A Great Place to Work?

A Comparative Analysis of Three Regional Labour Markets

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Introduction

Against a backdrop composed mainly of macro level labour market analyses, the Labour Market Dynamics (LMD) Research Programme conducted an exploratory study of three separate labour markets that was focused at the micro-level on the interface between individuals and households, and employment. This commenced in the Hawkes Bay region in 1995/96 and was followed by West Auckland and South Waikato in 1997/98. As will be apparent in the brief descriptions that follow, each of these regional labour markets appears to be quite distinctive. Consequently, it was anticipated that they would provide a range of valuable insights, both individually and collectively, into the micro-level functioning of labour markets, thus complementing and building on existing data.

The study of each labour market was conducted in two phases, each with distinctly different approaches. The initial phase involved the surveying of a sample of households to gather general details on the make up of the household and its occupants. As well, all individuals between the ages of 16 and 65 in each household were asked to respond to a questionnaire on their work history, and their perceptions, concerns and attitudes regarding work and the labour market. The second phase of the research was a retrospective longitudinal analysis of people's work histories and experiences over the preceding ten year period. A smaller group was drawn from the original sample and information was gathered using semi-structured interviews and a life events/work history matrix. Since the key units of analysis were transitions that occurred in people's work profiles, a short discussion on how the concept of transitions was employed in this research is undertaken in the next section. The methodology used to develop and then analyse people's work histories across the period under study is then briefly outlined.

The findings in each region from both phases of the research programme have already been separately reported (for the survey analyses see Shirley et al, 1997, 2000a and b; for the ethnographic findings see Shirley et al 2001a, b, c, d and e). Whereas previous reporting isolated the analysis of each labour market, this working paper compares and contrasts the findings from all three regions as the result of data gathered during the second phase of the research programme. An acknowledged shortcoming in respect of this task is the inability to conduct any comparative analyses based on ethnicity due to problems with aspects of the data collection in Waitakere City and South Waikato. In general, this paper focuses on identifying and discussing people's qualitative labour market experiences across a small number of themes and headings that either emerged as common to all three regions, or as important in the context of the overall analysis.

Transitions Research – Concept and Methodology

Though the term transition is frequently used in labour market analysis and discussion, what is contained in this choice of word is a wealth of contextual detail. By its very nature, a transitional perspective emphasises the dynamic quality of such markets and focuses on "flows and not stocks" and can "reveal and explain patterns … during the lifecycle of individuals or groups" (Schmid et al, 1999:268). Thus, although our use of

the term transition incorporates the common meaning of the word – a movement or shift from one state or point to another – we develop the concept more fully to achieve such an emphasis and focus. In doing so we seek to identify the array of starting points and outcomes that can make up a transition and unpack the mix of contexts, influences and processes that are integral to any shift. The result is a detailed analysis of change at the micro-level of the labour market.

Such analysis is important for a range of reasons, one being that the labour market itself is undergoing significant change. Schmid et al (1999:268) conceptualise these changes, in part, as a greater blurring of the borderlines between gainful dependent labour market work and other productive activities. They note that the "'standard labour contract' is fading, but we do not know yet which new standards will develop". A transitional focus serves as one approach to analysing these changes. However, since paid work no longer necessarily forms the outcome of, or even the motivation for, some transitions, for approach to be valuable it also becomes necessary to understand work in its broadest sense.

People's work experiences across any period can be summarised in their work histories that are, in turn, composed of their work profiles – the combination of work activities that they were involved in at any one time. Transitions are changes to those profiles. Whilst thinking of transitions easily brings to mind shifts such as a move from unemployment to paid work, our use of this concept also encompasses more subtle and multi-layered change. Thus, transitions need not only occur when one type of work is substituted with something else or when there is a complete shift from one status to another. Rather, they can be signalled by the changing composition or shifting balance of activities within the mix of people's various work responsibilities. That is, when a person's work profile is altered but not necessarily completely changed nor entirely replaced.

The broad notion of work adopted here means that it would be highly unlikely that a person's profile could be described in terms of just one role. Though many of those interviewed in this study certainly seemed to have a predominant role or responsibility, blurring was evident as each person also took on other secondary roles or activities. Accordingly, when change occurs – at either primary or secondary level – we need to consider how different aspects of a person's profile complement, compete or conflict with one another as a result of any shift. Importantly, we also need to be alert to continuity. The maintenance of stable profiles and periods without change can be of equal interest and significance. In general, work histories were usually quite dynamic, though there was wide variation in the frequency, nature and degree of any changes, and people often demonstrated phases of relative stability or volatility.

Transitions can occur in a range of ways. In some cases they were forced on people while others were made by choice. Though certain transitions were sudden and complete – such as when a person lost a job – the study also revealed transitioning that was prolonged as people worked progressively towards a longer-term goal through intermediate shifts. Such shifts, though transitions in their own right, can also be seen as parts of a larger process. As such, they could be disjointed and unanticipated or show varying degrees of continuity, coherence and predictability. In each case there is undoubted value in focusing on the intermediate steps – which was, itself, a significant

part of this study – but by drawing these into a larger or longer-term picture, equally important insights are generated.

The context in which transitions occur also forms an integral part of understanding and describing them. Context can be viewed on a number of levels and in relation to a range of factors and perspectives. These levels take in considerations beyond the household – to the local community, the industry or sector, and to the regional and national situation. Various perspectives – such as social, cultural, economic and political viewpoints – might be considered at any level. Factors that could be addressed include issues such as gender, class, ethnicity, age and so on. The subjective as well as objective dimensions of transitions – that is, the experience of the transition from the perspective of those involved as well as how it appears to an observer – also need to be incorporated. Even if transitions appear by name to be of a similar kind, their objective circumstances can still be very different. Consider, for example, all the variations possible under the heading of 'redundancy'. The subjective dimension provides insights into how individuals and their families understand, experience and respond to the transition.

Whilst each person's transitions, profiles and histories can stand alone and be analysed separately, they also inter-weave to form a larger picture that exposes the intimate relationships between the actions of spouses and partners. It is not hard to see how one person's transition can affect others in the household. However, there can also be a complex inter-relationship between the transitions of spouses and partners. An obvious example would be how couples organise the care of children and other unpaid work, and consequently engage in paid employment. To adequately account for this, the household rather than just each individual must be considered. Doing so generates more complex but complete pictures.

Having given some depth to the notion of transitions, it is now possible to briefly describe how the interview data were collected and analysed. In considering the methodology employed in this part of the research programme it is worth noting at the outset that both retrospective and prospective longitudinal studies have their own sets of advantages and difficulties (Dex, 1991). A retrospective study – the approach adopted here – creates particular problems in ensuring detail and accuracy in people's recall that is compounded by the length of any period under study. Against these difficulties such an approach offers the opportunity to gather quite detailed data from an extended time frame during a relatively short interview. To maximise the quality of information it becomes important to develop and employ an interviewing strategy which aims to both minimise the problems associated with this approach whilst building on its strengths.

Using skilled interviewers is one important part of such a strategy, as is the interview process. To create the most favourable circumstances for recall, the interviews began with people recollecting major life events during the preceding ten years. These life events then served as cues to help the person recall their work history over the same period. This allowed a matrix of their personal and work histories across time to be progressively built up. Over the course of the interview more detail was added to the matrix. Such an approach clearly aided people's recall and allowed them and the interviewer to more accurately identify the timing of events and to build a detailed picture of these. It also helped the ongoing checking and clarifying of information.

Following Miles and Huberman (1994) a more condensed matrix that provided a graphical summary of a person's work history across the ten year study period was developed using the interview materials. Recorded on each were the person's work profile at the start of the decade and any subsequent changes. Each person's work history was organised into two parts. Firstly, there were the activities that they engaged in primarily or on a full time basis. Then there were additional or secondary activities. In adopting this approach, though, particular activities were not automatically privileged over others, but each was situated according to the how the person described and 'rated' it. So, paid work, education and training, and unpaid work could all be considered primary or secondary activities depending on the person and the household, as well as their circumstances and perceptions. When the matrices of adults in the same household were combined they created a work history of the household as well.

From the work history matrix we can identify individual transitions. Whilst such a summary format is useful, the detail of these transitions is not apparent in it. To provide this, each transition was described and analysed. A template was developed to aid and standardise this process and it canvassed many of the aspects alluded to in the preceding discussion of the concept of transitions. Table 1 outlines the factors considered in each transition. As is apparent, information was gathered not solely in terms of the individual but also in respect of the household. The wider context was also considered.

Table 1: Factors considered in analysis of each transition.

- ❑ The characteristics and mechanics of the transition – what sort of change occurred and how – are described.
- ❑ The process by which the transition occurred – how decisions were made, across what timeframe, who was involved and so on – is detailed.
- ❑ Any factors that may be relevant to the process are acknowledged. These include:
  - ▪ Individual and household
    - Attitudes, values & beliefs
    - Milestones (e.g. birth of a child)
    - Individual considerations (e.g. a person's desire to work)
    - Family considerations – not childcare (e.g. elderly relatives needing extra care)
    - Childcare considerations
    - Financial considerations
    - Education & Training
    - Skills & Experience
    - Other Issues such as
      - Age
      - Ethnicity
      - Gender
  - ▪ Welfare considerations (e.g. was the person eligible for a benefit or what were the abatement provisions)
  - ▪ Structural & Contextual Issues
    - Workplace level
    - Industry level
    - Locally and Regionally
- ❑ The impact of the transition – what outcomes it generated for the individual and the household (expected and unexpected) are considered. This includes the significance of the transition – what the change meant for the individual, the household, and possibly the workplace.
- ❑ Quotes from the interviewee or someone else in the household that illustrate aspects of the above points are included.

General themes, that had some bearing on the concept of transitions, were also identified from the interviews. Quotes that reflected aspects of a particular transition, a type of transition, or that related to the themes were gathered to support and illustrate the analysis. However they were used, quotes were particularly important given that one of the goals of the study was to create a narrative that, whilst focused on labour market transitions, drew heavily on the actual experiences of people.

When applied to each of the interviews this process yielded three distinct yet inter-related summaries for each person:
❑ the work history matrix for each adult in the household;
❑ a set of templates that detailed each transition for each person;
❑ individual/household synopses of key themes and issues.

These spanned the following decades in each area:
❑ Hawkes Bay – 1985 to 1995,
❑ South Waikato – 1987 to 1997,
❑ West Auckland – 1987 to 1997.

In these forms the data were now accessible for further analysis. This involved, firstly, the progressive drawing together of transitions of a similar kind. Initially, broad categorisations based on the entry or exit points of a transition were developed. The process then moved onto refining these larger categories into groups and sub-groups. These were subsequently analysed to identify common and contrasting characteristics. The comparison was based on the various features captured on the template. As well, sets were broken down further and analysed on the basis of individual (gender, ethnicity and so on) and household characteristics. What is hopefully evident is that a transition could be categorised and examined according to a number of criteria. The outcomes of applying this methodology, as have been presented in various reports, can be broader, more general findings and those that relate to narrower, more specific issues. Having transitions as a unit of analysis enables not only a strong qualitative emphasis but also allows some quantitative analysis, such as a comparison of the numbers and frequency of particular transitions for various groups. The work history matrices of people and households were also a focus of investigation. Like the transitional templates they too could be collated, based on various criteria, and analysed accordingly. Finally, the themes that had emerged in the interviews were considered for how they could enrich aspects of the transitional analysis and provide areas of separate interest and discussion.

The Regions

Hawkes Bay is a region with clearly defined geographical boundaries that correspond to the area administered by the Hawkes Bay Regional Council. It is dominated by two cities – Napier and Hastings – and has a population of around 140,000. Households in the region reflect a variety of social, cultural and economic groups. With a mixture of light industry, agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, forestry and service industries it is

a structurally diverse area. Over recent years, the local economy has experienced both contraction and expansion as firms and households in the region have adjusted to economic rationalisation and the restructuring of government services. Hawkes Bay is well serviced by local and central government agencies and it contains a wide range of educational services based in the public and private sectors. The ethnographic study in the Hawkes Bay region was based on 164 individual interviews (male 71, female 93) with people resident in 67 households[1].

The South Waikato region is represented by South Waikato and its surrounding areas. Though traditional forms of primary production are a major feature of the local economy, the integrated pulp, paper and plywood mill and processing plant at Kinleith dominates the labour market in much the same way that it has conditioned the development of amenities and services in the region for the past 40 years. Since the mid-1980s, the restructuring of the forest industry has had a major impact on communities such as South Waikato, and it therefore provides an opportunity to examine the way in which a regional labour market, dominated by a single industry, has adjusted to economic restructuring. Having experienced some decline over the last three censuses, this area now has a population of around 30,000. Whilst the numbers of non-Maori fall, the Maori population is increasing. Research on a slightly larger geographical area than considered here (Sceats, Pool and Brown, 1999) concluded that in respect of particular issues this could be considered a disadvantaged area in relation to the rest of New Zealand. A sample of 17 households from this region, in both rural and urban locations, provided 23 individual interviews (11 female, 12 male) for analysis

Located within New Zealand's major urban centre, West Auckland represents a labour market that appears to be more fluid, and less well defined (in geographic terms), than either South Waikato or Hawkes Bay. The area under study corresponds to that administered by Waitakere City and, as the fastest growing city in the Auckland region, has a population base of approximately 177,000. It includes significant Maori and Pacific Island populations, along with a diverse range of migrant groups such as Indian, Asian and continental Europeans. The socio-economic mix varies from affluent commuter suburbs to areas containing semi and unskilled workers with moderate to high levels of unemployment. Building on the history of Pakeha settlement, West Auckland still hosts timber milling and is home to many vintners and artisans. The area also contains an array of enterprises devoted to light industry, furniture making, boat building, and construction, though a general decline in manufacturing-based employment along with increases in the service sector has had an impact on industry in the area. Lower rates of resident workers than the other cities in the Auckland region, means that people living in West Auckland often work elsewhere. The analysis in this area was based on interviews with 89 people (46 female, 43 male) living in 67 households.

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[1] Greater detail on the make up of the samples from each regional ethnographic study can be found in the individual reports: Shirley et al, (2001a, d, c, d and e).

Comparing and Contrasting the Regions

1.   Stability and Volatility

Though very different, all three areas had similar proportions of people able to maintain reasonably stable profiles across the ten year study periods. Around a quarter of the people profiled in each region had at most one major transition or were able to maintain an unchanged profile for the entire decade. Others managed infrequent changes, while small groups had more volatile patterns. Though the profiles of some people showed this volatility across large portions of the decade under study, more often periods of relative stability and volatility occurred. Interestingly, whilst most people were content to have settled work patterns, a degree of change was important to a few. Take this man who, though he worked for the same company for many years, only stayed because of the variety they allowed him.

> I started off an apprentice joiner. …Started sweeping the floors, cleaning the toilets, making the cups of tea, things that apprentice's don't do now . …Two years later I went glazing for six months. …Yeah, then I went 18 months building. Came back into the factory, we started commercial joinery. So we did that and got onto finger jointing and moulding. I took over production, that's when I did locksmith then … I set up another factory, set that all up, came back into production. Five years as General Manager, now I'm doing development work. …And a lot of other things in between that (W.A.[2])

During the 36 years he was with the firm he reckoned on having between 20 and 40 different types of jobs at all levels.

For a number of women the volatility of their work histories came as a response to their other roles, in particular, caring for children. Thus, some would stop and start work, or change jobs as their circumstances altered. This pattern applied to single parents as well as those in relationships. In Hawkes Bay there was also a group who made repeated use of seasonal work, alternating between this and unpaid work or receipt of a benefit, often for several years. Though these people had numerous changes to their work histories, there was also a certain rhythm to their patterns of change. Some of these cases are discussed in more detail in a later section.

Another major source of volatility was related to the period across which people's work histories were examined (between 1985 and 1997). It featured times of significant change and turbulence in New Zealand with many public and private enterprises restructuring and downsizing. Though particular areas of the economy and country may have experienced the extremes of this at times, no sectors or regions escaped and the changes worked their way through all levels of public and private organisations. As a result – and of particular interest to the research – major changes occurred to the nature of work and the functioning and structure of the labour market. The heavy reliance of the South Waikato and Hawkes Bay economies on the rural sector, when combined with the significant changes that occurred in that sector, meant considerable impacts for many people across these regions. In the latter region, for instance, two large meatworks which were significant local employers closed within

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[2] The following abbreviations at the end of quotes identify which region the interviewee was resident in: W.A. = West Auckland, S.W. = South Waikato, H.B. = Hawkes Bay.

the study period. Whilst the make up of the West Auckland economy may have differed from the other two, it was not immune to the effects of the large scale changes that were occurring.

It is unsurprising, given the massive reorganisation and change that occurred in individual companies and across whole sectors, industries and localities, that the work histories of many people in all the regions were affected by episodic unemployment. Redundancy was frequently associated with restructuring, though there were wide variations in the circumstances of the resulting enforced transitions. Compare the closures of two meatworks in the Hawkes Bay region. The first, Whakatu, closed at the beginning of the decade and the second, Tomoana, nearer the end. Apparently some warning was given of the impending closure of Whakatu. Some of those affected were not recalled from the off-season whilst others were laid off having already returned to their jobs. Redundancy was paid to the workforce and people reported that conditions of the settlement meant that the payments did not affect their entitlements to welfare benefits. The circumstances of the Tomoana closure were vastly different. For this group there was no warning. People found out via the media or as they arrived for work and were turned away. One man graphically recalls his personal experience of that closure.

> We didn't know Tomoana would be closed. See the next morning I woke up and ready to go to work and, hello, ready to hop in the car and go to work, and the news come out and Tomoana is closed… I went over there and everybody is just outside on the road, the gate is shut. We don't know what was going on…It hurt because that was where I got the money to pay the mortgage and buy the living for the family. It really affected….I really felt like packing up and going home. We had just bought this home and couldn't afford to just let it go (H.B.).

A West Auckland carpenter recalled an even harsher situation when the construction company he worked for suddenly closed down.

> Then one day we came out [to work] … We didn't know anything. Next minute we were, all the cops were down underneath and security was down the bottom. They told us … that was our last day on the premises and to come back Monday. …come back and pick up our tools, and then yeah, so we called in on Monday and a new contractor was on the job. ..we just received our pay on the street (W.A.).

Such circumstances can only add to the distress of people at an already stressful time. Unfortunately, difficult and unpleasant redundancy processes were all too common.

Just as the redundancy process varied, so too did the effects on those being laid off. People experienced the whole spectrum of responses. At one end, as these comments illustrate, it can be a devastating event.

> It kicked me, it knocked me over for a six, eh? ... I'd never been fired before ... that was a real kick ... It took a lot of effort [to go to a skills training course] for the first couple of weeks. I was late every day. I'd be plodding, and all it was straight down and across the field and down the road, only about a fifteen/twenty minute walk, I still used to be late. …I actually went through depression (H.B.).

> I had a breakdown. I could not work for 6 weeks. I couldn't work for 6 weeks. I got a nervous breakdown, I was just sitting and crying. I was so mad, I came home, I screamed at my little boy, I screamed at my wife (W.A.).

Whilst this next person did not experience such a negative impact, he still found that being made redundant affected him in more insidious ways.

> When I was made redundant you lose your confidence and I went to a couple of interviews and the interviews were terrible, my CV was great but I mean the interview were just a disaster.

Finally, occasionally there were people who perceived being laid off as a positive experience. However, they were very definitely in the minority.

> I looked at the positive side of things. All the redundancies in the early '90's, '91, '92 when every company was closing and redundancies, I said "Why?" ...[Just a] one-off paper thing. That is part and parcel of life. So I took it positively (W.A.).

Alongside these direct impacts, the massive changes that were occurring also had more indirect flow-on effects for large numbers of others, which often affected their work histories. A Hawkes Bay veterinarian, for example, described what the downturn and restructuring in the rural economy had meant for him, his business, and the wider community.

> By about 1985 interest rates were absolutely horrific. They were about 23, 24% per annum. ... Then from '87 to about 1990, things were very tight, there was no growth. Farmers didn't have much money. The employees around here didn't have so much money and, as mentioned before, Whakatu closed. I – we –had opened a branch practice … where a lot of people employed in the freezing works [lived] and of those, about somewhere between a third and half who had been employed at Whakatu suddenly became unemployed. ...And it was really shattering for Hawkes Bay and made a difference to us (H.B.).

He eventually elected to sell up his business and take a job with a government department.

Of course, not everyone suffered or lost out as a result of the changes that were occurring. Take this man's experiences.

> In the past 15 years the industry I am in has basically stayed the same ... in the last 12 months it has really changed ... with deregulation the gas industry has really grown up ... and definitely the customer is benefiting from it. ...We are all given the opportunity to supply a product and really help the customer out, it is all customer focused now. ...I think, in my opinion, that all the people who are left are happier, they are all working really hard but are getting rewards for it, not necessarily monetary rewards, probably better satisfaction in the job. There are monetary rewards but we are also being treated for what we are capable of doing ... everyone had been allowed to express their own knowledge and experience. They are able to say hey I can do that and what about this ... The people who work with me as a team, not under me, I think they are three times happier (H.B.).

However, most people were, at best, ambivalent and more often, quite negative regarding what had happened. Such experiences of and reactions to the instability and volatility of the times were most prominent in Hawkes Bay but also frequently acknowledged by those living in West Auckland. Alongside this it should be added that in all three areas there was a sense, despite the periodic uncertainty in the intervening years, that some things were improving in the latter phases of the study periods.

2.   Paid Employment

Despite the research programme deliberately examining work in a range of senses, the interviews in all three regions still clearly showed that paid employment retained a fundamental position in people's lives. Obviously, it contributed to material well being, but the importance of paid work was also evident in what people said and did. In addition to talking of the terrible effects of being unemployed, people spoke about what paid work meant to and for them, and their families.

> You feel a lot better about yourself when you are working. Good feeling when you get up and you know you have to go somewhere to work and bring money in (S.W.).

> All I know is that if I tried to give up my job I'd probably go nuts in four months because I'd just be home all the time you know and yeah it's just I can't handle not being at work (S.W.).

As well, people demonstrated the importance of paid work through strong commitments to their jobs, the amount of time they devoted to them, and the sense of priority they attached to paid employment. This was apparent, as well, in people's usually intense efforts to find jobs when unemployed. Only a small number of those interviewed had no involvement with paid work in any form across the entire study periods.

As the preceding section has emphasised, the turbulent nature of the study years affected many people's engagement with paid work in a variety of ways. Though this naturally displayed regional variations, in some general respects patterns of engagement with varying forms of paid work showed some similarities across the three areas. Thus, for example, the balance of shifts into and out of full time paid work, the mix of voluntary and enforced moves into paid employment, the motives for working part time, and the gender distribution in this form of paid employment all demonstrated broad likenesses.

Whilst each area had people working in a wide range of sectors and occupations, the make up of particular regions also exerted some influence on the structuring of paid work, as the following discussions of self-employment and seasonal work illustrate. In general, the self-employed businesses in all three regions were of a similar ilk. Most were owned and operated by one person or a couple. Even in the case of the former, spouses or partners often played a prominent role. When others were employed, it was highly unusual for the number to exceed five people. Thus, these enterprises could usually be classified as small businesses and many were family businesses. Other working papers from this programme explore aspects of self-employment with, firstly, the roles and contributions of partners or spouses examined using the notion of social capital (Firkin, 2001a) and, secondly, the development of a model of entrepreneurship as the exercise of capital (Firkin, 2001b).

Self-employment was a popular option in all areas with around a quarter of households in Hawkes Bay, a fifth in West Auckland, and about 40% in South Waikato reporting this form of employment for some or all of the study period. The nature of the businesses in Hawkes Bay reflected the make up of the region with about 25% related in some way to the diverse rural economy and the balance associated with various trades and services. The influence of a regional economy was particularly

apparent in South Waikato, and helps explain the area's high proportion of self-employed. Here, the self-employed activities of those interviewed strongly reflected the make up of the local economy. Of the seven enterprises, five involved share or contract milking, one was associated with the pulp and paper mill, and another centred on horticultural activities. Each of these sectors is a notable feature of the South Waikato economy.

The most striking and influential difference between the three areas in terms of paid work concerned the availability and significance of seasonal work in the Hawkes Bay region. Whilst the heavy emphasis on rural industries and forestry in the South Waikato area means that seasonal work is also likely a feature of that labour market, little mention was made of it in the interviews from there. Apart from sharing the obvious characteristic, seasonal work is made up of diverse forms of employment, across a range of industries and sectors, and with consequent wide variation in the length of seasons, types of work, and pay and conditions. In Hawkes Bay farming and the associated processing of its produce, as well as horticultural and viticultural sectors all provided seasonal employment, as did linked industries such as packaging and canning. Each sector had a degree of uncertainty and unpredictability: the meat industry because of considerable restructuring during the study period which reduced job opportunities; the susceptibility of fruit and vegetable production to vagaries such as the weather; and the vulnerability of flow on industries (such as packaging and canning) to downturns at other points of the production cycle. Despite these factors, seasonal work provided a large number and wide range of employment opportunities in Hawkes Bay. Some people managed to find other jobs in the off-season to approximate a full years work. Whilst the meat sector tended to have a settled pool of workers, the fruit and vegetable sectors had more transient workforces though some people became repeatedly involved in these latter sectors.

It was not just the degree of availability and utilisation of seasonal work in Hawkes Bay that was radically different from the other regions, however. Of particular interest is a group who were repeatedly involved in seasonal work, year after year. These were termed cyclical-seasonal workers and, like others employed seasonally, their involvement in this pattern of work occurred for a variety of reasons. Financial motives were always prominent, though it was apparent these cyclical-seasonal workers often had few other viable alternatives, given their lack of qualifications and experience, and any other responsibilities that they had. In some cases women saw seasonal work as a source of additional income. Though the work was usually full time, its time-limited nature meant that balancing it with their unpaid responsibilities created only short term challenges. Other people used it as a fill in whilst seeking full time or permanent employment and here it needs noting that some were compelled by the Employment Service to undertake seasonal work.

> Regardless whether you like it or not if [NZES] say you've got to go and
> pick fruit, you've got to go and pick fruit. ... [or] your dole gets cut (H.B.).

Often, because other work did not eventuate, this fill-in or short-term initiative became extended and was repeated. Thus, for different reasons, a group became established in a cyclical pattern – sometimes out of choice but more often due to circumstances. For those forced into these cycles, there was the sense that the longer they remained employed this way, the less likely it was that other opportunities would arise. The

average length of time for maintaining any one pattern was just over four years. Those with patterns of greater than two years worked for between three and ten years.

Like any seasonal employee, the jobs of cyclical-seasonal workers were as vulnerable as the industries they worked in, and the work they performed was often low skilled, very physical and highly repetitive. As well, these workers had to be particularly conversant with benefit entitlements and regulations, and comfortable dealing with welfare agencies as they repeatedly moved between welfare and employment, or supplemented the latter with the former. Thus, though some were quite happy in this type of work, others were less enamoured of it. Despite any dissatisfaction that people may have felt, and the negative aspects and implications of being involved again and again in seasonal work, at an individual level repeated periods of seasonal work represented for some people a substantial portion of both their income and their engagement with paid employment over the whole study period. In addition, cyclical-seasonal workers often came to be seen as skilled, experienced and valued employees. Accordingly the same employers would offer them work each year. These links were important as they might mean promotion or seniority within the workplace, and thus higher status and possible enhancement of earnings.

3.   Education and Training

People in all regions acknowledged the importance of education and training, especially for young people. It was often seen as one response to challenging labour market conditions and the growing spread of technology in the workplace. As one of the people engaged in cyclical-seasonal work, this man now felt consigned to low skilled employment for the remainder of his working life, which he saw as primarily due to his lack of education.

> The availability of jobs is basically education, you need education to get yourself a proper job … If I stayed at school then I would have been into a different kind of workforce … I try to instil into my children – it is their own decision, but then without education they have nothing to fall back on, they are either going to be like me … or better themselves (H.B.).

His closing remarks echoed comments by many other people who were concerned that their children have the best preparation for the rapidly changing future.

Despite the recognition of the importance of education, two provisos were raised in Hawkes Bay. Firstly, experience could be as valuable or sought after as any qualifications.

> In a lot of jobs now you have to have qualifications and experience, if you haven't got the experience they are not going to take the time out to teach you (H.B.).

Of course, the issue can then become, how do people get that experience? Secondly, regardless of a person's qualifications and experience, as this person observes, there still had to be jobs for people to fill.

> These days you have to qualify. ..and then again some of them are qualified and they still don't get a job (H.B.).

Dupuis, de Bruin and Firkin (2000) undertake a detailed discussion of these issues. Drawing on the interview data from Hawkes Bay, the impact of contextual factors on

people's decisions regarding education and training is illustrated, and the underlying assumption of human capital theory – that there is an unproblematic link between education and training and individual and national outcomes – is critiqued.

Later, some discussion will be undertaken regarding the characteristics of skills training and work placement programmes for the unemployed across the three regions. In this section, those who undertook full time or part time tertiary-level programmes at universities, polytechs and private or other providers are considered. Whilst those who took on the former obviously included school leavers, interestingly, in all three regions high proportions of older adults also participated. In West Auckland the proportion was around two thirds, whilst almost half of those doing some form of education or training in Hawkes Bay were older adults. Even the quite small group in South Waikato was made up mostly of those studying later in life rather than school leavers. A small number of older adults also took more than one course – say work skills training courses prior to moving onto a polytech programme. Men and women were fairly evenly represented in the Hawkes Bay; West Auckland was made up almost entirely of men.

It was not unusual for adults to be married or in relationships and to have children at the time they were studying or training. Most had been in paid work for many years prior to taking on the course or programme. Given that these were not only full time, but also usually of a substantial length – one year or more – they represented significant endeavours, entailing considerable changes and challenges for the participants and their families. Such was the case for this man who, after many years in the Navy, had left to attend Bible College. He and his wife, who worked close to full time as a social worker, had three young children. She describes their situation.

> We're on one income. We've gone from a double income to a single income. …Well I suppose it's a sacrifice isn't it? … It's a financial sacrifice that you accept and you go with because students don't get paid to train anymore like in my day I got paid to train as a teacher so um yeah. …He gets about $24.00 per week but what it means is that we just have to watch your spending and um you go without. But that's okay. We're better off than a lot of other people. We've got a home … It's only for three years (W.C.).

In the majority of cases these undertakings were clearly the result of a choice rather than circumstances (such as being made redundant or being unable to continue with a certain type of work due to injury) conditioning the decision. People were generally looking to improve their work opportunities and whilst most retrained, a small number did training they had not been able to do up till then, and a few enhanced basic qualifications they already had. Interestingly, the school leavers in West Auckland who had done some education and training after leaving school also each undertook some major study or training some years later.

Adults rather than school leavers were also heavily represented in part time education and training. This had a strong association with paid employment and, though sometimes used to enhance existing qualifications, often it served as a means to acquire new skills and to improve a person's employability. Another strong feature was that it enabled study and training to be managed with other responsibilities such as a full time job or caring for children. Both these features help explain why part time education was heavily skewed towards women, especially in West Auckland and Hawkes Bay where they outnumbered men almost four to one. Thus, not only could

women undertake part time study or training whilst caring for children, but they often used these types of programmes to facilitate a return to paid employment or to develop skills and expertise once employed. Often this was in response to disadvantages that they sensed or experienced as a result of the time they had spent away from the workforce caring for children. These disadvantages were frequently associated with technology-based change.

4.   School Leavers

The small numbers of school leavers in both West Auckland and South Waikato make comparisons difficult with the much larger group in Hawkes Bay. What stands out about those from West Auckland is that most left school because of a sense of dissatisfaction with the education system yet, despite the uncertain nature of the labour market, only one person had any firm plans or ideas of what they wanted to do. Though the others all got paid work fairly easily, each subsequently had an unsettled employment history for varying periods and to different degrees. In a couple of cases such periods were fairly protracted or repeated. This volatility was sometimes the result of choice, but more often arose from a mix of choices and involuntary transitions. It was less common for all the transitions to be enforced, as in the case of one young woman who was made redundant four times.

In Hawkes Bay, the school leavers were distributed among those who went straight to paid employment, those who entered tertiary study, and a final group who were unable to get paid work. Some of the last group did skills training or placements schemes whilst unemployed. Slightly more people fell into the first category than the other two, which had similar proportions. Regardless of which route they took after school, unemployment was a significant feature of most of their work histories between leaving school and being interviewed. In fact, only two of these nineteen people had spent no time unemployed. Both were women who had gone directly from school into full time jobs. For the others, episodes of unemployment varied in duration and frequency and were often interspersed with some paid work (though not always as much as the person was looking for). Like some of those who were unemployed directly from school, a few did skills training programmes or work placements at a later time. Despite these difficulties, only two of those who wanted or were available for full time employment did not manage to get such work at some point. There were variations, however, in the number, length and make up of the periods of paid employment and the level of security these people experienced in their patterns of work. Surprisingly, a number of those who had completed some form of tertiary training were still unable to get jobs and spent some time unemployed. Work placements proved very useful for them and an initial phase of unemployment was generally their only episode. The most vulnerable group were those who experienced unemployment immediately after leaving school. They struggled to get settled work despite frequent exposure to training courses and placement programmes.

5.   The Experiences of Beneficiaries

Though the distributions of people receiving welfare varied across the regions, many of the qualitative findings regarding their experiences bore some strong similarities. Importantly, they provide insights that run counter to how beneficiaries are often negatively perceived by the public and portrayed in the media. For instance, no-one who was interviewed was entirely content receiving a benefit and very few people opted to remain on welfare if they could avoid it. Even a young man, interviewed in West Auckland, who repeatedly chose the UEB over paid employment expressed dissatisfaction with this lifestyle and concern over his future. However, he was in something of a vicious circle. Though he wanted to be in paid employment, because of his limited qualifications and experience he couldn't find work that he enjoyed or that paid well and so he easily became disillusioned and opted out. A married man in Hawkes Bay, who experienced the longest continuous period receiving the UEB of any interviewee (around 9 years), reported that although he had adapted his lifestyle accordingly and used his time productively, there had been numerous negative affects personally and for his family. After being made redundant he had quickly become disillusioned after being unable to get work.

> During my time off I was spending time with the schools, with the sports teams, with the Maori culture groups … At the time we were in an area of what they call low socio-economic area, [it was] mainly just to give the [local] kids something positive to do. ...I suppose to me it was important, but unpaid important. ...I was still keeping myself occupied but on a voluntary basis. …I think being long term unemployed you get to the stage where you become, I wouldn't say lazy … but I would say they become stagnant. ... [My children] see their father as a, not so much a no-hoper, but one who can do something but is not doing anything … [they say], "Why haven't you got a job dad, why haven't you got a job?" …I have seen a lot of my friends who have been working since they left school and materially are doing very well for themselves, they have got their own houses their own vehicles. I'm 35 years old now and I am still renting a house ... to that extent I suppose I am missing out on a lot of material things by being long term unemployed. …We were one of those families that could survive on the dole at the time because we budgeted. We just had to make do with what we had and couldn't get luxuries (H.B.).

He eventually found a full time paid position, partly as a result of his involvement in voluntary work and his cultural affiliations. A Task Force Green Scheme placement also helped.

Whilst some people coped or managed better than others, another prominent theme was the sense of struggle that most people acutely experienced when relying on any form of welfare. These two quotes capture what many described.

> It's pretty scary because sometimes it is just a matter of living out of 'op' shops and making all your own things. Soup's good and you use the vegetable garden (H.B.).

> It was a very difficult time for us because with the sole income being from the unemployment benefit and a residual amount from the business, we found it very hard. In fact, some weeks we didn't know where we were going to get food from. It was a very difficult time and not something I would want to live through again (H.B.).

Consequently, people were driven to seek work to supplement or replace any benefit. Unfortunately the structure of the abatement system often worked against people's desires to work, creating disincentives to make these sorts of transitions and sometimes encouraging a shift out of any paid work. The abatements on her income had previously forced this woman to give up a part time job when her husband became unemployed. However, despite the effects on her, their dire financial circumstances on a second occasion made such an option untenable.

> I am sorely tempted to throw in this job but we can't afford me to. I am only earning 30c in the dollar after I have earned my $80, because that is how much you lose. You pay back the government 70% of your wages once you've earned over the amount you are allowed to earn while the spouse is on the unemployment. It doesn't really pay me to go out to work, to make enough money I have to work very long hours and I get terribly tired (H.B.).

One image of beneficiaries not supported in any of the three areas related to their involvement in undeclared income. Whilst claims can obviously be made regarding whether people would admit to this, even during confidential research, the interviews revealed only a few people illicitly earning, what was usually small amounts of money, typically over short periods. Mostly they did this by some casual under-the-counter work or, occasionally, having a boarder living in their house. Given the struggle that most beneficiaries spoke of, it is hardly surprising that although small in amounts, such income was often significant. Only one person engaged in this practice long term and to a substantial degree. He was the young, frequently unemployed man interviewed in West Auckland (and mentioned above). His earning undeclared wages for times on top of the UEB undoubtedly added to his difficulties finding a job that offered an attractive wage.

Though the interviews in the South Waikato region only revealed a small number of people who had received the UEB, Hawkes Bay and West Auckland provided more numerous cases with a wide range of experiences. As has been noted, the turbulent economic times encompassed by the periods under study generated numerous enforced transitions, mainly through redundancy, and many of these resulted in the person receiving the UEB when they were unable to get other work immediately. In West Auckland, another sizeable group of UEB recipients were those who had recently arrived in or returned to New Zealand and could not get work. They accounted for almost half the small number of receiving the UEB in this area. The earlier comments of the unemployed man in Hawkes Bay illustrated that alongside the obvious tangible rewards, those who were unemployed were also aware of the myriad of less tangible but equally important benefits that working provided them and their families, and the array of negative impacts generated by being out of work, especially over a protracted period. Just such an awareness is nicely encapsulated in the following quote from another man who, despite difficulties getting settled employment, was willing to take on a range of seasonal and casual jobs.

> When I am working everything seems to be a lot better that when I am just sitting around at home on the unemployment benefit, for myself and for the house that I rent. There is a lot of better things around me when I am working… Not just the fact that we are getting paid for it and the money is there, it is good to pay the bills but I feel a lot better in myself when I am working. ...When I came home I know I have done a days work. It gave me more of an urge to do more around the house, I think I do more around the

house when I am working than when I am just sitting around and not working. I know during that break when I haven't got any work the shed seems to be in a mess, the lawns need mowing and the garden is full of weeds. But when I am working I go to work and come home and get into jobs, so everything seems to be in place (H.B.).

Consequently, as the next selection of remarks show, people in this group were keen to get work and active in their job seeking.

He was looking for work all the time, he wouldn't sit back and wait for them to come to him (H.B.).

I am always looking for a job and I don't like just sitting (H.B.).

I looked up the paper every night for something (H.B.).

I'm always watching the paper and I'm registered at the [NZES] (H.B.).

I just took on anything that went (H.B.).

He is not a person that likes to sit around....He was forever looking in the paper but basically [found] nothing. ...[He] was trying for that six months and there was just nothing there ... he had to go and report ... he would go in and still nothing (H.B.).

In the Hawkes Bay, people's poor perceptions and experiences of the government employment agency of the time, the NZ Employment Service[3], indicated that this was of little assistance to them in the employment process.

In all three regions, it was the break up of a marriage or relationship that lay behind a move into welfare for the vast majority of those receiving the DPB. Each recipient of this benefit recognised that they needed to prepare for the future when their children were older and, if not already doing so, they expressed a desire to engage in paid work or to take on some study or training. However, the hard realities of being a single parent, prominent amongst which were the challenges and demands of coping with work and/or study on top of caring for their children, tempered any such considerations. Consequently, single parents seemed to be constantly weighing the effects and impacts of any other activities on their children. Childcare was, therefore, a critical issue for them, with the age of children an important consideration in determining their participation in work or study. Though less so in West Auckland, in the other two regions recipients of the DPB clearly recognised the stigma they faced as a group, even in comparison to other beneficiaries.

You have also got the social stigma that you are nothing but a dole bludger …[and there's] very much more stigma on the DPB …you are not another one of the *solo parents* stigma. …I noticed that on the DPB it was " ha, you are nothing but another bloody solo mother, why aren't you in the workplace supporting your bloody kid?" I noticed that with a lot of people, shop retailers in particular. I noticed that "low class, DPB, solo mother" and that sort of situation and that got to me (H.B.).

Skills training programmes and work placement schemes were provided in all regions for those out of work, though only one person in South Waikato and three in West

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[3] It should be acknowledged that this Service is no longer in existence following its merger with the Income Support arm of the Department of Social Welfare to form the *Department of Work and Income* on 1 October 1998.

Auckland reported attending either. Their experiences reflect the more detailed conclusions that can be drawn from the large number of people involved in such programmes or placements in the Hawkes Bay. In summary, both these initiatives for the unemployed appeared to have limited value in leading to work, though the placements appeared to have more utility than the skills programmes. Some complaints about the quality of staff, facilities and course content were also raised. A final point regarding education and training was made quite vocally by a number of those on the UEB in Hawkes Bay and concerned the inequities they saw in relation to recipients of the DPB. Whilst the latter were encouraged and tangibly supported to do tertiary based education or training, those on the UEB were discouraged from this and channelled into skills training or placement programmes. Given the poor outcomes of these, they clearly felt disadvantaged as a result.

A particularly interesting feature of the Hawkes Bay region emerged as the result of the large amount and diverse array of seasonal employment available there. As has already been outlined, seasonal employment was utilised by many people in a range of circumstances. Some of those receiving the UEB worked seasonally to supplement or replace their benefit. Whilst it most usually started out as a fill-in until more permanent work could be found, due mainly to a lack of other opportunities, a small group became well established in a cyclical pattern of seasonal employment/unemployment over many years. Whilst still of some positive value in providing employment, albeit for limited periods, for those forced into such cycles there was the sense that the longer they remained employed this way, the less likely it was that they would get other more settled and permanent work.

In closing this section it is worth noting that a number of people, particularly in West Auckland and Hawkes Bay, were unemployed and seeking work but not receiving welfare. Whilst occasionally people voluntarily gave up work, in most cases these shifts were still enforced but the ineligibility for welfare was likely due to the earnings of spouses/partners exceeding a certain limit, or the imposition of a stand down period due to the receipt of redundancy payments. Although in a few cases these earnings or payments still provided a reasonable income, in most cases they represented a considerable drop for households to manage on. Not being entitled to any welfare assistance only added to the difficulties people experienced at these times, thereby generating even greater stress for individuals and families. The uncertainty of not knowing when or if work would eventuate only compounded this.

6.   Population Flows

Particular aspects of people's movements within New Zealand and overseas that were captured in the research are discussed in this section. Similar proportions of people in all three regions reported that they had travelled out of New Zealand for extended periods during the years under study. These people fell into two broad groups: those who went overseas to travel, work or study (often in combination) but with the intention of returning; and those who left intending to settle permanently in another country – usually Australia – but who returned for various reasons. No-one in the South Waikato fitted the latter category, while West Auckland and Hawkes Bay had similar proportions. All three regions had cases of people out of the country for

extended periods. Those in this group who returned to South Waikato had few problems finding work, which was also the case for the vast majority of those coming back to West Auckland. There are some differences for the two groups in Hawkes Bay, however, with those returning from extended travel – usually single and younger – all experiencing some difficulties finding settled work. The people who came back having intended to resettle in Australia – married couples, with more work and life experience – generally had fewer problems getting settled work when they sought it.

Perhaps the most glaring disparity between the regions is in the area of immigration. Whereas only one family in Hawkes Bay and one person in South Waikato immigrated to New Zealand during the study periods, almost 21% of households in West Auckland featured individuals or families who had migrated. These originated from many regions of the world – Australia and the Pacific, Asia, the USA, and the United Kingdom. They were attracted by a range of factors and though three cases did not involve considerations about paid work, a prominent perception among the others was that this country offered better employment prospects. Only two people had jobs arranged before they arrived. As the case of a man from the Cook Islands shows, even pre-arranged work was sometimes not without its problems.

> It doesn't really work out well, what we have actually talked [about] in the Island. …When we came down here it was different …You see back in the Island they told us they were going to pay us $18.00 per hour. So when we got down here it was $12.00 per hour. …That's a big difference …The earlier group that came, um, they provided transport for them to get around. …We had to find our own transport. Look for our own accommodation, you know, and we were struggling for the first two or three months (W.A.).

About a year after arriving the company closed down leaving him and his fellow workers out of a job.

Those without prearranged jobs showed a keenness to work and were very active in trying to find settled, long-term employment. About half of them found jobs fairly quickly and easily, whilst two others took some time before eventually managing this. Others were unsuccessful and elected to either accept work that they found less than satisfactory or pursue other options. One older woman eventually gave up her fruitless search for employment in order to care for her ill husband, and the husband in another couple elected to retrain at polytech. His wife, who was a tax accountant, took part time work in a far less skilled area, as did a doctor from Bangladesh[4]. Their cases showed that although qualifications and experience could be useful in relation to getting work, they provided no guarantees, as not all overseas qualifications are readily accepted. Like a small group of others, the woman also identified language difficulties as a significant obstacle in her search for work and so had started a course in English.

Mobility also occurred within the country with some people moving into each of the regions, and others spending periods out of, but returning to a particular area. A small group made numerous shifts, either between their 'home' region and other areas, or around different parts of the country before settling in the area in which they were

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[4] This man was one of a number of overseas doctors who qualified to settle in this country based on immigration criteria but whose medical qualifications were not accepted by the Medical Council. Consequently, they had to undertake and pass a series of expensive and demanding examinations to be allowed to practise here.

interviewed. Shifts were made for purely work or personal reasons, though often it was a combination of the two. Whilst moves for personal reasons were most usually undertaken by choice, those related to employment could be enforced or voluntary. Some were within the same organisation and companies occasionally transferred people giving those involved little choice. Other relocations were necessary as people changed jobs. Overall, shifts seemed to be chosen rather forced on people. Where a couple was involved the move was almost always prompted in relation to the male partner's employment.

People in between 50% of households in the South Waikato region, down to 12% in West Auckland were involved in domestic relocations. Hawkes Bay sat between these two at about 20%. One-way moves – those into a region rather than those involving shifts out of and then back to an area – were more frequent in West Auckland and Hawkes Bay. The sample of families interviewed in South Waikato certainly seems to contain a high number of 'mobile' households. Two were policemen who had been posted there from elsewhere. Others were share or contract milkers, the nature of whose employment saw them making frequent shifts as they chased better opportunities, many of which took them out of the region but later allowed them to return. These factors might offer a partial explanation for the high mobility in this area. The latter also helps explain the trend towards more shifts out of and then back into the area compared with the other two regions.

7.   Social Networks

Perhaps the strongest similarity among all three regions was the prominence played by social networks in people's job seeking activities. Whilst people still searched newspapers, utilised agencies (state and private sector), and some even went door-to-door in their search for work, significant numbers of people utilised their social networks in some way as part of their efforts at securing employment. Given how poorly the NZ Employment Service was rated in relation to finding people work, particularly in the Hawkes Bay region, the role of a prominent alternative approach via social networks is of considerable interest. The power of this approach is neatly illustrated in this case where, despite appearing to have limited knowledge about the work that a job entailed, a woman was offered a position partly due to her relationship with the employer.

> Talking to a lady that is a manager [there] - she is a friend of the family - and I was on a work experience there and two weeks later she came in and talked to me … She asked me if I liked working with handicap[ped] people and I didn't know what she was talking about. But she explained it to me and went back to her job, and then about two days later I got a phone call and got an interview for a caregiver. So I went up and then I started … and I've been there since then (S.W.).

Though a small number of people bemoaned the role of networks, like this woman most spoke of, or experienced them, in a more positive fashion.

Across the three regions between 60% and 70% of households reported that at least one successful transition for a person was influenced in some way by their social

networks[5]. Whilst there were wide variations in people's reliance on networks, how often they were employed, as well as their make up and manner of use, it was quite common for them to be implicated on more than one occasion and, where a household comprised a couple, for both parties to make use of them. Take the experiences of a couple who were interviewed in the Hawkes Bay. The man was unemployed several times and, as is apparent, on most occasions it was his networks that played a vital role in connecting him with a range of work opportunities.

Husband:

[Got that job] through a friend of my brothers, he got it for me.

[Found out about that job] through a friend of my sisters.

A friend of mine, her and her partner were involved in running a farm so they approached me about doing their farm work and while I was on that farm a fellow asked me if I could do his trees for him.

On the off chance I applied to the factory that I used to work at and they rang me up.

Wife:

I actually got [that job] from my sister.

My mum actually rang me up and told me about [this job] and I just went down and got it.

Networks were also important for people who were moving between jobs or who were returning to paid work from a variety of circumstances – being unemployed or injured for example, as well as women who had been out of paid work caring for children. Contacts built up through voluntary work, often associated with children, were important for some of the latter group as this woman's case shows. She got a position as a teacher aide after initially helping in the school canteen and then in the classroom.

I used to be [at the school] all the time anyway so they decided they'd better pay me. Cause I'm up there all the time doing something (W.A.).

At an immediate level, networks comprised people's family, close friends, and work associates. Reinforcing the importance of weaker ties (Granovetter, 1974), extended family and acquaintances, as well as the family, friends and associates of this inner circle formed a more dispersed network. Whilst such a secondary group was frequently utilised, stronger ties seemed more prominent in linking people with opportunities in the three regions under study. Being part of local communities and neighbourhoods, associations through religious affiliations, and belonging to voluntary, sporting and social organisations, all provided an array of contacts and networks. So, too, did professional groups.

Social networks operated in a range of ways to facilitate a transition into employment. Some people used them as part of a comprehensive strategy.

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[5] It should be noted that a number of households where social networks were not mentioned featured people who had no changes to their work histories or no involvement in paid employment. Thus, this percentage would be higher still if only taken over households featuring transitions into and between paid work.

> [I was] going to the Employment Services, going through the papers thoroughly and keeping my ears open and you know making sure that everyone I knew, knew I was looking (H.B.).

At the other end of the continuum networks were often used as the sole means of finding work. The reliance on networks varied, often depending on the urgency of finding work, the evaluations people made of the value their networks could likely have in this process, and any past experiences of networks linking them with opportunities. Usually, as is evidenced in the above quote, they were deliberately employed in the search for work. Sometimes, though, they inadvertently came into play.

> I was down at basketball and a friend of mine who works at pest control said to me would I be interested in pest control and I asked what sort, and he said bugs and things like that and I thought that wouldn't be too bad a job and I thought I'd be interested in getting into that sort of thing. He said there could be a job going at his work and I went down and had an interview and that was it (H.B.).

Regardless of their place in any strategy, at the very least networks served to promote the exchange of information – a person let another know of a job opportunity. However, they were regularly reported to have played a much more active and influential role. This could involve people making an employer aware of a suitable employee that they knew of, through to advocating on that person's behalf and, not unusually, even making arrangements for them to have an interview or the like.

> When a position came up through the company … [my friend], he'd actually you know like told this guy about my position and things like that … and so he jacked me up with the big boss there and we had a chat at the end and I more or less started straight away (W.A.).

For employers, obvious attractions were not having to take on completely unknown staff and the savings in time, effort and money offered by a network approach to recruiting.

> The owner of [the bar] actually came to me and asked me if I would go to work for them. So that's how I got [that] job …Because I used to work for him … He was the manager … when I was there (S.W.).

As the only region to have a large number of immigrants, West Auckland revealed an insight into the difficulties of finding work for those without networks. Though a few of the immigrants had jobs arranged, and some had little trouble getting work, others struggled with employment. As the following quote from one immigrant illustrates, whilst a range of issues were implicated in this, people in these circumstances sometimes acknowledged that a lack of networks put them at a disadvantage.

> We came at the worst time in 1990. … I never thought it was a job to get a job. It was quite depressing. I was new and you know there were a lot of Telecom laid off and so I'm competing against them and their mates and their knowledge and things like that because I was strictly right off the boat you could say and I didn't have that network which is very, very vital (W.A.).

When immigrants later changed jobs, often these subsequent moves were eased by the existence of networks that they had been able to establish since arriving.

8.   Gender

Gender was a prominent feature of all three regional analyses. This had several facets but is neatly summarised by the recognition that the gendered nature of work remained remarkably enduring, both in the workplace and the home, across all the areas. In the domestic sphere, women were still responsible for much of the housework and remained the primary caregivers in relation to children. Indeed, considering these various issues from another angle, childcare can be seen as a highly influential factor in relation to the distribution of work between men and women within and outside households.

Women's responsibilities regarding the care of children had significant effects on their participation in paid work requiring many of them, for example, to periodically disengage from paid work to have and look after children, and then later manage a return to some form of employment. The latter was often a challenging transition and the age of children was frequently cited as a critical factor in determining the form of work (part time or full time, for example), the hours of work during a day, and the type of work (for instance, some women opted for a job that matched their other obligations rather than returning to a role they had had previously). Once working, women then had to balance paid and unpaid responsibilities. Though managing these proved highly demanding in many cases, women seemed to accept and cope extraordinarily well with this. Take a very typical scenario:

> [My daughter] was starting at morning kindy, so it involved someone
> picking her up ... for the hour from twelve to one when [she] finishes kindy
> ... but again I have my mother and mother-in-law... ...And [my son] I take
> him to school before I get [to work] and I take [my daughter] to kindy and
> I'm not [at work] till ten past nine, quarter past nine and they're fine about
> that. And I'm finished at quarter past one. I can still keep up everything at
> home for a couple of hours before school finishes (H.B.).

Because any paid work was often conditional on their unpaid responsibilities, as is well recognised, part time and casual employment were prominent options for women (Davidson, 1994). In contrast, men usually accorded their paid role the highest priority with it seldom predicated on their other responsibilities and any unpaid work usually regarded as secondary. Interestingly, some men responded to becoming a father by increasing their involvement in paid work.

Women's primary role in relation to childcare helps explain the strong gender bias also evident in relation to voluntary work. Since a great deal of this was associated with children, women once again had a heavy involvement in much of this. It should be added, however, that voluntary involvement sometimes generated opportunities in paid employment. If education and training was used as a means to aid a return to, or to enhance opportunities in, paid work, part time courses were often one way that women chose to obtain skills and qualifications. Frequently their time out of the workforce caring for children was cited as disadvantaging them, hence their need to do additional courses and the like.

> I was behind the modern technology, it took me ages, that is why I took the
> house cleaning because there were heaps of applicants [for office jobs] and
> I found I was being beaten and I think it was because of the computer so I
> actually did a course on the computer (H.B.).

Whilst producing benefits, courses were often other activities to balance with their unpaid responsibilities and sometimes with paid work as well.

> I completed two papers plus working and found I just didn't have enough
> time, quality time [with the family] (H.B.).

This woman consequently gave up her paid work.

As to gender and paid work, two contradictory trends emerged. On the one hand, varying degrees of change were occurring in relation to gender-based work role segregation, something that was practically evidenced by people's work experiences.

> The women's side of it has changed a lot. They are able to do a bigger
> variety of work now that what they were doing when I first started (H.B.).

> There are a lot more women in the workplace and they are also in the
> higher paid jobs (H.B.)..

However, against this, people's attitudes still revealed certain clear and persistent demarcations in relation to what was considered appropriate work for men and women to do. The physical aspects of any job and the nature of the work seemed to be a major means of delineating work by gender.

> There are certain jobs that some women can't do – like windows. …you
> have to get out on a ledge and hang out the window, one foot on the ledge
> and one foot inside. You can't expect women to be out there doing that sort
> of thing (H.B.).

> [Working on power lines] is a manual job and it is only men that are
> employed (H.B.).

> There is no women involved in [wool pulling]. ...It is just because it is
> unhygienic, not because a woman can't do it, although they might not be
> able to do certain aspects of it. There is a lot of lifting and acid involved
> (H.B.).

> A lot of it was reception [work], I don't think [men] would be keen on
> doing that (H.B.).

9. Ageing

A set of issues that arose out of the intersection of ageing and employment were raised in every region. These related to the experiences of "older" workers. Whilst no definitive measure of what constituted an "older" worker could easily be distilled from the interviews, being in one's fifties seemed a common demarcation. That said, some people like this woman, had experiences they classified as related to their being "older" whilst still in their forties.

> Well, they don't tell you, but I think my age works against you. Once
> you're over 40, "that's it" sort of thing (W.A.).

As happened to her, discrimination against older workers could be covert, though some people reported much more overt prejudices.

> I looking for job then I went lot of place and they say your age is too much,
> you can't get no job (W.A.).

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Some of those who commented on this issue saw it tied in with a youth orientated culture which consequently favoured younger workers.

> I went and saw our production manager and said I am thinking of applying for this [promotion] ... but I get the feeling I will be told I am too old. He told me straight that I was too old ... They look for young people between the ages of 18 to 25 for the jobs that come up here (H.B.).

It should be added, however, that reflecting the complexity of these issues, some of those who were interviewed in Hawkes Bay recognised that many youth had their own set of difficulties getting and retaining work.

The first issue to concern older people, was the perceived and very real vulnerability of older employees to being made redundant, especially with restructuring a frequent feature of many workplaces.

> Cutting down on staff and trying to bring in younger ones… Us older ones are not very good. I know its against the law but they do it (H.B.).

Secondly, there were the difficulties faced by older people in gaining re-employment when this occurred. For instance, one woman wondered how some of her older colleagues would cope with being laid off, which seemed to be happening with growing regularity in the printing industry she was part of.

> Some of the men there who are in their late 50's, not quite retiring and of course retiring age is getting further away, what are they going to do? (H.B.)

These problems were also seen to be exacerbated by the lengthy service many older workers had within a company. Not only did this obviously limit their job seeking experience, but it also meant that their work history and skills had likely become narrowly focused on the job and employer that they had been with for some time.

Thirdly, there were concerns expressed by older workers who were employed in physically demanding and risky occupations as to their ability to continue in these jobs until retirement. As well as the actual work, people sometimes found it equally hard to cope with exposure to the weather and demanding workplaces.

> I don't want to be doing it till I'm 65. … the factory is freezing cold [in winter], 'cause that's the nature, it's an all steel installation. You've got about three rollers on all the time so it gets fairly hot in the summer (W.A.).

Finally, some unresolved questions regarding older worker's attitudes towards training and education were raised. Though this was seen as one way to respond to issues that confronted them, such as those raised above, some older people felt less interested or willing to engage with training, even when offered in the workplace.

> But a lot of the courses they are offering are not relevant to the work that I am doing. I'm in a hands-on job and with my years of knowledge, this is more invaluable than what can be learned in a classroom. A lot of people that are up and coming that are going to come up into the system, they will benefit from those courses. At my age I don't think I could benefit a lot from them (H.B.).

This was not a universal reaction, though, with some older people embracing such opportunities. However, whilst not closed to any such involvement, older workers sometimes recognised that any investment in training had to be seen in relation to how

long they had already been doing a job and/or weighed against their remaining working years. As well, they were aware that even with extensive and impeccable qualifications, many of their age group still had trouble getting and maintaining work.

Conclusion

As part of the Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme, this paper fulfils an important role in relation to the ethnographic study of three regional labour markets. Whilst those analyses isolated patterns and issues of interest in each area, it is when these are considered in relation to one another that further layers of analysis emerge. These might relate to how quite distinct labour markets generate unique local influences and circumstances. Alternatively, they could focus on how, despite differences, each region conforms to common trends or reinforces shared findings. Somewhere in between lie outcomes that demonstrate the existence of local variations even within broad similarities.

In reviewing the preceding discussion, it is easy to identify areas where all three regions share very similar characteristics. Some are broad and unsurprising features such as the prominence of paid work in people's lives and the persistence of the gendered division of labour in both paid and unpaid spheres. Also not unexpected was the recognition of the importance of education and training for a person's employability, though this was not without qualification. In addition, the difficulties faced by older people match a growing awareness of issues for this group. Other common but more striking findings emerged as well. Prominent amongst these was the high number of older adults in all centres who embarked on full time education or training courses, often when they were married with children. Though the role played by social networks in helping people find and obtain paid employment is hardly novel, the degree of emphasis placed on it was surprisingly high. As a dominant and persistent theme across all three regions, the value and importance of social networks in this process should not be underestimated.

Even within broad patterns of similarity, regional differences were evident. Thus, the type and nature of paid work showed variations across each area and the self-employed businesses in the South Waikato clearly illustrate this. Similarly, though each region had people who relocated around New Zealand, a particular locality often influenced the nature and frequency of these moves, as was especially apparent once again in South Waikato. How people were affected by and responded to the tremendous change and uncertainty in this country across the periods being studied was also the product, to a degree, of where they lived.

Despite differences between regions, common threads of qualitative experience were still discernible, regardless of where people were domiciled. When drawn together, these often created quite strong impressions. This is evident in the experiences of beneficiaries. The struggle that most endured, the stigma they often experienced, and the value they placed on paid employment – apparent in what happened when they lost work and were without it for a time, and the efforts and sacrifices they made to subsequently get a job – ran counter to many pre-conceptions about this group.

Similarly, though the shape of economic restructuring may have differed across the regions, the human experiences of this created remarkably comparable pictures.

While in some cases it was not possible to compare very different sized groups in each area, interesting points can still arise from an examination of them. Thus, the burden of unemployment that school leavers in Hawkes Bay experienced can be highlighted. Though the same group in West Auckland were all prompted to leave school because they were unhappy with the system, only one seemed to have any ideas or plans for what they would subsequently do. When groups were able to be compared, some more distinct contrasts between regions became evident. Significant amongst these were findings relating to immigration – where clear-cut differences can be seen in the high immigrant population in West Auckland compared to the other regions – and seasonal employment. The large amount of this type of work that was available in Hawkes Bay made for a whole host of opportunities not available elsewhere. These came in a variety of forms from low-skill, short term work for people in various circumstances through to a group of cyclical-seasonal workers who became established in this type of employment.

Overall, the findings of each ethnographic study together with this comparison add to the growing body of knowledge about labour market activity at the micro-level. This is not only in theoretical terms, however, since the rich narrative that runs throughout all these reports also adds to our understanding of people's lived experiences. As well as these findings complimenting existing macro-level analyses and data, they go some way to compensate for the dominance of such approaches. They also have the potential to be integrated with other related labour market research (such as that being conducted by the Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme). Thus, the outcomes and utility of this research can only enhance and better inform the development of policy and provision of services.

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