

# Mortgaging Our Future? Families and Young People in Australia

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Social Policy Research Centre

Mortgaging our Future?  
Families and Young  
People in Australia

edited by Róisín Thanki  
and Cathy Thomson

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## Foreword

This volume contains five papers presented at a one day seminar hosted by the Social Policy Research Centre on 19 July 1996. The theme of the seminar was *Mortgaging Our Future? Families and Young People in Australia*.

The papers brought together here address a range of issues relating to families and young people. The seminar began with Peter McDonald's paper, which presents a broad and troubling overview of the changing circumstances of young people in Australia and the problems they face. This is an important paper in its own right and also provides a context for the following papers. The paper by Stein Ringen and Brendan Halpin examines the effect of children on disposable income and consumption produced in families. Peter Travers reports on the findings of research in the tradition of Peter Townsend and the conception of poverty and relative deprivation. Travers' study examined the feasibility of measuring differentials in the levels of deprivation experienced by Department of Social Security clients. The paper by Mark Lynch, Michael Emmison and Emma Ogilvie deals with the same research tradition, as it has been applied in the field of criminology. Their research tests the usefulness of the theory of relative deprivation in explaining juvenile delinquency in young people. The paper by Judy Cashmore and Marina Paxman discusses the results from a study which examined the circumstances, experiences and needs of a group of young people leaving wardship in New South Wales.

Seminars such as this provide an opportunity for researchers, policy makers and practitioners to exchange ideas and gain information about current research. These papers, all reporting the results of original research studies, contribute much to the discussion and analysis of issues surrounding families and young people in Australia.

Sheila Shaver  
Acting Director

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## Acknowledgements

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# Young People in Australia Today: A Socio-Demographic Perspective

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My task is to provide a broad overview of the changing circumstances of young people in Australian society as a context for the later papers in this collection. Who are we talking about when we refer to *young people*? If we use the post-war study of human development to answer this question, we find the formulation of a specific life-cycle stage between childhood and adulthood sometimes termed *adolescence*, sometimes termed *youth*. In this literature, the stage has been seen as transitional, a stage during which the dependency of childhood is set aside for the independence of adulthood (Stevens-Long and Commons, 1992).

The title of our seminar today, however, is not adolescence in Australia nor youth in Australia, but young people. Because adolescence is associated with physical, sexual development, in age terms, adolescence probably now refers to roughly ages 9-14 years, probably not quite what we have in mind as constituting young people. On the other hand, as I understand it, youth is not the appropriate terminology because when used to refer to a person rather than a life-cycle stage, it has a male connotation. I guess, also, that most people would think that young people have a more extended age range than youth.

It can also be argued that use of the terminology, young people, reflects a degree of dissatisfaction with the notion that there is a separate and distinct life-cycle stage lying between childhood and adulthood. Rather, there are different dimensions of dependency and maturity and these occur at different ages and at different times for different people. Nowadays, we are said to maintain something of the child into later life and it is accepted that dependency remains with us in various forms throughout our lives. If this viewpoint is taken, then we should talk about young people in age terms, that is as people who are young without being too prescriptive about required life-cycle transitions. Consequently, I shall be talking about young people as people aged, in approximate terms, between 15 and 30.

In the past 25 years, that is, roughly one generation, the socio-economic world of young people has changed considerably. We can think about these changes by comparing the lives of young people today with those of their parents, say, the generation now aged between about 40 and 55 who were aged 15-30 in 1971.

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This comparison has meaning not only in terms of time trends but also in terms of intergenerational family dynamics.

Twenty-five years ago, becoming adult was clearly defined by the markers of marriage, leaving the parental home, starting work, bearing children and buying a house. All these tended to occur around the same time and at very young ages by previous or subsequent standards. For example, in 1972, 33 per cent of Australian women had married by the time they turned 20 and 83 per cent by the time they turned 25. Thus most women were married by the time they were 25 and most men soon thereafter (McDonald, 1992). In 1994, the equivalent proportions married had dropped to six per cent by age 20 and 42 per cent by age 25, that is, well under half of all women have not married by the time they are 25. For young men, less than a quarter have married by age 25 today (derived from ABS, Catalogue No. 3310.0, 1994).

Early marriages in the parental generation were commonly followed by early childbearing. For example, based on 1972 birth rates, about two-thirds of all Australian women had had a child by the time they were 25. By 1994, this fraction had dropped to just over a quarter of all women. And the fraction is continuing to fall (derived from ABS, Ref. No. 4.4, 1972 and ABS, Catalogue No. 3301.0, 1994).

The decline of early marriage and early childbearing does not mean that today's young people are less sexually active. For much of the last 25 years, facilitated by more reliable contraception, young people replaced early marriage with living-together arrangements. More recently, living-together arrangements have also become less common among young people. A 1991 survey of 23 year olds, for example, showed that the most common situation for these young people was to have an intimate, sexual partner but to be not living with that person. This in turn is related to the extended dependency of young people upon their parents and to continued residence with their parents. Consequently, most often, the sexual part of these relationships takes place in the parents' home, with the parents' knowledge (McDonald, 1995).

The shift in relationship form has continually been towards less formality, a lower level of commitment, and a lower degree of predictability. The relationships of young people are fragile, that is, the break-up rate is much higher than for marriages. Many young people will have had a series of relatively, long-term sexual relationships and many will be struggling emotionally with the break-up of a relationship. In summary, in their relationships, young people today experience a much lower degree of stability and predictability than was the case for their parents at the same age.

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The world of work has also become more variable and less predictable for young people, but there are gender differences in the trends. In 1972, 49 per cent of all 15-19 year old men were already working full time and by ages 20-24, this percentage had risen to 86 per cent. By May 1996, the percentages of men working full time had dropped to 22 per cent for 15-19 year-olds and to 64 per cent for 20-24 year-olds. Only one in 40 of all 15-24 year-old men in 1972 was unemployed compared to one in eight today. At ages 25-34, only one in 20 men was not employed full time in 1972. This compares with one in five today (ABS, Reference No. 6.22, 1972 and ABS Catalogue No. 6203.0, May 1996). Thus, young men in the parental generation were able to define their lives around full-time employment. Transition to full-time employment is a much more drawn out process for young men today and many are concerned that they will never experience this transition. For those in paid employment, the fear of job loss was almost non-existent in the parental generation at the same age, but is ever-present for many young employed persons today. The job contract route is destabilising for all but the most confident.

The work situation for young women today is very different to that of their mothers, but also the trend for women has been different to that for men. While for men, there has been a fall in full-time employment at all ages from 15 to 34, for women, the fall has only occurred at ages 15-19 while, at ages 25-34, there has been a substantial rise in participation in full-time employment. The shifts between 1972 and 1996 in the percentages of women employed full time are as follows: ages 15-19, a considerable fall from 46 per cent to 13 per cent; ages 20-24, little change with a slight fall from 52 per cent to 48 per cent; ages 25-34, a substantial rise from 27 per cent to 41 per cent (ABS, Reference No. 6.22, 1972 and ABS, Catalogue No. 6203.0, May 1996).

Of course, at the younger ages, the fall in full-time employment for young people is related to a considerable extension of the time that is spent in full-time education. Today, 70 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men aged 15-19 are in full-time education. At ages 20-24, the equivalent percentages are 17 per cent for women and 16 per cent for men (ABS Catalogue No. 6203.0, May 1996). It is difficult to obtain comparable figures for the parental generation, but probably around 30-35 per cent of both men and women in the parental generation would have been in full-time education when aged 15-19 (figures estimated for 1981 are 42 per cent for males and 44 per cent for females). Apparent Year 12 retention rates, after being relatively constant throughout the 1970s, rose sharply during the 1980s, rising from about 35 per cent in 1980 to 77 per cent by 1992. Interestingly, the Year 12 retention rate has fallen again in recent years to 72 per cent in 1995 (ABS, Catalogue No. 4102.0, 1996). In the area of participation in full-time education, equality for women has been achieved and surpassed.

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Thus, young people today are much more highly educated on average than their parents were, but, as we have seen, this does not necessarily lead to better employment prospects. Indeed, the gap between potential and realisation is undoubtedly an unsettling factor for today's young people. For their parents, if you did the training, society provided the reward. This is no longer guaranteed. Today's employment environment is considerably more competitive and, hence, less predictable.

Young people today are also much less likely than their parents to be home owners or purchasers. Housing affordability has deteriorated considerably across the two generations unless the young person moves to a place where there are poor employment prospects, something of a Catch 22 situation. For a variety of reasons (delay of employment, debts on education, costs of a single life style, travel), most young people have not saved much for a deposit. Thus, most are facing mortgages of over \$100,000 to purchase their own housing. A commitment of this size is not easily embarked upon if the young person is not employed or feels uncertain about the security of his or her income. Ironically, high property values enhance the wealth of the parental generation while shutting out the young generation from home ownership.

If employment contracts mean more frequent shifts of employment, gaps between jobs and more frequent shifts of place of residence, then home ownership is a precarious undertaking. Couples will need to continue to both work full time for longer periods as a hedge against termination of employment for one of them.

Age group, 25-34, is central to the future working career. While there is some variation, work careers are established in this age group. If you are not into the main game by age 35, you stand a good chance of remaining out of it in the future. In 1972, 95 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women aged 25-34 were employed full time. In 1996, the same percentages have changed to 81 per cent for men and 41 per cent for women (ABS, Reference No. 6.22, 1972 and ABS, Catalogue No. 6203.0, May 1996). Thus, the gender difference has fallen sharply. Given the emphasis placed upon paid working careers in the socialisation of younger women and given their higher level of involvement in education than young men, we could expect that the gender difference in full-time employment in this crucial age group will get smaller in the near future. The fragility of relationships, the high cost structures faced by young people particularly in relation to housing and the insecurity of employment are all factors which will encourage young people of both sexes to attain and maintain full-time attachment to paid employment.

Somewhat inconveniently, however, age group 25-34 is also the central age of childbearing for women, and there are both social and physiological reasons why this will remain the case. Almost two-thirds of all fertility occurs in this age

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group (ABS, Catalogue No. 3301.0, 1994). This clash between fertility and full-time employment is a central issue for the future. The traditionalists (husband employed full time, wife at home with the children at least until they go to school) are likely in this scenario to be the alternative stream rather than the mainstream. The mainstream among those with children will be combinations of the following: shorter periods out of paid employment for mothers, fathers also spending some time out of full-time employment and formal child care being in heavy demand. In the past five years since access to long-day care has been extended, the use of long-day care has risen sharply (Meyer, Moyle and Golley, 1996). As this reaches a critical mass and as the quality of long-day care programs improve, long-day care will be seen as good early childhood education, rather than simply as care. Those whose children are not in long-day care will (probably correctly) see their children as being educationally disadvantaged and demand similar access. There is already evidence of this trend in the use of long-day care by parents for purposes other than employment or study. This is particularly the case in Queensland where there is not such a strong tradition of pre-school education compared to other places.

The other important alternative to the clash between childbearing and full-time employment is simply not to have any children. This matter will be able to be investigated more fully using results from the 1996 Census as this census has restored the important question on number of children ever born to women. Approximate estimates based on 1994 age specific fertility rates for Australia and birth-order statistics for births in Western Australia suggest that 28 per cent of women will have a birth by age 25, 56 per cent by age 30, 72 per cent by age 35 and 76 per cent by age 40. Thus, based on 1994 rates, over 20 per cent of Australian women will not have a child (derived from ABS, Catalogue No. 3301.0, 1994).

When they were young, the parents of today's young people experienced little confusion about their status as independent adults. Their future was clear. Many had attained the markers of adulthood almost before they knew it, and, from an economic perspective, they were well able to maintain this status. However, from the point of view of maturity or emotional experience, the parental generation was much less well-equipped than today's young people. The parents have saved their confusion to later in life and this confusion is reflected in high divorce rates. Many of the parental generation now see themselves as not having had the same opportunity as their children have had to mature and gain experience before they 'settled down'. Some in the parental generation have also felt the cold hand of employment redundancy and, like young people, many more are now apprehensive about their futures. Around a quarter of today's young people have parents who are separated and about 20 per cent have no employed parent. Others of the parental generation, however, are supremely confident about their own

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experience and visit their confidence upon their children and upon young people generally (McDonald, 1992).

In summary, young people today face an economic environment in which it is difficult to be confident about the future. You may not get a job. If you do, you have few guarantees that it will be secure. To get the job, you will have to be highly competitive, super-skilled and supremely adaptable to whatever the employer wants. In other words, they face the ideal labour market of the economic liberal philosophy. In this environment, today's young women are well-advised to attempt to secure their own economic future and to not set out upon the high-risk path of dependency upon a man, the path that their mothers followed. For heterosexual couples, the choice between careers which, in the parental generation almost always went in favour of the man, will in future be much more competitive. Gender equality in education has been achieved; the trend to greater gender equality in employment is well under way. Many young men are having difficulty in adapting to this reality and, consequently, in forming or maintaining relationships with young women.

The present government believes that an economic liberal agenda can run alongside a conservative social agenda. The experience of young people in Australia today described above is entirely counter to this view of the future. Confronted with an insecure and highly competitive economic environment, to stay in the main economic game, young people have embraced (or been forced to accept) a liberal social agenda involving more flexible forms of relationships, higher rates of full-time employment for women, lower birth rates, high rates of relationship breakdown and lower levels of home ownership. It is foolish to consider that faced with insecurity, lack of predictability, instability and high costs, young people today will simply follow the conservative social agenda of their parents.

While most young people will struggle to stay in the main game, it is evident that greater numbers than in the parental generation will drop out (or be dropped out) of the game to varying degrees. Youth homelessness, and its ensuing consequences, is one manifestation of this trend. Another is the considerable increase in the proportion of births occurring outside marriage. Substance abuse, crime and suicide are extreme manifestations.

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# Families, Children and Consumption Resources

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## 1 Introduction

Families generate consumption through work in the market and production in the household. Family members, notably adults/parents, divide their work time between market and household work so as to get the optimal level of consumption for the family. This is done under a range of influences and constraints. The presence of children represents, on the one hand, a pressure to generate additional consumption resources and, on the other hand, a constraint in the range of choices available to parents. This paper analyses the 'effects' of children on the value of the consumption that is available to families by considering both income from sources outside the family and consumption produced within the family.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Income

The presence of children influences the economic situation of families profoundly (for a recent review, see Browning, 1992). In terms of economic well-being there are two possible effects, on income and on costs. While there is a large literature

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1 This work is part of ESRC project No. R 000 23 4427, which explores the importance of within-household economies in standard of living measurement, in collaboration with Jay Gershuny, Stephen Jenkins and Nigel O'Leary. Contact: Department of Applied Social Studies and Social Research, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2ER.

2 By 'income' we here mean disposable cash income. Consumption produced in the family is referred to as 'household production'. The sum of income and household production is 'consumption resources'. We use the term 'family' rather than 'household' since non-family households (e.g. multi-adult households) are not included in the analysis.

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on the costs of children (Cigno, 1991, Ch. 6) and on female labour force participation and wages (e.g., Joshi and Davies, 1993; Waldfogel, 1993), there is less specifically on children and family income (e.g., the issue is not discussed by Browning).

Children may have two opposite effects on family income and the result in the aggregate is theoretically indeterminate. There are factors which may boost income. The needs of children represent a pressure on parents to earn more income. Governments generally transfer income to families with children, and may give tax relief, as compensation for the costs of child rearing. Older children may earn income of their own. Other factors may depress income, notably that parents need to devote time to their children and hence may have less time for market work and less ability to take advantage of market opportunities. This might reduce family income directly in the short run and indirectly in the long run through career and human capital effects. In addition, there may be measurement effects through other causalities. Economic ability is among the factors parents take into consideration when deciding on children, which might thus be reflected in higher incomes in families with children. These various factors may work in different ways during different periods of the family life cycle.

The presence of children has been demonstrated to depress female earnings (see Fuchs, 1988; Waldfogel, 1993). This is the case generally in industrial societies and this effect appears to be stronger in Britain than in some other European countries. Joshi and Davies (1993) have estimated that the life-time earnings foregone by British women with two children, compared to women without children, is between 54 and 71 per cent (and demonstrated this effect to be roughly comparable to one simulated under a 'German' family policy regime, but stronger than under 'French' or 'Swedish' family policy regimes, although the direction is the same in all cases). There is reason to believe that the effect of children to depress family income goes mainly or entirely through labour force participation and the wages of mothers.

Less is known about the effects of children on male earnings. It has been suggested that men may benefit from marriage in terms of earning capacity (Greenhalgh, 1980; Korenman and Neumark, 1991; Daniel, 1991). If there is also an effect of children, it would clearly be weaker than for women due to the lower elasticity of labour force participation for men (Killingsworth, 1983). It may be that the effect for men is to boost earnings, which would be a reasonable expectation under an assumption of a division of labour between fathers and mothers whereby fathers respond to the pressure for more income and mothers to the care needs of children. According to Ermisch (1991), based on British data, the correlation between hourly earnings and children is positive for men and negative for women.

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Since male earnings contribute more than female earnings to family income, it is not clear how the effects suggested above would add up. And whatever the aggregate result for earnings, there would still be tax allowances and incomes from transfers and capital. Cigno (1991), drawing on available literature, identifies partial estimates, notably on female earnings, but fails to identify robust aggregate results.

### 3 Household Production

The main forms of household production are housework and child care, and these activities are balanced against leisure and personal care. Personal care and leisure is 'produced' and 'consumed' by the same person, child care and housework is produced mainly by adults/parents, child care is consumed by children while all family members in principle share in the consumption of goods and services from housework.

The presence of children has an obvious effect on the distribution of time-use. Since more time must be devoted to child care, less time will be available for other activities. It is, however, not obvious to what degree the additional time in child care is taken out of other forms of household time-use or out of market work, or, if re-allocated within the household, how it is re-allocated from housework, personal care or leisure. Time-use is strongly segregated by gender, both in the distribution of time between household and market work and within the household (Gershuny, forthcoming). The pattern of time-use for women depends strongly on children. Women with children, compared to women without children, use much less time in market work, much more time in housework and child care, and possibly some less time in personal care and leisure. To some degree, there are similar differences in time-use between women with children depending on the number of children, but women's time-use is more sensitive to the presence of children than to the number of children. Men's time-use, although not insensitive to children, varies much less.

Over the period covered in this study, female labour force participation increased strongly. For example, from 1973 to 1986, participation rates increased for married women from 55 per cent to 66 per cent (age 16 to 59, employed and unemployed, General Household Survey 1987). The contribution of wives' earnings to family income, however, increased only moderately, e.g., from 17 per cent to 20 per cent of gross income in married couple families in the age range 20 to 49 by the age of head of household. In the same age range, there was no increase in the relative contribution of wives' earnings in married couple families with two or more children, and with three or more children where it decreased. Married women moved to using more time in paid work and less time in housework, while married men spent less time in paid work and more time in

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housework. For women and men together, the aggregate time in housework increased and in paid work decreased. In families with children both mothers and fathers have moved to spending more time on child care, including per child (Ringen and Halpin, 1995).

## 4 Assumptions

We are concerned with the effects of children on aggregate family resources. Other aspects of the standard of living of children and families with children, including the value of available resources in equivalence terms, are analysed elsewhere (Ringen and Halpin, 1995). Our question here is whether the presence of children has the effect of boosting or depressing the resources that are available to families, other things being equal, and in what family-life-cycle patterns. We assume that income and household production represent the consumption available to families. We are not presently concerned with how available resources are used. The empirical analyses are of British conditions and are not necessarily representative internationally.

We start with cash income, which is measured as family disposable income on the assumption that it is against disposable rather than gross income that behaviour is adjusted. (We do not consider non-market goods from outside the family, e.g., 'free' services from the government.) A straight comparison of families with and without children shows average income to be higher in families with children. Among families with children, however, income does not increase in a uniform way with the number of children. In groups of families by the age of the head of household, average income is in some cases higher and in some cases lower in families with children than in families without (see Ringen and Halpin 1995, based on the same data as used in the present analysis). Elementary comparisons of this kind are hence not conclusive and anyway do not answer the other-things-being-equal question, for which purpose more elaborate multivariate analyses are needed.

We then move to the broader concept of consumption resources by adding the value of household production. We include only the value of housework (core housework, maintenance, shopping) since this is the only within-household activity which generates goods and services that are available to be shared between household members. We disregard child care, personal care, and leisure. The benefits of these activities are 'allocated' directly to some family members and are most meaningfully treated in an analysis in which the individual is the unit (which is done in Ringen and Halpin, 1995). While there are theoretical arguments for defining welfare as a function of all activities (i.e., 24 hours per day), this is rather uninteresting in its application since one could then, assuming free choice in the use of time, take the (marginal) wage rate as a perfect measure

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of welfare. In a more restricted consumption framework, as here, we prefer to be conservative and to broaden the income measure only moderately so as to avoid counter-intuitive results which dwarf the significance of cash income for family well-being. We consider only housework by adults/parents, and disregard children's housework.

The value of housework is estimated with the housekeeper wage method, on the assumption that what families 'earn' by producing goods and services in the household is what they would have had to pay someone else to produce the same goods and services for them.<sup>3</sup> This is compatible with our consumption approach; it is the value of available consumption that we aim to measure. The main alternative is to use opportunity cost, i.e., to estimate the value of the individual's housework by his/her market wage, on the assumption that this represents the cash income that is sacrificed by devoting time to housework. This, however, is less compatible with our consumption approach since this method measures some welfare value to the individual of his or her housework rather than the value of the consumption produced. It is less conservative, most likely resulting in higher estimated values. It also, we feel, assumes a freedom of choice in the amount of paid work which is hardly realistic, at least not for parents, who have to adjust their activities to the needs of their children.

## 5 Data And Housework Time Estimates

Our main data sources are Family Expenditure Surveys (FES) for 1986 and 1976. The particular files we use have been harmonised and have consistent definitions of variables insofar as this is possible (see Coulter, Cowell and Jenkins, 1994). Income is in December 1986 £s. The information for generating housework time estimates comes from two time budget surveys, the Social Change and Economic Life survey, 1987, and the BBC time use survey of 1974/5. These are described in Gershuny (forthcoming).

The prediction of amounts for housework rests on work described in Gershuny and Halpin (1995). The principle is simple: using variables present in both the FES and time budget files, we estimate a model of the determinants of housework time, using the time budget data. We then use the resulting parameters to predict the housework time for individuals in the FES surveys. Because time use patterns have changed substantially over the period, it is important that this prediction is

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3 Our notional housekeeper wage is £2.80 per hour. This approximates the December 1986 rate (all monetary values are given in Dec. 1986 £) as intermediate between the values for April 1986 and 1987 (respectively £2.75 and £2.93) for the category chefs/cooks for adult females given in the New Earnings Survey 1986 and 1987.

done using time-use data collected more or less contemporaneously with the FES data.

Given that our interest is with children and family economies, the samples for analysis have been restricted to the 'normal' child/family range, that is, to families where the head<sup>4</sup> is aged from 20 to 49. Households with more than two adults, and married couple households where one adult is absent, are excluded.

The households in the working sample are hence either single adult or couple, with or without children. Table 1 gives figures for the samples analysed and the total survey samples.

**Table 1: Sample Sizes and Exclusions**

	1986	1976
Included households	2943	2841
High income outlier	1	0
Spouse absent	24	57
Three-plus adults present	885	948
Head outside age range	2950	3116
Total excluded	3860	4121
Total sample	6803	6962

## 6 Analysis

Our goal is to examine the effects of children on the disposable income and consumption resources of the family. This we do essentially by estimating correlations between children and income/resources while controlling for the most relevant other variables. Our intention is simply to flush out the influence of the single factor we are concerned with, the presence of children, and not to explain family income/consumption more comprehensively.

We use a straightforward least squares regression model which is described in the Appendix. Before arriving at the final model, a range of variables and model forms was examined. In the end, a relatively simple form (an untransformed income variable and ordinary least squares) was preferred, simply because more complex models did not perform better in terms of fit or interpretability.

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<sup>4</sup> Head of household is defined in the data as male adult if present, otherwise female.

The final model contains relatively few variables. Had our purpose been to model the determinants of income/resources we would have added more variables and obtained a better fitting model. However, since the intention is only to estimate the effects of children, we have excluded intermediate variables through which children affect income/resources (e.g., the employment status of parents), and limited the model to child variables and genuine control variables. We would have wanted to include the education level of the head of household (and did so for some analyses of the 1986 data where it contributed significantly) but could not do so in the comparative analyses since this information was not collected in the 1976 data set.

In fitting the model on the whole data set it became apparent that the effect of age, even controlling for other factors, was non-linear, and the effect of other variables changed with age. Such a model was simply unwieldy and the results were difficult to interpret. Matters were greatly simplified by splitting the sample into three age bands, 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49 by head of household, and fitting a simpler model equation to each separately (age is entered only in linear form, and the only interaction fitted is that between age-of-youngest-child and number-of-children). This strategy removes the non-linearity of age (within each band the effect is more or less linear, and the overall non-linearity is reflected by differing age parameter estimates in each band) and also allows the parameter estimates for the other variables to differ with age.

Results are presented in Tables 2 and 3. These tables are directly derived from the regression estimates as explained in the Appendix. Cells with fewer than ten cases are excluded as potentially misleading.

The tables read as follows. The figures for the non-child categories (top left hand cells) show the expected income and consumption resources of 'typical' married couples in the relevant age-band, with no children. The rest of the cells give the differences between these estimates and expected disposable income and consumption resources of families with children, other things being equal. The differences are in absolute figures (1986 £s) and as a percentage of the value for the relevant typical non-child couple. The tabular presentation displays effects by number of children, age of youngest child, and family life cycle.

## Results

The main results can be summarised as follows, starting with the 1986 disposable income estimates.

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**Table 2: Effects of Children on Family Disposable Income, Absolute and Relative**

Number of children	Under 5		Age of youngest child 5-9		10 and over	
	1986£s	%	1986£s	%	1986£s	%
<b>1986</b>						
Age of head of household: 20-29						
No children 11937						
One	-3695	(-30.9)	-4470	(-37.4)	-	-
Two	-3729	(-31.2)	-5012	(-41.9)	-	-
Three	-4007	(-33.5)	-	-	-	-
Four plus	-4445	(-37.2)	-	-	-	-
Age of head of household: 30-39						
No children 13508						
One	-2682	(-19.8)	-990	(-7.3)	-2802	(-20.7)
Two	-2530	(-18.7)	-1964	(-14.5)	353	(2.6)
Three	-3240	(-23.9)	-2051	(-15.1)	-	-
Four plus	-3675	(-27.2)	-4020	(-29.7)	-	-
Age of head of household: 40-49						
No children 11593						
One	-971	(-8.3)	-2140	(-18.4)	-334	(-2.8)
Two	-847	(-7.3)	567	(4.8)	984	(8.4)
Three	-1527	(-13.1)	361	(3.1)	4541	(39.1)
Four plus	-2980	(-25.7)	-	-	-	-
<b>1976</b>						
Age of head of household: 20-29						
No children 9608						
One	-2593	(-26.9)	-2005	(-20.8)	-	-
Two	-2682	(-27.9)	-2415	(-25.1)	-	-
Three	-2195	(-22.8)	-	-	-	-
Four plus	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age of head of household: 30-39						
No children 11059						
One	-2238	(-19.4)	-1497	(-13.0)	-1886	(-16.3)
Two	-2106	(-18.2)	-1465	(-12.7)	-559	(-4.8)
Three	-1785	(-15.5)	-1058	(-9.1)	-	-
Four plus	-1839	(-15.9)	-1062	(-9.2)	-	-
Age of head of household: 40-49						
No children 9585						
One	-262	(-2.7)	-296	(-3.0)	498	(5.1)
Two	-488	(-5.0)	482	(5.0)	1502	(15.6)
Three	-630	(-6.5)	1186	(12.3)	2583	(26.9)
Four plus	-387	(-4.0)	1740	(18.1)	-	-

**Table 3: Effects of Children on Family Consumption Resources, Absolute and Relative**

Number of children	Under 5		Age of youngest child 5-9		10 and over	
	1986£s	%	1986£s	%	1986£s	%
<b>1986</b>						
Age of head of household: 20-29						
No children	13522					
One	-3064	(-22.6)	-3898	(-28.8)	-	-
Two	-3007	(-22.2)	-4370	(-32.3)	-	-
Three	-3139	(-23.2)	-	-	-	-
Four plus	-3380	(-24.9)	-	-	-	-
Age of head of household: 30-39						
No children	15420					
One	-2090	(-13.5)	-627	(-4.0)	-2343	(-15.1)
Two	-1859	(-12.0)	-1542	(-10.0)	806	(5.2)
Three	-2468	(-16.0)	-1636	(-10.6)	-	-
Four plus	-2761	(-17.9)	-3333	(-21.6)	-	-
Age of head of household: 40-49						
No children	14196					
One	-460	(-3.2)	-1855	(-13.0)	-65	(-4)
Two	-136	(-.9)	908	(6.3)	1310	(9.2)
Three	-796	(-5.6)	729	(5.1)	4943	(34.8)
Four plus	-2093	(-14.7)	-	-	-	-
<b>1976</b>						
Age of head of household: 20-29						
No children	10739					
One	-2572	(-24.0)	-1893	(-17.6)	-	-
Two	-2756	(-25.7)	-2450	(-22.8)	-	-
Three	-2274	(-21.2)	-	-	-	-
Four plus	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age of head of household: 30-39						
No children	12491					
One	-2291	(-18.3)	-1547	(-12.4)	-1987	(-15.9)
Two	-2105	(-16.7)	-1566	(-12.5)	-439	(-3.5)
Three	-1904	(-15.2)	-1064	(-8.5)	-	-
Four plus	-1972	(-15.8)	-1144	(-9.2)	-	-
Age of head of household: 40-49						
No children	10937					
One	-43	(-.3)	-209	(-1.9)	520	(4.7)
Two	-315	(-2.8)	536	(4.9)	1532	(14.0)
Three	-300	(-2.7)	1202	(10.9)	2736	(25.0)
Four plus	-299	(-2.7)	1608	(14.7)	-	-1.



1. The effect of children on household disposable income is generally negative, and in some categories strongly negative (henceforth referred to as the 'income gap').
2. The strongest effect is found in the one-child-under-five categories, suggesting the significance of the any-children/no-children difference is greater than that of additional children after the first child.
3. The income foregone because of children is higher (both in absolute and relative terms) the younger the parents (head of household).
4. The effect of additional children, after the first child, is modest, notably while the youngest child is still under five, except in families with four or more children in which there is a considerable additional income gap.
5. In the youngest family category, the income gap is higher when the youngest child is over five, no doubt reflecting an effect of early family start.
6. In the two older family categories, the negative effect on family income weakens with the age of children.
7. In the oldest household category (and just barely so in the middle category), the effect eventually turns positive with increasing age and number of children.
8. In no category with a child younger than five, and in no category with a single child, is the effect found to be positive. However, with increasing age of head of household, increasing age of youngest child, and increasing number of children, the effect turns from negative to positive and eventually turns strongly positive.

The second part of Table 2 reproduces the same type of estimates for 1976. There are both similarities and differences in the results for these two years of observation. Findings 1, 2, and 3 above also apply to the 1976 results. Finding 4 applies as to the modest effect of additional children after the first child, but not to the additional income gap in families with three, four or more children. Here, the effect of additional children is generally to reduce the income gap, although moderately so, except in the oldest family category. Families with four or more children do not stand out as a special case. Finding 5 does not hold in the 1976 data: there is no trace of a penalty for an early start in the youngest family category - rather the opposite - whereas in 1986 there is a considerable penalty. Findings 6 and 7 hold also in 1976, but it appears that the weakening of the negative effect and the development towards a positive effect occurs earlier in the family life cycle in the 1976 than in the 1986 data. This is also reflected in a

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difference in respect to Finding 8 in that the effect turns positive also in the ultimate one-child category, i.e., with head of household over 40 and the single child over 10.

The relative figures in the table give the magnitude of the effects in relation to the level of income in the comparison categories. Comparing 1986 to 1976, it appears generally, but not without exception, that the effect of children has moved so as to become more strongly negative in the categories in which it is negative and less strongly positive in the categories in which it is positive (in addition to turning positive 'later' as observed above). In the youngest category of families, the relative income gap has increased from the order of 20 to 30 per cent in 1976 to 30 to 40 per cent ten years later. In the oldest category, the negative effects are generally higher and the positive effects generally lower in 1986 than in 1976. The picture is mixed in the middle age group. In all categories with a youngest child under five, the relative income gap is either equal to or greater in 1986 than in 1976, whereas in the categories with older children the recorded effects move in both directions.<sup>5</sup>

Table 3 gives the results for consumption resources (disposable income plus the value of housework time excluding child care). The patterns in Table 3 are almost exactly the same as those summarised above as to the direction of the effects both within the age bands and with respect to life-cycle effects between age bands. In no single cell does the direction of the effect change from Table 2 to Table 3 and there is no difference between the two tables in the direction of change in the effects when moving between age bands. However, there is some difference in the magnitude of effects. In the 1986 observations, the effects measured in consumption resources are very different from those measured in disposable income. In absolute terms, the value of consumption resources is obviously higher than disposable income. In spite of this, all negative effects are lower in absolute terms in consumption resources than in disposable income, and much lower in relative terms. The positive effects are higher in absolute terms and (with only one single exception) also in relative terms. In the 1976 observations, the effects are pretty much the same whether measured in consumption resources or in disposable income. In absolute terms, the gaps are remarkably similar by both standards, and this applies to both negative and

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5 While the absolute income differences in the table are independent of the choice of reference category, the relative differences are not. Estimates with alternative reference categories show the relative differences to be sensitive to this choice, notably to geographical location within or outside the southeast. Defining the reference category to be in the southeast does not change the pattern of difference in the relative estimates between the two years of observation, but reduces the magnitude of difference in many cases. This is because it raises the values for all categories, and the model does not allow any change in the effects of other variables; thus all effects are relative to a higher base.

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positive effects. In relative terms, the gaps are in most cases slightly lower in consumption resources than in disposable income, but these differences are small.

## Discussion

There are two possible influences on the economic situation of families with the presence of children, on outlays (the costs of children) and on income. This paper investigates the latter. Income effects may be in the form of pressures for more income to meet the needs of children or constraints in earning capacity because parents need to devote time and attention to children. In addition, the presence of children changes the time-use of parents and this may affect the balance between income from outside the family and production of goods and services in the family.

These analyses confirm that children strongly affect the economic situation of their families. The decisive contrast is between families with (younger) children and families without children; the number of children, although not insignificant, matters less.

On income from outside of the family, constraints clearly win over pressures. Families with children generally have a lower actual income than the theoretically expected income without children. The income gap is considerable, notably for young families with young children. Over the ten-year period of observation the effect of children has become considerably stronger.

It may be somewhat rash to interpret this income gap strictly as a result of constraints. No doubt, there is an element of choice in that some give higher priority to career and some higher priority to family and children. At least part of the income gap may therefore reflect a sacrifice in cash income that parents gladly accept for the joy of family life. Nevertheless, the general expectation is that, other things being equal, children mean less income.

One of the reasons there is an income gap is that children cause parents to use less time in market work and more time with the family. This is the case in particular for mothers, but to a lesser degree also for fathers. Work in the family produces goods and services for consumption. It might therefore be expected that if available consumption is measured inclusive of household production the effects of children would be modified compared to the effects as measured in disposable income. Our results are not straightforward in respect of this hypothesis.

In the 1986 observations, the effects are indeed modified, the negative effects downwards and the positive effects upwards. The modification of the negative effects means that what most families with children sacrifice in cash income they

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to some degree recuperate through additional household production. But only to some degree; the gap is modified, it is not eliminated. Also, in terms of consumption resources, therefore, the expectation continues to be that, other things being equal, children mean loss.

In the 1976 observations, however, the effects are not noticeably modified. Here, the gap remains roughly unaffected by the broadening of the measure to include household production. The value of available resources is shifted upwards, but the measured effects of children remain largely unaffected.

In the recent observation, then, compared to the earlier one, families with children sacrifice more cash income but also recuperate more through household work. The end result is that the effect of children on consumption resources measured broadly has not changed very much. What has changed is the way families combine children, income from work in the market, and household production.

These results are based on cross-sectional data and hence do not say anything directly about developments over the life cycle for the same families. There is, however, an exceptionally clear pattern in these results which suggest economic sacrifices for families with children in early periods of the family life cycle, then movement towards a reduction of this sacrifice over the family life cycle, and eventually reaching a situation of positive effects of children. It is not possible from these observations to say anything with certainty about how negative and positive effects add up on lifetime family income/resources, but these results indicate that the positive effect comes late in the family life cycle and that it is not likely to be anywhere near enough to make up for negative effects over a long period earlier in the life cycle. A surprising finding, perhaps, is that there are traces of an 'investment effect' in that when the effect eventually turns positive it increases with the number of children.

Also in these life-cycle patterns, there are differences between the 1986 and 1976 observations. While in the more recent observations, there are signs of an additional 'penalty' for an early start with children as well as for many children (three or four and more), there is no trace of such penalty effects in the 1976 observation.

These complex, changing relationships reflect considerable changes over the relatively short period of observation in the economics of child rearing. Families have, in a sense, become more economically 'vulnerable' to children. Having children normally implies an economic sacrifice in terms of resources for consumption (i.e., a sacrifice prior to the costs of children in outlays). In the end, the sacrifice appears to be relatively stable over time. However, the underlying processes appear to have changed. In terms of income, the sacrifice has increased, but at the same time parents have responded by increasing the contribution from

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household production. The end result suggests more drastic adjustments in the behaviour of parents.

We are not in a position to offer a full explanation of this transition. A range of factors may be relevant - changes in family size, the timing of children, more single parent families, unemployment - but it seems likely that part of the explanation must lie in changes in the role of women, in particular in the increasing labour force participation of married women. Since women adjust more than men to children in their labour market behaviour, this has made family income more sensitive to children. Without children, women have come to contribute more income. With children, there is more income in the form of female earnings to lose. Women, moving out of the labour market and into the family as a result of children, cause increasing household production which compensates for decreasing income. With families depending more on female earnings, an early start with children, and a higher number of children, will be more disruptive for family income.

## **Appendix: Details Of The Regression**

Effects are estimated by ordinary least squares regression, which is applied to two dependent variables and within separate age bands. The dependent variables are family disposable income and family consumption resources (untransformed and unequivalised). The presence of children is captured by two independent variables, number of children (categorical: none, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more), and age of youngest child (categorical: none present or under 5, 5-9, 10 and over). Control variables are number of adults (continuous), age of head of household (continuous), residence (binary: London and the southeast versus elsewhere), family type (categorical: couple, single male, single female), and a dummy variable identifying single female parents. The interactions between number-of-children and age-of-youngest child are included. The raw regression results are given in Table A.1.

This model fits well within the age bands.  $R^2$  is not very high but most parameter estimates are highly significant; overall fit is constrained by our wish to isolate the relationship between children and the dependent variables, which requires us to exclude other powerful explanatory variables such as employment status because the effect of children will operate in large part through such variables. To fit the whole data set at once it is necessary to take account of the fact that the effect of age is distinctly non-linear (age, age-squared and age-cubed are necessary to take account of the fact that income rises rapidly with age to a peak and then falls more slowly, even when controlling for other variables), and that the effects of many of the other variables change with the level of age. The alternative method of splitting the data into three slices is somewhat non-

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parsimonious, but is distinctly more manageable and readily interpretable than the multiple-interaction global model.

The interaction between number-of-children and age-of-youngest is significant only in some of the models but is included in all panels for consistency. Where it is insignificant its inclusion has very little effect on the predicted values.

Tables 2 and 3 are generated from the raw regression results by summing the parameters for age-of-youngest and number-of-children relevant to each cell. For instance, in Table 3 (1986, the 20-29 age band) the value of -3,898 for families with a single child aged 5-9 is the sum of -3,064 (the raw effect for number-of-children = 1), -707.70 (the raw effect for age-of-youngest-child being 5-9) and -126.8 (the interaction term applying to 1 child/5-9 families).

Other formulations of the regression model have been examined, notably the log transformation of the dependent variable, and the square and square root transformations. None offers particular improvement in fit over untransformed income.

Years of education of head of household is available only for 1986 and is therefore not included in the presented models. Its effect is generally to reduce the range of difference between categories. Notably it reduces the penalty associated with higher numbers of children, suggesting that heads of large families have below average education. However, it does not materially alter the pattern of the relationships. Its effect differs across the three age bands, suggesting that at least part of its effect is through the timing of family formation.

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Table A.1: 1986 and 1976 Estimates, Disposable and Extended Income

	1986						1976					
	Disposable income			Consumption resources			Disposable income			Consumption resources		
Age range:	20-29	30-39	40-49	20-29	30-39	40-49	20-29	30-39	40-49	20-29	30-39	40-49
R2	0.27	0.15	0.25	0.33	0.20	0.30	0.44	0.20	0.28	0.49	0.23	0.30
Parameter Intercept	-1084	1509	10887***	816.8	3627*	13427***	-1657*	326	3398*	-931.4	1832	4109**
Number of children												
One	-3695***	-2682***	-971	-3064***	-2090***	-460	-2593 ***	-2238***	-262	-2572***	-2291***	-43
Two	-3729***	-2530***	-847	-3007***	-1859***	-136	-2682 ***	-2106***	-488	-2756***	-2105***	-315
Three	-4007***	-3240***	-1527*	-3139***	-2468***	-796	-2195***	-1785***	630	-2274***	-1904***	-300
Four plus	-4445***	-3675***	-2980**	-3380**	-2761**	-2093*	-2208***	-1839***	-387	-2219***	-1972***	-299
Age of youngest child												
5-10	-534.4	-345	7142***	-707.7	-572	6698***	609.3	777	2127**	571.8	828	1907*
Over 10	-2929	5819	14084***	-2748	5406	13584***	19267***	354	1528	17230***	452	1896
Number of adults	1818**	3571***	3281***	1795**	3592***	3262***	2864***	3163***	2841***	3099***	3304***	2843***
Single female parent	3955***	1341	1861*	3270***	618	1544	1632***	1006	-300	1481***	472	-804
Age of head	375.4***	139**	-130**	364.6***	132**	-128**	221.5***	126***	11	218.9***	116***	25
South east resident	1983***	2269***	3038***	1929***	2255***	3009***	868.4***	736***	797***	945.6***	702***	775***
Marital status												
Single man	-3847***	-2459***	-460	-3756***	-2295**	-371	-1243***	-774*	-1199**	-860.3**	-638	-1065*
Single woman	-5953***	-3751***	-4096***	-7548***	-5508***	-6706***	-2413***	-2058***	-1528**	-3254***	-2897***	-2562***
Number-of-kids/Age-of-youngest interaction												
One/5-10	-241.4	2037	-8311***	-126.8	2035	-8093***	-21.32	-36	-2161	106.8	-83	-2073
One/Over-10	22736***	-5940	-13447***	22294***	-5660	-13188***	-17850***	-19	-768	-15914***	-148	-1334
Two/5-10	-748.4	912	-5727**	-655.9	889	-5654**	-342.5	-137	-1157	-266.0	-288	-1056
Two/Over-10	0.000a	-2936	-12252***	0.000a	-2741	-12138***	-15309***	1193	462	-14293***	1214	-50
Three/5-10	0.000a	1534	-5254*	0.000a	1404	-5173*	0.000a	-51	-311	0.000a	12	-405
Three/Over-10	0.000a	-1281	-8016**	0.000a	-1136-	7844**	-19346***	1107	1685	-17858***	1147	1140

Notes: (a) not enough cases to estimate; \*\*\*: Significant at 1%; \*\*: Significant at 5%; \*: Significant at 10%

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# Deprivation Among Low Income DSS Australian Families: Results from a Pilot Study

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## 1 Background

This paper is based on a report on the Deprivation Standards Project (Travers and Robertson, 1996), a study carried out under contract to the Commonwealth Department of Social Security (DSS) in 1995. The specific task of the deprivation standards project was to develop and test a survey instrument to collect data on, and allow comparisons of, relative deprivation among social security clients; and to conduct a small pilot survey utilising the survey instrument. The aim of the pilot survey was to allow DSS to consider whether, in practice, it is possible to measure differentials in the levels of deprivation among clients.

This study of relative deprivation among DSS clients focuses on so-called 'direct' measures of standard of living, rather than on income alone. Income, especially current income, can be an imprecise measure of standard of living. This is especially so for those whose principal source of income is the social security system where payments are flat rate (rather than being linked to a person's previous income), and also means tested. We would not expect to see a great deal of variation in income among social security clients. There may, however, be considerable variation in clients' savings, their assets (especially the family home), their family resources and responsibilities, their health, their access to services, the time since they last were employed, the nature of their previous employment, and the time they have been receiving social security payments. With this in mind, we therefore follow a tradition of research on standards of living where questions on income are supplemented by questions on how people are actually living in terms of their possessions, housing, transport, social activities, as well how they themselves see their living standards (Erikson and Åberg, 1987; Mack and Lansley, 1985; Travers and Richardson, 1993). One of the primary tasks of the study was to see if relative deprivation in terms of these direct measures follows a similar pattern to deprivation in terms of income. In

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other words, are those who are worst off in terms of income also worst off in terms of housing, transport, social activities, and morale?

In this pilot survey, only DSS clients were interviewed. This means that the 'deprivation' described can only be relative deprivation. That is, different groups of clients can be compared with each other to see if there are relatively greater or lesser degrees of deprivation. The pilot study does not make comparison with the standards of living of the community as a whole, nor with some absolute benchmark.

## **2 Survey Development**

### **2.1 The Research Team**

Associate Professor Peter Travers of the School of Social Administration and Social Work, Flinders University was the Principal Researcher. Ms Frances Robertson, a Senior Research Associate, and Dr Audrey VandenHeuvel, a Research Fellow with the National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS), Flinders University, undertook substantial work in the design of the questionnaire, and Frances Robertson was also responsible for data entry and the bulk of the analysis, and is a co-author of the full report. Staff of the Adelaide office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics gave advice on the draft questionnaire. MRC-The Market Research Company acted as consultants to the project in the recruitment of participants of focus groups, and also in the conduct of the pre-pilot survey.

### **2.2 The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire developed for the Pilot Survey covers demographic and other characteristics, current and previous employment details, and questions that form the basis of deprivation indicators. In this paper, I will concentrate on the deprivation indicators.

Our strategy for developing indicators of deprivation was twofold:

- a scale of deprivation in terms of access to basics of life; and
- additional indicators in terms of cash-flow, financial strain, housing and social contacts.

### **2.3 Basics of Life**

For the development of a scale of deprivation in terms of access to basics of life, we adopted the procedure developed by Mack and Lansley (1985) and elaborated

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on by Halleröd (1994). The concept of deprivation used is 'an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities' (Mack and Lansley, 1985: 39). The task is then to identify socially perceived necessities or basics of living, and enforced lack of these items. Respondents are shown a list of items and are asked which items they regard as necessities in the sense that all persons should be able to afford them and not do without them. They are then asked, in relation to each item, if they themselves lack it, and whether this is by choice. At that stage it is possible to rank respondents according to the number of items they lack, other than by choice.

We used four focus groups drawn from the general population to assist us in identifying the list of items that might potentially be regarded as 'necessities'. The four groups comprised one of people with dependent children, one of young singles, one of middle-aged people without dependants, and one of older people.

Our conclusion from the focus groups was that despite difficulties, it is, nonetheless, possible to identify a meaningful list of items that are regarded as basic to an acceptable standard of living in Australia at the present time. Moreover, the ranking of the items by the four focus groups was very similar. In addition, as can be seen from Table 1, the mean ranking of the focus groups proved to be highly correlated (.9) with that of the pilot survey.

#### **2.4 Additional Indicators of Deprivation**

The index of access to basics of life will indicate whether people have certain commodities and capabilities. It will not, however, show how they are living on a day to day basis in terms of being able to pay bills, and the extent to which they may have a cash-flow problem. We therefore sought information on nine items relating to cash-flow or financial strain. We also asked about ability to raise \$1000 in an emergency, about difficulty in getting access to important places, about perception of one's ability to manage, and whether one's standard of living has declined or is likely to decline in the near future. In addition, data were sought on housing, health and social contacts.

#### **2.5 The Sample**

A sample of some 400 DSS clients living in Adelaide and one country district of South Australia were approached by DSS by letter. To limit variability among the small number who could be interviewed in a pilot study, the sample was confined to couples, half of whom were age pensioners, and half of whom were not. One third of those approached by DSS declined the invitation to take part in the study. Of the remainder, outright refusals to participate at the survey stage were not

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**Table 1: Rating of 'necessities', Pilot Study and Focus Groups**

	Pilot	Focus
Medical treatment and medicine if necessary	2.99	3.00
Bath or shower	2.94	2.97
Warm bedding in winter	2.94	2.95
Warm clothes in winter	2.97	2.92
Beds for everyone in the household	2.94	2.92
Electricity or gas	2.97	2.87
Refrigerator	2.94	2.87
Substantial meal at least once a day	2.93	2.87
Stove (cook-top plus oven)	2.83	2.71
Public transport for one's needs	2.72	2.58
Secure locks on doors and windows	2.8	2.50
Heating in at least one room in the house, if it's cold	2.9	2.39
Insurance on contents of home	2.48	2.34
Glasses, change of glasses if necessary	2.94	2.29
Inside toilet	2.79	2.29
Telephone	2.51	2.21
Washing machine	2.82	2.18
Celebrations on special occasions, like Christmas	2.43	2.16
Car	2.38	2.05
Hobby or leisure activity	2.38	2.05
Examination of teeth by dentist once a year	2.7	1.87
Electric fan / cooling	2.49	1.82
Not more than two persons in each bedroom	2.42	1.71
Vacuum cleaner	2.61	1.71
A 'best outfit' for special occasions	2.41	1.58
Radio	2.3	1.53
Hair-cut at least every third month	2.3	1.47
New, not second-hand clothes	2.74	1.42
Presents for friends and family at least once a year	2.4	1.40
Clothes that to some degree are in fashion	1.64	1.34
TV	2.4	1.32
Friends/family for a meal once a month	2.21	1.32
Holiday away from home for one week a year	1.8	1.18
Night out once a fortnight	1.38	0.89
Special meal once a week	1.63	0.82
Microwave oven	0.82	0.66
Video / VCR	0.58	0.47
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>1.99</b>
Correlation	0.90	

high, though there were many instances where no contact was made. This can in part be explained by the very scattered distribution of the sample over the whole of the Adelaide metropolitan area. Though in most cases, several calls were made to each dwelling, as well as attempts by telephone to arrange interviews, the very considerable distances involved limited the number of calls that were feasible. Of the sample we received from DSS and who were within the scope of the survey, 50 per cent completed the questionnaire. The sample is skewed in terms of gender, with an over-representation of females.

### **3 Survey Results: Multiple Indices of Deprivation**

In Table 2, we present a summary of the answers to the question on necessities of life. Table 3 shows average deprivation scores for four client groups on 13 different indices of deprivation.

#### **3.1 Access to Basics of Life**

The distribution of the responses for each of the items which formed the 'basics of life' question are set out in Table 2. One of the striking features is that there are seven items which no-one lacked because they were short of money: bath or shower, electricity or gas, refrigerator, stove, public transport for one's needs, inside toilet, and a TV.

Though the term 'necessities' was used in the question put to clients, we have used the more general label 'lack basics' to describe the resulting index. This is to take account of the fact that both the pilot study and the focus groups judged some items to have a lower rating than others in terms of 'necessity'.

#### **3.2 Summary Indices of Deprivation**

Though there may be interest in the answers to individual questions relating to deprivation (as in Table 2), the sheer bulk of information is such that it is helpful to summarise several pieces of data into indices. Our procedure was first to construct 13 such summary indices. In Section 3, we go on to describe the construction of a single index.

The very extensive information on the basics of life (only a portion of which is shown in Table 2) was converted into a summary measure of deprivation we labelled LACKBAS (lack basics) as follows. A score of 100 would be achieved by a respondent who could not afford all 37 items on the list of basics, while at the other end of the scale, a person who lacked no items at all (except by choice)

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**Table 2: Deprivation in Terms of Lack of Basics: Proportion Who Do Not Have Item Because They Could Not Afford It**

	Raw scores
Holiday away from home for one week a year	.50
Night out once a fortnight	.45
Insurance on contents of home	.27
Special meal once a week	.25
New, not second-hand clothes	.24
Friends/family for a meal once a month	.21
Secure locks on doors and windows	.17
Examination of teeth by dentist once a year	.17
Hobby or leisure activity	.15
A 'best outfit' for special occasions	.14
Hair-cut at least every third month	.12
Glasses, change of glasses if necessary	.11
Presents for friends and family at least once a year	.11
Video / VCR	.11
Microwave oven	.10
Clothes that to some degree are in fashion	.06
Telephone	.05
Warm bedding in winter	.05
Substantial meal at least once a day	.05
Celebrations on special occasions, like Christmas	.05
Washing machine	.05
Car	.05
Vacuum cleaner	.04
Warm clothes in winter	.03
Electric fan / cooling	.03
Not more than two persons in each bedroom	.03
Medical treatment and medicine if necessary	.02
Heating in at least one room in the house, if it's cold	.02
Radio	.02
Beds for everyone in the household	.01
Bath or shower	.00
Electricity or gas	.00
Refrigerator	.00
Stove (cook-top plus oven)	.00
Public transport for one's needs	.00
Inside toilet	.00
TV	.00

**Table 3: Average of Deprivation Measures for Client Groups**

Deprivation measure <sup>(a)</sup>	Full-rate age pension	Part-rate age pension	Full-rate other client	Part-rate other client	Significance <sup>(b)</sup>
Lack basics (LACKBAS)	4	1	14	8	###
Poor cash-flow (SHORT \$)	5	0	30	26	###
Difficulty getting to important places (DIFFGET)	5	3	10	3	##
Dissatisfaction with home (DHOME)	22	20	39	41	###
Dissatisfaction with street (DSTREET)	41	39	43	35	n.s.
Not enough income to get by on (NOTGETBY)	29	0	44	21	##
Unable to raise \$1000 in a week (NOTGET\$)	22	21	54	45	##
Dissatisfied with life (NSATLIFE)	11	7	23	34	#
Standard of living worse now than 2 years ago (NWORSE)	39	29	69	38	###
Standard of living worse in 2 years time than now (FWORSE)	46	14	26	10	##
No health insurance (HINONE)	64	50	95	83	###
Low social activity (NOTACT)	25	7	13	17	n.s.
Equivalent monthly family income (EQINCOME) (\$)	1486	1720	1329	1836	##

**Notes:** (a) On all items except income, the measure ranges between 0 (low deprivation) to 100 (high deprivation).  
 (b) F-test of significant difference between client groups.  
 ### Probability < 1%  
 ## Probability < 5%  
 # Probability < 10%  
 n.s. Not significant



would receive a score of 0. Each item was weighted according to its rating as a 'necessity'. Thus, two respondents who each lack a single item need not receive the same score. For instance, someone who lacks 'warm clothes in winter' would receive a higher deprivation score than someone who lacks a microwave. Of the 110 respondents, 28 received a score of 0, while the highest deprivation rating was 43.

We used the responses to the questions on client perceptions to construct the following five measures of deprivation. In each case the score is 0 or 1, according to the presence or absence of the deprivation item.

NOTGETBY	Not enough family income to get by on
NOTGET\$	Cannot raise \$1000 in a week for an emergency
NSATLIFE	Dissatisfied with life today
NWORSE	Present standard of living worse than two years ago
FWORSE	Standard of living two years hence will be worse than now

There were ten questions relating to cash-flow problems. The responses to these were converted into an index labelled SHORT\$, showing the proportion of the ten items with which the respondents had cash-flow problems.

The survey contained extensive questions on frequency with which clients took part in various forms of social activity. In keeping with our focus on deprivation, the responses were used to construct an index of *inactivity* labelled NOTACT.

Other indices constructed from the responses are DHOME, a measure of dissatisfaction with the condition of one's home; DSTREET, a measure of dissatisfaction with noise and safety in one's street; DIFFGET, an index of difficulty in getting to important places, such as a shopping centre, an hospital, and homes of friends and relatives; and HINONE, no health insurance.

Finally, client income was converted into equivalent income (EQINCOME), that is, after-tax income, adjusted for family size. As will be noted, income in this study can be thought of in two different contexts. Low income might itself be a measure of deprivation, or alternatively, it might be considered as one of the characteristics of clients that explain levels of deprivation. Thus, in Table 4 we will consider income as a measure of deprivation, whereas in Table 6 we consider it as an explanatory variable of deprivation measured by other means.

### 3.3 Deprivation Measures Applied to Client Groups

In Table 3, the summary deprivation measures described above are applied to four client groups: full-rate and part-rate age pensioners; full-rate and part-rate 'other'

Table 4: Significant Correlations Between Measures of Deprivation

	Lacknec	Short\$	Diffget	Dhome	Dstreet	Notgetby	Notget\$	Nsatlife	Nworse	Fworse	Hinone	Notact	Egincome
Lackbas		*	*	*	◆	*	*	*	*	*	*	◆	◆
Short\$	*		*	*	◆	*	*	*	*	*	*	◆	◆
Diffget	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Dhome	*	*	*		◆	*	*	*	*	*	*	◆	◆
Dstreet	◆	◆	*	◆		◆	◆	*	◆	*	◆	◆	◆
Notgetby	*	*	*	*	◆		*	*	*	*	◆	◆	◆
Notget\$	*	*	*	*	◆	*		*	*	◆	*	*	◆
Nsatlife	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	◆	◆	◆	◆
Nworse	*	*	◆	*	◆	*	*	*		*	◆	◆	*
Fworse	*	*	◆	*	*	*	◆	◆	*		◆	*	◆
Hinone	*	*	◆	*	◆	◆	*	◆	◆	◆		◆	◆
Notact	◆	◆	◆	◆	*	◆	*	◆	◆	*	◆		◆
Egincome	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	*	◆	◆	◆	

Notes: Pearson correlation, 2-tail test of significance, \*probability < 10%, ◆not significant.

clients. For ease of comparison all of the measures in Table 3, except for equivalent income, have been converted to a scale from 0 (lowest deprivation) to 100 (highest deprivation).

On two of the indices, satisfaction with one's street, and low social activity, there is no significant difference between client groups. The remaining eleven indices all show significant differences between the client groups. On six of these measures, age pensioners have a clear advantage: lacking basics, having cash-flow problems, dissatisfaction with home, not being able to raise \$1000 in an emergency, being dissatisfied with life, and not having health insurance. When it comes to current income, the perception that one cannot get by on one's income, and thinking one's standard of living will be worse in two years, the division is rather between part-rate and full pensioners, with those receiving a full payment being more disadvantaged. On the remaining two indices, difficulty in getting to important places such as hospitals, and the perception that one's standard of living is falling, the 'full-rate other' group is significantly worse off than the other three.

## 4 A Single Index of Deprivation

### 4.1 Deriving a Single Index

The question addressed here is whether the 13 measures of deprivation discussed in the previous section can be summarised still further, perhaps into a single index of deprivation. A first step is to see how closely the 13 are correlated with each other. We did this, and the results are set out in Table 4.

The most striking feature of Table 4 is that equivalent income has no significant correlation with any index except NWORSE (the perception that one's standard of living is lower now than two years ago). In other words, with this one exception, people's ranking on income is not similar to their ranking on the other indicators. It would clearly be inappropriate, therefore, to include equivalent income in a summary measure of the other indices. We also excluded the four indices that had the next-lowest correlation with the others. These are dissatisfaction with one's street (DSTREET), no health insurance (HINONE), the expectation that the one's standard of living will fall over the next two years (FWORSE), and the low activity index (NOTACT).

We are thus left with eight principal indicators of deprivation, all of which are to a high degree inter-correlated:

LACKBAS	Unable to afford basics
SHORT\$	Cash-flow problem in past year

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NOTGET\$	Cannot raise \$1000
NOTGETBY	Cannot manage on family income
DHOME	Index of dissatisfaction with home
NSATLIFE	Index of dissatisfaction with life, or low morale
DIFFGET	Difficulty in getting to important places
NWORSE	Present standard of living worse than two years ago

A useful statistical technique for summarising such an array of complex data is factor analysis. When we applied factor analysis to the eight indices, only one factor was extracted. This gives us confidence that we are justified in summarising the eight into a single scale or index. The simplest way of constructing such an index from a statistical point of view, though not as regards intelligibility, is to allow factor analysis itself to generate a score for each individual.

A problem with this approach is that it is not easy to understand just what the resulting index means, since it is two stages removed from the original items on the questionnaire. An alternative approach is to select the individual items from the eight deprivation measures that are most highly correlated with the factor-based index. We did this, and identified 21 items that are highly correlated with the factor-based index. These items are as follows:

- Not afford friends or family for meal once a month;
- Not afford hobby or leisure activity;
- Not afford holiday away from home for at least one week a year;
- Not afford new rather than second hand clothes;
- Not afford night out once a fortnight;
- Not afford special meal once a week;
- Not keep up with payments for electricity, gas, or water in past year;
- Pawned or sold something to get money in past year;
- Unable to heat home because short of money in past year;
- Went without meals because short of money in past year;
- Went without or delayed dental care because short of money in past year;
- Went without or delayed optical treatment because short of money in past year;
- Not able to raise \$1000 in a week in an emergency;
- Not enough income to get by on;
- Dissatisfied with cooling or heating of home;
- Dissatisfied with condition of home;
- Dissatisfied with security of home;
- Dissatisfied with life today;
- Difficulty getting to a hospital;
- Difficulty getting to doctor, dentist, other health facilities; and
- Standard of living worse than two years ago.

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These items comprise six of the 37 items (unweighted) that make up LACKBAS, six of the nine items from SHORT\$, three of the four items from DHOME, two of the 13 items from DIFFGET, and the single items that comprise NSATLIFE, NOTGETBY and NWORSE. Note that none of these items involves a commodity such as a car, refrigerator, washing machine, TV, or telephone. They relate, rather, to the social deprivation items of the lack basics of life scale, to cash-flow problems and financial strain, to morale and self-perception of standard of living, and to capabilities such as not being able to raise \$1000 in an emergency.

The index is constructed by simply giving each individual a score according to the number of items they lack. This index correlates very closely with the factor-based index (0.97). This suggests that the two are interchangeable for practical purposes. We will use the 21-item index in the analyses of the data because of its advantage in terms of intelligibility and simplicity.

In the pilot study, the worst-off client scored 19 on the 21-point DEPRIVATION index, while 18 per cent scored zero, that is, they did not experience deprivation in terms of any of these items.

We described in the previous section how we found that income did not measure the same thing as our other measures of deprivation. We then simplified these other measures into a single summary index based on 21 items we labelled DEPRIVATION. Figure 1 shows the relationship between income and DEPRIVATION. This scattergram shows just how weak is the relationship between the two, with the trend-line showing only a very slight tendency for those on higher incomes to experience lower deprivation. The correlation between the two is -0.2.

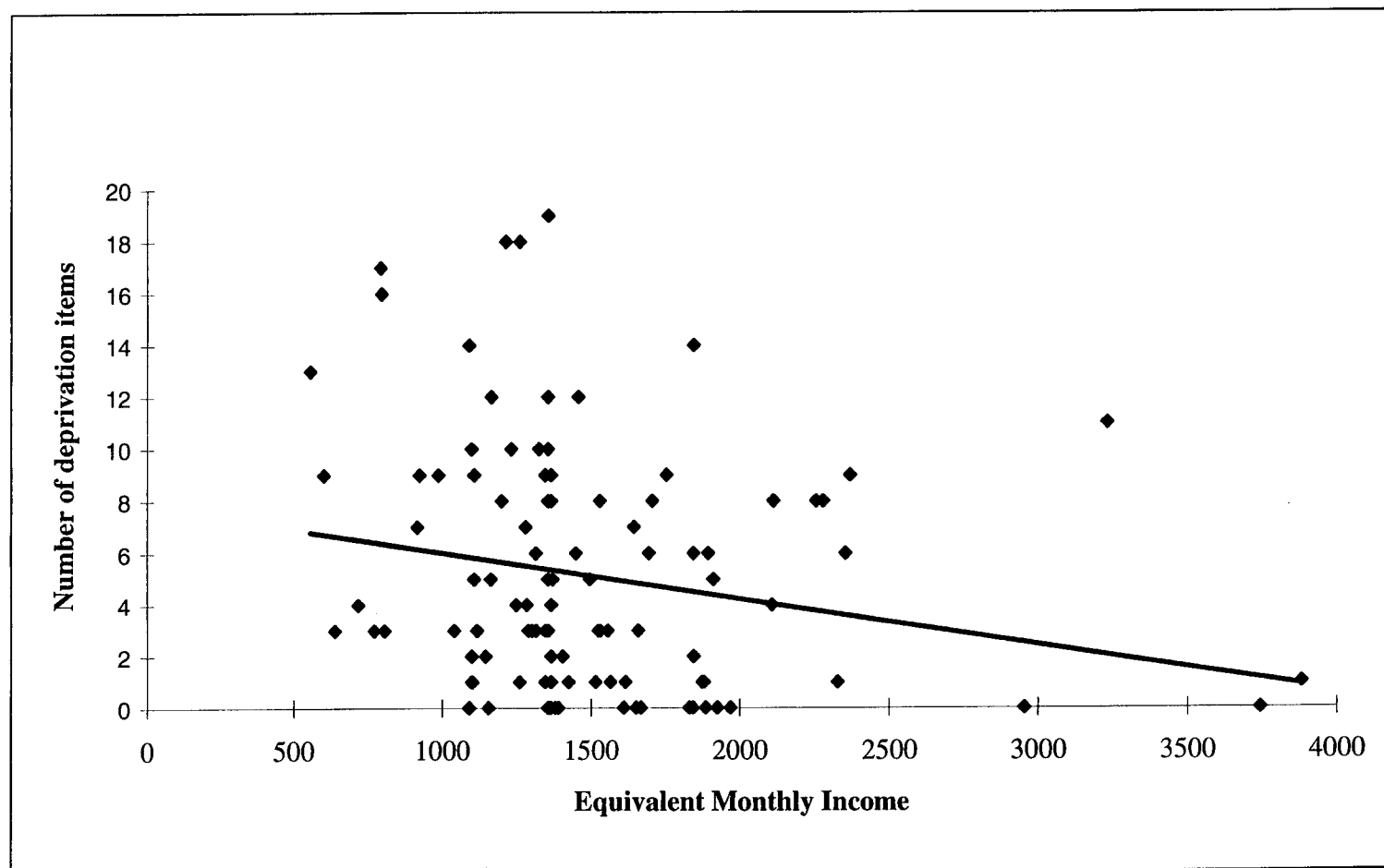
#### **4.2 Inequality in Deprivation Between Client Groups**

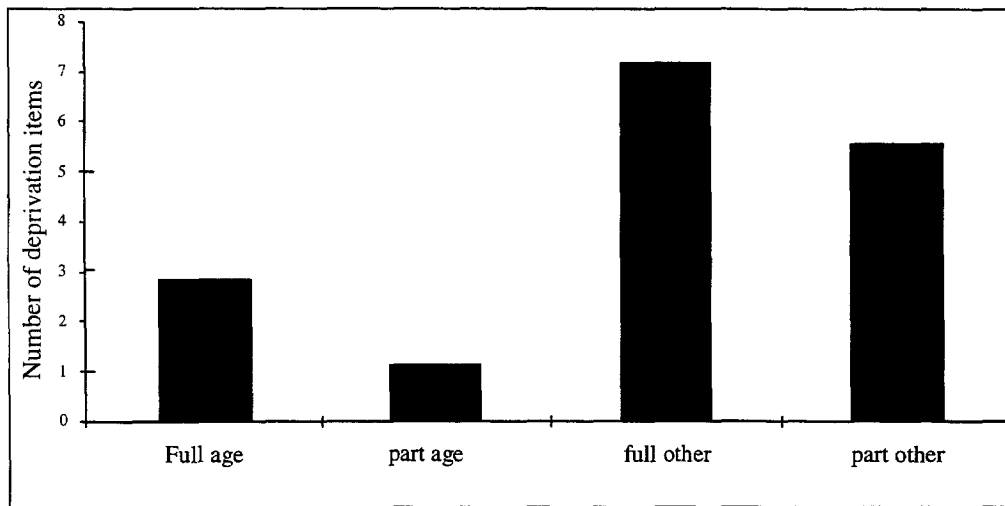
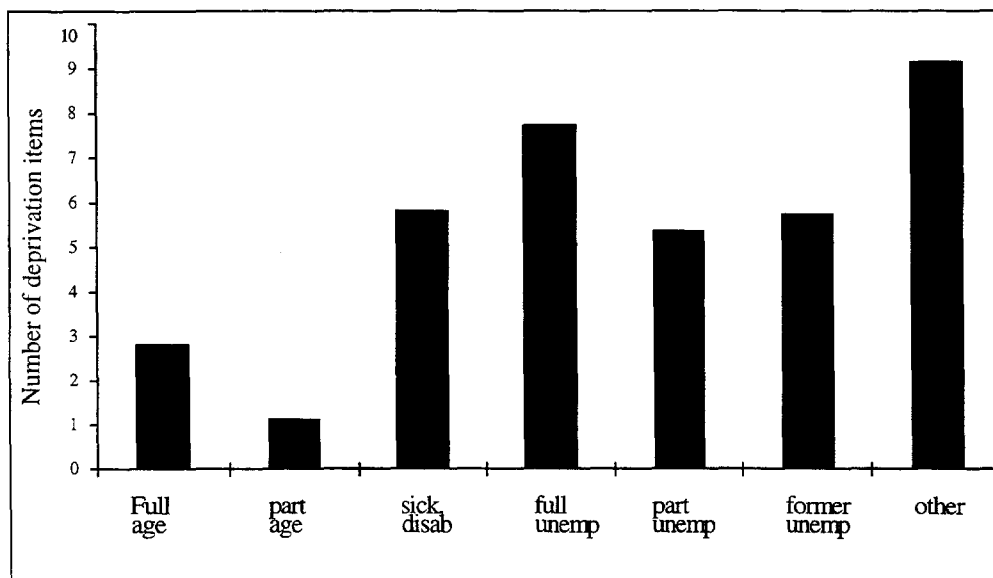
Using the summary DEPRIVATION score as our index, we present the results for the four principal client groups in Figure 2. The chart shows that the average deprivation score for the client groups is lowest for the part-rate age pensioners, and highest for those receiving 'full-rate other' payments.

Figure 3 is based on the same data as Figure 2, but this time with the 'other clients' broken down into the separate payment categories. Note that the numbers are very small when this further subdivision is made, and the results should be interpreted with caution. With that proviso in mind, it is those on 'other' payments (such as Austudy and partner allowance), followed by those receiving full-rate unemployment payments who fare worst. The 'former unemployed' group have a surprisingly high deprivation score. These are people who were

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Figure 1: Deprivation by Income



**Figure 2: Deprivation Score by Client Group****Figure 3: Deprivation Score by DSS Payment Category**

unemployed when the sample was drawn, but had since obtained a job, and in most cases a much higher income than that of DSS clients. Their high deprivation scores are due in part to some of the deprivation items referring to events that occurred during the past year, but also because, as some pointed out to interviewers, the move from unemployment to employment can involve new expenses and need not result in an immediate improvement to living standards.

### 4.3 Inequality Within Client Groups

To this point, our focus has been on differences *between* client groups, with age pensioners emerging as consistently less disadvantaged than other clients. However, averages can be misleading in that some clients in a particular group may be well above, and others well below, the average.

We can see how close the members of a group are to the average by means of a measure of inequality known as the coefficient of variation (standard deviation divided by the mean). If there were perfect equality within the group, with all having the same score, the coefficient of variation would be zero. The more inequality there is, the higher the coefficient of variation. Our finding here is set out in Table 5.

**Table 5: Inequality Within Client Groups**

DSS Category	Coefficient of Variation	
	DEPRIVATION	EQINCOME
Full-rate age pension	1.428	.187
Part-rate age pension	1.323	.291
Full-rate unemployment payment	.586	.279
Part-rate unemployment payment	.878	.303
Formerly unemployed	.900	.605
Sickness, disability or other payment	.536	.361

What Table 5 shows is that in terms of income, full-rate age pensioners are the most homogeneous group, with the former unemployed the least, followed by those on sickness, disability and 'other' payments. The situation is very different when it comes to DEPRIVATION. On this measure, both age pensioner groups are very unequal, while those on sickness and full unemployment payments are the most homogeneous. In other words, our finding that age pensioners *as a group* are the least disadvantaged needs to be qualified by the observation that there is a great deal of inequality among age pensioners. In fact, the highest



deprivation score in the pilot survey occurred among the full-rate age pensioners. In the case of those receiving full unemployment payments, on the other hand, their average high deprivation score is a far more accurate indicator of the individual scores.

#### 4.4 Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate analysis is used to answer more complex questions than whether, say, age pensioners are less disadvantaged than other clients. In a multivariate analysis, we ask questions, such as 'What is the best indicator of disadvantage when we examine a range of factors at the same time?' We can then see, for instance, whether age pensioners are less disadvantaged than other clients, even when we take into account such factors as housing status, social class, birthplace, health status, and place of residence. Table 6 summarises the results of this kind of analysis in relation to our summary index DEPRIVATION.

**Table 6: Indicators of High and Low Deprivation**

Low Deprivation	High Deprivation
English-speaking birthplace other than Australia	
Non-metropolitan area	Metropolitan area
Pay low rent or mortgage	Pay high rent or mortgage
Can afford home-contents insurance	Cannot afford home-contents insurance
Good health	Poor health
High equivalent income	Low equivalent income
Full-rate age pension	Full-rate unemployment payment
Part-rate age pension	Former unemployed
Sickness, disability pension	Other non-age pension client

Note that in previous discussions when it was pointed out that equivalent income and our deprivation index had a very low correlation, we were treating income as a measure of deprivation. In this context, we are using income as an 'explanatory' variable and asking whether it tells us anything, over and above what we learn from all the other variables. In Table 6, low equivalent income is one of the indicators of a high deprivation score. This means that even though we have shown that the income scale and the deprivation scale measure different things, it is still better to have more rather than less income if one is to avoid a high deprivation score. This has important policy implications. We are saying that income itself is not a useful way of identifying the worst-off DSS clients. But our results do suggest that, over and above the other factors we have identified,

higher income is associated with a lower deprivation score, and lower income with a higher deprivation score.

According to Table 6, living in a country region is an indicator of a lower score on the composite deprivation index. One reason for this is that several of the items in the deprivation index relate to satisfaction with one's standard of living. Those outside metropolitan Adelaide tended to have lower aspirations in terms of what was needed for a reasonable standard of living. This may in turn have influenced levels of satisfaction. In any case, 'dissatisfaction with the security of one's home' is likely to be greater in the city. Other items on the index refer to access to health facilities. Though in general one might expect greater difficulties of access in country areas, this may not be the case in a particular country district.

The explanatory variables used here are those appropriate for this pilot study. They do not include gender, for instance, because of the skewed nature of the pilot sample. Nor do they include any distinction between couples and those who are single, again because of the nature of the sample. In a full survey, these would be two obvious additional explanatory variables.

#### **4.5 Other Factors Influencing Deprivation**

The questionnaire contains several questions that would not be expected to show significant results in a small pilot survey, but may do so in a larger study. Among these were the questions on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin (three respondents); on difficulty in making payments towards care of children who do not live with client (two respondents); on difficulty in paying for child care services (eight respondents); on non-use of child-care because of cost (two respondents); on difficulty in giving help to family members (ten respondents). In response to a question on interruptions to training or study, 39 respondents said they had done further training in the past five years. None of these withdrew or deferred because of financial problems.

A further characteristic of DSS clients which could be expected to be associated with very considerable deprivation is homelessness. However, even in a large survey using standard survey procedures, the homeless are likely to be under-represented. This is true not only of those who are literally homeless, but also of those in temporary accommodation.

#### **4.6 Alternative Measures of Deprivation**

In the interests of simplicity, we have concentrated in this paper on a single summary measure, the 21-point scale we have called DEPRIVATION. We have noted, however, that two of its components, LACKBAS (unable to afford basics)

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and SHORT\$ (the cash-flow problem index) are very highly correlated with DEPRIVATION. There may be some policy purposes for which these two indicators would be a preferred measure. Though there were insufficient observations in the pilot study to construct an index based on the question on savings, there are indications that this too may prove to be a powerful indicator. Finally, we note that the response to the single question 'How are you managing on your family income' (NOTGETBY) has quite a high correlation with DEPRIVATION.

## 5 Conclusion

In answer to the primary question addressed in this project, namely, whether this methodology enables one to measure differentials in the levels of deprivation among clients, our answer is in four parts. First, we have shown that using a deprivation standards approach, we have identified two principal dimensions on which deprivation occurs, an income dimension and a relative deprivation dimension. The two are only weakly correlated. In other words, if clients are ranked according to their income, this ranking bears very little relationship to their ranking in terms of deprivation (Figure 1). This is a key finding of the project. If income were, in fact, a good proxy for other indicators of deprivation, there would be little point in using other than that single measure.

Second, we have shown how the relative deprivation dimension can be measured using a single index. The index based on the results of the pilot survey comprises 21 deprivation items. If this methodology were applied to the results of a larger survey, it may well be possible to produce a similar index with an abbreviated set of deprivation items. The 21 items used here are as follows:

- Not afford friends or family for meal once a month;
  - Not afford hobby or leisure activity;
  - Not afford holiday away from home for at least one week a year;
  - Not afford new rather than second hand clothes;
  - Not afford night out once a fortnight;
  - Not afford special meal once a week;
  - Not keep up with payments for electricity, gas, or water in past year;
  - Pawned or sold something to get money in past year;
  - Unable to heat home because short of money in past year;
  - Went without meals because short of money in past year;
  - Went without or delayed dental care because short of money in past year;
  - Went without or delayed optical treatment because short of money in past year;
  - Not able to raise \$1000 in a week in an emergency;
  - Not enough income to get by on;
-

Dissatisfied with cooling or heating of home;  
 Dissatisfied with condition of home;  
 Dissatisfied with security of home;  
 Dissatisfied with life today;  
 Difficulty getting to a hospital;  
 Difficulty getting to doctor, dentist, other health facilities; and  
 Standard of living worse than two years ago.

Third, using the deprivation index developed in the survey, we have shown significant variations in deprivation between client groups. Whether one looks at the preliminary results as shown in Figures 2 and 3, (where we simply present the average deprivation score for each client group or subgroups of these client groups), or the more complex multivariate analysis as shown in Table 6, the story is similar: it is clear that those receiving 'other' payments (the largest sub-group of whom are those on full-rate unemployment payment) are the worst off, while those on a part age pension are the least disadvantaged. Note that the pilot study does not cover single people or sole parents.

Fourth, the use of the deprivation index tells a significantly different story from the use of income-based measures when it comes to the degree of similarity within the client groups. In terms of income, full-rate age pensioners are the most homogeneous group, whereas in terms of deprivation, they show the greatest degree of variation in their deprivation scores (Table 5). The implication of this for policy is that attempts based on averages to identify greatest need can be misleading when it comes to individuals within that group.

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# Wards Leaving Care

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## 1 Introduction

When children are deemed to be 'in need of care' because of the inability or unwillingness of their parents to care for them, the 'last resort' is wardship - the transfer of guardianship from their parents to the state in the body of the Minister of Community Services. Wardship orders generally mean that children are removed from their home and placed in substitute care but not all children in substitute care are on wardship orders and some children on wardship orders may live with their parents or with relatives at some stage during their wardship.

While wardship orders may be short term (i.e. for one or two years), they are more commonly longer and may continue until the child is 16 or 18. As a result, in recent years approximately 100 young people aged 16 to 18 years leave wardship in New South Wales each year and face the tasks of managing their transition from care at the same time as they are adjusting to other changes and moving to a more independent status in other areas of their lives. The issues they have to deal with are not all unique to young people leaving care but they are complicated by and affected by their experience in care and by the extent and type of financial and emotional support they can obtain. This paper therefore explores the issues of the timing of the transition from care, young people's readiness for it, their needs in relation to accommodation and financial assistance, and emotional support.

## 2 Aims and Methodology of the Study

This study used several sources of information - interviews with young people leaving wardship, and with age-mates living at home or in refuges, departmental files, and interviews with workers - to examine the circumstances, experiences and needs of young people aged 16 to 18 who were leaving wardship in New South Wales. It documents young people's perceptions of being in care and of

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making the transition from care, and their needs for support through this transition.

## 2.1 The Sample

The survey sample consisted of 91 young people aged 16 to 18 who were discharged from wardship in New South Wales over the 12 month period from 1 September 1992 to 31 August 1993.<sup>1</sup> Forty-seven young people agreed to participate, and were interviewed before their impending discharge from wardship and again three months after discharge; 45 of the 47 were interviewed again for the third time 12 months after being discharged from wardship, giving an overall re-contact rate of 95.7 per cent. They comprised the *interview group*. The remaining 44 young people were not able to be contacted before they were discharged from wardship ( $n = 22$ ) or after they agreed to participate ( $n = 13$ ) or were unwilling to participate ( $n = 9$ ); they constituted the *non-interview group*.<sup>2</sup>

**Procedure.** Contact with young people who met the study's criteria of being wards of state, aged 16 to 18, and about to be discharged from wardship, was made through the New South Wales Department of Community Services. A letter was passed on to the young people by their District Officers inviting them to participate in the study. If the young people agreed to participate, the most appropriate way to contact them was established. From this stage on, we made contact with the young people, explained the purpose of the study, and arranged to meet and interview the young people at a location convenient to them.

A series of three interviews was conducted with willing participants. The first interview was conducted up to three months prior to discharge and covered issues related to the experience of being in care and the young people's expectations and plans after discharge. The second interview was conducted at least three months after discharge. It was concerned with the young person's circumstances around and after discharge, including any changes in living arrangements, education or employment, and any support from the Department or other sources during the transition period. The third and final interview, conducted one year after discharge from wardship, was concerned with further changes in the young

- 1 An additional 14 young people were expected to be discharged during this period but were not. Four were interviewed but were not included in the study because their discharge from wardship did not occur during this time.
  - 2 To ensure that we had not missed any young people who were discharged during the specified 12 month period, a check was made later (after the end of the period) with each office. We supplied a list of the young people we believed were discharged during the 12 months and asked for this list to be verified. This check did not reveal any further young people who should have been included in the study but it did indicate that some young people expected to be discharged had not been discharged.
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person's circumstances and with their current perceptions of their time in care and their needs after discharge.

The interviews were generally face-to-face and taped with the consent of the young person for later transcription. Most interviews were conducted in the young person's home (47 per cent) but others were carried out in a variety of locations.<sup>3</sup> Two young Aboriginal women were, according to their choice, interviewed by an experienced Aboriginal woman interviewer. All participants were paid \$20.00 per interview.

## 2.2 Comparison Group Study

**Sample.** Two groups, each of 20 young people, were included to provide comparison groups for the wards leaving care. One group, the '*away from home*' group or '*early home leavers*', comprised young people living independently from the age of 16 to 18; just over half were male (55 per cent). Most (75 per cent) were living in a refuge or in supported accommodation at the time of the interview and the others were living with friends, in a boarding house or in rented accommodation. Seven were friends of the young people leaving wardship and were contacted through them. The others were contacted through three supported accommodation or housing programs for young people in Sydney. Nearly all ( $n = 18$ , 90 per cent) were unemployed at the time of the interview although a number had been working; two were still at school. Their average age was 17.98 years ( $sd = .09$ ) and they had been living away from home, on average, for 2.5 years. The average age at which they left home was 15.5 years but ranged from 11 to 18 years. Most had parents who were no longer living together, and indeed, conflict with their step-parent or their parent's de facto partner was one of their main reasons for leaving home ( $n = 8$ , 40 per cent). The other main reasons were wanting to be independent or conflict over wanting to 'do things their way' ( $n = 15$ , 75 per cent) and not being able to cope with the violence, abuse or conflict at home ( $n = 16$ , 80 per cent).<sup>4</sup>

The other group, the '*at home*' comparison group, comprised young people aged 17 to 19, still living at home with at least one parent. Eight were friends or partners of the young people leaving wardship, and the others were contacted through several schools in an area similar in socio-economic status to the area and schools attended by the wards. The average age of the '*at home*' group was 18.4

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3 These included parks, cafes, schools and New South Wales Department of Community Services offices. A small proportion (about 16 per cent) were conducted via telephone because of the cost and long distances involved in travelling to more distant areas (such as Broken Hill and Queensland).

4 Most young people referred to two or more reasons for leaving home.

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years ( $sd = .58$ ). Most were either employed or studying (or about to begin a course). Just over half (55 per cent) were female.

**Procedure.** Where young people were friends of the young people leaving care, contact was made through them and the purpose of the study first explained by them. Where young people were living in supported accommodation or refuges, they were approached by their workers and asked if they were willing to participate. The other young people still living at home were contacted by their former school and given a letter explaining the study and asking for their participation. In all cases, before each interview, the purpose of the study and the reason we needed their participation was explained. Like the wards, participants were told that we were interested in their views and that what they told us would remain confidential.

Most interviews were conducted in the place where the young person was living but some were conducted at a friend's place. All the interviews with the young people in the '*away from home*' group were face to face and so were most of the '*at home*' group interviews. Some of the interviews with young people still living at home were, however, conducted via telephone for convenience and choice because a number were restricted by working hours and other commitments. Like the former wards, young people in the comparison groups were paid for their participation.

### 2.3 Study of Departmental Files

The departmental 'B-Files'<sup>5</sup> for all the young people leaving care in the specified period were reviewed and coded. This was done for several reasons: to test the representativeness of the interview sample by examining demographic differences between them and the non-interview sample; to gain (reasonably) accurate information about the movement of children and young people in care, by recording information about their placements; and to obtain information about departmental practice and about the services offered to young people in care and about to be discharged.

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5 Reviewing the B-files was extremely time consuming and the amount of work involved was seriously under-estimated. Each file took between three and eight hours to review, the time depending on the size and complexity of the file, as well as the way they were organised. It is clear that it is impossible for workers to gain a quick clear picture of children's backgrounds from these files unless they are well organised and contain clear summary up-dates. Access to the files was, however, very valuable and yielded much more useful information than the Client Information System (CIS) entries. It provided the only reliable basis of comparison between the young people we were able to interview and those we were not.

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## 2.4 District Officers' Interviews

The District Officers and non-government agency workers who were involved with young people at the time they were about to be discharged were asked if they would be prepared to talk to us about the young people and their views about how well prepared they were for discharge, and any concerns they had about their experience in care. All the District Officers and agency workers we were able to contact agreed to be interviewed, including several who were on leave or who had since left the employment of the department. Five District Officers, however, were unable to be contacted. Most interviews were conducted by telephone.

## 2.5 How Representative was the Interview Sample of Young People Leaving Care?

A comparison of the demographic characteristics of young people in the interview sample and the non-interview sample indicates that the interview sample provides a good representation of the overall population of young people leaving care during the study period, although the interview sample included more female and fewer Aboriginal respondents and more from rural areas than the non-interview sample.

In terms of their history in care, there were some differences between the interview and the non-interview sample, especially in relation to the number of placements during wardship. Although there was no significant difference between the interview and non-interview groups in the age at which they entered care or wardship (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1), young people in the non-interview group had significantly more placements during wardship (mean of 8.2 compared with 5.3) and were generally more unsettled (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Age of Children at Admission to Wardship

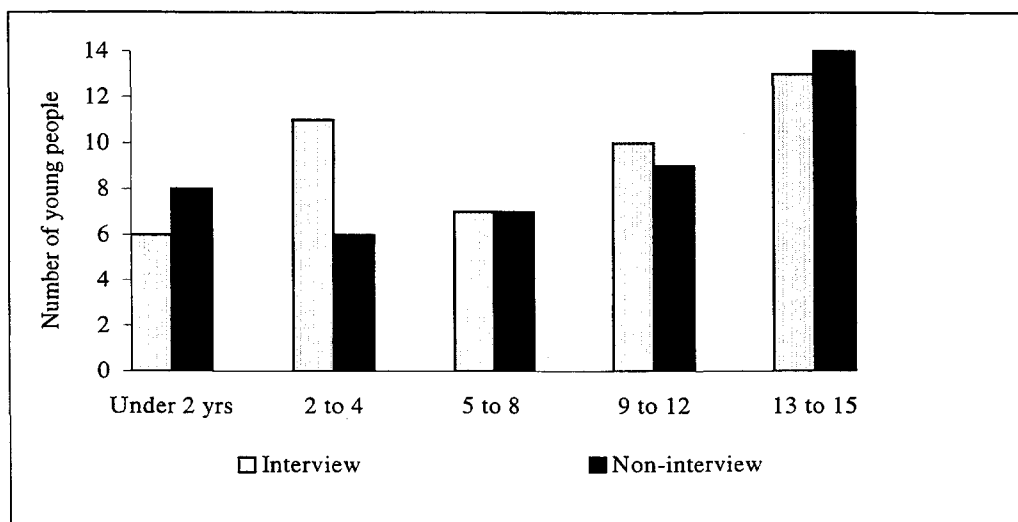
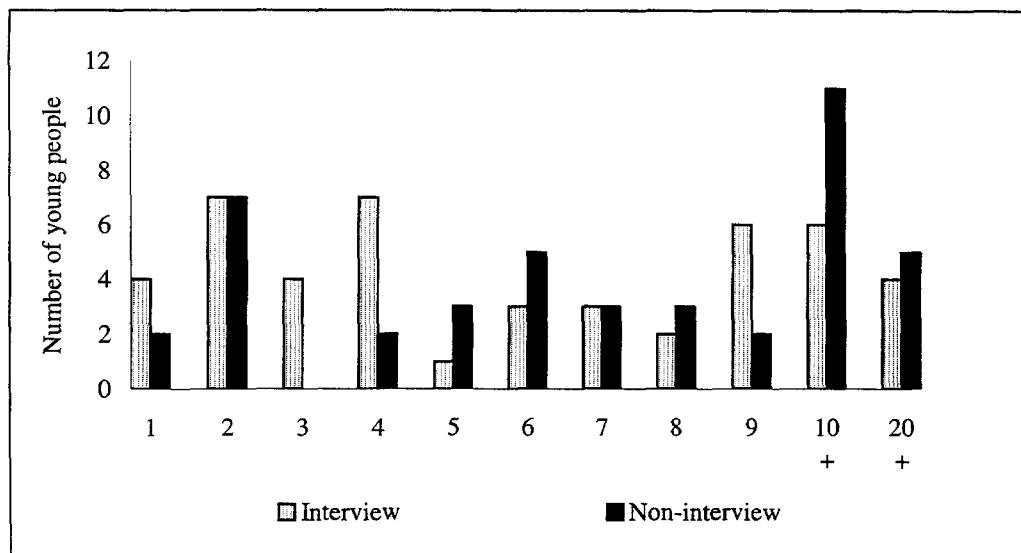


Figure 2: Number of Placements During Time in Care by Group



## 2.6 How Representative are the Young People Leaving Care of Young People in General?

Both the interview sample and the total group of young people leaving wardship differed from the general population of young people *not* in care in several ways.

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [TSI] people were over-represented in wardship.* Fourteen young people (ten female and four male) were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, constituting 15.4 per cent of the interview sample, compared with only about two per cent of young people under 19 at that time in the general population in New South Wales (ABS Catalogue No. 2740.0, 1991).
- *Young people in wardship were more likely to have spent time in a detention centre than young people in general.* Nine of the 91 state wards leaving care (9.9 per cent overall: eight males, 21.6 per cent and one female, 1.9 per cent) had spent time in juvenile detention centres (Office of Juvenile Justice, 1993). In contrast, at the same time in 1992, only .07 per cent of the general male population in New South Wales between the ages of 10-17 years and .003 per cent of females had been in a juvenile detention centre (Dagger, 1993).
- *Wards were more likely to be unemployed.*

- *Young women in wardship were more likely to have teenage pregnancies than their age-mates in the general population.* Nearly one third ( $n = 17$ , 31.5 per cent) of the young women leaving wardship were mothers or had been pregnant, compared with only two per cent of under 19 year-olds in the general population (ABS Catalogue No. 4101.0, 1991). This is consistent with the findings of overseas research (Biehal et al., 1994; Cook, 1994).

In summary, young people leaving wardship differed from their age-mates who had not been in care in ways that left them at some disadvantage. Furthermore, while the young people in the leaving care interview sample were fairly representative of all the young people leaving care at that time, they had, on average, a more settled history than those who did not participate. There were also clearly different patterns of experience in care among both groups, with some young people entering care as young children and others as adolescents, and some having a stable, long-term placement, and others having a history of multiple placements. The findings therefore need to be interpreted in this light - as perhaps underestimating the needs of some young people both in care and after care.

### **3 Findings**

To understand what assistance young people leaving care may need, it is important to know what their experience in care was like, what their circumstances are just as they are leaving care, and what support they can expect from various sources. For example, where are they living just before being discharged from care and what are their expectations about the possibility and desirability of continuing to live there? What educational background do they have and what are their chances of employment? Who is there to provide financial and emotional support? What skills do they have to enable them to manage independent living? How do they feel about being discharged from care?

#### **3.1 Timing of Discharge**

Most of the young people in this study (75 per cent) were discharged from wardship at 18 or at 16 (18 per cent) at the termination of their orders. A small number, however, were discharged early before their order terminated, generally at the instigation of the young person. Presumed stability or maturity were not prerequisites for discharge, however, and a number of young people were discharged although they were anxious about their ability to cope and unsure what support they could receive after leaving care. Indeed, less than half the young people interviewed just before they were discharged from care believed

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they could receive any assistance from the Department of Community Services after leaving care.

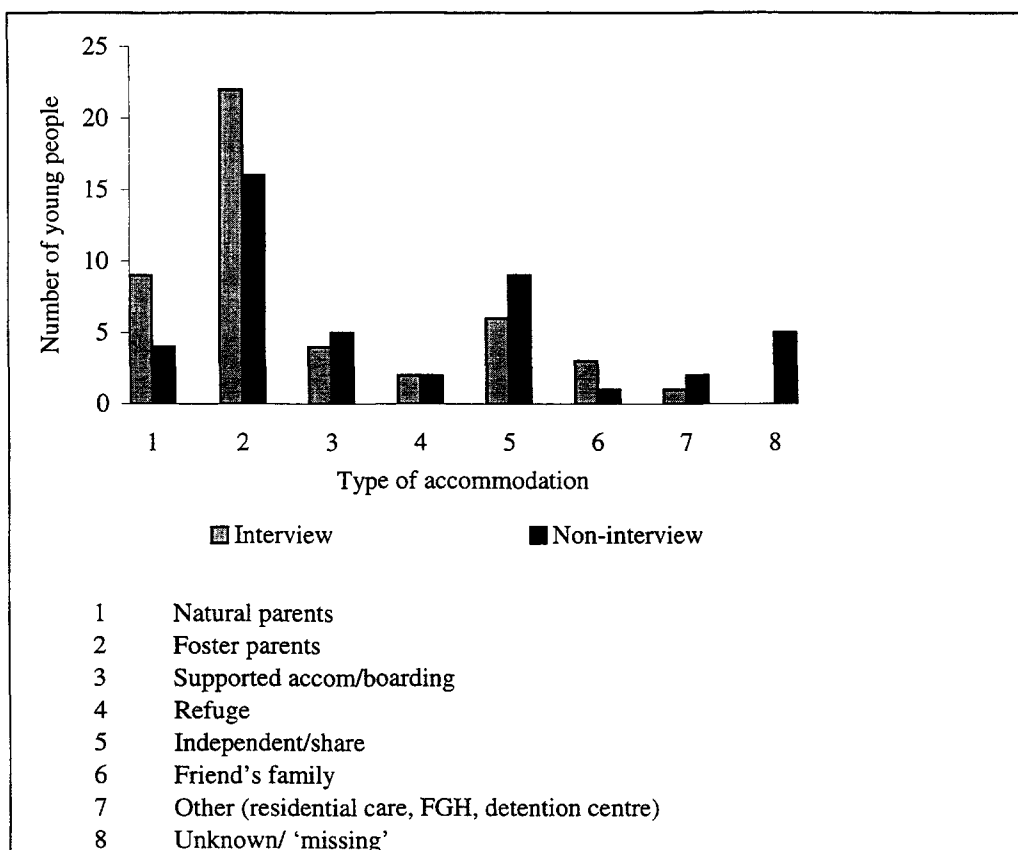
Young people leaving care are then in a very different situation from their age mates. If they are in foster care, their discharge from care may change or terminate their relationship with the people they are living with but this change does not occur at a time of their choosing; nor does it relate to their preparedness or readiness. If leaving care means leaving 'home', this occurs much earlier than it does for young people in general and with few options for returning home. Unlike young people living at home with their parents (e.g. those in the '*at home*' comparison group), they also have limited support options.

### 3.2 Living Arrangements

What discharge means to young people is clearly influenced by their living arrangements and their expectations about continuing in those arrangements. Some young people were already living independently at the time they were discharged from wardship (interview group: 6, 12.7 per cent; non-interview group: 9, 20.5 per cent) and some had returned to live with their parents (interview group: 9, 19.1 per cent; non-interview group: 4, 9.1 per cent). The most common living arrangement, however, was foster care (interview, 22, 46.8 per cent; non-interview, 16, 36.4 per cent) (Figure 3). This includes departmental and non-government agency foster care as well as relative and self-selected foster care. More young people in the interview group than in the non-interview group and more who had entered care *before* rather than during adolescence were in long-term stable foster care. A number of young people had also returned to live with their parents or were living independently. Overall, then, the majority (72.3 per cent) of young people in the interview group, but just under half of the non-interview group (47.7 per cent) were living in familial settings with foster parents, natural parents or with relatives or friends' families just before they were discharged from care<sup>6</sup>. This does not necessarily mean that they were stable or well integrated into this setting or that they could expect to stay there beyond their wardship. In fact, less than half those living with foster parents (41.2 per cent) or with their natural parents (42.9 per cent) expected to stay in those living arrangements beyond wardship. Most intended to move into independent or share accommodation so that a substantial number of young people expected either to move into, or to remain in, independent living.

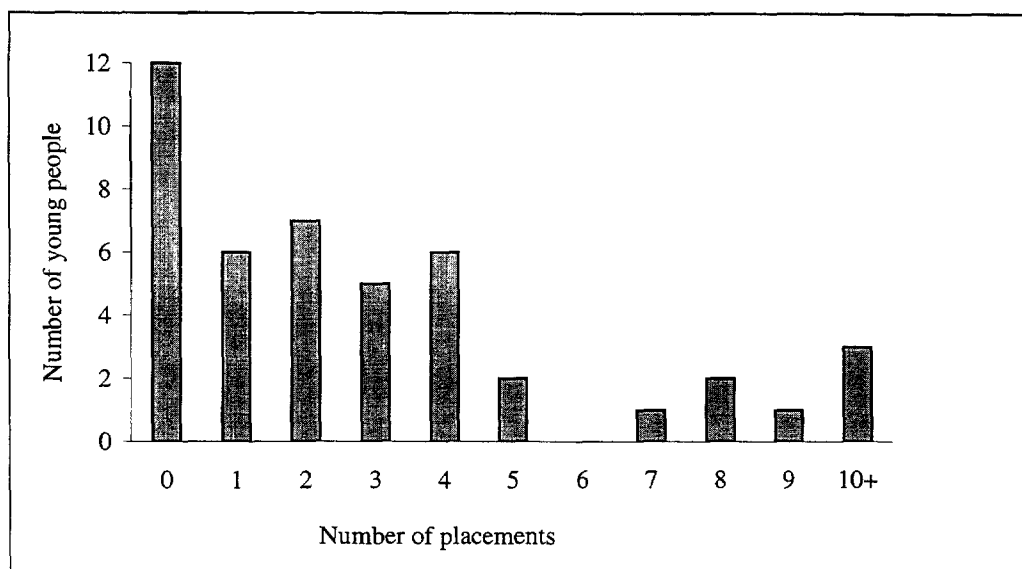
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6 The whereabouts of five young people in the non-interview group (11.4 per cent) was unknown. This followed the break-down of the foster relationship for two young people but the others had a fairly long period of instability before this.

**Figure 3: Accommodation Before Discharge from Wardship**

Three months after leaving care, nearly half (47 per cent) the young people had moved from their last place in care. Their main reasons for moving were conflict with the people they were living with, their desire to be independent, and the short-term nature of their accommodation (e.g. living with friend's family). In a few cases, the end of wardship provided a good excuse or opportunity to move on from a less than happy foster arrangement.

Twelve months after leaving care, three out of four young people (76.6 per cent) had moved at least once; the average number of moves during this time was three (see Figure 4). More young people were in living or had lived independently or in shared or supported accommodation during this time than in any other living arrangement (57.4 per cent). For the seven young people who had returned to live with their parents, four continued to do so but three moved out because of conflict. Of the 22 young people still living with foster parents when they were discharged, 11 (50 per cent) were still living there. Two had moved back after

**Figure 4: Number of Places Since Discharge**

difficulties in independent living, a pattern that is similar to that of young people moving in and out of independent living from their parents' home. For eight of the 11 who moved, the move was expected as most moved into independent living or to a friend's family. For the other three for whom the move was unexpected, two were the result of conflict and one was because the young woman became pregnant and wished to establish herself in independent living before the birth of the baby.

Significantly, the more places young people had lived in during their time in care, the more places they lived in after leaving care ( $r = .55$ ,  $n = 45$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Young people who were in stable long-term care were less likely to have moved than other young people whereas those who moved frequently during care because of placement break-downs and movement from one form of short-term insecure accommodation to another were more likely to move more frequently after care because of conflict and the insecurity of short-term accommodation. In some cases, a number of moves followed a premature move to independent living which the young person was unable to manage. For example, one young woman was discharged from wardship while she was living in a refuge. After discharge, she moved 10 times within a year, from one friend's place to another in a series of short-term stays, lasting from a few days to five or six weeks. She met several different women at refuges or clubs but none of these arrangements proved to be very successful.

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First I moved into a flat with a woman I met at the refuge but she drank and didn't look after her kid and was always yelling and carrying on. So I went to a friend's for about three weeks but we got evicted because my friend didn't pay the rent and she had animals and it wasn't allowed. The next place was just for a few days with another woman; that was only temporary. I moved back with Mum for four months and that was OK until the end; we had a fight and Mum put all my stuff on the verandah and locked me out. Next I lived with a lady I met at the RSL in her flat but then her son came back so there was no room.

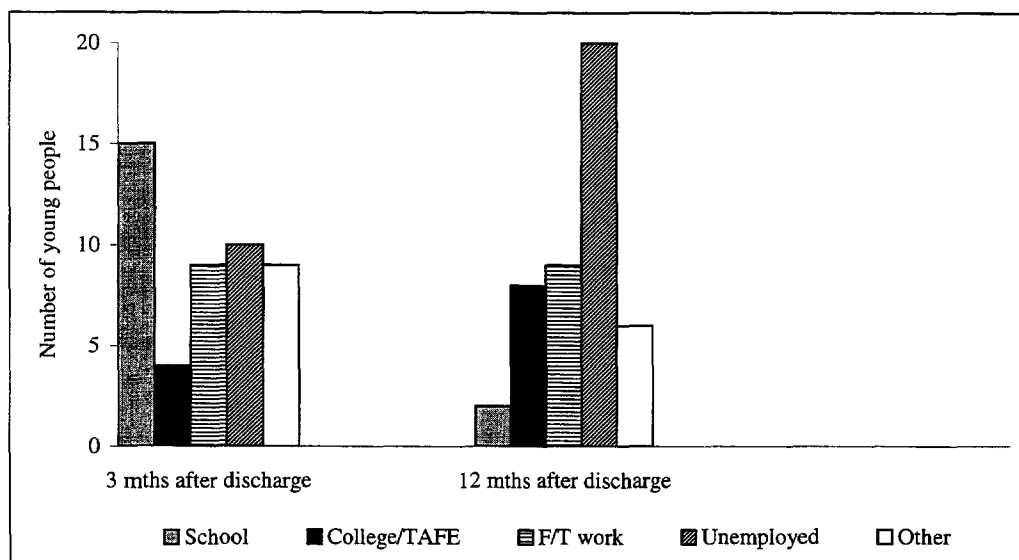
### 3.3 Education and Employment

Young people's educational attainment and their capacity to gain employment were similarly affected by their experience in care and there were several different patterns related to group membership (wards or comparison group) and the stability of living arrangements. Whereas eight out of ten young people in the '*at home*' comparison group completed Year 12, only 35.6 per cent of ex-wards and a mere 10 per cent of those in the '*away from home*' comparison group had done so. This is closely associated with the stability of young people's living arrangements and the number of schools attended. Young people living at home in the '*at home*' comparison group attended an average of only 2.3 schools during their school career (i.e. just over one primary school and one high school) whereas the average for wards was 5.4 and for those in the '*away from home*' comparison group, 6.9. While some movement between schools reflected behavioural problems within the wards group and the '*away from home*' comparison group, it was also closely associated with the stability of their living arrangements. For example, among the wards, the more placements they lived in while they were in care, the more schools they attended ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .005$ ) and the fewer years of high school they completed ( $r = -.42$ ). Furthermore, those who had lived in one long-term placement (at least 75 per cent of their time in care) attended significantly fewer schools and were more likely to have completed *at least* Year 10, even if they were no longer in that long-term placement just before they were discharged from care. Ten of the 11 young people who did *not* complete Year 10 had *not* lived in one long-term placement.

After leaving school, young people who had been in care followed various patterns but overall their level of unemployment was considerably higher than that of their peers. Just after they were discharged from wardship, 63.8 per cent of wards were studying or working, and 25.7 per cent were unemployed; 12 months after leaving care, only 43 per cent were studying or working and 44 per cent were unemployed (see Figure 5). This rate of unemployment is significantly

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**Figure 5: Education and Work Status of Wards 3 Months and 12 Months After Discharge**

higher than the overall rate of unemployment of about 27 per cent for young people this age, and is consistent with the findings of similar research in England (Biehal et al., 1995).

Within this overall picture, there were several patterns which again reflected the stability of their history in care and their current living arrangements. Positive or normative patterns involved continuing to study, moving from school to work or moving from unemployment to work or study. The more stable their period in care and the more stable their living arrangements when they were discharged from care, the more likely they were to follow this pattern rather than the less positive pattern of moving from school into unemployment and from employment into unemployment. There were, however, several cases of recovery from insecure patterns of employment. For example, one young man living in a refuge returned to complete Year 10 at TAFE after some time out of school and without work. He planned to complete secondary school and then study agricultural science.

### 3.4 Money Management and Financial Support

Money, and the ability to manage it were significant concerns for young people in all three groups. The differences between the three groups are in line with their employment and educational status. While most ex-wards and young people in the *'away from home'* comparison group were neither working nor studying and received unemployment or other benefits (ex-wards, 51 per cent; *'away from home'* comparison group, 80 per cent), most young people in the *'at home'*

comparison group were either working full time or receiving AUSTUDY (60 per cent).<sup>7</sup> In terms of ability to manage and 'make ends meet' financially, the young people in the '*away from home*' comparison group had more difficulty overall than the ex-wards or the '*at home*' group. In the '*at home*' comparison group, only three young people said they could not 'make ends meet', and nearly all (95 per cent) said they were at least 'as well off' as other people their own age. In contrast, just over a quarter of the ex-wards (27.3 per cent) and nearly half the '*away from home*' group (45 per cent) said they were 'worse off' than others their age. This was despite the fact that the average fortnightly income for the '*at home*' group (\$239.85) was lower than that of the other two groups (ex-wards, \$357.47; '*away from home*' comparison group, \$352.80). This was mainly because all except one of the young people living at home were able to obtain financial assistance from their parents whereas ex-wards and young people living away from home had more limited and generally less reliable sources of support. Money alone was not the only determinant of how well young people manage financially.

Perhaps the best indicator of this difference between the three groups was what a shortage of money meant in practice. Table 1 shows the percentage of each group of young people who reported having to go without or cut back on various goods and services, most of which are generally regarded as necessities. The items are listed in order of increasing frequency for ex-wards. There are quite marked differences between the three groups, with few young people in the '*at home*' group reporting the need to go without or cut back on anything apart from their social life, dental services and clothes. No young people in this group had to cut back or go without electricity or heating, whereas over half those in the '*away from home*' group (58.8 per cent) and a third of the ex-wards had to go without heating. Some young people were living in converted garages and poorly insulated accommodation without any heating during winter. Others were unable to afford to pay for medication for acute conditions, such as ear and throat infections, or for chronic conditions such as asthma. In several cases, they reported using others' prescription drugs without any success.

### 3.5 Family Contact and Emotional Support

Most young people who had been wards retained or initiated contact with their parents and natural family after being discharged from care although for a

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7 Seven students in the '*at home*' comparison group did not receive AUSTUDY, however, because their parents' income was above the means-test cut-off point; they relied on money from their parents or from part-time work. Four ex-wards also were without income; three were in the waiting period for AUSTUDY or unemployment benefits after leaving school or work.

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**Table 1: Percentage of Young People Going Without or Cutting Back on Living Items**

	Comparison groups		
	Ex-wards	Away from home	At home
	%	%	%
Medicine	15.8	52.9	11.8
Personal items/toiletries	17.7	85.0	5.9
Use of electricity	24.4	22.2	0.0
Haircuts	26.6	29.4	5.5
Food	28.9	66.7	11.7
Heating	33.3	58.8	0.0
Dental services	44.4	64.7	29.4
Use of telephone	48.9	64.7	11.7
Clothes	68.9	82.3	23.5
Social life	68.9	88.2	41.2

significant number their mothers and fathers had either died or their whereabouts were unknown; the mothers of 11 young people had died and two could not be found, and six fathers had died and 17 could not be located or their identity was uncertain. Several young people had made considerable efforts to find their parents, and two had 'found' their mothers. Several others were still looking for their fathers.

Twelve months after they were discharged, 64 per cent had contact with at least one parent, generally their mother, and 14 per cent were in contact with both. The picture was not greatly different from that just before discharge and the best predictor of whether or not they had contact was whether or not they had contact while they were in care. Although it is Departmental policy to maintain regular contact between children in care and their families, in practice this can be difficult and resource-intensive and a substantial minority (35 per cent) of young people were not happy with the amount of contact they had been able to have with their parents and siblings.

One of the effects of this separation and also of some young people's disillusionment with their parents becomes obvious when young people who have and have not been in care were asked who they would turn to for emotional support and for help if they were in trouble (Table 2). Whereas most young people still living at home (comparison group) said they would call upon their parents for emotional support and for help if they were in trouble, as well as to friends and partners, ex-wards were less likely even than young people in the

**Table 2: Sources of Emotional Support for Ex-wards and Comparison Groups**

Support source	Emotional			In case of trouble		
	Ex-wards %	Away home %	At home %	Ex-wards %	Away home %	At home %
Parents	11.2	20.0	70.0	19.0	29.4	73.7
Foster parents	22.2	-	-	26.2	-	-
Relatives	11.1	5.0	10.0	23.9	0.0	21.1
Siblings	11.1	5.0	20.0	11.9	5.9	0.0
Friends/partners	59.1	64.7	89.5	28.6	17.6	52.6
District Officers	11.1	-	-	14.3	-	-
NGO workers	8.9	20.0	0.0	7.1	52.9	0.0
No one	15.6	15.0	5.0	7.1	0.0	0.0

'away from home' group to seek support from their parents. Once again, their experience in care had an effect since those who had been or were still in stable foster care indicated that they would turn to their foster parents for both emotional and financial support, although there were clearly some tensions here for some ex-wards. For example:

This year has been confusing. When I grew up, I felt like part of the family. Now my views are changing. I don't know how much I owe them now, how much they mean to me. All along I hated the idea of being fostered. I wished I was like a normal family, but that's the way it happened and I'd like to forget about it.

Young people's vulnerability and need for support if they are living away from home and during their transition from care is brought into focus by the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and attempts among this group and the numbers of young women who became pregnant or were already parents.<sup>8</sup> Over half the young people leaving care (57.7 per cent) had thought about suicide and over a third (35.5 per cent) had made at least one attempt. A third had thought about committing suicide both before and after being discharged from care. By comparison, 29 per cent of young people in the 'at home' group had thought about suicide at some stage but none had attempted it; and disturbingly, 68.4 per

<sup>8</sup> Among the ex-wards, one-third had at least one pregnancy or were parents by the time they were 19, and several of the children were already in care. To our knowledge, none of the other young people were parents.

cent of the young people living away from home with no support from the Department had thought about suicide and 38.9 per cent had attempted it.

### 3.6 Case Studies

The experiences, circumstances and perceptions of two young people participating in the longitudinal study illustrate some important findings of the research and have significant implications for policy development and practice. The case studies give an indication of the range of experiences in care, the level of monitoring and types of assistance offered in care and after care. The three findings discussed have implications to three particular issues:

- the influence of young people's experience in care on their circumstances after care;
- the need for flexible timing of discharge so that young people leaving care are not faced with several transitions at the same time; and
- the need for the Department of Community Services to provide ongoing support and advice to young people after care.

The two young people in care selected to illustrate the study's findings had very different experiences in care and outcomes after leaving care although their families only lived a couple of streets apart in a country town in northern New South Wales. Both cases were managed by the same Department of Community Services Centre but they had different District Officers. Despite their similarities in age, gender, address, wardship and service centre, Louise in *Case One* received excellent services and support whilst in care and after care underpinned by stability, continuity and regular monitoring. In contrast, the outcome for Sara in *Case Two*, of 13 years in care, was poor.

The case studies are written from the perspective of the young women themselves as told to the interviewer.

#### Case One

Louise became a ward when she was 14 because she had been sexually abused by her father since she was 12. She was placed in a children's home. Louise did not want to be fostered because she was scared of living with another family. She had some contact with her mother and sister until her father was jailed for three years and since then she has had no family contact, from her immediate or extended family. Workers tried to reverse this lack of contact to no avail. When she saw her family in town they either ignored her or verbally abused her. She

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was very hurt by her family's rejection and had episodes of damaging her belongings, locking herself in her room and she also thought about suicide. However, the staff at the children's home and her regular District Officer gave her a lot of support, counselling and tutoring which helped her establish a constructive life style. Staff at the children's home changed over the years but she always had the same District Officer.

Technically, Louise's discharge was due to occur on her 18th birthday, but it was delayed for a couple of months until after the HSC exams. She was able to stay on at the children's home after discharge. Her District Officer told her support would be ongoing, and include both financial support (in addition to AUSTUDY/JSA), advice, and access to her B-file. Discharge was seen merely as paperwork and support would be maintained. Three weeks of her summer holidays following discharge were spent on a cultural exchange trip to America funded by DOCS. After returning to Australia she moved into a transition house run by the children's home. She received \$4,000 establishment money from DOCS (i.e. crockery, bed, linen, white goods; telephone, gas and electricity bond). AUSTUDY was her main source of income.

After discharge, she received regular after-care support from staff at the children's home and remained in regular contact with her ex-District Officer who had changed jobs. When Louise was interviewed for the third time (she was about 19<sup>1/2</sup>), she had moved from the transition house and was renting a flat nearby with a friend. She had completed a one year TAFE course and was looking for work. She received JSA plus a rent subsidy of \$50 a fortnight from DOCS. She continued to have regular contact with the staff from the children's home and her ex-District Officer. She had no contact with her family. She received Victims Compensation and her ex-District Officer arranged financial investment advice for her.

## Case Two

Sara and her younger sister became state wards when Sara was five because their mother suffered from schizophrenia and spent periods of time in hospital. They were both placed in foster care with their relatives about 1,000 km away. She did not meet a District Officer over the eight years in this placement.<sup>9</sup> She complained twice to her District Officer (in her home town) during school holiday visits about being unhappy but nothing changed and she was too young to do anything about it. At 13 she refused to go back to her foster carers. She said she just wanted to forget about that time, she hated living there, her aunty always

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9 B-file records five District Officers from the area office where the foster placement was, and one in her home town during this time.

put her mother down and she didn't help her write letters or telephone home. They spent school holidays in their home town but she wanted more contact with her mother when she entered care. From 13 she had four placements alternating between her grandmothers, restoration to her mother's and aunt's homes. She liked living at her mother's but sometimes it was difficult to study because of her mother's schizophrenia. In the months before her discharge from care she was living with her mother (a pensioner), in Year 11 and hoping to go on to university and study law. Sara's life was reasonably stable at this stage. She received AUSTUDY, although it took two months to get her first payment because of ID problems. During this time DOCS gave her counter-cheques which she had to repay.

DOCS asked Sara if she wanted to be discharged six months before her 18th birthday. She said she looked forward to the privacy and to not having DOCS tell her what to do. Her District Officer, for the last three years, was on stress leave and resigned just before Sara was discharged. Hence a District Officer she had never met took her through the procedure. Sara was told she could come to DOCS for advice but not financial assistance; she was not told about access to her B-file. Sara saw discharge as her case being closed and filed.

In the year following her discharge from care, she had no contact with DOCS. She lived with her boyfriend in their second place within 12 months. They broke the lease on their first flat to repay the bond money they borrowed and moved to a cheaper place. AUSTUDY was her only source of income. She couldn't make ends meet when she had to repay an AUSTUDY overpayment (administrative error), leaving her with an income of \$44.00 per week, so she left Year 12 to work in a shop. During the year after discharge, she became pregnant and received Special Benefit after leaving her casual job. She has a strong family identity and regular contact but financially she is on her own. Sara said she would like to finish the HSC but would need help with the cost of child care. She didn't think to ask DOCS because they hadn't done much for her in the past so why would they now? She believes her time in care could have been better if she had seen her District Officer more regularly to check her placement; she is very bitter about her first placement. She said in theory she would like after-care if her experiences with DOCS had been better. (During the third interview Sara told me she had been sexually abused in care but had not told any professionals; she did not want to say any more about it.)

**In care.** Young people's circumstances after care are influenced by their experiences in care. Continuity with District Officers allows trust to develop; it could provide more opportunity for young people to participate in decisions and case plans, and to have their privacy and confidentiality respected, without having to retell their story to several workers. It also allows for placements to be

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monitored to prevent abuse in care. Stability in accommodation assists ongoing relationships to form, a sense of belonging, and consistency in schooling. Family contact in care, where appropriate, also reduces vulnerability after care.

In Case One, Louise had placement stability throughout her time in care which continued after care. In comparison, Sara (Case Two) moved five times between members of her extended family. Problems arose when she was left too long in her first placement without sufficient monitoring. B-file notes record that this placement met her material needs but she suffered emotional deprivation. As a result of this unhappy experience she saw DOCS as unhelpful.

Louise in Case One developed trust with her District Officer and some carers at the children's home and received continuity in care. Sara (Case Two) knew three of her District Officers and developed a good rapport with the one she had in her mid-teens. She viewed him as being personally helpful but did not think to turn to DOCS for assistance once he had resigned although she needed further assistance. Louise (Case One) had no family contact despite efforts because her family was unwilling. She received ongoing regular support from her District Officer and some carers at the children's home, plus counselling. Sara in Case Two had family contact and support but was financially at risk. She received no financial assistance from DOCS once she was eligible for AUSTUDY. Sara (Case Two) was abused in care which she never disclosed to professionals yet with regular contact, monitoring and continuity of District Officers this may have been prevented or the perpetrator held accountable.

**Discharge.** The timing of discharge needs to be flexible and informative so that young people leaving care are not faced with several transitions at the same time: for example from care and leaving school, changing accommodation, or pregnancy/ motherhood. The case studies show the different circumstances and experiences of two young women leaving care from the same Department of Community Service regional office. For Louise in Case One where there was continuity of care from one District Officer and one placement, discharge was flexible and informative. It was discussed over several months and she was reassured that discharge did not mean care would cease.

In contrast, Sara (Case Two) had a more unstable time in care. She agreed to be discharged six months before the time specified in her care order. She was restored to her mother's home and studying for the HSC. Her B-file was closed on this successful note. Unfortunately, her situation changed dramatically in the ensuing months. She had to move to her aunt's to concentrate on her studies and her income support payments were reduced because of an AUSTUDY overpayment. The repayments left her without enough money to live on so she left Year 12 to work. She did not think to ask DOCS for financial assistance as she thought discharge meant her case was closed. The District Officer assigned

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the task of discharging Sara, because her regular District Officer was on stress leave, said the level of information and support offered at discharge were poor. The District Officer confirmed that she did not inform Sara about access to her B-file.<sup>10</sup>

**After-care.** There is a clear need for ongoing support and advice for young people after care. After-care needs to be pro-active but sensitive to the young persons' wishes. Young people are often willing to accept help but often not willing to ask for it. The amount and type of support needed will change over time depending on the young person's circumstances and maturity. The required support might include information and advocacy regarding education, vocational training, employment, personal history, income support and budgeting, housing, counselling, independent living skills, parenting, and financial assistance.

Louise in Case One received pro-active ongoing support and financial assistance after leaving care. An interview with her District Officer revealed an enormous effort was made to get the support and services Louise needed. On two occasions her first submissions for assistance were rejected, but on re-submission were successful. Her District Officer also spent a lot of her own time (unpaid) with Louise, spent her own money on birthday and Christmas gifts, attended her graduation ceremony, took her camping with a friend one weekend, and talked to her on the telephone in the evening and weekends. She believes without this extra support she could have had a very different outcome as a result of being in care. In contrast, Sara (Case Two) had no contact once she was discharged from care and within 12 months she had left school before completing the HSC, was pregnant and living in poor accommodation. She would have liked to complete her HSC but needs help with the cost of child care. She said she did not think to ask DOCS because they had not done much for her in the past. She thought she might accept assistance if it was offered in a non-stigmatising way. Access to her B-file is important considering she is having a child.

#### **4 The Transition from Wardship**

It must be ensured that all children for whom the state assumes responsibility benefit from an adequately supported transition into productive adulthood ... Where the state has intervened to rescue a youth from inadequate parenting, the

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<sup>10</sup> The District Officers interviewed as part of the study felt exit from care arrangements were inadequate and one District Officer said that under current procedure and practice young people are discharged as second class citizens. District Officers would like discretion to be removed and all wards to be discharged with the same access to resources and information.

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obligation exists for the state to properly complete the undertaking. (Meston, 1988: 633)

This study documents young people's perceptions of being in care and of making the transition from care. Their 'voice' provides the most powerful evidence of their needs. Several issues emerged from this study in relation to children's experiences in care, their discharge from wardship and transition to independent living. This paper has concentrated on issues arising from the transition from wardship. The main issues in relation to the transition from wardship concern the age at which young people are discharged from care and the extent to which they are prepared for it, both in terms of their maturity and their level of living skills.

## 5 Conclusion

Young people leaving wardship are not a homogenous group. They vary in a number of ways: in ethnicity and race, the age at which they entered care, the number of placements they have had, the type of placements, who they are living with when they are discharged from wardship, whether they are working, studying, looking after their children or unemployed, and what support they have had, if any, from their family, foster family, workers or friends. What they need upon discharge and at various stages beyond discharge will therefore depend on their circumstances at that time. Thus while the overall requirements for young people in their transition to independence contain a number of elements<sup>11</sup>, young people's need for them will differ and vary over time.

Young people leaving care have a variety of needs that need to be addressed by changes to legislation, policy and practice. The experience of the young people in this study provides very clear evidence of those needs. The two case studies (Section 3.6) illustrate the discrepancy in levels of support that occurs within and between Area Offices. While the young people participating in the study reported a number of positive experiences, they also highlighted a number of issues both in care and after care that are a cause for concern and need to be addressed with some urgency. Most importantly, these involve taking children and young people seriously and respecting their right to information and to be heard, and their right to support and protection which the state, as their guardian, should ensure both in care and after care. Their needs and concerns are consistent with the findings of an increasing overseas literature in the UK, Canada and the United States. These countries have, however, gone much further than Australia in recognising and addressing the needs and rights of young people leaving care in legislation, policy

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11 Details are provided in the published research report: J. Cashmore and M. Paxman (1996), *Wards Leaving Care, A Longitudinal Study*, New South Wales Department of Community Services, and available from the NSW Department of Community Services.

and practice. However, the first steps are now being undertaken to address these issues here. For example the NSW government has allocated \$1.2 million over the next three years to fund an after-care service for young people leaving care.

It is also clear, however, that a number of young people who have not been in care but are unable to live at home are also in dire need of assistance. These young people are, in fact, quite similar in many respects to young ex-wards who have not had a long-term placement. It is also important to remember, in view of the criticism about the care that children receive in the 'care' of the state, that some children - those who were in a long-term stable placement (with appropriate support and birth family contact) - often do very well, and much better, in fact, as many recognised, than they would have done had they remained with families who were unwilling or unable to care for them (Fanshel and Shinn, 1978; Johnson, Yoken and Voss, 1990; Wald et al., 1988).

## Appendix 1

**Table A1: Mean Age of Entry into Care and Wardship by Group and Gender**

	Interview group		Non-interview group	
	Male (n = 18)	Female (n = 29)	Male (n = 20)	Female (n = 23)
<b>Age (years)</b>				
Entry into care <sup>(a)</sup>	5.8 (4.4) <sup>(b)</sup>	7.6 (5.6)	7.2 (5.5)	8.2 (5.4)
Admission to wardship	7.9 (4.5)	8.3 (5.5)	8.4 (5.5)	9.1 (5.4)

Note: a) Entering care is defined by the date at which children first moved into an out-of-home substitute care placement. Admission to wardship was defined by the date on which the application for wardship was granted.  
b) Numbers in bracket indicate standard deviation.

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# **Juvenile Delinquency and Relative Deprivation: An Empirical Test and Conceptual Reformulation**

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## **1 Introduction**

In this paper we aim to assess the usefulness of the relative deprivation thesis as an explanation for the criminal activity of young people. In the first section of the paper we present data which suggests that the underlying premise of the theory, that economic or material disadvantage is the causal factor in delinquency, is mistaken or at least in need of a sharper analytic focus. The data we examine indicates that young offenders are likely to have access to almost as wide a range of highly desired consumer goods as both the general population and adolescent non-offenders. In the face of this evidence we are led to reconsider exactly what deprivation entails in the lives of young offenders. Our argument, in brief, is that relative deprivation must be thought of not so much as the denial of opportunity to consume high status consumer goods, but rather the denial of opportunity to be integrated into a larger community or society. By this we mean that young offenders are far more likely to perceive themselves as not having control over their own environment and consequently of understanding their position in terms of immediate micro-interactions. In the second section of the paper we develop this argument by suggesting that being deprived of emotional support in early life, attitudes to peers, 'fun', 'honour' and 'justice' are centrally implicated in delinquent/ criminal trajectories. In accounting for the part these factors play in the aetiology of juvenile crime we return to the work of David Matza and Gresham Sykes (Matza and Sykes, 1961; Matza, 1961; Sykes and Matza, 1957) and their pioneering research on the 'inner world' and subterranean values of delinquency.

## **2 Objective Difference in the Distribution of Material Rewards**

The idea of relative deprivation as a causal factor in the production of crime has, of course, a long pedigree in criminological theory. At least since Merton's

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(1957) typology of deviant behaviour, conventional wisdom has it that delinquency and crime more generally has an acquisitive character stemming from the inequalities in the distribution of material rewards characteristic of competitive economic systems. For Merton and those following in this tradition (eg. Clinard, 1964; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955), the unequal distribution of economic rewards and opportunities necessarily leads to a focus on the lower classes since this is the strata in society who are most objectively deprived.

More recently the interpretation of economic factors in the aetiology of crime has come to be viewed more explicitly as one of *relative* deprivation. In this account it is not the *objective* fact of economic deprivation *per se* which underpins criminal activity but the *subjective* feeling of being deprived, sentiments which can of course occur at all levels of the social structure. In this way relative deprivation theory has been advanced as a major explanation of white collar and organised crime (Box, 1983). One of the clearest statements of relative deprivation has been advanced by Lea and Young in their recent book *What is to be Done about Law and Order* (1993). Lea and Young point out that the idea of relative deprivation itself may involve more than just an economic dimension:

Relative deprivation is not, of course, identified solely with economic crimes. The crimes of the poor are not simply concerned with achieving the necessities of life. The group which most conforms to this pattern is women, often single parents, involved in shoplifting in food stores. However, an adaptation to relative deprivation especially but not exclusively for young men, may involve the accumulation of status goods such as a particular type of clothing, trainers, video recorders and other things necessary to achieve a certain status - a status which itself is part of an adaptation to exclusion from the mainstream achievements of society. (Lea and Young 1993: xi)

Crucial to Lea and Young's account is the idea that relative deprivation has been enhanced or exacerbated in contemporary society through the pervasive influence of the media, particularly advertising, which stresses the importance of success and the consumption of consumer goods. More than at any other time, all individuals are exposed to the values which suggest people should aspire to middle-class lifestyles and patterns of consumption.

The coherence of relative deprivation as a theoretical explanation is thus premised upon two factors: firstly, the existence of objective differences in the distribution of economic rewards and forms of consumption, and secondly, a population who are uniformly cognisant of the desired middle-class lifestyle as a consequence of this media exposure.

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In the first section of this paper we want to consider some empirical evidence which has a direct bearing on the first of these premises: the existence of objective difference in the distribution of material rewards. Data for this comes from the fortuitous coincidence of two unrelated research projects currently under way at the Department of Sociology at the University of Queensland: The Sibling Study which is inquiring into the determinants of juvenile crime and delinquency and the Australian Everyday Culture Project (AECF), a large scale investigation of the cultural tastes and forms of cultural consumption in Australian.

## **2.1 Project Descriptions: Data and Methods**

**The Australian Everyday Culture Project** is an inquiry into everyday cultural consumption within Australia over a wide range of areas, including film, television, music, literature, newspapers and magazines, the visual arts and design, sport, housing and furniture, fashion and food. The study is in part designed as a replication of the conceptual approach developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) for his analysis of the French system of cultural tastes. Data for the project have been obtained primarily through focus group discussions which served as a prelude to a national mail survey carried out between November 1994 and March 1995. The AECF sample obtained comprises 2755 respondents systematically selected from current electoral rolls from all states and territories.

**The Sibling Study** is a survey of more than 1100 adolescents, primarily mixed sex sibling pairs, aged between 12 and 18 years. The sample is comprised of four subsamples of adolescents; these are: urban Aboriginals, the chronically marginalised/disadvantaged, serious offenders and a school-based (control) group. Importantly, for the purposes of this paper, the 'offender' subsample does not consist of sibling pairs for the most part. All Sibling Study respondents completed a 65 page questionnaire comprising some 750 variables. A smaller subset of 80 respondents drawn from two youth detention centres also participated in a series of less structured (that is, qualitative) interviews over a three month period in early 1995. The qualitative material presented in this paper derives from these interviews.

## **2.2 Access To Valued Consumer Goods**

Although the theoretical concerns informing the two projects are quite different, both projects have incorporated within their principal data collection instruments sets of items which seek to measure the levels of ownership (AECF) or at least (Sibling Study) access to a number of expensive, although widely desired, household consumer goods: TV, personal computer, CD player etc. In the

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following tables we present the core empirical component of the paper in which we compare the incidence of ownership/access to these household consumer goods as found in the general population sample obtained by the AECF, and the sample of young offenders obtained by the Sibling Study.

As can be seen in Table 1, personal computers and telephone answering machines are the least readily available consumer goods for most age groups. The 'over 60' category has yet to take up CD players to any great degree, and indeed, it is this group which is most objectively deprived in terms of access to consumer goods. This is of course the group least likely to be either a victim or perpetrator of a crime.

If we turn to Table 2 we can compare the levels of access found in the national survey of 18-25 year olds with the 12-18 year olds drawn from the Sibling Study. Because of the age difference we would obviously expect somewhat lower levels of access in terms of some goods amongst the Sibling Study sample. The Sibling Study sample has been subdivided into two groups; an 'offender' group comprising respondents who admit to having broken into a building to steal things some time during the previous 12 months and a 'non-offender' group who do not report a 'Break and Enter' offence. This non-offender group will of course include respondents who have committed other offences, but such offences are less directly 'acquisitive' in the sense entailed in the relative deprivation thesis. In using this definition of offender, the case for the relative deprivation thesis is being advantaged. The exclusion of respondents who, say, commit drug or alcohol offences, reduces the degree to which the lines between acquisitive criminality and other illegal behaviours is blurred, thereby making any differences between the groups more diffuse. This is an important point, about which we need to be very clear. If cannabis users, for example, were to be included in the offender category then the degree of difference between 'offenders' and 'non-offenders' would be markedly reduced. This would happen because cannabis use is so common and for many respondents constitutes their only serious illegal behaviour. Including such respondents in the offender group would therefore mean that the offender category was in a sense being 'skewed' by respondents who in all other respects are members of the general (non-offending) population.

As can be seen in Table 2, the offender group only differs from the non-offender group with respect to access to computers, telephone answering machines, and somewhat curiously, radios. In terms of access to televisions, video cassette recorders, CD players and telephones there are no statistically significant differences between the groups. However, comparing the level of access between offender and national samples does reveal that offenders do have consistently lower levels of access to these consumer goods. Whilst, at least in part, this

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**Table 1: Household Consumer Items by Age**

Consumer Item	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-59	Over 60
Radio	98.2	98.3	98.7	97.9	97.5
Television	98.5	98.1	98.7	99.2	98.2
VCR	87.7	91.7	92.8	90.5	64.7
CD Player	80.8	70.5	66.9	65.5	25.1
Computer	47	43	54.7	39.8	9.5
Telephone	95.8	97.7	97.6	96.5	96
Answering Machine	27.5	29.9	27.5	26.8	9.9

Source: Australian Everyday Culture Project (n=2757) (percentage of respondents with at least one item)

**Table 2: A Comparison of Access to Household Items: National Levels Compared with Non-Offender and Offender Levels**

Consumer Item	% Access AECF Sample 18-25 years of age	% Access Sibling Study 12-18 years of age non-offenders (n=849)	% Access Sibling Study 12-18 years of age offenders (n=186)
Radio	98.2	92.9(a)	88.1(a)
Television	98.5	87.7	86.5
VCR	87.7	73.8	72.0
CD Player	80.8	69.5	66.1
Computer	47.0	44.6(b)	20.0
Telephone	95.8	79.9	75.8
Answering Machine	27.5	19.0	12.9(a)

Notes: a) Probability of significant difference between offenders and non-offenders = 0.03  
b) Probability of significant difference between offenders and non-offenders = 0.001

undoubtedly reflects an age effect, the case could nevertheless be made that it is these small but consistent differences which underpin acquisitive criminality. Table 3 presents a series of Odds Ratios which address precisely this issue.

If we calculate the odds ratio to determine whether or not the lack of access to particular consumer goods is associated with an increased likelihood of committing acquisitive crime we find that once again it is only with respect to answering machines, computers and radios that there is any statistically

**Table 3: Odds Ratios for Levels of Access to Household Consumer Goods by Involvement in Crime 'Break and Enter' in Order to Steal**

Consumer Item	% No Access For Offenders (n=186)	% No Access For Non-Offenders (n=849)	Odds Ratio No Access/Break and Enter	Prob
Radio	11.9	7.1	1.76	0.03
Television	13.5	12.3	1.11	0.65
VCR	28.0	26.2	1.09	0.61
CD Player	33.9	30.5	1.17	0.35
Computer	80.0	55.4	3.22	0.001
Telephone	24.2	20.1	1.27	0.20
Answering Machine	87.1	81.0	1.58	0.04

significant association. Respondents without a computer in the house are three times as likely as respondents with access to a computer to have committed a break and enter offence. Similarly, respondents without an answering machine or radio are slightly more than 1.5 times more likely to offend than respondents who do have these goods in the household. It would appear, then, that these data provide some support for the relative deprivation thesis. Although the levels of access to consumer goods amongst offenders is relatively high compared with the slightly older national sample, and in the majority of cases at equivalent levels to non-offenders, there are nevertheless indications that objective deprivation is motivating criminal behaviour. If we take the view that the differences in levels of access observed when comparing offenders to non-offenders are sufficiently great as to suspect their being implicated in acquisitive criminal behaviours, then, the second premise of the relative deprivation thesis must be examined. That is, are these observed differences, irrespective of their magnitude, associated with a subjective awareness of deprivation? Table 4 takes up this issue by comparing offenders with non-offenders in terms of the sense of being 'cheated'.

Central to the relative deprivation thesis is the notion that it is the awareness of the importance of access to material goods, i.e. 'things', which leads to the sense of deprivation if access is denied. However, in comparing offenders with non-offenders it emerges that the offenders are not significantly more likely than non-offenders to 'look at the things other people have and feel cheated'. Slightly over 55 per cent of offenders 'hardly ever' or 'never' feel cheated, and similarly, slightly over 59 percent of non-offenders hardly ever or never feel cheated. This is not a statistically significant difference (prob=0.30).

**Table 4: A Comparison of Offenders and Non-offenders by the Sense of Being 'Cheated' when Seeing the Things Other People Have**

When you look at the things other people have, do you ever feel cheated?	% Offenders, Break and Enter To Steal (n=186)	% Non-Offenders (n=844)
Often - Sometimes	44.6	40.5
Hardly Ever - Never	55.4	59.5

If we then focus specifically upon those material rewards which offenders appear to be objectively deprived of access to, once again, we find no statistically significant difference between offenders and non-offenders in terms of the subjective sense of being cheated (Table 5).

**Table 5: Comparing Offenders and Non-offenders in Terms of the Sense of Being 'Cheated' by Selected Material Rewards**

Material Rewards	% Offenders without access who often/ sometimes 'feel cheated'	% Non-offenders without access who often/ sometimes 'feel cheated'	Prob.
Computer	43.2	41.7	0.46
Answering Machine	43.8	39.5	0.93
Radio	50.0	37.2	0.45

As is clear from Table 5, for those items for which statistically significant differences in levels of access exist between offender and non-offender groups, these differences do not result in significant differences in terms of a sense of being cheated. That is, offenders without access to computers, answering machines or radios are no more likely to feel cheated than are non-offenders without access to these rewards. Given that the total number for the offender category is 185 we need to be somewhat cautious about these figures, but nevertheless, the picture is clear, consistent and counter to the relative deprivation thesis.

### 3 Deprivation

The conclusion emerging from the findings presented in the previous section is that the denial of access to material possessions is not in itself an adequate way to

explain delinquent behaviour. Levels of access to consumer goods amongst offenders appear to be relatively high even when the differences between offenders and non-offenders are amplified by categorising criminality which is not explicitly acquisitive as non-offending. And, in any event, the objective differences, such as they are, do not appear to be associated with subjective differences in terms of a sense of being denied/ cheated. Does this entail the outright rejection of the view that deprivation has no part to play in the genesis of delinquency? We would caution against the premature abandonment of relative deprivation, but at the same time we would seek to place the concept in a much richer and diversified theoretical framework.

In this section, we aim to show that deprivation is a factor in the lives of young offenders but that it is deprivation of a more indirect or intangible kind. By this we mean that young offenders are not necessarily materially deprived but rather they are relatively deprived of a feeling of being connected to the wider world. As is displayed in the following tables, young offenders are not as likely to feel that they can control their immediate environment as non-offenders, nor are they as likely to think things will work out for them in the future.

As can be seen in Table 6, the offenders were much less likely than were non-offenders to be 'very sure' or at least 'pretty sure' that life would work out OK for them. Whilst 77 per cent of non offenders took this view, only 46.5 percent of the offenders were similarly confident. Perhaps even more interesting is Table 7 in which offenders and non offenders are compared in terms of the degree of control they feel they can exercise over how their life unfolds. Whilst only 11 per cent of the non offenders believed they were unable to make their life the way they wanted 'at all', almost 20 per cent of the offenders did feel this way. Expressed as an odds ratio, this means that respondents who 'can't really make life be the way I want at all' are twice as likely (1.96) to be offenders as respondents who believe they can change at least some things about their life.

**Table 6: A Comparison of Offenders and Non-offenders by the Sense of Surety that Things Will Work Out OK in The Future.**

How sure are you that things will work out OK for you in the future?	% Offenders Break and Enter To Steal (n=157)	% Non-offenders (n=766)
Very Sure - Pretty Sure	46.5	77.3
Not Too Sure - Won't Work Out At All	53.5	22.7

**Table 7: A Comparison of Offenders and Non-Offenders by The Sense of Being Able to Make Life the Way you Want It**

How much can you make your life be the way you want it to be right now?	% Offenders Break and Enter To Steal (n=183)	% Non-Offenders (n=831)
I can't really make my life be the way I want at all.	19.7	11
I can some things - can make it be whatever I want it to be.	80.3	89
Prob = 0.002		

This sense of not being in control is in our view an indication of something far larger and more important than access to consumer goods when attempting to explain juvenile delinquency/ criminality. Essentially, we are drawn to the argument provided by social control theory that parent-child *intra-family* dynamics play an important role in either inculcating or suppressing propensities to criminality. Specifically, we would argue that the level of 'emotional support' provided to young people as they grow up is strongly associated with the propensity to criminality. The Sibling Study instrument includes a range of measures of emotional support (see Appendix) which allow us to categorise adolescents as growing up in households characterised by a lack of emotional support from even one adult carer, or alternatively, as growing up in households with at least 'moderate' if not 'high' levels of support being provided by at least one adult carer.

As can be seen in Table 8, 41 per cent of the adolescents who believed they had no control 'at all' over their life came from households providing levels of emotional support which were 'low' or 'none'. In comparison, in households where at least one adult carer was providing support at a 'moderate/high' level, the percentage of adolescents who felt they could not make their life what they wanted was 18 per cent. This means that adolescents who are deprived of even moderate emotional support from one adult carer are three times more likely to feel they cannot control their lives than is the case for adolescents receiving at least moderate support from one carer.

If, as is shown in Table 7, this sense of control is significantly associated with criminal behaviour, and, emotional support is a determinant of this sentiment,

**Table 8: Degree of Control Over One's Life by Level of Emotional Support**

	% No Control 'at all' (n=137)	% Control 'some things/ everything' (n=927)
Low/ No Emotional Support	40.9	17.9
Moderate/ High Emotional Support	59.1	82.1
Prob = 0.001		

what then is the relationship between emotional support and criminality. Table 9 shows that there is a highly significant relationship between level of emotional support and offending behaviours generally, and, acquisitive crime specifically. In terms of 'general' criminality, i.e. 'doing something you know or think is against the law', Table 9 shows that 62 per cent of adolescents from households without at least moderate support from at least one carer, have offended. This compares with households in which at least one carer provides at least moderate support and in which the percentage of adolescents who have offended is 50 per cent.

**Table 9: Breaking the Law and Committing a Break and Enter By Level of Emotional Support<sup>(a)</sup>**

	% 'General' Criminality Have Broken The Law (n=620)	% 'Specific' Criminality 'Break and Enter' (n=191)
Low/ No Emotional Support	61.5	36.2
Moderate/ High Emotional Support	49.6	13.4
Prob=0.001		Prob=0.001

Note: a) It is important to keep in mind here that because of the Sibling Study sample design (i.e. the over-representation of offenders) it is not the absolute percentages which are of interest but rather the relative percentages.

In terms of specifically acquisitive behaviours such as 'Break and Enters', Table 9 shows that 36 per cent of those from low support households have committed a Break and Enter in order to steal things, compared with only 13 per cent from households providing support. Expressed as an Odds Ratio this means that adolescents from low support households are 3.6 times more likely to commit a Break and Enter than are adolescents from households providing support.

The conclusion we arrive at from considering these data, together with the qualitative interviews, is that in situations where young people are deprived of adequate levels of emotional support from adult carers, they turn to their peers to provide such support and if their peers are delinquent the likelihood of adopting a delinquent/ criminal life style is thereby increased. This effect can be seen in Tables 10 and 11. The Sibling Study instrument permits the development of a measure of the extent to which adolescents align themselves with their friends in terms of a range of activities: that is, irrespective of their own attitude, to what extent would they 'join in' with their friends if the friend was involved in activities such as using drugs, fighting, bullying, doing a break and enter, stealing cars, stealing, etc. (see Appendix).

**Table 10: Alignment with Peers by Level of Emotional Support (n=1097)**

Level of Emotional Support	Very High Alignment	High Alignment	Low Alignment	Very Low Alignment
Mod/ High Support From Two Adult Carers	21.4	22.1	28.4	28.0
Mod/ High Support From One Adult Carer	24.0	25.9	24.0	25.9
Low/ No Support From Any Adult Carer	27.0	21.5	35.2	16.5
Prob = 0.005				

If we examine the degree to which adolescents align themselves with their peers in terms of an expanded measure of emotional support we find that being deprived of emotional support from adult carers is associated with an increased level of alignment with peers.

Table 10 reveals two pertinent effects. Yes, adolescents from low support households are more likely to align with peers at the 'very high' level than is the



**Table 11: Offending (Break and Enter) by Alignment with Peers**

Level of Alignment with peers	% Offenders Break and Enter To Steal (n=187)	% Non-offenders (n=854)
Very High	36.4	20.5
High	24.6	22.5
Low	21.9	29.5
Very Low	17.1	27.5

Prob = 0.001

case for adolescents from high support households, 27 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. But, it also emerges that, proportionately, adolescents from low support households are the most likely to have a 'low' alignment with their peers. While 28 per cent of adolescents receiving emotional support from two adult carers and 24 per cent of adolescents receiving support from one carer align with peers at the 'low' level, fully 35 per cent of adolescents deprived of support from any adult carer align at this level. At first sight this would appear to run counter to the argument we are presenting. However, if emotional support is an important contributing element to a sense of integration with the wider society, then it is not really so surprising that being deprived of emotional support may on the one hand emphasise the importance of peers and on the other hand reduce ones capacity to forge meaningful links with peers. The crucial issue with respect to the specific issue of criminality, rather than more general issues of social estrangement or alienation, is whether or not the extent to which one aligns with peers is associated with offending behaviours. Because the measures used in the construction of the alignment measure are aimed at determining the extent to which respondents would join in criminal activities if their friends were involved, it is difficult to measure this using the Sibling Study data without confusing the independent and dependent variables. Notwithstanding this important caveat, it is interesting to note the very clear pattern shown in Table 11. Table 11 reveals a very clear pattern indeed. In the case of the offenders the degree of alignment moves unambiguously from 'very high' at 36 per cent *down* to 17 per cent with 'very low' alignment. In the case of the non-offender group the pattern is equally unambiguous but reversed, moving from 'very high' at 20 per cent *up* to 27 per cent with 'very low' alignment.

At this point there is an obvious question to be asked. Even if it is accepted that it is not material deprivation which 'counts' but deprivation of emotional support leading to a heightened emphasis upon the importance of peers, does it follow

from this that such a reorientation increases the likelihood of offending? That is, is it the case that reorienting oneself to peers involves an increased likelihood of involvement with delinquent sub-cultures? As can be seen in Table 12, this does indeed appear to be the case.

**Table 12: Friends Who have Done Something They Knew or Thought Was Against the Law by Level of Emotional Support**

Level of Emotional Support	% Friends Who Have Broken The Law	% Friends Who Have Not Broken The Law
Mod/ High Support From Two Adult Carers	51.6	48.4
Mod/ High Support From One Adult Carer	65.3	34.7
Low/ No Support From Any Adult Carer	71.7	28.3
Prob = 0.001		

Of those households characterised by moderate/ high support from two adult carers, 52 per cent of the adolescents had friends who they knew to have broken the law. This compares with low support households, in which 72 per cent of the adolescents had friends they knew to have broken the law.

There is a somewhat tangential, but nevertheless important point which needs to be made here. It should not be assumed that receiving support from one adult carer means a single parent family, or that receiving support from two adult carers means a two parent family. The provision of emotional support is a quite different issue to that of family structure. Indeed, in 25 per cent of two parent households the adolescents reported low or no support from both parties. Conversely, in more than 30 per cent of single parent families, the adolescents reported moderate or high support from two adult carers. It would be a serious misinterpretation of this data to read it as a legitimisation of dual carer families at the expense of single carer families.

#### 4 Peer Orientation

In our view the data presented here, when considered *in toto* suggests that objective deprivations faced by these young people are neither the primary nor sufficient reason for their status as 'delinquents'. It does not appear to be the

subjective dimension of the unequal distribution of material rewards which is important with respect to juvenile criminality, but rather, it is the consequences of aligning oneself with (delinquent) peers as a result of being deprived of emotional support which is important. In order to examine the consequences of the orientation to peers we need to examine the values and sentiments which structure the delinquents' sub-cultural world. Having rejected relative deprivation as a useful starting point we need to examine how an amplified sense of solidarity with peers can be articulated in delinquent/ criminal ways. It is at this point that we are drawn to the view that the pioneering 'naturalistic' approach of Matza and Sykes, the first criminologists to recognise the importance of such normative factors, retains its relevance today.

#### 4.1 Matza and Sykes: The Moral Order of Delinquency

The central thrust of Matza and Sykes is nicely summed up by the slogan 'tell it like it is' together with the recognition that delinquent sub-cultures are not made cohesive through a commitment to 'deviant' values. On the contrary, Matza argues that delinquent behaviours represent intermittent acts of deviance which take place in the context of an acceptance of the norms and values of wider society. Our qualitative research with incarcerated adolescents leads us to concur completely with this view and we would nominate 'justice', 'honour/loyalty' and 'fun/excitement' as the three key values which young offenders respect and honour. We began our research with offending adolescents uncommitted to any particular theoretical framework beyond an acceptance of the view that it was important the adolescent's 'voice' come through. During the course of the three months in the detention centres it became apparent to us that the issues we were categorising in terms of 'justice', 'honour/loyalty' and 'fun' were in important respects a restatement of the issues that Matza and Sykes identify as 'techniques of neutralisation'.

Matza and Sykes provide an explanation of delinquency which allows for the recognition that juveniles are at least partially committed to the prevailing normative structure. For Matza and Sykes, delinquency is

an unrecognised extension of defences to crime, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquents but not by the legal system or society at large.  
(Sykes and Matza, 1957: 666)

Sykes and Matza describe these justifications as neutralisations which both follow and precede delinquent behaviour.<sup>1</sup> The five techniques identified by Matza and Sykes can, we suggest, prove a useful explanatory tool when they are employed in

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst in a sense it is a minor point, we nevertheless feel bound to query the term neutralisation because of the way in which it implies an attempt to excuse rather than explain behaviour.

the context of a recognition of the central role of loyalty, justice and fun. We should make clear at this point that we are not saying that Sykes and Matza and Sykes offer five ways of understanding delinquency while we offer three which we think are somehow better. Rather, we are suggesting that the three factors we identify as crucial can all be seen to be addressed by Sykes and Matza as part of their neutralisation techniques.

Before discussing delinquency in terms of the three key factors we identify, it is probably useful to briefly recall the factors identified by Sykes and Matza. The five techniques of neutralisation are: denial of responsibility; denial of injury; denial of the victim; condemnation of the condemners and the appeal to higher loyalties. As will be shown, these strategies are clearly incorporated into our concepts of justice, honour/loyalty and fun.

## 4.2 Justice

The notion of justice is an important component in explaining motivations for crime. In many ways this concept can be seen as a very particular aggregation of Sykes and Matza 'denial of the victim' and 'condemnation of the condemners'. Several examples can be cited to illustrate this point. The first example involves a girl who explained how, upon visiting a variety store, she and two of her friends were continually followed around the shop and then escorted rudely from the premises. The shopkeeper explained that she 'didn't want your [their] sort around here'. The girls took the view that the shopkeeper was at fault for having presumed that they were going to steal something. In order to pay her back they proceeded to 'knock over' her shop continually, for four weeks. The shopowner was eventually forced to close the business whereupon the girls went to her closing down sale, purchased some minor object, and asked the shopowner whether she remembered them. She answered in the negative so they explained that 'we're the one's you kicked out one day, we're also the one's who did over you're shop'. This particular 'translation of [a] belief into action' (Matza, 1964), that is, 'people are innocent until proven guilty' and the premature stigmatising of people as criminal is unjust and warrants retribution, is a clear example of what Matza terms the denial of the victim and the condemnation of the condemners. Thus, when the cousin of one of the girls did over a warehouse three times in a row he was held in contempt because 'you should only ever do over a place once. Unless they deserve it, it's just not fair'. From the girls perspective the first shopowner had become an 'appropriate target' (Sykes and Matza, 1957) whereas whoever owned the warehouse had done nothing to deserve ongoing harassment. Clearly, motivations for these criminal acts, based upon notions of justice and the appropriateness of the target, owe little to the concept of relative deprivation. Instead, they are good examples of deviant acts prompted by a strong commitment

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to, albeit deviant expressions of, values propagated by the wider, non-delinquent community.

### 4.3 Honour and Loyalty

An example of the phenomenon of articulating the norms of the wider society in ways which the 'straight' community considers deviant occurs in regard to assault, particularly that of police officers. Whilst in general there is a surprising degree of respect for police officers, who are seen as 'just doing their job', if the officers go beyond their job description because they hold racist and/or sexist views then once again retaliation is warranted in the interests of justice. In situations in which the friends of the juvenile are insulted or assaulted, issues of honour, loyalty and solidarity come immediately to the fore. A particularly interesting example can be cited here. For young Murri girls it is not uncommon to be the recipient of terms such as 'black slut' or 'coon'. The Murri girls frequently understand this racism as a permanent and unalterable feature of their world. However, when these sorts of comments are made in the presence of their white friends, the white friends will often respond by provoking a fight in defence of their maligned companions.

This response is in no way paternalistic on the part of the white girls, while the endemic nature of racism in Australia means that many Murri girls have long since realised that the least confrontational way of coping with racism is to feign indifference. The white girls, however, are genuinely affronted by the slurs being cast upon their friends and feel honour bound to respond. The response of the white girls is not uncommonly an assault upon the person making the racist/sexist comments, even if this involves assaulting a police officer. These behaviours are not limited to females. The example can be cited of a Murri boy who was referred to as a 'little black bastard' by a Correctional Services Officer. A white friend of the boy responded by assaulting the officer for which he was subsequently charged with assault occasioning actual bodily harm. Many similar examples could be cited of white youths responding aggressively, and illegally, to racist comments.

Complex issues are being touched upon here which will be explored more fully in a subsequent paper. However, it is important to recognise that it is not being suggested that 'quietism' is the universal response of Murri adolescents to racism. Nevertheless, examples such as that provided are important because once again they cannot be incorporated within the explanatory framework provided by the relative deprivation thesis without a level of 'fancy footwork' which does not really withstand scrutiny. In contrast, it is very obvious that what we are calling 'honour and loyalty' and what Sykes and Matza describe as 'appeals to higher loyalties' and 'condemnation of the condemners' are apposite.

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It might be objected at this point by those still persuaded by the relative deprivation thesis that it is not fair to use the examples of assaults in order to discredit a theory which takes as its starting point objective disadvantage and sees criminality, particularly property crime, as a response to the subjective awareness of this disadvantage. It could be argued that assaults constitute an 'across the board' response to micro-level interactions which may or may not have anything to do with advantage or disadvantage. However, we would argue that these examples are telling instances of the way in which issues such as honour and loyalty are elevated in importance by those who are relatively deprived in terms of a personal sense of social integration with the wider society.

#### **4.4 Fun and Excitement**

When explaining why juveniles become involved in crime all of the youths interviewed expressed notions of 'fun', 'for the thrill', 'it was a kick' and 'just for the rush of it'. While the relative deprivation thesis arguably explains why some 'things', such as CD players, are understood as desirable, as 'fun' to possess, it does not really explain why the *act* of stealing the CD Player is fun in and of itself. Without wishing to labour the point, there is not much fun and excitement in the relative deprivation thesis. One of the key examples we can utilise here is that of car theft. The majority of young people within the centre had stolen or been involved in the theft of a car. All of them described the 'rush' involved in cruising around with a group of friends as well as the pleasure involved in being skilful enough to steal a car and get away with it.

It is not so much the acquisition of a car which is important, particularly given that the majority of youths abandoned the cars undamaged once they had finished enjoying them. What was of significance for the youths was the illicit thrill involved in stealing a motor vehicle together with the pleasure involved in tearing around city streets with a group of mates.

There is a distinct connection which can be made with Matza and Sykes 'denial of injury' and juvenile car theft. These youths are rarely involved in major profit making car theft where parts are sold and motors remade. They are far more likely to simply 'borrow' the car (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 667) for 'fun'. They do not damage the car unless by 'accident' and frequently leave the vehicle parked somewhere once they have finished with it.

#### **4.5 Denial of Responsibility: A Problematic Issue**

With the exception of 'denial of responsibility' it seems to us that Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralisation are usefully subsumed within three factors

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we identify as 'justice', 'loyalty/honour' and 'fun/excitement'. It is important to note that Sykes and Matza's final technique, 'denial of responsibility', is not being overlooked by us, but rather rejected outright. Our reason for rejecting denial of responsibility as a useful heuristic device is that in our view it is simply wrong. Almost all of the delinquents we interviewed accepted without hesitation responsibility for their actions. Indeed, the suggestion that they would not face up to the consequences of their actions is one they would take great offence to because it calls into question issues of honour.

## 5 Conclusion

The subject of this paper has been the identification of some key factors in explaining juvenile delinquency. We began by examining empirically one of the major theoretical frameworks in mainstream criminology. The relative deprivation thesis does not appear to be strongly supported by data drawn from the national general population survey utilised in the Cultural Consumption project and the Sibling Study project, with its more direct focus upon delinquents. In attempting to utilise an effective alternative to the relative deprivation thesis the qualitative component of the Sibling Study has led us to the view that deprivation of emotional support is the crucial issue in propelling adolescents into delinquent sub-cultures, and that a significantly modified version of the framework provided by Matza and Sykes is useful in 'unpacking' criminogenic peer solidarity processes.

It is a matter then of rethinking what exactly it is that amounts to relative deprivation. If it is simply lacking material goods which are then acquired through criminal means, then the theory is at best weak and more probably flawed. If, however, it is lack of access to a sense of integration, of being an active and recognised part of the wider society, then perhaps a modified version of the theory can usefully be applied to delinquency and criminality in adolescents.

## Appendix

### **The Measure of 'Emotional Support' (Parker, Tupling and Brown, 1979).**

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they had experienced the factors listed in the eight items below. Respondents were asked to reply in terms of 'the parents or adults who looked after you when you were a child growing up'. The items were listed separately for the female adult carer and the male adult carer. The choices allowed for were: very often, often, occasionally, hardly ever and not applicable. The eight items were as follows:

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Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice  
 Gave me as much help as I needed  
 Seemed to understand my problems and worries  
 Was affectionate to me  
 Liked talking things over with me  
 Understood what I needed  
 Made me feel I was wanted  
 Gave me praise

Respondents who scored 'very often' or 'often' on two or less items were defined as 'low emotional support'.

### **The Measure of 'Alignment with Peers'**

This measure was created from a scale comprising the nine items listed below. For each item respondents could choose one of the following responses: I would join in, I would try to stop them, I would do nothing, I don't know what I would do, I would report them, I would walk away. The choice 'I would join in' was coded '1' with all other legitimate responses coded as '0'. A simple summative scale was then created and divided into four quartiles to produce the categories used. The items used were as follows:

If you had a friend who started shoplifting, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend and they started to break into houses, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend who started stealing cars, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend who started bullying other people, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend and they started vandalising things, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend who started doing graffiti or tagging, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend and they started getting drunk a lot, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend who started using drugs, what would you do?  
 If you had a friend and they started getting into fights, what would you do?

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