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Final Report

The stigmatisation of social housing: findings from a panel investigation

authored by

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for the

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Southern Research Centre

April 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from a panel investigation established to consider the impact of stigma for social housing residents and the policies that can be deployed to mitigate its effects. The panel team included experts in public policy, housing and the media. The team met on three occasions in the latter part of 2010. While the panel deliberated on issues that traversed theory and practice, a substantive amount of time was set aside to explore the role of the media as a contributor to reinforcing stigma, and the ways that social housing organisations can promote more positive media reporting. The findings of the panel are as follows:

The stigmatisation of social housing

There are complex reasons as to why social housing neighbourhoods are subject to popular vilification. These neighbourhoods are usually seen, not as a symptom of social inequity, but as a contributory factor that heightens social disadvantage, commonly viewed as havens for crime and sites for policy interventions that reinforce cultures of welfare dependency. From this perspective, the primary reason for why social housing has become so stigmatised can be traced to government policies that have limited access to those households with acute needs. As a consequence, the vast majority of tenants now residing in social housing are there because they have no other options. This 'reality' informs the wider public understandings of social housing and acts as a brake on attempts by state housing authorities, tenants' groups and welfare lobbyists to highlight the positive contribution made by social housing.

Conceptualising stigma in relation to poverty

The concept of stigma serves as a lens to interpret and make sense of the ways that inequality and discrimination impact on tenants, social housing organisations and the wider society. The concept is valuable in highlighting how existing inequalities and ideology structure social relations. For this reason, the stigmatisation of social housing needs to be viewed in a wider discursive setting that includes the way that policies are conducted and the role performed by the media.

Policies to address stigma and the role of the media

There are practical steps that social housing agencies can undertake to mitigate the effects of stigmatisation, particularly in relation to media reporting. For example, they might seek to establish professional contacts with senior journalists with a view to ensuring more positive accounts of social housing. Also, new virtual media provides an opportunity for tenants' organisations and lobbyists to counteract negative stories of social housing. Though the production of more positive accounts has no direct impact on the underlying material problems (lack of investment, residualisation etc.), it can affect how individuals interpret social policy interventions and thereby challenge simplistic caricatures that lead to prejudice.

Gaps in knowledge

There are gaps in knowledge relating to our understanding of social housing and its problematic reputation. There is a need for research that makes explicit the wider 'politics' of housing and how, in particular, the subsidy and taxation arrangements reinforce the divide between well-off home owners and rental investors on the one hand and low income social housing and private rental tenants on the other. The attempts by state housing authorities to address the problems that arise in

disadvantaged social housing neighbourhoods can only have a limited impact so long as this divide remains in place.

Policy conundrum

Finally, there is a conundrum that all welfare and social housing agencies face when taking steps to mitigate the effects of stigma. Campaigns that draw attention to the problems of social housing can inadvertently reinforce prejudice and stigma. On the other hand, positive stories are less likely to attract the attention of policy-makers and entice the release of new revenue streams. There is no simple way to address this quandary. Consequently, campaigners seeking to improve social housing need to remain vigilant to the way information is interpreted by policy-makers and the public at large.

1   INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a panel investigation that met to explore the problems of social housing stigmatisation and consider strategic innovations to address its effects. The panel focused on six questions.

1. What are the causal factors that accentuate the stigmatisation of social housing?

2. What are the implications of stigmatisation for housing organisations, tenants and neighbourhoods?

3. What practices are deployed by housing organisations to challenge the effects of stigmatisation and overcome opposition to new housing development?

4. What role can media advocacy and marketing techniques perform in tackling stigma?

5. How might media strategies complement other strategies (such as social mix policies and neighbourhood renewal)?

6. What are the most effective policies that can be used by housing organisations to address the effects of stigmatisation?

The investigative panel comprised experts from academia, the media, and the housing sector (see Appendix for full list). Three meetings were convened between June and October 2010 (twice in Hobart and once in Melbourne). The first meeting in Hobart focused on identifying the causal factors associated with stigma and a consideration of its effects. Our second meeting took place in Melbourne in late September. Among the participants were experts from the wider Melbourne metropolitan region, including social housing residents and community representatives, housing sector professionals, and senior media educators and practitioners, all of whom contributed their time on a *pro bono* basis. The perspective and enthusiasm of these participants added invaluable breadth and depth to the panel investigation. Discussion at this larger Melbourne meeting was characterised by constructive exchange (including expressions of differences of opinion) between differently-situated participants; establishment of meaningful connections between more abstract, theoretical approaches to housing stigma on the one hand, and more applied, practical strategies for addressing it on the other; and by a strongly expressed desire for ongoing dialogue between meeting participants. The methodology used by our facilitator was an original combination of the hosting and harvesting facilitation style deployed by consulting practices such as Art of Hosting (see <http://www.artofhosting.org>) and participatory methods (Whyte 1991; Winter 1989). Further details of our facilitation approach are set out in the Appendix. Our final panel meeting took place in late October in Hobart where we reviewed the evidence that we had collated, identified gaps in knowledge, and advanced some suggestions for future research avenues.

The issues we discussed from our panel investigation are set out below. The report begins with an exploration of the concept of stigma and its use as a lens to interpret contemporary inequalities and discrimination. Sections 2 to 5 set out some of the causal processes that constitute stigmatisation and how these impact on housing welfare organisations, tenants and neighbourhoods. Section 6 provides a summary of the panel's policy suggestions as well as the issues we identified as gaps in knowledge and the areas that merit further exploration.

1.1 Investigating stigma

Our initial task was to consider how we should investigate the stigmatisation of social housing neighbourhoods. There was agreement among the panel team that it would be helpful to situate stigmatisation within the context of the 'narrative frameworks'[1] underpinning housing policy intervention. At our first meeting, we identified that there are at least three significant narrative frameworks informing contemporary housing policy (for an extended discussion, see Atkinson & Jacobs 2010). The first frame can be termed 'pathological'. Within this frame, disadvantage experienced within social housing neighbourhoods is explained as a consequence of deteriorating social values, with individuals deemed culpable for their predicament. The second frame foregrounds the significance of 'structural inequality'. This frame has little support within policy communities because it has such significant resource implications. The third frame is what can be termed 'reconstitutive', in that it views social stigmatisation as amenable to bureaucratic endeavour. Within this frame, it is assumed that area-based initiatives and housing management practices are sufficient policy vehicles to ameliorate the poor standing of social housing locations and the tenants who live there. Contemporary housing policies in Australia are, to a considerable degree, underpinned by 'pathological' and 'reconstitutive' narratives. In practice, they serve to buttress explanations that lend support to interventions that are managerial in scope. While structural processes are recognised as a factor to explain contemporary inequality, redistributive policies are rarely countenanced.

1.1.1 Theory

Our approach for considering the impact of stigmatisation encompassed both theory and practice. The narrative frames we have set out above draw from two sources: firstly, by making use of research that has sought to make explicit the way that stereotypical representations influence public perceptions of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. For example, Stone (1989) and Mee (2004) argue that, within populist understandings of social issues, social problems are presented as common sense and self-evident. As Stone (1989, p.282) writes: 'problem definition is a process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame and responsibility'. It is evident that the dominant representation in relation to disadvantaged neighbourhoods establishes the cause, blame and responsibility for poverty as largely attributable to the individuals who live there. The imagery used to situate such neighbourhoods often features photographs and text that reinforce further this mode of understanding.

Secondly, our approach was informed by the social constructionist epistemologies used in earlier housing related research (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2003, 2004). One of the central claims of social constructionism is that agenda setting and lobbying are significant influences that shape the way in which social problems are understood. Of particular interest is the role played by powerful interest groups and the reasons as to why certain problems (such as social stigma) assume prominence at different periods of time and why only certain prescriptions are countenanced. In our view, an understanding of stigmatisation needs to recognise the contested aspects of the policy-making process and the role that powerful groupings have in agenda setting alongside significant material factors such as poverty.

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[1] We use this term to denote the key ideological assumptions that inform both contemporary housing policy debate and practice.

1.1.2 Practice

At the level of practice, we were interested in exploring innovative strategies that have been used by policy-makers. At our first meeting we noted the evidence from the UK set out by Dean and Hastings (2000). They suggest that some progress can be made to address the problem of stigmatisation through purposeful marketing and communication strategies. They claim that strategies that are specifically tailored to the perceptions of small groups of influential business representatives (real estate professionals, local businesses, property developers etc.), welfare professionals (teachers, medical staff) and local residents (prospective first time buyers, parents with school age children) can have a positive impact. These strategies aim to reward key stakeholders for developing their understanding of social housing and their awareness of its benefits and role in helping to address inequality (Atkinson & Jacobs 2008). As we discuss in Sections 4 and 5, research undertaken by Dean and Hastings (2000) and Hastings and Dean (2003) highlights the benefits that can flow from policies that seek to break the cycle between ignorance and stigma. They advance strategies based on the principle of exchange that can help address misconceptions about the role of social housing and the overall community-wide benefits that accrue from sustainable investment strategies. The methods promoted by Dean and Hastings (2000) centre on urban renewal programs, but their findings were relevant for our broader based investigation.

1.2 Context

At our first panel meeting we also discussed the context in which stigma took place. We noted that while all low income neighbourhoods are subject to stigmatisation in Australia, it is social housing neighbourhoods that are subject to most pernicious forms of vilification. Very often, these social housing neighbourhoods are seen, not as a symptom of social inequality, but as a causal factor that accentuates social disadvantage, a haven for crime and a setting for policy interventions that reinforce a culture of welfare dependency (Mee 2004). In the media, social housing neighbourhoods are associated with 'problem' families. TV current affairs programs such as *60 Minutes*, for example, interview despondent social housing tenants who have been in conflict with their neighbours or who have been subjected to crimes such as arson and assault. The message that viewers interpret from these programs is that social housing locations are ones that should be avoided. In the UK, while the 'problem' image of social housing estates predominates across media communication in news, popular fiction and television programming (Mooney 2009), there are examples where the ordinariness of life in such neighbourhoods is to the fore. The BBC Scotland comedy show, *Still Game*, for example, presents a series of colourful characters in a dignified light, despite setting the show in a high-rise social housing development. Research by Palmer et al. (2005) noted how crucial the role of the media is in framing narratives that link social housing with poverty and crime.

We discussed how the 'problematisation' of social housing neighbourhoods and its secondary effects have been noted in recent academic scholarship. For example, research by De Decker and Pannecoucke (2004) has highlighted the antipathy that many home owners have towards social housing tenants. This antipathy stems from an anxiety that social housing has a negative impact on property values and neighbourhood serenity. Cattell (2001) and Hastings (2004) both report how social housing neighbourhoods are eschewed by businesses as sites for new investment, while Warr (2006, p.2) has observed how poor neighbourhoods receive media attention during crisis points, when 'something goes terribly wrong'.

As we discuss further in Section 4, the negative stereotyping of social housing locations can serve to accentuate problems for already disadvantaged population groups in terms of employment opportunities, quality of local services, and educational and health outcomes of residents. Research has also shown that many tenants in these locations internalise the negative assumptions of others and incorporate a sense of dislocation about their status (Palmer et al. 2004, 2005; Permentier, van Ham & Bolt 2008). The stigmatisation of social housing is deeply embedded and may even operate as a brake on policy interventions that aim to improve the plight of tenants living in these locations (Arthurson 2004b; Warr 2005, 2006; Atkinson & Jacobs 2010).

1.3 Understanding contemporary policy-making

It was also at our first panel meeting that we explored how the low reputational status of social housing neighbourhoods therefore presents a significant challenge for policy-makers and practitioners. Perhaps it is the perceived intractability of these issues that explains why there has been relatively little research on this topic. As we explained earlier in the report, a feature of contemporary policy-making is the narrow frame in which initiatives to tackle social and economic inequality are constituted. However, it is worth noting that this has not always been true. In the 1950s and 1960s there was a greater propensity to view poverty as a symptom of the capitalist system and the way that it operates. Policy prescriptions took greater account of this reality and interventions were made in the area of progressive taxation to ensure that resources could flow into areas of disadvantage (Jacobs 2009; Judt 2010). Increasingly, governments have moved away from this form of societal intervention to those that are more individually focused (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde 2006). There is also a component of social policy (e.g. in New South Wales) that has sought to encourage social mobility by using fixed term tenancies to encourage public housing occupants to exit disadvantaged neighbourhoods. While this might be of benefit for some of the more 'advantaged' or resourceful public housing households, it effectively compounds the problems for those left behind and reinforces further stigmatisation. And 'therein lies the rub': the more that policies seek to encourage pathways out of poor neighbourhoods, the greater the stigma experienced by those who remain *in situ* (see Ellen & Turner 1997; Wassenberg 2004 for a discussion).

1.3.1 Prescriptions

The dominant 'reconstitutive' paradigm informing policy intervention in locations with high concentrations of social housing is to attempt, what Lupton and Tunstall (2008, p.110) have termed 'spatial disordering'; that is, to break up and deconcentrate social housing. The assumption informing spatial disordering is that a mix of tenures is necessary for establishing the conditions for enhanced neighbourhoods and better outcomes for individual tenants. Fiscal incentives have been put in place for social housing providers to diversify their stock and encourage other providers and owner-occupiers to invest in the stock. It is claimed by its proponents that encouraging owner-occupiers to move to social housing neighbourhoods can assuage the negative assumptions about specific localities and lead to better outcomes for individuals. However, the evidence as to whether this policy is successful is contested. For example, Randolph et al. (2004) have argued that large-scale renewal of social housing has only had mixed results in offsetting negative imagery. Arthurson (2004b, 2011) has claimed that the benefits of social mix are greatly exaggerated, and a more significant causal factor to explain social housing's problematic status is the lack of investment and targeted allocation policies. Other policies that have been implemented include public/private partnerships, community capacity-building projects and physical renewal of housing and neighbourhoods. While these policy initiatives

may have led to improvements in the services provided to tenants and the built environment, social housing neighbourhoods retain their stigmatised status in the eyes of the wider public, media outlets and local business communities (for an extended discussion, see Galster 2007).

Recently, Darcy (2009) has made the connection between mixed communities and the problematic status of public housing. He argues that the raison d'être informing a mixed community strategy is that the tenure of social housing generates pernicious social effects. As he writes, 'these are almost invariably portrayed as negative, despite contrary research showing the non-shelter benefits accruing to households as a result of income-related rents, and relative housing security' (Darcy 2009, p.10). Social housing neighbourhoods are discursively constructed in ways that lend support for policy interventions to reorder social composition.

Up to this point in the report, we have set out our approach and provided a brief commentary on the conduct of policy-making and the initiatives in place to encourage social mix as a way of tackling social disadvantage and stigma. In the next section we turn our attention to the concept of stigma in relation to poverty.

2 CONCEPTUALISING STIGMA IN RELATION TO POVERTY

2.1 The contribution of social science

The previous section outlined the context that informed our initial discussion; in this section, we explain the concept of stigma itself. We considered why stigma has become an important focus of research in disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, medical science and geography. Much of the interest can be traced back to Erving Goffman's (1963) classic text, *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Goffman argues that stigma is best understood as a social process in which both individuals and groups are judged to have negative characteristics that transgress social norms. For Goffman, stigma is experienced as negative labelling. The relationship between poverty and stigma is closely aligned insofar as both are viewed as being outside the mainstream (Warr 2005). Those who are poor are effectively stigmatised because an assumption is made that social housing tenants are a marker of poverty and welfare dependency. This view of poverty as a sign of failure is frequently internalised by those who are labelled, and in turn can generate further social disadvantage (Waxman 1983). Indeed, the idea that stigmatisation can intensify social disadvantage is important. It is an idea emphasised across the body of research on stigma and we return to it at various points in this report.

Reidpath et al. (2005, p.470), in a review of research that has been informed by Goffman's conceptualisation, argue that much of what we understand about stigma has been mostly descriptive and often lacks explanatory power. They suggest that by focusing on stigma as an interaction between individuals, we risk neglecting the 'macro-sociological' perspective. As a consequence, the forms of interventions that have been advanced assume that if more information and better communication can address negative problems associated with stigma, then 'knowledge is all that stands in the way of behaviour change' (Reidpath et al. 2005, p.471). They emphasise an alternative understanding of stigmatisation as:

> the application of unarticulated and deeply embedded rules that govern to whom membership should be accorded—marking and separating in crude terms, the 'in group' from the 'out-group'. Implicitly, it is about the assessment of social value, where in this context social value describes one's worthiness for membership in the community i.e. whether one merits social investment (Reidpath et al. 2005, p.471).

2.2 Social identities: the virtual and the actual

Reidpath et al.'s (2005) conceptualisation is valuable in that it acknowledges the way that the experience of stigma is accentuated by asymmetrical power relationships. However, there is certainly scope for exploring in more detail the different ways that perceptions of social housing neighbourhoods are internalised psychologically by those who live there. Research has shown the complex physiological and psychosocial consequences of stigma include risks to physical health and responses of stress and anxiety (Major & O'Brien 2005). Stigmatised groups can absorb negative images that contract the ambit of their ambitions and opportunities, and this may be reinforced through the prejudicial attitudes and behaviour among those interacting with them (Major & O'Brien 2005; Link & Phelan 2001; Ziersch & Arthurson 2005).

There are perhaps two key groups that social housing residents interact with where the issue of stigma is to the fore: employers and local service providers. Thus, as we discuss in Section 4, residents often experience discrimination in the job market from

prospective employers (Bradbury & Chalmers 2003; Palmer et al. 2005; Ziersch & Arthurson 2005). While this discrimination can be experienced as unjust, it can also be internalised to produce depressed aspirations and expectations of employment outcomes (Brattbakk & Hansen 2004). And there is evidence that local service providers, whether these be public services such as schools or police departments or private services such as retail or insurance, can provide their services in ways that residents perceive as misrecognising or devaluing their needs and expectations (Atkinson & Kintrea 2001; Wacquant 2008; Hastings 2009a).

Reutter et al. (2009, p.298) note how stigma is conceptualised as the disjuncture between the virtual (social) and actual (personal identity). They see stigmatisation as referring to:

> specified characteristics of social identities that are devalued in specific societal contexts by virtue of the nature of existing macro-level relations of power and discrepancies between social identities and actual identities that arise as a consequence.

Their research entailed 59 interviews in low income neighbourhoods in the Canadian cities of Toronto and Edmonton. They reported that their respondents had informed them of the extent to which they felt stigmatised by outsiders using phrases such as 'being labelled', 'being a stereotype' and 'looked at and treated differently' (Reutter et al. 2009, p.300). They found that participants living in poverty have a profound sense of stigma consciousness and a sense that in some ways they were responsible for their predicament. Among their coping strategies were concealing their discreditable status and managing the sense of dislocation between how they thought they were perceived (virtual) and how they feel (actual). In some instances, this amounted to disregarding negative views or pejorative comments or engaging in a form of cognitive dissonance, i.e. distancing themselves from other people in the same situation by making a distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. Some also reported taking on a political role by engaging in activism and campaigns, for instance, media interviews and lobbying.

Another finding from the research was that people living in disadvantaged places very often support pathological explanations in terms of their own situation, but endorse structural interventions in the field of policy: 'overwhelmingly negative social identities of people living in poverty is incongruent with our findings that people in these same communities generally favour structural, not individualistic, attributions of poverty' (Reutter et al. 2009, pp.307–8). That residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods understand their own plight in terms of the dominant pathological frame is perhaps not surprising. However, when the pathological assumptions about people in poverty are internalised, and then go on to shape how stigmatised individuals and communities cope with stigma, this can be particularly problematic. Thus, individuals engage in identity constructions that seek to shed their stigmatised identities and affirm their actual identities. In so doing, *others* are imbued with negative characteristics: a clear coping mechanism. However, this projection of stigmatising attributes on to others does nothing to alleviate stigma and, arguably, intensifies its effects. The stigma of disadvantaged neighbourhoods can be viewed as partly constituted as a defence mechanism to generate psychic distance from fearful feelings with regard to poverty and exclusion (Jacobs 2009; Klein 1986).

2.2.1 Stigma and power dynamics

The important point in relation to understanding the concept of stigma, as Link and Phelan (2001, p.367) make explicit, is that its effects are 'contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the

construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons and discrimination'. In short, the impact of stigmatisation is dependent on the balance of power within societal relationships. Of course, it is quite possible for people who are deemed powerless to stigmatise those who are powerful. Yet these judgements have less impact on wider social relations as they are incapable of disrupting the existing social order. What is really interesting is that the stigmatisation of vulnerable groups such as social housing tenants is seen in wider society as largely unproblematic. At the risk of generalisation here, we tend to make judgements or assumptions about the personal attributes that we think are characteristic of social housing tenants and not on the inequality of power relationships within society. When framing discussions of stigmatisation we need to pay close attention to the dynamics of power relations and the cultural narratives that inform our understanding.

2.3   Conceptual challenges

At this juncture, it is appropriate that we make some reference to the obstacles that may arise when using the concept of stigma. Link and Phelan (2001), in a wide-ranging article, highlight some of the other criticisms that have been made about the concept. First, much of the research is often uninformed by the lived experiences of people who are deemed stigmatised; often there are misunderstandings of how stigmatisation feels and assumptions are made that are not necessarily substantiated. The second challenge is that research on stigmatisation tends to privilege individual agency and neglect the wider social context. At times, social scientists appear to have been captured by the pathological frame, although there are of course exceptions. Stigma is often construed as a quality within the person rather than a designation that is ascribed by others. For these reasons, it is important in any research on stigma not to fall into the trap of pathologising disadvantaged communities. There is a risk that a focus on stigma inadvertently reinforces the negative assumptions that have been normalised and thereby render communities as somehow powerless. We also need to note that not everyone who is the object of stigmatisation experiences it negatively. While some will internalise this mode of labelling, it is possible for groups to confront it in positive ways (Palmer et al. 2004). In such cases, these groups have sought to subvert the stigmatisation directed towards them by directly challenging these negative assumptions. The most obvious example in relation to social housing is through creative action, that is, festivals, sport, political campaigns and public art exhibitions. We have explored the ways that stigma can be challenged through the meetings of the investigative panel and we report on the pertinent approaches in Section 6. Prior to this, we consider some of the causal factors that accentuate stigma and its implications.

3   CAUSES OF STIGMA

3.1   Political factors

Having introduced the concept of stigma, we now turn our attention to an exploration of the causal factors that can accentuate stigma. During the course of our investigation, we discussed how stigmatisation can be viewed as a symptom of underlying causal factors, all of which establish the conditions in which stigma becomes manifest. In the area of housing, perhaps the most significant factor has been the underinvestment in social housing and the deployment of an allocations policy that has prioritised vulnerable households with high social needs. There is a large body of literature in Australia and the UK (Productivity Commission 2005; Malpass 2005) that has highlighted the ways in which social housing has become marginalised from 'mainstream' society (a process known as 'residualisation'). In practice, this has meant that those with choice often exit the tenure, leaving neighbourhoods comprised of those with least resources and opportunities. In tandem with this process, social housing has developed a significant association with crime and criminality, disorder, anti-social behaviour, welfare dependency and impressions of a detached underclass unwilling or unable to engage with labour market opportunities or mainstream norms and values (De Souza Briggs 1998; Murray 1994; Wilson 1987, 1996; Popkin et al. 2004). Much of this debate has been contentious; not least with regard to whether these problems are confined to specific localities and the degree to which social renters are disengaged from 'mainstream' social networks (Jargowsky 1997; Lee & Murie 1997; Kleinman 1998, 1999; Lupton 2001).

While these concerns have led to a significant research agenda in the UK, USA and Western Europe, in Australia there has been less analysis of the way that stigmatisation can be linked to a diminution of social diversity within social housing. This has both negatively and cumulatively impacted on those with least choice remaining in social housing. In Chicago, the Gautreaux urban renewal program was predicated on the assumption that residents in areas of concentrated deprivation were likely to have problems in relation to life chances, such as education, employment and health (Rosenbaum 1995; Crump 2003). Gautreaux was based on a civil court challenge to the Chicago housing authority by a tenant who argued that, if life-chances were affected by location in a neighbourhood of ghettoised poverty, then continued tenancy allocations could be challenged as prejudicial to the health and economic life of households in the neighbourhood.

3.2   Socio-economic factors

We have already highlighted that stigma can be understood in terms of 'structural inequality'. While this frame is not to the fore in policy debates about housing policy generally or stigma specifically, it is worth recalling that stigmatisation requires and, arguably, flourishes in conditions of socio-economic inequality. We know, for instance, that neighbourhoods with a large concentration of social housing are not as likely to secure inward investment, the local benefits of quality private sector retail outlets or the ability to attract sufficient students to local schools (Speak & Graham 1999). For social housing organisations, the stigmatisation of social housing makes it difficult to acquire and develop new sites and can entrench already depressed property markets (Arthurson & Jacobs 2004).

The power asymmetries we noted earlier in the report that underpinned the salience of labelling and othering are, in large part at least, a symptom of larger social inequalities. Indeed, stigmatisation appears to be a particular problem in highly

unequal societies such as the UK and USA (Wacquant 2008). Further, it appears to be a growing problem in those societies where inequality itself is increasing, such as Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands (Brattbakk & Hansen 2004; Permentier 2009). Link and Phelan (2001, p.377) argue that 'the labeling of human differences can be more or less prominent'. There is some evidence to suggest that the degree of prominence is related to the degree of inequality. In the Australian case specifically, it may be that the stigmatisation of social housing is related not just to a wider societal inequality but also to the particularly iniquitous complexion of social housing relative to other tenures, in terms of its socio-economic composition. Our understanding of socio-economic disadvantage as a symptom of the wider political system and the capacity of powerful interest groupings to resist change encouraged us in the course of our discussions to turn our attention to policy related issues and the role of the media.

4 ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN REINFORCING STIGMA

There was agreement among the panel members that the media has a significant, indeed key influence on how social housing estates are viewed by the wider public and for this reason we were keen to probe its role in more detail. As we noted in our initial panel meeting, the negative associations of social housing tenants are no doubt fuelled by unsympathetic portrayals both on television and in the popular print media. It is not uncommon for social housing estates to be portrayed as sites of crime and disorder. As Palmer et al. (2004) have explained, the implicit assumption is that many residents have eschewed any responsibility for their neighbours and instead live an alienated and bleak existence.

Academic scholarship has made an important contribution to understanding the role played by the media in constructing particular narrative frames (Silverstone 1999; Croteau & Hoynes 2000). It is recognised that our understanding of what constitutes social reality is shaped by wider ideology and culture. In this respect, our knowledge is always mediated and to some extent a reaffirmation of our preconceptions. Hall (1982) has described our propensity to assume that social processes do not mediate what we learn from watching, reading, seeing and hearing. Hall uses the term 'naturalistic illusion' to convey the way representations are inculcated by power relationships and ideologies.

The media's role in reproducing negative narratives of social housing, in our view, needs to be understood in the context of the competitive environment in which the media operates. There is considerable commercial pressure for journalists to provide entertaining stories that will appeal to large audiences. It is an inescapable fact that negative stories of social housing are more likely to appeal than those that frame it in a positive light. Perhaps this is because negative depictions convey an alternative reality that elicits an emotional response. In the area of media research, writers such as Entman (1993) and Van Dijk (1997) make use of the term 'framing' to explain how media construes social reality. They point out that media is not just a conduit of information but actually provides a narrative from which to interpret this information. Media reporting in practice selects aspects of reality and then makes this reality salient to advance a particular interpretation (McCullagh 2002).

The media is not neutral, but embedded in the political/social nexus, and as such reflects the dominant power relationships that exist within society. This is why groups with limited access to resources are rarely able to challenge these hegemonic narratives. Cohen (1980) has used the term 'moral panics' and media 'amplification' to interpret the way that specific social groups are imbued with negative pathologies, noting how these panics often surface in periods of insecurity and social dislocation.

4.1 Social housing and the media

We considered in detail the implications of media reporting for social housing. We noted how reports focusing on social housing estates typically document disputes between neighbours and are continually highlighted through sensationalist reporting, with the phrase 'neighbours from hell' being common (Scott & Parkey 1998, p.325). Evidence from the UK suggests that residents of social housing estates consider media representations of their neighbourhoods as being at odds with their experience, as media outlets devote attention to the estate most frequently when negative events have occurred. Similarly, media accounts have tended to consist of photographs and excerpts of reports of negative events that have occurred in the past, in order to subversively construct current events in the light of more negative connotations than they would warrant (Dean & Hastings 2000, p.21). To confound this issue, most media

reports that present a pejorative narrative of social housing estates often do so unmediated and unchallenged (Hastings 2004). The implications as highlighted by one study are that even when positive news stories were written, reporters would contextualise the estate as being fraught with crime, poverty and disadvantage, in order to justify and explain the 'newsworthiness' of the story (Dean & Hastings 2000, p.22).

In our view, social problems, such as the stigmatisation of social housing, can be constructed in a number of ways. Both media reporting and political lobbying can act as influential catalysts for the problematising of certain social issues (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994, p.152; Papadakis & Grant 2001, p.293). In this regard, the way that social policy and social issues are reported can be particularly instrumental in setting political agendas to address social problems. At the same time, mainstream discourses in neoliberal societies tend to advance narratives that explain socially excluded groups as marginalised, with individuals carrying some responsibility for their disadvantage. Thus, the causes and effects of structural inequality are largely overlooked within mainstream media discourses. As a result, this lack of focus on structural explanations of disadvantage constitutes a mitigating effect of compounding the negative individual and structural effects of stigma (Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 2003, pp.430–40; Mee 2004, p.117; Card 2006, p.53).

4.1.1   Housing policy strategies to challenge current media practice

The most useful publication for the purposes of our investigation was the research co-authored by one of our panel members, Annette Hastings (Dean & Hastings 2000). Dean and Hastings argue that building both positive and negative reputations of social housing estates is a process within which there are three distinguishable factors which involve different actors: *responding to images, shaping images, and challenging images*. Within this framework, Dean and Hastings (2000, p.29) define the process of responding to images as the overt reactions to the image of a housing estate. This behaviour is represented in immediate reactions to the estate as a stimulus, or a gradual shift in behaviour as a result of the reputation itself. The process of shaping images involves actions and behaviour that consciously and unconsciously confound the reputation of the estate. This type of shaping is typically unconscious and thus the effect on the reputation of the estate is usually inadvertent. Challenging images involves behaviour that is purposely constructed in order to influence, manage or challenge perceptions of an estate. This method can be casual in nature, or one facet of a wider strategic plan or policy.

We have discussed previously the process of responding and shaping images of social housing estates, and the malign effects of negative representations on residents. In particular, we have argued that the media plays a significant role in shaping and responding to images. But what recent innovations have been implemented within housing policy to address the issue of stigma on social housing estates and how can the media be employed to meet this end? In the course of our discussions, we considered evidence from the UK that goes some way towards answering this question. In a study focusing on three poorly perceived estates, Hastings (2004) formulated a typology to illustrate the various private and public actors involved in the processes of responding to, shaping and challenging negative perceptions. Most actors were responsible to some degree for responding to and shaping existing imagery of the estate, however, the degree to which each category of actor influenced the three processes (responding to, shaping and challenging) was not equal. Commercial or populist media had as their core activity the shaping of perceptions, with responding to existing imagery as a secondary activity. To follow on from Dean and Hastings (2000), we can consider the processes of responding to and

shaping images of social housing estates as promoting both positive and negative narratives. Thus, taken on its own, it could be argued that to some extent the process of image shaping among commercial media actors may be positive in nature. However, Hastings (2004) argues that the commercial media has little to no impact in challenging existing stereotypes. In other words, commercial media actors were not involved in actions that sought to either purposefully or inadvertently overturn the existing negative perceptions of the social housing estates at the focus of the research.

Within the Australian context, the lack of media reporting aimed at challenging stereotypes of social housing paints a similar story. In our recent panel investigation workshop in Melbourne, involving social housing workers, residents and media personnel, there was a general consensus that 'good news is not news', in the sense that good news stories about social housing are not as interesting to the audience or as profitable to run as negative ones. However, those with first-hand knowledge of social housing neighbourhoods agreed that there was not a lack of good news stories, but a lack of interest from commercial media in printing these stories. Good news stories were often shared with commercial media, but rarely acted upon. It was suggested by one of the panel members that no news is good news, i.e. that 'normal' neighbourhoods don't appear in the news for either good or bad reasons.

On the other hand, the role of community media tells a different story in regard to challenging stereotypes. From examining the evidence presented by Dean and Hastings (2000) and Hastings (2004), community media outlets were among a group that were explicitly involved in challenging the images of the social housing estates. Other actors in this group were community activists and alliances, local residents, housing organisations and stakeholders involved in urban renewal strategies. In particular, community media actors were explicitly involved in challenging stereotypes to the extent that it was found to be their main activity—additionally, community groups, for whom challenging conventional imagery was also their core activity, used community media to promote positive stories about the estate. They accomplished this without needing to contextualise the estate as an undesirable area in order to justify the promotion of positive narratives. Community groups were also active in challenging stereotypes in earnest, by using community media to follow up alternative viewpoints or counter-arguments in regard to negative stories having been run in the mainstream media (Hastings 2004). These views were echoed by participants at our Melbourne workshop who felt the most accessible route to using the media to challenge negative stereotypes was to harness community media in the form of local newspapers. The appeal of this was twofold: stories that presented communities in a positive light were of particular interest to community news outlets, while community media contacts were more accessible to the residents of social housing than reporters working in larger, mainstream and often distant media outlets.

While the relationship between community groups and community media in regard to challenging negative imagery can certainly be considered beneficial, the process of harnessing community media in order to challenge negative representations is not without limitations in its own right. While participants at the Melbourne workshop were supportive of using community media to challenge stereotypes, some concerns were raised among community workers regarding the limitations of relying on community media to overturn stereotypes. The most salient of such limitations is the restricted audience. Firstly, community media generally has a significantly narrower readership than mainstream media publications, however, it is widely regarded that it is from within these populist media sources that many of the negative stories about social housing estates originate. Secondly, due to community media's narrow readership, concerns were raised that positive stories regarding social housing estates were

predominantly consumed by individuals familiar with the estate, or indeed living in the estate, who are likely to already be aware of the counter-arguments and alternative viewpoints expressed by community media outlets. Workshop participants referred to this as a potential problem of 'preaching to the converted': mainstream media outlets continued to report negatively about social housing neighbourhoods, and the wider community remained largely uninformed about 'good news' that was occurring in the poorly perceived suburbs.

For media strategies that may address the limitations associated with harnessing community media to overturn stereotypes, we can revisit the evidence from the UK literature. Dean and Hastings (2000) stress the importance of communicating with mainstream media outlets in regard to challenging negative imagery and delineated such strategies into two processes: nurturing and communicating. Nurturing can be considered as the proactive management of relationships between estate image managers and media personnel. Communicating can be defined as the process of 'getting the message out there' in regard to the proliferation of facts and positive stories about the estate.

Evidence presented by Dean and Hastings (2000) involving regeneration programs in social housing estates suggests that the more successful attempts at reframing of negative imagery occurs when nurturing strategies are employed in regard to forming effective relationships between both regeneration and community stakeholders and mainstream media outlets. Such relationships may consist of stakeholders communicating positive stories about estate regeneration projects to such outlets which, in turn, may form a catalyst for changing perspectives within the wider community. Dean and Hastings (2000) emphasise the importance of enhancing these relationships by providing journalists with a 'scoop' that will not be published by other outlets. This sentiment was echoed among participants in the Melbourne workshop who stressed the importance of building relationships with both community media contacts and, where possible, with mainstream and commercial media. It was noted, however, that many of the residents and groups who would be the focus of potential good news stories lacked the relevant commercial media contacts needed to engage the mainstream media. The concept of a 'barrier' between social housing communities and the media was a common theme. The idea of providing news outlets with exclusive 'scoops' may also be problematic, as most community stakeholders felt it was generally unlikely that commercial media outlets would pick up on positive news stories originating from disadvantaged communities, thus creating a need to shop stories around to multiple newspapers, both community and mainstream, in order to maximise the chances of a story being followed up. Of those who worked within disadvantaged communities, many stressed the importance of attaching a personal face to positive news stories. This helped to engender a personal narrative focused on the individuals who are making positive stories within the community, as opposed to framing communities and the individuals within them as homogenous.

Dean and Hastings (2000) stress the importance of monitoring media coverage in order to assess the extent of balanced reporting in regard to both positive and negative stories about social housing estates. The successful reframing of the reputation of two disadvantaged estates at the centre of their research was measured by the extent to which media reports about the area were considered to be more balanced. It was apparent from the discussion at our panel meeting held in Melbourne that there were a divergence of views on who should be responsible for advocating on behalf of disadvantaged communities. Should the onus be on social housing providers, community groups, tenants' groups or residents? The research context set out by Dean and Hastings (2000) involving the reframing initiatives employed within three social housing estates highlighted the use of professional public relations officers who

were tasked with writing 'good news' press releases concerning the estate and, effectively, 'helping journalists do their job' by liaising with mainstream journalists in order to establish effective working relationships. Within this UK context, the public relation officers were employed by stakeholders such as urban renewal strategists and developers, that is, those with a clear financial imperative to overturn negative stereotypes. Dean and Hastings (2000) also suggest that media training should be undertaken by community workers and lobby groups, allowing community groups and stakeholders to better advocate with journalists on behalf of the community.

The strategy of forming effective relationships between stakeholders and journalists can also promote the position of journalists as stakeholders within the community. This has the added benefit in regard to the possibility of quashing negative stories before they are printed, due to the increased likelihood that the relationship between journalists and the community will facilitate a discussion of the facts of the story before going to print (Dean & Hastings 2000). When negative stories about estates are to go to print, community stakeholders representing the estates at the focus of Dean and Hastings' research stressed that the relationship with the media meant that positive narratives were increasingly woven into what would have previously been a wholly negative news item.

Furthermore, Dean and Hastings argue that a useful communication strategy for challenging negative imagery originating from media sources involves community stakeholders launching a counter-argument against pejorative reporting. This can be implemented by presenting facts which, where possible, serve to 'debunk' the original negative news item. Real-world accounts from the Melbourne workshop revealed that some community groups and tenant representative groups from social housing estates within Victoria were actively engaged in such debunking by using community media to publish counter-stories in response to negatively framed stories appearing in the mainstream media. In some instances, this strategy resulted in mainstream media outlets picking up the stories.

These techniques for managing the media should not be considered as a panacea. As already discussed, positive media strategies to address stigma will always to a large extent be undermined by the effects of social inequality and place-based disadvantage. In the UK, the evidence suggests that, despite the good work of community-focused journalists and the establishment of strong relationships between individual journalists and the housing estates, many positive news stories are infused with an overriding negative narrative when they are edited before publication (Dean & Hastings 2000). However, the numbers of positive stories about the housing estates have increased as a result of a combined effort between media management, community advocates and estate regeneration stakeholders.

This section of the report has explored the causes of stigma and the role of the media in perpetuating stigma. It was the view of the panel that the residualisation of social housing and its portrayal in the media combine to accentuate negative perceptions. In the next section we summarise the effects of stigma for organisations, tenants, neighbourhoods and the wider society.

5   IMPLICATIONS OF STIGMA

In the preceding sections we have discussed the ways in which social housing locations have developed a significant association with stigma. In this section we summarise our discussions as to how these negative perceptions have important repercussions at a range of levels impacting on individual tenants, neighbourhoods, housing agencies and other organisations providing services to low income households, and the public at large.

5.1   Housing and welfare agencies

For housing and welfare agencies representing low income clients, stigmatisation has numerous implications. These include low demand and devaluing of housing assets located in certain neighbourhoods and opposition to social mix policies.

5.1.1 Low demand and devaluing of assets

The general impression that social renting is stigmatised has itself led to low demand for housing in particular neighbourhoods (Jacobs & Arthurson 2003). This means that housing located in less than favourable neighbourhoods is harder to let and in some instances unlettable. The UK government's Social Exclusion Unit raised awareness of the link between some disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the low demand for housing, whereby particular social housing estates or blocks were defined as 'difficult to let' (Power 1987). The implications of this raise questions about how high demand for social housing and rationalisation by governments is reconciled with low demand or unlettable housing located in particular neighbourhoods (Bramley & Pawson 2002). In the long term, stigmatisation can also entrench already depressed property values for social housing (Galster & Zobel 1998).

5.1.2 Opposition to social mix

We have already made some reference to social mix in respect of existing communities living in social housing locations but, for state housing authorities and community housing organisations, negative perceptions of social housing not only undermine initiatives to improve the quality of life for tenants they also make it more difficult to overcome opposition to new development. Current debates about social diversity in urban regeneration projects, new-build housing, affordable housing, planning sustainable neighbourhood units and the integration of social, transport and health services at appropriate spatial scales all feed into debates about the constitution and future role of social renting and other social services. In the UK, reintroducing social diversity into poorer areas was identified by the former Labour Government's Prime Minister's Strategy Unit as an important target, while regional housing strategies now reflect a deeper tendency to promote mixed tenure development as a response to the social stigmatisation that resulted from mono-tenure estates of social housing. In Australia, interest in the implications of a social mix within neighbourhoods for lowering stigma has begun to gain momentum through local regeneration projects in many of the states and territories, but these debates have not been as advanced or as sympathetically received as in other countries (Arthurson 2004a). Contemporary Australian policy directions also support finding sites for locating new social housing in areas with high concentrations of private home-ownership, and 'spot purchasing' rather than concentrating social housing in particular neighbourhoods as in the past. The stigma and association of depressed property values with social housing is a deterrent to acceptance by private home owners of 'pepper potting' of social housing within neighbourhoods constituted predominately of private housing.

In our view, it is important for social housing organisations to adopt a proactive role in seeking to challenge the stigma surrounding social housing and engender a more positive understanding of the contribution it makes to community wellbeing, otherwise efforts to improve 'social mix' will continue to be hindered by disagreements with private home owners. This sort of community resistance has been commonplace in the past and is likely to increase if the stigma remains unaddressed or becomes worse as the impacts of residualisation intensify (Marsden 1986; Trioli 2010).

Overall, for welfare agencies representing low income clients, stigmatisation has several implications. Firstly, it makes it difficult to present their services as efforts that comprise mainstream or 'normal' responses triggered by life-course situations that we are all at risk of entering (such as unemployment, homelessness and physical or mental illness). Secondly, it reinforces a sense of social homogeneity focused around deprivation and social problems among the clients of welfare services which, research suggests, may have further and negative feedback effects on these groups. Finally, as we discuss below, stigmatisation can affect the quality of services that social housing locations receive beyond housing. There is strong evidence from the UK, for example, of sub-standard environmental services being provided to neighbourhoods perceived as 'undeserving' (Hastings 2009b.) The inadequacy of schools in relation to the needs of very disadvantaged areas has also received much attention (Lupton 2001). The feedback effects resulting from other service agencies' failure to meet the needs of social housing areas will undoubtedly undermine the capacity of social housing agencies to provide their own services to an appropriate standard.

5.2   Tenants

As stated at the start of the report, stigma also has important consequences for social housing tenants, affecting access to employment and educational opportunities and having impacts on their social networks and health and wellbeing.

5.2.1   Employment and educational opportunities

For the residents of stigmatised neighbourhoods, employment searches may be restricted as employers see tenants as untrustworthy or of a poor social character by virtue of their place and tenure of residence. There is some evidence that tenants who live in areas of concentrated social housing often experience 'postcode' discrimination in the job market (Bradbury & Chalmers 2003; Palmer et al. 2005). It has also been suggested that the experience of living in an ill-reputed neighbourhood may cause residents to adopt self-defeating behaviours. For instance, educational horizons and personal ambitions may be curtailed by fatalistic values linked to place of residence and the effects of experiencing spatially concentrated disadvantage.

5.2.2   Social networks

Stigma and a poor reputation also impacts on the quality of residents' social networks and social capital. There is evidence that living in a neighbourhood with a poor reputation can affect trust between neighbours, contribute to social isolation and reduce the breadth of social ties. Residents tend to develop strong bonding social ties with other locals that provide important mutual support and help them to get by in day-to-day life. However, they have fewer ties with people living outside the area—*bridging ties*—that are equally if not more important as they provide access to role models and essential resources necessary to get ahead in life, such as employment and educational opportunities (De Souza Briggs 1998; Ziersch & Arthurson 2005).

The other part of the problem is that experiencing social stigma sets up a double barrier. Firstly, those living in the neighbourhood and needing to deal with the disparaging assumptions made about them may respond by confining themselves to

their local and familiar settings. Secondly, the stigma deters outsiders from visiting the neighbourhood or wanting to know the people who live there. This increases the social homogeneity within the neighbourhood and undermines the capacity to develop more heterogeneous outside networks (Warr 2005).

5.2.3 Health and wellbeing

The literature is also beginning to explore the health implications of living in stigmatised neighbourhoods, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged residents. Macintyre and Ellaway (2000, p.343) identify the image or reputation of an area as an 'opportunity structure'. By this they mean that the 'socially constructed and socially patterned features of the physical and social environment may be health enhancing or health damaging'. From this viewpoint, the way that residents, policy-makers and the business sector perceive the neighbourhood has potential impacts on residents, available infrastructure, and who is likely to move into or out of the neighbourhood.

A growing body of evidence indicates that the perception of control that tenants have over the processes of stigmatisation is an important factor, as the effects of lack of control include decreased morale and self-esteem and increased anxiety levels (Marmot & Wilkinson 2001). Feelings of shame, blame, devaluation and deviation from the 'normal' are associated with the health related effects of stigma (Scrambler 2009). Moving to lower status neighbourhoods likewise appears linked to lowered health and wellbeing (Ziersch & Arthurson 2005). Some researchers have identified that the feelings associated with social stigma are similar to racial prejudice and may have analogous detrimental effects on health (Krieger et al. 2005; Kelaher et al. 2008). The fear of crime and negative perceptions of safety that are often associated with stigmatised neighbourhoods have also been linked to lowered health and wellbeing outcomes (Ziersch & Baum 2004; Warr 2005).

Stigma has important ramifications, not only for those already located in social housing, but also for other eligible individuals and families. Social surveys undertaken by Burke, Neske and Ralston (2005) report that as many as 46 per cent of Australian households living in private rental accommodation and in receipt of Commonwealth Rental Assistance claim that they would never consider applying for public housing because of its poor reputation.

5.3 Neighbourhoods

We also considered evidence that the stigmatisation of whole neighbourhoods has compounding effects that can intensify disadvantage (Galster 2007). These effects result from processes internal and external to the neighbourhood. Thus, the earlier discussion on how stigmatisation is internalised and how this, in turn, manifests in depressed aspirations and so on, is relevant here. However, we have also identified that there are external drivers of stigma that can intensify local problems, levels of disadvantage and social mobility, most notably, the quality of neighbourhood services.

There is evidence that stigmatised neighbourhoods attract poorer quality substandard services and lowered local amenity. Galster (2007) argues in fact that stigma produces misrecognition of the needs of very disadvantaged areas to the extent that they do not get an appropriate share of resources for local services (see also Wacquant 2008). Such stigmatisation has repercussions for schools near to social housing localities that are unable to attract pupils, with home owners often sending their children to schools outside of the neighbourhood (Stenson & Watt 1999). Research on municipal environmental services shows how staff vary the quality of their service provision according to their perception of the neighbourhood (Hastings

2009a). A key argument is that poor quality services are not only an effect of stigma, but a cause of further disadvantage and stigmatisation.

The poor reputation of an area can affect the confidence of others who are important in neighbourhood outcomes. Businesses can become reluctant to locate in or near areas with a poor reputation, reducing local employment opportunities. There is also evidence that employers discriminate against local residents and that private sector services such as quality retail outlets may withdraw. The general public and business may see these neighbourhoods as 'no go' areas. As noted earlier, government funding criteria may also affect neighbourhood reputation in that poor areas are often problematised in order to secure funding for regeneration and local services, with the potential to contribute to further stigmatisation (Hastings & Dean 2003).

5.4   Wider society

During the course of our deliberations we noted that, for the public as a whole, the stigmatisation of particular neighbourhoods accentuates the gulf between an apparently poor and spatially contained minority and a well-off majority. Taken as a whole, these issues undermine policies to establish a cohesive and pluralist society as well as diminishing contemporary political imperatives associated with social inclusion.

There are indications that the problems will get worse due to the targeting of social housing to the highest need and complex clients. The longer that the stigmatisation of an area is left unaddressed, then the harder it is to remedy. We mentioned earlier the research by Hastings and Dean (2003) that involved showing positive news stories to people about a stigmatised area that had undergone regeneration. They found that in a number of cases these stories were interpreted negatively, either through respondents rejecting the stories as an accurate reflection of the areas or choosing to highlight the problematic nature of the neighbourhood, for instance, through emphasising that an employer was undertaking a special work program with residents to deal with high unemployment, rather than focusing on the more positive aspects of the neighbourhood.

Taken together, these types of experiences related to stigma have both negatively and cumulatively impacted on those with the least choice remaining in social housing. The social costs of these stigmatising perceptions are therefore important and tangible. In a society that promotes home ownership as a 'natural' and 'aspirational' tenure, the need for social housing as a pathway to such ownership, as a temporary stop-gap and essential mechanism for dealing with a lack of affordable housing, as well as changes in household circumstances and labour market insecurity, remain essential roles. However, political willingness to value these roles has often been undermined by the view that social housing tenants form an 'undeserving poor'. It is also possible that the ways in which home ownership has been marketed and understood in Australia as a favoured tenure itself reflects changes in the relative desirability of social renting (Atkinson & Jacobs 2008).

6 POLICIES TO ADDRESS STIGMA

In terms of policy interventions, the panel recognised that the stigma associated with social housing is difficult to address. The perception of it as a tenure of last resort has been reinforced by allocation policies that restrict entitlement to households with acute needs. We therefore have to be cautious and avoid making any grandiose claim about the efficacy of any intervention in this current political context. As we have noted earlier, research by Hastings and Dean (2003) and our own panel discussions provide examples of some of the measures that can be adopted. However, there is only limited knowledge of their effectiveness and impact. In respect of theory, the stigmatisation of social housing has been conceptualised in a wider discursive setting that includes the way that policies are conducted and the role of the media. We have made explicit the impact of stigma, noting its societal effects and its ramifications for the conduct of government.

6.1 Issues relating to practice

The panel agreed that, in practice, it was important that organisations seek to challenge negative stereotypes of social housing by developing a media strategy. There is considerable scope to use the new media as a vehicle to subvert existing stereotypes in informal yet provocative ways. This was a consistent theme that recurred at each panel meeting. We recognised its potential as a technology to subvert dominant stereotypes; for example, through blogs and social networking websites. Participants who attended the panel meeting in Melbourne spoke of how the new social media is often used to proliferate 'jokes' about common stereotypes associated with public housing. These jokes served to further deride certain communities and the residents who live there, with the information travelling quickly and to a large audience. There was a strong desire among workshop participants who worked within social housing communities to use social media to spread a positive message. Our panel and invited experts also felt it was important to create coherent and finite guidelines in regard to media strategies, for example, how will strategies be implemented, and how will their success and outcomes be measured? At our final panel meeting, we advanced some suggestions in relation to housing organisations and agencies, media practitioners, lobbyists, tenants' organisations and non-government organisations.

6.1.1 Housing agencies and organisations

We agreed that there is a need for social housing agencies to create the space in their work program for regular dialogue with a wide range of external stakeholders, residents, community representatives and personnel from agencies across government. In respect of challenging stigma, it is important to engage with key informants such as real estate agents, property developers, police (including frontline officers), political advisers and policy analysts across relevant portfolio silos, and cultural/urban design practitioners (including architects and artists). Social housing agencies also need to focus their attention and resources on building relationships with key media players.

We recognised that one of the difficulties for social housing agencies is that they are required to present mixed messages. On the one hand, there is a need to reinforce depictions of a financially and socially desperate sector in order to attract more funds. On the other hand, there is a need to highlight more positive stories that emphasise resilience within social housing communities to counter popular prejudice. Social housing agencies when campaigning for more resources have to be careful not to reinforce an understanding of tenants as passive victims of government policy. They

also need to encourage residents to participate in consultations and other events relating to policy and practice in this field. In our view, it is essential that social housing agencies remove barriers that might act as a deterrent, for example, by providing fair recompense or incentives for residents (remuneration for time, transport, childcare costs etc.).

6.1.2 Media practitioners

As part of ensuring better professional development and support for media practitioners working on social housing issues, we wish to draw attention to the discussion at the Melbourne workshop on the Mindframe initiative (a resource that provides training and advice on the portrayal of suicide and mental illness, <http://www.mindframe-media.info>). We heard how this initiative can be used as a template or partnership model for establishing a similar resource related to stigma and social housing. Our hope is for a more balanced portrayal of social housing that eschews sensationalism and instead seeks to locate individual stories in a wider social and policy context. There are examples that can be drawn on to show that this is possible (e.g. BBC Scotland's *Still Game* program mentioned earlier). Participants in the panel meeting also felt that senior housing managers should take steps to establish closer working relationships with social policy journalists and editors as a way to engender a better understanding of the positive contribution made by social housing.

There was general support for making use of online social media (Facebook, Twitter and other tools) as a medium to respond to positive and negative media reporting, policy developments and other initiatives. These have the potential to facilitate freer flows of information and 'smaller voice' agencies, without gatekeeper obstructions. There is scope too for tenants' organisations in particular to work alongside arts and cultural groups to advance social justice outcomes. In a Tasmanian context, Kickstart Arts Inc is a best practice exemplar, <http://kickstart.org.au>. Another innovation worthy of consideration would be to establish a 'community connection' award for best practice initiatives that counter housing stigma by media practitioners (including reporters, editors and program makers), parliamentarians, property developers, business personalities, sector bureaucrats and beyond. Sponsorship of this award by a higher-profile, well-respected tenants' organisation or non-government organisations would be most desirable.

6.1.3 Lobbyists: tenants' organisations, non-government organisations and Federal Parliament

We noted in our discussions that in Australia, there is no national lobby or tenants' organisation with sufficient financial resources to effectively campaign for social housing, so much of the work in this area is undertaken by welfare agencies such as St Vincent de Paul, Shelter and Anglicare. In our view, social housing would benefit from an enhanced lobbying agency or national campaign that is able to provide key policy-makers and politicians with more literature to address stigma. Some of the most interesting websites that have been established internationally by tenant activists are titled YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard), for example, <http://www.livableplaces.org/news/yimby.html> and <http://www.yimbyli.com/>. We are not aware of any similar campaigns being undertaken in Australia.

We recognised too, that the Federal Parliament is a vital forum for national debate, and in our view there is scope for developing a Mindframe style resource specifically styled for politicians and their advisers, across party-political divides. There is also scope to support individual parliamentarians with a known interest in and/or dedication

to better outcomes in this area and to provide information sheets and briefing notes in response to relevant issues and developments.

6.2 Conclusion: gaps in knowledge and issues for future research

All participants viewed the facilitated panel format as a success in that it provided us with space to engage in critical debate and analysis. Our discussions enabled us to consider the utility of the concept of stigma in order to understand the problematic status of social housing. At each meeting we spent considerable time unpacking the role of the media and noted its significant contribution in shaping popular understandings of social housing and neighbourhood disadvantage. We also sought to fathom the cumulative effect of negative media constructions, the way that it serves to reinforce a sense of marginality and exclusion and where opportunities exist to tackle stigma.

It was apparent from our discussions that many of the problems within the social housing sector can be traced to the shortage of funds, allocation policies that restrict access to households with high social needs, and a negative portrayal in the popular media. Yet we also heard that there is scope for policy professionals and tenants' organisations to address this problematic status by engaging in a dialogue with influential actors within the media, business and government.

The panel participants were unanimous that more positive reporting of social housing, both on television and in newspapers, would have beneficial effects. Yet, in making this point, they were also aware that this alone is not sufficient to challenge stigma. The key finding from our panel investigation is a relatively simple one: the negative stigma associated with social housing is symptomatic of the policies enacted by successive governments. It will remain entrenched unless adequate funding is made available and social housing can be accessed by a broad range of socio-economic groups, not just those with high levels of need. For this reason, strategies to tackle stigma have to engage with the structural and political issues that have effectively undermined the case for social housing investment. There is clearly a role for campaigns that highlight the inequities surrounding the funding of housing in Australia.

In terms of expenditure, the broad thrust of Australian housing policy remains primarily focused on support for home ownership through tax breaks and other subsidy schemes and on the private rental market through funds provided to low income tenants that are passed on to landlords in the form of rent in order to maintain the value of owner occupied homes and protect the assets of housing investors. A recent study by Yates (2010, p.87) notes that the overall tax expenditure on housing (inclusive of imputed tax) is currently around $53 billion per annum, but as much as $45 billion of this is in the form of subsidies to owner occupiers and a further $5 billion is provided to rental investors. For home owners, this amounts to a subsidy of $8000 each year, while private renters receive on average $13 000 per household and public housing tenants just $1000. The main beneficiaries of housing tax subsidies are those on high incomes, investors and older households. The current arrangements not only accentuate existing social inequalities but also undermine the efficacy of area-based management interventions to tackle disadvantage in deprived neighbourhoods.

Therefore, from our perspective, one of the most pressing tasks is to consider the 'politics' of housing, in particular, the role of powerful interest groups and industry lobbyists in persuading government to maintain significant subsidies to well-off owner occupiers in the form of tax exemptions and first home owner grants. As we noted at the start of the report, social housing, rather than being viewed as a worthwhile investment to promote cohesion, is seen instead as a drain on resources that

reinforces poverty. There is nothing inevitable about this negative portrayal, but it would require a significant reconfiguration of existing subsidy arrangements and a more neutral policy in relation to home ownership and rental investment.

This noted, there are gaps in knowledge in relation to stigma that require further investigation. In any future research, we took the view that it will be helpful to probe further the portrayal of social housing as 'a problem', and the degree to which this problematisation can be attributed to a feedback loop and a conflation of cause with effect. Other questions for future research that we identified at our final meeting include:

→ Is there anything intrinsic or inevitable about social housing's stigmatised status?

→ Are the problems that feature within social housing locations symptomatic of the effects of policies, including under-investment and targeted allocation rules, which have coalesced together households with a high level of need?

→ What strategies do individual tenants living in social housing deploy to deal with the prejudice they encounter in the jobs market and in their encounters with law enforcement agencies and welfare agencies?

→ How effective are other forms of interventions to challenge stigma, such as public art, community festivals and theatre?

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APPENDIX

Composition of the panel

Kathy Arthurson   Flinders University

Natasha Cica   University of Tasmania

Kathleen Flanagan   Anglicare, Tasmania

Keith Jacobs   University of Tasmania

Anna Greenwood   University of Tasmania

Annette Hastings   University of Glasgow

Jan Forbes   Housing Tasmania

Jocelyn Nettlefold   Vodafone, Australia

Meeting timetable and topics

June 30 (Hobart): Identifying causes of stigma and its effects

Keith Jacobs   Panel Member

Kathleen Flanagan   Panel Member

Anna Greenwood   Panel Member

Natasha Cica   Panel Member (and Facilitator)

Kathy Arthurson   Panel Member

Jan Forbes   Panel Member

Jocelyn Nettlefold   Panel Member

September 3 (Melbourne): The role of the media in reinforcing negative perceptions of social housing

Keith Jacobs   Panel Member

Kathleen Flanagan   Panel Member

Anna Greenwood   Panel Member

Natasha Cica   Panel Member (and Facilitator)

Kathy Arthurson   Panel Member

Jocelyn Nettlefold   Panel Member

Jan Forbes   Panel Member

Jim Davison   AHURI

Deborah Warr   University of Melbourne

Maureen Leahy   Meadows Primary School, Melbourne

Julie Szego   Age newspaper

Alex Wake   RMIT University

Chris Shields   Community Housing Ltd Group Architects

Mark Dowling   Victorian Public Tenants Association

Jeanette Pyett	Victorian Public Tenants Association
Jacky Dacey	Victorian Public Tenants Association
Russell Castley	Victorian Public Tenants Association
Janet Lunzarich	Geelong South Public Tenants Group
Ana Rufatt	Victorian Public Tenants Association

October 28 (Hobart): Next steps and policy recommendations

Keith Jacobs	Panel Member
Kathleen Flanagan	Panel Member
Anna Greenwood	Panel Member
Jocelyn Nettlefold	Panel Member
Natasha Cica	Panel Member (and Facilitator)
Kathy Arthurson	Panel Member
Jan Forbes	Panel Member

Methods of facilitation

Our facilitation approach was informed by methods associated with participatory action research (see Whyte 1991; Winter 1989), insofar as we encouraged our panel members to interact and discuss the research problem in a holistic way, and to view the project as a collaborative endeavour. In this respect, the panel meetings differed from more traditional formats for social policy hearings in which expert witnesses are called to provide advice on particular aspects of the research topic. The innovative approach we adopted was also informed by the hosting and harvesting facilitation style deployed by consulting practices such as Art of Hosting (see <http://www.artofhosting.org/>). The deliberations of the panel provided the research team with valuable qualitative data to consider the topic of stigma in considerable detail.

Challenges

A key challenge in the panel meetings was ensuring that our discussions did not become too generalised or were sidetracked on issues that were not related to the theme of stigma. The role of the facilitator was therefore crucial in ensuring that we remained focused on the key questions. Another practical challenge was collating the qualitative data, including for the purposes of producing this report. We decided not to digitally record our meetings because of the obvious risk that this might inhibit discussion. Instead we relied on shorthand notes and information written up on whiteboards, recording the arguments and conclusions reached by the group, rather than the specific contributions of particular individuals.

Suggestions

For future panel investigations, we would recommend two distinctive aspects of our successful approach. First, the physical space should be configured to encourage a sense of comfort and confidence for all participants. Second, an appropriately experienced person should act as facilitator, spending time at the start of the meeting encouraging all participants to feel at ease, as well as providing (and then enacting) 'ground rules' for the meeting. In our view, sensible and sensitive 'ground rules' are most helpful for participants who have less experience and confidence in speaking

and interacting in a large group, especially in the presence of academic and other recognised experts in the field.

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