Material deprivation and social exclusion among young Australians: a child-focused approach

Children and poverty in Australia

1.1 million Australian children and young people are living in poverty (Davidson et al., 2018). This is of particular concern 'because of the damage that poverty may do to a child's development, their future productive capacity, and their life prospects more generally' (Productivity Commission, 2018: 121).

As the OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría observed, child poverty 'will permanently scar a generation, preventing it from ever reaching its full potential' (OECD, 2008). Poverty impacts on young people's health, education, employment prospects, well-being and social inclusion and increases the likelihood they will be reliant on welfare across their lives.

There is an urgent need to tackle child poverty, both in Australia and globally, given its negative social and economic consequences. This is supported by two international policy frameworks to which Australia is a signatory – the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The CRC recognises the right of every child to an adequate standard of living and that their views be given due weight in responding to issues that affect them. The SDG includes a target for all countries of 'reducing at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions' by 2030 (Australian Government, 2018).

Measuring child poverty and disadvantage

The conventional approach to measuring poverty is income-based[1] and relies on the income of adults to determine whether children are identified as 'poor'. It treats children as passive, assuming they make no contribution to household income, take no actions to influence household income or spending, and that their views on relevant factors are the same as their parents/carers.

However, rather than being 'invisible', children in poverty have significant agency and act in various ways to ease the financial strains they feel they impose on their parents' lives and budgets (Ridge, 2002, 2011; Redmond, 2009; Skattebol et al., 2012).

The income approach to poverty measurement is important but has limitations, particularly when examining child poverty, as it doesn't take account of:

- The views of children themselves and what they value

- Their experiences and the living standard outcomes they achieve

- The multidimensional aspects of poverty and disadvantage.

[1] For example, the OECD sets the poverty line at 50 percent of median household income, and all households below that income, and all people living in those households, are then defined as living in poverty.

The consensual approach to measuring disadvantage

New approaches to measuring poverty, that take account of how people live and examine the material and social dimensions of disadvantage, have been developed and usefully applied in many countries, including Australia.

The consensual approach to measuring disadvantage involves establishing what items a majority of the population agree are 'essential' to achieve a standard of living that is consistent with prevailing community norms. This is then used to identify individuals who are deprived of particular 'essentials'. People who are missing out on multiple essential items are defined as experiencing severe deprivation.

This approach has been successfully used with adults both internationally (Townsend, 1979; Mack and Lansley, 1985, 2015; Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas, 2006; Dermott and Main, 2017) and in Australia (Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths, 2007; Saunders and Wong, 2012). This publication reports on the first time the consensual approach has been used with young Australians.

A child-focused approach

The *Material deprivation and social exclusion among young Australians: A child-focused approach* project was funded by the Australian Research Council through a Linkage grant. It was led by a research team from the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales Sydney and undertaken in partnership with the New South Wales (NSW) Advocate for Children and Young People, the NSW Department of Education and The Smith Family.

The research is grounded in and builds on children's own views and experiences. It involved both focus groups and a survey with children and young people (hereafter referred to as young people for brevity) in Years 7 to 10 in NSW, conducted through

government high schools and financially disadvantaged students on The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* scholarship program.

Focus groups

Over 80 young people participated in the focus groups.[2] Young people's views on the items and activities that are essential for all young people to 'live a normal kind of life' in Australia today were explored. Topics included individual possessions, household needs, food, family, friends, school, transport and free time.

What young people have and do

Three technology items – a mobile phone, a computer and internet access at home – were identified as being essential for young people to participate in today's society. A mobile phone was overwhelmingly seen as the most important of these items, and needed by young people to communicate with family and friends, for emergency situations, for practical reasons, such as accessing public transport timetables, and for social media and entertainment purposes.

A computer was identified as key to supporting young people's participation and engagement in school and learning. The lack of a computer was seen as potentially impacting on young people's attitudes to and experiences of schooling, as well as their overall well-being.

Access to the internet was also strongly linked to a young person's ability to engage and participate in school. Young people without the internet at home were unable to complete their homework and assignments, with one participant noting '*You can't do anything without the internet'.* High internet costs meant many young people were living in households without internet access and needing to rely on free Wi-Fi connections in their local community to overcome lack of access at home.

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[2] Seven focus groups involved students from NSW government high schools and three were with *Learning for Life* participants. Young people came from 6 NSW sites – one in inner Sydney, three in outer Sydney and two in regional areas.

A job was also identified as being important, particularly by older young people in the focus groups. A job made young people less reliant on their parents/carers; gave them some autonomy around their own spending decisions; and was a way to contribute to household income.

Young people's views on the importance of the 'right' type of clothing and footwear to 'live a normal life' varied, with brand-name footwear seen as more important than brand-name clothing. Some young people felt spending money on brand-name shoes ensured better quality, reliability and comfort. Others felt they would be more likely to be judged adversely if they didn't have brand-name footwear. Young people in The Smith Family focus groups were more likely to give less importance to brand-name clothing and footwear than young people in the government high schools focus groups.

Home

There was consensus from focus group participants that around the age of 10 to 12 years, young people needed to have their own bedroom - their own 'personal space' - where they could study and spend free time. However it was common for young people in the focus groups to be sharing their bedroom with other family members.

A quiet space or desk at home was generally more important to older young people as the pressures of study and homework increased. As with their own bedroom however, many participants didn't have these items.

Food and diet

A balanced and varied diet was important to most young people in the focus groups. They saw a healthy diet as a 'need' and were able to clearly differentiate between food 'needs' and 'wants', with items such as chocolates and hot chips fitting into the latter.

The amount of money in a young person's household determined the amount and type of food available to them, with many households purchasing cheaper

(and often unhealthier) food alternatives because of limited financial resources. Young people had a good understanding of what a healthy diet meant, but due to a lack of money in their household often lacked the control to ensure they had such a diet.

Spending time with family

Spending time with family was a 'high priority' for most young people and this was mainly done through eating out, day trips and holidays. The frequency with which young people experienced these activities was often dependent on the amount of money left over in the household after spending on other 'essentials'.

Day trips and holidays were identified as important opportunities to spend 'family time' away from the stresses of everyday life and for developing strong family relationships. As such, holidays away from home were seen as a 'need' rather than a 'want'.

The location of a holiday generally didn't matter to young people, as long as they happened at least once or twice a year. Holidays generally involved visiting and staying with family, enabling the costs to be kept to a minimum and the possibility for later reciprocation. Holidays also enabled young people to visit family members who they might not see very often, particularly grandparents.

As young people expressed it:

'(Holidays are) just a good time for us to bond and not worry about things back at home'.

'It gives me a chance to really relax and reconnect with my family'.

Friends and socialising

Young people spent their free time outside of school in a variety of ways. Some participated in organised activities, such as sports or dancing, which helped them to 'meet other people' and 'gain friends'.

Others made use of free public spaces or saw eating out (take-away or fast food) as an important way to spend time with friends. Participation in activities was seen as having well-being and mental health

benefits as well as helping to alleviate boredom. Some young people valued having time on their own for activities such as reading, listening to music or watching television.

Young people wanted to be able to decide how they spent their free time, however participation was often influenced by the amount of money in their household, with a number of organised activities being seen as 'quite expensive'. Many young people sought cheaper alternatives or didn't participate because of cost. As with brand-name items, young people in The Smith Family focus groups considered participation in organised activities as less important than those in the government high schools focus groups.

School and neighbourhood

School was an important part of the young people's lives and there were a number of items and activities they identified as contributing to their ability to participate in school and learning. This included the correct school uniform, as this was seen as part of 'fitting in' with the school community.

Young people also wanted the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular school activities, such as sport, music, drama, chess, dance, debating and technology groups, if they were important to them. School camps were considered an extra-curricular activity rather than part of the school curriculum, because they required an additional cost. These camps were seen as a good opportunity to 'form new friendships' as they allowed for socialising with others outside of the classroom.

Participation in extra-curricular school activities often required additional costs. So while participation was important to many young people, as with their involvement in organised activities, many did not participate due to cost.

Public spaces, particularly parks or green space within their neighbourhood, were also seen by young people as important to live 'a normal kind of life'. The importance young people put on these spaces was influenced by whether they had access to a backyard at home, with these spaces seen as interchangeable. Public space and parks within a five to ten minute walk of their home, were seen as very important by young people who didn't have a backyard at home. As indicated above, internet access in a range of public spaces was also important to young people.

Transport

Access to transport – whether by car or public transport – was linked to young people's ability to move around their local neighbourhood. Its availability – or lack of – impacted their ability to participate in activities and the broader community. Access to transport was particularly an issue for young people in regional areas, with a car being considered essential by them.

Focus groups summary

In summary, the focus groups confirmed that young people are able to differentiate between needs and wants, and between luxury and basic items.

Unsurprisingly, for many participants, the money available in their household determined the items and activities they had access to. Young people regularly sought cheaper alternatives to further stretch their own and their family's limited resources, reinforcing that they have significant agency.

The What young people need survey

The focus groups and the latest international child poverty research informed the development of the *What young people need* survey as part of the *Material deprivation and social exclusion among young Australians* research project. The survey sought to identify what items a majority of young people saw as essential for all young Australians to lead a 'normal life'. It included both things to 'have', for example fruit or vegetables at least once a day, and things to 'do', such as a meal out with family at least once a month.

Survey participants

The survey was completed by two groups or samples of school students in Years 7 to 10 in New South Wales. Around 2,700 students from 52 government high schools[3] completed the survey, as did around 340 financially disadvantaged students on The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program. The rationale for including this second group was to verify the survey was relevant and could be completed by young people in the most financially disadvantaged circumstances, and to allow the circumstances of this group to be compared with those in the first sample, that is more representative of the general population of young people in NSW.

The two samples share a common profile across a range of characteristics including gender, school year level, self-assessed health status and whether English is normally spoken in their home. As shown in Table 1 however, there were two demographic characteristics where the profiles of respondents varied: The Smith Family sample included higher proportions of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds or who had an on-going disability or medical condition, compared to the government high schools sample.

Table 1: Indigeneity and disability characteristics of survey samples

Characteristic	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
Is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	10.5	19.9
Has an ongoing disability or medical condition	11.2	20.5

The government high schools sample is reasonably representative of the population attending all government high schools in NSW. The sample does however include an over-representation of more disadvantaged schools and an under-representation of more advantaged schools, based on each participating school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).[4]

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[3] These schools were from both metropolitan and regional areas.
[4] ICSEA uses Australian Bureau of Statistics data relating to student factors, such as parents' education, and school factors, such as geographic location, to give each school a score. It allows schools to be compared along a spectrum of advantage-disadvantage. Further information is available in the full report of this project (Saunders et al., 2018).

Socioeconomic background and poverty

Table 2 provides information on a number of socioeconomic background and poverty indicators for both samples of students. While significant proportions of both groups experience disadvantage, as expected, The Smith Family sample is more disadvantaged on a range of individual and household indicators.

Table 2: Indicators of socioeconomic status and poverty

Indicator	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
Young person has at least $20 a week of their own money	32.2	16.9
Young person has had a job or paid work in last 12 months	40.6	21.1
Lack of money very or quite often stops young person doing what they want to do	22.5	35.4
Lack of money very or quite often stops young person seeing their friends	14.6	22.9
Young person has no adults in their household in paid work	5.4	34.1

For young people in both groups, a significant proportion live in families who have 'not enough' or 'just enough' money to get by on. This is particularly the case for those in The Smith Family sample, as shown in Table 3. Around one in five (21.0 percent) of those in the government high schools sample indicated that their family had 'not enough' or 'just enough' money to get by on, as did three in five (60.5 percent) of The Smith Family sample.

Table 3: Does your family have enough money to get by on?

	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
Not enough	3.1	8.6
Just enough	17.9	51.9
Enough for a few extras	53.5	36.5
More than enough	23.2	2.1

Note: Figures in this table may not total to 100% as not all respondents answered all questions.

Home, family, friends and school

The survey asked young people about their home, family, friends and school. As Table 4 shows, most young people in both samples feel they have comfortable and safe homes, live in a family which gets along well together and have friends to help them if needed. The majority of young people who didn't agree that their family gets along or that they have friends to help them, were neutral in their responses, indicating they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements.

Table 4: Home comfort and safety, family and friends

	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
My home is comfortable		
Strongly agree or agree	92.5	92.0
Neither agree or disagree	5.0	5.7
Disagree or strongly disagree	2.5	2.4
I feel safe at home		
Strongly agree or agree	89.9	90.7
Neither agree or disagree	6.6	8.1
Disagree or strongly disagree	3.5	1.2
My family gets along well together		
Strongly agree or agree	71.0	69.3
Neither agree or disagree	18.9	24.2
Disagree or strongly disagree	10.1	6.6
My friends will help me if I need it		
Strongly agree or agree	79.9	79.0
Neither agree or disagree	14.8	18.0
Disagree or strongly disagree	5.3	3.0

Note: Figures in this table may not total to 100% as not all respondents answered all questions.

Young people's responses to a range of school related questions are shown in Table 5. While the majority of both samples feel safe at school, significant proportions indicate that they don't enjoy school nor do they feel part of their school community. This is important given the relationship between young people's sense of belonging at school and their likely longer-term engagement in education.[5] Table 5 and analysis of a range of other school-related data collected through the survey[6] suggests that young people in The Smith Family sample generally have more positive attitudes to schooling than those in the government high schools sample.

[5] See for example NSW Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (2015) *Student wellbeing: Literature review* which can be accessed at https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/student-wellbeing-literature-review
[6] Further information is available in the full report of this project.

Table 5: School enjoyment, community and safety

	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
My school is a place that I enjoy being		
Strongly agree or agree	46.5	56.0
Neither agree or disagree	30.4	26.2
Disagree or strongly disagree	23.1	17.8
I feel part of the school community		
Strongly agree or agree	49.5	56.3
Neither agree or disagree	30.4	28.3
Disagree or strongly disagree	20.0	15.3
My school is a place where I feel safe and secure		
Strongly agree or agree	61.3	65.4
Neither agree or disagree	24.9	24.1
Disagree or strongly disagree	13.8	10.5

Note: Figures in this table may not total to 100% as not all respondents answered all questions.

The future and overall life satisfaction

As Table 6 shows, similar proportions (over half) of both groups indicated that they were always positive about their future, with around 15 to 16 percent of both groups disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement. A significant proportion (around 30 percent) of both samples neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Table 6: Positivity about the future

	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
I'm always positive about my future		
Strongly agree or agree	55.6	53.6
Neither agree or disagree	29.3	30.4
Disagree or strongly disagree	15.2	16.0

Note: Figures in this table may not total to 100% as not all respondents answered all questions.

Young people were also asked to rate their life overall, using a scale from 0 (worst possible) to 10 (best possible), with five indicating 'my life is okay'. The average (or mean) response for both groups was very similar at 7.2 for the government high schools sample and 7.4 for The Smith Family sample. This indicates that most young people were generally fairly satisfied with their lives. However, some young people in both groups (13.8 percent for the government high schools and 6.6 percent for The Smith Family samples) rated their lives at only 4 or below.

The 'essentials of life' for all young Australians

A key aim of the *Material deprivation and social exclusion among young Australians* project is to identify a list of items that a majority of young people believe are essential for all young Australians. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether each of 24 items (shown in Table 7), which were drawn from the focus groups and other international research with young people, were essential for all young Australians. They were also asked whether they personally had each item, and if they didn't, whether they wanted it.

This consensual approach, outlined in Figure 1, characterises an individual young person as being deprived of a particular item, if:

• The item is identified as essential by a majority of young people
  and

• The young person doesn't have the item
  and

• They want the item.

Figure 1: Logic of the consensual approach to deprivation among young people

Is it essential? ......> Do you have it?

Is it essential? → YES / NO

Do you have it? → YES / NO

If you don't have it, do you want it?

If you don't have it, do you want it? → YES / NO

YES → MAJORITY SUPPORT – THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE

MAJORITY SUPPORT – THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE ......> YES
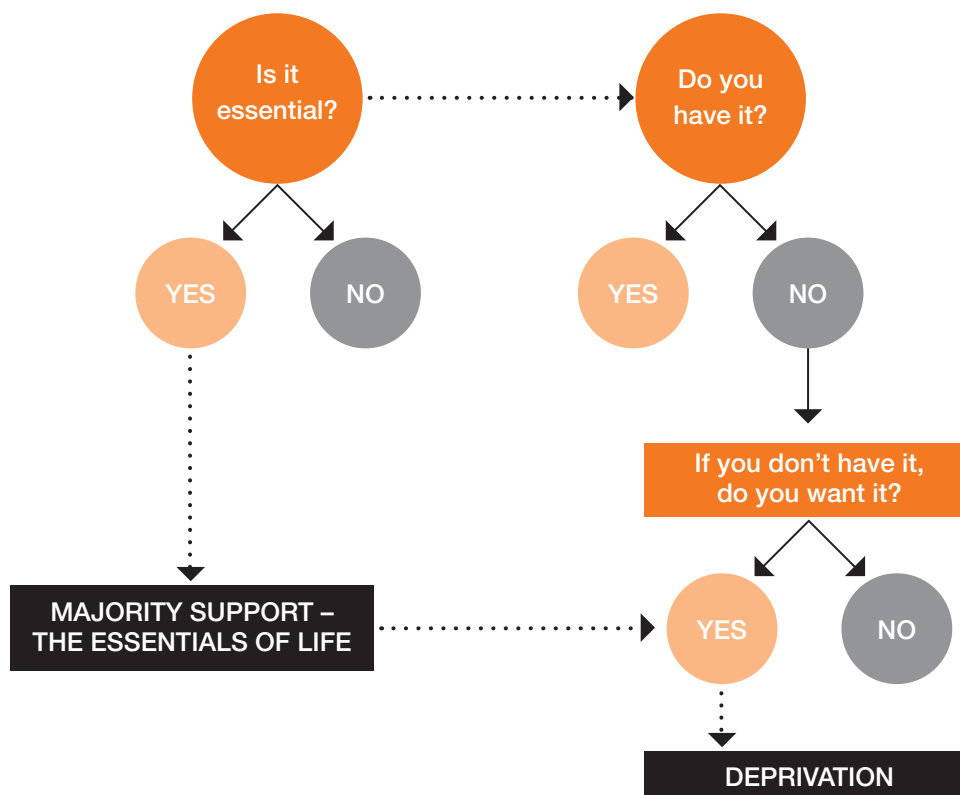
YES → DEPRIVATION

Table 7 shows that the responses from the government high schools and The Smith Family samples are very similar and the degree of consensus about which items are essential is high. Almost all young people in both groups for example, indicated that three meals a day, a good education and access to public transport in their local area, were essential for all young Australians. In contrast, much lower proportions of young people from both groups, saw items such as cable or satellite television at home or after school tutoring, as essential.

Table 7: Support for items being essential for all young Australians

Item	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
A mobile phone (a)	63.6	66.0
A computer or other mobile device	75.3	81.8
A pair of shoes that fit properly (a)	97.7	97.6
The right kind of clothes to fit in with other people your age	66.2	71.4
Some money (from paid work or from your parents/carers) to spend or save each week	76.0	78.5
Cable or satellite TV at home (a)	53.8	51.9
Internet at home	79.8	81.2
A family car (a)	91.8	87.2
Three meals a day	96.1	96.4
Fruit or vegetables at least once a day	96.0	94.6
Books at home suitable for your age	79.5	85.1
A separate bedroom for each child 10 years and older	71.1	76.1
A meal out with my family at least once a month	62.2	64.7
A holiday away with my family at least once a year	64.0	62.8
A good education (a)	97.8	97.3
Clothes you need for school (including sports gear)	94.7	96.7
Go on school trips or excursions at least once a term	68.5	77.3
Extra-curricular activities at your school (like sport or music)	82.1	86.4
After-school tutoring (a)	41.5	46.6
A place at home to study or do homework	89.6	90.2
Money to pay for classes or activities outside of school	83.5	84.9
Internet access in public spaces	79.7	76.4
A local park or green space	85.5	89.7
Access to public transport in my local area	92.1	93.4

Note: (a) The six items in italics were removed from the analysis following a range of statistical tests.

A range of statistical tests[7] were undertaken to establish that the items are robust and appropriate measures of poverty, and importantly, can be aggregated into an overall index of child deprivation. These tests resulted in the 24 items being reduced to 18 as indicated in Table 7. For example, while the focus groups had indicated that a mobile phone was 'essential' it was removed from the list because the statistical tests suggested it was not a robust poverty indicator. The list of 18, items highlights the diverse needs of young people and reflects the different dimensions of their lives – at home with family, with friends, at school and in their local community.[8]

Proportion of young people deprived of essential items

The 18 items that young Australians identified as essential for all young people fall into two broad groupings: one that captures material deprivation (a lack of 'things' that young people see as essential) and social exclusion (a lack of 'doing' activities that young people see as essential).[9] Table 8 uses these two groupings and shows the proportion of both samples who do not have each of the 18 items identified as essential, as well as the proportions who don't have but want that item. The latter indicates the proportion of young people who are deprived of each item, in line with the definition outlined in Figure 1.

Table 8: Deprivation rates for individual essential items

Item		Government high schools sample		The Smith Family sample	
		Does not have %	Does not have but wants (Deprived) %	Does not have %	Does not have but wants (Deprived) %
Material Deprivation	A computer or other mobile device	8.2	5.0	20.1	16.7
	A place at home to study or do homework	12.9	6.0	17.5	9.3
	A separate bedroom for each child 10 years and older	22.1	13.3	32.2	22.5
	Books at home suitable for your age	16.1	3.1	15.6	7.3
	Clothes you need for school (including sports gear)	2.6	1.1	4.4	3.4
	Fruit or vegetables at least once a day	5.4	2.3	9.0	5.1
	Money to pay for classes or activities outside of school	13.7	6.2	36.0	27.0
	Some money (from paid work or from your parents/carers) to spend or save each week	22.8	15.2	34.2	27.8
	Three meals a day	5.6	1.9	4.1	1.4
Social Exclusion	A holiday away with my family at least once a year	31.5	21.2	61.8	52.5
	A local park or green space	7.7	3.1	12.1	8.6
	A meal out with my family at least once a month	29.7	14.4	43.5	31.9
	Access to public transport in my local area	12.8	5.1	10.7	6.1
	Extra-curricular activities at your school (like sport or music)	13.6	4.6	18.9	10.3
	Go on school trips or excursions at least once a term	32.3	20.4	31.3	21.3
	Internet access in public spaces	21.9	14.1	33.6	22.0
	Internet at home	8.4	6.8	22.0	19.0
	The right kind of clothes to fit in with other people your age	10.2	2.1	19.3	11.0

Note: Not all respondents answered each survey question. The figures in the above table are conservative as those who didn't respond to a particular item were assumed to have the item and therefore not deprived of it.

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[7] Further information on this is available in the full report of this project.
[8] The deprivation items are signposts or indicators of poverty and should not be interpreted literally as measures. For this reason, it is often preferable to examine summary measures based on all items.
[9] This is a useful disaggregation because material deprivation and social exclusion have been a focus of research literature, however it does introduce some ambiguity into which items fit where. For example, does the absence of equipment and clothes needed to participate in school sports represent material deprivation (the item is missing) or social exclusion (since the absence of the item may prevent participation).

As Table 8 shows, the deprivation rates for several items for the government high schools sample is very small (around 3 percent or less). This includes for the following items: clothes needed for school; fruit or vegetables once a day; three meals a day; clothes to fit in; and a local park or green space. However, significant proportions of young people in this sample (over 20 percent), are deprived of a family holiday away each year or going on school trips or excursions. Both of these activities had also been identified as high priorities in the focus groups, including because they provide an opportunity to connect with family and friends.

Small proportions (around 3 percent or less) of The Smith Family sample were deprived of two of the essential items, namely clothes needed for school and three meals a day. However, relative to the government high schools sample, there were more items where 20 percent or more of The Smith Family sample were deprived, including: a separate bedroom; money to pay for classes or activities outside of school; some money to spend or save each week; a meal out with family once a month; going on school trips or excursions; and internet access in public spaces. While large proportions of both samples were deprived of an annual holiday away with family, this was particularly the case for those from The Smith Family, with over half of this group (52.5 percent) being deprived of this essential item, compared to 21.2 percent of the government high schools sample.

The focus groups identified the importance of a computer or other mobile device and internet access for young people's engagement in school and learning, yet 5.0 percent of the government high schools sample and 16.7 percent of The Smith Family sample were deprived of the former. In addition to having more limited access in public spaces to the internet, close to one in five (19.0 percent) of The Smith Family sample was deprived of access to the internet at home, much higher than the 6.8 percent for the government high schools sample.

Multiple and severe deprivation

While the extent to which young people are deprived of individual essential items is of interest, the extent of multiple deprivation is of particular importance given the likely compounding effect of wanting, but being without, more than one of the essential items. Table 9 shows the extent to which young people in both samples are deprived of items deemed to be essential. Young people who are deprived of three or more items are defined as experiencing severe deprivation.

Table 9: Incidence of multiple deprivation

Number of deprivations	Government high schools sample %	The Smith Family sample %
0	50.3	28.8
1 or 2	31.0	30.8
3	7.8	9.2
4 to 6	8.1	20.5
7 to 9	2.3	8.0
10 or more	0.5	2.7

Note: Not all respondents answered each survey question. The figures in the above table therefore may not total to 100%. They are also conservative as those who didn't respond to a particular item were assumed to have the item and therefore not deprived of it.

Table 9 shows around half (50.3 percent) of the government high schools sample are not deprived of any of the essential items, with the proportion being much lower for The Smith Family sample (28.8 percent). Significant proportions of both groups however, experience severe deprivation, that is, they are deprived of at least three essential items. Around one in five (18.7 percent) of the government high schools sample and two in five (40.4 percent) of The Smith Family sample experience severe deprivation. The latter includes close to one in three (31.2 percent) who are deprived of four or more essential items and one in 10 (10.7 percent) who are deprived of seven or more items.

Table 10 provides an indication of which items young people who are experiencing severe deprivation are likely to be missing out on. It shows for example, that of young people who are deprived of three or more essential items, 14.6 percent of those in the government high schools sample and 29.4 percent of those in The Smith Family sample are deprived of a computer or other mobile device.

Table 10: Incidence of severe deprivation by individual item

	Item	Government high schools sample	The Smith Family sample
		Severe deprivation %	Severe deprivation %
Material Deprivation	A computer or other mobile device	14.6	29.4
	A place at home to study or do homework	22.4	18.4
	A separate bedroom for each child 10 years and older	37.6	36.0
	Books at home suitable for your age	12.4	14.0
	Clothes you need for school (including sports gear)	4.8	7.4
	Fruit or vegetables at least once a day	10.4	10.3
	Money to pay for classes or activities outside of school	25.8	52.2
	Some money (from paid work or from your parents/carers) to spend or save each week	42.4	46.3
	Three meals a day	7.6	2.9
Social Exclusion	A holiday away with my family at least once a year	59.8	75.7
	A local park or green space	11.2	17.7
	A meal out with my family at least once a month	48.2	56.6
	Access to public transport in my local area	17.8	12.5
	Extra-curricular activities at your school (like sport or music)	16.2	21.3
	Go on school trips or excursions at least once a term	49.4	39.7
	Internet access in public spaces	46.2	40.4
	Internet at home	20.8	33.1
	The right kind of clothes to fit in with other people your age	7.4	21.3

Note: Not all respondents answered each survey question. The figures in the above table are conservative as those who didn't respond to a particular item were assumed to have the item and therefore not deprived of it.

High proportions of students in both groups who experience severe deprivation, do not have: a separate bedroom; money to pay for classes or activities outside of school; some money to spend or save each week; an annual family holiday away; a regular meal out with family; internet access in public spaces; or go on school trips or excursions once a term. For example, 59.8 percent of the government high schools sample and 75.7 percent of The Smith Family sample who experience multiple deprivation, don't have an annual holiday away with their family.

The items in this list shows that deprivation can undermine the ability of families to enjoy activities together that most young people in other Australian families take for granted. It can also weaken young people's participation in important school activities which have a range of learning, engagement, well-being and social benefits. Being deprived of having one's own money can also impact on young people's sense of autonomy and independence, which is particularly important as they move through adolescence.

A new Child Deprivation Index

Analysis of the data collected from the *What young people need* survey has enabled the development of a new Child Deprivation Index (or scale) that measures the severity or extent of overall deprivation at the individual child level. The Child Deprivation Index (CDI) is derived by adding up the number of items each individual in a sample is deprived of and dividing the total by the number of young people in the sample.[10] A higher score indicates that deprivation is deeper or more severe.

The CDI has been calculated for both the government high schools and The Smith Family samples as shown in Table 11. The Index can be broken down into the two forms of deprivation previously discussed – material deprivation and social exclusion – with the overall CDI score being the sum of the scores for the two component indexes.

Table 11: Material Deprivation, Social Exclusion and Child Deprivation Indexes

Index	Government high schools sample score	The Smith Family sample score
Material Deprivation Index	0.48	1.04
Social Exclusion Index	0.79	1.57
Overall Child Deprivation Index	1.27	2.61

As Table 11 shows, the scores for each of the three Indexes are higher for The Smith Family sample compared to the comparable scores for the government high schools sample. Across both samples, the incidence of social exclusion – that is being unable to 'do' activities young people see as essential – exceeds that of material deprivation – that is lacking 'things' young people see as essential.

Subgroups within each sample who had above average CDI values include: girls; young people from Indigenous background; those who report 'fair' or 'poor' health status; those with a disability or ongoing health condition; those living in a household where no adult has a job; and those who had moved house or school more than once in the last year.[11] The last characteristic highlights the role that volatility in life circumstances plays in exposing young people to deprivation.[12]

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[10] The Child Deprivation Index will be a conservative measure of deprivation as those young people who didn't respond to a particular item were assumed to have the item and therefore not deprived of it.
[11] Further information on this is available in the full report of this project.
[12] There is uncertainty over the direction of causation with regards to moving house or school. It is possible for example, that those with high levels of deprivation are forced to move house for affordability reasons and this results in young people also having to move school. If this is the case then housing or school volatility are consequences of deprivation rather than the causes.

Deprivation and well-being

The information collected through the *What young people need* survey means that the Child Deprivation Index can also be used to examine the associations between deprivation and different indicators of young people's well-being, such as their overall life satisfaction, positivity about the future, family functioning, connectedness, school enjoyment and safety.

Analysis shows[13] that across both the government high schools and The Smith Family samples, young people with higher CDI scores (that is, those experiencing deeper or more severe deprivation), report lower levels of life satisfaction and less control over their lives.

There is also a clear inverse relationship between the degree of deprivation young people experience and their positivity about the future, home comfort, family functioning, enjoyment of school and sense of safety. Young people who, for example, disagree with the statement 'I'm always positive about my future' have a higher CDI than young people who agree with this statement. This means there is a strong negative association between positivity about the future and the degree of deprivation young people experience. Similarly, young people who strongly agree that their 'school is a place that I enjoy being' have lower scores on the Child Deprivation Index.

Deprivation and the schooling experience

Young people who participated in both the focus groups and the survey were all attending government high schools in NSW. The former confirmed that school is an important part of young people's lives. The survey explored a number of aspects of young people's satisfaction with school, including whether they feel happy and safe there and part of the school community. Young people who expressed dissatisfaction about their schooling, generally scored higher on the CDI than young people who were satisfied with their schooling. This association is exemplified by responses to the survey question about being part of the school community as shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Child Deprivation Index by feeling part of the school community

	Government high schools sample CDI	The Smith Family sample CDI
My school is a place where I feel part of the community		
Strongly agree	0.85	1.60
Agree	1.14	2.55
Neither agree nor disagree	1.33	2.89
Disagree	1.64	3.48
Strongly disagree	2.00	3.94*

*Derived from a sample of less than 20 young people so should be treated with caution.

[13] Further information on this is available in the full report of this project.

There is also a clear negative relationship between how well students feel they are doing at school and the level of deprivation they are experiencing, as shown in Table 13. Students in both samples who feel they are not 'doing well' at school have a higher CDI score than students who feel they are 'doing well'.

Table 13: Child Deprivation Index by how students feel they are doing at school

	Government high schools sample CDI	The Smith Family sample CDI
Overall, how do you feel you are doing at school at the moment?		
Very well	0.95	1.02
Quite well	1.20	2.84
Not very well	1.51	2.80
Not at all well	2.42	4.46*
Not sure	1.42	2.48

*Derived from a sample of less than 20 young people so should be treated with caution.

Across all of the indicators and dimensions examined, young people who are deprived of at least three of the items regarded as essential by a majority of young people, have lower levels of well-being and more negative attitudes to schooling than those who are not experiencing severe deprivation.

It cannot be proven that severe deprivation *causes* poorer well-being or more negative attitudes to schooling. However the weight of evidence from analysis of data from the *What young people need* survey is consistent with the view that higher levels of deprivation among young people causes them to experience and report lower levels of life satisfaction and well-being and more negative attitudes to many aspects of schooling.[14] This view is supported by many other studies (see for example Redmond et al., 2016).

[14] It is intuitively far more plausible that causation runs *from* deprivation *to* well-being and *to* attitudinal and aspirational outcomes rather than in the reverse direction. The fact that similar patterns exist across multiple indicators examined in this research further supports this view.

Conclusion

This research is the first time that the consensual approach to understanding poverty and social disadvantage has been applied to young Australians.

Survey respondents in both the government high schools and The Smith Family samples had few difficulties understanding what was asked of them in the *What young people need* survey and were able to provide relevant information. This confirms that the approach can be used with young people to better understand their views on what constitutes deprivation, and in turn to estimate the proportions who are experiencing deprivation, including to a severe extent.

This approach is more credible than household poverty rates when discussing children's disadvantage, as it uses child-centred indicators, rather than treating children as passive and 'invisible'.

Analysis of the data collected from two groups of young people, shows the approach is able to provide nuanced insights and highlight the different experiences of diverse groups of young people. In this case, the particular level of disadvantage experienced by The Smith Family group, compared with the more representative government high schools sample, is apparent.

The clear conclusion from this research is that significant numbers of young people in NSW are experiencing deprivation. It highlights in a very concrete way, the nature and extent of social disadvantage being experienced by young Australians – including the types of essential material things and activities that many of them are missing out on.

The extent of child deprivation is of serious concern, in particular, because of its negative effects on their well-being now, and through the impacts on school motivation and performance, the likely detrimental long-term effects.

As such, there are important policy implications from this research. Addressing the deprivation facing young people who are most severely affected could potentially positively impact on a range of important life outcomes. For example, reducing young people's deprivation may improve negative attitudes to schooling and in turn improve their school performance.

The important insights and findings of this research, albeit at this stage from one Australian jurisdiction, provides an impetus to further refine the approach as a precursor to the regular collection of up-to-date deprivation data for children and young people. This can inform discussions about child poverty in Australia and more importantly provide an evidence base for policy development aimed at reducing the very large number of young Australians living in poverty.

Deprivation among children and young people is an obstacle that prevents many of them realising their full potential. There is an urgent need for Australia to be vigilant about tackling child disadvantage and to work to achieve its Sustainable Development Goal of reducing at least by half, the proportion of children living in poverty by 2030.

This requires us to be able to identify where such disadvantage exists, to measure and better understand it, and through that, to more effectively address it. The child-focused approach provides a credible framework for achieving this by building on the perceptions, attitudes, experiences and aspirations of young people themselves. It can contribute to helping shape a better Australia.

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