

CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS: ISSUES OF POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

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Janet Taylor  
Helen MacDonald  
Brotherhood of St Laurence

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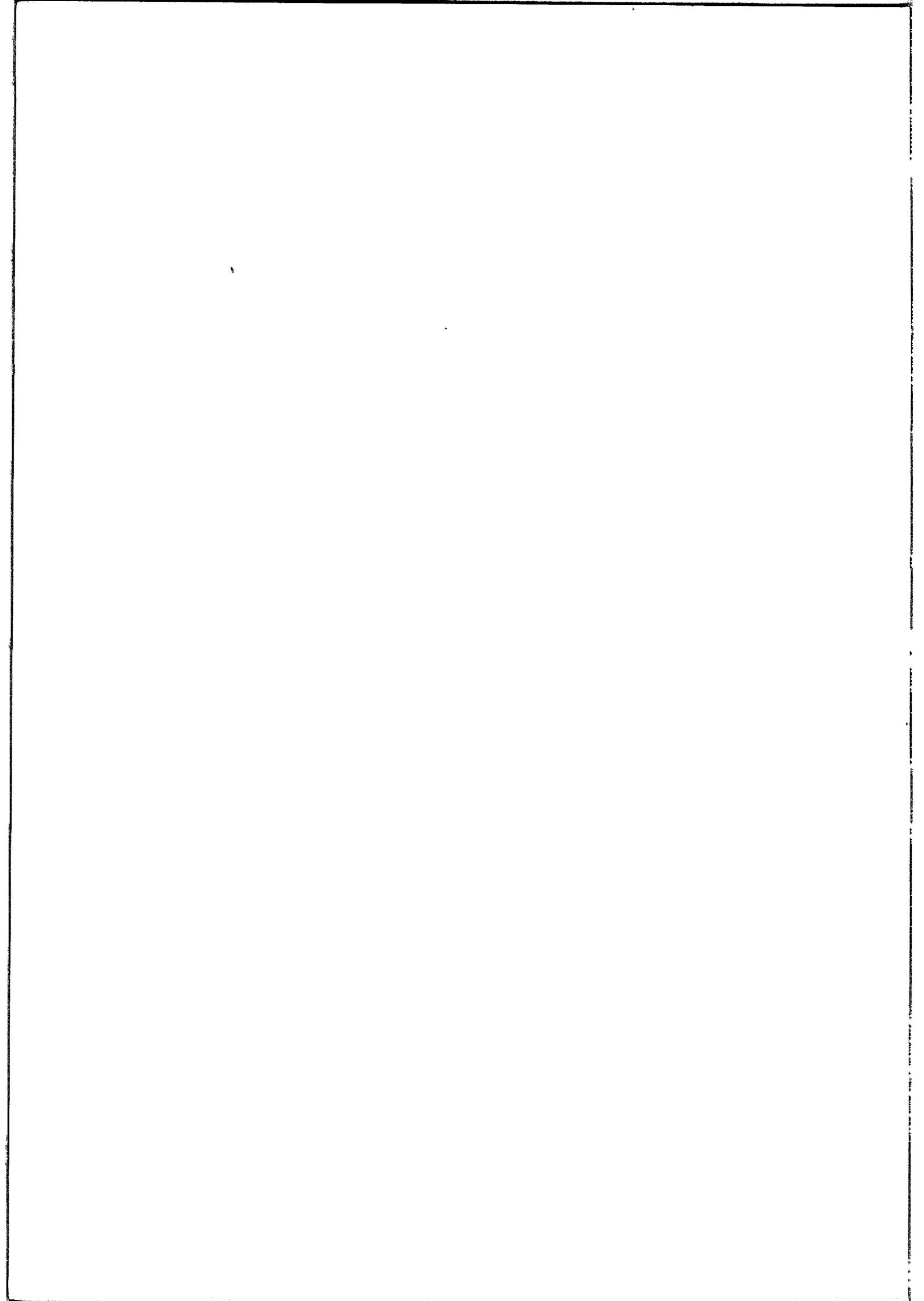
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*Janet Taylor  
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# Foreword

A notable tradition of research into poverty was established in Australia in the 1970s by Professor Ronald Henderson CMG, founder and first Director of the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. This tradition emphasised the enormous importance of documenting the detailed facts about the extent and level of poverty in Australian society. As Professor Henderson showed, particularly in his National Commission of Inquiry Report, *Poverty in Australia*<sup>1</sup>, welfare and other relevant policies depend on an informed picture of the extent and nature of poverty.

In the large literature on immigration in Australia, however, a relatively neglected field has been the degree of poverty among newly arrived groups, and its incidence by age. Consequently, the Bureau of Immigration Research considered it particularly appropriate to award a research grant for a study of issues of poverty and disadvantage among children of immigrants, in response to an application from the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

The Brotherhood has a strong reputation not only for its welfare work among the needy in society, but also for research to pinpoint the areas in which disadvantage is greatest, and assistance most urgent. This reputation for useful research is confirmed, I believe, by the clear, well-explained report *Children of Immigrants: Issues of Poverty and Disadvantage*, by Janet Taylor and Helen MacDonald, with which the Bureau is very pleased to be associated.

In their work, the authors consider various factors related to the increase in child poverty in the context of information about immigrant families. The factors concerned are: sole-parent families; rate and duration of unemployment; inadequacy of income support payments; housing costs; and low wages.

The conclusion of the authors is that:

... children in immigrant families are likely to be over-represented among children in poverty in Australia. Income poverty for immigrant families is likely to be exacerbated by factors relating to migration (such as lack of support networks), English language ability and, in some cases, cultural factors . . . Broadly, non-English speaking (NES) groups, especially the recently arrived, are most at risk of poverty.

Whereas this outcome may be of little surprise to those living and working in immigrant fields, its general and detailed documentation through a work of scholarship is important. Highlighting and establishing the position through research strengthens overall consciousness of the issue, and provides a springboard for policy choices.

The Bureau is therefore grateful to the Brotherhood of St Laurence and its researchers, Janet Taylor and Helen MacDonald, for their work. It is particularly pleasing that the research has been done through and by an important community group, and I commend the study to public attention.

JOHN NIEUWENHUYSEN  
Director Bureau of Immigration Research

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<sup>1</sup> R. F. Henderson 1975, *Poverty in Australia*, Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, AGPS, Canberra

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
DSS	Department of Social Security
ESB	English-speaking background
FAS	Family Allowance Supplement
MCHC	Maternal and Child Health Centre
NESB	Non-English-speaking background

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## **Executive summary**

The high level of child poverty in Australia became a major issue of concern towards the end of the 1980s. Numbers of children living below the poverty line will increase considerably during the recession of the early 1990s. Australia's poor children include many who are the children of immigrants. The purpose of this report is to examine issues of poverty and disadvantage among children of immigrants. The study's starting point is disadvantage in terms of poverty or low income, and it considers selective additional factors associated with immigration and language which can compound income-related disadvantage for children in immigrant families.

Key questions addressed by the report are: To what extent are children of immigrants living in poverty? Children of which immigrants are living in poverty? What is the relationship between low income and other forms of disadvantage for the children of immigrants?

The report seeks answers to those questions from three different sources of data:

- a survey of recent Australian publications relating to poverty among children from immigrant families;
- unpublished Department of Social Security (DSS) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data which provide numbers of children of immigrants in low-income families;
- an analysis of the first stage of the Life Chances Study which explores the impact of poverty and disadvantage in a number of immigrant families.

### **Literature review**

A literature search for recent Australian publications on the issue of poverty among children of immigrants produced little which directly addressed the topic. A number of reports, however, present data about the economic and employment situations of immigrants in general. Recency of arrival and non-English-speaking background (NESB) continue to be identified as major factors associated with poverty for immigrants. Lebanese and Vietnamese immigrants are noted as having particularly high levels of unemployment and associated disadvantage.

Studies of children of immigrants typically do not focus specifically on poverty, but show the children to be disadvantaged in a variety of ways which can interact with economic disadvantage, such as poor access to services, educational disadvantage, low health status and prejudice. Disadvantages associated with gender are raised in a number of studies.

Five factors related to the increase in child poverty in Australia since the 1970s are considered in the report in the light of the data available about immigrant families. These factors comprise sole-parent families, rate and duration of unemployment, inadequacy of income support payments, housing costs and low wages. The impact of these factors on immigrant families suggests strongly that children in immigrant families are likely to be over-represented among children in poverty in Australia. Income poverty for immigrant families is likely to be exacerbated by factors relating to immigration (such as lack of support networks), English language ability and, in some cases, cultural factors. However, there is great variation among immigrant families. Broadly, non-English-speaking (NES) groups, especially the recently arrived, are most at risk of poverty. English-speaking background immigrants are better off overall than non-English-speaking immigrants on a range of poverty-related indicators and in some cases also fare better than the Australian-born.

## **The incidence of poverty among children of immigrants**

In order to estimate the numbers of children in immigrant families in poverty or on low incomes, this report examines two sources of data: unpublished DSS data (1990–91) and the ABS 1989 Victorian Social Survey.

Available national statistics do not readily allow calculations of the number of children of immigrants living in poverty (below the Henderson poverty line) or on low incomes. At a national level, the most useful indicators of numbers of children living on very low incomes (for 1990 and 1991) come from the DSS.

The DSS data provide an estimate of numbers of children of immigrants living in low-income families, but one which does not allow calculation of the Henderson poverty line and one which cannot account for low-income working families not in receipt of Family Allowance Supplement (FAS).

Key findings in the DSS figures show:

- 24.4 per cent (287 000) of all children in recipient families had an overseas-born parent;
- 16.4 per cent (192 000) of all children in recipient families had a parent of NESB;
- children in NESB families were over-represented among those receiving Sickness Benefit (43.1 per cent), Special Benefit (39.1 per cent), Invalid Pension (30.1 per cent) and Unemployment Benefit (29.5 per cent). In contrast, children in NESB families were under-represented among those receiving FAS (13.0 per cent) and Sole Parent Pension (9.4 per cent).

More detailed data obtained from the Victorian Social Survey (1989) enables an estimate of the number of children of immigrants living below the Henderson poverty line in Victoria. These figures, however, represent an underestimate of total numbers in poverty because of the use of gross rather than net income to calculate the poverty line. The analysis of the Victorian Social Survey shows that children from NESB families were clearly over-represented among those in poverty in Victoria. At a minimum:

- 230 000 Victorian children were living below the Henderson poverty line in 1989 (18.7 per cent of all children in Victoria);
- 22.4 per cent (at least 69 000) of all children in NESB families were living below the Henderson poverty line.

The Victorian Social Survey showed children of Lebanese and Vietnamese background as more likely than those of other identified birthplace groups to live in families with a low income, with a government benefit as their only source of income and who spend more than 50 per cent of their income on housing. Over 40 per cent of children of Lebanese or Vietnamese background lived in families in which the head of the family had been unemployed in the previous twelve months.

## **The Life Chances Study**

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is undertaking a longitudinal study of 167 children born in 1990 in two Melbourne inner suburbs. The Life Chances Study aims to explore the life chances of the children in relation to a range of social and economic variables over a number of years. This report examines the data from stage one of the study, comparing the situation of babies with both parents born in non-English-speaking countries (29 per cent), with children of other immigrant parents (20 per cent), and with children of parents both born in Australia (51 per cent).

The major focus of the analysis undertaken for this study are the forty-eight children in the NESB families. These families were predominantly from Southeast Asia, in particular Viet Nam, with smaller numbers from the Middle East and Europe.

The families in the Life Chances Study were assessed in relation to the Henderson poverty line:

- children in NESB families were significantly over-represented among those in poverty. Fifty-four per cent of the NESB children were in families with below poverty-line incomes, in contrast to 18 per cent in other immigrant families and 8 per cent in families with Australian-born parents.

The NESB families with incomes below the poverty line fall into three types: two-parent families with father unemployed, two-parent families with father employed on low wages, and sole-parent families.

Many of the parents in the NESB families with below poverty-line incomes were recent arrivals with limited education and poor English, but by no means all fitted these categories.

The Life Chances Study data show a wide range of variables on which the children in NESB families could be seen as disadvantaged in comparison with children in other families born in the same suburbs. These include the NESB families' relatively low incomes, high unemployment, parents' lack of English, parents' limited education, rental and 'high-rise estate' accommodation. They also include the comparative lack of social supports for the NESB mothers with young babies. They were less likely to have had help from grandparents, less likely to have friends to turn to for advice, less likely to be receiving any help with the baby than were other mothers. They also made less use of some services, being less likely to have attended an obstetrician, pre-natal classes, a birthing centre, or a paediatrician, or to have had contact with the Nursing Mothers Association.

However, the children in NESB families were as likely as the others to use the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHC) and general practitioners, indicating that, in these suburbs, these services are accessible irrespective of income and language.

Overall, the disadvantages faced by the NESB families as a group were considerable and, on average, greater than those faced by the other families in the study. The disadvantages often related to the interaction of low income, immigration and language. However, there was also a range of family situations. In no way could all children of NESB immigrants be seen as disadvantaged.

## **Conclusions**

The report, in looking at issues of poverty and disadvantage for the children of immigrants, has found, both at an Australia-wide level and at a local area level, that children of immigrants are over-represented among those in low income families and, in particular, that large numbers of children with NESB parents live in families with incomes below the Henderson poverty line.

The findings have implications for a range of policy decisions, and for service provision for children, if these children are not to be excluded from full participation in Australian society. Adequate employment, income security and housing are needed for the immigrant parents, and support services must be able to target NESB families with children, taking into account low family income as well as language and cultural factors.

Chapter 3 examines some of the data from the first stage interviews of the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Life Chances Study. This is a longitudinal study of all children born in two Melbourne inner suburbs in selected months in 1990. Approximately half (49 per cent) of the 167 children have at least one immigrant parent. The first stage of the study involved interviews with mothers and ratings from Maternal and Child Health nurses when the children of the study were aged four to six months old. The interviews cover a range of social and economic factors which have a bearing on the welfare of children and their families. The data allow the assessments of the families' incomes in relation to the Henderson poverty line, but also allow the presentation of the families' own perceptions of their situation and of the influences on the children.

Later stages of the Life Chances Study will follow these children and their families' socio-economic situation over a number of years. Mothers will be interviewed in the children's second and third years of life. The findings from these subsequent interviews will be the subject of a later report.

### **Poverty and poverty lines**

Poverty in Australia is a relative phenomenon—relative to the commonly experienced or taken-for-granted standard of living in this country at this time. People are said to be living in poverty when their 'incomes are so low that they are unable to purchase, or have access to, those resources which affect their life chances and opportunities' (Harris 1989, p. 2). In Australia today, those resources include sufficient food, secure housing, access to health care and education, and an ability to meet basic energy and transport costs (Trethewey 1989; Harris 1989).

Level of income is a key indicator of poverty, but people's capacity to meet their basic costs is also influenced by their employment security, their housing costs, and the number and ages of their dependants, among other factors (Harris 1989). These conditions affect people's ability to buy goods and services, to participate in society and to make choices, and therefore, to purchase and gain access to those basic resources average Australians accept and, indeed, expect.

Poverty lines are an income measure of poverty. They are an approximate measure of a complex experience used to simplify and quantify poverty for descriptive and analytical purposes. In Australia, the Henderson poverty line is the most widely used and, although it is controversial, it is currently the most accepted measure of poverty (Oxley, Prosser & King 1991; Carter 1991, p. iv). It is used where possible in this study.

The Henderson poverty line was developed in the early 1970s by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty chaired by Professor R. F. Henderson. The inquiry calculated the amount of money needed by an income unit (a family group) to achieve a minimum standard of living by covering basic living costs. In determining the poverty line for different family types, consideration is given to their varying costs based on the number of children, whether it is a single-parent or couple-headed family, and whether the family head is in the labour force or not (employed or unemployed). Housing costs can also be taken into account. Henderson described the poverty line as being at an 'austere low level' and people living below it as being 'very poor' (Henderson 1975, p. 13). Poverty-line figures are updated quarterly by the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne.

### **Children of immigrants in Australia**

In Australia, the children of immigrants are a vast and diverse category. They can include children born overseas who have come to Australia, with or without their parents, at a

variety of ages from infants to young adults; they can include children born in Australia to parents born overseas. Some families arrive as 'economic' migrants, having chosen to come to Australia for what they hope will be a better life, some come as refugees forced from their homeland by civil war or persecution, others come to study or on business (Bureau of Immigration Research 1990).

Immigrant families come from an enormous range of birthplaces, speaking many languages, with different religions and different ethnic identifications. Some come here to join large numbers of compatriots who have already established themselves in Australia; others arrive very much on their own. Some families settle here, others will move back and forth between their country of origin and Australia. Children may live in families with a strong ethnic identity, they may have parents who have immigrated together or have come from quite different countries. Their families may be recent arrivals or long-term residents.

In all, the differences between 'children of immigrants' can be immense and can influence their situations profoundly. These differences are often obscured in the data available and need to be kept in mind when categories as broad as 'overseas-born' or 'immigrant' or 'NESB' children are discussed.

In looking at the influences on children in immigrant families, three factors can be distinguished which often interact but which also have an independent impact: immigration, language and cultural factors (Taylor 1978).

Immigration brings its own challenges both to adults and children, in terms of adjusting to a new physical and social environment and loss of family and friends. These challenges apply both to immigrants who speak English and share other aspects of Australian culture and to those who do not. Significant aspects of immigration include recency of arrival and whether the immigration was voluntary or forced, as for some refugees. In addition some immigrants experience a double migration as they move from a rural to an urban life at the same time as they leave one country for another.

Language factors, particularly lack of proficiency in English, have profound effects on immigrants' ability to participate economically and socially in Australia. For those with minimal English, the availability of interpreters, both trained and informal, is significant and will be related to the size of the language group and its length of residence. For children, important aspects of language include not only their ability to speak English, but also whether they are able to communicate fluently with their parents (and other relatives) in their parents' first language. The availability of English classes and of bilingual education is also very important.

Cultural values and practices which differ markedly from those of the majority of Australians present a further factor of influence on the situation of children in some immigrant families, irrespective of length of residence or English language skills. At times these can be related to discrimination and prejudice experienced by parents and by children. The gender-based expectations of some ethnic groups provoke particular stresses for their daughters (see, for example Brookes 1985; Storer 1985).

It is not the purpose of this report to debate the pros and cons of immigration. Our interest here is to look at issues of poverty and disadvantage for immigrant families with children, while acknowledging that for many immigrant families the stresses and strains of immigration, of language and cultural differences are outweighed by the advantages they find in Australia. Many immigrant families prosper both economically and socially. Our concern is with those who do not. The study attempts to understand the barriers to those who do not prosper and what can be done about these at both community and government level.

The 1982 Families Survey found that immigrants from non-English-speaking countries were slightly more likely to have other relatives in the household than Australians (5.1 per cent as opposed to 3.4 per cent of Australian-born families). Those from Asia had a higher proportion (9.1 per cent), while for those from UK and Ireland the proportion was only 2.9 per cent (ABS 1989).

### **Immigrants and poverty**

Although the focus of the literature search undertaken is on post-1984 studies, it is relevant to refer to the 1966 Melbourne poverty survey as it remains one of the most comprehensive studies of immigrants and poverty. It was the first major Australian study of poverty and involved a survey of 4000 households in Melbourne in 1966 (Henderson, Harcourt & Harper 1970). The study found some 7.7 per cent of income units in poverty, but 14.5 per cent of recent immigrants (five years or less). The then recently arrived Greek and Italian immigrants were worst off with poverty rates of 16.2 per cent and 15.3 per cent respectively, compared with 9.2 per cent of British immigrants (p. 127). While many immigrants were seen to share the general prosperity of that time, the study pointed to the problems of those who lived in poverty, in overcrowded conditions, with poor health and expensive housing, language problems, isolation and lack of knowledge of social services. It would seem that many of these problems persist for recent non-English-speaking immigrants in the 1990s.

A second major study of immigrants and poverty forms part of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. It reported two national surveys carried out in 1973 and found Italian, Greek, Maltese and Lebanese groups had relatively more people on low incomes than other groups. The study emphasised the disadvantage of high housing costs, low incomes and problems of gaining access to community sources of economic and other kinds of support (Martin 1975, p. 180). Martin did not, however, find a consistent relationship between period of residence and poverty.

Poverty in ethnic communities is the subject of the smaller scale study by Deasey (1987). Income poverty, among groups such as injured immigrant workers and unemployed newly arrived immigrants, is seen as compounded by lack of language skills, information poverty and isolation from support networks. The study found NESB people in poverty had particularly limited access to either mainstream welfare services or to self-help or other community groups.

Two publications which draw together a range of aspects of the situations of immigrants are *Overseas-born Australians 1988: A Statistical Profile* (ABS 1989) and *The Economic Status of Immigrants in Australia* (ABS 1990b). Jones and McAllister (1991) wrote a major report on unemployment and immigrants. The data from these studies are considered further below.

A study which focuses specifically on immigration and poverty is that by David Johnson (1991). Johnson analyses the 1981-82 and 1985-86 ABS Income Survey data. He estimated that poverty rose by 27 per cent overall in that time. The increase in the poverty measure used reflected an increase in numbers living in poor-income units, a fall in the average income of the poor and an increase in variance of poor incomes. In 1981-82 the level of poverty was much the same for immigrants as a whole as for the Australian-born. However, the level of poverty was much higher for immigrants from non-English-speaking countries than for the Australian-born, and it was much lower for those from English-speaking countries. There was considerable variation according to birthplace. In 1981-82 the highest levels of poverty were found among income units with heads born in Lebanon (Johnson 1991, pp. 25-6.)

Because of the very large increases in poverty among some immigrant groups (particularly from Oceania and Asia), Johnson found that by 1985–86 the level of poverty of immigrants as a whole was significantly greater than among Australian-born. Poverty rose by 16 per cent for Australian-born 1981–82 to 1985–86, but rose by 48 per cent for immigrants. This reflects both an increase in the proportion in poverty and also the extent to which the incomes were below the poverty line. Increases in poverty occurred in all immigrant groups with the exception of immigrants from Africa (presumably because of large migration from South Africa). (The ABS 1985–86 *Income Distribution Survey, Australia*, however, used only seven categories of immigrant birthplace: UK and Ireland, Italy, Other Europe, Asia, America, Africa and Oceania.)

Johnson (1991) found that poverty was greatest among those who had been in Australia the shortest time. In 1981–82 those income units whose head had been in Australia less than six years had significantly higher poverty rates than other groups. In 1985–86 those who had been in Australia less than six years but also between seven and sixteen years had considerably higher rates of poverty than immigrants of longer residence or the Australian-born. Poverty was greater, and had increased more, among immigrants with no more than secondary schooling than those with post-secondary education.

Overall, the immigrants with highest poverty were those who were:

- resident less than six years in Australia
- from a non-English-speaking birthplace
- with secondary schooling only.

Johnson concluded, after controlling for age of head of household and educational qualifications, that years of residence and English language background remain independent factors affecting poverty among immigrants (Johnson 1991).

While Johnson and others have identified that recency of residence and NESB are associated with poverty for immigrant families, these factors reflect a range of interwoven aspects which are likely to be associated with low income and/or high expenditure.

A number of indicators of disadvantage are drawn together from reports of ABS data for 1986–90 in table 1.1 to allow comparison between Australian-born and those born overseas in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. Where available, data have been included for two relatively large birthplace groups which have been identified as having high levels of disadvantage, those born in Viet Nam and Lebanon. For example, Lebanese- and Vietnamese-born have the highest rates of unemployment (Jones & McAllister 1991). Some information is available for these two groups because of their size, while there are other smaller immigrant groups whose disadvantage is hidden within the overall statistics.

In brief, table 1.1 points to the disadvantages of NESB immigrants in contrast to Australian-born residents in terms of: lower average weekly income, higher rates of unemployment (except for very long-term residents), higher rates of health and injury problems preventing work, higher proportions in labouring and other low-paid jobs, higher proportions on social security benefits and lower labour force participation rates. The data available for Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants emphasise not only their very high rates of social security reciprocity (reflecting very high unemployment), but also very different rates of labour force participation of married women (the rates of the Vietnamese being much higher than Australian-born women, the Lebanese rates much lower). The English-speaking background (ESB) immigrants are less disadvantaged than NESB immigrants on all these indicators and in some cases (for example, average weekly income for couples with children) are better off than the Australian-born.

Table 1.1: Immigrants: selected indicators of disadvantage, Australia, 1986 to 1990 by birthplace

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Overseas Total</i>	<i>Overseas— English-speaking countries</i>	<i>Overseas— Non-English- speaking countries</i>	<i>Viet Nam</i>	<i>Lebanon</i>
Mean gross weekly income (1986)						
couple with dependent children	\$630	\$577	\$641	\$542		
sole parent—total	\$253	\$243	\$243	\$243		
sole parent—female	\$238	\$231	\$249	\$217		
Unemployment rate (1987)						
period of residence						
0 to 4 years	—	15.5%	7.6%	22.0%		
5 to 14 years	—	10.2%	8.8%	11.6%		
15 to 24 years	—	7.3%	6.8%	7.8%		
25 or more years	—	5.3%	5.0%	5.4%		
Total	7.5%	8.7%	7.1%	10.1%		
15- to 19-year-old-persons	18.4%	21.1%	16.8%	26.8%		
couple with dependants (1990)	3.7%	6.2%	4.2%	7.5%		
sole parent	11.4%	12.7%	10.1% <sup>a</sup>	15.3%		
Main difficulties in finding work (males, 1986)						
own ill health or injury	5.9%	10.3%	—	14.0%		
language/ethnic background difficulties	—	7.6%	—	12.3%		
Occupations (1987)						
labourers and related workers	14.4%	18.2%	14.7%	21.1%	28.0%	20.8%
plant and machine operators and drivers	7.2%	10.0%	6.7%	12.8%	30.7%	18.7%
Education (1987)						
post secondary school qualifications	35.4%	39.9%	45.2%	36.0%		21.5% <sup>b</sup>
Principal source of income government						
cash benefits (1986) <sup>c</sup>	30.8%	33.3%	31.2%	35.0%		
Government benefits (rate per 1000, 1989) <sup>d</sup>	26.2	37.1	26.1	45.5	144.5 <sup>e</sup>	146.8
Labour force participation rate (1989)						
males	76.8%	73.7%	76.2%	71.9%	74.8%	71.9%
married females	51.8%	50.1%	52.7%	48.3%	65.1%	24.8%
Married females proportion employed full-time (1989)	50.8%	58.7%	49.5%	65.9%		

Notes: a. Subject to sampling variability. b. Western Asia including Lebanon. c. includes pension and benefit recipients. d. includes unemployment, special and sickness benefit. e. comprises Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam.

Sources: ABS 1989: table 3.1, table 4.12, table 4.28, table 4.31. ABS, 1990b: table 6.2, table 6.4, table 7.3, table 7.7. ABS, 1990c: table 35.

These and other indicators of disadvantage related to poverty are discussed in more detail below. While they refer primarily to adults, they will have a considerable impact on the children of the immigrants concerned.

**Income**

Average weekly income for married couples with children in 1986 was considerably higher for Australian-born than overseas-born couples. The mean weekly income for Australian-born was \$630 and for overseas-born \$577. However, overseas-born from English-speaking countries had a higher income than the Australian-born (\$641), while those from non-English-speaking countries received only \$542 per week. A similar distribution was found among sole-parent (female) households, but with a much lower average income (Australian-born \$238, English-speaking birthplace \$249, non-English-speaking birthplace \$217) (ABS 1990b, p. 105). (See table 1.1.)

**Unemployment**

Unemployment is a major cause of poverty and is typically higher for recent immigrants and especially those from non-English-speaking countries. Unemployment rates for overseas-born are consistently higher than for Australian-born across all age groups and for males and females. The rates of unemployment reduce with the period of residence and those resident more than fifteen years have similar rates to Australian-born (ABS 1989).

**Barriers to employment**

Unemployment can be associated with both the time needed to locate a job, and with lack of English. These factors can hamper locating employment and the ability to do particular jobs (Miller 1986; McAllister 1986). Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications by Australian employers is a further aspect of unemployment. Even in the work force, many immigrants are in low-paying jobs again associated with lack of English and of recognised training (Chapman & Iredale 1990). Immigrants from non-English-speaking countries can be over-represented in blue-collar employment with high rates of work injuries which, in turn, can lead to unemployment; options for 'light duties' are seldom available for non-English-speaking injured workers. High rates of occupational health problems for both men and women immigrant workers have been associated with discrimination in the worker's compensation system (Collins 1988). The continuing decline in Australia's manufacturing industry is a major factor in immigrant unemployment for both males and females.

**Education**

Education level can be associated with likelihood of unemployment. Australia's overseas-born population, as a whole, is generally better educated than the Australian-born population, but there is considerable variation among birthplace groups. In 1987, 35.4 per cent of Australian-born had post-school qualifications; 36.0 per cent from non-English-speaking countries and 45.2 per cent from English-speaking birthplaces. However, the lowest proportions were from Western Asia (including Lebanon) with 21.5 per cent and Southern Europe with 23.8 per cent with post-school qualifications (ABS 1989, p. 83). (See table 1.1.)

**Income support**

When they are unemployed, immigrant families are less likely to know about or be eligible for income security and other community supports. This again is particularly the case for recent and non-English-speaking migrants. However, 1986 data show that a higher proportion of overseas-born than Australian-born are dependent on government cash benefits for their principal source of income (35.0 per cent of non-English-speaking birthplace, 31.2 per cent from English-speaking countries and 30.8 per cent of Australian-born). These figures would, however, include many aged pensioners (ABS 1990b, p. 107). (See table 1.1.)

As recipients of government benefits (unemployment, sickness and special benefits), people from non-English-speaking birthplaces had a much higher rate (45.5 per 1000) in 1989 than Australian-born (26.2 per 1000) or those from English-speaking countries (26.1 per 1000) (ABS 1990b, p. 109). By far the highest rate of benefit recipiency was among Lebanese (146.8 per 1000) and Indo-Chinese (144.5 per 1000). Whiteford (1991) makes a comprehensive analysis of social security beneficiaries, taking into account the age distribution of the birthplace group and the lack of entitlement to pensions of some immigrants.

Newly arrived settlers are in a special position in relation to income support because of their lack of eligibility for various income support payments (pensions in particular) because of residency requirements. Other issues include assurance of support under family reunion provisions where the assurer or sponsor initially undertakes to support the newcomer. This can cause financial strain for the assurer but also for the new arrival if the assurer is no longer able or willing to continue support. In this case, Special Benefit may be paid but becomes a debt owed by the person providing the assurance of support (Whiteford 1991). A further category of immigrants who may receive no income support at all are those who, having come to Australia as students or visitors, try to change their status to that of refugee or immigrant. Applicants for refugee status may have to wait for up to two years for a determination of their status. They are ineligible for social security benefit during this time. Batrouney (1991) points out that this is particularly anomalous for those who have gained work permits, worked and paid taxes during this time. The situation of children in these cases is of concern.

#### **Labour force participation of women**

The rate of labour force participation overall is lower for overseas-born than Australian-born (see table 1.1), but is higher for married women, particularly from non-English-speaking countries. While the high participation of married women is not necessarily an indicator of disadvantage, it does have particular significance in considering the situation of children and access to child-care. The vulnerability and exploitation of some groups of immigrant women in and out of the work force is looked at in a number of studies (for example Martin 1984; Alcorso 1987) and is pointed to as an area for further research (Wooden et al. 1990). The barriers to labour force participation for women of NESB who are sole parents has been the subject of a 1991 study by Cass, Wilkinson and Webb looking particularly at Vietnamese-, Turkish- and Spanish-speaking women. One of the main barriers was the women's perception of their responsibility to care for their children; however, they had strong aspirations to work when their children were older and lack of English proficiency, lack of access to English courses and associated childcare were major barriers to this.

#### **Expenditure**

Not only can income be low for many immigrant families, their expenditure can be particularly high. The high cost of housing is frequently reported. Newly arrived families are first likely to be in private rental accommodation and to then face high mortgage costs as they buy a house. Immediate resettlement costs will include setting up a household with furniture and other goods. Some immigrant families also have to repay money borrowed for their fares to come to Australia, others have additional financial responsibility, such as supporting family members in their country of origin, the costs of return visits to see relatives or the costs of bringing family members to Australia. These are expenses non-immigrant families do not face to the same extent.

The 1988-89 ABS Household Expenditure Survey found that average weekly household income was similar for Australian-born and overseas-born residents, but that the immigrant households have higher expenditure, particularly on housing and food. Length

of residence was shown to have a very marked influence on expenditure with the most recent immigrants having the highest expenditure. This was particularly clear in the case of housing costs, transport, and household furnishings and equipment. The housing costs reflected the high proportion of very recent immigrants in private rental accommodation; 66 per cent of those who had arrived in 1987-88 and 48 per cent of those who had arrived in 1984-86 in contrast to 17 per cent of Australian-born (BIR 1990).

#### **Family size**

Large family size is also associated with high expenditure and poverty. As mentioned previously, while many immigrant groups have similar sized families to Australian-born parents, there are some groups (for example the Lebanese) who, on average, have considerably larger numbers of children.

#### **Discrimination**

A further factor which is likely to influence poverty among immigrant families is that of discrimination, racism or prejudice which can influence both employment opportunities and access to community supports. Matheson (1991) reviews studies of racism and community relations in Australia over the last twenty years and emphasises the link between economic downturn and racism. The 1989 National Inquiry into Racial Violence found people from NESB one of three major groups who were most frequently victims of racial violence (the other two being Aborigines and activists against racism).

Discrimination against Asians, Arabs and Muslims was reported particularly (Moss 1991).

Evans and Kelley (1986, p. 203) make controversial generalisations on the basis of 1981 Census data, contending that prejudice leads to discrimination in the Australian labour market and claiming that all immigrants (other than those born in the Mediterranean region who were highly educated overseas) do as well as native Australians in the labour market. A 1991 study of discrimination against immigrant workers concluded that workers from non-English-speaking countries experience some disadvantage in the workplace, but that the data do not allow hard conclusions about the extent to which this is the result of direct or indirect discrimination in the labour force (Foster, Marshall & Williams 1991).

In discussing the extent of discrimination, Wooden (1990) suggests that, while it is possible that many Australians may have prejudiced attitudes to immigrants, the extent of ethnic discrimination is not large. However, it is very real for the individuals and groups who experience it. Racial discrimination, for example, was prevalent in the experiences of refugee women (Pittaway 1991) and indigenous Africans (Batrouney 1991).

#### **Ethnic groups and new arrivals**

Studies of particular ethnic groups can contribute to the understanding of poverty among immigrant families and its interaction with other factors. Publications range from a study of Sardinian women in an isolated rural community (Andreoni 1989) to consultations about the settlement needs of small newly-arrived ethnic groups (Jupp et al. 1991).

Batrouney (1991), studying recent African immigrants in Melbourne, found some 80 per cent of his sample were, by their own account, at or below the poverty line. Financial problems were a major settlement difficulty for many Vietnamese refugees at least in their first four years of settlement (Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission 1984).

#### **Service provision**

Access to community services is a factor which can interact with poverty for immigrant families with children. Issues are raised about service provision by authors such as Cox (1987) in his extensive study of welfare and immigrants in Australia on the one hand, and in relation to the provision of specific services in a geographic area on the other (for example, Charlesworth 1988). Cox outlines a range of immigrant welfare needs at

individual, family and societal levels which should be understood within the immigration-integration process. The latter takes into account the immigrants' background, immigration and resettlement experiences, and host society, group interaction and personal variables.

Pittaway's (1991) study of refugee women in Sydney brings home very clearly the extent of disadvantage which can be suffered. Over two-thirds of the 204 women interviewed had survived severe forms of torture and/or trauma and many of their children were also affected. She concludes that most refugee women are assisted so little by the services provided in Australia that they are in danger of becoming an 'underclass', unemployed, unemployable and unable to assist their children (Pittaway 1991, p. xiv). She provides detailed recommendations about the service provision required.

## **Children of immigrants: poverty and disadvantage**

### **Children in poverty in Australia**

The increased number of children living in poverty has been a major concern in Australia from the mid-1980s. These have included children living in families and also homeless children.

The question of the number of children living in poverty in Australia in the late 1980s was much debated in relation to the Prime Minister's 1987 promise that no child need live in poverty by 1990, and the introduction by the Hawke Government of a range of income security measures to alleviate poverty in families. The impact of these measures and the difficulties of measuring poverty are explored in detail in *Measuring Child Poverty* (Carter 1991). King (1991, p. 52) concludes that the decrease in the extent of child poverty from 1986 to late 1989 reflects a reduction in child poverty due to the Government's income support initiatives, but at the same time an increase in the extent of child poverty due to the uneven distribution of economic growth. Assuming a take-up rate of FAS of 75 per cent of those eligible, he estimated some 513 200 children in poverty (after housing costs have been taken into account) in Australia in late 1989. The minimum estimate, assuming 100 per cent take-up of FAS, was 420 000 children in poverty (p. 56).

Some of the children living in poverty in Australia will be children of immigrant families. The numbers concerned are explored further in the analysis of statistics in chapter 2.

A major conference on child poverty was convened in April 1988 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Council of Social Service. The revised papers published in *Child Poverty* (Edgar, Keane & McDonald 1989) cover a range of topics including social costs, housing, health and education, and the majority of articles refer to Australian children in general. Some contributors refer specifically to immigrant families in poverty. For example, Connell and White (1990) point to cultural marginalisation as an aspect of poverty to be addressed by the education system; and Brownlee and King (1990) discuss the impact of the Hawke Government's Family Package and identify problems for immigrant families of access to information about poverty-relieving programs such as FAS.

In contrast, *Poverty in Childhood* (Nixon, McWhirter & Pearn 1990) addresses child poverty, homeless children, child abuse, health and education, but gives immigrant children no particular attention.

Child poverty and disadvantage have been a major focus of the work of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which has considered the present and future situation of Australian children (Harris 1989, 1990; Choo 1990; Crossley 1990; Taylor 1990). A 1989 Brotherhood study has also emphasised the economic cost to the community of poverty through foregone revenue, payment of benefits and private costs to individuals and families (Dixon 1989).

Patricia Harris in *Child Poverty, Inequality and Social Justice* (1989) describes child poverty as an index of the inequalities that currently persist within Australian society. She identifies the factors most commonly related to the increase in child poverty since the 1970s as:

- 1 the increase in the number of sole-parent families;
- 2 the increase in the rate and duration of unemployment among households with dependents;
- 3 the inadequacy of income support payments for families with children;
- 4 housing costs; and
- 5 wage restraint (Harris 1989, p. 14).

Harris explores the relationship of inequality and poverty and finds that immigrants from NESB can be confronted by a combination of economic disadvantage (being concentrated in skilled and semi-skilled jobs with lower average rates of pay and minimal upward job mobility) and 'cultural domination' (for example, being excluded from access and participation by language factors). She argues that, while poverty alone can result in marginality and exclusion, when it is combined with ethnicity the effects are amplified. She calls for policies to strengthen the multicultural base of Australian society (Harris 1989, p. 85).

In *All Our Children* Harris (1990) argues that while poverty itself places a child at risk, there are also barriers to access to and participation in services. These barriers weigh more heavily on the children of the poor than on those of the rich and exacerbate the differences between them. She considers particularly health, education and community services for children; and calls for services which use positive discrimination measures to promote access and participation of children of immigrant families.

### **Children of immigrants and poverty**

The literature search for post-1984 publications on the issue of poverty among the children of immigrants produced little which dealt directly with the topic.

Some studies which have focused on children in poverty in Australia have included children of immigrants. For example Trethewey (1989) presents the financial situation of ten low-income families over a twelve-month period and includes a Lebanese family with six children reliant on unemployment benefit. Their story illustrates many factors shared by other non-English-speaking immigrant families in poverty, from the father's inability to use his specialist skill (as a furniture engraver) in Australia to the limitations lack of English placed on employment, communications with the children's school or getting help from welfare agencies, all compounding the basic lack of money for food and clothing and other expenses.

Studies which focus on children of immigrants typically do not look at poverty specifically, although the issue may be referred to. Studies which make some reference to the impact of poverty or economic disadvantage on children of immigrants cover topics ranging from child-care to teenage unemployment.

For example, in a study of family day care D'Mello and Bugueno (1989, p. 23) note that child-care expenditure is usually at the bottom of many immigrants' list of priorities and emphasise the low wages many mothers receive as factory workers.

Manderson (1989) reviews research on infant feeding which finds lower incidence and shorter duration of breastfeeding among Southern European and Vietnamese women. She sees this as linked to economic disadvantage, including pressure to work in low-paid jobs. Lowest rates tend to occur among recent immigrants who are typically also employed in poorly paid and unskilled occupations with no opportunity for breastfeeding in the

workplace. She notes also that the women lack extended family networks which can encourage breastfeeding.

Studies of school-age children have generally concentrated on school-based issues of educational aspirations and achievement rather than issues of poverty. Marsh (1988), in reviewing research on access and success of school children from NESB, points to economic factors, especially for newly arrived immigrants, in determining the extent to which their children can participate in formal schooling. He notes unemployment, overcrowded housing conditions and lack of knowledge of available financial assistance as particular economic factors inhibiting participation in education. He concludes that, overall, immigrant Australian children do experience some disadvantage in performance at school, but that there is considerable diversity within and between ethnic groups. There seems to be insufficient emphasis in the research Marsh reviews on the impact of financial factors on access to education and to success therein.

There have been a number of studies of young people from immigrant families in relation to unemployment (for example, DEET 1987). Marsh (1988, p. 16), in reviewing these, points to groups who have been most at risk of being unemployed. He includes immigrant teenage girls, adolescents whose education has been interrupted, refugee youth, Indo-Chinese, Lebanese, Turkish and Greek youth, and youth from recently arrived groups.

A group at risk of poverty and homelessness which has been the subject of a number of studies is that of Vietnamese and other Indo-Chinese young people, especially those without families. Loh (1985) emphasises their financial difficulties and the fact that their poor English and lack of education give them little prospect of employment. Australia accepts some 300 juvenile refugees without accompanying parents each year. Those under 18 years with neither parent or close adult relative are classified as 'unattached' minors and are placed under the guardianship of the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration. 'Detached' refugee minors are those who come without parents but come with, or have already in Australia, another close adult relative. There were 2219 detached and unattached refugee minors in Australia in December 1988, most being in New South Wales (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989). The National Inquiry into Homeless Children reported the problems of these young refugees: newly formed households with relatives were often overcrowded, stressful and likely to break down with the young refugee moving to the streets, while incorrect documentation of age made obtaining income support difficult. These young refugees needed both ethno-specific accommodation and intensive and prolonged counselling and support.

Recently arrived NESB young people in a Perth study identified their major difficulties as language and racism, followed by lack of job qualification and lack of money (Delahunt 1988).

### **Disadvantage**

Children in immigrant families are seen as disadvantaged in a variety of ways not directly linked to economic disadvantage or poverty, but which can certainly interact with poverty. These aspects of disadvantage can include access to services, educational disadvantage, health status and prejudice.

Problems of access to services is one such disadvantage. As mentioned previously, this can relate to access to child-care. Yeatman (1988) reviews multicultural policies and programs in children's services with particular emphasis on child-care services. She notes the high levels of work force participation by immigrant women, particularly in manufacturing jobs and in shift work. Yeatman concludes that it is unlikely that NESB children will gain equitable access to child-care, let alone culturally appropriate child-care, given the scarcity of child-care places. Access to services for children with disabilities is another issue of concern. A Victorian study points to some of the problems non-English-speaking parents

have in participating in the processes necessary to have a child with disabilities integrated into a regular local school. These include lack of information, lack of interpreters, assessment by unknown experts, and inability to assess the child's competence in a language other than English (State Board of Education 1987).

One aspect of educational disadvantage for girls from some immigrant families is that they are being kept away from school by their parents because of cultural values. This was explored by Brookes (1985) for Turkish girls in Melbourne schools and was found to be a real issue for some families, although not widespread.

Health-related difficulties for children of immigrants can range from high rates of particular conditions such as thalassaemia or hepatitis B among particular groups to a lack of understanding by health professionals of their parents' health care practices and beliefs (Vimpani & Parry 1989).

The psychiatric disorders and emotional distress of Indo-Chinese refugee children and adolescents, particularly those without parents, is an additional area of concern (Krupinski & Burrows 1986; Le 1986). The accommodation needs of Indo-Chinese refugee young people are explored by Wallace (1990) in a Melbourne study.

The Office of Youth Affairs (1986) reviews the literature of the 1970s and early 1980s on first-generation immigrant and refugee young people and their needs in health, education and employment; all areas in which research shows them to be disadvantaged. It emphasises the high levels of unemployment for young immigrants, accounts of dysfunctional behaviour and severe inter-generational conflict for some groups. The review describes as dramatic some of the differences between the experiences of young male and female immigrants.

An interesting approach to researching disadvantage is that of the Human Rights Commission study which involved teams of NESB school students exploring prejudice in their schools (Henry 1986). Disadvantage in terms of racism is also explored from the young people's perspective in studies such as that of Voulgaris and Castania (1987).

There have been a number of approaches to the issue of advantage and disadvantage among children of immigrants (for example Burns & Goodnow 1985; Birrell & Seitz 1986; DEET 1987; Collins 1988; Kalantzis & Cope 1988; Holton 1990). There are conflicting views about whether children of immigrant families do better or worse than those of Australian-born families in terms of access and participation in post-secondary education and occupational achievement. Holton concludes that there is currently no consensus on questions of immigrant social mobility and economic disadvantage, that the general verdict on social mobility of non-English-speaking immigrants is cautiously positive, but that poor industrial health, unemployment and variation between different ethnic groups remain important factors (Holton 1990, p. 172). Gender must also be taken into account when considering disadvantage within ethnic groups because of the particularly disadvantaged position of many young women (Holton 1990; DEET 1987).

Holton also considers the literature which has looked at immigrant families as 'achievers' as well as that which sees them as 'victims'. He quotes low divorce and separation rates and low crime rates for NESB families, suggesting considerable family stability despite economic difficulties and social disruption.

In addition to the question of whether or not immigrant families are disadvantaged, Burns and Goodnow (1985) explore the experience of inequality for the immigrant family. They discuss situations where the immigrant family's goals are not accepted as legitimate, where goals are accepted but access or achievement is a problem, where families or individuals are not defined as needing help, where resources provided are inadequate and where they are 'cultural strangers'.

While the major focus of this study is the Australian situation, Bureau of Immigration Research staff conducted a search for major overseas publications on the topic of poverty and disadvantage among children of immigrants. The more significant studies located included a comparison of schooling and health status of children of immigrants and non-immigrants in the United States using the large scale 1976 Survey of Income and Education (Schultz 1984). This study concluded that years of schooling completed by immigrants differed relatively little from that of children of non-immigrants, although there was variation by country of origin. Health limitation and disabilities were found less frequently among children of immigrants. The survey nature of the data allowed for only limited explanation of the findings. A British study of children of immigrants explored health and social problems for children, namely of West Indian and Asian (Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian) families, drawing on the experience of the author, a paediatrician of Indian origin as well as on various published studies (Lobo 1978).

## **Discussion**

In the light of the data available for immigrant families, including that presented in table 1.1, we can reconsider some of the factors which have been related to the extent of child poverty in Australia in general. To restate the five factors identified by Harris (1989):

- 1 *Sole-parent families.* A smaller proportion overall of children of immigrants live in sole-parent households than do children with Australian-born parents. However, non-English-speaking sole parents have even lower average income than do Australian sole parents and immigrant sole parents are likely to have fewer social supports.
- 2 *Rate and duration of unemployment.* Unemployment rates are higher for overseas-born than for Australian-born across all age groups and for males and females. Unemployment is particularly high for recently arrived NESB families. Duration of unemployment is also high for immigrants.
- 3 *Inadequacy of income support payments.* Immigrant families are over-represented as recipients of social security benefits. However, income support payments can be particularly inadequate for immigrant families on the one hand because of their relatively high expenditure, and on the other because of their exclusion from some social security payments and fringe benefits due to residency requirements for eligibility or lack of knowledge.
- 4 *Housing costs.* Housing costs tend to be particularly high for newly arrived immigrant families, especially those who are in private rental accommodation.
- 5 *Wage restraint and low wages.* Immigrants, especially from NESB are over-represented in low-wage employment.

These five factors combined suggest strongly that children in immigrant families are likely to be over-represented among children in poverty in Australia. However, there is great variation among immigrant families. Broadly speaking, non-English-speaking groups, especially the recently arrived, are most at risk of poverty. Income poverty in immigrant families is likely to be exacerbated by factors relating to migration (such as lack of support networks), English language ability and, in some cases, cultural factors and prejudice. While immigrant families in poverty are particularly likely to need support services in the face of the lack of informal support, their access to available services is likely to be restricted by the same factors which intensify their needs (namely language, lack of knowledge of services and lack of social networks).

Returning to the initial questions posed by the study in the light of the literature search undertaken, we found little data which would enable us to answer the first question, to what extent are children of immigrants living in poverty? However, as outlined above, the

data available would suggest that children of immigrants are likely to be over-represented in poverty.

The second question asks, children of which immigrants are living in poverty? And the data indicate, again as outlined above, that children of NESB immigrants and of recent immigrants are more likely to be in poverty than are others. As for all Australian children, the children of immigrants most likely to be in poverty include those in single-parent families, with parents unemployed or on very low wages and with high housing costs. Some of the aspects which can intensify or prolong poverty and which are specific to immigrant families include lack of English and lack of recognition of qualifications as barriers to employment or to higher paid employment, lack of eligibility for and lack of knowledge about social security and other income support payments, and high costs associated with resettlement and family reunion.

The third question asked is about the relationship between low income and other forms of disadvantage for the children of immigrants. Very low income or poverty can exclude children from participating fully in the society in which they live. The available literature does not provide extensive information about the way this affects children of immigrants, although many aspects of it are likely to be well known to ethnic service providers working with low income NESB families. Lack of English (their parents' and their own) is likely to exclude children of immigrants from a variety of opportunities: cultural factors may inhibit their participation in some aspects of society; prejudice and discrimination may actively exclude them from others. At least for some, the low income and language difficulties of first arrival are transitory. Nonetheless, it is crucial that support services are in place and accessible to ensure that children of immigrants do not become excluded members of Australian society.

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## Chapter 2: The incidence of poverty among children of immigrants

The preceding literature review outlined the interrelationship of factors which can cause poverty and disadvantage among immigrant families and their children. This chapter builds on that analysis by presenting statistical data for 1986–91 on the numbers of dependent children in immigrant families according to levels of parental income and receipt of Commonwealth Government pension and benefit, duration of unemployment, housing costs and housing tenure.

Some of the data in this section have been compiled from published documents, but most are unpublished data from a 1989 survey which has been conducted by the ABS, and from the DSS (1990 and 1991). Both national and Victorian statistics are detailed here in order to examine whether the children of immigrants are over-represented in poverty, and to identify the children of which immigrants are in poverty. Chapter 3 completes this report's analysis by examining local-level and case-study data for two inner-urban Melbourne areas. As a whole, the study presents a picture of poverty and disadvantage among children of immigrants both at the broad, macro level and on a personal, micro level.

This analysis is unique because while most available statistics use the 'household' or the 'income unit' as the unit of analysis, these data focus, where possible, on dependent children in families or in income units so that the extent of poverty among children of immigrants can be calculated. Further, it broadens the measurement of poverty by presenting the widely used measure of income poverty (the Henderson poverty line) with other 'indicators of disadvantage' such as labour force status, housing costs and housing tenure, and low income (receipt of a Commonwealth Government pension or benefit).

A detailed report on immigrants and the social security system which includes a focus on the age composition of recipients has been published (Whiteford 1991). The report does not enumerate dependent children, but does include a useful discussion of the various possible definitions of immigrant children.

The definition of dependent children used here is, to a large extent, necessarily determined by the data collection agencies. Although there is some variation between the ABS and the DSS definitions, where it has been possible, a consistent definition has been adopted.

The definition of dependent children used in this section, unless otherwise specified, is that provided by the ABS:

All family members under 15 years of age; family members aged 15 to 19 attending school or aged 15 to 24 attending a tertiary education institution full-time, except those classified as husbands, wives, sole parents or other family heads (ABS 1990a).

The DSS uses the same age limit to define dependent children, 'but exclude[s] children receiving a Commonwealth income tested pension, benefit or allowance (e.g. Austudy)' (DSS 1990b, p. 6).

The analysis of dependent children presented here is based on parental country of birth (birthplace of father in case of two-parent families). Broad birthplace groupings—Australia, overseas English-speaking countries and overseas non-English-speaking countries—have been selected in accordance with widely used analytic frameworks. Overseas English-speaking birthplaces include Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America. Non-English-speaking birthplaces cover the balance of overseas countries.

Where it has been possible, further attention has been given to Viet Nam (Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia in the case of DSS data) and Lebanon within the overseas non-English-

speaking countries of birth for two reasons. First, these are two of the larger groups for which data are often available, and second, recent research has documented high rates and long durations of unemployment among Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants (see, for example, Jones & McAllister 1991). Given the relationship between unemployment, low income and poverty, it is expected that these two groups and their children will be somewhat over-represented in an analysis of poverty and disadvantage and their particular circumstances deserve further consideration.

Before considering children of immigrants from low-income families, we sought to establish total numbers of children of immigrants in Australia.

### Australia's children—ABS data

Among families with parent(s) born overseas, there are children born overseas and children born in Australia. We are concerned with both these groups. At the time of writing, 1991 Census figures are not available and the 1986 Census presents the most available data. In June 1986, the ABS enumerated 3 207 400 children aged under 15 years in two-parent families and a further 422 200 children in single-parent families—some 3 629 600 children (table 2.1). According to the definitions of birthplace of parent used here (birthplace of father except in the case of female-sole parent families), children with an Australian-born parent made up 71.3 per cent of the total, followed by those with an NESB parent (18.2 per cent) and children with a parent from an overseas English-speaking background (ESB) (10.5 per cent).

Children with overseas-born parents, particularly those with non-English-speaking parents, are relatively less likely to be in sole-parent families. Among the dependent children in single-parent families, 80.0 per cent had an Australian-born parent, while 10.5 per cent had a parent who was born in a non-English-speaking country, and 9.5 per cent had a parent from an overseas English-speaking country. For the children in two-parent families, 70.1 per cent had an Australian background father, 19.2 per cent had a NESB father, and 10.7 per cent had a father born in an overseas English-speaking country.

Table 2.1: Children aged under 15 years in couple- and single-parent families by birthplace, Australia, 1986

Birthplace of parent <sup>a</sup>	Family type					
	Couple with dependent children		Single parent with dependent children		Total children	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australia	2 249 800	70.1	337 700	80.0	2 587 500	71.3
Overseas:						
main English-speaking countries	342 000	10.7	40 300	9.5	382 300	10.5
non-English-speaking countries	615 600	19.2	44 200	10.5	659 800	18.2
Total	3 207 400	100.0	422 200	100.0	3 629 600	100.0

Notes: a. birthplace of father for children in couple-headed families.

Source: ABS 1990a; table H3.

The ABS has estimated there were 253 934 overseas-born children aged under 15 years in Australia in June 1989. This was 6.8 per cent of all children at that time. Of the overseas-born children, 36.8 per cent came from Asian countries and 30.9 per cent came from European countries. The largest single birthplace group of overseas-born children were from the United Kingdom and Ireland (18.8 per cent) followed by children from New Zealand (14.6 per cent) and Viet Nam (6.6 per cent) (ABS 1990a).

## **Dependent children in pension, benefit and Family Allowance Supplement (FAS) recipient families—DSS data**

Detailed characteristics of the Australian pensioner and beneficiary population are recorded on a regular basis by the DSS, Canberra. From these data, families with dependent children living on a fixed low income can be enumerated according to the country of birth of the recipient parent. Although dependent children are the unit of analysis in most cases, for the DSS data birthplace background is defined as the birthplace of the parent who receives the social security payment.

Described here are the dependent children in recipient families: Pension (Aged, Invalid, Class B Widows and Widowed Persons Allowance, Sole Parent, Sheltered Employee Allowance and Rehabilitation Allowance), Benefit (Unemployment, Sickness, Special), and FAS.

FAS is a payment to low-income working families who have dependent children. Introduced in December 1987, FAS offers a payment for children aged under 13 years equivalent to 15 per cent of the married pension rate and for children aged 13–15 years a payment equal to 20 per cent of the married pension. Discussion about using income security benchmarks as an alternative measure of poverty to the Henderson poverty line is provided by Oxley, Prosser and King (1991, pp. 25–6).

The DSS data presented here do not allow quantification of the number of children and their families living in income poverty. However, as the principal source of family income, it is known that most pension and benefit payments to families with children do not provide an income which exceeds the Henderson poverty line. For example, in the December quarter 1990, a single parent with four children aged under 13 years and with no additional income, received a pension which was \$55.85 per week below the before-housing poverty line (Brotherhood of St Laurence 1991). Further discussion of the Henderson poverty line as a measure of poverty is provided later in this section.

King (1991) has used 1986 ABS data and simulation techniques to estimate the proportion, in 1989, of income units and the number of children living below the poverty line according to the income support they received. Notably, he found that 85.5 per cent of beneficiaries with children were below the before-housing poverty line, as were 32 per cent of sole parent pensioners and FAS recipients and 39 per cent of pensioner couples with children. King (1991, p. 56) estimated that this was 469 900 children in recipient families in 1989.

### **Estimates of dependent children**

Whiteford (1991) explains the limitations of comparing birthplace groups because of the differences between the age composition of immigrants from different birthplaces and the residential requirements for receipt of government payments based on recency of arrival. This analysis, however, focuses on the dependent children in immigrant families, and the data presented are useful to identify the propensity for over-representation in certain social security payment categories of families with children from selected birthplace groups.

Table 2.2 shows the number and percentage distribution of dependent children who lived in families where the head received a pension, benefit or FAS payment in late 1990 and early 1991, a total of 1 176 451 dependent children. Dependent children with an Australian-born recipient parent totalled 889 348 (75.6 per cent), while 192 478 (16.4 per cent) dependent children had a non-English-speaking background, and 94 624 (8.0 per cent) had overseas English-speaking background. Table A in the appendix provides estimates of dependent children by *detailed* country of birth for each of the pension, benefit and FAS payment categories.

**Table 2.2: Total dependent children in pension, benefit and FAS recipient families by birthplace of recipient, Australia, 1990 and 1991**

Country of birth of recipient <sup>a</sup>	Pension (January 1991)					Benefit (November 1990)				Total children (1986)	
	Age	Invalid	Class B widows and WPA	Sole Parent	SEA and Rehab.	Un-employment	Sickness	Special	FAS (Dec. 90)		Total
	<i>Number</i>										
Australia	4877	42 334	1017	351 792	1425	116 646	14 615	4395	352 247	889 348	2 587 500
Overseas	1789	24 237	348	82 608	476	72 674	14 648	3915	86 408	287 103	1 042 100
English-speaking countries <sup>b</sup>	418	4 182	78	40 714	161	16 813	2 047	668	29 544	94 625	382 300
Non-English-speaking countries	1371	20 055	270	41 894	315	55 861	12 601	3247	56 864	192 478	659 900
Viet Nam/Cambodia/Laos	46	471	16	5 270	40	14 263	1 526	1257	7 068	29 957	N/A
Lebanon	111	3 193	6	3 406	14	10 827	4 958	462	7 482	30 459	N/A
Total	6666	66571	1365	434 400	1901	189 320	29 263	8310	438 655	1 176 451	3 629 600
	<i>Percentage</i>										
Australia	73.2	63.6	74.5	81.0	75.0	61.6	49.9	52.9	80.3	75.6	71.3
Overseas	26.8	36.4	25.9	19.0	25.0	38.4	50.1	47.1	19.7	24.4	28.7
English-speaking countries <sup>b</sup>	6.3	6.3	5.7	9.4	8.5	8.9	7.0	8.0	6.7	8.0	10.5
Non-English-speaking countries	20.6	30.1	19.8	9.6	16.6	29.5	43.1	39.1	13.0	16.4	18.2
Viet Nam/Cambodia/Laos	0.7	0.7	1.2	1.2	2.1	7.5	5.2	15.1	1.6	2.5	N/A
Lebanon	1.7	4.8	0.4	0.8	0.7	5.7	16.9	5.6	1.7	2.6	N/A
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Notes: a. Excludes country of birth not stated (13 110, 1.1 per cent dependent children).

b. Includes Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States of America.

Source: Department of Social Security, unpublished data.

### **Percentage distribution of dependent children**

The final column of table 2.2 provides an estimate of the proportion of all Australian children according to the male parent's birthplace. These data are a guide to the comparative representation of children in the pensioner and beneficiary population and the wider population. However, the comparison is limited in that the ABS 1986 data referred to children aged under 15 years, while the DSS data included dependent children aged up to 24 years.

As a guide, when comparing dependent children in DSS recipient families with the total population of children, it was those with a non-English-speaking background who were somewhat over-represented. In 1986, children with a parent born in a non-English-speaking country were 18.2 per cent of the population. With the notable exceptions of dependent children in Sole Parent Pension and FAS recipient families, those with non-English-speaking background were more numerous in each payment category. Children in Sickness Benefit (43.1 per cent) and Special Benefit (39.1 per cent) recipient families were more than twice their representation in the entire population.

On the other hand, the dependent children in pension, benefit and FAS recipient families with overseas English-speaking background were uniformly fewer than their 10.5 per cent representation in the population.

When looking at the distribution of children within payment categories, as would be expected, it was the dependent children with an Australian-born recipient parent who made up the majority, except in the case of Sickness Benefit. Some 14 648 (50.1 per cent) dependent children had an overseas-born parent who received Sickness Benefit, slightly more than the 14 615 (49.9 per cent) who had an Australian-born parent. This could reflect to some extent ineligibility for Invalid Pension because of residency requirements for some overseas-born Sickness Benefit recipients. Whiteford (1991, p. x) explains that comparisons of groups in relation to specific payments can be 'distorted' and even 'unreliable' because recent immigrants may not be residentially qualified for Age, Invalid or Sole Parent Pension.

Among social security recipients as a whole, there was an over-representation of dependent children with non-English-speaking background among the overseas background group. This trend was evident in each of the payment categories. Among the invalid pensioners, for example, 24 237 (36.4 per cent) dependent children were in families with overseas origin and the majority (20 055 or 30.1 per cent) had non-English-speaking background.

For families receiving Unemployment Benefit, 72 674 (38.4 per cent) dependent children had an overseas-born parent and the majority of this group (55 861 or 29.5 per cent) was from non-English-speaking background. More importantly for the NESB group was that their share of Unemployment Benefit recipients was greater than their population share (18.2 per cent). Two large groups of dependent children in Unemployment Benefit recipient families had a Vietnamese (14 263 children) or Lebanese (10 827 children) background.

Sickness Benefit is paid to people who are temporarily unable to work because of illness or injury. As mentioned, half the dependent children in these families had an overseas-born parent, 12 601 (43.1 per cent) had a parent with non-English-speaking background. The 4958 children with a Lebanese-born parent comprised 16.9 per cent of dependent children in Sickness Benefit recipient families.

With regard to Special Benefit, the purpose is 'to provide income support to a person in severe financial need who is ineligible to receive any other pension or benefit and who remains unable to provide for his or her own support due to circumstances beyond his or

her control' (DSS 1991, p. 3). Such circumstances include not being residentially qualified for a pension or benefit. Among the Special Benefit recipient families, 3915 (47.1 per cent) dependent children had an overseas-born parent, 3247 (39.1 per cent) had a parent born in a non-English-speaking country, and 1257 (15.1 per cent) had a Vietnamese-born parent.

As many as 352 247 (80.3 per cent) dependent children in FAS recipient families had an Australian-born parent. Among the 86 408 (19.7 per cent) with overseas-born parents, again it was the dependent NESB children who made up the majority, 56 864 or 13.0 per cent, but who were fewer than their population share (18.2 per cent). Dependent children with Vietnamese- and Lebanese-born parents comprised a similar proportion, 1.6 and 1.7 per cent respectively, a total 15 550 children.

Excluded from the estimate of FAS recipient families were those families who were eligible for but did not receive FAS. It is widely acknowledged that the take-up rate for FAS is less than 100 per cent. The extent of take-up of FAS is likely to depend primarily on the amount of the FAS payment, administrative simplicity and timeliness, personal preference, knowledge of FAS eligibility criteria, and labour market conditions around interchange between FAS and Unemployment Benefit (DSS 1990a, p. 30). Despite the difficulty of identifying the total eligible population and, therefore, of measuring take-up rates of FAS due to the absence of a single reliable data source, concern has been raised by community groups about the lower take-up rate among immigrant families and the accessibility of information on FAS to non-English-speaking immigrants in particular (NOW Centre Report 1987). One study found that only 11 per cent of immigrant families, compared to 29 per cent of all families, had heard of Family Income Supplement, the precursor of FAS (NOW Centre Report 1987, p. 2). This suggests that the estimates of dependent children in FAS recipient families with non-English-speaking background are likely to underestimate the number of dependent children in the eligible population. King (1991) has established that 47.7 per cent of potential FAS recipient families were living below the before-housing poverty line in 1989, but his analysis did not consider country of birth of the potential FAS group.

### Large family size

As discussed in chapter 1, large family size has been associated with high expenditure and poverty, particularly among the Lebanese. Table 2.3 shows the results of further analysis of the FAS group according to large family size. It shows FAS recipients in each birthplace group with five or more children as a proportion of the total FAS recipient families in each group.

**Table 2.3: FAS recipients with five or more dependent children by birthplace, Australia, 1991**

<i>Country of birth of recipient<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>FAS recipients</i>	
	<i>Families with five or more dependent children</i>	<i>Total families</i>
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Australia	6333	4.4
Overseas:	1633	4.4
English speaking countries <sup>b</sup>	492	3.9
Non-English-speaking countries	1141	4.6
Viet Nam/Cambodia/Laos	144	4.9
Lebanon	375	15.3
Total	7966	4.4

*Notes:* a. Excludes families where country of birth not stated (6.5%).

b. Includes Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States of America.

*Source:* Department of Social Security, unpublished data.

Table 2.4: Mean and median duration of receipt of Unemployment, Special and Sickness Benefit by birthplace, Australia, 1990<sup>a</sup>

<i>Country of birth of recipient</i>	<i>Mean duration (weeks)</i>				<i>Median duration (weeks)</i>			
	<i>Unemployment Benefit</i>	<i>Sickness Benefit</i>	<i>Special Benefit</i>	<i>Total Benefit</i>	<i>Unemployment Benefit</i>	<i>Sickness Benefit</i>	<i>Special Benefit</i>	<i>Total Benefit</i>
Australia	49.3	51.4	43.5	49.3	21.5	22.3	8.5	21.1
Overseas	54.9	62.6	87.0	59.1	24.6	33.5	58.1	27.4
English-speaking countries	46.5	47.7	48.3	46.8	20.2	22.5	12.5	20.3
Non-English-speaking countries	59.4	68.6	91.8	64.9	27.2	38.3	63.8	31.7
Viet Nam/Cambodia/Laos	65.0	75.8	118.3	72.9	35.3	46.5	87.5	38.7
Lebanon	84.8	86.2	81.8	84.9	40.0	54.6	60.3	45.6
Total <sup>b</sup>	50.7	55.0	67.2	52.1	22.2	25.5	27.7	22.7

Notes: a. Includes beneficiaries with and without children.

b. Includes country of birth not stated.

Source: Department of Social Security, unpublished data.

The Lebanese group emerges as the most likely to have larger families; those with five or more children being 15.3 per cent of total Lebanese FAS recipient families. This compared to a relatively uniform 4 to 5 per cent in other birthplace groupings.

#### **Duration of benefit receipt**

The particular disadvantage experienced by Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants noted from the literature is evidenced in their mean and median duration of benefit receipt. Table 2.4 shows the average and median duration (in weeks) of Unemployment, Sickness and Special Benefit receipt for these two groups, and benefit recipients in broader birthplace groupings. In this instance, benefit recipients as a whole are the unit of analysis rather than the children of recipients.

In every case, except for Special Benefit, Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants experience longer average and median duration of benefit receipt. Those immigrants from Lebanon receiving benefit rely on the payment for an average of 84.9 weeks and those from Viet Nam for an average of 72.9 weeks. Their median durations of benefit receipt are 45.6 weeks and 38.7 weeks respectively. While immigrants from non-English-speaking countries who receive benefit experience an average duration of payment of 64.9 weeks and a median duration of payment of 31.7 weeks, their counterparts from overseas English-speaking countries have 46.8 weeks mean duration and 20.3 weeks median duration.

This pattern of benefit receipt, in terms of mean and median durations, is observed for both Unemployment and Sickness Benefit. In the case of Special Benefit, the average duration among the Lebanese recipients (81.8 weeks) is slightly lower than for overseas-born recipients as a whole (87 weeks).

#### **Summary**

Data from the DSS have enabled us to calculate the number of dependent children in low fixed-income families according to the birthplace of the recipient parent. Comparing this information with the numbers of children in Australia according to parent's birthplace, as provided by the ABS, shows a tendency for over-representation of children with NESB in recipient families.

In 1986 there were 3 207 400 children in Australia; 71.3 per cent had Australian-born parents, 18.2 per cent had overseas non-English-speaking background and the remaining 10.5 per cent had overseas English-speaking background.

In pension, benefit and FAS recipient families in late 1990 and early 1991, there was a total of 1 176 451 dependent children. Children with an Australian-born recipient parent totalled 889 348, while 192 478 had a non-English-speaking background and 94 625 had an overseas English-speaking background. In all payment categories except for Sole Parent Pension, Sheltered Employees Allowance and FAS, dependent children with non-English-speaking background were over-represented compared with their numbers in the wider population. On the other hand, dependent children with overseas English-speaking background were uniformly fewer in each DSS payment category than their representation in the population.

The particular disadvantage experienced by Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants was evidenced in their average durations of benefit receipt, which, in nearly all payment categories, was longer than all other birthplace groups. Lebanese families experience the further disadvantage of high expenditures associated with larger families, being more likely than all other immigrants in the FAS recipient group to have five or more children.

#### **Disadvantage among dependent children in Victoria**

The DSS data presented so far provide an estimate of the numbers of children living in low-income families, but do not allow comparison of their incomes with the Henderson

Table 2.5: Dependent children: indicators of disadvantage, Victoria, May 1989

<i>Country of birth of income unit head<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Total number of dependent children<sup>b</sup> ('000)</i>	<i>Gross weekly income of income unit less than \$279<sup>c</sup> (%)</i>	<i>Dependent children in income units receiving Government benefit only (%)</i>	<i>Dependent children in income units where head unemployed or unemployed some time in past 12 months (%)</i>	<i>Dependent children in income units spending more than 50% of income on housing (%)</i>	<i>Dependent children in private rental housing (%)</i>
Australia	805.8	12.6	4.3	11.5	3.2	11.4
Overseas	425.9	13.4	5.1	13.1	5.9	13.1
English-speaking countries	116.0	10.6	2.8	11.5	3.8	15.9
UK and Ireland	96.0	10.7	1.5	10.9	4.6	10.4
Other main English-speaking countries	20.0	10.0	9.5	14.0	0	42.5
Non-English-speaking countries	309.9	14.4	5.9	13.7	6.5	12.1
Europe	185.5	14.5	3.8	8.8	5.1	8.7
Italy	47.4	16.0	3.4	11.4	7.0	1.1
Greece	40.7	13.3	4.7	13.0	4.2	9.3
Yugoslavia	30.5	17.1	0	2.0	7.9	7.5
Other Europe	66.9	13.0	5.2	7.6	3.1	14.3
Asia	96.0	16.4	11.4	24.3	9.8	18.2
Viet Nam	23.2	37.5	29.7	40.5	12.9	4.3
Lebanon	12.3	28.5	16.3	41.5	19.5	24.4
Other Asia	60.5	5.8	3.3	14.6	6.6	22.3
Other non-English-speaking countries	28.4	7.0	1.8	10.2	5.6	13.4
Total	1231.8	12.9	4.5	12.1	4.1	12.0

Notes: a. An income unit in this table is a married or de facto couple with dependent children or a sole-parent family.

b. Dependents include persons aged 15–24 years old who studied full time in the year prior to the survey.

c. Approximately 50 per cent of average weekly ordinary time earnings for full-time employed males in May 1989.

Source: ABS 1990d; unpublished data.

ABS 1991; table 1.

poverty line. No recent Australia-wide information was found which specified numbers of children in immigrant families living in poverty; therefore, more detailed data obtained from the Victorian Social Survey (ABS, 1990d) were used to estimate the number of Victorian families and of dependent children living below the Henderson poverty line.

The Victorian Social Survey was conducted by the ABS throughout Victoria in May 1989. It was based on a sample of dwellings, and occupants were interviewed about a wide range of social and economic indicators. The sample covers about one-fifth of one per cent of Victoria's population, that is, about 3500 households. Birthplace background of the children included in this analysis is defined by the birthplace of the parent who completed the ABS survey, the 'income unit head'.

Detailed information was available from the Victorian Social Survey for some of the larger birthplace groups (see table 2.5). Again, Viet Nam and Lebanon have been given particular attention because of the high levels of disadvantage experienced by immigrants and their children from these two countries.

As well as allowing a comparison of incomes with the Henderson poverty line, the ABS data for Victoria enabled estimation of the number of dependent children living in disadvantaged circumstances according to other selected indicators. Based on the review of literature, the 'indicators of disadvantage' used here included family heads receiving a low income (i.e. gross weekly income less than 50 per cent of average weekly earnings), receiving a Commonwealth Government benefit only, being unemployed in a twelve-month period, spending more than 50 per cent of income on housing, and living in private rental housing.

Of particular concern is the relationship between income poverty and other forms of disadvantage. Receiving low wages, being unemployed, and receiving a Commonwealth Government benefit as the only source of income are linked to poverty and disadvantage. High expenditure, especially in housing costs, is another aspect of the equation. Prosser and Bisset (1990) examine the situation of low-income private renters and point to the loss of disposable income because of the rent rises that have offset gains in recent social security entitlements. Public housing tenants, on the other hand, are protected from high housing costs by rebated rents which limit rents to up to 25 per cent of income. Prosser and Bisset note further problems for private renters in the lower end of the rental housing market in terms of access to cheaper housing, overcrowding, limited security of tenure and quality of housing.

These 'indicators of disadvantage'—low income from wages or benefit, unemployment, housing costs and housing tenure—are analysed here for Victoria's children.

### **Results**

In mid 1989, the ABS estimated that there were 1 231 800 dependent children in couple or single-parent families in Victoria. (In this analysis the term family is used in place of income units which were enumerated by the ABS and explained in the notes to table 2.5.) Of these children, 805 800 (65.4 per cent) lived in families where the head (usually the male parent for couple families) was born in Australia, compared with some 426 000 children (34.6 per cent) whose family head was born overseas. As many as 25.2 per cent of all dependent children lived in families whose head was of NESB, and 9.4 per cent had a parent from an overseas English-speaking country.

### **Income**

Of the dependent children whose family head was born in Australia, 12.6 per cent lived in families with a gross weekly income less than half average weekly earnings (ordinary time earnings for full-time males in May 1989); and only 4.3 per cent were in families where the head received a Commonwealth Government benefit only. An even smaller proportion of

children in immigrant families from English-speaking countries, some 10.6 per cent, lived in families receiving less than half average weekly earnings.

In contrast, of the dependent children whose family head was born in Viet Nam, 37.5 per cent were in families with a gross weekly income less than half average weekly earnings and nearly 30 per cent lived in families where the head received only Unemployment, Sickness or Special Benefit. For the Lebanese families, 28.5 per cent of dependent children lived in very low income families, and 16.3 per cent in families who received Commonwealth Government benefits as their sole income source.

### **Unemployment**

Some 13.7 per cent of dependent children with non-English-speaking background, 11.5 per cent with overseas English-speaking background and the same proportion (11.5 per cent) with an Australian-born parent had experienced family unemployment.

Dependent children in families where the head was born in Lebanon were slightly worse off in terms of unemployment than their Vietnamese counterparts. Both groups, however, were badly off compared with dependent children from all other identified birthplaces. Some 41.5 per cent of Lebanese and 40.5 per cent of Vietnamese children lived in families where the head had been unemployed at some time in the twelve months preceding the May 1989 survey.

### **Housing**

The dependent children whose family head was born in Lebanon were worst off in terms of the proportion of income their family spent on housing. Nearly one-fifth (19.5 per cent) of this group were in families spending more than 50 per cent of income on housing. This compared with 12.9 per cent of dependent children in families where the head was born in Viet Nam, and 6.5 per cent of dependent children in families with non-English-speaking background. Again, the proportions for the dependent children with an Australian-born parent (3.2 per cent) and those with overseas English-speaking background (5.9 per cent) were lower.

However, the dependent children in families where the head was born in Viet Nam were different from most other groups in terms of the housing tenure of their families. Only 4.3 per cent of this group were in families who rented privately. Analysis showed that these children were more likely to live in homes that were being purchased by their Vietnamese-born family head (49.1 per cent). The dependent children of Lebanese origin were more likely to be in privately rented housing (24.4 per cent), which was more than twice the proportion of dependent children whose family head was Australian-born (11.4 per cent).

### **The Henderson poverty line**

Data obtained from the Victorian Social Survey (ABS 1990d) have enabled an approximate estimation of, first, the number of Victorian families with dependent children living below the Henderson poverty line and, second, the number of dependent children living in poverty. The Victorian children who are living in poverty and the extent of poverty among immigrant families have been identified.

The Henderson poverty line was discussed in the introduction to this report. The before-housing poverty line, which includes housing costs, was used in this analysis. Comparisons of incomes with the Henderson poverty line updated from its 1973 base by seasonally adjusted household disposable income per capita (as calculated by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, June 1989) were assessed. Poverty incidence calculations were made for families according to the birthplace of the family head and as to whether that person was in the labour force (i.e. employed or unemployed) or not in the labour force (not working or seeking work). The number of children in each family type was also considered. Those families whose income was below the poverty line are said to be in poverty.

**Table 2.6: Families with dependent children in poverty by family type, labour force status and birthplace, Victoria 1989**

Family type	March 1989 poverty line (\$ per week)	Country of birth of income unit head ('000)			Total families in each family type	Percentage of each family type in poverty
		Australia	Overseas: main English-speaking countries	Overseas: non-English- speaking countries		
<i>Head in the labour force</i>						
Married couple with:						
1 child	273.30	7 100	1 100	2 100	176 300	5.8
2 children	319.30	14 600	1 600	5 000	227 400	9.3
3 or more children	365.20	17 200	1 000	7 000	128 600	19.6
Single parent with:						
1 child	218.20	4 200	500	500	37 000	14.1
2 children	264.20	5 200	1 000	1 000	21 600	33.3
3 or more children	310.10	1 000	0	1 000	3 000	66.7
<i>Head not in the labour force</i>						
Married couple with:						
1 child	241.30	4 100	0	4 900	15 000	60.0
2 children	287.10	600	0	500	2 000	55.0
3 or more children	333.10	0	0	3 000	3 000	100.0
Single parent with:						
1 child	186.10	9 200	1 500	5 300	16 400	97.6
2 children	232.00	8 300	500	3 000	13 800	85.5
3 or more children	277.90	3 100	1 000	1 500	6 700	83.6
Total families in poverty		74 600	8 200	34 800	117 600	
Percentage of birthplace group in poverty		17.8%	12.8%	20.8%	18.1%	
Total Victorian families		419 400	64 100	167 400	650 900	

Sources: ABS, 1990d; unpublished data. National Institute of Economic and Industry Research and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Social Policy Research Unit, Newsletter no. 17, June 1989.

The results, however, are likely to be underestimations of the number of Victorian families living in income poverty, because they are based on the *gross* weekly income of the income unit head. This is a departure from Henderson's use of the poverty line as a measure of a family's ability to meet basic costs based on their disposable or available income. A further difficulty was encountered, again leading to underestimation of dependent children, in that the 'family type' variable was trichotomised (i.e. one child, two children, and three or more children families) by the ABS. With these limitations in mind, the following data provide a guide to assess the extent of poverty among immigrant families in Victoria.

#### **Victorian families in poverty**

The results of the analysis are given in table 2.6. It shows an estimate of the number of Victorian families with dependent children living below the before-housing poverty line in 1989, but as mentioned above this will be an underestimate. The first part of the table shows families whose head was in the labour force (either employed or unemployed) and the second part shows families whose head was not in the labour force. Broad birthplace groupings—Australia, overseas main English-speaking countries and overseas non-English-speaking countries—are analysed for married-couple and single-parent families according to the number of children in each.

The first column of table 2.6 is the March 1989 poverty line for each family type. The March 1989 poverty line was chosen because of its relevance to the families at the time of the survey. For example, a married-couple family with one child whose head was either employed or unemployed required \$273.30 per week to meet all costs including housing in March 1989.

In 1989 at least, 117 600 Victorian families, or 18.1 per cent of all Victorian families, were living below the Henderson poverty line. Among those with an Australian-born family head, 74 600 (17.8 per cent) lived in income poverty, compared with 8200 (12.8 per cent) of Victorian families with a family head from an overseas English-speaking country, and 34 800 (20.8 per cent) with a family head from an overseas non-English-speaking country. Clearly, it is families with non-English-speaking background who were more likely than other broad birthplace groups to be living in poverty in Victoria at that time.

The final two columns of table 2.6 show the total number of Victorian families in each family type and families in poverty as a percentage of each group. These data show that larger families and single parent families were more likely to be living in income poverty. At least 3000 (66.7 per cent) single-parent families with three or more children whose family head was in the labour force were estimated to be in poverty. Of the families whose family head was not in the labour force, more than half of each family type was living below the Henderson poverty line, and a large proportion of single-parent families were again living in poverty.

**Table 2.7: Estimate of dependent children in poverty by birthplace of income unit head, Victoria 1989**

<i>Country of birth of income unit head</i>	<i>Total dependent children</i>	<i>Estimate of dependent children in poverty</i>	<i>Per cent of dependent children in poverty</i>
Australia	805 800	145 900	18.1
Overseas			
Main English-speaking countries	116 000	15 300	13.2
Non-English-speaking countries	309 900	68 300	22.4
Total	1 231 800	230 500	18.7

*Source:* ABS 1990d, unpublished data.

### **Victorian children in poverty**

Using the same data, an estimate of the number of dependent children in Victoria has been calculated for each of the broad birthplace groupings. Table 2.7 presents the results of this analysis and shows that some 230 500 children, or 18.7 per cent of all Victorian children, were living in income poverty in 1989.

Among the children with an Australian-born family head, at least 145 900 or 18.1 per cent were living in poverty, compared with 15 300 or 13.2 per cent with a family head from an overseas English-speaking country, and 69 300 or 22.4 per cent with a family head from an overseas non-English-speaking country. Once again, the children with non-English-speaking background were somewhat over-represented in poverty in Victoria.

### **Summary**

In Victoria, the extent of poverty and disadvantage among immigrant families and their children, especially among those with non-English-speaking background and Vietnamese and Lebanese immigrants and their children in particular, was evidenced in the ABS data (ABS 1990d).

Dependent children with Lebanese and Vietnamese background were more likely than all other birthplace groups for whom data were available to live in families with gross weekly income less than \$279 per week, who are receiving a Government benefit as their only source of income, and whose family head has been unemployed in a twelve-month period. Children of Lebanese immigrants are more likely than all others to live in privately rented housing, and dependent children with either Vietnamese or Lebanese background are more likely than all others to live in families who spend more than 50 per cent of their income on housing.

In examining income poverty among Victorian families and their children, as many as 117 600 families with children (18.1 per cent) lived below the before-housing Henderson poverty line in 1989. Yet, some 34 800 Victorian families with non-English-speaking background (20.8 per cent) lived in poverty, compared with about 8200 (12.8 per cent) with overseas English-speaking background. While these figures are estimates, it was larger families and single-parent families who were more likely to live below the Henderson poverty line.

Of children in Victoria in 1989, some 230 500 (18.7 per cent) lived in poverty. Again, it was the dependent children with non-English-speaking background who were over-represented. At least 69 300 (22.4 per cent) of this group lived below the before-housing Henderson poverty line, while about 15 300 (13.2 per cent) of their counterparts with overseas English-speaking background lived in similar circumstances.

### **Discussion**

In drawing together data for dependent children in immigrant families in Australia and in Victoria, this analysis has revealed which children experience poverty and disadvantage and to what extent this includes children of immigrants.

The most recent estimate of dependent children in families living on a low fixed income in Australia was that provided by the DSS. From this data we could not calculate how many of these children and their families lived below the poverty line, but most pension and benefit payments for families with children have not provided an income which exceeds the Henderson poverty line. Earlier work by King (1991) has estimated that as many as 85.5 per cent of beneficiaries with children lived below the before-housing poverty line, as did 32 per cent of sole-parent pensioners and the same proportion of FAS recipients.

The Australia-wide data showed us that 1 176 451 dependent children lived in families who received a Commonwealth Government pension, benefit or FAS payment in late

1990. Of these children, at least 287 103 or 24 per cent were children of immigrants. Some 192 478 or 16 per cent were children with NESB.

The propensity to over-representation of dependent children with non-English-speaking background in recipient families was evident across all DSS payment categories, except in the major categories of Sole Parent Pension and FAS. On the other hand, dependent children with overseas English-speaking background were uniformly under-represented in pension, benefit and FAS recipient families. The relatively few children of non-English-speaking parents in Sole Parent pensioner families reflects closely their few numbers in sole-parent families and residency requirements for social security payment. In contrast, the apparent under-representation among FAS recipients is most likely to indicate the lack of knowledge of immigrant families of their entitlement to this payment.

The ABS data for Victoria did allow us to estimate the number of families with dependent children and the number of children living in income poverty according to broad birthplace groups. Despite the limitations of the data as described earlier, it showed us that at least 69 300 Victorian children with non-English-speaking background (some 34 800 families) were living in poverty, compared with at least 15 300 dependent children with parents from an overseas English-speaking country (about 8200 families). As expected, larger families and single-parent families were more likely to be living in poverty.

The data for Victoria also provided an opportunity to explore disadvantage among dependent children in specific birthplace groups according to the income, employment and housing status of their family head. Of those whose birthplace was specified, the dependent children in Vietnamese and, in particular, Lebanese families were worst off on the indicators of disadvantage included here. For example, family unemployment had been a part of the lives of over 40 per cent of dependent children with a Viet Nam- or Lebanon-born parent, and nearly one-fifth of dependent children with Lebanese background were in families who spent more than 50 per cent of their income on housing.

Overall, the data presented here have shown us that dependent children with non-English-speaking background were likely to be over-represented in national measures of disadvantage. Also, the Australia-wide data reaffirmed the disparity between children with overseas non-English- and English-speaking background. The Victorian data focused on the disadvantage experienced by dependent children with Vietnamese or Lebanese family heads, and income poverty among families and their dependent children in broad birthplace groups.

It is the belief of the Brotherhood of St Laurence that all Australian children have a right to develop to their potential for full participation and citizenship in the Australian community (Carter & Trethewey 1990, p. 18). To achieve this goal, the Brotherhood has developed a set of objectives in a plan for children which encompass an adequate income and safe, affordable housing, a good education and a good job, a high standard of health care and a healthy environment, support from the community, and accepted cultural identity and freedom (Carter & Trethewey 1990, pp. 18-19).

As a basic entitlement, all children must be protected by an income which is at the same time guaranteed and adequate, and their housing must be secure. Until these entitlements are provided, equality of opportunity is impossible (Carter & Trethewey 1990). The data presented in this chapter have shown us that the children with non-English-speaking background and their families require particular consideration in terms of advancing their financial and housing security. The analysis suggests that special targeting of NESB families is needed in the provision of income security, labour market programs and housing assistance.

# Chapter 3: The Life Chances Study

## Introduction

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is undertaking a longitudinal study of 167 children born in 1990 in two of Melbourne's inner suburban municipalities. The study aims to explore the life chances of the children in relation to a range of social and economic variables. These include their parents' employment, housing and general financial situation, their local neighbourhood and access to services and social supports. Also included are questions about the children's health, family relationships and the parents' plans and expectations for their children. The inner suburbs selected have a very diverse population in terms of economic situation, housing tenure and ethnic background. This allows comparisons to be made between children in low- and high-income families and children of immigrants and others. The study aims to follow these children over a number of years, including those who move out of the inner suburbs. Subsequent follow-ups will explore the changes in the families' situations over time and the influence of such changes on the development of the children. The study seeks to identify factors which will enhance the life chances of children, including those in low-income families.

This report examines data from the Life Chances Study, comparing the children of immigrants and those of Australian-born parents, and considers the issues of poverty and disadvantage for the immigrant families and their children. The questions raised earlier in the report are addressed in relation to the data, namely:

- To what extent are children of immigrants living in poverty?
- Children of which immigrants are in poverty?
- What is the relationship between poverty and other forms of disadvantage for children of immigrants?

In contrast to chapter 2 which sought information at a national and state level, data from the Life Chances Study allow us to look in more detail at the situations and experiences of immigrant families on low incomes and the impact of this in their children.

The study was planned as a census of all children born in selected months in 1990 in two adjacent inner Melbourne municipalities. Initial identification of the children and contact with the families was through the Maternal and Child Health Service, a universal service run through local councils in Victoria and largely funded by the State Government. The Maternal and Child Health nurses who are notified of all births in their municipalities asked the mothers of the children born in the selected months (six months in each municipality during March to December 1990) to participate in the study. Some mothers were unable to be contacted as they had moved out of the area without a forwarding address soon after the birth and some declined to participate in the study. Overall, 66 per cent of the children whose births were notified to the Maternal and Child Health Service in the selected months participated in the study. Information from the Maternal and Child Health Service about the children who did not participate shows that they included children from a range of income groups and ethnic backgrounds, but indicate that children from low income and NESB families were somewhat over-represented among the non-participants. With this qualification, the children who participated in the study can be seen as representative of all those born in these inner suburbs. Of the 167 children in the study, 56 per cent were female and 44 per cent male.

The first stage of the Life Chances Study involved interviews with the mothers during the children's first year of life and also ratings by the MCHC nurses on children's health and mother's 'coping'. The large majority of interviews (95 per cent) were carried out when the babies were aged four to seven months of age, with the remaining few when babies were

aged eight and nine months. Interviews with non-English-speaking mothers were conducted by bilingual interviewers (Vietnamese-, Cantonese- and Hmong-speaking) or through interpreters. (Full details of the methodology are available in the forthcoming report on the Life Chances Study.)

At the time of the birth, the families were all living in the two selected suburbs. By the time of the interviews 9 per cent of the 167 children (15 children) had moved to other areas in Melbourne, eleven to relatively nearby inner and northern suburbs, and four further afield.

The two suburbs of the study have traditionally been working-class localities with low-cost housing and local industries. The areas have also for many years been sites of early settlement for immigrants to Australia and availability of low-cost public housing (including very visible high-rise estates) has ensured that this pattern persists in spite of the overall rise in housing costs. In the last twenty years or so, some parts of the suburbs have undergone a process of 'gentrification' with young, middle-class residents renovating the older housing. The areas were chosen for the study because of the diversity of their resident population within a relatively small geographic area. The 1986 Census showed that the two suburbs have a considerably higher proportion of low-income households than Melbourne as a whole, but that one of the suburbs has also a higher proportion of high-income households. The two suburbs have a higher proportion of managers and professionals as well as a higher than average proportion of public housing and private rental tenants and a high proportion of residents born overseas. The two suburbs thus have both low- and high-income families, from a wide range of birthplaces and living in a variety of housing types.

### **The children of immigrants**

Who are the children of immigrants in the Life Chances Study? By definition, the children in the study are all themselves Australian-born. Of the total of 167 children in the study, 49 per cent (81 children) had at least one parent born overseas. It is this broad group which will be defined as children of immigrants for analysis in the study.

For a major part of the analysis of the data, three groups are compared (see table 3.1). The groups include (a) those children with both parents born in non-English-speaking countries (referred to as the 'NESB' group), including absent NESB fathers in sole-parent families; (b) those children with English-speaking background immigrant parents, with one ESB and one NESB parent or with one Australian-born parent and one immigrant parent either ESB or NESB (the 'other' immigrant group); (c) those with both parents born in Australia (the 'Australian' group).

The major focus of the analysis is on the children in the NESB families. The situations of families from particular birthplaces will also be considered.

#### **The NESB families**

The NESB families in which both parents were born overseas were predominantly from Southeast Asia (33 children) with smaller numbers from the Middle East (10 children) and Europe (5 children). The largest birthplace group was from Viet Nam, with 21 children having both parents born in Viet Nam (and another four having one Vietnamese-born parent). These Vietnamese parents had typically come to Australia as refugees during the 1980s. Their length of time in Australia ranged from one to twelve years. They included both Vietnamese and Cantonese speakers. A distinct group of recent refugees were four Hmong hill tribe families from Laos who had been in Australia for two or three years. Other Asian-born couples came from China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and included some couples in which partners had different countries of birth.

**Table 3.1: Life Chances Study: parents' birthplace**

<i>Parents' birthplace</i>	<i>Number of children</i>	<i>%</i>
Australia		
Total both parents Australian-born	86	51.5
NESB		
Both parents NESB		
Asia		
Viet Nam (both parents)	21	
Laos (both parents)	4	
Other (China, Viet Nam, Hong Kong Singapore, Malaysia)	8	
Total Asia	33	
Middle East		
Turkey (both parents)	5	
Other (Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria)	5	
Total Middle East	10	
Europe (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Italy)	5	
Total Europe	5	
Total NESB	48	28.7
Other		
One parent NESB/one Australian-born		
Europe (Germany, Italy, Greece, Holland, Czechoslovakia)	11	
Other (Turkey, Morocco, Western Samoa)	3	
Total NESB/Australian	14	
One parent ESB/one Australian-born		
UK	6	
NZ	4	
Other (USA, West Indies, Tanzania, Indonesia)	4 <sup>a</sup>	
Total ESB/Australian	14	
Both parents ESB (UK, NZ)	3	
One parent ESB/one parent NESB	2	
Total Other	33	19.8
Total	167	39.0

Note: a. Includes two parents born to English-speaking parents in non-English-speaking countries.

Source: Life Chances Study, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

The largest group from the Middle East were five children with both parents born in Turkey. The Turkish parents ranged from those who had lived in Australia since childhood to very recent arrivals. Other Middle Eastern birthplaces included Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. The remaining five children had European-born parents (from Italy, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria).

#### The 'other' immigrant families

The parents from English-speaking countries of origin typically came from the United Kingdom (9 children) and New Zealand (6 children) and had married Australian-born partners. The parents from non-English-speaking birthplaces with Australian-born partners were predominantly from Europe (11 children with parents from Germany, Italy, Greece, Holland and Czechoslovakia), in contrast to the Asian and Middle Eastern origins of those

families in which both parents were of non-English-speaking background. Some of the Australian-born parents married to immigrants were themselves children of immigrants, in some cases of the same origin as their partners (including those of Greek and Turkish origins).

### **The Australian families**

Of the 86 children with both parents born in Australia, some had grandparents born overseas. The persistence of ethnic language beyond the first generation is indicated in the five families in which both parents were Australian-born but in which a language other than English was spoken at home. The languages spoken were Italian, Greek, Albanian, Maltese and Dutch, reflecting the European origins of Australian's earlier post-war NESB immigrants, and the overall diversity of the Australian people.

### **Characteristics of the families**

The families were grouped on the sole criteria of parents' birthplace. However, the groups differed from each other in a number of other significant ways. Length of residence, English-speaking ability and family structure are considered briefly here. The differences in income level will then be considered in terms of the distribution of poverty; some of the factors associated with low income will be examined and then the NESB families will be compared with the 'other' immigrant and Australian families on a range of characteristics, including employment, housing, social supports, use of services, family functioning, children's health and future plans.

### **Length of residence**

The overseas-born parents in the NESB group were typically much more recent arrivals than those in the 'other' immigrant group (see table 3.2). In the NESB families, 31 per cent of the mothers and 25 per cent of the fathers had been in Australia for two years or less, while only 6 per cent of immigrant parents in the 'other' category were such recent arrivals. Only 4 per cent of all NESB parents had been in Australia for over twenty years while 4 per cent of the 'other' overseas-born parents had been. The average number of years of residence of the mothers of the NESB group was 5.8 years and of the fathers 7.7 years,

**Table 3.2: Life Chances Study: length of residence of parents by birthplace**

<i>Length of residence</i>	<i>Parents' birthplace</i>							
	<i>Both NESB</i>		<i>Other</i>		<i>Both Australian</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<b>Father</b>								
1 to 2 years	12	(25.0)	2	(6.1)			14	(8.4)
3 to 5 years	7	(14.6)	1	(3.0)			8	(4.8)
6 to 20 years	21	(43.7)	8	(24.2)			29	(17.3)
over 20 years	3	(6.3)	10	(30.3)			13	(7.8)
Not known	5	(10.4)	3	(9.1)			8	(4.8)
<b>Total (fathers born overseas)</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>(72.7)</b>			<b>72</b>	<b>(43.1)</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>7.7 years</b>		<b>17.8 years</b>				
<b>Mother</b>								
1 to 2 years	15	(31.2)	2	(6.1)			17	(10.2)
3 to 5 years	11	(22.9)	3	(9.1)			14	(8.4)
6 to 20 years	21	(43.7)	4	(12.1)			25	(14.8)
over 20 years	1	(2.1)	4	(12.1)			5	(3.0)
Not known			1	(3.0)			1	(0.6)
<b>Total (mothers born overseas)</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>(42.4)</b>			<b>62</b>	<b>(37.1)</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>5.8 years</b>		<b>12.2 years</b>				

**Table 3.3: Life Chances Study: English ability of NESB parents**

<i>English ability</i>	<i>Father</i>		<i>Mother</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Speaks English				
Very well	5	(10.4)	6	(12.5)
Well	20	(41.7)	11	(22.9)
Not well	14	(29.2)	23	(47.9)
Not at all	3	(6.2)	7	(14.6)
Not known	6	(12.5)	1	(2.1)
Total	48	(100.0)	48	(100.0)

while for the 'other' immigrant group, immigrant mothers had been in Australia, on average, 12.2 years, and immigrant fathers 17.8 years.

#### **English ability**

The English ability of those parents of NESB in the 'other' group was generally good, with only two parents described as not speaking English well. In contrast, 46 per cent of parents in the NESB group spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all' (14 fathers spoke English 'not well' and three 'not at all', and 30 mothers had limited English, 23 speaking English 'not well' and 7 'not at all') (see table 3.3).

#### **Family structure**

Typically, the families with both parents born in non-English-speaking countries were larger than the 'other' immigrant families or those in which both parents were Australian-born (table 3.4). For over half the Australian-born families, the baby on which the study centred was the only child. The average number of children in the NESB families was 2.2, in the 'other' immigrant families 1.8 and in the Australian-born 1.6. Only two families had more than four children, both NESB.

Twelve per cent of children were in sole-parent families, in all cases the sole-parent being the mother. The proportion was somewhat higher for NESB families (17 per cent) than for the 'other' immigrant (12 per cent) or Australian families (9 per cent) (see table 3.4).

**Table 3.4: Life Chances Study: characteristics of the families by parents' birthplace**

<i>Selected characteristics</i>	<i>Parents' birthplace</i>							
	<i>Both NESB</i>		<i>Other</i>		<i>Both Australian</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Number of children								
One	20	(41.7)	14	(42.4)	48	(55.8)	82	(49.1)
Two to three	20	(41.7)	17	(51.5)	35	(40.7)	72	(43.1)
Four to five	8	(16.6)	2	(6.1)	3	(3.5)	13	(7.8)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)
Average no. of children	2.2		1.8		1.6			
Family structure								
Sole parent	8	(16.7)	4	(12.2)	8	(9.3)	20	(12.2)
Couple	40	(83.3)	29	(87.9)	78	(90.7)	146	(87.8)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)

The birthplaces of the absent fathers were obtained and the sole-parent families are included accordingly in those with either both NESB parents, both Australian-born parents or with the 'other' immigrant families.

### **Parents' age**

The average age of the mothers of the children in the study was 30.7 years. The mothers in the NESB families were, on average, slightly younger (29.5 years), those in 'other' immigrant families somewhat older (32.5 years), with those in the Australian-born families in between (30.7 years). The ages of the mothers ranged from 18 (there were four mothers under 20) to 44 years (11 mothers were in their forties) with a similar range across all three birthplace groups. The average age of the fathers in the study was 34.1 years (33.3 years for the NESB families, 36.1 years for the 'other' immigrant group and 33.8 for the Australian families).

### **Children and families in poverty**

Are children born in Melbourne's inner suburbs in 1990 living in families which could be described as being in poverty? The families in the Life Chances Study have been assessed according to the Henderson poverty line. (This was calculated for each child taking into account whether the head of the family is in the labour force (including being unemployed looking for work) or out of the labour force, whether it is a one- or two-parent family, the number of children in the family and the household's disposable income.)

The poverty line is often described as an 'austere' measure of poverty and its use is often accompanied by the calculation of an additional line of 20 per cent above the poverty line. Studies using this distinguish between the very poor (below the poverty line) and the rather poor (between the poverty line and 20 per cent above it) (for example Henderson et al. 1970; Carmichael et al. 1990). The poverty line is updated quarterly and for this study the September quarter 1990 (before housing costs) line was used. The amount differs for each family type, but to give the example of a family with two parents and two children with the head in the work force the poverty line was estimated to be \$351.51 per week. In contrast, for a sole-parent (with one child) not in the labour force the poverty line was \$204.82 per week. As a point of comparison, at the same time average weekly earnings were \$589.20 per week (full-time adult male ordinary time earnings at November 1990, ABS 1991).

The analysis of the Life Chances data shows that 23 per cent of the children are living in families with incomes below the poverty line, and 11 per cent of the children are living with incomes between the poverty line and 20 per cent above it. The remaining 65 per cent are living in families with incomes over 20 per cent above the poverty line (see table 3.5).

The findings show that not only are there children of immigrants living below the poverty line and near the poverty line, but that they are significantly over-represented among the low-income families in this study. Of the 81 children with at least one parent born overseas, 40 per cent are in families living below the poverty line, in contrast to 8 per cent of those with both parents Australian-born. However, this finding is even more marked for those children with both parents from non-English-speaking countries. Of these NESB children, 54 per cent are in families with incomes below the poverty line. In other words, of some 167 babies born in two inner suburbs in a period of 1990, 39 were born to families with incomes below an austere poverty line. Of these, 26 were children with both parents of NESB and 7 were children with both parents Australian-born.

The report will now consider more closely the situation and characteristics of the families with incomes below the poverty line. In particular, we will look at those from non-English-

**Table 3.5: Life Chances Study: position in relation to poverty line by parents' birthplace**

Relation to the poverty line	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Very poor								
Below the poverty line	26	(54.2)	6	(18.2)	7	(8.1)	39	(23.3)
Poor								
Between poverty line and 20 per cent above poverty line	9	(18.7)	2	(6.1)	8	(9.3)	19	(11.4)
Not poor								
Over 20 per cent above poverty line	13	(27.1)	25	(75.7)	71	(82.6)	109	(65.3)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)

Note:  $\chi^2$  47.07342 DF4  $p > 0.0000$ .

speaking background, both as the majority of the immigrants in the study and as the majority of the low-income families overall, with reference to the questions of which children of immigrants are in poverty and of the relationship between poverty and other forms of disadvantage.

### 1. The NESB families below the poverty line

The Life Chances Study found that over 54 per cent of the babies born to families in which both parents were born in non-English-speaking countries were in families with incomes below the poverty line. We will consider first these 26 children in NESB families below the poverty line and look in more detail at the families in terms of characteristics such as birthplace, family structure, education, English ability, length of residence and employment.

Almost half of these children (12) were in families with both parents born in Viet Nam, 4 belonged to Laotian-born Hmong families and the remaining 10 children had parents born in a wide range of countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, China, Hong Kong and Viet Nam (father only). The Vietnamese children below the poverty line represented just over half (57 per cent) of all the Vietnamese children in the study while all four Hmong families in the study lived below the poverty line.

The NESB families with incomes below the poverty line could be characterised as:

- sole-parent families = 8 children
- two-parent families with husband unemployed = 11 children
- two-parent families with husband employed = 7 children (see table 3.6).

**Table 3.6: Life Chances Study: types of families below poverty line by parents' birthplace**

Families below the poverty line	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Sole parent families	8	(30.8)	3	(50.0)	5	(71.4)	16	(41.0)
Two parents: father unemployed	11	(42.3)	3	(50.0)	2	(28.6)	16	(41.0)
Two parents: father employed	7	(26.9)	-	-	-	-	7	(18.0)
Total	26	(100.0)	6	(100.0)	7	(100.0)	39	100.0

***Sole-parent families***

Eight of the children with both parents from NES countries lived only with their mothers. The family income for all eight of these children was below the poverty line. They included four children with Vietnamese mothers, and four with mothers from the Middle East and Europe. None of these mothers of young babies was in the work force and all were dependent on the Sole Parent Pension for their income. Their length of residence in Australia ranged from two years to nineteen years. Most of the mothers had only a few years of secondary education, one had had only primary school, none had tertiary education. Five of the mothers spoke English 'not well'.

There was a range of family situations, from a 19-year-old single mother with her first baby sharing accommodation with friends to an older woman whose gambling, alcoholic and violent husband had recently left her with four young children. Most mothers lived alone with their child or children (six cases), two shared with other adults. All but one lived in public rental accommodation, half in high-rise estates.

The following is a case study of one of these families:

*A mother from the Middle East with four young children. She has been to school in Australia and speaks English well. She is separated from her husband who has been unemployed for seven months, his last job was as a factory worker. Their Ministry of Housing flat is damp and too small, the mother is worried about the children's health. She has been behind in SEC payments and the rent, feels she has not enough money when the bills come in and can't buy the food she wants to for the children. She has had to miss meals. She is quite exhausted with the care of the babies and 'nervous' now having to bring up four children on her own. She misses her own mother who is not in Australia, and cannot help her. Her only source of income is the Sole Parent Pension.*

***Two-parent families: father employed***

Seven children lived in families in which the father's wage provided an income below the poverty line. These families included three Hmong families and Vietnamese, Hong Kong, Chinese and Egyptian families. The families each had two, three or four children. Most were recent arrivals, but the range of time in Australia was two to sixteen years. In five families both parents had had only primary schooling or less. In the other two families the parents had reached Year 11 or 12 in secondary school. The mother's rating of the father's English was 'not well' in two cases, 'well' in five. Only one of the mothers spoke English 'well', six 'not well' or 'not at all'. The fathers' jobs included work in a clothing factory, process work for a car manufacturer, and bus driving, while two worked in Chinese restaurants. One father worked part time, six full time. Most had been unemployed at some stage in the last three years. All but one lived in high-rise public housing. Three of the families received Family Allowance Supplement (FAS).

The following is a case study of one of these families:

*A Hmong couple with three young children. They have been in Australia two years. They live in a high-rise flat. The father currently earns a low wage as a process worker, but had previously been unemployed for twelve months. He has primary schooling only. The mother has had no formal education and speaks no English at all. She says her husband speaks English 'well'. She has not worked in Australia. She has difficulty paying the rent and would like a smaller and cheaper flat (two instead of three bedrooms). She finds all the bills arrive and there is not enough money for food, she borrows from friends but has had to miss meals.*

***Two-parent families: father unemployed***

Ten children lived in families in which their low income could be associated with the father's unemployment and the family's reliance on social security benefits. In one family the father was unemployed but they were not receiving social security benefits but were living on their limited savings. The families included Vietnamese (seven) and Hmong,

Chinese, Egyptian and Turkish. Most were relatively recent arrivals (five years or less) and three of the recent arrivals had been unemployed since coming to Australia up to three years ago. Father's time in Australia ranged from ten months to eleven years. Length of unemployment ranged from three months to three years. Most of the families had three or more children. Most of the fathers had some secondary schooling only and six of the ten spoke English 'not well'. Four of the mothers had only primary schooling and eight spoke English 'not well'. Typically, the fathers were unemployed factory workers in Australia, including one who had been a qualified accountant in his country of origin. He was, however, the only father in this group with tertiary qualifications. Most of the families lived in high-rise flats (public housing). None of the mothers was currently employed.

The following is a case study of one of these families:

*A Vietnamese family with two daughters both under the age of two. The father has been in Australia six years. He was a soldier in Viet Nam. His last job in Melbourne was as a process worker in a shoe factory but he has been unemployed for over twelve months. The mother who is aged 26 has been in Australia three years. She has had only primary schooling and her English is not good. She says her husband speaks English well and he is having lessons. She worked when she first arrived in Australia but not since the birth of her children. The family live in a high-rise public housing estate. They try to send some money back to the father's father in Viet Nam and find this a stress. The mother says they live 'frugally'. Their source of income is Unemployment Benefit.*

## **2. The 'other' immigrant families below the poverty line**

Six children were living in 'other' immigrant families with incomes below the poverty line (that is in families with at least one parent born overseas and at least one parent of English-speaking background). They form a diverse group of families. They include three sole-parent families and three two-parent families in which the father was unemployed. Three mothers were Australian-born with NESB husbands, three were born overseas. Five of the families had one NESB parent (Greece, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Western Samoa). The overseas-born mothers had been in Australia less than five years while three of the four overseas-born fathers had been in Australia over twenty years. The parents typically had some secondary schooling, but included three parents with tertiary qualifications.

The following is a case study of one of these families:

*Couple with four children. The mother is Australian-born of Greek parentage and the father was born in Greece and has been in Australia seven years. The father is a tradesman who has been unemployed for a year. His employment situation is compounded by his poor English and his alcoholism. The family live in her parents' house. There are significant disagreements within the household. The mother is a teacher but is not working at present. The family's income is Unemployment Benefit. The mother rates their income as just enough to get by on but they get behind with phone bills and rate payments.*

## **3. The Australian families below the poverty line**

The children in the Life Chances Study with both parents born in Australia were very much less likely to be living in families with incomes below the poverty line than were the children of immigrants. Only seven children (8 per cent) were living in such families in contrast to 54 per cent of the children in NESB families.

Five of these children lived in sole-parent families and only two in two-parent families. None of the parents was in the work force and all were dependent on social security payments for their income. Three were only children, four had older brothers or sisters. Two of the single mothers were living with their own mothers, a support the NESB mothers seldom had available. All were living in public housing. None of the parents had completed secondary education. The number of children ranged from one to four.

The following is a case study of one of these families:

*One young Australian-born couple with a below-poverty line income have two children aged 2 and 6 months. The father (aged 19) has been on Sickness Benefit for twelve months and that and Family Allowance has been their sole source of income. The father left school at Year 10 and started an apprenticeship. The mother left school at Year 8. The family has moved from the inner suburb since the baby's birth to a northern suburb to get a larger Ministry of Housing flat but are not happy because of lack of backyard and presence of drug users. The parents have had arguments and money problems. However, the mother feels they have enough money to get by on with a few extras. The mother has been depressed and is currently taking anti-depressant medication (and had taken an overdose).*

### **The children of NESB immigrants who are not on low incomes**

While the families of immigrants in the Life Chances Study are over-represented among those on very low incomes, they are scarcely represented at all among those on high incomes. Of the 16 per cent of children (27) who were in families with incomes over \$59 555 (Family Allowance cut-off level with one child), none were from NESB families, 5 were from 'other' immigrant families and 22 were from Australian families. Thus, 26 per cent of the children in Australian families were in high-income families and 16 per cent of those in 'other' immigrant families, but none of the NESB families.

The three NESB families with the highest incomes had annual incomes between \$32 000 and \$59 555. The parents were all Vietnamese-born and had been in Australia between six and eleven years. In two families the mothers as well as the fathers were currently employed. The parents in one family had only primary schooling, in the other some secondary schooling. In one family the father owned his own business, a clothing factory in which he worked and for which the mother did piece work at home. In another family both parents worked as machinists in a relative's clothing factory in which they owned a share. In the third family the father was a skilled tradesman, the mother had a tertiary qualification and was on maternity leave from a professional job.

### **Factors associated with low income**

The literature reviewed suggests that factors associated with low income can include non-English-speaking birthplace, length of residence in Australia, English ability and unemployment. These factors are considered for the children in the Life Chances Study using the variables of father's birthplace, father's length of residence in Australia, father's English ability, father's employment status and family income level. The sole-parent families in which the father was absent are excluded from this analysis, as the data relating to father had less direct impact on the family income. The family income is categorised as 'low' where income is not at least 20 per cent above the poverty line, and as 'other' for those incomes above this level. For the families in this study, low income is significantly associated with the following variables (see table 3.7): father's unemployment, father's NESB birthplace, father's limited English ability, and father's education level (primary or secondary school only as opposed to tertiary or trade training). There was only a slight association of low income with father's length of residence in Australia, in contrast to the literature reviewed. The lack of strong correlation of length of residence and low income probably reflects to some extent both the cut-off point used (five years or less as opposed to over five years) and the growing economic recession of 1990-91.

The children of Australian-born fathers in the Life Chances Study are predominantly in families in which the fathers are working and the family income is not low (88 per cent) and the children of ESB immigrant fathers are typically in the same situation (73 per cent). However, only 35 per cent of the children of NESB fathers have fathers employed and a family income which is not low. These include fathers who are recent arrivals and longer-term settlers and who have good and less good English (although more than half are

Table 3.7: Life Chances Study: income level and associated characteristics of fathers<sup>a</sup>

Characteristics of father	Income level				Total	(%)
	Low income	(%)	Not low income	(%)		
<b>Father's birthplace</b>						
NESB	30	(73.2)	20	(18.9)	50	(34.0)
ESB/Australia	11	(26.8)	86	(81.1)	97	(66.0)
Total	41	(100.0)	106	(100.0)	147	(100.0)
$\chi^2 = 36.46098$ DF1 $p > .0000$						
<b>Father's English</b>						
Not good	14	(34.1)	4	(3.8)	18	(12.2)
Good	27	(65.9)	102	(96.2)	129	(87.8)
Total	41	(100.0)	106	(100.0)	147	(100.0)
$\chi^2 = 22.63341$ DF1 $p > .0000$						
<b>Father's education</b>						
School only	31	(75.6)	35	(33.3)	66	(45.2)
Post school	10	(24.4)	70	(66.7)	80	(54.8)
Total	41	(100.0)	105	(100.0)	146	(100.0)
$\chi^2 = 19.60341$ DF1 $p > .0000$						
<b>Father's employment</b>						
Unemployed	21	(51.2)	3	(2.8)	24	(16.3)
Employed	20	(48.8)	103	(97.2)	123	(83.7)
Total	41	(100.0)	106	(100.0)	147	(100.0)
$\chi^2 = 44.19428$ DF1 $p > .0000$						
<b>Father's years in Australia</b>						
5 years or less	15	(46.9)	7	(25.0)	22	(36.7)
More than 5	17	(53.1)	21	(75.0)	38	(63.3)
Total	32	(100.0)	28	(100.0)	60 <sup>b</sup>	(100.0)
$\chi^2 = 2.20726$ DF1 $p > .1374$						

Notes: a. Fathers in two-parent families only. Income data missing from 3 cases.

b. Immigrant fathers only.

longer-term residents with good English). Another third of the children (31 per cent) of NESB fathers live in families with low incomes in spite of the father's employment. Again, those fathers include both recent arrivals and others and those with good English and without. The remaining 31 per cent of children live in low-income families in which the father is unemployed, again with a range of English ability and length of residence. Two particular issues are raised by these data, first, that the father's wage does not bring many of these families above a low-income level and, second, that being a longer-term settler and/or speaking good English are not in themselves enough to protect immigrant families in the early 1990s from unemployment and low income.

### Experiences of low income

The focus of this analysis has been on low income and the characteristics of the low-income families. Also to be considered are what low income means to the families and what other aspects of the lives of immigrant families could constitute disadvantage for the children.

How do the families see their own financial position? The mothers were asked to comment about the family's financial situation. The responses reflected the distribution of income with the NESB families significantly over-represented among those who 'did not have enough money to pay their bills' and those 'with just enough to get by on' and under-represented among the families with 'enough money to get by on with a few extras' and those who were 'able to save' (17 per cent of NESB families did not have enough money to pay the bills in contrast to only 4 per cent of Australians and none of the 'other' immigrant families) (see table 3.8).

**Table 3.8: Life Chances Study: financial situation—mother's assessment by parents' birthplace**

Mother's assessment of financial situation	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Not enough to pay bills	8	(16.7)	–	–	3	(3.5)	11	(6.7)
	2.7							
Just enough to get by on		(56.3)	10	(31.3)	20	(23.5)	57	(34.5)
Enough to get by with a few extras	10	(20.8)	13	(40.6)	38	(44.7)	61	(37.0)
Able to save	3	(6.3)	9	(28.1)	24	(28.2)	36	(21.8)
Total	48	(100.0)	32	(100.0)	85	(100.0)	165 <sup>a</sup>	(100.0)

Note: a. Missing data = 2.

Similarly, NESB families were over-represented among those who described their financial situation as insecure or not as secure as they would like (83 per cent of NESB families, in comparison to 54 per cent of Australian-born parents and 47 per cent of 'other' families) and under-represented among those who saw themselves as financially secure.

Mothers were asked whether they ever had to miss a meal because of lack of money, a question some of the more financially secure mothers found quite disconcerting in its novelty. However, 7 per cent of mothers reported that they had to miss meals. NESB families were again over-represented (there were 13 per cent 'NESB', 5 per cent Australian and 3 per cent 'other' in the responses).

What were the mothers' perceptions of the family financial situation that their new babies were born into? Half the mothers in NESB families and the 'other' families felt they were worse off financially than they had been three years earlier (i.e. in 1987–88) while 40 per cent of the Australian-born families said they were worse off. A quarter of the NESB families saw their situation as much the same as three years earlier while a quarter felt they were better off financially. In contrast, 44 per cent of Australian-born families and 37 per cent of 'other' immigrant families saw themselves as better off. Unemployment was the most common reason given for being worse off. For some this reflected the father's unemployment, for some the mother's leaving the work force because of the baby. Two mothers present their differing assessments of their financial situations:

(Better off). We have been able to save money during the past three years. When we arrived from Viet Nam, we were penniless. (Vietnamese)

(Worse off) You know, we've been here for over ten years. We worked. We could save some money. But now we are unemployed. My children are too small, we saved some money, but if we continue living like this, money will be used up. (Vietnamese)

What effect would the family's financial situation have on the baby? Again the NESB families were over-represented among those foreseeing a negative effect (the mothers of 33 per cent of NESB children feared a negative effect, the mothers of 15 per cent of children from 'other' families and only 4 per cent of the Australian-born). Some NESB mothers feared they would not be able to afford to buy the things their babies would need as they grew. They were also very worried about the effect of ongoing unemployment.

That low income and poverty are to some extent relative concepts was illustrated by the comments of a number of low-income NESB immigrant families.

For example, one family arrived in Australia three years ago after a horrific boat journey from Viet Nam and four years in a refugee camp. They now have three young children. In terms of Australian income levels they could well be described as poor. They have been

unemployed since their arrival, except for some casual work, and their income is Unemployment Benefit. However, this income, together with the controlled rent of their high-rise flat, gives them relatively more security than they have had in the past. In the words of the father:

We are neither rich nor poor but we are mentally secure. The only problem is language.

Similarly, another family with an income below the poverty line see themselves as better off than they were three years earlier because, while the husband's low wage as a cook is similar to what he earned in Hong Kong, they have the addition of Family Allowance Supplement here.

Some immigrants, particularly recent immigrants, are quite positive about the economic advantages of being in Australia even though their low income level causes them assorted hardships. Some see their low income as temporary and to be improved when the baby is older and the mother able to return to work. However, others were very concerned about the wider economic situation and lack of work associated with the current recession.

## **The NESB families: factors in disadvantage**

### **Immigration**

For the NESB families of the study, immigration has had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were often expressed in terms of employment opportunities (in spite of experiences of unemployment) and educational opportunities for their children. Child-care and support services for babies were also mentioned. A few mothers (both from Southeast Asia and the Middle East) appreciated the relative freedom they have as women to go out in Australia and the independence of not living in an extended family.

On the other hand, the disadvantages of immigration commonly expressed by many of the mothers we interviewed were the loss of support of relatives and loneliness. This was often particularly acute for these mothers caring for young babies. The cold climate and 'unstable weather' were often mentioned by Vietnamese mothers as a problem for their children's health. The English language was named as the main problem for many.

To quote some of the mothers on the difficulties of settling in Australia:

Different climate, different language, loneliness. I miss my old mother. I used to work very hard in Viet Nam, but there were a lot of relatives and friends around. Here, most of the time I stay at home, confined to the four walls, busy looking after the baby, doing all the housework.  
(Vietnamese)

We have to learn English. The food is different and housing is also different, for example high-rise flat. We never knew that we would have to live in the sky—the twenty-first floor. I have to stay in the high-rise flat with no backyard—I do not have to go and work on the farm but in a factory. (A Hmong woman from Laos)

I feel extremely alien at the moment especially as I don't speak the language. We came for better living—more modern. It seems all right but because I can't speak English I can't make myself understood. It would have been better if I'd spoken English. (Turkish)

More than one move can increase the points of comparison with Australia as one woman who went from Viet Nam to France illustrates:

France was better than Australia: social security, employment, health care, child care, including schooling for children. But Asian food is cheaper here. And in France there was no interpreting service. Still, life here is much easier than in Viet Nam and I hope my children can have a more comfortable and secure life. (Vietnamese)

### **English language**

'The main problem is the language' was a comment made frequently by the NESB mothers, 62 per cent of whom described themselves as speaking English 'not well' (23

mothers) or 'not at all' (7 mothers). (None of the mothers of the 'other' immigrant families described their English ability as not good.)

The mothers were asked whether their English ability caused them problems and 40 per cent responded that it did. The problems nominated were mostly in terms of general communication, of not being able to understand other people, not being able to express themselves, not being able to read forms. Language difficulties with doctors and hospitals were nominated specifically by four mothers and language problems in getting employment, particularly clerical work, were reported by three mothers.

The interviewer described the situation of a Hmong woman:

She doesn't speak English. She feels that she can not really help her son with his reading and writing. She is worried that, when her husband goes back to work, she'll have no one to interpret for her—especially when she has to take her children to see a doctor, or to a public hospital—she doesn't know how to book an interpreter and doesn't know where to get one. (Hmong)

The mother noted:

I had a bad experience with the hospital because my daughter was born in there and they never called an interpreter to come and help me talk to the doctor. (Hmong)

Mothers were asked if there were places they did not go because they didn't speak English. The responses included doctors, hospital, Department of Social Security, school and shops. Three mothers said they would seldom go out anywhere alone. The mothers' lack of English was thus associated with a range of practical problems which have an impact on their children, including contact with medical services, with child-care, with schools and even with being able to shop for children's clothes.

However, not all mothers with limited English felt that this caused them major problems. Some were well supported with nearby friends and relatives, were able to use shops and doctors where their own language was spoken and could carry on much of their daily life without the need for much English.

The mothers were asked if there were places to which they went only if someone spoke their own language. Half the mothers (24) responded yes to this. The majority of these (20) went, at least sometimes, to a doctor who spoke their language (including Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish and Lebanese). Seven mentioned shops, and some named places where bilingual staff or interpreters are available, including the community health centre (5), the Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) (5) and hospital (5).

We asked the mothers if there were places they went where they got someone to speak English for them. The mothers who did so most commonly mentioned the DSS and hospitals as places where they got someone to interpret. Other responses included the community health centre, doctors, the Ministry of Housing, the Immigration Department, CES, Legal Aid and the MCHC. Most relied on a combination of interpreters. Of the 32 mothers who mentioned having someone to interpret for them, many (25) had used official interpreters (including the Telephone Interpreter Service), followed in frequency by their partner (14), relatives (8), friends (8) and older children (2). However, some women noted that often their friends and relatives were too busy to help with interpreting.

Parents' lack of English can provide a background of disadvantage for some children in that it can limit their parents' job choices and potential income and cause difficulties in communication with a range of necessary government departments. It can provide more immediate disadvantage in terms of contact with health and other services for children.

A good network of interpreters and bilingual staff does much to counteract this disadvantage for some in the area of the study, but there have been recent significant reductions in the interpreting services available, a trend of great concern to many who have been involved in the study.

A number of mothers had attended English classes on arrival in Australia; some had learned some English at school in their countries of origin; some had attended English classes in refugee camps. Some were keen to do more classes but the need for child care made this difficult.

### Parents' education

The education level of the parents of the NESB families was, on average, considerably below that of the parents in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families; a quarter of the NESB fathers had only primary school education, while all the fathers in the other families had at least some secondary education (see table 3.9). Conversely, over half (54 per cent) of the fathers in the Australian families had tertiary education, almost half (47 per cent) in the 'other' immigrant families, but only 17 per cent in the NESB families.

The mothers in the NESB families typically had somewhat less education than the fathers (30 per cent had primary school education only and 9 per cent had tertiary education). The NESB mothers had also considerably less education on average than the mothers in the

**Table 3.9: Life Chances Study: education and employment of parents by parents' birthplace**

Selected characteristics	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
<b>Father's education</b>								
Primary only	10	(24.4)	—	—	—	—	10	(6.7)
Secondary	23	(56.1)	9	(30.0)	28	(35.4)	60	(40.0)
Tertiary	7	(17.1)	14	(46.7)	44	(54.4)	64	(42.7)
Trade	1	(2.4)	7	(23.3)	8	(10.2)	16	(10.7)
Total	41	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	79	(100.0)	150	(100.0)
<b>Mother's education</b>								
No school	1	(2.1)	—	—	—	—	1	(0.6)
Primary only	14	(29.8)	—	—	1	(1.2)	15	(9.0)
Secondary	25	(53.2)	13	(39.4)	33	(38.4)	71	(42.8)
Tertiary	4	(8.5)	16	(48.5)	46	(53.4)	66	(39.8)
Trade	3	(6.4)	4	(12.1)	6	(7.0)	13	(7.8)
Total	47	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	166	(100.0)
<b>Father's employment</b>								
Employed	25	(59.5)	26	(86.7)	73	(92.4)	127	(82.1)
Not employed	17	(40.5)	4	(13.3)	6	(7.6)	27	(17.9)
Total	42	(100.0)	30	(100.0)	79	(100.0)	141	(100.0)
Employed but has been unemployed in last 3 years	12	(48.0) <sup>a</sup>	5	(19.2) <sup>a</sup>	8	(11.0) <sup>a</sup>	25	(20.2) <sup>a</sup>
<b>Father's current occupation</b>								
Professional	4	(16.0)	9	(34.6)	41	(56.2)	54	(43.5)
Admin., exec., management	3	(12.0)	7	(26.9)	16	(21.9)	26	(20.9)
Clerical	1	(4.0)	1	(3.8)	1	(1.4)	3	(2.4)
Para-professional	—	—	1	(3.8)	1	(1.4)	2	(1.6)
Transport/communication	1	(4.0)	2	(7.7)	3	(4.1)	6	(4.8)
Trade	2	(8.0)	3	(11.5)	7	(9.6)	12	(9.7)
Production	9	(36.0)	2	(7.7)	2	(2.7)	13	(10.5)
Sales	1	(4.0)	—	—	—	—	1	(0.8)
Service	4	(16.0)	1	(3.8)	2	(2.7)	7	(5.6)
Total (fathers employed)	25	(100.0)	26	(100.0)	73	(100.0)	124	(100.0)
<b>Mother's employment</b>								
Has worked since birth	8	(17.4)	16	(48.5)	34	(39.5)	58	(35.2)

Note: a. Percentage of employed fathers.

'other' immigrant and Australian families. The levels of education of the 'other' immigrant and Australian mothers were very similar to those of the fathers (with the exception of trade qualifications) (see table 3.9). Those few mothers with tertiary qualifications included a registered nurse (from Hong Kong) and an accountant (from Egypt) and a commerce graduate (from Viet Nam).

The disadvantages of limited education for the parents included, for a few, illiteracy in their own language. One mother explains:

I never attended school at all. It limits my opportunities. I cannot write to my relatives. I have to depend on my husband and friend to write for me all the time. (Hmong)

As would be expected, there was a close association between mothers' limited schooling and lack of English. Only two of the fourteen mothers with only primary education spoke English well; they both had received some of their primary schooling in Australia.

### **Employment**

There were major differences in types of occupation of the fathers in the study. The most common occupational category for the fathers in the NESB families was production work (39 per cent of the employed fathers in the NESB families, in contrast to 8 per cent in 'other' immigrant families and 3 per cent in Australian families). Over three-quarters of the employed fathers in the Australian families were in professional or administrative, executive or management positions (78 per cent of the Australians, 62 per cent of the 'other' immigrants and only 27 per cent of the NESB working fathers). Not only were the NESB fathers less likely to be in professional employment, they were considerably less likely to be employed at all (only 60 per cent of fathers in NESB families were in employment, in contrast to 87 per cent of those in 'other' immigrant families and 92 per cent in the Australian families (see table 3.9). Of the NESB fathers currently in employment, 20 per cent had only part-time work and almost half had been unemployed in the past three years.

The unemployed fathers in the NESB families had typically been unemployed for longer (average 82 weeks) than the fathers in the 'other' immigrant or Australian families (25 weeks and 62 weeks respectively).

Unemployment has assorted costs. In the words of one of the Vietnamese women: 'We don't want to live on the dole. My husband says he is ashamed every time he goes to CES.'

Many of the mothers of the children in the study were not in the work force at the time of the interviews (when the babies were aged four to seven months). The NESB mothers were least likely to be so (17 per cent had worked since the birth), while those in 'other' immigrant families were most likely to have worked (49 per cent), with the Australian mothers in between (40 per cent having worked since the birth). The relatively low number of NESB women working could reflect both their larger families and their more limited employment opportunities. Half the NESB mothers had not been working before the baby was born (compared with 15 per cent of 'other' immigrant and 16 per cent of Australian mothers). Most of the mothers who had worked since the birth of the baby had worked as machinists. For some, this had meant doing piece work at home. (One mother was working part-time as a nurse, one of the few NESB mothers with a professional qualification.)

Child-minding is a major issue for women considering returning to work. Where the NESB mothers had worked since the birth, the babies were typically looked after by the baby's father, grandmother or other relative or in a couple of cases by the mother herself as she sewed at home. Day-care centres were seldom used. One mother had had her child in a day-care centre for four weeks but had taken him away because he was unwell.

The importance of the extended family was clear in providing both employment and child-care. However, the following quote illustrates some of the tensions for mothers working:

When the baby was one month, I returned to work. I brought him to the factory. (My husband's brother is the boss.) At first I just sewed pieces together. But then we had to cut the samples. I thought it wouldn't be good for the baby's health so I sent him to my sister's place. It is a big family. The baby gets a lot of love and care and cousins to play with him. She looks after the baby on weekdays. I bring him home for weekends. When I first sent the baby to my sister's I came to her house every day to see how he was. At night I missed him so much. To us, it is job or children. I have no other choice. I have little time to myself. But I'm rather happy.  
(Vietnamese)

### Housing

The typical housing situation of the NESB families was very different from that of the 'other' immigrant families and Australian families although there was a spread of housing tenures within each group (see table 3.10). The most common housing for the NESB families was public rental (63 per cent). The 'other' immigrant families were most typically (61 per cent) purchasers or owners of their own home, as were the families with Australian-born parents (65 per cent). In contrast, only 13 per cent of NESB families were owners or buyers. Over half the NESB families (54 per cent) lived in high-rise public housing (20-storey blocks), while only 9 per cent of 'other' immigrant children and 5 per cent of children of Australian-born parents did so.

Life in the high-rise flats was a mixture of advantages and disadvantages for the immigrant families. The advantages were in terms of relatively low rents which gave some security to the families on low incomes. Other advantages included being near relatives, child-care and English classes. Disadvantages included lack of safety, noise, lifts breaking down and poor playground facilities.

The mothers comment:

[Good things?] Low price, warm in winter, laundry available, close to health service. [Things you don't like?] Different types of people. Some use drugs. Clothes in the laundry being stolen. Noise.  
(Vietnamese)

It makes life difficult—especially if the stove is broken or the hot water is not working, or the heater is off. My main worry is being alone in the lift with a stranger—going to the shop at night time. Because the area is not safe and the people are very strange—plus we have so many nationalities with different levels of income living in the area all together. (Hmong)

The four Hmong families all live in the high-rise flats.

We are close to relatives. It's very important for the Hmong people to live close to each other. So we can walk to each other to get help whenever we need it. (Hmong)

Table 3.10: Life Chances Study: housing tenure by parents' birthplace

Housing tenure	Parents' birthplace						Total	
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian			
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Owner	3	(6.3)	5	(15.2)	15	(17.4)	23	(13.8)
Buying	4	(8.4)	15	(45.5)	41	(47.7)	60	(35.9)
Renting: public	30	(62.5)	5	(15.2)	6	(7.0)	41	(24.6)
private	9	(18.8)	3	(9.1)	17	(19.8)	29	(17.4)
Other (sharing with friend, living with parent, living in family house)	2	(4.2)	5	(15.2)	7	(8.2)	14	(8.4)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)

The situation of the home purchasers in some of the quieter streets of these inner suburbs is very different from those in the high-rise flats. However almost two-thirds of all the families in the Life Chances Study are planning to move in the next five years (63 per cent of NESB families, 67 per cent of 'other' immigrants and 63 per cent of those with both Australian-born parents).

The majority of NESB families considered their current housing was adequate (68 per cent), compared with less than half of the 'other' immigrant families (46 per cent) and somewhat over half of the Australians (58 per cent). This suggests that the NESB families have less high expectations of their housing at this stage of their lives than the other families. The main reasons given by the NESB mothers for the housing being inadequate were too few bedrooms with the arrival of the new baby and the lack of a safe play area. The NESB families in rented accommodation also noted problems getting repairs done (23 per cent) and lack of privacy (33 per cent).

The relatively low cost of public rental housing has been a major factor in making the lives of many of the low income NESB families possible rather than impossible. Of the NESB families living in private rental, 33 per cent had difficulty paying rent. However, 21 per cent of those in public rental also had difficulty in paying the rent, reflecting their very low incomes.

## **The NESB families: social supports, use of services and family functioning**

### **Social supports**

The social support of relatives and friends can provide some buffer against economic disadvantage and can be of great importance for families with small children. While many of the NESB families had relatives and friends who could provide support, overall the NESB families had less social support than did either the 'other' immigrant families or the Australian families and, as mentioned above, many of the NESB mothers spoke strongly of missing their family.

Relatives and friends provided a wide range of supports for some NESB families in the study, including financial help and assistance with accommodation, employment and child-care as well as practical and emotional help with the birth of the children in the study.

The NESB mothers varied greatly in their family situations. Some had come quite alone to Australia, others had come with or to join close relatives. One woman had come to Australia aged 18:

I came to Australia by myself. Our boat landed in Darwin. After a while we were transferred to Brisbane. Then one group came to Melbourne. I attended English class for some months then I began working. My whole family stayed in Viet Nam.

The Vietnamese refugee families had often experienced a range of separations and reunions as they moved through refugee camps to Australia.

For some of the Vietnamese-born parents (and for some others) it was major adjustment in their lives not to be part of a three-generational extended family. The absence of their parents had considerable significance as they were without their traditional source of authority. For some this was mostly seen as a burden, for others as independence.

Comments included:

It's a bit boring for me. I have no relatives here in Australia. My husband has one brother here. We have no one to depend on but ourselves.

I can assimilate well in this society. I can have an independent life. I can choose what is good for me. In Viet Nam children have to obey their parents, parents arrange their lives for them.

On first arriving in Australia a number of the parents had stayed with relatives or friends.

Table 3.11: Life Chances Study: social supports by parents' birthplace

Social supports	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Mother's mother lives in Melbourne	14	(29.2)	21	(63.6)	53	(61.6)	88	(53.0)
Mother's parents helpful since baby's birth	23	(47.9)	31	(93.9)	76	(87.4)	130	(77.8)
Mother's parents a stress since baby's birth	8	(16.7)	4	(12.1)	19	(21.8)	31	(18.6)
Mother has friends for advice	36	(75.0)	30	(90.9)	77	(89.5)	143	(85.6)
Help after birth	42	(87.5)	31	(93.9)	81	(94.2)	154	(92.2)
Help after birth from partner	25	(52.1)	25	(75.8)	61	(70.9)	111	(66.5)
Help after birth from relative	20	(41.7)	21	(63.6)	53	(61.6)	94	(56.3)
Help after birth from friend	4	(8.3)	8	(24.2)	21	(24.4)	33	(19.8)
Help after birth from services	7	(14.6)	10	(30.3)	29	(33.7)	46	(27.5)
Help now (baby 4-7 months)	33	(68.8)	29	(87.8)	74	(85.1)	136	(81.4)
Advantage of neighbourhood								
Relatives close	25	(52.1)	16	(48.5)	36	(41.9)	77	(46.1)
Friends close	29	(60.4)	22	(66.7)	66	(76.7)	117	(70.5)

This provides important initial support, but often at the cost of overcrowding. Some recently arrived families were still sharing accommodation at the time of interview, with their small babies.

One couple with three children were living with a friend in a flat. The mother outlined the sleeping arrangements and commented on the difficulties when the friend had visitors:

At first the baby and I slept in the living room. But then I had to get up early before the friend got up. Now my husband sleeps in the living room, I and three children in one room.

(Vietnamese)

Some of the mothers mentioned being able to borrow money from friends or relatives as one way of coping with paying bills from a low income. For others, friends and relatives were a source of finding employment.

Table 3.11 presents a number of indicators of social supports. The one indicator on which the NESB families rated more strongly than the other families was having relatives in the neighbourhood. In discussing the advantages of living in their local neighbourhood just over half (52 per cent) the mothers in the NESB families mentioned having relations close by, while even more (60 per cent) had friends close by. This reflects to some extent the concentration of NESB families living in the high-rise public housing estates. Nonetheless, the NESB mothers were still less likely than the other mothers to have friends nearby.

Moving away from the inner suburbs often further reduced social supports, and phone calls replaced personal contact.

Some of the women talked of the differences in social life in Australia and their country of origin. For example:

In my country people stay home and you can talk to someone. Here everyone goes out to work. You can't see anyone in the street or neighbours or anyone like that. (Egyptian)

Some wanted to make Australian friends but could not because of their lack of English.

### Support since the child's birth

The mothers were asked a number of questions about the help they received after the birth of the child and up to the time of the interview when the child was four to seven months old. Support from grandmothers was often valuable emotionally and practically around the

birth of a new baby. The mothers in the NESB families were much less likely to have their own mothers living in Melbourne (29 per cent) than were the mothers in the 'other' immigrant or Australian families (64 per cent and 61 per cent respectively). Even fewer had the father's mother in Melbourne (19 per cent).

In spite of the relative absence of grandmothers close by, almost half (48 per cent) of the mothers in the NESB families felt their parents had been helpful. This help was much more frequently available, however, for the mothers in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families.

The sort of support provided by the grandmothers ranged from, at its most extensive, that provided when the family live in the grandmother's household to the emotional support which could be provided by phone calls even from those living overseas. One Vietnamese mother who lives with her own mother commented:

My mum cooked special meals for me. She and my husband take care of the baby. She gave me advice on child-rearing. Now I'm working, my mum stays home with the baby.

The cooking of special food, appropriate for the mother in the first month after the birth, was mentioned by a number of Vietnamese women as something their mothers or sisters were able to do for them. This was of considerable importance to them.

For a few NESB mothers their parents had been seen as being a stress (as well as or instead of being helpful). One of the reasons given for this was the financial stress of sending money to support family overseas although some of the mothers added that they were happy to do this.

The physical absence of relatives limited the practical help they were able to give the mothers with young babies. A number of mothers commented that their parents would have been helpful if only they had been in Australia. For others, phone contact with their mothers provided an important link—at least until the expensive overseas phone bills arrived.

Three-quarters of the mothers in the NESB families had friends to whom they could talk and ask advice of, but a quarter did not, a much larger proportion without friends than for the mothers in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families. The value of friends for support with a new baby included their experience with their own children and their practical help.

The large majority (88 per cent) of mothers in NESB families said they had received some help with the baby after the birth, although even more of the 'other' immigrant and Australian mothers did so. Help received was most often from their husbands (52 per cent) followed by services (15 per cent) and friends (8 per cent). However, the 'other' immigrant and Australian mothers more frequently received help from each of these sources.

While some of the mothers received valued assistance from relatives and friends, others found that their friends and relatives were too busy with their own lives to provide the support they hoped for. This was mentioned in particular in reference to friends and relatives not having time to act as interpreters and who were not in close geographic proximity.

As well as providing support in child-rearing, relatives and friends provided an important focus for recreation for the families in the study who had relatives and friends nearby.

The stereotype of the NESB family surrounded by an extended family, while it reflects the situation of some families, mocks the extreme isolation of others.

#### **Use of services**

The availability and accessibility of health services and community services can be significant factors in mediating the life chances of children, particularly those in low-income families.

Table 3.12: Life Chances Study: services used by parents' birthplace

Services used	Parents' birthplace						Total No. (%)
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	
<b>During pregnancy</b>							
GP	37	(77.1)	24	(72.7)	60	(69.8)	121 (72.5)
Obstetrician	8	(16.7)	22	(66.7)	60	(69.8)	90 (53.9)
Pre-natal classes	11	(22.9)	18	(54.5)	62	(72.1)	91 (54.5)
<b>Birth</b>							
Public hospital	45	(93.8)	19	(57.6)	40	(46.5)	104 (62.3)
Birthing centre	-		9	(27.3)	23	(26.7)	32 (19.2)
<b>Since birth</b>							
Maternal and Child Health Centre	47	(97.9)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	166 (99.4)
GP	42	(87.5)	26	(78.8)	71	(82.6)	139 (83.2)
Hospital	20	(41.7)	13	(39.4)	36	(41.9)	69 (41.3)
Chemist	26	(54.2)	24	(72.7)	72	(83.7)	122 (73.1)
Paediatrician	6	(13.0)	14	(42.4)	37	(43.0)	57 (34.5)
Nursing Mothers Association	1	(2.1)	9	(27.3)	32	(37.2)	42 (25.3)

Because of the age of the children of the study (four to seven months) information was sought from the mothers about the services they had used before the baby's birth, their experiences of the birth and services they had used subsequently for the baby. Table 3.12 shows the use of various services by the NESB, 'other' immigrant and Australian mothers.

The one service which was used by all the mothers and babies was the Maternal and Child Health Service. The only mother who was not in contact with the Maternal and Child Health Service at the time of the interview was a recently arrived Turkish woman who spoke no English and had moved from the inner suburb since the birth. She wanted to find where the appropriate Maternal and Child Health Centre was but had not been able to. This information was obtained for her during the interview.

General practitioners were the next most frequently used service. Most mothers had seen a GP during their pregnancy (73 per cent) and had taken their babies to the GP (83 per cent) since their birth. There was relatively little variation between the mothers of immigrant and Australian families in use of GPs, although the NESB families made slightly more use of GPs (77 per cent before the birth and 88 per cent after).

Hospitals provided another health service used equally by immigrant and non-immigrant families alike for their babies, although for considerably smaller numbers. Fewer than half the children in NESB families (41 per cent) had been to hospital and only 15 per cent had been hospital in-patients.

The relatively similar use of these services (Maternal and Child Health Service, general practitioners and hospitals) across the immigrant and non-immigrant families is a strong indication that at the time of the study these services were relatively accessible to the low-income NESB families. They were accessible financially in that the Maternal and Child Health Centre provides a free service to all, while, at the time of the interviews, most of the NESB families would have received free medical care either as Health Concession Card holders (as pensioners, beneficiaries or FAS recipients) or because many of the local doctors bulk bill all patients. Another aspect of access applicable to these services is that of language. The Maternal and Child Health Centre had regular times for appropriate interpreters and also used the Telephone Interpreting Service. A number of NESB families were able to go to doctors who spoke their own language, and the hospitals at times have

interpreters available. The third factor in access to these services was their geographic proximity.

In contrast to the services which were equally used, there were a number of health services which were much less likely to be used by the NESB families. Before the birth the NESB mothers were much less likely to have gone to an obstetrician (17 per cent) than the 'other' immigrant (67 per cent) or Australian mothers (70 per cent). This reflects the costs associated with private medical specialist care as does the relatively rare use of paediatricians for the children in the NESB families (13 per cent) compared with those in 'other' immigrant (42 per cent) and Australian families (43 per cent). The NESB mothers were much less likely to have gone to pre-natal classes, none had used a birthing centre, only one had had contact with the Nursing Mothers Association, and they were also less likely to use chemists for advice.

The one area in which the NESB families were over-represented was that of having the birth in public hospital. This again was most likely to reflect the lack of choices their relatively low incomes provided.

Some mothers received help with the baby after the birth from community services (such as council home help). However, only 15 per cent of NESB mothers received help from services, compared with 34 per cent of Australian mothers and 30 per cent of 'other' immigrant families. Some NESB mothers, in particular those with a large number of children, said they would have liked home help. One (Chinese) mother of four did not get council home help because of language; she would not have been able to speak to the council worker.

#### **Satisfaction with services**

A variety of questions was asked about the mothers' satisfaction with the services they used. Some of the responses are presented in table 3.13. Mothers were asked about the services they used during pregnancy and for their own health since the birth and whether they had found any of the services they used 'particularly helpful'. Overall there was a high level of satisfaction, with approximately 90 per cent of women who had found services particularly helpful. The responses were very similar for immigrant and non-immigrant women.

Mothers were asked to rate their satisfaction with services they had used for their babies. The most frequently used services were Maternal and Child Health Service, general

**Table 3.13: Life Chances Study: satisfaction with services by parents' birthplace**

<i>Satisfaction with services</i>	<i>Parents' birthplace</i>							
	<i>Both NESB</i>		<i>Other</i>		<i>Both Australian</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Services used for mother during pregnancy and after birth								
Found services particularly helpful	43	(89.6)	29	(87.9)	79	(91.7)	151	(90.4)
Help needed with health but not received	9	(18.6)	11	(33.3)	22	(25.6)	42	(25.1)
Services used for baby								
Very satisfied	8	(16.7)	17	(51.5)	41	(47.7)	66	(39.5)
Satisfied	34	(70.8)	12	(36.4)	30	(34.9)	76	(45.5)
Both satisfied and dissatisfied	6	(12.5)	4	(12.1)	14	(16.3)	24	(14.4)
Not known	–	–	–	–	1	(1.1)	1	(0.6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

practitioners, hospitals and chemists as presented in table 3.12. The large majority of mothers were satisfied or very satisfied with the services used (85 per cent), and this was similar for immigrant and non-immigrant mothers. However, the NESB mothers were much more likely to say they were 'satisfied' (71 per cent) rather than 'very satisfied' (17 per cent), in contrast to the mothers in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families. This difference could reflect the limitations placed on communication with service providers by the language difficulties.

The NESB mothers made various comments about the services they used during pregnancy, for the birth, and for the baby thereafter.

### ***Pre-natal classes***

Less than a quarter of the NESB mothers went to pre-natal class (23 per cent) in contrast to 72 per cent of the Australian families. As all of those NESB mothers who did attend the classes found them helpful, this low attendance could well be seen as disadvantaging those women who did not attend and possibly their children. Some of the mothers did not know of the classes at all. Others were not informed about classes in a meaningful way as the following dialogue recorded by an interviewer indicates:

*Mother:* I didn't know about it [classes].

*Father:* They gave you some pamphlets to bring home.

*Mother:* Oh yes but I didn't read them.

(A recently arrived Vietnamese woman with only primary education, little English and her first child 11 months old at the time of the birth of the second.)

Another mother had been advised of the date of the Vietnamese pre-natal class, but her baby arrived first. However, she was grateful for the written material in Vietnamese given to her by the hospital interpreter. This highlights the problems for hospitals in attempting to run classes in appropriate languages but not being able to offer them frequently enough.

One pre-natal service which received particular mention was the shared care run at the local community health centres in conjunction with the Royal Women's Hospital:

You don't have to wait for a long period like in the hospital when you wait hours and hours. The doctor is very good. She was a specialist from the Royal Women's Hospital. You can have a cup of coffee, the children can play in the play area. They showed me a video tape. (Egyptian)

The mothers who attended classes and found them helpful commented:

The first time we had nutrition class. The second time we were shown around the hospital. I found it very useful. Even though this is my third child, she is eight years from the second child. Hospital here is different from that in Viet Nam. And in case my husband was away I would know exactly which room to go. The third time we were recommended things to buy for the baby. (Vietnamese)

I attended two sessions: Session 1 was exercise. Session 2 was how to breathe properly when delivering. They also showed us a video. The nurse there spoke Vietnamese. (Vietnamese)

### ***The birth***

A birth is an event of special significance and of vulnerability. The NESB mothers discussed both positive and negative experiences with the birth of their child. A number commented on the kindness and helpfulness of the nursing staff and some contrasted this with their experiences in their countries of origin. The availability of Vietnamese interpreters was a positive factor mentioned by some of the mothers:

Hospital staff was very kind and good. They knew that I can't speak English so they got a worker from another ward to ask me about my health, my diet. I could have rice with my meal. (Vietnamese)

For some, the birth itself was a negative experience. More than one mother complained of long waits for doctors to arrive for the delivery. Where interpreters were needed and unavailable this was also a major problem for mothers at this crucial time. Another difficulty for some was the nurses' expectation that the mother would look after the baby in hospital when the mother concerned felt too sick and tired to do so. This was also related to cultural expectations of the post-natal period.

The findings of this study confirm the appropriateness of recommendations outlined in the review of birthing services in Victoria (Health Department, Victoria 1990, p. 75) to improve the responsiveness of birthing services to NESB women, including improving access to information, expanding the availability of options such as shared care and enhancing the skills of care-givers in cross-cultural communication.

### ***Maternal and Child Health Centres***

Once the baby was home from hospital the service used by all the NESB mothers was the Maternal and Child Health Service. Of the NESB mothers who had found services for their children 'particularly good' the majority (73 per cent) named the Maternal and Child Health Service. For some, visiting the Maternal and Child Health Centre was a regular occurrence:

In the beginning every week, then every two weeks, now every month for a check-up and weigh and measure and to ask about things like rashes, dandruff, any problem. (Egyptian mother with 6-months-old baby)

Mothers were often very appreciative of the nurses, mentioning them as kind, cheerful, patient and caring for both mother and baby as well as giving very helpful advice. They also appreciated the home visits, the use of interpreters and the nurse's role as a point of referral to other agencies. This was particularly important for the newly arrived Hmong families for whom few interpreters are available:

The centre provides an interpreter once a week. The nurse can really understand our problem and try to help us. If she cannot help, she is always prepared to refer us to the places that can give help to us. She not only works as a maternal nurse, but as a social worker as well. (Hmong)

Only three NESB mothers had not found the service helpful. One had not been reassured sufficiently about her baby's wheezing and lack of weight gain by the nurse who told her that she need not worry. Another felt that the centre had only weighed the baby and that she had not got much out of it.

### ***Health services***

Many of the NESB mothers had taken their babies to the doctor. Some were able to take them to doctors who spoke their own language. Some felt they were very well served by their doctors:

Dr T was attentive and spent a lot of time to clarify points for me. He also cared for my well-being. (Vietnamese)

The parents who had had experience of taking their children to hospital were often very positive about the help received. For example, one woman said of the Royal Children's Hospital:

They showed that they truly cared for their patients. They comforted me when I was worried and sad. (Vietnamese)

The local community health centres were attended by a number of the NESB mothers. In addition to the Share Care pre-natal service noted already, the community health centres had bilingual health workers and ran Indo-Chinese and Turkish women's groups as well as medical, dental and other services. The NESB mothers who used the centres included

Vietnamese, Hmong, Turkish and Egyptian. One mother commented about her local community health centre staff:

They are all very good. There are workers there who can speak my language. They are very kind and caring. They tried to help me overcome the language difficulty [by] introducing me to a home tutor [and] encouraging me to join the women's club. It has a child-care service where I go to the dentist. The ethnic worker there is very kind and sympathetic. (Vietnamese)

Some of the Asian women consulted Chinese herbalists both for themselves and their children and found them helpful. However, one felt that her use of Chinese herbal medicine had stopped her milk supply (and that she could not tell the MCHC sister), another complained of the expense of the Chinese herbal medicine.

Some of the mothers saw the availability of support services for children in Australia as an advantage over their countries of origin, for example, Viet Nam. One general expression of satisfaction with the services used pointed to the perceived lack of discrimination:

They all are helpful. First come, first served; there is not discrimination. (Vietnamese)

A number of the NESB families seem well linked into local mainstream services which are skilled in using interpreters (such as the Maternal and Child Health Service) or which have ethnic workers (community health centre) and also attend doctors of their own ethnic group. However, language can remain a major impediment to using services for some of the NESB families.

The crucial role of the Maternal and Child Health Centre, not only as a universal preventative health service but as a source of referral, is emphasised by these families who may have limited contact with or ability to contact other services.

The Life Chances Study showed that some NESB families with small children felt they were receiving very good services. However, the comparative lack of use of some services by the NESB mothers must be kept in mind in considering disadvantage. While the suburbs in question had some well established services for some NESB groups, the smaller ethnic groups and most recent arrivals are likely to remain particularly disadvantaged in terms of information about services and in language supports to use them.

### **Family functioning**

When one is considering the disadvantages that children may face, some measure of family functioning becomes relevant; that is, how the family manages its internal relationships and how it relates to the outside world. A number of aspects of the families' lives were explored in the Life Chances Study (see table 3.14).

Maternal depression after the birth of a baby has been the subject of considerable research (for a relevant local study see Williams & Carmichael 1991). The present study did not seek to fully assess maternal depression, but did ask mothers whether they had felt 'low or depressed' after the birth of the baby and about their experiences of this. There was a marked difference in response to this question from the mothers in NESB families, almost half of whom said they had felt low or depressed (46 per cent) and from the 'other' immigrant mothers and Australian mothers who were much more likely to report such depression (67 per cent and 76 per cent respectively). Given the additional pressures of low income, unemployment, relative lack of social supports and language difficulties, this is a somewhat surprising finding and could suggest cultural differences in expectations. The response was clearly not primarily related to low income, as over half the women in NESB families with below poverty line incomes said they had not felt low or depressed since the birth (56 per cent) while most (73 per cent) of the mothers of 'not poor' Australian families had felt depressed. Approximately half the NESB mothers in each of the three income groups (below the poverty line, below the poverty line plus 20 per cent and over 20 per cent above the poverty line) had felt low or depressed while half had not.

**Table 3.14: Life Chances Study: family functioning by parents' birthplace**

Family functioning: selected indicators	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Mother has felt low or depressed since birth of her child	22	(45.8)	22	(66.7)	65	(75.6)	109	(65.3)
In the last 12 months:								
Marital disagreements	17	(35.4)	7	(21.2)	23	(26.7)	47	(28.1)
Mother's health problems	14	(29.2)	4	(12.1)	13	(15.1)	31	(18.6)
Serious financial problems	15	(31.3)	7	(21.2)	20	(23.3)	42	(25.1)
Father major job change	18	(37.5)	13	(39.4)	21	(24.4)	52	(31.1)
Serious housing problem	9	(18.8)	4	(12.1)	14	(16.3)	27	(16.2)
Problem with the law	2	(4.2)	6	(18.1)	5	(5.8)	13	(7.8)
Illness or death of someone close	16	(33.3)	16	(48.5)	38	(44.2)	70	(41.9)
Events of last 12 months have affected caring for child	9	(18.8)	4	(12.1)	12	(13.9)	25	(15.0)
Mother relies on baby's father 'a lot'	15	(31.3)	13	(39.4)	57	(66.3)	85	(50.9)
Mother's overall rating of happiness								
Very happy	6	(12.5)	13	(39.4)	44	(51.2)	63	(37.7)
Happy	17	(35.4)	16	(48.5)	33	(38.4)	66	(39.5)
Mixed feelings	18	(37.5)	3	(9.1)	7	(8.1)	28	(16.8)
Unhappy	6	(12.5)	1	(3.0)	1	(1.2)	8	(4.8)
Very unhappy	1	(2.1)					1	(0.6)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)
Mother's managing/coping								
Very well								
Mother's rating	19	(39.6)	22	(66.7)	52	(60.5)	93	(55.7)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	17	(36.2)	18	(56.3)	41	(48.2)	76	(46.3)
Quite well								
Mother's rating	20	(41.7)	10	(30.3)	33	(38.4)	63	(37.7)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	20	(42.6)	11	(34.4)	34	(40.0)	65	(39.6)
A few problems								
Mother's rating	7	(14.6)	1	(3.0)	1	(1.2)	9	(5.4)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	10	(21.3)	2	(6.3)	9	(10.6)	21	(12.8)
Poorly								
Mother's rating	2	(4.2)					2	(1.2)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	-	(0)	1	(3.1)	1	(1.2)	2	(1.2)

Note: a. 3 cases missing—percentages given of 164 cases.

Williams and Carmichael (1991) had found maternal depression associated with inability to speak English, being a recent arrival, and lack of support. The more limited question about feeling low or depressed in our study did not find similar associations within the NESB group (over half of the 'depressed' mothers spoke English well and over 70 per cent had been here for more than three years). A stronger association seems to be country of birth, with only 29 per cent of the Vietnamese women saying they felt low or depressed, approximately half the other Asian and Middle Eastern women and all of the small number of European-born women.

Of those mothers who reported having felt low or depressed since the birth, three-quarters felt they were over these feelings by the time of the interview (when the baby was four to

seven months old). This was the same for mothers of NESB, 'other' immigrant and Australian families.

The NESB mothers who felt they had been low or depressed described their feelings, including anxiety about managing the baby, worry about the baby's health, irritability with the baby and older children, lack of sexual interest and loneliness. The following are examples of comments made:

I don't know if it's the kind of depression you have after a child's birth or it's because you are confined in the flat all day long. Sometimes I feel very sad. (A Vietnamese mother with two children under 20 months.)

I did not understand why she cried. She seemed to have given me a lot of problems. I was also worried I could not manage a new baby. Sometimes I gave her a few slaps on her bottom and scolded her, but I love her because she is my daughter. I was irritable then. I talked to my husband. He helped me to look after her. He helped to reduce my problems and anxiety. It lasted two to three months. By the fourth month, I felt better. (Vietnamese)

You get very depressed and you feel that no one was going to help you. I cried easily. I think women should get more help at home. It would have been better if someone could come to my home and talk to me. I can't get out with two kids. I've got a car but I can't drag them both around, I can't go anywhere. I still feel depressed now and then. I get uptight when they're screaming and I can't do the housework. (Italian)

Some of the mothers had found being able to talk to their husband, relatives or friends had helped them when they felt depressed, others found nothing helped (except the baby not crying).

Mothers who were depressed varied in whether they felt this had had an impact on the child, but some certainly felt that their irritability and rejection did influence their handling of the baby. This can be seen as one element of disadvantage in these children's lives.

The mothers were asked to rate their happiness overall and this produced a very different response to the question on depression (table 3.14). Although the NESB mothers were less likely to say they felt low or depressed after the birth than were the other mothers, they were less likely to describe themselves as very happy or happy. While over half the Australian mothers described themselves as very happy, only 13 per cent of the NESB mothers did so. Conversely, half the NESB mothers described themselves as having 'mixed feelings' or 'being unhappy' in contrast to 9.3 per cent of the Australians. The Australian mothers were most likely to describe themselves as 'very happy', the 'other' immigrant mothers as 'happy' and the NESB mothers as having 'mixed feelings'. When the mothers commented on their 'mixed feelings' it was often in terms of missing relatives overseas. The seven NESB women who described themselves as unhappy were, with one exception, separated or separating from their partners.

The mothers were asked about a range of 'life events' which might influence family functioning and whether they had experienced any of these in the past twelve months (see table 3.14). The NESB mothers reported most of these events more frequently than did the other mothers. They were more likely to report serious disagreements with their husbands (35 per cent), their own serious health problems (29 per cent), serious financial problems (31 per cent), husband having a major job change—often unemployment (38 per cent), or serious housing problems (19 per cent). They were less likely to have had someone close to them ill or die (33 per cent) or to have had problems with the law (4 per cent).

Did these life events affect the care provided for the baby? The NESB mothers felt they did so (19 per cent) slightly more often than the 'other' immigrant or Australian mothers (12 per cent and 14 per cent respectively).

In some cases serious marital disagreements had led or were leading to parents separating, which would have a major effect on the family's functioning. In spite of the comment from one Vietnamese woman: 'It's not our tradition to tell people outside the family our problems', there were a number of Vietnamese women who spoke of marital discord and violence. One woman whose husband had recently left her with four young children described the marital situation and its effect on her caring for the children:

We often quarrelled. He is a gambler and an alcoholic. The quarrels made me very unhappy. He even hit me during fights. I felt tired and depressed after fighting with my husband; I got into a bad mood and had little energy left for the children.

This mother wept when asked about her children's future.

Another woman outlined the negative impact of the birth of additional children and unemployment on her relationship with her husband. Their husbands' lack of assistance was an issue for some women, as was the lack of recognition of the demands of caring for small children.

Other sources of serious marital disagreement included the number of children the couple planned to have.

Although there were serious marital disagreements reported in some 30 per cent of NESB families, in half the families the mother described the father's relationship with the baby as very close (52 per cent). Nonetheless, this was less frequent than in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families where the father was described as very close to the children in 64 per cent and 79 per cent of cases respectively. Some mothers were very positive about the influence their husbands would have on the babies. For example:

He'll have a good influence. My husband is cheerful and hard working. He loves the baby dearly. (Vietnamese)

Some fathers were helpful from a distance:

He is very responsible for the baby. He supervises me in looking after her. When she cries, he gives her to me. He thinks the baby does not prefer to be looked after by him. (Vietnamese)

Almost a third of mothers in NESB families (including two of the sole parents) said they relied on their partner 'a lot' (31 per cent). Again, the mothers in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families were more likely to rely a lot on their husbands (39 per cent and 66 per cent).

Overall, how were the mothers managing with their babies? We asked this question both of the mothers and the Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) nurses. The large majority of NESB mothers saw themselves and were seen by the MCHC nurses as managing very well or quite well (see table 3.14). Approximately 20 per cent of NESB mothers rated themselves and were rated by the MCHC nurses as having a few problems managing.

The 9 children in NESB families in which the mothers said they were having problems included 4 with mothers who were recent arrivals (3 years or less) from Southeast Asia, 3 with mothers from Viet Nam who were longer-term residents and 2 from the Middle East. In 3 cases the parents were separated, in 6 cases the families' incomes were below the poverty line.

In summary, various aspects of family functioning produced disadvantage for some of the children of the study. This was in terms of their mothers' diminished ability to care for the children, associated with feelings of depression after the birth of the baby, or with problems in managing, associated with financial difficulties, marital tensions or separation, lack of support and the interaction of these. While depression was less commonly reported by the NESB mothers than by the other mothers in the study, a higher proportion of NESB mothers were having problems managing with their baby.

### The children's health

At the time of the first interview, the children were typically four to seven months old and little can be said at this stage about the effect on them of what can be seen as factors of disadvantage in their family and wider environment. We can, however, say something about their health (see table 3.15).

Approximately half the mothers reported problems with the birth. The NESB mothers and the 'other' immigrant mothers reported birth problems somewhat less often than the Australian mothers (46 per cent and 46 per cent as opposed to 58 per cent of the Australian births). Problems mentioned included Caesarians, forceps deliveries, induced labour, and long labours. However, while there were difficulties with the delivery, fewer babies were reported as having health problems at birth. Again there were somewhat fewer NESB babies with health problems at birth (21 per cent compared with 24 per cent of 'other' immigrant and 26 per cent of Australian babies).

Both the MCHC nurses and the mothers rated the health of the babies at the time of the interview. The MCHC nurses rated the health as good or excellent of 79 per cent of the children of NESB immigrants, 82 per cent of children of Australian families and 88 per cent of the children of 'other' immigrants. (See table 3.15.) When MCHC nurses' ratings were considered for low income families there was no relationship between the child's health and parents' birthplace for families below the poverty line.

Some 20 per cent of children in NESB families had health rated as less than good. Of the 9 babies in NESB families rated by their mothers as having only fair or poor health, 5 were in families which had an income below the poverty line and in which the mother was rated as having problems in managing and described herself as unhappy. These were clearly families with a variety of stresses. Of the babies rated as having poor health, one had been

**Table 3.15: Life Chances Study: child's health by parents' birthplace**

Child's health	Parents' birthplace							
	Both NESB		Other		Both Australian		Total	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Problems with birth	22	(45.8)	15	(45.5)	50	(58.1)	87	(52.1)
Baby: health problems at birth	10	(20.8)	8	(24.2)	22	(25.6)	40	(24.0)
Baby: hospital in-patient	5	(10.4)	2	(6.1)	11	(12.8)	18	(10.8)
Baby's health overall								
Good/excellent								
Mother's rating	39	(81.2)	33	(100.0)	83	(96.5)	155	(92.8)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	37	(78.7)	18	(87.5)	69	(81.2)	134	(81.7)
Average/fair								
Mother's rating	7	(14.6)	–		2	(2.3)	9	(5.4)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	7	(14.9)	3	(9.4)	15	(17.6)	25	(15.2)
Poor								
Mother's rating	2	(4.2)	–		1	(1.2)	3	(1.8)
MCHC nurse's rating <sup>a</sup>	3	(6.4)	1	(3.1)	1	(1.2)	5	(3.0)
Problems caused by baby's behaviour	15	(31.3)	12	(36.4)	41	(47.7)	68	(40.7)
Initial feeding								
Breastfed	25	(52.1)	29	(87.9)	77	(89.5)	131	(78.4)
Bottlefed	16	(33.3)	3	(9.1)	7	(8.2)	26	(15.6)
Breast and bottle	7	(14.6)	1	(3.0)	2	(2.3)	10	(6.0)
Total	48	(100.0)	33	(100.0)	86	(100.0)	167	(100.0)

Note: a. n = 164 (three cases missing).

admitted to the Royal Children's Hospital with problems including breathing problems, diarrhoea and kidney problems, and one had had a renal operation at three months.

Mothers were asked whether their baby's behaviour caused problems. As table 3.15 indicates, almost one-third of NESB mothers said 'yes' (31 per cent), but this was a smaller proportion than for the 'other' immigrant and Australian mothers. Problems specified were most commonly associated with sleeping, feeding difficulties and crying.

One further variable directly related to the child was the feeding method used. While the majority of all babies were initially breastfed, the proportion was considerably smaller for the babies in NESB families. One-third of the NESB babies were initially bottlefed (as opposed to 9 per cent of 'other' immigrant and 8 per cent of Australian babies). Bottlefeeding can be linked to disadvantage in that health service providers see breastfeeding as the preferred method for the baby, and also that bottlefeeding brings additional costs for low-income families. Some NESB mothers mentioned having difficulty in finding the money to buy formula. In discussing their reasons for bottlefeeding, some mothers said they had wanted to be able to go back to work, or to English classes. At least two Vietnamese women did not feel their milk was good. Comments included:

I bottlefeed, so I can go to English class and shopping. I can leave him with a friend for a longer period. It's convenience, but the milk formula is very expensive now. (Hmong)

I had two children already. They are healthy but thin. I thought my milk must not be very good. (Vietnamese).

Health factors produced an aspect of disadvantage for a small number of NESB children in the Life Chances Study. The implications of these early health problems will be considered in later stages of the study.

### ***Future plans***

The mothers whom we interviewed discussed a range of their plans for the future, from their own plans to return to work, to family size, and their hopes and plans for their child's future.

### ***Mother's employment and child-care***

Of the mothers who had not already returned to work since the baby's birth all but three of the NESB mothers (6 per cent) planned to at some stage. Money was the most frequent reason given by the mothers for their return to work and this was particularly so for the NESB families. Of the NESB women planning to return to work, 93 per cent gave money as a reason (in contrast to 71 per cent of Australian and 69 per cent of 'other' immigrant mothers). Only a small number of NESB women mentioned that they enjoyed work, liked the adult company or did not want a break in their careers as reasons for returning to work, while these were much more prominent factors for the mothers in the 'other' immigrant and Australian families.

The decision to return to work caused conflict in some families:

My husband's salary is not enough. I want to go back to work, but my husband prefers me to stay at home to look after the baby. I cannot sleep because I cannot decide whether to go out to work or not. (Vietnamese)

Some mothers discussed their preference for a relative caring for their child rather than a child-care centre. They believed that their baby would be healthier in the care of a relative, who would love the child as well as look after it. One mother whose own mother will look after her baby when she returns to work commented:

It will be one-to-one care for my baby. It will be good for my baby, less chance of being infected by disease like AIDS. If I put her in a child-care centre, she may learn more things but she can become sick more easily. (Vietnamese)

In the families in which the father is employed, the mother's return to work will presumably improve the family's financial situation. However, given that many of the mothers have limited employment experience or training and are most likely to be able to find only low-wage employment, their employment might not add greatly to the financial security, especially with child-care costs. If the family is reliant on Unemployment Benefit or Sole Parent Pension, the mother's return to low-paid employment could mean the loss of relevant concessions, part of the 'poverty trap'.

One of the sole parents felt that she could manage to look after her four children if she was *not* working. She had worked in a factory for seven years and now has poor health:

I am receiving sole parent benefits. If I am thrifty I can still manage with the money.

### ***Family size***

The planned family size is likely to have an important impact on the financial situation in terms of expenditure for the low-income families. Five NESB mothers planned to have more than four children (five or six children), in contrast to none of 'other' immigrant mothers and only one Australian mother. Some of the NESB mothers noted that their most recent babies had not been planned and for some this had had considerable repercussions in terms of marital tension and financial difficulties.

A number of the Vietnamese women wanted to have four or five children and emphasised the support that brothers and sisters can give each other. A mother of four children who wants five explained:

I want to have a lot of children so that my children can get comfort from brothers and sisters. They won't feel lonely. They can support one another when they grow up and I and my husband are old.

A Hmong mother of three echoed this sentiment:

I want three sons and two daughters. I want to have a large family so when they grow up they'll have many relatives to help each other.

A young Lebanese mother with her first baby plans to have six children. Even for families presently living on below-poverty-line incomes, having a large number of children may be seen as an important investment for the future.

Other families are making decisions to limit their families to one or two children because of costs and other family responsibilities:

I will stop at two. It is very expensive to care for more than two children. Also my mother-in-law may come from Viet Nam; she is in a wheel chair. My father-in-law is also old. I need time and energy to look after them. Therefore two children are enough. (Vietnamese)

I want to have many children but now we are on the dole. I don't know whether we can get a job soon. I'm 35 already so I think two is an ideal number. (Vietnamese)

Mothers were asked whether the sex of their children would affect how many they had. The large majority said 'no' and this was fairly similar across the birthplace groupings (79 per cent of NESB, 67 per cent of 'other' immigrants and 71 per cent of Australian families). However, for some mothers or their relatives, it was very important to produce sons:

In the Hmong culture the son is very important because he is to carry the family surname.

In contrast and less commonly:

I wanted to have a daughter, therefore I kept on trying. But after four pregnancies I still had no daughter. (Vietnamese)

At least two of the Vietnamese babies had been born after the reunion of their parents after years of separation as refugees.

### ***Bringing up the child***

The mothers were asked about their hopes and plans for the children's future, including questions about the importance of religion, education and gender. These questions reflect something of the cultural factors which can differ between ethnic groups.

Almost half the children in the NESB families would be brought up in a particular religion (46 per cent), in contrast to 33 per cent in the Australian families, and 39 per cent in 'other' immigrant families. The NESB families were considerably more likely to see religion as very important (38 per cent) than were the other family groups (15 per cent of 'other' immigrant and 11 per cent of Australian families). The most frequently named religions were Islam (10 children) Catholicism (6) and Buddhism (5).

Education was seen as very important for the large majority of children across all birthplace groups (88 per cent of NESB, 85 per cent of 'other' immigrants and 88 per cent of Australians). The majority of NESB mothers said they wanted their children to complete tertiary education (63 per cent, slightly more than the 58 per cent of 'other' immigrants and 57 per cent of the Australian families). Almost half the NESB mothers (42 per cent) said that they wanted their children to have some or all of their schooling in private schools (as did 61 per cent of 'other' immigrant and 50 per cent of Australian mothers).

The majority of mothers said they did not think there are differences in how they should bring up a girl or a boy; however, the NESB mothers were more likely to say there should be a difference than were the Australians (35 per cent of NESB, 33 per cent of 'other' immigrant and only 19 per cent of Australian mothers said there should be a difference).

Cultural differences between immigrants and non-immigrant families in areas such as religion and gender do not, in themselves, indicate disadvantage. However, when the immigrant family has strong beliefs which differ markedly from the Australian norm, it could possibly disadvantage the children in terms of misunderstanding or, in more extreme cases, prejudice and in being 'caught between cultures'.

Clearly the belief in importance of education for their children was shared by immigrant and Australian families. The type of schooling the NESB parents hope for, however, could well be limited by their financial situation.

Those mothers who had older children born overseas were asked if they thought the Australian-born baby would have different opportunities from the older children. Half the NESB mothers answered yes. They felt the baby born in Australia would have less difficulty with English than the older children born overseas, would have better access to health care and education and that the baby would have the advantage of older brothers and sisters to help with schooling.

Maybe the baby can get some help from his sisters and brothers because they know English and go to school here. They can give him support in schooling and when he goes out in the society. (Vietnamese)

## **Discussion**

We now consider our initial questions in light of the findings of the Life Chances Study.

### **To what extent are children of immigrants living in poverty?**

The answer for the children of the study born into two inner Melbourne suburbs in 1990 is that to a large extent they are living in families with incomes below or near the Henderson poverty line. Of children with at least one parent born overseas, over half (53 per cent) were living in families with low incomes (less than 20 per cent above the poverty line). This was in marked contrast to only 17 per cent of children with both parents born in Australia. Moreover, the immigrant families with low incomes were more likely to have very low incomes, incomes below the poverty line, than were the low-income Australian families.

### **Children of which immigrants are in poverty?**

The largest number of children of immigrants in the Life Chances Study who are in poverty are those with both parents of NESB. Seventy-three per cent of the NESB children were in low-income families, and 54 per cent lived in families with incomes below the poverty line.

Within the NESB families, those with incomes below the poverty line fell into three family types: two-parent families with father unemployed, sole-parent families, and two-parent families in which the father was in low-wage employment. In none of these families was the mother in paid employment.

The most recent NESB arrivals were most likely to have incomes below the poverty line. Seven of the nine families in which both parents had been in Australia less than three years had below-poverty-line incomes, either because of unemployment or low wages. However, there were also children whose parents had been in Australia for over ten years who were living below the poverty line, the father being either unemployed or on very low wages.

What was striking was the range of characteristics of the NESB immigrant families with very low incomes. Most of the parents in these families had limited education; a third of the fathers had only primary education and 40 per cent of the mothers had primary schooling or no schooling. However, in one family both parents were recently arrived qualified accountants with good English. Half of the fathers and most of the mothers in the very low income families had poor English, but by no means all. The very low income NESB families came from a range of birthplaces, with Viet Nam, Laos, Turkey, Egypt and Yugoslavia being the main countries of origin. They also reflected a range of years of settlement.

There was also diversity of education and length of residence among those NESB families with the highest incomes. They included a couple, both with only primary education, who had been in Australia eleven years. They were working in a clothing factory in which they owned a share.

### **What is the relationship between poverty and other forms of disadvantage for children of immigrants?**

The Life Chances Study data indicated a wide range of variables on which the children in NESB families could be seen as disadvantaged in comparison with children in other families born in the same suburbs. There were also some variables on which they were very similar to the other families and a few in which they were, perhaps, advantaged. Whether some particular variables indicate advantage or disadvantage is arguable, and one could point to advantages of the mothers of babies being at home rather than in the work force, or the advantages of large families. On the other hand, both mother's employment and numbers of children can have a significant impact on the family's financial situation.

#### ***Disadvantages***

In the Life Chances Study, babies with both parents from NESB birthplaces were more likely than the other babies to be in families with the following characteristics:

##### *Income:*

- incomes below the poverty line
- 'not enough money to pay the bills'
- 'just enough to get by on'
- see themselves as 'financially insecure'
- have had to miss a meal because of lack of money
- see themselves as worse off than three years ago

- feel their financial situation will have a negative effect on the baby's future.

*Employment*

- father currently unemployed  
 father currently employed who has been unemployed in the last three years  
 father currently employed whose wage is below the poverty line  
 mother who has not been employed since the baby's birth.

*Language*

- parents speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'.

*Education*

- father and mother with primary education only.

*Housing*

- rental accommodation  
 public housing high-rise estates.

*Family structure*

- three or more children.

*Social supports*

- mother's mother does not live in Melbourne  
 no help from grandparents since the birth  
 mother does not have friends for advice  
 mother is not currently receiving any help with the baby.

*Use of services*

- mother did not use an obstetrician, pre-natal classes, a birthing centre, Nursing Mothers Association, or a paediatrician  
 birth was in a public hospital  
 mother was not 'very satisfied' with services.

*Family functioning*

- mother has had serious disagreement (recent at the time of interview) with her partner (the comparison between the numbers of NESB and other families showed little difference for this variable)  
 MCHC nurse rates the mother as having problems in coping.

*The baby*

- baby was initially bottlefed as opposed to breastfed  
 baby's health is rated 'poor' by mother and by MCHC nurse (very small numbers).

*Advantages*

The babies with both parents from NES birthplaces were more likely to live in families with the following characteristics:

*Family functioning*

- mother did not feel she was depressed after the birth  
 mother did not feel the baby's behaviour caused problems.

### ***Similarities***

The babies with both parents from NES birthplaces were relatively similar to those with 'other' immigrant parents and to those with both parents Australian-born on the following factors:

- family is planning to move within five years
- mother received help in the weeks after the birth
- having relatives in the neighbourhood
- problems with the birth
- use of general practitioner after birth
- use of Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) care
- likelihood of baby having been hospital in-patient
- MCHC nurse rating baby's health good or excellent.

The relationship between poverty and other forms of disadvantage can be one of both cause and effect. Variables such as parents' limited education and lack of English can limit their employment prospects and thus their income, while the low income in turn can limit housing and other choices. Low income or poverty can lead to exclusion from participation in many aspects of our society. Lack of English can have a similar effect of exclusion. The combination of very low income and lack of English is particularly likely to intensify such exclusion.

The main disadvantages experienced by the immigrant families in the Life Chances Study which relate to their immigrant status include, for some, their limited or disrupted education (in their country of origin or refugee camps), their lack of English language skills, and the absence of social supports of close relatives. Cultural factors could be seen as creating disadvantage for some immigrant families, for example when their health beliefs and birth and post-natal practices were not understood by Australian health service providers.

The impact on the children of the study of the disadvantages experienced by the families are, in many ways, mediated by the parents. Some mothers in the study reported the way the stresses of unemployment and low income led to arguments with their husbands which, in turn, affected their caring for their children. For some this was made worse by their lack of social supports. Another source of disadvantage with a direct impact on these small children was the limitation that language and lack of information put on their mothers' use of health services for them.

Overall, the disadvantages faced by the NESB families as a group were considerable and much greater than those faced, on average, by the other families in the study. The disadvantages often related to the interaction of low income, immigration and language factors. However, in no way can all children of immigrants be seen as disadvantaged. The range of family situations was great, even among those on low incomes. While there were extremely isolated families, there were also those with busy social lives, there were families distressed by unemployment, but there were those working very hard and saving for their futures. It is important that service providers and policy-makers recognise both the multiplicity of disadvantages which the NESB families can face, but also their variety of family and financial situations.

The very low incomes of these NESB families is a major issue for their current functioning and their children's futures. One factor to be taken into account in relation to the proportion living below the poverty line and the timing of the study is that many mothers were out of the work force because of the recent births of their babies and were planning to return to work to improve the family's financial position.

A second factor is the economic recession. The interviews took place in late 1990 and early 1991 as the effects of the recession were becoming obvious with increased retrenchments. Australia-wide, from November 1990 to February 1991 (about the time of interview), 11 000 jobs had been lost in textile, clothing and footwear industries and 52 000 jobs lost overall in manufacturing industries, which typically are a major source of employment for NESB immigrants, male and female. The employment situation of the families will be taken into account in future stages of the Life Chances Study. Will the employed fathers keep their jobs? Will there be employment available for those not currently in work? These are significant questions for the future.

A third factor which will affect their future financial position is the number of additional children born to the families.

At the wider level, the factors affecting these children's futures include macro-economic factors and, in particular, employment policies which ensure jobs for people with limited training and English skills, or else provide sufficient and appropriate training to meet the requirements of the jobs available. Also needed is a wage system which provides adequate remuneration to support families with children, a system of adequate income security provisions for those without employment, and housing policies and programs which provide affordable housing.

At the local level, accessible services to support families with children, including health, education and child-care services are crucial. In spite of the economic disadvantages experienced by many of the NESB families in the Life Chances Study, many mothers found local services both accessible and helpful, including Maternal and Child Health Centres and the services of community health centres with ethnic workers and interpreters. However, the low use of pre-natal classes, breastfeeding support services and home help by NESB mothers raises questions about the accessibility of these services. To have access to these services the NESB mothers must first have information about the existence of the services, they must be able to communicate with the service providers, and they must be able to afford to use the services. The services must be geographically accessible and culturally appropriate. Recent reductions in the availability of interpreters have had a negative impact on the service which can be provided, for example, by the Maternal and Child Health Service to non-English-speaking mothers. The expansion of the user pays system for interpreting services threatens to reduce availability still further. The availability of free, local, caring services with workers with whom the mothers can communicate will play an important role in the futures of the children in the Life Chances Study.

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# Conclusions

The study has focused on issues of poverty and disadvantage for the children of immigrants in Australia; it has found that at an Australia-wide level, and at a local area level, children of immigrants are over-represented among those living in low-income families. In particular, large numbers of children of non-English-speaking background parents live in families below the poverty line.

The study has addressed the question of the extent of poverty among children of immigrants, asked which children of immigrants are in poverty and examined the relationship between low income and other forms of disadvantage. Looking at the extent of poverty among children of immigrants we found that, at a national level, data were not available to allow a current estimate of the numbers or proportion of children of immigrants in poverty. However, DSS statistics indicate some 287 000 children of immigrants in low-income families receiving pensions, benefits or Family Allowance Supplement. The data also suggest that there are likely to be large numbers of children in very low-wage-earning NESB families who are eligible for, but not receiving, Family Allowance Supplement. Children in NESB families are over-represented among children in families receiving Unemployment Benefit, Sickness Benefit and Invalid Pension, highlighting the considerable workplace disadvantage of the NESB parents, a factor documented in other studies.

The *Victorian Social Survey* data (ABS 1990) allow an approximate estimate (i.e. an underestimate) of children in poverty, indicating at least some 85 000 children of immigrants lived below the austere Henderson poverty line in 1989. This represented 19.9 per cent of all immigrant children in Victoria.

Of the children in NESB families in Victoria at least 22.4 per cent were living below the poverty line, in contrast to at least 18.1 per cent in Australian families and at least 13.2 per cent in English-speaking background immigrant families. While the poverty measure used provides an underestimate of those in poverty, it provides an indication of the relative differences between birthplace groups.

The Life Chances Study found 54 per cent of children in NESB families living below the poverty line, in contrast to 18 per cent of those in 'other' immigrant families and only 8 per cent in families with Australian-born parents.

These findings clearly indicate that any consideration of children in poverty in Australia in the 1990s must take into account that a significant proportion of those children will have immigrant parents, particularly of non-English-speaking background and that poverty alleviation measures must meet their special needs if they are to be successful. The major implication of the statement that children from particular birthplace groups are 'over-represented' in poverty is not, as some would say, that they represent a burden on the social security system, but that the Australian society has failed to provide adequate employment and income security for its members.

The second question addressed by the report is children of which immigrants are in poverty. At the broadest level the answer is that the children of NESB parents are more likely to be in poverty than the children of ESB parents. However, there is significant variation among birthplace groups. Both nationally and in Victoria, a large proportion of children of Lebanese- and Vietnamese-born parents are living in families with very low incomes and high levels of unemployment. Again, their needs, particularly in terms of the language of communication, must be taken into account. There are also smaller ethnic groups who do not show at all in birthplace statistics but who experience high levels of poverty. For example, all the Hmong families in the Life Chances Study had incomes

below the poverty line. While the number of Hmong families was very small (four), they shared the situation of being very recent arrivals with very limited education or training.

Another approach to answering the question of which children of immigrants are in poverty is to look at family type. The Life Chances Study showed children in three types of NESB families in poverty; namely, sole-parent families, two-parent families in which the father was unemployed and two-parent families in which the father was employed but earning a low wage. In none of these families with young babies was the mother working. Fewer than half of the low wage earning families whose incomes were below the poverty line were receiving Family Allowance Supplement.

The third question the study considered was the relationship between poverty and other forms of disadvantage for the children of immigrants. The two factors of recency of arrival and non-English-speaking background have been found to be associated with poverty among immigrants in a number of studies including the Life Chances Study. Low income for the NESB families in the Life Chances Study was associated with parents' low levels of education, limited English, and, to some extent, length of time in Australia. The interaction of these factors is related to lack of employment and low-wage employment as basic aspects of low family income. These have important implications in poverty alleviation particularly during recession. However, while recent arrivals with limited English and education are very likely to be unemployed, many longer-term NESB residents are also experiencing unemployment in the current recession.

Other aspects of disadvantage which interacted with low income were identified for the children in the Life Chances Study. A particular disadvantage was the lack of social supports available to the NESB mothers. While some had help from their husbands, relatives and friends, overall they were considerably less likely than the Australian families to be receiving such help. For example, the mother's mother was often of particular help with the new baby; however, typically for the NESB families the baby's grandparents were not living in Melbourne (or even in Australia) and were unable to provide practical assistance. Indeed, some low-income NESB families were sending money overseas on a regular basis to support their relatives.

The children of the Life Chances Study were infants during the first stage of the study, and in many ways the influence of low income was mediated through their mothers. Low income certainly produced stresses for the NESB mothers, in some cases associated with marital tensions, which in turn some of the mothers found influenced their ability to care for their babies. Lack of social supports again intensified the stresses on these mothers and influenced their interaction with their children. Low income had a direct impact on some of the babies in limiting the formula, medication, nappies and clothing the mothers could purchase for them.

Low income also influenced the mothers' use of health and other services for their children, for example, use of paediatricians. The mothers' lack of English had an impact on their knowledge of, and use of, services for the baby, as illustrated in their low use of pre-natal classes or contact with the Nursing Mothers Association. Bottlefeeding as opposed to breastfeeding was more frequent among the NESB babies, an aspect of disadvantage identified by health professionals.

Both low income and lack of English limited the options of the NESB mothers, while absence of relatives and friends intensified their isolation, all with likely longer-term negative impacts on their children. These factors highlight the need for services which are free or low cost, multilingual and which can provide social support.

Two major issues which emerge for the futures of the young children of immigrants living in poverty in the Life Chances Study are the impact of the recession on their parents' employment plans and the availability of support services in the community for the

families with very limited options. The subsequent stages of the Life Chances Study will address these issues.

The second and third stages of the Life Chances Study will provide longitudinal data for the participating families and will look at the effects of the recession on the families, at who moves into and out of poverty and the reasons for this, as well as looking at the impact of these and other factors on the children.

Future research is also needed at a national level to identify the children of immigrants in poverty and monitor changes in this over time. At present, national statistics are not available to enumerate accurately children of immigrants in poverty. What are needed are statistics from the ABS which provide detailed birthplace data, numbers of children of immigrants, and income measures which allow calculation of an agreed poverty measure. Similarly DSS data, giving detailed birthplace information and children of recipients, needs to be made regularly and be freely available.

The findings of the study have important implications for a range of policy levels and for service provision if the children of immigrants are to grow up as fully participating members of our society. At a broad level, adequate employment, income security and housing are essential and these need to be backed up at the local level with good quality support services.

The life chances of the children of immigrants are related strongly both to those policies which influence all families with children in Australia and to those policies which have a special relevance for immigrant families. Policies which promote full and safe employment, an adequate guaranteed minimum income for families, secure housing and universal education and health care form an important basis for all families. In addition, there are a range of policy issues, relating particularly to access to services, which can have a specific impact on the children of immigrants. These include issues of access which relate to English language skills, for example access to employment, access to information about social security entitlements, and communication with health care professionals. Provision of English language tuition and of interpreters and translators is clearly relevant here. Immigration status and length of residence also affect access to social services, for example lack of Medicare support for asylum seekers and restricted entitlement to social security benefits for recent arrivals, which can have serious implications on the well-being of the children in the families concerned. Some of these issues are outlined below.

### ***Employment***

Employment opportunities for immigrants with limited formal education and limited English need to be developed alongside appropriate vocational training and language and literacy teaching schemes. This presents particular challenges to both Federal and State Governments in the face of the decline of Australian manufacturing industry which has been a major employer of immigrants, and in a time of recession and high overall unemployment.

### ***Income security***

Income security, in terms of adequacy of social security pensions and benefits, is an issue for all low income Australian families. Particular issues for immigrant families are raised from this study which have implications for federal government policy. These include:

- The analysis of both DSS statistics and the Life Chances Study data suggest an under-utilisation of Family Allowance Supplement by eligible NESB families. Information is needed to promote take-up of Family Allowance Supplement for non-English-speaking low income working families.

- ❑ Residency requirements for pensions mean that some immigrant families receive social security benefits (for example Special Benefit) with more stringent income tests than apply to families with similar needs who have been in Australia long enough to qualify for a pension (for example a Sole Parent Pension or Invalid Pension).
- ❑ 'Assurance of support' requirements for sponsoring family members to Australia and supporting them after arrival produce financial strains for some immigrant families which are not experienced by other families in Australia.
- ❑ The lack of income support and medical benefits for children of people in Australia who are seeking refugee or immigrant status and who are currently entitled to neither income support nor health costs while their status is under consideration places those children at considerable risk.

### ***Housing***

Affordable housing remains a critical variable in family survival and for many low-income NESB families the availability of public rental housing ensures this. It is most important, and dependent on both Federal and State Government policies that public housing continues to be available and that it provides a safe and healthy environment for children.

### ***Immigration and settlement policies***

Family reunion remains a most important factor for many NESB families and an immigration policy which allows this adds significantly to family well-being. Family reunion not only reunited separated refugee parents and children in the Life Chances Study, but also brought together extended family members who provided an important social context for the growing children as well as practical and emotional support for the families.

The policy of the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs which limits 'resettlement' services to 'new' arrivals incorrectly assumes a more rapid and complete settlement process than occurs for some families, especially in time of recession. Unemployed parents with limited education and poor English need quite similar support services if they are to provide for their children, whether they have been in Australia six months or six years.

### ***Local children's services***

Services at a local level to meet the needs of all Australian children must be targeted to include those of immigrant families. This requires service providers who are bilingual or comfortable and skilled with the use of interpreters and who are familiar with the cultural aspects of family life and child-rearing for the children with whom they work. It also requires the availability of skilled interpreters. For a service to be targeted at NESB families it must take into account low family income as well as language and cultural factors. It is the responsibility of the three levels of government to ensure that there are adequate resources and properly trained staff in areas with large numbers of NESB families.

A service of particular relevance for NESB families with very young children is the Maternal and Child Health Service (Victoria) with its mandate to contact all mothers of new babies and to provide a service which is both free and local. Not only is this service ideally placed to provide skilled assessment and advice, but it can act as an important referral agency for immigrant mothers in relation to other community services, and can also provide social support groups for mothers. It is vital that the Maternal and Child Health nurses have ready access to interpreting services. Other important services for NESB families with young children include pre-natal classes, home help services, and breastfeeding support services.

The issues raised here relate in turn to a range of federal, State and local government responsibilities. At the federal level, immigration, social security, employment, housing and health policies and funding provisions are all involved in providing the context in which children of immigrants grow up in Australia, and influence the extent of poverty and associated disadvantage these children are likely to experience. At a State level, similarly, housing and health provisions can play a central role in these families' well-being, as can those support services provided by the State government in combination with local government, such as the Maternal and Child Health Service.

In conclusion, it is important for service providers and policy-makers to see beyond the stereotypes of immigrants, to recognise both the immigrant families who are in poverty and those who make successful new lives in Australia and to provide appropriate supports to allow the children of all families a 'fair go'.

Table A1: Total dependent children in pension, benefit and FAS recipient families by detailed birthplace, Australia

Country of birth of recipient	Pensions <sup>a</sup>					Benefits <sup>b</sup>				FAS <sup>c</sup>	Total	
	Age	Class B			Total	Unemployment	Sickness	Special	Total			
		Invalid	Widow & WPA <sup>c</sup>	Sole parent								SEA & Rehab <sup>d</sup>
Australia	4877	42 334	1017	351 792	1425	401 445	116 646	14 615	4395	537 101	7 880	544 981
UK/Ireland	362	3 428	62	28 934	132	32 918	12 157	1 512	357	46 944	20 427	67 371
Europe (UK/Ireland)												
Austria	10	87	1	353	0	451	176	19	1	647	194	841
France	3	34	1	385	4	427	204	22	3	656	265	921
Germany	69	436	15	2 555	10	3 085	1 105	145	45	4 380	1 581	5 961
Greece	111	3 040	67	1 646	11	4 875	1 940	699	46	7 560	1 781	9 341
Italy	170	2 524	44	2 648	18	5 404	2 339	689	57	8 489	3 140	11 629
Malta	26	868	2	1 216	14	2 126	938	324	29	3 417	1 132	4 549
Netherlands	40	348	18	1 867	25	2 298	1 010	144	17	3 469	1 925	5 394
Poland	54	209	9	1 208	13	1 493	1 234	142	61	2 930	858	3 788
Portugal	4	169	0	324	0	497	220	68	12	797	302	1 099
Spain	7	172	3	391	2	575	283	74	5	937	266	1 203
Switzerland	4	26	0	143	2	175	137	16	14	342	235	577
USSR	25	54	5	241	0	325	215	17	18	575	216	791
Yugoslavia	86	2 889	19	3 027	16	6 037	2 554	693	64	9 348	1 628	10 976
Other Europe	40	448	7	2 183	18	2 696	2 527	396	97	5 716	2 216	7 932
Total	649	11 304	191	18 187	133	30 464	14 882	3 448	469	49 263	15 739	65 002
Middle East												
Cyprus	15	384	0	282	2	683	477	148	8	1 316	615	1 931
Iran	0	19	0	207	2	228	323	32	42	625	359	984
Iraq	0	46	2	135	0	183	129	25	7	344	116	460
Israel	3	49	1	81	0	134	81	18	4	237	135	372
Lebanon	111	3 193	6	3 406	14	6 730	10 827	4 958	462	22 977	7 482	30 459
Syria	7	171	1	165	4	348	143	58	11	560	181	741
Turkey	8	1 455	4	1 113	12	2 592	1 687	602	49	4 930	911	5 841
Other Middle East	0	85	0	116	0	201	114	29	10	354	154	508
Total	144	5 402	14	5 505	34	11 099	13 781	5 870	593	31 343	9 953	41 296
USA and Canada												
Canada	2	30	2	362	0	396	210	13	5	624	385	1 009
USA	3	64	1	738	1	807	391	20	16	1 234	816	2 050
Total	5	94	3	1 100	1	1 203	601	33	21	1 858	1 201	3 059
South and Central America												
Argentina	2	73	2	314	12	403	250	37	7	697	277	974
Brazil	0	14	1	82	0	97	9	0	3	109	43	152
Chile	3	115	2	796	5	921	853	102	55	1 931	776	2 707

Colombia	0	17	0	71	0	88	26	2	3	119	60	179
Peru	1	12	0	119	0	132	22	2	7	163	83	246
Uruguay	0	79	1	338	1	419	147	54	5	625	176	801
Other America	6	95	2	676	5	784	1 464	147	200	2 595	969	3 564
Total	12	405	8	2 396	23	2 844	2 771	344	280	6 239	2 384	8 623
Africa												
Egypt	21	352	4	607	11	995	847	219	26	2 087	868	2 955
Kenya	0	8	0	73	0	81	32	2	0	115	59	174
Mauritius	9	38	0	320	0	367	77	15	4	463	244	707
South Africa	10	53	5	636	0	704	405	30	25	1 164	854	2 018
Zambia/Zimbabwe	0	8	0	172	1	181	90	8	2	281	240	521
Other Africa	7	114	3	588	9	721	615	93	54	1 483	744	2 227
Total	47	573	12	2 396	21	3 049	2 066	367	111	5 593	3 009	8 602
Asia (excluding Middle East)												
China	27	78	7	394	0	506	318	64	44	932	1 169	2 101
Hong Kong	2	18	1	233	0	254	207	14	8	483	1 473	1 956
India	15	120	3	783	9	930	688	51	29	1 698	1 578	3 276
Indonesia	21	71	0	273	3	368	120	14	3	505	376	881
Japan	1	3	0	87	0	91	17	0	1	109	123	232
Korea	5	19	1	86	0	111	103	4	3	221	430	651
Malaysia	13	78	1	637	16	745	686	27	19	1 477	2 094	3 571
Pakistan	5	20	0	72	2	99	68	6	0	173	152	325
Philippines	271	937	2	1 775	10	2 995	750	30	54	3 829	3 769	7 598
Singapore	2	30	1	254	0	287	110	2	4	403	450	853
Sri Lanka	7	44	1	261	1	314	503	19	25	861	921	1 782
Taiwan	0	3	0	14	0	17	25	0	0	42	191	233
Thailand	20	22	0	232	0	274	36	3	4	317	178	495
Viet Nam/Cambodia/Laos	46	471	16	5 270	40	5 843	14 263	1 526	1257	22 889	7 068	29 957
Other Asia	22	161	5	767	10	965	2 845	509	190	4 509	2 774	7 283
Total	457	2 075	38	11 138	91	13 799	20 739	2 269	1641	38 448	22 746	61 194
Oceania												
Fiji	13	109	6	667	0	795	207	12	15	1 029	835	1 864
New Caledonia	0	1	0	25	0	26	1	0	0	27	16	43
New Zealand	41	607	8	10 044	28	10 728	3 650	472	265	15 115	7 542	22 657
Papua New Guinea	32	107	2	787	5	933	326	31	17	1 307	689	1 996
Tonga	3	25	1	313	0	342	119	18	9	488	213	701
Other Oceania	24	107	3	1 116	8	1 258	1 374	272	137	3 041	1 654	4 695
Total	113	956	20	12 952	41	14 082	5 677	805	443	21 007	10 949	31 956
Other—not stated	56	410	4	1 105	11	1 586	5 602	193	180	7 561	5 549	13 110
Total	6722	66 981	1369	435 505	1912	512 489	194 922	29 456	8490	745 357	444 204	1 189 561

Notes: a. As at January 1991. b. As at November 1990. c. Class B Widows and Widowed Persons Allowance. d. Sheltered Employee Allowance and Rehabilitation Allowance. e. Family Allowance Supplement at December 1990.

Source: Department of Social Security, unpublished data.

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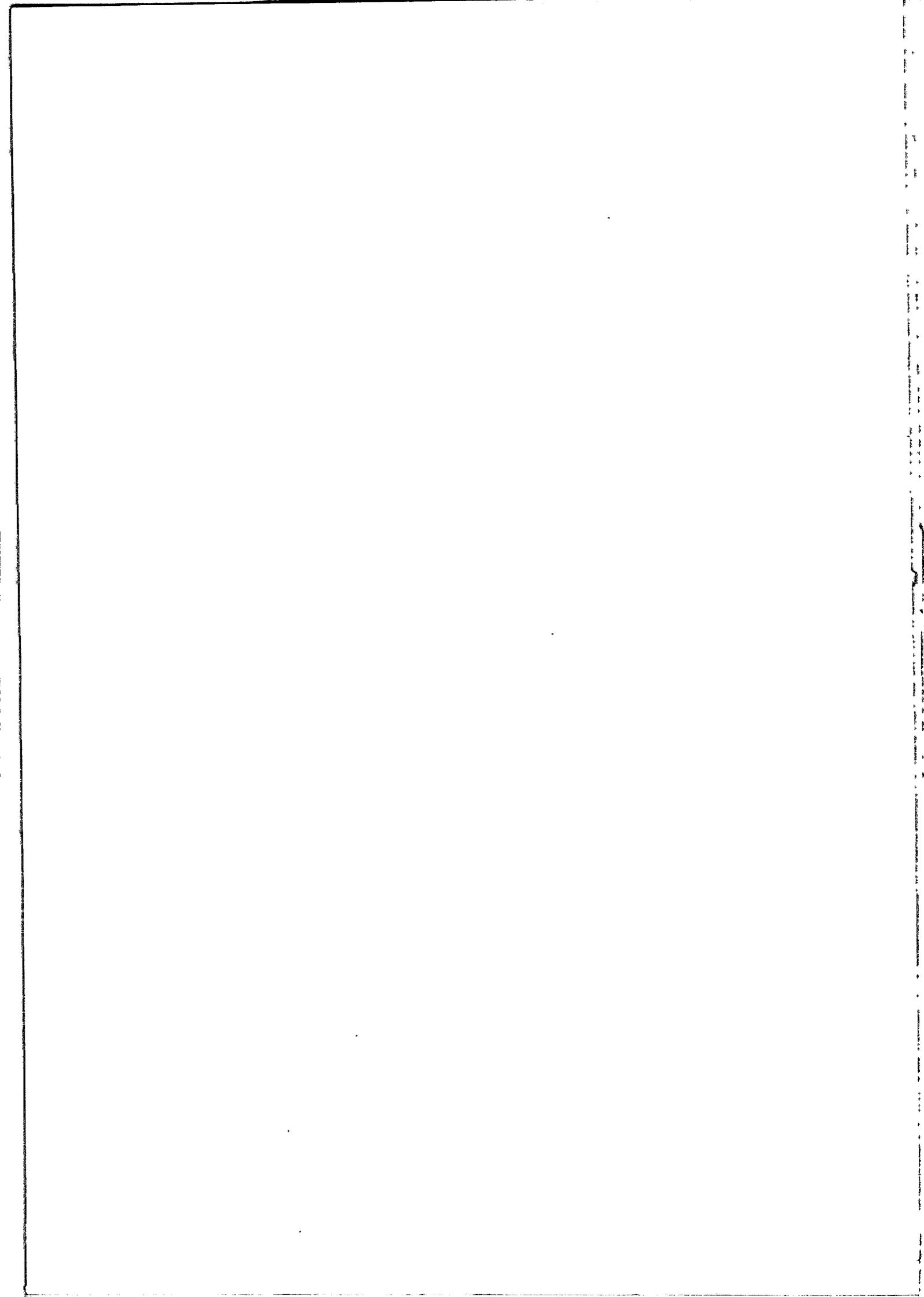
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## BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

The Bureau has an extensive program of research publications covering a wide range of issues related to Australia's immigration and population. The following is a selection of these publications.

*Atlas of the Australian People, State and Territory Reports and National Overview* by Graeme Hugo, Flinders University.

*Australian Immigration: A Survey of the Issues* by Mark Wooden, Robert Holton, Graeme Hugo and Judith Sloan, Flinders University.

*Australian Immigration: Consolidated Statistics* by Bureau of Research, Statistics Section.

*Bibliography Series: Aged Immigrants in Australia; Indochinese Refugees in Australia; The Economics of Australian Immigration; Immigrants in the Australian Labour Market; Immigrants and Crime in Australia; Racial Discrimination in Australia; Immigrants and Australian Politics; Immigration Policies 1945-1991* by Bureau of Immigration Research, Library, Canberra.

*Community Profiles: Australia Born; English Speaking Born; Germany Born; Greece Born; Italy Born; Lebanon Born; Malaysia & Brunei Born; Netherlands Born; New Zealand Born; Non-English Speaking Born; Philippines Born; Poland Born; UK & Ireland Born; Vietnam Born; Yugoslavia Born* by Bureau of Immigration Research, Statistics Section, Canberra.

*Discrimination Against Immigrant Workers in Australia* by Lois Foster, Anthony Marshall and Lynne Williams, Bureau of Immigration Research.

*Immigration and the Australian Economy* by William Foster and Lyle Baker, Bureau of Immigration Research.

*Immigration, Ethnic Conflicts and Social Cohesion* by Bill Cope, Stephen Castles and Mary Kalantzis, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong.

*Immigrants and the Social Security System* by Peter Whiteford, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

*Internal Migration in Australia 1981-1986* by Martin Bell, Applied Population Research Unit, The University of Queensland.

*Migrant Unemployment and Labour Market Programs* by Roger Jones, Social Science Data Archives, Australian National University, and Ian McAllister, Department of Politics, University College, University of New South Wales.

*Refugee Women—Still at Risk in Australia* by Eileen Pittaway, Refugee Council of Australia.

*Settlement Needs of Small Newly Arrived Ethnic Groups* by James Jupp, Andrea McRobbie and Barry York, Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Australian National University.

Bureau publications are available for sale at Commonwealth Government bookshops.

The increased number of children living in poverty has been a major concern in Australia since the mid-1980s. Australia's poor children include many who are the children of immigrants, and the purpose of this report is to examine issues of poverty and disadvantage among this diverse group.

The report asks three key questions:

- To what extent are immigrant children living in poverty?
- Children of which immigrants are living in poverty?
- What is the relationship between low incomes and other forms of disadvantage?

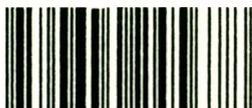
Answers are sought from a wide range of sources, including Australian publications from the mid-1980s and after, Australian Bureau of Statistics and unpublished Department of Social Security data, and an analysis of the first stage of the Brotherhood of St Laurence Life Chances Study.

The Life Chances Study explores the life chances of 167 children born in 1990 to families living in inner suburban Melbourne, in relation to their parents' employment, housing and financial situation, their local neighbourhood and access to services and social supports. Comparisons are made between children of immigrants and those of Australian-born families and between children in low- and high-income families.

*Children of Immigrants* concludes that the children of immigrants are over-represented in low-income families and, in particular, that large numbers of children with non-English-speaking parents live in families with below poverty-line incomes.

The report lists a range of issues which need to be addressed if these children are not to be excluded from full participation in Australian society. As such, this report will form valuable reading for policy-makers at federal, State and local government levels; for service providers working with immigrant families and their children; and for the general reader.

*The Bureau of Immigration Research was established by the Federal Government in 1989 as an independent research body within the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs to commission, conduct and promote research into immigration and population issues.*



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