PhD Opportunity at UNSW

https://www.scientia.unsw.edu.au/scientia-phd-scholarships/creating-better-communities-young-families-co-designing-community

Project title: *Creating better communities for young families: co-designing community measures for early childhood development*

Description of the project

This project will focus on how community members in the most disadvantaged urban communities can collaborate with service providers and researchers can draw on existing datasets and data generated by the community to collaborate to improve outcomes for young children. Our previous research has shown that in communities where families engage with each other and with service providers and community leaders, the wellbeing of children appears to be better than communities with low levels of social capital, poor service coordination and challenging built environment. This project will add to the evidence base by demonstrating that communities can utilise a range of datasets to address these risk factors and improve the wellbeing of children. The project will involve working with two disadvantaged communities as per Socio-economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) score, and with a range of professionals working in that community. These communities have high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD residents. The first part of the project will be to undertake an analysis of existing administrative and survey data, in particular the Australian Early Development Index, to profile the community. The candidate will then present these findings to community members and local stakeholders and will use a range of qualitative and quantitative (survey) methods to work with and identify actions that can be taken to address these issues. The PhD will focus on the process and the potential for knowledge translation by taking these methods to scale to improve the lives of children in disadvantaged urban communities across Australia.

The ideal candidate will be an individual with the following skills:

- Quantitative statistical analysis at least to basic level (the student will develop these skills if necessary)
- Qualitative research or interviewing
- Experience at engaging or working with disadvantaged families
- Experience of local service delivery in urban areas
- Some of these skills can be taught, but the candidate will have to have some experience as a practitioner or volunteer in disadvantaged communities.

Outcomes

This project will generate high level academic developments along with significant research impact on the most vulnerable communities in urban Australia. The development of 'big' data at a community level is a new phenomenon in Australia, and the mobilisation of data by communities to benefit young children is both an opportunity and an intellectual and impact challenge for research in the next decade. This project therefore makes a contribution to academic excellence, with the potential for becoming part of a much larger program of cross faculty multi disciplinary research, as well as developing methods for translating research to a range of stakeholders to advance equity and wellbeing for vulnerable young Australian children from diverse backgrounds. The proposed project aligns with UNSW's social engagement priority in two key ways. First, the project highlights the importance of community-research partnerships. The PhD candidate will leverage partnerships between the University, clinical service providers, Local Councils and other organisations providing support to disadvantaged families at the community level. Second, the program aligns with the Grand Challenge theme and will help develop action plans to address "rapid urbanisation' by building community engagement and participation while also examining the impact of the neighbourhood, green spaces and other built environment factors that contribute to family connectedness and social cohesion that are likely to have a positive impact on neighbourhoods/society locally while also working towards dissemination at a global level. The project also aligns with the 2025 strategy in building UNSW's community, national and international reputation through the conduct of interdisciplinary research that will have a strong potential for social impact at a global level.

Supervisory team

Professor Valsamma Eapen– Faculty of Medicine, School of Psychiatry (Professor)

Professor Ilan Katz - Social Policy Research Centre, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Conjoint Associate Professor John Eastwood – Faculty of Medicine, School of Women and Children's Health

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