



INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Monday 20th November, 2006

Emmanuel College, The University of Queensland

REPORT

Introduction

This workshop was organised by the Australasian Centre on Ageing at the University of Queensland and supported by the ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well. There were 24 participants, including 19 Australian researchers in the field, 2 international researchers and 3 government representatives (state and local). Most of the researchers were based in Queensland at one of three universities (UQ, QUT or Griffith).

Professor Helen Bartlett, Convenor for the Independent Living and Social Participation Theme in the Network, welcomed participants and outlined the purpose of the workshop and the significance of intergenerational relations research within the Australian research agenda on ageing.

Professor Sarah Harper, Director of the Oxford Institute of Ageing, was the guest speaker. She provided a useful international context and described recent changes to families including their changing nature and structure, changes to the number of generations alive at one time, the changing duration of kin roles, and the growing prominence of grandparents. Prof Harper then focused on the research being conducted at the Oxford Institute of Ageing, and in particular that on grandparents and migrant care workers. Her presentation was thought-provoking and enabled the participants to appreciate the broader context of their own interests in this area.

Group discussions focused on the nature and strengths of existing research, and the gaps in knowledge that remain.

Existing research strengths

Areas related to this issue that participants identified as receiving most research attention included:

- Grandparenting issues
- Informal contributions to family and community, e.g. caregiving, community participation
- Productivity and workforce issues (e.g. skills shortage)
- Infrastructure needed to support older population (e.g. housing and relocation)
- Demographic trends and issues
- Care (e.g. who is going to care for older people?)

Future research development

Further research development was identified as necessary in the following areas:

- Grandparenting e.g. grandparents parenting their grandchildren, social and financial support
- Relocation of older people and families – impact on family structure and intergenerational relations; distance between family members
- Demography – infrastructure to support changes; ensuring a good intergenerational mix in community planning
- Exchanges
 - Informal care of people with disabilities and implications for older carers
 - Informal care of older people and implications for younger carers
 - Transfer of care between younger and older people
 - Economic transfers between younger and older people
- More strategic links between practice and research so each can inform the other (e.g. ensuring a solid evidence base for practice, and the appropriate evaluation of practice)

Research gaps

The following specific research gaps were identified (the first five issues were the most frequently mentioned by participants):

1. Defining 'intergenerational' – consistent definition needed that is not limited to economic aspects
2. Younger carers (e.g. caring for parents)
3. Legal and financial aspects
 - a. Financial abuse of older people by family
 - b. Contestability of wills
 - c. Inheritance
 - d. Guardianship
4. The diversity of intergenerational relations and what these differences mean for:
 - a. Multicultural and migration issues including appropriate care options for CALD older people, and caring from a distance
 - b. Indigenous intergenerational relations
 - c. Economically disadvantaged
 - d. Young old, oldest old
 - e. Gender e.g. what is the role of grandfathers?
5. The changing face of intergenerational relations
 - a. Changes to families, roles and expectations, mobility
6. Workforce/retirement issues
 - a. Labour force issues, skills shortage
 - b. Balancing competing demands of work and care roles
 - c. Transitions between work and retirement
 - d. Age discrimination
 - e. Preparation for retirement
 - f. Social and economic factors related to continuing working and retirement
 - g. Age and skills/work capacity issues

7. Grandparents in general (e.g. support required, social impact)
8. Informal contributions including the balance between informal and formal care
9. The role of the private sector in addressing older people's needs
10. Social capital
 - a. Age-friendly communities – creating a community for all ages, and one that includes need of the non-ambulatory
 - b. Involving all age groups in volunteering and community development
11. Health
 - a. The benefits of intergenerational relations for mental and physical health (e.g. the relationship between children on older people in the early stages of dementia)
 - b. Understanding disability and preparing for change (e.g. economic impact, impact on roles in family)

Concluding comments

The workshop provided a useful forum for setting out an agenda for research development in the area of intergenerational relations. It was noted that this is a very large agenda with a need for further prioritisation and greater cross-disciplinary efforts. It was also recognised that research being undertaken outside the Ageing Well Network should be identified and recognised in any agenda setting. In addition, the importance of understanding how Australia is located in the international context regarding progress in this field of research was also recognised. There was interest from participants in following up with more focused Network workshops to generate specific research proposals.