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TITLE:

Do Social Connections Make Us Happier? New Evidence Comparing Urban and Rural Australia

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The pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal that has been widely recognised by academic research and government policies. The literature documents that individuals' happiness is affected by various demographic and socioeconomic factors; yet little research has systematically examined if social connections influence happiness and whether the impacts differ between urban and rural areas. Using an approach of social networks analysis, this paper investigates positive and negative effects of social connections and networking activities on happiness. Findings from the 2014 *Australian Social Networks Survey* reveal that people who have a club membership, a dense personal network for discussing important matters and a stronger sense of neighbourhood belonging tend to be happier in urban and rural areas. Besides, urbanites would be happier if they have a higher level of social trust, receive more types of social support and spend more time in social activities. Feeling stressed about social commitments, feeling restricted by social demands, and being excluded by a social group are negatively associated with happiness in urban and rural areas. This evidencebased paper, drawing on the comprehensive social networks data that has been first ever available in the Australian context, contributes to both academic and policy study of happiness.