When a family thinks their child might have a disability, the child and family undergo an assessment process to identify their support needs. The disability assessment process usually involves several steps and contact with multiple professionals and service organisations. The entire process can take several years. Previous research has identified that families want ongoing support during the assessment process. However, current disability support practice usually precludes case management for these families as being too costly. SPRC research, funded by a University of New South Wales grant, examined the effectiveness of alternative low level support, such as peer support and reactive case management.

This article presents the background to the research and the methodology employed. It describes families’ experience of disability assessment and their experience of low level support in the form of coordination, peer support and counselling. It concludes with implications for policy and program change.

BACKGROUND

Previous research conducted by the SPRC and the Disability Studies and Research Institute found that families wanted ongoing support to improve their understanding of the assessment process and of ways to effectively support their children (Tudball et al., 2002). Because intensive case management is considered too costly to offer to all families, low level support has been proposed to fulfil the functions of case management (Fisher and Fine, 2002). Examples of low level support that may prove effective for families with children undergoing disability assessment include peer support, reactive case management, participation in a support organisation, or information and referral during assessment (Tudball et al., 2002). The effectiveness of low level support had not been examined before. This research sought to understand which types of, and in what ways, low level support can improve families’ experience during the child disability assessment process.

METHODOLOGY

The research compared the experiences of families with and without low level support through interviewing families. Speaking

CONTENTS

Improving Child Disability Assessment.................1
Staff and Visitors..................................................2
From the Director.................................................3
Looking Back on Peter Saunders’ Directorship........6
Indicators of Disadvantage.................................7
Book Review: Contemporary Motherhood...........11
New Projects ....................................................12
From the Interns ...............................................13
PhD News .......................................................13
ASPC Review ..................................................14

LEAD ARTICLE:
Karen Fisher discusses families’ views on improving the child disability assessment process.

EDITORS • DUNCAN ALDRIDGE, CHRISTIANE PURCAL AND CATHY THOMSON

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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.
I recently attended two conferences back to back in Melbourne. The first was the annual Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) Centre Directors’ Symposium. The theme this year was the Research Quality Framework (RQF). Accommodating the RQF is particularly challenging for centres, because many are avowedly cross-disciplinary or even work across sectors.

The second conference was the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) annual conference. The keynote speaker was Hallie Preskill, current president of the American Evaluation Association. The main theme of her talk was how to embed an evaluation culture into centres, because many are becoming businesses and the RQF is just another method for achieving this transformation. However, more interesting is how this transformation has affected the day-to-day activities and thinking patterns of academics.

I was particularly astonished by the response of the centre directors at the CHASS meeting towards the RQF. The mood was generally anxious but positive. There was a feeling that the RQF (or something like it) is inevitable and probably a good thing, but that the details need to be sorted out so that activities such as cross-disciplinary research, performances and exhibitions will be dealt with appropriately. Nobody questioned the basic premise that academic endeavour should be measured, graded and compared.

The fact that all the arguments and debates about the RQF occur at the margins - is it a cost-effective way of measuring research value or impact, can it effectively compare outputs of chemists and dramatists - shows that the paradigm has comprehensively shifted and the tipping point has long passed. Academic freedom as it was previously known is dead.

That made me think about the RQF. The RQF is perhaps the apogee of a phenomenon that has swept western society in general and academia in particular. It is trite to say that universities have become businesses and the RQF is just another method for achieving this transformation. However, more interesting is how this transformation has affected the day-to-day activities and thinking patterns of academics.

So here is an example of a tipping point, ‘butterfly effects’ (a butterfly flapping its wings in Tokyo causes a hurricane in Texas) and the like, and all are based on false premises. The whole point of tipping points is that it is not possible to create them. By definition they are one-off and unpredictable events. If they were predictable, then every shoe company would be able to imitate the feat of Hush Puppies – and even more significant is that the manufacturers of Hush Puppies played no part in the resurgence of the brand.

Characterised essentially by a philanthropic impetus became focused on inputs, outputs and outcomes; professional judgement was substituted by procedures; and clinical supervision was substituted by managerialism.

But is this a good or a bad thing? When pressed, most academics would probably say that it undermines the essence of real academia. And it is associated with right-wing politics and the belief that business practices are more effective than public service in every sphere of life.

However, it is very interesting that the impetus towards managerialism came from both the left and the right in the child welfare sector. The left felt that professional judgement and supervision were prejudicial towards minorities and women, and therefore tough regulation and proceduralisation were essential to ensuring a more equitable outcome.

There is also a strong progressive case to be made for the RQF. It is part of the general move towards more accountability for professions that had previously been inviolate. I think we all believe that the increased accountability of doctors, police and lawyers is a positive development. So why should academics be the only profession to escape public scrutiny? Academia consumes a great deal of public money, and there are always competing priorities for government expenditure. Academia must compete in the market of national benefit.

Nevertheless, it is hard to see how initiatives such as the RQF empower citizens. It always amazes me that in our society the solution to virtually every problem is couched in bureaucratic or management terms. But that is the paradigm we live in now. The tipping point was passed a long time ago.
with families about their experience during assessment has many advantages over interviewing professionals. It offers a different perspective to service providers or policy-makers; disability affects the entire family, not just the child; and families advocate for their children in their contact with the service system. Research about their experiences can inform the development of a more responsive system.

For this study, 22 families were recruited through service providers or snowball recruitment. Parents were interviewed alone, as a couple, or in groups with other families. Just over half of the families (14) had some form of organised support during assessment. Most of the families were still undergoing assessment at the time of the research. Some had found support since their assessment finished. The families varied in circumstances, such as where they lived, family characteristics, socioeconomic situation, cultural background and the children’s age and support needs.

Families’ Experience of the Assessment Process

Most families in the sample – including those who received low-level support and those who did not – found the disability assessment process difficult. Families mentioned several difficulties, and their experiences presented here reinforce the findings of Tudball et al. (2002). First, the families found the assessment process confusing. For most people this was the first time they had contact with disability services. They did not understand what the assessment process involved and were unfamiliar with disability labels and why these labels might be important for accessing scarce support services.

Second, the assessment process is protracted for most children. In many cases, completion of assessment steps is a prerequisite to accessing support services. Families experienced waiting lists for the assessments, and rationed services once assessments were completed. Some delays were related to waiting for children to reach a certain age and developmental point. Other delays occurred because the disability sector, like other parts of the human service system, is experiencing a shortage of specialists and trained staff to conduct the assessments.

Third, the experience is isolating. The families did not know other people who had gone through the process before; they did not have support to understand and manage their child’s behaviour; and they could not explain their circumstances to their extended family, their friends and other members of their social networks.

Fourth, the experience can be stigmatising for families, in the worst cases resulting in discrimination towards the child, parents and family. A mother described how both she and her child were socially excluded from parent groups. Others described how professionals blamed the parents or intimated that the parents were unrealistic about their child’s needs or abilities.

Consequently, most families considered the disability assessment process a very negative experience. The parents experienced worry and frustration; some children’s behaviour worsened while the family was unsupported; relationships within the family and with friends deteriorated; and children were denied access to services. The research explored whether low level support was sufficient to prevent some of these negative experiences with the assessment process.

Experience of Low Level Support

Families in the study who received low level support while their children were being assessed had experienced several types of support, including a coordinator; peer support; and counselling. These are described below.

Coordinator

Some families had access to a coordinator who provided a single point of contact and low intensity case management. They supported families by, for example, organising assessments and making referrals to services and specialists. The coordinators were available to answer questions and provide information when the families required it. They also organised peer support with other families.

Some families spoke about the importance of having a single point of contact to ask questions when they reached a new stage of the assessment or had a new experience or problem. People who filled that role ranged from case managers, people in support organisations, health or disability specialists, to informal contacts in other families. One parent said:

He [the social worker] has been really supportive, and I just don’t think I’d be anywhere without him really. If I want to know something or just want to talk to him about anything, he’s always there.

Having a single point of contact was reported as less important for families with resources and capacity. The parents of one child in the study, for example, did not require much assistance from their support worker because they had the financial resources to access services quickly. However, the worker accelerated their son’s access into preschool services.

Peer Support

Some families received peer support from other families with a child with disability. They spoke
about the importance of sharing their experience of parenting a child with disability; of exchanging information about the next steps in the assessment process; of finding out where to access services and how to find support; and of being able to enjoy their child’s achievements together with other parents. Some peer support groups also arranged formal support, training and professional advice. This was most common where the peer support was facilitated through a support organisation. One mother commented on the benefits of peer support through a playgroup:

Initially I didn’t want to go to a special needs playgroup, because I was still in denial … [but] being with a whole lot of other mothers [at the playgroup] who also had disabled kids, you could then start to find parents that knew what you were going through.

Several parents cautioned about the risks of online peer support, which they had abandoned because of its medical focus on their child’s needs; a focus on fixing the child’s ‘problems’; and seeking to blame or to explain why the child had support needs.

Other parents described the benefits of generalist family disability peer support over diagnosis-specific support. Parents of children with multiple needs that did not fit neatly into one diagnosis and whose needs would change as they grew older preferred generalist family disability peer support because it addressed wider childhood and family issues. After dropping out of a disability-specific support group, which was all ‘doom and gloom’, one parent went to a generalist family support group that he found more beneficial:

[Our district] has a special needs parents group together. I think it’s once a term and I really enjoy that and they all talk about what their kids have done and how they’re improving, what they’ve got into.

Counselling
The final type of support valued by the parents in the study was counselling for family members, including the child, parents and siblings. Families said they needed professional support to understand their reactions to the assessment process and the diagnosis. They needed help to know how to explain their situation to other people, particularly the extended family and other parents; and they needed assistance to deal with their expectations around disability, childhood and parenting.

THE BENEFITS OF LOW LEVEL SUPPORT
The researchers asked parents to reflect on the impact of low level support during their child’s disability assessment process on both the child and the family. Parents reported that the support improved their child’s social contact with other children and improved the quality of their family relationships, both within the household and the extended family. It accelerated their access to advice about meeting their child’s and family’s needs, and to find early intervention and prevention services and therapy.

The support also benefited the parents, siblings and other relationships. For example, some families sought out support to prevent a negative impact on siblings. Others were desperate for contact with other people in similar circumstances so that they could find ways of understanding their experience and explaining it to others. Low level support provided them with social networks and emotional help. Parents said that it gave them a sense of security because they learned where to turn for advice and a sense of satisfaction that they were doing their best for their child in a difficult service sector. It improved their understanding of the assessment process and of how to negotiate access to services.

CONCLUSION
Overall, the majority of families who had access to low level support during the disability assessment period had a better experience than families who did not receive support until after the assessment process. Families benefited from a range of low level support opportunities, including coordination, single point of contact, counselling and referral; and contact with other families during assessment, rather than waiting for a diagnosis that may not be available for years, if ever.

This research suggests that access to low level support during the child disability assessment process can improve families’ experience of the process. Offering low level support follows the principles of early intervention and prevention. Unfortunately, low level support is rarely available because agencies prioritise families with children with high needs or children who have already received a diagnosis. If the findings of this research were used to inform policy decisions and resource allocation, families’ experiences during child disability assessment could be improved.

REFERENCES


Acknowledgements: Ciara Smyth, Sonia Hoffmann, Jacqueline Tudball (Social Policy Research Centre), Therese Sands and Leanne Dowse (Disability Studies and Research Institute). A version of this paper was presented at the Dare to Care, South West Sydney Ageing and Disability Conference, Sydney, 19 July 2007.
After two decades at the helm of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), Professor Peter Saunders has retired from his position as Director. Peter joined the Social Welfare Research Centre (as it was then known) as Director in 1987 and remained Director until July this year. Ilan Katz took on the role of Acting Director in 2005 when Peter was awarded an Australian Professorial Fellowship, until 2007, when he was appointed Director.

Peter has played a significant role in the centre’s development into one of the pre-eminent research organisations in the field of social policy. SPRC is now regarded very highly both nationally and internationally for its contribution to research and policy debate.

When Peter joined the Social Welfare Research Centre, in 1987 it was quite different to the SPRC of today. The SWRC commenced its operations in 1980 with core funding from the Commonwealth government to support its research agenda, encompassing the conduct and dissemination of high quality independent multi-disciplinary research on a broad range of social issues. In 1987 this core funding was around three quarters of a million dollars with the Centre receiving about $200,000 from other sources (mainly commissioned research). At that time the Centre employed 23 staff.

Core funding of the Centre ended in 2001, and was replaced with an open tender to provide ‘social policy research services’ to the now Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The result of this was a slightly larger budget that was shared between the SPRC and two other research institutes. Under Peter’s leadership, despite these changes in the funding sources, by 2006 the Centre’s income had grown to $4.5 million, with 35 staff members.

Over this time, despite his responsibilities as Director, Peter published widely on Australian and international social policy issues. He was elected a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences (ASSA) in 1995 and for many years was a member of the ASSA Executive Committee and Chair of its prestigious Workshop Program Committee. From 2001-03 Peter was a member of the Australian Research Council Expert Advisory Committee on the Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences, and is currently a member of the Board of Governors of the Foundation for International Studies on Social Security and of the Research and Policy Advisory Committee of the International Social Security Association. These achievements are testimony to Peter’s strong leadership, international reputation and outstanding scholarship.

Luckily for the SPRC Peter will remain in the Centre as a Research Professor in Social Policy and UNSW Scientia Professor. We look forward to more of his scholarly research and contributions to social policy in the future.
INTRODUCTION
This Bulletin is the third in a series that describes some of the main findings from the Left Out and Missing Out: Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage project. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council and is based on a collaboration between the SPRC and our Industry Partners Mission Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, ACOSS and Anglicare, Diocese of Sydney. Previous Bulletins have examined community views on the essentials of life (No. 1) and the scale and scope of deprivation in Australia (No. 2). The project report Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia was released in November. It can be downloaded from the SPRC website, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

The focus of this Bulletin is on social exclusion – what it means, what forms it takes and who is experiencing it. The concept of social exclusion has had relatively little impact on Australian policy formulation, although it was one of the factors that shaped the thinking and recommendations of the McClure Report on welfare reform, released in 2000. It has received far greater attention in Britain, where the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) has exerted a major influence on the ‘whole of government’ policy agenda, allowing it to break out of the cross-departmental rivalries that often impede or prevent action. The importance of policies that promote social inclusion and social cohesion (the former a prerequisite for the latter) has also grown in the European Union, where the ‘Lisbon Agenda’ agreed to by EU Heads of State in 2000 places these issues at the centre of the European social policy agenda (Atkinson, 2007).

DEFINING SOCIAL EXCLUSION
The SEU defines exclusion as ‘what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked and mutually reinforcing problems’ (Bradshaw et al., 2004). This definition captures the idea that there is uncertainty surrounding the consequences of exclusion (‘what can happen’), but that its manifestation is multi-dimensional (‘a combination of linked problems’) and has an important locational component (‘people or areas’). The approach has been extended by a group of leading British researchers, who have proposed the following working definition:

‘Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.’ (Levitas et al., 2007, p. 9)

This definition makes explicit the idea that social exclusion is broader than poverty, embracing issues of process, the denial of rights and lack of participation. It also emphasises not only what social exclusion is, but also what it gives rise to – its consequences, for individuals and for society, in both the short-run and over the longer-term.

Researchers at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics have used a somewhat less prescriptive definition, in which:

‘An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in key activities in the society in which he or she lives’ (Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud, 2002, p. 30)

Although not made explicit in this definition, social exclusion is seen by the CASE group to reflect a lack of connectedness that is multi-dimensional, and shaped by the communities, social and physical environments in which people live.

This discussion highlights the fact that, unlike poverty where the focus is on a single dimension (lack of resources) – exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept that highlights the role of institutional structures and community attitudes in creating the barriers that lead to exclusion. It also emphasises the importance of process and relational issues, and the importance of the family and community context in shaping exclusion at the individual level. This explains why exclusion research can uncover social divisions based on gender, race, ethnicity and location that are often obscured when studying poverty as a lack of income.

FORMS OF EXCLUSION
Social exclusion can take many forms. The CASE approach identifies four broad dimensions of exclusion:

- **Consumption exclusion** – having an income below one-half of the median;
- **Production exclusion** – being either unemployed, long-term sick or disabled, or in early forced retirement;
- **Political engagement** – not voting or belonging to any political organisation; and
- **Social interaction** – lacking someone who will offer support in key areas of personal life.

Researchers involved with the new Poverty and Social Exclusion survey (Bradshaw, 2004; Levitas, 2006) also identify four main dimensions of exclusion:

- **Impoverishment** – being poor in terms of both low income and deprivation;
- **Labour market exclusion** – identified using a range of labour market indicators, including living in a jobless household;
- **Service exclusion** – restricted access to public transport, play facilities and youth clubs, and basic
services inside the home; and

Exclusion from social relations – which covers non-participation in common activities, the quality of social networks, support available in times of crisis, disengagement from political and civic activity, and confinement resulting from fear of crime, disability or other factors.

Both sets of indicators capture the different forms of exclusion implicit in the earlier definitions, and each includes poverty as one dimension of exclusion. Although economic exclusion is important, it is potentially confusing to include poverty itself as a form of exclusion, particularly when studying how the two concepts relate to each other and which groups they affect.

Two other features of exclusion are also worth emphasising: first, since exclusion refers to things that people do not do, this presents a challenge when identifying it using social surveys, because these tend to focus on identifying the things that people actually do do; second, the role of affordability (or inadequate resources) is not a key factor when it comes to identifying exclusion, where what matters is what people do or do not do, not what they can or cannot afford. This latter distinction is also important when differentiating between social exclusion and poverty.

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN AUSTRALIA**

The above discussion has shaped the ways in which the research has provided an initial picture of the extent and nature of social exclusion in Australia. The data used for this purpose are taken from the Community Understanding of Poverty and Social Exclusion (CUPSE) Survey that is described in the two earlier Bulletins in this series. Briefly, the CUPSE survey covers over 2,700 Australians drawn at random from the electoral roll. The survey was conducted by mail, achieved a response rate of around 47 per cent and produced a sample that is broadly representative of the population as a whole. A shorter version of the survey was also completed by almost 700 users of welfare services when they accessed services. The two samples, are henceforth referred to as the community and client samples, respectively.

Following the CASE approach, social exclusion is defined to exist where individuals are not participating in key activities in society. In applying this definition, the ‘key activities’ include only those activities that are engaged in by a majority of the population, where this can be derived from the CUPSE responses, or (where it cannot) refers to activities that are known to be widespread and strongly supported. (Examples of the latter include having a social life and paying your way when out with friends).

Three dimensions of social exclusion have been identified:

- **Disengagement** – lack of participation in social and community activities;
- **Service exclusion** – lack of adequate access to key services when needed; and
- **Economic exclusion** – restricted access to economic resources and low economic capacity.

Disengagement refers to a lack of participation in the kinds of social activities and events that are widely practiced by members of the community. Service exclusion focuses on exclusion from services used by a majority of the population, whether mainly provided by the public sector (health care; disability; and aged care services), or by the private sector (dental treatment; banking and related services). Economic exclusion is captured by a range of indicators of economic stress, including inadequate access to savings, credit, assets and the labour market.

The incidence of each of the 27 indicators of exclusion is shown in Figure 1 (disengagement), Figure 2 (service exclusion) and Figure 3 (economic exclusion). Results for the community sample are shown in blue and for the smaller client sample in red. It is clear that, across all 27 indicators, social exclusion is more pronounced in the client sample than in the community sample, although there are several instances where the incidence rates of service exclusion are similar in both samples. (The incidence of child care exclusion is expressed as a percentage of those of working-age, aged care service exclusion is expressed relative to those aged over 70. In contrast, the incidence of both disability and mental health services exclusion is expressed as a percentage of all age groups, since access in both cases is qualified by ‘when needed’).

Figure 1 shows that the three of the most common indicators of disengagement are having no annual holiday away from home, children not participating in school activities or outings, and no hobby or leisure activity for children. The fact that all three forms impact on children is of concern, with the latter two raising concerns about the longer-run impact of children being denied the opportunity to participate in activities that contribute to their educational and personal development. While most Australians regard themselves as a sociable lot, many report that they have no social life, cannot pay their way when out with friends and do not participate in any form of community activity.

Figure 2 indicates that service exclusion is widespread among the Australian community, with large proportions of the working-age population excluded from child care, and many facing exclusion from disability, mental health and dental services when they need them. Around 5 per cent are excluded from medical treatment and have no access to a bank or building society, and a significant proportion has faced exclusion from basic domestic services over the past 12 months, as a result of being unable to pay their household utility bills. What is most striking about these results is the widespread nature of service exclusion even among the general population, as represented by the community sample.

In relation to the incidence of economic exclusion, Figure 3 indicates that around one-quarter of those in the community sample do not have more than $50,000 of (non-housing) assets, while over one-fifth (if they are working-age) live in a jobless household. Around 15 per cent could not raise $2,000 in a week if they had to, and almost one-in-ten had not spent $100 or more on a ‘special treat’ for themselves over the last year. The gap between the two samples is much larger here, and it is clear that economic exclusion is a major problem for those who use welfare services. This in itself is not too surprising given how the client sample was recruited, but the rates of exclusion are extremely high: over 70 per cent in the case of lack
of emergency savings, low assets and joblessness. These findings bring home the message that although economic prosperity may be widespread, many people are still forced to survive on a low standard of living.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AMONG KEY GROUPS

In order to provide a clearer picture of the patterns of exclusion, attention now focuses on the incidence of specific forms of exclusion among groups in the community known to have a high risk of experiencing poverty and other forms of disadvantage. The five groups included are:

- Sole parent families
- Unemployed people
- People with a disability
- Public renters
- Indigenous Australians

In order to keep the task manageable, ten indicators have been identified for detailed examination. Table 1 shows the incidence of each indicator among the five selected groups and the average exclusion rate across all 10 indicators. Although there is variability in the incidence of exclusion across sub-groups and items, some general patterns are nevertheless discernible. Thus, the areas where exclusion is generally most common are (in declining order): lack of child care; no emergency savings; living in a jobless household; unable to pay one’s way when out with friends; and no participation in community activities.

The first three of these both reflect and prevent economic participation and there are several cases where the incidence of exclusion in these areas is close to, or exceeds, 75 per cent.

In relation to overall exclusion (as it is experienced in these ten dimensions), the groups that face the most serious problems are unemployed people and public renters, followed by Indigenous Australians and sole parent families. People with a disability also face relatively high rates of exclusion from child care and banking services, as well as having low rates of participation in community activities and no social life.

Aggregate indicators of social exclusion combine the different forms of exclusion into a single number and can be difficult to interpret. However, it is useful to examine the extent to which individuals experience multiple exclusion, since this provides an insight into the extent to which people experience ‘a combination of linked and mutually reinforcing problems’ that was highlighted in the SEU definition discussed earlier.

Table 2, which refers to the community sample only, indicates that multiple exclusion is widespread. Over half of the sample experienced 4 or more forms of exclusion simultaneously, while almost one-third experienced 6 or more separate instances of exclusion. Both figures are well above the corresponding incidences of multiple deprivation that were described in Bulletin No. 2. Around one-third of the sample is not in anyway disengaged, while around one-quarter and about one-half experience no forms of service exclusion and economic exclusion, respectively. Around 13 per cent (one-in-eight) experience 4 or more instances of disengagement and service exclusion, while only around 7 per cent experience 4 or more forms of economic exclusion. All three forms of exclusion among key groups...
of multiple exclusion fall off sharply once the number of indicators exceeds 5.

**SUMMARY**

The results presented here provide the first comprehensive picture of the extent of social exclusion in Australia. They reveal a disturbing picture of widespread exclusion, and a heavy concentration of its specific forms among the sub-groups known to be disadvantaged in other dimensions.

The results show that social exclusion is a major problem that affects significant numbers of Australians, with its incidence often exceeding 20 per cent in the community sample and 40 per cent in the client sample. Large proportions also have no social life, do not participate in community activities and are unable to pay their way when out with friends. These latter forms of exclusion have obvious spill-over effects on other people, as well as on social cohesiveness more generally. Vulnerable groups such as sole parents, the unemployed, people with a disability and Indigenous Australians face very high exclusion rates in some key areas. Multi-dimensional exclusion (experiencing 4 or more separate indicators simultaneously) is also prevalent, affecting over one-half of those in the community sample.

More work is needed to relate the estimates of the extent of exclusion to the risks that underlie them and to the adverse effects that result from being excluded – for individuals, families and communities. This initial examination of the issue has demonstrated that many Australians are excluded in various dimensions. The findings suggest that action is needed to prevent and combat the many causes, manifestations and consequences of social exclusion.

**REFERENCES**


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**Table 1: Incidence of Selected indicators of Exclusion Among Vulnerable Sub-Groups in the Community Sample (percentages)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exclusion indicator</th>
<th>Sole parent family</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>People with a disability</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Indigenous Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No regular social contact with others</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No participation in community activities</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not pay my way</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No access to a local doctor or hospital</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No access to a bank or building society</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not pay utility bills</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child care</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No emergency savings</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No special treat</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobless household</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average exclusion rate</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: The Cumulative Incidence of Different Forms of Social Exclusion (percentages)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of indicators</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
<th>Service exclusion</th>
<th>Economic exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or more</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 or more</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 or more</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BOOK REVIEW

CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD: THE IMPACT OF CHILDREN ON ADULT TIME
BY LYN CRAIG, ASHGATE, ALDERSHOT 2007

REVIEWED BY MARTY GRACE
Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, Victoria University

I recently overheard one young woman ironically suggesting to another that she could drop a troublesome baby off at child care and pick her up when she turns eighteen. The friends chuckled together at the outrageous suggestion. The devotion and sacrifice of motherhood had been acknowledged, along with an undercurrent of protest at the impact of babies on women’s lives.

Scholarly examination of motherhood is complex, multi-layered and potentially fraught. Lyn Craig’s Contemporary Motherhood: The Impact of Children on Adult Time acknowledges the theoretical and practical complexity of the broader topic, but keeps the focus clearly on her specialty, time use. The book reports and discusses her original research into parental time use. She analysed the Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey (1997) and the Multinational Time Use Study World 5.5. For the latter data set, parental time use is arranged in conventional sequence, with a clear description of the research methodology followed by chapters focussing on different aspects of the data analysis. Time impacts of children, comparisons of unpaid work in households with and without children, gender differences, and comparisons of couples and singles are covered in satisfying detail. Following this groundwork, later chapters focus on further in-depth gender analysis, and caring for children as a secondary activity. This is clearly important, since those with relevant experience understand that slipping out to the supermarket for a few things by oneself is very different from the same activity when undertaken concurrently with looking after a couple of small children.

Craig problematises parenthood, stating that we have had ‘half a sex revolution’, with profound changes in women’s lives, but remarkably little in men’s. She states:

A major cost of parenting is the time it takes. No adequate social provision for this time is being made; it is not quantified and its extent is unknown. The issue is left to women to deal with individually, on an ad hoc basis … (Craig 2007:1).

Craig sets her work in the context of scholarly investigations of the costs of children, in terms of both money and time. She positions herself squarely in the tradition of Waring, Ironmonger, Bittman and Pixley, Crittenden, and Folbre, seeing the work of caring for children as economic activity. Within this view, time spent is a cost to parents that produces a benefit for the whole community.

The chapters of Contemporary Motherhood are arranged in conventional sequence, with a clear description of the research methodology followed by chapters focussing on different aspects of the data analysis. Time impacts of children, comparisons of unpaid work in households with and without children, gender differences, and comparisons of couples and singles are covered in satisfying detail. Following this groundwork, later chapters focus on further in-depth gender analysis, and caring for children as a secondary activity. This is clearly important, since those with relevant experience understand that slipping out to the supermarket for a few things by oneself is very different from the same activity when undertaken concurrently with looking after a couple of small children.

Craig’s major finding is that the arrival of children brings a significant increase in unpaid workload for parents, especially mothers.

The book is based on a large research project that allowed Craig to explore further questions that arose from her initial analysis. For example, she found that non-parental care such as formal child care does not result in equivalent reductions in parental care. Exploring this apparent non-substitution paradox, she found that employed parents shift and squeeze their time to meet the intensive demands of children early and late in the day. Mothers in particular reduce leisure time and time spent on self care rather than reducing time spent caring for their own children.

International comparisons gave some support to the idea that different social policy environments result in different time impacts of children. Comparing Italy, Germany, Australia and Norway, Craig found that gender accounted for much more variation in unpaid workload than differences in welfare regimes. In analysing these findings, Craig characterises Australia as a market-oriented regime with good market opportunities for women and a style of individualism that treats children as a private benefit like pets rather than as a public good. Time costs of children are privatised rather than socialised.

Contemporary Motherhood is based on sound and thorough empirical research. However, it goes beyond empiricism to analyse the political and policy significance of gender differences in time use. As Craig indicates, the second half of the revolution requires significant institutional, cultural and personal change. This book is important, both as a reference work on time use and as a contribution to broader discussions of Australia’s social arrangements for work and families.
NEW PROJECTS

These projects will be described in more detail in future issues of the SPRC Newsletter.

ARC LINKAGE GRANTS

The SPRC was successful in both Linkage Grant Proposals submitted to the Australian Research Council (ARC) in 2007.

• Grandparents as primary carers of their grandchildren: A national, state, territory analysis of grandparent headed families - policy and practice implications
  
  This project is a unique collaboration between researchers, a number of departments in the Commonwealth, NSW, South Australian and Northern Territory governments concerned with child and family welfare, and Mission Australia. It uses innovative methods to analyse non Indigenous and Indigenous grandparents as primary carers of their grandchildren. The project examines the circumstances and needs of grandparents and grandchildren in different formal and informal arrangements. It will provide a comprehensive audit of national, state and territory policies and identify options for the development of policies and services to promote the health and wellbeing of grandparents and children. The Chief Investigators on the project are Deborah Brennan, Bettina Cass, Sue Green and the Principal Investigator is Anne Hampshire.
  
  • Experiences of families with children with disabilities in China
  
  Family experiences of child disability in China have not been researched inside or outside China. This study applies a child-based human rights framework in four domains (care and protection, economic security, development and participation) to investigate families’ experiences of the effectiveness of support to fulfil their children’s rights. Analysis draws on the 2006 Second National Survey of Disabled People (the first international analysis of these data) and interviews with families and officials. The research contributes to the understanding of child disability rights in China. Results will be useful to policy makers in China and Australia and international agencies who seek to realise the rights of children with disabilities. The project will strengthen connections between Australian researchers and policy makers, Plan International (China and Australia) and the China Disabled Persons Federation. Xiaoyuan Shang, Karen Fisher and Wei Wei are the Chief Investigators.

FACSIA SPRS PROJECTS

The 2007 projects under the Social Policy Research Services contract with FaCSIA are:
  
  • The impact of separation and child support payments on income support receipt and income (Bruce Bradbury). This project compares the patterns of income support receipt, as a proxy for labour supply, by parents before and after their separation.
  
  • Sole mothers’ time allocation to paid work and childcare in contrasting policy regimes (Lyn Craig). This project compares the time that sole parents spend in paid work and in care of their children in Australia, the USA, Sweden and Finland.
  
  • Exploring the dimensions of significant life course transitions for parents and children (Tony Eardley). This project addresses the paucity of Australian data and information in this area through a qualitative study of mothers’ experiences of workforce return, including both mothers’ and children’s perceptions of that transition.
  
  • Wealth as a protective factor for child outcomes (Ilan Katz). This project examines the reasons for the relationship between positive outcomes for children and their family’s socio-economic status, and in particular why young children in the highest socio-economic bracket do best.
  
  • The impact of child support on payer and payee incomes (Gerry Redmond). The research examines the circumstances and living standards of families with children who are affected by child support payments.

UNSW EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER GRANT

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, UNSW, has awarded Natasha Cortis an Early Career Researcher grant for the project titled:
  
  • Assessing self-employment as a strategy for balancing work and family

This project uses recent Australian survey data to explore intersections between work and family life for those employed in their own businesses. The research aims to establish the role of self-employment as a strategy for achieving work-family balance, and to inform the development of social and economic policies that shape Australian family life and sustain micro-business.

OTHER PROJECTS

• Research agenda for younger people with disabilities in residential aged care, funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. Researchers: Karen Fisher, Christiane Purcal and Saul Flaxman;
  
  • Integrated rehabilitation and recovery care program evaluation, funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services. Researchers: Karen Fisher, Kristy Muir and David Abellé, Heather Gridley and Jenny Sharples (Victoria University);
  
  • Cost of providing specialist disability services and community services in Queensland, funded by Disability Services Queensland. Researchers: Karen Fisher, Marianna Rhakovic, David Maynard and Peter Abelson (SPRC), Lesley Chenoweth (Griffith University) and Sally Robinson (DSaRI);
  
  • Culturally and linguistically diverse young people and mentoring, funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Researchers: Kristy Muir, Pooja Sawrikar, Megan Griffiths and Matthew Hatton;
  
  • Poverty in Australia: sensitivity analysis and trends, funded by the Australian Council of Social Service. Researchers: Peter Saunders, Bruce Bradbury and Trish Hill.
The SPRC Internship Program is now up and running. The program provides an opportunity for exceptional students from Australia and overseas to gain practical social policy research and evaluation experience in a multi-disciplinary environment. During second semester 2007, the SPRC has been hosting four undergraduate students: Samantha Ner (Social Work, UNSW); Matthew Hatton (Social Science, University of Sydney); Elise Trask (Social Sciences/Law, Macquarie University) and Priyatharsheni Balachandran (Economics/Social Sciences, UNSW). Below, two of these interns describe their experiences at the SPRC.

Samantha Ner: I am currently studying social work and took a four-month internship at the SPRC to experience indirect methods of intervention such as research, policy and administration. So far, I have worked on projects about young carers, grandparents raising grandchildren and early intervention, which the SPRC intern coordinator matched to my interests.

I was incredibly fortunate to be able to attend the Australian Social Policy Conference, which was extremely interesting, as well as other seminars within the Centre. My tasks have been transcription, developing a resource directory, using SPSS and endnote software programs, coding and assisting with literature reviews, and presenting my experiences in the intern/postgraduate workshop.

The skills that I have strengthened include administrative skills, data entry, listening, information gathering, writing, communication and organisation. During my time here I have cultivated a greater understanding of the role of research within the social policy arena and have acquired knowledge of research methodology and the issues facing disadvantaged groups.

Overall it has been a wonderful opportunity to learn from such professional staff with such a high level of expertise.

Matthew Hatton: As a fourth year Bachelor of Social Sciences student at the University of Sydney, I feel fortunate to have undertaken my internship at SPRC. It has a great reputation for research in areas related to my interests (history, sociology and social policy).

The internship gave me the opportunity to participate in a research project concerning Horn of Africa young people and the ways mentoring can address their needs. I organised resources, and planned and wrote sections of the literature review for the project.

I also attended workshops and seminars as well as the Australian Social Policy Conference. SPRC has introduced me to a professional social research environment and improved my understanding of research methods and issues in Australian social policy research.

I have greatly benefited from this experience, having developed my writing and research skills and my appreciation for conducting social research.

FROM THE INTERNS

PHD NEWS

More champagne is cooling in the fridge as two SPRC Research Scholars await their examiners’ reports. Marilyn McHugh has submitted her thesis, 'Costs and Consequences: Understanding the Impact of Fostering on Carers'. The study examines the direct and indirect costs to volunteer carers of providing a fostering service in Australia.

Christie Robertson’s study of the Smith Family VIEW Clubs of Australia, ‘From Philanthropy towards Social Enterprise’, has also been submitted. The research investigates the effectiveness and sustainability of women’s voluntary participation through a case study of the VIEW Clubs.

The Centre has two new PhD scholars. Helen Hodgson, a senior lecturer at the Australian School of Taxation (Atax), UNSW, has commenced her thesis on ‘A Proposal for a Family Tax Transfer System’. The aim of the research is to develop a new model for a tax transfer system for Australian families. Currently, family tax transfer benefits are delivered to Australian families through the Family Tax Benefit system, which incorporates elements of both the tax and the welfare system. The study plans to examine the equity and efficiency of the system, and consider how to best match delivery mechanisms to national social policy and economic goals. Helen’s research is supervised jointly by Professor Bettina Cass (SPRC) and Professor Chris Evans (Atax).

Sharni Chan, a Research Officer at the SPRC, is in her first year of a PhD program at the University of Sydney. Her thesis is looking at the everyday mediations and adaptations of people experiencing precarious (i.e. casual, non-permanent) work. The research asks: Has the colonisation of work into the lifeworld occurred to such an extent that we can talk of precarious life-ways? The thesis seeks to document and analyse not just the impacts of casualisation, but also the daily acts of resistance to precarity. This method is aimed at discovering the tools various groups of precarious workers may adopt as well as potential points of solidarity. Sharni’s study will contribute to an understanding of the political dimensions of precarious employment, possibilities for political mobilisation, and relationships to political apathy and populism. She is supervised by Dr Diarmuid Maguire in the Department of Government and International Relations.
The SPRC hosted the 10th Australian Social Policy Conference in July. The conference is one of the key events on the social policy calendar, and provides a forum for dialogue and interaction between academia, non-government organisations, policy makers and practitioners. Over the three days of the conference almost 500 delegates attended, roughly one-third from Government (federal, state and local level) Departments; 40 per cent from University and the remainder from NGOs.

The conference theme centred on two interrelated issues in social policy. The first concerned life-course transitions, including the diverse challenges and opportunities which people experience within their age, gender, social, economic and cultural contexts and the second focusing on identifying the interconnections between social investment policies, services and programs which build both community capacity and social resilience for individuals situated within their social networks.

The first keynote speaker for the conference was Professor Brooks-Gunn (Columbia University) whose presentation focused on the disparities that exist between children who are poor and affluent, who have parents with high and low education, and who are ethnic minorities and majorities, and what can be done about these.

The second plenary address of the conference was given by Professor Barbara Pocock, Director of the Centre for Work+Life, based at the University of South Australia. Professor Pocock spoke about patterns of work in Australia and challenges to improve policy outcomes.

The final plenary speaker was Professor Fiona Williams, University of Leeds, who put forward the idea of an ‘ethic of care’, particularly addressing the shifting distribution of child care provision and asking how far a political ethic of care can be developed to encompass local, national and international relations and policies for care.

The theme of building family and community capacities was developed in the conference forums, one focusing particularly on Indigenous policies and programs, while Professor Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Professor Ross Homel and Adjunct Professor Don Weatherburn discussed policies that make a difference for children and families facing economic adversity.

Delegates enjoying their lunch break. Professor Barbara Pocock delivering her address.
The two remaining forums addressed advocacy and consumer participation, and the demographic challenges facing Australia – the latter forum being organised in conjunction with the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well (Productivity and Economic Security Theme).

In the contributed paper section of Conference, special sessions were organised around the Welfare to Work reforms, Chinese Social Policy, and ageing.

During the conference this year a discussion was held about the formation of the Australasian Social Policy Association and a preliminary meeting was held to discuss the formation of the association (more information available from Professor Ilan Katz on 02 9385-7810).

Conference delegates were again asked to vote for what they identified as the best paper from the 140 papers presented. We are pleased to announce Cosmo Howard’s paper ‘Administering individualisation: competing logics of social service delivery in Australian welfare reform’ was voted as the best paper. Cosmo, from the University of Victoria, Canada, received a $200 book voucher.

The runner up was John Hudson and Stefan Kuhner (from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York) with their paper entitled Towards productive welfare? A comparative analysis of welfare state effort in 18 OECD countries.

The papers and/or presentation slides from the keynote speakers and contributed papers (including the two above) are available from the conference website http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2007/program.htm

There will be a selection of papers from the conference published in 2008 in special editions of the Australian Journal of Social Issues and the Australian Journal of Labour Economics.
The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Summer Workshop is a one-week workshop designed to introduce researchers in the social sciences to comparative research in income distribution, employment and social policy using the LIS database. It is held annually, and is aimed at researchers with varying levels of knowledge and experience.

The Luxembourg Income Study has made comparable over 160 large microdata sets that contain comprehensive measures of income, employment and household characteristics for 30 industrialised countries (including Australia). For general information about the LIS project, see www.lisproject.org.

The language of instruction for the workshop is English. The workshop format includes a mixture of lectures on comparative research, laboratory sessions and individual one-on-one advisory sessions. Attendees will also be introduced to the new Luxembourg Wealth Study (www.lisproject.org/lws.htm). By the end of the workshop, attendees will be fully trained to use the database independently.

Workshop faculty include the LIS directors, Janet Gornick and Markus Jäntti, the LIS staff and guest lecturers. In addition, the winner of the annual Aldi Hagenaaars Memorial Award will present his/her paper.

The 2008 workshop will be held from 7-12 July 2008. The standard tuition fee of €1,400 covers instructional materials, single-occupancy accommodations, and full board. Transportation to and from Luxembourg is generally the responsibility of the student.

By a special arrangement between the LIS project and the SPRC, a subsidy comprising the tuition fee plus AUD800 towards travelling costs is being offered to an Australian resident researcher to attend the 2008 Workshop. PhD students and early career researchers are particularly encouraged to apply, but more experienced researchers are also eligible. The objective of the subsidy is to boost Australia’s research capacity for cross-national socio-economic research.

Applications consisting of a completed workshop application form (available from www.lisproject.org/workshop.htm), a Curriculum Vita, a one-page statement on the reasons for attending the workshop (especially the relevance of the workshop to your research) and the names of two academic referees should be sent to Bruce Bradbury by email at b.bradbury@unsw.edu.au by 3 March 2008. The successful applicant(s) will be notified within two weeks. The selection committee reserves the right to award nil or more than one award based on the quality of the applications. Applicants are advised to also separately enquire with their own institutions about additional sources of travel funding.