

litigation ... is one explanation of the welfare explosion" which is then the prelude to a somewhat misleading discussion of the so called "Greek welfare fraud" case. In this case, Jones i) fails to say the case against Greek doctors and social security clients was a legal furphy, (ii) fails to provide any evidence that there is increasing litigation, and (iii) fails to show how this alleged litigation leads to the alleged welfare expenditure explosion.

On almost every page there are odd or mystifying connections drawn which often left this reader gasping. Equally on the broad front, there is

little attempt to sustain an overriding framework that is analytically compelling. The introduction which attempts to sketch out some six broad themes is not taken up systematically and used to develop a framework for the book. And claims that social policy or the welfare state has failed to solve the basic problems of social dependency, such as poverty or unemployment, because the social sciences have failed to provide solid research or theory are gratuitously silly. Tens of thousands of studies on poverty, homelessness and unemployment have always pointed to the problem, ie, the ways in which we

organise our lives. The solutions will not be found in more books or reports, but in the political will to change fundamental patterns of social, economic and cultural power over decision-making and resources.

Ultimately this book is full of useful facts and information, but fails as an analytically coherent introduction for those of us struggling to make sense of or change the welfare state.

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***Family obligations and social change*** by Janet Finch  
Polity Press, 1989. 269pp. \$32.95 pb.

In recent years, the issue of family support for dependent members has become not only a matter of private interest, but increasingly a focus of public policy debate. Although the state has used notions of 'family obligations' ever since Poor Law days, the demise of the post-war welfare state has heightened the importance of understanding what modern families are prepared and able to do for their members, especially the young, elderly and disabled. In this significant contribution to debates on care of family members, British sociologist, Janet Finch, maps a conceptual framework that is firmly based in empirical evidence about patterns of family life in modern western societies. This is primarily the background to her own study of the processes of decision making and experience of caring for relatives, which is to be reported elsewhere, and offers a full and meticulous analysis of the pertinent issues.

She sets as her task clarifying what we know about contemporary kin relationships, especially as they pertain to providing assistance to members in times of need. She therefore focuses on a variety of forms of practical and emotional support that go beyond the immediate household. Finch forgoes analysis of respons-

ibilities of spouses to each other, or of parents to young children, in favour of painting a broad picture of cross-generational and wider kin patterns of interaction and material support. The recurrent themes in the book are to do with distinguishing between evidence of family assistance and the reasons for it being given, the complexity of the interaction between social expectations of appropriate kin support and actual family processes, and the role of the state in building certain notions of family obligations into social policy. Each of these is addressed with attention to class, gender and ethnic variations in view of Finch's argument that the patterns of family support, in modern Britain at least, are fluid and negotiable, yet also very much a matter of socially structured behaviour. Chapters overview the evidence from research on family support for adults, historical changes in such patterns, the economic and demographic influences on them, and the role played by the state through institutionalising concepts of family obligation in law and public policy.

The discussion here draws together a wide range of related literature, but it is in the last three chapters that Finch's own perspective becomes more established. Her central argument is that, to understand how family obligations get 'worked out' in

contemporary society, we have to use a sophisticated framework that recognises the interaction of material interests with normative guidelines about what is 'the right thing to do' in particular situations. Using insights from several social theorists who have tried to explicate the relationship between individual behaviour and social constraints, Finch explores the ways in which people use skills of negotiation to provide care and material support when they are able to do so, and the expectations, particularly of women, that shape the range of choices available. The 'sense of obligation', she argues, is quite personal in its application, and based on life history and circumstances rather than on abstract moral considerations about 'duty'. Assumptions about the role of the family, usually meaning women, in providing care within a community framework therefore provide a singularly inappropriate basis for social policy.

This is the most important implication of the analysis provided here, and it is disappointing to find it so turgidly dissected that its real impact may be missed. The writing style, especially the very careful review of other people's research and of various theoretical debates, makes this book a solid sociological text. Unfortunately, it also tends to weight down the

reader. Although some case material from the empirical studies of others illustrates its claims, *Family Obligations and Social Change* suffers from its very strength. As a substantial background analysis for a major ongoing research project, it leaves the reader waiting for something that can

not yet be delivered, that is exploring more vividly the social processes involved in contemporary family negotiations around responsibility for kin. We can look forward to Janet Finch's demonstration of her argument in subsequent accounts.

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The Australian Red Cross Society has asked the NCBA to draw attention to its activities, particularly with regard to youth, including its youth publication, YAKKA. The following article appeared in a recent edition of YAKKA (Autumn 1991), and readers of *Children Australia* will be interested in the campaign for the victims of war. To obtain copies of YAKKA or more information on Red Cross Youth activities, contact your local Red Cross office (listed below). Copies of the report, *Casualties of Conflict* are available from the National Headquarters, at a cost of \$10.

An international Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War was recently launched simultaneously around the world in some 150 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies including Australia. About 70 people, including young actress Tamsin West, singer Daryl Braithwaite, athlete Debbie Flintoff-King and former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam backed the campaign, which aims to help people around the world realise that civilians have the right to be protected during wars.

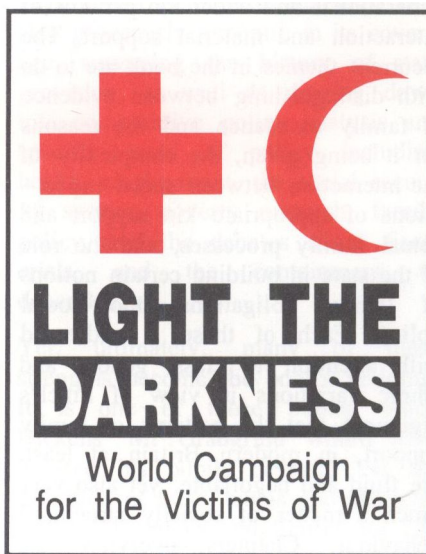
At the launch, the Chairman of the Australian Red Cross Society, Michael Wansley said: "The world has clearly failed to respect humanity. Too often civilians are just not aware of their right to be protected under International Humanitarian Law, and too often the combatants do not respect those rights.

Mr Wansley also revealed some shocking figures contained in a report entitled *Casualties of Conflict*, which details the plight of war victims. He also screened a thought-provoking

video clip, set to the John Lennon song "Imagine", which shows how important the Red Cross is in picking up the pieces in times of conflict. All television stations around the country have indicated an interest in playing the clip, so keep a look-out for it on TV!

The campaign will culminate on World Red Cross Day (8 May 1991) with a host of activities which are being planned by Red Cross youth groups around Australia.

Plans incorporating the "Light the Darkness" theme include formation of a human cross, and candle lighting in front of the War Memorial in Canberra as well as a 'hands on' display in the Memorial's Discovery Room; a candlelit vigil attended by celebrities at Darling Harbour in Sydney and kite flying in various locations around Australia.



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