

SPRC Newsletter No 53 - June 1994

Author:

Martin, Julia

Publication details:

Working Paper No. No 53

SPRC Newsletter

1324-4639 (ISSN)

Publication Date:

1994

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/1060>

License:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>

Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/45389> in <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au> on 2024-04-24

SPRC Newsletter

SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

No. 53 JUNE 1994 FREE.

EDITOR: JULIA MARTIN

CONTEXTUALISING INEQUALITY

BY PETER SAUNDERS

In an article in the *SPRC Newsletter* published last year, Sol Encel reflected on the alternative meanings of social policy (Encel, 1993).

Those reflections served, amongst other things, to reinforce T.H. Marshall's famous statement that 'social policy is not a technical term with an exact meaning' (Marshall, 1967: 7). The truth of this proposition has been demonstrated on many occasions since then, including in some of the contributions to the 1987

In his contribution to the Conference, Howard Glennerster suggests that social policy is fundamentally concerned with defining the appropriate scope for *collective*, as opposed to *individual* action (Glennerster, 1989). A second proposal, made from the floor at the Conference by Ian Gough, emphasised the distinction between economic policy - state intervention in the sphere of *production* - and social policy - state intervention in the sphere of *reproduction*.

Neither approach, however, appears to have received general endorsement or widespread acceptance, and many would agree with David Piachaud when he claims that 'a clear distinction and separation between social and economic policy now appears impossible to sustain' (Piachaud, 1989: 263).

There is, of course, far more to these debates than a concern to set clear-cut boundaries around the discipline of social policy. Indeed, given its essential multi-disciplinarity, such an exercise is an inherently risky endeavour. Disciplinary boundaries serve not only to protect those huddled within them, but also act as barriers to those on the outside. Social policy needs to be given clear and precise meaning so that its concerns can be elevated to the same level of importance as those currently accorded to economic objectives.

Until this occurs, the goals of social policy will always take second place to those of economics - to be striven for when economic circumstances permit, then to be abandoned in the name of

fiscal responsibility as soon as the economy turns down (or the financial markets express their disapproval).

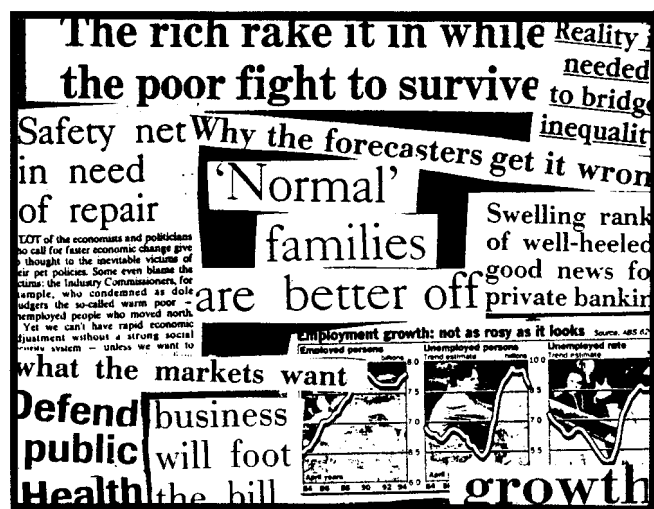
THE GOALS OF SOCIAL POLICY

The failures of the 1980s and the misery, hardship (*and* economic costs) of the 1990-93 recession are bringing home the need to consider economic and social

**the goal of social
policy is not to pick up
the pieces left behind
by economic progress**

policies together, and to find ways in which they can mutually reinforce and support each other.

The goal of social policy is not to pick up the pieces left behind by economic progress, nor to tend to the casualties of the market, but to contribute positively to the achievement of economic objectives,



Conference held in celebration of the seventy fifth anniversary of the Department of Social Science of the London School of Economics (Bulmer, Lewis and Piachaud, 1989).

DEFINING BOUNDARIES

The book of conference proceedings, *The Goals of Social Policy*, contains two specific suggestions which focus on what many people see as the key contemporary issue: that of distinguishing between social policy and economic policy.

CONTENTS

- FROM THE DIRECTOR
- FROM THE PROJECTS
- NEW PUBLICATIONS
- SEPTEMBER DEPENDENCY CONFERENCE
- BOOK REVIEW:
REFLECTING ON RESEARCH PRACTICE: ISSUES IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE

or at least to maximise the contribution of economic achievements to living standards and social welfare.

One feature of developments over the past two decades has been the emergence of inequalities which have been the outcome of economic processes, but which have had numerous social consequences. Because of this, the study of inequality provides a natural route into the harmonisation of economic and social policy. For some, inequality has been so central to the study of social policy as to be part of its definition.

for some, inequality has been so central to the study of social policy as to be part of its definition

In a paper published as a *Supplement* to the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* in February 1976, David Donnison proposed that

the social policies of Governments are those of their actions which deliberately or accidentally affect the distribution of resources, status, opportunities and life chances among social groups and categories within the country, and thus help to shape the general character and equity of its social relations. Social policies are therefore concerned with fairness. (Donnison, 1976: 13)

Clearly, inequality as conceived here is multi-dimensional, so that social policy should include consideration of the various dimensions of inequality, the causes of inequality (both in the immediate and systems or structural senses), the dynamics of inequality (both within and between generations), the consequences of inequality, the nature of the attitudes to inequality (what they are, and how they are generated and legitimised) and the effectiveness of actions designed to reduce inequality.

Consideration of effectiveness needs to encompass not only government programs and policies which intervene in the processes that generate various forms of

inequality, but also the role and impact of a wide variety of other redistributive mechanisms which operate outside of government.

In countries like Australia, two systems of redistribution - the public and the private - operate alongside each other. To focus exclusively on the public system is to ignore important interactions with, and responses to, private redistributive mechanisms which, in the limit, can frustrate the goals of public redistributive policies. We need to understand how both processes work if we are to explain what is actually happening in the world.

INEQUALITY AND INEQUITY

There is, of course, an important distinction to be made here between inequality - the identification and measurement of various dimensions of difference, and equity - the judgement that those differences are 'fair' in some sense. Donnison's quote makes it clear that the ultimate concern of social policy should be with questions of fairness, or with the social justification of inequality rather than with just its measurement.

The issues of inequality and inequity do, however, need to be kept distinct, because while values are fundamental and ever-present in the study of social policy, the discipline of social policy itself must be more than a system of beliefs if it is to gain academic credibility and policy relevance.

For far too long, as Nevile (1990) has emphasised, economists have been prepared to make pronouncements about matters of public policy under the guise of objective economic argument, when many of those pronouncements in fact reflect their own value judgements about normative social (as well as economic) questions. Exposing the false objectivity of such claims is important, but not if that causes these values to be replaced by someone else's - at least not if they themselves are then presented as value-free analysis and argument.

OBJECTIVES AND MEANS

The definition and scope of social policy were also addressed by David Piachaud in his Plenary Address to the 1993 Social Policy Conference (Piachaud, 1993). Piachaud proposed a broad definition of social policy which includes policies that provide income support or services (the conventional welfare state), policies designed to tackle specific social problems such as crime, drug addiction and child abuse, and policies in the race relations and equal opportunity areas which aim to shape the general development of society. He argued for the need to reconsider the fundamental objectives of social policies and to distinguish these from the means of achieving them.

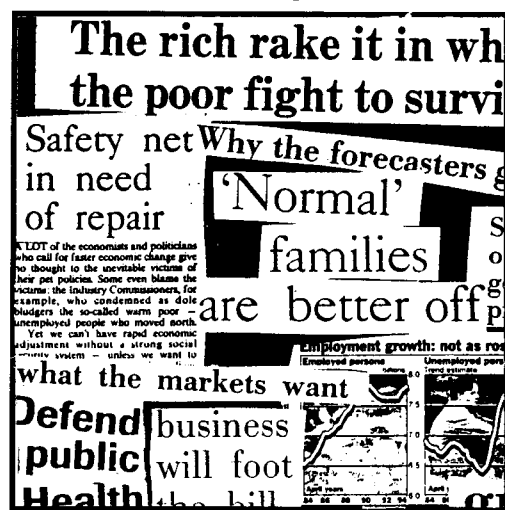
To a certain extent, Piachaud takes issue here with Donnison, as is clear from the following statement:

Social policy thinking needs to move beyond redistribution, which has dominated thinking since the Second World War, and in a sense move back a step to think about people's capabilities and how those with limited capabilities - whether due to lack of skills, lack of child care, or lack of jobs - may be empowered to help themselves. (Piachaud, 1993: 13)

Piachaud goes on to argue that social policy experts should permeate economic policy discussion, just as economists have permeated the social policy field for the last two decades (though hopefully with less damaging consequences!).

Piachaud's analysis is timely and his arguments well directed. In terms of Donnison's earlier comments, we need to continue to analyse inequality, but more from the point of view of those affected by it, not as a 'social problem' which exists in a vacuum. Such an approach lays the foundation for analysing inequality in terms of the social structures and economic power relations which underlie it.

In short, the study of inequality has to be made explicitly contextual, thereby giving emphasis to its relational and



causal dimensions. This is where social policy can contribute what economic analysis cannot.

INEQUALITY RESEARCH

Notwithstanding Piachaud's comments, Donnison's emphasis on inequality as a focus for social policy has proved to be of enduring relevance and value over the last two decades. The inevitable consequence of attempts to 'roll back the state' and rely on market mechanisms has been to increase existing inequalities and legitimise new ones. The extent and nature of these need to be documented and their causes and consequences investigated. This is one of the tasks of an organisation like the SPRC and our program of research has given considerable attention to these issues.

Perhaps the most well-known area of SPRC research on inequality has been concerned with the distribution of income. We have focused on this topic for a number of reasons, including the availability of good quality data (both national and international), the existence of a well-developed conceptual framework of analysis, and because income (and income redistribution) are fundamental to well-being in societies like Australia.

the study of inequality has to be made explicitly contextual

Much of our past work in this area has focused on documenting the trends in income distribution, locating these within more general economic and social processes and developments, and investigating the impact and effects of the tax-transfer system. The work utilising microsimulation models and methods by Bradbury and Doyle (1992) for example, has been particularly important in highlighting the relative importance of the various processes and mechanisms which influence disposable incomes, and has paved the way for others to develop more sophisticated models for specific purposes.

More recently, we have been investigating the impact on inequality of demographic change, of changes in labour market behaviour and in the taxation system, and of variations in noncash

social wage provisions. Some of this work has been undertaken as part of the Study of Social and Economic Inequalities and will be released in a series of reports later this year.

We have also been investigating the position of immigrants in the Australian income distribution, comparing this with the situation in other countries, and using microsimulation techniques to investigate the impact of

immigration on the distribution of incomes. This research, funded by a grant from the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (BIPR), has just been completed and should be published by the BIPR in due course.

Our research on inequality is taking us into new areas of distributional analysis and raising issues relating to access and discrimination, including in the labour market context, but also in relation to broader social structures and arrangements.

We are also continuing to study issues associated with the measurement of the needs of families - the equivalence scale question - and how alternative living (and income-sharing) arrangements affect measured inequality.

Finally, we are exploring how the changing patterns of domestic and labour market involvement of family members are raising new concerns about the structure of inequality within and between families and how social security programs should, and are, being redesigned to deal with these changes.

We have done relatively little research in the past on the consequences of income inequality, choosing to focus instead on its dimensions and causes. However, I have just received a Small Grant from the Public Health Research and Development Committee (PHRDC) to develop an integrated data base from the income distribution and health surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 1990. This grant will fund the initial stage of what will hopefully become a longer-term

program of research into the nature of the relationships between relative income position and health status, building on the research already conducted as part of the National Health Strategy (National Health Strategy, 1992).

Other dimensions of inequality feature heavily in the Centre's research on the welfare state and community support services. Research by Sheila Shaver on the gender dimension of welfare takes as its starting point the failure of conventional analysis of welfare state

regimes to recognise gender divisions in the labour market within which welfare programs are designed and operate.

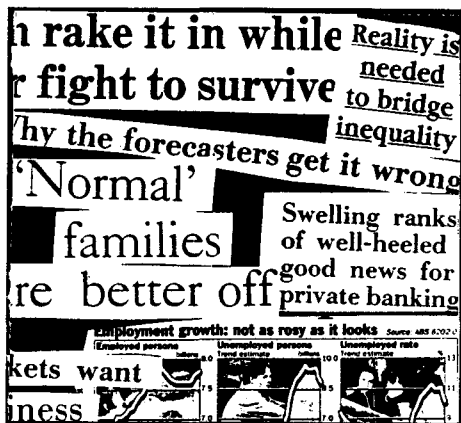
We have just embarked on a project to investigate the role of socioeconomic factors in determining the access to, and use of, community-based services by frail elderly people. Specific attention will be paid to whether it is the particular circumstances of the individuals themselves, or of the broader locational climate within which they live, that exerts the greatest influence on access to services and service use.

Our research on inequality is taking us into new areas of distributional analysis

Related to this is a study of the impact of location on housing costs, transport costs and well-being which will hopefully reveal new insights into territorial inequality, an issue that is receiving increasing attention because of its relation to the regional aspects of relative disadvantage.

It is important that research organisations like the SPRC continue to research questions of inequality. No doubt others will continue the important task of delineating where the 'economic' ends and the 'social' begins, but to some extent that is an inevitably fruitless task.

The economic and social aspects of our lives are so fundamentally and irrevocably



continued on page 11

SPRC STAFF

Telephone: (02) 385 3833
Facsimile: (02) 385 1049
Email: sprc@unsw.edu.au

Director
Peter Saunders

Deputy Director
Sheila Shaver

Senior Research Fellows
Bruce Bradbury
Sara Graham
Anthony King

Research Fellows
Natalie Bolzan
Judy Cashmore
Michael Fine

Senior Research Assistants
George Matheson
Robert Urquhart

Research Assistants
Jenny Doyle
Diana Encl
Marilyn McHugh
Marina Paxman
Helen Studencki
Cathy Thomson
Vanessa Whittington

Honorary Research Associate
Sol Encl

Research Scholars
Phil Cross
Morag McArthur
Judy Mellers
Gina Mitchell
Gaby Ramia
John Sinclair

Administrative Assistant
Suzanne Vaughan

Publications & Information Officer
Julia Martin

Librarian
Lynn Sitsky

Secretary to Director
Gloria Gervasoni

Secretarial
Jackie Comer
Lynda Pawley



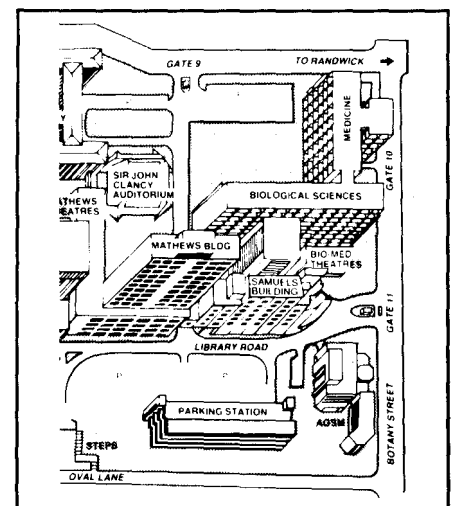
The Social Policy Research Centre (originally the Social Welfare Research Centre) was established in January 1980 under an agreement between the University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government.

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. Current research areas cover poverty, inequality, and standards of living; social security, taxation and the labour market; the welfare state; and community support services for the frail elderly and younger people with disabilities.

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

The level of taxation has been back on the agenda in recent months. We have all become understandably wary of reading politicians' lips in order to gain reassurance on the topic, yet our politicians continue to find themselves in the firing line from all sides on the tax question. The issue of a special jobs levy to fund assistance to the unemployed was rejected in this year's Budget, where extra revenue was instead provided from the 'growth dividend' - the tendency for taxes to rise automatically as employment recovers and incomes grow.

Politicians have long recognised that the politically least damaging way to raise extra revenue is through processes like 'the growth dividend' and 'bracket creep' which do not require specific legislation or, even worse, the introduction of new taxes. And isn't that, after all, what we as the electorate have implicitly endorsed by supporting the continued existence of a progressive income tax and other taxes (e.g. sales tax) which automatically generate additional revenue in this way? In this sense, the growth dividend is a perfectly legitimate way for governments to fund their programs - particularly those that benefit the victims of recession.

Aside from the question of how to raise *additional* tax revenue, the whole issue of Australia's level of taxation has also been receiving attention. Evidence from the OECD confirms that in 1991, Australia's level of tax revenue as a percentage of GDP (29.2 per cent) was lower than in any other OECD country - lower even than in countries like Turkey, Iceland, Spain and Portugal. More recent figures for 1993 contained in the latest *OECD Economic Outlook* show, in relation to the level of general government current receipts as a percentage of GDP, Australia again ranks towards the bottom, its ratio (32.9 per cent) being lower than everyone else's except for the United States.

Such 'league table' comparisons do not, of course, provide any basis for claiming that our level of taxation is too low. (Nor, incidentally, do they provide grounds for congratulating ourselves on our tax achievements.) What ultimately determines the appropriate level of taxation in Australia are the opinions, aims, effects and priorities that exist here in Australia, not those prevailing in other countries. The OECD comparisons do, however, illustrate the weakness in the argument that higher taxes cannot be sustained, either politically or economically. The fact that higher taxes currently exist in nearly every other OECD country (and have existed in Australia in the past) casts serious doubt on the validity of such propositions.

Finally on the issue of taxation, a recent review undertaken within the IMF reaches the conclusion that the reductions in high personal income tax rates introduced in many countries since the mid-1980s have not brought about significant improvements in incentives to invest or in tax compliance. The study does not reflect an official position of the IMF, but it was nonetheless regarded as being of sufficient importance to receive coverage in a recent issue of the *IMF Survey*.

The findings are hardly surprising. After all, the evidence that high tax rates cause such behaviour has always been non-existent or highly suspect. What is clear is that the personal tax changes which have occurred have been reinforced by growing disparities in before-tax wages, thus exacerbating inequality as well as lowering tax revenue. These issues are coming to the fore in the policy debates of the 1990s, not only in Australia, but also in many other countries. It seems quite likely that much of the focus of economic policy in the 1990s will be on addressing the legacy of the 1980s, just as policy in that decade was primarily concerned with responding to the problems which emerged in the 1970s.

1993 ANNUAL REPORT

At the same time as you receive this *Newsletter* you should also receive the Centre's *Annual Report* for 1993. As in previous years, we continue to strive to improve both the style and content of the *Annual Report*, with a view to making it more focused and reader-friendly without compromising its important accountability objectives: explaining what we do, how we do it and with what results. Important contributions to this year's *Report* were made by Sheila Shaver and Suzanne Vaughan, assisted by Julia Martin and Jackie Comer, all of whom deserve to be congratulated for their efforts.

STAFF

■ I am pleased to report that Robert Urquhart has been appointed to the new position of senior research assistant. Robert has been at the Centre since 1990 working in several areas including most recently as part of the Study of Social and Economic Inequalities. He will continue to work in the area of inequality.

■ I am also pleased to welcome Vanessa Whittington to the Centre. Vanessa joined us in May as a research assistant. She has been actively involved in research for several years, most recently investigating issues of housing need, and the mental and emotional needs of young people in Sydney.

■ Phil Cross has decided to resign his SPRC Postgraduate Scholarship and undertake PhD study in North America. We are sorry to lose him, but wish him well in his new position and hope that his interest in economic policy and distribution will continue.

■ Finally, a word of welcome to Gina Mitchell who has joined the Centre to continue her PhD studies on the development of poverty policy in Australia.

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

Do Frail Aged Peoples' Financial Circumstances Influence Their Use of Formal Community Based Support Services?

BY NATALIE BOLZAN

In Australia, as in other developed countries, demographic and other far-reaching socioeconomic changes have led to concerns about how the growing dependent population, especially the aged population, will be supported.

Although community care policies for aged people dependent on the support of others on account of their ill health or disabilities are by now well established, they are constantly evolving in response to changing and increasing demands.

Governments and other groups concerned with the interests of elderly people have to address issues associated with service effectiveness and efficiency as well as with the appropriate and equitable allocation of support services. Issues surrounding the payment for support services by users of these services are also on the policy agenda.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The SPRC Community Support Services Research Team is assessing the feasibility of conducting research into how the personal financial circumstances of frail aged people affect their access to and use of formal community support services. We hope that this work will shed light on this important aspect of equity and service use for frail aged people.

The relationship between service use and personal resources is already very much part of the policy debate. *The Aged Care Reform Strategy, Mid-Term Review 1990-1991* raised the issue of the financial consequences to frail aged individuals of receiving assistance from formal support services (p. 140). It postulated that such people may well experience quite

considerable aggregate costs of services, despite each individual service charging relatively small fees. In this way the Review drew attention to the effect of service use on financial circumstances.

However, an equally important question concerns the influence of financial circumstances on service use. This was only touched upon when the Review reported that there are some areas of low socioeconomic status and social disadvantage in which there is a relatively low provision of services (p. 11). However, nothing beyond the impact of locality was explored in the Review in relation to the influence of financial circumstances on service use.

**although community
care policies for aged
people are by now well
established, they are
constantly evolving in
response to changing and
increasing demands**

The 1988 ABS *Survey of Disability and Ageing* also lends some support to the view that this is an important area for research. The Survey showed that for some community support services, up to 20 per cent of people over the age of 60 did not receive a service or received fewer services than they felt were necessary, because of their cost. In the case of home maintenance, as many as 31 per cent expressed some unmet need for services related to cost.

RESEARCH UNDERWAY

For a number of years the Community Support Services Research Team has been exploring how people who are dependent on the support of others to enable them to remain in their own homes manage to do so. In particular, it has considered the part played by both the formal, usually publicly provided services and informal carers. An assessed need for support, based on the individual's level of dependency is normally the main criterion used to allocate public services. Whilst the Team has examined in some detail the relationship between level of dependency and the need for and use of assistance, the part played by a person's ability to pay for either public or private services has not been the focus of our research. However, in the course of this work, this relationship has emerged as one requiring further investigation.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The relationship between the personal financial circumstances of the frail aged and their use of services have been formulated into three broad research questions:

- to what extent do the personal financial situations of frail elderly people influence their selection and use of domiciliary and community-based support services? What are the financial consequences to consumers of these services?
- how do service providers allocate and prioritise support services, and what consideration do they give to the financial circumstances of frail aged clients in this allocation?
- what is the influence of the socioeconomic characteristics of a locality on the availability of services and the way these are allocated to people at different income levels within localities?

THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

As this research is attempting to break new ground, we thought it prudent to map out the area and develop a strategy for exploring the terrain through a Feasibility Study. In August last year the Centre's Management Board approved such a Study, and work on the Feasibility Study is now underway.

The Feasibility Study is charged with

- establishing the parameters of the research;

- exploring the feasibility of conducting research in the area;

- testing a methodology for exploring the relationship between personal finances of frail aged people and their community support service use;

- providing some preliminary findings on the existence of the relationship between frail aged peoples' personal finances and service use; and

- recommending whether a larger study in the area is warranted and determining whether such work is feasible using the methodology proposed.

CURRENT STATE OF THE STUDY

To date, the parameters of the research have determined procedures for selecting a sample of frail aged people, and a methodology has been designed. The latter is being implemented in one area health region of Sydney.

The feasibility study will be small in scale (30 people) and conducted amongst people who are 65 years or more, live alone and have a moderate to severe disability. Interviews will be conducted with people at different income levels and in two localities, one of high and the other of low socioeconomic status.

The Study is on target in meeting its objectives and should be completed towards the end of this year. It is expected that the results will be available in published form.

REFERENCES

Department of Health, Housing and Community Services (1991), *Aged Care Reform Strategy, Mid Term Review 1990-91*, AGPS, Canberra.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1989), *1988 Survey of Disabled and Aged Persons Preliminary Results*, ABS, Canberra.

Married Women's Employment and Social Security

BY ANTHONY KING

The rise in the employment rate for married women has been one of the most dramatic changes in the Australian labour market over recent decades. This trend has, however, not been evident in the case of women married to unemployed men. Employment rates for these women have remained low.

Research in Australia and overseas suggests that, while means testing is important, there are other factors which come into play in the low employment rates of women with unemployed partners, such as values regarding work roles within a couple, and the correspondence between the labour market characteristics, such as skills, of partners.

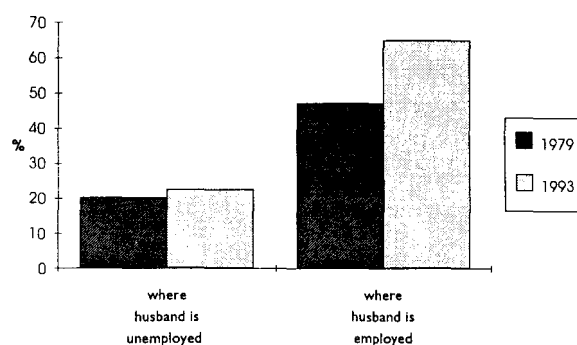
Stemming from the same concern that prompted the White Paper policy changes

noted above, the Department of Social Security commissioned the SPRC to conduct a study of the labour market circumstances of women whose partners are receiving certain types of income support, namely, unemployment benefits or Disability Support Pension.

The study entails a personal interview survey with 130 such women. Fieldwork was completed in December last year, as was

analysis of statistical data from the ABS and from the Department of Social Security. The survey included women with

Employment rates for women in married couples



Source: ABS, Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families (Cat. No. 6224.0)

Concern with the low employment rates of these women is evident in a number of the policy changes announced in the Government's White Paper on Employment and Growth, *Working Nation*, released last month. In particular, the White Paper announced a shift to the separate provision of unemployment assistance to partners in an unemployed couple and the easing of income tests.

WHY SO FEW?

The operation of the social security means tests is conventionally advanced as the explanation why women with unemployed partners have not benefited from the increases in labour market participation enjoyed by married women in general. But is this the whole story? To what extent is the appropriate policy response confined to an easing of social security means testing and the enhancement of labour market assistance?

**while means testing is
important, there are
other factors in the
low employment rates
of women with
unemployed partners**

different degrees of labour force participation and covered matters such as couples' past and present labour market circumstances, their understanding of certain social security provisions, and attitudes regarding their involvement in paid work.

The report from the study is being drafted and will be available later this year.

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

Contemporary Issues in Income Distribution Research

BRUCE BRADBURY (ED.)

SPRC Reports and Proceedings No. 115

This report presents revised versions of five papers presented at a one-day seminar held at the Social Policy Research Centre in December 1993 entitled *Contemporary Issues in Income Distribution Research*.

Michael C. Wolfson's *Divergent Inequalities: Theory, Empirical Results and Prescription*, examines the nature of income distribution polarisation using Canadian evidence.

Poverty Measurement with Bounded Equivalence Scales: Australia in the 1990s, by Bruce Bradbury focuses on the methodological problem of measuring poverty changes without detailed knowledge of the relative needs of people in different family types.

The paper by A.B. Atkinson, Karen Gardiner, Valérie Lechene and Holly Sutherland, *Comparing Low Incomes in France and the United Kingdom: Evidence from the Household Expenditure Surveys*, looks at a number of methodological issues in the measurement and comparison of low incomes in the UK and France.

Contributions from Gender and Unions to Earnings Differences among Young Australians: The Analysis of a Panel, by Gábor Kőrösi, Russell J. Rimmer and Sheila M. Rimmer, draws on data from the Australian Longitudinal Survey to consider how gender and union membership affect the labour market outcomes of young Australians over time.

Bruce Headey's and Peter Krause's paper, *Inequalities of Income, Health and Happiness: The Stratification Paradigm and Alternatives*, considers relationships in Australia and Germany between income, health and well-being and the implications of these for stratification theory.

Poverty and Inequality: Social Security in Australia in the 1990s

PETER SAUNDERS

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 48

Using data from the household income surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, this paper begins by reviewing trends in income inequality and poverty in Australia over the 1980s.

The analysis reveals increased inequality

over the decade, primarily amongst the wage and salary incomes of full-time workers. Poverty also increased when measured using the Henderson Poverty Line.

Both trends are similar to those experienced in many other countries over the period, which suggests that the underlying causes are economic and international in origin. The paper goes on to assess what these and other developments imply for the Australian social security system in the 1990s.

Attention focuses specifically on questions for research and policy in relation to: adequacy, coverage and incentives; the appropriate unit of analysis; labour market change; and certainty of support and the stability of the system as a whole.

Rising on the Tasman Tide: Income Inequality in Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s

PETER SAUNDERS

SPRC Discussion Paper No. 49

Throughout the 1980s, tax and transfer policies in Australia and New Zealand have followed broadly similar paths. Reductions in personal tax rates have benefited those on the

One day conference -

'Social Policy and North Australia: Local Issues and National Policies'

Darwin, October 1994.

Jointly sponsored by the SPRC and the Centre for Social Research, Northern Territory,
with the participation of the Northern Territory Council of Social Service

For information please contact Julia Martin (02) 385 3857 or Dr Bill Tyler (089) 466 808

**Have you been
(unsuccessfully) trying to
fax the SPRC?**

The SPRC has a new fax number,
effective immediately. It is:

(02) 385 1049

The new (shorter) mailing address is:

**Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052
Australia**

The new telephone number is

(02) 385 3833
(General Enquiries)

With all other numbers, replace '697'
prefix with '385'.

We apologise for any inconvenience
these changes may have incurred.

highest incomes, while increased target-
ing of transfers has affected those on low
to middle incomes. This paper explores
how income distribution in both coun-
tries has responded to these and other
changes.

The approach adopted is to replicate
the methods utilised in a recent study for
New Zealand undertaken within the De-
partment of Social Welfare so as to pro-
duce comparable results for Australia.
Comparisons of disposable incomes (both
unadjusted and adjusted for needs using
an equivalence scale) show the incomes
and living standards of different house-
hold types in each country.

This is followed by a comparison of
the two income distributions, which re-
veals a clear trend towards increased
inequality in both countries since the mid-
1980s.

The change in equality in New Zea-
land after 1985-86 was such that by 1989-
90 its distribution was no longer
unambiguously more equal than that in
Australia, as it had been earlier in the
decade. The paper concludes with a brief
discussion of the role of some of the
measurement issues in explaining the
differences observed in the analysis.

PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

SPRC REPORTS AND PROCEEDINGS

No. 115 Bruce Bradbury (ed.), **Contemporary Issues in Income
Distribution Research**, June 1994, 184pp. \$9

SPRC DISCUSSION PAPERS

No. 48 Peter Saunders, **Poverty and Inequality: Social Security in
Australia in the 1990s**, May 1994, 40pp. Free

No. 49 Peter Saunders, **Rising on the Tasman Tide: Income
Inequality in Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s**, June 1994,
40pp. Free

BACK IN PRINT

Discussion Papers

No. 26 Sheila Shaver, **Gender, Social Policy Regimes and the Welfare
State**, November 1990, 24pp. Free

No. 43 Michael Fine, **The Fragmented Structure of Community Support
Services: A Community Case Study**, June 1993, 28 pp. Free

PUBLICATIONS LIST

Free of charge. Please tick box if you would like one. ☐

FORWARDING DETAILS

Send to: The Publications and Information Officer
Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales
SYDNEY NSW 2052

Name:

Organisation:

Address:

State:

Postcode:

Telephone No:

I wish to purchase the following publications (quote code, eg 'RP115'):

and I enclose my cheque/money order in the sum of \$
in payment. (Please make cheque/money order payable to the Social Policy Research Centre)

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

[ID NO.]

(number in square brackets at top of address label)

Organisation:

Address:

State:

Postcode:

Telephone No:

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

REFLECTING ON RESEARCH PRACTICE: ISSUES IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE

PAM SHAKESPEARE
DOROTHY ATKINSON
SALLY FRENCH (EDS)

Open University Press, Buckingham, 1993,
pp. xii plus 146, \$39.95 (pb)
Available through Allen and Unwin

Reviewed by Morag McArthur

Nearly ten years ago, in my first job as a research assistant, I worked on a project that examined the experience of women whose children were in care. The interviews were long and emotionally exhausting for both the women and myself. I remember thinking two things as I drove away from these women's homes. The first was the guilt of invading and stirring up their strong feelings through the interview process. The second was a hope that the research would improve the experiences of these and future women.

By having these feelings, I thought that I had lost my sense of 'objectivity'. I also had doubts whether the research would result in change. Fortunately, the project leader was a woman who worked within a feminist framework and believed that the feelings and actions of the re-

searcher were part of the process of doing research and should be subject to discussion and reflection. Such views are closely examined in *Reflecting on Research Practice*.

This book is a collaborative project written by ten women researchers and explores behind the scenes of the research process. It uncovers aspects of research that are often concealed, such as the doubts and dilemmas that arise, unintended consequences that can oc-

edge is created by both the researcher and the researched. It is imperative when involving vulnerable groups to reflect on the ethical issues and values that arise in justifying what we do as researchers and that underpin practice.

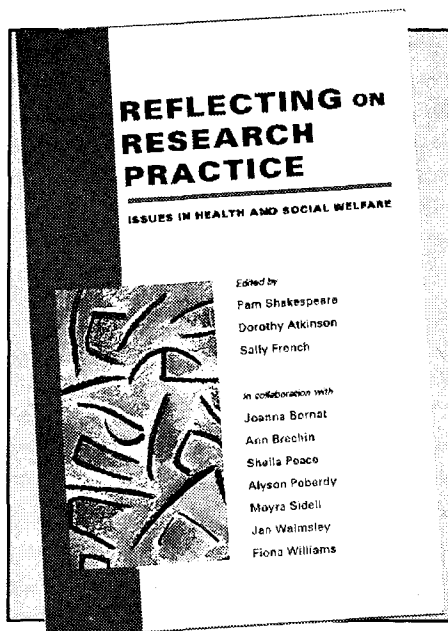
Reflection in the research process is fundamental to good practice, not just in reflecting upon the mechanics of the research process, but in accepting the impact of the self in the 'doing' of research.

The three main themes throughout the book are 'the self', the research subjects and the practice of research. The authors believe examining the processes of others will have an impact on 'good' practice by developing and interweaving these three major themes throughout the book.

The theme of the self is reflected in each author providing autobiographical material which establishes the 'I' in the process. This provides a way for the writers to reconstruct and make sense of their experience. The use of *self-disclosure* is used to provide information about the personal lives of the writers and in some chapters is also described as a method of developing rapport in an interview. The authors maintain that they are

involved in a process of developing self-awareness; an awareness of the influence, and use, of self in a research situation. This means, for some people, acknowledging their responsibility for the overall quality and integrity of their research, and for safeguarding the anonymity, confidentiality and general welfare of the research subjects. (p. 5)

The second theme is that of the 'research subjects'. There are problems with the term 'subject' as it seems to borrow from the more positivist notions



cur, and the mistakes and problems that form as much a part of research as the eventual findings. Using their own experiences, the authors reveal through the process of self-disclosure and self-reflection, the place of self in

the development of ideas; in the setting up and the doing of research... and in the processes of interpretation and dissemination. (p. 1)

The authors contribute to the growing body of literature of reflective research that argues that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed. This is why reflection on the research process is an integral part of doing research, because knowl-

**this book uncovers
aspects of research that
are often concealed,
the mistakes and
problems that form as
much a part of research
as the eventual findings**

of research which are not in line with the values that underpin the book. Nonetheless, it is the concept of *other-awareness* that is of major concern.

Other awareness is related to the need for sensitivity to the potential exploitation that can arise from the research process, particularly when the research involves

**some may regard
the notion of
reflection as self-
indulgent, soft and
perhaps not 'real'
research**

vulnerable or oppressed groups. The chapters examine the interactive nature of the research process and all use participative methods which attempt to ameliorate the differences in the power relationship between researcher and the researched. Another important aim is to provide the researched with a voice.

The third major theme of the book is that of the practice of research. Each of the authors use their own research practice as a vehicle for reflecting on different aspects of the research task. They trace the steps, from the thinking stage, to negotiation with funding bodies, explaining the project to others, observing, relating, sharing and presenting through to the 'telling' stage. Although the material could have been presented in different ways, the structure of the book allows for the notion of research as having both a story and a process. The authors have

*chosen to juxtapose the many truths
of research in a specific order that
constitutes one particular story. (p.4)*

Put it in your diary...

**The 1995 National Social
Policy Conference
will be held at the
University of New South Wales
on
5-7 July 1995**

**Theme: Social Policy and the
Challenges of Social Change**

This decision also allows the reader to either read from beginning to end or choose a particular aspect of interest as each chapter is also a self contained story dealing with a specific part of research.

All the authors are involved in the arena of social welfare either as academics or practitioners and all have a particular interest in exploring the lives of vulnerable groups. The areas of practice that the chapters focus on are people with learning difficulties¹, people with disabilities and older people. There is also a chapter dealing with 'observing' that takes the reader to a village in Papua New Guinea to examine issues around women's health.

This book is both fascinating and useful as it engages on a number of levels. The experiences of many of the authors, with regards to the nature of female academic working life with its tenuous and short term nature, are sure to strike a chord with many readers. Research can often be a lonely and doubt-ridden process. The autobiographical nature of *Reflecting on Research Practice* recognises this and makes readers feel less isolated in their own pursuits.

The book is written for a variety of audiences, from those just embarking on a research career, to more experienced workers, to the respondents of projects, and to others who may simply be interested in the process of doing research.

On the level of providing insights into the general research processes it successfully meets its objectives. Based on sound arguments of the interactive, inclusive and reflective nature of research it provides ideas and support for this type of endeavour.

Some may regard the notion of reflection as self-indulgent, soft and perhaps not 'real' research. However, it provides insights into the elements of research that often remain unacknowledged or disguised. Thought and careful reflection about those elements can only ensure that research is ethical, useful and meaningful.

FOOTNOTE

¹The term 'learning difficulties' is used in Britain in a slightly different way to what we would mean in Australia. It is used to describe people who have been labelled, at some point in their lives as requiring specialist mental disability services.

continued from page 3

intertwined that any attempt to unravel them will be difficult, if not impossible.

What matters is not whether it is possible to ascribe a particular action or policy as being either 'economic' or 'social', but recognition of the fact that economic forces and policies operate in a social context. This fundamentally limits what is economically possible, in just the same way as available economic resources impose limits on what can be achieved socially.

REFERENCES

Bradbury, B. and J. Doyle (1992), *Family Incomes and Economic Growth in the 1980s*, Reports and Proceedings No. 102, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney

Bulmer, M., J. Lewis, and D. Piachaud, eds, (1989), *The Goals of Social Policy*, Unwin Hyman, London

Donnison, D. (1976), 'An approach to social policy', *Australian Journal of Social Issues, Supplement*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 3-31.

Encel, S. (1993), 'The meaning of social policy - some reflections', *SPRC Newsletter*, No. 50, September.

Glennerster, H. (1989), 'Swimming against the tide: the prospects for social policy', in Bulmer, Lewis and Piachaud, eds, (see above) pp. 108-28.

Marshall, T. H. (1967), *Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd Edition, London.

National Health Strategy (1992), *Enough to Make You Sick. How Income and Environment Affect Health*, Research Paper No. 1, National Health Strategy, Canberra.

Nevile, J. (1990), 'The case for deregulation: economic science or ideology?' *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 71-80.

Piachaud, D. (1989), 'Social policy and the economy: Introduction', in Bulmer, Lewis and Piachaud (eds), (see above) pp. 261-6.

Piachaud, D. (1993), 'Social Policy - Parasite or Powerhouse of the Economy?' in *Theory and Practice in Australian Social Policy: Rethinking the Fundamentals*, Reports and Proceedings No. 111, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney, pp. 1-15.

Dependency, the Life Course and Social Policy

**A ONE DAY SEMINAR
FRIDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER
9.15 AM - 4.45 PM**

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM

Dr Diane Gibson, Head of the Aged Care Unit, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Dependency: The Career of a Concept

Professor Anne Edwards, Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Monash University
Youth (In)dependence: Current Theory and Policy Issues

Mr Bruce Bradbury, Senior Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre
The Transformation of Dependency in the Australian Social Security System: Beyond the White Paper

Professor Sol Encel, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of New South Wales and Honorary Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre
Age and Dependency: Myths and Realities

Dr Cherry Russell, Senior Lecturer, School of Community Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney
Older Peoples' Construction of Dependency: Some Implications for Aged Care Policy

Dr Sheila Shaver, Deputy Director, Social Policy Research Centre
An Overview

VENUE

The Social Policy Research Centre, 3rd Floor, Samuels Building,
University of New South Wales (see page 4 of this Newsletter for map)

COST

\$60 (concessions \$35) including morning coffee, lunch and afternoon tea
and a volume of the seminar papers (to be published later in 1994)

REGISTRATION

by 9 September 1994

FURTHER INFORMATION

Tel: (02) 385 3857 Fax: (02) 385 1049

Email: sprc@unsw.edu.au

Complete and send this form to
Julia Martin, SPRC, UNSW, Sydney NSW 2052
or fax (02) 385 1049

REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed find a cheque/money order for
the one-day conference, 'Dependency, the
Life Course and Social Policy' on
24 September 1994.
Cheques should be made payable to the
Social Policy Research Centre.

Name:

Organisation/Address

Contact Phone:

Contact Fax: