Family Matters
Australian Institute of Family Studies | 2011 Issue No. 87

Sustaining families in challenging times

Australian Institute of Family Studies
The Institute is a statutory authority that originated in the Australian Family Law Act 1975. It was established by the Australian Government in February 1980. The Institute promotes the identification and understanding of factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia by:

- researching and evaluating the social, legal and economic wellbeing of all Australian families;
- informing government and the policy-making process about Institute findings;
- communicating the results of Institute and other family research to organisations concerned with family wellbeing and to the wider general community; and
- promoting improved support for families, including measures that prevent family disruption and enhance marital and family stability.

The objectives of the Institute are essentially practical ones, concerned primarily with learning about real situations through research on Australian families.

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Rural and regional families

Pressures on families arise from many fronts and occur on a range of scales. Recent events in Australia, New Zealand and Japan have demonstrated, yet again, just how dramatically major external events such as droughts, floods, earthquakes and tsunami can affect families and communities.

Given the impact of the catastrophic events of past months, and ongoing concerns about the effects of climate change more generally, there is considerable interest among policymakers in better understanding the diversity and course of the effects that such events have on families and communities, especially those who are already vulnerable. In particular, recognition is growing of the need for research that informs the development of programs of support, in the short-, medium- and longer terms, for affected families and communities. Building on the research already completed by the Institute on the social and economic impacts of drought and on carers in regional and remote Australia, the Institute is extending this focus to include examination of the longer term impacts of widespread natural disasters on families and communities.

The recently released Facts Sheet—Families in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia—compares families living in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia with those living in major cities. Drawing on data from the Australian Census, the ABS General Social Survey and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), it shows that there are many similarities in families across areas of varying remoteness, though distance can still be a tyranny.

Focus on resilience and vulnerability

Life at 5

The latest chapter in the ABC’s Life television series—Life at 5—focused on the resilience of children and their transition to school, with two episodes screening on 15 and 22 February on ABC1. The series has been following 11 children and their families since the children were babies, and explores factors that help to give a child the best chance at life. While the children and families are not participants in LSAC, the series draws extensively on analyses of the data from the study, and includes expert commentary from academics who are part of the Consortium Advisory Group for LSAC, as well as involvement of the Institute’s researchers. The focus of the Life series on resilience and vulnerability is timely and parallels the analyses that Institute researchers and others have been undertaking using the LSAC data. This focus is particularly relevant to a range of national policy priorities for governments.

Supporting Vulnerable Families

Concerns about the impact of the geographic concentration of disadvantage on the wellbeing of children and their future life chances has underpinned the development and implementation of place-based or area-based initiatives in a number of countries, including Australia. The major area-based intervention designed to enhance the development of children in disadvantaged communities around Australia is Communities for Children (CfC), a key element of the Australian Government’s Family Support Program (FSP).

LSAC informed the design of the evaluation of CfC, which was commissioned by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and undertaken by the Institute and the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). The evaluation reports were published in 2009 by FaHCSIA as Stronger Families in Australia Study: The Impact of Communities for Children (Occasional Paper No. 25) and National Evaluation (2004–2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004–2009 (Occasional Paper No. 24).
The evaluation, in turn, informed the extension of the CfC initiative to bring a stronger focus on child protection services under the aegis of Communities for Children Plus. Commonwealth, state and local governments and the non-government sector are working together to plan and deliver targeted services according to local needs. This will help enable known success factors from the current CfC model to be extended and strengthened towards providing the services and supports that families require to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children.

Out-of-home care

LSAC has also influenced the design of a groundbreaking study being undertaken with Community Services, New South Wales Department of Human Services. With staff of the SPRC, the universities of Adelaide and Sydney, and researchers from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, the Institute has been contracted to assist with Stage 2 of Pathways of Care, a longitudinal study of out-of-home care. Children aged 0–17 years entering out-of-home care for the first time in New South Wales and who have final Children's Court orders, will be eligible for inclusion in the study. The study has commenced data collection, with information collected from carers, caseworkers and the children themselves, along with data sourced from administrative systems and other agencies.

Past adoption practices

In 2011, the Institute will commence a national research study about the extent and impact of past adoption practices. This project builds on an earlier project completed in April 2010 for FaHCSIA. The earlier review found that past practices relating to adoption have the potential for lifelong consequences for the lives of the women and their children, as well as others.

In June 2010, the Community and Disability Services Ministers’ Conference announced that the ministers had agreed to a joint national research study into past adoption practices, to be conducted by AIFS. The aim of the research study is to utilise and build on existing research and evidence about the extent and impact of past adoption practices to strengthen the evidence available to governments to address the current needs of individuals affected by past adoption practices and support improved service responses. The study will involve a large-scale survey and a qualitative study.

Information and publishing developments

AIFS Records Authority

Government records authorities specify the process for the storage of records and their transfer to the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to form part of the historical collection of the nation. The Institute commenced work on the development of its new Records Authority in December 2009 and on 4 February, Ross Gibbs, Director-General of the NAA, visited the Institute for the signing of the finalised Authority. The new Records Authority will now guide the Institute in the effective management of its records, especially in light of new developments in information technologies.

Creative Commons and Family Matters

The Australian Government has recently mandated that as much Australian Government public sector information as possible should be made freely available under the Creative Commons licensing system. Planning is underway to ensure that the Institute meets this requirement and applies the appropriate licensing options to our publications, datasets and other information.

This national approach to licensing arrangements for public sector information has also stimulated discussion of the Institute's...
publishing strategies, particularly in relation to *Family Matters*.

The Institute is currently considering the editorial structure and role of external reviewers. We have also decided to move to two editions per year while maintaining the total number of articles published. From 2011–12, AIFS will also make each edition freely downloadable from the date of publication while continuing to make print editions available on subscription (see page 5 for more information).

**Visits and conferences**

**Indonesian delegation**

On 7 December 2010, the Institute hosted a delegation from the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs. Their focus was on learning more about the family law system in Australia and the Institute’s role in evaluation and dissemination, focusing particularly on the work of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC). Ms Ruth Weston and Dr Lawrie Moloney also briefed the delegation on the Institute’s *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms* and developments in mediation and family support, especially as provided by Australia’s network of Family Relationship Centres.

**Family and Community Strengths Conference**

In December, I delivered my final keynote address for the year, entitled *Modern Families But Enduring Myths*, to the 6th Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference, held concurrently with the international Strengths and Assets Summit at the University of Newcastle. The university usefully sought the advice of delegates who were attending these events regarding the prospects for expanding its cross-disciplinary offerings in family studies, building on the work of the university’s Family Action Centre.

**Catholic Care Conference**

My first conference presentations for 2011 took place on 24 February. I was very pleased to participate in the 25th Anniversary of CentaCare Sandhurst Conference, themed “Being and Celebrating Family Today”, and delivered the opening keynote address, entitled *Australian Families in the 21st Century: Recent Research Insights Into Family Form and Functioning*.

That evening, I had the pleasure of delivering the speech at the 25th anniversary celebration. My topic was *In Celebration of Families Today*. CentaCare Sandhurst is part of the Catholic Diocesan family welfare organisations located throughout Australia and provides a wide range of family support services to its region via centres at Bendigo, Wedderburn, Echuca, Shepparton, Cobram, Wangaratta and Wodonga. I think that it is very important for the Institute to maintain its outreach to regional Australia.

**Concluding thoughts**

As we are all well aware, the recent widespread floods in many areas have broken the drought in a catastrophic way. The cyclones have been equally devastating in their impacts. And the destructive earthquake in New Zealand and tsunami in Japan have shaken us all. Like the Victorian bushfires, floods, cyclones, earthquakes and tsunami are events beyond the family sphere that can have profound impacts and leave indelible imprints. On the one hand, the courageous and compassionate responses of so many highlight the best of humanity. On the other, these immediate responses tend to be short-lived, and some of the multi-faceted problems faced by victims can remain with them across a lifetime, and may even span generations. Furthermore, the more widespread the problems are, the greater is the likelihood that support is eroded, given that many others are also engulfed by the same tragic circumstances, and other events progressively overtake those not so directly involved. While the support of family tends to endure, assistance from neighbours, our communities and governments is vital to ensure recovery and to maintain family resilience. It is also easy to lose sight of the fact that such disasters do not displace the more commonplace pressures that Australian families face. Many couples face ongoing, everyday problems that place family life under pressure. The partnerships of families, communities and governments can provide the timely supports that keep families on track and enable them to bounce back when life brings its inevitable challenges.
New appointments

Daryl Higgins

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Daryl Higgins as Deputy Director (Research) of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which he took up on 3 March 2011. Dr Higgins has been one of the Institute’s General Managers, with responsibility for a wide range of research, evaluation and dissemination projects focusing on policy- and practice-relevant issues. In particular, he led the clearinghouses at AIFS, which are focused on responding to adult sexual assault, protecting children, enhancing family relationships, strengthening families and communities, and overcoming disadvantage for Indigenous Australians. Prior to joining the Institute in 2004, Dr Higgins was a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Deakin University. He has extensive experience in managing and supervising research, and has led projects looking at children in out-of-home care, child-safe organisations, Family Court processes for responding to allegations of child abuse, caring for a family member with a disability, welfare reform, jobless families, past adoption practices, and community development approaches to children at risk in Indigenous communities. Dr Higgins has considerable expertise in evaluation methodology and frameworks across areas such as child protection, out-of-home care, sexual assault, childcare, parenting, care for family members with a disability, and family and community wellbeing. Together with Ruth Weston, Daryl most recently shared the role of Acting Deputy Director (Research). Ms Weston will also remain part of the Executive Team, in the new position of Assistant Director (Research).

Sue Tait

It is also my pleasure to announce the reappointment of Ms Sue Tait as Deputy Director (Corporate and Strategy). Ms Tait brings a wealth of experience as a senior executive in the public sector. She joined the Institute in 2005, and has occupied the role of Deputy Director (Corporate and Strategy) for most of this period. In this role, she has led the Institute’s transition from operating under the Commonwealth Companies and Corporations Act 1997 to the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 (FMA), a major undertaking that involved comprehensive review and redevelopment of the Institute’s governance and accountability frameworks and systems. She has also overseen a range of other initiatives, including relocation of the Institute to new premises in 2007, and has been central to ongoing strategic planning and resource development. Ms Tait has been instrumental in the development of partnership arrangements and memoranda of understanding with a range of key stakeholders in Australian government departments and agencies, states and territories and international research organisations. Prior to joining the Institute, she had extensive experience in the Victorian Department of Education and Training, including roles as Regional Director and General Manager in the Office of School Education. She has also served as Non-Executive Director of a range of community- and education-focused boards, and currently sits on the Audit Committee of two other FMA agencies.

Changes to Family Matters publication and subscriptions

The Australian Government has recently introduced a policy that encourages making public sector information freely and easily available for use and reuse, where possible.

In line with this new policy, from issue 89, access to Family Matters will change. Instead of the current three issues of the journal being only obtainable on subscription, all issues will be available for free download from the AIFS website as soon as they are published.

However, should readers wish to continue to receive printed versions of the journal, Family Matters will still be available in hard copy, on a subscription basis.

In conjunction with these changes, from issue 89, AIFS will also move to publishing only two issues of Family Matters per financial year, although each issue will be longer than in the past, resulting in a similar number of articles being published over that period. The annual subscription price will therefore remain the same.

If you wish to receive printed copies of the journal, please complete the subscription form on page 72. Alternatively, you can sign up to aifs-alert at <www.aifs.gov.au/institute/lists/aifs-alert.html> or follow us on Twitter or Facebook to be notified when the latest issue of Family Matters becomes available on the AIFS website <www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fammats.html>.

Whichever way you choose to read Family Matters, you will still have access to our usual high-quality and accessible articles and we hope you continue to enjoy our journal.
Australia enjoys higher living standards than many other countries; however, not all families in this country are living prosperously. Some families struggle to make ends meet and child poverty continues to be a serious social issue. Unforeseeable events can also throw families in the "deep end". The recent floods and cyclones in some states—Queensland in particular—and the devastating earthquake in New Zealand and tsunami in Japan, are examples of this. In challenging times such as these, some families are likely to face greater difficulties and experience longer term negative effects on their wellbeing than others.

Research that increases our understanding of factors promoting and hindering the wellbeing of individuals and families in different circumstances is important to provide an evidence base for policy development and adjustment. Conferences, such as the biennial ones run by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, represent an important opportunity for researchers, service providers, practitioners and policy-makers to exchange ideas and knowledge. This edition of Family Matters includes six papers, including the three keynote presentations, that were presented at the Institute’s most recent (11th) conference, held in July 2010.

Aletha Huston’s keynote address focuses on the effectiveness of public policy in alleviating child poverty, and the influence of research on policy development and the design of various supporting families programs. She begins by reviewing the definition of poverty used in Western countries and points out that the definition used in the US is expressed in terms of material deprivation alone and measured in absolute rather than relative terms, unlike European countries and Australia, which now see poverty as entailing a set of broad dimensions of social exclusion. As such, the conceptualisation of poverty in the US fails to recognise the range of disadvantages that people living in poverty have to endure. Huston observes that two policy streams have thus been operating in the last few decades in the US, with each having different underlying assumptions about the causes of poverty. One policy stream focuses on changing individual behaviours (such as through skills training), with the assumption being that certain personal characteristics are key causal factors of poverty (a “social selection” theory). The other stream aims to remove barriers that keep people in poverty and to generate opportunities for them to escape poverty (such as through job creation), which is guided by the view that poverty is largely explained by social circumstances (a “social causation” theory).

Huston presents two evidence-based policy examples that have generally been considered to be effective: early childhood intervention programs and employment-based welfare programs for low-income parents. While the programs of both policies, which are based on either the social selection or social causation theory, have improved children’s lives, they have not been successful in closing the gap between disadvantaged and other families, and any initial improvements that were achieved in some of the programs have gradually faded. Thus, Huston argues that it is necessary to develop a new conceptual framework for policy development that incorporates a more informed appreciation of the causes of poverty and a refinement of the definition of poverty itself. She further maintains that policies are likely to be more effective if they are designed on the basis of both social selection and social causation theories rather than being built solely on one or the other. She emphasises that defining poverty should go beyond the narrow lens of material deprivation and be broadened to incorporate social exclusion. In her view, this approach would lead to better policy development.

Jane Millar presents a longitudinal qualitative study that followed the experiences of sole mothers in the labour market in the early to mid first decade of the new millennium. As she notes, sole mothers represent one of the most disadvantaged groups in Western society and therefore tend to be targeted in social policy. In this keynote address, Millar first details various policies that have been implemented in the UK to encourage sole parents to enter the labour force, including improving the accessibility and affordability of child care and the provision of skills training and financial incentives such as tax credits. Millar’s study investigated the labour force experiences of sole mothers in the UK over four to five years, from 2002–03 to 2007 and found that the road to entering and sustaining paid work is far from easy for many. While the majority of sole mothers in the study had engaged in paid work, they had difficulty in sustaining employment, with changes in jobs and work hours being a common experience. In addition to the insecure nature of their employment, they tended
to hold low paid jobs. Consequently, their financial positions remained stagnant after having initially improved through moving from income support to paid work.

Like couple mothers, balancing work and family responsibilities is obviously an issue confronting sole mothers who enter the labour force. Millar highlights the constant struggle experienced by many sole mothers during the period investigated in relation to looking after their families and staying in paid work. In the last few years, the global financial crisis has led some governments to cut spending on social welfare and services. Millar argues that the provision of reliable and secure government support to working families becomes even more important in challenging times such as these, when such families are particularly vulnerable and less able to fend for themselves. Millar maintains that while the UK’s welfare-to-work policies have been effective in their first five or so years, the effects are unlikely to be sustainable over time, especially in times of economic downturn and rising unemployment.

Naomi Eisenstadt, a former Director of the Social Exclusion Taskforce set up by the British government in 2007 to bring the marginalised into mainstream society, outlined a new framework—Think Family—which the taskforce adopted under her direction. The key features of the Think Family framework include a coordinated support system, a focus on the needs of all family members, building on family strengths, and the provision of tailored support. In her brief history of public sector reforms in Britain, Eisenstadt stresses that a minority tend to miss out, despite the fact that each reform has benefited many people’s lives. More importantly, the minority who has missed out has had difficulties that are increasingly complex and experienced on multiple fronts. She argues that disadvantages tend to “clump together” and interact with each other, and thus often lead to poor outcomes for children. While society has become more prosperous, the gap between the top and bottom of the social gradient has widened. Without policy intervention, disadvantaged families would fall further behind; thus, Eisenstadt argues that social policies need “a more nuanced approach”. In this context, she maintains that good policy practices tend to focus on a particular group and have a lead professional working with each family. This means that such professionals must have a small case load to enable them to concentrate on and build a strong and continuing relationship with just a few families. While developing such practices may entail higher costs, not doing so will result in the even higher social costs of having poor outcomes for children across generations. In promoting the Think Family approach, Eisenstadt stresses the importance of cooperation and information sharing between services, which is critical in the current climate of reduced public spending.

While sole mothers tend to fare less well financially than couple families with or without children, time use research has found that sole mothers are not necessarily more time-poor than childless women living with a partner. Robert Goodin questions the logicality of basing such findings on actual time use and proposes a very different methodological thinking in his keynote paper. He argues that a distinction should be made between choice and necessity regarding how people use their time; in particular when measuring the amount of time spent in paid work. Without such a distinction, research on time use can reach misleading conclusions, as in the example finding above that sole mothers have as much spare time as childless women in couple families. In other words, sole mothers are really worse off in terms of discretionary control over their time.

Some policies with the best intentions do not necessarily achieve their intended outcomes. Past adoption practices are an example of this. To right the wrong, the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in 2009 commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies to review the research literature on past
adoption practices in Australia and thus help services to better support affected individuals and families. The article by Daryl Higgins in this edition discusses the results of this research and provides an account of how societal attitudes influenced the practices—which reached a peak in the early 1970s—of having single mothers relinquish their children for adoption, often coerced and in secrecy. Higgins describes the ongoing trauma of separation that these mothers and children have endured ever since. Better policies and support provided to individuals and families affected can only be achieved with a good understanding of the long-term impacts on and needs of these individuals and families. Higgins emphasises the need for systematic research to inform policy-making and assist in the development of tailored service responses for those who have been affected.

Higgins demonstrates that societal attitudes play an important role in shaping social policy. The article by Anna Reimondos, Ann Evans and Edith Gray presents research on an emerging change in patterns of couple formation in Australia—“living apart together”—whereby some people choose to maintain their relationship with separate residences. While such relationships are by no means new, they have become increasingly visible and prevalent in some Western countries. The authors provide a typology of people in such relationships—the under-25s, young adults who were previously de facto, single parents, and previously married older people. The four groups are not only different according to their demographic profile, but also in their decisions about whether to live apart, and their future living arrangements. In particular, older couples were more likely than younger couples to choose to maintain separate residences. Understanding the meaning of such relationships and monitoring their presence among people at different stages of the life course not only helps in developing a good understanding of changes in patterns of couple relationship formation, but also sheds light on the support networks available to older people.

As the brief outline above shows, one of the running themes in the articles in this edition concerns improving the wellbeing of children in our society; in particular, reducing child poverty. Three articles, by Huston, Millar, and Eistentadt, devote their focus on this issue from different perspectives. Huston points out that child poverty has been a constant presence even in many wealth countries, including Australia. Indeed, the social database of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that about 12% of children across OECD countries live in poverty. The child poverty rate in Australia is similar to this average. Children in one-parent families (often sole mothers) are more likely than those in two-parent families to experience poverty. Not surprisingly, sole-parent families are one of the key groups to which policies have been directed, given their greater need for support compared with other types of families.

Paid employment is considered a key pathway for disadvantaged families (including many sole-parent families) to escape poverty, which policy-makers believe would lead to reduced child poverty and thus, in general, to improved child wellbeing. Nevertheless, Huston demonstrates that current social policies in the US have achieved limited success. Similarly, Millar’s study reveals that sole mothers’ financial position from paid work, while better than being on income support, remained stagnant and insecure. All three authors highlight the fact that families in poverty do not simply face material deprivation, but also tend to confront a range of issues in their lives, with some being the consequences of material deprivation. Thus, it is important to develop new frameworks for developing better and more effective social policy. Social policy research is at the forefront of providing the evidence base to help in this process.

Another issue to emerge in this edition is that of research methodology. Goodin’s discussion demonstrates the importance of research methodology in shaping research findings that may form the evidence base for policy-making. Similarly, Huston maintains that variation in the definition of poverty between Western countries can influence the policy direction on this issue. Reimondos and colleagues demonstrates the need to monitor social changes—in this case, non-residential couple relationship—that have implications for other areas of social policy development.

Social policy development is an ever-evolving process that is shaped by a range of factors, including economic conditions, social attitudes, balancing the needs of various social subgroups, the resolve of policy-makers and, importantly, research evidence and support. Increasing prosperity in Australia and other developed countries has not benefited all their citizens in the same way. As Eisenstadt points out, the issues that those who fall behind face are increasingly multi-faceted and, accordingly, social policies need to be more sophisticated. This cannot be achieved without the evidence base provided by social policy research. The publication of selected papers from the Institute’s 11th conference represents a continuing effort of the Institute to provide research evidence for social policy development and the broader social community.

Endnotes
1 Some sole mothers first participated in the study in 2002, while others joined the study in 2003.
2 “Living in poverty” is defined as living in households with an equivalised income of less than 50% of the median.

Lixia Qu is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
Australians pride themselves on having dubious origins. The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) fits that bill. Conceived as an afterthought to the *Family Law Act of 1975*, the Institute’s birthing took fully another 5 years, and another Act of Parliament to patch up botched initial legislation. Not only were the circumstances of its birth unfortunate. The Institute’s original mandate seemed to give it little scope for action. The Act charged it with (and I quote) studying “factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia”.1 Taken very literally, and seen in a narrow family law context, that could have been pretty limiting. But right from the start, the Institute saw the impact of *work* on family life as an important part of the “factors affecting marital and family stability”. It has been studying that for three decades now: through its path-breaking Maternity Leave Study; through the book *Work and Family Life* (Wolcott & Glezer, 1995), and the magisterial Australian Living Standards Study underlying it; and continuing into the present day through the Institute’s research theme on “Families and Work”.2

Among the many high-quality research tools available for exploring those issues in Australia, I want to draw attention to one in particular: the Australian Time Use Study. Piloted in 1987, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has been conducting time use studies (increasingly intermittently, which is a great pity) for almost a quarter century now. Those ABS studies have become the gold standard, methodologically, among time use researchers worldwide (Stinson, 1999).

From the earliest days of those time use studies, family researchers have been exploring them to cast light on issues of work–life balance that confront Australian families. Janeen Baxter and Diane Gibson’s book, *Double Take* (1990), and Michael Bittman’s on *Juggling Time* (1992) stand alongside international classics such as Juliet Schor’s *The Overworked American* (1991) and Arlie Hochshild’s *The Second Shift* (1989) and *The Time Bind* (1997) in that tradition.
One key insight runs through all those books. That is the observation that people can be “time poor” as well as “money poor”, and that those two may not always track one another closely.

Here’s one back-of-the-envelope way of getting a sense of that. Begin with the standard way of calculating poverty rates in terms of money—as half of the median equivalent income (i.e., household income adjusting for household size) across the country as a whole. Call anyone who has less income than that “money poor”. Then recall the international convention (to which Australia is a signatory) that says people should not have to work more than 40 hours per week in paid labour. Let’s take that as a rough-and-ready indicator of time poverty. Call anyone who spends more than 40 hours per week in paid labour “time poor”. Then just go to the Luxembourg Income Study database and run the numbers.

In one pretty typical year, the proportion of the prime working-aged Australian population who were “money poor” was just under 13%. But if you ask, “What proportion of the population was either time-poor or money-poor?”—that is, were poor by one or other (or both) of those standards—the answer jumps to a whopping 51%. Truly. Over half the prime working-aged Australian population either had an income below the poverty line and/or worked more than 40 hours a week earning that income.

Well, that’s certainly a finding that grabs our attention. But what exactly are we to make of it? Everything depends on what exactly is going on with the extra two-fifths of the population that is time- or money-poor, over and above those who are money-poor alone.

There are two possibilities, here. Maybe, in case 1, they were academics, working 50 hours a week for sheer love of their subject. In that case, we wouldn’t be very worried; they’re doing what they’re doing purely for fun. But maybe, in case 2, they have to work long hours just to push their incomes above the poverty line. That would worry us.

The point is well captured in a joke that was current in the US during the Clinton Administration:

Q: “Why are you complaining about the state of the economy? Don’t you know that President Clinton has created 2 million new jobs?”

A: “Yes, and I’m holding down three of them!”

Not good, if that’s the only way the person can stay out of poverty.

It is a great shame that ordinary time use studies fail to make this crucial distinction: between people who are working long hours because they have to, and people who are working long hours because they choose to. Ordinary time use studies simply count up how many hours a day people spend doing each of several things: how many hours they spend in paid labour; how many hours in unpaid household labour (shopping, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids); how many hours in personal care (eating, sleeping, personal hygiene). In ordinary time use studies, how much “spare time” people are said to have is just how much time they have left over after deducting time actually spent in those three broad classes of activities.

But that way of looking at things conflates the cases of the university researcher working long hours for fun and the person working three jobs just to get by. To pull those cases apart, what we require is a measure—not of how much time people actually spend in paid labour—but rather of how much time they need to spend in paid labour. The same applies for all those other sorts of activities I mentioned. (After all, lots of people spend more time than strictly necessary cooking for fun, keeping the house fastidiously tidy and lounging in bed, just as lots of people spend more time than the minimum necessary in paid labour.)

With my colleagues James Rice, Antti Parpo and Lina Eriksson, I developed and operationalised a concept of “discretionary time” that attempts to make just that distinction. We try to specify how much time people strictly need to spend in each of those sorts of activities. What’s left over we call their “discretionary time”. They may—they probably will—choose to spend some of their discretionary time doing more of those same things. That’s fine. There’s no reason they shouldn’t. It’s perfectly reasonable for people...
to want more than a minimally adequate income, more than a minimally adequate meal, more than a minimal night’s sleep. Our point is just that, when doing more than the minimum that is strictly necessary, that should be seen as a choice; that is, their chosen way of how to spend some of their discretionary time, not a limit on how much discretionary time they have available to spend.

Of course, the trick lies in how to define what is “minimally necessary” in all these realms. I’ll tell you how we did it in a minute; and I’ll defend that as being superior to alternative approaches to that task, whenever called upon to do so. But I want to emphasise, above all else, the importance of finding some way—whether ours or some other—of operationalising this crucial distinction between choice and necessity. Time use studies can seriously mislead us if that crucial distinction is not made—in ways that matter for public policy. (I’ll show how shortly.)

Here is how we operationalised “necessity” in each of the three major realms of time use. “Necessary time in paid labour” we define (unsurprisingly) in relation to the standard poverty line: half the median equivalent income in your country. How much time is necessary for you to spend in paid labour is, we say, however long it would take someone at your current wage rate to get an income over the poverty line. The poverty line is a measure of necessity; anything above that is discretionary. That’s easy, because there is such a widely agreed measure of poverty in the realm of money. We piggyback on that in devising a measure of “necessary time in unpaid household labour”. By analogy, we say that how much time you need to spend on that is just half the amount of time spent on that by the median person in your country living in a household with the same structure as your own. (Gratifyingly, specifying necessity in this realm in this way, we find that about the same proportion of people fall below that standard of “necessity” for unpaid household labour as for paid labour. That doesn’t exactly “validate” that instrument, but it at least offers some welcome reassurance.)

Alas, we cannot implement exactly the same procedure when it comes to estimating “necessary time in personal care”. Merely taking half of what the median person does there would yield an unreasonably low estimate. (The reason for that is simple: “personal care” time consists very largely of sleeping and, although we all laze about from time to time, virtually no one gets literally twice as much sleep as he or she needs.) Instead, we take four-fifths of the amount of time the median person actually spends in personal care as our measure of what is necessary to be done in those activities. (That proportion was chosen because it yields roughly the same proportion of the population doing less than “necessary” as in the other two classes of activities.)

There are, as I say, other ways to specify what is “necessary” in each of those realms. I’d like to be able say, “They all come to roughly the same in the end”, but we don’t know that yet. No one else has systematically implemented any of those alternative strategies on any nationwide dataset that I know of. So all I can do is report how much of a difference it makes to distinguish, in the particular way that we have done, between choice and necessity in the use of time.

First, let me describe how things would look if we were to follow the ordinary practice of time use researchers. Remember, they focus on how much time people actually spend in all those activities, and calculate “spare time” as what is left over. Well, by those standards a lone mother would be no more time-poor than a childless woman in a dual-income household (call her a “DINK” for short: dual-income, no kids). Calculating things the way time use researchers conventionally do, both DINKs and lone mothers would have had around 30 hours of “spare time” per week. But does anyone seriously believe that a lone mother is no more pressed for time than a dual-earner with no kids? That just can’t be right.

What’s gone wrong in the ordinary time use calculation of “spare time” is, once again, a simple failure to distinguish between choice and necessity. It’s perfectly true that, once you subtract out all the hours that the DINK,
actually spends at her desk, she has no more “spare time” than the lone mother. But what those calculations miss is the fact that the lone mother has to spend much more of her time in the ways that she does, whereas with the DINK spending her time as she does is to a much larger extent her discretionary choice.

The magnitude of that difference is revealed by our calculations of “discretionary time”. Instead of focusing on how much time people actually spend in those activities, we ask, “How much time is it strictly necessary for them to spend in those activities?” How much discretionary time they have is simply how much is left over, after that is subtracted away.

When the calculations are performed in that way, the DINK and the lone mother appear as polar opposites. Lone mothers in Australia had around 60 hours of “discretionary time” per week, in contrast to 87 hours for DINK women. That’s to say, in terms of control over their time, lone mothers were 27 hours a week worse off than DINKs. Think of it: 27 hours. That’s like having to work three extra days a week (Goodin, Rice, Parpo, & Eriksson, 2008, chapter 5). That is a huge difference. But it only comes into view if we abandon the ordinary methodology of time use researchers and adopt instead some sort of methodology that is sensitive to the difference between choice and necessity in the use of one’s time.

At international conferences of time use researchers, I have entered pleas that we make this distinction. I am pleased to report that all the main players there are wholly onside; as well as the audience at the monthly seminar of the Research Division of the World Bank. So I hope, and believe, that we are getting some traction on the problem, and general practice will soon be reformed. (That is to say, we’ll soon get new measures to supplement the old—which remain, of course, useful for other sorts of purposes, I hasten to add.) But while I’m confident that we will eventually get it sorted out, in the meanwhile, family researchers need to know that there are problems with the data currently on the table and that makers of family policy might be seriously misled by it.

Rest assured. In terms of discretionary control over their time, lone mothers really are temporally the worst off people in the community, notwithstanding the false impression you might get from looking at time use data as it has traditionally been presented.

Endnotes


2. Examining “the extent to which paid work arrangements affect family life and family wellbeing. Because of work, many people feel stressed, rushed and dissatisfied with the amount of time they have for their family. The Institute considers it important, then, to continue to investigate the ways in which family members manage their time, especially with regard to paid employment and the division of paid and unpaid work within families” (AIFS, 2009, p. 8).


4. The numbers in the text are from the 1990 Survey of Income and Housing Costs and Amenities, for purposes of comparability with the other cases we were studying in Goodin, Rice, Parpo, and Eriksson (2008). Obviously the percentages change from year to year; but it is the difference between poverty measured in these two different ways that is of interest here; and that difference between them persists across the years.

5. These figures are for the early 1990s (based on the 1992 Time Use Survey), a choice forced on us by the data requirements of the Discretionary Time study. For details, see Goodin et al. (2008, chapter 5).

References


Professor Robert Goodin is at the School of Philosophy, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. This article is an edited version of Professor Goodin’s keynote address presented at the 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 7 July 2010.
Children in poverty
Can public policy alleviate the consequences?

Aletha C. Huston

Child poverty is persistent throughout the world; even in many wealthy countries. Among Western industrialised countries, the United States has high child poverty rates (about 20% in 2009) as well as high income inequality. In recent years, two US policies to address child poverty have received support: early intervention to improve the health and development of young children, and employment-based financial incentives and work supports for low-income parents. Both types of policy are well-supported by high-quality research, a welcome trend toward evidence-based policy. But, they are not enough. In this paper, I argue that two features of the predominant theory of change in US poverty policy limit our ability to tackle the problem. First, we define poverty narrowly as lack of income or economic hardship; by contrast, the European Union and Australia consider social exclusion/inclusion to be the core problem to be addressed by policy. Second, we focus primarily on changing individual behaviour rather than also changing the economic and social structural conditions that lead to high rates of child poverty.

I begin by considering what we mean by poverty and assumptions about the causes of poverty. I then discuss current knowledge about early childhood intervention and employment-based incentives for parents as examples of well-documented, evidence-based policies designed to reduce poverty or its effects. Finally, I consider the implications of theories of change for future policies as well as for future directions in research.

Defining poverty
Low income
Absolute definitions
Annual income is the most common guidepost for assessing poverty within and across nations. The United States uses an absolute definition. The federal poverty threshold is an estimate of the minimum income needed by an individual or family to avoid serious material hardship.
It originated in 1963 from estimates of the minimum food budget required for adequate nutrition, using the assumption that food constituted about one-third of a family’s expenditure. It varies depending on family size and is adjusted annually for inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (see Schiller, 2008, for a detailed explanation). In 2009, the threshold for a family of four people was $22,050. The measure has a number of faults, including the fact that it is not adjusted for regional differences in cost of living or for in-kind benefits received as part of public assistance (Citro & Michael, 1995), but it does allow comparisons of trends over time for individuals and for groups of people. The US government is currently publishing a revised version of the poverty definition in an effort to correct some of these flaws, but it continues to be an absolute threshold based on annual income.

In Figure 1, the trends for poverty among US children and adults from 1959 to 2008, using the federal definition, are shown. The percentage of children living in families with incomes below the poverty line declined until 1969, rose to high levels in the 1980s and again in the 1990s; in 2009, 21% of US children lived in poor families (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). Income is volatile by this definition, with many families moving in and out of poverty over their children’s lifetimes, but some families remaining in chronic poverty over many years. Single-mother households and families of colour (both African-American and Latino) are disproportionately represented among the poor, especially the chronically poor (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2010).

Relative definitions

In contrast to the absolute definition of poverty used in the United States, the OECD and most European countries use a relative definition based on some percentage of the median income in the country. This relative index generates a higher poverty rate in the US than does the absolute index. Cross-national comparisons of income poverty in 2000 in 24 OECD countries, defined as family income lower than 50% of the median income, showed that the lowest rates are in Denmark and Finland (less than 3%) and the highest rate is in the United States (22%). The rates for Australia and the United Kingdom were 12% and 17% respectively. In 17 of the 24 developed countries, however, child poverty increased from 1990 to 2000 (UNICEF, 2005). During the period from 1998 to 2008, the rates of child poverty in the UK declined substantially (Waldfogel, 2010).

Social exclusion

People living in income poverty often suffer a broad range of disadvantages that are summarised in the concept of social exclusion. In 1984, the then European Economic Community (1985) adopted an expanded definition of poverty that informed the idea of social exclusion: “For the purposes of this Decision ‘the poor’ shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live” (Article 1.2). Scholars have struggled to produce a precise definition of social exclusion. One such effort by Kahn and Kamerman (2002) seems to capture its many facets: “[inequalities in] basic living; family economic participation; housing; health; education; public space; social participation; as well as the subjective experience of social exclusion” (p. 27). Reducing social exclusion became integral to the policy goals of the United Kingdom and Australia as well as those in other member states of the European Union, but the term is almost never used in United States policy discussions. Although many components of social exclusion may be affected by increased income alone, striving to reduce social exclusion leads to a broader range of policy strategies addressing the cultural and social conditions associated with poverty, as well as individuals’ perceptions of inclusion. For example, governments must...
address ethnic, gender and racial bases of social exclusion that go well beyond income.

The focus on social exclusion has also led governments to address child wellbeing broadly; considering the whole web of conditions that are often a consequence of (as well as being determined by) income poverty (Huston & Bentley, 2010). For example, in its 2007 report, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre went well beyond material deprivation to examine five additional areas of child wellbeing: health and safety, educational wellbeing, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks, and subjective wellbeing. The United States and the United Kingdom ranked lowest among 21 OECD countries on the overall index of child wellbeing. As the data were based on the years from 1990 to 2000, they did not reflect the possible effects of the Labour Party’s program to reduce child poverty in the UK. Australia was not included in the analysis (UNICEF, 2007).

Summary

In the developed world, poverty is typically defined by a family’s current income compared to an absolute standard designed to represent the amount needed for a minimally adequate standard of living (absolute poverty) or to the median incomes of people in the same country (relative poverty). Although income poverty is correlated with material hardship (e.g., food insufficiency, inadequate housing, lack of access to medical care), it is not a perfect index of such hardship (Mayer & Jencks, 1989).

Defining poverty as “relative” assumes that poverty is more than material deprivation—that it reflects a person’s economic situation relative to the expectations and norms of her or his society. The focus on social exclusion rather than income per se expands both theoretical and policy concerns to the web of personal and institutional barriers that are correlated with low incomes in modern industrialised societies. Understanding how poverty affects children’s development and how policies may alleviate some of those effects requires consideration of the material, social and institutional conditions associated with poverty.

Causes of poverty

Theories about the causes of poverty fall into two broad classes: social selection and social causation (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). According to the social selection hypothesis, individuals succeed or fail to climb the economic ladder largely because of individual characteristics, including ability, skills, motivation, and mental and physical health. Children born into poor families are disadvantaged by having parents with low levels of the qualities needed for acquiring income, and the children in turn have relatively poor intellectual and social skills as a result of both genetic and environmental influences provided by their parents. Some version of this theory informs politically conservative views that the poor should be able to help themselves and that providing assistance without requiring behaviour change perpetuates poverty.

Most poverty policies in the United States are based on social selection—they are designed to change the skills and behaviour of individuals who are poor or who are likely to become poor. In Table 1, some illustrations of such policies are shown. Poverty and welfare policies directed at adults are intended to: increase individuals’ employment through improving their skills, motivation and effort; reduce “dependence” on welfare; and promote marriage and financial responsibility for children. Some of the major policies for young children are designed to improve early developmental competencies and promote “school readiness”.

According to the social causation hypothesis, economic and social institutions and structures offer opportunities and barriers that lead to poverty or affluence. The availability or lack of jobs paying high wages or requiring particular skills, for example, can have a strong impact on the likelihood that individuals will be poor. Some version of this view informs politically liberal views that emphasise such policies as living wage and anti-discrimination laws. Examples of such policies are shown in Table 2. They include those designed to: improve work opportunities and job availability, assure adequate wages for work, prevent race and gender discrimination,
Table 2  Examples of policies guided by social causation theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets of policies</th>
<th>Sample policies</th>
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<tr>
<td>For adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities for work, job availability</td>
<td>Job creation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low wages</td>
<td>Minimum or living wage requirements, wage supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race and gender discrimination</td>
<td>Anti-discrimination policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child care availability</td>
<td>Subsidies and publicly supported child care</td>
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<td>Educational opportunities</td>
<td>Grants for education</td>
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<td>For children</td>
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<td>Quality of child care</td>
<td>Quality initiatives and support</td>
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<td>Educational opportunity</td>
<td>“Ready” schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood resources</td>
<td>Parks, safety measures</td>
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and assure developmental and educational opportunities for children and adults.

Conger & Donnellan (2007) argued for an interactionist view incorporating both social selection and social structure; that is, the recognition that individuals are limited by the social and institutional opportunities available to them, but that people’s own abilities and personal characteristics also influence the ways in which they use (or do not use) those opportunities.

I turn now to examples of two US policies that are evidence-based and widely accepted as effective: early childhood intervention and employment-based welfare for low-income parents. I chose these examples because my long-time involvement in research on these topics has led me to think extensively about their strengths and weaknesses. For both policies, there is good empirical evidence that they produce socially significant improvements in children’s lives, but the gains are not sufficient to overcome the substantial inequalities between the poor and the “not poor” in the US.

Early childhood interventions

Over the past fifty years, policy-makers and scholars studying children have increasingly come to recognise the importance of experiences in the first few years of life, including the prenatal period, for children’s long-term health and development.

Interaction among genetic predispositions and early experiences affect the extent to which the foundations of learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health will be strong or weak” (Shonkoff, 2010, p. 357).

Early developmental lags

In the 1960s, policy-makers and the public became aware that children living in poverty entered school at age 5 with fewer skills than their more affluent counterparts. But we now know that developmental differences associated with family income begin much earlier than age 5. In the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), data were collected on a representative sample of 11,000 children born in 2001 in the United States. The Bayley Cognitive Assessment, a measure of overall developmental level, was administered at 9 months and again at 24 months. The comparisons of average scores of children from families with low incomes (less than 200% of the poverty threshold) to those of children from higher income families are shown in Figure 2. The zero point on the graph represents the average for children from non-poor families. At 9 months, children in low-income families were slightly behind; by 24 months, the difference was much larger—over half of a standard deviation (Halle et al., 2009). That is, only about 30% of the children in low-income families scored at or above the average for those from more affluent families. Less pronounced but significant disparities also appeared for children’s health and positive social behaviour. Although there are undoubtedly many reasons for these differences, the important point is that they exist; children in low-income families are already at a considerable developmental disadvantage by the time they reach their second birthdays.

Relationship between low family income and later functioning

The environments experienced by children in poverty affect not only early developmental progress, but also have lasting impacts on intellectual development. The early years are a “sensitive period” for environmental influences; that is, experiences in these years have particularly strong and lasting effects. Poverty or low family income during the first five years of life is more deleterious for intellectual development than is poverty later in childhood or adolescence. In one large longitudinal study, family poverty during early childhood predicted low achievement test performance in the school years (ages 6–12); once early
childhood income was taken into account, family income during the school years was not related to achievement (Votruba-Drzal, 2006). Even longer lasting effects were established in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), a longitudinal study that has been following families since 1968. Poverty during the first five years of life predicted poor school performance throughout the school years as well as low adult educational attainment; family income in later periods of childhood and adolescence did not add predictive power (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010).

Although poverty in the early years also influences social behaviour—both positive and problem behaviour—there is less evidence that its effect occurs during a sensitive period. For example, income in both the early years (ages 0–5) and middle childhood (ages 6–12) had cumulative effects on behaviour problems at ages 7–12 (Votruba-Drzal, 2006). Similarly, in the PSID, poverty in adolescence predicted adult psychological distress, arrests and non-marital child bearing, even with earlier poverty controlled (Duncan et al., 2010).

The mechanisms by which low-income environments affect early development are just beginning to be understood. Shonkoff (2010) proposed a developmental model incorporating three types of early environments—human relationships; physical, chemical and built environments; and nutrition—that interact with genes to produce biological “memories” with long-term consequences for adaptive behaviour and responses to stress. The model reflects the fact that we have finally discarded simplistic nature vs nurture concepts, as investigators demonstrate some of the biological mechanisms by which genes are translated into observable characteristics through complex interactions of biological and environmental influences.

**Early interventions**

In the US and the UK, early intervention has been one policy response to the evidence regarding the importance of early childhood experiences. In the US, Head Start was launched in 1965 as a large federal program to enrich the experiences of children about to enter school, and it continues 45 years later. During the same time period, a number of demonstration programs, primarily for children in the 3–5 year old age range, were undertaken to gain better understanding of what types of intervention might be effective. In many cases, the evaluations of these programs were random or quasi-random assignment experiments, allowing comparisons of children who had access to the interventions with comparable children who did not.

I cannot do justice to the large body of research investigating the effects of these preschool interventions, but two generalisations emerge. First, carefully designed intensive interventions can produce improvements in school achievement and social behaviour. Across 20 studies reviewed by Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon (2005), school achievement for children in the intervention programs was superior to achievement by control group children. The average difference was about one-third of a standard deviation. Two of the most carefully studied programs, the Perry Preschool Project and the North Carolina Abecedarian Program, had lasting effects on educational attainment, labour market participation and, in one case, reduced crime, well into adulthood (Karoly et al., 2005). Economic analyses of these interventions consistently show long-term positive cost–benefit ratios (Heckman, 2006; Karoly et al., 2005).

Large-scale national programs such as Head Start produce more modest positive effects, and there is considerable debate about the duration of the initial advantages produced by the program. In the National Head Start Evaluation Study, applicants for Head Start were randomly assigned to be admitted to a Head Start program or to be in a control group. By the end of the year, children in the Head Start group (especially 3-year-olds) had better language and literacy skills, fewer behaviour problems and better health, and received less harsh parenting than control group children (Administration for Children and Families...
[ACF], 2005), but most of the differences were no longer evident by the end of first grade (ACF, 2010). Some commentators interpret these findings as evidence that Head Start in its current form is ineffective, but others point out that the study design was corrupted by the fact that many children in the control group attended preschool programs, including Head Start programs that were not part of the study. Perhaps age 3 is too late to begin. One of the most effective demonstration programs was the Abecedarian study in North Carolina, in which children were given high-quality full-time child care from the age of six weeks to kindergarten entry (Campbell et al., 2008). Large-scale interventions using combinations of parent education and preschool programs for children from birth to 3 can produce positive effects, particularly for children’s health and social-emotional wellbeing. Sure Start is a community-based intervention in the UK providing a broad range of services to low-income families. The most recent evaluation shows that 3-year-olds in Sure Start communities displayed more positive social behaviour and independence, and their parents exhibited more positive parenting practices and provided more stimulating home environments than was the case in comparison communities (Melhuish, Belsky, Leyland, & Barnes, 2010). The Early Head Start program in the US offers a similar mixture of services. An early evaluation indicated positive effects on children’s development and the quality of the family environment, but only in communities where the program was fully implemented (Love et al., 2005). Finally, nurse home visiting programs offering services during pregnancy and after birth to high-risk parents can also produce improvements in child health and development (Olds, Sadler, & Kitzman, 2007).

Summary

Scholars and policy-makers have been persuaded by this evidence that early interventions are a good societal investment because they reduce the disadvantages associated with poverty during the first five years of life. James Heckman (2006) summarised the argument: “Investing in disadvantaged young children is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large. Early interventions targeted toward disadvantaged children have much higher returns than later interventions such as reduced pupil-teacher ratios, public job training, convict rehabilitation programs, tuition subsidies, or expenditure on police” (p. 1902). Nonetheless, early interventions alone do not and probably cannot solve many of the problems associated with poverty. They are not designed to reduce poverty in the short run, but to eliminate some of its effects on children’s intellectual, behavioural and health problems, with the aim of reducing the likelihood of poverty in the next generation.

Welfare and employment policies

A second major policy approach is designed to reduce poverty in today’s families by increasing parents’ employment. Policy-makers in the US and other developed countries have confronted three basic facts over the 20th century: (a) earnings are the principal source of income for the great majority of families everywhere; (b) single-parent families, especially those headed by single mothers, are much more vulnerable to poverty than are two-parent families; and (c) the demands of employment conflict with child-rearing responsibilities, making it difficult for a parent to do both. In most of the 20th century, policy responses to this information typically involved providing income and in-kind assistance (e.g., housing, medical care) that was intended to allow single mothers to care for their children at home. In the United States (and elsewhere), this approach became less viable over time, in part because it typically did not raise single-mother families out of poverty and in part because mothers of young children from all economic groups were entering the labour market in larger and larger numbers. At the same time, “welfare” became more politically unpopular, as the majority of its recipients shifted from being widows to being divorced and never-married mothers who were portrayed to the public as lazy and...
undeserving. Race also played a role. Although the majority of recipients were white, the public image was an urban African-American woman with numerous children born out of wedlock (Quadagno, 1994).

**Work as the goal**

Ultimately, the emphasis of US welfare policy moved away from offering meagre support to parents who were not working towards encouraging employment. In the 1990s, both carrots, in the form of earnings supplements, and sticks, in the form of sanctions and time limits on benefits, were instituted to promote this goal. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was expanded following then President Clinton’s campaign slogan that policy should ‘make work pay’. In 1996, the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA) made major changes in federal welfare policy, emphasising employment and limiting welfare benefits to a total of five years in a parent’s lifetime. The label for the welfare legislation—“personal responsibility”—clearly reflected the underlying theory of change; the goals were to change the employment, marital and parenting behaviour of poor individuals. A number of European countries, particularly the United Kingdom, also shifted their policies towards encouraging employment, though the policy tools were more generous and less punitive than were those in the US (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007).

As the winds of policy change began to blow in the 1980s, a number of large, random-assignment studies were initiated to test the types of policies being discussed in the US. Initially, the major questions concerned the possible impacts of policy changes on parents’ employment, earnings and use of welfare (see Gueron & Pauly, 1991), but eventually attention turned to asking about the effects on children, who were, of course, the intended beneficiaries of public assistance for low-income parents.

**The Next Generation Project**

The Next Generation Project was a collaborative effort that took advantage of the variation in the policies tested in different experiments to compare the impacts of different policy features on children’s development. The policy features examined included mandatory vs voluntary participation in job search, job training, time limits on eligibility for cash benefits, earnings supplements and enhanced child care assistance. These studies showed consistently that simply moving from welfare to a job did not increase family income on average; hence, work alone did not move families out of poverty (Bloom & Michalopoulos, 2001). Programs that offered earnings supplements, however, did raise family income, and these were the programs that also led to improvements in children’s school performance, especially for children who were in the preschool years when their parents entered the program (Morris, Duncan, & Clark-Kauffman, 2005). Similarly, policies that offered enhanced child care assistance increased children’s enrolment in centre-based child care, which in turn led to better school achievement and to reductions in externalising problem behaviour once they entered school (Crosby, Dowsett, Gennetian, & Huston, 2010; Morris, Gennetian, Duncan, & Huston, 2009).

In the original conceptual model guiding the Next Generation studies, we expected changes in parents’ sense of wellbeing to be an important pathway for effects on children. A large body of non-experimental literature supports the hypothesis that the negative effects of poverty or income loss on children’s psychological wellbeing are mediated by parents’ stress (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; McLoyd, Aikens, & Burton, 2006). In the policy experiments, parents’ wellbeing depended on the ages of their children—parents who had preschool-aged children reported increased depressive symptoms when they were in programs requiring employment, especially when they were expected to move quickly
into a job. Those whose children were school-aged, on the other hand, reported lower levels of depressive symptoms, and their children’s social behaviour also improved (Morris, 2008; Walker, Huston, & Imes, 2010). People with preschool children probably encountered more difficulties in reorganising family routines and arranging satisfactory child care, especially at short notice, than did those with school-aged children.

These welfare and employment experiments are consistent with the longitudinal studies described above in suggesting that the effects on children vary by child age. The most positive long-term effects of increased income and centre-based child care on later achievement and intellectual development occurred for children in the preschool years (3–5 years old). Positive effects on children’s social behaviour also occurred in middle childhood (roughly ages 6–11 years). For adolescents, however, mothers’ entry into required employment led to somewhat negative impacts on staying in school and behaviour problems (Gennetian, Duncan, Knox, Vargas, & Clark-Kauffman, 2004).

New Hope: A different philosophy

New Hope was one of the experiments in the Next Generation group of studies, but it differed from the welfare studies in goals and philosophy. It was a community-initiated poverty-reduction demonstration program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, based on the assumption that poor people want to work and that public policy should provide work supports enabling them to do so. The founders viewed employment as the route out of poverty for most people and argued that, “if you work, you should not be poor”. The underlying theory of the causes of poverty was more interactionist than those of most welfare programs, attributing poverty at least partially to the economic and structural conditions that lead to low wages.

The New Hope program was designed to offer benefits that would lift full-time workers’ incomes above the poverty threshold and would provide the basic work supports needed to sustain employment—specifically, child care and health care. For people who worked full-time (30 hours a week), it offered earnings supplements that would bring their income above the poverty threshold, child care subsidies, and health care subsidies. Project representatives provided respectful assistance to help people find jobs, organise child care, and the like. If a participant could not find a full-time job, the program offered access to community service jobs that paid the minimum wage and entitled the individual to New Hope benefits.
The organisers of New Hope intended it to be a model policy that could be adopted on a large scale. To make their case, they contracted an independent research organisation, MDRC in New York, to undertake an evaluation using the most stringent research method—random assignment. To qualify for New Hope, applicants had to be at least 18 years old, have earnings below 150% of the poverty threshold, live in the target areas in Milwaukee, and be willing to work full-time. Both men and women were eligible, whether or not they had children. Applicants who met these criteria were assigned by lottery to be in either the New Hope group that could access the program services, or in a control group that could not. Both groups could use other services in the community.

Of the 1,356 adult participants in the New Hope study, 745 had at least one child aged 1–10 years at random assignment. Our research team studied the progress of those children over eight years after random assignment. The New Hope benefits were available for three years, so our evaluation tested effects on children during and after the treatment group had access to those benefits. As well as examining parents’ economic and emotional wellbeing and parenting behaviour, we assessed the children’s academic achievement, socio-emotional wellbeing, non-parental care, and extracurricular activities. Thomas Weisner, an anthropologist who was part of the New Hope team, directed an ethnographic study that gathered repeated intensive qualitative interviews and observations among a randomly selected subset of 44 program and control group families in order to provide a complement to the large-scale quantitative assessments.

The results have been presented in detail in several articles and in two books, Higher Ground: New Hope for Working Poor Families and their Children (Duncan, Huston, & Weisner, 2007) and Making It Work: Low Wage Employment, Family Life, and Child Development (Yoskikawa, Weisner, & Lowe, 2006). Two years after random assignment, children in New Hope families, compared to those in control families, had better achievement, higher levels of positive social behaviour (i.e., social skills, compliance, autonomy), and fewer behaviour problems (both externalising and internalising problems) according to their teachers (Huston et al., 2001). Many of these differences were maintained after the New Hope program ended (Huston et al., 2005; Miller, Huston, Duncan, McLoyd, & Weisner, 2008).

New Hope was an intervention with adults; why did it affect their children? Two pathways are supported in our analyses. First, New Hope produced modest improvements in family incomes, reducing the likelihood that the family would be officially “poor”. Reduced poverty would be expected to increase resources for children and enhance their developmental opportunities. Second, the program increased parents’ use of centre-based care for younger children, and out-of-school structured activities for older children, providing care environments with better potential to promote positive development than the informal and unsupervised settings experienced by the control group children. Our qualitative data suggested a third vital component—respectful and useful services provided by staff, who were called “project representatives”. Participants talked frequently about the supportive environment in the New Hope offices, noting that representatives returned phone calls, offered useful information, and were available. One person said that the staff wanted you to succeed, contrasting them with the welfare office where they wanted you to fail. Parents’ access to social support and improved psychological wellbeing would be expected to carry over into their home lives and into warm and supportive interactions with their children.

Conclusions from work-based programs

Advocates for children and policy-makers were understandably alarmed about potential dangers for children if their single mothers were required to get and maintain employment. Advocates for welfare “reform” asserted that parents’ employment would not only better the economic position of the family, but would allow them to join the American mainstream and provide good models for children. Both were partially right and partially wrong. Overall, the experiments that tested policies requiring employment, even without additional income or centre-based care, showed very few deleterious effects on children. The worst fears of the naysayers were not realised, though we should be concerned that the policies did nothing to improve poor children’s wellbeing. At same time, these experiments demonstrated that employment-based policies can improve children’s lives if the family moves out of poverty, children have good child care and opportunities for structured out-of-school activities, the mother has time to arrange for the changes in family responsibilities when she starts work, and case workers provide respectful support.

The New Hope program was designed to offer benefits that would lift full-time workers’ incomes above the poverty threshold and provide the basic work supports needed to sustain employment—specifically, child care and health care.
There are two important caveats to these generalisations. First, the studies took place during a period of relatively low unemployment, raising questions about additional barriers faced by single mothers whose low levels of education and skills make them non-competitive in an economy with fewer available jobs. Second, children of different ages responded differently to parents’ participation in employment-related programs. Positive effects on achievement in elementary school were most consistent for children in their preschool years (aged 3–5 years old when their mothers entered the programs). Positive effects on social behaviour were most likely for children in the early school years at program entry. Negative effects on achievement and minor delinquent behaviour occurred for those in early adolescence (between about 11 and 13 years) at program entry (Morris et al., 2005). We have little information about the effects of these programs on infants and very young children under the age of 3 years.

As the results of these experiments were emerging during the 1990s, policy changes were already occurring. From 1995 to 2000, rates of employment among single mothers increased, the number of people receiving cash assistance (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC] or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]) declined markedly, and poverty among single mothers declined (Haskins, Primus, & Sawhill, 2002). Although some commentators attributed these patterns to changes in the welfare laws, several conditions coincided, making it difficult to single out one cause. First, unemployment rates were low, and jobs were fairly easy to find in most places. Second, during the same period that the welfare law was revised, work supports for low-income parents were expanded. The maximum benefit available from the federal EITC grew by 25%, from $3,110 in 1995 to $3,888 in 2000, and a number of states offered additional earnings tax credits within their state income tax systems. For example, the state of Wisconsin, where the New Hope study was conducted, offered a benefit that added approximately 25% of the federal benefit, depending on family size. Federal investments in child care and early education programs for children from low-income families doubled during the 1990s, extending child care assistance to many more children, albeit still not funding the majority of eligible children (Fuller, Kagan, Caspary, & Gauthier, 2002).

Theories of change
The two types of anti-poverty policies I have described here—early intervention and work-based programs for adults with low incomes—are among those considered most successful by scholars and policy-makers alike. Both are supported by extensive and methodologically strong policy research that documents their positive effects on children’s development as well as their positive cost–benefit ratios. Yet, both have produced only modest successes. Quality early interventions improve school performance by about one-third of a standard deviation, a result that is impressive but does not close the poverty gap. Large-scale programs—for example, Head Start—reduce the income gap in performance on pre-reading skills by about 45% (ACF, 2005), but much of this gain is not sustained. New Hope produced about one-fourth of a standard deviation improvement in school achievement, but gains gradually faded.

We can do a better job of creating effective policies by clarifying our theories of change; that is, the conceptual frameworks describing the causes of poverty, and the very definition of poverty itself. Such theories are typically not well articulated by policy-makers (or by anyone else), although they are implicit in the rhetoric and discussions of policy goals and choices.

Causes of poverty
Most of the US social policies that I have described are based on a social selection model. Both early interventions and welfare-to-work policies are intended to change the skills, motivations and behaviour of individuals. Early intervention programs are typically couched in language about increasing school readiness in the short run, and improving human capital and economic productivity in the long run.

The welfare law passed in 1996 also targets individual change. Its stated goals were to increase employment, reduce welfare “dependence”, and encourage marriage and parental responsibility. It was not explicitly designed to reduce poverty (Greenberg et al., 2002). Virtually all of the provisions in the law target the behaviour of individual adults—getting parents into jobs, removing the guarantee of cash supports, and requiring parents to assume financial responsibility for their children. There are no provisions for community service jobs or publicly supported work, nor are there any provisions for job creation or wage supports.

An interactionist theory of change is suggested by data from these experiments showing differential effectiveness for different groups of people and providing some information about how individual characteristics interact with available opportunities. In the New Hope study,
the families who were most likely to increase work and income were those who began with just one barrier to employment (e.g., having preschool children, a low education, or a criminal record) (Duncan et al., 2007). Across all of the Next Generation studies, children in families with moderate levels of disadvantage, but not those with relatively high or low levels of disadvantage, showed increased school achievement and participation in centre-based child care as a result of parents' participation in the employment-based programs (Alderson, Gennetian, Dowsett, Imes, & Huston, 2008).

**Definitions of poverty based on social exclusion**

Defining the problems of poverty as social exclusion rather than solely as deprivation of resources leads to a theory of change with a different balance of social causation and social selection as causes of poverty, to expanded targets of social policy, and to a broader range of goals for policy effects on children. Social exclusion is central to the discussions of poverty in the European Union and is articulated in poverty policy goals in the UK and Australia, among others. Often citing social exclusion, the British “war on poverty”, launched by the Labour government in the late 1990s, had three goals: promote work and make work pay; increase financial support for families; and support the early health, education and development of children (Waldfogel, 2010). Two of these—work promotion and early childhood development—are similar to the targets of US policies, but increased financial support for families distinguishes the UK goals from those in the US.

The social exclusion approach also leads to an expanded scope of policy targets and approaches. It is concerned with basic material wellbeing and promoting employment as the principal avenue for families to move out of poverty, as well as improving current and future human capital. But a social exclusion perspective also leads to policy goals designed to reduce inequality and increase social participation and perceptions of belonging to the mainstream. Grouping a range of policy targets under one rubric—social exclusion—may facilitate the formation of integrated policies that cross the usual silo lines (e.g., across housing, education and health).

**Implications for research**

Poverty research rarely includes individuals' perceptions of social exclusion or inclusion, but there is suggestive evidence that such perceptions may affect children's responses to living in poverty. The modest improvements in income for New Hope families not only eased the pressures to provide basic material needs, but also contributed to parents' and children's feelings of social inclusion. In the ethnographic interviews, New Hope parents were asked how they used the increases in income provided by the program. They talked about meeting basic needs, but also of being able to provide a few “extras”. They felt good about being able to take their children for a fast food meal, buy a child a birthday present, or shop for new clothes instead of going to the thrift shop. One parent spent several hundred dollars on professional photographs of her son’s high school graduation, reflecting the importance of that milestone for her and her family. Being able to buy these “extras” made both parents and children feel part of the American mainstream—being like everyone else. And, it was this aspect of income that predicted improvements in children's positive behaviour as well, possibly because it gave them a sense of belonging (Mistry, Lowe, Benner, & Chien, 2008). Our understanding of the processes underlying the effects of poverty could be enriched by more research that incorporates individuals' perceptions of social inclusion.

Defining poverty as social exclusion leads to research investigating child wellbeing and rights as well as human capital goals for children. The objectives of early interventions are typically phrased as some version of school readiness—assuring that children have the skills needed to succeed when they enter “regular” school in kindergarten or first grade.
The research and evaluation literature is rife with the term “child outcomes”. The ultimate justification for early interventions in the US is largely economic—raising children to be economically productive, tax-paying adults who will stay out of prison. It is not enough to show that a policy produces a safe, stimulating, loving environment; evaluators are required to show some lasting change in the child’s skills or behaviour. There is no doubt that economic productivity is an important goal in any society, but this orientation sometimes leads us to think about children primarily as economic products rather than as citizens with the right to a decent life and wellbeing, now as well as in the future.

Policy implications

Policies might be more effective if they were based on interactionist assumptions about causality—that individuals’ attributes interact with the economic and social context that they confront. Some of the employment-based policies tested in experiments addressed structural as well as individual barriers to generating income. Earnings supplements, for example, are designed to correct for wage inadequacies in the marketplace and the impact of tax policies that penalise low-wage workers. But work incentives and job training might be more effective if they were coordinated with job creation. In addition, policies to increase children’s school readiness might have more lasting effects if they were coordinated with schools’ readiness to build on the skills they bring.

In the United States, we do not have a coordinated or integrated child or family policy. Defining poverty more broadly to include the many facets of experience with which it is correlated might lead to more coherent and less piecemeal policies. Even within early childhood intervention, for example, policies for prenatal and postnatal health, home visiting, child care and early childhood education are fragmented, leading one group of investigators to suggest developing a “system of care” to encompass them (Astuto & Allen, 2009).

Because children are often left out of policy discussions, even when they are likely to be affected directly, some version of the European Union’s “mainstreaming” process might make children’s welfare more salient. “Mainstreaming” would require any new policy proposal to evaluate its impact on children—a Child Impact review. Mainstreaming would put children’s welfare into conversations about policies for such topics as housing and transportation, as well as the more obvious areas of education and public assistance. The need for such a policy was especially evident in many of the debates about changing the US welfare system, in which the arguments revolved around adult work and welfare receipt. Policy-makers sometimes cited the reduced numbers of welfare recipients as evidence of “success” after 1996, without considering the consequences for children who are, of course, the intended beneficiaries of financial support for parents.

Conclusion

Child poverty is a persistent problem in the developed world, particularly the United States, even though we have a standard of material wellbeing that is unprecedented in history. Poverty is typically defined as a lack of income or material resources, but social exclusion represents a different lens that leads to a broader range of policy solutions. Recent research has provided strong support for the effectiveness of early interventions in reducing or ameliorating some of the consequences of poverty for children by providing more stimulating and supportive environments, both at home and in early care and education settings. On another front, employment-based policies for parents that provide work supports in the form of wage supplements, child care and health care assistance can also lead to
improved school performance and behaviour of children.

Despite their successes, these policies have not eliminated poverty or its consequences for children. I argue here that we can do a better job by examining the implicit and explicit theories of change underlying poverty policies. Policies aimed at income poverty, at least in the US, are designed primarily to change individuals by improving their skills, increasing their motivation and ability to be “self-sufficient” and adding to their human capital. Work supports for adults often use public funds to compensate for the inequities in the marketplace rather than changing the conditions that produce those inequities (e.g., low-wage jobs, discrimination). Defining poverty as social exclusion leads to a relatively stronger emphasis on policies designed to address the societal and institutional causes of poverty, and correspondingly less emphasis on changing individuals. In both cases, we should take seriously the point that social causation and selection based on individual attributes interact; individuals with different skills and personal characteristics use and respond to economic and social opportunities differently. Policies directed to both causal agents in the society and to changing individuals might be more successful than either alone.

The ultimate goal of US policies for children is often couched in human capital terms—increasing their readiness to profit from school and to become economically productive adults—partly because the underlying theory of change emphasises social selection and partly because these goals are persuasive to a broad range of citizens. A theory of change derived from social exclusion leads to goals for children that include not only human capital, but assurance of basic rights and wellbeing. The choice of goals goes beyond social science to underlying values of the society. Most developed societies, including the US, profess a strong belief in the importance of children’s wellbeing. Our policy evaluation criteria should reflect that belief.

References


Professor Aletha C. Huston is Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor of Child Development, University of Texas at Austin. This article is an edited version of Professor Huston’s keynote address presented at the 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 8 July 2010.
One of the most enduring themes in British social policy is the importance of promoting and sustaining high levels of employment. Over the past 10 to 15 years, this goal has been pursued using a range of policy instruments. Welfare-to-work policies have promoted, supported, cajoled and compelled more and more people to seek work, including people with disabilities, long-term health problems and caring responsibilities. Social security and tax measures have provided financial support and incentives to work, supplementing wages for low-paid and/or part-time workers. Family policy has provided child care services and extended parental leave and other employment rights to help parents and carers reconcile work and family responsibilities. As the much-repeated slogan of the Labour years put it, “work is the new form of welfare”.

This article takes a close-up look at the experience of working in Britain from the perspective of the families who are at the receiving end of this rhetoric and these policies. It draws on longitudinal qualitative research to examine the labour market experiences of a sample of lone mothers over the four to five years between 2002–03 to 2007–08. Lone mothers are a particularly interesting group for exploring the work-focused policy agenda. First, they are a key target group for policy; there are about two million lone parents in the UK, of whom nine in ten are women, making up about 26% of families with children (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2009). About three million children live in lone-parent families. Lone mothers have high poverty rates compared with other families, and they also experience more persistent and long-term poverty. They have low employment rates compared with other families, and they also experience more persistent and long-term poverty. They have low employment rates compared with other mothers, and they move in and out of work more often than other women. Getting more lone mothers into work, and ensuring they stay in work, has therefore been a crucial part of the Labour Government’s promise to end child poverty. Second, lone mothers potentially have a number of difficulties in sustaining employment. They face a gendered labour market in which women are paid less than men and have a narrower range of job...
opportunities. But they are also less likely than other women to have educational or vocational qualifications and to have work experience (although this has been changing in recent years).

The initial sample for our study consisted of lone mothers who had been receiving income support (i.e., social assistance) but who had started work and claiming tax credits some time between October 2002 and October 2003.1 We first interviewed the families (50 mothers and 61 children) in the first half of 2004. We interviewed the families again (44 women and 53 children) in mid-2005, and for the third and final time (34 mothers and 37 children) in late 2007 (Ridge & Millar, 2008). There was thus typically at least four years between the date of leaving income support and the final interview; for some families, just over five years. These were in-depth interviews, carried out face-to-face, and thus generated very detailed and rich information.

The women all had at least one child aged over eight whom we also interviewed as a key part of the research design.2 It is of course individual people who hold jobs, but the impact of work is felt by the family as a whole, including the children, in respect of both money and time. When a lone mother starts work her life changes in many ways, and so do the lives of her children. The children are active participants in this and we wanted to hear directly from them about how this affected their lives.

The main aims of the study were to examine the impact of paid work—and for some, job loss—on family life and living standards for lone mothers and their children over time; and to explore how lone mothers and their children negotiated the everyday challenges of sustaining low-income employment over a period of 5 years.

The 1997 Labour Government: Making work possible, making work pay work

What was the political and social environment at the time when these women were about to enter the labour market? The Labour Government that had been elected in 1997 had a strong commitment to welfare reform. The UK had experienced very high levels of poverty and growing inequality in the 1980s and 1990s. Measures to support employment were a high priority. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) started in 1998 and was one of the first of the employment activation programs. NDLP provided individual information, guidance and support to lone parents who wanted to find jobs. Participation in the NDLP was voluntary for lone parents, and there was no compulsion for them to take up jobs. A number of child-focused initiatives also started in 1998, included Sure Start (locally based services providing health, child care and early years support, initially in disadvantaged areas) and the National Childcare Strategy (aiming to provide quality and affordable child care for all children aged under 14, including free part-time nursery places for all 3- and 4-year-old children).

A national minimum wage was introduced in 1999, alongside reductions in the tax thresholds and in national insurance contributions. The new tax credits also dated from 1999, replacing the existing in-work benefit (family credit) with more generous and extensive support. These were in turn replaced from 2003 by the child tax credit (for families with children) and working tax credit (for people in low-paid work). Working tax credit also includes a child care tax credit, covering part of the costs of registered child care. Tax credits are means-tested on an annual assessment of income, with an end-of-year reconciliation to take account of changes in income and circumstances since the initial award.

Our sample of lone mothers were thus entering (or re-entering) the labour market at a relatively good time in 2002–03. The impact of Labour’s policy measures were starting to take effect, in the context of a favourable economy and

Lone mothers have high poverty rates compared with other families, and they also experience more persistent and long-term poverty.
buoyant labour market. Between 1997–98 and 2002–03, the employment rate for lone mothers rose from 45% to 53%. The number receiving income support fell from just over a million to about 850,000, while the number receiving in-work family or tax credit support increased from about 350,000 to almost one million. As employment rose, poverty rates (below 60% of median, before housing costs) for lone-parent families fell from 47% to 39% (Department for Work and Pensions [DWP], 2010b). Jobs were available. There was information, individual guidance and support available to get jobs, but no compulsion to take up this help or to seek work. Child care provision was starting to expand and some help was available to meet the costs.

The women we interviewed had all chosen to get jobs and they were all keen to make it work for themselves and their families. They thought they would be better off, financially and in other ways, and some had specific longer term plans—to buy their homes, to save for longer term security, to get better jobs after their children grew up. How did they get on?

Sustaining work: Job stability and income security

At each of the interviews, the majority of the women were in work—43 out of 50, 37 out of 44, and 29 out of 34—so the overall picture is positive in that most did succeed in sustaining employment. However, if looking at individual change over time rather than just the cross-sectional picture, it is clear that getting settled into work took some time and for most of the women involved changes in jobs and/or hours, and some periods of unemployment or sickness. There was a lot of movement—in and out of work, changing jobs, changing hours of work—throughout the study. Of the 34 women who were interviewed all three times, 13 had stayed in the same employment since the start (some with changes in hours), 18 had changed jobs (some with periods of unemployment), and three were mainly unemployed.

Those women who had been in work at one or more of the interviews had not been in the “best” (in the sense of being well-paid and secure) part of the labour market. But nor were they in the worst. Many worked in personal services. The jobs included care workers in residential homes and in various child care settings. There were also support workers in schools, housing associations, youth probation and health services. There were nurses, teaching assistants, teachers and lecturers in further or higher education. Some worked in retail, including catering, and in offices. There was also a bus driver, a cleaner and a general worker in a cinema, and self-employment in care work, gardening, crafts and beauty services. Ten women were working in part-time jobs, usually for between 20 and 24 hours per week. Four of these were being paid at or around the national minimum wage level (£5.52 per hour in 2007). Sixteen women were working full-time (30 or more hours) and their average wage of about £390 per week was below the mean of about £465 for all women working full-time (ONS, 2007). Overall, therefore, by the third interview, we were looking at a fairly typical pattern of women’s work, but with slightly lower than average pay for both part-time and full-time workers.

At every interview, almost all the women agreed that being in work was better than being on income support. This was in part because they were financially better off—although for some the gains were marginal—but it was also because in general they valued working. Working was important for self-esteem, for social contacts, as a role model for children, as an opportunity to use skills and experience, and because they thought it provided them with a quality of life that is impossible to achieve on benefits. The children also generally agreed; they thought that it was better for their mothers to be in work, family income improved and they were able to do more things. The older children in particular valued the independence they had, even if it meant they spent more time looking after themselves and their siblings and doing housework.

The social inclusion aspects of work were clear. Work took the families away from the stigma of living on income support—a factor
that was important to both the mothers and the children. But sustaining work was often hard going, and this became more apparent the longer the study went on. At the first interview the relief of getting off income support and having some spare money, sometimes for the first time in years, created a positive feel to the interviews. There was much re-decoration, holidays, days out, buying things for the children, going out and socialising. But by the third interview there were many families for whom income and living standards had not changed much and circumstances seemed to have levelled out.

At the final interview, we asked the women whether they felt they were better off than they had been at the previous interview and whether they felt financially secure. The answers were thoughtful as the women weighed up the various aspects, and the responses were mainly positive but often qualified. For many the answer was “yes but”:

I don’t know that the standard of living is any better than when I was on benefits because you pay more for your food.

It’s how you manage your money isn’t it, really? I think back to when I was on income support … I never had much money, if any money, really, and I didn’t have any debt. That was the good thing, but now I have debt.

Debatable. Probably better in work, but I think the added stress, you know, you spend more on clothes, you’re running a car …

Because there were so many factors that the women were taking into account, the relationship between employment stability and feeling better off and being financially secure was complex and not necessarily the same at each interview. But it is possible to divide the women into three broad groups at the third interview. The first group—13 women—were sustaining work, feeling better off and generally financially secure. Six of these women had been in stable employment in the same jobs since the start of the study. So these women had achieved their stability and security relatively quickly. For the other seven this had taken longer, with most having at least one job change along the way. Being able to move from temporary to permanent work was a key factor in promoting a feeling of security. The second group was almost the same size—12 women—but these women did not feel they had improved their financial situations by very much, if at all; nor had they achieved financial security. Six of these women had been in the same employment since the start, so employment stability alone was not enough to make them feel secure. In general, the work patterns were quite mixed in this group, with several women working part-time, shift or variable hours. Finally, the third group—of nine women—were struggling financially. This included the three women who were mainly unemployed and others who had also spent some time out of work, unemployed or sick. There were also two workers who had stable jobs but variable hours and pay.

So, although the overall view at each interview round, among both mothers and children, was that it was better for the mothers to be employed, this was tempered with some ambivalence. After four to five years in work, about two-thirds of the women still in the study felt they were living in constrained and insecure financial circumstances. The question therefore arises—why had more of the women not been able to improve their financial situations?

**Strategies for increasing income**

Many of the women had very complex income packages—wages, child tax credit, working tax credit, child care tax credit, child benefit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, child support, and possibly loans. Older children sometimes brought their wages or benefits into the household. Some women had partners living with them, again with wages or benefits coming into the household. So, in theory at least, maximising income could be pursued in different ways. In practice, not only was it difficult to achieve an increase in any one source of income, but even if that did happen the interaction between the various sources of income was likely to reduce any overall gain. We can see this by looking at the main sources of income in turn.
Wages

Wages are at the centre of the income package, not only as a major source of income but also as the gateway to eligibility for tax credits and in-work benefits; so we start by looking at how the women tried, or not, to increase their wages. As we have seen, many of the women changed jobs and hours, especially when they first moved into work. Sometimes this was completely outside their control, as temporary jobs ended, or they were made redundant, or because of ill health. Those who changed jobs or hours by choice usually did so for care or family reasons, as they needed hours or location that fitted with their child care arrangements. So it was not so much that the women were seeking jobs with higher wages, but more that they were looking for suitable jobs to fit in with family life. One of the ways in which the women managed to achieve an acceptable work–family fit was by working part-time and, if they could, within school hours. Many of the women could have earned more—per hour and per week—by working longer hours and some did increase their hours over time. However, part-time jobs rarely became full-time jobs and so it was necessary to change jobs to get extra hours, or to take on second or third jobs.

But family circumstances often made it difficult to work longer hours. Many of the women relied upon other family members for informal care and so had to fit with what was available and what they felt they could ask family members to do. Some of the mothers were also providing care themselves—for example for elderly parents—and that became more common as time went on. As far as possible, working time had to mesh with these family arrangements and obligations rather than the other way around. The views of the children were also an important factor in making decisions about work, especially the number of hours worked and the timing of those working hours. As noted above, most of the children did agree that it was better for their mothers to be in work. But the children were of the view—almost unanimously and at every interview—that part-time work was better and that working school hours was best. This was especially the case when the children were younger. It was partly because they wanted to spend time with their mothers, but it was also because of what they saw as the impact on their mothers. One of the girls in the sample who had left home for university by the third interview, said:

I don’t like the fact that her particular work tires her out so much that she’s almost—she’s going to work, she comes home, she has dinner, goes to bed, there’s not really time for enjoyment almost.

Having to work longer hours was something that many of the women resisted, at least while their children were younger. As one woman summed up, “It is hard: work full-time and a full-time family”.

Thus, when they found a manageable fit between family and work, many of the women chose to stay with more or less the same jobs and hours of work, if they could. Seeking to improve their employment situations or their wages required a much longer time frame than just a few years.

Tax credits

Tax credits were thus topping up wages so that working was financially possible, which is exactly the role that they are intended to fulfil. The women all agreed as to the importance of tax credits in enabling them to work, acknowledging that without that financial support they could not have managed. Tax credits were particularly valued when the mothers started work, as they left the security of income support for the less certain world of work. As one mother put it, “It was very helpful to have benefits at the beginning when you were totally out on your own”.

However, almost all of the women had experienced some difficulties with the receipt of tax credits. Some of these were caused by administrative errors and failures, including delayed or incorrect payments, and duplicate...
payments that then had to be repaid. But many of the problems were inherent in the design of the tax credit system, which is based on an annual assessment with a provisional award, which is then adjusted at year end. This created considerable uncertainty about entitlements and about what changes in family, employment or child care circumstances should be notified, and when. This uncertainty was compounded by a lack of any detailed information on how entitlements were calculated. Without a clear statement setting out calculations and entitlements, some of the mothers felt that they were unable to establish from their award notice how their payment had come about or to challenge the amount they were awarded. They also felt cautious about changing hours of work or seeking pay increases, because they could not be sure what impact this would have on their tax credits.

Other benefits
A few families were receiving help with housing costs, through the housing benefit scheme and/or reductions in local council taxes. Many of the same problems of delays, incorrect payments and arrears associated with tax credits also applied to these payments. However, these were usually a minor source of income, so the problems were not so intense—except for those families who were doubly disadvantaged by problems with both tax credits and the housing benefit.

All the families were receiving child benefit (the universal family allowance paid per child), and this was an important, stable source of income.

Child support
Child support from a former partner is another possible way to increase income, especially as child support payments are not taken into account in assessing tax credit entitlements. The addition of a fully disregarded child support payment to the household budget could therefore make a considerable difference to family income. However, throughout the study the level of child support receipt was consistently low and there was general discontent with the Child Support Agency. Several of the women had high levels of child support arrears owing and they felt that there was little prospect of them ever receiving payment. Some women were, in effect, trading off the lack of child support money for more time, and other in-kind support, from the fathers. Even when payments were established, payments could be irregular and unreliable, and would change if the former partner’s circumstances changed (if he lost his job, for example) or had children with a new partner. Except in a very small handful of cases, relying
on regular income from child support from a former partner was not a realistic option.

**Partners**

It is sometimes suggested that the most effective income-enhancing strategy for lone mothers is to get married, or at least to find a new partner and become a two-carer family. Again, fine in theory, but not so easy to make this work in practice. At the third interview, 16 of the 34 women had indeed found a new partner, but just five of these had resident partners. There was some reluctance to develop relationships to the point of living together, because that might mean a loss of control over income and, even more risky, it might generate a claim on the family home. New partnerships might not work out, leaving the women financially worse off than before. This happened to one woman who remarried between the first and second interview, had two babies in quick succession, but by the third interview was alone again, with a larger and younger family and no financial support from either partner. Children were also sometimes cautious about their own relationships with their mothers’ new partners, especially if the partners took on a child care role while mothers were at work.

**Family support**

Other family members, and sometimes friends, were often an important source of practical help—providing child care, including for school holidays; presents for Christmas and birthdays; general emotional support; and sometimes loans. But family and friends were never regular sources of ongoing financial support. Such a role would sit very uncomfortably in most families today, even though family ties and support remain generally strong.

However, the children, especially as they grew older, did play a role in helping to support family income. This was usually indirect rather than direct. They got their own jobs so that they could earn money for their own needs. And they moderated their financial demands on their mothers by not asking or expecting certain things. One girl, aged 16 at the third interview, stated:

> I know that we ain’t got much money like everybody else has got the money. So like when it’s like school trips and everything, I would like give me Mum slip and I said, “If you ain’t got money, it don’t matter because I’m not right bothered about going on school trips anyway”.

**Living as others do**

The women thus had to manage on their low incomes and this meant that they often needed to manage their spending very carefully. But there was a bit of a tension in this, because being in work also raised expectations and aspirations. It meant that the women felt that they had—or that they should have—a bit more autonomy and choice. They wanted to live and do the same things as other families do. And that might include living a little beyond their means. As one woman said:

> There is this great sense of satisfaction when you’re working to say that I did all this myself and to want to be like any other family. So you do spend and you go on the family holidays and you have the car and you do all those things, because you do just want your children to have that same—not luxuries—but the same opportunities as any other child in any other family.

**Desperately seeking security**

Achieving security in work was thus a significant challenge for these families, with limited opportunities to substantially improve their financial situations through work. The wages/tax credit dynamic was central to this. Not only were these the two largest sources of income but they were very closely tied together, and in general the women were aware of this. As one mother in steady employment said:

> What I get in one hand I get took off in the other, so at end of day, it don’t really make any difference at all. Because what if they put my wages up, which I had the opportunity to do, and then family tax credit will take it off because I’m only allowed to earn so much anyway. So at the moment, while my son is at the age he is, it doesn’t really make any difference to me whether I get a pay rise or not. We do get pay rises every year but it doesn’t make any difference to me really. I mean, I’m in that bracket where it doesn’t make much difference. I’m only allowed to bring so much into house anyway.

Her language here is striking. She says twice that she is only “allowed” a certain level of income, which indicates something about the feelings of powerlessness that being part of this sort of system can engender.

This poverty trap—where wages rise and tax credits go down—was undoubtedly real to many of the women and it did influence how they thought about employment and the choices that they made. But it was not the whole story. What the women did was also influenced by their own aspirations, by the possibilities and opportunities available in the labour market, and by the timing and nature of family change.

As discussed above, the women were not necessarily seeking any immediate changes in their employment. Once they had found something that worked for them and their

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**Achieving security in work was a significant challenge for these families, with limited opportunities to substantially improve their financial situations through work.**
families they tended to want to stay with it. But, over time, there were two main types of employment advancement that were important to the women. One was about moving from temporary to permanent employment. A number of the women started in temporary jobs, in some cases being employed by an agency, which would supply workers to various employment locations. Agency work in particular often involves long and erratic hours, and is prone to unemployment or slack periods when there is less work available. This could sometimes help when the women needed flexibility for family reasons, but the women in this sort of work were usually keen to move on to something more permanent. The other form of advancement was aimed at getting better jobs, and this was usually a longer term aspiration that involved studying or training alongside part-time work. In both of these employment trajectories earnings could be variable and irregular and tax credits were essential to supplement wages.

Moreover, while the women were trying to pursue these employment goals, their family circumstances were also inevitably changing over time. In particular, their children were getting older. For those with young families, this could sometimes help them with their employment, by reducing child care needs, for example. But for those with older families, it could mean the end of their status as “lone-parent family”, when all their children reached the age of 16 (or 19 if in full-time education) or if the children left home, for example to live with their fathers.

One of the original aims of the tax credit system was to help smooth incomes through employment and family change. But in practice the women had to make their way through quite a complex landscape in order to financially manage these employment and family changes. For example, one mother who worked in an educational setting doing three different jobs had a five-year plan to gradually increase her hours in the job she favoured most and reduce her hours in the other two jobs. This would see her past the period when her tax credits for her children would stop, and ease her into stable employment doing work that she wanted to do: “I need to be on a wage I can live on, not just exist on”. Her plans were working out and she was feeling secure and quite confident at the third interview.

In another family, tax credits ended when the son finished an apprenticeship and started work. This meant the mother had to increase her hours to try and make up the income:

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They dropped my tax credits so I had to start working fifty-five hours a week and I’ve done that for a year and a half. Fifty-five hours a week, nights as well, just to make the money up to what I was getting before. Obviously I was getting it and then they didn’t let me know it was stopping and the bills still had to be paid so I was more or less … I have barely seen daylight for a year now because I’ve been in bed or at work at night.

This woman had been feeling fairly secure at the second interview, because she had managed to get more stable employment, but she felt that she had lost that security at the third interview.

This was also true for another woman who had been in a different job at each interview, as she tried to find stable employment. But by the third interview, her tax credits had ended because her children were too old. We asked how important they had been:

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Extremely important, because … I’ve been able to, you know, keep a good roof over the girls’ head and it’s been a security to me. Well, it’s security I don’t have now … And now, when I’m in the situation where I no longer get that help, it is very, very hard … It doesn’t actually get easier as you get older and the girls move away, because that security just totally leaves you.

She almost felt she wanted to give up work, “but if I walked away, then it would have been all for nothing”.

The financial support provided by tax credits was absolutely essential in enabling the women to enter and stay in work. It would not have been possible to live on their wages alone. But these families found that there were limited opportunities to increase their income and that the wages/tax credits package did not always provide financial security. Financial security is very important not just for budgeting but also
for quality of life. Indeed, the key to feeling better off in work is not just income level but also income security. This could be very hard to achieve in practice.

All parents have to struggle

Does all this matter? It could be argued that what we have been describing is no more than the reality for many working people, and these women were receiving a lot of state financial support, especially through the tax credit system. One of the women in the study made more or less this point herself. She had stayed in work continuously, taking on more responsibilities but without any significant increase in pay. She received tax credits throughout and that included the child care payment. She currently had no large debts but nor had she had any holiday since we first met her, and she had no savings. At each interview she said she was just managing financially and that she was only marginally better off than on income support. But she did feel financially secure. At the third interview, she said:

I just plod along anywhere. I just go at my own pace … Financially I struggle every month, so I just get used to doing that. But I suppose all parents do, no matter whether you are a single parent or whether there is two of you.

As she says, “all parents” have to get used to getting by. And in the current climate of economic crisis, rising unemployment and public sector spending cuts, this type of argument must have some force. David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister elected in 2010, has repeatedly said that “we are all in this together” and that everyone will have to be affected by economic austerity and reduced public services. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to be concerned about the circumstances of poor working families such as these.

These lone mothers and their children are very much representative of the “hard-working families” for whom the British welfare state is being reformed and reshaped to support. The work-as-welfare agenda—making people better off, promoting choice and independence—offers the promise of a better quality of life through engagement in the working world. These women made the commitment to work with exactly those goals in mind—to create better lives for themselves and their families. They are doing everything that is expected of them in this policy environment. But, as we have seen, even after four to five years, many were still struggling to achieve an adequate and secure standard of living in work. This took a toll on both the women and the children.

This was apparent in relation to debt and health problems, both of which worsened over time. Serious debt was a real danger for some of these families, and over half of the women had problematic debts at the third interview, including three women with debts so high that they had declared themselves bankrupt or had taken out Individual Voluntary Agreements (legally binding debt deferment). Their health also declined. At the first interview, 12 out of 50 women reported health problems. At the third interview, it was 19 women out of 34, including 13 women who reported periods of substantial stress and depression. For the children, as we have seen, in general the positive aspects of work tended to outweigh the negative aspects. But the reverse was true in families where work was irregular, and especially where there were further periods of unemployment. Those children did not feel that the mother’s attempts to stay in work had improved their situations. Being a child in a poor working family was in some ways worse than being a child in a poor non-working family, because at least in the latter they spent time with their mothers.

“All families” may indeed have to struggle at times to sustain work and family life. And it is not unreasonable or unfair to expect people and families to have to make the best of what they have. As a society we value work as a route to independence. As individuals we seek to balance aspirations for work with family life and caring responsibilities. The record of the UK Labour Government in seeking to promote work and tackle child poverty shows that policy measures need to be substantial and sustained in order to have an impact. Labour’s policies were most effective in their first five or so years, but this effort was not sustained over time (Joyce, Muriel, Phillips, & Sibieta, 2010; Waldfogel, 2010).
The UK’s Coalition Government, elected in 2010, started by announcing significant cuts in the social security budget, including many measures that will directly affect working families, such as freezing child benefits, limiting tax credits to the poorest families, cutting housing benefits, requiring lone parents to be available for work once their youngest child is aged five, and changing the basis for the uprating of benefit and tax credits. The Government estimates that the impact of the 2010 budget on child poverty in 2012–13 is “statistically insignificant” (HM Treasury, 2010). But other analysis suggests that the cuts will fall more heavily on the poorest, including lone parents (Browne, 2010; Trade Union Congress, 2010).

Furthermore, the Coalition Government is now committed to a very radical reform of the social security and tax credits system. This will replace many existing benefits and tax credits with a single universal credit, as broadly set out in the publication 21st Century Welfare (DWP, 2010a). If such reform produces a simpler and more transparent system, then it could make life much easier for many poor working families, especially those people who move in and out of work or have frequent changes of job or hours of work. But the experience with tax credits shows that delivering such a scheme in a way that is actually helpful to claimants is very challenging indeed. There will be nowhere else for families to turn if they are let down by a single system, particularly if this has swept universal child benefits into the mix.

The level of government financial support for British working families is falling, with substantial cuts in benefits, tax credits, services and public sector jobs expected as the government seeks to reduce the financial deficit as quickly as possible. The nature of that financial support is also likely to change radically. But if benefits for working families are lower, then it is all the more important that the support available is reliable, stable and secure. Providing security should be a guiding principle for future policy.

Endnotes

1 The Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-1079) funded the first two rounds of interviews and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded the final round. The sample was selected by the Inland Revenue and DWP from their records, and names passed to the researchers after the families had agreed to take part. For practical purposes, we confined the study to southwest England and Yorkshire, including urban and rural areas.

2 Some of the mothers also had preschool-aged children.

3 We lost 16 women from the sample, six at second interview and ten at third interview. There were eleven women who had moved and we could not trace; three who withdrew for health reasons and two who withdrew for other reasons. Although we do not know what happened to these women, it seems unlikely that they had employment patterns that were any more stable than the women we did interview.

4 Benefits are increased annually in line with inflation. From April 2011, the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) will be used for the indexation of all benefits, tax credits and public service pensions. This will reduce expenditure by £5,840 million by 2014–15 (HM Treasury, 2010, Table 2.1).

References


Professor Jane Millar is Professor of Social Policy, University of Bath. This article is an edited version of Professor Millar’s keynote address presented at the 11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, 9 July 2010.
Think Family
A new approach to Families at Risk

Naomi Eisenstadt

The United Kingdom’s Families at Risk Review was commissioned in 2007 by then Prime Minister Tony Blair. Having set up the Social Exclusion Unit early on in Labour’s first term, the Prime Minister was disappointed that many of the deep-seated and complex problems facing the most disadvantaged families had not yet been tackled. While much progress had been made, there was still much to do. The review was established to find out:

■ Who are the most excluded families?
■ How many are there?
■ What are their problems?
■ What can be done about them?

The context for the work can be seen as part of a very long history of social progress. A series of social reforms in Britain from the 19th century onwards had a huge impact on the quality of life for the many. However, with each wave of reforms, the difficulties of those few not helped became more and more complex and intractable. Clean water in the 19th century dramatically improved the health of the nation.

In the 20th century, free state education and the establishment of the National Health Service were again universal services that initially not only shifted the curve, making life better for the vast majority of the population, but also narrowed the gap between the top and bottom, thus reducing inequality and reducing abject poverty. It could be argued that the major reform of the 21st century in Britain has been the child care revolution. Universal preschool education has been made available for all, and flexible co-funding arrangements for child care for working parents have transformed the employment prospects for women, and significantly reduced child poverty in Britain.

All these reforms have been successful for the many, but a minority have still missed out, and the gap between that minority and the rest has significantly widened, particularly in the last thirty years, when incomes at the very top have risen very steeply. Hence, things have gotten better for the many, significantly better for the few at the very top, and significantly worse for the few at the very bottom. Most people
in Britain are healthier, wealthier and probably wiser than thirty years ago. There have been significant improvements for the many as the wealth of the nation has increased, public services have improved, and public health campaigns, particularly on smoking, have had real impact. However, no public policy works for all. The numbers for whom these changes have failed to work are relatively small, but the persistence and complexity of their problems is costly to themselves and to the state. They cost the state through increased spending on special education, social welfare benefits, health services and the criminal justice system. They cost families themselves through high levels of stress and poor outcomes for children across generations.

The lesson is not that public policy has failed, but that it has succeeded for the many and failed for the few. This means a more nuanced approach is needed in the debate about universal or targeted services. The private sector response to the dilemma of who is not buying a particular product is market segmentation—consumer research informs private companies as to who is more or less likely to buy a product. We need a similar approach to the complex issues of deep disadvantage. We need to understand why policies don’t work for particular groups, and then to consult with those groups and individuals to figure out what would work.

The nature of the problem

Public health data consistently tells us two key facts:

- Inequalities interact with each other. Poor mental or physical health in early childhood leads to poor educational outcomes; poor educational outcomes reduce the chances of gainful employment for adults; and workless adults are more likely to be unwell, both physically and emotionally.

- For virtually all disadvantages there is a clear gradient across social classes. This means that while families in the lowest quintile are likely to have the most severe problems, families in the other quintiles also have problems. By concentrating only on the poorest, much need is left unmet. But the highly complex and multiply disadvantaged families tend also to be among the poorest.

The two diagrams in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the point. Figure 1 shows the relationship between poor educational attainment and obesity in a local authority in southeast England. It shows a clear correlation between higher results at tests for sixteen-year-olds and lower obesity rates in secondary schools. Interestingly, the outlying school, St Paul’s, has a catchment from throughout the authority, so a much more mixed intake, hence both good exam results and high obesity rates. Figure 2 shows the likelihood of multiple deprivation in adulthood based on social class at birth. While
nearly one in three of adults born into the bottom quintile will be deprived in adulthood, one in twenty adults born into the top quintile will also be deprived at age thirty.

Risks to children come from their parents

Most of the factors that are risky for children are concerned with the state of their parents. Long-term worklessness, poor housing, poor maternal mental health, or having a parent in prison are all key factors in determining poor outcomes for children. In Britain, we have made major reforms of children’s services but have had a much more difficult challenge in ensuring that adult services understand the needs of parents. Adult psychiatric services rarely take account of the needs of children in determining treatments for their patients who coincidentally happen to be mothers or fathers. Boys with a father in prison have a very high risk of winding up in the criminal justice system. Overcrowded housing makes it harder to find a quiet place to do homework, or even have friends to visit after school. It is self-evident that the key problems that affect children are not problems that can be solved by working solely with children. We need a more systematic approach that recognises the complexity and interrelated nature of family problems.

Moreover, particular risks seem to clump together. The starred bars in the graph in Figure 3 show how particular disadvantages tend to occur together, like poor housing, worklessness and mental health problems. These then have a particularly harsh impact on children living in families with these sets of disadvantages. In Britain, we know that a relatively small number of families have a large number of these problems. Indeed, just over half of Britain’s families have one or no serious disadvantages, while 2% have ten or more. But the impact on children living in these families is a highly elevated risk of having poor outcomes. Figure 4 (on page 40) illustrates the risks to children associated with the number of problems faced by parents in the family.

What can government do?

The UK government has developed a wide range of policies to support families. They fall under three broad strategies.

First, a range of policies are designed to reduce pressure on families. These tend to be anti-poverty measures like financial support through tax credits, flexible child care and targeted benefits. Also included in this category are improved maternity and paternity leave arrangements and rights and legal protection for parents.

Second, the government has played a role in enhancing the capabilities of parents. These
tend to be more service-oriented activities such as parenting programs, information and guidance, and mainstream universal services like health visiting.

The third and most difficult is the role that government plays in safeguarding children from harm. This responsibility is sometimes in tension with the second strategy of support and enhancing capabilities. Government always struggles with judgements as to whether in extreme circumstances children are better off without their parents; that is, in substitute care provided by the state. In Britain, as in other countries, the record of the state as a substitute parent has been poor. Children in the care system generally do not do as well as their peers; however, it is always difficult to know to what extent this is a result of negative life experiences before the decision to put children into care, or a result of failures of the care system itself. In my view, it is often a combination of the two. Great efforts have been made in Britain in the last ten years to improve the care system, some of which have met with success. While much of the attention has been on safeguarding children from non-accidental harm, other safeguards include accidental harm, such as baby seats in cars, the provision through children’s centres of home safety equipment and, in many areas, the fire service has been providing and installing free smoke alarms. Indeed, injuries and deaths of children due to accidental events have a similar social gradient to other poverty-related disadvantages. Children in poor housing are considerably more likely to die from fires or road traffic accidents than their peers in better quality accommodation.

Despite what may look like a coherent set of strategies above, The government in the UK has a somewhat confused attitude towards parents. For issues like school choice, the government sees parents as consumers of a public service over which they should have choice. When it comes to issues of child neglect or abuse, parents are clients, and often government agencies treat parents as pupils who need to learn how best to be a parent through courses and parenting programs. Moreover, there is a difficulty in the use of the term “parents”, when usually the mindset is “mothers”. Men are sometimes seen as “benefits cheats” or “deadbeat dads” unwilling to support their children. In other circumstances, where fathers are absent, men are seen as substitute role models. This last vision of male role model somehow implies that children with an absent father need a male role model—a reasonable substitute for the person with whom they may have had a warm relationship with before the breakdown in the relationship with their mother. Moreover, many lone mothers will be in contact with their own fathers, brothers or male friends. It is hard to imagine anyone suggesting that a child without a mother needs a female role model.

**Think Family**

In considering issues of complex disadvantage, the UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force came up with the Think Family framework to meet the needs of children in families whose members have complex and entrenched problems. The framework includes four key features:

- **no wrong door**—contact with any service offers an open door into a system of joined-up support;
- **look at the whole family**—services must assess the needs of *all* members of the family, working with both adult and children’s services;
- **build on family strengths**—successful programs always work on the basis that the family has some skill base or inherent strengths on which jointly developed plan of action can be built; and
- **provide tailored support to need**—families with complex problems need support that is specially designed around a number of needs across different members of the family.
Programmes like Family Intervention Projects and Nurse Family Partnerships are good examples of interventions that contain all the above features. They also tend to be highly targeted: Nurse Family Partnerships at first-time teen mothers, and Family Intervention Projects at particularly disruptive families who cause such distress within neighbourhoods that they are often threatened with eviction. Both interventions include another important characteristic: they rely on a lead professional having a particularly strong and persistent relationship with the family. Such lead professionals have small case loads and work intensively with families. Plans are agreed with the families and milestones carefully tracked to ensure progress. Typical of such plans is agreement on what behaviour changes are expected from each family member and what additional support the lead professional can deliver, including often quite practical support: transport, improved housing conditions, or free access to laundry facilities. It is often the highly practical support that delivers engagement with often intransigent and historically non-compliant service users. Delivery of such practical help builds trust and engenders a feeling of being heard, which is often missing in the relationship between very disadvantaged families and the service providers meant to work with them.

**Challenges to the implementation of Think Family**

Critical to the Think Family approach is the ability of the lead professional to ensure relevant local agencies will deliver on additional services. The lead professional cannot personally deliver every service needed, and so must have the authority to get such families ahead in the queue for drug and alcohol services, adult mental health services, housing and the range of other services that may be needed. Very often in families with a range of complex problems, an individual may fall just beneath the entry threshold for a service; for example, they might not quite be depressed enough. The impact on families of high thresholds, particularly in adult services, can be severe and needs to be addressed for Think Family to work. This means adult services, particularly mental health services, must take into account that a patient or client is also a mother or father. This requires changes in service protocols as well as service cultures.

Workforce issues are also key. Taking a whole-family approach requires different professionals to understand and respect each others’ roles, and be willing to share expertise and data. Most families would prefer to deal with fewer professionals; that is, one person who can
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very bureaucratic and burdensome, for professionals and families alike. Moreover, many outcomes are not evident for some years post-intervention. When can we know if it did or did not work, and for whom?

Finally, the three issues most often evident in deep disadvantage are poor housing, long-term worklessness and poor maternal mental health. All of these issues are very expensive to deal with. One might argue that they would be even more expensive if left alone, but costs in the here and now are always more pressing than the hopes of future cost savings. Unlike the last ten years, in Britain we are now in times of significant fiscal constraint. When money is tight there is much more to be gained by collaboration and reducing duplication, but also much more resistance to shared budgets. We are facing very tough times ahead, and holding on to the gains both in practice and in thinking from the last ten years is going to be very tough. But there are also some hopeful signs, and much to play for.

References and further reading


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The past few decades have seen substantial changes in relationship formation and dissolution patterns in Australia, as in other Western countries, including the postponement and decline of marriage and the increasing popularity of cohabitation. These trends have also led to a change in what demographers and social researchers define as being in a union or relationship. In the past, the distinction was between those who were married versus those who were single (never married, separated, divorced or widowed). Today, a tripartite model is typically used instead, differentiating between those who are single, cohabiting or married (Hakim, 2004; Rindfuss & Vandenbergheuvel, 1990; Roseneil, 2006). In this model, anyone not living in the same residence as a partner is classified as being single. This perspective is reinforced by social surveys oriented toward collecting data about households and the relationship of individuals within those households (Asendorpf, 2008; Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, & Mays, 2010).

However, a growing body of research is now accumulating on another form of partnership that is not easily accommodated within this tripartite relationship model—that of people who are in “living-apart-together” (LAT) relationships; that is, those who identify themselves as being in a relationship with someone with whom they do not live (Trost, 1998). Such relationships are also sometimes described as non-cohabiting or non-residential relationships. Individuals in these unions are essentially “hidden populations”, not registered in any official statistics (Borell & Ghazanfereen Karlsson, 2003). This makes it difficult to estimate how common they are, but survey evidence from a range of countries suggests that a substantial percentage of the population that would typically be classified as single is in fact in a LAT (non-cohabiting or non-residential) relationship. In Australia, nationally representative surveys indicate that between 7% and 9% of the adult population has a partner who does not live with them.¹
Interest in LAT relationships has only recently emerged and there remain questions as to how these relationships should be defined and accommodated, at both a conceptual and theoretical level. As Haskey & Lewis (2006, p. 38) noted, LAT raises many of the same kinds of questions that were raised when cohabitation first came to be widely recognised as a distinct form of partnership. These questions relate to both the characteristics of the individuals involved as well as the meaning of the relationships themselves; whether they are a transitional stage before cohabitation or marriage, or a completely new form of partnership. Evidence suggests that individuals enter into non-residential relationships for a range of different reasons throughout the life course.

To date very little is known about non-cohabiting relationships in Australia, because of the lack of nationally representative survey data on this topic. For the first time in Australia, questions on LAT relationships were asked in the 5th wave (2005) of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. We used these data to examine LAT relationships, with the aim of providing an estimate of their prevalence, investigating the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of individuals in these unions, and examining how the meaning attached to these unions varies across the life course.

**Background**

According to Levin (2004), the LAT relationship is a “new family form” that existed in the past but in recent years has become much more prevalent and visible in society. Due to the lack of historical data on the prevalence of LAT relationships, it is difficult to know with certainty if there has been a real rise in the prevalence of non-residential unions, or whether this form of relationship has simply begun to attract more attention than before (Ermisch & Siedler, 2008). Evidence from a Swedish poll conducted in 1993, 1998 and 2001 appears to show an increase in the prevalence of non-residential relationships (Levin, 2004), and increases between 1982 and 1997 have also been reported for Japan (Iwasawa, 2004). However, no increasing trend was found between 1991 and 2005 in a study using the German Socio-Economic Panel (Ermisch & Siedler, 2008). Despite the somewhat mixed evidence, there are good reasons to believe that non-cohabiting unions have become increasingly common in recent years, while at the same time the recent academic and media interest in these relationships has also made them more visible.

One reason why LATs may be more prevalent today is the simple fact that a growing proportion of the population is now unpartnered at any point in time (Weston & Qu, 2006). For example, between 1986 and 2001, the percentage of women aged 30–34 who were unpartnered (not cohabiting, not married) increased from 23% to 34% (de Vaus, 2004), while for men in their early 30s, the equivalent rise was from 29% to 41%. As a larger proportion of the population is not in a cohabiting or marital union, the proportion of the population that is “at risk” of forming a non-residential relationship has also increased. Factors contributing to the increased prevalence of individuals who are unpartnered, include socio-economic changes such as the prolonging of time in education, demographic trends such as increased life expectancy, and increased rates of relationship dissolution through divorce or the breakdown of cohabitations (Castro-Martín, Domínguez-Folgueras, & Martín-García, 2008; Milan & Peters, 2003; Weston & Qu, 2006). At the same time, ideational changes have made alternative forms of partnerships more acceptable in society, and couples who find themselves in a relationship with a new partner who lives elsewhere may not feel as great a social pressure as they would have in the past to settle down together in a common residence (Levin, 2004).

The greater availability of quantitative data from social surveys as well as qualitative studies has also made these relationships more visible (Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Trost, 1998). Until recently, the majority of research on LAT relationships originated from Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Norway (Levin & Trost, 1999) where this type of union has
long been socially recognised and accepted as a distinct type of relationship (Borrel & Ghazanfareeoon Karlsson, 2003). However, with the dramatic increase in interest in LATs during the past few years, research is now also accumulating from a growing list of countries, including France (Beaujouan, Regnier-Loilier, & Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009), Germany (Asendorpf, 2008), Spain (Castro-Martin et al., 2008), United Kingdom (Duncan & Philips, 2010; Ermisch & Siedler, 2008; Haskey 2005; Haskey & Lewis, 2006), Canada (Milan & Peters, 2003), the United States (Strohm et al., 2010) and Japan (Iwasawa, 2004).

In terms of prevalence, evidence suggests that a substantial minority of the total adult population is involved in a LAT relationship. For example, in the US, data from the General Social Survey of 1996 and 1998 indicate that 6% of women and 7% of men are in a LAT relationship (Strohm et al., 2010), and the 2001 Canadian Social Survey produces similar estimates of 8% of the population aged 20 and over being in a LAT relationship (Milan & Peters, 2003). Direct international comparisons of the prevalence of LAT relationships are difficult to make, however, because of the differences in the age ranges of the analytical samples, the dates of the surveys, and the definitions of LAT used. Due to the relatively recent emergence of scholarly interest in non-cohabiting unions, there is still a lack of consensus regarding their precise definition.

**Definition**

With regard to definitions, one of the most important questions in the recent literature is where, if anywhere, the boundary between casual dating relationships and more committed LAT relationships should be drawn. In general, there is some agreement that more casual and fleeting relationships should be differentiated from more committed non-residential unions, and often different terms are used to make a theoretical distinction between the two. For example, Haskey (2005) termed the former as “those who have a partner who usually lives elsewhere”, and the latter as LAT relationships. Similarly, Trost (1998) used the term “steady going couples” to identify casual relationships, as distinct from the more committed LAT couples. However, in practice, trying to categorise respondents into one group or the other is very difficult. Various factors have been used by researchers as proxy indicators of the level of seriousness of the relationship. In their study of young people in Spain, Castro-Martin et al. (2008) excluded LAT relationships that had lasted for less than two years, while Haskey (2005) used a number of alternative ways to try and estimate the “true” number of LATs from the Omnibus Survey in Britain, such as by excluding the relationships of young adults who were still living at home.

Since quantitative data on non-residential unions come from surveys, question wording plays a very important role in determining how such unions are defined and enumerated. As Haskey (2005) recognised, it would be impossible to simply ask survey respondents whether they were in a “living-apart-together” relationship as most people would not understand the term without some explanation and elaboration. Instead, surveys have used a variety and combination of terminologies to distinguish dating relationships from more committed unions (Strohm et al., 2010). Examples include:

- “Do you have a main romantic involvement—a (man/woman) you think of as a steady, lover, a partner, or whatever?”
  If yes, respondents are asked if they live with their partner. (1996 & 1998 US General Social Survey)
- “Are you in an intimate relationship with someone who lives in a separate household?” (2001 Canadian Survey)
- “Do you have a steady relationship with a male or female friend whom you think of as your ‘partner’, even though you are not living together?” (1998, 2003 & 2008 British Household Panel Survey)
- “Are you currently in an intimate ongoing relationship with someone you are not living with?” (Generations and Gender Survey (GGS); 2005 & 2008 HILDA)

The degree to which these questions are able to exclude less committed relationship varies. The
The last question, which was included in HILDA, is probably one of the strongest as it includes the terms “intimate” and “ongoing”. Nevertheless, unlike questions on more objective concepts, such as legal marital status, it is inevitable that even the clearest question about non-residential unions will involve an element of subjectivity (Haskey, 2005).

An important theoretical question regarding LATs relates to the meaning of these partnerships and whether they are a transitory step taken before entering a live-in relationship, or whether they represent a more permanent arrangement. A closely related distinction is whether partners are living apart voluntarily, through an active choice, or involuntarily due to constraining circumstances (Levin, 2004). Previous research suggests that the meaning of LAT relationships and the reasons why individuals enter into them, depends very much on what stage of the life course an individual is at (Beaujouan et al., 2009; Strohm et al., 2010).

LAT relationships appear to be more provisional and involuntary among younger cohorts. The geographic location of places of work or study, as well as financial and housing factors may prevent young people from moving into a joint residence with their partner. Involuntary relationships may also be the result of having caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents (Levin, 2004). While these circumstances prevent moving in together, for these individuals the possibility of cohabiting in the future is there if and when circumstances change.

Alternatively, LAT relationships can be more permanent arrangements that allow for intimacy but also autonomy and independence, and this appears to be particularly the case for older individuals (Levin, 2004). Other reasons for actively wanting to live apart include the feeling of not being ready to live with someone, and having concerns about children (Beaujouan et al., 2009). Qualitative evidence suggests that those who are voluntarily living apart include individuals who have already gone through a divorce or a relationship breakdown—experiences that have left them particularly “risk averse” (de Jong Gierveld, 2004; Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006).

While useful, the distinction between LAT relationships that are involuntary and those that are more voluntary and permanent arrangements, might not always be clear cut. Based on a qualitative study of LATs in the United Kingdom, Roseneil (2006) suggested that apart from these two main groups of LATs—the “regretfully apart” and the ‘gladly apart’—there is also a large group of individuals who are “undecidedly apart”. People in this group have not made a definite choice to cohabit or not. Some speak of not being ready or of fearing that cohabitation may ruin their relationship; reasons that have also been mentioned in other qualitative studies (Haskey & Lewis, 2006). As Haskey & Lewis noted, fear and perceptions of risk are important considerations, because in many ways the “leap of faith” needed for moving from a LAT relationship to a cohabiting one is greater than the one needed to transition from cohabitation to marriage.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and pattern of LAT relationships in Australia. The first objective was to determine the prevalence of non-residential relationships in Australia and to describe the key features of these relationships, including their duration, the frequency of contact and the geographic distance between partners. We then identified a typology of four types of individuals at different stages of their life course who were in LAT relationships, and investigated how the meaning and purpose of non-residential relationships varied across these four types of people. If the nature and pattern of LAT relationships in Australia is similar to that found from research in other Western countries, we would expect that for younger individuals, a LAT relationship is likely to be a transitional relationship, or a step towards cohabitation, while for older individuals it may be a more voluntary and permanent arrangement.
Data and method

Data

To investigate the prevalence and characteristics of non-residential unions in Australia, we used data from the 5th wave of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. HILDA is a large-scale nationally representative longitudinal survey that is conducted on an annual basis and interviews all members of a household aged 15 and over. In the 5th wave, several key questions were included for the first time as part of Australia’s participation in the international Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), a cross-national longitudinal survey coordinated by the Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

The question in HILDA asked respondents who were not married and not living with a partner, whether they were in an intimate ongoing relationship with someone with whom they were not living. Respondents who answered yes were then asked a series of more detailed questions regarding their relationships, including: the month and year the relationship started, whether a definite decision to live apart had been made (and if yes by whom), the geographic distance to the partner, and the frequency of contact. Respondents were also asked if they intended to start living with their current partner during the next three years, and if they planned to marry in the future.

It is important to note that the questions on non-residential partnerships were restricted to those who were not married, unlike in the standard GGS questionnaire, where the possibility that a respondent is married and in a relationship with their spouse but not living with them is included.2 The questions were asked of both heterosexual and same-sex couples, and we have included both types of couples in this study.3 Also, we made no specific distinction at the outset between more and less casual relationships; all living-apart-together relationships were considered, even if they had only been ongoing for a short time. The total sample size in Wave 5 was 12,759 individuals, but as relationship questions were only asked of respondents aged 18 or over, or less than 18 but not living with parents, we excluded all those aged less than 18. This resulted in a total analytical sample of 12,066 respondents, of which 974 were in a LAT relationship.

Method

The analysis is undertaken in two parts. The first section describes the prevalence and characteristics of LAT respondents compared to those who are single, cohabiting or married, using weighted percentages and summary statistics. Three important aspects of LAT relationships are also investigated and compared by age: relationship duration, frequency of contact and geographical distance between partners. In the second section, we use multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) and cluster analysis to identify different profiles of respondents with similar demographic characteristics. These different groups of individuals are then compared in terms of differences in their intentions for the future of their relationships.

Creating a typology of LATs

To create a typology of individuals in LAT relationships, we followed the strategy used by Beaujouan et al. (2009), who analysed the French GGS data and used multiple correspondence analysis. MCA is a method of identifying patterns among three or more categorical variables (Greenacre, 2007), which works by converting contingency tables into a low-dimensional (typically two-dimensional) space or map.4 The proximities, shown graphically on the map, can then be interpreted. In this case, we were interested in the interrelationship between four key demographic variables of individuals in LAT relationships: their sex, their age, the presence of children, and previous relationship history. Age is divided into four categories. The presence of children is described by a three-category variable indicating whether the respondent had no children, at least one resident child, or only non-resident children. Finally, previous relationship history was divided into three categories, consisting of those previously married, previously cohabited but never married, and never cohabited or married.

Based on the results of the MCA, Ward’s cluster analysis of the coordinates of the observations was used to group together respondents with similar characteristics. We identified four types of individuals with similar demographic characteristics and, using these groups, we investigated how the groups differed in their answers to three key questions: whether or not they have made a definite decision to live apart, whether they intend to live together within the next 3 years, and whether or not they intend to marry. This allowed us to see whether their relationship was voluntary or involuntary, and the degree to which it was seen as a transitional or permanent arrangement. We used MCA and cluster analysis rather than regression methods to examine demographic characteristics.
differences in relationship intentions because of the high multicollinearity between many of the variables in which we were interested.5

Results
Prevalence and characteristics of LATs

The distribution of the HILDA sample according to their relationship status (single, married, cohabiting or LAT) by age, is shown in Figure 1. The graph shows a clear pattern between age and relationships status, with the proportion that were in a LAT or cohabitating relationship declining with age, and the proportion in a marriage increasing.6 Of those aged 18 and over, 36% were not married or cohabiting, a figure that is similar to the 39% estimated by the 2006 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2009). The overall percentage of the sample that was in a non-cohabiting union was 9%, which represents 24% of those who were not cohabiting or married.

Apart from age, relationship status was also related to several other key demographic and socio-economic variables, as shown in Table 1. Compared to those who were single, cohabiting or married, those in a LAT relationship differed on several key characteristics. They were less likely to have children compared to those who were married, cohabiting or single, and they were also less likely to have ever been married. Their marital and fertility history is, of course, closely related to their young age profile.

People with a non-cohabiting partner had a similar employment status to those who were cohabiting, and the education profile of the LATs was also similar to both cohabiting and married individuals. However, the percentage of LATs who were only educated up to Year 11 or below, was lower than for the relationship status of the other groups. This could be due to a cohort effect, since younger people have higher education levels than older cohorts; however, it might also be that LAT relationships are simply more prevalent among those with higher educational levels, as other studies from the United Kingdom, Spain and Germany have found (Castro-Martin et al., 2008; Ermisch & Siedler, 2008; Haskey & Lewis, 2006). A possible reason for this is that individuals with higher education and occupational statuses are more likely to have jobs that require a degree of travel and mobility, and at the same time they are more able to afford two separate residences (Haskey & Lewis, 2006). Castro-Martin et al. (2008) also suggested that among younger individuals in Spain LAT arrangements may suit those who prioritise a professional career.

Duration, frequency of contact and distance between partners

At the time of the survey, the majority of LAT relationships had, on average, been ongoing for only a short amount of time; the mean duration of these relationships was 2.4 years, and the median was 1.5 years. These averages, however, hide quite substantial variations in relationship durations. While the majority of respondents (40%) had begun their relationship less than 12 months before the survey, a substantial 28% were in a relationship that had lasted for 3 years or more. The cross-sectional nature of the data makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the timing of transitions out of non-cohabiting relationships, but the results seem to indicate that after one or two years, individuals in non-resident relationships commonly experience some transition, either by ending the relationship or by starting to live together. How long a LAT relationship had been ongoing was closely related to a person’s age, as shown in Figure 2. In particular, those aged 45 and over stood out, as nearly half of the people in this age group were in a relationship that had lasted 3 years or more, compared to less than a third of respondents in all the other younger age groups.

Another important characteristic of LAT relationships that we considered was how frequently the partners met. The frequency of contact between partners gives us some indication of the importance of a LAT partner to
an individual’s daily life. We found that despite not sharing the same residence, the frequency of contact between partners was very high, with around 75% of individuals meeting their partners at least three times a week, and many of these on a daily basis.

As with the duration of the relationship, the frequency of contact also showed some variation by age, as shown in Figure 3 (on page 50). The association with age was negative, with those aged under 35 meeting their partners most often. At these ages, the two partners may be attending the same school, university or workplace, which would allow them to meet their partner on a frequent basis. The relatively less frequent contact among those over 35 could also be related to the fact that these older respondents are also the ones who are more likely to have resident children, and would therefore experience greater time constraints. Nevertheless, even among those

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Demographic characteristics of sample, by relationship status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age group (years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% (weighted)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>25–29</td>
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<td>30–34</td>
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<td>45+</td>
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<td>Number of children</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>Not in the labour force</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate/diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11 or below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N (unweighted)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA Wave 5
aged 45 and over, around 80% still saw their partner on a weekly basis.

A key factor regulating the frequency of contact between partners was how close they lived to each other. As might be expected from the high frequency of contact, the majority of people with a non-residential partner lived very close by to their partners. Nearly three-quarters lived in the same city as their partner, and a further 15% lived in different cities in the same state. Only a minority were in a long-distance relationship with a partner who lived in another state (2%) or overseas (5%). The close physical proximity between partners’ residences was also indicated by the travel time between residences. Around one quarter of individuals lived less than 10 minutes away from their partners, with the median time being 20 minutes.

The relationship between age and geographic location between partners is shown in Figure 4. Out of all age groups, those aged 45 and over were the most likely to be living in different cities, which would also explain the lower frequency of contact mentioned above. It is interesting to note that among the 25–34 year age group, just under 10% had a relationship with someone living abroad. It could be speculated that this is related to the relatively high degree of travel undertaken at these ages (ABS, 2008). These respondents may have met a partner while travelling or working overseas, or their partner may have moved overseas for travel or work reasons.

**Typology of LATs**

Our next step was to identify a typology of individuals in LAT relationships. From the MCA and cluster analysis, we identified four main types of individuals, whose characteristics are shown in Table 2. We called the first group the “Under-25s” because they were primarily made up of individuals aged 18–24. This group was relatively homogenous, having no children, no previous history of marriage, and, for the most part, no history of cohabitation. The second group we termed “Young adults, previously de facto”. As the name implies, this group was primarily made up of young adults between the ages of 25 and 34, the majority of whom were childless and had no marriage history, but usually had experienced at least one cohabitation in the past. The third type was the “Single parents”, who were older people, typically over 30, most of whom had been married and had at least one child resident in the household. Finally, we identified the “Older, previously married” group, which was also relatively homogeneous, consisting mainly of those aged 45 and over who had previously been married. Our typology of individuals was very similar to the one derived from the French GGS (Beaujouan et al., 2009).

**Intentions to cohabit or marry**

Based on our typology of individuals, we then examined group differences in whether a definite decision had been made to live apart, and in their future intentions to cohabit...
or marry. We found clear differences between the group responses, including whether they had made a definite decision to live apart, as shown in Table 3. For example, while over 70% of the older respondents who had previously been married had made a positive decision to live apart, this was the case for less than half of the under-25s.

To some extent, a definite decision to live apart could be taken as implying that the arrangement of not living in the same household was one of choice rather than constraint. However, this may not always be clear-cut, because young adults still living at home may have stated that they had made a definite decision to live apart, as opposed to a preferred choice, but only because of constraints such as lack of financial resources that prevented them from moving in with their partner.

When there had been a definite decision to live apart, most people indicated that it was a joint decision between them and their partner. The single parents were most likely to state that the decision to live apart was solely theirs, followed by the older group. While the responses of the single parents are not surprising, it is interesting that in the other groups where the decision was not joint, individuals usually stated that it was their decision alone, even though we would expect the decision to be roughly equally divided between the two partners.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents in LAT relationships, by type of individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under-25s</th>
<th>Young adults, previously de facto</th>
<th>Single parents</th>
<th>Older, previously married</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>48</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>37</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47</td>
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<td>44</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N (unweighted)</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>974</td>
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<td>Within-class variance</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.16</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HILDA Wave 5

Despite not sharing the same residence, the frequency of contact between partners was very high, with around 75% of individuals meeting their partners at least three times a week, and many of these on a daily basis.
Turning to people’s intentions regarding the future of their relationships, nearly two-thirds of respondents planned to live together within the next 3 years, although there was large degree of variation in responses (Table 3). The young adults were the group with the highest stated intentions of living with their partner, at 79%, while the lowest intentions were found among the older group, at 32%.

In general, it is difficult to tell whether those who stated that they did not intend to live together in the next 3 years were just uncertain if their relationship would continue that far into the future, or whether their answer was more an indication of a preference to maintain the status quo and stay in the relationship in the long term but continue living in separate residences. Given the earlier results regarding the age pattern of duration, it may be speculated that for young adults a negative intention reflects an uncertainty about the future of the relationship, while for older adults—who had relationships of the longest duration—it could indicate a preference to keep the current living arrangements.

It is also interesting to note that there was not always a close link between having made a definite decision to live apart and intentions to not live together at all. For example, while 61% of young adults (previously de facto) had made a decision to live apart, around 79% did intend to move in together within the next 3 years.

Respondents were also asked about their plans for marriage in the future. There was no explicit mention in this question whether the future marriage was to the current LAT partner or to a hypothetical future partner; we assumed that the majority would answer with respect to their current partner. As with the intention to cohabit, responses to the marriage question also varied greatly among the groups. Among the under-25s group, just over 70% thought that they were likely or very likely to marry in the future, and attitudes towards marriage were also positive among young adults who had previously been de facto. On the other hand, single parents and older respondents had much lower intentions of marrying, a result that was also found by Ermisch & Siedler (2008). Over
two-thirds of the older respondents said they were unlikely or very unlikely to remarry in the future.

Discussion

The results from the analyses of HILDA data closely resemble the ones from other international studies. In particular, we find that older respondents, most of whom were widowed or divorced, were the most likely to be “voluntarily” living-apart-together and to have little intention to transition into cohabitation. While we do not know the reasons behind the choice, the wish to maintain a degree of independence and autonomy is likely to be an important consideration (Beaujouan et al., 2009). Qualitative research of LAT relationships in later life in other countries highlights that for the elderly, important concerns appear to centre around the practicalities of sharing living quarters with someone else and having to adjust to another person’s habits, and the wish to remain autonomous and maintain or continue relationships with children and grandchildren (de Jong Gierveld, 2002).

The single parents most closely resembled the older respondents in their decision to live apart and their future plans for cohabitation. Again, we do not know the reasons behind the decision, though it is possible that they did not want to disrupt the home environment of their resident child(ren) by bringing a new partner into the home or by moving into another residence. Around half of the single parents did, however, envisage living with their partner in the next 3 years. At this time, the resident children may have grown accustomed to the partner, or they may have grown up and left the household.

A high percentage of young adults who had previously cohabited intended to start cohabiting with their partner in the next 3 years, and also to marry in the future. This group may feel the greatest normative pressure to consolidate their relationship by living in a common residence. For those under 25, the single parents, and the older, previously married, couples, the pressure to move in with their partner is unlikely to be felt as strongly. Indeed, these groups may even have felt a social pressure not to live with their partner.

The under-25s groups was more evenly divided in terms of whether a definite decision had been made to live apart. In this group, we may be picking up a substantial proportion of casual and fleeting relationships. For the more committed partners, the arrangement may be more a matter of circumstances and practical or financial constraints rather than choice. At this age, and with no previous experience of living with a partner, they may also not feel ready to take the step to move in with their partner.

Conclusion

Changing demographic trends mean that a substantial proportion of the population is
For younger individuals, it is important to identify the constraints they face in setting up a common residence with their partner, in particular in relation to financial and housing factors.

now not living with a partner. According to the 2006 Census, in Australia 4.6 million people aged 20 and over, or nearly a third of the adult population, were not living with a partner or spouse and could therefore be classified as being unpartnered (ABS, 2007). We estimated from the HILDA data that around 24% of the single population was in fact in a relationship, albeit not living with their partner. This translates to over 1.1 million Australians in living-apart-together relationships. We suggest that it is important to understand more about these partnerships, as the lives of people who are truly single, compared with people who have a non-resident partner, are likely to be different in many respects. Several authors have also predicted that LAT relationships are going to become more common in the future. Reasons for this include the ones discussed earlier, such as the continuation of demographic trends of increased life expectancy, increased rates of marital dissolution and the rise of cohabitations. Also important may be increased gender equality and the rise of dual-career couples, and cases where working women are less able to relocate for their partner’s job (Levin, 2004; Castro-Martin et al., 2008).

For younger individuals, who are known to be moving out of the parental home at increasingly later ages (de Vaus, 2004), it is important to identify the constraints they face in setting up a common residence with their partner, in particular in relation to financial and housing factors. More qualitative research would also be of interest in order to understand young people’s attitudes towards establishing a common residence with a partner, and the degree to which non-residential relationships among young people are related to individualistic values, risk aversion or fear of commitment, as has been suggested (Heath & Cleaver, 2003). Among older individuals, it is also important to learn more about their intimate relationships, because non-residential partners may be an important source of instrumental and emotional support, especially for the elderly who are living alone.

It is important to not only understand more about these relationships in their own right, but also a greater understanding of why new relationship types such as LATs are formed can provide some insight into reasons for changing relationship trends, such as the postponement and avoidance of marriage (Casper, Brandon, DiPrete, Sanders, & Smock, 2008; Strohm et al., 2010). However, to understand the nature of live-apart-together relationships at all stages of the life course, more quantitative and qualitative research is needed. At the moment, our understanding of these relationships is limited by the cross-sectional nature of most quantitative studies. Longitudinal data on LAT relationships would allow us to study their duration, and their possible eventual development into separations or cohabitations.

Endnotes

1 In HILDA Wave 5 (2005), the weighted percentage of those aged 18 and over and with a non-resident partner was 9%. In Wave 4 (2006) of the Negotiating the Life Course survey, the weighted percentage of those aged 18–65 and not living with their partner was 7%. In the Family, Social Capital and Citizenship survey, 7% of the sample had a non-resident partner (unweighted).

2 In the literature, there is no standard treatment of married couples in living-apart-together relationships. Sometimes married couples are included in the definition of LAT unions (Levin & Trost, 1999), and other times excluded (Haskey, 2005). There is general consensus, though, that LAT relationships do not include so-called “commuter” marriages/cohabitations, where the couple maintains one household, but one partner lives elsewhere for periods of time due to work reasons (Levin & Trost, 1999).

3 There were 18 same-sex couples in the HILDA sample (< 2% of those were in LAT relationships).

4 We used the XLSTAT software to perform the multiple correspondence and cluster analysis <www.xlstat.com>.

5 An alternative analysis strategy to that outlined would be to have each of the three key topics of interests (whether relationship is due to a definite decision to live apart, intention to live together in next 5 years, and intention to marry) as the dependent variable and to see how key demographic and socio-economic characteristics—such as age, number of children and employment— influenced the dependent variable. This strategy was not used because of the high degree of multicollinearity between age and the other independent variables; for example, younger respondents are much more likely to have never had a previous live-in relationship and to not have children, while the opposite is true for older respondents. This made it
difficult to separate out the effects of age from the other variables of interest.

6 Since these are cross-sectional results, the pattern is influenced by both cohort and age effects.

7 Fifty-nine respondents did not know the month the relationship started, but knew the year. In these cases, the month was imputed to June. In addition, two had missing information on the duration of the relationship, as they did not know the year the relationship started.

References


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Unfit mothers ... unjust practices?
Key issues from Australian research on the impact of past adoption practices

Daryl Higgins

Although reliable figures are not available, in the decades prior to the mid-1970s, it was common in Australia for babies of unwed mothers to be adopted. There is a wealth of material on adoption in Australia—including individual historical records, analyses of historical practices, case studies, expert opinions, personal testimony provided to two parliamentary inquiries—but limited empirical research on the issue of past adoption practices and its impact on those involved.

Over the past century, adoption practices in Australia—and society’s responses to unwed pregnancies and single motherhood—have undergone considerable changes. Until a range of social, legal and economic changes in the 1970s, it was common for babies of unwed mothers to be adopted.1 The adoption practices at the time had the potential for lifelong consequences for the lives of these women and their children, as well as others, such as their families, the father, the adoptive parents and their families. Commentators, professional experts, researchers and parliamentary committees have all accepted that past adoption practices were far from ideal, had the potential to do damage, and often did (see Box 1).

Many authors talk about the “adoptive triangle”: (a) the adopted child; (b) the birth, or “relinquishing”, mother; and (c) the adoptive parents. Each of these “parties” to the events may bring a different perspective. The primary focus of this review is to look at research literature on the adoption of the babies of unwed mothers, and the impact on these mothers of the surrounding experiences. There is a much wider body of research looking at both the experience of adopted children, and the experiences and needs of adoptive parents; however, it is beyond the scope of this brief review to give detailed consideration to these perspectives.

There is limited research available in Australia on the issue of past adoption practices.2 Finding relevant literature to review in this field is problematic, as it is difficult to identify
A new national research study on the service response to past adoption practices

On 4 June 2010, the Community and Disability Services Ministers’ Conference (CDSMC) announced that Ministers had agreed to a joint national research study into past adoption practices, to be conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). The focus of this study will be on understanding current needs and information to support improved service responses. It is anticipated that this will be the largest study on the impact of past adoption practices ever conducted in this country. The aim of the research study is to utilise and build on existing research and evidence about the extent and impact of past adoption practices to strengthen the evidence available to governments to address the current needs of individuals affected by past adoption practices. Information will be collected using an online survey, hard-copy surveys and in-depth interviews, integrating results from across the different elements of the study.

The study will commence in mid-2011, to be completed by mid-2012. For more information, see: <www.aifs.gov.au/pastadoptionpractices>.

This study will complement the work of the History of Adoption Project at Monash University, which is focused on “explaining the historical factors driving the changing place, meaning and significance of adoption”, particularly through its collection of oral histories. See: <arts.monash.edu.au/historyofadoption>.

Box 1: Past adoption practices

Until the early 1970s in Australia, unwed (single) women who were pregnant were encouraged—or forced—to “relinquish” their babies for adoption. The shame and silence that surrounded pregnancy out of wedlock meant that these women were seen as “unfit” mothers. The practice of “closed adoption” was seen as the solution—where the birth identities of adopted children were effectively erased to allow the children’s identification with their new adopted family. Mothers were not informed about the adoptive families, and the very fact of their adoption was usually kept secret from the children (see Swain & Howe, 1995).

Terms used to describe past adoption practices

A range of different terms is used in the literature to refer to both adoption practices and the women affected by them. Some of the terms are perceived as “value-laden”, either because of their acceptance of a particular point of view (e.g., “stolen” implies illegal practices), or because their attempt at neutrality (e.g., “relinquishing mothers”) potentially hides what are alleged as immoral or illegal practices. These terms include:

- relinquishing mothers;
- parents who relinquished a child to adoption;
- birth mothers;
- natural mothers;
- genetic parents;
- adoption of ex-nuptial children;
- mothers affected by past adoption practices;
- mothers of the “stolen white generation” (analogous to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children removed from their parents, which occurred at roughly the same time period);
- real parents;
- losing a child to adoption;
- reunited mother of child/ren lost to adoption;
- separation from babies by adoption; and
- “rapid adoption”—the practice of telling a single mother her baby was stillborn, and the baby then being adopted by a married couple.

Source: Higgins (2010)

research that examines the issues of consent and the contested nature of what “voluntary” relinquishment would look like, given the social attitudes, historical social work/child welfare practices and financial pressures at the time (such as views about single mothers, ex-nuptial children, and illegitimacy). A search of the literature on adoptions that addresses historical perspectives provides the closest alignment to this issue. There appears to be a dearth of literature published in peer review outlets, so the issue of critiquing the validity of the claims is an important one—separating out anecdotes, case studies, historical critiques and solid empirical data on the impact of past practices.3

History of adoption laws and policies

In-depth analysis of past laws and institutional policies in Australia, and the changes that have occurred over time have been addressed in detail in a couple of major books, particularly Swain and Howe (1995) and Marshall and McDonald (2001). Some of the key events, as
described by these authors, are outlined in Box 2 (on page 58). Since these legislative changes, adoption practices have reflected this shift away from secrecy to open adoptions. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), which publishes national statistical information on adoptions in Australia, noted that in 2007–08:

Agreements made at the time of adoption indicate that the majority of local adoptions are now "open" (77%)—only 23% of birth parents requested "no contact or information exchange". (AIHW, 2009, p. 20)

Prevalence estimates
With national statistics only compiled from 1969–70 onwards, it is not possible to reliably calculate the total (cumulative) number of past adoptions across Australia. Since 1969, rates of adoption of Australian-born children by non-related persons (i.e., excluding overseas adoptions, and adoption by step-parents, etc.) were highest in the early 1970s (with the highest being 9,798 for 1971–72). From then, there was a rapid decline through to the early 1990s, since when it has remained relatively stable at around 400 to 600 children per year—around 5% of the annual number of adoptions in the early 1970s (see Figure 1). There are a number of reasons for the considerable decline in adoptions to the current levels, despite the fact that a larger proportion of children are now born outside registered marriages. These include:

- an overall decline in fertility rates;
- greater availability and acceptance of birth control methods;
- the establishment of family planning centres;
- greater social acceptance of single parenthood and of children raised in de facto relationships; and
- the availability of welfare payments and social supports for single parents (AIHW, 2009).

Understanding the true extent of past practices, or its ongoing effects, is problematic. Winkler and van Keppel (1984) estimated that there were 35,000 non-relative adoptions during the 12 years from July 1968 to June 1980. In terms of lifetime prevalence—considering both past and more recent rates of adoptions—Winkler, Brown, van Keppel, and Blanchard (1988) estimated that "one in 50 women in Western countries in 1988 have placed a child for adoption (traditional, closed adoption) since the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 48). Although not based on verifiable data, it highlights the issue that, as they accumulate over a number of decades, the number of adoptions in total is likely to be significant. Winkler et al. also estimated that 1 in 15 people are affected by adoption (including birth parents, adoptive parents and the adoptee). Inglis (1984) claimed that, in Australia, more than 250,000 women have relinquished a baby for adoption since the late 1920s. Although she did not describe the basis for this calculation, it is one that has since been widely cited. In sum, there are no accurate data on the number of Australians who have been affected.

There is a wide range of people who may be affected by past adoption practices, including:

- mothers;
- the adopted children;
- fathers (anecdotal evidence from case studies suggests that often mothers knew

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Box 2: Legal and policy milestones regarding adoption and single mothers in Australia

- Legislation on adoption commenced in Western Australia in 1896, with similar legislation in other jurisdictions following.
- Before the introduction of state legislation on adoption, "baby farming" and infanticide was not uncommon.
- Legislative changes emerged from the 1960s that enshrined the concept of adoption secrecy and the ideal of having a "clean break" from the birth mother.
- The Council of the Single Mother and her Children (CSMC) was set up in 1969, which set out to challenge the stigma of adoption and to support single and relinquishing mothers.
- The status of "illegitimacy" disappeared in the early 1970s, starting with a Status of Children Act in both Victoria and Tasmania in 1974 (in which the status was changed to "ex-nuptial").
- Abortion became allowed in most states from the early 1970s (the 1969 Menhennitt judgement in Victoria and 1971 Levine judgement in NSW).
- Further legislative reforms started to overturn the blanket of secrecy surrounding adoption (up until changes in the 1980s, information on birth parents was not made available to adopted children/adults).
- Beginning with NSW (in 1976), registers were established for those wishing to make contact (both for parents and adopted children).
- In 1984, Victoria implemented legislation granting adopted persons over 18 the right to access their birth certificate (subject to mandatory counselling). Similar changes followed in other states (e.g., NSW introduced the Adoption Information Act in 1990).
- By the early 1990s, legislative changes in most states ensured that consent for adoption had to come from both birth mothers and fathers.

* "Baby farming" refers to the provision of private board and lodging for babies or young children at commercial rates, a practice that was often abused for financial gain, including cases of serious neglect and infanticide (see Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 21).
who the fathers were, including boyfriends and even husbands;
■ the mother’s family (who may have failed to provide support or actively demanded relinquishment, silence and censure);
■ subsequent partners of the mothers;
■ siblings; and
■ the adoptive family.

The range of people involved suggests therefore the potential for wide-ranging impacts, including the possibility of the effects of past adoption practices on these individuals in turn “rippling” through to others, including other children and family members.

There are also a number of organisational contributors, including:
■ management/leaders of the organisations involved with adoption at the time (hospital administrators, leaders of churches or religious orders);4
■ individuals within these health, charitable and religious organisations (social workers, nurses, doctors, nuns); and
■ doctors treating infertile couples, who created demand for babies to be given up for adoption.

Societal factors

From the 1940s, it was seen as desirable for unwed mothers to relinquish their children as early as possible—straight after birth. Women’s magazines became fierce advocates for adoption. Waiting lists of prospective adoptive parents began to emerge in 1940s and 1950s. As demand outstripped supply, the pressure to relinquish was particularly high in maternity homes where matrons and social workers were often personally acquainted with the prospective adoptive parents (see Marshall & McDonald, 2001; Swain & Howe, 1995).

Some of the key social factors that have played a role in developing and maintaining adoption practices included:
■ the enactment of child welfare legislation, development and administration of policies, the operation of statutory welfare departments, and the funding/regulation of other non-government organisations to operate adoption services in each state/territory;
■ the absence or inadequacy of political and social structures available to support single mothers;
■ psychological and social work theories that were used by proponents to support various aspects of the adoption practices, including support for the idea that an adopted child should have a “clean break” from the “relinquishing” mother; and
■ broader societal attitudes in areas such as the role of women, sex and illegitimacy, poverty and the capacity of single women to effectively parent and raise good citizens, the silence that descended on pregnancy outside of marriage, and the “closed” nature of adoption prior to the 1970s.

Solving three social problems: Illegitimacy, infertility and impoverishment

Common themes relating to the dominant social views, and the consequent treatment of single pregnant women include:
■ shame;
■ silence;
■ blame (fear of passing on delinquency through bad parenting; seeing pregnancy as being the effect of “sin”); and
■ discriminatory behaviour (compared to the treatment of married mothers in hospitals).

According to Harkness (1991), both the adoptive mother and the “relinquishing” mother can be seen as products—or victims—of “a punitive and patronizing society anxious to graft newborn babies on to ‘good’ (married) mothers as quickly as possible” (p. 2). Consequently, in the period up to the early 1970s, many saw adoption as being explicitly (or implicitly) the solution to the intertwined problems of: illegitimate babies, the risk of impoverishment...
environment and upbringing is so small that I believe for practical purposes it can be ignored. I believe that in all such cases the obstetrician should urge that the child be adopted. In recommending that a particular child is fit for adoption, we tend to err on the side of overcautiousness. “When in doubt, don’t” is part of the wisdom of living; but over adoptions I would suggest that “when in doubt, do”, should be the rule. (p. 165)

S. Swain (1992) argued that “community hostility towards single mothers and fears about the ‘quality’ of their offspring resulted in secrecy becoming central to Australian adoption practice” (p. 2). Based on an analysis of historical documents from NSW, Jones (2000) argued:

It was thought that removal of illegitimate children, children at risk of neglect or moral contamination and children from hard-core problem families would give the family a second chance to heal itself just as single mothers would be able “to live happy and useful lives” after relinquishment, for in those days before grief counselling, mothers were expected to “get on with life” instead of confronting their grief and loss. (pp. 52–53)

Choice and coercion

Commentators acknowledge that there were limited choices for these women, and “coercive social forces” led many women to sign consents for adoption up until legislative reform in the 70s and 80s (Marshall & McDonald, 2001). A number of different contributors to the inquiry held by the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues (2000) identified the lack of choice experienced by single pregnant women in the past, including the lack of availability of contraception and abortion, and the lack of awareness and respect for the rights of women (e.g., to see the child, to revoke the initial decision, or to choose between relinquishment or keeping the baby). One mother interviewed by Swain and Howe (1995) stated: “They said to me ‘the decision is yours’ ... But it was mine without any help anywhere” (p. 145).

Across the various types of literature reviewed, a consistent theme was that the mothers whose babies were adopted reported less social support from their family than single mothers who kept their babies. There was a lack of pre-relinquishment information or post-relinquishment emotional support and advice about options. From an autobiographical perspective, Frame (1999) described the situation for his birth mother after she relinquished him:

Like many girls in a similar position, she was advised to forget about the child and continue with life as though nothing had happened. No mention was made

...
of the trauma and grief associated with relinquishing a child. There was no offer of any continuing spiritual or psychological care. None existed. (p. 29)

It is important to also consider the role of the parents of the young unwed mothers affected by past adoption practices. For example, one of the women from Kate Inglis’ (1984) groundbreaking Australian compilation of personal testimonies, “Joy”, described her emotional reaction when she thinks back on the actions of her own mother: “The longer I’m a mother the more amazed I am about what she [my mother] did to me. I mean after what you go through with kids you’d fight for them, wouldn’t you?” (p. 31).

Secrecy and silence

Secrecy and silence began with the experience of teenage/single pregnancy, and continued through the experience of adoption and the future lives of the women subjected to these past practices. Swain and Howe (1995) provided data suggesting that between World War II and 1975, approximately 30–40% of women who became pregnant out of wedlock spent time in an institution to conceal their pregnancy (i.e., they became invisible). However, the invisibility did not stop with the birth and the adoption; the silence continued. According to accounts of the mothers, their experience of adoption was “a particular kind of hell we weren’t allowed to talk about” (Harkness, 1991, p. 4). Case studies provide evidence that women kept the secret, often not sharing the information with friends, partners or subsequent children until much later—if at all. Silence can be seen as part of the “punishment” for the single woman who became pregnant: “Her pregnancy hidden… she was compelled to collude in her own punishment by maintaining her silence” (Swain & Howe, 1995, p. 11).

Secrecy was the main priority in adoption legislation prior to the 1980s. Ley (1992) argued that “it was believed that by obliterating a child’s birth identity it was possible to create for an adopted child a new identity which would ensure the genealogical history of the adoptive parents was now that of the adopted child” (p. 101). However, this assumption underlying the legislation at the time—that the “relinquishing mother” wanted her identity to remain a secret to her child—is not necessarily correct (Winkler & van Keppel, 1984).

Silence resonates through the lives not only of the mothers, but also of their adopted children. As one adoptee stated:

I think one of the worst things about “closed adoption” is the silence—the social covering up of the visceral, emotional, psychological, genetic and historical connections to the original mother and the denial of loss for all. (Durey, 1998, p. 104)

In attempting to explain the ongoing detrimental effects of adoption that their study uncovered, Winkler and van Keppel (1984) argued that the silence that surrounded “relinquishment” significantly contributed to the harmful effects experienced by many of the women involved. The authors briefly reviewed the research on bereavement experiences for mothers whose child died during or shortly after childbirth. The key element associated with a positive adjustment for bereaved mothers was communication; yet for mothers who “relinquished” a baby to adoption, the secrecy and silence compounded the difficulties they experienced.

Reunion experiences

Since the changes in Australian legislation during the 1970s and 1980s that provided access to birth records, and the establishment of services to assist with making contact, significant numbers of adoptees and birth mothers have exchanged information or made contact. The protection of privacy that has been put in place allows for either the parent or the child to place a veto on being contacted by the other party.

Regarding the number of vetoes placed on contact between adoptive children and their birth parents, AIHW (2010) noted:

As in previous years, in 2008–09 the number of applications for information far exceeded the number of vetoes lodged against contact or the release of identifying information—3,607 compared with 52. (p. 32)

In choosing to attempt reunion, one of the main motivations for mothers is to know about their child’s welfare; however, this is tempered with concern about how such an approach would be received:

While wanting to know that their children are alive and well, (mothers) are often reluctant to intrude into their lives or worry about upsetting their relationships with the adoptive parents. (Harkness, 1991, p. 149)

Another common motivation is that birth mothers want their child to know that they belonged and were loved/wanted. In one of the testimonies presented by Harkness (1991), “Gayle” reflected on her daughter, and what she hoped the adoptive parents would do:

I thought of her often. Just wondering and hoping that she was happy. I also hoped when she got older that her
parents would be kind about me. That they would tell her that I loved her. (p. 78)

Harkness (1991) referred to the following phases in reunion:

There’s the anticipation and excitement as the search nears conclusion, the euphoria of the first meeting, the honeymoon period, the “let-down”, transition, and finally, resolution. (p. 204)

In the absence of other information, many adoptees assume that they were unloved and unwanted. Reunion, or some form of information exchange or contact, can help with communicating the mothers’ circumstances and the reasons surrounding the adoption, including feelings such as having no option, being coerced or feeling vulnerable. Reunion can bring relief or a sense of connection; however, the experience is not always positive. Feelings associated with reunion can include renewed guilt for the past “relinquishment” and fear of rejection by the child, and if the outcome is not positive, contact may cease (e.g., see Farrar, 2000).

There is a limited body of research on reunion experiences, and the evidence appears mixed as to the degree to which this process is uniformly beneficial for all those involved (NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000).

Traumatising aspects of past practices

Gaps in research relating to ongoing trauma

It has also been noted that there are “gaps” in the traditional research literature where particular issues of relevance for affected mothers are not considered, many of which relate to the issue of consent and coercion, and the theme of ongoing trauma (Higgins, 2010). These issues include:

- administration of high levels of drugs to the mother in the perinatal period (including pain relief medication, sedatives and a hormone that suppresses lactation) that were believed to affect their capacity to consent;
- not allowing the mother to see the baby (active shielding with a sheet or other physical barrier during birth, or removing the baby from the ward immediately after birth);
- withholding information about the baby (e.g., gender, health information, or even whether the baby was a live birth);
- discouraging the mother from naming the baby;
bullying behaviour by consent takers (seen as the “bastions of morality” who are protecting “good families”);

- failure to advise the mother of her right to rescind the decision to relinquish;

- failure to adequately obtain consent from the mother (being too young to be able to give consent; interactions with other issues raised above that impaired the mother’s ability to give fully informed consent; consent given while under the influence of drugs; not being fully informed of rights, etc.);

- treating the mothers differently from married women;

- abandonment by their own mothers/families;

- the closed nature of past adoption practices (secrecy, and the “clean break” theory; see Iwanek, 1997);

- assumption of a married couple’s entitlement to a child (adoption was a mechanism for dealing with infertility; see Harper, 1992), with the joint “problem” of illegitimacy and infertility (see Frame, 1999); and

- experimentation on newborn babies with drugs, with children dying or being adopted without any follow-up of these experiments (see Parliament of Australia Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2004).

These kinds of traumatising experiences were recounted by a number of women in submissions to two different state parliamentary inquiries (NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2000; Parliament of Tasmania Joint Select Committee, 1999). According to the final reports from both of these inquiries, the evidence was seen as equivocal. It would take some significant historical research using archival material to determine the extent to which these practices were widespread and different to the treatment of single mothers who kept their babies or of married mothers.

One issue of particular importance is the trauma of the separation of mother and child. Mothers—particularly those who have not had any contact—continue to be traumatised by the thought that their child grew up thinking that they were not wanted. In the words of one mother: “It wasn’t the children who were not wanted. Mothers weren’t wanted because they were unmarried” (cited in Higgins, 2010, p. 13).

The grief and trauma is seen as “unresolved”, due to the silence surrounding “closed” adoption that prevented the mother from being able to mourn her loss (Goodwach, 2001; Rickarby, 1998). For mothers, the ongoing silence means knowing that her child is out there, wondering how they are, and knowing that there is a possibility of reunion—not the “severed bond” as promised by the clean break theory that shrouded the event in silence (Iwanek, 1997). In describing the grief and trauma, many authors have drawn on related bodies of research, using recent infant–mother attachment research to support their contention that separation causes emotional damage to both mother and child (e.g., Cole, 2009). It is somewhat ironic that earlier research in this same field (e.g., Bowlby, 1969) was used to justify the practices of the time (i.e., not allowing the child to bond with the birth mother so as to provide a “clean break” that encourages bonding with the new adoptive parents).

**Time (does not) heal all wounds**

Contrary to the popular myth that “time heals all wounds”, one theme that was fairly consistent across the different studies and methodologies reviewed here was the notion that the pain and distress of mothers’ experiences of adoption did not just “go away” with the passage of time. In his qualitative study of women recruited through a support group for relinquishing mothers, Condon (1986) found that “the majority of these women reported no diminution of their sadness, anger and guilt over the considerable number of years which had elapsed since their relinquishment” (p. 118). However, the healing effect of time is exactly what practitioners expected during that period.

Reinforcing the notion that the feelings do not just “go away”, on the basis of his data from adoption information service users, P. Swain (1992) claimed that most birth mothers “go on wondering and worrying about their child for
the rest of their lives. For almost all, the contact with their child brings immense relief” (p. 32).

In a recent qualitative study with a limited, non-representative sample, Gair (2008) observed the feelings of powerlessness, low self-worth, depression and suicidal feelings/behaviours in people affected by past adoption practices in Australia, including adoptees, birth mothers, a birth father and an adoptive mother. However, the extent of such effects in a representative sample has not been measured.

Conclusion

In this brief review of past adoption practices, the focus has been on gathering evidence from the research literature that can be used to assist with understanding their impact, in order to develop appropriate responses to the needs of those who are affected.

The available information highlights the following themes:

- the wide range of people involved, and therefore the wide-ranging impacts and “ripple effects” of adoption beyond mothers and the children that were adopted;
- the grief and loss associated with past adoption practices, but also the usefulness of understanding past adoption practices as “trauma”, and seeing the impact through a “trauma lens”;
- the ways in which past adoption practices drew together society’s responses to illegitimacy, infertility and impoverishment;
- anecdotal evidence of the diversity of practices and lack of uniformity of experience;
- the role of choice and coercion, secrecy and silence, blame and responsibility, the views of broader society, and the attitudes and specific behaviours of organisations and individuals;
- the ongoing impacts of past adoption practices, including the process of reunion between mothers and their now-adult children, and the degree to which the reunion is seen as a “success” or not; and
- the need for information, counselling and support for those affected by past adoption practices.

A common theme across all of the research is the pervasiveness of the shame and silence, and the effect this has had in terms of isolation, lack of support and specific services. Marshall and McDonald (2001) argued that long-term pain for relinquishing mothers could have been relieved if they had had help in dealing with the relinquishment, accompanied by support and the opportunity to know something about the child (p. 73).

Based on her advocacy work with mothers who have been separated from their babies by adoption, Lindsay (1998) identified what she saw as being essential for the healing process, and for which society—rather than individuals—are responsible:

- availability of ongoing counselling with highly skilled psychologists;
- provision of trauma counselling services pertaining to mothers and children traumatised by adoption separation;
- establishment of advertising campaigns encouraging mothers to speak out;
- provision of education programs for GPs and other health services providers; and
- avoidance of statements that are likely to re-traumatising (e.g., referring to “unwanted babies”, “your decision”, “birth mother”, “think about how the adoptive parent feels”).

At the conclusion of their groundbreaking Australian empirical study, Winkler and van Keppel (1984) recommended that two things were most needed for these women:

- counselling and support; and
- increased information.

The efficacy of these various services or actions have not been empirically tested in relation to the specific population group; however, they are consistent with the broader theoretical and empirical literature on other forms of trauma, such as the field of child abuse and neglect or adult sexual assault (Connor & Higgins, 2008; van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). As with other groups who have experienced pain and trauma, having society recognise what has occurred (i.e., naming it, and understanding how it occurred and its impact) is an important element in coping with and adjusting to the deep hurt they have experienced.

As past adoption practices cannot be “undone”, one of the steps in the journey for both mothers and children given up for adoption is the choice around reunion. Given the variability in responses provided in the case study literature, and the absence of any systematic empirical evidence, this is an area where further research would be of particular value. Services attempting to support those affected—including professional counsellors, agencies and support groups—would all benefit from a greater understanding of typical pathways through the reunion process, estimates of the number of reunions that have occurred, the perspectives of those involved, and factors...
that are associated with positive and negative reunion experiences.

Apart from these issues relating to reunion, there are other ongoing issues for mothers affected by past adoption practices, including problems with:
- personal identity (the concept of “motherhood” and self-identity as a good mother);
- relationships with others, including husbands/partners, subsequent children;
- connectedness with others (problematic attachments); and
- ongoing anxiety, depression and trauma (Higgins, 2010).

The focus of the current literature review has been on the young women who relinquished babies to adoption and the effect of this on their lives, and to a lesser extent, the adopted children (particularly in relation to reunions). However, it is important to also consider the perspectives of biological fathers and other family members, such as children, partners, siblings, grandparents and the adoptive parents. In particular, there is little research to help understand the experience of men—both those who were adopted, and those who were biological fathers of children “relinquished” to adoption (Coles, 2009; Frame, 1999; Marshall & McDonald, 2001).

This review has shown that past adoption practices can have lifelong consequences. Although there is a wealth of historical records that could be examined, there is little systematic research on adoption experiences in Australia up to the key changes in the 1970s. In assessing the value of the research literature in understanding the context and impact of past adoption practices, it is important to acknowledge that we are viewing past behaviour and judging it by the standards of today, with the benefit of hindsight. This does not discount the impact of these practices on those affected. Views about the moral correctness of past practices, or even the contributions of individuals or institutions are evident in the literature, and while this material is distinguished from research, its significance is still acknowledged. For example, while acknowledging the pain and suffering of those affected by these past practices, the Parliament of Tasmania Joint Select Committee (1999) aptly summed up what the body of literature also shows:

In hindsight, it is believed that if knowledge of the emotional effects on people was available during the period concerned, then parents may not have pushed for adoption to take place and birthmothers may not have, willingly or unwillingly, relinquished their children. Witnesses and respondents [to the Inquiry], who include some adopted children, would not therefore be experiencing the pain and suffering which continues to influence their lives. (p. 11).
Commentators, experts, researchers and parliamentary committees have all accepted that past adoption practices were far from ideal, had the potential to do damage, and often did. What is often left unspoken is the issue of responsibility. It is implicit in discussions around the adequacy of consent (and the allegation of widespread immoral and illegal behaviours, such as failing to advise about rights of revocation, administration of high levels of drugs that could affect decision-making ability, etc.). In addition to the choice and volition of the woman involved (however impeded or affected), questions remain about how these past events occurred, and the current needs of those affected. Taking the time to understand the full extent of the impact of past practices is needed in order to be able to tailor appropriate service responses to meet the needs of those affected.

Endnotes

1 For example, Commonwealth financial support for unwed mothers was not routinely available until the introduction of the Supporting Mother’s Benefit in 1973.

2 Although the focus of this paper is Australian research on past adoption practices, limited references are made to overseas literature where relevant—particularly that of New Zealand—and where documents were easily accessible.

3 Empirical research refers to studies where researchers base their conclusions on data collected systematically via a direct or indirect method, and utilising recognised methods of analysis to synthesise the information or test hypotheses. In this brief review, I have focused on empirical qualitative and quantitative studies (for a full summary, see Higgins, 2010, Appendix A).

4 It is important to note that during the decades when great numbers of women were surrendering children for adoption (including the 1970s), the major social institutions of government, church and the law were governed almost entirely by men (Marshall & McDonald, 2001, p. 80).

5 Discriminatory practices were exemplified by the use of file markers such as “UB” (short for “Unmarried—Baby for adoption”), which determined the social work and nursing practices (Farrar, 1998). Such practices have been understood by some writers to be punishment for the “moral failure” of the women, with activities being carried out unsympathetically by staff.

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thoughts and actions. *Australian e-journal for the Advancement of Mental Health, 7*(3), 1–10.


**Daryl Higgins** is Deputy Director (Research) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This article is based on a report, commissioned by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Higgins, 2010), and available at: <http://fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/past_adoption/Pages/default.aspx>. The report has also been reprinted in the *Australian Journal of Adoption, 2*(2), available at: <http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/aja/issue/view/142/showToc>.

Although there is a wealth of historical records that could be examined, there is little systematic research on the experience of past adoption practices in Australia.
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Current trends in child abuse and neglect in the United States: What might Australians learn from and disregard from this evidence base?

Professor Marianne Berry

Seminar held at the Victorian State Library on 8th September, 2010

Seminar report by Alister Lamont

This seminar, presented by Professor Marianne Berry, Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, reviewed the nature of the evidence base on child abuse and neglect in the United States. Professor Berry also analysed what services and service components are provided in the US and then discussed the practices and policies that might and might not be effective within the diverse cultures and policy frameworks in Australia.

Professor Berry highlighted that in order to understand the extent of child abuse and neglect, it is essential to have a national incidence/prevalence survey. In the 4th wave of the US National Incidence Study found that child physical abuse had decreased from previous waves, while child neglect remained the same. The question of how we can ascertain the extent to which prevention services are working to reduce incidence of child maltreatment was then raised. Berry advised that effective education about child maltreatment will lead to early identification of maltreatment. Early intervention and prevention programs can be seen to be working if abuse referrals and notifications rise (and then hopefully fall in future years). However, higher numbers of referrals and notifications are a good thing only if the system has the capacity to serve those children once identified.

To measure whether the system does have the capacity to serve vulnerable children and families, Professor Berry highlighted that, from the evidence available, the most effective prevention practices should include the following components:

- one-on-one learning and practising of skills in parenting, social skills and negotiation;
- sharing within a strong caring relationship;
- workers modelling these same skills in their interactions with others;
- giving praise, praise, praise; and
- providing clear and concise information, not lengthy or complicated.

Professor Berry emphasised the importance of engagement in predicting positive outcomes in practice, highlighting that effective engagement should include the following:

- including staff that look like families, e.g. community members;
- no judging or blaming of parents (keeping an open mind);
- being honest and encouraging even when the news is less than encouraging;
- helping with concrete needs: financial support and health care;
- meeting with families at their homes;
- working towards goals with a sense of urgency; and
- providing practical support, such as transportation.

The discussion after Professor Berry’s presentation focused on how the evidence presented could be adapted to an Australian context. It was widely agreed that Australia has similar (but not the same) types of issues, yet the aspects of best practice should still be universal in both contexts.

Safeguarding and protecting children across the United Kingdom

Dr Sharon Vincent

Seminar held at the Institute on 13 October 2010

Seminar report by Myfanwy McDonald

Dr Sharon Vincent is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh/National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) Centre for UK-Wide Learning in Child Protection. The centre is a unique collaboration established three and a half years ago that undertakes comparative analysis of child protection policy within the UK.

Dr Vincent’s main area of study is child death review processes and her main reason for visiting Australia was to undertake research investigating state and territory differences in Australia regarding child death reviews.

In this seminar, Dr Vincent described some of the key themes relating to safeguarding and protecting children in the UK, focusing specifically on differences in policy between England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Although the UK is often thought of as a single entity in terms of child protection policy, there are in fact differences between countries within the UK. These policies have the potential to diverge further with devolution.

Dr Vincent focused on six key issues. Firstly, she discussed the thresholds for intervention. All countries in the UK have the same threshold for intervention,
based upon the concept of significant harm. However, there is no working definition of significant harm; rather, it is determined via professional judgement.

Dr Vincent described the documents that have been developed to provide guidance to child protection professionals. While the English guidance document (Working Together to Safeguard Children) is 390 pages long, the Scottish Government have kept their guidance document brief so as not to overwhelm professionals.

In terms of how individual cases are managed in the UK, Dr Vincent noted that, while there have been policy reforms, the way in which cases are managed has undergone minimal changes—“the experience … for a child and for a family is likely to be almost the same”. The stages involved in individual case management (i.e., reporting to statutory services, investigation, assessment, child protection planning and regular case review) are similar across the UK and broadly similar to those in many states and territories of Australia.

There has been a shift in the language used within UK guidance and legislation to describe child protection and these are echoed in the Australian context. For example, rather than focusing specifically upon “high-risk” children, the UK has seen a shift towards “safeguarding” all children, “widening the net so that you don’t just look at children who are at risk, it’s about protecting all children, about making sure all children are safe”. The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–20 represents a similar shift in the Australian policy context towards protecting all children.

Another theme Dr Vincent discussed is the UK’s shift towards service integration. The UK provides some interesting examples of how to bring about integrated services—England has forced local authorities to restructure their services so they are more integrated, while Wales and Scotland have provided local authorities with a greater level of independence in regard to integration.

Dr Vincent went on to briefly discuss child death review processes in the UK, noting that England, Wales and Northern Ireland have made, or are making, child death review processes statutory, whereas Scotland will not.

Dr Vincent raised some thought-provoking questions about the role of comparative policy research. Is it good or bad to have divergent policies? Does it matter if different countries within the UK do things differently? Dr Vincent pointed out that perhaps the most important question is: What are the outcomes of different policies? In essence, we can only make a judgement about “good” and “bad” policies if we can answer this question. However, as Dr Vincent noted, the challenge (also faced by Australian researchers and policy-makers) is measuring outcomes when the relevant data are not available.

Dr Vincent concluded her seminar by highlighting that while child protection policies are often developed in response to things that have gone wrong, “a lot actually goes right”. Sharing good practice is essential to developing our knowledge of what works in the field of child protection.
from the perspective of victim safety (state family violence law), to being a friendly parent (family law), to failing to protect a child from exposure to family violence (child protection law). Fragmentation and divided responsibilities across jurisdictions also make it difficult for decision-makers to attend to children as participants in the legal system who need safe outcomes.

Professor Croucher highlighted the need for better integration of family violence legislation to improve the legal experiences for victims of family and domestic violence. Possible options outlined to achieve this include developing integrated services (such as specialist courts) and drawing on the example of the Magellan case-management model to develop a coordinated system. The full suite of 187 recommendations for reforming legal frameworks and improving legal practice can be found in the Commission’s report.

As well as describing the ALRC review, Professor Croucher provided insight into the benefits and challenges of joint national law reform projects. Collaboration between the two large organisations of the ALRC and NSWLRC involved sharing different technology and resources; dividing responsibilities; reaching stakeholders for national consultation in (sometimes in remote locations); and complementing other concurrent research and reviews while avoiding duplication. These considerations would be likely to help other national collaborative projects in the future.


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### Institute seminars

#### International presentations on Australian leave policies and arrangements

In October 2010, AIFS’ Principal Research Fellow Dr Michael Alexander attended the annual seminar of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research, of which he is a one of four Australian members. The network currently has 48 members from 27 countries—mostly from Europe, but also Australia, Canada and the United States. It is organised jointly by the Flemish Government’s Centrum voor Bevolkings- en Gezinsstudie and the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), Institute of Education, University of London. The network meets to discuss developments on issues related to the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities, including leave policies. It also publishes an annual review of leave policies and associated research in the 27 member countries (see <www.leavenetwork.org>).

This year, the network held its seventh two-day seminar in Bologna, Italy. Dr Alexander updated the network on the new Paid Parental Leave scheme that commenced in Australia on 1 January 2011.

Prior to attending the network seminar, Dr Alexander was also able to bring an antipodean perspective to a half-day seminar held in London and hosted by the UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills on parental leave arrangements and the role of fathering in Europe and Australia. As well as Dr Alexander’s presentation on the Australian parental leave arrangements, including some highlights from an upcoming Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) research report on fathering, the seminar heard from the two UK members of the Leave Network, Professor Peter Moss from the TCRU, and Professor Margaret O’Brien, Co-Director of the Centre for Research on the Child and Family, University of East Anglia. Professor Moss is co-coordinator of the Leave Network and presented an overview of the parental leave arrangements across Europe and the UK. Professor O’Brien is a leading UK expert on the role of fathers and fathering and discussed the latest evidence on the role of fathers in the care of young children within families. The seminar was attended by the new UK Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer and Postal Affairs, Mr Edward Davey MP. The seminar provided a timely opportunity for the minister and members of his department to hear the latest research and policy developments in the area of parental leave and the role of fathers, as the new UK coalition government is looking to make some changes to the UK’s parental leave arrangements within the next year or so.

Dr Alexander was also able to make a presentation to the Economics and Social Policy Masters program at the University of Barcelona, where he presented on LSAC, including highlights from the upcoming LSAC research report on fathering.
Katherine Browne

The following selection of books on family-related topics are recent additions to the Institute’s Library. They are available through Libraries, through the Institute’s Library via the Inter Library Loan system, or for purchase from good book shops. Prices are given as and when supplied.


In 2006 the Commonwealth government introduced new family law legislation, initiating a major change in the way that the Australian community was to approach and manage parental separation and divorce. A key feature of the changes was the development of a network of 65 Family Relationship Centres. This report investigates the developments and outcomes of one of the first Family Relationship Centres to be established, the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Family Centre. This research paper is aimed at policy-makers and researchers.


Thriving! revolves around the central theme of building resilient kids from age 3–12. The book is set out in five sections: setting the scene, get the foundations right, building confidence in kids, developing character in kids, and promoting resilience. Section one, get the foundations right, introduces the concept parental resilience and support networks. Section two, building confidence in kids, provides strategies for developing independence and resourcefulness in kids. Section three, developing character in kids, gives suggestions for promoting strong personal values in children which will act as their moral compass through life. Section four, promoting resilience, focuses on strategies to develop lasting resilience in kids. With practical, common sense strategies, this book is an excellent resource for parents of children aged three to twelve.


Aimed at children and parents, this book answers many of the difficult questions kids have about sex. The questions in the book came directly from children aged 10–14 in NSW and were collected over a decade of research. The book is written in a way that kids will understand and provides expert advice on subjects such as sexual intercourse, relationships, having a baby, and homosexuality. This book would be a valuable addition to any household with young children and to all public and school libraries.


This book is a collection of essays exploring the issues of social capital and social justice from the standpoint of emerging and established Australian scholars. The essays are divided into two themes; measuring and applying social capital in public policy and the application of social capital discourse and policy. This collection is based on papers presented at a workshop of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences, held in July 2006 at the University of Queensland and would make valuable reading for social care practitioners, students and policy makers.
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The Institute is a statutory authority that originated in the Australian Family Law Act 1975. It was established by the Australian Government in February 1980.

The Institute promotes the identification and understanding of factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia by:

- researching and evaluating the social, legal and economic wellbeing of all Australian families;
- informing government and the policy-making process about Institute findings;
- communicating the results of Institute and other family research to organisations concerned with family wellbeing and to the wider general community; and
- promoting improved support for families, including measures that prevent family disruption and enhance marital and family stability.

The objectives of the Institute are essentially practical ones, concerned primarily with learning about real situations through research on Australian families.

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