

# ISSR Review August 2011

(linked stories)



## Director's welcome

In ISSR, our aspirations for our research are straightforward. We aspire to do research that is high quality, that draws on and brings together theoretical and substantive expertise, advanced social scientific research methods and robust, credible evidence. We aspire to do research that is significant, that addresses important questions and topics and advances knowledge in demonstrable ways. We aspire to do research that is worthwhile because it contributes positively to enhancing human wellbeing. And we aspire to do research that is engaged, in that it involves stakeholders and participants with interests in the objectives and outcomes of the research we undertake.

Many social science research institutions would probably acknowledge similar aspirations. Ours are not unique or even especially original. The challenge lies not in articulating them, but in meeting them, or at least in getting closer to meeting them. For a new research institute that depends very largely on "soft money" this challenge is sometimes an acute one. There are sometimes hard trade-offs between doing what pays the bills or is necessary to take incremental steps forward, and what genuinely meets our ambitions for the kind of work we would like to do.

It is therefore extremely gratifying when opportunities arise for us to undertake research that exemplifies everything that the Institute aspires to. In this issue of the ISSR Review we report on a number of such projects. As one of three National Homelessness Research Partners funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), ISSR is undertaking a major new program of research that will contribute directly to the Australian Government's target to halve the number of people who are homeless in Australia by 2020. The 2006 Australian Census, the source of the most recent data, identified about 105,000 people as homeless in Australia on any given night. About 16,000 of these are "roofless" or "sleeping rough", and in improvised dwellings, in conditions that many people typically think of as being homeless. Others are moving between various forms of temporary shelter or living in other forms of housing and accommodation that fall below prevailing minimum community standards. We hope that ISSR's research will contribute directly to providing the evidence that is needed to ensure that a basic human entitlement, adequate housing, is available to everyone in Australia.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) consists of 32 affluent democracies from North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia. On GDP per capita, these are the world's "rich countries". Thirty countries in the OECD offer some form of national paid parental and/or maternity leave – employment protected paid leave of absence from work for mothers or parents on the birth of a child. From 2011, this number will increase to 31 as the Australia's Paid Parental Leave scheme comes into effect. (Among OECD countries the United States is the laggard). What impact will Paid Parental Leave have on mother's employment rates following the birth of a child? Will the scheme affect the health of mothers or infants? What will it mean for gender equity in households and workplaces? How will employers respond? These are some of the questions to be addressed in the national evaluation of the Paid Parental Leave Program to be undertaken by ISSR, with researchers from the Universities of Tasmania, Sydney and Melbourne and the Australian National University. This is a major four year evaluation of one of the most significant social policy initiatives of recent times and we are delighted to have lead responsibility for it.

Social science increasingly highlights the roles that neighbourhoods and communities play in shaping social advantage and disadvantage in relation to economic inequality, employment, crime, and social cohesion. A group of ISSR researchers is specifically examining how community characteristics buffer or contribute to violence against ethnic minorities. Australia is genuinely a nation of immigrants. About half of the Australian population was born overseas or has at least one parent who was born overseas. Immigration was and continues to be essential to Australia's economic, social and cultural development. Understanding what lies behind ethnic violence and conflict addresses an issue which challenges one of the defining characteristics of Australian society.

I hope you enjoy reading about these and the other projects and developments in the Institute for Social Science Research.



Mark Western

# Providing research evidence for national homelessness policy

## *Providing research evidence for national homelessness policy*

The Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness entitled *The Road Home* has set itself the ambitious target of halving the level of homelessness in Australia by 2020. As part of a wide range of initiatives designed to achieve this goal, the Australian Government is funding an extensive program of research to ensure that policies and programs have a strong research evidence base.

Much of this research will be undertaken by three university research groups: the Institute for Social Science Research at UQ, Swinburne University's Institute of Social Research and Flinders Partners, the commercialisation arm of Flinders University. These research bodies were successful in their applications for Homelessness Research Partnership Agreements with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Commonwealth Department with carriage of the homelessness initiatives. For ISSR this Partnership Agreement involves research to the value of \$1.33 million to be undertaken by ISSR and other researchers at UQ between 2010 and 2013.

Under the direction of Professor Andrew Jones, ISSR is currently negotiating its program of research with FaHCSIA. Building on current research work funded by AHURI, ISSR is firstly proposing a research project on the effectiveness of programs designed to reduce the number of 'rough sleepers' through provision of supported housing. This project will utilise ISSR's strengths in longitudinal quantitative research as well as its substantive research expertise in homelessness.

Another proposed project is an examination of programs designed to address Indigenous homelessness. This project will be undertaken by ISSR and the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC), under the leadership of Professor Paul Memmott. Previous studies by Paul Memmott and colleagues have identified the distinctive nature of Indigenous homelessness and the need to recognise the different types of 'public place dwelling' by Indigenous people. This project will build on this understanding to identify effective ways of addressing Indigenous homelessness.

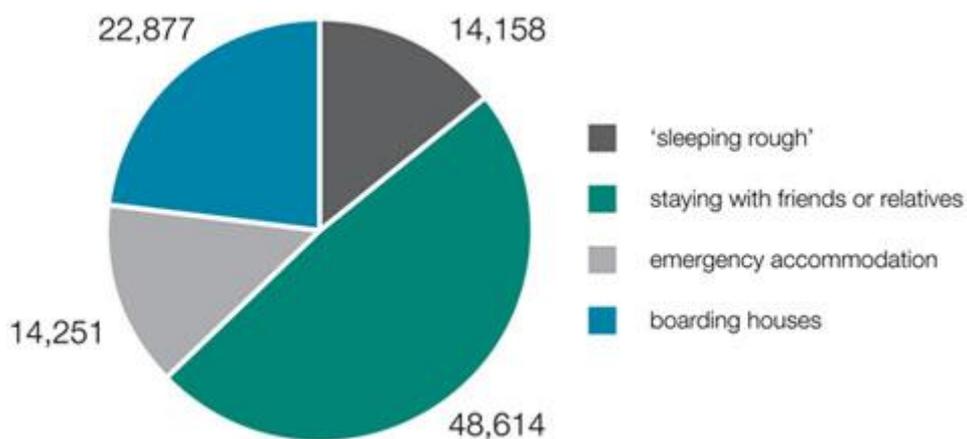
Other proposed projects also build on ISSR's research strengths. A proposed study of the homelessness workforce is linked to the goal of improving the quality of homelessness services through addressing issues such as recruitment and retention of staff, and improved training and management of staff. This study will be located in the Employment and Education research program, under the leadership of Professor Bill Martin, an expert in community services workforce research. Other proposed studies on collaboration and service integration and policy responses to

older homeless people reflect research strengths in public sector management and older persons' housing respectively.

This major research project provides an example of ISSR's research engagement with major social policy issues of national significance. Research has a vital role to play in policy areas such as homelessness. Effective policy requires an understanding of the causes, nature and extent of homelessness and the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and assist them to get their lives back on track. Providing robust evidence to underpin policy is a core task of Australian social science and of ISSR.

If you would like to know more about homelessness research at UQ and/or to participate in the UQ Homelessness Researchers' Network please contact [Dr Cameron Parsell](#).

**Figure 1: Number of homeless people per homeless category, 2001**



# The Vulnerable Communities Project

---



## *The Vulnerable Communities Project*

This project is part of a larger program of research currently underway at the UQ node of the Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security (CEPS). Our UQ based research team, led by Professor Lorraine Mazerolle and Dr Rebecca Wickes, are working closely with Associate Investigators Associate Professor Tina Murphy (Deakin University), Dr Adrian Cherney (UQ) and Dr Jonathon Corcoran (UQ). Our project is concerned with understanding the community-level processes that lead to inter-group tension and conflict.

Over the next 12 months, we will test an integrated ecological theoretical model that is constructed to examine the dynamic structural and social mechanisms associated with violence, in particular violence against minority ethnic groups.

This model draws heavily on the social capital, collective efficacy, social disorganization and police legitimacy literature and seeks to provide the international scholarly community with a new way for thinking about the factors that lead to inter-group tensions and conflict. From July 2010, we will conduct a large survey of over 4000 residents living in 150 state suburbs in both Brisbane and Melbourne. Professor Mazerolle and Dr Wickes presented the plans for testing the model to scholarly audiences across Australia and in the US, to police partners from Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania, and to policy makers working to improve government approaches to the “human factors” side of national security.

The findings from this project will be critical for developing and implementing sound policing and community security policies and practice.

# Meet Dr Cameron Parsell



Cameron Parsell is a sociologist working in the field of homelessness and marginal housing. He recently joined ISSR as a postdoctoral research fellow attached to the Social Wellbeing, Health and Housing program.

Cameron is currently engaged in a number of homelessness research projects funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs (FaHCSIA). His current research focuses on people living in public places (rough sleepers), and it examines the way contemporary policy and practice initiatives enable people to exit homelessness.

Cameron's research is considering a controversial practice response, that in contrast to traditional 'social work values', assertively engages with people sleeping rough and proactively intervenes to move them into accommodation and housing. His research is particularly interested in the decisions and choices people make in relation to sleeping rough over homeless accommodation. Similarly, he is interested in distinguishing the often conflated complexity of issues that cause homelessness on the one hand, from the more straightforward means to end it on the other.

Informed by the significant numbers of people that move in and out of homelessness, Cameron has been grappling with a number of strategies and tenancy conditions that can effectively ensure that people do not exit housing into homelessness.

Cameron recently completed an ethnographic study focusing on people sleeping rough in inner urban Brisbane as part of his doctoral studies. This research initially set out to explore identity, but it became apparent that public places and notions of home were central to how many people lived and constructed their sense of self. In tension with what can be considered romanticised images of homelessness, Cameron found that people living in public places were leading extremely constrained and dangerous lives. In turn, people experienced the public places in which they resided as the antithesis of their homes. People idealised home, and home constituted a physical dwelling. The realities of sleeping rough meant that accessing a physical dwelling was seen as necessary in order to exercise autonomy and agency – to feel at home.

Prior to his research career, Cameron has a history in direct social work practice in the fields of homelessness, social housing and child protection.

# Dr Gentry White

## The University of Queensland New Staff Startup Grant

ISSR Research Fellow, Dr Gentry White, received The University of Queensland New Staff Startup Grant for \$12,000. The funds will be used to purchase high-performance computing hardware and fund a research assistant as part of a program of research concerning counter-terrorism interventions.

This program proposes to develop mathematical models to for analyzing terrorist activity, utilizing state of the art computational methods for a family of self-exciting models to describe terrorist activities. These models will help to advance the existing theoretical understanding of terrorism and the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures. The resulting research should serve as the basis for an ARC Linkage Grant proposal in partnership with The Federal Attorney Generals Office.