Data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its surveys of household income and expenditure are widely used to examine trends and differences in living standards, poverty, disadvantage and income distribution and how they have changed (Bray, 2001; Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell, 2001; McColl, Pietsch and Gatenby, 2001; Saunders, 2001; Barrett, Crossley and Worswick, 2000; Whiteford and Bond, 2000). They also form the basis of microsimulation models that extrapolate how incomes change in response to changes in external economic and demographic conditions (Harding, 1996). Modified data from the income surveys are used by the Luxembourg Income Study to compare patterns of economic inequality and poverty in Australia with those in other countries (Bradbury and Jäntti, 1999; OECD, 1998).

These studies use the data to examine the aggregate situation, as it applies to the economy as a whole or to the general population. However, the data themselves are based on samples of the population. In drawing implications for the population, it is important that the data are reported correctly, and it is also necessary to apply a set of weights to the sample data so that they are representative of the population as a whole. It follows that the reliability of the reported data and the procedures used to weight the survey data play an important role in determining the aggregate picture.

These issues have come to the fore recently as a result of concern expressed over the accuracy of aspects of the data and the reliability of some of the research based upon them. The ABS has itself acknowledged that there are problems with some aspects of these data, identifying problems with some aspects of the quality of the reported income data for those at the lower end of the income distribution in some of the surveys (ABS, 2002a; 2002b). These concerns make it difficult to identify with precision how household income and its distribution has changed in recent years and over the longer-term - yet these are issues of intense policy interest.

The SPRC has been examining the quality and consistency of the data in collaboration with ABS, Continued on page 4
**Staff and Visitor Update**

**Visitors:**
PROFESSOR TIM SMEEDING, from Syracuse University USA visited the Centre in January.

BYUNGSIK LEE visited the Centre from the Statistical Office in Korea. Byungsik will be working with Michael Bittman during his visit here.

JØRGEN ELM LARSEN is visiting the Centre from the Department of Sociology at the University of Copenhagen. Jørgen’s current area of research is the integration of marginal groups.

**Departures:**
KATE NORRIS has taken leave for a year to travel and work in Canada.

MARIA MACKELL has decided to relinquish her scholarship.

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**The Social Policy Research Centre**

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

The views expressed in this Newsletter, as in any of the Centre’s publications, do not represent any official position of the Centre. The SPRC Newsletter and all other SPRC publications present the views and research findings of the individual authors, with the aim of promoting the development of ideas and discussion about major concerns in social policy and social welfare.
Designed - as opposed to its means - reform debate has emphasised the consequence of past reforms. That have both been a direct complexity and incentive structures features of the current system - its seems intent on addressing two.

Despite this, the government’s welfare reform agenda. Minister Abbott has signaled his intentions to simplify the social security system and reduce the disincentives that make it harder to achieve the transition from welfare to work. This is a tough ask, as Tony Abbott readily acknowledges, but he sees a need to proceed with reform in an area where it is long overdue.

Those of us who have witnessed the last two decades of active reform of our social security system must wonder where those involved in the political process have been hiding! Whatever one thinks of the merits of past reform activity, one would have to be remarkably resistant to the historical record to claim that we have not already had a lot of it - probably too much in the minds of many observers. Despite this, the government seems intent on addressing two features of the current system - its complexity and incentive structures - that have both been a direct consequence of past reforms.

Much of the recent welfare reform debate has emphasised the means of the system - how it is designed - as opposed to its ends - what it is trying to achieve. In its determination to improve the former, it is important that the government should not lose sight of the latter. What we want from our welfare system is the provision of adequate income support at times when people are not able to provide for themselves in the market place: a form of insurance against unexpected contingencies such as disability, unemployment and other capacity-restricting risks. In general, the simpler the system and the more it encourages self-reliance the better, but there are limits on the extent to which this can be achieved without sacrificing other important goals.

One of the lessons that emerged from the tax reform debates of the 1970s and 1980s was that the more emphasis one gives to simplicity as an objective of reform, the more difficult it becomes to achieve a balance between the goals of efficiency and equity. With efficiency an obvious current priority, there are concerns that the reforms will have an adverse impact on equity, and this is something that will need to be monitored closely as the debate unfolds over the course of the year.

The (re-named) Australian Social Policy Conference that will take place in July - the eighth in the series - will provide an important venue to discuss these and other policy and research issues. We are fortunate to have as our International Plenary Speakers this year, Professor Jonathan Bradshaw from the UK and Associate Professor Kathryn Edin from the US - both of whom have contributed important insights into how social issues are conceptualised and studied in their respective countries. They share a common interest in the well-being of families and in particular, of children living in families who are struggling to maintain their economic and social viability. The complexities of the welfare system and its incentive and disincentive structures at times play a role in their problems, but few would see the solutions lying in these areas alone. There is a far greater need to create and maintain an economic and social climate in which vulnerable families can flourish in ways that provide children with the opportunities they need to realise their full potential.

We can learn from the research conducted by these two excellent scholars and be provoked into thinking about what their findings and insights imply in this country. There have been significant moves in both the UK and the US (particularly in the UK) to document and address the problems faced by children, including child poverty and its long-term outcomes effects, and we can gain by giving greater priority to the needs of children (and young people) in our own policy deliberations.

**POST-GRADUATE STUDY AT THE SPRC**

The Centre offers a unique interdisciplinary environment for PhD study in both basic and applied research across a broad range of areas in social policy. Study in the Centre is organised jointly with a variety of Faculties and Schools of the University. Students typically study on a full-time basis, with the support of Scholarships such as the Commonwealth Government Australian Post-graduate Awards and the Australian Research Council Australian Post-graduate Awards - Industry. Students are provided with working facilities as part of the Centre’s research environment and with access to the Centre’s specialist social policy library, data and other resources. Those potentially interested in undertaking research training through the Social Policy Research Centre should contact Michael Bittman (02 9385-7806 or m.bittman@unsw.edu.au) or Peter Saunders (02 9385-7810 or p.saunders@unsw.edu.au).
The analysis highlights a number of areas where the existing data are not capable of providing a consistent picture of change over time.

How Reliable Are Our Income Distribution Statistics? continued from page 1

with funding from the Australian Research Council. Some of the initial findings from the project are described here, in summary form: (Interested readers should consult a longer paper that will shortly appear in the SPRC Discussion Paper series). This paper contributes to this important debate over data quality by examining how aggregated data from the household income and expenditure surveys compare with external sources. It focuses on the data derived from the following surveys:

- The Income Distribution Surveys (IDS) that refer to financial years 1981-82, 1985-86 and 1989-90;
- The Survey of Income and Housing Costs (SIHC) that have been undertaken since 1994-95, (although the analysis that follows does not include data from the last two of these surveys); and

The analysis highlights a number of areas where the existing data are not capable of providing a consistent picture of change over time. It also points to areas where amendments to the raw data may be necessary in order to allow a more informed comparison to be undertaken.

It is important to emphasise that there are at least four explanations for any differences between the (weighted) survey data and those derived from other sources: First, they may reflect differences in the scope of the surveys and the data sources that they are compared with. Second, they may reflect differences in the concepts used to define what constitutes the relevant population or its level of income. Only after standardising for these legitimate differences, can any difference be attributed to the third and fourth reasons, which more directly reflect problems with the survey data themselves. The third reason relates to the appropriateness of weights allocated to the survey data generated by the benchmarking procedure (as explained further below). The fourth reason relates to misreporting of income (and possibly other characteristics) by the survey respondents.

Because this paper does not attempt to systematically adjust for the first three of these factors (scope; concepts; and benchmarking), the observed differences in the results presented cannot be assumed to reflect reporting errors (deliberate or otherwise). This point emerged from previous comparisons undertaken by ABS (1999), which revealed a substantial difference between the ‘raw’ figures on total gross income - with the SIHC-based estimate of $313.1 billion falling well below the corresponding Australian System of National Accounts (ASNA) figure of $491.8 billion. However, when the differences in scope and definition between the two sources are adjusted for as far as is possible, the two figures decline to $305.8 billion and $342.3 billion, respectively, and the difference between them narrowed from $178.7 billion (36.3 per cent) to $36.5 billion (10.7 per cent). Thus, a substantial portion of the difference between the ‘raw’ figures can be explained by differences in scope and definitional differences (the majority of which is due to definitional differences), although a considerable difference remains even after adjusting for these.

The starting point for our comparisons was the implied estimates of population size and structure, and of the main labour force aggregates. In aggregate terms, the surveys match total population accurately; the survey-based population estimate is relatively stable at around 98 per cent of the census value for the IDS/SIHC and the two latest HES surveys, although it is considerably lower (at around 88 per cent) for the earlier HES surveys, where benchmarking was not applied. The IDS and SIHC ratios are similar to each other, despite the fact that special dwellings were in scope for the IDS, but not for the SIHC - possibly reflecting the relatively small size of the institutionalised population, particularly in recent years.

Similar percentages have also been derived for various age groups. These indicate that, in general, the surveys provide less accurate estimates of the size of population groups (differentiated by age) than of the population as a whole. For instance, all of the pre-1993 surveys tend to over-estimate the numbers of children aged under 15 (due to a lack of household composition benchmarks) and all of the surveys under-estimate the numbers of people aged 65 and over (primarily because residents of special dwellings, which include retirement homes, were out of scope for all of the surveys). The comparisons indicate that the differences in population structure are substantial and may thus have potentially important consequences when the data are used to examine the circumstances of specific groups in the population.

Comparisons with external labour force data reveal that the survey-to-external-benchmark ratios for the total numbers of employed persons are reasonably close to the population ratios. However, the ratios for employed males and employed females are similar to each other within surveys, with the exception of HES 88-89 and HES 93-94, in both of which the ratios for employed females are higher than those for employed males. The ratios for part-time workers vary considerably between surveys for both males and females, and are well below 100 per cent in some surveys and above 100 per cent in others. The
numbers of unemployed males and females are over-estimated in almost all of the income surveys, while they are under-estimated in all HES surveys apart from HES 98-99.

We now turn to some comparisons of income as reported in the surveys and the corresponding ASNA measures (to the extent that this is possible given the problems already alluded to). We begin by comparing aggregate gross income from the surveys to gross household income in the national accounts. Such ratios of both current and annual income from the IDS/SIHC surveys to ASNA are relatively stable between survey years, but low at around 65 per cent. The ratios derived from HES are also low, but less stable, largely because of changes made to HES benchmarking procedures. As demonstrated by ABS (1999: 56-62), the consistently low ratio is largely a result of some major differences between the way that income is conceptualised and measured in the ASNA and in the IDS, SIHC and HES surveys and scope differences (differences which could not be controlled for in our analysis of total gross income), rather than of under-reporting of income in the surveys.

When the trend in the ratio of the survey to ASNA measures of household disposable income per capita is examined, there is a clear downward trend - although it is reasonably stable across the surveys conducted since 1993-94. This finding, which has been observed elsewhere (e.g. Saunders, 1996), is important because the National Accounts measure has been used to adjust the Henderson poverty line in studies of income poverty that compare incomes as reported in the surveys to the poverty line so adjusted. (Johnson, 1987; 1996; Saunders and Matheson, 1991). This approach to measuring poverty, in conjunction with the trends described above, suggests that the extent of poverty may have been increasingly over-stated since 1981 by use of the Henderson poverty line.

Further examination of the major components of income also produces some fascinating results, perhaps more interesting than the above comparisons of total income, since conceptual differences proved far easier to control for at the component of income level. These comparisons suggest that cash wages and salaries have been generally reported quite well in the surveys, although there are some substantial differences between and within surveys in these ratios, with the annual wage income ratios consistently higher than the current ratios for both IDS and SIHC. This is probably because annual wages and salaries include some non-regular overtime and any bonus payments which current income does not, since it is collected as ‘usual’ receipts from wages and salaries.

The ratios of survey-based to ASNA measures of income from government pensions and allowances vary considerably between and within the different surveys. The fact that all ratios are under 90 per cent (generally fluctuating around 80 per cent) is partially related to the fact that institutionalised persons are out of scope for all of the surveys. The most stable series of ratios is that of current receipts from government pensions and benefits in the SIHC/IDS. Interestingly, these ratios of government pensions and allowances are higher for current income than for annual income (with the exception of 1981-82). This may be primarily a recall problem, especially in the SIHC, since respondents were not always asked to have records from the previous financial year ready to refer to during the interview (ABS, 2002a). Further analysis of these data (summarised in the main report) indicates that the under-coverage of welfare incomes is most acute in relation to Unemployment Benefits and Parenting Payment, where the ratios are lower for the HES than for either the IDS or SIHC, and tend to fluctuate between 60 per cent and 90 per cent. However, apparent under-reporting of income is not restricted to those forms of income that are concentrated at the bottom of the income distribution. Our analysis suggests that income from own business/ partnership items appears to be reasonably well reported in the surveys over the years. In contrast, even after adjusting for a number of definitional differences, property income appears to be significantly under-reported in all of the surveys. Further, there is little consistency in this ratio for either current or annual income in SIHC/IDS, nor for the HES, with the ratios varying from 32 per cent to 64 per cent — far below the corresponding ratios for government welfare benefits presented earlier. If these discrepancies can be interpreted to reflect income under-reporting by survey participants, it is clear that this occurs across the entire income spectrum and is not restricted to those at particular points in the income distribution, or is restricted to specific forms of income.

The primary aim of the research reported here is to examine how well the income and expenditure survey aggregates match external aggregate data as a means of alerting users to some of the pitfalls that exist in the data and to warn against their uncritical use in describing current circumstances and past trends. Comparisons with external aggregates produce results that are contingent on scope differences, the benchmarking procedures adopted in the surveys, the concepts employed, as well as possible misreporting of income. The effects of these factors are often difficult to disentangle, and hence interpretations of the findings should be undertaken with caution.

Continued on page 9
INTO THE WILDERNESS?: POVERTY RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA

BY PETER SAUNDERS

In retrospect, the pledge by former Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1987 to ‘end child poverty by 1990’ was a watershed in Australian poverty research. It focused attention (and intense political pressure) on whether the poverty statistics would confirm or refute the Prime Minister’s commitment. They were never going to be up to the task. First, because data from the next household income survey would not become available until well after the next federal election was due in 1990. Secondly, because the methods used to estimate poverty - based on the poverty line developed by the Poverty Commission in the 1970s (the Henderson poverty line) – came under attack from those with an interest in discrediting the poverty statistics in case they indicated that child poverty (or any other poverty) still existed in 1990.

There has been an improvement in the availability of household income data since then, with the previous five-yearly collection cycle replaced by an annual survey in 1995 (although this has since been partly reversed). However, poverty research has not recovered from the attack on the Henderson poverty line. Rather than acknowledging that the original poverty line had some defects that needed removing, the poverty debate has seen a series of very public disputes over the poverty statistics that have undermined the credibility of all poverty research.

The current Federal Government, elected in 1996, has focused its attention on reforming the ‘welfare system’ (social security provision to those of working age) by introducing measures designed to reduce ‘welfare dependency’ by encouraging - at times requiring - beneficiaries to take active steps to find work. The parameters of this approach were broadened in response to the report of a Reference Group on Welfare Reform that emphasised ‘participation’ rather than employment as the goal of reform, where participation was defined to include not only economic activities like employment, training or job search, but also social activities such as voluntary work and socially valued caring.

The report also made passing reference to the need to maintain the adequacy of social benefits, but there was no mention of poverty as such and the official silence on this issue was maintained. We are thus currently faced with a situation in which what is acknowledged to be one of the most highly targeted social security systems in the industrial world – a classic example of the social assistance approach to social security – exists in a country that has no way of monitoring its effectiveness in reducing or preventing poverty – the primary goal of any social assistance scheme.

Several State governments have undertaken reviews of poverty policy, while leading welfare agencies like The Smith Family and the St Vincent de Paul Society have commissioned studies of poverty in order to raise public awareness of the issue. The Brotherhood of St Laurence – an organisation whose interest in poverty pre-dates the Poverty Commission – has also undertaken some interesting research on attitudes to the definition, cause and consequences of poverty among different groups in the community.

These debates raise important issues relating to how the measurement of poverty should adjust to the changing social, economic and policy context that have re-awakened old debates about the relationship between poverty and inequality. Inequality has increased, particularly in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, and the attention this has drawn has been at the expense of any interest in poverty.

There are encouraging signs in the emergence of social participation as a factor to be considered in the welfare reform debate, though it is too early to reflect on how much impact this will have. The issue of social capital has also attracted the interest of researchers and government (the former in part reflecting the funding priorities of the latter) with considerable effort being put into trying to understand why some communities deal better with economic adversity than others.

This can be partly explained by political concern over the viability of regional and rural communities and the growing disparities between the economic circumstances of those based in the major cities and those living in ‘the bush’. Rural poverty has always been an issue in Australia, although the intense political concern surrounding it has not been backed by research on the extent and nature of rural poverty. There is a pressing need for poverty to be put back onto the national policy agenda. The announcement late last year of an enquiry into poverty in Australia by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee provides a unique opportunity to do this.

An earlier version of this article appeared in the September 2002 issue of the Cooperative Research Program on Poverty (CROP) Newsletter. Further details about CROP are available on its website: www.crop.org
The SPRC is now inviting offers of papers from researchers, teachers, students and practitioners of social policy. Papers can present the results of research, discuss conceptual approaches to contemporary social policy research, describe work in progress or raise issues for social policy debate.

As in previous conferences, discussion will be organised around thematic strands. This time a number of strands or special sessions will be organised or coordinated by members of the social policy community outside the SPRC itself. A final list of these strands and sessions will be available at a later stage. In the meantime, the main broad topic areas from within which the final strands will be selected, and for which we are currently seeking offers of papers, include the following.

- Employment, unemployment and welfare reform
- Income distribution and social inequalities
- The work/family balance
- Retirement and ageing
- Childhood and social inclusion
- Inclusion and exclusion of indigenous australians
- Health, disability and inclusion
- Spatial dimensions of social policy
- Citizenship and inclusion
- Organisation and delivery of community services
- Open

The Open strand will be for papers on other subjects of interest and importance outside the main themes.

Selection of papers will be based on refereed abstracts. If you wish to offer a paper, please send the title and an abstract of no more than 200 words. Please specify the thematic area into which you feel your paper falls. We reserve the right to place it elsewhere, where appropriate, in the interests of balance.

The closing date for the receipt of abstracts is 31st March 2003. Please send your abstract (preferably by email) to aspc2003@unsw.edu.au

Or by post to:
Australian Social Policy Conference 2003
Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales
Sydney NSW 2052

Or by fax to: (02) 9385 7838

Telephone enquiries about papers or the conference in general should be directed to (02) 9385 7802. Please note registration for the conference will be handled by the Hotel Network who can be contacted on: +61 2 9411 4666

The conference website is now online in skeleton form, more details will be added to the website as they become available.
REACHING ISOLATED CARERS: CONTACTING CARERS WITH UNMET NEEDS FOR INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

In 2002 the SPRC was awarded an ARC Linkage grant to investigate innovative methods for identifying and contacting isolated carers. The project is being conducted in partnership with the advocacy group, Carers NSW, and four NSW government departments: the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care; the Department of Community Services; NSW Health; and the Department for Women.

A carer is a person who provides informal assistance or support to people who are frail aged, or have disabilities or long-term illnesses. In Australia, as in other industrialised countries, there has been a shift in policy direction away from institutional care toward ‘care in the community’. The most recent estimates by the ABS suggest that there are around 2.3 million carers in Australia, the majority of whom are women.

International research has suggested that services designed to support carers make significant differences to their health and welfare. Access to support and services may assist carers to preserve their social participation, combine paid work and caring activities, and sustain their caring role for a longer period of time. A major factor limiting the take-up of services is the failure of carers to identify themselves as carers and as in need of assistance. The failure to be aware of the need for and the availability of support is tantamount to being ‘isolated’. This project aims to use a newly developed method to identify carers even where they do not self-identify.

The project consists of three stages:

1. Literature review and data analysis to identify isolated carers and their needs.
2. An intervention in one metropolitan and one regional area to inform isolated carers of available supports.
3. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention.

In stage one of the project, the data analysis builds on the work of a previous ARC-funded collaboration with Carers NSW where analysis of the ABS 1997 Time Use Survey data found that carers displayed a distinct pattern of time use - a ‘time signature’. The ‘time signature’ permits the analyst to identify carers who do not self-identify in the Time Use Survey. Using this information, in conjunction with information on the use of services from the ABS 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, the project will identify the support received by different categories of carers. The use of services by locality will also be estimated using the Census 2001 and information in databases maintained by the research partners.

In stage two, having identified the categories of carers with unmet need, the project team will develop and trial strategies for disseminating information and extending support to isolated carers. In the final stage of the project the effectiveness of the intervention in the two localities will be evaluated.

Reports documenting the results of this research will be prepared for the research partners and will assist in the NSW government departments in targeting information and support services for carers. The SPRC staff involved in the project are Michael Bittman, Cathy Thomson, Kimberly Fisher, and Trish Hill.

CHILD POVERTY

Child Poverty: A Review is to be published shortly as a Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) Policy Research Paper. This report, commissioned from the SPRC by FaCS, addresses five main questions. How should we define child poverty? Should it be a focus of policy concern? How should it be measured? What causes it? What policy strategies can be used to combat it?

In this review, poverty is defined as an unacceptably low standard of living. The review focuses on an ‘economic’ concept of living standards defined in terms of the degree of access to economic resources. The economic resources relevant to children’s living standards include state provided services, parental caring time, though in practice most research has restricted attention to the role of family income.

MEASUREMENT

Estimates of poverty are used for two main purposes. The first is analytical; to compare poverty levels and to identify the causal and outcome variables associated with poverty. A second objective is to use poverty rates as an explicit policy target. Whereas some degree of measurement error is tolerable when poverty measurement is used
analytically, the latter usage places much greater demands on the data. In Australia, recent estimates of child poverty using different data sources have produced quite different results. For example, estimates of child poverty in the late 1990s using a half-median definition range from 12 to 15 per cent, depending upon which ABS income definition is used. For many analytical purposes this difference is not important. For example, the Australia’s middling-to-poor position in the cross-national ‘league table’ of child poverty rates is unchanged.

However, for policy targeting purposes, more robust estimates are required and alternative survey methodologies should be explored in order to obtain more robust estimates of the standard of living in apparently very low-income households.

**THE PROXIMATE CAUSES OF CHILD POVERTY**

Australia’s poor child poverty performance is associated with high levels of lone parenthood and joblessness, together with medium levels of wage inequality and social expenditure. Compared to other countries, the most disadvantaged children in the English-speaking countries receive a relatively small proportion of their family income from the labour market.

Despite having a below-average unemployment rate, Australia has the third-highest level of parental joblessness across 17 OECD countries. The proportion of Australian families with children who are jobless has been increasing steadily since the early 1980s. Both the increase in joblessness within family type and the increase in lone parenthood contributed to the overall

*Continued on page 12*

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**HOW RELIABLE ARE OUR INCOME DISTRIBUTION STATISTICS?**

Continued from page 5

Overall, the comparisons suggest that the use of the IDS/SIHC or HES data may give rise to misleading estimates of income distribution and poverty and how these have changed over time. In future work, we plan to develop a set of operating procedures designed to maximise the inter-temporal consistency of the data and we are optimistic that this will facilitate improved analyses of poverty and income distribution in Australia. In the interim, those who wish to use the data should be aware of the limitations implied in the comparisons reported here.

**REFERENCES**


The Direct and Indirect Effects of Unemployment on Poverty and Inequality
Peter Saunders
High and persistent unemployment has presented a major challenge for the welfare state from two directions. First, it has eroded the funding base and second, it has increased the demands on welfare programs because of the consequences for poverty and inequality resulting from high unemployment. This paper explores these latter effects using a range of national and international evidence. It is argued that the effects, while generally presumed to exist, are complicated by the ways in which poverty and inequality are measured (on the basis of the economic status of families) and the growth in dual-earner families that has weakened the link between the economic status of families and individual family members.

Women’s Financial Independence: Australia in the 1980s and 1990s
Sharon Burke and Gerry Redmond
In this paper we investigate the changing characteristics of working age women, focusing on their financial independence. We combine an examination of policy and institutional changes that occurred in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s with an analysis of income survey microdata for the years 1982 and 1996-97. We argue that demographic changes (relating to marriage and fertility) and public policies in the fields of childcare and social security helped many women achieve financial independence during the 1980s and 1990s but the effects of restructuring and deregulation in the labour market dominated.

Comparing Living Standards Across Nations: Real Incomes at the Top, the Bottom and the Middle
SPRC Discussion Paper 120, December 2002
Timothy M. Smeeding and Lee Rainwater
What is the distribution of real income within as well as across countries? The purpose of this paper is to try to answer this question by presenting estimates of the real purchasing power (PPP) parity-adjusted distribution of disposable income for a number of countries.

No Child Left Behind?
SPRC Discussion Paper 121, December 2002
Timothy M. Smeeding
When we compare the well-being of American, Canadian or European kids, can we really say that the United States not left any of its children behind? What can we say about equality of opportunity or fair life chances for America’s children compared to their counterparts in other rich countries? The paper summarizes the poverty status of American children and then the variance in their ‘real’ standard of living. We briefly look at the reason why low-income American children and their parents are in such straits and conclude with a few low cost policy suggestions on how to improve the living standards of poor children, so that their greater accountability and better labor market for performance is rewarded by better family outcomes.

Globalization, Inequality and the Rich Countries of the G-20: Evidence from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)
SPRC Discussion Paper 122, December 2002
Timothy M. Smeeding
The purpose of this study is to summarize and comment upon what we know about the determinants of both the level and trend in economic inequality over the past two decades, and to relate these findings to the progress of globalization in these nations. While the fruits of economic progress in rich nations have not been equally spread, we argue that most citizens in rich Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations have benefited from the trend toward global economic progress.

ASPC Call for papers closes March 31. Details page 7.
BOOK REVIEW

MANAGING TO CARE - CASE MANAGEMENT AND SERVICE SYSTEM REFORM
By Ann Dill, Aldine De Gruyter, New York, 216pp
RRP $46.00
REVIEWED BY NATASHA POSNER

If you thought of case management simply as a commonplace, well-accepted, innocuous method of reconciling client ends with service provision/program means, this book will make you think again. Dill provides an insightful and thorough-going critical analysis of case management’s evolution as a social process and product, along with a comparative assessment of the policy and practice of case management in three service settings. In doing this, she draws on the interweaving perspectives of social constructionism, political economy and organisational theory (particularly the work of Meyer and colleagues), to demonstrate how case management has been ‘malleable in response to political dynamics and the diverse constituencies with interests in its outcomes’ (p.18), and become a ubiquitous feature of service systems.

The book’s introductory chapter examines the diverse nature of case management, how its core functions can serve a range of objectives for clients and service organisations, and the origins and development of case management in the USA, where it became a distinctive service component and then a fixture on the service landscape reflecting changing political philosophies and social forces. Dill argues that case management came to be seen as a ‘technical fix’ for the lack of coordination, barriers to access, inefficiencies and gaps in the care network provided by human service systems. While it was initially a tool for integrating services on the level of the individual, it has become a means of coordinating and rationing service delivery and constraining the costs of care, providing a human face for bureaucracy. In this way, the boundary spanning role of the case manager contains a contradiction between the professional ideology of the carer and the efficiency needs of bureaucratic systems.

This thesis is taken up again after assessment of the different forms case management practice has taken in chapters on long-term care for the elderly (brokerage model), mental health care (therapist approach) and social welfare (gatekeeper role). The fifth chapter of the book is an analysis of the recurring themes and contradictions of case management across service sectors, with a brief look at case management in a range of other countries including UK, Germany, Netherlands and Australia. Dill’s concern with the ‘symbolic as well as the structural basis’ for case management is further developed in her explication of the ‘symbolic currency’ of case management through which it has become an institutionalised practice and system of symbolic relations connoting core service system values.

The last chapter argues for the need to challenge the assumptions that case management is a neutral service tool and that what is good for the system is also good for the client. Dill concludes, clearly regretfully, that by reinforcing domestic policy paradigms, case management has served the purposes of social control rather than social change. Even though we still know little about the how case management can best address problems, we can be sure, she suggests, that it will remain a central element of service systems.

The Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework prepared for The Cabinet Office SPRC Report 7/02 is now available from the SPRC Website. www.sprc.unsw.edu.au
rise in joblessness. Cross-nationally, however, the best predictor of high child poverty rates is high wage inequality. Since poor children generally live in families with no earners, this association probably arises from indirect factors, such as the association between minimum wage and benefit levels.

POLICY STRATEGIES

In the US, policies to influence fertility and marriage have been a central part of child poverty strategies. Though the US is not unique in having a high lone parenthood rate, its high teenage fertility rate is unique among rich countries. In Australia, teenage fertility rates are less than half the level of the US (though still higher than in many countries of Western Europe), and the proportion of poor children who live in lone parent families is lower. Nonetheless, policies to address the situation of children with young or lone parent mothers should still be an important part of an Australian child poverty strategy.

The (partial) success of the US anti-poverty policies in recent years has led some researchers to propose a similar policy strategy for Australia. Wage-tax tradeoffs have been proposed to increase labour demand whilst maintaining living standards. However, the low degree of association between unemployment and parental joblessness rates suggests that, to the extent to which these policies may work in reducing unemployment, they may still be a poorly targeted instrument for reducing child poverty. The SPRC researcher on this project is Bruce Bradbury.