



Curtin University

How to maximise the policy impact of feminist economics? Lessons from Action-Research

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Solidarities and Challenges at the Intersection of Inequalities

Our Study: “Inside the Blackbox: Intra-household Resource Allocations of Older Couples” (2017-19)

- The focus of our research is on ownership, control and management of resources within older couple households.
- Why? Australia has moved from reliance on tax-payer-provided age pension to compulsory defined contribution accounts (superannuation).
- We are also interested in understanding the link between gender analysis and policy change in relation to intra-household issues for older Australians
- Mixed-methods approach:

Analysis of **survey data**
ie. *Housing, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia* survey.

Interviews with older couples.

Feminist Action Research into political, policy and budgetary processes relevant to older couple households.

Why Feminist Action-Research?

- ❖ Conceptual and methodological framework blending participatory action research and feminist lens.
- ❖ Focus on how knowledge is created and its role in emancipatory change.
- ❖ Aims to create knowledge that encourage the participation of women in research and include their experiences and views.

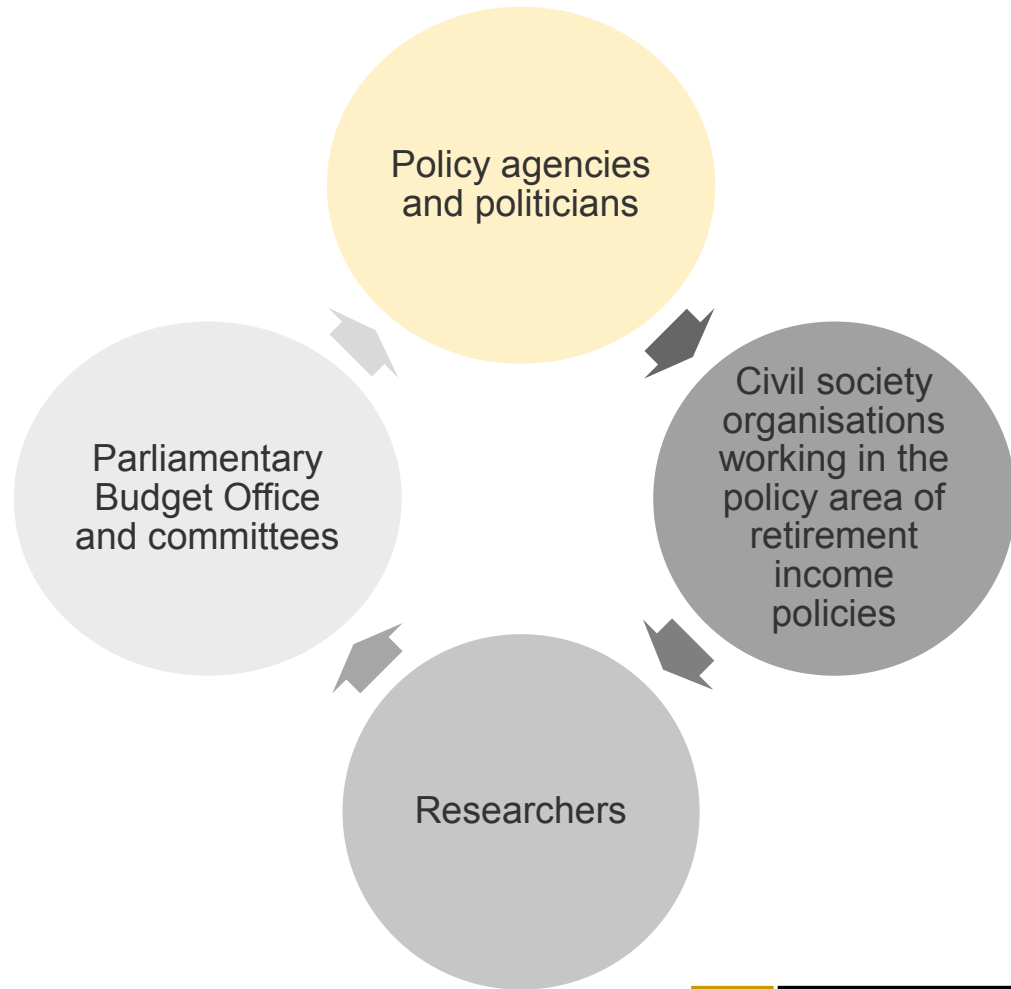
Our approach to action-research

- ❖ Observation and engagement: Meetings complemented by email and phone discussions.
- ❖ Keeping an account of a practice of gender analysis (civil society).
- ❖ Submissions to parliamentary commissions and briefings to politicians.
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews with representatives of civil society organisations, researchers and policy actors with experience in policy influence and change.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT? INITIAL THOUGHTS



1. Understanding the policy process - Policy community relevant to retirement incomes:



2. Understanding the policy process: The policy and political context

- ❖ How individuals use and manage their retirement income is gaining some policy traction.
- ❖ Women's economics insecurity in retirement has been documented.
- ❖ Yet there is no change in policies re. retirement incomes.
 - ❖ Depletion of gender machinery in government.
 - ❖ Neoliberalism has reduced entry points for gender issues.
 - ❖ Women in retirement no perceived as a constituency.

3. Identifying intra-household inequality as an issue

- ❖ **Placing intra-household inequality in retirement on the agenda:**
 - ❖ Intra-household issues in retirement are invisible and seen as outside the realm of the retirement income policy.
 - ❖ Situations of vulnerability as the only site for action: *transparency in divorce*.
- ❖ **Articulating the problem:**
 - ❖ Belief that inequality in retirement savings will close as the system matures.
 - ❖ Belief that idealised versions of about families.
 - ❖ Superannuation are prioritized in Australia's retirement incomes.

4. Policy analysis

❖ On the inside:

- ❖ Bureaucracy was a welcoming space to our research team.
- ❖ How we presented our research mattered and experiences were powerful.
- ❖ Policy framework and agenda sets the tone for the analysis that gets noticed.

❖ On the outside:

- ❖ Limited visibility of academic research.
- ❖ NGO dedicated to the well-being of older Australians has produced its first report on gender inequality in retirement.
- ❖ Placing the research in the paper: 'Who's the boss?' Survey (Western Australian)



How has our analysis changed?

- ❖ Greater focus on **discussing** the potential of what we are finding and **listening** to what matters to those engaged in policy.
- ❖ **Communication** of findings – *Briefing Notes as well as journal articles.*
- ❖ **Expanding the debate:** Presence of an international voice (S. Himmelweit).

What have we learnt about action-research?

- ❖ Policy processes are complex: analysis involves different lenses.
- ❖ Juggling demands of the project and those of AR is hard.
- ❖ Our multi-method and discipline approach has been an asset to generate engagement with the issue.
- ❖ Engagement is resource intensive and challenging.
- ❖ Our focus is on the potential to generate new ideas and an agenda; change is complex, demands activism and cannot be hurried.

