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Living standards determined by more than income

The Ministry of Social Development's Centre for Social Research and Evaluation has released the first report from its 2004 survey on the living standards of New Zealanders.

Part of the Centre's ongoing Living Standards research programme, New Zealand Living Standards 2004 shows that three in four New Zealanders report having a fairly comfortable to very good living standard.

The research looked at factors that contribute to both positive living standards and lower living standards. "Interestingly," says Deputy Chief Executive of Social Development Policy and Knowledge, Marcel Lauzière, "people on benefit were found to have lower living standards than working people with comparable incomes.



Marcel Lauzière

While income can certainly help improve our living standards, this research demonstrates the importance of sustained employment, as well as higher levels of education, home ownership and other assets."

The range of factors that contribute to lower living standards include multiple marriage breakups, financial or employment shocks, and serious health issues.

"While this is to be expected, what is particularly interesting is the cumulative effect found in the research," says John Jensen, lead researcher on the project.



John Jensen

"These 'life shocks' tend to have little impact on living standards when they occur in isolation but multiple restrictions are capable of combining

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Former and current members of the Ministry of Social Development's Centre for Social Research and Evaluation's Living Standards research team during a planning meeting for the future direction of the research programme. From left: Bev Hong, Davina Jones, Linda Angell, Rob Hodgson, Sathi Sathiyandra and John Jensen.

Living Standards data available on request

The Centre for Social Research and Evaluation's Living Standards research programme has produced a rich source of information that will help researchers, policy makers across sectors, communities and government agencies to develop sound policies to address both living standards and wellbeing more generally.

"The dataset contains information on many matters other than living standards, such as family structure, labour market participation, education, disability and health, to name just some of the areas," John Jensen, lead researcher on the project, says.

The Centre would like to see this information used as widely as possible, and welcomes inquiries from people who wish either to extend the research reported here or to use the data to look at new topics and questions.

To request data from the New Zealand Living Standards 2004 survey, use the heading "Access to living standards data" and mail the manager, Social and Economic Wellbeing Evaluation Team, Centre for Social Research and Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development, PO Box 1556, Wellington 6140.

Living standards determined by more than income

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to substantially lower living standards. The research found that people with up to seven life shocks have a similar average living standard to those with no life shocks. Eight seems to be the tipping point."

These issues will be explored further in a report due to be published in June 2007. This report will build on the preliminary explanatory work done for *New Zealand Living Standards 2004* to produce a full analysis of variation in living standards.

The research team is also working on a report describing the living standards of Pacific people in New Zealand. The Centre for Social Research and Evaluation expects to publish the report in December 2006, along with a document detailing the methodology used.

All published reports from the Living Standards research programme are available at www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/social-research/living-standards/index.html

Call for abstracts

The organisers of the Social Policy, Research and Evaluation Conference 2007: Connecting Hearts, Minds and Lives are calling for people to send abstracts for papers and the poster competition.

The conference will be held in Wellington on 3–5 April 2007, and has the theme of "Investing in social success". The sub-themes are:

- social investment – effective and sustainable social investment
- global context for social policy – building engagement to maximise opportunities
- social dynamics – implications for change and cohesion
- enduring social challenges – improving traction on critical issues.

Submission criteria are available at www.msd.govt.nz/events/conferences/social-policy-07.html

Chair's comment



SPEaR is now almost five years old. SPEaR's chair, Professor Richard Bedford, reflects on the committee's achievements.

Born in an unforgettable year, SPEaR has facilitated and led initiatives since 2001 that are designed to ensure the government's social research knowledge and data needs are met. SPEaR continues to provide practical advice on how to improve systems and networks within the sector, most notably through some best practice guidelines. Although there is still have some work to do, the social sector is now enjoying increased recognition as a key player in providing both quality policy advice to Ministers, as well as being an active player in fostering the next generation of researchers, working in collaboration with BRCSS.

I am proud of SPEaR's achievements to date. The Committee and Secretariat are involved in many projects that traverse complex research protocol and data access issues. SPEaR also continues to actively support researchers through the Linkages Programme. With rounds in May, August and November each year, Linkages provides funding that both builds knowledge for informing the development of social policy, as well as sponsors initiatives to improve research capability, including agency research practice. The total funds allocated to date (\$969,620.50) over 10 rounds, shows the important contribution SPEaR is making to building capacity and capability across the sector.

The next phase of our website portal will soon be released, which aims to be a "one stop shop" communicating news and events related to social research and evaluation in New Zealand. Through the website it will be possible to upload information quickly and easily, get information about research funding and current job opportunities in the sector, and download SPEaR's best practice guidelines to ensure quality research and evaluation criteria are met. The website will allow cross-agency and cross-disciplinary information sharing in a way that hasn't been possible to date, and will provide researchers and evaluators with an opportunity to keep up to date with developments in the sector.

SPEaR's work programme also includes mapping of social research and evaluation in the social sector in order to establish a coherent picture of current social policy research and evaluation activities, as well as lines of advice to key research funding agencies in the public sector. We will continue to develop our ability to provide government and the sector with best practice advice and to facilitate communication across the sector. I look forward to keeping you up to date with progress. We welcome feedback and constructive criticism on the work of SPEaR.

Showcasing New Zealand housing research

The inaugural Australasian Housing Researchers Conference, hosted in June by the southern node of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute at Flinders University, Adelaide, brought together housing specialists from around Australia and New Zealand. Housing New Zealand Corporation Chief Advisor for Housing Sector Policy, Blair Badcock, says the concept for the conference was modelled on the annual Housing Studies Association meetings in the United Kingdom and will be held in alternate years to the National Housing Conference in Australia. More than 100 people attended the meeting, including a strong contingent from New Zealand research organisations. "This provided an opportunity for us to 'showcase' our housing

research and make connections with policy analysts from the Australian and state governments and researchers working on similar housing issues in Australia, such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare." Parallel sessions were held on topics such as: housing markets; housing affordability and government programmes; public housing management; neighbourhoods, community and housing; housing design issues related to ageing; design for sustainable housing; health and housing policy; homelessness; and innovation and advances in housing research. Queensland University and RMIT University are investigating the feasibility of hosting the conference next year, in either Brisbane or Melbourne.

Evaluation highlights value of healthy housing

An evaluation of a Healthy Housing programme shows how a cross-government initiative can work well. The evaluation has also shown improvements in the standard of housing and the health and wellbeing of the families involved, as well as reductions in crowding.

Healthy Housing, launched in 2001, is a joint initiative between the Housing New Zealand Corporation and district health boards. It aims to reduce the risks and rates of housing-related diseases, and improve wellbeing for tenants, particularly children, in areas with high concentrations of Housing New Zealand houses, high levels of deprivation and high rates of potentially avoidable hospitalisations.

The programme was piloted in Onehunga, Mangere and Otara between January 2001 and June 2002 and then extended to Glen Innes, Panmure, Wiri, Whangarei, Kaitia and Kaikohe.

Housing New Zealand area co-ordinators, public health nurses and families work together to assess what needs to be done to houses, and about living arrangements and health and social issues. Families and providers then implement agreed action plans to reduce crowding, improve the health of the occupants and link families to appropriate health and social services.

Various evaluative activities have been undertaken in the five years of the programme. Analysis of administrative data and a cost-benefit analysis were undertaken by Housing New Zealand. Evaluation of outcomes and the pilot evaluation were undertaken by Auckland UniServices, and an analysis of hospitalisation data by Counties Manukau District Health Board. In some cases, evaluative work is ongoing.

Housing New Zealand's Acting Manager of Research and Evaluation, Patricia Laing, says the evaluation shows the interventions have improved the housing-related health of the state house tenants and increased tenants' sense of wellbeing and community participation.

"The analysis of the hospitalisation data confirms families' increased sense of wellbeing." The pilot evaluation noted a 33% drop in potentially avoidable hospitalisations. The programme evaluation recorded a 37% decrease. "This downward trend is expected to continue over time thereby increasing the value of the initiative," Patricia says.

There was also a small but significant benefit to cost ratio for Housing New Zealand, but Patricia says the cost-benefit analysis only measures some easily quantifiable indirect benefits. "The outcomes evaluation suggests that there are many additional benefits to tenants that can only be measured qualitatively."

These benefits include: increased wellbeing among the tenants; reduced truancy and family fighting, especially between siblings; street kids returning home; adults going back to school; and families reconnecting with extended families and the wider community, including church groups.

"Evaluation of Healthy Housing indicates that the outcomes are being achieved and that these achievements will increase the quality of life for tenants and benefit Housing New Zealand and district health boards over time."

Patricia says the outcomes evaluation also noted that Healthy Housing team members from Housing New Zealand and the district health boards go to great lengths to achieve positive results for families. "This dedication contributes to the success of Healthy Housing and the sustainability of the initiative."

For more information, contact Patricia.Laing@hnzc.co.nz

Family relationships

A new report shows that on the whole New Zealanders are happy with the state of their relationships. *New Zealanders' Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting* was funded by the Families Commission's Blue Skies Fund. The report, by Dr Jeremy Robertson of the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families at Victoria University, found New Zealanders regard relationships with a range of people as important, particularly those with their children and partners, followed by extended families. For more information, go to www.familiescommission.govt.nz/

Taking account of gender in disaster response

"Gender influences our everyday lives and so it is not unexpected that it also affects the way in which disasters are experienced," says Rosalind Houghton, co-organiser of a recent workshop on gender and disasters. "Yet the impact of gender is often overlooked in disaster research and planning."

The workshop was run as part of the New Zealand Natural Hazards Management Conference, held in Christchurch in August, and provided an opportunity for those attending to hear about research on the subject and meet others in what is a relatively small field.

"The workshop examined the different ways that gender impacts upon individuals' planning and responses to natural hazard events, both in New Zealand and overseas," Rosalind says. "About 30 people attended, which was a good size for discussion."

Speakers included international experts from the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia as well as representatives from New Zealand Police, Civil Defence and non-government organisations.

"For example, Dr Elaine Enarson, of Brandon University in Canada, gave an overview of how gender was a factor affecting our everyday lives so it should also be taken into account in disaster management and planning. Sarah Stuart-Black, of the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, spoke on the changing nature of emergency management and the greater involvement of women now," Rosalind says.

Dr Tania Caulfield, of World Vision Australia, spoke about the impact of disasters on women in India, such as a change in their roles or the need to relocate. Other speakers,



Workshop speakers and organisers, left to right: Dr Tania Caulfield, World Vision Australia; Neil Peterson, New Zealand Police; Sarah Stuart-Black, Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management; Dr Elaine Enarson, Brandon University, Canada; Sara Williams, Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management; and Dr Maureen Fordham, University of Northumbria, UK.

including Rosalind, talked about the incidence of violence during and after natural disasters.

Rosalind is researching reported cases of domestic violence after disasters in New Zealand for a SPEaR-sponsored PhD at Victoria University, after completing an Honours study last year that found an increase in reported domestic violence in Whakatane following major flooding in July 2004.

"The key messages that came from the workshop were that people often do not think about gender issues in relation to disaster management and planning, that it is important that people talk and share information, and that there

needs to be more research done.

"A lot of emergency management policy claims to be gender neutral but it's not – it's actually gender blind, and the two are not the same. For example, women's feminine hygiene needs are not taken into account," Rosalind says.

"It's about incorporating women's voices but also raising awareness that gender is an important issue to consider in planning and response."

The workshop was partly funded through a SPEaR Linkages Visiting Speaker Award.

For more information, contact rosalindhoughton@hotmail.com

International benchmarks for New Zealand education

Participation in international education studies provides New Zealand with benchmarks for comparing our system with those of other countries, and a rich source of evidence for developing education policy.

Responsibility for managing New Zealand's participation in the international surveys rests with the Comparative Education Research Unit in the Ministry of Education.

The work covers: the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA); Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL); and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). A fifth survey, the International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), is in the early planning stages, with the study to be conducted in 2008.

The unit comprises a core team of nine staff, but this can swell to 30 at peak times to help with coding and entering the data.

"CERU is part of the Strategy and System Performance group. As such, we have a monitoring role for student achievement and adult foundation learning and literacy. We also provide evidence for policy decisions and to assist with strategic priority setting," CERU manager Lisa Rodgers says. "So we provide international benchmarks, identify achievement trends and provide information to help with forecasting."

PISA is done every three years, and about 4,500 New Zealand fifteen year olds from 170 schools have just completed tests for the 2006 survey. New Zealand is one of 56 countries taking part in this cycle which focuses on scientific literacy but also assesses reading and mathematical literacy. The



The Ministry of Education's Comparative Education Research Unit team, from left: Paul Satherley, Maree Telford, Megan Chamberlain, Steve May, Robyn Caygill and Lisa Rodgers. Absent are Jeremy Praat, Kate Lang, and Abby Nurse.

assessments look at students' ability to apply knowledge and skills and to analyse, reason and communicate effectively as they pose, solve and interpret problems in a variety of situations. The survey also obtains background information on the students and their schools.

"PISA is a key indicator for measuring our progress in providing an education system that has strong learning foundations, successful school leavers and motivated and self-directed lifelong learners," says senior research analyst Maree Telford. "PISA measures how New Zealand compares internationally for these goals, and enables us to identify strengths and weaknesses in our curriculum."

Data collection is under way for the 2006 Adult Literacy Survey and Life Skills Survey (ALL), which builds on the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). "It will provide information on the stock of skills New Zealanders have, whether that's the right stock of skills and whether we have the right skill building programmes in place," says ALL project manager Paul Satherley. A lot of the analysis will be done within CERU in consultation with other agencies interested in adult skills, such as the Department of Labour, the Tertiary Education Commission, and the Ministries of Social Development, Women's Affairs, Te Puni Kōkiri and Pacific Island Affairs.

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International benchmarks for New Zealand education

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New Zealand is one of 40 countries taking part in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). PIRLS is a cycle of assessments carried out every five years, and is designed to measure trends in reading literacy achievement. It involves New Zealand's Year 5 students (10 year olds), and data for the second cycle were collected in New Zealand late last year.

Senior research analyst Megan Chamberlain says PIRLS looks at reading literacy levels of middle primary school children, at the point where they have "finished learning to read and are moving to reading to learn". Students' reading comprehension skills are assessed using a variety of texts, from stories to brochures to science material.

"We look at how well our students perform against students from other systems as well as monitoring how well groups of students within New Zealand are progressing.

"We also collect valuable background information from school principals, classroom teachers, and from the children themselves. Parents also provide information about their child's early literacy experiences.. The background information helps us to understand the influences on students' reading achievement.

"Some of the effects of our literacy strategy should start to show up in this cycle. It won't be the sole measure of success but it will be an indicator of how it is progressing," Megan says.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) likewise provides data that is used for monitoring our education system and identifying trends in students' mathematics and science achievement at Year 5 (10 year olds) and Year 9 (14 year olds).

The third cycle was completed in 2002–2003 and data collection for the fourth cycle will take place in New Zealand towards the end of this year, although this time covering only Year 5 students.

Senior research analysts Robyn Caygill and Kate Lang say the data will indicate if interventions such as the Early Numeracy project, which started in 2001 and is being progressively rolled out nationwide, are having an effect.

For more information, go to <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/research/index.html>

How does New Zealand's education compare?

PISA 2003 The mean performance of New Zealand 15 year olds was significantly higher than the OECD mean for each of the four areas assessed in 2003 (reading, mathematical and science literacy, and problem solving). Finland was the only country that performed significantly better than New Zealand in reading and only four countries achieved a result that was significantly better than New Zealand in mathematics and science. Results from PISA 2006 are due at the end of 2007.

IALS 1996 New Zealand has a similar distribution of literacy skills within its adult population as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. About one in five adults were operating at a highly effective level of literacy. Results from the 2006 Adult Literacy Survey and Life Skills Survey (ALL), which builds on IALS, will be available from mid 2007.

PIRLS 2001 New Zealand students had a mean reading score that was significantly higher than the international mean for 35 countries but lower than that of students in 11 countries including Sweden, the Netherlands, England and the United States. New Zealand students were well-represented in the highest levels of reading proficiency but there was a relatively large gap in scores between our highest and lowest performing students compared with most other high performing countries. Results from PIRLS 2005-2006 will be available from December 2007.

TIMSS 2002–2003 At Year 5 (middle primary), the New Zealand students' mean score for mathematics was similar to the international mean for 25 countries but their mean science score was significantly higher. Students' mean performance in each learning area was similar to Australia's but lower than for England and the United States. New Zealand had a significant improvement in both mathematics and science achievement in the eight years since the first study in 1994–1995.

At Year 9 (lower secondary), the mean scores for both science and mathematics were significantly higher than the international means for the 46 countries taking part. There were no significant changes in the overall mean performance for either subject in the eight years since the first study in 1994–1995. Results from TIMSS 2006–2007 (Year 5 only) will be available from December 2008.

Making housing affordable

New research on housing affordability in Nelson, Marlborough and Tasman has identified ways for local government, employer and community groups and central government agencies to increase and diversify housing stock in these regions.

The research, led by Motu Economic and Public Policy Research, was jointly funded by the Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand (CHRANZ), the Ministry of Economic Development (from the Regional Initiatives Fund) and the Work and Income regional office for Nelson, Marlborough and the West Coast.

Arthur Grimes of Motu says the research shows Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough require improved access to affordable housing, improvements in housing quality and increases in the supply and diversity of accommodation types. "Ensuring a supply of affordable housing is essential to the economic and social wellbeing of the three areas."

The research found house prices in the area rose 70% between 2002 and 2004. The surge in population came from increased employment and internal migration (retirees and purchasers of vacation homes) and put pressure on the housing market.

Housing supply (both for owner-occupied and rental properties) has not matched demand, and home ownership rates and housing affordability have declined. It found housing development has been restricted by land availability, zoning, infill and density regulations, lack of infrastructure, natural hazards, the

desire for green space and questions over the use of productive farmland for housing.

Solutions suggested by the researchers include changes to planning, infrastructure and transport and to regulations on infill housing and housing density. Others address the needs of migrant workers, support from employers, overcrowding, poor quality rental properties and compliance with codes and consent processes.

For more information contact arthur.grimes@motu.org.nz or terrence.aschoff@chranz.co.nz, or go to www.chranz.co.nz for free copies of the full research report.

More research

The Centre for Housing Research, Aotearoa New Zealand will be releasing two research reports next month. *The Impact on Housing Energy Efficiency of Market Prices, Incentives and Regulatory Requirements* will look at the effect of prices, incentives and regulations on energy efficiency within households, and will recommend options for regulatory and market-based instruments to encourage energy efficiency. *Māori Housing Experiences: Emerging Trends and Issues* will provide information on the housing experiences and aspirations of Māori communities, to inform policy in the housing area.

People in R&E

Alison Chetwin is to take up the position of Evaluation Manager at New Zealand Police early in October. She is currently Team Leader Research and Evaluation at the Ministry of Justice, where she has been a researcher and evaluator for 12 years. During that time, she evaluated crime prevention, burglary, family violence, victim and cultural interventions as well as managed what is now the New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey. She expects the evaluation team in New



Zealand Police will work on similar areas, but with a police operational focus.

Hannah Pashby has recently taken up the position of project advisor for SPEaR. Her job involves looking after the SPEaR Linkages Funding Programme and marketing. Before taking on her new position, Hannah worked on contract to the Ministry of Social Development as the team administrator for the Strategic Projects and Communications Team and for SPEaR.

