

Editorial

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Among the plethora of minor parties fielding candidates in Australia's 2016 federal election was a relative newcomer called Sustainable Australia. Formed in 2010 and campaigning with the slogan 'Better, not bigger', the party's policy centrepiece calls for Australia to slow its population growth through a combination of lower immigration, changes to family payments, and the withdrawal of government agencies from proactive population growth strategies (Sustainable Australia, n.d.). At a global level, the party also calls for Australia to increase foreign aid with a focus on supporting women's health, reproductive rights and education. Like most minor parties, its candidates polled poorly, attracting too few votes to secure seats in the Senate. But in the ensuing months, the South Australian branch of The Greens broke from the national party platform by proposing the aim of stabilising South Australia's population within a generation (The Greens SA, 2017). Just this August, Australian business entrepreneur Dick Smith launched a 'Fair Go' manifesto, similarly calling for reductions in Australia's population growth to address rising economic inequality and a "decline in living standards" (Dick Smith Fair Go Group, 2017).

Although barely registering a blip on Australia's mainstream political radar, population growth is an issue that is quietly on the simmer, following other nations where it has been a simmering, even boiling, issue for some time. Relevant to how we live within our environment and, more particularly in this context, to issues of community well-being, population growth is an overlooked and important dimension of wider public welfare debates. No longer is the issue considered a challenge merely for developing countries and booming nations like India and China. Yet, for most communities and individuals, the day-to-day significance of population growth—and overpopulation—depends still very much on context and personal perspective. For human service workers, the matter of whether population growth is relevant or irrelevant to work with children and families is shaped by the nature of the professional services being delivered; the visibility, or otherwise, of the impacts of growing population on service demand and service operations;

and the dynamics of the community in which the service is located.

Of course, in Australia and western nations generally, discussions about population size and developing sustainable growth targets are notoriously fractious. Talking about population raises difficult questions about lifestyle and personal freedom. It engages our most deeply held values about what family life should look like, how the needs of the individual should be balanced against those of society, what we take to be our responsibilities nationally and internationally, and what we regard as the essential foundations for economic stability. As readers may surmise, it's also a topic that struggles to be debated separately from the vexed issue of immigration. In the case of the political organisations mentioned earlier, each was at pains to acknowledge that, while population growth and immigration are related issues, they are also distinct. Yet, certainly in Australia, the US and Canada, the relationship between the two sees efforts to raise the issue of population growth often attacked or misconstrued as tantamount to covert racism, "greenwashing", or an assault on the benefits of multiculturalism (see, for example, Bayliss & Allen, 2016; King, 2013; Wiles, 2014). Indeed, when googling "attitudes to population growth" for this piece, it was notable that many of the studies or informal surveys that appeared dealt with attitudes to immigration rather people's views about living pressures or the kinds of communities they preferred to live in.

The situation is similar in the UK, where, as Diana Coole (2012, p.31) notes, 'political scientists have tended to ignore the issue [of population growth] while political elites are manifestly reluctant to address it'. The Brexit campaign made it abundantly clear that arguments to lower immigration often had their roots in xenophobia. However, in Britain, the distinction between immigration and the simple need to manage population volume also seems better understood, in part, perhaps, because of the sheer increase in competition for space, services, roads and transport that people have witnessed during their lifetimes. For a nation where the idea of "countryside" features prominently in the cultural psyche, the prospect of accommodating another

city the size of Greater London by 2039 has a way of focusing the mind (Office for National Statistics, 2015). In a recent YouGov survey ranking nine issues of national concern for 17 countries, UK respondents ranked population growth as more serious than climate change (12.4% and 10.8% respectively), and only third behind global terrorism (26.1%) and poverty, hunger and thirst (13.3%) (Dahlgreen, 2016). This follows an earlier survey, conducted in 2011, in which 79% of UK adults thought their country's population was too high. Almost half (45%) indicated it was much too high (Population Matters, 2011).

Yet, interestingly, there is not necessarily a close correlation between concern about population growth and national population densities. In the YouGov survey referred to above, respondents in Singapore and Hong Kong, which have population densities of 18,513 and 16,444 people per square mile respectively, ranked population growth a lesser issue than the UK (with 660 people per square mile) (Dahlgreen, 2016). Context suggests that it is the experience of *rapid* population growth that is most likely to attract concern, particularly when infrastructure fails to keep up with community needs and population pressures change the composition of communities at a fast pace. These, ironically, are also the very conditions that can ensure population growth has benefits for the human service professions. In the US, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the American social work profession is expected to grow 12% between 2014 and 2024, much faster than the average for other professions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Jesus Vasquez writes that 'new social work education programs are popping up all over the country to try to keep up with the demand', which has been driven by population growth in US cities and the accompanying challenges of poverty, job insecurity, lack of affordable housing and limited access to quality healthcare and education (Vasquez, 2014).

In Australia, social workers in the outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne are also likely to be conscious of the detrimental impacts of rapid urban growth on vulnerable families and individuals. Sydney, for example, has seen many lower-income residents pushed to the middle and outer rings of the city limits as the inner suburbs become increasingly gentrified. As a result, "lower-income residents are being driven further from areas with good access to jobs, transport and services" and feel most acutely the impacts of inadequate infrastructure and services (Troy, Easthope, & Crommelin, 2017). Such trends also make it possible to link population growth indirectly to a variety of issues that affect children's welfare—like low housing affordability and its effects on children's experience of poverty. One recent study by researchers from Swinburne University of Technology used a child-focused method to establish how many children were in families exposed to unaffordable private rental housing. The authors estimated that over 340,000 children in Australia were living in housing-related poverty in 2013–14 (Stone & Reynolds, 2016). Other issues that serve to link population growth, when not effectively han-

dled, to the well-being of vulnerable children and families include diminished access to green space, with its widely documented implications for people's health and stress levels (World Health Organisation, 2016). Studies have shown that the health benefits of access to green space are actually greatest among the lowest socioeconomic groups, and, correspondingly, that the loss of green space can exacerbate existing disadvantage (Jennings, Myron, Shanahan, Coutts, & Sinykin, 2017; Mitchell, Richardson, Shortt, & Pearce, 2015).

Clearly, there is plenty of work for the human services that stems from population growth. However, it is also true that the emphasis for social work remains on managing the impacts of population growth, rather than contributing to debates about population as a strategic issue and ethical conundrum. Population tends to be framed chiefly as a demographic problem, useful to know about for practitioners working with migrant communities in cities or planning services for the aged, or as an issue pertinent to those in the allied disciplines of foreign aid and public health. In a typical student social work text, for example, overpopulation is shown to be linked to food and water scarcity, economic problems, terrorism, energy and resource shortages, immigration and overcrowding, while the case for family planning is essentially apportioned to developing nations (Zastrow, 2011). More expansively, Dominelli's *Green Social Work* explores population within the context of environmental degradation, social conflict and mass migration patterns, and outlines a variety of important roles for social workers in highlighting the weaknesses of current relief systems, responding to natural disasters and environmental crises, and providing culturally appropriate responses (Dominelli, 2012). Crucially, she also reflects on the inequitable distribution of resources and the uncomfortable reality that, although internal population rates are declining in the largest westernised nations, those same nations are still the greatest consumers of the planet's resources. As Dominelli states:

The spread across the world of the Western industrial model originally developed in the UK, a country with a small population, is clearly unsustainable for contemporary demands. It has been unable to sustain high standards of living even for the few who benefit from neoliberal capitalist development now, so it is unlikely to be capable of catering for the growing numbers of world's population, which the UN predicts will exceed 9 billion by 2050. (p. 275)

The consumption of resources that accompanies the western lifestyle is, indeed, the key reason why sustainable population advocates argue that developed nations should not consider themselves off the hook when it comes to lowering population growth, even when they already have birth rates below the replacement standard of 2.1 children per woman (World Bank, 2015).

Equitable expectations and international solidarity are other issues to consider. In an article on the role that

social work can play in addressing environmental sustainability and reproductive justice, Deepak (2011) notes that initiatives to stabilise population have not always been handled well. Writing from a postcolonial feminist perspective, she points out that population control policies have typically been racialised and gendered in targeting ‘third world women and women of color in developing countries’ (p. 9), while at the same time there has been:

an unspoken understanding . . . that white first world women will not be asked or expected to have fewer children. Instead, this population is targeted for assisted reproductive technology to create more children, and national policies in many European countries encourage women to have more children through financial incentives or time off work. (p. 9)

However well-intentioned the efforts may have been to provide or impose fertility control measures in developing countries (and this is not to suggest that access to family planning has been unwelcomed by women in the developing world), Deepak’s observation serves to challenge what has long been a western double standard when it comes to population growth. In effect, developed countries use arguments in favour of economic growth to argue for their women to have more children, while poorer nations are told to achieve their economic growth goals by having fewer.

Such an observation only hints at the array of complex issues that deserve to be unpicked and considered in detail. Yet how the balance is struck between managing population growth and managing the distribution of resources is evidently key, and there are various ideas about how this might be realised. One school of thought, for instance, is that population growth will naturally slow in developing nations as people achieve a higher standard of living, and it is therefore expedient to hasten development. The underlying assumption is that a low birth rate is an inherent feature of a westernised lifestyle, although, as, Dominelli (2012) indicates that is not an altogether rock-solid proposition. Others have argued that the solution lies with simply reducing consumption in the West in order to equitably cater for the billions of people expected to join the planet. Both scenarios are frail. The former assumes the developing world could achieve lifestyle parity and lower birth rates with the current resources to hand—which is perhaps unlikely given the view in parts of the scientific community that we have already passed our sustainable carrying capacity (UNEP Global Environmental Alert Service, 2012). The latter assumes that those of us who enjoy the western lifestyle will be willing to reduce our resource consumption or gently adapt to lifestyles with a lower ecological footprint—and, frankly, there’s very little indication of westernised communities being happy to swallow that pill. Just consider, for a moment, the manner in which we continue to revise *up* minimum standards that entail ever greater energy and resource consumption. In Australia that can mean floodlights and all mod-cons for local sports fields, televisions in every waiting room, the installation of tension-wired guard rails

along hundreds of kilometres of already buffered regional freeways, or, an emergent trend, double beds for children. We are nothing if not masters of self-justification for our habits in the West, myself included.

As Deepak’s comments hint, who does what, what one expects of others, and on what basis, are just some of the questions that responding to population growth raises. No one country can point the finger at another; contributions by every nation are required, and they will take many forms, large and small. She also offers a reminder that the effort to limit population growth may sometimes challenge how we understand and achieve social justice. How might we, as human service professionals, respond when confronted with more frequent conflicts between the assumed rights of individuals and the long-term needs of whole communities? What position might we take when the desire to uphold the cultural traditions of a family or community entails a use of resources we find unjustifiable (such as children’s food fights, or splurging on frivolous presents at Christmas)? And do social workers have a responsibility to act with the future-generational resource needs of families in mind? There are more confronting questions we might ask too. What policy positions might be adopted in response to some family payments being reduced to discourage large families? To what extent do we believe there is a “right” to have children anyway? Should IVF services be funded by the public purse (as they currently are in Australia, the UK and Canada) and, if not, how might services reach out to support couples who can’t have children? How do we ensure equitable, easy access to reproductive and family planning services? And how might we make mainstream the expectation that men must take as much responsibility for contraception as women?

In June 2017, the United Nations (UN) revised up its projections for global population growth. The world’s population reached nearly 7.6 billion in mid-2017; it’s currently expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion by 2050, and 11.2 billion by 2100 (UN, 2017). Most of that growth will occur in Africa and Asia, while Europe, North America and Oceania will also grow, and be net receivers of migrants. In 2012, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP Global Environmental Alert Service) reviewed 65 different estimates of the earth’s carrying capacity. The majority of studies put the earth’s limits at or below 8 billion people, but fourteen studies suggested it could be 16 billion or greater. But as the UN (2017) itself stresses, estimating future population growth involves an Aladdin’s cave of variables. It’s a bit like climate change: cause gives rise to effect, but where and how those effects are seen can be erratic and unpredictable. Population growth will occur—that *is* inevitable—but by how much is in a constant state of flux. A couple of points variance to a birth rate can, when scaled up, make a difference of many thousands or millions. Small changes can have a huge effect on how children will experience their world in the future.

No matter what happens, social workers and other human service professionals will be on the frontline. They will

be managing the impacts of growth (or degrowth), helping families and communities respond, and shaping aspirations for what is desirable and achievable. The Australian Academy of Science (1995) released this statement in 1994: 'In our view, the quality of all aspects of our children's lives will be maximised if the population of Australia by the mid-21st Century is kept to the low, stable end of the achievable range, i.e. to approximately 23 million' (p. 136). Australia cruised past that target in April 2013. It's time for everyone to bring their thoughts and hopes to a sensible, respectful population discussion. It is one of the most monumental, slippery, frustrating and plain fascinating debates humanity has countenanced. No one who cares for, or cares about children, can afford to ignore it.

We thank Caitlyn Lehmann for providing a thoughtful and informative Editorial on what is an important topic now, and will no doubt become an even more pressing issue into the future. Now we turn to the content of this issue, beginning with two opinion pieces. The first, by Meredith Kiraly and Cathy Humphryes, is a look at the nature of out-of-home care, and the rise of kinship care in particular. The second is by Julie Edwards, the CEO of Jesuit Social Services. Julie has provided some insights about the nature of children and young people's offending behaviours and the impact of this on their futures. Julie reflects on what an effective youth justice system might be and looks at what is being done both locally and internationally to try to stem reoffending. Next is a practice commentary by Susan Tregeagle who examines the utility of therapeutic residential care. Susan acknowledges the necessity of this type of care in some circumstances, but is suggesting that much needs to be done to improve the system to meet the needs of young people who either have no other option than residential care or require extensive therapeutic support.

This issue contains four research articles. The first, by Kym Macfarlane, Amy Hayes, Ali Lakhani and Glenn Hodgson, examines the effectiveness of playgroups for fathers and their families. They found that fathers experienced a number of positive outcomes by participating in a playgroup including improved family functioning, a feeling of belonging to a community and improved relationships with their children. In the next paper, Jelena van der Wal, Rebekah Grace and Kelly Baird acknowledge the importance of gathering young people's perspectives on their communities, and used a photovoice methodology to explore the perspectives of young people living in a disadvantaged area of Sydney. When asked to identify the strengths and challenges in their local community, five key themes emerged—Local People and Places; Financial Struggles and Opportunities; Personal Resilience and Skills; Health and Wellbeing and The Impact of Stereotyping Media Constructions. Karen Martin and Lisa Wood examined the effectiveness and impact of a therapeutic musical drumming intervention programme for adolescents who were displaying antisocial behaviour. Measures of mental wellbeing, psychological distress, post-traumatic stress symptoms and antisocial behaviours

were collected before and after a 10-week drumming programme. Results suggest that the programme had some positive effects on boys for all measures except psychological distress, however it appeared to have no impact on girls. The final paper, by Kathy Eadie, is an evaluation of a trauma-informed collaborative wrap-round model of care that is tailored to children and young people in out-of-home care who present with complex and extreme behavioural and mental health problems. Results of a pre/post-test analysis suggest that the service had a positive impact on young people's 'general functioning and adjustment; antisocial behaviour; overactivity and poor attention; non-accidental self-injury; problems with scholastic and language skills; emotional symptoms; peer and family relationships; self-care and independence; and school attendance.' Finally, this issue ends with two reviews. Frank Ainsworth and James Whittaker have offered their thoughts on *A consensus statement about therapeutic residential care for children and youth* and Chris Goddard has reviewed the film *I, Daniel Blake*.

This was a year of transition for *Children Australia* as it moved from the auspices of Ozchild to ownership by Cambridge University Press. Like any significant change there are always new and interesting processes to navigate, but Jennifer and I were supported by a very helpful team at Cambridge University Press and, as always, are grateful for the support and guidance offered by the journal's esteemed list of Editorial Consultants. We would like to thank the reviewers and authors who contributed to the content in 2017, which we hope has some positive impact on the lives of children and their families in our community. We look forward to bringing many more interesting and informative articles for you next year. We wish you all the very best for the festive season and look forward to your continued interest and involvement in 2018.

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