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# SPRC Newsletter

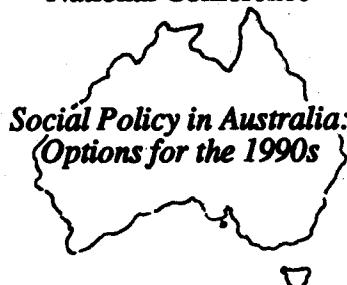
No 38 October

Editor: Jennifer Young

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**IMPORTANT!**  
Social Policy Research Centre  
National Conference



See Announcement Inserted

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## Social Policy Research Centre

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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 initial agreement, for a period of five years, was renewed in 1984 and, most recently, in 1989. In accordance with the agreement the Centre is operated by the University as an independent unit of the University. The Director of the Centre is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor and receives assistance in formulating the Centre's research agenda from an Advisory Committee and a Research Management Committee. Under the most recent agreement the Centre was re-named, and the existing Advisory and Research Management Committees have been replaced by a Board of Management.

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 post-graduate studies in social policy. Current research areas cover poverty and inequality, social security and the labour market, taxation, unemployment, the social wage, 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.

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR ...

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In July I attended the British Annual Social Policy Association (SPA) Conference held at the University of Bath. I presented a paper on the impact of employment growth on poverty in Australia, which the Centre will be releasing shortly in revised form in our Discussion Paper series. The SPA Conference attracted over 200 participants and was structured in a similar way to our 1989 Social Policy Conference, with invited plenary sessions to start each day followed by concurrent sessions for contributed papers. In terms of the number of participants and the number of papers, our 1989 Conference compares extremely well with the Bath SPA Conference, particularly given the relative population sizes of the two countries.

I was, however, struck by one great difference between the two conferences. The vast majority of participants at the Bath Conference came from Social Policy (or Social Administration) Departments at British universities or colleges and almost all participants had received formal training in the discipline of social policy. In contrast, almost no one at the Australian Conference was in that position simply because we have very few opportunities in Australia to study social policy as a subject to tertiary degree level. It is true that this situation is beginning to change, but we still have a very long way to go before we catch up with the British (and other European countries) in this regard.

Given the present lack of opportunities for formal training in social policy in Australian tertiary institutions, the standard of social policy research and debate in Australia is surprisingly good. That there is a great and increasing amount of interest in social policy issues in Australia is evidenced by the success of the 1989 Conference, as well as by the interest shown in other seminars and conferences organised by this Centre and other institutions working in the social policy field. It is my view that social policy as a legitimate field of study and research is undergoing an enormous expansion which will continue into the next century, because it brings to bear on issues of practical and policy importance insights from a range of conventional academic disciplines. These include anthropology, economics, political science, public administration, social work, sociology and statistical methods. By combining elements of each of these disciplines, social policy is developing the kinds of new and exciting insights that often can only come from a multi-disciplinary approach to a particular set of issues.

As Director of the Centre, I am constantly aware of the multi-disciplinary nature of Australian social policy research. Members of staff of the Centre have training in most of the disciplines mentioned above, and that

multi-disciplinary expertise is one of its great strengths. It also makes for lively and provocative debates and discussions of social policy issues, as we have discovered at our internal research seminars which we run on a regular (and increasingly frequent!) basis. But I can't help but feel that we all suffer somewhat as a result of lacking any formal training in the discipline of social policy. Each of us brings to our work the theoretical constructs, concepts, methodologies, ways of thinking - and hidden values - that reflect the subject matter of our training. These are hard to recognise and even harder to escape from. One of the great strengths of the discipline of social policy is that it has the potential to build on some of the better elements of a range of existing disciplines to produce analysis of current issues that are, as a consequence, more insightful and relevant.

However, there is an urgent need to expand the role of social policy teaching in our tertiary institutions if we are to train a generation of people with the skills that will undoubtedly be necessary as the importance of social policy continues to grow. Social policy must be elevated to the status of an academic discipline in its own right, and not just the subject matter of optional courses for those studying economics, government, social work or sociology. That will require a commitment from both government and the tertiary institutions themselves. If I am correct in arguing that the importance of social policy is destined to grow rather than contract, that commitment is needed now. I am convinced that it will be well-rewarded.

## Deputy Director

As I indicated in the last Newsletter, Sheila Shaver has now joined the Centre as Deputy Director. Sheila's own academic background in fact illustrates the point that I have just been making. After beginning her formal training in economics, she moved into sociology and now brings the benefit of both disciplines into her work in social policy. Before moving to the School of Behavioural Sciences at Macquarie University in 1975, Sheila spent ten years as a researcher at the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at Melbourne University. That experience brought her into direct contact with many of those whose research and ideas still dominate much of social policy thinking in Australia, including Ronald Henderson and Richard Downing to name but two. She made a number of contributions to *People in Poverty*. A Melbourne Survey, which was published in 1970 and set the framework which later guided the work of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. She has

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR ...

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maintained her interest in income support, but has also researched community services issues, as evidenced by her joint authorship (with Jean McCaughey and Helen Ferber) of **Who Cares? Family Problems, Community Links and Helping Services**. Her current research interests include the role of class, gender and community in the Australian welfare state, and comparative policy analysis focusing specifically on social policy regimes in liberal democracies and social citizenship in old age. Her range of skills and interests will both strengthen and complement those already present in the Centre, and she will undoubtedly make a major contribution to the fulfilment and extension of our research agenda. I am very pleased to be able to welcome her to the Centre, to what I am sure will be a productive time for the Centre and what I hope will be an enjoyable experience for Sheila herself.

## Annual Report

For those of you who receive the Newsletter by mail, you should by now have discovered (and already read!) our 1989 Annual Report. (I take full responsibility, by the way, for selecting the colour of the cover, so please direct any complaints direct to me!) The Annual Report gives a comprehensive account of the full range of activities undertaken by the Centre and its staff during 1989. This is the first time that such a broad range of material describing the work of the Centre has been brought together in one place. I do hope that you will all take some time to read it and, if you have any comments or suggestions to make, I would be more than glad to receive them. Bringing together all of the material for the Report proved to be a far bigger exercise than originally envisaged. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues for assisting with this, and particularly Suzanne Vaughan, without whose efforts it would not have been possible. We will, henceforth, produce an Annual Report each year, but we are also planning to ensure that in future it will be released a little earlier than proved possible this time.

## Publications

It is appropriate at this stage to point out that for the first time this Newsletter does not contain a full list of Centre publications. Such a list is now available separately, and can be obtained by contacting our Publications and Information Officer, Jennifer Young, by mail or by phone on (02) 697-5150. We will also include a full list of Centre publications in each year's

Annual Report and will continue to announce and summarise new Centre publications in the Newsletter.

The following publications have been released by the Centre since July 1990:

## SPRC Reports and Proceedings:

- No. 86 Sara Graham and Clare Stapleton, **The Extra Costs of Participation in Work, Education or Training for People with Disabilities: An Exploratory Study**, July 1990, 91 pp.

## SPRC Discussion Papers:

- No. 19 Russell Ross and Peter Saunders, **The Labour Supply Behaviour of Single Mothers and Married Mothers in Australia**, July 1990, 42 pp.
- No. 20 Russell Ross and Peter Whiteford, **Income Poverty Among Aboriginal Families with Children: Estimates from the 1986 Census**, July 1990, 39 pp.
- No. 21 Russell Ross and Peter Whiteford, **Compensating Low Income Groups for Indirect Tax Reforms**, August 1990, 25 pp.
- No. 22 Peter Saunders, **Reflections on the Review of the Home and Community Care Program**, August 1990, 18 pp.
- No. 23 Peter Saunders and George Matheson, **Sole Parent Families in Australia**, September 1990, 47 pp.
- No. 24 Bruce Bradbury, **Unemployment, Participation and Family Incomes in the 1980s**, September 1990, 52 pp.
- No. 25 Peter Saunders, **Employment Growth and Poverty: An Analysis of Australian Experience, 1983-1990**, September 1990, 46 pp.

## Conferences and Seminars

The Centre organised a public seminar on 'Sole Parents and Public Policy' which took place in Sydney on 30

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR ...

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August. One of the speakers at the Seminar was Dr Jane Millar, the 1990 Visiting Fellow at the Centre who presented a paper on 'Lone Parents in the United Kingdom: Policy Choices and Constraints'. A summary of this and other papers presented at the seminar is provided on pages 23 and 24.

Details of the Centre's Inter-state Conference organised jointly with the Centre for Australian Social Policy Analysis at the Phillip Institute of Technology in Melbourne are provided on the inside back cover. The Conference will take place on 23 November at the Phillip Institute, and will be opened by Brian Howe, the Commonwealth Minister for Community Services and Health.

We are now well into the planning of our 1991 Social Policy Conference. The theme selected this time is **Social Policy in Australia: Options for the 1990s**. I am delighted to be able to confirm that the invited plenary session papers for the Conference will be presented by Professor Gøsta Esping-Andersen from the European University Institute in Florence, Dr Stein Ringen from Norway, Professor Ian Shirley from Massey University in New Zealand, Professor Lois Bryson from the University of Newcastle and Professor Linda Rosenman from the University of Queensland. As will be apparent from this list, we are planning for a strong international perspective throughout the Conference. It will greatly assist us if people planning to contribute papers for the Conference indicate their intentions as soon as possible. Further details about the Conference and how to submit contributions are provided on the green insert in this Newsletter.

### Visitors

I have already mentioned that Jane Millar from the University of Bath was the Centre's 1990 Visiting Fellow. She spent two months at the Centre and her visit proved to be an enormous success. We were all sorry to see her leave so soon, but hope that she will be able to visit us again in the not too distant future. Our 1991 Visiting Fellow will be Stein Ringen, who will spend two months at the Centre from the middle of June.

We have recently had to say farewell to two other visitors. Marie-Luce Guillaume has returned to Switzerland and Mike O'Brien to New Zealand. They both proved to be popular colleagues, and our best wishes go to both of them. Jorgen Elm Larsen arrived at the Centre in August from the University of Copenhagen to stay for a period of nine months. He

will be spending his time researching alternative approaches to the conception and measurement of poverty, from a sociological perspective. Other Visiting Scholars currently at the Centre are Associate Professor Bettina Cass (Sydney University), Dr Hugh Pritchard (University of Technology, Sydney - Kuringai Campus), Professor Adrian Webb (Loughborough University, UK) and Dr Judy Yates (Sydney University).

Peter Saunders  
Director

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# TIME FOR A REAL FAMILY POLICY?

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All government programs need political support in order to maintain their longer-run sustainability. On one level, that statement is almost a truism, but at a different level it represents the beginnings of a theory of the growth and structure of government activities. Like all generalisations, it is an easy statement to take issue with. But if one wants to develop a more detailed explanation of the growth (and demise) of government programs, it is not a bad place to start.

The statement itself raises the issue of what in turn determines the extent of political support (or lack of it) for government programs. One factor determining the political support for government programs is surely the number of voters who receive, and perceive themselves to receive, benefits from the program. Admittedly, this is in one sense an individualistic view of the world, but it does not pre-judge the kinds of government activities from which voters will perceive themselves to derive benefits. Some, for example, will derive benefits from programs which provide assistance to groups to which they themselves do not belong (or to which they do not expect to belong), or more generally from programs which seek to achieve a fairer society through resource redistribution. There is ample room in the approach for moral positions or altruistic behaviour. But there are limits to the degree of altruism in liberal capitalist democracies such as ours, because they rely so heavily on the principles of self-interest and freedom of choice.

This line of argument suggests that those programs which provide direct and clearly apparent benefits to large sections of the voting public will, in the long run, receive the greatest degree of political support and will thus be most sustainable over time. That sustainability will arise not only because of the benefits received by voters under the program, but also because this in turn will ensure a willingness on the part of voters to forgo the resources through taxation that are necessary to fund the program. Just as in the private sector 'you get what you pay for' so in the public sector voters, according to this argument, follow the maxim 'you pay for what you get'.

Voter support is, of course, not the only factor that will determine the level and pattern of public services. Nor should it be. After all, if it were, then the allocation of public resources would bear little relation to patterns of social need, and most minority groups would almost certainly receive little or no assistance from government. But thinking in terms of voter support leads one to enquire into the kinds of political coalitions necessary to support and sustain the development of the welfare state. Such an approach is central to the analysis of the Scandinavian welfare states, as well as

being common to European social democratic thinking, although it is generally absent from much of the Australian literature.

Having briefly explained the idea, let me now turn to some of its implications in the Australian context. Consider first the relative levels of Commonwealth government social security and welfare expenditure on two groups, the aged and families with children. According to figures in the *Budget Statements 1990-1991*, social security and welfare expenditure on assistance to these two groups in 1989-90 was \$8615 million and \$4963 million, respectively. (In fact, the former figure is an underestimate since it excludes service pensions paid to the aged, while the latter figure is something of an overestimate since it includes all expenditure on sole parents pensions, much of which accrues to the (adult) parent rather than to the children themselves.) According to population figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the estimated resident population on 30 June 1989 was around 16.8 million. Of this, there were just under 4 million children (aged 15 and under), and just over 2.2 million aged people (women 60 and over and men 65 and over).

In other words, children outnumber the aged by almost two to one, yet social security and welfare spending on the aged was almost 75 per cent higher than spending on children. On the basis of these figures, Commonwealth social security and welfare expenditure per aged person is currently about \$3920 a year on average, while expenditure per child is around \$1240 a year on average. And remember that this average expenditure relativity in favour of the aged - currently running at well over three to one - would have been far greater five years or so ago before such measures as the pension assets test and higher family payments were introduced.

The relativity also remains broadly unchanged if the scope of the exercise is broadened to include Commonwealth and State government spending on education, health, children's services and aged care programs. These programs affect the precise estimate of benefit relativities, but do not change the main conclusion that on average benefits for the aged are far greater than benefits for children.

It is important to point out at this stage that this example is not intended to imply that the higher benefits accruing to the aged are achieved at the expense of lower benefits to children. Far from it, as we shall see. Nor is it intended to imply that benefits for the aged in Australia are excessive. International

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# TIME FOR A REAL FAMILY POLICY?

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comparisons in fact indicate that the generosity of the Australian pension is low relative to most other OECD countries. The figures quoted above are only intended to point to the fact that there is a great difference between average benefits for the two demographic groups.

Why this great disparity? And does it matter? Over the course of the life cycle, each of us will receive benefits as both children and later (hopefully!) as aged people. So from a life cycle point of view, the differences described above may seem of little consequence. They reflect differences in the timing of government financial assistance, but not in the total amount received over the life course. But the differences are nonetheless substantial and that raises questions about why that is so.

In terms of the arguments developed earlier, the political support for government programs depends upon the extent to which voters benefit from them. Herein lies a clue to understanding the differences in average benefit levels. By the time individuals reach voting age the childhood part of their life is already behind them, whereas the adult and aged stages of life still lie ahead. Time moves in one direction and ages each of us in one direction along with it. Voters thus have far more personal interest in government programs that provide benefits to adults and to the aged than they do in programs that benefit children - and the figures confirm that this interest is reflected in the relative levels of benefit that they are prepared to finance. Parents will, of course, derive direct and indirect benefits from government programs which assist children and will thus be attracted to policies which promise more support for 'families' - as our current breed of politicians know only too well! But not all voters are parents and thus not all voters receive such benefits, yet all voters (including parents) will benefit from programs for the aged, either currently or in the future.

The point can also be illustrated somewhat differently. Imagine a world in which time went backwards. In that world, we would all be 'born' at the current point of death and then 'de-age' and become progressively younger each year until we 'died' at the current point of birth. No one could vote until eighteen years 'after' they were 'born'. In such a world, who would believe that the relative pattern of assistance for the 'young' and the 'old' would look as it does now? Surely, in such a world, we would vote ourselves levels of assistance in our twilight ('childhood') years that were well above those received in our formative ('aged') years. That would be as rational in this

imaginary world as our behaviour in this regard is in the real world at the moment. Political support goes a long way in explaining differences in the levels of government assistance.

Let me now apply a similar line of thinking to family assistance policy. In recent years (even though it is not a new phenomenon) both Government and Opposition in Australia have been competing for voter support through their respective 'family policies'. Whether the projected stereotype is the suburban couple with two children standing alongside the picket fence, the newly married working couple struggling to pay the mortgage and support the kids, or a young single mum in the housing commission unit, politicians have been falling over each other to proclaim the depth and sincerity of their support for - and the merits of - their policies for 'the family'.

The reasons for this are not difficult to understand. All voters - and hence all political support - exists in families of one form or another, so that appealing to 'the family' is a sure-fire political vote-winner. The reality, of course, is that the policies of the political parties tend to promise additional support for some families at the expense of others. In recent years, the families that have been promised extra support have been families with children, party differences tending to depend upon whether one or both parents are in work. Family policy thus tends to involve a redistribution of assistance among families with children rather than any significant increase in the overall level of assistance to all families with children.

This situation will only fundamentally change if the degree of political support for families with children is increased. One way of doing that, and thus of really improving the level of assistance to families with children in a sustainable way, is obvious if the argument developed earlier has any relevance. It is to extend voting rights to children as well as to adults - to introduce, at last, a real system of universal suffrage.

There would, of course, be a number of practical problems which would have to be overcome if the vote were extended immediately to all children. I would propose, initially at least, lowering the voting age to, say, 14 and then gradually lowering it further beyond that. The votes of younger children would be given as proxy votes to the main adult caregiver, normally the mother, or to the main guardian or custodial parent. Those caring for children would thus have one vote for themselves and one for each younger child for whom they are responsible.



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# TIME FOR A REAL FAMILY POLICY?

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If the idea of extending voting rights to all children is too radical, there are other proposals that may be more acceptable but which would have a similar, though less marked, impact. One such idea is to redesign the electoral boundaries so that each electorate contains the same number of people rather than the same number of (adult) voters. This idea, which received some support in certain ALP circles in the early seventies, would have the effect of giving more political support to (adult) voters in electorates with above average numbers of children. It would create a system of representative democracy in which greater weight, relative to present arrangements, would be placed on the views of voters with children.

The introduction of such voting reforms would have an immediate and dramatic effect on our political landscape. The number and pattern of marginal seats would change dramatically, and in ways which would boost the employment of political scientists for years to come. And once that happened, the rest would inevitably follow. Politicians would seek to maximise their support by proposing programs and policies which raised the benefits to the most important voters - those with responsibilities for caring for children. Government assistance for children would surely increase as a result at the next election (if not sooner!) and to an extent that is unthinkable under current arrangements.

But there could also be other significant consequences of the change. Since the policy would have the effect of raising the benefits associated with child rearing, the birth rate could be expected to increase, offsetting the projected rise in old-age dependency and thus improving the prospects for funding the pension bill in the coming decades. That would in turn have implications for the desired overall level of immigration. The change would also allow greater voter expression of issues affecting our longer-run future, with beneficial impacts on the support for sustainable development policies and other environmental issues. Support for military spending and the defence budget would almost certainly decline. We might even be able to end child poverty!

Peter Saunders

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# NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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## **1989 DIARY OF SOCIAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY**

National Institute of Economic and Industry Research,  
Australian Institute of Family Studies and the  
Social Policy Research Centre

1990

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The *Diary of Social Legislation and Policy* has its roots in a chapter of the book edited by R. B. Scotton and Helen Ferber (1978), *Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia, Volume 1, The Whitlam Years 1972-75*, published by Longman Cheshire for the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. Chapter 7, prepared by Helen Ferber, is a 'Diary of legislative and administrative changes' for the years of the title. A second volume (1980) covering the first Fraser years included a similar chapter, bringing the coverage up to 1978. These chapters, or 'diaries', proved to be useful works of reference. Following their favourable reception the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (IAESR) was joined by the Institute of Family Studies, now the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the Social Welfare Research Centre, now Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), to produce a series of further diaries in the same style and sequence. The National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) replaced the IAESR as sponsoring body between 1983 and the appearance of the 1984 Diary.

The first of these diaries appeared in 1980; the policy changes in 1979 were covered in appendices to volumes for 1980, 1981 and 1982. Production of the diaries fell behind at some stage; the 1984 Diary appeared in 1987, a combined volume for 1985 and 1986 appeared in 1989, and another combined diary was produced for 1987 and 1988. This item is to announce the appearance of the 1989 Diary and to foreshadow the regular appearance of the diary, perhaps even earlier in the year.

Over the years there have been various changes in the contents of the diaries, necessitated by changes in portfolio arrangements and other events. Since 1984 the diaries have not included, as earlier numbers did, the main policy changes at State level in the fields of

social security and welfare; since 1985 the diary has recorded changes in education policy, not included for earlier years. However, so far as is possible, the diaries follow the original format used by Helen Ferber. They are produced for calendar years; items are arranged in date order under a number of headings so that changes and events in given policy areas can be easily traced. The areas covered in the 1989 Diary are Social Security, Community Services, Health, Employment and training, Education, Family law, Immigration and Housing. The chief sources of information for the entries are departmental press releases, annual reports, the Budget Papers and other documents released by departments during the year, including Budget Related Papers.

The 1989 *Diary of Social Legislation and Policy* has been compiled by researchers from NIEIR, AIFS, SPRC and the Bureau of Immigration Research. It is available from either AIFS or SPRC (\$7.95). It should continue to be a useful reference resource for research workers and to provide a succinct account of policy during the year for a wide variety of readers.

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## **THE LABOUR SUPPLY BEHAVIOUR OF SINGLE MOTHERS AND MARRIED MOTHERS IN AUSTRALIA**

Discussion Paper No. 19

Russell Ross and Peter Saunders

July 1990

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Using data from the 1986 Income Distribution Survey and other sources, a comparison of the socio-economic status and employment patterns of single mothers and married mothers is presented. A model is then developed and estimated using a probit analysis of factors thought to explain employment status (employed full-time, employed part-time, not employed) and the relative importance of marital status in determining employment status. Factors included in the model are the woman's age, her level of educational attainment, her previous employment experience, age(s)

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# NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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and number of dependent children, access to non-earnings forms of income, and, for married mothers, the employment status of her spouse and his income.

The results indicate that most of the variation in labour force behaviour of the two groups can be explained by variations in the factors listed above. However, even after adjusting for all other factors, it is still true that sole mothers are less likely than married mothers to be in the labour force, but if they are employed they are more likely (than married mothers) to be in full-time employment. The major differences between the two sets of mothers is in their responsiveness to changes in their access to sources of income other than earnings.

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## INCOME POVERTY AMONG ABORIGINAL FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN: ESTIMATES FROM THE 1986 CENSUS

Discussion Paper No. 20

Russell Ross and Peter Whiteford

July 1990

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This paper brings together information from the 1986 Census of Population and Dwellings and the 1986 Income Distribution Survey to estimate poverty rates for Aboriginal families and other families. It also describes the factors associated with income poverty among Aboriginal families.

The analysis in this paper is primarily descriptive and is limited to measuring income poverty using the Henderson poverty line. The main objective is to provide the first estimates of poverty among Aboriginal families with children since the early 1970s. The results (for 1986) confirm the common perception that income poverty rates are much higher among the Aboriginal population than among the non-Aboriginal population, although the gap is less dramatic for sole parent families than it is for two parent families. The major factor associated with this poverty is joblessness, with over half of all Aboriginal families with children having no employed adults. However, poverty is still

higher among those Aboriginal families with children in which there is at least one employed adult than it is among comparable non-Aboriginal families with children.

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## COMPENSATING LOW INCOME GROUPS FOR INDIRECT TAX REFORMS

Discussion Paper No. 21

Peter Saunders and Peter Whiteford

August 1990

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Proposals for the introduction of some form of broad-based consumption tax are a continuing theme in Australian taxation policy debates. This paper discusses methods of compensating low income groups for the effects of such a tax on their standard of living.

The paper discusses the compensation proposals put forward in the Draft White Paper (DWP) on Reform of the Australian Tax System in 1985, and also analyses data on low income groups released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from the 1985-86 Income Distribution Survey.

The paper discusses the scope of compensation proposals, the level at which they are to operate, their timing, and the processes used to effect compensation.

The paper concludes that the mechanisms proposed in the DWP to protect low income social security recipients were generally adequate in form. There are considerable complexities involved in protecting other low income persons outside the social security system, however; this particularly relates to the level of compensation and whether it should be the individual, the family income unit, the household or some broader grouping. The adequacy of any compensation proposals will depend upon which level is judged to be appropriate, but it is likely that there will continue to be disagreement about these issues.

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# NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE REVIEW OF THE HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM

Discussion Paper No. 22

Peter Saunders

August 1990

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The First Triennial Review of Home and Community Care (HACC) Program was released in early 1989. This paper discusses the main thrust of some of the recommendations made in that Review, specifically those relating to program administration, planning and user rights. The discussion of these issues and how the HACC Review addressed them is preceded by a summary of the general demographic, economic and policy context within which the HACC program was introduced and has evolved. The final section of the paper addresses two issues that are of longer-run relevance to the development of the HACC Program, the first relating to the role of carers in the program and the second the broad question of costs and who should bear them.

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## SOLE PARENT FAMILIES IN AUSTRALIA

Discussion Paper No. 23

Peter Saunders and George Matheson

September 1990

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This paper is intended primarily as a resource document. It provides information on the number of sole parent families in Australia, on the growth of sole parent families and on a range of indicators of their socio-economic circumstances. The focus in the paper is on describing the existing situation and trends over time rather than on explaining the causes of the

observed trends. The paper begins with a brief summary of the demographic characteristics of sole parent families and how these differ from those of married couple families. This is followed by a discussion of poverty and inequality among sole parent families, again focusing on comparisons with couple families with children. This analysis highlights the degree to which sole parent families are characterised by low relative incomes and thus by high rates of poverty. The provisions for sole parents in the social security system are then described, focusing on income support coverage issues, the reasons for benefit termination and questions relating to the poverty trap facing sole parent pensioners. Finally, the labour market status of sole parents - particularly sole mothers - is compared and contrasted with that of married mothers, this being undertaken against a background of the main trends in the Australian labour market since the early seventies.

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## UNEMPLOYMENT, PARTICIPATION AND FAMILY INCOMES IN THE 1980s

Discussion Paper No. 24

Bruce Bradbury

September 1990

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What has been the impact on family incomes of the changes in participation and unemployment rates experienced during the 1980s? This Discussion Paper estimates the overall and distributional impact of such changes using microsimulation methods. (A companion paper by the same author is forthcoming in the SPRC Reports and Proceedings Series. It describes in more detail the methodological issues associated with the simulation of labour market changes. This Discussion Paper focuses upon the substantive results obtained from the simulation.)

The paper begins by summarising the trends in the labour market status of persons in different family types over the 1980s, together with the relationship between labour market status and incomes in 1985-86. These results are then combined to obtain estimates of the

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# NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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effect of unemployment and participation changes on family incomes over the 1980s.

It is estimated that for every one percentage point increase in unemployment the average net income of working age families decreases by 0.75-0.85 per cent. Similarly, for every one percentage point increase in the participation rate of married women aggregate incomes increase by 0.27 per cent, and the average incomes of married couples by 0.42 per cent. Since 1983-84, falling unemployment has had a slightly greater impact on family incomes than has increasing married women's participation, although for couples the increase in women's participation has been more important.

Within family types, the impact of the increase in unemployment associated with the 1982-83 recession was unambiguously inequality increasing. This has been partly reversed subsequently, but the increased incomes due to participation increases have largely bypassed those married couples at the bottom end of the income distribution. This stems from the fact that whilst the overall labour force participation rates of married women have risen significantly over the 1980s, this has not been the case for married women with unemployed husbands. The role of the income support system in generating this relationship is identified as an important question for future research.

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## **EMPLOYMENT GROWTH AND POVERTY: AN ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE, 1983-1990**

**Discussion Paper No. 25**

**Peter Saunders**

**September 1990**

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Employment growth in Australia since 1983 has been high in both historical and international terms. It has been claimed that the growth has had a major impact on reducing the incidence of poverty among working families. However, although the links between unemployment and poverty are well documented in the poverty research literature, employment growth does

not necessarily lead to an automatic reduction in poverty in a labour market characterised by labour supply flexibility, two earner families and increased part-time work. This paper reviews Australian labour market changes between 1983 and 1989 and uses the poverty line methodology developed by the Poverty Commission to estimate the impact of those changes on poverty. The data used in the analysis are generated by a microsimulation model based on the 1986 Income Distribution Survey. These data are first used to estimate the incidence of poverty in 1982-83, 1985-86 and 1989-90 using poverty lines adjusted in relative and absolute terms. A counterfactual is constructed which simulates family incomes in 1989-90 on the assumption that 1982-83 labour market conditions prevail. Comparisons of this counterfactual with estimates of actual family incomes in 1989-90 indicate that employment growth over the period has had only a modest impact on poverty. This conclusion is shown to hold whether the changes in poverty over the period are measured using a relative or an absolute poverty standard.

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## **THE EXTRA COSTS OF PARTICIPATION IN WORK, EDUCATION OR TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

**Reports and Proceedings No. 86**

**Sara Graham and Clare Stapleton**

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The initial impetus for the study described in this report came from the Department of Social Security and from the Social Security Review's recommendations for reform of that part of the social security system concerned with income support for people of working age who are sick or who have disabilities. The Review's recommendations, contained in Issues Paper No. 5 **Towards Enabling Policies: Income Support for People with Disabilities** (Cass et al., 1988), focus on the development of policies to provide encouragement and support for people with disabilities to realise their potential for employment, education and training and participation in other major activities of adult life.

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# NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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One of the Review's recommendations was for a non-income-tested, non-taxable disability allowance, to be set initially at \$20 per week. This allowance was seen as a recognition of the extra expenditure that participation in community activities can involve.

The purpose of the study was to contribute to discussion of the possible role of such a disability allowance. More specifically, it set out to describe in detail the extra economic costs borne by adults with disabilities when they participate in community activities. It focussed on two kinds of activity: employment, and education and training. It further explored the relationship between level of expenditure, nature and severity of disability and type of activity.

The study was undertaken in the Sydney Metropolitan Area between October 1988 and May 1989, based on 60 interviews of men and women aged between 20 and 50 years. Information was collected by means of a personal interview in the respondent's own home using a structured questionnaire.

The main focus of the study was on the extra direct costs: on actual expenditure on goods and services incurred as a result of participation. Two types of expenditure were distinguished: (i) recurrent, that is, expenditure incurred at regular intervals in the course of the year preceding the interview, and (ii) non-recurrent, that is, expenditure incurred only occasionally since the onset of the disability. Some attention was also paid to indirect costs in the shape of income forgone as a result of disability either by the respondent or the respondent's primary caregiver. Since a good deal of expenditure incurred on account of a disability is in effect a prerequisite to participation in the workforce or in education, the extra expenditure associated with disability more generally was considered.

The sample consisted of 30 people with physical impairments, that is with paralysis or muscular problems, 17 with intellectual impairments, 3 with sensory impairments, 4 with psychiatric illnesses and 6 with a range of other impairments.

At the time of the interview, 35 people were in full- or part-time employment. Thirty-one of these incurred some expenditure in consequence. The range of expenditure was considerable. The lowest figure for recurrent expenditure in the preceding year was \$240, the highest \$4800. Mean recurrent expenditure was \$1481, the median \$1112. The main component was the cost of travel to work. Only 3 members of the sample, 2 of whom were people with sensory

impairments, reported any non-recurrent expenditure connected with work. Although other respondents had work-related needs that would have involved expenditure, these were met by external sources of support: government agencies, employers, colleagues, friends and family.

Twenty-four people in the sample were involved in further education or training programs at the time of the interview. The mean and median recurrent expenditures of these people for the preceding year were \$1616 and \$1224 respectively. The range was \$70 to \$5000. The main component was the cost of the educational or training courses themselves, particularly for those attending Activity Therapy Centres.

Very few people reported non-recurrent expenditure on items connected with education and training. Although recurrent expenditure tended to be somewhat higher for those in education and training than for those at work, mean non-recurrent expenditure was lower. However, the number of cases involving this kind of expenditure is too small to warrant any conclusions.

All but 3 people in the sample had incurred additional recurrent expenditure on account of their disabilities in the year before the interview. The amounts spent ranged from \$1 to \$4255. The mean was \$760. The greatest amounts were spent on private medical insurance (recorded as an item of additional expenditure only if respondents said that they would not have taken out such insurance had it not been for their disability), home care (when the full commercial rate was paid), items needed to manage incontinence and specialists' fees. Although not necessarily the areas where the highest expenditure was incurred, the items and services of most salience to respondents were visits to the GP and medicines, both prescribed and non-prescribed.

Over 60 per cent of the sample had acquired non-recurrent disability-related items since the onset of their disabilities. As before, the range of expenditure was wide: from \$6 to \$108,395, with a mean of \$8676. The largest amounts had been spent on home modifications and mobility aids. The respondents' expenditure, considered alone, was not an accurate indication of need however, because many had received assistance from a variety of other sources, both formal and informal. In particular, a number of respondents, having had their disabilities since childhood, were still living with their parents. In most such cases the parents had already made a considerable financial contribution to the disability-related needs of their offspring.

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## NEW SPRC PUBLICATIONS

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Although actual expenditure was not always a significant factor, a very high proportion of those presently in employment, or in employment at any time since the onset of disability, felt that their earnings, chances of promotion or work-related benefits had been affected by their disabilities. Eighty-six per cent of respondents felt that their earnings or chances of promotion had suffered, and 50 per cent felt that their fringe benefits had been detrimentally affected.

When respondents were highly dependent, the employment of spouses and co-resident parents was also likely to be affected. This was much less likely in cases where the respondent's dependency was moderate or minimal.

The sample was too small to permit generalisation of the findings to the disabled population at large. However, it usefully highlights many of the issues

involved. The range of expenditure was great. It was clear that for some people a disability allowance set at \$20 per week would amount to a substantial recognition of their extra expenditure, whereas for others it would represent no more than a token. The study has drawn attention to the way in which socio-economic circumstances tend to determine how needs are met. It also points to the importance of both formal and informal modes of assistance. It indicates, too, the many non-financial obstacles in the way of people with disabilities who seek to participate in the ordinary life of the community. Disadvantage may sometimes seem to stem from the disability alone, but usually the main constraints on participation arise out of the interaction of the disability with the social and physical environment. For many people, a disability allowance will make an appreciable contribution, but the effective promotion of participation will involve support of many different kinds.

## **Publications Order Form**

### **New SPRC Publications**

The following SPRC publications (summarised on pp. 7 to 12) are now available.

**1989 Diary of Social Legislation and Policy** (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, University of Melbourne; Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW). \$7.95

**SPRC Reports and Proceedings No. 86, Sara Graham and Clare Stapleton, The Extra Costs of Participation in Work, Education or Training for People with Disabilities: An Exploratory Study.** \$8.00

### **Social Policy Research Centre Discussion Papers**

(Only a limited number of Discussion Papers are printed and they are available at no charge on a first-come, first-served basis.)

No.19 Russell Ross and Peter Saunders, **The Labour Supply Behaviour of Single Mothers and Married Mothers in Australia**, July 1990.

No.20 Russell Ross and Peter Whiteford, **Income Poverty Among Aboriginal Families with Children: Estimates from the 1986 Census**, July 1990.

No.21 Peter Saunders and Peter Whiteford, **Compensating Low Income Groups for Indirect Tax Reforms**, August 1990.

No.22 Peter Saunders, **Reflections on the Review of the Home and Community Care Program**, August 1990.

No.23 Peter Saunders and George Matheson, **Sole Parent Families in Australia**, September 1990.

No.24 Bruce Bradbury, **Unemployment, Participation and Family Incomes in the 1980s**, September 1990.

No.25 Peter Saunders, **Employment Growth and Poverty: An Analysis of Australian Experience, 1983-1990**, September 1990.

### **Publications List**

You will notice that a publications list has not been included in this Newsletter and in future it will be available separately. If you wish to receive a copy, please place a tick in the box opposite.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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## SURVEYS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH (SECOND EDITION)

by D. A. de Vaus

Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1990, 343 pp., \$22.95

Reviewed by George Matheson

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If the title led you to expect an epistemological critique of social surveys, or a history of their use and development, then this is probably not the book for you. However, if on the other hand you are seeking the most lucid, readable and comprehensive textbook on the practicalities of conducting social surveys and analysing the results, it would be difficult to go past David de Vaus's *Surveys in Social Research*. This is the second edition of a book which is already well established as a set text for undergraduate courses in research methods. As such, its structure and content reflect those of a typical introductory 'methods' course. We begin with an overview of the theory-research nexus, and proceed to the specification of a research question, the formulation of conceptual constructs and development of indicators for them. Following this, consideration is given to sampling, design of a survey instrument, and techniques of data collection. Then much of the second half of the book offers an in-depth examination of the techniques of analysis available, given the type of data collected and the nature of the problem under investigation: univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis are all explained with admirable clarity, along with useful practical advice on such matters as coding and scale construction. Finally, it is all drawn together in an account of one of de Vaus's own research projects, which is offered as an illustration of the survey research process.

While this book is intended primarily as a textbook for university students, its thoroughness and attention to detail should make it a useful reference work for social researchers generally. How reliable is a sample of 600 likely to be? Refer to chapter 5. What should be included in a covering letter for a mailed questionnaire? Consult the list on pp. 108-109. When might one consider using Deviant Case Analysis? See p. 270. How do you construct an equally weighted scale from dissimilarly coded items? All is explained in chapter 15. In particular, the many 'non-experts' who are called upon to conduct surveys from time to time could

benefit greatly from de Vaus's recommendations on numerous aspects of their task.

Certain characteristics of *Surveys in Social Research* are particularly pleasing. One is the author's approach to the use of statistics, in which the emphasis is placed on the appropriateness of particular techniques and the interpretation of results. Many other methods textbooks devote great tracts to computational formulae for various measures or even extensive mathematical treatments of the logic underlying them, when the primary concern of the student (at least in the introductory course) is making sense of the stream of figures coming out of the computer.

Another positive aspect of the book is de Vaus's insistence on the importance of theory in survey research. He argues, following Marsh (1982), that the criticisms of the survey method as mindless empiricism are criticisms of its misguided application: a good research project is concerned with the testing of propositions derived from theory, and empirical testing of one kind or another is an essential component in the process of theoretical advancement. Similarly, de Vaus draws on Merton (1968) in noting the role of research in adjudicating among the *ex post facto* explanations which different sociological perspectives might offer for a given empirical finding. If anything, perhaps the author might have made more of this side of things, particularly the salience of theoretical perspectives. Certainly, he recognizes that researchers' theoretical commitments influence the questions they choose to investigate and the observations they decide to make. However, surely one of the most intriguing qualities of theoretical perspectives in practice is the way in which virtually any new findings on a subject can be interpreted in a manner consistent with a theorist's existing commitments, whichever school of theorising he or she happens to endorse? For example, how much evidence (and what kind) would be needed to decide once and for all between 'human capital' and 'multivariate Marxist' approaches to income determination? Likewise, any number of competing accounts of the relationship between class background and educational attainment have peacefully(?) coexisted for a good many years, with everyone producing survey results to support their own position. Perhaps the Mertonian ideal of empirical adjudication among perspectives collapses somewhat in the real world of politics and paradigms.

Of course, in the present context, to criticise de Vaus for not going into these issues in detail would be rather unfair. Such an exercise would require a different sort of book from the one which he set out to write. Judged

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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by criteria appropriate to the sort of work it is, *Surveys in Social Research* is a very good book. It covers technical matters in accessible language; it is sufficiently wide-ranging to be of use as a general reference, yet well-structured enough to fulfil its function as an undergraduate text; it offers a balanced coverage of design, data collection and analysis; and it demystifies statistics and other seemingly esoteric devices. David de Vaus wrote this book to fill a major gap in the range of methods texts available. Its popularity to date and the publication of a second edition indicate that he has been successful in attaining this goal, and deservedly so.

## Other Literature Cited

- Marsh, Catherine (1982), *The Survey Method: the contribution of surveys to sociological explanation*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Merton, Robert K. (1968), *Social Theory and Social Structure* (second edition), New York: Free Press.

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## WEDLOCKED? INTERVENTION AND RESEARCH IN MARRIAGE

by David Clark and Douglas Haldane

Distributor: Allen & Unwin, 179 pp., \$29.95

Reviewed by Marilyn McHugh

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The authors state that the title of their book is intended to be more than a play on words.

*At one level wedlock is a relationship involving a pledge or promise, one to the other. With the question mark we seek to relativise this, recognising that pledges may be broken, may change over time and may mean different things to different individuals, particularly between men and women. Wedlock in this sceptical sense conveys issues of freedom or bondage; of being*

*caught in unchanging stasis or being actively held; of acting upon.*

Marriage, problems of marriage and marital relationships are the focus of the book. Many of the ideas in the book were influenced by the authors' experiences as chairman and director of a marital agency, the Scottish Marriage Guidance Council. The authors offer a combined perspective on counselling, training and research into marriage in the United Kingdom.

Clark and Haldane's particular interests lie in the development of organisations which simultaneously undertake work in research, intervention and training. The first section of the book describes the processes and structures in marriage through the life cycle, discussing the ideologies of marriage variation and marital tensions. The authors note that in the United Kingdom (as in Australia)

*... the most visible public outcome of marital unhappiness in our society today is of course mass divorce. There has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of divorces in the United Kingdom since the early 1960s, with figures increasing from 27,000 in 1961, to 162,000 in 1983. In this later year nearly 50 per cent of divorces occurred before the couples tenth wedding anniversary and 20 per cent took place before five years of marriage ... About seven divorces in ten involve children under the age of 16.*

Paradoxically at the same time one marriage in three today is a remarriage for one or other of the partners. Now there is divorce and remarriage on a mass scale. The authors note there is a major cultural shift in public perception of marriage from its institutional dimensions to a preoccupation with its relational character.

*Mass remarriage seems only to be possible in a society which is less concerned with marriage as a legal, moral and religious edifice and more attentive to its place within the spectrum of adult personal relationships.*

The remainder of Section 2 continues to map out major sociological factors which impact upon and intertwine with the experience of marriage through the life cycle. It is a particularly interesting section as it draws together the evidence which points to the many ways in which marriage in our society has become a public issue of major significance. In Section 3 attention is paid to the inner world of marriage and the private reality of men and women in marriage. The authors

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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note the difficulties associated with approaches to marital work. They propose a **model of consultation** which embodies an organisation of concepts, a system of ideas or perceptions which seek to make sense of phenomena and experiences, as a basis for, or guide to action. Their model of consultation is explained in great detail. The model favours a triadic arrangement of couple and practitioner where the practitioner acts as a resource, collaborating with the couple in search of a resolution utilising a range of methods and techniques.

In Section 4 the book examines the history, development and current state of practice, training and research in marital work. The various strengths and weaknesses are described in these areas with the authors noting that resources devoted to any kind of research on marital work in the United Kingdom have been very limited.

One of the major points made by the book is that it details how little we know about the institution of

marriage despite the fact that to many in our culture it has become a near-universal experience of adult life.

*Given its crucial role within a nexus of interlocking beliefs about home, domesticity and parenthood, its importance to the moral guardians of church and state, we might expect greater attention to have been given to it by researchers.*

More is known about 'marital problems' than about marriage more generally. While the book focuses on the situation in the United Kingdom it should attract a wide readership as the situation in Australia, as in so many other industrialised countries is probably very similar. This book is well written, informative and thought provoking. It should prove useful and interesting to those who are concerned with the social aspects of marriage and who seek to understand the state of marriage today and approaches to research and intervention in marriage.

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# NEWS FROM OVERSEAS

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The recently established **Centre for Social Policy Research (ZeS)** at Bremen University has sent us the following information about its organisation.

The Centre is an inter-disciplinary research institute focusing on the welfare state's foundations, its structural change and societal effects. Starting from the problems at the level of social policy the Centre is looking at, among others, problems of policy formation as an answer to structural change in demography, economy and society. The Centre is also studying the effects of these answers on the social policy environments.

The Centre is subdivided into five units:

- theory of the welfare state and its legal constitution (Prof. Dr C. Offe, Prof. Dr U. -K. Preuß)
- institutions and history of the welfare state (Prof. Dr S. Leibfried, Prof. Dr H. -G. Haupt)
- economic analysis of social policy (Prof. Dr W. Schmähl)

- health policy, industrial and social hygiene (Prof. Dr R. Müller)
- gender policy and the welfare state (Prof. Dr I. Ostner).

The Centre and its units started their work in the first half of 1989. Seven professors and about 20 researchers are involved in the research work of the Centre.

The research staff also contributes to the teaching in the different departments of Bremen University. In this way and through graduate studies, a component jointly undertaken with the special research units (Sonderforschungsbereich) 'Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course' of the German National Science Foundation, the Centre is contributing to improved qualification at Bremen University.

The Centre for Social Policy Research is supported by the state of Bremen (the Ministry for Education, Science and the Arts as well as the Ministry for Youth and Social Affairs) and in its startphase (the first five years) through a generous grant from the Volkswagen-Foundation.

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# SEMINARS, CONFERENCES

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## SPRC WORKSHOP ON TAX-BENEFIT MODELS AND MICROSIMULATION METHODS

1 June 1990  
University of New South Wales

by Bruce Bradbury

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With an increasing demand for the analysis of complex social and economic policies, Australian researchers are increasingly turning to the use of various types of simulation methods in order to calculate the impacts of policies on economic 'micro' units such as households. These microsimulations are generally undertaken for two main reasons:

- To combine different data sources to provide more adequate descriptive accounts of the economic situation of households, and how these have changed over time. Microsimulation is necessary because available data sets are either incomplete, unavailable or not timely enough to address the questions of researchers and policy makers.
- To evaluate the impact of hypothetical changes on either the policy, social, or economic environment of households.

Most such simulations have in common a concern with the effects of tax or income support policy changes on the living standards of persons and households, and consequently the development of *tax-benefit models* is a major component of most microsimulation exercises.

As a consequence of the increasing interest in these methods, the SPRC organised a workshop on June 1 to bring together the users of these methods to share common developments, methodologies and difficulties. The participants invited to the workshop included researchers from each of the relevant Australian research institutes and government agencies, as well as representatives from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

In his overview of overseas research, Otto Hellwig distinguished between several different types of microsimulation models. These models can be differentiated by the extent of factors modelled (e.g.

calculating changes in net incomes vs more systematic incorporation of behavioural responses), as well as by the methods used to 'age' data sets to reflect changes over time. *Static ageing* involves the re-weighting of the micro data base in order to reflect the changes in some (small) set of calibration variables over time. *Dynamic ageing* is much more ambitious, and simulates the longitudinal data base that might be obtained by observing individuals over time. Whilst much more complicated, this latter method is significantly more flexible in the relationships that can be incorporated.

The main applications of these models have been for analysing the revenue and distributional implications of tax and transfer policy options, with most applications based on static microsimulation methods (i.e. using static ageing). The main use of dynamic models has been to simulate accumulation processes (e.g. savings behaviour) and to analyse policy impacts over the life cycle.

In comparison to the US and Europe, microsimulation is still in its infancy in Australia. Nonetheless it is clear that a birth has occurred. Phil Gallagher's paper provided an overview of the current state of the art of Australian tax-benefit and microsimulation models. Whilst Australian policy evaluation has long used simple models of revenue projections and of policy impacts on hypothetical families, comprehensive simulations of the impacts of taxes and benefits only began in the mid 1980s. However, in these few years there has clearly been something of a 'growth spurt', with Gallagher now able to identify 22 Australian tax-benefit models (of varying degrees of sophistication) in current or recent use. The 'father' of this growth of activity has undoubtedly been the release by the Australian Bureau of Statistics of unit record tapes from its income and expenditure surveys. The continuing requirement for such data is a point made forcefully by Gallagher, and this was one of the main points of discussion during the workshop.

Gallagher notes that the majority of the tax-benefit and microsimulation models in Australia have been undertaken by the academic or research communities rather than by government departments. One of the main goals of Gallagher's paper was to identify the most appropriate way for the Australian Department of Social Security to develop a more sophisticated modelling system for the evaluation of tax-benefit policy options.

To date, however, the organisation most prominent in microsimulation in Australia has been the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR).

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# SEMINARS, CONFERENCES

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An overview of the research of this institute is given in the paper by Anthony King, Will Foster and Ian Manning. Up until recently, most of their simulation has been based on static ageing models, with an impressively long list of applications since 1985. These include:

- Evaluations of tax-benefit reform options associated with the 1985 Draft White Paper, the election platforms of the major parties in 1987 and the 1987 Family Package, and alternative age pension proposals.
- Estimation of national and Victorian poverty incidences.
- Estimating the changes in disposable incomes between 1982 and 1987.
- Projections of housing affordability.
- Estimating the incidence of state concessions.

As well as briefly describing these applications, the paper also presents an introduction to the current research being undertaken at the Institute on dynamic microsimulation. An illustrative example is presented showing the impact of an expansion of superannuation on age pension coverage. The authors conclude with a summary of the lessons they have learned from the experience of microsimulation at the NIEIR—lessons that should be of relevance to all practitioners (and commissioners) of such research.

Whilst these three papers were essentially surveys, the last two papers of the workshop were addressed to more specific issues. The paper by Bruce Bradbury addressed one of the key practical difficulties in the static ageing of household data bases—how to adjust for the changing labour market status of the population. In particular, he addressed the question of the impact of the significant labour market changes in the Australian economy since 1981 on the level and distribution of family incomes.

The main conclusions of his analysis are that since 1983-84 the increase in wives' participation and the overall decrease in unemployment have had roughly equal impacts in increasing the total disposable incomes of families (though with the effect of unemployment slightly greater). Within each family type, the situation of the very bottom of the income distribution was generally little changed by labour market changes, as most of these people were non-participants over the whole period. The greatest changes in average incomes

were experienced by those deciles with slightly higher incomes. The exception to this however was couples with dependants. The average incomes of the bottom decile of this group were estimated to have fallen by 11 per cent between 1981-82 and 1983-84—mainly as a result of unemployment increases. Because of the consistently low levels of wives' labour force participation when husbands were not employed, only a small proportion of this income loss has been made up in the years since.

The paper concludes with a comparison of these results with that obtained from earlier research by the Social Policy Research Centre. In most (but not all) cases, the new method seems an improvement over the old.

The key results in Bradbury's paper, like most other microsimulation results, are estimates of effects on incomes. For the analysis of winners and losers, it is not always clear that this is the most appropriate measure. Bradbury, for example, points to the problems of interpretation regarding the increased income flowing from increased labour market participation. Whilst incomes may rise, something else is sacrificed (home production or leisure time). Some more general measure of welfare would seem desirable.

An additional limitation of other simulations that simulate tax or transfer changes is that often behavioural changes (for example any change in labour supply with a change in tax rates) are ignored. In the final paper of the workshop, Glenn Jones presented an introduction to the *Reform of the Australian Tax and Social Security System (RATSSS)* project. The key goal of this project is to address these two issues by incorporating the simulations into a model based upon the economic theory of household labour supply, consumption and welfare.

The key point of Jones' paper was that labour supply, consumption and savings should be considered as choice variables, and that different choices are likely to be made under different policy regimes. Since cash incomes (via labour supply) are thus choice variables, it is not correct to simply use cash income as the welfare measure to evaluate different policies. Rather, estimation of welfare impacts requires the systematic incorporation of the 'preference maps' of households. Jones argues that 'a model that implicitly fixes labour supply or restricts the range of elasticity responses is not likely to estimate revenue changes very well, nor is it likely to answer important questions concerning changes in behaviour such as labour force participation or savings behaviour'.

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# SEMINARS, CONFERENCES

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For researchers to go anywhere near realising the potential of this research program, however, will require a large amount of data about the way households respond to policy changes. This question of data availability was also the main topic of discussion during the workshop. Of particular interest to most participants was the question of access to the unit records from future ABS surveys. Access to this (or equivalent) data was generally viewed to be an important requirement for continued microsimulation research in Australia. The weight which is attached to this call for more data must obviously be evaluated in the light of the actual and potential usefulness of tax-benefit models and microsimulation methods. The breadth of applications covered by this workshop suggests that microsimulation methods have already gone a long way towards demonstrating this usefulness.

The papers from this workshop will shortly be available in the SPRC Reports and Proceedings series.

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## LINKING COMMUNITY SUPPORT, RESIDENTIAL CARE AND HOSPITAL SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

The Australian Association of Gerontology  
(NSW Division) Rural Conference,  
6-8 July 1990 in Morpeth, the Hunter Valley

by Michael Fine

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The NSW Rural Conference of the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) was held this year in Morpeth, close to Maitland, in the Hunter Valley. Participants enjoyed a stimulating conference program and the opportunity for close contact with colleagues, old and new, from across the state, in addition to the beautiful and historic environment of Morpeth, the first town established in the Hunter Valley and now for a large part a living exhibition of National Trust properties.

The theme of this year's conference, 'Linking Community Support, Residential Care and Hospital Services for the Elderly', allowed for a wide range of presentations which addressed the development of a new closely, integrated system of services for elderly

people whether they require support at home, in hospital or in nursing homes or hostels. A good many of the papers presented were able to highlight the innovations and achievements of recent years, drawing to attention once again the leading role services in the Hunter Region have shown us for many years. As well, developments elsewhere in the state received attention. One such example was the St George Live at Home Service which employs the comparatively new approach of 'Community Options' to provide individual packets of home support services and which is already operating in a number of other trial locations throughout Australia. One of the favourite themes to emerge at the conference, however, was that of sexuality and ageing, a topic addressed with considerable knowledge, enthusiasm and humour by Dr Margaret Filiptschuk.

The work of the geriatricians and the multi-disciplinary approach to service provision pioneered in the Hunter area has long been recognised as providing a model for the rest of Australia, and it seems clear that this tradition of progressive innovation has been continued. The self-help rehabilitation group, the Continence Advisory Program, and the Health Promotions Work carried out with elderly people with hearing problems also deserve wide recognition. Other developments in service provision in the Hunter, too numerous to detail here, were the subject of a special 'verbal guided tour' workshop held on the Sunday morning. This form of presentation allowed all participants to gain a clear overview of the operation of services in the area.

Of particular note was the leading role that members of the nursing profession have taken to service provision in the region. The model of 'Enablement Nursing' developed by Lee Hughes and others, emphasising the restoration of maximum independence to clients, has given a clear direction and purpose to the provision of long term care by nursing staff. Other developments, such as the education service which provides education to clients, support groups and others who need knowledge to deal effectively with the problems they experience, have also clearly been of considerable significance.

In addition to all this good news, a number of issues of concern were addressed at the conference. The precarious position of specialist geriatric services in public hospitals was given considerable attention, as were the likely difficulties to be faced with the imposition of diagnosis related groups (DRGs) as a major funding mechanism. Many of these concerns were the subject of the Keynote Address given by Dr Kevin Grant, National President of the AAG and were

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# SEMINARS, CONFERENCES

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vigorously debated in the sessions which followed. Further the impact of the Newcastle earthquake on the lives of many aged people and aged care services more generally was discussed. Clearly the long term effects of the disaster which has befallen the city have not received due attention outside of the area.

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## RESPIRE FOR CARERS

Friday, 7 September 1990,  
held in the auditorium of the Sydney Water Board  
by the Carers Association of New South Wales

by Marilyn McHugh

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Over 250 people attended the one day conference. The aim of the conference was to provide a platform for information, exchange and discussion by those who use respite care - carers and those who plan and implement respite care policy - Commonwealth and State Government and other officers such as the Australian Nursing Homes Association. For those unfamiliar with the term respite care, the National Guidelines (1989) for the Home and Community Care Program (HACC) of which carers are a specified target group defines respite care as follows:

*Respite care is a service which assists in supporting existing relationships between frail aged people or people with a disability and their families or unpaid carers. It is an arrangement which provides a short term substitute for usual care. Respite care can be provided on a planned or emergency basis and can be provided in a variety of settings, for example*

- in day facilities;
- in the respite carer's home;
- in the home of the person receiving care;
- at venues used by the general community accompanied by respite support personnel.

The opening address was by Heather McKenzie, international consultant on caring for the aged and disabled. Eleven submissions from a wide variety of groups representing carers, both in metropolitan and

rural settings as well as those from the ethnic community. It is impossible to summarise the needs and concerns of such a wide spectrum of associations and for those who are interested the collector can be obtained from the Carers Association of New South Wales, P O Box 48, Darlinghurst NSW 2010.

The afternoon session commenced with an address by the Hon. Peter Staples, MP, Minister for the Aged, Family and Health Services followed by speakers from other government departments representing Community Service and Health, Family and Community Services, and Health as well as spokespersons for the Australian Nursing Homes Association and Home Care Services of New South Wales. As with the submissions it is difficult in a few words to encompass the state of play between service planning, provision and implementation but it is worthwhile to highlight some of the Minister's points in his address.

- There is now a National Consumer Group for the Aged comprising various consumer groups and representing carers in each state and territory.
- Information for carers is very important. The Minister recently opened three resources centres in Queensland. Information via a 008 number means everyone can access services in Queensland to find out about their specific local community.
- HACC with its emphasis on frail aged and young disabled has not emphasised carers enough. The role and contribution of carers needs recognition not just by governments but in the community in general. This is especially so in relation to carers of those with Alzheimers disease as this condition is predicted to greatly increase within the ageing population.
- In-Home respite care is needed as well as extended hours respite and overnight respite.
- There is a need for more flexibility in respite care to better meet the needs of individuals.
- There is a need for better planning for more adequate distribution of respite care. So far there have been 369 day care centres opened in Australia since the beginning of HACC.
- A mid-term aged review organised by Brian Howe, Minister for Community Services and Health, and Peter Staples, Minister for the Aged, Family and Health Services will consider several



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issues together. They include a review of health services, housing and aged care programs as well as consideration of the Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit which currently provides a payment of \$42 per fortnight for those caring for chronically ill people.

- Issues of planning are important. Planning requires a high degree of consultation between federal and state governments. Attention will be given to this issue when these governments get together to discuss health policies in late October, 1990. Planning used to be based on a submission model. Now programs are moving to a needs based planning model at a local level. Information is required to target programs for specific needs in local areas. The information should be based on statistics about needs and data on who is receiving services.

It was on the whole a very interesting and informative conference with many opportunities for those carers and others in the audience to put their questions to the various government representatives. The Carers Association is to be congratulated for its efforts in bringing together such a wide and diverse range of individuals, from those who use services, those who implement the services and those who make policy for services such as respite care.

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## SOCIOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC AGENDA

Annual Meeting of the American  
Sociological Association  
held 11-15 August 1990, Washington DC

by Sheila Shaver

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The themes for this year's conference, 'Sociology and the Public Agenda', reflected both the location of the conference in the nation's capital and the committed liberalism (in the best American sense) of the organisation's 1990 president, William Julius Wilson. A black sociologist from the University of Chicago, Wilson set off the debate about the existence, character and formative causes of America's largely black

'underclass'. Eminent sociologists were invited to speak in nineteen thematic sessions over the five days.

Familiar social policy topics such as education, child welfare, drugs, race relations, poverty, inequality were foregrounded. But the theme asked sociology to examine itself as much as public policy, and special sessions also focused on the social construction of the public agenda, canvassing issues such as political participation, religion in politics, the roles of the intellectuals and social theories of citizenship. Interestingly, women and the politics of gender got no official place.

The American Sociological Association (ASA) is also the chief organisation of the discipline in a country where sociology has a larger and better accepted presence than in Australia. The national meeting features papers in every field of the discipline. Many of these also were relevant to social policy. There are, among others, special sections of the ASA concerned with ageing, urban and community studies, criminology, sociology of the family, racial and ethnic minorities, sex and gender and the applied practice of sociology.

In all, some 1,000 papers were presented in over 300 sessions. Any selection from all this necessarily is partial, a matter of individual interests, stamina and the contingencies of scheduling. My own program was eclectic and probably idiosyncratic.

So where is American social policy debate today? One answer follows from the strong empirical tradition in American sociology. Much of this work is quantitative, but historical and ethnographic methodologies are also strongly represented. Many papers reported the results of research measuring, analysing and evaluating social problems, partial forces and policy initiatives.

I heard, for example, that public opinion continues to support social security for the aged despite political campaigning about what are said to be unnecessarily high rates of contributory taxation. High rates of poverty continue among single elderly women, however, reflecting their more total dependence on it in a system assuming supplementary income from private pensions.

There were many reports on the dimensions of the 'underclass', dealing with urban structure, poverty, unemployment and industrial decline, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and female-headed family structure. The 'underclass' term has been the object of widespread criticism, most centrally for implying that

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the plight of the poor is a consequence of their own pathological behaviour. I heard little of this voiced at the Conference, perhaps because the argument has already gone on for some time. Wilson himself spoke of these debates in his Presidential address, when he indicated he was willing to abandon the term if it distracted from political concern with the structural causes of American poverty in changing industrial and urban structure. He did not seem to resile from the argument itself.

American debate is more concerned than in the past with the politics of social policy and with explaining processes of policy reform and the expansion and contraction of the welfare state. These questions were discussed at the conference in a number of ways. One is historical. There was a very lively discussion of the New Left and the legacy of the 1960s featuring a number of the key players of the period. This session did not produce anything new, but it was impressive to see the commitment that remains a generation later, for better and for worse.

More academically, historical research on War on Poverty of the same period is showing the key role of America's regional political economy in social policy. As with social security in the 1930s, the South's control over the national Democratic machine enabled it to limit effective reforms opening economic and political opportunity to black Americans. We could usefully bring some of this complexity into the history of Australian social policy, where we have tended to treat federal and state levels largely separately.

American interest in the politics of social policy was shown in a revival of interest in T. H. Marshall's thesis arguing that the entitlements of the welfare state represent an extension of the rights of citizenship. Marshall saw the civil and political rights gained in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as leading to the 'social right' to a minimum standard of living in the twentieth. A British (and Australian) revival has been underway for some while, though perhaps too much energy has been spent arguing about what Marshall meant and too little in putting the ideas to work for ourselves. American sociologists seem willing to handle the concept more freely. A most interesting comparative analysis of French and German citizenship linked to the legal status of racial and ethnic groups with the character of postcolonial nationhood.

Finally, the politics of social policy were discussed in two sessions where the 'Author Meets the Critics'. These are live book reviews, and the ones I attended retained impressive dignity given the possibilities of

such an occasion. One examined David T. Ellwood's *Poor Support*. This is a liberal critique of American welfare provision arguing for reforms both to raise levels of support for the poor and to develop strategies for increasing their labour force participation. The issues are familiar enough. The book was reviewed by speakers from both right and left. While the critics had much to say, there was remarkable agreement in their acceptance of Ellwood's basic agenda for reform.

Critics of the late Michael Harrington's *Socialism: Past and Future* were less diverse. Friends and longtime political associates, they share his anger about poverty (Harrington was the author of *The Other America*), corporate greed and the failures of the Democratic party. They have shared, too, his vision of a more just America. But all found his last book disappointing, expressing too sanguine a faith with too little consideration of how such visions need to be rethought in the changing circumstances of the present period. Their forthright criticism was itself a tribute to Harrington, who above all wanted his ideas taken seriously.

The discussion of Australian social policy has drawn largely from British and more lately European sources. We have, perhaps until recently, found little in common with American debates. The view from the ASA clearly suggests otherwise now.

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## SPRC SOLE PARENTS AND PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCE.

Thursday, 30th August 1990  
YWCA

by Jennifer Doyle

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The conference was attended by people from government, university, welfare groups and service provider backgrounds. The conference was officially opened by Mr Con Sciacca, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Security, who also launched the study *Who Pays for the Children?*, an evaluation of Stage One of the Child Support Scheme by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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A range of papers were presented at the Conference. Jane Millar, who was visiting the SPRC from the University of Bath, gave her paper on **Lone Parents in the United Kingdom, Policy Choices and Constraints**, which reported on the results of a survey for which she and Professor Jonathan Bradshaw have been responsible. Jane focused on the relationship between family responsibilities and paid employment, on the introduction of the new child support scheme in the UK (a scheme in some ways similar to the Australian scheme) and on how lone parents perceive their situation. Participants raised a number of issues during the discussion including the treatment of income for social security purposes under the current system and under the new child support system and its likely impact on constraining people's choices, the availability of programs to help overcome barriers to labour force participation, and the cost of child care. The importance of conditions of employment and hours of work as major factors influencing the employment of lone parents were also discussed.

Russell Ross presented the results of an analysis by himself and Peter Saunders at the SPRC on **The Labour Supply Behaviour of Single Mothers and Married Mothers in Australia**, using data from the 1985-86 Income Survey. Data was presented which suggested that although sole parents respond to labour market signals in the same way as married mothers, different patterns of labour force participation could be explained primarily by the presence of a pre-school child. Discussion focused on differences between unemployment rates of sole parents and married mothers and the effect of non-family characteristics which would also influence labour force participation.

Maureen Colledge of the Department of Social Security presented a review paper on **Workforce Barriers for Sole Mothers in Australia**, which is work being undertaken for the OECD. Age of mother and child, educational qualifications, job experience and skills, public income support and concessions, child support, child care, labour market conditions, occupational segregation and wages, and geographical location were identified as factors influencing participation in the workforce. During the discussion attention also focused on class issues and their relationship both to receipt of maintenance and to labour force participation.

Cathy Walters, also of the Department of Social Security in Canberra presented the results to date of the Department's evaluation of **The JET Program**. Following a description of the involvement and roles of DSS, DEET and DCSH and the identification of particular sole parent groups being targeted, Cathy

presented an evaluation of the JET program in terms of its accessibility, the interest it has generated, the numbers using it and, importantly, who was using it. Discussion largely centred on the fact that while JET could claim a high level of interest, a good proportion of those utilising the JET program were outside the target groups.

Bettina Cass, Marie Wilkinson and Ann Webb of the Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Sydney, presented the results of a study they have undertaken for the Office of Multicultural Affairs on **Sole Parents of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds: Opportunities for and Barriers to Labour Force Participation**. This paper focused on the high unemployment rates experienced by sole parent migrant women, their disadvantages in the labour market and their particular economic and social vulnerabilities. Health problems, access to social services and language barriers were but a few of the factors mentioned as contributing to this process. Further issues were raised during the discussion such as the prevalence of outwork, piecework payment and economic and social isolation. The importance of language courses and training as one means of enhancing the labour market participation of sole parent migrants was emphasised.

Finally, Margaret Harrison of the Australian Institute of Family Studies presented some results from the Institute's **Evaluation of the Child Support Scheme, Stage 1**. Although the Scheme has only been in operation since mid-1988, data were presented which described the experiences of custodial and non-custodial parents registered with the Child Support Agency and their attitudes towards the new system. Much of the discussion focused on the concerns of parents and the difficulties they encountered during the establishment of the scheme.

The proceedings of the conference will be published by the Social Policy Research Centre in the near future.

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