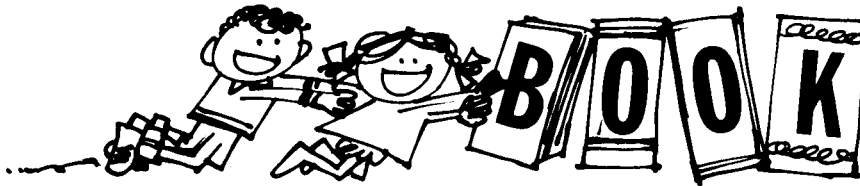


**Book Review Editor
Ruth Stewart**



CHARGING FOR SOCIAL CARE

By Ken Judge and James Mathews
150 pp
George Allen and Unwin
London, 1980
Hardback \$32.50
Paperback \$12.95

"Charging for social care" attempts to bring some reason to the awkward and rarely covered issue of how to set prices for publicly provided welfare services.

Unfortunately, despite a thorough coverage of the book's terms of reference, the reader comes away feeling not particularly enlightened.

The book is in fact an expanded version of a report by two academics for the British Department of Health and Social Security. The author's aim is to gather data on the pricing of a number of welfare services and comment on the development, and present state, of pricing policy for such services.

The authors highlight the fact that charges are used very frequently in the provision of local government welfare services, for a variety of reasons, including to keep costs down and to discourage overuse of the service. They show that prices have varied quite dramatically from one local government to another.

The study attempts to unravel the various types of subsidy that may be applied to welfare services and use economic theory to suggest appropriate charges to meet specific social policy objectives.

The book's weakness lies in its very narrow and technical focus. As a result the recommendations shed very little light: the authors note that there are anomalies between local authorities, that charging structures and objectives need to be re-examined and that more research in the area is needed. A slightly more interesting result was the need to consider who is actually paying subsidies for welfare services and whether it is the role of local authorities

or federal government to pay subsidies which are in effect a form of income maintenance.

Some questions though, are never raised, let alone answered. For example, the advantages and disadvantages of *not* charging are never addressed. It is clear from a number of comments through the book (e.g. p.138, p.140) that the authors are proponents of charges and either hope, or at least expect, that they will increase or be used more frequently in the future. On p.138 the authors say they "...expect that rising relative incomes for elderly clients will increase consumer choice and ease the burden of financing the growth of personal social services."

The book is based (implicitly) on the premise that welfare services are a necessary financial drain providing little, if any benefit for the community as a whole. As a result the authors fit very easily into the mould of Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Fraser, or even the 'small government' back-benchers of the Australian Federal Government.

The failure to tackle the costs and benefits of cost-cutting and service cutting is particularly worrying when it is clear that the book was written at a time when Margaret Thatcher was cutting great swathes through welfare services and increasing charges with scant regard for social policy objectives.

Likewise, for an Australian reader, the book offers no explanation of the impact of increasing charges for community services. At a time of 'small government' rhetoric, the trend is to increase charges on a user-pays basis and cut back services. It is critical that the impact of such policies on the community be addressed.

The result is that one is let down by this book. In pursuit of "academic objectivity", it divorces its subject matter from its context. Consequently it fails to come to terms with the likely impact of current policies, or with broader issues of distribution of services and resources, universal versus selective services, or the appropriateness of existing services.

Rather than assuming the challenge was to develop appropriate pricing structures for traditional welfare services, perhaps it would have been fruitful to consider the costs and benefits of developing more appropriate methods of meeting the same needs — self-help, consumer control, the provision of skills and information on existing services, to name but a few.

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Fathers At Home.

By Jan Harper, Penguin Books Australia
1980. \$5.50, 256 pages.

This is a very important and timely book. It is a very common notion that social research is only respectable if it involves large probability samples and sophisticated statistical analysis. This is of course far from the truth. Social surveys are useful for many purposes, but they rarely contribute much to the generation of new ideas, new aspects of theory or even to new facts about the behaviour of isolated or unusual groups. Innovative research is usually qualitative, selective, speculative and exciting. Jan Harper obviously enjoyed the piece of research reported in this book.

Fathers at home reports the experiences of fifteen couples in which the father stayed at home to provide care for children and do other tasks about the home while mothers attended work or studied. Eight of the fathers are major contributors to the book, seven have less but varying degrees of involvement in the project. The experience of these fathers and their families make interesting reading. The problems of the stay-at-home parent take on a new perspective when related by people (in this case men) who have not been



prepared personally or socially for this role. In a sense therefore, the book also tells us much about women who stay at home with young children.

In addition to the case studies, the book contains a number of general and sociological comments which point up similarities, link the accounts to social theory and provide some information about the context within which these families live. Chapters 6 and 8 are very important in this regard. They examine the literature on fathering and discuss the implications of the traditional models of fatherhood for all of us in the modern industrial society.

There is one aspect of the study which detracts from its many virtues. This is the selection of a new name for fathers at home, actually the borrowing of a name from the Swedes. A new name often draws attention to unrecognised elements of a phenomenon and helps us to see it free from some of our biases. However, "hemmaman" is foreign and confusing. How many people would have bought this book if the title was *HEMMAMEN*. Despite this criticism I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in parenting in the urban industrial society. I would also recommend its use as an example for students of the techniques necessary for researchers who want to explore and elucidate small but important areas of social life that do not lend themselves to survey research.

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The Last Resort — A Women's Refuge.
Compiled by Vivien Johnson.
Penguin, Australia, 1981.
\$7.95, 204 pages.

After some five years of collective meetings at one of Victoria's women's

refuges, **The Last Resort — A Women's Refuge** brought back memories of old ideological tussles, shifts of emphasis, compromises, battles fought with State and federal bureaucracies, and lasting friendships developed at meetings into the early hours.

For those reading this book without past or present involvement with the feminist refuges in Australia, it offers an opportunity to read about a practical application of feminist theory and the evolution of the ideas of the people involved in the setting up of the refuge.

The Last Resort is an account of the inception and growth of the Marrickville Women's Refuge. Much of the book is taken up with interviews of residents and ex-residents who talk about their past lives, their experiences at the refuge and their hopes and fears of the future.

Marrickville was one of the first twelve refuges funded in mid 1975 by the Federal Labor Government. It was opened in April 1976 in Sydney. It is now, some six years later, one of approximately one hundred funded refuges around Australia. Awareness of the need for refuges had been developing during the early seventies among various women's groups and health and welfare workers who were conscious of the difficulties faced by women with children and single women wishing to leave violent or unsatisfactory relationships. The view that women stayed in violent relationships because they simply had nowhere to go was becoming widely accepted as opposed to the more cynical idea often put forward in the past that they enjoyed suffering. This need became even more apparent in Sydney in March 1974 when a group of feminists squatted in a couple of inner city suburban houses and offered accommodation to women and children in need of shelter. The houses were inundated with people. Pressure was then put on the Federal and New South Wales Governments to respond to this obvious crisis. After a considerable wait and nine months of arguments with

the State Government and Local Authority Marrickville opened.

When the shelter first started the refuge movement was emphasising, for the purposes of publicity in many cases, the issue of domestic violence. What emerged as Marrickville developed were the more insidious problems of loneliness, unsuitable housing, inadequate pensions, and non-existent or expensive child care.

It was found that many women felt constrained to return to the relationships they had tried to escape. To quote from **The Last Resort** "beyond the refuge does not lie 'a viable new life in the community'. There lies an abyss of loneliness and poverty, with its attendant anxiety and depression."

The book documents honestly, and usually in residents' own words, the difficulties several families face in sharing one house — the arguments over house work and child care, racial bigotry, hierarchies which develop between old and new residents and the tension caused by a three year waiting list of priority public housing.

However, it also makes clear the support women can give each other and the enjoyment some women get out of communal living. One ex-resident illustrated this when she said "The kids still talk about the Refuge. We liked it there. We went back for the Christmas party. Ronny still keeps talking about Betty. He likes Betty. I tell you what, they're good things, aren't they, refuges? I didn't know about 'em".

There are several interviews with children in the book where they express their confusion over their parents' conflicts and show the divided loyalties experienced when parents separate.

In an interview of one of the refuge's child-care workers, the difficulty of offering anything positive to help the children cope with the changes occurring in their lives in the transitory atmosphere of the refuge is apparent. However, the worker also comments that the situation has improved greatly as, at