

The 2008 program for the Australian Institute of Family Studies Seminar Series offered quality speakers who focused on contemporary family-centred research issues. Recent highlights are summarised below.

### ***Social mobility as the engine of inclusion***

*Seminar held at the Institute on 24 September 2008  
Report by Ren Adams*



Professor Alan Hayes

This seminar, presented by Institute Director Professor Alan Hayes, focused on current knowledge of approaches to tackling social exclusion.\* Professor Hayes set the scene by looking at the background to the development of social exclusion approaches, exploring what social exclusion actually means, who is affected, and the themes that underlie this societal problem. The presentation examined international approaches to social inclusion, with particular reference to the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Professor Hayes discussed three commonly accepted forms of social exclusion:

- *wide exclusion*—referring to large number of people being excluded on a single or small number of indicators;
- *deep exclusion*—referring to being excluded on multiple or overlapping dimensions, which is more entrenched and deep-seated than wide exclusion; and
- *concentrated exclusion*—referring to a geographic concentration of problems and to area exclusion.

The policy approaches to these forms of social exclusion have a dynamic relationship—whereas the aim of wide social inclusion policies is to prevent people from becoming deeply excluded, the aim of deep social inclusion policies is to decrease the level of exclusion.

The Australian interest in social inclusion has been more recent and, as Professor Hayes pointed out, has been elevated in importance in recent times. He stated that insights from international experiences cannot replace the process of identifying the needs and challenges that are specific to the Australian context. The current Australian focus for promoting and maintaining social inclusion was presented. Specifically, “to be socially included requires opportunities for:

- securing a job;
- accessing services;
- connecting with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- dealing with personal crises, such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job; and
- being heard”.

Several priority areas for social inclusion policy were also identified.

To examine social exclusion in Australia, Professor Hayes explored gradients in developmental and educational characteristics of children as a function of the social position of their families. He advocated the importance of building Australia’s social inclusion agendas on what has worked, and avoiding the problems that others have encountered. In order to reduce social exclusion, both active and preventive policies are needed to prevent deep social exclusion, according to Professor Hayes. In conclusion, socially inclusive, fair and open societies need to strongly support families, value their diversity, provide high-quality opportunities for all and maintain the means of mobility, irrespective of social address.

\* It should be noted that the terms social “inclusion” and “exclusion” are often used interchangeably, especially when discussing policy approaches to tackling “exclusion” to attain more “inclusion”. The same applies to Professor Hayes’ presentation and this article.

### ***“Her beauty and her terror—the wide brown land for me!” The individual and family wellbeing of Australian rural and regional families in drought***

*Seminar held at the Institute on 23 October 2008  
Report by Ren Adams*

Institute Research Fellow Dr Ben Edwards teamed with Deputy Director Dr Matthew Gray to present to a large and varied crowd. Dr Edwards began by recalling some statistical data on indicators of drought, pointing out that the most recent drought has been one of the most severe on record. In fact, large parts of southern and eastern Australia have experienced dry conditions since 1996, while October 2007 marks the sixth anniversary of lower than average rainfall totals for the agricultural Murray–Darling Basin.

Dr Edwards highlighted that, while there have been many studies of the impacts of drought, there are very few large-scale surveys that provide a focus on the impact of drought on the wellbeing of families and communities in rural areas of Australia. It is this point that led to the instigation of the Institute’s Rural and Regional Families study, which is helping to improve understanding of the impact of drought on families and communities in rural and regional Australia and the implications for policy.

The study involved 8,000 rural and regional individuals who were surveyed between September to December 2007. The study intended to test whether there is an association between drought and financial hardship, employment,



Dr Ben Edwards



Dr Matthew Gray

mental health problems, the quality of couple and family relationships, community social cohesion and participation in community organisations, and the availability of key services in the area.

Among the items asked of study participants were questions relating to: drought perceptions; other natural disasters; demographics; household mobility; employment levels; income and financial hardship; farming issues; physical and mental health; relationships, including whole-family functioning; and community factors such as social cohesion, a decline in key services or whether respondents were members of organisations.

Dr Gray discussed the study findings and the impacts on families in drought-affected areas, examining financial and familial wellbeing. He reported a significant impact of drought on family finances; in particular, on farmers in these areas, where one-third reported farm production being at the lowest level ever. There was a clear indication of flow-on effects to the finances of other members of the community who, while employed, are not directly employed in agriculture. Importantly, Dr Gray pointed to instances of resilient families who adapt to drought, thereby limiting the financial impact and possibly leading to smaller impacts on family wellbeing.

***Men's role in preventing men's violence against women: Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault and the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Inaugural Joint Forum***

*Seminar held at the Jasper Hotel on 20 November 2008  
Report by Antonia Quadara*

On 20 November, the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) and the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse (ADFVCH) held a joint forum at the

Jasper Hotel in Melbourne. The forum explored the role that men can and do play in preventing male violence, and the challenges this involvement brings for responding to the incidence of sexual offending and domestic violence in our community.

Professor Bob Pease (Deakin University) presented his reflections on this issue, which had initially been published as ADFVCH Issues Paper 17 earlier in 2008. He was joined by an esteemed panel of researchers and advocates who are also working within, and thinking through, these issues and provided responses to Professor Pease's address:

- Dr Michael Flood (LaTrobe University/VicHealth)
- Ms Mayet Costello (Sydney University)
- Ms Michelle Wright (No To Violence)
- Ms Isabelle McRea (White Ribbon Day)
- Mr Dan Whitthaus (White Ribbon Day)

We were delighted to have a similarly esteemed audience. Representatives from government, sexual assault and domestic violence services, overseas clearinghouses, and researchers combined to make a capacity audience ... and then some! Clearly this issue cuts across a number of sectors; it is something people want to talk about and hear others reflect on.

With the panel, the audience discussed the dilemmas, tensions and possibilities associated with men's involvement in violence prevention work. Difficult topics were raised, such as the dangers of co-option, the diverting of funding, and the centrality of feminist/critical frameworks for understanding violence. Yet many also celebrated the possibilities and positives of men's involvement in violence prevention, seeing their integration into prevention work as being essential to reducing the incidence of violence.

This is the first time the two clearinghouses have come together to host a public forum and we look forward to holding another in the coming year. The event provided a valuable and rare opportunity for diverse sectors involved in sexual assault and domestic violence to come together and discuss both the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of that work, as well as the practical imperatives they face.

A copy of Bob Pease's paper can be found at: [www.austdvtclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/issues\\_Papers.htm](http://www.austdvtclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/issues_Papers.htm)

Copies of the panelists' responses are available on the ACSSA website.

## **Corporal punishment of children: Reforming the law: The whys and the wherefores?**

Seminar held at the Institute on 11 December 2008

Report by Prue Holzer



The Institute and the National Child Protection Clearinghouse welcomed Associate Professor Judy Cashmore, who gave a seminar presentation entitled: "Corporal punishment of children: Reforming the law: The whys and the wherefores?" Associate Professor Cashmore holds a PhD in developmental psychology and a Masters degree in education. She is currently Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney, as well as Honorary Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, and Adjunct Professor at Southern Cross University.

In this seminar, Associate Professor Cashmore discussed the way in which hitting children as a means of punishment is a complex, emotive and contentious issue. She provided an overview of research literature on the views of children and adults on the use of physical punishment. She emphasised that while we have some idea of people's views of physical punishment, we have little information regarding the extent to which Australian parents actually use physical punishment as a means of disciplining children. However, research does indicate that parents who have used physical punishment would

prefer not to have done so. Associate Professor Cashmore's presentation also considered the legal terrain in relation to physical punishment of children. She explained that an increasing number of countries, including our nearest neighbour New Zealand, have abolished the defence of reasonable chastisement. In so doing, she considered what Australia could learn from the New Zealand experience and that of other countries. Importantly, she stressed that legal reform in this area would need to be accompanied by public education to equip parents with additional disciplinary strategies, as saying "no" to hitting is not the same as saying "no" to discipline.

At the conclusion of Associate Professor Cashmore's presentation, two other speakers considered the issue of physical punishment. Dr Bernadette Saunders (Lecturer, Monash University) discussed children's views of physical punishment. Her presentation was based on her PhD research, which focused on legally sanctioned physical punishment of children, children's rights, and the intergenerational transmission of family violence. She drew on the direct quotes of children to illustrate their thoughts and views on this issue.

Ms Diana Smart (General Manager, Research, Australian Institute of Family Studies) concluded the seminar with a discussion of the prevalence of physical punishment and harsh parenting in two longitudinal research projects: *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC), and the Australian Temperament Project.

## **Australian Institute of Family Studies Seminar Series and events**

The Australian Institute of Family Studies runs a regular Seminar Series as well as other events, such as discussion forums and workshops with partner organisations.

### **AIFS Seminar Series**

The Institute Seminar Series feature eminent speakers who focus on contemporary issues in national and international family research. Seminar programs play host to a rich and diverse field of family research professionals from the Institute and from other organisations. The Seminar Series provides a forum for discussion and debate on a diverse range of family-related issues relevant to policy makers, practitioners and researchers. All seminars are free and open to the public.

### **Other events**

In addition to the regular Seminar Series, the Institute hosts events such as forums, workshops and conferences. These may be open to the public or by invitation only and are an opportunity for the Institute to collaborate with other research, community and/or government bodies.

### **Seminar and event material**

If you can't attend a Seminar Series or other event, the Institute regularly provides open access to presentations and audio recordings via the Institute's website: [www.aifs.gov.au/institute/seminars/seminars.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/seminars/seminars.html)

External Relations Officer, Ren Adams, handles coordination of the Seminar Series and other Institute events.

For feedback, queries or to attend future events, please contact us by email at [aifs-seminars@aifs.gov.au](mailto:aifs-seminars@aifs.gov.au) or phone the Institute on (03) 9214 7888 and speak with the External Relations team.

### **Upcoming events**

For details on forthcoming events, please refer to the Institute website: [www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au)

To stay in touch with upcoming events and the publication of presentations, audio recordings and/or papers, subscribe to our email alert service, *aifs-alert*, at: [www.aifs.gov.au/institute/lists/aifs-alert.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/lists/aifs-alert.html)

Seminar Series presentations are held in the seminar room at the Institute as well as larger venues across the country.