PROCEEDINGS OF SOCIAL POLICY FORUM 2001

CHILD AND FAMILY: CHILDREN IN FAMILIES AS REFLECTED IN STATISTICS, RESEARCH AND POLICY

ISSUES PAPER NO. 11

Edited by

STUART BIRKS

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION
2001

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INTRODUCTION

The papers in this collection arise from Social Policy Forum 2001: Children's Rights and Families, held in Wellington on 7th September 2001. It was the third Social Policy Forum held, the first being “Fathers, Families and the Future”, on 19 April 1999, and the second, “Children’s Rights and Families”, on 26th October 2000. Papers associated with those forums have been published, along with other contributions, in Issues Papers 4, 6 and 10.

Continuing the now established tradition, the aim on this occasion was to bring together research, practice and policy. The 100 or so attendees were therefore drawn from a range of backgrounds. They included politicians, public sector policy analysts, academics, and representatives of grass-roots and voluntary organisations. The organising committee was also drawn from these diverse backgrounds. Support and funding was provided by the Father and Child Trust, Wellington, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, and the Centre for Public Policy Evaluation at Massey University.

A fourth Social Policy Forum is planned for 2002.

The theme for the 2001 Forum was "Child and Family: "Children in Families as Reflected in Statistics, Research and Policy”.

This volume contains the addresses by all the main speakers, except for Merepeka Ruakawa-Tait who spoke eloquently, but off-the-cuff. It also includes a background paper, “The NZSCHF definition of ‘family’ and its implications”.

A closing panel, comprising Penny Hawkins, Mark Henaghan, Rhonda Pritchard and Jan Pryor, addressed the issue of “tomorrow’s family”. Although there are no papers from these participants, Jan Pryor’s brief talk drew on material from chapters 4 and 7 of her recently published book, Pryor J and Rogers B (2001) *Children in Changing Families*, Malden, MA : Blackwell.

Chapter One

OPENING ADDRESS

by Hon. Laila Harré

Good morning, and welcome to a forum that may promote constructive and informed discussion on issues relevant to the well-being and position of children in New Zealand today.

Much work has been done on this issue at a government level since I addressed you last year. I'll be reporting back today on some of the key findings of the nationwide consultation the coalition held as part of the development of an Agenda for Children, a first for any New Zealand government.

While this was taking place, we have also been involved in consultation around the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa, a concept similar to the Children's Agenda that covers young people up to the age of 24. Between these two processes we hope to be able to present a snapshot of what our children, young people and older youth age group think about growing up in New Zealand, and begin to address some of their priorities.

Part of that will be reflecting on what it's like to be a member of a family, whatever its shape or form, and especially what it's really like to be a child or young person within a family.

One of the things that struck me as I was travelling around the country talking to children is the diversity of issues they raised, and the level of understanding they had of things some grown ups are too quick to write off as adults only business. This reinforces just how much we miss out by not asking children themselves what they think and addressing their views and understandings a fundamental component of our ongoing policy and research work.

As Statistics New Zealand's population and Census manager Frank Nolan will tell you later on today, the same lack of focus exists when it comes to families. There have been few attempts to look at families as the prime objective of a survey. Family statistics are normally obtained from surveys with other objectives, and as such are often what Statistics New Zealand classifies as a "supplementary variable".

The latest Census data does tell us that the rate of marriage is continuing to decline, while the number of people living in de facto relationships is increasing. This can't lead to conclusions about the children in these differently organised families. It gives us no indication of the

stability of the environment they are living in or their "connectedness" with this and their other social groups. This is important information, as it is by far the biggest determinant of happiness and positive outcomes for children.

So this was the kind of thing we were hoping to gauge through the Children's Agenda consultation.

The consultation took place between April and June this year with a discussion paper prepared for adults and a discussion pack with colourful response sheet and stickers for children. An Internet site was also available for children to use to send a message to government.

Meetings were held to consult face-to-face with children, including 22 groups of children involved with IHC, 3 groups involved with CCS, 50 young people living in four Child Youth and Family residences, five groups focusing on Maori young people, two Pacific youth groups, and 41 separate meetings in 17 different schools around the country.

For the adults, we held ten consultation meetings around the country and we included separate opportunities for Maori and Pacific Island communities to engage.

The response from children was fantastic. There were almost 3500 individual submissions from them and 320 group submissions. Most children used the response sheets, but some sent drawings, posters, essays, letters and even videos.

We had an excellent response from Maori and Pacific children, and particularly from primary school aged children.

As for adults, there were 450 submissions. These represented the views of over 3500 people.

So overall, we had a very positive result in terms of the number of responses.

But what did children actually say?

By and large, children I spoke to focused on shortcomings in their immediate environment, on things like the lack of parks or safe and interesting things to do after school or in their environments.

When children and young people were asked what they liked about their lives the most common responses were that children liked "the freedom of not having to support themselves or bear responsibility in the way that adults do; and being able to have fun, play sport and enjoy their lives.

Other positive things that were mentioned frequently were living in a country that is relatively safe; the clean green spaces of New Zealand; and access to a good education.

The things most mentioned when children were asked what they most disliked were the limitations of age, including not being allowed to drive, buy alcohol, go to some places, or even to have a firearms license and being told what to do.

Other issues that concerned children and young people were:

- not being listened to or taken seriously;
- bullying;
- not being able to make their own decisions;
- having to go to school;
- being told off;
- having to do chores; and
- not having enough for me to do.

By far the most frequently mentioned suggestion for improving children's lives was to provide more things for children to do. I think if I were a social researcher interested in children I would be very interested in the issue of boredom – is that new? And if so is it because children have less to do or is it because childhood is viewed as a more passive period than in previous generations? And while there might appear much that is new for kids are their lives meaningful?

Other children wanted improvements to the school and education system; adults to address crime and the abuse of children and they wanted to be treated with more respect, trusted, given more responsibility, listened to and supported.

Children affirmed that friends, education, family, a safe environment and good health are important in their lives. My own discussion with kids revealed that while parents were particularly valued, sibling relationships were sometimes problematic.

It is interesting to note that there were different perceptions between children and young people of different ages of negatives:

For example for 5-12 year olds the big one was getting told what to do and fear of bullying and for 13-17 year olds it was not being taken seriously or listened to. Young people also wrote about peer pressure, problems created by drug and alcohol use, and the low rate of youth wages.

Boys wanted more sports, recreation and entertainment opportunities above all else. Girls focused on suggestions for improvement in the relationships between young people and adults – more trust of young people, more responsibility and freedom, and being listened to more.

Maori children and young people shared the views expressed by submissions overall but had particular concerns about stereotyping, crime and violence and economic disadvantage. Unlike the overall submissions, Maori mentioned physical discipline as one of the top ten negative aspects of being a child.

Pacific young people acknowledged the importance of family support but were also particularly concerned about child abuse, bullying and use of physical discipline. They also reported experiencing stereotyping, and were eager to have more support services for young people.

Children and young people with disabilities were concerned about stereotyping, along with lack of understanding of their disabilities and under-resourcing of their needs. Isn't it interesting that the children from all the marginalised groups were aware of society's negative perceptions of them.

The discussion paper which was the basis of the consultations with adults, proposed five goals:

- changing the place of children to see them as important members of our society in their own right;
- being more responsive to children’s interests and making their voice louder in decision-making processes;
- making sure services for children and their families are responsive to children’s interests;
- giving priority to addressing poverty and violence in children’s lives; and
- improving opportunities for all children.

Generally the adults who responded to the discussion paper liked these goals.

Overall the highest priority for adults was the need for improved education.

Other issues that rated highly were:

- the need to address violence;
- more parent education;
- the importance of families – “fix the family – fix the child” was a strong theme supported by all ethnic groups.

Many submissions focused on the need to address poverty, including those from Maori and Pacific people. Specific concerns within this were the cycle of unemployment, and the low levels of minimum wages and welfare benefits.

Those adult submitters who identified themselves as Maori generally supported the Agenda for Children’s goals and priorities for action, valued sport and recreation and our clean and green, unspoiled environment and the relative safety of New Zealand.

In terms of problems they:

- regarded socio-economic disparities and unemployment, including long term unemployment, as major problems;
- also regarded child neglect and abuse, and drug and alcohol abuse, as major problems;
- believed that there should be more parenting education and better education including free tertiary education;
- want to see benefit and income levels raised;
- want to see the Treaty of Waitangi used as a foundation document; and
- want to reinforce the value of the family unit.

Those who identified themselves as Pacific Island people tended to be less supportive of the Agenda for Children. Their approach seemed to be more focused on the responsibilities of adults, and emphasised the limits to children's understanding.

Their concerns about New Zealand as a place for children were:

- drug and alcohol abuse;
- lack of work opportunities and general unemployment, including long term unemployment;
- neglect and physical abuse; and
- the focus on consumerism.

They wanted more funding and resources for education, parenting classes, policies that reinforce the value of the family and support for culturally appropriate providers.

The government's next steps are to take on board what children and adults are saying and to produce an Agenda for Children that is relevant to New Zealand now.

This is about ensuring that all children can realise their potential, an important part of which is being honest about what is happening for everyone involved in children's lives. One thing the consultation showed up is that children are often painfully aware of what's going on in mum and dad's lives and the impact it has on the family, and we're not doing our children a service if we pretend this isn't directly influencing the way they value themselves.

For example, children I spoke to said they really wished either mum or dad could take a day off to spend with them when they were sick. But they understood the financial pressure taking a day off work created. And while this may have been a pain they understood the way work, through its capacity to create financial security, made for a happier mum and dad, and in turn a happier home life.

What they wanted, and this is echoed in overseas studies on working families, was more stress-free time with mum and dad, not more time per se. This is an important distinction, as is the fact that neither were they concerned with having parents that worked. Just parents that worked too much.

This is a really important fact to bear in mind when we are looking at the whole issue of parental responsibility and in particular the roles of mothers and fathers. A common argument here is that nowadays parental responsibility is less defined by gender and more equally shared, an argument that seems to have roots in the fact that more mothers are participating in paid work than ever before.

This is a fact, but the idea that this means that parenting, particularly childcare responsibilities, are being more evenly shouldered is not. Fathers' contribution in the form of unpaid labour has not increased at the same rate as mother's participation in paid work, and fewer mothers, particularly mothers of babies and young children, work than men.

In 1996 30 per cent of women with a baby under one year and 50 per cent of mothers of one to four year olds were in paid work.

When it comes to designing policy to better supporting families, we need to start by looking at all our institutions – including workplaces and the labour market. We also need to make sure we are focusing on outcomes that are best for children, which may mean putting adult interests a little further down the list of priorities than they are now.

Because it was a point of interest at last year's forum, and I understand a special interest of some of the organisers, there is the matter of how this thinking might affect children when their parents part.

Fathers rights groups claim that their interests are not being fairly represented in the Family Court. Of course when a relationship is so steeped in conflict that it needs the intervention of the Family Court the one wonders how any outcome is ever going to be "fair" on a child, let alone either parent.

In my view it's not the job of Family Court judges to engage in social engineering. They must reflect the realities of children's lives in their decisions, rather than assume an ideal, however desirable that ideal may be. I have no doubt at all that the ideal of having strong relationships between children, their parents and utter important adults is an utterly worthwhile one.

But if we genuinely share this goal of having both parents engaged in a rich primary caregiving relationship with their children then far more influential institutions than the Family Court, such as the family itself and the workforce, need to change first.

Let's bear in mind that the job of the Family Court is to intervene in the small minority of cases characterised by conflict and make a range of decisions based on the best interests of the child or children involved. It is unfortunately inevitable that many of these decisions are contested and bitterly disputed.
Perhaps if we shifted our focus to the social and economic institutions that define gender roles, rather than the judicial institution that reflects them, we'll make more progress.

It doesn't escape some of our attention that the growing harassment at our family courts looks much like the gauntlet women still have to run to access legal abortions. And much of the rhetoric used demonstrates a similar analysis of women's experience.

I realise that might pose something of a challenge to some here today but we all share and obligation to give our children the chance to be heard in all of the processes that are so often purported to be “for their own good”.

Thank you.

Chapter Two

Keynote Address:
CHILDREN AND PUBLIC POLICY – PUTTING CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE

By John Angus
Senior Manager, Child Family and Community Policy
Ministry of Social Development[1]

INTRODUCTION

1 Thank you for the opportunity to address this, the Third Social Policy Forum. The topic, *Children in Families* as *Reflected in Statistics, Research and Policy*, is a very appropriate one. The United Nations is later this month convening a Special General Assembly on Children, at which its member states will be asked to recommit to achieving, both nationally and globally, better outcomes for children, and greater recognition of their human rights. The central place of the family in achieving these goals is almost universally recognised. I commend the Father and Child Trust and its partners for the initiative in convening this forum.

2 As the chairperson has said, I am a public servant, and I want to preface my paper with the usual public servants' caveat. I am on this occasion speaking as an individual. This Government has asked the Ministry of Social Policy to make proposals for an Agenda for Children, in close association with our colleagues in the Ministry of Youth Affairs who are doing a similar exercise for youth, and I will be referring to some of the work underway, including the outcome of the recent consultation with children, young people and adults. But, I am not presenting here Government's formal Agenda for Children or its position on some of the policy issues I raise.

3 What I do want to cover falls into three parts:

- the position of children and young people – 0 – 17 year olds – in contemporary New Zealand – Where were are at, in colloquial terms;
- good outcomes for children and young people – What we might want;
- some suggestions for public policy in respect of children – How to get to where we want to be;

[1] This paper represents the author's views. It does not represent the formal position or views of the Ministry of Social Policy, or Government Ministers

I will end with a summary.

Recently 19 children from a school in Masterton made submissions to the Council which was revamping the swimming pool. One girl wrote : "Why don't you ask us children : we are the ones who use it!"

I have two things to say about this:

- first, what a sensible comment;
- second, that such participation was seen as newsworthy is an indication of how unusual it is to take children's views into account.

My argument is that putting children closer to the centre of public policy and public life will lead to more effective policy and better outcomes for them, from swimming pool design to tax reform.

THE POSITION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND

Some Key Facts

4

- There were just over 1 million children under the age of 18 years in New Zealand in June 2000, or 27% of the population. This proportion is projected to fall to 22% by 2016.
- Over the decade to 2010, the number of children aged below 10 years will decline steadily, while the number aged 10 – 17 will increase, peaking in 2006-07.
- The number of children in some ethnic groups is expected to grow. In 2000, 24% of children under 18 were identified as Maori, 10% Pacific and 7% Asian.
- The structure of New Zealand families has changed substantially over recent decades. Today's families are smaller and many parents are older when their first child is born. Maori women continue to have children at a younger age than non-Maori.
- In 1996, 24% of children under 18 were living in one-parent families, compared to 16% in 1986.
- In 1996, 26% of all children under 18 had a parent dependent on state income support.
- Income disparities amongst households with children increased markedly in the period 1988 – 1992 and have remained at an historically high level. Households with children disproportionately represented in lower income groups. Income mobility means that the "haves" and the "have-nots" are not necessarily the same people over time, but there is evidence of persistent low income amongst many households with dependent children, and 29% of children and young people in 1998 were in households with income below 60% of the median.

5 Population trends suggest that children and young people will become a proportionately smaller group within New Zealand socially, as will families with dependent children. This suggests that those with the interests of families and children as their focus should be vigilant that child and family issues are not overlooked.

6 The child population is already very diverse – more ethnically diverse than the population as a whole. Currently one quarter of children are identified in census related projections as Maori, and one tenth Pacific Islands peoples. It is worth noting that research suggests that we should not regard this group itself as homogeneous. For example, many Maori children live in ethnically mixed households in a wide range of social and economic circumstances. On average, however, Maori and Pacific Islands peoples children live in households which are relatively disadvantaged.

7 In terms of family structures and processes the position of children and young people in contemporary New Zealand has changed considerably in the past 30 to 40 years. I want to briefly note four aspects of this.

First is the change in fertility rates and age of child bearing since the 1960s. Children in New Zealand now live in much smaller families, and have older parents. These changes are potentially positive in terms of stability and resources per child.

Second is the much greater participation of carers – usually mothers – in paid work. Participation rates for all mothers with a child under five more than doubled between 1976 and 1996. Now approximately half of women with a child aged between 1 and 4 are in employment and approximately three quarters of those with a youngest child aged 13 to 17. Now most children in New Zealand live in households with a mother, usually the primary carer, in paid work. The change has, of course, substantial consequences for children in terms of how care is provided (the growth of child care for example), pressure on parents' time, and access to material resources. Policy responses have included greater funding for, and attention to, child care, but to a lesser extent, a look at how employment conditions fit with family responsibilities.

Third has been a change in family structures. Rates of separation and divorce are much higher now than in the 1960s. Many children experience a change in family circumstances as a consequence of parental separation and re-partnering. Related to this has been a substantial increase in the number of families headed by one parent. As noted previously, the proportion of children living in a sole parent family has risen from 16% in 1986 to 24% in 1996. Many children spend part of their childhood in a sole parent headed family. The main policy response to this has been the provision of income support to sole parents. Other policies, and indeed the models and measures we use to inform policy, have been slow to adapt to the fact that for many children their immediate family is no longer a geographic entity within one household. I want to return to the

relationship between some aspects of family circumstances and outcomes for children in the second part of this paper.

Fourth and harder to measure, but very important from a policy perspective, has been a greater recognition of ethnically based cultural differences in families. There has been, I think, a movement away from the assimilationist policies of 40 years ago towards a greater recognition of cultural differences, and of the particular place of Maori. I want to note, however, the diversity of family circumstances of Maori and Pacific Island peoples children. Census data, and research, shows that many live in ethnically diverse families – to the point where distinctions on ethnic grounds are greatly affected by how mixed ethnic families are categorised in the data gathering. I do not need to spell out the policy responses to ethnic diversity. They are many, varied, and sometimes contentious. They have been a feature of the current Government's social policy.

8 Let me turn to the economic position of children and young people. There is considerable evidence that the average economic position of children in New Zealand has worsened since the early 1980s, certainly in relative terms, and for a proportion, in absolute terms. The pattern of food bank usage would suggest this : use by families increased markedly in the early 1990s. A greater proportion of children are in lower income households; more are dependent on state income support (27% currently), the primary mechanism of income support for children, Family Support, is not indexed to inflation and has reduced in real value; and market income is less secure.

9 Meanwhile, the costs of raising children and young people have risen, for example in housing, health and education. David Thompson, the Massey historian, has argued on the basis of census data, that the economic position of families with dependent children has deteriorated markedly in the past 20 years, changing a century old trend toward improved circumstances. The living standards research being conducted by the Ministry of Social Policy shows that relative to older people, the working age population with dependent children has on average a lower standard of living, and more within that group face economic hardship[2]. There have been some recent policy changes to ameliorate the impact on families – free primary health care for under 6's, and income related rents being examples. The primary policy response has been targeted income support – Family Support and a few related tax credits.

9 Turning to the social position of children and young people, I want to note three things:

- first, if childhood means being economically and socially dependent on adults, then the age of childhood has increased. When I left school – a very long time ago in the mid 60s – most of my 16 and 17 year old peers went into paid work, and many moved to living independently of their parents. Now many children and young people stay

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2 Ministry of Social Policy. Living Standards of Older New Zealanders : A Summary, Wellington 2001, p.38

economically dependent longer and live with their families of origin until they are much older – a consequence of staying longer in education, and of lower entry level wage rates

- second, somewhat paradoxically given the previous point, it seems to me that children and young people live their lives in much wider contexts that 40 years ago, as a consequence of changes in family structures and processes (the many children with close family/parenting ties to more than one household), and as a result of the information communication technology revolution (internet, e-mail, text messaging and cell phones all link children directly to worlds outside their household and immediate family)

- third, is the disturbing prevalence of violence in children and young peoples lives, both family violence, including child abuse and violence amongst adult family members, and bullying. The 1995 victimisation survey shows the high level of violence, and it is significant that 5 to 12 year olds in our recent consultation with children and young people identified bullying as one of their major concerns.

10 Finally, in this brief discussion of the position of children and young people, is what might be labelled the place of children and young people in contemporary New Zealand : the status they are given; their portrayal in the media; the extent to which their interests and rights are taken account of.

11 A media researcher and academic, Judy MacGregor[3], has argued that children are generally presented in the media as victims, villains, "cutie pies", or appendages to pets. Research into the treatment of children in the judicial system suggests that despite some reforms, most are left feeling bewildered and shut out of decisions about them. Our discussions about children's rights as members of our society have often provoked quite a negative reaction – for example in response to proposals for a greater voice for children, the old cliché that they should be seen but not heard.

12 Many – perhaps most – children in New Zealand are respected and loved by those around them. But I do not think we can say that children in New Zealand are regarded collectively or often individually as citizens to be taken seriously, with a right to be heard and to participate as appropriate in decisions which affect them. Too often children in New Zealand are viewed:
- as passive recipients of services; or
- as vulnerable dependants who do not have a view on what is happening to them or whose views are not important; or
- as possessions or "chattels" in guardianship, custody and access provisions; or
- in the case of youth, as "problems" for society.

3 Information presented at the UNICEF / MSP Forum on Child Rights, Wellington, 30 August 2001

13 Let me now turn to the second part of my address : what we might want for children and young people in New Zealand.

Good Outcomes for Children

14 I believe that good outcomes for children and young people, defined as those conditions or states which best enhance their overall wellbeing, need to take account of three dimensions of childhood: the vulnerability of children, their development and socialisation needs, and their rights as members of our society.

15 The Ministry of Social Policy recently published *The Social Report*[4], in which a set of desired social outcomes were postulated. They cover:

- health;
- knowledge and skills;
- safety and security;
- paid work;
- enjoyment of human rights;
- recognition of culture and identity;
- economic standard of living;
- social correctedness;
- clear and healthy environment.

16 We want our children to be healthy, to gain knowledge and skills (and the ability to keep on learning), to be safe, to acquire the skills to earn a living as adults, to enjoy human rights and their own culture, to have access to an adequate income and standard of living, to have constructive relationships with family, peers and their communities, and to live in a clean, healthy sustainable environment.

17 I do not intend to assess the extent to which these outcomes are being achieved in contemporary New Zealand : *The Social Report* gives a rather mixed score. Instead I want to make one general comment, and then look at two particular aspects of outcomes for children.

18 The general point is diversity of child and family circumstances, the multi dimensional nature of wellbeing, the interdependence of its components, and the multi causation of good and bad outcomes. The diversity of circumstances (and some of the difficulties of assigning the complex social institution which is the family into economic, social and cultural boxes) should make us cautious about generalisation. The common practice of categorisation, and then comparison through simple statistical measures such as averages, does not always serve public policy well The literature on child development and child outcomes is full of evidence of the association between outcomes, for example between health and education, or education and future income. The compounding effect of

[4] Ministry of Social Policy, The Social Report, Wellington 2001

multiple disadvantages is well established. It is worth remembering this when assertions are made attributing poor outcomes to one cause. Comments about sole parenthood or income inequality often seem to fall into this category. I am making an important distinction between associations and causation here, and in the subsequent discussion.

19 I want to make some comment on three matters concerning outcomes for children. The first is the relationship between household income and outcomes for children. There is vast literature on this subject, and I can do little more than make some cautious and cautionary comments. One would sometimes think – from public comment – that low family income, and/or income inequality between families, was the primary if not the only cause of poor outcomes for children. This is probably because parental income is positively associated with most dimensions of child wellbeing – though the correlation is not particularly strong[5]. However, research into the relationship between family income and child outcomes suggests that:

- this effect declines when family background factors– such as maternal health – are controlled;
- it is more strongly associated with some outcomes than others e.g. education;
- it appears more important in early childhood;
- it is not a linear relationship – income changes are likely to be more significant in low income families;
- the health, skills and expenditure choices of parents are important;
- government's social expenditure has an important ameliorative effect.

20 This suggests that an across the board lift in family incomes may not be the most effective way to improve outcomes for children, though it may have an important signalling effect about the value we place on children. This does not, of course, mean that we should not be concerned about the economic position of low income families, and the reality of hardship for some. Nor does it mean we should not be concerned about the effectiveness of income support systems and about access to core services such as health and education. But more money into parent's pockets is not the full answer to such problems.

21 Second, let me make some cautious comments on the relationship between family structure and outcomes for children. This is a contentious area, and public discussion is not helped by simplistic assertions on the one hand that structure makes no difference, and or the other that changed social relationships and parenting arrangements are consigning all children affected to poverty, criminality and sexual promiscuity. Neither is true. Research indicates that sole parenthood is associated with such outcomes for children as lower educational attainment, behaviour difficulties, and lower subsequent labour force attachment. These findings hold even when characteristics specific to the child are controlled.

[5] It is important to note that this paragraph focuses on income, not wealth or living standards.

22 However, some recent research[6] based on the US longitudinal surveys, concludes that when family income, mothers' mental health status and skills, and the quality of the home environment are taken into account, the independent effect of family structure on the behaviour and cognitive outcomes of children (they looked at 7 -–12 year olds) almost disappears.

23 Though the study I have cited did not find it, there is some research which links multiple changes in family structure to poor outcomes. Also, it is very likely that being in a sole parent headed family is closely associated with such things as low income, and perhaps, poor health. Certainly this is the case for sole parents on benefit. We should therefore be concerned about the incidence, persistence, and policy responses to it. What is, it seems to me, wrong is to:

- label all changes in family structure as bad;
- treat sole parent headed families as one homogenous group – they are not;
- on one hand, deny that sole parenthood is associated with poorer outcomes for children;
- on the other hand, brand sole parenthood or the absence of fathers as the main cause of many – or even some – poor outcomes for children.

24 The <u>third</u> outcomes related issue I want to emphasise is the inclusion of human rights in the set of desired social outcomes : that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are enjoyed by all, including children. Too often we see human rights as something pertaining to adults – as if children were not yet fully human. Good outcomes for children and young people include their access to human rights, including the children's rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

25 It is worth reminding ourselves of what the Convention on the Rights of Child contains. Its articles cover three main kinds of rights for children and young people:

- Provision rights : these include the right to minimum standards of health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure;

- Protection rights : these include being safe from discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict; and
- Participation rights : these include the right to a name and identity, to be consulted and to be taken into account, to physical integrity, to information, to freedom of speech and opinion and to challenge decisions made on their behalf.

26 That concludes my comments on good outcomes for children. Let me know turn to how we might improve outcomes for children in New Zealand.

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[6] (M J Carlson and M E Corcoran "Family structure and children's behavioural and cognitive outcomes" in Journal of Marriage and Family 63 (August 2001) pp 779-792),

Public policy and improved outcomes for children

27 I should start this concluding section by repeating what I said at the beginning. These are my thoughts – and should not be taken as necessarily the views of the Ministry of Social Policy or of the Government.

28 The wellbeing of children and young people is enormously affected by public policy : policies to do with health, education, access to income, recreational facilities, and security all have direct consequences for children. Yet, often, children and their interests have not been central to public policy work. For example, since the mid 80s there has not been much attention paid to income support for children, but considerable attention to income support for older people. There is a child health strategy, but much of the public debate about health is about services to adults. Tax policies have a considerable impact on children – but children's interests have not, I suggest, been much in evidence in discussion of tax reforms in recent times. What I want to suggest, is that putting children and young people closer to the centre of public policy and public life and giving more attention to their interests would significantly improve outcomes for them.

29 Let me develop what putting children at the centre of public policy and public life might mean. I want to look at four aspects:

- the place children have in public policy and public life;
- their participation;
- the provision of services; and
- work on addressing particular problems.

I want to acknowledge, in making these comments, that I am drawing on work being done by my colleagues in the Ministry of Social Policy and Ministry of Youth Affairs on Governments' Agenda for Children and Youth Development Strategy[7].

30 First, place. I have already argued that children in New Zealand are not often regarded as citizens in their own right. This holds for much public policy as well, though there is some evidence that this might be changing, for example in the greater weight being given children's rights in policy currently (the increased role and resourcing of the Commissioner for Children is one indicator). Giving children a more central place might include:

- a Minister for Children;
- a clear location for children's interests within government policy agencies;
- requirements to consider impacts on children in policy decision making;

[7] Ministry of Social Policy, Agenda for Children Discussion Paper, Wellington 2001; Ministry of Youth Affairs Supporting the Positive Development of Young People in New Zealand, Wellington 2001

- similar requirements in other decision-making settings such as local government are governance structures for services for children.

31 Second, participation. Children and young people could be much more centrally involved in:

- governance arrangements for services important to them – we have made a start with students on BOTs;
- the processes of decision-making which substantially affect them as individuals. We have that in some circumstances, for example, under youth justice and care and protection, but we could do it in other circumstances – and do it better;
- consultation over policies and services at many levels. There are some good example. For example what Christchurch City Council has done in increasing participation by children. But we can do more.

32 What might putting children at the centre mean for the provision of services. Well, it might mean we address the fragmentation of services which is such a concern of parents, and others (concerns expressed again in the consultation we did on an Agenda for Children). It might mean:

- co-ordination of services around the child as a client – a whole of government approach. Some work has been done on this for particular groups : children in disadvantaged families through the Strengthening Families initiatives, children with high and complex needs, and there are aspirations to better co-ordinate services for children with disabilities;
- a requirement to prepare plans for children services across sectors such as Health, Education and child welfare. Again there is some progress at the margins, for example the commitment to prepare blueprints for care and protection services.

33 Finally, addressing particular problems. In the Agenda for Children work priority has been given to two major problems in contemporary New Zealand:

- the position of many children in families where there is persistent low income, material hardship and economic insecurity;
- the pervasive negative impact of violence, and its prevalence in too many children's lives.

Putting children at the centre in addressing the first problem, means naming it and addressing it as child poverty. This Government has at least begun the naming and taken some action to address it through public housing and special benefit changes. For the problem of violence it means finding better ways to reduce its incidence – something which has been a challenge since child abuse and family violence became foci of attention 30 years ago.

34 These problems are not easy to solve. I believe that more attention is being paid to children currently, certainly at a policy level, but that is not to say that it will continue. I suggest that putting children at the centre of attention through the sorts of mechanisms and changes I have listed, will mean that public policy in respect of children makes a greater contribution to good outcomes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

35 Let me conclude. I have argued that there are several causes for concern about the position of children and young people in contemporary New Zealand. They include:

- greater pressures on the families in which they live;
- the greater complexity of family structures;
- for some children poverty, and for many less advantaged economic circumstances than previous generations have enjoyed;
- the prevalence of violence;
- a struggle to have recognised and enjoy some of their human rights.

36 I have set out what we might see as good outcomes for children. We want our children to be healthy, to gain knowledge and skills (and the ability to keep on learning), to be safe, to acquire the skills to earn a living as adults, to enjoy human rights and their own culture, to have access to an adequate income and standard of living, to have constructive relationships with family, peers and their communities, and to live in a clean, healthy sustainable environment. And I have commented on three aspects of outcomes:

- the complex relationship between family income and outcomes;
- the contentious and complex relationships between family structures and outcomes;
- the importance of recognising the rights of children and young people.

37 Finally in respect of public policy and children, I have argued that consciously putting children more at the centre of public policy and public life, will mean that public policy makes a greater contribution to good outcomes for children than it has over the past few decades in New Zealand.

38 I do think that children's interests are being taken more into account at a policy level in government – but there is a great deal to do before that becomes meaningful in terms of impacts on children's lives. The words "put children first" or "put children more at the centre of public policy and public life", slip easily off the tongue. The trick is to find ways to do that which are effective, sustainable, shift resources, have positive impacts on children'' lives, and respect their place as full members of our society.

Chapter Three

FAMILY AND WHANAU IN A CHANGING WORLD

By Joan Metge

A few months ago I asked a group of mature Maori students to share their understanding and experience of the concept of whanau. The first speaker began by talking about growing up with thirteen brothers and sisters; then she singled out four great-grandparents, located them in their iwi and hapu and named the families stemming from them; and finally she spoke of her marriage and the children and grandchildren shared with her husband. In the space of five minutes she identified three distinct definitions of whanau, and not one of them coincided with the meaning which I as an observer identified some years ago as the primary meaning of the word, the one which "comes first to mind" when Maori hear it used without qualification.

The first point I want to make - and make strongly - is that the word whanau is used by Maori with a wide range of reference:

I can identify upwards of fifteen different meanings for whanau. The word family also has a wide range of meanings: even a concise dictionary will give you at least seven meanings for family. In both cases, one meaning stands out as of <u>primary</u> importance in everyday usage, but the range is extensive and includes meanings that are quite distinct and even contradictory. Moreover, it is common practice for speakers to slide from one meaning to another, often in the same sentence, without signalling the fact. When someone uses the words family or whanau without qualification, <u>never</u> assume that you know what they mean: always check what meaning <u>the speakers</u> have in <u>their</u> mind.

And while we have become used to talking about whanau as well as family, never let us forget that the New Zealand population includes many ethnic groups which cherish family forms which differ from either.

The primary meaning of family

Asked what they consider the <u>primary</u> meaning of family, most people define it as "a family group composed of parents (plural) and children" and, whether they say so or not, take it for granted that this family group is contained within one household.

There are several problems with this definition. Firstly, use of the word "children" implies that the younger generation are not yet adults, but the familial relationship between parents

and their offspring is not terminated when the latter come of age: it continues as long as they live, even if they lose touch or become alienated from each other. Secondly, parents and children do not necessarily live together on a daily basis. If the parents separate their children may live in and move between their two households, while adult "children" generally move out of the parental home. Thirdly, two parents are not always present or available to their children within the one household.

It is vitally important to make a clear distinction between family and household and to recognise variations in the make-up of the parent-child family according to circumstances.

The primary meaning of whanau

The primary reference of whanau is "a group of kin who act and interact with each other for common purposes", that is, who have a degree of corporate or common life. The whanau is not an alternative to the family. It is made up of a number of parent-child families along with independent individuals and couples.

The whanau of primary reference is a group, made up of people who keep in touch and do things together. It is moreover a group of kinsfolk: kinship is the glue which holds members together. These kinsfolk are of two kinds: a core group of members descended from a common ancestor or ancestral couple, and spouses and children who come from outside this core descent group. The whanau is relatively longlived: it has an on-going existence that outlasts individual members and parent-child families. And its members share and work together for common purposes.

In pre-European times, the members of a whanau lived together as a single household forming a single production and consumption unit, but absorption into a money and market economy radically altered this arrangement. Today whanau members are typically distributed over several households, which may or may not be close to each other and are supported by incomes acquired on an individual basis. These constituent households manage their own daily affairs but combine to work together on an "occasional" basis, from time to time and on special occasions. The common purposes for which they work together include the support and succour of members in need, the care and upbringing of children, shared by parents with other relatives, the care and management of group property such as marae and taonga, the organisation of whanau hui, and the maintenance of internal harmony. Being part of a whanau affects the life of parent-child families in significant ways, in particular, the extent of access to the support, experience and knowledge of other whanau members, and the obligation to provide support and knowledge in return.

Surprisingly, given a general tendency to set them in opposition, family and whanau have several features in common, though the details of their arrangements differ significantly.

Family and whanau are always changing

In the first place, both family and whanau are characteristically dynamic; they don't stand still

but are continually in the process of change. Children born into parent-child families grow up, develop their own separate personalities and interests and eventually move out of the household in which they were raised; parents may grow closer to each other or they may grow apart. The whanau, comprising as it does three, four or five generations, typically has a longer life than the parent-child family but a high internal turnover, gaining members by birth and marriage, losing others through death, migration and quarrels. Some opt in and out according to circumstance. As the years pass, whanau grow in size and generational depth until they are too big to fulfil their functions effectively. At that point they split into several new whanau which may keep in touch through periodic reunions or go their separate ways.

Family and whanau are inclusive

Family and whanau are not exclusive groups: members can and do belong to more than one at the same time. Most people belong to a family of orientation (the family they are born into) and a family of procreation (the family they help establish). Increasingly children move between the households of separated parents. Because whanau activities are discontinuous, individuals can be active members of the whanau of their father, their mother and their spouse. Maintaining such multiple membership is a juggling act, rewarding and burdensome at the same time.

Family and whanau have built-in tensions

Family and whanau have their own in-built tensions. In the family these tensions centre round the relation between parents and children and between older and younger, male and female siblings. The same tensions exist in the whanau but are complicated by the whanau's genealogical depth and longer life. Tensions between parents and children are offset, more or less, by affection and co-operation between grandparents and grandchildren; tensions between older and younger siblings are extended to cousins from senior and junior lines and to competition for leadership in the whanau as a whole. And there is a major fault line between whanau members who can trace descent from the group's founders and those who have married or been adopted in from outside. For Maori connection by descent takes priority over connection by marriage, a fact which places a strain on marriages (and hence on families) of which non-Maori are typically unaware.

Family and whanau are optional

It is at least a hundred years since the whanau was a universal feature of Maori social life. Today, there is at any given time a significant proportion of Maori who are not part of a functioning whanau, just as there is a significant proportion of individuals who are not currently living in a parent-child household. In the study of Maori households in urban and rural areas conducted by the Maori Studies Department at Massey University, 80% of the respondents said that whanau support was important in their lives, but the frequency with which they called upon that support or engaged in whanau activities varied from once a year to several times a month and was much higher in rural than in urban areas. One fifth of the Maori population choose to operate as ego-centric loners, emphasise family independence, or look to non-kin groups for support.

Family and whanau are subject to external influences

Family and whanau do not exist in isolation but have been affected, for better and for worse, by the major changes in ideology and practice which have occurred in New Zealand over the last twenty-five years.

In the area of family life, these changes have involved a decrease in family size but increases in the incidence of de facto marriages, the frequency of marital break-up and the proportions of sole-parent and blended families. Increased levels of stress in parent-child families have at once increased the demand for whanau support and reduced the capacity of whanau members to supply it. The Domestic Purposes Benefit encourages sole parents to set up separate households where formerly they lived with parents in three generation households or gave children to relatives to care for, assuring them of ready access to role models of both sexes.

An increase in Maori life expectancy (though still less than that of non-Maori) has improved the supply of elders but exacerbated intergenerational tensions in the whanau when elders remain active longer and hold on to traditional knowledge and power in the face of challenge from younger people with different aspirations and training.

The reinforcement of traditional adventurousness by high rates of unemployment and associated high levels of poverty, poor housing and poor health has resulted in increases in the geographic scattering of whanau members as Maori individuals and families move in search of work and new experiences. Every year substantial numbers go overseas, especially to Australia, while others leave urban areas to return to rural home communities. Geographic scattering reduces the frequency with which whanau members see and interact with each other, and thus adversely affects bonding, limits opportunities for young people to participate in whanau activities and learn from older relatives and increases misunderstandings between those who "keep the home fires burning" and those who travel abroad. To get together for whanau purposes, many Maori travel long distances under time constraints, risking over-tiredness and accidents.

Increases in the diversity of family forms

The net result of all these changes has been an increase in the diversity of family forms.

One parent families rival two parent families as a proportion of the total and a rising proportion of children live in blended family households, and in three generation and other kinds of extended family households or move regularly between two households.

Whanau too cover an increasingly broad range: from small three generation groups focused on living tupuna to large groups encompassing five to six generations from tupuna nobody living remembers; from whanau which are firmly grounded in their ancestors' home community to whanau which are completely alienated from their roots; from whanau whose group life is so attenuated that they come together only at tangihanga to whanau which are vibrant multi-faceted corporations using the latest technology to keep in touch; from whanau

which cherish and live up to the values handed down from their ancestors to whanau which are seriously dysfunctional.

Developing policies that provide for diversity

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing policy-makers in the family field is to recognise and provide for this diversity in family and whanau. In the face of their diverse and changing nature, there can be no blanket answers, no single model of development or practice that fits all cases. The most successful policies are likely to be those which recognise the complexity and variation within the field of family relations, provide for adjustments and modifications to be made according to context and emphasise empowerment and capacity building, helping people make their own informed decisions according to their particular situation and needs.

The first step in developing such policies is to get rid of any tendency to idealise and romanticise either family or whanau -- to see one or the other as the ideal form to which all (or all Maori) should aspire. Instead it is crucially important to see them as possible forms which have grown out of particular cultural histories, have advantages and disadvantages which can be capitalised on and allowed for, and in particular cases can be good, bad or indifferent. Like the little girl in the nursery rhyme, when they are good they can be very, very good, and when they are bad they can be horrid.

Before the care of children in particular can be entrusted to a particular family or whanau searching questions have to be asked about the nature of its functioning. In particular, is the whanau in question a genuine functioning group with a group life and commitment or is it a nominal, ad hoc collection of persons without any glue to hold them together? Is it functioning effectively according to a clear set of values or is it dysfunctional in some or all respects? How effective is its leadership, how open to and understanding of young people? Could it be encouraged to strengthen its corporate life?

To my mind two particular areas require far more thought and discussion than they have so far been accorded: first, the desirability of widening consideration of rights and responsibilities in relation to children to include the children themselves on the one hand and relatives other than parents on the other, especially grandparents; and secondly, the development of the available resources in the areas of child care and development, household management and budgetting, and group organisation and discussion.

It is one of my hobby horses that there is a plethora of books, videos and courses on parenting in the parent-child family but an almost complete dearth of advice about living in other kinds of family, including the grandparental family and the whanau. Here I speak from experience. I spent my first six years living with my parents and widowed grandmother; for four years I shared my home with my niece and her husband and two small girls; and for over forty years I have been closely involved in the on-going life of several successful whanau. On the basis of this experience I have a bias in favour of these arrangements, but I am well aware that if my grandmother had not been a strongminded and loving woman, if the layout of my house

had not been so suitable, if the whanau I admire had not had wise and experienced leadership, the outcome could have been different in each case.

Talking about family and whanau focuses attention on Angle-Celtic and Maori cultures. Near the beginning I made brief reference to the family types of the many other ethnic groups present in New Zealand. Too often we deal with cultures as if they were separate and bounded, insulated against each other. It is high time we recognised the high rate of intermarriage. When partners from different cultures marry, they are bound to run into differences between their ideas on many subjects and even more between their practices, particularly in relation to child raising. When conflict occurs, they may choose to follow one way or the other, but more often they work out their own special combinations and accommodations. Research focused on such families might very well produce imaginative and innovative ways of handling family life which could inform and inspire the rest of us.

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Chapter Four

STATISTICAL FAMILIES

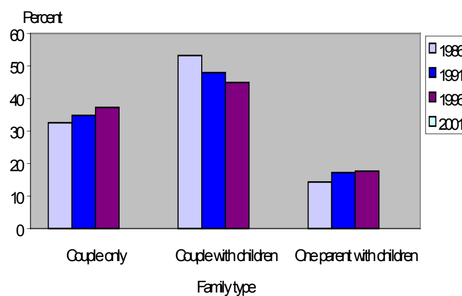
by Frank Nolan

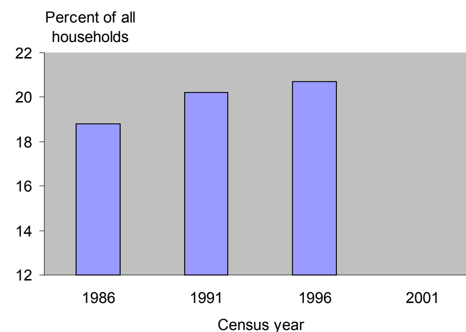
1. INTRODUCTION

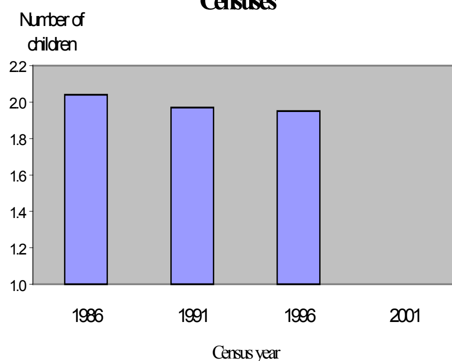
Statistical information on families has been collected from administrative sources as well as from household surveys. The most comprehensive household survey in New Zealand is the five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings. Many of the survey statistics relating to families are derived from the census.

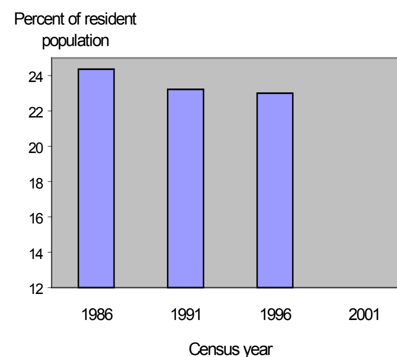
This paper reviews the methods of classifying families from survey information. It looks at the definitions used and surrounding issues.

2. WHAT WILL THE 2001 CENSUS SHOW?









3. SURVEY MEASUREMENT OF PEOPLE

Surveys of people have often been conducted through a survey of households. The strength of this method is that it provides an efficient means of measurement. It is based on a frame - households or dwellings - that is mutually exclusive and exhaustive - that is that you count everyone once and only once. This is also based on an assumption that individuals reside in one and only one household.

The efficiency is in aspects of sample design. Technically it is more efficient to select people within households, rather than individuals at random. A population frame, such as a census, can then provide the means to obtain quality estimates for the total population.

The household survey has also provided for a measurement of families. This measurement has both the assumption that individuals reside in one and only one household, and families also reside in one and only one household.

The most comprehensive household survey is the census. This is able to measure all individuals in a country at a point in time.

In most developed countries the census is a self-completed questionnaire. In that regard it has limited scope to collect concepts or details that are complex. Not only does it cause concern on the part of the public as to additional time taken, but often the complexity reduces the quality of the information collected. The census must be a simple collection, including topics that are easy to answer.
The strength of the census is in measuring small populations.

In contrast sample surveys may be administered by trained interviewers (perhaps by telephone). They can collect more detail because of the greater time that can be allocated and the ability of the interviewer to obtain better quality information.

4. SURVEY TOPICS

An issue with repeated statistical surveys is often the tension between consistency and relevance.

Consistency is related to measurement of change over time. So there is great interest in measuring the number of people in different towns over time and the relative size of different towns. For example is the population of Te Aro increasing, or is Hamilton larger than Dunedin?

However the questions still have to be relevant to the current people completing the forms. So census questions on amenities in dwelling change from flush toilet in 1945, to refrigerator in 1956, to television set and vacuum cleaner in 1966, to deep freeze and colour television in 1976, to internet in 2001.

For family statistics this means that changes in the underlying definition of a family may provide a measure which is more relevant for the current social norms. However this also restricts comparisons with previous statistics in that the data may not be comparable because of the change so introduced.

So for example, in the census, same-sex couples were only included in the classification for the 1991 census. While there were people living as a same-sex couple prior to this they were not included in the statistics.

The balance between consistency and relevance becomes one of statistical judgement. It is a balance between the needs of the users for measurement over time against the introduction of new measures which will be relevant into the future.

5. MEASUREMENT OF FAMILIES

The family nucleus is defined in the Statistics New Zealand Directory of Standards and Classifications as:
A couple, with or without child(ren), or one parent and their child(ren). The children do not have partners or children of their own living in the same household.

The couple is defined as:
Two people who usually reside together and are legally married, or two people who are in a consensual union.
(where consensual union has elements of mutual concern for each other; a degree of economic, social and emotional interdependence; a relationship considered to be akin to marriage).

The child is defined as:
a person of any age who usually resides with at least one person who is in a parent (natural, step-, adopted, or foster) role to him or her ..

The nuclear family is defined pragmatically within the census as:
- The family, in the first instance, is the nuclear family.
- The family fits within a dwelling.
- The family is more a social unit, than a biological unit.
- There may be legal and economic elements in deriving a family.
- The family does not extend to married / partnered children who live with their parents.
- The family does not extend to children who themselves have children.

The United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses continues this idea of family with the definition of:
the family within the household is defined as those members of the household who are related, to a specified degree, through blood, adoption or marriage. ...... A family can not comprise more than one household.

The measurement of families in most New Zealand household surveys and censuses has been as a supplement to the main purpose of the survey. So the Census of Population and Dwellings has a key outcome of measuring dwellings and people. The measurement of families is a derived outcome which is possible because information on relationship and living arrangements is collected.

This is a relatively simple method, whereby each census individual form asks people how they are related to other people in the household [Q19 - 2001]. This uses terms like:
legal husband or wife, partner or de facto boyfriend or girlfriend, son or daughter, mother or father, ...

In addition, the census dwelling form [Q4 - 2001] asks to list all the people who reside in the dwelling and asks how they are related to "Person 1".

A more exacting, but complex, method is to ask how every person is related to every other person in the dwelling.

The simple family measures that can then be derived from these two sources of census data are those of:

- couple only;
- couple with children;
- one parent with children.

Individuals are allocated to at most one family only. If an individual may be a (possible) member of more than one family, the priority is given to forming families from the youngest, then forming families through marriage / partnership.

The limitations on these data are:

- within households not between households;
- social and economic units rather than necessarily biological;
- individual membership of at most one family nucleus.

6. ISSUES

Clearly the data produced from these definition will have some limitations. This is probably true of most data collected. To outline a few of these:

6.1. Firstly individuals are allocated to one family only, but there will be instances where there are three generations living together. The definition above splits the three generations into at least one family plus others. If there are two generations living together with marriage/ partnership at each generation, two families will be formed.

So the statistical families formed under this definition do not account for more than two generations, nor for extended families (although an extended family definition is available).

6.2. Secondly the family is formed within the dwelling. This does not account for families who live across dwellings. These may include cases of people who are married or partnered but for some reason live in different houses.

For example a couple may have separated and children spend time with each in different dwellings. Is this one, two or three families? From one view-point, this may result in counting a one parent family and a one-person household rather than a couple with children.

6.3. Blended families are treated as families within households. This gives precedence to a social construct rather than a biological construct. So one "parent" may be the other parent's partner rather than the biological parent. Again is this really a case of multiple families?

6.4. A more complex structure is where parents have children by different partners. Again the current definition uses a social construction. And again there will be issues of not measuring parent responsibilities outside of the dwelling.

7. FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

These family definitions raise issues of how to attribute characteristics to the families. This relates to how the information collected about families can be used with other data.
So family income is taken as the total of the incomes of the members of the family. But can this quantitative measure be extended to attributes that are qualitative? How does a characteristic that is attributed to a person, become attributed to a family unit?

With more policy focus on the family there is a greater need to describe characteristics of the family. The number of family members, or family relationships can be categorised. But what is family occupation, family education, family ethnicity? Are these measures sensible? They are attributes of an individual.

For more qualitative measures, past classifications have relied on taking the attribute from the head of household and assigning that to the whole family. So it was possible to have blue-collar families. Effectively this meant that the head of household had a certain occupation. It was probably also assumed that the partner did not work. But what happens when both partners work?

Of particular interest is whether ethnicity can be attributed to a family - a Mäori family or an Asian family. Perhaps the closest solution is to characterise families as having at least one

member who has the specified characteristic - families with at least one member who has Mäori ethnicity.

There are questions about how to attribute access to housing amenities within a family or when families share the same house. It is assumed for example that if there are two cars available for use at the house, then family members have access to these? Likewise, if there is an internet connection at the house, does this mean that family members within the house have access to that facility?

8. ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS

There seem to be a range of options to look at in redefining the statistical family. These of course will also present challenges.

The policy outcomes to be monitored or measured from family statistics may be based on issues such as emotional, economic or social support. The support may be provided by a range of structures extending beyond the nuclear family defined above.

8.1. As a start there will be the question of measuring either the biological, legal or the social family or some combination. This issue can not be discussed independently of support provided to the family. It is also complicated by individuals moving between different "families".

   One consequence of some of this thinking is whether there are situations where there are more than two people acting in the parent role?

   A parallel is the question as to when one can define a "one parent" family.
   The social construct also recognises the possibility of families containing same-sex couples.

8.2. second issue is whether there should be a restriction to the nuclear family or whether there should be a broader definition of the "extended family".

   What are the bounds of the extended family? Is there a clear distinction between one family and another or is the possibility of inclusion in more than one family allowed?

   Part of this issue questions the position of "adult" children who are themselves part of another nuclear or extended family. This leads to increasing complexity, but is more reflective of reality.

8.3. A third issue is to remove the restriction on a family occupying just one dwelling. This seems a pragmatic solution for household based surveys but no longer represents reality (if it ever did).

While the household surveys may still be able to provide a surrogate measure of the family, better measures will require family measurements (however defined) that are not so constrained.

8.4. Most of the statistical measurement of families starts at the parent level for practical reasons (e.g. parents generally answer for very young children). However there may be an option to form families by reference to the child as the starting point.

There will be tensions here with the questions above - is this a biological or a social construct, how do you manage overlap between families (siblings being part of different families), and is this restricted to nuclear families?

8.5. Amongst all of these issues there remains a fundamental issues in the child parent relationship: for some children all parents may not be known. This was the case in the past, and may be increasing with medical science.

The definition of the family remains problematic and sensitive for some individuals and groups.

9. CONCLUSION

The history of the measurement of families through Statistics New Zealand's surveys shows that there have been few attempts to survey families as the prime objective of a survey. Family statistics are usually obtained from surveys with other objectives, and as such are often a supplementary variable and always derived from other information.

The very nature of these surveys is usually based on a household design, and so the subsequent family statistics have been developed around families within households. There have been further constraints with a concentration on the nuclear family.

A better measure of family may be obtained from a collection specifically aimed at deriving family information as the prime measure. Even within such a collection, there will be considerable debate as to how to define family. This may include decisions around:

- nuclear, economic, or extended families;
- biological or social or legal structures;
- the definition of a one parent family;
- the issue of same sex couples and children;
- families residing in different dwellings;
- blended families;
- allocation of family attributes – e.g. income or ethnicity.

With changes in society in regard to parenting and marriage / partnership, the historical concept of (nuclear) family may becoming less relevant. Certainly the information produced

from statistical surveys will have limitations when it comes to measuring families. This is not new. It is important that the strengths and weaknesses of different statistical (and administrative) data are recognised by users. And it is also important that producers of statistical information fully document issues with definitions and quality.

In most cases researchers are left to make the best use of what information is available.

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Chapter Five

WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE STATISTICAL FAMILY?

by Stuart Birks

Whenever undertaking analysis or using the results of analysis, it is prudent to take some time to consider the possible influence of perspectives on the nature of data and data classifications and on the definition of issues.

Many years ago, when working in strategic planning, I came across the terminology, "aims, goals and objectives". Aims referred to broad intent, goals were somewhat more specific descriptions of how the aims were to be achieved, and objectives were set out in terms of measurable policy outcomes. Hence a society might have an aim that its members should be able to achieve their "full potential in life". This might result in goals of adequate education and sufficient, suitable jobs for all who wanted to work. Specific objectives for a government might be to have 40 percent of school leavers proceeding to tertiary education, and an unemployment rate no more than 3 percent. Commonly, indicators would relate to objectives, and objectives may be selected on the basis of the availability of suitable indicators. They are therefore likely to influence what we observe, and what we try to do. The end results may be far removed from the attainment of the underlying aims. This is likely to apply as much in the case of policies for families as in any other area.

In the context of this forum:

THE DEFINITION OF "FAMILY" HAS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The definition is household based, but:
- some people live in more than one household
- income transfers, including lump sum payments in lieu of an ongoing income stream, take place across households between people in the same family (so there are related problems associated with the definition of income and the blurred distinction between income and wealth)

These considerations are important for family policy and law, and for studies of income distribution.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES OF RESEARCH

From time to time it has been suggested that scientists bear some responsibility for the implications of their research, as with the development of the atomic bomb. Similarly social scientists should consider how their findings may be used. Some issues are highly sensitive politically, and findings may be misused. Classifications can also be significant in affecting the results. This was central to the debate surrounding Simon Chapple's work on closing the gaps (Chapple, 2000). It is no less important when we consider families.

SO WHAT OF LANGUAGE?

The significance of language as a determinant of perspectives and understanding has been central to what is commonly called "political correctness". Standard usage in the past is, in many cases, no longer considered acceptable. Hence we see use of "chair" or "chairperson" in place of "chairman", and, instead of "he", people tend to use "he/she", or "they".[1]

This does not mean that we have eradicated gendered connotations in language, or that language no longer has gendered associations. In fact, some people who might have been used to a generic "man" or "he" may have now become sensitized to the gender-specific literal interpretation. Similarly, many terms that are heavily gender-loaded have only recently risen to prominence. To list a few, consider: "the carers" (i.e. women, according to Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2001); "primary caregiver", leading to "sole caregiver", "glass ceiling", "feminisation of poverty"; the redefinition of "parent" to mean a person in a parenting role; "abuser" and "victim"; "battered woman"; "gender pay gap"; "sole parent family"; "absent father"; "women and children" (as in the description of Afghan refugees from the *Tampa*, "NZ has offered to take women, children and family groups").

So, while feminist concerns about non-PC language have been vocally raised and addressed, there are similar issues now. We see this expressed in possibly more subtle ways, as in the following examples:

1) The following is an extract of Mary Capamagian's submission to the review of guardianship, custody and access:
   Change the law so that if separated (or separating) parents cannot agree on which parents should have custody, it be prescribed that one parent, having a certain qualification, have custody. I suggest that the qualification be that the younger parent be automatically the custodial parent. Some of my colleagues think that the mother should be the custodial parent. It is interesting that all colleagues who gave this opinion were male family lawyers. I suspect that designating the mother as the qualifying parent would be politically unacceptable, hence my suggestion that the younger parent qualify."

[1] Fashions change. Mr Logan Pearsall Smith, in *The Times* (London) of 4 March 1911, wrote, "*The Times* has won the gratitude of lovers of good English by its successful effort, not long ago, to supplant the uncouth word 'aviator' by the excellent and idiomatic compound 'airman'".

2) Section 15(1) of the revised Property Relationships Act 1976 allows unequal splitting *"...if, on the division of relationship property, the Court is satisfied that, after the marriage or de facto relationship ends, the income and living standards of 1 spouse or de facto partner (party B) are likely to be significantly higher than the other spouse or de facto partner (party A) because of the effects of the division of functions within the marriage or de facto relationship while the parties were living together."* The revisions reduced or removed other grounds for unequal splitting, such as one partner bringing more assets into the relationship or otherwise making a significantly higher financial contribution. The implications have clear gender connotations for many in established roles, as well as important (and possibly overlooked) signals for younger people considering future life decisions.

3) The Child Support Act Working Party (1994) specifically addresses the question of gender bias in the Child Support Act. On page 16, the issue of gender discrimination in the legislation is dismissed on the basis that the assessment criteria are gender neutral: "The Act is only concerned with the provision of financial support from absent parents toward their children, not the gender of the liable parent or custodian." The language is clearly gender neutral. However there is a difference between the technical effects of the legislation, as specified in the gender neutral language of the Act, and the distributional effects in terms of who is generally affected in what way. This is clearly stated and the bias apparent on page 24, where it states that: "a strong disincentive to workforce participation could result if every dollar earned by the custodian over a given threshold resulted in a decrease in child support. As 84% of lone parents are women, structural gender based inequities in the labour market could be worsened." In other words, although the language is gender neutral, the legislation is designed to meet gender-specific objectives.

As we can see, while avoiding blatant use of language, the same effects are created by using variables that are highly correlated, such as younger parent, or custodial parent.

We also see increasing reference to the acknowledgement of the "diversity of family types", as with the shift to a "social" concept of family, but these types are still household-based, including sole parent family. If anything, this process further downplays biological ties (and associated emotional and "social" ties) between children and one of their parents when their parents live apart.

Observation of current policy debate also reveals several alternative views on "family" when people live apart. Hence:

1) The National Council of Women's submission on the Child Support Amendment Bill 2001 advocated a "first families first" approach, whereby child support would have higher priority as a claim on a liable parent's income than the needs of children from a subsequent relationship. Here, at least in terms of money, family obligations are not

defined solely within a household. While referring to a "principle of acceptance of responsibility for one's children", the submission does not consider caregiving by liable parents, except to claim that, in some circumstances, some custodial parents might have to make concessions so as to retain custody of the children. This suggests that the NCW's view of inter-household intra-family connections are financial only.

2) Anne Smith, of Otago University's Children's Issues Centre, provided handouts at a workshop on children whose parents live apart (Wellington, 27 July 2001) which presented an "emotional connection" view of family, even if not in an very positive light. One quoted from Smart and Neale (1999): "if both want to remain engaged parents – they have to remain in some kind of relationship with each other...they cannot simply leave behind a relationship…in a way that couples without children can". Another included extracts from an article by Shelley Day Sclater (1995). They refer to coping strategies by separating parents:

   "The vulnerable parent's energies are then channelled into 'doing what's best for the children', conceived from the vantage point of the emotionally vulnerable parent, who is unable to see that the disputes over the children he has become involved in have their origins in his own inability to cope."

   The latter quote raises interesting issues in relation to social concepts of family as incorporated in the current census definition of "parent", which includes a person in the same household as a child who "acts as a parent". Emotional connection may be an important criterion, but individuals' stated connections may not be those that (some) analysts would want to acknowledge.

3) A cross-household emotional connection between biological parents and their children is acknowledged in a media statement of 21 June 2001 on the Child Support Amendment Bill 2001: "Mr Maharey said the Bill reinforced the Government's firm view that all parents had a responsibility to contribute to the financial and emotional support of their children."[2]

4) Arguably the widest view of "family" in a legal/policy setting is found in a case reported in the Dominion of 30 May 2001. The Court of Appeal ruled that a man should split his assets with a woman with whom he had neither co-habited nor had a sexual relationship. The Judge said that they were "emotionally committed" and "in many respects a couple". "To all outward appearances" they had committed themselves to each other.

[2] However, there was no mention of emotional connection in an announcement, in *Maharey Notes* of 5 November, that the Bill had been passed. See: http://www.executive.govt.nz/minister/maharey/notes/nov01/051101.htm#2

THE WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

The definition of family not a minor technical matter. It has very significant consequences. The additional move to a "social definition" of family is one that should have only been undertaken after widespread public consultation and discussion.

By defining a sole parent family, the other parent becomes invisible. The importance and contribution of the other parent is unlikely to be considered. Solutions to problems observed in "sole parent families" are therefore unlikely to involve the other parent. Not only is research on the effects of "sole parenthood" going to be distorted if the other parent's input is overlooked, put policy solutions may even inhibit the involvement of that parent. As a result, we are likely to be both understating and constraining the input of a parent for children considered to be in "sole parent families".

We have similar problems for children whose parents have repartnered. By defining people in households as "social parents", with them being indistinguishable in the data from biological parents, any parents outside their children's apparent household are invisible. Once again, we understate the input, real or potential, of these parents, and possibly limit that input through the policies put in place.

On 12 July 2001 Helen Clarke spoke at a dinner in Palmerston North. She talked about an inclusive society. Inclusion was taken to be dependent on financial requirements being met, although there are also social requirements, as in perception of the nature of family. In fact, the debate on inclusion does not consider inclusion within families. If inclusion is important, then surely it is particularly important in this most fundamental of society's institutions.

There is also increasing discussion of social capital, as discussed in Spellerberg (2001). She describes it as, "the social networks that help society to function effectively", or "relationships among actors (individuals, groups and/or organizations) that create a capacity to act for mutual benefit or a common purpose" (p.9). She also says that, "We are members of immediate and extended families…social capital is a resource that exists because of, and arises out of, these relationships." Moreover, social capital is increased, not reduced, through use, and, "Just as social capital can be diminished through lack of use (i.e. the lack of networking, communicative action, etc.) it can be actively destroyed" (p.9).

Surely a major component of social capital is that arising from the emotional ties within families in general and between parents and children in particular. As in other areas, if this phenomenon is ignored, not only are we failing to understand the issues, but we are also likely to be putting in place policies that are actually harmful to these overlooked relationships. Spellerberg states that, "The European perspective of social capital is that it is created in networks and relationships **outside the family**" (my emphasis, p.12). Even including family relationships within out definition, if we consider established parent-child relationships as social capital, then we must have difficulty with the idea, implicit in the census, that a parent can leave a household and be replaced by another adult.

IN SUMMARY

We have to decide whether or not we will acknowledge that families can be spread over more than one household. My own view is that the emotional links are commonly such that we cannot legitimately deny their existence.

If we acknowledge those links, then we have to refocus our analysis and policy structure accordingly. This will not be easy.

If we do not acknowledge families' inter-household links in all their dimensions, then I do not see how we can justify enforcing financial links alone, such as under the child support regime.

We have to be aware of the signals that we are giving to the members of our society, including its youngest members, and, in policy analysis, to consider the implications of these signals.

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Chapter Six

Keynote Address:
EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PRACTICE:
"WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN"

by Ian Shirley

INTRODUCTION

At the recent Knowledge Wave Conference in Auckland a thoughtful contribution was made by a secondary school student from Gisborne, Kesaia Waigth. Kesaia talked about housing being a symbol of spirit and she spoke of one street in her home town of Gisborne.

"There's a street I always go down to make me remember what it is I feel passionate about. The houses are sad. They are lived in but empty".

She went on to talk about how poverty "eats away at your soul and makes you ache". She concluded by questioning the purpose of the Knowledge Wave conference.

> "I can't put it into words, but I want to change it".

And then she quietly asked if that wasn't the overall purpose of the conference and the point underlying the rhetoric of a knowledge society?

Perhaps it was too much to expect of any conference in that it focused attention on the relevance of 'knowledge' and our ability to address major public issues such as housing, poverty and the neighbourhoods in which we live. But Kesaia went even further – she explicitly challenged participants to action – to change neighbourhoods – to change those living conditions that lead inevitably to material deprivation and a poverty of spirit.

The questions raised by this young Gisborne school student graphically capture the essence of a major research programme being conducted within the Institute of Public Policy and the New Zealand Institute of Family Studies – the programme is centred on evidence-based policy and practice and within the framework of the programme, the project of most interest to this conference focuses on the relationship between research and policy and on the nexus between research and practice – it sets out to identify *what works for children*?

Before I present an outline of the project (*what works for children?)* it is important to clarify

two major points. The first addresses the purpose of the project which I assume is consistent with the aspirations of delegates at this conference – despite our varied backgrounds and experiences, I assume that we, as statisticians, researchers, policy analysts and practitioners, are united by a common goal – namely, the economic and social well-being of this nations most precious resource – its children.

The second qualification concerns a series of constraints that present major obstacles to economic and social development in general and to the advancement of children and families in particular. These constraints fall into three major groups.

SCIENTIFIC TRADITIONS

The first stems from the capability of scientific research and the history of the scientific traditions, dominated as they have been by disciplinary boundaries and conventions and by a preoccupation (within the social sciences in particular) to study captive populations. These limitations can be traced back to the 4th century BC and to the distinction that was drawn by Aristotle between matter and spirit. It is a distinction that has been promulgated by scientists down through the ages in the belief that knowledge comes from analysing and reducing elements to a level at which they can be understood. If you want to understand the composition of water, you analyse the constituent parts – thus a basic principle of science is that smaller and smaller detail will give you knowledge about the whole. While this approach may be appropriate in the context of the natural sciences and in understanding our physical world, the same reductionist approach in the social sciences is clearly inappropriate in addressing human development. As each social science discipline has become more and more precise in the tradition of the natural sciences, so they have developed an expertise and language, which few can penetrate. To put it bluntly, there is now a significant group of scientists who know more and more about less and less and as a consequence the individual disciplines have become increasingly irrelevant in addressing the major questions that lie at the heart of economic and social development.

A related tendency concerns the preoccupation with captive populations. I referred to this tendency at a previous symposium (Shirley, 2001) in summarising the international literature on children – it is literature that is preoccupied with troublesome children and children in trouble. Historically speaking, the emphasis has been on pathology rather than resilience – on the culture of poverty rather than the culture of affluence – on the deviant, the poor and the dispossessed. As Heclo and Wildavski observe:

“less is known about the characteristic behaviour of civil servants and their political masters than about the fertility cults of ancient tribes”. We certainly know less about the customs and mores of finance officers and treasury (officials) than about witch doctors and faith healers, though each shares…the others function (Heclo and Wildavski, 1974:1).

Indeed there are some who may say that these functions are indistinguishable.

THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

A second series of constraints that need to be addressed concern the policy environment and the development patterns that have shaped the relationship between economic and social policy over time. These issues have been at the centre of a major research programme in which I have been engaged over many years. The focus of that programme centres on an examination of the way in which New Zealand abandoned the distinctive pattern of social policy that made this country the envy of the world especially in the decades following the 2nd World War.

The social contract at the centre of that development model was based on industrial conciliation and arbitration, the attachment of households to the labour market by means of employment, and the concept of the *Family Wage.*

Since the late 1980s the pattern of development has changed and there is now considerable evidence to show that the myopic pursuit of competitive individualism has effectively undermined the social contract that was at the core of the post war consensus. The fundamentals of the social contract were abandoned as artificial distinctions were drawn between social and economic policy. Social policy became the handmaiden of economic liberalisation dealing with problematic families and problematic children – Titmuss once referred to this approach as social 'plumbing'. Targeted programmes and punitive attitudes have dominated the social landscape and during the 1990s in particular the silo structure of Government Departments was reinforced with policy measures that focused on outputs rather than outcomes.

PRACTICE: INTERVENING IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A third set of constraints concern the delivery of social services and the programmes that are put in place to provide support for children and families. Judge Mick Brown canvassed many of these issues in his comprehensive review of the Department of Child, Youth and Family (Brown, 2000). There are two issues from that report that present as major constraints whenever we address the issue of services to children and families.

The first concerns the capacities of the social service sector to change the circumstances and/or behaviour of those families with whom they are working. Historically speaking, it is an ongoing dilemma for social service agencies and their practitioners in that the services they provide vacilate between reform and control and thus it is not surprising that this ambivalence is reflected in the profile of intervention services dominated as they are by remedial and rehabilitative functions rather than with prevention.

A related issue concerns the expertise of those who intervene in the lives of children and families and here it is often assumed (in the social services at least) that a kind heart, and a passion for the job, provides one with the credentials to practice. Many of those who work with families and children do not have the knowledge base or skills to make the decisions with which they are faced day after day – decisions that can literally mean the difference

between life and death – it is important to state in this respect that I am not confining my comments to social workers – the time has clearly arrived where we need to question the knowledge base and skills of Family Court Judges, Paedeatricians, Lawyers, Psychologists and the range of "professionals" who intervene in the lives of families and children – as in the case of the scientific traditions, a single disciplinary-based form of education and training is inadequate to deal with children as individuals, as members of a family, and as active participants in the neighbourhoods and communities to which they belong.

There are also a series of constraints under which agencies and practitioners work that need to be addressed and these include the short term competitive funding regime confronting voluntary agencies and the burden placed on managers who are continually engaged in raising capital for services, let alone development. An associated factor, that has been exacerbated by the fiscal stringencies of recent years, is the preoccupation of agency managers with outputs rather than outcomes. Some of us have been arguing for more than a decade that we need to develop programmes for families and children that have measurable outcomes and that is the task in which we are now engaged. Throughout the 1990s, as the New Zealand public has been entertained by a procession of second rate academics and one eyed American missionaries pontificating on issues such as welfare dependancy and lone parenthood, we have been developing a series of programmes aimed at giving substance to an agenda for children.

CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

The first phase in the project on evidence-based policy and practice began with a review of the international research examining good childhood outcomes. In conjunction with colleagues at the University of Auckland, we reviewed over 2000 studies of the child as an individual and as a member of a family as well as an examination of the environments in which children live (Shirley, Adair, Anderson, 1999).

The draft report focused on identifying those factors that lead to good childhood outcomes with particular emphasis on children as social actors, influencing as well as being influenced by, the worlds in which they live. The range of factors considered in the review included:

- those genetic and environmental qualities that condition human beings as they proceed through different stages of life toward 'having', 'loving', and 'being'
- those primary and secondary institutions with whom the individual engages in the process of development
- those historical and cultural interpretations of well being that can be linked to neighbourhoods and communities and to changing patterns of economic and social development. A preliminary overview was developed summarising the factors that lead to good outcomes for children and this is summarised in Appendix 1.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PRACTICE

The next phase of the project is part of a major research programme in which the Institute is engaged, focusing on evidence based policy and practice (Davies, Nutley and Smith, 2000). In order to address the constraints I referred to earlier in relation to research, policy and practice, the programme will:

- engage multi-disciplinary teams in each project
- adopt a development framework that effectively fuses social and economic policy, and
- draw conclusions from the wide spectrum of national and international research as to *what works and why.*

This is an ambitious agenda that will be judged, not only on the basis of research outputs, but more importantly on the way in which evidence is used in the development of policy and practice and ultimately as to the success or otherwise of these initiatives as measured by programme outcomes.

The central theme of the current project examines *the relationship between family research, policy and practice in New Zealand and comparative countries.* And underpinning this theme are two research questions:

- what is the place of evidence in the development of child and family policy? and
- what is the place of evidence in designing more effective interventions in the lives of families and children?.

The summary report of evidence-based projects that have worked (or not worked as the case may be) will not be completed until later this year but we are already seeing examples drawn from a range of OECD countries that are relevant to New Zealand. The Sure Start programme in Britain is one such example (Appendix II). The Early Development and Community Mapping project in British Columbia is another (Appendix III).

What is evident from an initial assessment of these programmes, is that we already have a considerable volume of evidence that can be assembled to suggest *what works for children*. Although obvious gaps remain, if we are prepared to use the best research available to reform current practice initiatives, then we can be more discerning in terms of what research is commissioned and we can prioritise those areas that will result in major advantages for children.

CHILD ABUSE

Take the issue of violence in children's lives. The negative impact of violence on childhood outcomes has been graphically illustrated by a wide range of studies, using a multitude of methodologies. We know that the combined effects of violence on television and through video games combine potently with the violence that some children experience in their homes. We know that witnessing violence against women has long-term consequences for

many children, as does sexual and physical abuse. We know that there is a clear relationship between violence against women and child abuse. (Hester, Pearson and Harwin, 2000; Wolfe, 1999).

We know that some interventions are most likely to be successful, (Guterman, 1999; Karoly et al., 1998). Namely those that are:

- Long-term
- Contextually embedded including home visiting services
- Multi-disciplinary
- Inter-generational: Pathways of services to women and children need to be interconnected but separate.
- Built on existing services
- Research orientated

Do we really need to learn more about the long-term effects of violence in children's lives? Do we really need to quantify how much violence against women affects childhood outcomes? Perhaps we would be better advised to invest in research that helps us understand how best to intervene in the 'interests' of children. If we know that high levels of emotional support from significant others can help mitigate the inter-generational transmission of violence against children (which we do) perhaps we need to put some of our scarce research resources into helping communities find new ways of providing more effective support.

Given the wealth of international evidence an examination of primary prevention initiatives is likely to yield significant results. The emphasis would be on evaluating prevention strategies (so that we can learn how to reduce the number of young children who are exposed to violence in the first place). It might include the repealing of Section 59 of the Crimes Act accompanied by a major public awareness campaign of authoritative parenting practice, as in Sweden. It might include measures to control the levels of violence on television and in interactive video games. Whatever, we choose to do, let's be sure that:

- We effectively evaluate (rather than just monitor) our efforts, so that we can learn from our successes and our mistakes. (It is a sad reflection on New Zealand, that the CYP&F Act, one of the foremost pieces of child protection legislation in the world, has never been – to this day – effectively evaluated).
- Develop initiatives as part of an overall strategy which means that the effect of one sector does not undermine the effect of another – in other words, we cannot afford to develop prevention strategies by transferring resources from child abuse programmes.

CHILD POVERTY

Another example relates to child poverty. The negative impact of poverty on childhood outcomes is graphically illustrated by a range of studies focusing on cognitive and physical development, verbal capacity and skills, IT test scores, academic readiness, educational achievement, and socio-emotional functioning. These studies provide strong evidence that

income poverty has a negative impact on the cognitive, academic and social/emotional functioning of children that goes well beyond genetically transmitted attributes. The most persuasive research stems from longitudinal studies that estimate the effects of family income on children's lives, independent of other conditions that might be related to growing up in a low income household. These studies by and large isolate the significance of family income by taking into account the effects of maternal age at the child's birth, maternal education, marital status and ethnicity (Bradbury and Jantti, 1999).

The conclusions drawn from these studies are difficult to refute. Family income has a substantial impact on the individual well-being of children and adolescents. Children who experience chronic poverty over a period of several years suffer the worst outcomes. These outcomes include high mortality rates and diminished physical health, significantly lower cognitive abilities and poorer educational achievements. Because children are dependant on others, they enter or avoid poverty by virtue of their family's economic circumstances and these circumstances are particularly relevant during the pre school years when poverty seems to exert its greatest impact.

The economic circumstances of children cannot be confined to household income alone. In one of the few comparative studies of childhood, Kennedy, Whiteford and Bradshaw (1996) compare the economic circumstances of children in 10 developed countries, by analysing the level and distribution of household disposable cash income and then combining these results with income concepts incorporating the value of 'non cash' benefits. 'Benefits' included government health and education programmes, health insurance coverage as provided by employers, and benefits arising from home ownership. The study revealed wide variations between countries in the economic circumstances of children and in particular, it highlighted significant national variations in the proportion of children living in poverty.

These variations between countries as to the level and extent of child poverty, change according to a range of mediating factors including: the demographic profile of the population; labour force participation and unemployment rates; earnings levels; income tax and transfer payments; as well as the value of non cash benefits. What has not changed over recent years leads to two significant conclusions:

1. It is not true that all countries are experiencing increases in poverty and inequality as the result of international economic pressures and demographic change. Countries are making choices through their social and fiscal policies and some are doing more than others to protect families from these forces. (It is a well established fact that among OECD Countries 'regardless of definition and family type, the economic circumstances of children are worst in the United States and best in Sweden' (Ibid 1996;165).

2. When the focus shifts to an examination of the economic circumstances of children versus other populations and groups, then both historical and comparative evidence suggests that children are the most seriously disadvantaged population. That is why some

of the most ‘progressive’ countries with respect to children’s policy focus on the well being of children irrespective of family or household structures.

How much more evidence do we need? With limited scientific resources and capacities, do we in New Zealand need to develop a poverty line? Do we need New Zealand based research to establish over and over again that children living in poor households in poor neighbourhoods are materially and socially disadvantaged? I seriously doubt the value of further research along these lines simply to satisfy those who want to argue poverty lines and research methodologies. Like Kesaia at the Knowledge Wave conference, surely the objective is to change the living conditions of children living in poor homes and poor neighbourhoods.

Likewise, in responding to child abuse, surely the primary objective is to protect children – to make them safe. If that means taking children from family and whanau, then so be it. There is no justification for assigning guardianship to a family knowing that the environment to which these children are being assigned is abusive, overcrowded, or under resourced. The interests of the child and the interests of society demand that the protection of children is paramount.

CONCLUSION

The research programme on evidence-based policy and practice is forcing us to distinguish between what works and what doesn’t. In the process we are coming to the realisation that we have a great deal of accumulated evidence from all over the world that can influence judgements as to what research is conducted and for what purpose. We have also learned very quickly that we have major gaps in our knowledge base and that in itself has been an extremely important aspect of the programme.

One of the first changes we have made to the scope of the programme is to recognise the significance of Policy-based evidence and Practice-based evidence. In other words the relationship between evidence and policy and evidence and practice is not a one way street. There are extremely important lessons to be learned from the accumulated wisdom and experiences of those working in the policy environment and from those practitioners working with children and families – including children themselves. Perhaps we should have recognised those realities at the outset?

APPENDIX 1: THE FACTORS THAT LEAD TO GOOD CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES

The child as an Individual	**The Child as a member of a Family**	**Children and their Environment**
• Genetic endowment	• Parental warmth and attachment	• Adequate household income
• Physical health	• A supportive and loving marital relationship	• Housing appropriate to age and space requirements of the child
• Language	• Consistent and non-abusive discipline	• A physical infrastructure capable of supporting the neighbourhood population
• Age-appropriate attainment of cognitive	• Provision of learning opportunities for social and cognitive development	• The provision of utilities in the form of water, sanitation, power, transport and communication
• Self regulating behaviour	• Realistic expectations and support for competence	• "Investment" in the social and cultural capacities of the community
• Emotional well being	• Structured, secure, caring, home environment	• The provision of education, health and social services
ABSENCE OF:	**ABSENCE OF:**	**ABSENCE OF:**
• Developmental abnormalities	• Domestic violence	• Poverty
• Malnutrition	• Chronic stress arising out of conflict between parents and between parents and children	• Homelessness • 'Work poor' households • 'Sink' schools
• Injurious behaviour such as the use of teratogens	• Physical and emotional abuse	• Physically and socially deprived neighbourhoods

APPENDIX 2

SURE START: EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

- A British Government initiative aimed at addressing child poverty

- Originated from a cross-sectoral review of services for young children

- Substantial funding (equivalent of nearly 200 Million New Zealand Dollars) started in 1999 with 60 demonstration targeted neighbourhoods – recently extended to include another 190 neighbourhoods with between 400 and 800 children per neighbourhood.

- Communities and government agencies within targeted geographical areas providing:

  - outreach and home visiting programmes
  - support services for families and children
  - quality early childcare, learning and play facilities
  - community healthcare, including information on child health and development
  - support for children with special needs

APPENDIX 3

The Early Development and Community Asset Mapping Project

This research project, developed by a team at the University of British Columbia, provides a platform of information from which to develop policies and community-level interventions to promote improved outcomes for children (Hertzman, Kohen, McLean, Evans & Dunn, 2001). The project uses the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a group-level measure aimed at determining children's readiness for school on five domains:

- Physical health and well-being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive development
- Communication skills and general knowledge

The purpose is examine populations of children in different communities so as to help communities assess how well they are going in supporting young children and their families, and to monitor changes over time. Maps of information from the EDI are superimposed onto maps of community assets and populations of young children. They found between neighbourhood differences to be very large particularly in terms of language and cognitive development.

They are able to supply detailed information on children's early development in relation to community assets and neighbourhood characteristics e.g:

- Sociodemographics
- Social housing
- Residential transiency
- Accessibility and availability of different types of child care provision
- Accessibility of local public libraries and rates of circulation of books for young children by neighbourhood
- Secondary prevention programmes in communities.

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Chapter Seven

Background paper

THE NZSCHF DEFINITION OF "FAMILY" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

by Stuart Birks

INTRODUCTION

The term "family" has many meanings. These can depend on social, cultural and economic context, and they vary over time as societies change. Policies are determined and implemented based on an understanding derived also from the available information. Definitions of "family" for the purposes of data gathering and analysis can therefore be very important in shaping our understanding of the issues and the effectiveness of policies.

This paper focuses on the definition of family found in Statistics New Zealand (1995), (NZSCHF), which is based on households and relationships between household members. It is the classification used in the census and elsewhere. This perspective has implications where relationships are not recognized, such as for same sex couples in the past, where families are not confined to one household, such as with Maori and other extended families, and where parents of dependent children live apart. To add to the confusion, terms are used in the classification that have very different meanings in common usage. The commonly understood meaning of extended family incorporates members of several households, but not so in the NZSCHF. A household focus results in terms such as "two parent family" and "one parent family", with only household members being considered to be family members. Children whose parents live apart and who spend time with both parents would be more accurately termed "two home children". Such an option is explicitly excluded from the NZSCHF. Even when the children spend equal amounts of time at each residence, they are assumed to live in one, and the other parent is not recognized as a parent. It can be quite misleading to use households as the basic unit for analysis. People can be active members of more than one household, and there can be sharing of resources and income between households. To illustrate the problems, this paper will focus on families where parents live apart.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions come from the glossary of the NZSCHF:

*An **extended family** is a group of related people who usually reside together and consists of:*

- *a family nucleus and one or more other related people; or*

- *two or more related family nuclei, with or without other related people*

*A **familial relationship** is a relationship in which a person is related to another household member by blood, marriage (registered or de facto) or adoption.*

*A **family nucleus** consists of two or more people, who are members of the same household, and who comprise either a couple, or at least one parent role/child relationship, or both.*

All people in a household under the age of 18 who are not employed full-time are classified as a child in a family nucleus in that household except when they have a partner or child (or children) of their own in the household or do not usually reside with members of that household.

***Note:** For this definition, the term "family nucleus" is used to clarify the specific type of family group that is being referred to. In the classifications, the term "family" is used as an abbreviation of "family nucleus".* (p.44)

It is noteworthy that the basis of these definitions is the household. Even to be considered an extended family, it is required that the people usually live together in the same household. Data are also gathered on *"the relationships (marital, familial and non-familial) the respondent has to all the people with whom he or she normally resides"* (p.46). Once again, this is household-based. We see the same for parenting:

*A **parent role** is the role of a person who usually resides with his or her natural, step, adopted or foster child (or children). A parent role can also be the role of people who provide care for household members under the age of 18 who are not employed full-time and do not have a partner or child (or children) of their own in the household. A guardian is regarded as a person who is in a parent role.* (p.47)

DISTORTIONS

There are major inaccuracies arising from the use of definitions that consider families to be a subset of households.

For example, there is a distinction drawn between activities performed for people who live in the same household and people who do not. There is a large number of families where the parents do not live together in the same household, as indicated by the more than 200,000 parents who are paying child support.[11] According to the definitions, non-custodial parents do not live in the same household as their children. Their time spent caring for their children is therefore classified differently. As the criterion is simply one of household (activities "performed for persons living in the same household"), the relationship of a caregiver to a child is not identified. It is therefore not possible to determine whether a caregiver in the same

[1] Inland Revenue Department (1999) states that, at 31 August 1999, there were 200,738 persons paying child support, in relation to about 300,000 children.

household as the child is a parent, a step-parent, someone in the parenting role, or another adult (older sibling, cousin, aunt, or uncle, say) living in the household. Similarly a non-custodial parent's time with a child would be classified in activities "performed for persons outside the respondent's household".

The household focus also results in inaccurate information on parents and families. For example, two parents living apart could be sharing the parenting of their children, but the children would be considered to live in only one household. If neither parent had re-partnered, the census would therefore record one of them as a sole parent and the other as a single person household. If the custodial parent had re-partnered, then the census would record the arrangement as a two-parent family, or a couple with children, or a couple with dependents. The new partner is considered a parent. Not only is there no record of a possibly active natural parent living in a different household, but there is no means of distinguishing between a natural parent living in a household and a step-parent living in that household. Once a couple separate, according to the census, one parent loses his/her parent status, and can be simply replaced by a new partner. This is a questionable assumption. Fleming (1999) suggests that there is a clear distinction between natural parents and step-parents:

Use of the "step" kin terms might be expected to transfer the cultural blueprint for a parent-child or sibling relationship through a social fiction of relatedness, but in the majority of families this did not occur. (p.94)

For many of the children in the study, their real mother or father was very much a part of their lives even if they did not live with them all the time, and their parent's new partner was not thought of as having a parental type of relationship with them at all. A belief frequently repeated in interviews was that "children can only have one father and one mother, and (my partner's) children already have a father (or a mother) who may not live with them but who they know well and see often." Even when the child's natural parent was no longer in touch, a parent's new partner did not necessarily take the place of that parent by assuming a full parental role. (p.95)

However, according to the NZSCHF, after separation the children are assumed to simply continue to live with one parent, and have no more contact with the other parent than a child in an intact family might have with someone in another household.

2001 CENSUS

The problems will persist with the 2001 census, as demonstrated by the following answers to written questions in the House:

QUESTION: Given the Government's wish to recognise the diversity of family types and to encourage the parenting involvement of both parents when they live apart, why does question 41 of the 2001 Individual Census Form refer to children according to membership of a household rather than membership of a family?

REPLY: The categories for the activity question (41) in the 2001 Census of Population and Dwellings have been designed to achieve consistency with the definitions used in the 1998/99 Time Use Survey. In the Time Use Survey, reliable data was collected on the context of different activities, including who [sic] activities are done for. The Time Use Survey distinguished between children and adults, between people who live in the household and people who live in other households, and whether children or adults were being cared for because they were ill or had a disability. The census activities question maintains these classification boundaries, and will therefore provide data complementary to the Time Use Survey results. [22]

QUESTION: Given the Government's wish to acknowledge the diversity of family types, why does question 4 of the 2001 Dwelling Census Form fail to explicitly recognise 'blended' families?
REPLY: The Census of Population and Dwellings is not a suitable vehicle for collecting information on blended families and shared parenting arrangements when parents live apart. The complexity of this information is such that it is very difficult to measure accurately with a self-completed census questionnaire. The basic principle of the census is to count every person once. Family concepts that extend beyond the household would result in some people being included in more than one family. This would lead to double-counting and would make it impossible to measure the number and characteristics of families in a consistent and meaningful way. A separate interviewer-administered survey, would be needed in order to collect quality information on blended families and shared parenting arrangements. [33]

It is said that quality information can be obtained with an interview-administered survey. The Time-Use Survey therefore offered such an opportunity. It seems, however, that the survey was structured to be compatible with the census, and then the census was structured to match the survey. Alternatively, perhaps, these are merely excuses, and no other definitions were considered.

The Minister suggests that the current approach does "measure the number and characteristics of families in a consistent and meaningful way". Approximately 300,000 children, roughly a quarter of all children in New Zealand, have a parent liable to pay child support for them. In other words, they are not living primarily with that parent. Is it meaningful to ignore that situation? It can result in inaccurate data on household composition and costs, on time spent caring for children, on the nature of parenting relationships within households, and, as will be shown below, on household income. A large portion of the household data gathered for the census will therefore be inaccurate. It is not possible to identify which specific households are affected, and therefore ALL census household data are suspect.

[2] Question for written answer: due 27 November 2000, no. 20556, Dr Muriel Newman to the Minister of Statistics. Hon. Laila Harre, Minister of Statistics, replied.

[3] Question for written answer: due 27 November 2000, no. 20558, Dr Muriel Newman to the Minister of Statistics. Hon. Laila Harre, Minister of Statistics, replied.

INCOMES

Where children spend time with parents who live in separate households, census data overstate the membership of one household and understate the membership of the other. This could be important in comparing household situations, for example, because the assumed costs would be overstated for one and understated for the other.

Income information in the 2001 census is requested in questions 25 and 26. They are almost identical to following questions, numbers 35 and 36 in the 1996 census:

Question 35

Tick as many circles as you need to show ALL the ways you yourself got income in ***the 12 months ending today.***

..

Domestic Purposes Benefit.

other sources of income, COUNTING support payments from people who do not live in your household

For the custodial parent, child support is included as income. It is not clear whether child support should be included as income for the parent or for the children. Technically, child support is for the children, but it is also for the custodial parent when used to offset Domestic Purposes Benefit payments. Even where child support payments exceed the DPB so there is no net government contribution, a custodial parent still collecting the DPB would be classified as receiving a government benefit.

Question 36

From ALL the sources of income you ticked in question 35, what will the TOTAL income be

- *that you yourself got*
- *before tax or anything else was taken out of it*
- *in the 12 months that will end on 31 March 1996?*

Income for the custodial parent is gross income including child support, but without acknowledging that child support receipts are tax free. Income for the liable parent is before deduction of child support and without recognition of the taxes paid on child support by the liable parent.

As a result, the gross income of a parent in receipt of child support is understated by the amount of tax that would be due on that amount of after-tax income. In comparison to someone not in receipt of child support, this is an understatement of up to 64 per cent of child support received, given the top marginal tax rate of 39 per cent.[4] In 2000-1 the maximum formula assessed child support is approximately $17,000, which would give a maximum

[4] This gross income measure is also used elsewhere. Other than the DPB, any benefit entitlements which are based on gross income will therefore be overpaid.

gross income understatement of nearly $11,000. In most cases it would be markedly less than this.

There is no recording of child support payments by liable parents, so no income adjustment can be made to allow for these payments. The gross income of paying parents will include both child support and tax paid on that support. In comparison to someone not paying child support, a paying person's equivalent gross income is overstated by the amount of child support paid, plus associated tax. In other words, the income is overstated by up to 164 per cent of the child support paid, or up to $28,000.[55] In a worst-case situation (living alone, paying maximum child support, and with the maximum assessed income), the census data will overstate the actual (child-support adjusted) gross income available to the household by 70 per cent.

Incidentally, given this method of measuring gross income, child support is counted as part of the income of the liable parent and also as part of the income of the recipient parent. Hence census income data involve double-counting of child support and therefore overstating gross incomes overall.

So we see that household composition data display a bias towards those assumed to have the children, and household income data show a bias towards those assumed not to have the children. These distortions reinforce each other such that, for example "sole parent" households appear worse off than they are, and liable "single person" households appear better off than they are. Income distribution studies using such data are therefore biased.

There is a further component to this bias that is not recognised by the census questions. Changing household composition through separation is associated with property settlements. The nature of these settlements is such that one party may receive a lump sum, whereas the other retains an entitlement to future income. This often arises the case of superannuation. Should someone receiving a lump sum in lieu of income be considered not to have any superannuation income? Should all superannuation received by a superannuitant be considered as income if that person has made a lump sum payment to an ex-spouse on the basis of the superannuation entitlement? This highlights the problem of definition of income, and difficulties of separating out income and capital.

We should be careful in our interpretation of census data when used to show the relative positions of custodial and non-custodial parents, of households with and without children, and of "single parent" and "two parent" households where different benefits are received.

The family in international conventions

The household-based concept of family suits current data gathering, but it does not match the view of family found in international conventions. For example, in Article 18.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it states that, *"States Parties shall use their*

[5] The overstatement of effective gross income could also affect (i.e. reduce) benefit entitlements.

best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child." Similarly, Article 16(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family; and relevantly they are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

This view of family, based on blood links and relationships between people, mirrors the common view of family. In fact, for many people, it may represent what they assume the official data mean by family. It may also be the assumed interpretation by those involved in policymaking and implementation. If so, they would be wrong.

FAMILY STRUCTURES ACCORDING TO THE IMMIGRATION SERVICE

New Zealand Immigration Service (2000) discusses the definition of family in the context of family sponsored immigration policy. It allows for the possibility that the concept of 'family' may differ over ethnic groups, considers families in terms of key relationships and obligatory ties, and focuses on relationships involving high levels of interdependence. Clearly this is far removed from a household based definition of family. Under the latter, a 'family sponsored immigration policy' would be meaningless. The point is made very clearly in the statement that, *"families can ... extend across more than one country, while still functioning as a family"*. Similarly:

While co-residence over some periods of life can reinforce obligations, co-residence is not a key characteristic of highly interdependent relationships. Families attempt to maintain obligations with family either within or between countries and despite living apart.

While separated families within New Zealand cannot be readily identified, the Immigration Service, in its context, considers separation of families to be potentially harmful:

Migration brings with it costs as well as opportunities, with some lamenting their inability to fulfil their obligations, especially in the early years. There are indications that the inability to fulfil obligations impacts negatively on people's health and can cause tensions and conflicts.

The Family Court, with its "one home base" approach, has a very different view of family conflict (Birks, 2001).

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL POLICY (1999)

This publication contains information on outcome measures related to families. The data are from the census, and therefore are based on NZSCHF definitions. This can be problematic, as indicated in the discussion above.

One indicator of low income (on p.5) gives the percentage of children with equivalent family income in the lowest two quintiles by family type. Two family types are considered, one parent and two parent. It suggests that a very high proportion of children in one parent

families fall into these low income categories. However it has been shown above that the income of these families might be understated, and the income of some others may be overstated. Both these effects would distort the income categories. In addition, the costs of the children may be spread over more than one household, thus bringing into question the equivalence measures used.

On page 7 of the publication, family circumstances are discussed. The focus is again on whether children live with one or two parents. It is suggested that, *"Family resources and the amount of parental attention available to children are likely to be greater when there are two parents"*. While this may be correct when there are two natural parents in the household, the same does not necessarily apply if only one of the "parents" is actually a parent to the children. Moreover, children might get more attention from two parents who are living apart than when they are together. This could arise if, for example, the parents have not re-partnered and are each fully focused on the children during their time with them.

EXTENDED FAMILIES

McPherson (2000) describes a study of extended families in New Zealand. Her interpretation of the term "extended family" incorporates a view of family which extends beyond one household. Her chosen definition is:

Being related by blood (cosanguinal), marriage (affinal) or formal social convention such as adoption, or de facto marriage but beyond the nuclear family household of spouse or parents and dependent children…Definition of extended family for calculation of size, in addition to the preceding definition, is "aged 18 years and over, who you know of, and regard as family". (p.71)

She mentions in-laws (p.77), and the effects of divorce and remarriage on first-degree and inter-generational relationships (p.81). The family connection is taken from the perspective of the adult survey participants. Non-custodial parent respondents' children under the age of 18 would not count as part of their family. In reality, from the point of view of children, even in the event of parental separation both parents and their extended families continue to be part of their extended families. A custodial parent may no longer consider the ex-partner and associated relatives to be part of the family, but these people and perhaps the children may continue to see a connection. If the children have ongoing contact with the non-custodial parent, then clearly there is actual support being given and perhaps additional functioning extended family relationships. Given the large number of children with parents who live apart, it would be inappropriate to disregard these connections.

CONCLUSION

As in reality families are not all single household, there are issues of family members spending time in more than one household, and income and wealth transfers between households. Neither of these are adequately addressed in the data organised according to the NZSCHF. This applies to census data, and similar problems arise with other data, such as that

gathered for the Time-Use Survey. The household focus leads to incorrect perception, and an inbuilt bias in terminology, data gathering and analysis. It focuses attention on “one and two parent families”. This perspective and the associated distorted data can have a marked effect on policy and research. We should at least recognise the limitations of the data. It would be more accurate in many cases to base policy on the concept of “one and two home children”, for example. Changes cannot be made to the 2001 census, but there will be opportunities to gather appropriate data from existing and proposed longitudinal studies.

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