



Paid Care: Now and in the Future

Bill Martin, Debra King and Sue Richardson

The workshop, 'Paid Care: Now and in the Future', was held at Flinders University on April 10-11 2006. It provided an opportunity for 12 researchers from various disciplinary areas to discuss their work and present it to an audience which included decision-makers in policy and industry, as well as several early career researchers. The workshop was developed out of discussions between members of the Flinders Social Monitoring and Policy Futures Network on the employment and labour market issues relating to the provision of low paid care-work in Australia.

The main focus of the workshop was on exploring the meaning and nature of paid care in Australia and how this relates to the policy framework within which care provision takes place. A range of issues were explored, including:

- Identifying what is distinctive about paid care services, and the assumptions; underlying normative and empirical debates;
- The different arrangements that enable the provision of different types of care, eg, private agreements, government services, corporate ownership;
- The ways in which the relational, emotional and moral aspects of care are enabled or not when care is provided by paid carers;
- The organisational structures that support the provision of different aspects of care (eg, physical, health, emotional, relational);
- Paid carers' experiences of the work they do; and
- The link between paid and unpaid care.

The workshop was opened by Sue Richardson, Director of the National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS) and President of ASSA, who noted the complexity of the issues relating to the provision of paid care and the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding these issues. Chaired by Bill Martin, Leader of the Flinders Social Monitoring and Policy Futures Network and Deputy Director of NILS, the presentations stimulated wide ranging discussions. The level of discussion was enhanced by the requirement that each paper be presented by a reviewer, with the author being given a short right of reply before discussion was opened up.

The first day began with Graeme Hugo's demographic perspective on contextualising the crisis in care. Through his explication of the shifts in population which are likely to result in an unprecedented proportion of people over 75 the next three decades, some of the implications for paid care were revealed. This included the challenge for the labour market to meet increased demands for paid carers in aged accommodation and in supporting older people to remain in independent living situations.

Bettina Cass drew on feminist critiques of the formal/informal, commodified/non-commodified dichotomies in the provision of care services to argue for the more longitudinal approach to care conceptualised by 'social care'. Referring to care provision at two life-course stages – young carers and grandparent carers – she illustrated how relations of care and the interconnections between formal and informal care provision are influenced by various policy frameworks.

In exploring the comparatively low wages received by paid care workers, philosopher Ian Ravenscroft turned to the work of Cornell economist Robert Frank who found that the total remuneration for labour is composed of both monetary and moral reward. The corollary to this is that when demand for care is high and wage rates for carers inevitably rise, it will be difficult to maintain (let alone improve) standards of care. For standards to be maintained, Ian argued that policies will need to shift from the regulation of caring institutions to focus more on the internalisation of caring norms by the professional training of carers.

Michael Bittman presented a paper based on his research with Trish Hill and Cathy Thomson on the impact of caring on wellbeing and earnings. Demonstrating that unpaid caring competes with demands of the labour market for the time of carers, he argued that particular cohorts of carers find that caring leads to a loss of income, susceptibility to financial distress and social deprivation, and potential difficulties in returning to employment (especially at the former rate of earnings). The research indicated that more information is required about the ways in which some unpaid carers manage to sustain employment, in order to provide support for them in appropriate ways.

Gabriel Meagher's analysis of the paid care workforce in Australia presented a picture of de-institutionalisation, de-professionalisation, functional underemployment and relatively poor pay. Focusing on how these issues impact on workforce planning requires redressing the ageing of the care workforce, the devaluation of care work, the lack of culturally appropriate services for Indigenous people and the lack of employment of Indigenous people in the care work sector. With the characteristics of workers being strongly linked to service outcomes and service quality, recruitment and retention of care workers become paramount, as does the need to maintain and enhance the qualifications of care workers.

Using empirical research on workers in Australian residential aged care facilities, Bill Martin questioned the assumption that paid care work is 'bad'. He argued that, in comparison with non-care work undertaken by people with similar human capital, the subjective experience of care work is positive – possibly because of the general character of 'caring' and the deeply positive cultural coding of this activity. However, as he noted, pay levels remain a major source of dissatisfaction amongst the care workers.

On the second day Debra King shifted the focus of discussion toward those organisations involved in the provision of care services. Identifying several tensions between the provision of care under a managerialist-market logic and the provision of

care within a relational logic, she questioned the capacity for organisations to support the kinds of care required by their key stakeholders: care recipients, unpaid family carers and paid care workers.

Sue Dodds' paper challenged the provision of care based on the dominant theoretical understanding of the citizen as an adult, self-reliant individual. Such understandings of care, she argued, have led to a deficit model of the care recipient, the devaluation of care giving and a paternalistic approach to care service provision. In contrast, viewing humans as innately dependent beings facilitates a refocusing on the mutuality of many care relationships and the skills required to deliver the relational aspects of care.

Michael Fine focused on the new social divisions that are emerging from changes and expansion in the public provision of care services. Reflected in the struggles to name, define and claim 'care', these divisions were seen to be linked to broader social, economic and political changes.

Maria Zadoroznyj used a case study of Mothercarers (young women who provide home care services for postnatal women) to illustrate the ambiguous trajectory of a new occupational group. The liminal position occupied by the carers influenced the success of the program, and demonstrated the need for further research into the different kinds of care services being provided. Of particular interest in the Mothercare research were the reasons why care recipients found the program acceptable/not acceptable, the issues in matching the labour force to the carer needs, and the level of structural flexibility and responsiveness that affected the program's capacity to meet the needs of the recipients as well as the care workers.

Deborah Brennan's analysis of childcare policy since 1996 covered assistance with the costs of childcare, access to maternity and parental leave, and subsidies for extended parental care. Her paper highlighted the ways in which the lack of integration between Commonwealth and State governments has created inconsistencies in the quality of care between states. In addition, she argued that addressing widespread community concern regarding the quality of long day care will require robust regulatory mechanisms and an end to the reliance on the market to determine the location of centres.

Operating within the constraints of available data, Diane Gibson's research (conducted with Ken Tallis) outlined the shape and nature of the caring workforce. Identifying five categories of care givers ranging across the divisions of formal/informal, and commodified/ uncommodified, the analysis focused on constructing an 'ideal' information base that incorporated four perspectives: demographic, activity, expenditure and fiscal.

From discussions throughout the two days it was evident that while the field of paid care research is emerging, it is doing so quite rapidly. A continued focus on the field is necessary to not only shape policy debates and influence labour market issues, but also to understand and improve care relationships and the organisation of care.

The workshop received excellent feedback from the participants and there was enthusiasm to continue sharing ideas. One outcome is therefore the development of a national network of academics and non-academics involved in research on paid care. Initial discussions have taken place via email and we are currently pursuing ideas for taking this forward. In addition we have secured a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* dedicated to a selection of the workshop papers.