Care and work activation policies for sole mothers

Where to for Welfare? Recent and proposed welfare reforms in New Zealand
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Lesley Patterson
Sociology Programme
Wellington

L.Patterson@massey.ac.nz
http://sspsw.massey.ac.nz/staff/lpatterson.shtml
40 Low Income Lone Mothers: a group biography over time

Panel established 2006
Wave one panel size: 48
Recruitment through community newspapers
Original income limit dropped
Diverse participants
Three more waves over next four years

Context: individualization, gendered risk, and welfare reform
Focus: income, care, work, relationships
I went to the doctor. She said to me ‘what’s your occupation?’
I said ‘I’m a mother.’
She said ‘I have to write on here that you’re unemployed.’

(p2w1:9)
## Problematising ‘Incentives’ and ‘Barriers’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Care</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Intra-family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for Families</td>
<td>- children’s fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>- other non-residential family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Support*</td>
<td>- co-residing family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
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<td>Market</td>
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Care use is complex

- **Market-based care***
  (centres, after school programmes, family-style)

- **Community**
  (unpaid, reciprocal)

- **Intra-family care**
  (unpaid co-residing family members, non-residential parents)
## Income security at wave one

<table>
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<th>Market</th>
<th>Child Support*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declining</td>
<td>Generally high</td>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Situational</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• situational</td>
<td>• generally high</td>
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</table>
## Income sustainability over time

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Declining</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Uncertain</td>
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*Child Support*
Income secure

Like other workers

Full-time, well paid, skilled work
Full-time care – intra-family and/or market

OR

Full-time mothers (care is work)
Income sustainable

Like other lone mothers

Care is work
Episodic, typically part-time paid work
Complex income mix
Market-based* or community care
Income secure and sustainable

*Like other mothers*

Part-time work (local, supportive)
Intra-family or community care
‘Breadwinner’ (Child Support)
Opportunities to care important
Income insecure and unsustainable

Like other low paid workers

Full-time low paid work
Minimal use of child-care
Comparatively isolated from family and community
No, low, or insecure Child Support
Concluding remarks

Resources at point of becoming a lone mother structure the experience:
- Income and care are more complex than ‘incentives’ and ‘barriers’
- Failure to ‘marry well’ has on-going implications

Participants who met WFF criteria generally positive:
- Mixed income streams
- Care sources and care requirements converge

Participants who do not meet WFF criteria generally sceptical:
- Limited access to market income
- Care requirements and care sources diverge

Income security and sustainability over time:
- Many concerned at welfare insecurity

Future reforms: lone mothers not ‘the same’ as other workers
- Implications for women’s autonomy, for mothers as citizens, and for ‘feminized poverty’ as contemporary life risk