

Has the Risk of Social Exclusion for Australian Children become more Geographically Concentrated? : Changes in the Indicators of Risk of Social Exclusion over the 1990s in a Spatial Context.

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The concept of social exclusion, encompassing a wider view of disadvantage than that of income poverty, is now used extensively in European debates about people at risk of experiencing social disadvantage. Aggregate national data indicate the groups at risk of social exclusion but it also has an important geographical dimension with the people at risk being concentrated in particular areas.

In an earlier series of papers based on data from the 2001 Census of Population, the authors explored spatial indices of risk of social exclusion for Australia's children. The results showed that the inclusion of variables, in addition to income measures of poverty, added to our knowledge about those geographical areas where children were more likely to be at risk of social disadvantage. This paper reports on a comparison of the 2001 results with results from earlier Censuses. This comparison will enable the identification of areas where the risk of social exclusion is more entrenched and to investigate whether there has been a widening gap among small areas in the risk of social exclusion for Australian children. The results reported in the paper are based on both a composite index and the geographical distribution of particular variables likely to be related to child disadvantage. The paper explores the methodological issues of comparing an index based on small area data over time and has important policy implications for the delivery of services to children.