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Final Report from Roundtable Meetings on the MOR for Children Framework

Prepared by the Children's Policy Centre

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Acknowledgements

This report summarises discussions from eight roundtable workshops convened to seek feedback on the MOR for Children Framework. The roundtables were attended by service providers, practitioners, policy-makers, and Commissioners for children and young people. We are deeply grateful for their time, expertise, and generosity in sharing their insights and knowledge.

The roundtables were convened by the Children's Policy Centre at the Australian National University and facilitated by Sharon Bessell, Angie Bexley, Grace Lovell and Celia Vuckovic.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A New Framework for Conceptualising, Defining, and Responding to Multidimensional Child Poverty	4
ROUNDTABLE 1: National Level Not-for-profit Organisations	8
ROUNDTABLE 2: Canberra-based and National Not-for-profit Organisations	11
ROUNDTABLE 3: National Not-for-profit Organisations	14
ROUNDTABLE 4: Tasmanian Not-for-profit Organisations	16
ROUNDTABLE 5: Tasmanian Organisations	19
ROUNDTABLE 6: Tasmanian Organisations	21
ROUNDTABLE 7: Tasmanian Organisations	24
ROUNDTABLE 8: Commissioners for Children and Young People	27

A New Framework for Conceptualising, Defining, and Responding to Multidimensional Child Poverty

The MOR for Children Framework¹ is designed to provide a child-centred approach to understanding, assessing and responding to child poverty.² Between November 2020 and February 2021, the Children's Policy Centre held a series of roundtable consultations to seek feedback on the Framework and input into its further development. A total of thirty not-for-profit organisations at state and national level participated in the roundtables. In addition, a series of roundtable discussions were held with Commissioners for Children and Young People from six states and territories, including the Victorian and South Australian Commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children and Young People, and the National Commissioner for Children and Young People. Consultations were also held with relevant government departments in Tasmania and at Commonwealth level. The roundtables were supported with a grant from the Policy Greenhouse at the Australian National University.

This report summarises the discussion from each roundtable, in chronological order of when the meetings were held.

The MOR for Children Framework is based on research with children in both Australia and Indonesia, and extensive work on multidimensional poverty undertaken through the Individual Measure of Multidimensional Poverty Program³ over the past fifteen years.

The MOR for Children Framework has three dimensions, which were defined - for the purposes of the roundtable discussions - as:

Material Deprivation: Insufficient money and material resources to meet basic needs

Opportunity Deprivation: Barriers to participating in meaningful activities that contribute to development

Relational Deprivation: The existence of structural factors that undermine strong and supportive relationships

Participants were invited to comment on the Framework, with three questions framing the discussion:

- Does it make sense conceptually?
- Are there missing dimensions that should be included?
- How can relationship deprivation be presented in way that focuses on structural causes, and does not stigmatise individual families?

To further frame the discussion, participants were shown an illustration of the 'Community Jigsaw'⁴ which informed development of the MOR Framework, and the MOR Framework Dimensions diagram.

¹ The MOR Framework is outlined in S. Bessell, 2021, 'Rethinking Child Poverty', *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*.

² A discussion paper on the MOR for Children Framework is available at http://cpc.weblogs.anu.edu.au/files/2021/10/The-MOR-for-Children-Framework_Discussion-Paper_2021.pdf

³ For more information on the Individual Measure of Multidimensional Poverty see <https://immp.crawford.anu.edu.au>

⁴ Bessell, S. with Mason, J. (2014). *Putting the Pieces in Place: Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia*, report from ARC Linkage Project. The Australian National University. Available at: <https://cpc.weblogs.anu.edu.au/files/2021/10/Children-Communities-and-Social-Capital-Report.pdf>

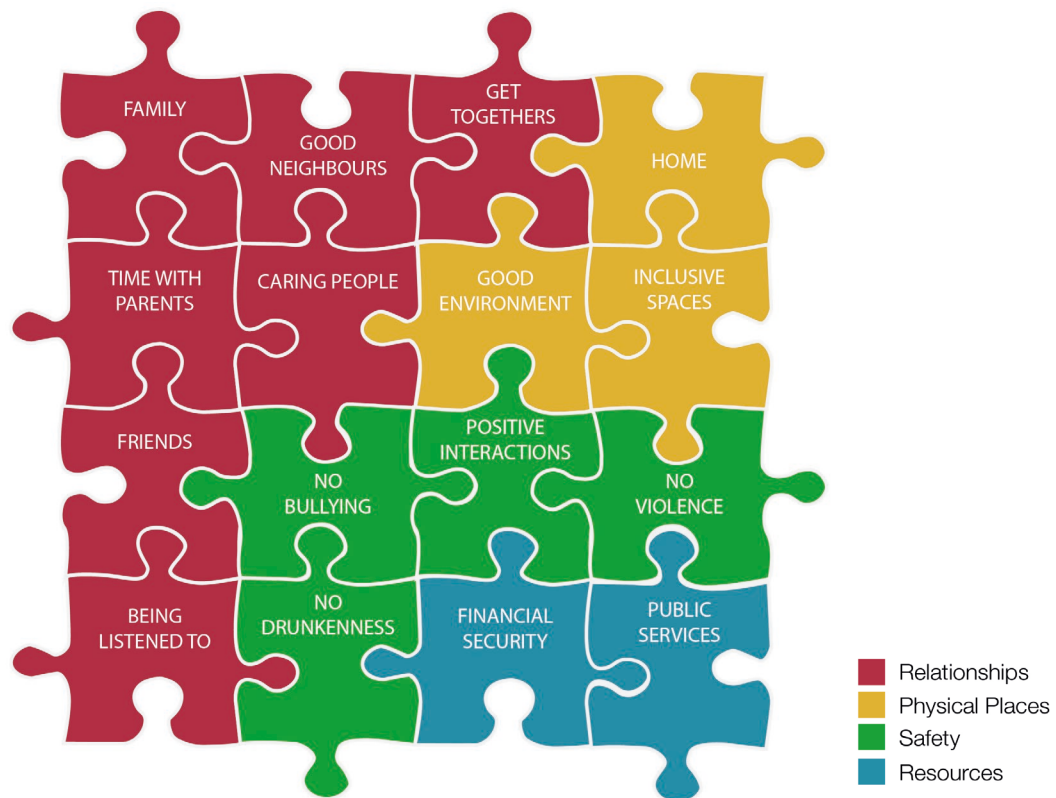


Figure 1: 'Community Jigsaw' developed as part of the Children, Communities and Social Capital research⁵

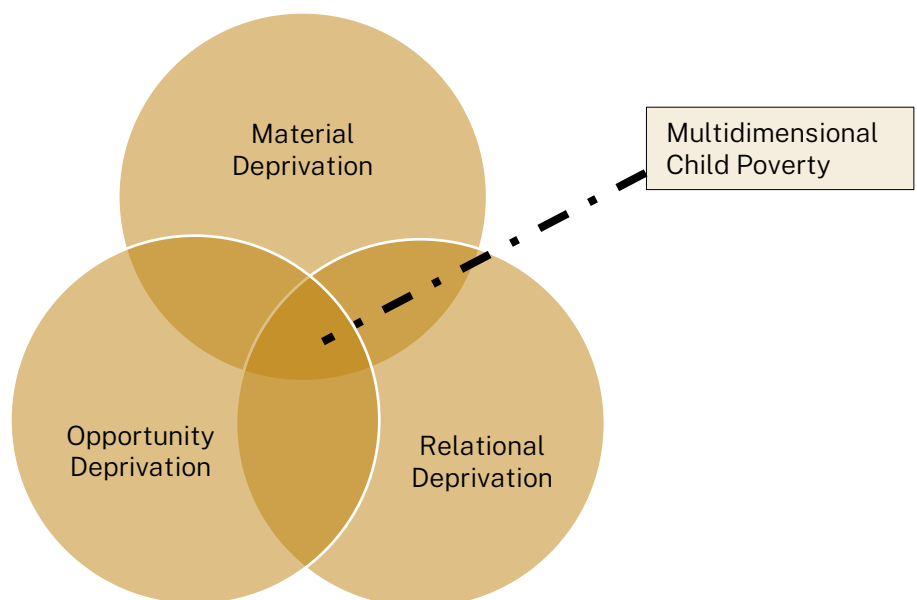


Figure 2: The MOR for Children Framework Dimensions

⁵ Bessell, S. with Mason, J. (2014). *Putting the Pieces in Place: Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia*, report from ARC Linkage Project. The Australian National University.
<https://cpc.weblogs.anu.edu.au/files/2021/10/Children-Communities-and-Social-Capital-Report.pdf>

In each roundtable, candidate themes and indicators for each dimension were workshopped. Candidate indicators were provided to start the discussion, drawn from the literature⁶ and from our own research. Participants were asked to comment on what was missing, and what should be removed. The candidate indicators for each dimension are as follows:

Material

Candidate Indicators

- Regular meals
- Nutritious food
- Clothing
- Footwear
- Money
- Adequate housing
- Essential utilities (electricity, water/plumbing, internet)

Opportunity

Candidate Indicators

- School excursions
- Sport/Creative/Other activities outside of school
- Computer/laptop (exc. mobile phone)
- Books at home
- Access to local library
- Extra-curricular activities at school

Relational

Candidate Indicators

- Time with parents
- Family activities
- Family meals
- Extended family
- Intergenerational connections
- Absence of bullying
- Connection with pets

The focus of the roundtable with the Commissioners for children and young people took a slightly different form. Rather than focusing on candidate indicators, the discussion explored the most valuable uses of the Framework. There was agreement among the Commissioners that the Framework would be most valuable, and have greatest impact, if targeted towards the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies to ensure sensitivity to multidimensional poverty and child-centredness.

⁶ See Saunders, P. et al. (2019). Child Deprivation In Australia: A child-focused approach. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 54: 4-21;
Chzhen, Y. et al. (2018). Measuring Multidimensional Child Poverty in the Era of the Sustainable Development Goals. *Child Indicators Research* 11: 707–709.
Gordon, D. & Nandy, S. Measuring Child Poverty and Deprivation. In Minujin, A. & Nandy, S. (eds.), *Global Child Poverty and Well-being: Measurement, concepts, policy and action*. The Policy Press.

Key Messages

This report captures the valuable insights of participants in the series of roundtables held in 2020-21, which provide input for the further development of the MOR for Children Framework.

Several key messages emerged from the roundtables:

- The Framework was considered to offer significant value, and the dimensions were confirmed as appropriate and useful.
- The relational dimension was considered to be especially innovative and to add value to understanding child poverty.
- There is a need for further research on the place of culture within the Framework, particularly the centrality of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- There is a need for further research to ensure the Framework is sensitive to gender and to disability.
- The child-centredness of the Framework is an important feature that must be maintained.
- The value of the Framework in identifying structural causes of poverty and systems failures is an important contribution. The challenge of identifying these was also highlighted.

ROUNDTABLE 1: National Level Not-for-profit Organisations

16 November 2020 – Zoom

Organisations represented

Barnardos New Zealand
Centacare
Families Australia
Multicultural Youth Affairs Network
Playgroup Australia
Smith Family
Social Ventures Australia
Uniting Care Australia

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the first roundtable meeting held on 16 November 2020, there was general enthusiasm and agreement among participants about the framing and wording of the three proposed dimensions — material, opportunity and relational. Participants felt that a broader understanding of poverty, beyond income, is essential and that the intersecting nature of the three dimensions is particularly useful. Participants generally felt that the three dimensions summarise and bring out the key themes related to child poverty. It was noted that the framework resonates strongly with a child’s rights approach.

The effect of Covid-19 on the Australian population, namely that many people are now unexpectedly experiencing poverty, was seen as an opportunity to have a different discussion around poverty on a national level.

Definitional issues were raised, particularly how we conceptualise poverty in Australia. Participants highlighted the need for a broad conversation in Australia around what is wanted for children and to maximise every child’s potential. It was noted that in Australia, policy focuses solely on meeting needs rather than fuelling aspirations. One participant noted that New Zealand is also grappling with similar definitional issues, and while a child wellbeing framework is currently in place in New Zealand, some problems - particularly around poverty - are being masked. It was suggested that framing child poverty as a collective problem that affects all of society and requires collective commitment to change would be most beneficial.

This discussion led to a key question being raised by many participants around the language of the measure, specifically the use of the word “poverty”. Some participants considered “poverty” to be a term that carries stigma. There was discussion as to whether framing around child and adolescent development would be helpful. There was discussion of alternative language such as “thriving”, “reaching one’s potential”, “succeeding”. There was also caution expressed around using potentially “othering” language. There was a concern among some participants that research and data intrinsically objectify and create “the other”, and in measuring poverty, it is important to make sure that this does not add to a greater sense of dislocation and removal.

Participants all held the belief that a child's sense of self and place in the world is fundamental, and therefore the opportunity and relational dimensions were seen to be fundamentally important. There was a general consensus that "opportunity" is the right word for the opportunity dimension but that the definition needs more work to capture both the present and the future.

Almost all participants cited the need for cultural sensitivity when discussing child poverty. The question of where racism and discrimination fit within some or all the dimensions was raised. Similarly, participants wanted to understand how subgroups and cohorts within the Australian child population can be taken into account in the framing. Furthermore, participants emphasised the need to identify access and equity barriers for children and young people from culturally diverse backgrounds and how these can be captured in the MOR Framework, particularly as part of the opportunity dimension. It was suggested that a focus on cultural identity, as well as racism and exclusion could be teased out of the opportunity and relational deprivation dimensions. It was noted that these concerns are core elements of child poverty and that it would be helpful to make these more explicit.

It was noted that what different groups and cultures expect for childhood isn't always the same, so systems need to take diverse expectations into account. That children take a role in supporting families and navigating systems, particularly in refugee and migrant families was also raised as an important consideration.

In regard to the relational dimension, the current focus of policy and data is school-readiness, as opposed to ensuring a child is ready to thrive. This means that time with parents is not always central in discussions around early childhood, leading to the potential sidelining of support for parents who are positioned as income-earners rather than spending time with their children.

Discussion focused on how the MOR Framework includes children with disability. It was noted by participants that many children with disability may experience opportunity or relational deprivation but may not meet the threshold for material deprivation. Do all three dimensions have to be included to equate to multi-dimensional poverty? How is the "invisible middle" recognised?

A question was raised as to how we actually measure non-material deprivation? Specifically, how is the systems level aspect actually impacting children? Participatory research with children was one suggested answer.

Discussion on proposed and potential indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the material dimension were access to medicine and health care, household income, and the cost of living. The question of how household income would be assessed was raised. Access to services was also seen as an important indicator but was flagged as context specific, differing across Australia. Domestic violence and mental health were also suggested as indicators for the material dimension.

Opportunity:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the opportunity dimension were access to quality early childhood education and care and affordable, quality services being available, including community controlled services. Uptake of services (not just availability) was seen as a key indicator as this demonstrates whether services are under-utilised because they are not

culturally sensitive, enjoyable, known about, etc. Both personal capital and public capital, such as libraries, schools, and transport, were seen as important indicators for this dimension.

Ways of identifying cultural participation, as well as racism and exclusion were raised. It was suggested there might be existing data to explore, particularly on participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the relational dimension were financial and other stresses impacting families. Participants noted that these stressors often impact children in the form of violence, mental health, neglect, and other adverse outcomes. Other potential indicators identified were: parents having access to mental health supports; drug and alcohol abuse; indicators of neglect; the child's sense of belonging; connection to community; safety; general wellbeing; and opportunities for socialising.

Participants noted that indicators might not be relevant to only one dimension. In the context of Covid-19, for example, access to devices and data can be seen to fit into all three dimensions - opportunity, material and relational.

ROUNDTABLE 2: Canberra-based and National Not-for-profit Organisations

17 November 2020 – In person

Organisations represented

ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)

ARACY

Beryl Women

Families ACT

Marymead

Uniting Care Kippax

Woden Community Services

Youth Coalition of the ACT

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the second roundtable meeting held on 17 November 2020, there was general agreement among participants that the proposed three dimensions and the ways in which they interact are a valuable contribution to the issue of child poverty.

One issue raised by participants was that place-based connection is missing from the three dimensions. It was noted that moving away from their family home and into other care situations has a lasting impact on children. Place was highlighted by one participant as essential to identity formation and may contribute to the ability to have material and relational resources available. It was also noted that disconnection from place interacts with cultural and spiritual deprivation.

The opportunity dimension was seen as an important dimension for identifying social exclusion and inclusion. However, participants had questions around the exact definition of this dimension. It was noted that children who grow up in poverty often miss out on things that don't directly contribute to development, for example, having no money to buy a skateboard or to go on school camp. The question was raised about how the opportunity dimension takes account of such examples. Play was also highlighted as an important opportunity that is often missed in developmental frameworks. These concerns connect to questions of belonging, particularly belonging to a community, which is directly linked to opportunity.

Ideas around social and cultural capital were raised, and the ways in which embodied behaviours and skills become markers of identity and status, with children then performing to what becomes expected of them – in potentially damaging ways. It was suggested that indicators of social and cultural capital are important, but often missed or considered soft indicators, whereas educational indicators are prioritised.

In regard to the relational dimension, “emotional capital” was mentioned by one participant as an important concept which relates to the ways in which children are cared for by their parents, and in turn, how they learn emotional skills. Ideas around “parental warmth” were also raised, noting that a lack of parental warmth can tip children into not only relational but material deprivation, including homelessness. The challenge of trying to communicate the importance of parental warmth was noted, particularly the need to find a better way of talking about it.

“Parental consistency” and “positive parenting” are examples of language that has been used previously.

Concerning the relational dimension, it was put forward that some children or adults might look back on their childhood and see the unintended strengths of material poverty, such as their relationships with grandparents or siblings. It was suggested that this might be an interesting way to ask children about relational deprivation, i.e. what are the strong bonds that children are forming (or not)? Conversely, the question was raised about children living in a home without material deprivation but facing severe opportunity and relational deprivation.

A few participants raised the importance of capturing the complexities of child poverty. For example, drug and alcohol issues may lead to or be preceded by mental health issues, and the relationship is not linear. It was suggested that there is a knowledge deprivation in how to deal with children with multiple complex issues or “complex families”. An ability to identify and manage multiple issues at a time was seen as critical.

Participants noted that violence, fear, and unpredictability should be captured in the dimensions, particularly because of the link between violence and poor educational outcomes, lack of social connection, and increased risk of homelessness. Not only experiencing but witnessing and/or sensing violence in the home was also considered an important indicator of deprivation.

The strain, stress, and time-consuming nature of living in poverty was also mentioned as a factor difficult, but important, to capture in the MOR Framework's dimensions.

Discussion of potential themes and indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the material dimension were internet, data and laptop, with data a separate indicator from internet. Another key indicator proposed for this dimension was transportation, including access, cost, and regularity of service. Transportation was seen as crucial for early childcare participation. There was a suggestion to overlay transport with disability as there are fewer transport options available for people with disability.

Other key indicators included access to medication and healthcare, including mental healthcare. It was noted that for many parents there is a trade-off between being employed and having a healthcare card. Quality of services and trust in services were also identified as indicators of material deprivation.

Opportunity:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the opportunity dimension were being able to drive, including the ability to attain a license and pay registration. Time was a key theme for this dimension, including time as a pressure (and the trade-offs and choices made when people are struggling to survive), time to contemplate parenting, and time with children. Too much time was also cited as a burden, as this can lead to poor mental health outcomes and poor parenting. It was suggested that time also related to the quality of material indicators: being able to find cheap goods and services is time-consuming.

How children think about the future was seen as an indicator of wellbeing and therefore opportunity. Whether children have concrete plans or abstract hopes for the future was seen as indicating opportunities.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the relational dimension were being able to ask for help and support. Participants noted that many children were becoming too resilient because they have little support and are unable to seek help. In regard to domestic violence, school attendance was cited as an important indicator, particularly children being too scared to go to school or wanting to stay home and look after family members. Homelessness was also identified as a key indicator of domestic violence. It was noted that while violence is an important indicator of relational deprivation, questions around violence need to be asked in a culturally sensitive way.

ROUNDTABLE 3: National Not-for-profit Organisations

18 November 2020 – Zoom

Organisations represented

Anglicare Australia
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
Early Childhood Australia
Mission Australia
National Council of Single Mothers & their Children
Parenting Research Centre

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the third roundtable, held on 18 November 2020, participants agreed that the proposed three dimensions make sense conceptually and that it is helpful to divide them along material, opportunity and relational lines. Participants were enthusiastic about the simplicity of the conceptual framework, particularly the fact that it features only three dimensions. The story map⁷ and animation⁸ were also well-received by participants.

A key issue raised was how this measure would identify the ways in which our systems reinforce deprivation and stigma. Dental care was cited as one example – as it is not a free service, lack of dental care was seen to reinforce difference and entrench stigma.

Another key issue discussed was the wording of the relational dimension, with the concern that the use of the word “relational” could create a narrative of shaming and blaming. Some participants suggested that while the word “relational” is appropriate, it has potentially challenging connotations, particularly when followed by the word “deprivation”. There was considerable concern that “relational deprivation” could make families dealing with poverty feel that being materially deprived results in poor relational outcomes. It was suggested that while “deprivation” might be acceptable wording to use for the government sector, it might not sit well with the general public. It was recommended that thinking of the audience for the measure and developing a strategy to communicate its meaning will be important. Participants felt that it will be critical to ensure that users of the measure and its findings understand that the deprivations experienced by children in the relational dimension are a result of systemic, rather than individual, failings. It was felt that this may need to be addressed by structural and systemic indicators sitting across all three dimensions, and by ensuring that the dimensions are all measuring and representing comparable things (e.g. all a mix of individual and systemic factors, or all only individual, or all focused on deprivation and the causes of that deprivation).

There was concern that the wording “relational deprivation” may be inappropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It was suggested that it will be important to test the language with these communities.

⁷ Story map can be viewed at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e020103afeec4c2d88b3ccdf101f7e2c>

⁸ Animation can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Udo2IHvK6A&t=5s>

Participants noted that while mental health and wellbeing have become more topical as a result of COVID-19 and may therefore gain traction, a wellbeing framework has drawbacks as it often masks the serious issues children face.

Other dimensions suggested were “environmental deprivation”, “social deprivation”, or something along the lines of a toxic stress framework. “Environment” was felt to be a useful concept as it may access people’s cultural models around systems, particularly the idea that nothing happens in a vacuum.

Discussions on potential themes and indicators

In discussing themes and indicators, many participants were concerned with being unable to identify indicators that capture systemic structures. The indicators were considered too specific to the individual level. There was concern that systemic level indicators need to evenly sit across all three dimensions. It was hard for participants to find indicators that addressed safety and belonging, which were considered necessary in all three dimensions.

Material:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the material dimension were safe and adequate housing, taking into account stability and crowding. It was suggested that internet access and having a device needed to be combined — both are critical and need to be in the same dimension. Indicators of education for those who live in dual cultures were identified as important.

Opportunity:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the opportunity dimension focused on school, including school uniforms. Participants noted that it is difficult to identify indicators for education at a systemic rather than an individual level.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the relational dimension were systemic racism, e.g. being able to go down to the shop, to feel part of a community, to feel safe in one’s community. Culture was identified as an important theme, including connection to culture, connection to country, connection to place, pride in culture, and knowledge of culture. Time with parents was identified as important but it was noted that measuring the quality of child-parent interactions also matters greatly.

ROUNDTABLE 4: Tasmanian Not-for-profit Organisations

15 February 2021 – Hobart, Tasmania

Organisations represented

Australian Childhood Foundation

Beacon Foundation

Brave Foundation

Colony47

Department of Education

TasCOSS

The Salvation Army

The Smith Family

Red Cross

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the fourth roundtable, held in Hobart on 15 February 2021, there was general enthusiasm and agreement among participants about the framing of the material, opportunity, and relational dimensions. Participants were very positive about the capacity of the measure to move beyond solutions based on material poverty.

Participants considered a strength of the Framework to be its potential to speak well to data, and to highlight the gaps in existing data sets. Participants noted that the Framework enabled them to see the interdependencies that sit across all three dimensions.

Participants emphasised the wisdom of children and their stories, and wanted to ensure that children's voices would remain central to this research.

Many participants noted that the Framework does not currently have a sufficiently strong cultural lens. Participants suggested that an emphasis on the lived reality of Indigenous children would be important going forward.

Participants felt that the relational dimension was particularly useful, and a key piece missing from the conversation about child poverty. Participants felt that relational poverty was fundamental and had not been developed in poverty measures to date. Some participants noted the importance of structural factors being clearly identified in this dimension, so as to avoid stigmatising families.

Several participants noted that some positive impacts of COVID-19 were that children were able to spend more time with their parents and caregivers, which in turn created positive behaviours for some. Conversely, participants noted that not all children are safe at home, and a family violence lens must also be visible in the relational dimension.

Furthermore, in regard to the relational dimension, it was suggested that intergenerational, entrenched, multi-layered, disadvantage among families is a critical issue, leading to deprivation in all dimensions. Participants noted that intergenerational trauma has a huge impact on children.

There was some concern among participants that the word “poverty” carries a certain stigma, which contrasts with the language being used in wellbeing frameworks. Access to supportive and nurturing relationships was also seen to be linked to both opportunity and material deprivation.

In regard to the opportunity dimension, roundtable participants spoke of a need to expand the proposed definition. Participants suggested that it take “ongoing development” into account and there were concerns around how development and participation would be measured. Some participants felt that a focus on access is most important. Others felt that outcomes were more helpful than determining whether people accessed certain services. However, some participants also felt that outcomes for individuals are hard to measure and highlighted the importance of measuring development in a way that uncovers structural barriers.

Participants suggested that the opportunity dimension needs to take into account the pressing needs of “survival” before it could look at development. Participants noted that opportunities in school can be erased if the environment outside school does not provide adequate support, drawing attention to the interrelated nature of the Framework.

Participants recommended that an emphasis on material deprivation remain central, and noted the benefits of the COVID-19 supplements for families and children in all dimensions. Access to welfare reduces stress and results in positive outcomes across all three dimensions. Participants also spoke of the difficulty their clients had in navigating services – they emphasised that this requires both time and a certain type of literacy; without the ability to navigate services, deprivation can occur across all three dimensions.

The question of how this measure compares to ARACY’s NEST was raised by one participant. Another participant asked how the measure could be practically applied, and by whom – i.e. was it a tool for policy, programs, etc.

Discussion on proposed and potential indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the material dimension were access to medicine and health care, including physical, dental and mental health care. Access to wi-fi and access to appropriate platforms for education. Housing was a key indicator in this dimension, including adequate and quality housing. Participants noted that the cost of housing in Hobart is a major problem. Transport was also suggested as a key indicator, including public transport and private vehicles (including their petrol and maintenance costs). Clothing was suggested as another key indicator, including new shoes which were chosen by the child. Participants recommended that not only having regular meals, but also nutritious meals, as an indicator.

The question of how to measure material indicators was raised by some participants. Participants noted that many families may have quite a lot of material goods but whether these were being used, were of good quality, and/or appropriate is another question.

Opportunity:

Access to quality health care, including physical, mental and dental, was suggested as a key indicator for the opportunity dimension. Childcare and transport were also suggested as indicators for this dimension. How housing impacts on educational outcomes was a key question and potential indicator raised by participants, and linking these was considered important. It was noted that “books are tools” and it is important to assess if children are being read to by their parents or carers, and what the literacy outcomes of this are. Laptops and wi-fi were also

considered key indicators for opportunity, as well as whether information was able to be accessed.

Understanding, comprehension, and access to information about support services were identified as key indicators of opportunity, as was effective targeting of services.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the relational dimension were intergenerational relationships and connection with community. Connection with story, place and own identity were also discussed as potentially important indicators. The quality of time with parents rather than simply time with parents was considered to be important. Participants suggested that safety needs to be explicitly included in the relational dimension, and it was noted that children can be “safer on the streets than at home”. For children in out-of-home care it was suggested that a connection to their own identity, through relationships and possessions, was important to include in the relational dimension.

ROUNDTABLE 5: Tasmanian Organisations

16 February 2021 – Hobart, Tasmania

Organisations represented

CatholicCare

Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania

Engender Equality

Libraries Tasmania

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the fifth roundtable meeting, held in Hobart on 16 February 2021, there was general enthusiasm among participants about the proposed Framework, particularly the relational dimension. Participants were positive about the potential of the measure to expand existing definitions and focus on the lived experience of children and families in poverty.

There was a general consensus among the participants that we need to usefully complicate discussions on child poverty to include issues that have been overlooked or not yet addressed. The Framework was considered a valuable means of doing this. Participants noted that solutions are often developed which do not fit within the values and framework of many families, and solutions and systems can often reinforce a lack of agency and control, and exacerbate poverty. Although participants noted that quantitative data is useful, all suggested that stories about people's lives are central to this work.

In regard to the relational dimension, participants felt that “making meaning” – whether through spirituality, connection to place or sense of belonging, being in touch with cultural practices, a sense of self and self-esteem – is important to consider.

It was suggested that mentoring programs, and the power of one-on-one relationships and capital, help people to negotiate opportunities which lead to better outcomes across all three dimensions.

One participant felt that the relational dimension speaks well to the dynamics that underpin family violence, particularly coercive control. Currently, family violence is reported on an incident basis but this does not fully explain what goes on within the home. During COVID-19, coercive control has become more common in domestic settings, but is very difficult to identify and report.

Participants noted that, as the Framework shows, relationships effect outcomes across both material and relational dimensions. They suggested it is important to consider the strong relationships present in some communities, and how these may positively affect opportunity and material outcomes. However, it is also important not to disrupt these ties through pursuing (white-centric, middle-class) ideas of development.

In regard to the opportunity dimension, roundtable participants noted that a good environment is crucial, including housing and public spaces, both of which impact upon a child's sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.

Across all dimensions, participants highlighted the importance of keeping the voice and experience of children at the centre. Participants liked the jigsaw for this reason, and considered it to be a clear and effective visual tool.

As raised in other roundtables, the participants in this roundtable suggested that a cultural lens is missing across the dimensions. They noted that this is particularly true for the relational dimension, and wanted to see ideas of cultural connectedness present within the Framework.

One participant also raised the question of how this research relates to what is happening in the wellbeing space. Another participant asked if the Framework relates to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Discussion on proposed and potential indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the material dimension were indicators around food, including both sufficient food and nutritional value of food. Other key indicators proposed were the ability to accept invitations and attend parties (including to be able to buy a present), and to join sporting clubs and afford associated equipment. Transport was considered a key indicator, including money to buy a car and regular petrol. Participants noted that it will be important to overlay material deprivation with disability.

Opportunity:

A key indicator proposed for the opportunity dimension was healthcare – particularly access to specialised care, dental care, and mental health care. Other key indicators included knowledge about libraries, internet, how to use Centrelink, and how to navigate and access relevant services. Support within the home to enable use of a digital device was also raised as a possible indicator.

The gendered aspects of the opportunity dimension were also raised, including access to sanitary products. Participants noted that girls' caring roles inside and outside the home (including of siblings and parents) impacts on outcomes, such as literacy. Sex education (both in schools and shelters) was identified as another indicator for this dimension.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the relational dimension were freedom from abuse, witnessing violence, coercive control, and neglect. Other indicators identified were knowing five people in the street who children could contact in times of stress, and a strong connection to community. The right to self-identify, including cultural practices, was identified as a crucial indicator of the relational dimension.

Gendered roles and the responsibility of some children, particularly girls, to take care of parents and siblings was also raised here. Participants noted that systems and structures, such as the education system, the community justice system, and the health care system, often perpetuate a hierarchy of power for young people, and suggested it would be beneficial to capture this in the Framework.

ROUNDTABLE 6: Tasmanian Organisations

17 February 2021 – Launceston, Tasmania

Organisations represented

Australian Childhood Foundation

CatholicCare

Department of Education

Learning Service North

Libraries Tasmania

Studentworks

Uniting

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the sixth roundtable meeting, held in Launceston on 17 February 2021, there was general enthusiasm from participants about the proposed Framework, particularly for the relational dimension and what this can add to efforts to address child poverty. Many participants felt that the relational dimension was the most important part of the research. Participants found the overlapping nature of the dimensions useful for understanding the multidimensional nature of poverty. Participants felt that the jigsaw is a very useful tool to illustrate this. Many participants highlighted the importance of going beyond material understandings of child poverty.

In regard to the relational deprivation dimension, many participants raised intergenerational poverty as a barrier to positive outcomes in both the material and opportunity dimensions. Participants suggested that relational deprivation, or a lack of positive relationships, interacts with the opportunity dimension and could act as a barrier to access and participation. Participants also spoke of the importance of “linking relationships” from an educational perspective and the success of the current wellbeing work being done in schools in regard to relationships.

Participants were wary of stigmatising parents, and suggested that many people were never parented well and therefore did not know how to be a “good” parent, even if they become materially resourced.

Participants noted that during COVID-19, many children performed better at school because they were able to spend more time with their parents. While this was not the case for all children, the impact of quality time with parents for many children was profound. Conversely, participants noted that many children leave home because of a lack of connectedness or, in some cases, being subject to violence at home. Participants also spoke about the impact of mobile phones and other devices on parent-child relationships.

In regards to the opportunity dimension, participants spoke of the geographical barriers in Tasmania that prevent access and participation. Participants said that many communities are insular, and there is a hesitancy to travel outside of these areas. While many children who access Child and Family Centres and local libraries are able to expand their networks, participants spoke of a hesitancy among many other families to visit such places due to them being “outside their comfort zone”.

Most participants spoke about the importance of seeing the material dimension in the context of the other two dimensions. Many said that even when people were doing better materially, they still might not be able to succeed in both the relational and opportunity dimensions due to a lack of knowledge and support. Participants noted that money is often seen as the solution to everything but it doesn't necessarily provide opportunities or address "cultures of poverty".

Participants discussed the ways in which material deprivation can lead to social exclusion, for example, the social exclusion that can occur if children living in poverty don't have access to mobile phones and other devices.

Discussion on proposed and potential indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by participants for the material dimension were children having access to digital devices such as mobile phones to talk with friends and facilitate connectedness. This included access to the internet – which was also seen as important for educational purposes. Participants suggested financial literacy, rather than just having money, is an important indicator. Participants also suggested being able to access and effectively negotiate Centrelink and other services as an indicator.

Opportunity:

A key indicator proposed for the opportunity dimension was healthcare, including physical, dental and mental healthcare. Participants also suggested systems literacy (Centrelink, support works) as a key indicator, as well as internet literacy. Disability and differing access, including being able to engage in extra-curricular activities, was suggested as another indicator of opportunity. Participants emphasised that the NDIS is so complex many people give up.

Participants suggested access to childcare and playgroups as a key indicator of opportunity. Other key indicators included how geography acts as a barrier to opportunity; including availability of both public and private transport. Being able to get a license, maintain a car, pay registration, and afford petrol were all identified as indicators associated with transport.

The impact of having a criminal record, especially on the process of gaining one's license, was also discussed. Subsequently, access to the legal system was suggested as another key indicator.

Participants identified being able to go on excursions and participate in co-curricular activities as a key indicator which also impacted upon relationships. Furthermore, parents' literacy and experience of school was identified as a factor influencing children's opportunities. Another indicator suggested was whether a child has to work to support the family's income and whether this impacts upon their ability to be a child.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by participants for the relational dimension were indicators on feeling safe, feeling loved, and spending quality time with parents. Other proposed indicators were whether children had a relationship with their grandparent/s, with relatives beyond their nuclear family, and more broadly within their community. Connection with siblings, particularly when children are in out-of-home care, was identified as an important indicator.

Indicators of anxiety and mental health issues amongst children was considered a potentially important indicator. Participants also suggested indicators of whether parents' have a disability or cognitive impairment that may result in a child becoming a caregiver.

An indicator of a child's "voice" and whether children can voice their opinion and be heard, was considered important.

ROUNDTABLE 7: Tasmanian Organisations

18 February 2021 - Burnie, Tasmania

Organisations represented ⁹

Big hART

Kin Raising Kids

Tasmanian Health Service Youth, Family

Community Connections

Discussion on proposed dimensions

In the eighth roundtable workshop, held in Burnie on 18 February 2021, there was general consensus among participants that the framing of the material, opportunity and relational dimensions is helpful. Participants considered the community jigsaw to be useful in illustrating the multidimensional nature of poverty and the interconnectedness of dimensions.

It was noted that technological changes are accelerating and entrenching poverty for some. Considering these issues is essential to understanding and addressing poverty, particularly for children and young people, for whom connection and belonging are often related to access to technology.

In regard to the relational dimension, connection with family (including grandparents and extended family) was considered to be of utmost importance. Several participants commented on the ways in which out-of-home care results in the breakdown of children's connections to biological kin, and highlighted the significance of relational deprivation for children and young people within the child protection and out-of-home care systems. Several participants with direct experience of out-of-home care noted that children are often placed in foster care before the possibility of family members, particularly grandparents, caring for them are considered. It was noted that foster care often involves moving from placement to placement, resulting in disconnection. Placing children with family helps to ensure they can maintain a strong sense of connection and belonging to both family and place.

Connection to country and a broader cultural connection are identified as key components missing from the relational dimension. Engagement with Indigenous communities was recommended to unpack and further develop appropriate indicators of connection to country.

In regard to the opportunity dimension, participants highlighted the difficulties many families encounter when trying to navigate systems and/or access benefits. Participants said that understanding and accessing the health system and social services takes literacy, confidence and time – things that many people living in poverty are often short on because of their circumstances.

Literacy – of both parents and children – was identified as a key factor influencing outcomes in the opportunity dimension. One participant suggested that children living in poverty often do not have the “opportunity to be a child”, as they often have significant responsibilities, including taking care of siblings and parents. Being able to afford to take part in school excursions, sport, and other activities was considered to be another key component of the opportunity dimension.

⁹ Note: a separate meeting was held with Burnieworks and CatholicCare in Burnie.

Participants also noted that many children are unable to access help with their education because their parents face barriers created by illiteracy or are hesitant to engage with services. Many participants also spoke of a reluctance of some families to go outside of their local area, and the subsequent lack of opportunity for children.

In regard to the material dimension, there was concern that informal carers are not sufficiently supported to provide the basic necessities for a child's upbringing. Participants noted that this is an urgent issue for grandparents who take on the care of their grandchildren, but receive no or inadequate financial support from government because they are considered informal carers. Participants spoke of informal carers, mainly grandparents, who are forced to return to work after retirement in order to qualify for Centrelink payments. Others are forced to use their superannuation to support the children they are caring for. This in turn impacts upon their relationships, specifically, being able to spend quality time with the children for whom they are caring for. Several participants felt that an emphasis on foster care means many informal carers are left with insufficient material resources, which in turn affects the opportunity and relational dimensions.

Participants also spoke of the acute disadvantage that many people in Tasmania's north-west live in – including lack of internet, transport, quality housing – and the challenges this brings to the conversation on child poverty.

One participant suggested that the jigsaw puzzle is useful for paediatric care, particularly to visualise where pieces are missing and what the strengths are within a given family.

Discussion on proposed and potential indicators

Material:

Key indicators proposed by participants for the material dimension were resources for children who are not yet in the education system, and affordable childcare. Adequate sleeping arrangements and bedding were also suggested, as a lack of these things can lead to poor school outcomes. Connectivity, including a mobile phone, internet, and other devices was also identified here, as well as associated digital literacy. Being able to attend excursions, play sport with adequate equipment, and access to specialised courses (both at school and through vocational training) with appropriate equipment were highlighted as important indicators.

Opportunity:

Key indicators proposed by roundtable participants for the opportunity dimension were time to navigate systems and organise important processes such as children's birth certificates. Birth registration and having a birth certificate were also mentioned as indicators here, as the lack of a birth certificate prevents access to Medicare, school and a range of services. Healthcare, and guidance around healthcare and healthy lifestyles, and information about how to care for children were other indicators suggested by participants. Transport, both private and public, was another key indicator which is particularly important in rural areas and often critical for access to school. Access to further education and whether children have access to Year 11 and 12 in their local communities were also suggested as important indicators, particularly in regional and rural communities where young people often need to leave home in order to continue to Year 11 and 12 at school. Adult literacy was also considered to be an important indicator of opportunity, as well as programs for children who get left behind in the school system.

Relational:

Key indicators proposed by participants for the relational dimension were intergenerational relationships, particularly the importance of recognising kin as valid carers. Attachment and bonding time with parents were also suggested as important indicators of strong child-parent relationships. Connection with others, particularly positive role models and supportive people, were considered important. Participants suggested that “happy parents (or carers) mean happy kids” and highlighted the importance of parents/carers being able to have time for themselves to relax and replenish.

ROUNDTABLE 8: Commissioners for Children and Young People

9 March 2021 - Zoom

Participants

National Commissioner for Children and Young People

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Australian Capital Territory

Assistant Commissioner for Children and Young People, Northern Territory

Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, South Australia

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania

Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia

Separate consultations were held with the Commissioner for Children and Young People In Victoria and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in Victoria.

Discussion on proposed dimensions

The eighth roundtable was held with Commissioners for Children and Young People from across Australia. There was general agreement among the Commissioners on the value of the measure and the relevance of the three dimensions, particularly the relational dimension.

There was initial discussion about the definition of poverty adopted within the Framework, and whether poverty is defined as multidimensional or whether the Framework is designed to sit alongside material definitions of poverty. The researchers explained that the Framework adopts a multidimensional definition of poverty, but it is considered to complement and supplement income poverty as a measure (rather than replace it). There was also discussion around the relationship between the three dimensions, as some participants noted that children may not be deprived in material basics, but nevertheless experience deprivation in opportunity and relational dimensions. The research team noted that the approach of the Framework recognises that income is central to the experience of poverty and a critical measure of it; however, all three dimensions are equally important. However, this discussion highlights the need for ongoing research to determine whether equal weighting of the dimensions - and associated indicators - is appropriate. The researchers explained that the dimensions are considered to be interconnected, and it is the overlap of dimensions that indicates multidimensional poverty.

There was discussion of the importance and value of the Framework in identifying the structural causes of poverty. As in previous roundtables, participants discussed the ways in which intergenerational patterns of poverty create barriers to achieving positive outcomes for children across all dimensions.

A few participants discussed work they are currently doing around wellbeing frameworks and discussed the process of this work including using public data initially (such as from the Australian Bureau of Statistics) and then going on to develop wellbeing surveys. This has enabled them to compare what children and young people say with the position of government agencies and existing data.

One participant highlighted the potential of the Framework to provide significant value in shaping the policy landscape, highlighting policy blind-spots, and capturing the complexity of poverty. It was suggested that cultural and gender lenses be applied to each dimension to deepen the Framework's analytic value. Participants highlighted the importance of the Framework in keeping poverty and material deprivation front and centre, and not becoming lost in the broader wellbeing conversation.

Participants also noted the ways in which systems can contribute to and deepen deprivation across the three dimensions. There was discussion, by way of example, of the removal of a child from their family being driven by material deprivation, but creating negative outcomes across both relational and opportunity dimensions. It was also noted that the lack of access to quality housing and/or childcare can embed deprivation across all three dimensions.

One participant was especially interested in how systems may inadvertently create material deprivation. For example, having systems and services online creates another level of material deprivation (not having access to internet, devices, data). Another example was the cost of education, which falls unequally on families with low income.

There was some discussion of the relevance of the Framework for Indigenous communities. It was suggested that the relational dimension enables a different understanding of "poverty", whereby communities may be seen as being "materially deprived" but may have strong relationships. Furthermore, it was noted that the meaning of material, relational and opportunity deprivation for Indigenous communities differs greatly from a white-centric view. It was also noted that the meaning of each dimension may also vary from community to community.

There was discussion of the ways in which white perceptions of material deprivation may result in Indigenous children being removed from their families, leading to high rates of incarceration, early death, and suicide. Participants spoke of removal of Indigenous children from their families - often on the basis of "poverty" - resulting in ongoing disconnection from community, family, culture, country and language - all of which have devastating impacts on children. A specific focus on how poverty impacts on Indigenous children was recommended. As the Framework is further developed, and indicators identified, it was recommended that a cultural lens be applied across all dimensions - with cultural advice and understanding sought from the communities, children and families that the Framework is designed for.

Participants noted that "poor" children, particularly Indigenous children who are perceived to be "poor", are likely to be subject to interventions by the state across all aspects of their life. Policing, child protection responses, and other systems responses are often driven by the wrong reasons, and do not work to protect the child and the family.

The relationship between poverty and disability was also highlighted. Participants felt that navigating the system and accessing services is a significant barrier, and a person with a disability is more likely to experience poverty.

The unintended and damaging outcomes of out-of-home care were raised as a key concern for participants. Placing children in out-of-home care was seen as a response to poverty that often leads to negative outcomes. It was noted that as COVID-19 supplements are withdrawn, there will be greater material deprivation and a subsequent possible increase in child removals. One participant suggested that this is "systems violence and a well-worn path that needs to be stopped".

Discussion on future directions for the research

This roundtable concluded not with a discussion on candidate indicators, as in other workshops, but on the most useful purpose of the Framework, that is as a measure of multidimensional child poverty, as a tool for directing services, or as a tool for shaping policies.

There was near unanimous agreement among participants that the Framework would be most useful if targeted towards the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies for sensitivity to multidimensional child poverty. Participants felt that the Framework would be particularly useful in highlighting the ways in which systems can exacerbate inequality and how this impacts on children specifically and society as a whole.

One participant suggested that the system assumes it is “values-free” but this is in fact not the case, and hides the ways in which efficiency measures often fail to provide structural solutions.

It was noted that demonstrating how the Framework aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals would be useful.

One participant said that she was interested in how applying a cultural lens could highlight the ways in which systems exacerbate inequality. This could lead to policy reform and to making our systems more equal. Participants also highlighted the value of a Framework that is able to demonstrate the damage of policies that respond to poverty by removing children. Moreover, participants emphasised the value of a Framework that is able to support more positive policy alternatives.

Participants noted that working at the policy level can impact the programs and services down the line. Participants also highlighted the importance of building a solid evidence base and ensuring that the Framework is able to have an impact from policy to frontline services, and is not merely a political tool for those in power.