

This is nothing new

Child protection concerns and poverty

Jane Thomson

The title encapsulates the argument advanced in this paper. The author argues that the associative link between child protection concerns and poverty, although well accepted, is not incorporated into practice with families. The paper presents the results of a small scale qualitative study undertaken in the two North Queensland regional cities of Townsville and Mackay. The author undertook interviews with ten (10) Family Services Officers (FSOs) in the Department of Families (DoF).

Interviews revealed that FSOs agreed that family poverty is a stressor for child maltreatment. Participants differed in the extent to which they ascribed personal or societal responsibility for these family circumstances. The paper concludes with four recommendations to deal with family poverty in a child protection practice and policy context. The paper argues that more can and should be done to help children and families in this regard.

Writers in the field of child welfare have confirmed the link that exists between child protection concerns and poverty within the child's/young person's family (Jordan, 1974; Gordon, 1988; Callahan & Lumb, 1995; CAFWAA, 2002; Tregeagle, 1985).

This paper presents findings from a small North Queensland research study that sought to explore the understandings of Family Services Officers (FSOs) in the Queensland Department of Families (DoF) regarding the influence of knowledge of family poverty on their practice. It appears from the literature that the link between child protection concerns and poverty is well understood. What appears to be needed in 2003 is re-examination of the links with the exploration of strategies for action.

PERSONAL PRACTICE FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

For all of my adult life, I have been committed to a structural analysis of social problems. My work as a social work practitioner, and my community service and research area of interest as an academic social worker, has been child protection. Despite its limitations as a reformist project, social work, with its emphasis on understanding the basis of oppression in social conditions and pursuing social justice for all (Mullaly, 1997), has given me an avenue to apply this analysis to the area of child protection.

This research project then is located firmly within my own value framework. My perspective is informed by postmodernist understandings (Agger 1991; Laird, 1995; Leonard, 1997). However I remain fundamentally committed to a child protection philosophy that challenges the structural basis of family problems. To do so does not deny the importance of personal agency and of the fact that people make personal choices for which they must take responsibility. However the extent to which poverty affects parents' ability to provide material and emotional nurturance to their children is illustrated by McCallum (2002: 3) who states:

Poverty has many more dimensions than income alone, its tentacles burrow deep and certain groups are particularly affected. These include long term unemployed people, students, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians and sole parents.

Dr Jane Thomson
School of Social Work and Community Welfare
James Cook University, Townsville, Qld 4811
Email: Jane.Thomson@jcu.edu.au

THE FACE OF FAMILY POVERTY IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

According to McCallum (2002: 3):

Whichever way you measure it, the levels of poverty in Australia are unacceptable. Too many people confront a scarcity of resources that prevents their social and economic participation. They are on incomes too low to make ends meet, locked out of a job, living in communities with limited services and industry, unable to afford adequate housing, or in poor physical and mental health.

In 2001, a Smith Family Report found family poverty to be widespread in Australia. The key findings of the Report in relation to children and families were as follows:

- 14.9 per cent of our children and 12.3 per cent of our adults live in poverty;
- The rate of child poverty declined in the first half, but rose sharply in the second half of the 1990s;
- Sole parents remain the group most at risk of being in poverty.
(Harding, Lloyd & Greenwell, 2001: 2).

This paper was strongly criticized by Saunders (2002) on the grounds of methodological differences. While his critique is not central to the subject of this paper, Saunders' concerns were substantial. However the Smith Family Report is the most recent review of family poverty nationally.

In my own state, the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) has implemented a *Fair Queensland* campaign in recognition of the fact that:

There is a growing gap between rich and poor. More and more working people live in poverty but at the same time executive salaries and bonuses are skyrocketing (QCOSS, 2001).

Additionally, in 1999, QCOSS commissioned a report into poverty in Queensland, where families were found to be a group vulnerable to poverty, due to the unique mix of pressures experienced at this stage of the life cycle.

LITERATURE ON THE LINK BETWEEN CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS AND FAMILY POVERTY

Poverty affecting children is very widespread in its impact (McClelland, 2000) and the existence of stressors described above can tip many parents over the edge into harming their children. The literature in relation to the link between child protection concerns and poverty is voluminous (Pelton, 1981, 1987; Gelles, 1992; Jordan, 1996; Tomison 1996a; Parton, 2002; CAFWAA, 2002). It is a long-standing literature (Gil, 1970; Jordan, 1974) and this point is very relevant to the issues in this paper and relates to the title. What is new about making this link? What has changed despite our knowledge? Why do we continue to pursue approaches to practice that fail to challenge poverty as an issue in child protection?

Tregeagle (1985) examined the link between abuse, neglect and poverty. She noted a strong association and a professional resistance to using this knowledge.

Gordon (1988) makes the point, crucial to this paper, that poverty does not 'cause' child harm. The great majority of parents battling against poverty do not harm their children. Conversely, not all families in which children experience harm are families in poverty. Additionally, as Tomison (1996a) notes, the debate continues as to whether poverty is implicated in child maltreatment because it precipitates maltreatment, or whether it is due to greater scrutiny by public agencies that results in over reporting in relation to poor families.

James (2000: 4) writes of poverty as a risk factor for child abuse:

Risk factors are those elements which put children's safety, welfare or well being at risk. They do not necessarily lead to child abuse and neglect, but they make it more likely.

There appears to be an institutional blindness to the role played by poverty in the risk of children experiencing significant harm or being at risk of future significant harm by care givers. There is one issue among many that illustrates this blindness.

Why do we continue to pursue approaches to practice that fail to challenge poverty as an issue in child protection?

Around Australia, there is considerable preoccupation with the over representation of indigenous children and young people in all stages of the child protection system. Indigenous children and young people are more likely to be subject to notification of concerns of maltreatment, more likely to have concerns substantiated, and more likely to be on child protection orders (SNAICC, 2002). Indigenous communities are chronically and drastically disadvantaged in contrast to the population as a whole. They are the poorest of the poor.

As Elliott and Sultmann (2002: 14) state, this over representation:

... appears to have its genesis in the lack of effective measures to address the broader social issues facing Indigenous families and communities.

CAFWAA (2002: 36) goes further, stating that in relation to the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

Poverty and disadvantage are the major causes of child removal, not inappropriate parenting.

This disadvantage contributes to a constellation of risk factors affecting indigenous children. This over representation will continue while there is no end to the poverty and disadvantage being experienced. A concentration on the over representation of indigenous children and young people without an appreciation of the underlying issues will perpetuate this blindness.

The great majority of parents battling against poverty do not harm their children. Conversely, not all families in which children experience harm are families in poverty.

METHODOLOGY

As I have argued in the preceding section, it appears to be very difficult to tackle poverty as a stressor in children experiencing harm or being at risk of harm, at a child protection practice level. I was interested to explore the understandings that child protection workers have of the links, and to interview them as to what they do in practice when they are engaged in child protection interventions with families. The approach adopted was qualitative. As I wanted to explore the practice experience of workers I considered it appropriate to choose a paradigm that allowed me to ask them. I therefore chose an interpretivist paradigm (Bryman, 2001). This paradigm was appropriate to the study design. It allowed me to understand the ways in which workers shaped their child protection practice in relation to their awareness of family poverty.

As Bryman (2001: 264) notes, within this approach:

The stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants.

May (1997: 38) describes the interpretivist paradigm as examination of:

...the commonsense methods that people use in making sense of their social environments.

I involved the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People in a supportive capacity and I believe this connection was crucial to my obtaining Departmental permission to proceed with the study.

Once approval had been granted centrally in Brisbane, the two regional directors assisted me to make contact at North Queensland area office level in order to obtain participants for the study. I attended staff meetings of the Mackay, Townsville and Thuringowa area offices to brief staff about the project and this gave FSOs an opportunity to choose to be involved. I requested that staff initiate email contact with

me if they were willing to participate. By proceeding in this way, individuals did not have to be identified as having volunteered to take part in the study, thereby ensuring confidentiality.

I organised individual research interview appointments. I employed a qualitative interview approach. I interviewed ten (10) FSOs. Within DoF, people from a range of social science backgrounds are employed as FSOs. Of the ten I interviewed, eight (8) were social workers and two had psychology qualifications (but were not registered psychologists). All were female.

The interviews were conducted in 2000 and 2001. They took place in the regional Queensland centres of Townsville and Mackay, in interview rooms in the respective area offices, and took approximately two hours. Interview questions were open ended and the style allowed for a free flowing discussion of the participants' practice. Broad theme areas for the questions were in relation to:

- the extent to which the participants saw poverty as an issue in families where child protection concerns exist;
- the extent to which poverty is caused by personal agency or societal factors;
- links with drug and alcohol use;
- solutions, both in the child protection practice context and by way of broader policy responses.

Interviews were taped and later transcribed. They were analysed by coding responses under a number of broad themes which corresponded with the questions asked (May, 1997). Pseudonyms have been adopted to protect participants' privacy.

Limitations of the methodology

I acknowledge that a limitation of this approach is that self-selecting individuals may have been particularly interested in the topic, their practice may reflect that and therefore they may be somewhat different from those who did not take part.

Strengths of the methodology

It is precisely because of the nature of the study that the methodology also has strengths. I was interested to elicit how it is that front line workers see the problems affecting families in poverty whose children are the subject of concerns about the harm or risk of harm that they are experiencing in their families. There appeared to be no other way than to ask them.

'YOU WATCH THEM GO UNDER': FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

This was Anna's reflection on the problems faced by families. All of the workers interviewed identified poverty as an issue in children experiencing maltreatment and coming into the child protection system, either on child protection orders or on protective supervision. Some were more

qualified in their support for the link. Some saw the problems as societal, while others saw it as more reflective of poor parental personal decision-making and priorities.

Interviews bore out the fact highlighted previously in this paper, that the link between poverty and child maltreatment is not causal, but is associative. In the words of Leanne:

Poverty is not a cause of child abuse but if you look at the majority of families where there is child abuse, there is certainly financial difficulty.

According to Anna:

The child protection cases that aren't on orders, if we could actually have cash for that, these people haven't got to the point where they really need their children removed, but they are really struggling, they are at that early stage; it is awful because sometimes you watch them go under and that is because we haven't been able to put enough stuff out there.

In Queensland, there are minimal provisions available to fund this type of support, but these do not compensate for the major long-term disadvantage experienced by such families.

Neglect, with its serious consequences, is strongly associated with poverty. Stating that 'we get the majority who do have financial difficulties or come from the poorer areas of town', Leanne went on to say:

I would say all the notifications we get have got some aspects of neglect in them.

For Anna, in many of the families seen by workers in the Department:

Usually those children are subject to extreme neglect, so poverty is a major issue and they (parents) can't get themselves out of that rut.

Four of the workers interviewed stated that while poverty is a major issue, it is created by parents' behaviour 'as they spend their money on drugs'. Tomison (1996b: 3) states, 'increased emphasis has been placed on the association between substance abuse and family violence as a whole'. The interaction between drug abuse, poverty and child maltreatment is a complex one. As Suzanne said, 'there are a million reasons why people take drugs'. However the fact that there is a link between drug use and poverty / poverty and drug use is documented (Tomison, 1996b) and confirmed by the workers interviewed in this study. Workers felt that there were situations where money that could have been spent on support of children was spent on alcohol and other drugs.

According to Janet:

Some of our kids don't get simple things like they don't get to go on school camps because sometimes parents can't afford it and sometimes that money is spent on alcohol ... kids are distraught...

Similarly, Deborah stated that:

For some kids poverty is an issue when the financial resources are being used to say support drug and alcohol habits. The kids seem to miss out on a lot of material things. ... I am struck by how impoverished kids' lives are when a parent has a significant habit – where their fixation is on keeping that habit and they are not in a position to meet the kids' needs.

These views are borne out by the CAFWAA Report (2002: 9):

Parental drug use is bringing more children to the attention of protective services and into care.

In Marianne's view, the effect of drug problems was far reaching. There was evidence from her practice that maltreatment as a child can result in misusing alcohol or drugs as an adult:

Certainly some kids who are traumatized go on to lead amazing lives but I guess I feel that lots of them end up being particularly vulnerable to risks as adults and either get caught up in violent relationships or get caught in the drug and alcohol cycles as a way to numb their pain.

Single parenthood is strongly correlated with family poverty (QCOSS, 1999; Keegan Eamon, 2001). Participants noted that children in such families are vulnerable because they are more likely to have limited resources (Callahan & Lumb, 1995) and single parents are more likely to 'lash out' in frustration because there is no other adult to relieve the pressures. While the link between poverty and child maltreatment is present, it is hard to decide definitively what role single parenthood plays. Another confounding issue is that children living in two parent families experience significant levels of harm. Where domestic violence is present, as is frequently the case where child protection concerns exist (Mendes, 1999), the ongoing emotional harm to children of witnessing such violence and being caught up in the dynamics of family violence is only beginning to be understood.

There appears to be an institutional blindness to the role played by poverty in the risk of children experiencing significant harm or being at risk of future significant harm by care givers.

Participants were mindful of the ways in which poverty reached beyond lack of income in its effects. FSOs spoke of children and young people being denied life-enriching opportunities to maximize their potential and 'the cycle continues' (Kathy). In this regard, FSOs were very critical of schools for doing less than they could to help children and young people in poverty.

In Melanie's words:

Schools won't make the effort to keep the communication open. Poor parents feel excluded from events such as parent-teacher nights. They feel intimidated, locked out; they feel they are so stupid that they couldn't possibly understand what the teacher is saying.

Janet went on:

Kids have to fit the mould and if they don't, the schools don't want them. They get embarrassed if they don't have uniforms or lunches, they don't want to go to school, they feel the stigma of being poor. Mum relents and lets them stay home and the cycle continues. There is a level of bullying from teachers. Many young people feel angry, that they are not listened to.

In continuing the theme of poverty impacting beyond income, Marianne said:

I find it difficult to separate the impact of economic disadvantage from the impact of other disadvantages that families that we work with often have. And there is lots of co-existing disadvantage ... It often seems like it is the whole package that results in families struggling and us becoming involved.

Suzanne and Margaret were workers who ascribed more societal than personal responsibility for poverty and child maltreatment. For me, Margaret's words sum up the issues:

Kids like the ones the Department deals with are also our future, they are the forgotten ones, and their futures can be very bleak. There is a social denial of the problems facing many of the families and young people the Department works with.

IF YOU COULD WAVE A MAGIC WAND? IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are four major implications with specific recommendations that are presented in this section for further consideration. Broadly it is my conclusion from undertaking this small scale study, that there is much more that can be done:

- to strengthen the material capacity of parents to care for their children; and
- to highlight poverty in families as a child protection practice issue.

The four areas discussed in this section relate to the two points above.

Whole of government approach to child protection

While the Department of Families is the lead agency with statutory responsibility for child protection in Queensland, meaningful child protection involves integration and co-ordination among a range of government departments. In relation to the findings from this study, the issue of assisting parents with drug issues appears particularly pressing. I applaud the policy efforts being undertaken to promote the

whole of government approach. I urge the Department of Families to expedite the development of case management options for working with parents in partnership with the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Service within Queensland Health. This strategy is also advocated by Tomison (1996b) and Ainsworth and Summers (2001). Drug addiction can be seen as an individual pathology, or it can be seen in structural terms. Whatever its origins:

Drug use by parents of children admitted to care is the most serious issue to face childcare and protection services in the last two decades. It is overwhelming these services world wide (Ainsworth & Summers, 2001: ii).

We need to do more.

All of the workers interviewed identified poverty as an issue in children experiencing maltreatment and coming into the child protection system ...

Lobbying for better income support for families.

One of the cyclical arguments in relation to income support revolves around the jurisdictional issues. As income support is a Federal responsibility, and the revenue flow to the States is negligible in relation to direct financial support to families, the problems remain unresolved as to how to target families in poverty where there are child protection concerns. Additionally this call comes in the context of a reduced willingness by the Federal Government to see income support as an entitlement, instead emphasizing the obligations of disadvantaged people (Wiseman, 2000).

As identified in this paper, one of the ironies of current policy in child protection is that we are able to resource alternative carers to care for children once they are on Child Protection orders, but there is very limited provision to materially assist the child's or young person's own family, thereby potentially averting a care order in families where poverty is a stressor.

Family support and early intervention: Practice that respectfully engages with parents

Increased funding to family services to allow them to identify and intervene on behalf of children whose level of disadvantage is likely to impact on their long-term well-being will represent excellent value for money if such intervention can reduce or prevent developmental difficulties and/or child abuse and neglect (Wise, 2001: 4).

In regional cities like Mackay and Townville, there is a vastly under-developed infrastructure in the non-government sector. There are problems in the level of expertise, ongoing opportunities for staff development and training, and across

the sector state-wide, pay levels markedly below those of the government sector. Also, services that do exist are frequently not well targeted to meet the needs of the most harmed and at risk children.

As Deborah stated:

We need support services that work intensively with people – either go and live in or have people live in the worker's home, and work for day after day after day.

Many parents who come to the attention of statutory child welfare departments experience their involvement as disempowering and labelling. The model of family support described by Thomson (2000) is respectful of the motivations and intentions of parents to ensure the safety and well being of their children. We need to move away from the 'blaming' of parents, which continues to exist, and certainly to reject the assumption that they are responsible for their poverty given what we know about the dynamics of a 'winners and losers' society (Stilwell, 1993).

Difficult decisions sometimes have to be made. However these must be based on best practice evidence (Corcoran, 2000; Osmond & Darlington, 2001). Working with parents within a context of a trusting relationship is clearly in the best interests of their children. This does not mean that services should unwittingly condone or minimize maltreatment or always work to keep children with their families. However, in hand with an effective safety monitoring mechanism, intensive family preservation work has much to recommend it. FSOs certainly supported the need.

In support of a greater focus on family support and early intervention, Elliott and Sultmann (2002: 18) state that, with proper resources:

Such services may prevent children entering care, proving cost efficient for the child protection system and possibly achieving longer-term savings across the health, education and welfare systems.

Documentation of poverty as an evidence base for practice

From this paper I wish to make a specific recommendation to the Queensland Department of Families. At present, the documentation of family circumstances collected by FSOs when they respond to notifications does not include any data on family income source or level. I believe this is an omission, and one that contributes to a poor evidence base (Osmond & Darlington, 2001; Pecora, 2002) for intervening effectively in impoverished families where children experience harm. An argument that has been put is that to do so is to heighten the intrusiveness of an already intrusive process of investigation of child protection concerns. I believe this is a false argument. The role of the State in intervening in families in order to protect children is, whatever way one looks at it, intrusive in that most parents

do not 'choose' to receive such involvement. Such intrusion is however justified.

We do have a responsibility to minimize intrusion and this is a principle of the *Queensland Child Protection Act (1999)*. This information could be sought only in the event of a substantiated notification (ie, such information would not be requested of every family visited by FSOs in response to an initial notification). Individual families' financial details would not be made public. They would however be made accessible to workers in order to improve case planning in impoverished families. If such information were to be routinely collected and analysed, with a clear process established for how the information would be used to assist children, this intrusion would be justifiable. In addition, unacceptable family poverty would seem to be condoned and perpetuated if it remains undocumented. Whose interests does this serve?

The uses to which this information could be put would include lobbying the Budget processes at Federal and State level for increased funding to assist vulnerable families and effectively targeting family support to reap the best outcomes for children who can benefit most from such interventions. The fundamental stalemate, however, remains in relation to which level of government has responsibility to improve material conditions in families where poverty plays a part in child maltreatment.

Further research

This paper has merely touched the surface of the issues. A larger scale Australian study is needed in order to document the influence of the links between poverty and child protection concerns.

CONCLUSION

We need to better understand the complex role poverty plays in child maltreatment. This paper has highlighted the fact that, according to workers interviewed in this small study, poverty is a major factor in client families. Workers differed in the extent to which they attributed individual agency to parents for the poverty they and their children lived in. While we as child welfare practitioners are not responsible for broad social structures, we can elect to broaden our gaze when understanding and responding to child protection concerns. This is an ambitious undertaking and we can all feel helpless in light of the magnitude of the issues. However, continuing to speak about family poverty as a central issue in child protection work is an ongoing priority.

□

REFERENCES

- Agger, B. (1991) Critical theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their sociological relevance, *Annual Review of Sociology*, No 17, pp.105-131.
- Ainsworth, F. & Summers, A. (2001) *Family Reunification and Drug Use by Parents*, Final Report, Research for the Care of Children Advisory Committee, Perth: Department of Family and Children's Services.
- Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- CAFWAA (2002) *A Time to Invest in Australia's Most Disadvantaged Children, Young People and Their Families*, Sydney: Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia.
- Callahan, M. & Lumb, C. (1995) 'My Cheque and My Children: The long road to empowerment in child welfare', *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice and Program*, Vol LXXIV, No. 3, May/ June, pp.795-819.
- Corcoran, J. (2000) *Evidence-Based Social Work Practice with Families: A lifespan approach*, New York: Springer Series on Social Work.
- Elliott, A. & Sultmann, C-M. (2002) *A Fair Start for Queensland Children, Young People and Families: A report card on child protection services*, Brisbane, QCOSS.
- Gelles, R. J. (1992) 'Poverty and Violence Towards Children', *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp.258-274.
- Gil, D. (1970) *Violence Against Children: Physical abuse in the United States*, Cambridge, Mass, US: Harvard University Press.
- Gordon, L. (1988) *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The politics and history of family violence. Boston 1880-1960*, New York: Penguin Books.
- Harding, A., Lloyd, R. & Greenwell, H. (2001) *Financial Disadvantage in Australia 1900 to 2000: The persistence of poverty in a decade of growth*, Sydney: Smith Family and NATSEM.
- James, M. (2000) 'Child Abuse and Neglect: Part 1- Redefining the Issues', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, February, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Jordan, B. (1974) *Poor Parents: Social policy and the 'cycle of deprivation'*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Jordan, B. (1996) *A Theory of Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Cambridge, Mass, US: Polity Press.
- Keegan Eamon, M. (2001) 'Maternal Depression and Physical Punishment as Mediators of the Effect of Poverty in Socioemotional Problems of Children in Single- Mother Families', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 71, No. 2, April, pp.218-226.
- Laird, J. (1995) 'Family-Centred Practice in the Postmodern Era', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, March, pp.150-162.
- Leonard, P. (1997) *Postmodern Welfare: Reconstructing an emancipatory project*, London: Sage.
- May, T. (1997) *Social Research: Issues, methods and process*, 2nd edn., Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- McCallum, A. (2002) 'Action Needed for all Australians to Feel Better', *Impact*, February, Sydney: ACOSS.
- McClelland, A. (2000) *No child...': Child poverty in Australia*, Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Laurence.
- Mendes, P. (1999) 'Marxist and Feminist Critiques of Child Protection: To protect children or to change society?', *Children Australia*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp.27-31.
- Mullaly, R. (1997) *Structural Social Work: Ideology, theory and practice*, Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Osmond, J. & Darlington, Y. (2001) 'Introducing Evidence Based Practice', *Information Sheet No 1. Using Knowledge in Practice*, Brisbane: School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Queensland and Department of Families.
- Parton, N. (2002) 'Protecting Children: a socio-historical analysis' in Wilson, K. and James, A. (eds), *The Child Protection Handbook*, 2nd edn., Edinburgh: Bailliere Tindall.
- Pecora, P. (2002) *The Challenge of Achieving Evidence-Based Practice in Child and Family Services*, keynote address, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies Conference, 2-4 September, Sydney.
- Pelton, L. (1981) *The Social Context of Child Abuse and Neglect*, New York: Human Services Press.
- Pelton, L. (1987) *For Reasons of Poverty: A critical analysis of the public child welfare system in the United States*, New York: Praeger.
- QCOSS (1999) *People and Places: A profile of growing disadvantage in Queensland*, Brisbane: Queensland Council of Social Service.
- QCOSS (2001) *A Charter for A Fair Queensland*, www.fairqueensland.org.au
- Saunders, P. (2002) *Measuring Australia's Progress and Economic Disadvantage and Inequality*, Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies, http: apprn.org/policy/ Saunders1.html
- SNAICC (2002) *Through Young Black Eyes: A handbook to protect indigenous children from the impact of family violence and child abuse*, Canberra: Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.
- Stilwell, F. (1993) *Economic Inequality: Who gets what in Australia?*, Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Thomson, J. (2000) 'Practical Responses with Women in Poverty: the value of 'trained in life' workers', in Weeks, W. and Quinn, M. (eds), *Issues Facing Australian Families: Human services respond*, Melbourne: Longman, pp.165-172.
- Tomison, A. (1996a) *Child Maltreatment and Family Structure. Discussion paper No. 1*, Winter, Melbourne: National Child Protection Clearinghouse.
- Tomison, A. (1996b) *Child Maltreatment and Substance Abuse. Discussion paper No. 2*, Spring, Melbourne: National Child Protection Clearinghouse
- Tregeagle, S. (1985) *Poverty and the Abuse and Neglect of Children*, Monograph No 12, Sydney: Barnados.
- Wise, S. (2001) *How Should Family Services Respond to "Children in Need"?*, Australian Family Briefing No. 11, October, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Wiseman, J. (2000) 'All For One or One For All? The past and future of the Australian Welfare State', in McMahon, A., Thomson, J. and Williams, C. (eds), *Understanding the Australian Welfare State: Key documents and themes*, Melbourne: Tertiary Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all the Family Services Officers who gave of their time in the interviews which form the basis of this paper. Without them this study could not have been undertaken. They were generous and open in their dealings with me. I also thank Clare Tilbury, then manager of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Review Unit within the then Office of Child Protection within Queensland Department of Families for her assistance in negotiating access at Central office level. Anne Reddell, then Regional Director, Townsville and Hinterland region, and Michael Bishop, Regional Director of Mackay/Whitsunday region of the Department, provided approval at the regional level. Area managers and team leaders from the Townsville, Thuringowa and Mackay area offices of the Department were very helpful in ensuring my access to staff. I thank Emilija Saleta from the Child Protection Branch within Department of Families for her help

I wish to thank Queensland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Robin Sullivan, and Sue Howard and Julie Harcourt from the Commission for their valuable assistance in conducting this study.

I thank Prof Ros Thorpe, Dr Susan Gair, Ms Anne Butcher and Dr Anthony McMahon from the School of Social Work and Community Welfare for their help.