

Children

In the period from 1981-82 to 1995-96 the poverty rates for children in Queensland reached a high in 1989-90 ('before housing' 24.1% and 'after housing' 26.0%), and then declined considerably in the period to 1995-96 so that the rates are now 18.6% and 18.9% respectively. Table 4 shows this progressive incline in the poverty rates and, then, the downturn.

Arguably, this drop in child poverty in Queensland can be attributed to the targeting of family support for families at risk of poverty and the combination of this with improving the access of low-income families to public housing. This improvement demonstrates that political will can have a significant impact on the alleviation of poverty.

Summary

- Sole parents continue to be most at risk of poverty of all income unit types in Queensland and while there has been some improvement in their material circumstances in the period 1981-82 to 1995-96 this has been patchy and marginal;
- Sole parents with two or more children are more likely to be living in poverty than any other income unit type and this has been a consistent trend since 1981-82;
- The circumstances of couples with three or more children have improved considerably in the period 1989-90 to 1995-96;
- The circumstances of couples with one or two children have steadily declined in the period 1981-82 to 1995-96;
- Child poverty has declined in Queensland from a high in 1989-90 to a low in 1995-96, this low being comparable to the child poverty rates of 1981-82.

3.5 The Composition of the Poor in Queensland, 1995-96

Table 5 provides a picture of the structure of poverty in Queensland in 1995-96, identifying the proportion of a particular income unit type out of the total number of those living below the poverty line.

This confirms that single people, across all ages, are a highly vulnerable group in Queensland. All up, they compose 64.1% of those who are living below the 'before housing' poverty line. This drops slightly in the 'after housing' category to 62.4%, reflecting the trends discussed earlier in 'after housing' poverty for (i) single people, 45-59/64; and (ii) aged single people – namely that affordable housing reduces the likelihood of these income unit groups being in poverty.

Single people under 25 compose 26.6 % of all those living in 'after housing' poverty in Queensland and 21.0 % of those living in 'before housing' poverty – an alarming figure by any standard!

This table also shows:

- the aged – singles and couples – constitute 26.3% of all those in 'before housing' poverty and 18.9% of those in 'after housing' poverty;
- all family types constitute 21.7% of all those in 'before housing' poverty and 24.7% of those in 'after housing' poverty.

Table 5: Composition of the Poor in Queensland, 1995-96, 'Before Housing' and 'After Housing'

Income Units	Before Housing %	After Housing %
Single people under 25	21.0	26.6
Single people, 25-44	13.2	18.1
Single people, 45-59/64	10.9	6.6
Aged single people	19.0	11.1
Aged couples	7.3	7.8
Non-aged childless couples	6.9	5.1
Couple, one child	2.5	3.6
Couple, 2 children	4.4	5.5
Couple, 3 or more children	2.2	2.5
Sole parent, one child	4.6	4.8
Sole parent, 2 or more children	8.0	8.3

Source: Based on 1995-96 ABS Survey of Income and Housing Costs unit record files. Unpublished estimates by the SPRC, September 1998.

3.6 Conclusion

On the basis of the estimates presented here, there is a growing number of people in Queensland who are living in material circumstances below the HPL. While this profile is derived from statistics it must not be forgotten that these tell the story of many people, individuals of all ages and families, who are doing it hard in the struggle to provide for the basic necessities of life. The human face of poverty must not be lost.

If poverty is seen as a result of structural inequality within society, any serious attempt to eliminate poverty must also seek to change the conditions which produce it. Although individual members of society are reluctant to accept responsibility for the existence of poverty, its continuance is a judgement on society which condones the conditions causing poverty.

From: *Preface ~ 1975 Report from the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty*