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THE IMPACT OF YOUNG MOTHERHOOD

BY BRUCE BRADBURY

Young mothers, and by extension their children, are one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups in Australian society. Around 9 in 10 teenage mothers are receiving income support payments, and they go on to have much lower family incomes in middle age.

Are these patterns a direct impact of having their first child when young, or does it simply reflect the fact that fertility patterns are heavily influenced by social backgrounds? The SPRC is currently completing two projects for the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs examining the situation of young mothers in Australia.

CHARACTERISTICS

Two definitions of 'young mother' have been used in this research. The most common definition used in previous research is 'teenage mothers', women who have their first childbirth when a teenager. However, women who have their first child in their early 20s are also socio-economically disadvantaged, and so those who have their first childbirth when aged 20 to 24 are also considered.

Teenage motherhood has become less prevalent in Australia since the early 1970s and is now relatively low compared to other English-speaking countries (but higher than most other non-English speaking OECD countries)

(UNICEF, 2001). Nonetheless, there are still over 11,000 births to teenage mothers per annum in Australia, together with 39,000 births to women aged 20 to 24.

In 2003, almost 9 in 10 of teenage mothers and around 7 in 10 mothers aged 20 to 24 were receiving income support payments, compared to only about a third of mothers aged 35 to 39 (see figure). Lone parent payments were the main income support payment received, though 16 per cent of teenage mothers were receiving partner payments. Interestingly, long-term patterns of income support seem to be much the same irrespective of whether the teenage mother was partnered.

Continued on page 4



Bruce Bradbury

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LEAD ARTICLE:
 Bruce Bradbury discusses the impact of being a young mother on women's later socio-economic outcomes.

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STAFF AND VISITOR UPDATE

DEPARTURES:

SAM EVERINGHAM has left the SPRC to take up a position of Research Manager at the Medical Benefits Fund.

INGRID WILKENS has concluded her time at the SPRC and returned to Germany.

ARRIVAL:

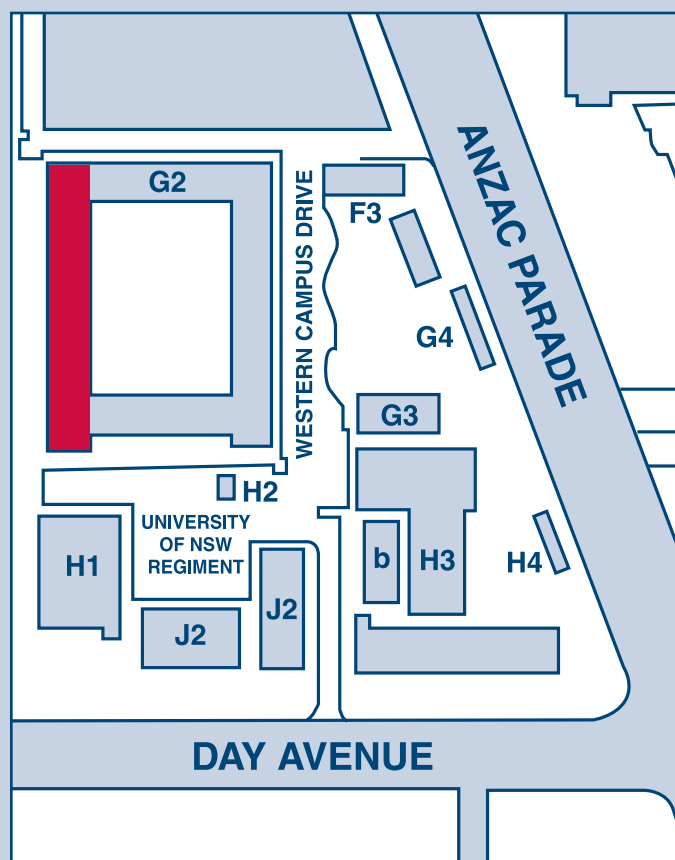
RICHARD BROOKS has joined the SPRC as Office Manager. Before joining the Centre, Richard was a Development Executive for a TV production company, overseeing a team of creative researchers creating ideas for new TV programs. He is also a trained journalist and dancer.

TONY EARDLEY has returned from long service leave.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Congratulations to DENISE THOMPSON who is now a fixed term employee of SPRC.

Congratulations to XIAOYUAN SHANG who has been promoted to Senior Research Fellow.



The Social Policy Research Centre is located at G2 on the Western Side of Anzac Parade, Kensington Campus, enter via Day Avenue.

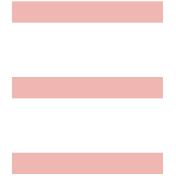
THE SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

The Social Policy Research Centre is located in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales. Under its original name, the Social Welfare Research Centre was established in January 1980, changing its name to the Social Policy Research Centre in 1990. The SPRC conducts research and fosters discussion on all aspects of social policy in Australia, as well as supporting PhD study in these areas. The Centre's research is funded by governments at both Commonwealth and State levels, by academic grant bodies and by non-governmental agencies. Our main topics of inquiry are: economic and social inequality; poverty, social exclusion and income support; employment, unemployment and labour market policies and programs; families, children, people with disabilities and older people; community needs, problems and services; evaluation of health and community service policies and programs; and comparative social policy and welfare state studies.

The views expressed in this Newsletter, as in any of the Centre's publications, do not represent any official position of the Centre. The SPRC 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.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY ILAN KATZ



I was recently struck by an article I read online about a debate currently raging in the world of physics. The holy grail of physics is the discovery of a 'grand' theory which will explain all the forces in the universe. The present orthodoxy is that the best candidate for this is 'superstring' theory, which, incidentally, predicts that the world has 10 space-time dimensions. But there is a powerful dissenting view which challenges this tenet. Its most famous exponent is Peter Woit, a mathematician at Columbia University, who has written extensively in the scientific and popular press challenging this theory.

This debate has absolutely no relevance to social policy or social research, but the reason I was so taken with it was that I realised that the world of social research is more or less devoid of intense debates such as these. There are two kinds of issues which are debated in the social sciences at present - ideological debates (left right) and methodological debates (quantitative v qualitative). Although these are different, they are, of course, interrelated - with qualitative researchers tending to be from the 'left' because they adhere to a constructivist rather than positivist epistemology, and vice versa. This sort of argument reached its apotheosis in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the heyday of post-modernism, but now has a rather old fashioned feel (partly because post-modernism, despite its roots in feminism and psychoanalysis, turned out to be deeply conservative in its own right).

Many of these debates have not really been resolved, but the battle is seldom joined between the different camps. The differences are dealt with in two ways; either the two sides totally ignore each other and live in parallel realities - writing in different journals,

attending different conferences and belonging to different academic bodies - or alternatively they collaborate on projects which combine methods or cross disciplines. These collaborations often develop a sort of synthetic quality in which the different disciplines or orientations work together on a superficial level, but do not really engage with each other on fundamental issues. Another favourite of social researchers and policy makers is to create 'straw men' to do battle with, who represent a point of view that nobody actually holds. I have been to countless conferences in which the presenter advocates early intervention against a supposed adversary who presumably believes that there should be no early years services for children. I have never met such a person, nor read any publication which attacks early intervention, but that does not stop the advocates from attacking those people. Similarly I have not met anyone who believes that policy and practice should not be 'evidence based', nor have I met anyone who advocates longer working hours and less time with children.

It seems a pity that real debate in the social sciences is mostly confined to the margins. The lack of real argument in the social sciences is beginning to have serious deleterious effects on the nature and quality of the social research. Consensus and collaboration are good, but the uneasy consensus which arises from people basically ignoring each others' views is not beneficial for the development of theory or methods.

I think that we need debates like the superstring arguments in the social sciences; arguments which are not about ideology, nor about methodology, but are actually about the nature of social reality. Some candidates for these debates

have surfaced in recent SPRC seminars and conferences, including the excellent SPRC seminar given by Professor Fiona Williams on caring and values, and the SPRC time use seminar this June which was co-hosted with the Office for Women.

Perhaps the most important of these issues is the question of individual agency v social constraint in relation to lifestyle choice. This debate is as old as philosophy itself, and certainly has been played out between sociology and psychology for over a century. But this is also a very modern question, and fundamental to the development of social policy and social research. Like the other debates this one also has had ideological adherents - the 'right' has argued for individual moral responsibility and choice (both that this is how people operate in the world and also that social policy should encourage individual as opposed to collective action) and the 'left' has tended to argue that social and political systems shape behaviour, so that what seem to be individual 'choices' are actually the result of social forces being played out. In the time use context the choices relate to women having children, returning to the labour market after childbirth and spending more or less time on domestic duties as opposed to paid work.

It turns out that the old individualist/society arguments are now not as straightforward as they previously were. Professor Williams argued strongly for reclamation of moral agency for individuals, on the grounds that viewing people's choices merely as functions of social forces is ultimately self defeating and dehumanising - it means that it is pointless for people to try to change their lives or society. Moral agency is what makes us human after all.

Continued on page 15



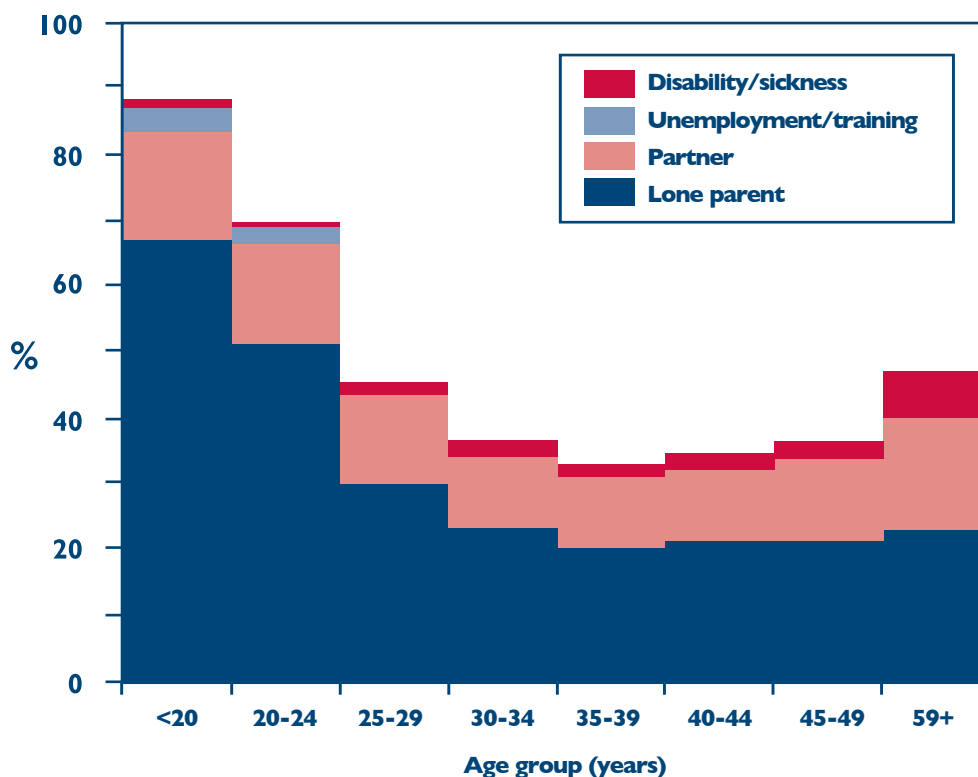
Ilan Katz

THE IMPACT OF YOUNG MOTHERHOOD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Proportion of Family Tax Benefit Recipient Mothers Receiving Income Support by Age

“Almost 9 in 10 of teenage mothers receive income support payments”



Note: Population: Mothers receiving family tax benefit in March 2003. About three quarters of mothers with children aged under 16 receive Family Tax Benefit. For young mothers (who have lower incomes) the proportion receiving Family Tax Benefit is probably much closer to 100 per cent.

Source: FaCSIA 1% Longitudinal Data Set.

“If the selection effect is important but the direct effect is not, then discouraging early childbirth will have little impact on the non-fertility outcomes of mothers.”

Young mothers have lower levels of education, are more likely to live in rural or socially disadvantaged urban areas and are more likely to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. Compared to women who described their religion as ‘no religion’, those with a religion of Buddhism, Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Uniting Church had lower odds of being a mother when aged under 25, while Islamic women had a higher likelihood.

Census data suggests that women who have their first birth when young continue to be socio-economically disadvantaged when in their early 30s. Among the partnered women who had their first child in their early 30s (ie

recently had their first child), 95 per cent had employed husbands. Among those with a teenage birth, only 78 per cent had employed husbands. This leads to corresponding differences in the husband's (and family) income. Only 10 per cent of men with a recent first child had incomes below \$400 per week, compared to almost 30 per cent among men with teenage first-birth partners.

These income differences are compounded by the fact that women starting their families when young generally end up having more children over their lifetime. The additional costs of raising more children also lowers their standard of living. These additional costs are

not addressed in this study. (From the mother's perspective, one might argue that these are usually not relevant, as she has chosen her family size. They might, on the other hand, be relevant to outcomes for children - an issue being addressed in current SPRC research).

These associations between socio-economic characteristics at age 30 and age at first birth appear to have become stronger over the past two decades. In particular, the gap in husband's income between teenage mothers and all mothers was substantially greater in 2001 than in 1981. This may reflect the increasing importance of labour market participation for middle-class women.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are two types of explanation for the strong associations between early childbirth and poor socio-economic outcomes. First, early childbearing may have a *direct effect* on outcomes. For example, schooling and higher education may be disrupted, as may entry into the labour market.

Second, these associations may arise as a result from *selection effect*. Women from a disadvantaged background may be more likely to have their children when young and also be more likely to be disadvantaged later. This link could exist either because young women with poor labour market prospects may rationally decide that becoming a mother is their best pathway to adult status and/or because these women may not have the knowledge or the ability to control their fertility. For example, termination services may be difficult to access in rural areas. The policy implications of these direct and selection effects are quite different.

There are three broad categories of policy intervention that could be used to improve the poor socio-economic outcomes of young mothers.

- Introducing measures to reduce young fertility, eg. changing financial incentives, sex education (of both young men and women), and increasing access to contraception and termination services in rural and other disadvantaged areas.

- Providing additional support to women who do have their children when young, eg. income support, parenting training and specialised child care services.

- Providing additional support to women who are likely to have their child when young. That is, increasing the opportunities for all

disadvantaged young women.

If the selection effect is important but the direct effect is not, then discouraging early childbirth will have little impact on the non-fertility outcomes of mothers. It will simply lead to women having their children a bit later but with their socio-economic outcomes unchanged (though it will change the life course timing of the costs associated with children, and might ultimately reduce the total number of children that disadvantaged women have). In this case, young motherhood can be seen as an effective means of identifying the most disadvantaged young women, and can be used to target assistance to this group.

On the other hand, if the direct effect is important, then providing this additional support to young mothers may actually lead to worse outcomes because it might encourage more women to have their children when young. In this case we might want to focus resources on the first and third options - discouragement and general support to all disadvantaged women.

IDENTIFYING THE DIRECT EFFECT OF YOUNG MOTHERHOOD


To disentangle the different causal mechanisms, it is useful to consider the two levels at which selection effects might work. The first level is pregnancy. Are young women and men likely to engage in sexual behaviour that is likely to lead to pregnancy? The second is termination. Are pregnant young women more likely to continue with the pregnancy or to have an abortion? Both levels of decision-making depend upon personal and family attitudes as well as the availability of contraception and termination services.

Selection on the basis of characteristics that are associated with socio-economic outcomes is possible at both stages. If selection effects predominate we would expect to find that socio-economic outcomes will be best among women who do not become pregnant at all, followed by women who become pregnant but have a termination, then by women who actually have a child when young. Miscarriages will occur among both women who plan to have a termination and women who do not, and so women with miscarriages will lie between the last two groups. On the other hand, if the direct effect of young childbirth is the most important effect then we would expect the main difference to lie between women who do and do not have a child when young.

To investigate these issues, the SPRC has used data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH). The younger cohort of this study comprises women who were aged 18-23 years old in 1996. The same women were surveyed again in 2000 and in 2003. The first wave survey collected information on the number of times that the respondent had been pregnant, had a miscarriage, a termination or given birth to a child. The 2003 survey, when the women were aged 25 to 30, collected information on a number of socio-economic outcome variables such as household composition, location (postcode), education, employment, occupation, individual and household income and housing tenure.

For the most part, the pattern of outcomes that we find most closely matches that expected on the basis of the selection effect hypothesis. Outcomes are better the 'further' the woman is from having a child prior to wave 1 of the ALSWH

"...we find no evidence for an impact of young childbirth on education, labour market, own or couple income or locational outcomes... On the other hand, we do find that young motherhood has an impact on partnering outcomes."



survey. Possible exceptions where there is some evidence of a direct effect are in patterns of partnering and in low levels of education, where there is some evidence that young births may lead to non-completion of year 10.

A more formal test of the direct effect hypothesis is to compare women who do have a child with a similar group of women who were pregnant in the same age window but who had a miscarriage. Because miscarriage is largely random with respect to socio-economic characteristics (after we control for smoking) this provides a powerful tool for the identification of a direct effect. (Some of the women who had a miscarriage would have gone on to have an abortion rather than a birth. The statistical technique of 'instrumental variables' is used to take account of this).

These techniques have recently been employed by researchers in the US and the UK. The US researchers found that becoming a mother at a young age actually increased the later earnings of mothers - compared to what they would have been if they had not become pregnant. They speculated that this was due to a less interrupted employment career for women who get their childrearing 'over and done'. Conceivably the older ages of their children (and hence greater expenditure needs) might also be a factor. The UK researchers, on the other hand, found little direct impact on mothers' education and employment outcomes. They did find, however, a significant impact upon the mothers' success in the 'marriage market'. That is, women who were teenage mothers are more likely to have unemployed or low-income husbands at age 30.

Applying similar methods using the ALSWH data, we find no

evidence for an impact of young childbirth on education, labour market, own or couple income or locational outcomes (the education result described above is found to be spurious). On the other hand, we do find that young motherhood has an impact on partnering outcomes. Being a young mother reduces the likelihood of being legally (rather than defacto) married when aged in the late 20s. Also, having a child in the early rather than late 20s leads to a greater likelihood of being a lone parent at around age 30. These are direct effects, controlling for all the (unobserved) socio-economic background differences between women who do and do not become young mothers.

CONCLUSION

Being a young mother is strongly associated with poorer socio-economic outcomes in later life. However, our research suggests that, for economic outcomes at least, this is primarily a selection effect. Women with characteristics that mean they are less likely to do well in education or the labour market are more likely to undertake (or be subjected to) behaviour that might lead to pregnancy and less likely to have a termination if they do get pregnant. The reasons for this arise from their capabilities, their preferences and the opportunities available to them.

To the extent to which this selection effect is the main reason for poor later life outcomes of young mothers, it makes most sense to provide assistance to help them rather than to expend resources to discourage them from having children. Even if they had delayed having children, the comparison with women who had miscarriages suggests that they would have had similar education

and labour market outcomes.

Nonetheless, the analysis here did find some evidence of direct impacts of young childbirth on partnering outcomes. These results may reflect the fact that young motherhood reduces the likelihood of being in a relationship with the father of their child - because the relationships existing in the late 20s are more likely to have been formed after the first childbirth. If this is the case, it might have implications for child outcomes.

The most obvious extension to the work discussed here would thus be a reanalysis when future waves of the ALSWH are undertaken. For many of the outcomes (eg. labour market status) wave 3 is still too early to identify long-term impacts. Another extension would be the use of subsidiary data sources to try to identify the extent of non-reporting of miscarriages and terminations and the impact of these on the estimated results.

Finally, it might be possible to use a similar approach to examine the characteristics of the children of young mothers. That is, one might compare the outcomes of children whose mother had previously miscarried at a particular age with the outcomes of children who were born at this age. No existing Australian dataset contains sufficient information on both children and mothers, but it might be possible to collect this by supplementing one of the existing longitudinal surveys.

REFERENCES

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SUPPORTING THE HIV/AIDS INFECTED AND AFFECTED CHILDREN IN CHINA

BY XIAOYUAN SHANG

AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

This research was conducted in September 2005 in four areas of China for UNICEF. It focussed on the needs of HIV/AIDS infected and affected (HAIA) children and the remedies needed to overcome the associated problems for these children and their families. There are over 2,200 persons infected with HIV/AIDS, and 1555 HAIA children in these areas. The survey reveals that the four localities have the highest registered HIV infection rates and the lowest national GDP and public expenditures in China. This means that there are limited government resources available to provide social support.

The research sites can be divided into two types of areas where the spread of HIV/AIDS followed different channels. In two of the four areas, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS is due to the blood-selling practice. In 1990 peasants first started to sell blood, with the sales peaking in 1995. In 1998 the selling of blood was made illegal. The blood-selling practice lasted for nine years. Other two areas are located in known drug trafficking areas, where intravenous drug use is a comparatively serious social issue. The sharing of needles by heroin users is a major cause of HIV/AIDS infection. From 1990 heroin addiction became a significant problem, which led to authorities implementing a campaign in 2000 to curb its use and spread.

THE HIV/AIDS ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

Social exclusion

The survey found that HIV/AIDS has a devastating effect on both the economy of the family household

and its social capital. This negative socio-economic effect is due not only to HIV/AIDS but is also caused by the social discrimination and exclusion experienced by sufferers, with the result that HIV/AIDS infection is also a cause of poverty.

Isolated communities are found in the areas where blood-selling was the main cause of HIV/AIDS spread. When some people in a community are found to be contaminated then that whole community was ostracised by other communities. In the two research sites, HIV/AIDS infected households and communities have suffered economic and social ostracism. For the past two or three years farm produce from these communities, such as pigs, vegetables and grains, have been boycotted by other areas because of their fear of contamination (Interviews 2005). This type of economic discrimination is disastrous for the whole community because the affected people cannot sell any of the agricultural produce, which is essential to their livelihood. As well as this, these areas have also been cut off socially as those who live in the affected areas are generally not welcome outside their own region.

In recent years because of the government's hard work in educating the population, the peak of the infection and panic has passed and the situation is improving. However, there is still a long way to go for the society to pass the crisis.

In the area where the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus is through drug injection, because HIV/AIDS infection is not restricted to any one area but has a more general distribution through individuals, specific areas do not suffer from

social discrimination. It is the drug users and their family members who are excluded.

Weakened family networks

In the two types of areas, there are differences among the HAIA populations in terms of their distribution, economic conditions, the degree to which family and kinship networks have been destroyed, and the social support from the government.


In the regions where the spread of HIV/AIDS is caused by blood-selling practices, the blood-selling practice has been recommended to or followed by relatives within the same nuclear or extended family, a wider kinship network, or people in the same communities (villages). Because of this, HIV/AIDS infection happened intensively in certain nuclear or extended families and some communities. The capacity to provide social support to orphaned children, traditionally assumed by extended families, was seriously weakened in these communities. Facing the problems caused by HIV/AIDS infection, the family network disintegrates and as the problem expands there is significant damage to family support networks.

ECONOMIC AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES FACING HAIA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Other people and children are the major casualties of the destruction of the family and the economy by HIV/AIDS. This is because the majority of HIV/AIDS sufferers are in their economically productive years and the loss of income over a lifetime due to either death or disability directly affects the vulnerable family household



Xiaoyuan Shang



members, that is the older people and children. They have lost both income earners and care givers. Children suffer not only economically but also in terms of their mental and physical development from the effects of HIV/AIDS. The family household's economic capacity is significantly reduced while the cost of ongoing care is increased, thus resulting in high levels of household debt. This causes a deep sense of helplessness and depression and often leads to a sharp decline in a family household's social status. The affected children also suffer social exclusion and loss of their formal social communication.

EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS FACING CHILDREN

Often, parents and family members can no longer afford to send their children to school owing to the costs associated with medical treatment and the lack of adequate income support. This lack of sufficient support from government and the community has led to

declining trust and increasing despair among infected villagers and their families.

EFFORTS OF GOVERNMENTS

In the investigated areas, extended family networks have responded to the problem and provided support and protection to orphans. But this support is now being undermined by the effects of HIV/AIDS. The extended family of children affected by HIV/AIDS can only offer limited support and protection.

In all surveyed areas, governments have acted to respond to the challenge of the spread of HIV/AIDS, in a number of ways. The government provide free treatment to HIV/AIDS patients. In one of the four areas, the government also provides living allowance to HAIA families and children.

The roles played by local governments are different. In some areas, local governments play a role of main financial helper and service provider of welfare provision. However, in most areas, the role of

local government is only as an organiser, that is, the government organises local businesses to play a major role in funding the services.

CONCLUSION

The devastating consequences of HIV/AIDS go beyond the family and peasant village society. They even go beyond the strength of local governments to stop the suffering caused by this catastrophe. The spread of HIV/AIDS is also emerging as a national menace for the future. Therefore, China must marshal its vast resources to combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS on families and children. The central government must play a leading role in providing health care and social supports to HAIA children and their families. The family and extended family along with traditional community organisations must be encouraged. The government needs to develop new models of organisations, including encouraging involvement of business society and non-government organisations.

CONGRATULATIONS TO DR XIAOYUAN SHANG

We congratulate Dr Xiaoyuan Shang on her recent promotion to Senior Research Fellow. Dr Shang joined the SPRC on a post-doctoral fellowship in October 2000. Since then Xiaoyuan's research has focused on the welfare of orphaned children and ageing in China. She has established partnerships with international organisations, Chinese government agencies and Chinese universities and research institutes. These partnerships have contributed to the Australia Research Council funded research undertaken by Dr Shang and Professor Peter Saunders in China.

BUILDING BRIDGES OR RESEARCHER/POLICYMAKER CONVERSATIONS?



Review of Peter Saunders and James Walter (eds) (2005), *Ideas and Influence: Social Science and Public Policy in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney. Available from UNSW Press \$39.95

BETTINA CASS
PROFESSORIAL FELLOW

The contribution made by social science research to public policymaking has been a subject of inquiry for many decades. In Australia public inquiries on various key issues (which have to varying extents been informed by the ideas of social scientists) can be identified since the colonial period (eg. 'expert' advice on Aboriginal people which informed Indigenous policies (Altman et al., 2005: 159-78). From the first decade of the 20th century expert advice was sought on issues such as pensions policy, or the perennial question of the decline of the birthrate; and the involvement of social scientists in policymaking was specially strong in the period of Post War Reconstruction and the post-Keynesian period (Smyth, 1994). The latter period was characterised by a belief in the value of state financed and controlled public investment in social and economic policy, when the term 'the policy sciences' was coined to denote the close relationship between the research community and the policy community in the joint endeavour of systematic planning. In the current period, however, which John Quiggin, (in this collection) sees as shaped by the 'shift from social democracy towards economic liberalism', evident from the mid 1970s (Quiggin, 2005: 21-43), when central planning and provision became a discredited principle in social and economic policy, the relationship between social science research and policymakers has become a much more contested and uneasy one.

This significant, informative collection of papers emanates from an original proposal made by John Nieuwenhuseyn, Director of the Institute for the Study of Global Movements at Monash University, who gained the interest of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia to assist a group of leading social scientists to investigate the contribution of social science to Australian public policymaking. The holding of several workshops on the theme of the interactive (or blocked) pathways between social science research and public policymaking enabled the editors and contributors to produce a book whose insightful papers hold together within a central, coherent framework. With respect to the contemporary contested, uneasy 'scholarship/policy interface', co-editors Peter Saunders and James Walter set the scene productively by identifying what they call 'entry points' which social scientists may use to influence policy, drawing on the metaphor of *building bridges* (Saunders and Walter 2005: 1-20).

INFLUENCING PROFESSIONAL OPINION

The first approach involves the *influencing of professional opinion*, through dissemination of research in scholarly peer-reviewed journals and other such modes of communication which may enable new ideas, concepts, theories and evidence to enter the terrain in which the contested interests of policymakers are played out. Here social science knowledge may help

to shape the policy debate by 'framing the problem' and influencing the discourse and ideas which surround it - which may be a long-term strategy. However, influencing actual policymaking depends upon the extent to which the ideas and evidence produced coincide with the interests of policymakers - the domain of politics.

INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION

The second approach involves *influencing public opinion*, through the wider media dissemination of research, a strategy that may provide policy advocates and social movement activists with ideas and evidence to support their campaigns to influence public policy. Relevant examples in Australia include the interactions between research on family and children's poverty, anti-poverty campaigns by NGO welfare organisations and peak bodies such as ACOSS, and various forms of Federal government response (Saunders; 2005, NATSEM and The Smith Family, 2000). Further significant examples are provided in Chilla Bulbeck's paper in this collection, identifying examples of gender policies which have drawn upon research, often produced by feminist social scientists, which have had widespread media dissemination and generated public interest (eg. issues of pay equity, domestic violence, maternity payments and child care), (Bulbeck, 2005: 141-58). However, actual policymaking has depended



Bettina Cass

"The implication for social scientists is that theory, as much as project findings, is a significant component of the research endeavour and the research/public policy interface."

upon the intermediation of gender policy offices at Federal and State levels, through what might be called a three way process of *policy conversations* involving social science researchers, public opinion mobilised by advocates, and policymakers whose interests coincide with the ideas and evidence produced, and who themselves often play a part in the production of knowledge.

ENGAGING WITH POLICY PRACTITIONERS

The third approach involves social scientists *influencing policy opinion directly* by engaging with policy practitioners in ways that affect their thinking and ideas. In this vein, Brian Head's paper on 'Governance' (in this collection) traverses the institutional arrangements for debating, considering, deciding, prioritising, resourcing, implementing and evaluating public policy, and concludes with the salient observation about the 'knowledge/power/practice triangle':

'A learning orientation is essential - for policymakers, program delivery practitioners, stakeholders and researchers. This is more likely to occur if at least some of the learning processes are mutually constructed and experienced'. (Head, 2005: 44-63).

I take this to entail a development of the metaphor of *building bridges* between researchers, policymakers and practitioners, to invoke the metaphor of mutual engagement in *researcher/policymaker conversations*. This is exemplified in the paper in this collection by Barbara Pocock, who writes of 'transmission mechanisms for research' in which social scientists take the initiative in engaging with policymakers (Pocock, 2005; 123-40), and also demonstrated in the instructive public policy case-studies in the work of Meredith Edwards (2001).

CONCLUSION

This book engages insightfully with some of the major contemporary questions for social science researchers, policymakers and policy practitioners, covering case-studies of 'Education and human capital' (Simon Marginson), 'Rights and responsibilities: Welfare and citizenship' (Peter Travers), 'Spatial difference and public policy' (Ruth Fincher), 'Work, Family and the shy social scientist' (Barbara Pocock), 'Gender policies: hers to his' (Chilla Bulbeck), 'Indigenous affairs' (Jon Altman and Tim Rowse), 'Liberty, security and the state' (Jenny Hocking), 'The quality of life' (Richard Eckersley) and 'Opinion formation' (Ian Marsh) - in addition to the articles already noted above.

A salient historical policy narrative is explored in the Altman and Rowse paper, which investigates from the 19th to the 21st centuries the various ways in which diverse social scientists have utilised perspectives of 'cultural difference' (anthropologists) or perspectives of 'equality' (economists) in their research on Indigenous peoples and communities, with significantly different policy implications. The implication for social scientists is that *theory*, as much as project findings, is a significant component of the research endeavour and the research/public policy interface.

It is not just the case-studies themselves which are of great interest, but the editors' productive categorisation of 'entry points' to the policy process. In this way, promise is held out for more fruitful and constructive *conversations* between social scientists and policymakers in which the learning processes are mutually constructed and experienced, with a clear eye to promoting social equity, inclusion and respect for difference.

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SPRC ESTABLISHES SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA ARCHIVE NODE

SOPHIE HOLLOWAY (ASSDA, ANU) AND PETER SAUNDERS

The Australian Social Science Data Archive (ASSDA) was established in 1981 in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australia National University. It was supported by ACSPRI (Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated), a small group of enthusiastic quantitative researchers who wanted their research data preserved, and to share it with the rest of the social science community to underpin the core scientific principles of verification, replication and extension and as a teaching resource.

The aim of the archive is to collect, preserve and redistribute social science data from the academic, government and private sectors. The data is converted into an archival format and metadata - that is, data about the data - is created. Preserved along with the data are all the other materials necessary to understand the collection, including questionnaires, codebooks, user guides and technical reports. All the materials are checked for compliance with the Copyright Act and the Privacy Act, and any researchers wanting to use the data must agree to the conditions set by the depositor.

ASSDA holds a wide range of data. Notable collections include the Australian Election Study series, public opinion polls, the historical census collection, specific subject collections such as the one focusing on drug use and general social attitudes surveys such as the

Australian Survey of Social Attitudes.

In 2004, ASSDA and partners at the University of New South Wales (SPRC) and the University of Queensland's Social Research Centre were awarded an ARC LEIF grant to establish a distributed archiving system across all three institutions. This grant allowed each partner, or node, to manage their own server and support at least one local data archivist who will build their collection and ensure the data is preserved according to international standards. ASSDA-ANU will become the central node and will be responsible for setting and maintaining the standards used across all nodes.

As a result of this grant, in September 2005, ASSDA released its new data discovery and distribution facility, powered by the NESSTAR software. NESSTAR allows registered users to browse the ASSDA catalogue, viewing frequencies and performing basic analyses such as cross-tabulations and regressions on all unrestricted datasets. NESSTAR also enables all related documentation to be viewed and downloaded, including questionnaires, codebooks and reports.

Through its ongoing support of ASSDA, ACSPRI has negotiated the removal of all administrative charges relating to the supply of ASSDA data to staff and students from ACSPRI member institutions. ASSDA also introduced a single

legal form to be signed to entitle each user from an ACSPRI institution to download all unrestricted datasets from the NESSTAR facility.

In April 2006, the SPRC brought its node online. The first dataset released by ASSDA-UNSW is the SPRC, *Coping with Economic and Social Change, Australia, 1999* survey. This dataset was processed by an SPRC staff member trained in data archiving procedure. The ASSDA-UNSW NESSTAR server can be browsed and searched separately, or as part of a complete ASSDA catalogue and can be accessed from the ASSDA website at <http://assda.anu.edu.au>.

The ASSDA-UQ node is due to come online in May 2006. A new grant is currently being prepared for submission to the ARC for funding in 2007 to allow the establishment of a third node at the University of Western Australia. If successful, the new grant will also allow the existing nodes to be expanded and refined. The main aim of this distributed system is to have at least one node in each State or Territory to support the collection and preservation of local data sources and to increase the archive's ability to service its user community.

The UNSW node can be accessed through the NESSTAR link on the main ASSDA website. Readers are encouraged to access the new nodes and 'get their hands dirty' examining the data they find there!

NEW SPRC REPORTS

Kristy Muir, Ann Dadich, David Abelló, Michael Bleasdale, Alan Morris and Karen Fisher, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative: Summary Report II*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, December 2005. http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/HASI_Report2Summary.pdf

Alan Morris, Kristy Muir, Ann Dadich, David Abelló and Michael Bleasdale, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative: Summary Report I*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, December 2005. http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/HASI_ReportISummary.pdf

Alan Morris, Karen Fisher, David Abelló, Kate Norris, Kelly Sutherland, Sarah Yallop, Ann Dadich and Kristy Muir, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative, Evaluation Plan*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, February 2005. http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/HASI_Evaluation_Plan.pdf

NEW PROJECTS

The seven projects below are funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs under the Social Policy Research Services Contract

WEALTH HOLDING PATTERNS OF AUSTRALIA'S ELDERLY

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Bruce Bradbury

Is an excessive proportion of the wealth of Australia's older people locked up in housing? Does unlocking this wealth provide an opportunity to increase their living standards?

Many people of age pension age live in dwellings that are much larger than they need or can afford to maintain. This is particularly the case for older singles (predominantly women). Much of this housing wealth is retained and ultimately transferred via bequests to children who are in their least needy lifecycle phase. Though there are sound reasons for both investing in housing and making bequests, it is possible that economic distortions lead to a higher than optimal investment in housing among the Australian population of age pension age - and hence a lower than optimal level of non-housing consumption. In particular, the exemption of owner-occupied homes from the Aged Pension asset test may discourage trading down to smaller houses and may also increase the magnitude of bequests.

However, all these implications rest on the assumption that the tax/transfer treatment of housing in Australia does indeed change housing ownership patterns. This is by no means certain. This project will compare home ownership and other wealth holding patterns among older people in Australia with those in other countries with different pension systems (the US and Western Europe) to see if the wealth holding patterns of the Australian elderly are indeed unusual. This comparison will use new Australian data on wealth holdings (HILDA and the ABS 2003-04 HES) together with data from the Luxembourg Wealth Study (LWS).

CHANGING PATTERNS OF RESOURCE TRANSFERS ACROSS THE LIFECYCLE

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Gerry Redmond and Bruce Bradbury

People face large fluctuations in their incomes and costs over their lifetime. What role has the Australian government played in evening out these fluctuations over the past 15 years, how has this changed in response to large changes in employment (particularly of women) and private saving behaviour (particularly housing and superannuation), and what pressures does this place on families to undertake private saving and/or private transfers between generations?

This study will draw upon the data assembled by the ABS in the four most recent Fiscal Incidence Studies to address these questions. (FIS studies, based on the Household Expenditure Surveys, were undertaken in 1988-89, 1993-

94, 1998-99 and 2003-04. Assistance from the ABS will be sought to also include data from the FIS study of 1984).

YOUNG CARERS: THE COSTS AND IMPACT ON WELFARE

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Bettina Cass

The project will focus on young people up to the age of 25 who carry out informal care-giving responsibilities for a family member (or friend) who requires care because of disability or chronic illness. Qualitative interviews in NSW and South Australia will identify young carers' experiences, aspirations, family composition, gender, intensity of care provision and its dimensions, their own health, participation in education, training and the labour force, and in social, cultural and recreational activities. Using a 'whole-of-family' approach, the project will also explore the circumstances, needs and aspirations of the person receiving care, and the ways in which the support of the young carer contributes to their well-being. Care-providers and care-recipients' access/lack of access to and usage/non-usage of formal services will also be explored. In addition to estimating the opportunity costs of care with respect to constraints on young peoples' participation in education, training, the labour force and social activities, the project will identify the societal and family-level benefits of young carers' contributions to the well-being of the care recipient. That is, the project will explore the 'worth' of care provided by young carers. The research will add to the evidence base through: qualitative studies to identify the experiences of young carers and care recipients

using a 'whole-of-family' approach; analysis of existing Commonwealth and State/Territory policies and programs which comprise the policy-settings in which the care relationships are situated; identification of policies which might minimise the risks for young carers of education, employment and social participation constraints; and the development of a framework for estimating the 'worth' of the care provided by young carers.

ACTIVE AGEING: INTER GENERATION TRANSFERS, CARING NETWORKS AND POLICIES MAINTAINING PARTICIPATION OF OLDER AUSTRALIANS AND THEIR CARERS

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Bettina Cass

The project will undertake an analysis of Australian and international literature on active ageing and care giving; and an analysis of large national data sets to identify the key risk and protective factors relating to economic and social participation and engagement in social networks of older people and their carers. The premises are that: understanding active and productive ageing and the maintenance of social and economic participation within social networks requires a focus on: the diverse socio-demographic factors which impact upon opportunities and risks for older people and their carers; a focus on the central role of care-giving in maintaining active ageing; and the policy-settings at Federal, State/Territories and workplace settings in which

participation opportunities are located. This is a very significant issue, given the association between socio-economic status, economic and social participation and health outcomes in later life for older people and carers.

THE EFFECT OF (DIS)SATISFACTION WITH WORK AND FAMILY BALANCE OR THE DIVISION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR ON RELATIONSHIPS SURVIVAL

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Lyn Craig

This project seeks to establish whether couples view current arrangements regarding work and family as satisfactory, and when they do not, whether this has practical implications for the continuation of marital relationships.

It is known that women continue to assume the major responsibility for domestic labour and for childcare. Women reduce the time they spend in the paid workforce following childbirth and take up 'family friendly' work measures much more frequently than men. However, what this means is contested. Some regard it as evidence of a positive choice revealing settled preferences by the women involved. Others view it as evidence that women are still constrained and disadvantaged by inequitable family responsibilities. This project would use longitudinal data to test which of these is the case, by investigating whether earlier dissatisfaction with how domestic work is shared, or with work family balance, is related to later marital breakdown.

This study will analyse secondary data from Waves 1-4 of The Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), a large-scale nationwide longitudinal survey of Australian households, conducted by the Melbourne Institute and the Department of Families, Community Services, and Aboriginal Affairs. HILDA tracks its respondents through life course changes such as marital breakdown and childbirth. It contains questions on satisfaction with work-family balance, experience with parenting, working hours and intra-household division of labour and extensive demographic data. This project would identify those couples with children who have separated during the course of the survey, and investigate whether this marital breakdown is related to earlier expressed dissatisfaction with work-family arrangements and/or domestic equity.

NON-RESIDENT PARENTS' USE OF SERVICES

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Tony Eardley

How do mainstream public services address the needs of children who have a non-resident parent? What policies and practices facilitate or inhibit engagement in services by these parents?

There has been a rise in the number of non-resident parents in Australia over a number of decades, but the policy questions relating to involvement in their children's lives have only recently become a major issue for policy makers. The role of fathers in general has become recognised as an important aspect of family policy, and fathers include a significant number of non-resident parents. Groups

advocating rights for fathers have also raised the political profile of non-resident parents, focusing mainly on the court processes and on child support, but their arguments and methods have often been controversial.

Although there is a growing body of research evidence relating to the importance of fathers in children's development and involvement of fathers in certain family support services, relatively little research or policy attention has been paid to the role of mainstream services for families where there is a non-resident parent. Yet anecdotal evidence, such as calls to parenting helplines, shows this to be a significant area of concern to both parents and children.

The main aim of this research will be to study how the most significant mainstream services (including schools, primary health care, social housing and children's services) address the needs of children who have a non-resident parent, and to identify positive policies and practices which facilitate and inhibit the involvement of these parents. In line with the department's interest in encouraging fathers to maintain involvement in children's lives both within two-parent families and after separation (Department of Family and Community Services, 1999), the research will inform

policy development to improve the organisation and delivery of services, to help them adapt to the increasing diversity of family structures and to make them more father-inclusive.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

Australian Government
Department of Families,
Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs

Ilan Katz

Over the past decade, and particularly in the past five years, there have been increasing calls for governments in developed countries to expend more resources on very young children. Important reports such as that of the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development (Shonkoff, Phillips, and National Research Council, Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood, 2000) in the USA, The Ontario Early Years Report (McCain Mustard, 1999) in Canada. One of the first advocates of this approach was Perry (1996). All these reports advocate a shift of resources from programs for older children towards intervention in the prenatal period

up to age three. However this work has all been done in the North American context, and these models only take into account public (ie state) expenditure, and not expenditure of time and money by parents. The inclusion of these factors may considerably alter the distribution of resources for different ages.

Building on three bodies of work - evaluation of early childhood programs, time use studies and estimates of the costs of children, this project would like to examine some of these factors, with a view, ultimately, of developing a better understanding of the value and impact of public investment in children of different ages and of different types. The following issues will be examined: What is the true level of resource provided to children of different ages in Australia, including public expenditure, parental time and parental cash outlays. How does the picture in Australia differ from that in the USA, where these models were developed? Another key question for policy makers is what the rate of return is for targeting the most disadvantaged families or communities as opposed to those families (or communities) which are likely to have the capacity to benefit from interventions.

SPRC SEMINAR PROGRAM

The Social Policy Research Centre hosts a seminar program featuring national and international speakers presenting from current and ongoing research. The July to December program is available from the SPRC website <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/seminars/2006s2.htm>. The Seminars are held in Room 2, The Green Office, Building G2, Western Grounds, UNSW. Please contact Megan Griffiths on 02 9385-7817 or megangriffiths@unsw.edu.au, for further information or to be added to the SPRC-email list.

Please check regularly as details are being updated as finalised.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

From the right there has also been a resurgence of the idea of 'community', and although this has more to do with social control than collective action, it does show that, intellectually, the reign of individualism is being challenged from the right as well as the left. In child development studies the ecological model, (which at its core proposes that children are not individual ontogenetic organisms, but are part of a collectivity which is crucial to their development) was revolutionary when first proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, but is now accepted orthodoxy.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of this debate is its potential for empirical enquiry. Rather than throwing brickbats at each other about whether choices regarding labour force participation or fertility are individual or societal, rigorous research such as that undertaken by

time use scholars can illuminate the issue and provide new and perhaps definitive insights into the issues.

I am not saying that this research will uncover the 'truth' about the extent to which choices are individual or collective. It would be naïve to believe that social research uncovers the incontestable 'truth' about an issue, and, of course, the meaning of research findings is often disputed. But research sometimes reveals unexpected features of the world and throws genuine light on theoretical debates, and that is what makes it interesting and challenging.

But before we get too excited about the development of evidence based policy, we should look again at the superstring debate in the 'hard' sciences, on which we in the social sciences model the nature of 'evidence'. Peter Woit's blog - devoted to debunking superstrings,

is called *Not Even Wrong* <http://www.math.columbia.edu/~woit/wordpress/>. This is a term he has taken from an earlier theoretical physicist, Wolfgang Pauli, who used this phrase to challenge his own intellectual opponents. What he is referring to here is that the superstring theory is so speculative that it is not even possible to disprove, and therefore it is 'not even wrong'.

The so called 'mature' physical sciences are therefore just as concerned with the nature of reality and of research evidence as the 'developing' social sciences. It is therefore unlikely that there will be ultimate winners and losers in these theoretical debates, but engagement in rigorous and informed argument (as opposed to intellectual mud slinging) is essential for social science, and I suspect for physical science as well.

SOCIAL POLICIES THROUGH THE LIFE-COURSE: BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL POLICY CONFERENCE

11TH TO 13TH JULY 2007

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Next year marks the 10th Australian Social Policy Conference (formerly the National Social Policy Conference).

Further information about the conference, will be made available through future issues of the SPRC Newsletter and the SPRC Website.

Please mark these dates in your diary now.

TOM WENGRAF

LONDON EAST RESEARCH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON, UK

WITH

PRUE CHAMBERLAYNE

OPEN UNIVERSITY, UK

THE BIOGRAPHIC-NARRATIVE INTERPRETIVE METHOD INTERVIEWING FOR LIFE HISTORIES, LIVED SITUATIONS AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

World-renowned BNIM experts Tom Wegraf and Prue Chamberlayne will be visiting Sydney to deliver two seminars on the Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method of research. The one-day taster on Monday 4th September will cost \$300, and the five-day workshop September 7-13 will cost: \$1750.00. The five-day course is limited to twelve participants.

Both courses are being held in Room 2, Building G2, Western Campus, University of New South Wales.

Please contact Richard Brooks (Richard.brooks@unsw.edu.au) for further information.

PUBLICATIONS AND MAILING LIST

SPRC REPORTS

Kristy Muir, Ann Dadich, David Abelló, Michael Bleasdale, Alan Morris and Karen Fisher, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative: Summary Report II*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, December 2005.

http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/HASI_Report2Summary.pdf

Alan Morris, Kristy Muir, Ann Dadich, David Abelló and Michael Bleasdale, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative: Summary Report I*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, December 2005.

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Alan Morris, Karen Fisher, David Abelló, Kate Norris, Kelly Sutherland, Sarah Yallop, Ann Dadich and Kristy Muir, *Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative, Evaluation Plan*, report prepared for the NSW Department of Health, February 2005.

http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/HASI_Evaluation_Plan.pdf

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