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# SPRC Newsletter

SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

No. 57 JUNE 1995 FREE.

EDITOR: JULIA MARTIN

## Youth Homelessness

BY MARINA PAXMAN

**H**omelessness among young people is now widely recognised as a significant and continuing social problem in Australia. It has also become a political issue.

Homeless young people often have difficulty accessing services and support that would assist them in their transition to independence. At most risk are those who have left home around the age of 15, because at this age there is a chance that they will fall between the responsibilities of two levels of government. Recent government initiatives have addressed these problems of access to services and support for young homeless people and these, along with young people's accounts of homelessness, are discussed in this article.

Traditionally, child welfare has been the responsibility of the State and Territory governments. Since the 1980s, the Commonwealth has taken on a significant role in providing income support and housing through the jointly funded Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (or SAAP) to homeless people aged 16 and over. Other programs include health, education and community services. More recently, the Commonwealth has begun to offer assistance to people under 16 years in

some areas. The expansion of Commonwealth provision to young people has responded to, and is facilitated by, the narrowing of the roles of States and Territories in adolescent welfare.

The Department of Social Security (DSS) commissioned the Social Policy Research Centre to research policies regarding child protection, income support, accommodation services and other welfare functions affecting homeless people aged 13-17 years. Sheila Shaver, Cathy Thomson and Marina Paxman conducted the fieldwork in September 1994.



### THE HOMELESS EXPERIENCE

Forty-two homeless young people participated in this study. Most lived in Melbourne and were contacted through the assistance of youth accommodation workers. The overall profile of homeless young people is unknown. However, it was obvious our sample under-represented cultural diversity, the experiences of those not accessing services and living on the street and in other exploitative arrangements, and those who had been successful in establishing a stable life away from their parents' home. Nevertheless, the data gathered reinforce many

***Each day involves looking for a place to live, like a rooming house or housing program. I have been looking for about one year and not getting very far.***  
(Rob, 17 years)

findings of previous studies and highlighted long-standing issues that still need to be addressed by policy makers.

The majority of those interviewed had left home the first time when they were 15 years or younger. For almost half leaving home was a permanent decision. The remainder had turbulent histories of returning to and leaving their parents' homes. Although most were in contact with their families, they were unlikely to return permanently because the situations which led to their homelessness were unlikely to change. Some said access to family mediation services would be useful for those wanting that kind of assistance. Seven had intentions of returning home and the remainder needed alternative secure accommodation and a living income.

A bottleneck in supported accommodation services has led to young people being accommodated in places which are not necessarily the most appropriate for them to progress to independence. Although 86 per cent of those interviewed had been homeless for more than one month since they last left home, almost one third had been at their place of accommodation for one-week or less. Only six were in housing arrangements where they were happy. Under 16s were using accommodation services funded

***I'm in limbo until next year when I want to go back to school now and finish Year 10... they said I can't enrol this far into the year***

(Anna, 16 years)

*continued on page 2 ►*

for 16 year olds and over. Emergency accommodation was being used for longer periods because there were inadequate entry and exit points.

***I didn't know about refuges and that I could go to them at 15 - I didn't know there were so many***  
(Linda, 15 years)

Two thirds had difficulties making ends meet. Some had gone without food for days at a time, or were involved in theft and other risk taking behaviour. Many said they had accumulated transit fines for fare evasion because they could not afford to buy a ticket. Those who had accessed supported accommodation services appeared more able to make ends meet because their accommodation costs were related to their income.

The majority were in receipt of Commonwealth income support. However, their experiences of applying for it, and remaining on it, were problematic. They said the application forms were hard to understand and the identification requirements difficult to meet. Some had incurred debts during the waiting period, some had had their benefits cancelled because they could not fulfil DSS obligations, and over one fifth had had their benefits reduced to pay back DSS or Austudy over-payments.

About one third participated in education, employment or training. The remainder had left school early. Of this group, 43 per cent said they would prefer to be working and 24 per cent wished to return to school or training. Barriers to working included the high level of youth unemployment, their low education levels, lack of stable housing and insufficient work experience. The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and Youth Access Centres (YACs) had little success in securing traineeships or jobs for the young people interviewed.

## **SOME FINDINGS**

Appropriate services and support depend on program evaluations from the young people's perspectives. The interview data collected from our sample of

homeless young people raise a number of issues.

Firstly, our findings contradict recent media coverage claiming that the availability of assistance serves to draw young people away from home and is a cause of family break-up. The majority of young people had not known about income support before they left home, and about half had not known about supported accommodation. Nor does the provision of support necessarily undermine relations with parents. While none of those interviewed received any regular financial support from parents or relatives, the majority had family contact. The data provide evidence that government-provided support to those who cannot live at home plays a vital role in young people's well-being.

The research indicates that young people would benefit from more information about services and support for homeless young people in the areas of accommodation, income support, family counselling and mediation, health and education. Young people need to know what services are available before they can utilise them. Schools could be a good place to disseminate such information.

Almost one third of the sample had been formally subject to a child protection order at some stage during their life. At the time of the interviews, seven per cent were state wards and ten per cent had a partial order for care and protection. These young people were aged under 16 and homeless. This raises concern about the quality and length of care being provided to state wards and the need for after-care for ex-state wards to ensure stability and well-being during the transition years.

Waiting periods for income support, training, accommodation and other services to this group need reconsideration. In principle, waiting periods for income support can be waived where a young person is in hardship, for example, those claiming the homeless rate. However, our fieldwork found a number of young people who had had to wait for support. This target group were young, vulnerable and unsupported, and having to wait often led to further alienation from the system of support designed to assist them.

There is a dearth of supported accommodation for homeless youth, especially longer-term accommodation providing sta-

bility and enabling them to develop independent living skills. One result is that under 16 year olds are housed in crisis accommodation and cheap private hotels.

Only a few had a stable and continuing relationship with a youth or protective worker, and very few had a relationship meeting the standards of case management. The young people wanted to be given choices and involved in decisions affecting them. This can only be facilitated if they have continuity with youth workers.

Several recent innovations in service delivery have improved access to services, in particular the Youth Pilot Projects which led to the establishment of the Youth Service Units by DSS; and YACs by the Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET). They have adopted a youth-oriented, holistic approach to service referral, including health, income, accommodation, employment and training services.

***A friend told me about refuges but I thought they were big halls with beds and I didn't want to go but I had a look and they were just like a normal house***  
(Pete, 15 years)

## **POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

Roles and responsibilities between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and the non-government sector in adolescent welfare have changed markedly in the last decade. The two most notable changes have been the States' and Territories' reduction in the number of young people under orders for care and protection, and the national income support program for young homeless people.

Currently, it is difficult for homeless people to negotiate the system of support and services. There have been many criticisms of the gaps and duplications in services whilst various levels of government battle over jurisdictions and cost-shifting. In response, a number of initiatives are reshaping Commonwealth,

State and Territory governments and the non-government sector policies addressing youth homelessness. Three significant developments are as follows.

- **The Commonwealth and State Case Management Protocol for Young People Under 16 Years**, (hereafter referred to as the Protocol), which began to take effect in the last months of 1994.

- **The Youth Training Initiative**, part of the Commonwealth's Working Nation program of employment and training, which commenced on 1 January 1995.

- **The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program** funding agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments expired on 16 December 1994. New agreements are currently being negotiated.

The Commonwealth House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs is conducting an Inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness, (hereafter referred to as the Inquiry). Its report is expected to be tabled in mid-1995. Both the SPRC study and the Inquiry raise concerns about potential problems in the above policy areas. By identifying problem areas, access to services and support for young homeless people can be improved.

### • The Protocol

The Protocol is a joint commitment of the Commonwealth, States and Territories to coordinate their services. It aims to ensure that all young people living away from home and unsupported by their parents have stable housing, income support and a person available to provide ongoing support and guidance. Specific guidelines for the implementation of the Protocol have been developed in each State and Territory. The SPRC research project was undertaken before the Protocol had taken effect. For these reasons we are not in a position to know how wide-

spread the concerns raised by our research are.

The principal objective of the Protocol is to establish a coordinated and effective initial assessment and referral process and to clarify which level of government is responsible for what. The Protocol affects the first phase of assistance to young unsupported people and is not seen as covering the longer term outcomes achieved by State and Territory departments.

The Protocol should result in young people being assisted with accommodation and an appropriate income support arrangement for their age and circumstance. In the case of young people under 15, income support may not be in the form of direct payment, and the nature of support will be determined by workers in each individual case.

In essence, the Protocol stipulates that responsibility for income support lies with the Commonwealth, and that the States and Territories are responsible for the well-being of young people under 15 and for assessing the needs of those 15 and over who are at risk of harm.

Overall, the Inquiry reports considerable support for the Protocol from organisations working with young homeless people, both for its potential to improve clarity and standards of support and the mechanisms for evaluation and monitoring.

One particular concern is that changes to the regulations governing the privacy of social security claimants will allow DSS to disclose information to State and Territory welfare authorities, including disclosures without the permission of the claimant. Of further concern is that changes to privacy rules and mandatory reporting to the relevant State or Territory welfare department of under 16s applying for income support may deter young people from seeking assistance because the State and Territory welfare departments still suffer from much community distrust.

The Protocol reaffirms the responsibility of State and Territory welfare departments for protective functions, including the assessment of the needs of young people who are not state wards.

Whilst the numbers in wardship are decreasing, those in need of care and protection are not. State guardianship for reasons of care and protection provides standards for which State and Territory welfare authorities are legally responsible. A consequence of the policies to re-

duce the use of wardship may be that no one can be held legally accountable for the well-being of homeless adolescents.

In principle, waiting periods have been addressed by the Protocol where by the States and Territories have agreed to support young people during the assessment period where necessary. Consequently, waiting periods should not be a problem under the Protocol. The success of the Protocol depends on resources allocated to child welfare at both levels of government. During our research youth workers were concerned that inadequate resources were available to assist young homeless people.

### • The Youth Training Initiative

The objective of the Youth Training Initiative (YTI) is to ensure that all unemployed people under 18 are participating in education or training. Recipients of the Youth Training Allowance, or YTA (which replaced Job Search Allowance and New Start Allowance for people under 18) will receive individual case management. DEET will be responsible for activity testing and case management. DSS will retain an administrative role. YTA claimants will continue to have access to the DSS social work service. Homeless students will still be eligible for Austudy, and those qualifying on the grounds of homelessness now also receive rent assistance. This is a significant development in the level of support provided to this target group.



***I phoned all the supported accommodation places on the list and filled out application forms... the waiting lists are from six weeks to a couple of months at all of them (Sean, 15 years)***

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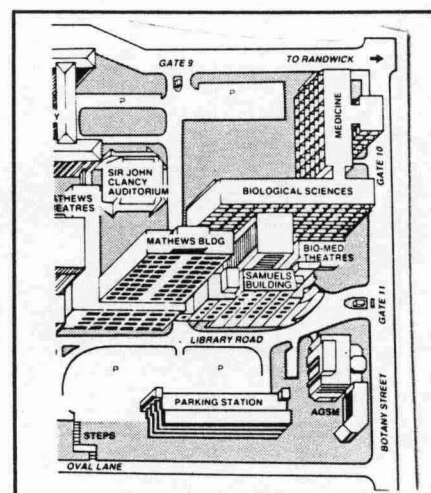
The Social Policy Research Centre (originally the Social Welfare Research Centre) was established in January 1980 under an agreement between the University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government.

The Centre is operated by the University as an independent unit of the University. The Director receives assistance in formulating the Centre's research agenda from a Board of Management, and in periodic consultation with the community. The Director of the Centre is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the operation of the Centre.

The Centre undertakes and sponsors research on important aspects of social policy and social welfare; it arranges seminars and conferences, publishes the results of its research in reports, journal articles and books, and provides opportunities for postgraduate studies in social policy. The Centre's current Research Agenda covers social policy issues associated with changes in work and employment; levels of social and economic inequality including poverty and the measurement of income and living standards; the changing structure of the mixed economy of welfare and the roles of state, market, household and non-government sectors in meeting social needs; in policies and programs in social security, taxation and the labour market, and in community services policies and programs.

The views expressed in this Newsletter, as in any of the Centre's publications, do not represent any official position of the Centre. The Newsletter and all other SPRC publications present the views and research findings of the individual authors with the aim of promoting the development of ideas and discussion about major concerns in social policy and social welfare.

The Social Policy Research Centre is located on Level 3 of the Samuels Building, University of NSW, Kensington Campus. Enter by Gate 11, Botany Street.



# FROM THE DIRECTOR

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

It is hard not to be impressed by *Beyond the Safety Net - The Future of Social Security* written by Peter Baldwin, the Minister for Social Security, and released earlier this year. One can but wonder how someone with his portfolio responsibilities who is also a member of the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) can find the time to write about these issues in such a coherent and thought-provoking manner. The paper is, as they say, 'a darn good read', for social security experts as well as for those with an interest in the challenges facing a system which costs around 8 per cent of GDP, or 35 billion taxpayer dollars each year.

After a decade of constant, almost frenetic change in our social security system, it is time to step back a little from the hurly-burly of the policy process and reflect on some of the underlying issues. Peter Baldwin's paper does just that. It is full of good sense, fresh insights and new ideas. Few will agree with all that it contains, but most will be challenged by its diagnosis of current problems and stimulated by the broad directions for reform it develops.

Those familiar with the debate on social security will find only passing reference to some of the issues which tend to dominate such discussions. While there is a good deal of attention given to the need to develop benchmarks for the adequacy of payments and a full-frontal attack on the appropriateness of the Henderson poverty line for this purpose, there is little explicit discussion of issues like eligibility, entitlements and incentives - even targeting hardly rates a mention!

Instead, there is extensive discussion of the shortcomings of maintaining the distinction between the development of policy and the delivery of programs, of the need to develop a customised approach to the delivery of Department of Social Security (DSS) programs, and of the need to simplify the basic payment structure whilst tailoring that structure to the specific yet changing needs of DSS customers.

Not everyone will agree with or accept Peter Baldwin's starting point that there will be no more significant increases in social security spending, even in the longer-term. This may be accepted wisdom on ERC, but there are many in the community who disagree and want to re-open the debate about levels of social expenditure and the taxes needed to finance them. The parameters of such a debate must extend beyond concepts of fiscal responsibility and expenditure targeting to recognise that our tax-transfer system is an institution which both expresses and shapes our views about the kind of society we want to live in.

Other readers will want to be convinced that the information superhighway can be harnessed to serve the purposes seen for it. But these kinds of issues need to be grappled with, otherwise the social security system (and the people it serves) will become the victim of change rather than the beneficiary of progress.

Peter Baldwin's vision for the future of social security sets out an exciting agenda for the next decade or so. However, in looking to meet the challenges it poses, we should not lose sight of the more mundane but nonetheless important matters currently confronting our social security system and the problems faced by those who rely upon it to see them through the hard times.

## MANAGEMENT BOARD

The first meeting of the Centre's new Management Board was held in March. With the advent of our new Agreement, the Board itself has been reconstituted. In addition to Professors John Lawrence and John Neville (the former in the role of Presiding Member) the University will be represented by Dr Helen Lapsley, Senior Lecturer in Health Services Management at UNSW.

The three Ministerial appointees are Chris Butel, First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Social Security, Mary Murnane, Deputy Secretary in the Department of Human Services and Health and Associate Professor Peter Travers, from the School of Social Sciences at Flinders University. It is an impressive team with a broad range of experience and expertise. I welcome them all to the Board and look forward very much to working with them over the next five years.

## CONFERENCE

The forthcoming Social Policy Conference will be the fourth such event and, overall, I think that we can be pleased with this particular aspect of our work.

This year, over 190 Abstracts were submitted to the conference - a testimony to its importance as a major event on the social policy calendar. Choosing between these has been a difficult exercise, and many will be disappointed that their paper has not been selected. However, I hope that those who have missed out will not be dispirited and will still make the effort to attend. We have designed the program this year so as to maximise the scope for contributions from the floor, so there is still an opportunity for everyone to express their views.

Not only does the conference itself bring considerable credit to the Centre, it also serves an extremely valuable role in strengthening the sense of teamwork and comradeship amongst our staff. Many of my colleagues have spent the last month or so getting the basic structure of the Conference into shape, and finalising the Program. I am sure that a glance at this year's Conference Program (see the liftout in the centre of this Newsletter) will testify to the value of their efforts and the success of their work.

Peter Saunders  
Director

# FROM THE PROJECTS

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

## Why do the wives of unemployed men have such low employment rates?

BY BRUCE BRADBURY

In 1991, the average employment rate for the working age wives of employed men was 65 per cent, whilst for those with unemployed husbands it was only 28 per cent. This reflects a pattern that has been well established for the last, and possibly the last two, decades in Australia and other countries. Why is this so?

The SPRC has just completed a research project on this issue commissioned by the Department of Social Security. This project looked at the labour market circumstances of women whose husbands (or partners) were receiving either unemployment benefits or Disability Support Pension. The outline of this study was summarised in the June 1994 issue of the *SPRC Newsletter*. This is a summary of the results from that part of the project dealing with women with unemployed husbands.

### THE 'INCOME EFFECT'

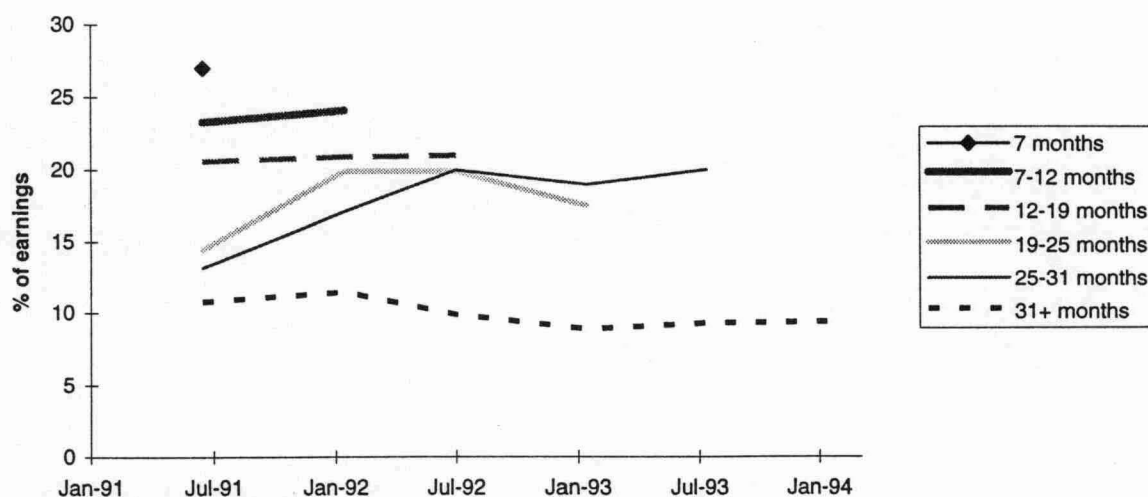
Whilst a lower employment rate for the wives of unemployed men is widespread, it might be expected that the opposite pattern might hold. That is, if one spouse loses their job, the loss of family income should provide a strong incentive for the other spouse to look for employment. Several reasons have been advanced to explain why this 'income effect' is more than offset. These explanations can be grouped into two categories, 'direct effects' and 'characteristic variations'.

**the loss of family  
income should provide  
a strong incentive for  
the other spouse to  
look for employment**

*Direct effects* are causal influences of the husband's labour market status upon the wife's labour market status. One possibility is the income test associated with income support payments. If one spouse is eligible for an income support payment, the household may gain very little income from the part-time or casual work of the other spouse. Whilst income tests will be eased during 1995, effective marginal tax rates will still be over 80 per cent for wide income ranges. Hence when a husband becomes unemployed there may be little incentive for the wife to look for, or retain, her employment unless she is earning a relatively high wage.

An alternative 'direct effect' has been termed the 'bruised machismo effect'. This stems from the wife's acquiescence to (or support for) the husband's desire to be the breadwinner of the family. Whilst it may be considered acceptable for the wife to be working when the husband is also, the combination of her employment and his unemployment may be too much of a

Wives' Employment Rates Over Time



deviation from traditional gender roles.

Finally, we may note that a high proportion of jobs are obtained via informal contacts with employers and other workers. In this way, the unemployment of one family member may reduce the opportunities for other members to gain employment.

Whilst all these direct effects are plausible, an alternative explanation is that women who are likely to have unemployed husbands are also likely to have different labour market characteristics which will make it harder for them to find employment. Both spouses live in the same location, and so will both suffer if the local economy is not performing. In addition, spouses tend to have similar age, education and skill levels and may share a wide range of (hard to measure) characteristics such as social contacts and attitudes.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

The study examined a range of different data sources in order to discover the relative importance of these different effects. The main conclusions of the study were as follows.

- That almost all the difference in employment rates can be accounted for by the different characteristics of women. These characteristics are not necessarily easily observed.
- Consequently the net impact of direct effects appears to be small. That is, if the impact of income tests, social roles and contacts are important in decreasing wives' employment they must be largely offset by the income effect.

**regional variations in labour markets do not appear to be very important**

These conclusions stem primarily from two key pieces of evidence. The first is that most of the difference in wives' employment rates is evident right at the beginning of their husbands' unemployment spell. It would be unlikely if any of

## Wives' Employment Rate by Husbands' Labour Force Status, 1991

Labour force status of husband	Employment rate of wives (%) (number employed/population)
Employed	65
Unemployed total	28
Unemployed for less than 2 weeks	40
Total (including not in labour force)	59

Notes: Calculated for married women aged 20-59 from the 12 Labour Force Surveys in 1991 (Source: ABS unpublished data)

the hypothesised direct effects would have influenced behaviour so quickly. This is shown in the table below.

This table shows that, of the 37 percentage point difference in employment rates between wives with employed and unemployed husbands, 25 percentage points (or 2/3 of the gap) existed at the beginning of the husband's period of unemployment. Moreover, much of the difference between the new entrants and all wives with unemployed husbands reflects the fact that those wives whose husbands are able to leave employment more quickly are also more likely to have employment themselves.

The second key piece of evidence comes from Department of Social Security administrative records. The figure below shows employment rates for women whose husband began to receive Unemployment Benefit in May/June 1991. The figure separates this group according to the length of time that the husband received benefit.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this figure is that the variation in wives' employment rate with respect to how long their husband is going to be unemployed is much greater than the variation over the duration of their husband's unemployment spell. Hence any (net) direct effects must be reasonably small in comparison to variations in the initial labour market characteristics of married women.

Exactly what the relevant labour market characteristics are, is however, more difficult to ascertain. Regional variations in labour markets do not appear to be very important, and educational qualifications and (using a simple four category defini-

tion) explain only about one seventh of the employment rate gap. More generally, skills and social contact are not easy to measure. However, the importance of pre-existing characteristics does suggest that additional labour market and training policies would be required to increase the employment of women with unemployed husbands.

Whilst the study concluded that the net impact of direct effects is small, this does not imply that particular factors, such as the effect of social security income tests, are not important. We can say with confidence that if these direct effects are important they are largely offset by the income effect encouraging wives to look for work. Interviews with a sample of

**little evidence was found to support the importance of the 'bruised machismo' effect**

married women conducted as part of the study revealed that some women do consider financial incentives relevant, though this was only a relatively minor reason for their labour force behaviour. Little evidence was found to support the importance of the 'bruised machismo' effect.

These issues are discussed further in the report from the study, which will be released in the SPRC's *Reports and Proceedings* series in the next few months. Some initial results were published in the March 1995 *Australian Bulletin of Labour*.

# NEW PUBLICATIONS

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

## **Social Policy and Northern Australia: National Policies and Local Issues**

**Proceedings of a One Day Conference, Friday 28 October 1994, Darwin**

**PETER SAUNDERS (ED.)**

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No. 120

**T**his volume features in the following papers.

Peter Saunders, *Welfare and Inequality in Australia in the 1990s*

Bill Tyler, *Constructing Indicators for Social Inequality for Northern Australia*

Anthony King, *Innovation and Change in Long Term Care: The Challenges of New Models*

Rebecca Orr, *Community Care and Accommodation Models for those People Suffering from Mental Illness*

## **Three Years at Home: The Final Report of the Longitudinal Study of Community Support Services and Their Users**

**MICHAEL FINE AND CATHY THOMSON**

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No. 121

**T**he introduction of community support policies in recent years has undoubtedly already changed the lives of tens of thousands of people. In the coming decades it is likely, either directly or indirectly, to affect virtually every Australian family.

*Three Years at Home* presents the results of a detailed three-year study of community support in a suburban community. It reports on the outcomes of the support provided to sixty people and documents the assistance given by formal services and unpaid family members.

## **Two Papers on Citizenship and Basic Income**

**SHEILA SHAVER AND PETER SAUNDERS**

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 55

**T**hese two short papers reflect on current proposals for reform in income support policy in light of continuing high levels of unemployment and underemployment.

In the first paper, Sheila Shaver reviews the conflicting arguments for Participation Income and Basic Income. The paper suggests the Working Nation White Paper reforms are part of a large scale historical shift in the character of the Australian welfare state. While social rights of citizenship such as income support were previously complementary to employment and capital accumulation, they are now being integrated into economic growth and development.

Peter Saunders' paper on Basic Income (BI) argues two key issues must be addressed in all proposals: conditionality and transition. Conditionality refers to the definition of those circumstances under which people are entitled to receive income support benefits. BI proposals have given insufficient attention to the problems associated with the transition to such a scheme, and in particular to the political influence of estimates of winners and losers.

## **Improving Work Incentives in a Means-tested Welfare System: The 1994 Australian Social Security Reforms**

**PETER SAUNDERS**

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 56

**A** dramatic rise in unemployment after 1990 prompted the Australian Government to establish

an expert committee to advise it on how best to respond to these developments.

The release of the 1994 White Paper on Employment and Growth foreshadowed a range of reforms. Expansion of labour market programs for the long-term unemployed was a central feature of the overall package, but so too were a number of significant reforms of the social security system. A major goal of these reforms is to provide a social security system more consistent with current labour market trends, and one which, whilst still heavily targeted, is designed to provide increased work incentives. This paper explains the nature of the social security reforms and analyses their consequences for incentives to increase participation in paid work.

## **Corporatism in Australia**

**PETER KRIESLER AND JOSEPH HALEVI**

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 57

**R**ecent developments in European corporatism and their relevance to Australia are examined in this paper.

Corporatism was explicitly taken up by the Australian trade union movement in the 1980s, following economic instability in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Labor Party, which came to government in 1983, stressed consensus as the basis of its policy making. Corporatism was seen as a desirable program, manifest in the various Accord agreements.

In the light of these agreements, Australia's economic performance from 1983 is evaluated in terms of the success of corporatist strategies. It is argued that these strategies did not succeed in generating the structural changes necessary for the domestic economy to maintain its international competitiveness, mainly due to the failure of any investment policy.

**Universality and Selectivity in  
Income Support:  
A Comparative Study in  
Social Citizenship**

**SHEILA SHAVER**

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 58

Citizenship is variously associated with equality of status, universality in the distribution of benefits and entitlements to a social minimum. This paper is concerned with social citizenship as the basis of rightful entitlement to the benefits of the welfare state, and with differences in the way in which it is expressed in the income support systems of different countries.

Outcomes measures with respect to citizenship in the old age pension systems of Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Norway and Sweden are compared with respect to inclusiveness, selectivity, income composition and the remediation of poverty.

**Household Semi-public  
Goods and the Estimation of  
Consumer Equivalence  
Scales: Some First Steps**

**BRUCE BRADBURY**

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 59

Models of household consumption used to estimate the relative needs of people living in different family types need to take account of economies of household size, price-like substitution effects and the allocation of consumption among the individuals of the household. No existing estimation tackles all three of these issues in a simultaneous and transparent fashion.

This paper combines a household production model introduced by Lau (1985) with a Samuelson-type (1956) household welfare function to develop a consumption model which is both general and amenable to the incorporation (and testing) of a range of additional identifying information. A simplified version of this model is used to estimate some preliminary equivalence scales and intra-household allocations.

# PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

Please mark boxes to indicate which publications you are ordering.

## REPORTS AND PROCEEDINGS

- ☐ No. 120, Peter Saunders (ed.), **Social Policy and Northern Australia, Proceedings of a One Day Conference, Darwin, April 1995**, 124 pp. \$9
- ☐ No. 121, Michael Fine and Cathy Thomson, **Three Years at Home: The Final Report of the Longitudinal Study of Community Support Services and Their Users**, April 1995, 205pp. \$9

## DISCUSSION PAPERS

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# BOOK REVIEW

S O C I A L P O L I C Y R E S E A R C H C E N T R E

## Evaluating Child Protection

BY DAVID THORPE

Open University Press, Buckingham, 1994. Distributed by Allen & Unwin. pp. xii plus 218, RRP \$39.95 (pb)

Reviewed by Judy Cashmore

In this book, David Thorpe is highly critical of current practice and ideology in relation to child abuse and child protection. He argues that the failure to distinguish between child welfare (those measures which promote the care and well-being of children) and child protection (those measures which act directly as a barrier between children and significant harm and injury) leads to inappropriate and intrusive investigation without providing the necessary supports for families in need of help.

This argument is based on data collected in Western Australia during 1987 and in Wales in 1990. The two samples consisted of all 655 cases notified to the Western Australian Department of Community Services over three months in 1987 and the

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was neglect**

first 100 cases notified to Welsh authorities in 1990.

The single largest reason for notification was neglect, and about half of all cases in both Western Australia and Wales were not substantiated. Single parents - especially mothers - were over-represented, as were cases involving parents with drug and alcohol problems. Thorpe concludes that

*the majority of 'child protection' matters are dealt with by investigation and some degree of admonishment... What is being investigated are the routine parenting practices of a substantial number of people. (p. 193)*

This view is continued on page 202:

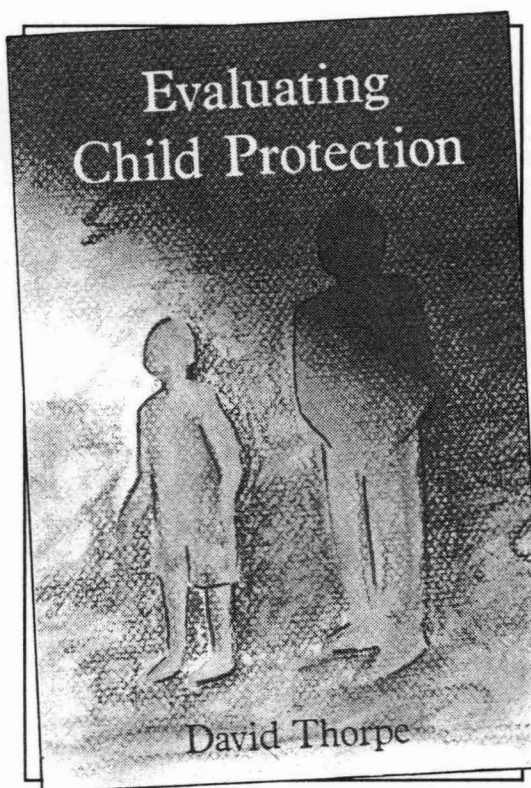
*That which does not conform to standard middle-class patriarchal child rearing norms is represented as 'at risk of abuse', neglect or abuse.*

The area of child protection therefore

broader support services.

In response to David Thorpe's presentation at the Deakin National Conference on Child Protection in November 1994, the Director General of the NSW Department of Community Services indicated that on a continuum from universal through targeted to crisis services, 85 per

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cent of the Department's child protection budget was spent on crisis and post-crisis services. This is certainly a critical issue. There is an urgent need to find ways of providing families with children with the necessary support while at the same time easing the burden on over-worked and under-resourced front-line workers, who are charged with the statutory responsibility to investigate notifications of abuse and neglect.

On the other hand, Thorpe's message may be over-interpreted and carries a number of dangers. First, it is highly appealing to cash-strapped and over-burdened departments and provides the rationale to apply stricter gate-keeping measures. This is at a time when one of the main complaints against such departments around Australia is not that they are overly interventionist (except for rare exceptions like the 'Children of God' case) but that they are too willing to refer cases on and close the file, such as those covered in Systems Abuse Report in New South Wales and the Fogarty Report in Victoria.

provides a mechanism by which families are 'normalised rather than assisted'.

Much of what Thorpe argues in relation to the over-representation of disadvantaged families in 'child welfare' (in the old sense of 'the welfare') or 'child protection' statistics and the moral, value-laden exercise of social work practice is not new. However, it bears some repeating, especially in view of the increasing emphasis on crisis services as opposed to

Studies funded by the NSW Department of Community Services into referral practices, including Cathy Humphrey's report on Referral Practices in Child Sexual Abuse Cases, have pointed to the marked drop-off in the proportion of cases referred to and receiving the required services. Over-burdened and inadequately trained workers do not have the time to follow up what happens to cases they refer on and about 40 per cent of cases notified to the NSW Department of Community Services have previously been notified.

Furthermore, reviews of child deaths generally find that the children who die at the hands of their families are well known to the department. In one recent case, the family was notified to the department on at least eleven separate occasions, and the child's mother asked for the children to be removed from her care. While Thorpe's point about the need to examine responses to 'ordinary' rather than extraordinary child abuse notifications is well taken, predicting outcomes for children in these cases is much harder.

Indeed, his study did not include any examination of what happened to cases which were 'not substantiated'. He did follow 'second round' notifications within 12 months for substantiated cases and found that around 16 per cent of children in these cases were further harmed or injured while their cases were 'open for service'. The way the data is presented did not, however, allow the reader to know how cases were responded to the second time round compared with the first round.

Perhaps the main concerns with

Thorpe's study and his findings, however, lie in the assumptions that are made about the seriousness of physical and sexual abuse and the apparent trivialisation of neglect and emotional abuse.

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Research by Kari Killen, who recently visited Australia, indicates the difficulty of modifying neglectful parental behaviour and the often severe consequences for children, and especially very young children, of chronic neglect. As Dorothy Scott (1994) pointed out in her response to David Thorpe at the Deakin Conference, acts of commission (such as physical and sexual abuse) are not necessarily more serious in their consequences than acts of omission (neglect and emotional abuse) and there is a danger of 'sociological reductionism' and determinism in Thorpe's strong emphasis on social class, race and single parenthood. Not all poor, black, or single parents abuse their children, and such an analysis risks stigmatising these families.

Thorpe's conclusions are also called into doubt because of methodological problems and questionable interpretation. The analyses are based almost exclusively on single variables only, on

single abuse type classification, and take little to no account of the children's age.

While there is quite a lot of detail, it does not assist in gaining an overall picture of the data, primarily because the tables and the analyses deal with only one variable at a time and do not allow the reader to draw out required information such as the proportions of different types of abuse cases that were substantiated. Similarly, while there may be a primary reason for notification, cases typically involve more than one type of 'abuse'.

Finally, the analysis of case files does not allow, or stops short of, an examination of the essence of this field: what is the outcome for the children involved?

This book provides a useful stimulus for debate about the current direction and the problems facing the child protection field. However, it holds significant dangers if its findings are accepted uncritically.

## REFERENCES

Deakin Human Services Australia (forthcoming), *Child Protection: Revising the Definitions*, Proceedings of Conference on Child Protection held at Deakin University, 25-26 November 1994

Fogarty, J. (1993), *Protective Services for Children in Victoria*, A Report by Justice Fogarty, Judge of the Family Court of Australia, Melbourne

Killen, K. (forthcoming), *Neglect and Reglect: Research and Practice*, NSW Child Protection Council Seminar Series No. 9, Sydney

NSW Child Protection Council (1994), *The Referral of Families Associated with Child Sexual Assault*, NSW Department of Community Services, Sydney

## Research on Women in the Labour Market

**T**he experiences of older women in the labour market will be the subject of a project led by Sol Encel, Honorary research associate at the Social Policy Research Centre. This project is funded by a grant from the Women's Research Groups Program, administered by the NSW Ministry for the Status and Advancement of Women. For the purpose of the study 'older women' are defined as 45 years and over.

Dr Encel is also engaged on a project funded by the NSW Mature Workers' Advisory Committee, dealing with the experiences of workers of both sexes aged 45 and over who have recent experience of unemployment and job seeking. The new grant will enable more emphasis on the experiences of women, who have been largely ignored in labour market studies.

A seminar will be held at the Centre to discuss this issues involved in this

project on 21 June 1995. Relevant women's organisations will be invited to send representatives. The researchers would also like to hear from any interested person offering helpful suggestions about the conduct of the research, or the seminar on 21 June.

Please contact Helen Studencki on  
(02) 385 3846  
or 385 3833  
or fax (02) 385 3049

***I'm not ready to go to school at the moment... I just left because I want to settle down and find a place to live... work things out with my mother and stuff***  
(Kim, 16 years)

The researchers are concerned that the integration of DSS income support with narrower DEET (Austudy) provisions could deprive some homeless young people of assistance. The tightening of eligibility, narrower grounds and longer waiting periods associated with the introduction of YTA are likely to make it more difficult for this group to receive income support. These changes affect those who have been away from home for a substantial period and seek to qualify for the independent rate on the basis of workforce participation. Submissions to the Inquiry, and the Standing Committee have called for greater clarity in this area.

Another problem that may arise from the changes to income support is that unrealistic training obligations may be imposed on homeless people and result in the cancellation of their allowance. The imposition of training obligations is a matter for the Commonwealth Employment Service. However, DSS can approve suspension of the activity test where the Department is aware that specific circumstances, such as homelessness, would warrant this. It is too early to know yet how often this will be done.

### • The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Several important issues have been identified concerning Support Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services for homeless people, notably guidelines which exclude funding services for unaccompanied people under 16. Under 16 year olds are using SAAP services when there are no alternatives, or even worse are referred to cheap private hotels. The terms of the forthcoming SAAP agreement, now in process of negotiation, appear to preclude the

funding of services exclusively for under 16s. Another problem is a lack of accessible and affordable long-term accommodation to which young people can move from SAAP services. The ongoing National Youth Housing Strategy will recommend ways to improve housing options for independent 15-25 year olds on low incomes. However, accommodation for under 15s needs attention.

Young people need stability and continuity of support and many departments at both levels of government are currently adopting the case management model. As the Inquiry has pointed out, the potential for duplication of case management functions needs to be addressed.



Finally, the contracting out of community services to non-government organisations needs to be implemented with adequate resourcing. During the course of our fieldwork in Victoria, youth workers reported that funds once devoted to the provision of State services were not being transferred to the non-government sector to provide adequate services and support to the community.

### COMMONWEALTH-STATE RELATIONS

Initiatives in Commonwealth, State and Territory policies addressing youth homelessness are occurring in an envi-

ronment that has seen the emergence of a mixed economy of welfare, deinstitutionalisation, dominance of the rights of the family, and a move away from an interventionist state towards services being provided by the community. In principle, social policies are attempting to deliver tailored services with various levels of intervention to suit the individual in need. Some of the objectives are to offer a range of choices, a reduction in the use of legal intervention and a simplification of the system by integrating and coordinating services to improve access.

There have been unsupported people who have achieved successful outcomes from government policies and programs. However, the data from our study gives little indication that access to services and the level of support offered to the majority of homeless young people is improving. There appears to be a gap between what governments say they are doing and what they are doing.

Young homeless people are not a homogeneous group. They want to be given choices and involved in decision making. The clear message from the young people was that safe, secure and affordable housing was their first priority before they could begin to embark on the other commitments to education or work.

The need for resources in child and adolescent welfare has grown significantly in recent years. The Protocol is much welcomed but without adequate resources and improved coordination and integration of services and support, the traps in the current system, or emergence of new ones, will detract from the objective to improve the welfare of this group.

***it is bad that you have to leave short-term refuges when you've found a place you like and workers that you like***  
(Matthew, 15 years)

The quotations in this article are from SPRC interviews with homeless young people conducted in September 1994 (false names are used for confidentiality). Graphics courtesy Streetwise Comics. For 'Hanging In!' and other comics, telephone (02) 560 3244