

MEDIA RELEASE

DROPPING OFF THE EDGE: THE DISTRIBUTION OF DISADVANTAGE IN AUSTRALIA

Extreme social disadvantage in Australia is real and it's measurable. Its endemic to a small number of locations in this country, and it can be fixed, according to major new research to be released on Wednesday.

Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia is the most comprehensive national study of its kind. The report, which is a joint project with Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, is the third in a series of reports on the issue, written by researcher, Professor Tony Vinson, from the University of Sydney.

The previous two reports (1999, 2004) mapped social disadvantage in New South Wales and Victoria. This latest report provides a very clear picture of areas of entrenched disadvantage nationally. It also shows how and where public policy can be used to overcome these long term problems.

The report finds that just 1.7 per cent of postcodes and communities across Australia account for more than seven times their share of top rank positions on the major factors that cause intergenerational poverty.

“Our findings demand recognition of a common pattern associated with inadequate education and training – unemployment, low income, poor health and ‘making ends meet’ by criminal means, resulting in high rates of convictions and imprisonment. Where these characteristics are concentrated there, too, we find high levels of confirmed child maltreatment,” said Professor Tony Vinson, author of the research.

“Just like the challenge of Indigenous disadvantage, the alienation of whole communities within mainstream Australian society simply cannot be tolerated, especially in times of such obvious economic growth and prosperity. We need targeted, coordinated action now from Federal and State governments, before these communities fall off the edge,” said Fr Peter Norden, Associate Director of Jesuit Social Services.

“The problem is of a scale that can be treated with the right policies targeted to the right places. Addressing pockets of disadvantage is not only good social policy, its good economic policy,” said Frank Quinlan, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia.

Maps and more information are available at www.australiandisadvantage.org.au.

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