

Home life, housing and work decisions

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National Research Venture 1

Qualitative research



- Complements quantitative analysis based on 'observed behaviours'
- Explores motivations, meanings and understandings
- Everyday lived experiences and decisions
- Personal histories and future aspirations
- Economic participation in context of other life concerns

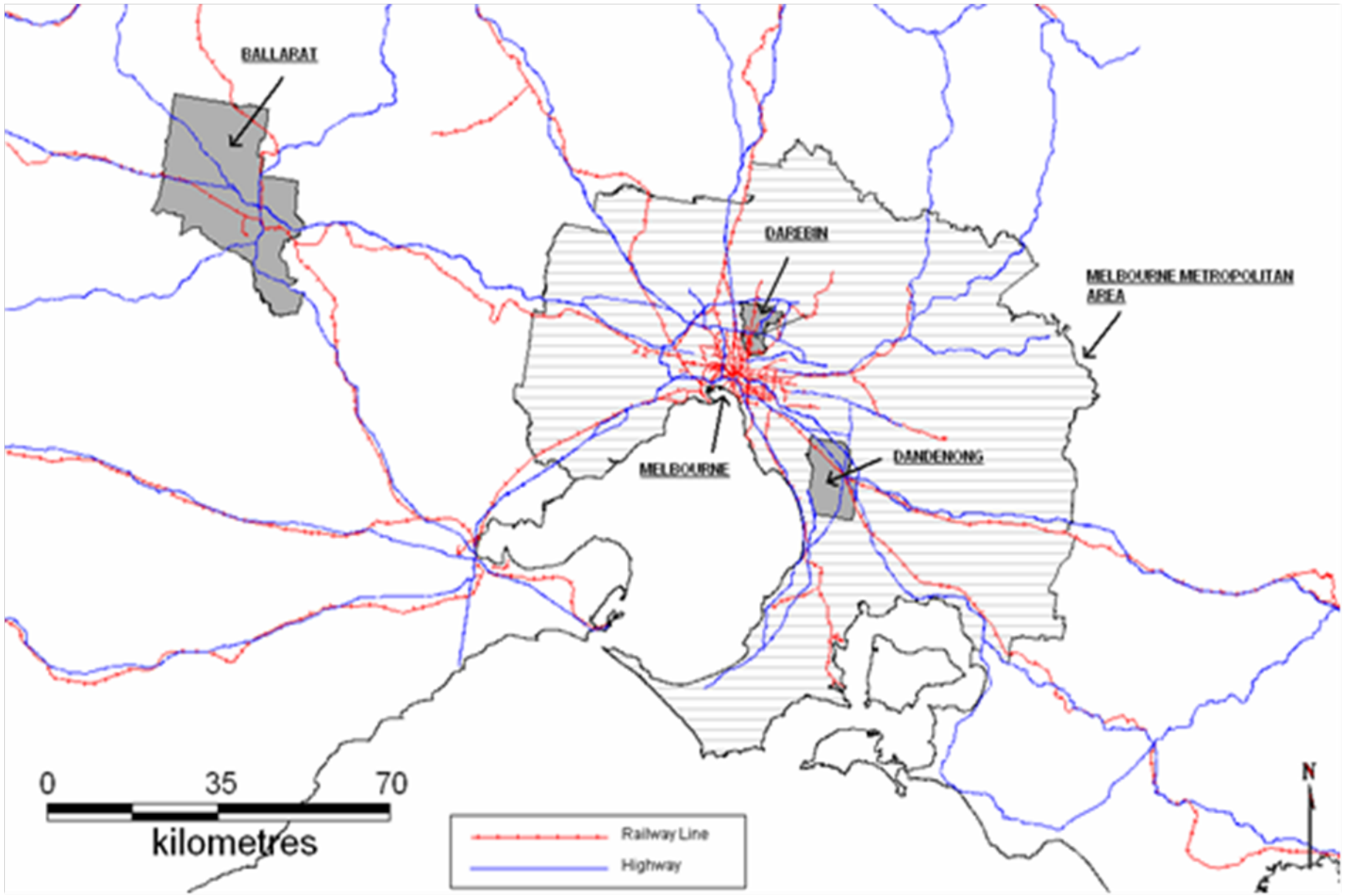
Undertaken by Swinburne University and University of New South Wales

The research

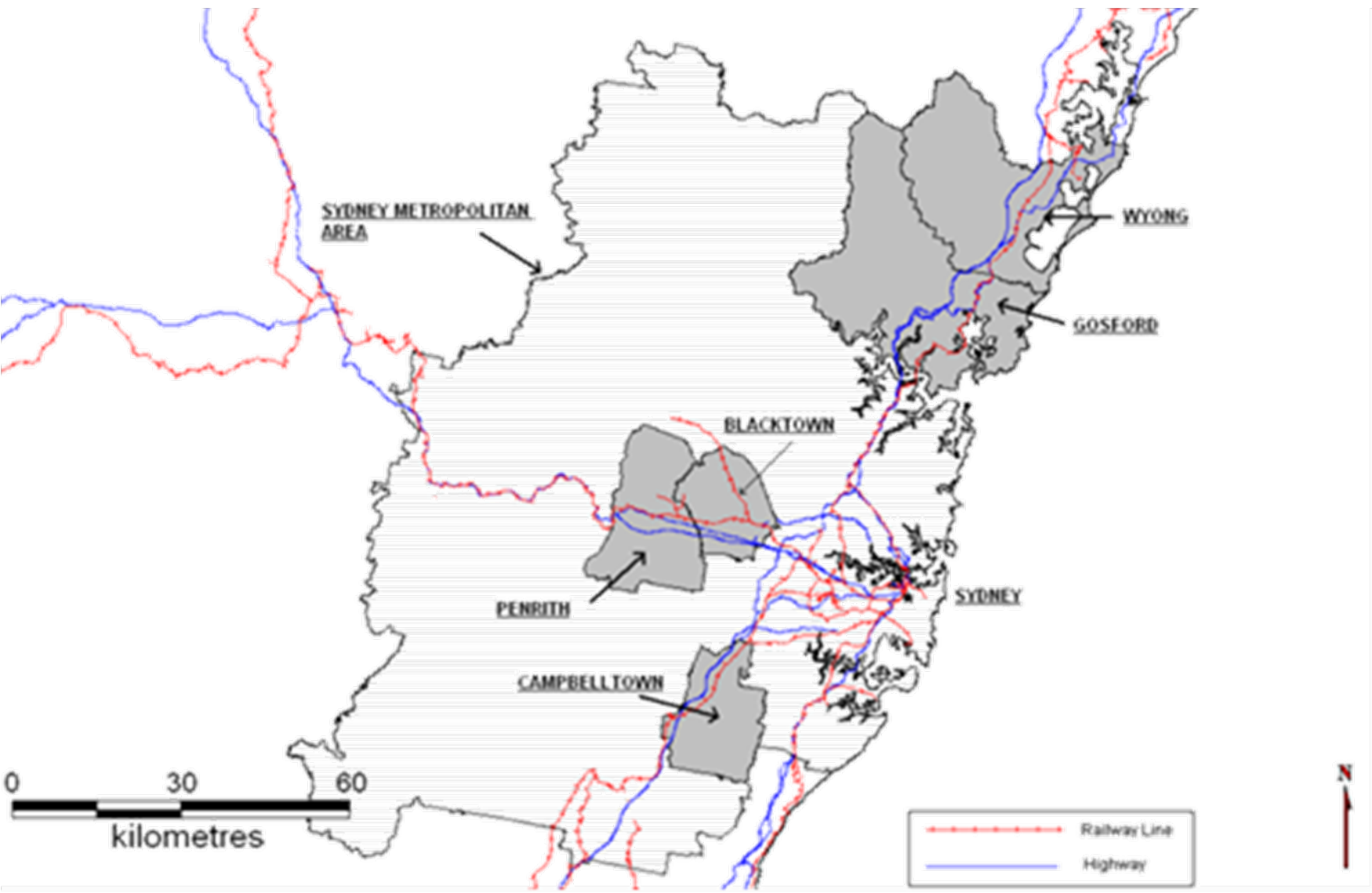


- 105 in depth interviews
- Receiving Centrelink payments and rental housing assistance
- Two thirds on 'longer term' benefits
- Two thirds women and one third men
- Mixed age group
- 6 locations in 2 states

Study sites (Victoria)



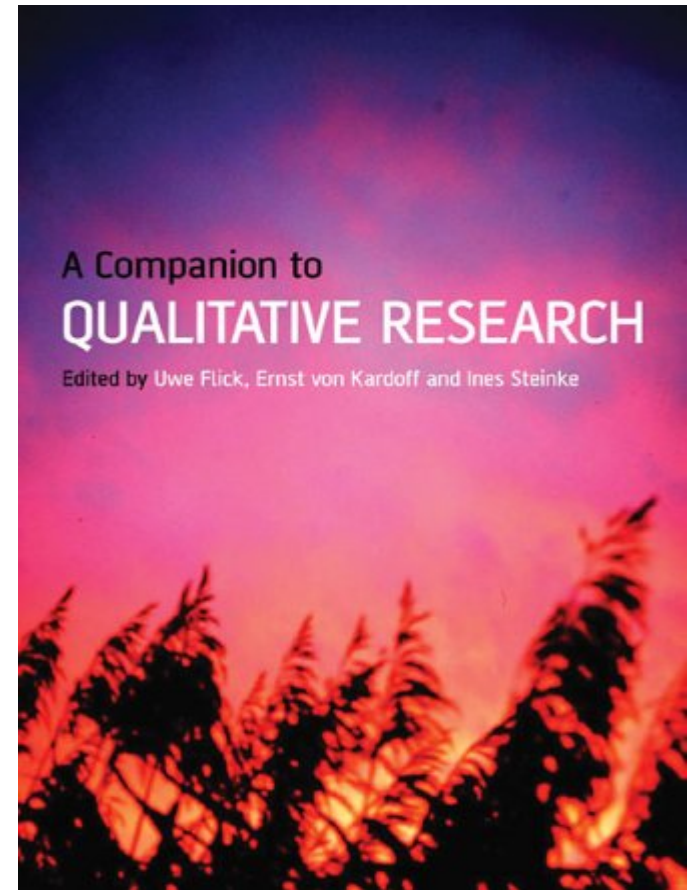
Study sites (NSW)



Qualitative research

Data analysis

- 105 'stories'
- Very rich and textured data
- Interpretivist
- Systematic analysis of key themes and patterns
- Use of narrative as illustration



1. Past circumstances help shape current attitudes and priorities

Family/employment/housing histories are interconnected:

- Instability in family background (security)
- Child abuse and family violence (safety)
- Low level of education and expectations (skills & confidence)
- Fractured employment histories (job types)
- High levels of residential mobility (security)

2. Work decisions not a simple financial calculation

Benefits of working:

- Financial (but difficult with part-time work)
- Non-financial (contact with people, reduce isolation, self-esteem, role model for children, etc.)

Costs of working:

- Extra costs (child care, transport/travel, work clothes, etc.)
- Lack of time (pay more, less time with children, etc.)
- Logistical problems and stress (effects on health and parenting, etc)

3. Main barriers to entering paid work

- Health issues (particularly mental health)
- Caring responsibilities
 - Logistical problems
 - Strong views on being a good parent (mothering)
- Location/place
 - Transport
 - Stigma/bad reputation of area

Cultural attitudes

‘Sally’, 39, 3 children, PPS, western Sydney

I know some people that do long hours of work and they get their 15-year-old to mind their five-year-old. I wasn't willing to let my kids mind themselves at 5 in the morning when I had a younger one, and I didn't even walk around the block at that time in the morning. I wasn't sure how safe they were in the house. Maybe it was just an involuntary fear, just being a single parent I wasn't willing to leave them there in case there was an accident or electrical fire or anything. I thought, if I got back and something happened to them ... So maybe there's an inbuilt sort of unreasonable fear when you're a single parent.....

■ Transport

- 58% did not have car or access to one
- Many low skill jobs (particularly for men) require driver's licence and/or access to a car
- Difficult to combine parenting and work using public transport

■ Area

- Poor reputation of area – attitudes of employers
- Little public transport

Reputation of area

‘Carl’, 37, single, 1 child, Newstart, public housing, south western Sydney

It was devastating. I became depressed and seemed like every time I turned up for an interview and was qualified for the position I got knocked back. So depression set in and I didn’t want to do anything then, after getting knocked back so many times. So I tried changing addresses, doing a PO box, and that didn’t work neither because stupid me put it under (area name), not the street name. So now when I apply for a job I don’t mention that area at all and it seems to be getting me further in for a second interview or a third interview.

4. Specific role of housing assistance

■ Rent setting

- Only a small component of broader disincentives
- Rent Assistance - know general effects
- Public housing - understand the effect of working on rents
- Not worth working part time (financial reasons)

■ Security

- RA – can move but instability adds to problems
- Public housing – low cost but stable lifestyle or get trapped in a poor area with fears for safety and concerns for children.

5. Economic participation includes unpaid work

47 of 71 women and 12 of 34 men had done unpaid work outside the home

Women

- extension of domestic duties, longer term, not expected to lead to a paid job
- more flexible with caring responsibilities

Men

- trying to get skills and experience, shorter term, hoped it would lead to a paid job

6. Different groups face different barriers to working

Hulse and Randolph 2004

Job seekers on Newstart/YA
(2/3 male)

Main barriers:

- Age discrimination
- Location
- Lack of skills and self-confidence

Hulse and Saugeres 2008

Two thirds on PP and DSP
(2/3 female)

Main barriers:

- Health
- Caring responsibilities
- Location

7. Implications for housing policy

- Housing as part of ‘whole of government’ strategies re family instability, DV, etc
- Financial incentives important but insufficient in themselves
- Address practical barriers to working – health, caring, location
- Role of housing assistance in improving security/stability
- Recognise cultural attitudes about caring
- Other types of participation such as unpaid work as a stepping stone

8. Assumptions about motivation and behaviour

'Assumptions about human motivation and behaviour are the key to design of social policy' [Julian Le Grand 1997: 153]

- 'Rational' decision-makers
- 'Freeloaders' (self interested individuals)
- Short-term horizons
- 'Dutiful but defeated'
- 'Resisters'
- Survival strategists

Full report

Hulse, K. and Saugeres, L.,
(2008) *Home life, work and
housing decisions: a qualitative
analysis*, NRV1 Research Paper
7, AHURI, Melbourne

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