

South Australian Men's Sheds: Who, What and Why?

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This paper describes the characteristics of South Australian men's sheds and the demographic profile of the men who frequent them for recreation and leisure. The paper describes 42 SA men's sheds and 163 men who are members of sheds in rural communities. We found that community men's sheds in SA continue to thrive in both metropolitan Adelaide and in communities further afield. SA was an early adopter of the men's shed culture yet still sees new sheds being established regularly, mainly in country areas. There are more sheds in regional, rural and remote areas than in Adelaide and non-metropolitan sheds are often larger, open more often and boast more members. SA sheds come in all

shapes and sizes, operate under a variety of models and offer a broad range of pursuits.

Members are motivated to join sheds because of the informality, camaraderie, sense of belonging, opportunity for purposeful endeavour, the male friendly environment and the variety of activities on offer. While the majority of participants have partners, one quarter live alone. This suggests a community men's sheds act as a buffer to social isolation and community disengagement, particularly in rural areas.

Rural SA sheds mostly cater for older, retired, lesser educated men, commonly from blue-collar backgrounds and often from disadvantaged communities. Co-incidentally this profile corresponds with the characteristics of men most at risk of ill health which presents a unique opportunity for the delivery of health promotion programs in this setting.

Keywords: men's sheds, rural, Australia, recreation, activities, motivation, characteristics, profile

Community men's sheds in Australia have been defined as “..a space where mostly older men meet to socialise, learn new skills, mentor others or generally take part in activities with other men.” (Milligan, 2014). Sheds, which are often workshop type spaces come in all shapes and sizes, with different governance, management and financial structures, and which offer a diverse range of social, leisure and recreational activities (Misan & Sergeant, 2009). However, as well as being a recreational space catering specifically for men and where an estimated 40,000 (Personal communication, Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA), <http://www.mensshed.org/home/.aspx>) Australian men spend their leisure time in social or productive pursuits, these spaces are also considered a potential vehicle for the promotion of men's health and well-being (Misan, 2008; Wilson & Cordier, 2013).

The community men's shed phenomenon arguably originated as an extension of the Australian rural or backyard shed (Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey, & Gleeson, 2007). This fixture was traditionally a male domain, distant from life's troubles and from family and work pressures where a man could relax and contemplate life's troubles while tinkering away at odd jobs or concentrating on their hobbies or pastimes (Misan, 2008). The community men's shed is still true to the concept

of a shed as a male space. However, rather than a place where men go to get away from others, the community shed provides a place where men go in their leisure time to be in the company of other men. In the shed, members can socialise, build or restore things, garden, pursue hobbies and interests, use computers and the internet, listen or play music, play cards or other indoor games among other pursuits, all while sharing life troubles and experiences with kindred male spirits in an informal, male friendly setting (Wilson & Cordier, 2013; Wilson, Cordier, Doma, Misan, & Vas, 2014).

The community men's shed phenomenon probably began in the late 1970's, with the earliest adopters of the concept in South Australia (SA) and New South Wales laying claim to being the first. In SA through the late 1980's and early 1990's, the shed concept was further endorsed by a number of organisations including some Aged Care facilities and Vietnam Veteran's associations, before expanding to rural communities (Earle, Earle, & Von Mering, 1995; Misan, 2008b) and then more broadly to Victoria and Tasmania (Misan, 2008). In 2008 there were approximately 250 sheds throughout Australia with SA and Tasmania having the most sheds per capita; there are now an estimated 1000 sheds across the country (AMSA (2014), <http://www.mensshed.org/home/.aspx>).

Despite the growing number of men's sheds and their recent recognition in policy as a potential vehicle for health promotion programs for older men (Australian Government, 2010, p. 16), there is limited current information about the profile of men who frequent them. In fact, the most recent research undertaken in this regard was in 2005 (Golding et al., 2007) when the shed movement was in its infancy. Moreover, there is little descriptive information about South Australian sheds in general or rural SA sheds in particular (Golding et al., 2007; Golding & Harvey, 2006; Graves, 2001).

Aim

The aim of the studies presented here is to describe the operational characteristics of community men's sheds in South Australia (SA), the types of activities undertaken in SA sheds, the demographic profile of the men who participate as members, and their motivations for joining and

returning.

Methodology

This paper combines data from two studies of South Australian men sheds, the first concerns the size, composition and the nature of the recreational activities undertaken for sheds across SA; the second, at the profile of men who attend non-metropolitan SA sheds, the reasons they attend and why they keep coming back. For both studies a descriptive, cross sectional, study design was used with data collected using self-administered, paper based surveys. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee.

Both surveys were administered between August 2012 and September 2013. The first survey was conducted in association with the then fledgling SA Men's Shed Association (SAMSA) by the first author (GM) and the second as a component of an Honours degree by the co- author (CO).

For the profile of SA men's sheds information was sought regarding shed age, size, location, opening hours, governance model, management structure, number of members, membership fees, and shed activities. For the demographic characteristics of rural SA sheds information was sought regarding age, education, marital and occupational history, and household income, living arrangements, reason for joining the shed, shed activities, and opportunities for learning.

Sampling Frame

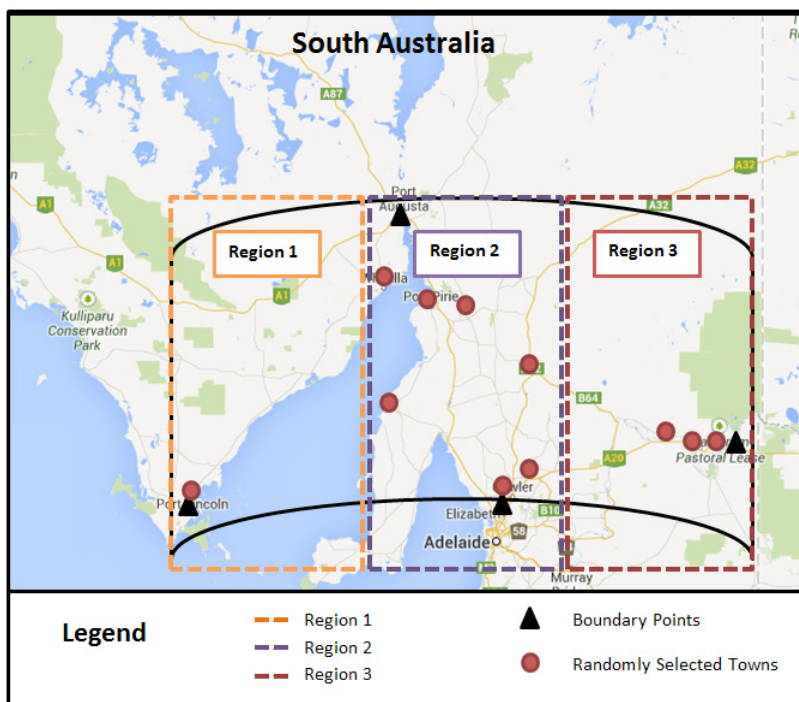
The sampling frame for the *SA Shed Survey* (SASS) was a survey of all (57) South Australian sheds on the 'register' of SAMSA at the time while for the *Rural Shed* survey the sample consisted of participants of 11 of the 25 non-metropolitan SA sheds in the sample boundary described below.

The sample boundary for the Rural Shed Survey (RSS) was a rectangle drawn to include Port Lincoln to the west, extending northwards in line with Port Augusta, then east to the Riverland and southward extending to Gawler an area covering approximately 112,850 km² (Figure 1). This area was selected for convenience purposes because of time and resource limitations. Sheds operating in this region were identified from the public records of the Australian Men's Sheds Association

(www.mensheds.org.au). To limit skewing of the sample, the boundary zone was divided into three clusters of roughly equal geographical area. Half of the sheds in each of these regions were selected with the aid of a random number generator (www.random.org; <https://www.random.org/lists/>) and approached for inclusion in the study.

For both surveys, sheds were eligible for inclusion if they self-identified as a community men's shed, were currently operating and had a person with the required authority to provide information on behalf of the respective shed.

Figure 1: Sampling frame for rural shed survey



Of the 25 sheds operating within the boundary, 12 were initially selected for inclusion in the study, of which eleven sheds agreed to be involved and were subsequently visited by the researchers. Sheds were visited in August – September 2013.

For the RSS, individuals were eligible for inclusion if they were male, over 18 years of age, and were a regular attendee at their shed. Sheds were contacted by telephone two weeks after the initial invitation was sent to check that the invitation had been received, to answer any questions

and confirm if the shed would be participating. Sheds agreeing to participate were contacted a week or two later to confirm the dates and format for the shed site visit. Participating sheds were sent the surveys together with additional information sheets in advance of the visit by the researchers.

For the SASS, the invitation to participate was made to shed co-ordinators in the first instance; completion and return of the survey was deemed implied consent. For the RSS, a two stage consent process was used, the first seeking agreement for participation from the shed co-ordinator, and the second from individual shed members who completed the survey. For the latter, survey completion was deemed as implied consent.

Study instruments

At the time of the studies a review of the literature failed to demonstrate standardised instruments that had been used for collecting demographic data from sheds or shed participants. Surveys were subsequently developed in house using relevant texts (Rea & Parker, 2005, pp. 30-72), examples from the literature (Golding et al., 2007; Nathan J Wilson & Cordier, 2013) and with advice from colleagues with experience in survey design.

The SASS comprised 18 questions over 5 domains and the RSS had 45 questions across 8 domains with free text, multiple choice and Likert scale responses formats as appropriate for both (Table 1). Internal and linguistic validity, question burden, the appropriateness of questions and the average completion time were assessed through pilot testing for both surveys.

Survey responses were collated using Microsoft Excel™ and data was analysed primarily using descriptive and bivariate statistical analysis, using SPSS™ Version 17 (SPSS Inc. , Chicago IL USA), as appropriate. Where relevant, the threshold for statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$ with appropriate adjustments for assessment of multiple variables.

Table 1: Survey details

Survey domain	Type of questions	No. of Questions	Response type	Response rate
SASS (SA Shed Survey)				
Operational matters	Name, year opened, address, size, opening hours, key contacts	7	Free text	98%
Membership	No. of members, female members, membership fees	4	Free text	83%
Activities	Activity description	1	Multiple choice + free text	100%
Management, governance	Decision making, co-ordination	3	Multiple choice + free text	94%
Affiliations	Peak body, State body, support needs	3	Multiple choice + free text	96%
RSS (Rural Shed (Member) Survey)				
Participant Demographics	Location, age, height, weight, waist, smoking status, occupation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, children, life crises	13	Free Text, Multiple Choice, Likert style	81%
Motivation for men's shed participation	Reasons for joining, activities, likes, learning opportunities	5	Likert style	87%
Health status #	Self-reported rating general, emotional, social and mental health; health concerns; mobility; health limitations; medical history	16	Likert style Free Text	86%
Health knowledge #	Chronic disease risk factors, alcohol, nutrition, prostate, reproductive & sexual health	6	Likert style	83%

Findings

SA Shed Survey (SASS)

Forty three out of the 57 surveys distributed were returned. Two were found to be duplicate surveys received from the same shed leaving 42 surveys eligible for analysis. Of the other 14 surveys, three were returned and annotated 'not at this address' giving a final sample size of 54 sheds. Of the other 11 that did not respond, in eight cases repeated attempts to contact the sheds went unanswered (phone calls and emails); in the three instances where contact was made, the person spoken to was not authorised to respond on behalf of the shed. This gave an overall response rate of 77.8% (42/54).

Overall, 27% of sheds were located in Adelaide and the remaining sheds in regional, rural or remote communities (Table 2). Of the 43 sheds responding to the survey 29 (67%) were located more than 25km from the Adelaide Central Business District (CBD).

Nearly one quarter (21.4%) of sheds responding had been established for two years or less and slightly more than half (52.4%) for more than 2 years but less than 10 years (Table 2). One shed reported being established for 15 years or more and two sheds for more than 30 years. Many more sheds have been established in rural areas than in Adelaide (19 rural cf. 7 in Adelaide) over the last 10 years. In aggregate these findings suggest that while some SA sheds were present at the beginning of the men’s shed phenomenon, the SA shed movement is still active as a recreational pursuit for older men with new sheds being established on a regular basis, particularly outside of Adelaide.

Table 2. Summary of years since establishment for of South Australian Sheds (n=42)

	Rural SA		Adelaide		Grand Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
Years since establishment –					
1 - 2	5	11.9%	4	9.5%	9
> 2 - 5	8	19.0%	2	4.8%	10
> 5 - 10	11	26.2%	1	2.4%	12
> 10 - 15	3	7.1%	3	7.1%	6
> 15 - 20	-	-	1	2.4%	1
> 20 - 30	-	-	-	-	-
> 30	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2
Still in planning stages	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42

The median size of the sheds in SA was 110 m², ranging from 12 m² to over 400 m². There were no urban sheds over 180m² in size. Only rural sheds were 200m² or larger. Over two thirds of sheds reporting having an area separate from the workshop area for socialising although for the smaller sheds this was usually an adjacent building or space not formally part of the shed complex. Rural sheds were more likely to have a social area than urban sheds, probably as a consequence of the generally larger size of rural sheds (Table 3).

Of those reporting opening times (37 / 42), over two thirds (26/42; 70.2%) reported being open on two or less days of the week; three sheds (8.1%) opened five days a week and one shed reported being open every day of the week. The median number of hours per day sheds reported being open was five, with a range of two to seven hours.

Table 3. Summary profile of South Australian Sheds (n=42)

	Rural SA		Adelaide		Grand Total	% of total
	No.	%	No.	%		
Days open per week -						
1	8	19.0%	-	-	8	19.0%
2	9	21.4%	6	14.3%	15	35.7%
3	3	7.1%	4	9.5%	7	16.7%
4	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	3	7.1%
5	3	7.1%	-	-	3	7.1%
7	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
unknown	4	9.5%	1	2.4%	5	11.9%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
No. of hours open when open -						
1 - 3	6	14.3%	4	9.5%	10	23.8%
> 3 - 5	10	23.8%	5	11.9%	15	35.7%
> 5 - 7	9	21.4%	3	7.1%	12	28.6%
unknown	4	9.5%	1	2.4%	5	11.9%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
No. of members -						
1 - 10	9	21.4%	1	2.4%	10	23.8%
11 - 20	7	16.7%	2	4.8%	9	21.4%
21 - 30	2	4.8%	4	9.5%	6	14.3%
31 - 40	3	7.1%	2	4.8%	5	11.9%
41 - 50	3	7.1%	-	-	3	7.1%
> 50	5	11.9%	1	2.4%	6	14.3%
unknown		0.0%	3	7.1%	3	7.1%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
No. of female members -						
1 - 5	19	45.2%	5	11.9%	24	57.1%
6 - 10	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%
11 - 20	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
> 20	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
Females not allowed	6	14.3%	5	11.9%	11	26.2%
unknown	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	3	7.1%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
Shed area in m² -						
1 - 50	2	4.8%	1	2.4%	3	7.1%
51 - 100	3	7.1%	4	9.5%	7	16.7%
101 - 150	7	16.7%	3	7.1%	10	23.8%
151 - 200	2	4.8%	2	4.8%	4	9.5%
201 - 250	3	7.1%	-	-	3	7.1%
251 - 300	2	4.8%	-	-	2	4.8%
301 - 350	2	4.8%	-	-	2	4.8%
> 350	3	7.1%	-	-	3	7.1%
unknown	5	11.9%	3	7.1%	8	19.0%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%

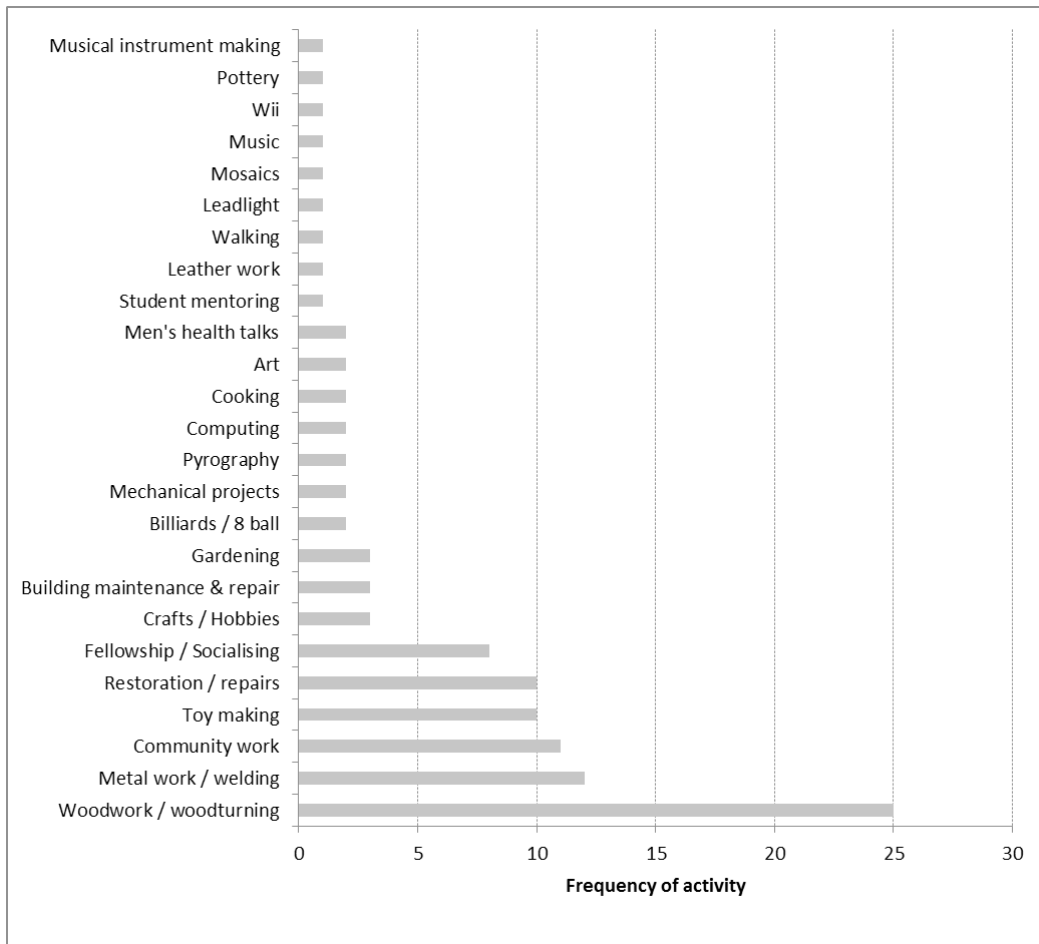
	Rural SA		Adelaide		Grand Total	% of total
	No.	%	No.	%		
Separate socialisation space -						
no	7	16.7%	4	9.5%	11	26.2%
yes	19	45.2%	8	19.0%	27	64.3%
unknown	3	7.1%	1	2.4%	4	9.5%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100%
Governance model -						
Health service	10	23.8%	3	7.1%	13	31.0%
Local council	3	7.1%	3	7.1%	6	14.3%
NGO	6	14.3%	1	2.4%	7	16.7%
Charitable organisation	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
Veterans League	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%
Separately incorporated	6	14.3%	2	4.8%	8	19.0%
Church group	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%
unknown	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	3	7.1%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
Management decisions by -						
Governing body	2	4.8%	1	2.4%	3	7.1%
Management Committee	8	19.0%	3	7.1%	11	26.2%
Local Co-ordinator	4	9.5%	3	7.1%	7	16.7%
members	9	21.4%	4	9.5%	13	31.0%
Mixed	6	14.3%	2	4.8%	8	19.0%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
Day-to-day co-ordination by -						
part time volunteer co-ordinator	15	35.7%	6	14.3%	21	50.0%
full time volunteer co-ordinator	6	14.3%	-	-	6	14.3%
part time paid co-ordinator	1	2.4%	2	4.8%	3	7.1%
full time paid co-ordinator	3	7.1%	-	-	3	7.1%
other model	2	4.8%	2	4.8%	4	9.5%
none		0.0%	1	2.4%	1	2.4%
unknown	2	4.8%	2	4.8%	4	9.5%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%
Fees and charges -						
No fee	9	21.4%	8	19.0%	17	40.5%
Daily fee	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	2	4.8%
Weekly fee	9	21.4%	-	-	9	21.4%
Annual fee	5	11.9%	2	4.8%	7	16.7%
Gold coin donation	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
Amenities fee	3	7.1%	2	4.8%	5	11.9%
Other	1	2.4%	-	-	1	2.4%
Total	29	69.0%	13	31.0%	42	100.0%

Slightly less than half (45.3%) of the sheds reported having 20 members or less and about a quarter (23.8%) having ten members or less (Table 3). About one third of sheds (12/37; 32.4%) reported having five to ten members attending regularly and a further 15 (40.5%) reported 11–20 regular attendees. Two sheds (5.4%) reported over 50 members attending on a regular basis. Over half of sheds (57.1%) reported having less than five female members and these having mostly background roles, rather than active participation in usual shed activities; eleven sheds (26.2%) had a male only member policy.

Only one urban shed reported 40 or more members compared with five of the rural sheds. Similarly bigger sheds reported larger memberships with only three sheds smaller than 150m² reporting 30 or more members compared with five sheds larger than 150m² (Table 3). There was no statistically significant association between shed size, the numbers of days or hours sheds were open or the size of the membership, although there was a trend for rural sheds to have larger memberships and to be open four or more days per week.

SA sheds undertake a broad list of activities the most popular of which include construction projects in wood and metal, making and repairing toys and general furniture and other product restoration. A significant proportion of sheds undertake work for members of their local communities and for various agencies including charities, non-government organisations (NGO), churches, child care facilities and local councils. Most sheds reported social activities or pursuits as integral to shed operations (Figure 2.)

Figure 2. The range of activities undertaken by SA sheds and SA shed members



Seventeen sheds did not charge a fee for participation. Other sheds charged a range of fees (daily, weekly or annual) with weekly fees being the most common. Most sheds charged an additional amenities fee for tea and coffee, usually a 'gold coin' donation. Additional charges are levied by some sheds for use of machinery and for the cost of project materials (Table 3).

Governance models varied across the sample with about one third (31%) of sheds being under the auspice of the local health service. Other governance models included NGO's (16.7%), local council (14.3%), or a War Veteran's Association (4.8%). About 1 in 5 (19%) sheds reported being Incorporated entities.

Management decisions were made by shed members in about one third (31%) of sheds, by a Management Committee in 26%, the shed co-ordinator in 16.7%, or the auspice organisation in

7.1% of cases. In over two thirds of sheds (27/42, 64.3%), day-to-day decisions are made by a volunteer co-ordinator working in either a full-time (6/27; 22.2%) or part time capacity (21/27, 77.8%). Six sheds (14.2%) had paid co-ordinators for day-to-day decisions of whom three were full time and three part time. Almost all sheds (90%) were affiliated with the Australian Men's Sheds Association (AMSA), the national peak body for men's sheds¹.

Rural SA Shed (RSS) Participant Survey

163 men's shed participants across 11 South Australian rural men's sheds responded to the rural shed participant survey. Of these, 154 were eligible for analysis; nine surveys, were returned unanswered and were not included in the analysis.

The mean age of the RSS respondents was 66 years (SD: 13.4 years) with the median being 68 years (Table 4). The age range was 22 – 87 years. Over two thirds (63.2%) of shed participants were retired and six percent (6%) were in paid work. For just over half of participants (51.8%), annual incomes of less than \$25,000 pa were reported, implying that about 40% were living on or below the poverty line (Davidson, Evans, Dorsch, & Gissane, 2013, p. 13) NSW, Australia; for 86% of respondents the main source of income was a government pension or similar welfare benefit.

Respondents were most likely to report coming from a blue-collar occupational background (88%), with labourer and tradesmen being the highest previous occupations reported, 25% each respectively. Just over half (53.9%) of respondents reported an educational attainment of year 10 or lower; 13.6% reported year seven or below as their highest level of educational attainment. Over one third (38.2%) of respondents reported having attained a TAFE or trade qualification and 6.7% completing a University qualification (Table 4). Nearly three quarters (73.9%) of respondents reported residing in their own home, 22% in rental accommodation, 3% in a retirement village; a quarter of participants reported living alone (Table 4).

Table 4 – Rural shed member demographics

1 Australian Men's Shed Association; www.mensshed.org/home/.aspx

Variable	Result	Variable	Result
Age (n= 136) #		Main Income Source (n=149)	
- Mean	66 years	- Government pension	86.7 %
- Median	68 years	- Investments	10.7%
- Standard Deviation	13.4	- Paid Work	2.6%
- Age Range	22- 87 years	Occupation History (n=130)	
Living Arrangements (n=150)		Blue Collar background	87.6%
- Living with Partner/Children	74%	- Labourer	24.65%
- Living alone	25.3%	- Tradesman	24.6%
- Living in a care facility	0.6%	- Farmer	20.8%
Housing Arrangement (n=149)		- Other	19.3%
- My own House	73.9%	- Driver/ mechanic	16.9%
- Rental Accommodation	22.3%	White Collar background	12.3%
- Retirement Village	3.3%	- Engineer	3.8%
Employment Status (n=152)		- Other	7.7%
- Paid Work	6%	Highest Education (n=67)	
- Retired	63.2%	- Year 7 or below	13.6%
- Unemployed	19.7%	- Year 8	10.1%
- Volunteer	11.2%	- Year 9	11.4%
Household Income (n=137)		- Year 10	18.8%
- \$0 – \$24,999	51.8%	- Year 11	12.1%
- \$25,000 – \$49,999	38.7%	- Year 12	16.1%
- \$50,000 +	9.5%	- Trade Qualification	22.8%
		- TAFE/ University	22.1%

– n refers to the number of respondents who provided answers to respective questions.
 Not all respondents answered all questions.

The most common reasons reported for joining the shed were to make new friends (95%), to contribute to the community (92%) and to stay mentally active (88.3%). Aspects of the shed most favoured by members were socialising (97%), learning from others (94%) and making new friends in the community (94%). The ‘ability to come and go whenever they wanted’ (92.7%) was the most popular reason for returning to the shed, followed by ‘no pressure to partake in activities’ (92.4%) and the ‘camaraderie’ (90.8%) offered by the shed setting (Table 5).

Shed participants also appear to be receptive to the shed as an environment for learning and for trying new activities. Respondents perceived the shed to be a good setting for informal learning about hobbies and crafts (88%), technology (76%), and health (74%). Sheds were favoured as potential settings for health promotion due to their friendly nature (92%), non-judgemental

environment (82%) and predominantly male group setting (82%) (Table 5).

Table 5 – Shed member motivations

	Proportion of respondents	n=
Reasons for joining the shed..		
Making new friends	95.4%	149
Contribute to the community	92.0%	148
Stay mentally active	88.3%	148
Stay physically active	80.4%	151
Keep me healthy	73.8%	148
Have time away from home	66.7%	154
Beat boredom	65.6%	150
Give me some space	57.0%	149
Beat loneliness	52.7%	149
Give my partner some space	50.3%	146
Beat depression	49.3%	153
Learn more about health	42.5%	150
Likes about the shed environment..		
Socialising	97.4%	155
Making new friends	94.0%	151
Learning from others	94.0%	151
Doing things for the shed	93.9%	148
Sharing stories / experiences	91.4%	151
Learning new things (e.g. information)	85.8%	148
Making / fixing things for others	80.9%	152
Sharing my skills	80.7%	150
Learning new skills	80.3%	147
Making / fixing things for myself	74.1%	147
Teaching others	63.7%	146
Why I keep coming..		
No pressure to do anything	92.9%	154
Being able to come and go when I want to	92.7%	150
The social aspect	90.8%	153
The shed environment (I feel at home in the shed)	90.0%	150
That decisions are made by the members	86.8%	151
The shed opening times	84.5%	148
The workshop aspect	83.9%	149
That there's no boss	71.8%	149
That there are no women	36.9%	149
Things I would like to do / learn..		
Hobbies/ crafts	88.5%	148
Social Events	80.4%	148
Trade/ construction/ fabrication	77.0%	148
Technology	76.0%	150
Health	74.5%	153
Exercise	54.4%	147
Mentor young men/ boys	53.1%	147
Cooking	38.6%	145

Discussion

SA sheds demonstrate a long history in the chronology of community men's sheds with some dating back to the beginning of the shed movement. Some sheds responding to the survey claim to have been operation for 20 years or more which positions them among the oldest sheds in Australia and certainly predates the recent mushrooming of men's sheds across in Australia over the last five or six years. Conversely, over half of the sheds responding to the state wide survey fit into the timeframe of growth over the last decade with about one third of sheds being part of the very recent growth trend (less than 2 years old) and about half of the sheds being less than 10 years old. Of note is that sheds in regional and rural SA are found more commonly than sheds in metropolitan Adelaide. This finding is consistent with other studies which report 58 – 67% of respondents being from sheds outside of major cities (Cordier & Wilson, 2013b; Golding & Harvey, 2006). This may reflect the closer 'community' context, greater general community socialisation, as well as more space and easier access to shed type spaces in rural areas compared with large cities.

The SASS provided a useful insight into day to day operations of South Australian sheds and the prominent governance models. Auspice by local health services is the most common governance model reported, suggesting that sheds that fall under the jurisdiction of a health service may have a stronger health focus than sheds not directly associated with health services health focus. However, other researchers have found that this is not necessarily the case unless there is a close relationship between a health service and the shed (Hayes & Williamson, 2005; Wilson et al., 2014).

This study found that rural sheds were generally larger than their metropolitan counterparts and boasted more members and more days of operation. It stands to reason that sheds with more floor space are be able to cater for more members and conduct a broader range of activities, which in turn may enhance their membership and sustainability. The SASS found the median size of a community shed was about 110m². If one considers that the typical household double garage (~45m²) can generally accommodate a car together with a work bench, some tools and storage space and perhaps when the car is absent, space for two to three people to work comfortably, it can be

reasonably envisaged that 110m² might typically accommodate work space together with a range of plant and equipment for up to 10 men at a time. This relatively small size would generally preclude a social area separate from the workshop area within the confines of the shed. It is no wonder that one of the most common requests from sheds around the country is for more room (Misan, 2008).

With regard to health status, males who are disadvantaged by poverty or geographical remoteness are at higher risk of ill health than their city counterparts. Males, from low-income households, living in disadvantaged areas, with lower levels of education and employed in blue-collar jobs generally report poorer health status (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, 2010, 2012). Older, rural, socially disadvantaged, lesser educated, socially isolated men are at additional risk (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012). Co-incidentally, the profile of men in rural SA sheds corresponds with this latter risk demographic (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008; Leahy, Glover, & Hetzel, 2009). This isn't to say that men's sheds make men sick but rather that older men with a range of social, psychosocial and chronic disease co-morbidities, are active participants in many SA sheds. This convergence of setting and risk profile suggests that men's sheds present a unique opportunity for targeted health promotion and illness prevention programs aimed at older, at risk men (Australian Government, 2010; Misan & Sergeant, 2009).

The RSS study of individual shed participants found rural shed members to be older, retired, with low levels of educational attainment, from blue-collar or farming backgrounds and from a lower SES grouping. The attributes are consistent with previous studies (Golding, 2011b; Golding et al., 2007; Golding & Harvey, 2006; Graves, 2001) but quantified for the first time for rural SA sheds. Members in this study were older than previously reported with sixty eight percent of men aged 65 years or older compared to 44% in the literature (Golding et al., 2007) . This may reflect the fact that SA was an early adopter of the shed concept (Earle, Earle, & Von Mering, 1999; Misan, 2008) and with SA sheds being slightly older than sheds in other states, the membership is also older. These findings further highlight the risk profile of SA shed members, who being older are likely to have one or more chronic medical conditions and be less likely to engage with the health system until they have a functional disability (Courtenay, 2000).

While the sample in this study reported education levels similar to those reported previously (Golding & Harvey, 2006), this sample had a higher proportion of men educated to year seven or less. Previous literature has described older rural men, because of their rural origins, as having lesser educational opportunities. This arose because of the expectation of male offspring to either to work on the family farm or to seek other work from a young age to support the family (Caldwell, Jorm, & Dear, 2004). This finding of low educational attainment may presents potential numeracy and literacy issues for some shed members, raising implications for the language and reading level used in health promotion materials as well as for other aspects of health literacy.

Data from this study showed a lower proportion of participants living alone compared with other studies (Golding & Harvey, 2006). Conversely, the study found that shed members were more likely to be living alone than the Australian average (17%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The relatively large proportion of shed members who live alone suggests that SA sheds provide a supportive environment that acts as a buffer to social isolation and community disengagement, both major contributors to poor health outcomes (Wilson & Cordier, 2013).

As a recreational setting, the informal nature of sheds has been previously linked to their rising popularity, with members enjoying the inclusive, male friendly atmosphere that sheds offer (Ballinger, Talbot, & Verrinder, 2009). The study found that social engagement and interaction is a key factor both for joining and returning to a shed with the main attractions being informality, camaraderie, sense of belonging, opportunity for productivity, a male friendly setting and the variety of activities on offer. These findings corresponds with other studies wherein the social aspect of the shed is a key reason for member participation (Cordier & Wilson, 2013a; Ormsby, Stanley, & Jaworski, 2010).

Shed participants are also receptive to the shed as a learning environment, including for health promotion. This information provides a positive outlook for future formal and informal learning including health promotion activities and is consistent with findings of others (Australian Government, 2010; Brown, Golding, & Foley, 2008; Glover & Misan, 2012; Golding, 2011a; Golding et al., 2007; Hansji, Wilson, & Cordier, 2014; Milligan et al., 2013; Wilson & Cordier, 2013).

Summary and Conclusion

This is the first paper to describe in any detail the characteristics of South Australian men's sheds and the men who frequent them for recreation and leisure. The paper describes the profile of 42 men's sheds in SA as well as that of 163 men who are members of sheds in rural communities. The findings demonstrate that community men's sheds in SA continue to thrive in both metropolitan Adelaide and in communities further afield. While men's sheds in SA appeared early in the evolution of the Australian community men's sheds phenomenon, new sheds are still being established on a regular basis, particularly in rural communities. There are more sheds in regional, rural and remote areas than in large urban centres which may reflect a greater acceptance or need for socialisation and recreational pursuits among men in rural areas as well as a greater general sense of community.

SA sheds generally cater for older, retired, lesser educated men from generally lower SES groups and most commonly from blue-collar backgrounds. Men in rural SA sheds appear older than described in previous studies and a greater proportion report lower educational attainment. The majority of participants are married and living with a partner although a higher than national average proportion live alone. This suggests a particular appeal of the community men's shed by socially isolated, older men, particularly in rural areas. Members are motivated to join and remain shed members because of the informality, camaraderie, sense of belonging, opportunity for purposeful endeavour, the male friendly environment and the variety of activities on offer. The relaxed informal atmosphere of the community men's shed is a conducive environment for hands on learning, offering the potential for tailored health promotion activities directed at older men.

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