AIDS-Orphaned Children

The AIDS epidemic in southern Africa is one of the world’s most urgent problems, devastating vulnerable communities and leaving millions of orphans in its wake. Researchers in SPSW are at the forefront of social science research on the consequences of orphanhood due to AIDS. Here, we highlight three recent or on-going studies on the subject.

HIV risk in adolescence
Orphaned children may themselves be at higher risk of being infected with HIV in adolescence, according to a study by Operario, Cluver, and researchers at the University of the Witwatersrand. They examined the HIV test results of a national representative household sample of young people in South Africa. The research found that young people who had experienced parental bereavement were more likely to engage in sexual risk behaviour and to test positive for HIV. Young females were shown to be especially at risk.

Psychological consequences
Dr Lucie Cluver (see below) recently completed the largest known study of the psychological consequences among AIDS-orphaned children. The research was conducted for her DPhil thesis. It was supported by a studentship from the ESRC and supervised by Professor Frances Gardner and Dr Don Operario.

Lucie surveyed 1200 young people in Cape Town, South Africa. The study compared AIDS-orphaned children to children orphaned by other causes (such as homicide) and non-orphans. She found that, after controlling for socio-demographic factors, AIDS-orphaned children experienced heightened levels of depression, post-traumatic stress, peer problems, delinquency, and conduct problems.

These negative mental health outcomes were largely determined by the effects of stigma and poverty, exacerbated by parental AIDS death. For example, children who reported food security and no stigma had a 19% chance of a clinical-level psychological disorder. But children with stigma and no food security had an 88% chance of disorder. According to Lucie, “It is essential that evidence-based interventions are developed and that these are rigorously evaluated.” Based on these findings, the South African government has decided to replicate the study on a national level.

Caregivers of AIDS orphans
DPhil student Caroline Kuo is currently studying well-being and social support among non-parental caregivers of AIDS orphans. Caregivers tend to be elderly grandparents and extended family kin, who may themselves be living with HIV and be socio-economically disadvantaged. Studying the psychological, economic, and social health of caregivers can provide important insights into developing family-focused interventions to improve the well-being of AIDS orphans. Kuo has recently been awarded a prestigious pre-doctoral fellowship from the U.S. National Institutes of Health in support of her research.

Lucie Cluver is a departmental lecturer in Evidence-Based Social Intervention. Her research interests are in the area of health and educational impacts of AIDS-orphanhood on children. She is currently working with the South African National Department of Social Development and the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative and collaborates closely with Cape Town Child Welfare Society. She trained as a social worker, and especially enjoys working with children and adolescents.
A Message from the Head of Department

Welcome to the first edition of Barnett House News, the newsletter of the Department of Social Policy and Social Work (SPSW) at the University of Oxford.

We have sent the newsletter to former staff and students of Barnett House, as well as to others who may be interested in keeping up to date with developments in SPSW.

The Department has undergone a substantial transformation in recent years. We introduced the innovative MPhil/MSc in Evidence-Based Social Intervention, expanded our highly successful MPhil/MSc in Comparative Social Policy, and have significantly increased our doctoral student provision.

Research activity has become more important within the Department, with a marked increase in the number of research projects in progress at any one time and the establishment of new research centres and groups. Among the latter are the Centre for Evidence Based Intervention (CEBI), the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP), and the Politics of Social Policy Research Group.

Teaching and research in Barnett House were originally focused mainly on Britain. Although this country remains at the centre of our work, we have become more international in scope. Our students come from around twenty countries and many of our research projects are international or comparative in scope.

This international focus is well illustrated by our work in South Africa, which is led by Professor Michael Noble. It includes not only research on poverty and social protection, but also teaching, training and policy advice. We are helping two 'historically disadvantaged universities' to develop Masters degrees in social policy, a subject that is relatively new in South Africa. Our evidence-based social intervention research there includes work on AIDS orphans and is led by Dr Lucie Cluver, a departmental lecturer. Both Michael and Lucie originally trained as social workers, studying for the MSc in Applied Social Studies in Barnett House.

I hope you enjoy reading Barnett House News and would be delighted to hear from you.

Professor Peter A. Kemp
Head of Department

Social Policy Research in South Africa

In April 2008, Professor Michael Noble was invited to meet the Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who was visiting Oxford. She requested a meeting with him to hear more about the work of the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP), a research centre within the department.

Mr Vusi Madonsela, Director General of the South African Government's Department of Social Development (pictured above), also recently visited CASASP for a five week sabbatical. The purpose of his stay was to learn more about social policy, with a specific focus on child poverty. While in Oxford, Mr Madonsela gave the second annual AB Xuma Memorial Lecture, speaking on 'Social security in South Africa: successes and challenges'.

CASASP's mission is to assist in the eradication of poverty and the building of citizenship in South Africa. It does this by (1) producing high quality and timely evidence-based social policy research; and (2) developing social policy as an area of study within higher education and government in South Africa.

Asylum Seeking Youth

Dr Paul Montgomery and DPhil student Raeli Bronstein have been awarded a grant by the John Fell OUP Fund to develop and test an intervention to improve the psychological well-being of young, unaccompanied asylum seekers in the UK.

The study is being conducted with the Department of Psychiatry and the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford, and is the first research collaboration between these departments.

The UK has experienced a surge in the number of young people seeking asylum, particularly from Afghanistan, Iran and Eritrea. In the last five years, there have been on average 3000 applications a year from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Over half are older adolescents aged 16 to 18.

There is a small but growing body of research on the mental health needs of young asylum seekers. It suggests that many of these children show symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and anxiety. These conditions are likely to be the result of the events that precipitated their flight, compounded by the stresses of claiming asylum, adjusting to the UK and being without a parent or guardian.

Paul and Raeli are developing an intervention to treat the mental health needs of these young people. It will be evidence-based, methodologically rigorous and relatively simple to implement. They are currently consulting social services departments and reviewing the previous literature on this subject.
Sex-biased Abortion

There has been a significant increase in the ratio of boys compared to girls born to India-born mothers in England and Wales, according to research carried out in the department by Sylvie Dubuc. This trend suggests that some parents are choosing sex-selective abortion.

The study, funded by the ESRC, analysed vital data registration statistics supplied by the Office for National Statistics. It looked at sex, birthplace of mother, and birth order within marriage from 1969 to 2005 for all mothers in England and Wales.

It found that, between 1990 and 2005, the number of births of boys per 100 girls by India-born mothers rose sharply, from 104 to 108. Because sex-selective abortion manifests itself in an altered sex-ratio at birth, a significant increase in the ratio of boys compared to girls suggests that some parents are choosing sex-selective abortion.

This increase in sex ratio coincides with the availability of pre-natal sex determination and is observed particularly at later birth orders (third child and later births). When considering only the births of the third or later child, the sex-ratio rises to an average of 113 boys per 100 girls for the period 1990–2005.

These findings mirror academic research carried out in India. The recourse to sex selective abortion by a small minority of Indian immigrant mothers appears to be the most plausible explanation for this trend.

Because the data are limited to births to foreign-born mothers, the results do not apply to second- or third-generation Indian women living in England and Wales. There was no significant trend in the sex-ratio of births from any other groups of foreign-born mothers and no birth order effect in any other group.

The findings of this study were used in a report by the BBC and have subsequently had substantial media coverage in the UK and India.

Sylvie Dubuc joined the department in 2006 as a researcher in the Oxford Centre for Population Research. Her previous work focused on quantitative studies of population dynamics in space and time and their links with the economy, society and the environment. Sylvie is now focusing on demographic trends with an emphasis on projections of ethnic minority and religious groups in the UK, and has recently been awarded an ESRC grant to carry out research in this area.

New Crime Research Findings

The positive effects of crime reduction interventions may 'spill over' into neighbouring communities. That is one of the key findings of a study carried out by David McLennan and Adam Whitworth from the department’s Social Disadvantage Research Centre (SDRC).

A common concern among policy makers is that area-based crime reduction interventions might simply displace criminal offences to neighbouring localities which are not subject to intervention, rather than produce true reductions in criminal activity.

But an opposite process might be occurring instead, whereby the positive effects of area-based crime interventions 'spill over' into surrounding communities leading to a diffusion of benefit.

As part of the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, David and Adam examined whether there was evidence of either displacement of crime or diffusion of benefit around the NDC crime reduction interventions.

They assessed changes in crime rates in each of the 39 NDC partnerships and in areas encircling each of the NDC partnerships, and analysed four high-volume crime activities, across four sets of sequential 12–month time periods.

Their analysis revealed significantly more evidence for the diffusion of benefit than for the displacement hypothesis. Areas immediately surrounding an NDC community were more likely to experience a reduction than an increase in crime. They also found that the likelihood of crime reduction decreased with the distance from the original intervention community.
Grandparenting Study

Grandparents who are involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren can contribute to a child's well-being, according to the first-ever national survey of the relationships that adolescents have with their grandparents.

The survey also found that a third of maternal grandmothers provided regular care for their grandchildren, with two out of five providing occasional help. Grandparents were also involved in helping to solve the young people's problems, as well as talking with them about plans for their future.

The study also showed that, at times of family breakdown and separation, many grandparents played an important role in bringing stability to their grandchildren's lives. Grandparents were also found to be important in times of family adversity and appeared to help the whole family cope with the difficulties. As one 12-year-old states, 'My nan is always asking if I'm getting bullied. My nanny P used to go in every time I'd come out of school crying and my nanny B would comfort me.'

The research was led by Professor Ann Buchanan, Director of the Centre for Research into Parenting and Children in the Department, and also involved the Institute of Education. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, it included a survey of 1,596 children aged 11 to 16 across England and Wales, and in-depth interviews with 40 children from a range of backgrounds.

Professor Buchanan said: "We were surprised by the huge amount of informal caring that grandparents were doing, which most grandparents really welcomed. What was especially interesting was the links we found between 'involved grandparents' and adolescent well-being. Closeness was not enough: only grandparents who got stuck in and did things with their grandchildren had this positive impact on their grandchildren's well-being."

Do the Early Years Matter?

What helps young children growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to develop to their full potential? This has been the subject of recently completed research in SPSW.

Over the last ten years, Government policies focusing on parents and their young children have proliferated. New service provision includes Sure Start, Children's Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries. Financial assistance has been provided via tax credits, childcare grants for low-income families, and Sure Start maternity grants. There have also been moves towards parental leave for fathers, improvements in maternity leave, and even a focus on the role of grandparents.

The current government is the first in Britain to treat 'family policy' as a matter of public concern and normative evaluation rather than a private matter. The upbringing of young children, and their development as productive citizens, is now seen as a matter of public policy. This new approach has been driven by two concerns: child poverty and the negative child outcomes associated with social and economic disadvantage.

Recent research by the department, led by Teresa Smith, has focused on two key family policy programmes. The first project evaluated the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI), which was launched in 2001. It aimed to kick-start new, high quality childcare in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and thereby to help parents into employment, reduce child poverty and boost children's development.

The NNI research showed that 75% of the 1,400 new nurseries were successfully located in the 30% most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country. Without a NNI nursery place, many of the low-income families living in these areas would not have been in work, used formal childcare, or claimed benefits such as the Working Tax Credit.

The second study evaluated the Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP). The introduction of this programme reflects the growing recognition that parents play an important role in their children's early learning. In particular, parenting style and the home learning environment are crucial to how well young children develop.

The ELPP evaluation showed that extra support can help parents with less awareness of how to help their children. Parents were enthusiastic about the books and toys their children enjoyed; they learned how to support their children's language development, for example, through shared reading; and they took their children out more, which also helped their children to develop.

What are the lessons from these and other research studies on the early years? First, it has underlined the importance of parents, the neighbourhood, and social policy; that it is possible for programmes to focus on parents in disadvantaged circumstances and, in doing so, to make a difference to their children's development. Second, it has shown that help in the home, and not just in good schools, is crucial. But third, it has also shown that there is still a long way to go to close the 'learning gap' between young children in disadvantaged areas and their better off peers.
Poverty in an International Context

Professor Robert Walker joined the department in April 2006 – an exciting addition to the staff and one that reflects the vibrant growth of the department over the past few years.

Robert is particularly interested in the use of rigorous research and scholarship to help inform real-world policy decisions made by national and overseas governments. A major focus of his work is the experience of poverty: how living in poverty shapes people's experiences, choices and futures.

His research has shown how even temporary episodes of poverty can adversely impact upon the life trajectories of individuals and families. This emphasises the importance of studying the experience of poverty over time. He comments, "We used to characterise the poor and the non-poor as if they never change places, but we know they do. Policy attention should focus on the factors that trigger spells of poverty, which can point to interventions for alleviating poverty episodes and their impacts."

Together with Senior Research Officer, Dr Mark Tomlinson, Robert is currently working on an ESRC-funded project that is using structural equation modelling to produce robust indicators of poverty in the UK.

Robert's research portfolio also includes investigations into the policy process in emerging economies, commonalities across policy structures, and the implications of difference, such as the role of social security at different stages of economic development.

Robert teaches masters students on the Comparative Social Policy course and supervises doctoral students in the department. He is currently Deputy Head of Department.

George Smith Retires

On 25th January 2008, approximately 40 current and former members of the department gathered together to celebrate the retirement of George Smith and in effect, the end of his long engagement with the University of Oxford.

George came to Oxford in 1960 as an undergraduate at St Edmund Hall where he studied Greats. Following two years as a teacher in India, George returned to the University and this department (then the Department of Social and Administrative Studies), first to study for a BPhil in Sociology and then to work as a researcher on the Educational Priorities Area Project and Community Development Project. George held a series of lectureships in the department until the 1980s. From the early 1980s until the mid 1990s he worked as the research adviser to HM Inspectorate of Schools in London, and then to its successor OFSTED. Throughout this period George retained a part time research role at Oxford, to which he returned full time in 1996, and additionally taught on the Masters programme in Comparative Social Policy (CSP). He later became the CSP course director, supervising a growing number of Masters and doctoral students. His research has mainly been in the areas of urban disadvantage, social security, poverty/lowl income and education, and the measurement of deprivation at the local level, including work in India and Bangladesh on the use of new sources of microdata for this purpose. With Michael Noble, George set up the Social Disadvantage Research Centre in the department in the late 1990s and was co-director until 2005.

He was made Reader in Social Policy in 2000, in recognition of the contribution he has made to the field. In 2005 George was elected as head of department for a two year period until 2007, succeeding Teresa Smith, his partner, who had held the post for eight years.

At the dinner, his successor Peter Kemp, on behalf of the department, expressed both gratitude and admiration for the considerable time and effort that George has put into the department over his many years here and in his many different capacities.

Despite having formally retired, George is still active in the department as a Senior Research Associate and he continues to teach and supervise students, as well as being a regular at seminars.
CBE For Professor Michael Noble

Professor Michael Noble has been awarded the CBE in the list of New Year Honours, 2008, in recognition of his services to research on poverty and deprivation.

Michael is Director of both the Social Disadvantage Research Centre (SDRC) and the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP) in the department.

SDRC has just completed the new national indices of deprivation for England, which is used by central government to allocate resources and guide policies for alleviating the consequences of deprivation.

Michael is also working with the South African government to develop high quality, evidence-based social policy research to assist in the eradication of poverty and the development of citizenship.

Weidenfeld Scholar

Saltanat Rasulova

Saltanat's profile is described in its BBC profile as 'a country of striking beauty and towering peaks. It became independent with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The economic situation is dire, particularly in the south, where unemployment is very high and poverty rife.' This says Saltanat, 'has meant great challenges for the government, especially on issues like infant mortality, child poverty, violence and abuse against children, child labour and dealing with large numbers of street children and those in orphanages.'

UNICEF, with its commitment to realising and protecting children's rights, is one of the agencies working in Kyrgyzstan to help the government.

'Saltanat describes being in Oxford as 'a phenomenal experience. I like the system here. It is quite complicated with all the buildings and people and passwords, but there's also lots of help from the college and from the University, with the IT and the libraries, and everyone has been really friendly.' Saltanat has an academic supervisor and two mentors in her college, St. Cross, to help her, and there is additional support from the Weidenfeld Programme. This has also helped me to settle in quickly,' she says. 'I am really grateful to them for that and for the opportunity to meet the other scholars who have been doing different jobs in different countries. Another of the Weidenfeld scholars — Ernst Abdirashitov, studying Evidence-Based Social Intervention in SPSW — is also from Kyrgyzstan and Saltanat has met a third person from her country, who came here with support from the Chevening Programme.

Saltanat is determined to 'get as much as possible from being at Oxford,' including learning French because she feels it will help her with the next stage of her career. Having completed her postgraduate year, she plans to continue to study or to work in the UK or elsewhere in the European Community before going home. She says: 'I will go back – I must go back – but I need more skills to take me, so that I can return to make my own contribution.'
Research Student Conference

The second bi-annual research student conference 'Policy and Practice: Bringing together Social Policy and Social Work' was held in March 2008. The event - organised by DPhil candidates Sarah McLoughlin, Sarah Schulman and Laura Valadez - brought together doctoral students to share research ideas, methodologies, and findings, and to forge new connections between students, faculty and research staff. Professor Roger Goodman, Head of the Social Sciences Division, opened the event. Sixteen doctoral students at different stages of their research presented on topics as diverse as post industrial economies and immigrants, self-help for anxiety, nurses' preparedness for retirement, childhood experience on a low income and access to healthcare facilities in Andhra Pradesh for HIV-positive women. The conference provided a supportive environment in which the speakers received valuable feedback on their research and the students attending gained additional insight for their own studies, helping to build a thriving and productive student network in the department.

Barnett Prize

The Barnett Prize for 2007 has been awarded to Lenah Saleh (St. Cross) for her journal article Moving beyond 'the Down Low': A critical analysis of terminology guiding HIV prevention efforts for African American men who have secretive sex with men.

Alumni

We take pride in the accomplishments and successes of our students. In each edition of the Newsletter, we will spotlight a few alumni and ask them to reflect on the training they received in the department.

Karen Matsuoaka was also a Rhodes Scholar. Her doctoral thesis, which she completed in 2006, investigated how health care coverage in the United States affects diabetic children's quality of life, services and health outcomes.

Karen is now a health economist and policy analyst for the White House, working in the Office of Management and Budget. She oversees regulatory policy-making and initiatives for a number of U.S. federal agencies. "As a Presidential Management Fellow, I am currently on detail from the White House to Congress on the House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Health. I am working on drafting legislation on a number of issues, including health IT, the crisis in U.S. emergency rooms, and clinical comparative effectiveness research."

Asked how postgraduate research training in the department helped prepare for this work, Karen says "My job requires me to synthesize large amounts of information quickly and to have a solid understanding not only of my specialty area (i.e. health policy) but also how it affects, and is affected by, other policy areas, such as tax, employment, immigration, and gender policy. In this regard, the pace of SPSSW's programme as well as its breadth has served me very well. I am grateful to the department for instilling in me the importance of thinking about how individual policies hang together, rather than focusing on policies in isolation."

Getting in touch

If you received your Master's or Doctorate in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, please send your contact details to: editor@socres.ox.ac.uk. We would be delighted to hear from you.
Barnett House Trained Social Worker Nominated for Man Booker Prize

Former Barnett House student Gaynor Arnold was nominated for the longlist for this year's Man Booker prize. After reading English Literature at St Hilda's College, Gaynor studied for a Diploma in Social and Administrative Studies at Barnett House, then the Department of Social and Administrative Studies, and has been a social worker for almost 40 years. Her book Girl in a Blue Dress was on the longlist for the 2008 prize.

Website

The department has a new website where you can find information on staff and their research interests, activities, publications, seminars, lectures, events, and more. See www.spsw.ox.ac.uk.

Write to us...

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. We would be very interested to hear your views and comments and to receive communications from any Oxford Alumni. Please write to the Editor, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford, Barnett House, 32 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2ER, or e-mail editor@socres.ox.ac.uk.

If you would like to add, remove, or update your details on the University's Alumni Database, please go to www.alumni.ox.ac.uk. If you would prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail, please contact editor@socres.ox.ac.uk.

Acknowledgements