

Community highlights

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought discussing.

[How Australians Die: cause #1 – heart diseases and stroke](#)

This week, we rain our How Australians Die series. It detailed five leading causes of death in Australia — [heart diseases and stroke](#) , [cancers](#) , [dementia](#) , [chronic lower respiratory diseases](#) and [diabetes](#) — and how we can lower the rates of these illnesses.

On the first article in the series, John Mendoza [posted](#) an alternative way of quantifying death: a focus on years lost rather than numbers of deaths. This, he argued, highlights the need to address suicide rates.

Regrettably the article only focuses on total numbers of deaths. And while there is no argument that cardio vascular diseases are responsible for the most deaths, most of theses deaths occur close to or indeed above the age of 75. The far more important statistic is the potential years of life lost. That is the total number of years of life lost to a specific cause before age 75. That cause is Suicide. Average age of suicide death is 44 years. That means for the official number of 2,864 suicide deaths in Australia in 2014, the average number of potential years of life lost was 31. Suicide deaths are predominately in the most productive years of life. That is not the case with cardio vascular diseases or indeed cancers. What we also know is that other leading causes of sudden death - falls, accidental poisoning and single vehicle accidents (all of which are rising - sharply in the cause of falls) - mask the real number of suicides. There is no compelling case for us to invest scarce public funds in more research or services for causes of death that occur predominately late in life. The economics case alone means we must invest in both suicide prevention research and services. This is costing our nation dearly.

Several commenters concurred, thanking John for his comment. David Roth added to the discussion with a [reply](#) about the potential “years of active live lost” from heart disease:

Community highlights

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While I agree that suicide is a major problem, I don't think we should disinvest in heart research, because we need to consider not only heart deaths, but possibly long periods of morbidity and disability before death occurs. That might be measured, if I may make up a term, as potential years of active life lost. Although death rates from heart disease for younger cohorts are considerably lower, I would speculate that the period of illness/disability preceding death is on average much longer than for older persons. These are potential long term costs to the economy, to the sufferer's family, disability services and the hospital system. Declaration of interest: being physically disabled by heart disease, I know this first hand.

Suicide remains a topic of interest and concern for our commenters. You can read our coverage on the subject [here](#).

The f-word enters the campaign and trips up both major parties

Eva Cox's article discussed how feminism entered the election campaign:

Bill Shorten unintentionally fired the feminism debate by saying the changes were targeted at women, both as the major users and household organisers of childcare. Nationals deputy Fiona Nash and Today show host Lisa Wilkinson branded this statement "prehistoric", so Shorten then had to defend his stance by saying men rely on women to handle childcare arrangements.

Multiple interesting comments and discussions appeared in the comment section. Here are a couple of samples.

Amanda Barnes [shared](#) a few perspectives on Shorten's comment:

There are several ways of looking at Shorten's comment. One, is that he is just stating the patently obvious. Childcare remains predominantly an issue that is dominated by women. Any cursory observation of the proportion of women to men at drop off and pick up at any school or child care facility will reveal that it is women who are still primarily responsible for these

Community highlights

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activities.

Another way of looking at the comment, is that we should be able to expect that a potential Prime Minister would be leading future developments in this fundamental policy area. An area that underpins the health of the community's social and economic systems. A leader should be visionary and speak from a place that seeks to define future trends rather than just reinforcing what is. Particularly if what is, is less than ideal.

As Eva and Susan have already pointed out, the issue of childcare is as much a societal one as it is a personal one. It is in all our best interest to have an equitable system that benefits everyone, not the least of whom are the children.

Christine Nicholls thanked Eva for the article and [argued](#) his comment reflects the way society views of society:

Another terrific article - thank you Eva. You also cover some of the considerable intricacies of the situation.

I'm no apologist for Shorten but I do think that his comment about childcare being largely the domain/province of women and something that actually continues to affect women to a greater extent than men, does actually address the 'realpolitik' (sadly) of the situation to the present day - that it is still largely REGARDED in Australian society as 'women's work' to sort this out (despite considerable advances in this arena over the years, largely class related owing to the fact that some people can afford it to a much greater extent than others).

But Bill Shorten is no wordsmith which is why he's needed to go into damage control over this. Meanwhile, Malcolm Turnbull has expertly exploited the situation by declaring himself a feminist - 'some thing' that even Julie Bishop will not admit to...as you state.

My points here are that this current situation involves imbricated matters of both gender and social class (as measured in economic terms), and these are indivisible in this debate, and also

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involves a PM with a silky tongue and a would-be PM who quite frequently comes out with clangers - and neither of these attributes are particularly provide great insight into the measure of each man. Equally, during the lead-up to the election each party is simply out to go for broke quite opportunistically when it comes to any perceived weakness displayed and that's what happened in this case...

Mike Swinburne asked why is was sexist to call childcare a "women's issue", beginning a discussion with Michael Croft and Susan Nolan.

[Mike Swinburne](#) :

Why on earth is it supposedly sexist to label childcare as a 'woman's issue'? It has been described as a woman's issue by everyone for years, including just about every single woman's lobby group in the country.

For Fiona Nash or Lisa Wilkinson to label Bill Shorten as 'prehistoric' for linking women with childcare beggars belief.

[Michael Croft](#) :

Because childcare is a societal issue and not a women's issue, so to label something on the basis of sex that affects all of us is sexist.

[Susan Nolan](#) :

Because child care is a parents' issue – not a women's issue. Something which women have been saying for well over forty years to my knowledge.

Community highlights

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Not all women have children – they are, however, still real women.

Parents have children – not women.

It is that rather large subset of the population who are parents – parents are both male and female.

[Mike Swinburne](#) :

Susan, I know that childcare is a parent's issue - I have been saying the same thing myself for years.

But women's lobby groups - and politicians - have been describing it as a women's issue for years. There is absolutely zero doubt about that. So it is hypocritical and it beggars belief that in the middle of an election campaign that a politician can be described as 'prehistoric' or 'sexist' for describing it in exactly the same way as people have been describing it for a bloody long time.

Either it is a parents issue - and people should have always been describing it as such, or it is a women's issue - and it wasn't wrong for Shorten to say that it was.

[Susan Nolan](#) :

All I can say, Mike, is that since the seventies the groups that I've been involved with (including at least some of the women's groups I've been involved with) have been describing child care as a parents' issue.

Community highlights

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That is my experience.

[Election FactCheck: is crime getting worse in Australia](#)

As we've said [before](#), we want to ensure people can discuss this year's federal election in a constructive way. That, to quote myself in a previous blog post, means a few things:

- removing personal attacks aimed other commenters or politicians
- removing comments that seem more interested in provoking people across political lines than having a constructive discussion
- keeping things on-topic
- encouraging people to show respect to those they disagree with.

By and large, our comments have been in line with these expectations during the election campaign. But that doesn't mean things haven't gone awry.

That was the case on our FactCheck on Pauline Hansen's statements about [crime getting worse in Australia](#)

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Here's part of a [comment](#) from Liz Minchin, one of our senior editors, on the article:

From a quick look I can see a fair bit of name-calling in this, and it's not very constructive. You might love or loathe a particular politician or party, but if we can stick to talking more about issues than people, it'd really help.

There are far too many websites where the majority of readers simply ignore or actually hate the comments, because they descend into partisan name-calling. Since we're called The Conversation, we really would like to be an exception to that rule: a place where people can

Community highlights

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come and find thoughtful, intelligent, constructive comments from people from all walks of life. When our comments sections do work like that - and they do sometimes, with genuine debate, not just argument - it's a thing of beauty.

We'll continuing working to ensure there's more genuine debate than just argument in our comments. And thanks to everyone that contributes to the former.

The Hobbit took our breath away: now it's the new normal

Finally, Peter Ormonde [pointed out](#) the embarrassing side of science on an article about an early human species:

Bloody science eh? Finding new stuff and upsetting the applecart. 'Twas ever thus.

But it is a peculiarity of this evolution business that one discovery can overturn an entire set of preconceptions, assumptions and expectations.

Just shows us what we don't know. And that can be embarrassing.

See you next week for more discussions that are the right kind of embarrassing.

Authors: Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

Read more <http://theconversation.com/community-highlights-60844>