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**SUCCESS IN AGRICULTURE:**  
A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS  
*Dr. Marie-Hélène Budworth & Dr. Sara Mann*

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Status of Women  
Canada

Condition féminine  
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## **Success in agriculture: A gendered perspective of social networks**

*Dr. Marie-Hélène Budworth & Dr. Sara Mann*

Existing empirical studies have examined gender differences in network strength and diversity (Huang & Aaltio, 2014; Robinson & Stubberud, 2011) and have found that women are more likely to have narrower, stronger ties and are less likely to receive benefits from their networks that favour their business success. Additionally, in terms of network resources, research suggests that women are more likely to be affiliated with less- resource rich associations and institutions (Davidsson, 2003; Lin, 2001). In this study, we examined the social networks of individuals within the agriculture sector specifically as a way of understanding how social connections inform career progression in this industry.

This study involved 25 individuals, both male and female, at varying stages in their career. The age of the participants ranged from 25 years to beyond 55, with a bi-modal distribution centering around 27 years and 48 years of age. 83% of the respondents had attended either college or university, 52% and 32% respectively.

Data was collected using three methods. First a survey asked respondents to rate career satisfaction, life satisfaction, and various networking behaviours. Second, social networks were mapped, allowing us to take a closer look at the strength and structure of the social connections at various stages of career. The following two sections review our findings and then draw conclusions from the data. Finally, a sample of respondents were interviewed in order to understand ideas about career and career success.

### **Findings**

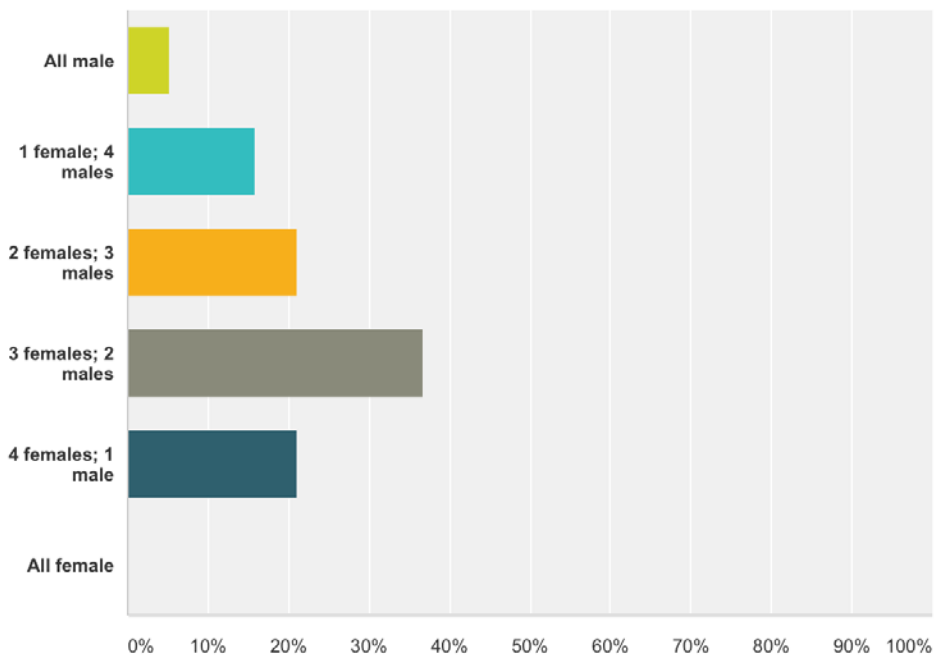
- Individuals were asked to name 25 people in their professional networks. Both early career and established women named more females as part of this network than did men at any stage of career.
- Individuals with higher levels of achievement (as measured by salary and job title) have more males in their professional network, even when controlling for years of experience.
- Individuals across the sample reported high levels of career satisfaction; career satisfaction was linked significantly to income and life satisfaction but not to other variables measured in the study (i.e., career satisfaction did not differ by gender).
- For established career individuals, education was linked to income for both men and women. For early career individuals, education was linked to income for women but not men. In other words, in the early years men can earn more with less education but this does not hold true for long-term success.

- When asked to name the 5 individuals at the 'core' of a network, both males and females indicated that they interacted most frequently with women (see diagram 1). In part, this can be explained by the fact that women are more likely to play support roles within administrative settings.

Diagram 1

### What is the gender composition of the 5 people in your network with whom you interact most frequently?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 1



Four sample social network diagrams follow. The diagrams are examples of early and established career networks matched to gender. Each dot on the diagram represents an individual in the respondent's social network. The lines between the nodes represent the connections between people. Where there are no lines, it can be assumed the individuals do not interact or do not know one another. The size of the dot represents the individual's 'centrality', or influence, to the network. Gender is labeled and also represented by colour. The respondents indicated that they seek advice from individuals who are represented by circles.

Diagram 2. Network of a female in her early career

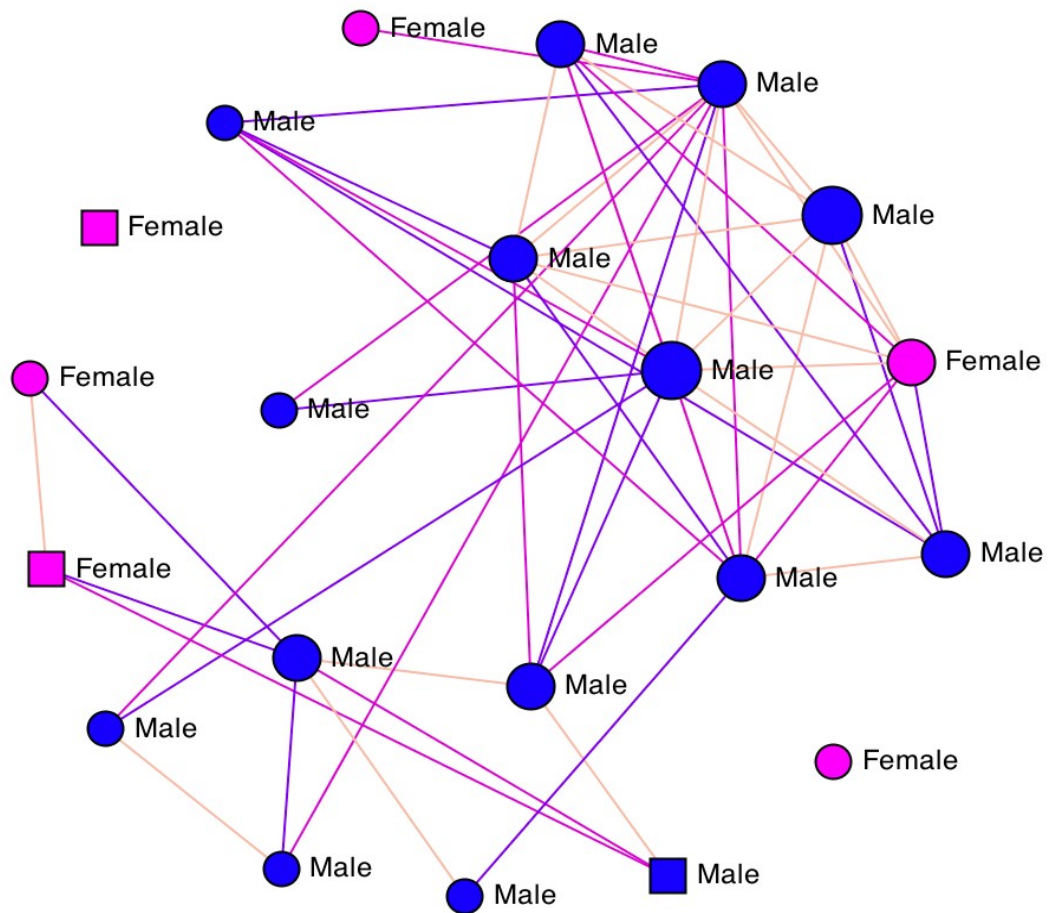


Diagram 3. Network of a male in his early career

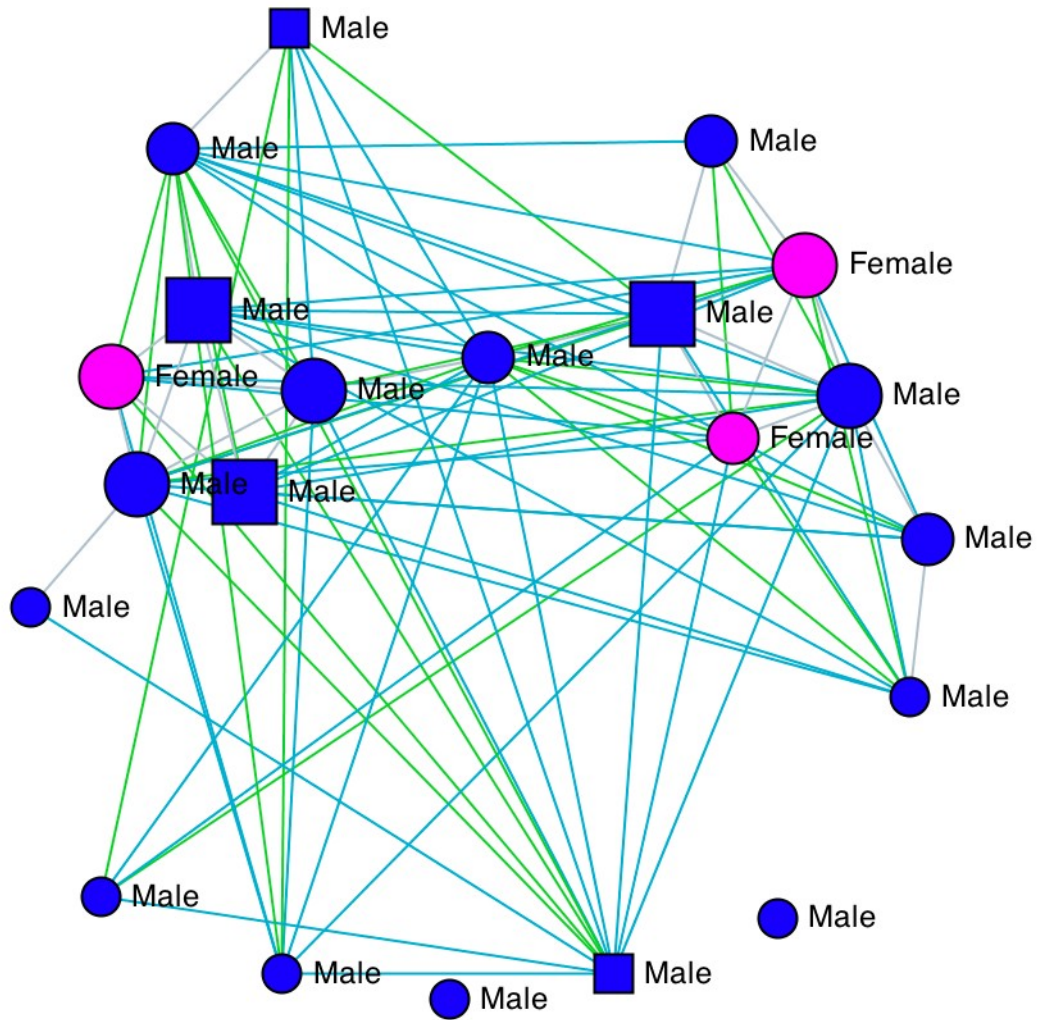




Diagram 4. Network of a female with an establish career (leadership)

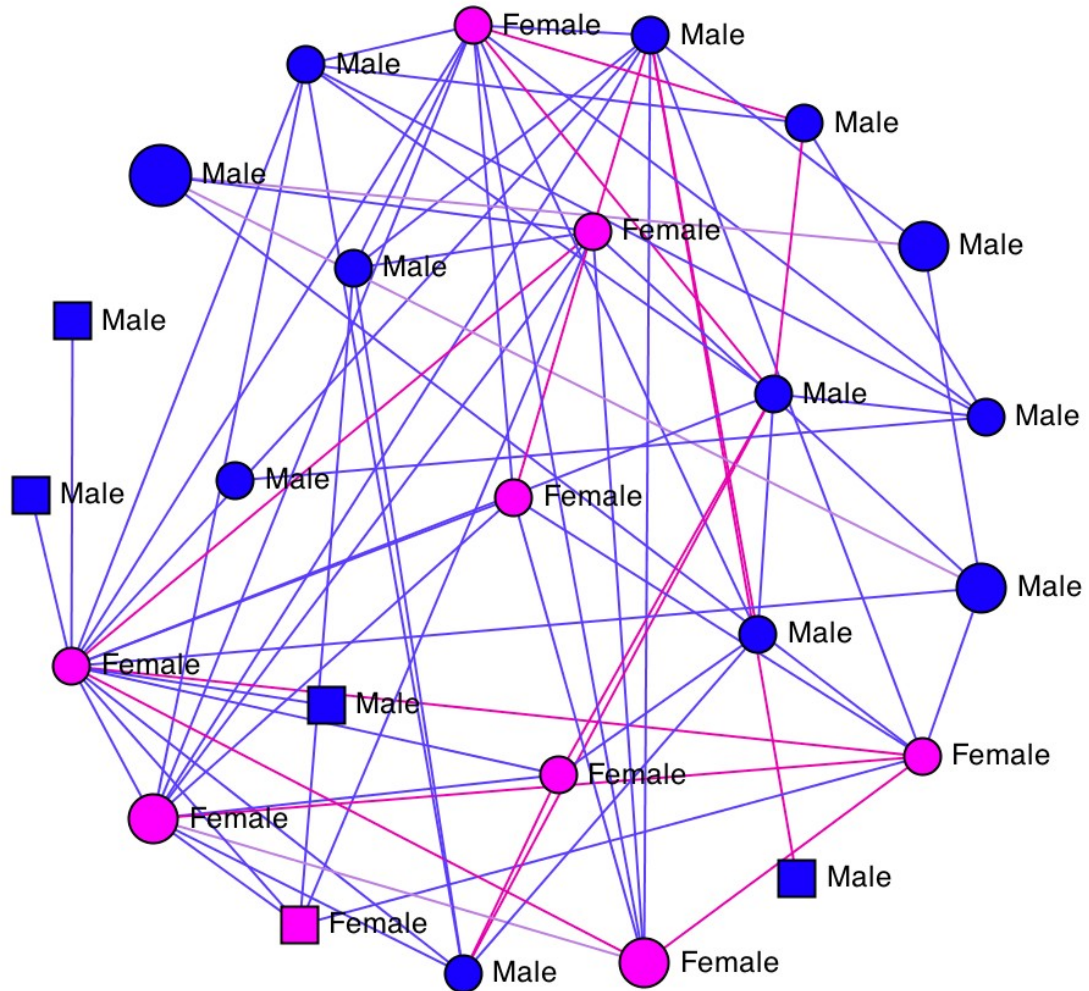
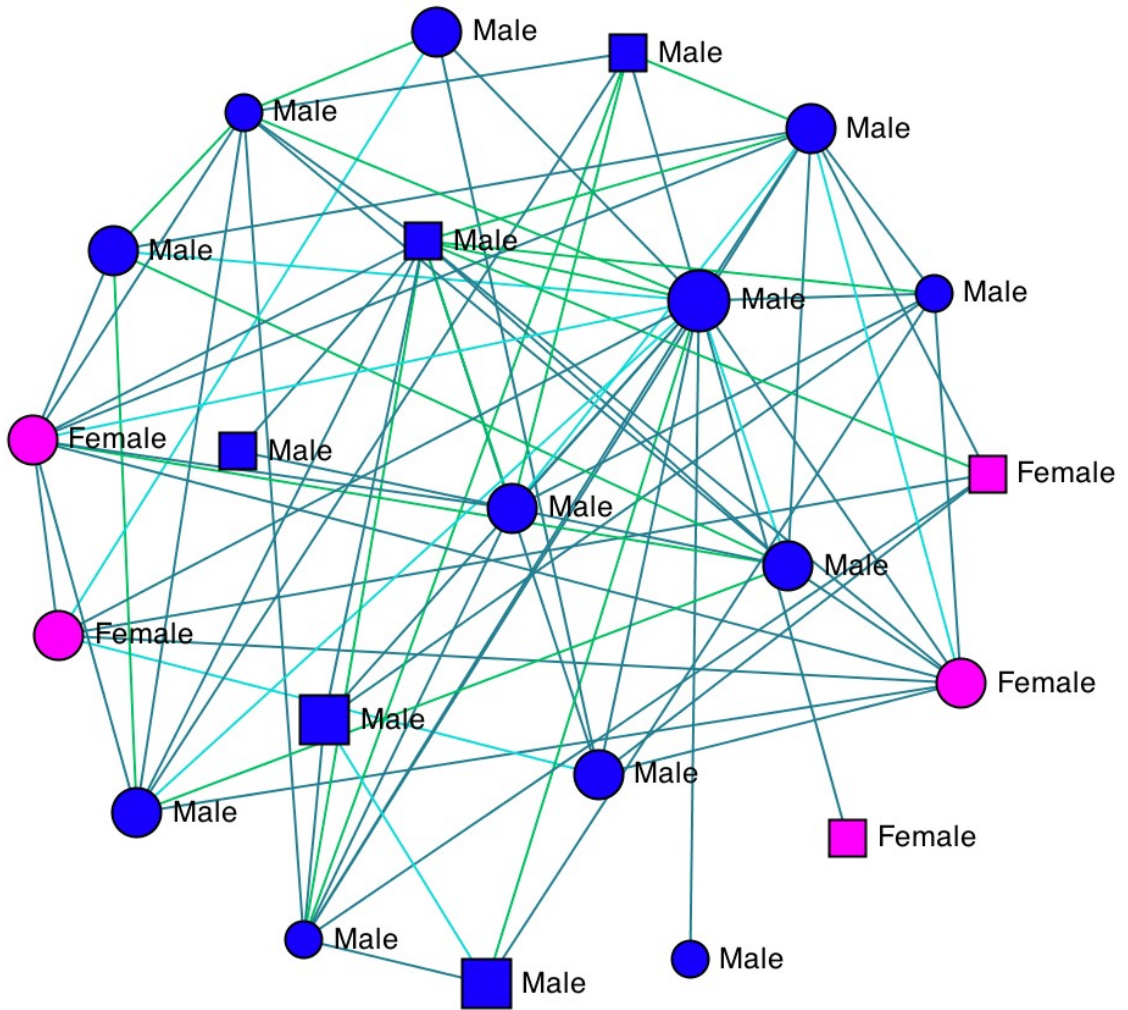


Diagram 5. Network of a male with an established career (leadership)



- All extended networks are majority male (68% to 85%). Notably the most male dominated networks belong to early career males and established career females.
- Both early male and early female career networks contain ‘cliques.’ Cliques represent dense clusters where everyone within a clique knows one another with limited interaction with other cliques within the network. The networks of established career individuals, both male and female, are characterized by the absence of cliques. In contrast, these networks are highly interconnected.
- A distinguishing feature of the network of an established, successful female is that she has a number of women who are central to her network from whom she seeks advice regularly.

## Implications

The aim of this section is to draw out observations from this data that can be used to guide and support women in establishing successful careers within the agriculture industry. While there are many interesting observations, the following points are most relevant to career development.

First, early career networks are characterized by the existence of cliques. In other words, early career networks are highly segmented. In order to transition into a leadership role, it is useful to develop your network connections such that there is a great deal of overlap. Professionally, this implies that individuals should aim to ensure that the work they are doing is connected. People know about their efforts across dimensions and, where possible, individuals from various parts of their network are given an opportunity to meet and interact. This can be useful because it increases the centrality of the individual to the network itself. If your connections all know, or know of one another, you have greater influence across the whole network. You become important as a person who connects people. Similarly, your efforts across projects and domains become known by a wider range of people.

Second, early careers are characterized by a heavy concentration of males. This might be due to availability. In other words, this might be simply because there are more men available relative to women at this stage of career. Nevertheless, there is a need to cultivate trusted relationships with males as they continue to hold positions of influence within the industry. Early career females need to ensure that they develop their skills for working closely with men in a male-dominated industry.

Third, an interesting characteristic of the networks of women in leadership is that they have a few women from whom they seek advice often and who play a large role in their network. This can be considered a ‘Board of Directors.’ Women in this industry find



success by having a group of trusted women who they can consult and problem solve with regularly. These other women provide resources, information, and psychosocial support. Their shared experience provides a foundation that normalizes challenges that come from being a woman in a male-dominated sector.

Finally, successful individuals in agriculture seek advice and guidance broadly, not just from a few individuals. This appears to be an industry where consultation, information sharing, and connecting with others is a pathway to success. Both men and women hoping to be successful in this industry need to ensure that they build networking skills and are able to make meaningful professional connections with others.