Title of paper:
Diversity and social cohesion: What role for housing policy and assistance?

Author names and affiliation:
Kath Hulse and Wendy Stone,
Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology

Presenter’s name:
Dr Kath Hulse

Abstract:
Recent eruptions of violence around a housing estate in Macquarie Fields (Sydney) have again highlighted the complex and sometimes fragile relationships between cultural diversity, poverty and social cohesion. This case raises questions about the role of housing and housing assistance in contributing to or mediating potential community conflict – including in the most disadvantaged of neighbourhoods. For example, what is the 'right' mix of public tenants? How can housing be regenerated to facilitate community? What effects, positive and negative, does tenure mix have on the community more broadly? Assumptions about the answers to these questions lie at the heart of much present day housing policy and housing management practice – yet in reality there is very little systematic evidence that addresses them.

This paper reports on AHURI funded research exploring the links between housing, housing assistance and a host of non-shelter outcomes, under the umbrella ‘social cohesion’. Social cohesion is a concept that describes social connectedness, taking account of economic inequalities. It is prominent in European and UK housing policy and may also provide means for better understanding and intervening in the relationship between housing, housing assistance and a host of non-shelter outcomes in Australia.

The paper reviews existing evidence about the relationship between housing, housing assistance and social cohesion; presents a conceptual framework for understanding these relationships, and critiques the relevance of the social cohesion concept for housing policy in Australia. It also indicates how the empirical part of the research will proceed. The policy challenge being addressed by this research is ensuring that the best possible community outcomes are facilitated by government through the delivery of housing policy and assistance, whilst allowing for a diversity of cultures and lifestyle preferences.

Presenter contact details:
Dr Kath Hulse
Institute for Social Research
Swinburne University of Technology
1 Alfred St
Hawthorn, Victoria, 3122
Ph. +61 3 9214 5321
Fax. +61 3 9819 5349
khulse@swin.edu.au

Keywords:
Housing, housing assistance, social cohesion, neighbourhood
Diversity and social cohesion:  
What role for housing policy and assistance?

Those at the top of society worry about social cohesion, confusing it with social control, whereas those at the bottom may be more concerned with defending local distinctiveness against dominant groups and ideologies (Pahl 1991: 354).

1. Introduction

Two teenage boys were killed in February 2005 when the car they were driving hit a tree during a police pursuit in the suburb of Macquarie Fields in south-west Sydney. Subsequent to the deaths, for the next four nights, young people threw a variety of missiles at the police in what the media termed 'riots'. These events centred on a public housing estate (Glenquarie) which was built in the 1970s. The area is economically and socially disadvantaged as measured by indicators such as the rate of unemployment, receipt of income support payments, children and young people living with one parent, and crime statistics.

Various explanations were offered in the media immediately after these events. These included police harassment of young people (residents), bad parenting (other residents), an enclosed community with high crime rates and a variety of other problems (a government crime research bureau), poverty (the Salvation Army), lack of attachment to fathers and other male role models for young people (welfare service), enclosed housing estate design and development not integrated with the rest of the community (academic), and concentrations of the most disadvantaged people with no hope of moving on (local mayor) (Age, 5 March 2005, Insight: 7).

A police inquiry into the incidents was critical of the police response to the 'riots'. A critique of this approach suggested that the underlying cause was economic deprivation and poverty, with the trigger a zero tolerance policing policy insisted upon by 'rule makers' and imposed on local police without regard to the consequences (Kennedy and McQueen 2005: 3). An inquiry by the Social Issues Committee of the New South Wales Legislative Council is still taking submissions. These types of events and concerns about lessening of social cohesion and threats to social order are not unique to Australia. Social disturbances in 2001 in the northern English cities of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley led to a House of Commons Committee Report on Social Cohesion (House of Commons 2004).

Such events and the reactions to them suggest complex and sometimes fragile relationships between cultural diversity, poverty and social cohesion. This case raises questions about the role of housing and housing assistance in contributing to or mediating potential community conflict – including in the most disadvantaged of neighbourhoods. For example, what contribution, if any, did the estate design and housing type and form make to these events? Did aspects of public housing management play a role, for example, in allocating households to the estate? What effects, positive and negative, does tenure have on the community more broadly? What is the 'right' mix of public tenants? How can housing be regenerated to facilitate community? Assumptions about the answers to these questions lie at the heart of much present day housing policy and housing management practice – yet in reality there is very little systematic evidence that addresses them.
The paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding these relationships, explores the relevance of the social cohesion concept for housing policy in Australia and shows how the empirical part of the research will proceed. It is based on a review and reflection of relevant literature during the initial stages of the project which is funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). Later stages of the research will seek to identify empirically some of these linkages through an analysis of five secondary data sets.

2. ‘Moral panics’, mediating institutions and the pursuit of ‘community’

The example of social unrest on a public housing estate cited above and the subsequent reactions reveal uncertainty as to causation and an anxiety that such events indicate a lessening of social cohesion and a threat to social order. Some of the reactions appear to be characteristic of what Cohen (1972: 9) in a famous study of mods and rockers in the late 1960s called a ‘moral panic’, that is, ‘a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media’. For each ‘moral panic’ there is a ‘folk devil’, a clearly identifiable group onto which deeper social fears and anxieties are projected. In this case, as in many others, the folk devils were young men living on the estate, and to a lesser extent their parents (usually their mothers) for failing to control them. It is important to note that the source of the moral panic is not necessarily the folk devil, but deeper anxieties that find their expression in the social construction of a deviant group that comes to symbolise the problem.

The idea of moral panics has been much discussed over the last thirty years and illustrates some of the complexities in considering social cohesion. Some commentators suggest that the process of labelling folk devils as deviant is too simple for what Beck (1992) and others have called a ‘risk society’. Instead they point to changing sites of social anxiety which have raised fundamental questions of trust, expertise, authority and social order (Ungar 2001: 288). Others have focused on the level of everyday practices, suggesting that these generalised anxieties are so intangible that people focus on immediate issues of personal or family security. Through routine and everyday practices, people strive to achieve a sense of order often subsumed in the concept of ‘community’ that offers the prospect of sameness and familiarity which contribute to feelings of personal safety and security (Bauman 2001).

This work suggests that social cohesion, which will be discussed in more detail later in the paper, can be considered at different levels. Czasny (2002: 3-4), for example, differentiates between the macro level of cohesion (based on the mix of market, government and cooperative regulating mechanisms for the solution of social problems associated with the distribution of goods and services) and the micro level (which focuses on the integration of individuals in a network of personal interactions within the framework of family, friendship, neighbourhood, membership, educational and work relationships). Following Weber, he argues that in complex societies all activity takes place simultaneously on two levels of meaning.

Much of the debate about social cohesion (and the related concepts of social capital, social inclusion/exclusion) hinge on the links, and tensions, between these levels. For example, individuals striving to achieve ‘community’ to enable routine social relations to take place in a predictable and ordered manner might act in a way which is protectionist, divisive and exclusionary – circumstances which are likely to be a fertile breeding ground for future moral panics (Hier 2003). The values that enable micro level units like neighbourhood to cohere may be at odds with the values of the wider society, if
community membership is defined partly by exclusion (Pahl 1991: 351). In other words, the factors that might encourage social cohesion at the micro level might lead to a lessening of social cohesion at the macro level.

Historically, some of the tensions between the two levels were mediated through membership of intermediate social institutions such as trade unions, professional associations, political parties, churches, cooperative societies and sporting clubs, which provided a form of shared identity and social solidarity (Castells 1997). Most of these have weakened considerably in recent decades, although often the impact in terms of social cohesion has been relatively neglected. For example, the decline in trade union membership has been much discussed in economic terms but there has been little consideration of the impact of their declining social role in promoting solidarity amongst members and providing a range of services and facilities. Similarly, decline in membership of churches has been seen primarily in terms of individual religious affiliations, rather than their role in maintaining social solidarity amongst sometimes diverse members through a common value base, mutual support and provision of services and facilities. The relatively unpopularity of these formal intermediate institutions in recent years has meant that the debate about social cohesion has slipped down a level to that of ‘family’ and ‘community’ (Pahl 1991: 348).

‘Community’ is often posited as the most important form of intermediate social institution between family and macro level social institutions, but it is a concept which is hard to define because it is used in multiple and overlapping ways. Community in most policy and many research contexts is based on locality/place, although it is sometimes used to refer to a non-spatial grouping based on common interests, such as ‘the arts community’ or ‘the disabled community’. It is also often used in a normative sense, either to recapture qualities from the past which are thought to have disappeared or need to be renewed, rebuilt or redeveloped, or to indicate that some communities are unsustainable and require assistance with building, strengthening or developing. It is in this context that community has an attraction for politicians and senior policy makers, including those concerned with housing. This attraction is not new: a quarter of a century ago, community was called the ‘spray-on solution’ (cited in Bryson and Mowbray 2005: 91).

3. Reasserting the importance of the ‘social’ in politics and policies

Former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher is supposed to have said: ‘There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are families’. This statement asserts the primacy of families over all other types of social institutions. Since that time, increasing disenchantment with market failure as well as state failure has led to a search for meaningful meso-concepts that emphasise the embedding of economic and political variables in intermediary social structures such as neighbourhoods, associations, churches and community organisations (Mayer 2003: 113-14). Consequently, politicians, bureaucrats, academics and others have spent a great deal of time reasserting the importance of the ‘social’ through a reinvigoration and reworking of some old concepts: social capital, social inclusion/exclusion, and social cohesion. We will look briefly at the first two of these before focusing more specifically on social cohesion which is the subject of this paper.

3.1: Social capital: the importance of social networks

The term ‘social capital’ has been used intermittently for almost a hundred years but it is only over the last decade or so that it has been widely used by policy makers and researchers in Australia (Winter 2000). The aim here is not to give full coverage to debates about social capital, as this has been done elsewhere (see Johnson et al. 2003
Definitions of social capital vary, with Li et al. (2003) declaring the concept ‘an infuriating one’. It is possible, however, to trace two related strands in the literature which concern both social processes and outcomes. Firstly, social capital refers to ‘networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups’, as used by the ABS following an OECD definition (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004). In essence this is about the importance of factors such as mutual support, reciprocity, trust and obligation which facilitate cooperation between people, the process by which people work together. Secondly, social capital involves access by individuals to various types of resources which are embedded in social networks, including social, economic, cultural, physical, knowledge and spiritual resources (Bourdieu 1986). This strand of thinking about social capital is more about outcomes – the extent to which people are able to augment their own personal resources (human capital) through access to resources found in social networks.

In the recent burgeoning of literature on the topic, writers have identified different types of social capital which can be summarised as: informal personal networks involving strong ties with immediate family and friends (bonding social capital), more distant and diverse networks involving weaker and less intensive ties (bridging social capital), and civic engagement (linking social capital) with more formal institutions such as local government and voluntary organisations (Putnam 1995; Narayan 1999; Woolcock 2000; Li et al. 2003). These are useful as a tool for thinking about levels of social capital, although they have to be demonstrated empirically.

There is a body of social research over a long period, going back to community studies in the 1960s and 1970s, which, although it uses different terminology to that of social capital, has demonstrated that people living in disadvantaged areas often have strong networks involving family, friends and immediate neighbours (for example, Forrest and Kearns 2001; Atkinson and Kintrea 2000). Whilst this is not always the case, it is more likely to occur where residents are relatively homogenous in terms of factors such as economic and social status, ethnicity or cultural background, or life circumstances. Governments often assume, wrongly, that concentrations of people on low incomes and with other disadvantages are characterised by isolation and a lack of social networks. They then produce solutions based on ‘social mix’ to alter the composition of estates, such as redevelopment or tenure diversification, which may weaken existing social networks rather than sustain or enhance them (Arthurson 2002).

There is an emerging view, although with rather less evidence, that people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have fewer and weaker connections with others outside of their immediate network (bridging and linking social capital) and that it is the lack of these types of social capital that reinforces disadvantage. This might indicate ways of reducing disadvantage by encouraging and resourcing people to make these connections and facilitating networks which include people living in particularly disadvantaged areas. The Wired High Rise project in Melbourne is an example of such an initiative, whereby low income residents of a high rise public housing estate were supplied with computers, internet and email access and training to enable access to electronic networks. There is a risk, however, that identifying a lack of ‘weak ties’ with diverse networks merely describes disadvantage due to marginalisation and is another way of ‘blaming the victim’ for their situation. Studies of more formal civic participation support this view, indicating that this type of linking capital is associated with people with higher economic and social status and higher levels of education (Li et al. 2003).
In the example given at the beginning of this paper about social unrest on a public housing estate, the language refers to an ‘enclosed’ estate, implying separation of dwellings – and, by implication, people – from the surrounding area. It is possible that strong personal networks based on family or kinship are a form of defence and protection against marginalisation from other social networks. These may provide essential support to vulnerable people, on the one hand, or, on the other, develop into protective mechanisms such as vigilante groups which are usually seen as a threat to social order. It is also possible that strongly defensive personal networks of ‘people under siege’ indicate a lack of trust in others, either generally or more specifically in institutions, an area also explored by writers on social capital. Fukuyama (1999) argues that people now engage in more single-issue, parochial and defensive activities which can lead to a ‘miniaturisation’ of community, such that social interaction and collective involvement may derive from conflict and lack of trust. One can think of involvement in Save Our Suburbs and similar organisations as examples of this. In these examples, there will be tensions between strong social cohesion at a very micro level and fragmentation between groups at a broader level.

3.2. Social inclusion/exclusion: economic disengagement and multi-dimensional disadvantage

The limitation of work on social capital is that, whilst emphasising the importance of social networks, it may divert attention from the structural changes which have created areas of concentrated disadvantage in the first place, such as changes in the labour market and patterns of investment. The concept of ‘social exclusion’ addresses some of these broader structural issues. It originated in France to refer to people on the margins of society who were excluded from the social insurance system, and was broadened to refer to concerns that high levels of unemployment and homelessness were leading to a ‘dual society’ which risked undermining social cohesion (Blanc 1998).

The term was then adopted and broadened by the European Union (EU) in order to re-brand its controversial anti-poverty programs as a new approach to entrenched problems of poverty and social disadvantage and is now often referred to as ‘social inclusion’. Social inclusion continues to be a very important part of EU policy processes which emphasise an inclusive labour market as a means of promoting social cohesion. The EU sees ‘being in employment as by far the most effective way of avoiding the risk of poverty and social exclusion’ (European Commission, cited in Hunt 2005: 113). Exclusion from the labour market has direct financial effects but also entails exclusion from the networks established through work which may provide a sense of social solidarity and identity. All EU members have committed to produce national action plans to combat poverty and social exclusion. Regeneration of areas where people have multiple deprivation is seen as important, but locality-based approaches are only one component of the overall strategy. The significance of the European concept is that it recognises that lack of capacity of local neighbourhoods is a result of economic and other changes, primarily economic disengagement, rather than a cause of poor economic and social outcomes.

In France, where the concept of social exclusion was first developed, there has been a critique that it obscures the processes by which people and groups become excluded or labelled as ‘outsiders’. Blanc (1998: 781) refers in this context to the paradox of the ‘ghetto’ as a visible form of exclusion, on the one hand, but also a place where a community experiences social solidarity and safety on the other. In other words, people and groups that are economically and socially excluded can, in some circumstances, have strong levels of social solidarity and cohesion. In this sense, one could question
whether, for example, targeting of social housing to those with acute and complex needs is, albeit unwittingly, part of the process of exclusion, such that vulnerable people are housed in the same place. In some circumstances, people may develop strong bonds with selected others as a form of protection in what may be seen as an insecure or unsafe environment. A compounding factor in this process of exclusion may be the actions of residents of more affluent areas in combining together to object to social and affordable housing in their neighbourhood. Such actions may improve social solidarity among these residents but effectively exclude lower income households from areas with higher levels of amenity and facilities.

In Australia, the approach developed by the Blair government in the UK has had the most influence. The government has a much-quoted definition of social exclusion as ‘a shorthand label for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown’ (Social Exclusion Unit 1998: 1). Social exclusion in this context refers to people and usually denotes multidimensional disadvantage. Thus it encompasses some ‘wicked’ social problems which governments find difficult to deal with, such as homelessness, teen pregnancies, school truancy, suicide and youth unemployment which appear to have multiple causation and which require ‘joined up’ solutions. In the UK there has been a strong focus on places with a concentration of disadvantaged people, mainly large public housing estates, through a national strategy on neighbourhood renewal. This strategy has influenced governments in Australia in the development of renewal strategies for public housing estates with increasing concentrations of people with multiple disadvantages.

Whilst there have been specific evaluations of these renewal projects, there has been as yet no systematic analysis of the processes which result in social and economic marginalisation of residents. However, we do have available the findings of a European Commission-funded project on socially excluded neighbourhoods in eight countries. This study found that, although each of the twenty-eight neighbourhoods had its own distinctive characteristics, three broad types of dynamics were important: the type of tenure and extent to which residents chose to live in the area, which affected commitment to the area and degree of empowerment; the cultural identity of the area, building on ethnic, age and length of residency divisions which affected feelings of solidarity, social identity and consensus; and the size and nature of residential turnover which affected levels of social engagement, sense of belonging and overall stability (Morrison 2003: 132). These findings have implications for housing policy and assistance in Australia. For example, do allocations policies in social housing disempower people and affect commitment to, and identification with, an area, thus risking increasing residential instability and turnover which contribute to disadvantaged neighbourhoods? Do household subsidies to low income households to rent privately lead to concentrations of low rental housing characterised by high turnover which may affect levels of engagement and weaken social stability?

Whilst most attention of policy makers has been focused on low income ‘excluded’ communities, it is important to note the growth of so-called ‘gated communities’ comprising higher income people who withdraw behind physical and electronic barriers to reduce the risk of unwanted social interactions with those ‘outside’. As Atkinson and Flint (2004) have pointed out, these same households may also use ‘tunnel like’ trajectories to move between their housing and places of work and leisure, thereby further reducing the likelihood of uncontrolled social interaction with ‘outsiders’. This type of self-withdrawal may limit opportunities for social engagement and social connections
(including ‘weak ties’) that contribute to social cohesion. It is not, however, typically seen as a problem by governments.

Ultimately, although the concepts of social capital and social inclusion/exclusion are useful, in themselves they provide only a partial insight. In this paper, we argue that social cohesion is an over-arching concept which combines elements of both of these.

4. Social cohesion: concept and indicators

The concept of social cohesion was originally associated with the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim who was fascinated by the way in which social stability and order was maintained despite the enormous economic changes of the time in which he was writing (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), particularly in specialisation and differentiation of tasks. He argued that modern societies achieved social cohesion through organic solidarity rather than any external imposition of order.

This idea of social cohesion based on organic solidarity has been much discussed and developed over the years. It refers to interdependence between members of a society, shared loyalties and solidarity (Jenson 1998 in Berger-Schmitt 2000: 3). In this sense, social cohesion is a ‘bottom up’ rather than a ‘top down’ phenomenon (Witten et al. 2003). It is sustained via a myriad of relationships between people and groups, many of which relate to the mundane and routine connections of everyday life. These relationships are often described as the ‘social glue’ that holds communities and societies together despite specialised roles, economic inequality and differences in social status. In practical terms, ‘social cohesion is about getting by and getting on at the more mundane level of everyday life’ (Forrest and Kearns 2001: 2127).

Social cohesion is, however, about more than the social relations of locality and neighbourhood. These relations are embedded in different economic and social circumstances. High levels of local social connection may well be attributable to different factors, and produce different outcomes, in areas of high disadvantage compared to more affluent areas (Kearns and Forrest 2000: 1011). For example, young people with no hope of a job and little to do might engage intensely with each other and form a strong protective unit against ‘outsiders’, particularly those in positions of authority, such as the police. Thus it is possible to have both high levels of social interaction among particular groups and high levels of conflict with outsiders. Conversely, high income households may live in ‘gated’ neighbourhoods with high levels of security against ‘outsiders’. They may, however, have low levels of social interaction and few meaningful social relationships within the neighbourhood.

The concept of social cohesion has been used by the OECD, the European Commission, various European governments and the Canadian government. A report for the EU suggests that there are two distinct but related strands: firstly, the reduction of disparities, inequalities, breaks and cleavages which have been seen as ‘fault lines’ in society; and secondly, a strengthening of social connections, ties and commitment to social groups (Berger-Schmidt and Noll 2000: 15). In other words, it combines many of the ideas about both social exclusion and social capital. For the purposes of this project, the working definition of social cohesion is, therefore, as follows:

*Social cohesion is a concept that describes social connectedness, including family and community wellbeing, taking account of economic inequalities.*
What then might constitute a socially cohesive society? Kearns and Forrest (2000: 996-1002), after reviewing the literature, suggest that five interrelated elements are important. Firstly, members share common values so that they can identify with, and support, common aims and objectives, moral principles and codes of behaviour and support for political institutions. Secondly, there is an element of social order and social control which is achieved through ‘getting by and getting on at the more mundane level of daily life’. Thirdly, social cohesion is related to principles of social solidarity which ensure that people are able to meet reasonable standards of living. Fourthly, it is about social networks and social capital. Lastly, social cohesion means a sense of belonging and attachments to place which helps shape social identity.

In terms of housing and housing assistance, each of these could be important. For example, there is a long history of government support for home ownership in Australia based on the assumption that this provides individual ‘ontological security’ (Saunders 1990), social stability and economic growth, as well as encouraging responsible citizenship and political participation. It could also be argued that there is an element of social control in the design of social housing that concentrates low income households in specific estates.

Social cohesion is then both multi-dimensional and can be seen at different social/spatial levels: the level of family or households (micro), the level of neighbourhood (meso) and other levels such as parts of a city, a town or city, national and even supranational which we call collectively the macro level social cohesion. Of these, it would appear that neighbourhood is an important level for exploring social cohesion, particularly where people are not formally engaged in work, study or voluntary activity, as is the case with many public housing tenants, for example, due to the targeting of assistance. There are also issues of gender here as approximately two-thirds of recipients of rental housing assistance (both public housing and rent assistance payments for private renters) are female which may well increase the importance of local neighbourhood as the place where the majority of daily routines take place.

These multi-dimensional and multi-layered dimensions render attempts to provide indicators of social cohesion complex and difficult. There are, however, some interesting examples of attempts to do this. Work for the Canadian government has identified six dimensions of social cohesion which are capable of measurement: inclusion/exclusion (the extent to which people participate or are marginalised in economic terms), legitimacy/illegitimacy (of institutions acting as a mediator of conflicts), recognition/rejection (about tolerating differences in a pluralist society), equality/inequality (of conditions), participation/non-involvement, and belonging/isolation (shared values, identity and feelings of commitment) (Rajulton et al. 2003: 2). These dimensions are set out in Table 1.
Table 1: Dimensions of social cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/type</th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Substantial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Inclusion/Exclusion</td>
<td>Equality/Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Legitimacy/Illegitimacy</td>
<td>Participation/Passivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural</td>
<td>Recognition/Rejection</td>
<td>Belonging/Isolation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rajulton et al. (2003: 2)

Rajulton et al. (2003) then developed measures for each of these at the Canadian Census Metropolitan Area level using the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. For example, ‘belonging/isolation’ was measured by variables such as proportion socialising weekly with family and relatives, with friends and in sports and recreation. ‘Inclusion/exclusion’ was measured by proportion in full-time job and proportion by job tenure (tenured, contract, etc.). The work can be regarded as developmental and a number of conceptual and data problems were identified by the authors.

5. The current research

In the Australian context, a review by Bridge et al. (2003) found a dearth of evidence on the links between housing assistance and social and economic outcomes, as well as a lack of conceptual understanding about how dimensions of housing assistance are linked to non-shelter outcomes such as social cohesion. Our research for AHURI aims to improve existing understandings of these relationships in Australia by focusing on the relationships between housing, housing assistance and various aspects of social cohesion, including family and community wellbeing.

The first stage of the research involved a review of the concept of social cohesion as discussed in this paper. The next stage will examine:

- How do aspects of housing (tenure, size/type of dwelling, density/site design, location) relate to indicators of social cohesion? How are these relationships mediated by the use of key services (such as child care and health care)?
- How do aspects of housing assistance (public housing, community housing, rent assistance and schemes supporting home ownership) relate to indicators of social cohesion? How are these relationships mediated by the use of key services (such as child care and health care)?

Five secondary data sets will be used. The analysis of these sources of data, each with particular advantages, will provide the first detailed account of the relationship between housing, housing assistance and social cohesion in Australia. The use of multiple sources of data has significant methodological advantages. Most notable is the capacity to explore relationships in great depth while at the same time ensuring that risks to external validity are minimised. This can be achieved because the data sets are complementary. Data with detailed variables will enable full exploration of relationships, and data with larger samples will ensure that research findings can be generalised to other populations with confidence. That is, it will be possible to determine whether the same types of results are found across different types of data sets, using different samples and sampling techniques. This is important given the dearth of other Australian research in this area. The data sets and their key strengths are as indicated in Table 2.
Table 2: Data sets for analysis of variables relating to social cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Sample size and coverage</th>
<th>Key strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families, Social Capital and Citizenship Survey (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2001)</td>
<td>Sample size = 1,500; national.</td>
<td>Detailed account of social capital, detailed information about inequalities, some information about housing assistance and other aspects of housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Social Survey (GSS) (ABS 2002)</td>
<td>Sample size = 15,500; national.</td>
<td>Detailed account of social capital, information about inequalities and information about housing assistance and other aspects of housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering Rental Housing Survey (ISR Swinburne 2003)</td>
<td>Total sample size (combines two samples) = 4,819; national.</td>
<td>Items about social support, information about inequalities and detailed information about private rental, includes many respondents in receipt of rent assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole Parents, Social Wellbeing and Housing Assistance (ISR Swinburne 2002)</td>
<td>Total sample size (combines two samples) = 1,688; three states.</td>
<td>Items about social support, information about inequalities and detailed information about public housing and assisted rental housing, focus on sole parent families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Australia survey (HILDA) Waves 1-2 (FaCS, Melbourne Institute 2001-03)</td>
<td>Sample size = 13,041 Wave 2; national.</td>
<td>Items about social support, detailed information about inequalities, detailed information about housing assistance and other housing attributes, detailed information about the use of key services. The data also enable investigation of over time effects if relevant.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *It is not yet clear whether changes in housing or housing assistance will impact on social cohesion over a short time period (one to three years). This will be investigated in the project through longitudinal analysis of HILDA data and included if relevant.

Variables from each of these data sets will be analysed using multiple regression techniques. Analyses will indicate whether relationships exist between variables and how large these are, taking account of the potential mediating effect of use of services. Controlling for other key variables in each multivariate analysis will ensure internal validity (that the relationships observed in the data can be attributed to the variables in question) to a high degree of confidence. Replication of similar types of analyses across multiple data sources will also highlight patterns in the research findings and enable identification of unexpected results to be explored.

Given that the data analysis is based on individual and household survey data, the primary focus of the proposed research is upon social cohesion at the individual/household or micro level. Individuals’ levels of social connectedness, housing circumstances and wellbeing will be explored. However, to varying degrees the data also enable analysis at neighbourhood or meso levels. Respondent perceptions of neighbourhood safety and social connectedness as well as data about local level characteristics such as SEIFA indices are examples of relevant neighbourhood/community level variables that will be included in the analysis. The data do not enable analysis of macro variables at a national level (such as GDP, civil conflict, divorce rates, infant mortality) and their relationship to social cohesion.
The extent to which individual/household and neighbourhood/community variables feature in each data set is indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Unit of analysis and examples of variables in secondary data sets relevant to housing, housing assistance and social cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Unit of analysis</th>
<th>Examples of variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Meso: respondent perceptions of trust and cooperation in local area, perception of safety; postcode link to SEIFA |
| General Social Survey (GSS) (ABS 2002)                                  | Primarily micro Very limited meso | Micro: contact with family and friends, source of support in a crisis, social activities, financial stress  
Meso: access to public transport, remoteness |
| Entering Rental Housing Survey (ISR Swinburne 2003)                     | Primarily micro Some meso | Micro: proximity to family and friends, housing quality, financial stress  
Meso: respondent perceptions of security of neighbourhood, respondent perceptions of local sense of community, local noise levels, amenity of local area, conflict with neighbours; postcode link to SEIFA |
| Sole Parents, Social Wellbeing and Housing Assistance (ISR Swinburne 2002) | Primarily micro Some meso | Micro: financial stress, perceptions of being part of local community, housing quality  
Meso: respondent perceptions of local sense of community, conflict with neighbours; postcode link to SEIFA |
| Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Australia survey (HILDA) Waves 1-2 (FaCS, Melbourne Institute 2001-03) | Primarily micro Some meso | Micro: contact with family and friends, access to support when need it, preference to stay in local area, financial stress, member club/group  
Meso: respondent perceptions of neighbourhood cooperation, local noise levels, local housing quality, local hostility and crime; postcode link to SEIFA |

6. Summary

Sporadic incidents of social unrest in low income communities are projected in the media as a threat to social order, particularly when they occur in a stigmatised place, such as a public housing estate. The paper suggested that these are ‘moral panics’, defined as an expression of deeper anxieties about economic and social change which find their outlet in the social construction of a ‘folk devil’. The folk devil comes to symbolise a threat to the social order, with young men often labelled in this way.

Such incidents generate concerns by governments and others that there is a lessening of social cohesion. What is meant by social cohesion varies but there are at least two different levels of concern: the macro level of government, market and cooperative regulatory mechanisms; and the micro level of family, friends and others encountered in the course of day to day living. Historically an intermediate level of social institutions was
also important in promoting shared identity, a common purpose and social solidarity, such as churches, trade unions and cooperative societies. These institutions have weakened in recent years.

Over the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been increasing appreciation of the failures of both government and markets which has led to a search for meaningful concepts that emphasise the embedding of economic and political factors in intermediary social institutions. Governments and others have promoted ‘community’ as a link between the micro and macro levels as a means of strengthening social cohesion. Unfortunately, the concept of community when used in this way is mainly rhetorical; neighbourhood seems to have more validity in this context as the place in which day to day social relations are conducted and constitutes a meso level in terms of thinking about social cohesion.

The reassertion of the ‘social’ has involved a reworking of old concepts such as social capital, social inclusion/exclusion and social cohesion. Work on social capital has highlighted the importance of social networks and the trust, cooperation, norms and values that underlie them. In particular, it has highlighted the importance of ‘weak’ social ties that make bridges between people in different social groups and networks. Work on social inclusion/exclusion has highlighted exclusion from employment and other economic and social activities as well as the multiple disadvantages of some people and residents of some local neighborhoods.

This project focuses on social cohesion which includes elements of both social capital and social inclusion/exclusion. It considers both the disparities and inequalities which form the ‘fault lines’ between groups of people and the social connections, ties and commitment that are found in social networks. Social cohesion in this context is both multi-dimensional and multi-layered. It is essentially a ‘bottom up’ concept and is sustained via a myriad of relationships between people and groups, many of which are found in the mundane and routine connections of everyday life.

The project continues with empirical research that will examine the extent to which aspects of housing (tenure, size/type of dwelling, density/site design and location) relate to indicators of social cohesion. It will also examine the degree to which aspects of housing assistance, such as public housing, community housing and rent assistance, relate to indicators of social cohesion. This part of the research involves an analysis of five secondary data sets and will provide the first detailed account of the relationship between housing, housing assistance and social cohesion in Australia. It is due for completion in August 2006 and will be published on the AHURI website.

Bibliography


