

# Poverty is not a life sentence in Australia

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Researchers say almost half of Australian families tracked in a 30-year study have experienced poverty at least once.

University of Queensland researcher Emeritus Professor Jake Najman said the study found little evidence of a persistent 'underclass,' suggesting that for many families poverty was a transient stage in life.

"It was common for families to move in and out of hardship, due to a change of circumstances such as loss of employment or marital breakdown."

"However, there was evidence of substantial economic mobility – the ability of a family or individual to improve (or experience a decline) in their economic status – both within a single generation and across generations."

Emeritus Professor Najman said it was not surprising those most likely to suffer poverty were single mothers, the unemployed and aged pensioners.

"The study suggested that poverty in Australia could be split into two groups – a relatively small group who experience chronic, long-term poverty and a much larger group who experience shorter periods of hardship."

"Interestingly, [adversity](#) experienced early in the child's life course does not independently predict poverty when the child reaches adulthood. "

He said that meant those who experienced high levels of poverty and/or adversity in early childhood rarely went on to experience [persistent poverty](#) and adversity such as unemployment as adults, and other factors were more likely to lead to adult poverty.

The study of more than 2000 Brisbane families measured [family](#) income when the child was born, and at five, 14, 21 and 30 years.

Emeritus Professor Najman said future research would investigate the health and behavioural consequences of the different forms of [poverty](#).

The research is published in *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** Jake M. Najman et al. The inter- and intra-generational transmission of family poverty and hardship (adversity): A prospective 30 year study, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0190504](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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