

ARE WORKING HOURS BECOMING MORE UNSOCIABLE?

MICHAEL BITTMAN AND JAMES RICE

The politics of working time has become the distinctive industrial issue of the 1990s. Changes to the organisation of working hours have been promoted as the solution to unemployment, reconciling career and private life and maintaining or enhancing the quality of life. While there has been a great deal published on the growth of non-standard hours of work, surprisingly little attention has been given to the study of trends in the length of the working day, the starting and finishing times of paid work and pattern of employment by day of the week.

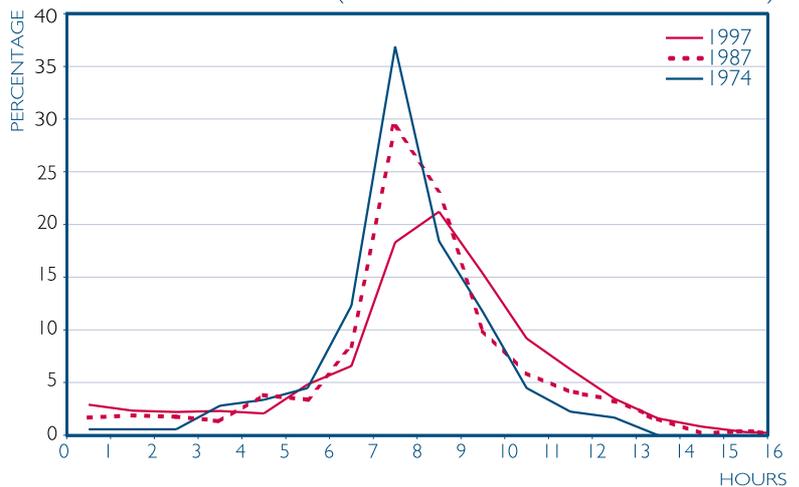
Contemporary society depends upon the balance between three institutions – the labour market, the family and the state – to assure the welfare of its citizens. European analysts have worried that increasingly long hours of paid work and the increasing incidence of long-term unemployment are two sides of the same coin. The Geneva-based International Labour Organisation (ILO) believes the new ‘flexibility’ demanded of modern employees, about when and for how long they work, results in a maldistribution of working hours. This generates still more unemployment and

increasingly precarious employment and reduces the bargaining capacity of organised labour. It is claimed that only state re-regulation of the labour market can redress the maldistribution of working hours and reduce unemployment. Following this line of reasoning, France has legislated for a shorter working week. The Netherlands has successfully promoted a ‘part-time society’ with low rates of unemployment by facilitating less-pay-for-less-hours deals between unions and employers.

There has been a longstanding concern about balancing the demands of work and family. Women’s earnings are crucial for many families. However, given their continuing family responsibilities, contemporary women face a double burden of paid and unpaid work. The welfare of children depends crucially on the welfare of their parents. Families must be able to care for their children, something that

demands both time and money. The increasing significance of families as providers of welfare has been underlined by the recent shift to home and community care for the frail aged and disabled. It is estimated that informal carers provide 74 per cent of all the care that enables disabled and elderly people to remain at home (Department of Human Service and Health, 1995). Shorter, more flexible working hours and special forms of leave are frequently promoted as ‘family friendly’ policies. Growth in unsociable hours of work, however, is considered by some to be inimical to family welfare.

FIGURE 1: LENGTH OF WORKING DAY (MALE METROPOLITAN PRIME-AGED WORKERS)



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FEATURE

The SPRC’s Michael Bittman and James Rice examine the emerging trend toward increasing levels of unsociable working hours.

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THE SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

was established in January 1980 (originally as the Social Welfare Research Centre) under an agreement between the University of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Government.

The Centre is operated as an independent unit of the University. The Director receives assistance in formulating the research agenda from a Board of Management and also through periodic consultation with the community. The Director is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the operation of the Centre.

The SPRC undertakes and sponsors research on important aspects of social policy and social welfare; it arranges seminars and conferences, publishes the results of its research in reports, journal articles and books, and provides opportunities for postgraduate studies in social policy.

The Centre's current research agenda covers social policy issues associated with changes in employment, income support and the labour market; changes in households and families; poverty, needs and economic inequality; and the restructuring of forms of social support.

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.

STAFF AND VISITORS UPDATE

ANNE MARIE GUILLEMARD, Professor of Sociology at the University of Paris V, Sorbonne is the SPRC's 1999 Visiting Fellow. She is widely known for her research on work, retirement and the changing life course, and for her cross-national research on ageing and social policy.

PETER TOWNSEND, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of Bristol, and Visiting Professor of International Social Policy at the London School of Economics, visited the Centre during July. He has set the terms for British social policy debates for more than a generation.

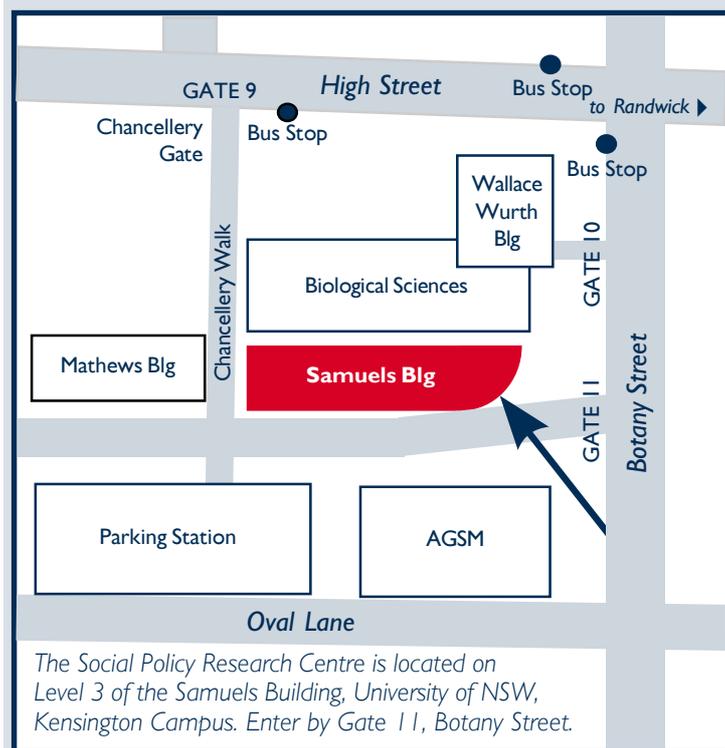
JAMES RICE has joined the SPRC as a Research Officer to work on an ARC-funded project investigating the changes that have occurred since the mid-1970s in how Australians use their time. James has relocated from the Sociology Program at the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU, where he is a PhD scholar.

CERI EVANS formerly at the Institute for Employment Studies in the UK, joined the SPRC as a Research Officer for three months working on the Centre's national survey of Australian attitudes to economic and social change. She leaves the Centre to embark on a round-trip of Australia.

ARIADNE VROMEN, one of the SPRC Research Scholars, has taken up a lecturing position in the Department of Government at the University of Sydney.

GUYONNE KALB recently left the Centre to take up the position of Research Fellow in the Department of Econometrics and Business Statistics at Monash University.

JUDY MELLERS is completing her PhD candidature with the School of Social Work at the University of New South Wales.



FROM THE DIRECTOR

BY PETER SAUNDERS

Many readers of this Newsletter will already have read in press reports that the Commonwealth Government has decided to fund the Social Policy Research Centre on a competitive tender basis from the beginning of 2001. The decision was conveyed to the Vice Chancellor in a letter from the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, in June and was announced by Professor Niland at the Opening of the National Social Policy Conference in July. He expressed disappointment with the decision, particularly in the light of the positive review of the Centre that had been delivered to the Minister and the Vice Chancellor earlier this year.

Shortly after the Minister's letter was received, the Government released its long-awaited Green Paper on the funding of higher education research and research training. Considerable emphasis is given in the Green Paper to the need for increased contestability and competition, based upon peer review, in order to promote research excellence. So too is the need for more emphasis on long-term strategic research, on multi-disciplinary and collaborative research, and for users to have a greater voice in the allocation of research funds. These goals have been a feature of the Centre's development over the last decade or so.

We share the Vice Chancellor's disappointment at the Government's decision. This is not only because it takes no account of the recommendations of the very positive Review (which, I might add, absorbed a considerable amount of Centre resources during 1998 and involved an extensive community consultation on the work of the Centre among users of its outputs) but also because it appears to ignore the considerable efforts that have already been put into making the SPRC consistent with many of the principles articulated in the Green Paper.

We have, for example, been raising a considerable proportion of our total funding from external

grants since we were first required to do so in 1990. In 1998 income from external funding exceeded \$410 000, equivalent to more than 38 per cent of our core grant from the Commonwealth. More recently, as we have become eligible to apply for funding from the Australian Research Council (ARC), competitive peer-reviewed grants have also begun to feature in our funding profile. Our research has always been multi-disciplinary and we have engaged in a number of collaborative exercises – both of which are actively encouraged in the Green Paper.

It is all too easy in these circumstances to dwell on the perceived injustice of such decisions and to adopt a defensive attitude that can be seen as motivated primarily by self-interest. After all, we have been actively researching the consequences for community organisations that have themselves been subject to competition, and finding not all of them are bad. Why should we not be subject to the same processes? If we are as good as we think we are, what do we have to fear from a competitive process that can serve as the spark for renewal and rejuvenation? And if another institution is judged better than us, will not the national interest be the ultimate winner?

These are fundamental questions, and they raise many important issues. One of these relates to the impact of competition on the longer term sustainability of research in what is a relatively small field of study in a small country. Since its establishment in 1980, the SPRC has made a major contribution to the training of social policy analysts in Australia, with many of its past staff and students now working in the university sector and within government social policy agencies.

This kind of training takes time, and needs a stable institutional base. The process could be severely disrupted if the Centre is constantly under threat of being relocated as one host institution attempts to outbid another, not to mention the impact on existing staff of the prospect that their positions may be

moved to the other end of the country when the current funding cycle comes to an end. There are already many deterrents to choosing a career in social research; we need structures that encourage more people into the area, not more obstacles that drive them elsewhere.

Any assessment of the overall gains from increased competition must be set against the direct and indirect costs associated with the introduction of a regime of regular contestability. In the long run, there is a real danger that the nation's overall research capability will be adversely affected, with any short-term gains more than outweighed by the long-run costs.

There is also the point that the decision about who is to win the competitive process is likely to be made within the bureaucracy rather than by an independent group of peer reviewers, as envisaged in the Green Paper's recommendations. There are obvious and acute dangers, in an area of research that is closely focused on policy, that if politics are allowed to intervene in the selection process (whichever Party is in government), this would compromise the independence of whoever wins the funding contract.

Our past record of performance highlights the value of a Centre like the SPRC that can undertake and publish independent policy-focused research. Even if this occasionally leads to some tension and debate over the interpretation of research findings, is that not the basis on which true scholarship and the search for knowledge are built?

I remain optimistic that the Centre that was formed by my predecessors and that I am proud to have been associated with for the last twelve years will continue to improve. I am heartened by the many expressions of support for the SPRC that were voiced during the recent conference and in other communications. We remain committed to the ideals of research excellence and relevance and believe that we have much to contribute to the understanding of social issues and to the development of appropriate responses to them.

ARE WORKING HOURS BECOMING MORE UNSOCIABLE?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“The hours that prime-aged women contribute to the labour market have significantly increased and the contribution of prime aged men has significantly declined.”

Finally, the publication of Juliet Schor’s *The Overworked American* in 1991 revived interest in the link between economic progress and leisure time in highly industrial societies. Intuitively, increasing prosperity should mean increasing freedom from drudgery. However, Schor has suggested that, perversely, economic progress is leading to a ‘decline in leisure’ and that extra productivity has been wasted in an ‘insidious cycle of work-and-spend’ (Schor, 1991: 107-38).

ALLEGED GROWTH IN UNSOCIABLE HOURS

Drawing these separate concerns together, there have been three ways in which contemporary working hours have been considered ‘unsociable’. First, current working hours are considered unsocial because the number of hours worked is thought to be too great, leaving no time for leisure and social contact. A second view emphasises the maldistribution of working hours, that overwork for some means unemployment and social exclusion for others. The third view calls our attention to the balance between working life and private life. From this perspective, long working hours are unsociable because such hours of work make it difficult to accept one’s fair share of domestic and family responsibilities. This is especially true when the hours worked fall outside 9am to 5pm on weekdays. Let us examine the evidence for each of these propositions in turn.

1 THE DECLINE IN LEISURE – ALL WORK AND NO PLAY?

Perhaps the strongest indication of mounting time pressure is given by the increasing proportion of the population who report feeling short of time. The proportion of 18-64 year olds in the United States who report ‘always feeling rushed’ rose from 24 per cent in 1965 to 28 per cent in 1975, leapt to 35 per cent in 1985 and reached a peak of 38 per cent in 1992 (Robinson and Godbey, 1997: 231).

Unfortunately, there has been no comparably consistent sequence of measures in Australia. The best indication, however, comes from the dwindling proportion of prime-aged working Australians (25 to 54 years) feeling relatively free of time pressure. For example, one in six women in 1974 ‘almost never felt rushed’, whereas in 1997 only one in eight ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ felt rushed. The Women’s Health Australia project demonstrated that the more ‘rushed’ a woman felt, the greater the likelihood that she would assess her health as poor. Among the mid-aged cohort of Australian women, there was a tendency for the proportion reporting a feeling of ‘constant tiredness’ to rise as hours of paid work increased.

Time-diary estimates of the working hours of metropolitan prime-aged working Australians can be assembled for almost the last quarter of this century, using information drawn from the analysis of four separate time use surveys, conducted in 1974, 1987, 1992 and 1997¹.

These data show the length of the working day down to the nearest five minutes.

Average time spent in paid work per capita provides a snapshot of societal trends in the distribution of paid work over the last quarter of a century. During this period the per capita hours of paid work required

of every prime-aged member of Australian society have remained stable (at about 27 hours per week). However, this unchanging per capita average masks a dramatic sexual redistribution of paid work. The hours that prime-aged women contribute to the labour market have significantly increased and the contribution of prime-aged men has significantly declined.

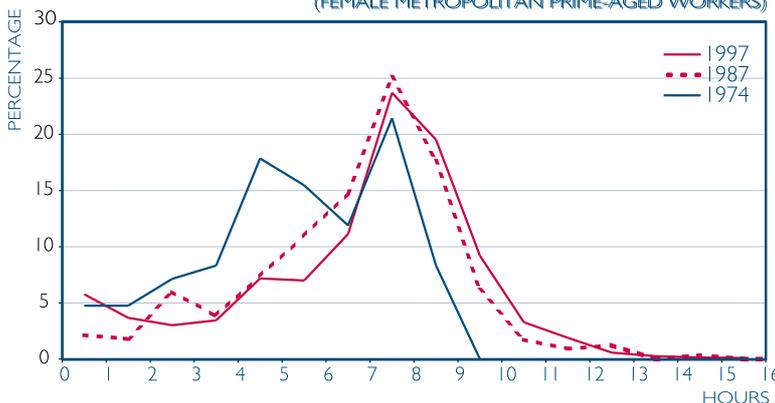
2 THE MALDISTRIBUTION OF WORK – INSECURITY AND THE GROWTH OF OVERWORK

Of course, as others have noted (ABS, 1999; ACIRRT, 1999) the stability of average working time implies nothing about the dispersion of length of working hours. In the absence of a self-evident trend toward longer average hours of work, debate has shifted to issues connected with the polarisation of working hours. Polarisation of working hours implies very long hours, or overwork, for some, few or no hours for others.

In 1974 the proportion of metropolitan prime-aged men who were in employment approached one hundred per cent. By 1997 the proportion of prime-aged metropolitan men who were not employed increased to more than 13 per cent. Women’s employment over this period grew steadily, by almost 19 percentage points, defying labour market cycles. The net result of these opposing trends for each sex is that there has been a small overall increase in the labour participation of metropolitan prime-aged persons.

A study of the diaries of prime-aged metropolitan men shows that the length of their working days has become longer and less standard. Figure 1 (see page 1) shows the distribution of the length of the working day for this group of workers for three of the survey years. The increasing dispersion of working hours over this period is evident as a flattened peak and increased proportions in the tails of the

FIGURE 2: LENGTH OF WORKING DAY (FEMALE METROPOLITAN PRIME-AGED WORKERS)



distribution in the 1990s compared with earlier decades. There is also a discernible shift in each successive distribution towards the right hand side of the diagram, indicating a progressive tendency towards longer working days. In 1974, working hours were arranged relatively tightly around a peak in the range of seven to eight hours a day – more than 55 per cent of the observations fall within this narrow range. In 1997, by contrast, less than 40 per cent of working days were between seven and eight hours in length and there was a preponderance of working days of eight hours or more. In 1997, more than a third of the working days of this group lasted longer than nine hours, more than one in five male metropolitan prime-aged workers worked more than ten hours a day, and one in eight worked longer than 11 hours a day. The proportions with such long working days in 1974 were markedly lower. For example, less than one in 18 prime-aged male metropolitan workers worked more than eleven hours a day. (The proportion of men working part time is too small to significantly influence the results).

The distribution of working day lengths among female metropolitan prime-aged workers has also undergone important changes over the last quarter of a century (see Figure 2). However, the pattern of change for women is one of progressive movement away from a short working day (significantly involving hours of work resembling the hours of the school day) towards more ‘standard’ daily hours. Very long hours of daily work have been uncommon among women in the past but this situation is changing fairly quickly. In 1974, for example, not a single metropolitan prime-aged woman worked longer than nine hours a day, while in 1997 one-sixth of the women in this category had a working day of longer than nine hours. A striking finding is that the working days of women in this group who describe themselves as working part time are getting perceptively longer.

3 THE BALANCE BETWEEN WORKING LIFE AND PRIVATE LIFE – THE SPREAD OF NON-STANDARD HOURS?

A unique feature of the diaries is the information they provide about what time of day an activity takes place. This allows us to analyse the prevalence of unsociable working hours, i.e. the amount of work that takes place outside the hours of 9 am to 5 pm on weekdays. Since 1974, the average number of unsociable working hours worked by prime-age metropolitan workers has grown by a little over one hour per week for men and by almost three hours per week for women. Our data indicate that more people now work on Saturday or Sunday than was the case in 1974, and that this is especially true for women.

Change can arise from a number of sources. If some occupations, such as managerial and professional occupations, typically involve working at unusual hours, then a progressive increase in the number of managers and professionals would cause the average number of unsociable hours worked to grow over time. Factors other than occupation that may also influence the number of hours worked at unsociable times are gender, age, marital status, number and age of children, household type, educational attainment, migrant status, geographical location and day of the week.

An ordinary least squares regression equation was used to test whether there was any change in the number of unsociable work hours independent of changes in the factors mentioned above. The regression procedure confirmed that education, occupation, being young, being a mature worker, being a lone adult (or in a shared household), country of birth, and age and numbers of children all have significant effects on the amount of work undertaken at unsociable hours. However, when these factors were held constant, a significant increase (two hours and 40 minutes per week for men and one hour for women) in time

worked during unsociable hours was still evident in the period leading up to 1997.

The study of time-diaries provides support for those who argue that changes in working time are affecting the time available for other activities. Since the 1970s, working times have become more dispersed, with higher rates of unemployment, fewer days of work, but longer working days. Standard working hours are now less typical for both men and women workers. Work at unsociable times of the day has also increased over the course of this period.

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FOOTNOTE

1. The 1974 survey was conducted by the Cities Commission and the 1987, 1992 and 1997 surveys were conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The material presented here is based on the authors’ analysis of Confidential Unit Record Files supplied by the ABS under its agreement with the Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee.

“Since 1974, the average number of unsociable working hours worked by prime-age metropolitan workers has grown by a little over one hour per week for men and by almost three hours per week for women.”

1999 NATIONAL SOCIAL POLICY CONFERENCE

The 1999 National Social Policy Conference, *Social Policy for the 21st Century: Justice and Responsibility* was held at the University of New South Wales from 21-23 July. This was the sixth of these biennial national conferences organised by the Social Policy Research Centre.



Left to Right: Professor Peter Townsend, Professor Peter Saunders, Professor Jill Roe, Dr Sheila Shaver, Professor Anne Marie Guillemard and UNSW Vice Chancellor, Professor John Niland

The conference attracted 565 delegates, 15 per cent more than attended the 1997 conference. A wide range of representatives from a variety of organisations attended. Overall, 46 per cent of delegates were from government, 31 per cent were academics and 20 per cent were from non-government organisations.

Given that the Conference is one of the Centre's most important activities, it is rewarding to find through our post-conference evaluations that a majority of those attending found the conference enjoyable and worthwhile. One conference attendee described it as offering 'a rich kaleidoscopic picture of current social policy; the opportunity to meet people who make substantial contributions to social policy research.'

The Keynote Address was delivered by Professor Jill Roe of

Macquarie University. The Plenary Addresses were given by Professor Anne Marie Guillemard, University of Paris V and Professor Peter Townsend, University of Bristol and London School of Economics.

The conference also featured six Forum Sessions. As usual, these proved popular, and gave rise to lively discussion in the session and afterwards.

Because an unusually large number of papers had been offered, this year's



Lunch at the Conference

SOCIAL POLICY FOR THE **21ST CENTURY** **JUSTICE** AND **RESPONSIBILITY**



Jill Roe delivering the Keynote Address



Jenny Chalmers delivering her paper

conference program was extended to provide for eight concurrent sessions of contributed papers. The large number of papers attests to a very healthy level of activity within Australia's social policy community.

Judging from the completed evaluation forms, most of those attending found papers in their areas of interest. However, some delegates felt that there were too many concurrent sessions, and that they could not hear all the papers that interested them. Some delegates also reported disappointment with the small number of papers addressing Aboriginal issues in social policy and the policy concerns of different ethnic groups. We hope to improve this aspect in any future National Social Policy Conference.

One of the highlights of the Conference was the Conference Dinner, held at

the WatersEdge Restaurant overlooking Sydney Harbour. Spectacular views, excellent food and inspirational entertainment by Sydney's Solidarity Choir created a wonderful atmosphere for delegates to discuss the conference, catch up with old friends and meet new ones. The

success of this year's conference is largely attributable to the tireless efforts of SPRC Staff, in particular, the Conference Organising Committee comprising Sheila Shaver, Jo Penty, Marilyn McHugh, Stefani Strazzari, Sharon Hancock and Suzanne Vaughan.



Audience at the Keynote Address

BOOK REVIEW

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL TRENDS 1999
Australian Bureau of Statistics (1999)
Australian Social Trends 1999 Catalogue Number
4102.0 Canberra

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL BITTMAN

Australian Social Trends appears every year. This publication draws on the whole range of the social surveys collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (one of the world's top ranked statistical agencies) to produce a snapshot of Australian society. It replaced the more irregular *Social Indicators* in 1994. *Australian Social Trends* differs from its predecessor by putting less emphasis on comprehensive coverage and more emphasis on topicality, interpreting often previously unpublished information from the most recently completed surveys to address significant issues of the day. Any loss in comprehensiveness is mostly offset by the regular publication of standard sets of social statistics in each issue and the inclusion of a cumulative topic list, which allows the reader to obtain a complete listing of the wide range of topics covered since 1994. With this mixture of facts and interpretation, the new publication aims to be among the most lively, accessible and informative publications produced by the Bureau. The 1999 issue covers a characteristically broad array of topics of interest to readers working in the field of social policy.

Australian Social Trends 1999 devotes considerable space to the ageing of Australian society in a comparative context. There are brief sections on the causes of the ageing of population, the differential rates of ageing by State and Territory and the effect of migration on this process. There is an analysis of the health status and economic resources of those aged over 65 years. Generally there is a balanced appraisal of the implications of the ageing process

for social policy. Many of the findings are well known to specialists but this publication provides a usefully compact summary and a good antidote to the highly exaggerated talk of 'the ticking of the time bomb' of ageing.

There is an original and intriguing analysis of the prospects of older jobseekers (aged 45-59 years) from the longitudinal Survey of Employment and Unemployment Patterns (SEUP) found under the heading of 'Under-Utilised Labour' in the section on Work. This analysis shows that 65 per cent of jobseekers aged 55-59 had failed to find any employment in a two-year period (the comparable rate for jobseekers aged 20-44 years is 20 per cent). Where older workers were able to find work, they typically found casual employment, in jobs that lasted less than six months, at lower levels of skill (and lower rates of pay) than their previous jobs.

Socio-economic disadvantage is documented in a number of sections. People living in disadvantaged areas are more likely to rate their health as poor, smoke, take less exercise and are less likely to have private health insurance. Lower income families tend to be one income families, typically working in low skill jobs.

The 1997 Time Use Survey is the source for a variety of contributions under diverse headings. As might be expected there is an analysis of how couples share domestic work, showing the disproportionate burden borne by women and how little the domestic division of labour has changed in the last five years. Even those women whose hours

of paid work are the same as their husbands', are no closer to equality in domestic labour time.

Statistics on time spent in child care are always difficult to present in a form that makes sense to parents, especially mothers. These difficulties arise from a multitude of causes, restricting the definitions to instances when child care is the first mentioned activity, giving older children (10-14 years) the same weight as infants and averaging across all these distinct situations. For example, the previously published average time spent in child care (as the main activity) by mothers with dependent children (0-14 years) is 14 hours per week. Using the broader definition of time spent in child care employed in *Australian Social Trends 1999*, mothers of pre-schoolers spend more than 56 hours per week in child care activities. The problem with the first figure is not that it is wrong but more that it gives very little information about major policy issues - like how to balance work and family.

Interpreting changes over the past five years adds even more difficulties. So many things change together. Over this period, women increased their labour participation slightly, the average completed family size fell and more child care places became available. Although *Australian Social Trends 1999* reports a four and one half hour fall in mothers' average weekly time spent in child care, this contradicts the published finding that average child care time of those whose diaries show any record of child care activity has not decreased. So are parents devoting less time to child care? Personally, I would not build social policy on the expectation that parents' child care time is falling.

Incidentally, *Australian Social Trends 1999* contains an interesting little snapshot covering the care of children whose natural parents have

separated or divorced. A tiny minority of children (three per cent) are in (meaningful) shared care arrangements, the overwhelming majority (88 per cent) live with their mother. Less than half the families where a natural parent lives elsewhere receive child support payments. Of those children who receive cash support, more than half get less than \$46 per week and one-third less than \$23 per week.

A pioneering analysis of the time-diaries shows a growing trend towards loneliness. Regardless of age and family status, Australians are spending more time alone. Upon the release of *Australian Social Trends*, these findings, more than any other, provoked public discussion. Young persons living with their families (who average less than two waking hours a day on their own) may feel, like Greta Garbo, that 'they want to be alone'. However, loneliness reaches disturbing proportions among older groups. Men aged 65 year or more and living alone spend an average of 13 waking hours without human company and women in a similar situation average a bare 48 minutes per day more human fellowship. Given the social nature of the human species, it is hard to imagine that this is a healthy amount of social contact. If the policy emphasis for care of the aged has switched to care at home, then the extent of isolation and loneliness among these groups suggests a powerful reason for the expansion of community services.

The other use of the time-diary data is to trace the ways that Australians use their free time. Over the seven days of the week Australian have, on average, about 35 hours of free time. Parents get less free time than the rest of the population and people over 65 get the most. Free time is mostly

devoted to home-based entertainments, with television (to a less extent, radio and CDs) taking the largest slice. Socialising with friends and relatives is a close rival for television in the competition for free time. In parallel with the findings on loneliness, among those aged 65 years or more, socialising lags well behind television watching by a ratio of one to two. One in two households now has a computer and one in five a connection to the



internet and these proportions are growing rapidly. When people do engage in out-of-home leisure activities they are more likely to go to the movies than any other activity. After the movies, public recreation facilities such as botanic gardens, libraries and animal and marine parks are the most attended. Participation in 'high culture' is more restricted judging by attendance at venues, although the attendance at art galleries, opera or musicals, theatre, dance and other performing arts total to more than 13 million visits, and participation is not confined to capital cities.

Language and cultural issues also turn up in a number of other guises. Ever wondered how many Australians speak a language other than English at home? The answer is about two and half million, mostly (74 per cent) first generation migrants. Two-thirds of second generation migrants speak only English at home. About 48 200 people mostly living in the remote central and northern regions of Australia speak indigenous languages. The outlook for the maintenance of these indigenous languages outside the Northern Territory is uncertain.

Christine Annu is not the only Australian entitled to sing about their island home, although, outside of Tasmania, with a population of 6708, the Torres Strait Islanders are the largest group. On the other hand the majority of people on Moreton, Rottneest and the Whitsunday islands are visitors. For those with an interest in the preservation of wilderness, on census night (6th August 1996) 'there were 61 men and 9 women' living in the Australian Antarctic Territory.

There is no space to mention the items on asthma, the hurdles facing young first home buyers, the near epidemic of anxiety, the rising tide of educational attainment in Australia, or the booming expenditure on gambling.

Australian Social Trends 1999 contains a surprising amount of new information on topical issues. Also it builds into a surprisingly rounded picture of the characteristics of Australian society and how it is changing. As such it makes a potential gift for overseas visitors who are interested in contemporary Australians, not just marsupials, native vegetation and sunshine.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

SPRC DISCUSSION PAPERS

TAX THEORY AND TARGETING A SURVEY

SPRC Discussion Paper
No. 100

Bruce Bradbury

In many countries, the targeting of income transfer schemes leads to a very high effective marginal tax rate on private income. How can the equity goals associated with targeting be made consistent with the maintenance of labour supply incentives? This paper reviews the inevitable trade-offs facing income-tested tax-transfer systems, and then goes on to examine the conclusions of a growing body of economic analysis of these questions. This analysis, growing out of the literature on 'optimal income taxation' seeks to provide a framework for a balancing of the conflicting efficiency and equity issues involved in income-based redistribution.

Though existing research is not able to provide firm guidelines to policy, there are valuable insights - particularly from research that has begun to incorporate the administrative features of programs. These have major implications for the structure of income testing. Insofar as activity testing increases labour supply, one might argue for the use of a higher benefit withdrawal rate - since this permits a lower tax rate at other points in the distribution without defeating equity objectives. At the same time, economic theory has yet to seriously analyse the diversity of social goals in this area. Different social evaluations of the value of 'leisure' may have important implications for policy.

HOME AND AWAY REFLECTIONS ON LONG-TERM CARE IN THE UK AND AUSTRALIA

SPRC Discussion Paper
No. 101

Melanie Henwood

The challenges posed by an ageing population are major preoccupations of governments throughout the developed world. There are many dimensions to such challenges, and this paper focuses on issues relating to long-term care in old age. The debate around such matters has been similar in the UK and in Australia. In both countries, a history of incrementalism and poorly presented policy reform has contributed to widespread public mistrust, and a sense of injustice at the extension of means testing or user pays principles.

This paper examines the analysis and conclusions of a Royal Commission in the UK, set up to explore options for the finance and structure of long-term care. A fundamental principle advanced by the Commission is that the risk of needing long-term care should be shared by all citizens, rather than borne by those who have the misfortune to need such care. A separation of the personal care costs of long-term care from the living and housing costs components has been proposed as the most equitable way of sharing costs between individuals and the state.

Major reforms to the structure of community care in the early 1990s in the UK (and similar developments in Australia) were concerned largely with improving management and accountability of local services and with promoting community rather than residential-based models of care. These failed to address the larger underlying question about the balance of responsibilities

between individuals and the state and how to achieve a sustainable model for funding long-term care. The proposals by the Royal Commission in the UK can be seen to offer one such model. It is not without flaws and a cautious initial political response is evident. Nonetheless, the model has an immediate appeal in the simplicity of its argument, and in the prospect of offering improved individual security and enhanced social cohesion.

AUSTRALIAN ATTITUDES TO UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE

SPRC Discussion Paper
No. 102

*Tony Eardley and
George Matheson*

Social security support for unemployed people in Australia in the last decade has become increasingly conditional on their demonstrating ever greater job search effort. Yet we know relatively little about whether this shift accords with public opinion. This paper draws on a study of community attitudes to unemployment and unemployed people, commissioned by the former Department of Social Security, based on review and analysis of attitudinal survey data. Overall the evidence is ambiguous. Although, by international standards, Australians take a relatively hard line on the responsibilities of unemployed people to actively seek work, there is little information available about views on the specifics of activity testing. Also, although a majority oppose greater public expenditure on unemployment, they still see an important role for government in addressing unemployment and supporting unemployed people.

THE COSTS OF CHILDREN BUDGET STANDARDS ESTIMATES AND THE CHILD SUPPORT SCHEME

SPRC Discussion Paper
No. 103

Marilyn McHugh

In 1998, the Department of Social Security released a report on the development of indicative budget standards for Australia, by a group of researchers at the Social Policy Research Centre. This paper explains the methodology used in the research, including a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the budget standards approach, and

illustrates these by presenting estimates of the costs of children.

A budget standard identifies the goods and services required to attain a given standard of living, and then prices them to arrive at the budget that corresponds to the standard. The research derives budgets for a broad range of Australian households at two separate standards: 'modest but adequate' and 'low cost'. The modest but adequate standard broadly corresponds to what is needed in contemporary Australia to allow full participation in Australian society, falling between the standards of decency and survival on the one hand and luxury on the other. The low cost standard is one which still allows a degree of social and economic

participation consistent with community standards, but may require frugal and careful management of resources. Budgets have been developed at the two standards for a total of 46 different household types.

One advantage of the budget standards approach is that it allows estimates to be derived of the costs for additional household members, by comparing the estimates for *different* household types at the *same* standard of living. The paper explains how this is achieved in practice and illustrates the method by analysing the estimates of the costs of children produced from the research and comparing these estimates with the level of child support payments.



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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

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SESSION TWO

SEMINAR PROGRAM

The SPRC is moving premises this year. The August seminars will be held at our current location, 3rd floor, Samuels Building, University of New South Wales (adjacent to Gate 11, Botany Street, Randwick). When a new location has been arranged we will post this information on our WEB site and inform the SPRC e-mail list. The times and dates of seminars are subject to change. To confirm the location, times and dates of seminars contact Jenny Chalmers or Cathy Thomson on 02 9385 3833.

THURSDAY 5 AUGUST, 12.30-2.00PM

PROFESSOR KEN JUDGE

University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

Poverty dynamics and self-reported health: evidence from the British Household Panel Survey

TUESDAY 17 AUGUST, 12.30-2.00PM

PROFESSOR BRIAN NOLAN

Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland

Income poverty and deprivation in European Union countries

TUESDAY 24 AUGUST, 12.30-2.00PM

PROFESSOR JACQUELINE GOODNOW

Department of Psychology
Macquarie University

Family distributions: from household tasks to inheritances

TUESDAY 31 AUGUST, 12.30-2.00PM

DAVID FRUIN

Board Member of a Primary Care Group, UK

A primary care led National Health System: Conservative ideas - Labour implementation

WEDNESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

DR XIAOYUAN SHANG

Department of Sociology
University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Economic reforms and institutional changes in China's social security system

TUESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

DR MICHAEL MUETZELFELDT

Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights
Deakin University

Contracted service delivery and citizenship: prospects for non-managerial quality assurance and accountability

TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

PROFESSOR PETER SAUNDERS AND CATHY THOMSON

Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales

What do Australians think about economic and social change? Results from an attitudinal survey

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

DR ELIZABETH SAVAGE

Department of Economics
Sydney University

Health insurance and health care utilisation: theory and evidence from Australia 1989-90

TUESDAY 5 OCTOBER, 12.30-2.00PM

DR TONY EARDLEY

Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales

A fair go or a hard line? Australian attitudes to unemployed people and activity testing

TUESDAY 19 OCTOBER, 12.30-2.00PM

KAREN FISHER AND DR MICHAEL FINE

Social Policy Research Centre
University of New South Wales

Coordinated care of older persons

TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER, 12.30-2.00PM

MICHAEL DARCY

Department of Social Policy and Human Services
University of Western Sydney

Homelessness and mobility

TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

PROFESSOR DAVID ROSE

Institute for Social and Economic Research
University of Essex, England

Panel data and public policy

TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER, 12.30-2.00PM

**PROFESSOR NANCY FOLBRE AND
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LEE BADGETT**

Department of Economics
University of Massachusetts, USA

Job gendering: occupational choice and the marriage market