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**“It’s the people that keep me here”: Exploring the role of community attachment in increasing length of residency.**

### **Abstract**

The increasing transient population within rural and remote communities challenges the sustainability of regional Australia. Challenges to sustainability are particularly present for mining communities that have an increasing reliance on transient workforces. Identifying ways to increase length of residency within mining communities could assist in increasing the economic and social stability of these communities. The aim of this qualitative research was to explore residents' intentions to stay and factors that increased their intentions to leave a remote mining community. Twenty residents (three males, 17 females) recruited from a remote mining community in Queensland, Australia, participated in interviews. Interview data was analysed using thematic analysis within an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework. The participants reported their connection to people and place was their predominant motivation for wanting to stay in the community. The main reasons that participants reported wanting to leave the community was a perceived lack of access to family, services and employment, and lifestyle factors. Additionally, some participants reported intentions to leave as they perceived that the community was not their permanent home. These findings provide practical insight into strategies that could be developed to increase length of residency. For example, improving community attachment and satisfaction through promoting awareness of the available services and activities in which residents can participate. Through these strategies for increasing the length of residency within regional communities, the sustainability of these communities may then in turn be enhanced.

**Keywords:** regional sustainability; community connectedness, length of residency

Highlights:

- Intentions to stay and factors that increase intentions to leave were explored.
- Connection to people and place was a predominant motivation for wanting to stay.
- Improving community attachment and satisfaction may improve intentions to stay.

## 1. Introduction

The sustainability of regional communities within Australia are being threatened by increasing challenges to community longevity and liveability (Hossain et al., 2013; Petkova, Lockie, Rolfe, & Ivanova, 2009). One of the challenges that these communities face is that of the rise of the transient population. Transient populations are particularly associated with workforces in the mining sector, a dominant industry in many regional communities in Australia. The decreased length of residence, and as such increase in transient population, in regional mining communities is due to multiple factors such as increasing reliance on long distance commuting (Storey, 2001, 2010) and the experience of downturns (Shandro, Veiga, Shoveller, Scolbe, & Koehoom, 2011). As such, the aim of this paper was to identify ways in which to increase lengths of residency within regional mining communities to promote their sustainability.

To understand how lengths of residency influence community sustainability, we first need to clarify what is meant by “community” and why the sustainability of these regional communities are important. Scrutiny has been placed on the term ‘community’ due to varying definitions and uses of the term “community” from different perspectives (Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002). In the context of this paper, community was investigated in terms of a rural Australian, mining industry based town. A geographical community provides a useful proxy in this case as many mining industry based towns are in rural and remote areas and therefore experience some degree of physical isolation. These communities generally have defined physical boundaries where residents use the same services, share the same local government and share a sense of belonging (Black, 2005). Therefore, community in this context was defined as a community of place or a geographical community. In terms of ‘community sustainability’, this concept has also faced considerable debate, with little consensus over its definition (Black, 2005; Storey, 2010). The New South Wales Premier's

Department Strengthening Communities Unit (2001) defines a sustainable community as one where residents are able to live healthy, productive and enjoyable lives in the present and future. Therefore, community sustainability can be conceptualised as the long-term maintenance of community wellbeing or functioning (Costanza & Patten, 1995). Further, a sustainable community should be economically, environmentally and socially healthy (President's Council on Sustainable Development, 1997). Building community sustainability from a bottom-up approach can help build regional, state and national sustainability as well (Longstaff, Armstrong, Perrin, Parker, & Hidek, 2010). Consequently, sustainable communities may help ensure the sustainability of the wider systems of which they are a part. To achieve community sustainability as defined above, it is important to identify the challenges, such as transient populations, which regional communities face that could hinder community long-term wellbeing.

The transience of a population can be increased by a number of factors, but the use of long distance commuting (LDC) has been often been indicated as an associated factor (Storey, 2001, 2010). LDC can be defined as when an individual has to travel to and stay in a work region that is different to the region where they normally reside (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Research has identified that increased local service provision (measured as available teachers per student, medical practitioners per resident and proportion of houses with internet) and increased rental accommodation was associated with decreased long distance commuting (LDC) use and encouraged migration into a region (Nicholas & Welters, 2017). Therefore, there is some evidence to suggest that higher use of LDC workforces may contribute to a lower retention of residents to the region and that this potentially affects the availability and stability of retention-associated services (for example, health & education) within the region.

Both community characteristics and individual factors can influence decisions to move to and stay in a regional community. Research has identified that a community's lifestyle or liveability and available education opportunities can affect the attraction and retention of residents within regional areas (Miles, Marshall, Rolfe, & Noonan, 2006). More region specific issues affecting the attraction and retention of potential residents included: distance from major centres; lack of job opportunities for partners; lack of employment variety; high workloads; difficulty finding relief staff; professional isolation; lack of social and cultural infrastructure; children's educational needs; and negative perceptions of rural, mining and regional areas (Miles et al., 2006). These issues affecting attraction and retention of potential residents are not consistently identified within all communities, nor do they affect communities in a similar way. As such, there are difficulties that are unique to each community that inhibit both the attraction and retention of residents.

In addition to community characteristics, individual factors can also influence the likelihood of moving to and staying in a regional community. Strong community attachment and satisfaction may increase length of residency through decreasing individuals' intentions to leave a community. However, there has been difficulties in past research in identifying the influence of community attachment and satisfaction due to a plethora of terms, definitions and measurements used to assess these factors (Lewicka, 2011). Broadly, community attachment can be defined as an individual's connection with other residents and the community in which they live (Trentelman, 2009). Therefore, community attachment entails the social aspect of an individual's attachment to a community (Anton & Lawrence, 2016). Erickson, Call, and Brown (2012) identified that increased community attachment was associated with increased community satisfaction where community satisfaction was defined as the subjective perception of community functionality (Erickson et al., 2012; Trentelman, 2009). For example, the extent to which an individual can access services or participate

within society. Community satisfaction has been associated with decreased intentions to leave and increased intentions to stay (Heaton, Fredrickson, Fuguitt, & Zuiches, 1979; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992). Specifically, residents' satisfaction with local economic opportunity, service quality and the physical environment influence decisions to leave or stay in a community (Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Vogt, Allen, & Cordes, 2003). It may be that increasing individual satisfaction with community functionality and to a lesser extent, individual connections with other residents and community, can decrease intentions to leave and could ultimately lead to increased community length of residency.

An individual's community attachment and satisfaction may also change over time. For example, residents' decisions to stay or leave may change dependent on their stage in life (Everingham et al., 2013). What may be important to an individual when they are young may change as they age. More specifically, changes in employment or family, such as divorce or lack of services for young people, may influence individual intentions to stay in or leave a community (Everingham et al., 2013). In uncertain situations, Halfacree and Rivera (2012) suggest that it is easier for an individual to remain in their community. On the other hand, geographical inequalities, such as higher educational opportunities within urban areas, can contribute to young peoples' intentions to leave (Everingham, Devenin, & Collins, 2015). However, attachment to a local place and social relationships are reported by young people of rural communities in spite of their reported frustrations of isolation. Experience with and attachment to specific communities as well as specific types of communities may influence individual fit with rural communities (Everingham et al., 2015). For example, a sense of rootedness or connectedness with a geographical area may influence an individual's experiences within a community and their sense of acceptance and permanency. Specifically, the rural environment seems to play a large role in residents' decisions to stay within rural communities. People that have moved to a rural community who report a pro-rural view of



their migration, report the uniqueness of the rural landscape and their relationship with the landscape (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Therefore, the characteristics of the specific community as well as the individual need to be considered in regards to residents' intentions to stay or leave. These findings further indicate that facilitating connectedness with a community may be key to increasing the likelihood of staying across life stages.

The attraction and retention of residents within mining communities is of particular importance as there are many factors inherent to mining communities that can decrease lengths of residency. Reliance on LDC is a particular issue for mining communities as it can impact community economic viability (Storey, 2001). Changing from a residential workforce to a transient workforce can reduce the economic viability of the available infrastructure and services within a community due to fewer residents making use of such amenities (Storey, 2010). Additionally, residents of mining communities perceive LDC to inhibit the integration of temporary residents into the community (Haslam McKenzie, 2010; Storey, 2001). The perceived lack of integration can often result in mining community residents' perceiving that mining profits flow out of their community to metropolitan areas where LDC workers often reside (Carrington & Pereira, 2011; Petkova et al., 2009; Storey, 2001). As such, the introduction of LDC and therefore a transient population can reduce the actual and resident-perceived economic viability of mining communities.

In addition to the increased use of LDC, mining communities can also experience increased temporary populations. The primary reason that people generally move to mining communities is financially driven and often viewed as a temporary move to save money (Sharma & Rees, 2007). The sense of belonging and connectedness to community is resultantly lowered within the community. Additionally, previously held negative perceptions of mining communities could hinder new residents' ability to form an attachment to the community and to be satisfied with the community. As noted previously by Miles et al.

(2006), negative perceptions of rural, mining and regional areas can affect the attraction and retention of potential residents. Furthermore, for mining communities, population loss due to downturns within the mining industry can also result in decreased lengths of residency (Shandro et al., 2011). Fewer jobs during downturns results in residents leaving the community in search of employment opportunities in other communities (Shandro et al., 2011). The resulting population loss has been associated with poorer social cohesion within mining communities (Bell, 2009). The reduction of social networks is suggested to erode residents' familiarity with and trust of each other (Morrison, 2003). These findings indicate that changes in mining activity can result in the disruption of social networks and in turn social cohesion within mining communities. Therefore, these factors inherent to mining communities may inhibit individual satisfaction with and attachment to community resulting in decreased lengths of residency.

Mining communities are subject to many factors that can decrease lengths of residency through decreasing residents' community attachment. As indicated above, mining communities can experience decreased length of residency due to multiple factors such as increasing reliance on LDC (Storey, 2001, 2010) and the experience of downturns (Shandro et al., 2011). However, there is limited research on how lengths of residency may be increased within Australian mining communities. Therefore, the aim of this paper was to explore mining community residents' intentions to stay in or leave their community and the reasons behind these intentions. Specifically, this paper explored the role of community attachment and satisfaction in influencing length of residency within a mining community. Increasing length of residency within mining communities could help increase their economic and social stability and in turn sustainability. From these findings, suggestions are made for strategies that may increase the length of residency and thus improve sustainability within

mining communities. This study was part of a larger project intended to explore the impacts of the mining industry upon residents of mining communities.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Methodology**

The methodological framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was applied within this project. IPA provides a framework for the analysis of the lived experiences of participants. IPA involves exploring the individual subjective perception of an experience rather than providing an objective statement of the experience itself (Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA therefore allows for the exploration of the study's aim which was to gain an understanding of residents' intentions to stay in or leave their mining community.

### **2.2 Participants**

Any resident of the target community was eligible for participation, provided they were over 18 years of age. General community residents were recruited from a mining community through contacting local media organisations and social media sites to raise awareness about the study. The research was promoted via local radio stations and newspapers within the community. The project was also promoted through various industries (such as health, education, mining) to capture diversity of experience of living in a mining community. There are no strict guidelines regarding sample sizes within IPA due to the importance that is placed upon the individual's experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). No limit was placed on the amount of participants required for the project. There were 20 participants (three males, 17 females) in the current study, who were recruited from one remote mining community in Queensland, Australia in 2015. Participants were aged between 23 and 81 years with an average age of 41 years ( $SD=16$ ) and they had lived in the community between 1.5 to 53 years with an average of 16 years ( $SD=16$ ). Those who reported intentions to stay in

the community (10 participants) had lived there for an average of 21 years ( $SD=17$ ) and those who reported intentions to leave the community (10 participants) had lived there for an average of 11 years ( $SD=14$ ).

### **2.3 Materials**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to explore their perceptions of living in a mining community. Interview questions were designed by the research team to explore constructs based on the previous literature specifically regarding community wellbeing and satisfaction. There were 14 main interview questions used within the larger project with associated prompt questions if needed. From the broader project, this paper explores the question ‘Do you have any intentions of leaving the community?’ Interviews were audiotaped for verbatim transcription.

### **2.4 Procedure**

There were 16 individual interviews and two interviews conducted with two participants attending the same time. The majority of the interviews were held face-to-face (16) and two were conducted over the phone. The face-to-face interviews occurred at a time and place within the community chosen by the participant. Phone interviews occurred at a time chosen by the participant. This project was approved by the James Cook University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number: H5913).

### **2.5 Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within an IPA methodological framework (Smith et al., 2009). Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information that can be used within many qualitative methodologies and therefore fits within the IPA framework (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis provides a systematic process to identify, analyse and report on patterns within data. Analysis was conducted as an iterative process of six steps including 1) data familiarisation, 2) generate initial codes, 3)

organise potential themes, 4) revise themes, 5) generate definitions and names for themes, and 6) generate report on analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data familiarisation for interview data is generally achieved by the researcher being involved with the interviewing processes, transcribing the interview for the recording, and reading and re-reading the interviews. Generating initial codes involved the systematic generation of codes for important data within the entirety of the collected data. Initial codes were generated through manifest-content analysis where the visible and/or apparent content of the transcripts were coded (Boyatzis, 1998). Searching for themes involved identifying patterns within the initial codes focussing on the relationships evident within the codes. A theory-driven approach influenced how the initial codes were combined to create the themes specifically drawing on the community wellbeing and sustainability literature. Revising themes involved testing the themes against the original data within the codes to ensure that the data coded under a theme is similar and fits together meaningfully, and that there are clear distinctions between each of the themes. Generating definitions and names for themes involved refining the specifics of each theme and identifying how each theme differed from the others. Finally, generating the report on the analysis is the outcome of the analysis that was undertaken. Data analysis was aided by the use of the qualitative data software NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty. Ltd., 2016).

### **3. Results and Implications**

Results showed a clear distinction between those who reported intentions to stay and those who reported intentions to leave. The first section explores participants' intentions to stay and the associated implications for increasing length of residency. The second section explores participants' intentions to leave and the associated implications for increasing length of residency.

#### **3.1 Intentions to Stay**

Among the participants who intended to stay in the community, there were those who were committed to staying in the community and those who were ambivalent, or had no reason to leave at that point in time and would therefore stay. Participants who were *committed stayers* were the individuals who would stay in the community regardless of the perceived foreseeable events. Participants who were *ambivalent stayers* were the individuals who wanted to stay in the community but reported perceived foreseeable events as potential reasons to leave. Examples of this distinction are provided below.

Committed Stayer - P06: *No we don't have intentions to leave here ... even if the town did go down quite a lot...*

Ambivalent Stayer - P18: *... when I find it's my time to move on I will, but at the moment I'm staying put.*

*Committed stayers* and *ambivalent stayers* reported similar reasons to stay within the community, however the *ambivalent stayers* also reported potential reasons that would influence their decision to leave the community (see Figure 1).

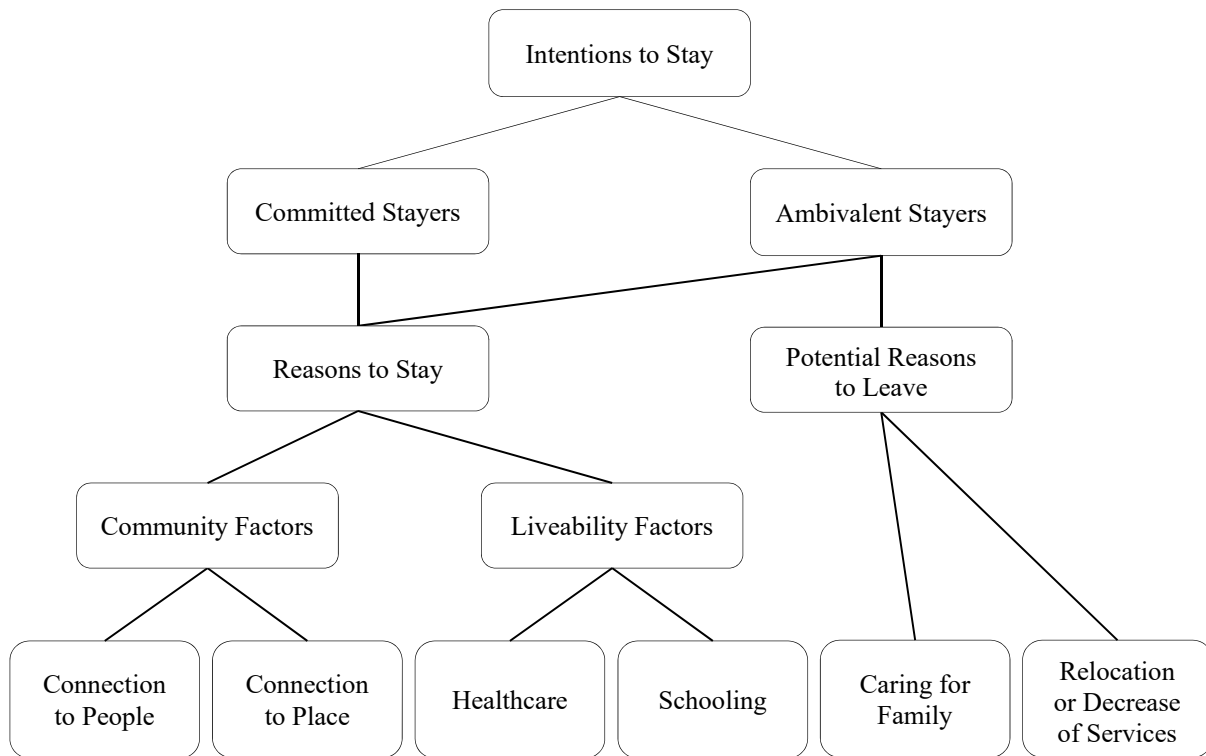


Figure 1. Reported intentions to stay and differences between committed and ambivalent stayers.

### 3.1.1 Reasons to stay.

Both committed and ambivalent stayers reported similar reasons to stay. Two themes were identified within participants' reported reasons to stay – *liveability factors* and *community factors*.

*Liveability factors* were reported by participants as the minimum standard of expected services and other factors that enhance suitability to live and stay within a community. Two further themes were identified - *healthcare* and *schooling*.

*Healthcare* was characterised by reports of the adequate provision of necessary healthcare services. This participant's report indicates that individual wants may decrease with age thus, intentions to stay may be improved as long as basic services (such as healthcare) are available.

*P06: ... but your needs are small when you get old, and as long as you've got a good hospital that you can fall into when you need to and a couple of doctors...you're alright.*

*Schooling* was characterised by reports of perceived adequacy of the school quality within the community. This participant's report suggests that for families with children, the perceived adequacy of schools within the community contributes to intentions to stay.

*P05: ... there's nothing that we can see in our lives at the moment that would warrant us wanting to go...the schools are great.*

The reported *liveability factors* suggest that people are content to live within a community as long as they perceive that community has the basic services required of any community. Other research has also found residents' satisfaction with the local service quality influenced reported intentions to stay (Heaton et al., 1979; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Vogt et al., 2003). Further, the current findings support previous findings that the availability of local services facilitates longer lengths of residency (Miles et al., 2006; Nicholas & Welters, 2017). Furthermore, this perception of basic services or the *liveability factors* can differ from person to person. Specifically, the stage of life for the individual (e.g. age and family) may influence the perception of these liveability factors. This finding adds further support for consideration of the individual's life stage when interpreting their intentions to stay (Everingham et al., 2013).

*Community factors* were perceived by participants as being unique to the town. Two further themes were identified - *connection to people* and *connection to place*.



*Connection to people* was characterised by reports of being close to family and friends both physically and emotionally. These reports highlight the importance of social relationships in influencing individuals' intentions to stay within the community.

*P15: If I wasn't here I [wouldn't] be seeing the kids as regularly.*

*P14: I think the, people is the most important thing about this place and so I think it's the people that keep me here.*

*Connection to place* was characterised by reports of attachment to the surrounding environment, enjoyment and happiness within the community, and the community forming part of their identity. An appreciation of the rural environment within the community as well as a sense of history with the community seems to facilitate intentions to stay.

*P05: Well the environment, we love getting out bush.*

*P18: I enjoy living [here] ...you've been brought up to live in the conditions out here, the dirt, the dust, the no water, and it is your roots, so...you can appreciate more than what people would when they come here for just say to work in the mine.*

*P05: The kids are happy.*

*P01: I would like to see...the seventh, eighth generation [town residents].*

The reported *community factors* were perceived as being unique to the town and keep residents within a community regardless of the available basic services. The social aspects of participants' reported community attachment were fundamental in their intentions to stay. Participants' connection to people and place were perceived as factors that may not have been possible in other communities. Therefore, these connections to the people and place of the community seem to play an important role in intentions to stay. These results suggest that

community attachment may play a more central or direct role in intentions to stay than suggested by Erickson et al. (2012). Furthermore, the importance of the rural environment being unique to the community is indicated as playing an important role in individuals' community satisfaction and therefore their intentions to stay (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Everingham et al., 2015). The reported attachment to the surrounding environment further fits with previous findings of satisfaction with the physical environment influencing decisions to stay in a community (Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Vogt et al., 2003). Additionally, participants' reported connection to place further highlights the importance of experience with and attachment to specific communities or specific types of communities in influencing individual fit with rural communities (Everingham et al., 2015). These results support that connectedness with a geographical area can influence an individual's sense of acceptance and permanency.

Based on these findings and the previous literature, increasing lengths of residency within communities may be achieved through programs that target increasing individuals' perceptions of liveability and connection to people and place. Promotion of a community's available local services may help to improve residents' perceptions of a community's liveability. Additionally, new residents may have few social networks within the community and/or may be unaware of what is available within the community. Facilitating new residents' engagement with the community may help achieve increased connection to people and place. Enhancing community engagement could be accomplished through providing welcome packages that contain information about the community and the groups, services and activities available for residents. Increased awareness of and access to what is available within the community may facilitate the development of networks and encourage individuals' engagement with the community.

### **3.1.2 Potential reasons to leave.**

For the ambivalent stayers, two themes were identified as reasons participants reported that would determine their decision to move - *caring for family* and the *relocation or decrease of services*. The potential reasons to leave provide the parameters in which an individual is willing to remain within a community. That is, intentions to stay within a community are dependent on certain factors being present or events occurring.

*Caring for family* was characterised by concern for being able to provide for the needs of children, to care for ageing parents, and to be close to grandchildren. Some of the reports suggest that for families with children, the perceived adequacy of their quality of life within the community can influence their intentions to stay. These reports also suggest that having family outside of the community can be a strong pull factor influencing intentions to stay.

*P01: ...if it comes to the point of making sure she's got everything she needs be it education, a house, opportunities and [if] it means we have to move then we have to do it.*

*P09: ...the only possible reason to move would be probably for family reasons... 'cause my family's all, mostly down in [metropolitan area]. My parents are elderly.*

*P02: If grandkids came on the scene, you'd be tempted [to leave].*

*Relocation or decrease of services* was characterised by concerns of work being relocated or if work was not available, and if the town itself were to close. These reports indicate that industry has an influence on residents' decisions to remain within a community.

*P18: But if work were to have to relocate me I will have to go.*

*P16: ...if it wasn't for the work...we wouldn't be living here.*

*P15: And the only thing that would probably definitely make me move is if the place was closing up.*

These reported potential reasons to leave further indicate that satisfaction with local service availability and employment opportunity influence individual decisions to leave or stay in a community. This finding supports the work done by Stinner and Van Loon (1992), and Vogt et al. (2003) where satisfaction with local service quality and economic opportunity influenced intentions to stay or leave. Furthermore, participant reports of potentially leaving for work or if the town closed supports previous findings of decreased lengths of residency within mining communities due to employment or industry changes (for example, LDC work structures or downturns) (Regional Australia Institute, 2015). Again, an individual's stage of life (e.g. working age) may influence the perception of these *potential reasons to leave* (Everingham et al., 2013). Additionally, these findings highlight the uncertainty residents experience within mining communities. In communities where employment and services are more stable, *relocation or decrease of services* may not be reported as a potential reason to leave. However, despite this uncertainty, ambivalent stayers still reported that they would stay within the community. As Halfacree and Rivera (2012) noted, it is easier to remain within a community when experiencing a relatively uncertain situation.

From the reported intentions to stay, committed stayers reported they would stay in the community regardless of the perceived foreseeable events. Ambivalent stayers reported they wanted to stay in the community but perceived foreseeable events as potential reasons to leave. Both committed and ambivalent stayers reported liveability and community factors as reasons to stay. Ambivalent stayers reported caring for family and the relocation or decrease of services as potential reasons to leave. These findings indicate that committed stayers perceive factors unique to the community that influence their intentions to stay regardless of

available basic services. Whereas ambivalent stayers perceive a level of basic services required to remain within the community.

### 3.2 Intentions to Leave

Four themes were identified within participants' reported intentions to leave – *time limit*, *access to services and employment*, *family factors*, and *lifestyle factors* as seen in Figure 2 below.

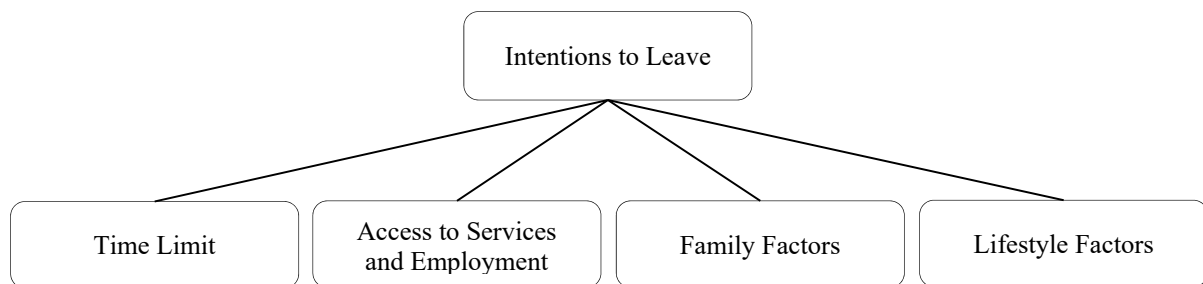


Figure 2. Reported intentions to leave.

#### 3.2.1 Time limit.

Participants who reported intentions to leave often had a specified time limit placed on their length of stay within the community or there was a more general perception that they would not remain in the community permanently.

*P19: Well as soon as my daughter finishes high school...she's in year 10 now, we joke with her that we'll have our car packed and idling out the front of her graduation ceremony.*

*P12: It's not our forever home, it's not somewhere we want to live out our entire working life and retirement, but in terms of it being a period of [our] lives, definitely enjoy living here.*

These reports highlight that residents may have enjoyed living within the community but still hold an intention to leave as the community may not fit with their life expectations (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Additionally, participants' reports of a time limit on their length of stay within the community supports previous findings of financial reasons as being the primary reason for moving to mining communities and this move being viewed as temporary (Sharma & Rees, 2007). Changing new resident's perceptions of the community to one where the community could be their permanent home could be one way to increase length of residency. Increasing connection to people and place could shift the perception of the community from being solely employment-based (as is the case with many new residents to mining communities) to a perception that is liveability and lifestyle-based. As indicated in the research conducted by Miles et al. (2006), many people may base their decision to relocate to a community on the community lifestyle factors. Therefore, highlighting that there is more to mining communities than just the available employment could influence residents' perceptions on their permanency within the community.

### **3.2.2 Access to services and employment.**

This theme was characterised by a need to be closer to health specialists (specifically tertiary healthcare), wanting access to a wider range of schooling options, and to find more employment options or relocating due to work. One participant also reported that if the town were to close then they would move sooner than planned.

*P03: I'd prefer to be closer...to services and stuff because I'm supposed to see an eye specialist every six months, or thereabouts, and I see them about once every 18 months, when I can get the money together to do it.*

*P13: So the school that I was looking for was a play based education system and that's the reason why I'm going.*

*P04: ...we're looking at [might have to] leave town because there is no work.*

### **3.2.3 Family factors.**

These factors were characterised by wanting to be closer to family to see them more often or to care for ageing family members. As noted within intentions to stay, having family outside of the community can be a strong pull factor also influencing intentions to leave.

*P13: ...we probably still would leave, cause we're finding the stretch from between when we visit our families is getting bigger and bigger.*

*P04: ...we've got ageing parents and that kind of thing.*

### **3.2.4 Lifestyle factors.**

These factors were characterised by the physical environment, such as wanting to be closer to the coast; greater access to shopping; and being able to purchase more affordable land. These reports highlight a lack of connection to place resulting from a lack of appreciation of the rural landscape and the perception of geographical inequalities.

*P10: We are coastal, I am finished with the middle of Australia.*

*P08: We miss like just having everything available to you. You go shopping, well, Bunnings here is a prime example, it's in a tin shed.*

*P03: Probably in the next couple of years I'm planning to move towards [coastal city] a bit because I want a couple of acres of land and I can't afford to buy it here.*

The above perceived lack of access to services and employment, family, and lifestyle factors supports the previous finding that retention of residents was affected by a lack of

access to services and employment, and lifestyle or liveability factors (Miles et al., 2006). Furthermore, in accordance with those participants who had intentions to leave, *ambivalent stayers* also reported that access to services and employment as well as caring for family would influence their decision to leave the community. The perceptions of inadequate local economic opportunity, service quality and physical environment have been previously reported to influence decisions to leave a community (Heaton et al., 1979; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Vogt et al., 2003). Additionally, perceived geographical inequalities contributes to a focus on wanting to be in a city (Everingham et al., 2015) or, in this case, to the coast. Therefore, lessening the perceived impact of these reported reasons behind residents' intentions to leave may help to increase the length of residency. These reported impacts could be decreased through reducing the difficulty residents experience in accessing health services or visiting family members outside the community. Offering travel rebates, or providing greater awareness where rebates are already in place, is one way in which the perceived difficulty of accessing health services and family may be minimised. Indeed, some airline companies and airports have recognised the increased travel costs for regional Queensland mining communities and offer residents a discount on flights (Qantas Airways, n.d.). Reducing travel costs may reduce the perceived difficulty of accessing health services and family that could reduce residents' intentions to leave.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to identify ways in which to increase lengths of residency within regional mining communities to promote their sustainability. This aim was achieved by exploring mining community residents' intentions to stay in or leave their community and the reasons behind these intentions. Results showed a distinction within this mining community between those who reported intentions to stay and those who reported intentions to leave. Given these differences, different approaches, as outlined above, need to be taken to



increase intentions to stay and decrease intentions to leave. Specifically, connection to the people and place of the community seem to play an important role in reported intentions to stay. Furthermore, connection to people and place may also play a role in decreasing intentions to leave through changing residents' perceptions of the community to one that is liveability and lifestyle-based. Whilst there were identified differences between the reported intentions to stay and leave, the provision of basic services and building attachment is key to enhancing community sustainability. These findings highlight the importance of attachment to people and place in increasing lengths of residency.

The results have also highlighted that intentions to stay or leave may lie on a continuum. Ambivalent stayers identified potential reasons to leave and at the same time wanted to remain within the community. Additionally, some people who reported intentions to leave still reported appreciation for their time in the community. These findings suggest that strategies aimed at increasing lengths of residency within mining and regional communities need to recognise the meanings underlying residents' intentions to either stay or leave as highlighted in this paper. Implementing the strategies suggested within this paper (such as welcome packages, promotion of local services and travel rebates) could increase mining and other regional communities' length of residency, ultimately leading to not only their own improved social and economic stability and sustainability, but also for the regions, states and nation of which they are a part.

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