

# **Fitting-in as ‘Fringe Dwellers’: Families, Mobility and Acceptance in Non-Metropolitan Areas**

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Since the 1970s, there has been a marked movement of people away from major centres to locations outside capital cities (Burnley & Murphy 2003; Fincher & Wulff 2001; Hugo 2003). Many of these are families with young children. This is a trend now evident in Australia and in other comparable post-industrial nations, such as the USA. Often, this relocation has been driven by the desire for a ‘sea change’ or ‘tree change’. In other cases, it is a form of forced mobility, brought about by the need for stable, continuing employment, or improved lifestyle. For others, it is a choice, in order to avoid surveillance by government agencies, ex-partners and, to escape from a former existence.

The romanticisation of life in a non-metropolitan area may turn to disillusion, as realities of poor or non-existent services and infrastructure, isolation and stigmatisation of the ‘new’ arrivals themselves become the norm. Thus, many of the new comers experience vulnerability and disadvantage as an outcome of the relocation.

In this paper, we report on findings from our research, such as factors of social inclusion and exclusion across three diverse non-metropolitan locations in Queensland and New South Wales. We seek to offer insights into this emerging phenomenon, and to offer examples of the isolation and exclusion experienced by those who move to the fringes, outside major centres.

Our paper is based on research being undertaken for a three year ARC funded project entitled, ‘Families on the Fringe’, where the relocation of families with young children, aged 0-8 years, to non-metropolitan areas, is being investigated.