvement in workshops and committee was highest, followed by surveys and local interest groups.
- Of those who had participated, 39 per cent had provided written feedback.
- Lobbying individuals was the least favoured type of participation.
- Participants were most satisfied by their involvement where face-to-face techniques were involved.
- The majority of participants thought that decision-makers 'sometimes' listened and responded to community input; 19 per cent though this 'rarely' occurred.

What supports women to participate?

- More than 70 per cent of respondents wanted to see more structured opportunities for participation and feedback (set times, clear guidelines for involvement, feedback from involvement).
- Other popular types of support included special assistance and childcare.
- Use of daytime meeting was not identified as important.

Why don't women get involved?

- Main reasons for non-involvement:
 

Competing commitments (kids, work, child care)	23 per cent
Lack of time	15 per cent
Lack of interest	14 per cent
Lack of opportunity	11 per cent

Who would like to be involved?

- Strongest interest in future involvement was expressed by younger age groups.
- Those on higher incomes were most likely to want to be more involved.
- There was little variation in interest across the different locations.

## 2. Background and project brief

The WPN of Victoria was established in 1994 to promote the role of women in all aspects of the town planning and land development process. The WPN aims to raise the awareness of women's perspectives on specific issues related to planning, and it advocates gender balance in decision-making processes, particularly at the local government level.

The WPN is committed to undertaking regular research projects which address planning issues, particularly those affecting women's aspirations and needs. The WPN Research Project for 2002 was initiated to explore the ways in which women take part in policy and decision-making at the local level. Current planning legislation identifies written submissions as the primary mechanism for community input into planning decisions, however a wider range of techniques are used at the local level, particularly in relation to strategic planning processes. The project acknowledges that this participation can take a number of forms from very active involvement in local steering committees and lobby groups to a more passive and ad hoc involvement through responding to telephone surveys or making written submissions. The project has not attempted to examine women's participation in the electoral process at the local level as other work through the Municipal Association of Victoria is addressing this issue.

In March 2002, the WPN commissioned **collaborations: planning with your community pty ltd** (in conjunction with Auspoll Pty Ltd) to design and apply a survey tool to capture patterns of women's participation in local decision-making in Victoria. This report presents the results of this research and an analysis of some of the implications of the findings for enhancing the involvement of women in planning processes at the local level.

### 3. Approach

The brief required the application of a telephone survey to capture the views of women in east/west metropolitan areas, as well as in a mix of regional/urban/suburban municipalities. To this end, it was decided that the sampling should be targeted to four municipalities to enable a comparison of the results from different geographic areas. The municipal areas were selected to represent some of the diversity in local government. This report refers to the areas sampled by generic titles in acknowledgement of the types of municipalities/shires they represent.

The four areas surveyed represent:

- a Rural Regional Hub
- an Industrial Regional Centre
- a Metropolitan Growth Corridor
- an Inner Urban Municipality.

A sample size of 100 was achieved for each municipality, attaining a total of 400 surveys which meets the social science  $\pm 5$  per cent standard error. The surveys were completed in the week prior to Easter, 2002.

The eight-minute survey looked at several key questions around women's participation in community consultation. The questions included a mix of closed- and open-ended inquiry, as well as the capacity for respondents to 'rate' their preference or satisfaction levels on a sliding scale. Primarily, the survey investigated:

- frequency of women's participation in local decision-making
- types of consultation participated in
- satisfaction with different consultation methodologies
- preferences for different consultation methodologies
- ideas around what might improve participation levels
- preference for receiving information
- level of community connectedness beyond consultation participation.

In addition, the survey sought a detailed level of socioeconomic information about the survey sample, asking for age bracket, employment status, income level (personal and household), country of origin, language spoken at home, cultural/ethnic background, education level and household structure. This level of socioeconomic data-gathering was designed to enable a useful degree of later cross-referencing of data.

The survey tool used is attached to this report as an appendix.

## 4. Research context

This section of the report provides an overview of each of the local areas that were the subject of the survey. It identifies key sociodemographic factors and provides an overview of the local policy context for consultation and participation in planning processes.

### 4.1 Case Study A: 'Rural Regional Hub'

- The character of the Rural Regional Hub arises from its diversity and remote location. It covers a wide geographic region and the urban area supports and is surrounded by several satellite townships. The urban area is a major service centre, with well-developed transport, education, medical, commercial and retailing networks.
- Unlike many regional towns, the Rural Regional Hub is growing strongly, and its population (around 50,000) is characterised by a high number of young families. The median age is 34, and the largest population group is aged between 35–49 (20 per cent of the community)
- 87.4 per cent of residents are Australian-born, and 88.8 per cent of residents speak English as their primary language.
- The Rural Regional Hub has a higher proportion of residents leaving school at a younger age than Victoria as a whole. The majority of residents (19.2 per cent) left school at age 14 or younger.
- The median weekly income in the Rural Regional Hub at the time of the 1996 Census was \$487.00, and the unemployment rate was 11.3 per cent.
- The Rural Regional Hub Council has several pieces of consultation policy. The Community Consultation Policy was adopted in June 2001, and the Community Participation Action Strategy in November 2001. Both are scheduled for review later in 2002.
- Several pieces of consultation have been undertaken in the Rural Regional Hub by council during the preceding 12 months. These include a Community Satisfaction Survey and a variety of methods under the Community Participation Action Strategy.
- Council believes that its consultation strategies generally have highlighted the need to ensure a gathering of views of the aged, youth and residents in the Rural Regional Hub community. Also identified has been a need to increase the numbers of male participation in local decision-making processes.

## 4.2 Case Study B: 'Industrial Regional Centre'

- The Industrial Regional Centre incorporates a population of around 200,000.
- The Industrial Regional Centre faces significant changes in its population profile over the next 20 years. Key changes will be a reduction in the numbers of children and adolescents aged 0–19, and a significant increase in the overall age of the population.
- 79.1 per cent of the population of Industrial Regional Centre were born in Australia, including an Indigenous population of 830 people. Nationalities which have a greater representation in the Industrial Regional Centre compared with the combined rest of Australia include people from China (excluding Taiwan), Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and, in particular, Vietnam.
- The Industrial Regional Centre City Plan 2001–04 is a macro strategy which aims to improve basic services while pursuing economic development for the city. Developing and implementing 'an effective community communication and consultation framework that connects citizens to their council' is a key part of the macro strategy.
- In keeping with this aim, the Industrial Regional Centre Council is currently in the process of developing a Community Consultation Policy, and a draft had just been completed at the time of writing this report in May 2002.

## 4.3 Case Study C: 'Metro Growth Corridor'

- The Metro Growth Corridor LGA is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Australia. In the next few decades, the Metro Growth Corridor is expected to emerge as one of the country's top-five most-populated municipalities, with an anticipated population of more than 300,000.
- Council reports that, on average, 40 families move into the Metro Growth Corridor each week
- 60 per cent of households include children, 70 per cent of the population is aged 40 or under, and 12 per cent of the population is aged five or younger.
- The Metro Growth Corridor has no formal consultation policy at this stage, but supports the Best Value Victoria initiatives which were introduced by the State Government in December 1999 to guide the provision of services by local governments in Victoria.

## 4.4 Case Study D: 'Inner Urban Municipality'

- The Inner Urban Municipality is located close to Melbourne's CBD, and is one of Melbourne's most populous municipalities (pop. around 140,000).
- This is an ageing population; the median age is 34 years, and the share of the Inner Urban Municipality's population aged 65 or older rose nearly 2 per cent between 1991 and 1996.
- The Inner Urban Municipality has an ethnically and culturally diverse population. More than 36 per cent of residents were born overseas; 45 per cent of residents (aged five years or more) speak a language other than English at home, compared to 26 per cent of all Melbourne residents.

- Consultation is considered by the Inner Urban Municipality council to be a critical part of democratic governance, and is seen as a key step towards enhanced decision-making.
- Issues flagged as relevant for consultation include: site-specific consultation; area improvement; service planning; policy development; major projects/strategic issues; and strategic plans.
- The Inner Urban Municipality council currently embraces a wide range of consultation techniques. These include: personalised information letters to households, surveys, letterbox drops, council newsletters, special publications, advertisements, media, via community leaders, personal briefings, focus groups, community meetings and public meetings.

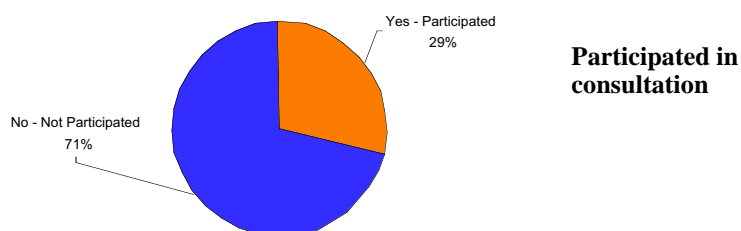
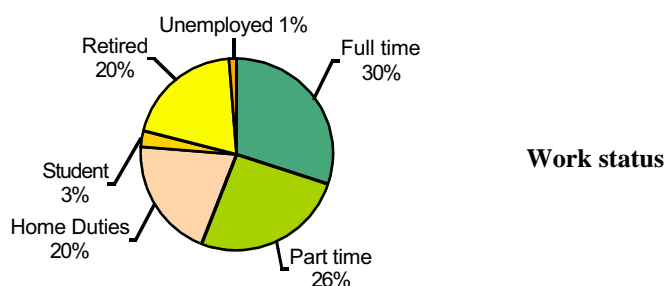
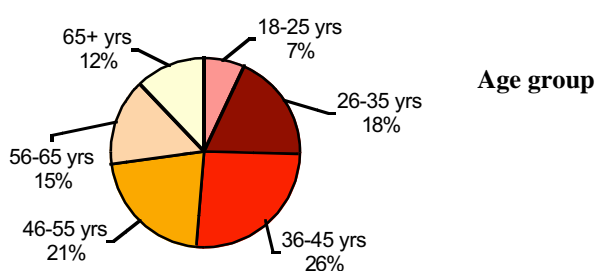
## 5. Data analysis

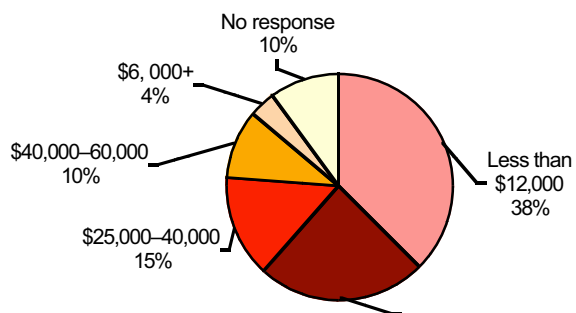
This section of the report presents the results of the telephone survey of 405 women across four local government areas.

### 5.1 Survey sample

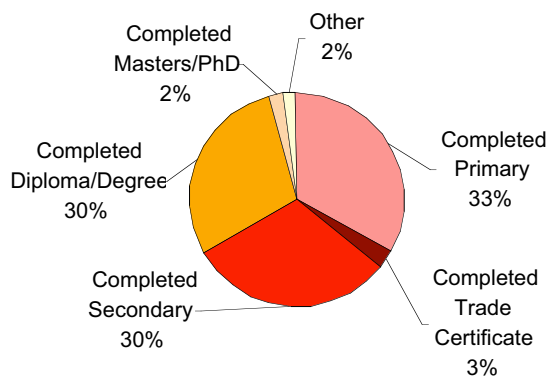
The overall sample comprised 405 respondents across the four municipalities of Rural Regional Hub, Industrial Regional Centre, Metro Growth Corridor and Inner Urban. Interviewing was conducted during the evenings of Monday, 25 to Thursday, 28 March 2002.

The pie charts below illustrate some aspects of the composition of the survey sample:

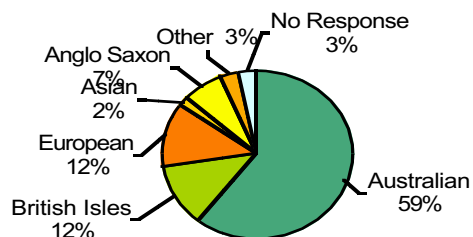




**Personal income**



**Education**



**Cultural/Ethnic Background**

## 5.2 Summary of key findings

Presented here is a summary of the key findings of the research project. Included is an analysis of the sociodemographic factors as well as an examination of the different patterning that can be observed amongst the four different municipalities selected for review.

### Participation in local decision-making

When asked whether they had participated in any form of local decision-making, just under one-third of respondents (29 per cent) indicated they had done so. Participation rates were higher for women aged between 46–55 and the over-65s. Participation rates were lowest for the 18–35 age group (only 18 per cent participated).

Respondents in the higher income levels were more likely to have participated in local decision-making than those with lower income levels. This pattern was seen in both the personal income and household income groupings.

Involvement levels also tended to increase with the level of education achieved. Respondents who had completed primary school recorded an involvement of 23 per cent, and this ranged up to the 60 per cent involvement from those who had completed a Masters/PhD.

Respondents from non-English-speaking households were much less likely to be involved than those from English-speaking households; and accordingly Australian, British Isles or Anglo Saxon respondents were also more likely to be involved.

Inner-urban respondents recorded the highest level of participation in local decision-making, with 39 per cent indicating some involvement. This was followed by Rural Regional Hub (34 per cent), Industrial Regional Centre (23 per cent) and Metro Growth Corridor (21 per cent).

The main reasons given for non-participation in local decision-making were given as: *Due to other commitments* (23 per cent), *Lack of Time* (15 per cent) and *Lack of interest* (14 per cent). This was not uniform across the sample, with the sector of least participation (18–25s) indicating they were *new to the area* or *don't know/no response*. *Commitments* was the most common reason given for non-participation in the 36–45 and 46–55 age groups, as it was for respondents from two-parent families. The reason most commonly given for non-participation by 65+ aged respondents was due to being *elderly/disabled*.

While the *commitments* reason was the most common across all municipalities, residents in the Metro Growth Corridor also recorded high levels of *don't have time* and *not interested*. While the *don't know/no response* was generally less than 10 per cent, the Regional Rural Hub showed a slightly higher count at 15 per cent.

#### Have you been involved in any form of local decision-making?

Yes	29%
No	71%

#### What are the main reasons you have not participated in local decision-making?

'I don't have a babysitter—which makes it hard to attend meetings'

'I work odd hours'

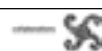
'I'm not interested because I don't speak good English'

'No-one asked me'

'It is too much for me at 81'

'I've just moved, not involved in the community'

'Don't know that there has been anything to decide besides voting'



Of those respondents involved in local decision-making, just under 70 per cent indicated they had done so within the past year. Overall the majority of respondents in all age groups who had participated in consultation had done so within the past six months.

Across the municipalities, 61 per cent of the Rural Regional Hub respondents indicated they had participated *last month*. This is reflected in the discussion of recent consultation initiatives implemented in this municipality. Respondents from the Industrial Regional Centre were least likely to have been involved within the *past month* and the *past year*.

### Consultation methods—participation and satisfaction

The participation methods which recorded the highest level of respondents involvement were: *Involvement in local committees* (19 per cent) and *Attending workshop/meetings* (18 per cent). *Written feedback* recorded the lowest level of involvement overall.

The majority of respondents indicated they were either *very satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with all consultation methods. The highest rating participation type was involvement in *local committees*, which attracted a *very satisfied* rate of 55 per cent.

Residents in the different municipalities showed different usage patterns for various consultation methods. This may reflect community character and preference, as well as the consultation habits and policies of the different local governments concerned.

Respondents in the Inner Urban Municipality recorded the highest level of participation in *face-to-face surveys or interviews*, as they were for *phone surveys or interview*. Respondents in the Rural Regional Hub also recorded high levels of participation in these methods, and the highest level of participation in *lobbying individuals*.

Across all municipalities, participation in *written feedback* mechanisms was largely influenced by income and education. Women with personal incomes over \$40,000 were considerably more likely to provide written feedback than those on lower incomes, and the higher the education, the higher was the likelihood of women providing written feedback. Respondents whose main language was not English reported no participation in written feedback.

When questioned about how effective they thought participation in local decision-making might be, 72 per cent of respondents thought that decision-makers listened to community input 'all' or 'some' of the time. Of respondents who have been involved in local decision-making, 88 per cent believe that their involvement helps to create better decisions for the community.

There was little variation across localities, with the bulk of the responses falling into the *sometimes* option. The highest *all the time* response came from participants in the Rural Regional Hub

**When was the last time you participated in community consultation?**

In the past year 70 per cent had participated

**Have you participated in any of the following types of consultation?**

Highest level of participation overall was in *involvement in Local Committees*

**Was this undertaken in the last 12 months?**

The majority said yes.

**How would you rate your satisfaction with this consultation?**

The majority of respondents were either *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*

**Do you think that your involvement in local decision-making helps to create better decisions for the community?**

Yes	88%
No	9%
Don't know	3%

**Do you think that decision-makers listen and respond to community input?**

Yes all the time	4%
Yes sometimes	68%
Rarely	19%
No not at all	8%
Don't know	1%

(7 per cent), and the lowest was from the Industrial Rural Centre (1 per cent).

When queried about preferences for greater involvement in local decision-making, respondents were divided fairly evenly each way. Respondents in the older age groups were slightly less likely to want to become more involved, with 32 per cent in the 56–65 age group and 28 per cent of the 65+ age group indicating a they would like more involvement.

Participants who had already participated were more likely to indicate an interest in further involvement (58 per cent, compared with 43 per cent from those who had not participated).

Willingness to become more involved tended to increase with the level of personal and household income. However there was little variation across the four municipalities.

When asked to rate the importance of various consultation methods, *involvement with local interest groups* attracted the highest overall importance of the nine options. The next-most important methods nominated were *involvement in local committees*, *providing written feedback*, *face-to-face survey/interview* and *attending workshops/meetings*.

Across all consultation types, respondents from the Rural Regional Hub consistently attributed a higher importance rating that did the other municipalities, except where responses were more uniformly high as they were for *involvement in local committees* and *involvement in local interest groups*. The overall mean importance scores were in the moderate range for the Industrial Regional Centre (3.18) and Metro Growth Corridor (3.18), moderate to high for residents of the Inner Urban municipality (3.31), and high to very high for residents of the Rural Regional Hub (3.74).

### **Influences on participation**

In trying to distil some of the motivations behind respondents' participation rates, the survey asked about a number of factors designed to make participation more possible. When asked to nominate the importance of these factors, respondents ranked the top two aspects as: *Feedback from input* and *Set start and finish times*. The two next-most important factors named were *Set roles/guidelines for participation* and *Providers of special assistance (that is, interpreters)*, with *Ability to influence decision* closely following. *Day meetings* recorded the lowest importance rate overall.

Respondents were then invited to suggest factors which may increase their participation rates in local decision-making processes. Five responses in particular emerged from this open-ended questioning: *Nothing*, *More information*, *If I had more time*, *If it was a relevant topic to me*, and *Community input*.

**Do you want to become more involved in government decisions that affect you?**

Yes	48%
No	50%
Don't know	3%

**How would you rate the following methods of participation on a scale of 1 to 5?**

Top two responses:  
 Involvement with local interest group (mean 3.69)  
 Involvement in local committee (mean 3.63)

**Thinking about participation in local decision-making, how important is each of the following factors for you?**

Of respondents, 70 per cent place high importance on having *feedback from input* as well as *set start and finish* ..

With 50 per cent of responses falling into the *Nothing* category, however, a more qualitative exploration of the possible improvements to consultative approaches would be beneficial in order to achieve a greater degree of insight.

The survey also asked how women preferred to be informed about local issues. More than one response was possible, and the *Local newspaper* was the most popular response for the sample in total. Residents in the Industrial Regional Centre indicated a higher preference for the *Local newspaper*, while residents of the Rural Regional Hub preferred the *Radio* and the *National newspaper*. Residents of the Inner Urban Municipality were more likely to nominate *Mail-outs*.

When respondents were asked where they would usually go to get involved in local decision-making, most nominated *council* or *Community Centre/Library/Town Hall*. Respondents living in an English-speaking household were more likely to indicate *council*, whereas residents from a non-English-speaking background were more likely to seek information via a *Community Centre/Library/Town Hall*.

The survey also took interest in how connected respondents were to their community in general. 38 per cent reported being a member of a local community club or organisation. Respondents who had previously participated in community consultation were more likely to be members of a local club (55 per cent) compared to non-participants (31 per cent)

**Is there anything else that would increase your participation in local decision-making?**

"Nothing would increase my participation"

"Nothing comes to mind"

"A better understanding of how things work"

"More information sent out and notification"

"Another 10 hours in each day"

"If something directly affected me that I feel strongly about"

"If other people are listening and are really willing to participate"

**How would you like to be informed about local issues?**

Local newspaper 61%

**If you wanted to get involved in decisions which affect your local community, where would you go?**

Council offices 61%

"I would ring the council first and then get my directions from them"

**Are you currently a member of any local community clubs or organisations?**

Yes 38%

No 62%

## 6. Opportunities for improved participation

The research indicates some interesting trends regarding who participates in local decision-making and how women prefer to be involved. This project has not set out to provide solutions or establish any particular targets regarding the involvement of women, rather it aims to provide a picture of the way women are currently involved. From this enhanced understanding of the 'way things are', we can draw some lessons about what is working well and where participatory processes could be improved. This section of the report identified some of these opportunities.

### 6.1 Who participates – opportunities for broadening the input of women in local decision-making.

The results of the research indicate that approximately 30 per cent of women take part in influencing local decisions that effect their lives. What is the significance of this figure? It is difficult to benchmark voluntary involvement at the local level. In countries where voting is not compulsory participation rates vary widely between 30–70 per cent of the adult population. The WPN research targets an area of decision-making that is highly localised and often issue-based, which would lead to a narrower field of interest or potential participants in the first place (for example, closure of a childcare centre, open space policy development, or a planning application on a specific property). The more significant issue raised by the research is perhaps the nature of *who* participates in local decision-making.

The research identifies some key factors which appear to influence who gets involved in local decision-making. Age, education and income have a significant impact on participation, suggesting that participation is uneven across the female population and some key groups of women are not getting as involved as others. The selective nature of this participation is a critical factor if the aim of a consultative process is to seek broad-based input into decision-making.

<i>Likely profile of a participant</i>	<i>Likely profile of a non-participant</i>
Over 45 years old Lives in inner Melbourne or regional Victoria Retired or employed on a full-time basis Earns an above-average income Speaks English as their first language Completed a tertiary qualification A single parent or part of a couple without children living at home	Between 18–25 years old Living in outer metropolitan Melbourne Most likely unemployed or involved in home duties, part-time work or study Highest level of education, primary level or trade certificate Household income under \$60,000 a year Living in a two-parent family or as part of a group household

Without assuming that people with like sociodemographic characteristics share values and views, the nature of these hypothetical profiles indicates that the views of key sections of the population are potentially not being included. This raises the question as to how representative current local government consultation processes actually are. Where participation is voluntary, the nature of the involvement is not likely to be representative of the broad range of interests. This suggests the need to better target participatory process to ensure a broader range of views are captured, or at least to be aware that the same women will be excluded from decision-making unless processes are specifically designed to encourage their involvement.

The differences in participation levels between the four municipalities may be due to a number of factors. These *may* include a greater sense of community in regional communities (the Rural Regional Hub), a lack of opportunities to participate (Industrial Regional Centre) or other commitments and responsibilities which make it harder to participate (Metro Growth Corridor). It is interesting to note that in those municipalities where specific policies or recent projects have taken a proactive approach to community involvement, participation rates were higher (Rural Regional Hub, Inner Urban Municipality)

The research also explores barriers to participation, with 'competing commitments' and 'lack of time' being the most frequently given reasons. Local government is rarely in a position to remove the structural barriers that may see women unable to find the time to become more involved at the local level. However, aligning opportunities for participation with other interests offers an efficient way of seeking the views of those with competing commitments (for example, consultation with a school parents committee, displays and surveys in the local shopping centre).

The survey responses indicate that language barriers will be a natural impediment to participation in any local decision-making if a proactive approach is not taken to address this on a regular basis. A significant number of respondents also indicated that they hadn't been involved because the opportunity had not presented itself or they weren't interested. How do we engage with this group of people to make participatory processes meaningful and accessible to a broader range of women?

## 6.2 How women participate—enhancing the quality of the participatory experience

The research offers the positive finding that 88 per cent of those who had been involved in local consultation and research processes felt that their participation helped to improve the quality of local decision-making. This figure provides a good starting point for enhancing the involvement of women in planning and policy making at the local level. Nearly three-quarters of the total survey sample believed that decision-makers listen and respond to community input, which is not the picture often portrayed in the media of jaded and disenfranchised constituencies. This affirmation of the potential of participatory processes creates a context for reflection on some of the ways in which the quality of the participatory experience could be enhanced.

The first of these reflects the low use of written feedback versus face-to-face techniques in consultation. Satisfaction was highest with verbal participation methods such as workshops and involvement in local committees; and written feedback recorded the lowest level of involvement overall. This is significant when viewed alongside the requirements of many planning mechanisms to provide community input via *written* submissions. In addition, respondents whose main language was not English reported no participation in written feedback. For women's participation to be enhanced across all spheres of local decision-making, therefore, a **mix of verbal and written feedback mechanisms** need to be made available as part of a whole 'menu' of consultation options.

Setting **clear parameters for involvement** is another factor which is also clearly indicated as desirable by participants. Aspects of participation such as feedback from input, set start and finish times and set roles/guidelines for participation were all flagged as important aspects of making involvement more appealing. This suggests that local governments could immediately boost participation of women in their consultative processes by making this kind of information and assistance available from the outset. What is clear here is a desire for consultative processes to fit in with existing time constraints, as well as a high degree of relevance and background information and a genuine community and government commitment to a participatory process.

The reasons given for non-participation ('other commitments', 'lack of time', 'lack of interest') indicate that participation rates by women can be best improved by **fitting in with existing commitments** (that is, supporting needs for consultation after hours, and provision of child-care, etc.), as well as **improving motivation to take part** in local decision-making processes. Improving motivation might be achieved with a mix of two strategies: increasing the sense of community 'ownership' of local issues (via long-term community-building strategies) and increasing the level of information around how consultation outcomes might have a tangible effect on life in a particular area. With 88 per cent of participants reporting they felt their involvement helped create positive change, there is clear opportunity for local governments to build on existing optimism.

There is clear preference for the **distribution of information** to occur via local newspapers, with secondary preferences for the radio/national newspaper in the Rural Regional Hub and for mail-outs in the Inner Urban Municipality. However, in terms of participants seeking their own information on local decision-making options, those from a non-English-speaking household were most likely to go to a Community Centre, the Library or the Town Hall, indicating one of two things: that newspaper notification could better cater for language needs, and that Community Centres/Libraries/Town Halls could be used even more pro-actively to reach people from **culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**.

Another key opportunity for expanding the diversity of those involved in local decision-making processes is in **improving participation rates for younger women** (between 18 to 35 year olds). With only an 18 per cent participation rate, four out of five younger women are reporting no participation in local decision-making—a significant sector of the community to be missed by consultation. The most common reasons given by the 18–25 age group for non-participation was that they were 'new to the area' or 'don't know', while the 26–35 age bracket were more likely to say 'they don't have time'. There is opportunity here to more closely match consultation preference with methodologies; 26–35 year olds, for example, were more likely to have used written feedback than women in other age categories. It may be that with a high degree of internet use among young people that online consultation may increase the participation rates of the 18–25 year olds.

Also clear from the survey is that the majority (70 per cent) of respondents felt that '**feedback from input**' was an important factor in participation in local decision-making. This is a factor which local governments can affect directly, by improving communication with the community to ensure participants are informed about the extent of their effectiveness. Being *heard* in a consultative process is crucial to participant satisfaction, and if this satisfaction is high there is more likelihood of participation in the future.

## Attachment 1. Survey tool

Good afternoon/evening my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from Auspoll and tonight we are conducting a survey on women's participation in local decision-making. I'd like to speak to a female in the household over the age of 18 years. I have some questions that should take about 8 to 10 minutes. **Repeat Intro if required** **Thank you**

Q1 Have you been involved in any form of local decision-making? 1. Yes (if yes go to 2) 2. No (if no go to Q1.1)

Q1.1 What are the main reasons why you have not participated in local decision-making? PROBE

GO TO Q5

Q2 When was the last time you participated in community consultation?

1. In the last month 2. In the past six months 3. In the past year 4. In the past 2–3 years 5. More than three years ago

Q3 Have you participated in any of the following types of consultation? **Interviewer, read out list below. Where a respondent answers 'yes', ask:** Was this undertaken in the last 12 months? **and,** How would you rate your satisfaction with this consultation?

	<i>Methods of consultation</i>	<i>Yes only</i>	Was this undertaken in the past 12 months YES/NO		Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Unsatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1	Face-to-face survey or interview	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
2	Phone survey or interview	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
3	Written feedback	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
4	Attending workshop/meeting	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
5	Involvement in local committee	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
6	Involvement with local interest group	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
7	Lobbying individuals	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4
8	Other (Specify)	1	1. Yes	2. No	1	2	3	4

Q4 Do you think that your involvement in local decision-making helps to create better decisions for the community?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't know (don't offer)

Q5 Do you think that decision-makers listen and respond to community input?

1. Yes all the time 2. Yes Sometimes 3. Rarely 4. No Not at all 9. Don't Know (don't offer)

Q6 Do you want to become more involved in government decisions that affect you?

1. Yes 2. No 3. Don't Know (don't offer)

Q7 How would you rate the importance of the following participation options on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very low and 5 is very high in importance?

		Probe for: High/Very high			OR	Low/Very low	
PARTICIPATION OPTIONS		Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low	Don't Know (don't offer)
1	Government meetings (for example, council meetings)	5	4	3	2	1	9
2	Drop-in info session	5	4	3	2	1	9
3	Face-to-face survey, interview or discussion	5	4	3	2	1	9
4	Telephone survey or interview	5	4	3	2	1	9
5	Written feedback	5	4	3	2	1	9
6	Attending workshop/meeting	5	4	3	2	1	9
7	Involvement in local committee	5	4	3	2	1	9
8	Involvement with local interest group	5	4	3	2	1	9
9	Lobbying individuals	5	4	3	2	1	9
10	Other (Specify)	5	4	3	2	1	9

Q8 Thinking about participation in local decision-making, how important is each of the following factors for you?

ISSUE	LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE					
	Very high importance	High importance	Moderate importance	Low importance	Very low importance	Don't know (don't offer)
8.1 Day meetings	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.2 Child care provided	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.3 Ability to influence decisions	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.4 Set start and finish times	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.5 Small group discussions	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.6 Feedback from input	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.7 Set roles/Guidelines for participation	5	4	3	2	1	9
8.8 Providers of special assistance (that is, interpreters)	5	4	3	2	1	9

Q8.1 Is there anything else that would increase your participation in local decision-making? PROBE

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Q9 How would you like to be informed about local issues? Interviewer – ask as open question, but circle responses below. More than one response is possible. ONLY write out responses which do not have a category.

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1	Local newspaper	5	Radio	9	Email
2	National newspaper	6	Pamphlets/Handouts	10	Web sites (Internet)
3	Word of mouth	7	Community noticeboards	11	Public forums with councillors
4	Community group updates	8	Mail-outs	12	Occasional newsletters

Q10 If you wanted to get involved in decisions which affect your local community where would you go?

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Q11 Are you currently a member of any local community clubs or organisations?

1. Yes please specify \_\_\_\_\_ 2. No

Q12 To help us analyse the results, could I ask you which of the following age groups is appropriate to you?

1	18-25	2	26-30	3	31-35	4	36-40	5	41-45	6	46-50	7	51-55	8	56-60	9	61-65	10	Over 65
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Q13 Are you:

1 Working full time	2 Working part time	3 Home duties	4 A student	5 Retired	6 Unemployed
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Q14 Which of the following categories best describes your personal income?

1	Less than 12,000	2	12 to 25,000	3	25 to 40,000	4	40 to 60,000	5	60,000 +
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Q15 Which of the following categories best describes your household income?

1	Up to \$20 000	2	\$21 000 to \$40 000	3	\$41 000 to \$60 000	4	\$61 000 to \$80 000
5	\$81 000 to \$100 000	6	\$101 000+				

Q16 Where were you born? 1. Australia 2 Overseas [Specify] \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 What is the main language spoken at home? 1 English 2 Other [Specify] \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 How would you describe your cultural or ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_

Q19 What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

1.	completed primary	2.	completed trade certificate	3.	completed secondary
4.	completed diploma/degree	5.	Completed masters/PhD.	6.	Other, specify

Q20 Is your household structure?

1.	Two parent family	2.	Couple, no children	3.	Single parent family
4.	Single person household	5.	Group household	6.	Other, specify

As I said earlier, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ from Auspoll. To enable my Supervisor to verify that this survey has been conducted, I need to ask your first name. NAME \_\_\_\_\_ **Thank you for your participation**

## Attachment 2. Survey data

**See separate document:** Report to Women's Planning Network Quantitative Research, April 2002  
Auspoll Pty Ltd.