

Women Combining Paid Work and Parenting

Working Paper No. 8
Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme

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**ALBANY AND PALMERSTON NORTH
LABOUR MARKET DYNAMICS RESEARCH PROGRAMME
2002**

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ISSN: 1175-6683

ISBN: 0-9582294-5-7

Acknowledgements

The research programme on *Labour Market Dynamics and Economic Participation* is funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research, Science and Technology from the Public Good Science Fund. The assistance of the Foundation in both the launching and maintenance of the *Labour Market Dynamics* research programme is gratefully acknowledged, as is the continuing support of the host institution, Massey University.

This working paper has been adapted from a Master's thesis entitled "Caring and Providing: Women Combining Paid Work and Parenting", which was supervised by Associate Professor Marilyn Waring and Dr Ann Dupuis at Massey University, Albany.

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1. Introduction

Women have always worked, but this work has frequently been undervalued and undercounted in the economy, in society and in the home. In the past forty years, however, the issue of women's work has been receiving considerably more attention. The reason for this is that women have been moving into paid work in ever increasing numbers. Many propose that this movement of women into the labour market has been the most significant employment trend since the 1960s. Moreover, it has been suggested that women now have the best of both worlds, they are able to choose to participate in paid employment on an equal footing with men, or to revert to the more traditional role of homemaker and mother if they please. Given the increasing labour force attachment of women, one could expect that women have achieved equality of conditions, pay, stability and continuity of employment. Yet, while there is no denying that women have made real gains over the years, evidence suggests that women are still invariably concentrated into low status and low paid work, there is still a substantial differential in the earnings of women compared to men, and women are still continuing to carry out the bulk of the caring and domestic work. Despite this, there is an overwhelming assumption that women share an equal position within the workplace, strengthening the belief that the 'the battle is over'. This paper, however, provides further evidence that the changes that have occurred for women in paid employment do not indicate that this 'battle is over'.

While there are a number of theories explaining the existence of occupational segregation and the male/ female pay gap, at the heart of the continuing gender inequality in the labour market lies the enduring assumption that the responsibility for the care of the children and the household remains that of women (Ruberly, 1998). One response, therefore, from those interested in ending the inequalities between men and women is to address the issues and barriers involved in the participation in paid employment by those women who have dependent children. This study examines the factors that influence the paid employment experiences and decisions of women with dependent children.

The thesis (Byrnes, 2001) on which this paper is based analysed the life history data of twenty women with dependent children. A multitude of factors were unearthed from the analysis of the data as affecting the decisions women made regarding paid employment, and the subsequent experience of combining paid work and parenting. These factors were analysed according to a tri-level framework that clustered the findings into three arenas that operated to influence the paid employment of women with children: the structural context; institutional factors; and the individual and family. Within these contexts, there is a degree of overlap, nonetheless this classification provided a useful analytical framework.

Theories that explain the existence of gender segregation and inequality in the labour market can be generally classified into three broad categories that parallel the three classifications of this study: structural; institutional; and domestic. While all these theories are plausible they have been criticised as being misinformed, based on evidence that is incomplete, and discussed in terms of their intellectual merits and explanatory adequacy (Hakim, 1996). However, the reality of the work experiences of the twenty women in this study whose work and life histories were analysed are

central to this thesis. While I do not suggest that women's subordinate position in the labour market is due singularly to their position as mothers, I propose that the pattern of women's employment and persisting assumption that women are caregivers, remains central to any theory of gender subordination. Moreover, it is clear that a narrow focus on the family or the workplace, or indeed the structural system in isolation, does not adequately explain gender inequality in the workplace. Rather, there are a multitude of factors in a number of sites that confirm and reproduce the restricted access women with children have to the labour market.

There are two themes that weave their way through the study. They are by no means unique to this study. However, they are among a number to have emerged from international studies of women and the labour market (for example, Hakim, 1996; Rees, 1992). The first theme is the ideology of the family. This refers to the way in which society aspires to an ideal of the family, which constitutes a form consisting of a breadwinner husband, wife at home and two children. The ideology of the family is highly influential in shaping the decisions and experiences of the women in this study: it structures women's choices over their participation in the labour market; it legitimates the concept of the family wage and the corresponding position that women's paid work is secondary; and it underlies institutional policies and provisions.

The second theme concerns the notion of choice women with children have in the labour market. There is a widespread assumption that women are able to choose the terms and conditions upon which they participate in paid employment. However, I suggest that these choices are constrained by forces that operate at the family, institutional and structural level, to such a degree that 'choice' is a fictional notion. Domestic commitments are the first constraint, followed by the low self-esteem and lack of confidence many women exhibit when returning to the paid workforce. These factors intersect to exclude women from participating in the labour market under the same conditions as their male counterparts, directing them instead into typically female, part time work. The way this type of work is organised further restricts the choices women are able to make in the labour market. The reality is that if women 'choose' to participate in part time employment compatible with their domestic responsibilities they are restricted to a female 'job ghetto' of low paid work. Furthermore, government and workplace policy and provision do little to remedy this situation.

2. Women and Work

In New Zealand, the past forty years have seen remarkable changes in women's participation in paid employment. Two fundamental shifts have been occurring. The first is the increase in the proportion of women working, and the second has been in the typical pattern of women's labour force participation during their lifetime (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). By 1996, the proportion of the New Zealand labour force that were women had risen to 45.7 per cent, compared to 23 per cent in the 1950s. Perhaps the most significant increase in labour force participation amongst women has been that of women with children. According to the 1996 Census, nearly 50 per cent of women whose youngest child was aged between one and four were in employment, rising to 70 per cent when the youngest child is over eight.

2.1 Gendered Occupational Segregation

Despite the increasing integration of women into the labour force, there is a strong differentiation in the jobs held by men and women. This segregation is both horizontal and vertical: not only do women and men work in different industries, but within these industries they work within different levels of the hierarchy. Moreover, research suggests that this segregation occurs not only in New Zealand (Fargher and Maani, 1992), but is a worldwide phenomenon (OECD, 1998). The 1996 Census data demonstrated that in New Zealand women tend to be concentrated in relatively few occupations, with slightly under half of employed women working in just two occupations: clerks, and service and sales workers (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). Certainly, all of the women in this study were employed within traditionally female dominated occupations, particularly clerical work, service industries, and community services. Gendered occupational segregation has been described as the single most important cause of the gender inequalities, particularly wage differentials, in the labour market (Witz, 1993). The explanations for gender segregation and pay differentials are complex and manifold, and there is a lot of debate amongst feminists about the mechanisms generating the disadvantage of women within paid work. What follows is a brief sketch of the main perspectives.

It is generally recognised that there are two main determinants in explaining gender inequalities in the labour market: the private and the public spheres. Within the private sphere, the 'domestic responsibility model' (Bruegel, cited in Witz, 1992) cites women's oppression in the family as dictating the terms and conditions under which they engage in paid work, thereby leaving them at a disadvantage to men. Another reason given for the segregation and pay disparity is simply that women 'choose' to work in jobs that are low paid, that they are not motivated by money in the way that men are. The division of labour within the family paired with women's 'choice' to work within unskilled traditionally female occupations means they amass fewer marketable skills than men. Economists have explained gender segregation in employment and women's lower wages using 'human capital theory' which argues that women have less human capital than men because of their position in the family (Walby, 1990). This is due, in part, to the time spent out of the workforce, and also because the expectation of performing caring work means that women are less likely to spend time acquiring qualifications. Human capital theory has a strong element of

‘choice’ underpinning it: women choose the occupations for which their lesser skills will give them the best rewards and fit in with their intermittent work patterns; and households decide on the division of labour and human capital investments.

Many feminists argue that the domestic responsibility models do not sufficiently explain the gender differential in employment. Feminists have argued that it is also necessary to examine the structure and operation of the labour market. ‘Dual labour market theory’ and ‘dual-systems theory’ are two feminist perspectives that do this. Dual labour market theory examines the ways in which the labour market is structured into two distinct sectors; primary and secondary (Witz, 1992). Primary sectors are characterised by forms of employment associated with high wages, good career prospects, and favourable conditions. Secondary sectors, by contrast, are composed of jobs characterised by low wages, lack of skill, are likely to be part-time, casual, or temporary, and have few fringe benefits. The confinement of women to secondary labour markets, which are constructed using social attributes, provides the main reason for gender related job segregation and disadvantage.

Dual-systems theory introduces the concept of patriarchy to explain gender segregation. Dual-systems theory maintains that there are two systems interacting in society, a gender system and an economic system (Rees, 1992). The modern forms of these two systems are patriarchy and capitalism which, it is argued, combine to oppress women. What is important about dual systems theory is that it has shifted the form of patriarchy, from a private form, which revolved around male control over women in the family, to a public form, sustained through male control over women’s activities in the public sphere, particularly waged work. Moreover, it challenges the conventional view that the position of women in the labour market is determined by their position in the family, and argues that gender segregation and patriarchal practices in the labour market are important in confining women to a subordinate position within the household (Walby, 1990).

Yet another perspective on the gender division in the labour market focuses on the barriers to women’s full access to opportunities in the labour market (Rees, 1992). The ‘liberal feminist’ approach centres on legislation, for example equal pay, removal of discrimination, and policies that aim to reconcile paid work with parenting. One criticism of this approach is that it offers no challenge to the status quo, seeking instead to instead secure equal access within the existing system (ibid).

While helpful in understanding the persistence of gender segregation in paid work, none of these approaches are without criticism. At the core of many of the explanations is that women are mostly responsible for the bearing and subsequent caring of children, although it has been demonstrated that this does not by any means provide an exhaustive explanation for gender segregation and inequalities within paid work. However, it is clear that it is a significant determinant in the way that individuals and households, institutional actors, the labour market and broader structural factors intersect to produce gender segregation and inequality. The issues covered in this paper demonstrate the significance of childrearing on the differentials in labour market participation and exposes some of the impact of structural, institutional and personal factors.

3. The Study

The research presented in this study emanated from further analysis of the life events and work histories data generated as part of the Labour Market Dynamics and Economic Participation (LMD) study (Shirley et al., 1997). The focus of the study was on labour market ‘transitions’, such as the transition from unpaid to paid work, unemployment to work and vice versa. In-depth interviews were conducted with 164 people from 96 households in the Hawkes Bay region. The interviews provided detailed chronicles of people’s labour market transitions between 1985 and 1995. Whilst the specific focus of the study was not on women and work, the project was designed with the intention of further analysis, therefore generated considerable information relevant to the present study.

Interviews with women who had given birth or adopted children within the ten-year retrospective period (between 1985 - 1995) were selected for analysis. From this data set, women were selected using a stratified procedure to ensure that all groups within the target population were represented. The classifications and variables included in the selection were:

- Ethnic representation¹
- Family configuration
- Patterns of employment
- Child care experiences
- Income

Table 1 provides a summary of the household characteristics and employment status of the twenty women whose work histories were analysed.

The interview transcripts of these twenty women were examined in order to develop common themes and categories. The categories that emerged from the interview data were structured according to a tri-level analysis that took into account: the macro or structural context; the institutional level of employment and workplace policy; and the micro level of the individual and family.

¹ In the data, set there were only two identified ethnicities, Maori and European.

Table 1 Summary of Household Characteristics and Employment Status

Name	Ethnicity	Women's Occupation	Hours/Week	Marital Status	Husband's Occupation	No. of Children	Income ²
Ruth	NZ Euro	Gardener	3-6	M	Nurse	3	\$45,000
Fiona	Maori	Student	FT	M	Dean	2	\$60,000
Sarah	English	Teacher	FT	M	Bank	2	\$75,000
Emma	NZ Euro	Receptionist	20	M	Forestry	2	\$52,500
Julia	NZ Euro	Salesperson	30	S	-	1	\$20,000
Denise	NZ Euro	Govt Dept	22	M	Solicitor	1	> \$100,000
Margaret	NZ Euro	Café Worker	Cas	D	Surveyor	3	\$28,000
Karen	NZ Euro	Librarian	ML	M	Marketing	2	unknown
Josephine	Maori	Seasonal Orchard	Cas	M	Unemployed	6	\$25,000
Anita	Maori	Nursing Student	FT	S	-	1	unknown
Anne	NZ Euro	Not employed	0	M	ACC	3	\$332 week
Jane	NZ Euro	Office Manager	15	M	Plumber	2	unknown
Sandra	Maori	Receptionist	Cas	S	-	4	\$310 week
Lorraine	NZ Euro	Restaurant	Cas	M	unknown	2	\$28,000
Kim	NZ Euro	Area Rep	FT	S	-	1	unknown
Nikki	NZ Euro	Govt Dept	FT	M	ACC	3 ³	\$37,300
Aroha	Maori	Cleaner	10	M	Freezing Works	3	\$30,000
Tania	NZ Euro	Govt Dept	FT ⁴	M	Food Manuf.	2	\$28,000
Clare	Maori	Not employed	0	S	-	1 ⁵	unknown
Roberta	NZ Euro	Gardener	Cas	M	Brewery Worker	2	\$37,000

Cas = Casual; FT = Full-time; NZ Euro = New Zealand European; ML = Maternity Leave; M = Married; D = DeFacto; S = Single

² This is household income where known. The interviewers did not collect exact details of income such as net or gross figures, or whether income is inclusive of government benefits. It is assumed that annual income is gross, and weekly income from government income support is net.

³ Nikki was pregnant again when interviewed.

⁴ Tania was on maternity leave at the time of the interview and intended to return to her previous job on a full-time basis.

⁵ Clare had one child and was eight months pregnant at the time of the interview.

4. The Structural Context

The first level of analysis focuses on the way in which the political economy and broad social context played a role in influencing the paid employment situation of the twenty women whose work histories were analysed. As we will see later in this paper, government provision such as maternity leave, childcare provision, and support for single mothers have implications for the employment of women with children. Indirect social security provisions, including unemployment benefit, child benefits and family support also impact on the employment of women with children. Furthermore, analysis of the interview data demonstrated the important role of the political economy on the experiences of mothers in the labour market. The state also plays an important role in influencing society's behaviour and attitude towards work and family. Therefore, in thinking about the paid employment of women with children, it is imperative to consider the welfare state and the role it plays in society.

Esping-Anderson (1990) has developed what is probably the most well known of the typologies used to characterise the divergent welfare state regimes. He divided welfare states into three clusters of regimes; the liberal/residual (which characterises the English speaking industrialised countries); the social democratic/ universal (which characterises the Scandinavian countries); and the corporatist/conservative (which characterises the rest of Europe). While feminist academics such as Martha MacDonald (1998), Nancy Fraser (1996) and Diana Sainsbury (1996), have acknowledged the existence of these welfare state regimes, they have argued that they fail to provide an indication of the impacts of the typologies on women. Indeed, they have argued that each of the regimes reflect and shape relations in the family and the labour market, including gender relations. The liberal/residual state (of which New Zealand is said to prescribe) supports the 'male breadwinner model', where men are expected to be the sole, or at least the main, breadwinner, and women are expected to be home-based carers or secondary labour market participants who are economically dependent on their partners. The social democratic/universal model which is associated with the norm of active labour force participation by all adults, aims to achieve gender equity principally by promoting women's employment (Fraser, 1996). However, MacDonald (1998) argues that this model, designated the 'universal breadwinner model', typically characterised by Sweden, means that women carry the double burden of caring and providing.

It has been purported that the New Zealand government of 1984 to 1995 supported the male breadwinner family (Kelsey, 1997). Morris (1999) has argued that this has mainly been through omission. For example, the state failed to provide adequate childcare provision, paid domestic and parental leave and pay equity legislation. This section further illustrates the degree to which the welfare state regime affected the employment of women with children; first by discussing the economic reforms of the 1984 – 1995 period, and then addressing the influence of the state on the attitude of society towards mothers who engage in paid employment.

4.1 The Political Economy of New Zealand

During the economic reforms begun by the Labour Government in 1984 and continued by the National Government in 1990, every aspect of New Zealand's economic policy was subjected to radical change. Immediately after coming to power in 1984, the Labour Government devalued the New Zealand dollar by 20 per cent. Then ensued a series of fiscal reforms; the finance markets were deregulated, the dollar was floated, interest rate controls were abolished following an earlier expiration on the income and price freeze. The budget later that year saw export and domestic subsidies and import tariffs abolished in order to reduce government expenditure. The government also announced a fundamental reform of the tax system, moving the emphasis from direct to indirect taxation. The marginal income tax rates were lowered and a goods and services tax (GST) on domestic expenditure was introduced.

The labour market too underwent a restructuring process over the ten-year period, both directly and as an indirect result of the other economic reforms. Labour markets became progressively deregulated, compulsory union arbitration was abolished, and in 1991, the Employment Contracts Act was introduced to replace the system of national awards and collective bargaining. State expenditure was reduced and government departments were reorganised to run along business lines in order to increase efficiency (Dalziel and Lattimore, 1996; Harris and Dalry, 1994; Kelsey, 1993, 1997).

In the years from 1984 to 1995, New Zealand changed from being the most heavily regulated of the OECD economies to being among the most liberal (Harris and Dalry, 1994). The costs of this transformation, known as the 'New Zealand experiment', were primarily borne by the labour market. The most significant of these costs was perhaps the considerable rise in unemployment (from less than four per cent in 1984 to eleven per cent at its peak in 1991). Harris and Dalry (1994) argued that the major cause of unemployment post-1984 had been the reduction in demand of labour by firms, which resulted in substantial job losses. They identified three main factors that resulted in downsizing. First was the push by the government to deregulate and open up the New Zealand economy, coinciding with the corporatisation/privatisation of government enterprises and the reduction of protection and subsidies for various sectors. Overall, this led to a tightening of domestic demand for goods and services and a decrease in the international competitiveness of the country, while concurrently exposing domestic markets to increased competition. The second factor that influenced the decision to downsize was the poor output and productivity growth and high inflation disposition of much New Zealand industry. This became increasingly important following deregulation, particularly given the reduced protection against international and domestic competitors. The final factor was the longer-term changes in markets that resulted in the decision to downsize. These changes included the increasing globalisation of markets, paired with an increased use of technology that led to changing product cycles, the need for new labour practices and new styles of management. Due to these long-term effects, employers tended to reduce the size of the workforce as part of the reorganisation process.

Certainly these factors contributed to the downsizing of employment in the Hawkes Bay region during the 1984 to 1995 period. Of particular significance to the district was the rationalisation of the meat industry, resulting in the closure of three meat works in the late 1980s and early 1990s; the difficulty of the pip-fruit industry to

compete in a deregulated global market; the closure of a food manufacturing plant; and the restructuring of government departments and state owned enterprises. While prior to 1984, the Hawkes Bay region had an unemployment rate well below the New Zealand average, following these adjustments, the unemployment level increased to a level higher than the national average (Maori Employment and Training Commission, 2000).

These changes had implications for women's employment in three major ways. First, was the change in the nature and pattern of employment. In Hawkes Bay, female employment participation increased during the 1990s, from 49 per cent to 56.6 per cent. As in other parts of the country, Hawkes Bay saw an increase in employment in the tourism and services industries, where women predominated. Furthermore, changes in labour practices such as the increase in short-term employment, part-time and casual work have occurred in many occupations (Davidson and Bray, 1994).

The second way in which women's work was affected was due to the closure of industry in Hawkes Bay. This affected the women both directly, when they were made redundant themselves, and indirectly when their partners were laid off. For example, Aroha and her husband both lost their jobs within six months:

I lost my job before Frank and then when [the freezing works] closed down that was the end of his job, he had offers of doing that manual stuff for a while, but it wasn't worth it. It just wasn't worth him going out and slogging his gut out, because he is a worker, to slog his guts out for that sort of money.

Aroha spoke of the hardship the family faced until her husband got another job:

We were lucky we had savings, but it wiped out our savings in that ten weeks.⁶ Because we had a mortgage then so we had to make sure that was paid. I'm not sure when we got the payment from the super, it wasn't straight away. To survive in those weeks we had to use our savings and that was hard because it took a long time to cover ourselves because it was so unexpected. We found out just like everybody else, just sitting watching the news. It was tough.

One of the first actions of the 1984 Labour Government was to abolish interest rate controls. Subsequently, interest rates rose, reaching a peak of over twenty per cent in 1987 (Dalziel and Lattimore, 1996). For people with mortgages, this had obvious effects on their outgoing costs. Fiona and her husband had purchased a property intending to make a lifestyle change, giving up their teaching careers in order to establish a horticulture business. However, the interest rate hike meant that things did not turn out as they had planned:

At that time we both resigned and we went up North and we bought land and we were flower growing. I resigned to do that with him. Then being 1985 that was the year interest rates shot up, so immediately we were on the land growing flowers etc, we were struggling financially because the interest rates just shot up to 20 per cent. We bought the land in December

⁶ The ten weeks Aroha referred to was the stand down period before her husband was entitled to an unemployment benefit.

and we moved just after R was born in April and from then on we were really struggling with financial commitments. I ended up back in full time teaching at the start of the following year, which I was not happy about but had to financially... The strain of keeping up the financial pace was not the lifestyle we wanted.

The final economic reform that emerged from the data as influencing the employment situation of many of the women was associated with the restructuring of government operations. The Labour Government of 1984 reorganised public enterprises (such as Forestry, Electricity, Telecommunications, Post Office Bank, and New Zealand Post) into primarily business or commercial enterprises. For workers, these measures generally spelt disaster (Kelsey, 1997). Three people in the current study had been employed at Telecom and all were made redundant. According to Ruth's husband Paul, even after moving to a larger city, being re-employed at Telecom was not an option:

Ongoing retrenchment and restructuring the entire time, right through Telecom has just continued to do that. I did actually make inquiries with Telecom to get work but they kind of laughed quietly over the phone.

Moreover, the Labour Government initiated state sector reforms that brought about a radical transformation of previously non-commercial activities of health, housing and social welfare. Indeed, the entire 'machinery of government'⁷ (Boston, 1991) received an overhaul. Amongst the more notable changes include departments that have a high proportion of women working within them, including Health, Housing, Labour, Inland Revenue and Social Welfare. Four women in this study had worked within these government departments during the ten-year period of the work history analysis, and all were influenced to varying degrees by the restructuring that occurred during that period. For example, the government department that Denise worked for underwent a number of changes during the ten-year period:

I was restructured, sometime in '91 I think it was, latish '91... When I was restructured I had to take a step down, to regional training. When I came back [from parental leave] they couldn't offer me that particular job part time, but they offered me one grade down, part time. And then I was restructured again in December '94... Basically what they were doing was flattening the structure out, still keeping the majority of the jobs at the lower grades but less jobs at the higher grades, sort of flattened it out at the top, so that there was less advancement up. And I applied for redundancy but they said 'no'. Much to my dismay I got given a job. Yes, at both opportunities I applied for redundancy. A lot of people at the grade lower than I was got redundancy – got paid off. About sixteen people from Napier got paid redundancy... In the restructuring you had very few choices as to what you could actually do. You were told what jobs there would be and you had to decide whether you wanted to apply for any of them. And had to risk the chance of being put in something that I didn't want to do, or wouldn't suit me or whatever.

⁷ Boston (1991:264) uses the term 'machinery of government' to refer to 'the systems and structures of government, the allocation of government functions among departments and other agencies, and mechanisms for co-ordinating departmental operations'.

4.2 Technological Change

Intertwined with the downsizing of the labour market in the 1980s and 1990s was the changing technologies which clearly had implications for the labour process and patterns of work organisation, particularly for women. Harris and Daldy (1994), suggested that the range of new technologies during this period, and the pace at which they were being developed and applied in the workplace, together with their widespread impacts, was probably greater than in any previous period of technological advance. The escalation of the production and use of new technologies metamorphosed the level and kinds of skills required in the workforce, the demand for training and retraining and patterns of work organisation (Rees, 1992). Moreover, many of the changes in technology occurred in areas where women predominantly worked, particularly the service sector. For women with children, the implications of new technologies on their employment were compounded by them taking periods away from the workforce to care for their children. Ruth, a former dental nurse, aptly summed up the situation for many women:

For instance in this last several years... for a woman to perhaps even take maternity leave and then step back into that, the whole thing has changed before your eyes. When you are in it it is just a process that you are involved in. Both for us, in dental nursing and post office work and nursing, has changed radically in that actual period of time, over a decade.

Indeed, for Ruth, the working situation had changed so much, partly due to the introduction of new technologies and partly due to restructuring of the dental nurse service, that she felt unable to return to this type of work:

Dental nursing has undergone a metamorphosis in the entire time that I, which is a period of 15-17 years, has continued much like Telecom did, to become a more and more difficult environment to be re employed into. The nature of the job, in talking to them that are still involved, has changed radically. It has gone so quickly that I don't think that I could have at any time stepped back into that work environment.

These new technologies meant women were unfamiliar with the working environment, so when they returned to work after a break, they were disadvantaged in relation to their colleagues. Subsequently, women had to work hard to avoid the difficulties faced in having to re-enter an altered work environment, either by retraining to gain the necessary skills, or by returning to work following a short period of parental leave, which is a choice some mothers are not prepared to make:

[A]nd that was a choice I made, I could've perhaps continued, other people do take maternity leave and keep up to step and get back in there, but you know you have to work quite hard at doing that.

Returning to the workforce during this time of rapid technological changes had implications for women, such as Josephine, whose skills had not kept up with the changes. As a consequence, she was restricted in the type of work she did:

You see a lot of jobs advertised in the paper but they're for, you know you've got to have quite high qualifications. More of the office jobs... I'd like to do a computer course 'cos I'd like to get into computers. When I was younger I worked in an office, but that was the old shorthand/typing,

dictaphone. No computers in there then. But I'd like to sort of get back into that line. But I need to do a [course], you know get to know the computers.

The impact of the development of technological change on the labour market is extremely complex, partly because of the difficulty in controlling for other influences that are also at work (Harris and Daldy, 1994). The period covered by the work history analysis of the current study is proof of this. The interval from 1985 to 1995 saw major changes in the structure of New Zealand's economy, at a time when there were also rapid advances in technology. It is clear from the women's comments that technological changes had a definite influence on their paid employment experiences. Indeed, Ruth likened the disadvantage she faced on account of the many changes during her time out of the workforce to her husband's redundancy from Telecom due to restructuring:

Which was really quite scary for us both because we spent a lot of time training, we were in a parallel situation, to then have our circumstances of life, because life is like that, change and then never be able to catch up with that employment again even though we had trained and committed a lot of years to training, but never be able to actually catch up into that same employment situation again was actually quite daunting.

4.3 The Social Economy

Aside from the political economy of the period covered in the life history analysis, there were also wider societal forces that impacted on the women's employment. It is apparent when examining the influences on labour market status, the degree to which the pervasiveness of the 'ideology of the family' impacted on the employment of women with children. The ideology of the family refers to the way in which the family is universally presented as an ideal, predicated upon a model of a family form consisting of a bread winner husband with a wife at home and two children (Rees, 1992; Shirley et. al., 1997). The implications of this ideology in sustaining a gendered workforce and suppressing women's wages will be discussed later in this paper, as will the pervasiveness of the stereotype model of the family form within the household itself. However, at a structural level, the ideology of the family had implications in determining the attitudes of society and the state towards women with children and paid work.

Concomitant with the increase in the number of working mothers, has been a polarisation process between those who believe women should be at home caring for children and those who believe that women's paid employment is as central to their lives as it is for men. In Britain, this debate, dubbed 'the mother war', has been fought out publicly in the media, by politicians, academics and ordinary citizens, with those against working mothers claiming it damages the children (Buxton, 1998). In New Zealand, the debate has been less vociferous in the media. However, the focus of the governments over the past fifteen years suggests they supported the move to keep women in the home. Indeed, it has been argued that this was the attitude of New Zealand society in general, and when unemployment grew in the 1980s, employed married women were attacked as 'job stealers' (Else, 1996). Catherine Hakim, a British academic, believed that government campaigns are effective in ideological

reform as a mechanism of social engineering (Hakim, 1996). She gave two examples of power of the government's involvement in ideological change. The first was the British government's campaign to pull women into the workforce during World War Two, and then revive the ideology of domesticity after the war to reinstate the pre-war division of labour. The second was in China, where there was a relatively successful transformation of sex roles in the 1950s, and by the success of the one child per couple policy where it had traditionally been regarded as imperative to have at least one son (Hakim, 1996: 187). Within a New Zealand context, the 'girls can do anything' campaign provided an example of a successful government campaign resulting in an ideological change.

It had not been in the government's interest to reform the ideology of the family however. Kelsey (1993) has suggested that the neo-liberal ideology that has underpinned the New Zealand Governments of the 1980s and 1990s assumed the existence of the traditional, nuclear, role stereotyped family unit. This assumption not only contributed to the protection of family values, but led to a series of welfare and other provisions, predicated upon a model which does not apply to a growing proportion of the population. Single parent families, reconstituted families, and co-habitation have all been on the increase (Shirley et al., 1997). Nevertheless, with the state withdrawal of welfare the 'family', however fictitious a concept, had to take responsibility for its own members.

The prevailing perspective of the government invariably affects society, and evidence of this was found in the interview transcripts of the women in this study. The women's motives for working illustrated that the women themselves felt like they had to justify their decision for being involved in paid employment. Moreover, some women reported being criticised by friends, family or colleagues for returning to work. As Kim stated:

It wasn't a difficult decision to make going back to work for me. I did get some flack from family members and my mother for one was not impressed.

This was a prevailing attitude among those responsible for recruitment of staff also. Many women made comments about being discriminated against when applying for a job because they had children, as these comments from Lorraine and Julia illustrated.

I am always looking, but it's hard to fit in with a child. You would go for interviews and you would say you have a one-year-old or a two-year-old and they weren't interested... They think you're maybe not quite so reliable. But I think I was always. I never let [previous employer] down once... It used to really bug me that people would turn me down because you had a child. Like I have applied for many a job and soon as they find out you never hear from them again. I just presume that is the reason.

It is really hard if you've got a child and that's what I find when you have to go for an interview. If you apply for a job and they'll say to you "have you got a child?" and you see them take a step back almost. And they say

“what about child care?” I say it’s not a problem. They sort of don’t believe you. I find that really, really hard.

Single mothers were particularly subject to invective regarding their moral responsibilities. The National Government of the early 1990s undertook a campaign against people receiving the domestic purposes benefit (DPB), accusing them of posing a threat to family values (Kelsey, 1993). Indeed, much of the attack on the weakening ideology of the family has been aimed at single mothers. According to Alan Gibbs, a member of the Business Round Table: *‘We have swapped husbands for benefits. Today all the symptoms of poor families are the result of that huge social change. It has nothing to do with economics’* (cited in Morris, 1999: 22). The single mother was frequently assumed to be cheating and ‘bludging’ off the state and her fellow citizens, and needed to be punished (Kelsey, 1993). This punishment came in the form of benefit cuts, and stigmatisation and harassment by the Department of Social Welfare and indeed society as a whole.

The five women in this study who were single mothers all reported feeling the unwelcome stigma of receiving a domestic purposes benefit, and did what they could to avoid it. Kim gave people the impression that her full-time voluntary work was in fact a paid job in order to avoid the negative attention being a DPB recipient gave her:

They just see you as a bludger on society... They just think you are completely bludging and that you are lazy and that, honestly they have no idea how hard it is. I just find it is good if you are actually doing something, at least you can say “I am an area rep”, I don’t have to tell them who it is with, it is better than saying I don’t do anything. I couldn’t handle that, I would make something up, I would probably tell them I was a fire fighter or a para glider or something.

This stereotype of the single mother as a bludger and cheat was used by the state to justify surveillance over every aspect of the single mother’s life, including not only what she spent, but also where she lived and who she slept with (Kelsey, 1993). Neighbours, friends and family were encouraged to spy and inform on the single mother. Julia was the subject of this vindictive reporting:

I don’t want to do that [go back on the DPB]. I like my independence. There seems to be so many restrictions on what you do, and you have so many people watching you all the time. When I was on the DPB I had my brother staying with me for a little while and the next thing I know I’ve got Social Welfare at me saying you have a male living at your house. You are living with a male. They never bothered to find out that it was my brother staying with me. He was staying with me for 6 weeks while he was waiting for a house. He sort of had to move out of the flat where he was in, and he was buying a house and he had nowhere to stay for a period of 6 - 8 weeks. So he moved in with me. Fine, but no, Social Welfare came round - you’re living with a male. But never mind I turned around and said he’s my brother and he’s living in that room and my son’s living in that room.

It is clear that the attitudes of society towards single mothers were instrumental in forcing Julia into the paid workforce, and Kim into full-time voluntary work.

However, for many single parents, the constraints and barriers to participating in the workforce are too great. Beneficiaries who work part-time faced high abatement levels, and the lack of childcare and low wages meant most single parents were unable to engage in paid work. It is ironic that in a climate where there was an overall move to keep women in the home, single parents were being forced into the workforce. This was done under conditions of blame and harassment, ignoring the constraints faced by single mothers seeking to re-enter the workforce, thus the support for single parents to participate in the workforce was virtually nonexistent. Furthermore, the drive to encourage single mothers into the workforce undermined the importance of the work they were already doing; bringing up the next generation.

Fiona Williams' (1989) theory of the welfare state has highlighted the strong influence that normative ideas about family, work and nation have on social policy. Within the context of mothers and paid employment, this section has confirmed the degree to which society and the workings of the state shaped the women's position in paid work. The political economy of New Zealand during the 1984 to 1995 period was undermined by the neo-liberal ideology that assumes the existence of a traditional, role stereotyped family. The implications of this ideology on the employment participation and experiences of women with children demonstrated the power of moral exhortation endorsed by the state. Moreover, the economic reforms covered in the life history period influenced the employment decisions and experiences of the women. Both the labour market restructuring and the technological revolution, created an uncertain and unstable labour market, precisely in the areas of work where women have traditionally found secure employment, namely office work and public sector employment. The changes over the past decades have also undermined men's employment security, particularly within industry and manufacturing, which has also impacted on the employment of women.

Clearly, the ideology of the state has obvious implications for working mothers, not only in the ramifications for policy provision in reconciling reproductive and paid work, but also in wider welfare provision. The male breadwinner model implicit in the workings of the New Zealand state has discouraged female labour force participation (except for single mothers) and reinforced a traditional gender division of labour. However, the wages from women's work are increasingly essential to support the family, and the number of mothers in paid work means they can no longer be considered to be marginal or contingent. Paid work is now a regular and expected part of a mother's life. This being so, there needs to be a fundamental transformation from a society based on the male breadwinner household to a more gender equal system of social order.

5. The Institutional Context

This section moves from the macro context to examine the way in which institutional forces impact on the employment/non-employment of women with children. There were two central institutional factors that emerged from the interview data as influencing the employment situation of the 20 women whose work records were analysed. The first was the nature and patterns of work undertaken by the women. Of particular importance was gender segregation within both the type and form of employment; the high level of part-time and casual employment; the low level of remuneration and employment conditions; and the occupational segregation and mobility. The issue of voluntary work is also considered.

The second part of this section focuses on the workplace and governmental provision of policies and programmes designed to reconcile child bearing and rearing with paid work. Central to this latter level of analysis is the way and extent to which these policies influence the employment patterns and situations of the women in this study.

5.1 The Feminised Nature of Employment

5.1.1 Patterns of Labour Market Participation

Overseas literature demonstrates that whereas the typical male working pattern is of continuous labour force participation from leaving full-time education until retirement age, women's participation in the labour force over their lifetime tends to vary (Hewitt, 1993). A similar pattern is evident in New Zealand. The life history method employed in the original study from which the data for this paper is drawn captured the changing work patterns of the women over the course of their child bearing years, and highlighted the extraordinary impact that childbearing has on patterns of participation and occupational distribution.

The dominant stereotypical employment pattern in recent years has been a period out of paid work following the birth of a child, with a subsequent return to the same position on a part-time basis (Rees, 1992; Statistics New Zealand, 1999). However, the reality for many women bears little resemblance to this arrangement. In fact, none of the women whose work patterns were examined in this study subscribed to this idealised work pattern. Rather, the current analysis illuminates the complexity of women's movement in and out of full and part-time employment. No one pattern of participation described the majority of women. Furthermore, very few of the women actually planned their employment pattern. Indeed, most women were motivated by opportunities, or were forced by external factors to alter their employment arrangement. The interview data that is presented here will demonstrate the significance of the interaction between external institutional forces and the child bearing and rearing responsibilities of women in shaping the paid work patterns of the women.

One of the causes of gendered occupational segregation amongst women with children is that when women leave paid work to care for children, they typically experience downward occupational mobility, often moving back into lower level jobs than those

they left prior to having children (Dex, 1987). In her analysis of survey data of British women, Dex showed that childbirth is the greatest single cause of downward occupational mobility, and this is likely to be caused by a move to part-time work, because part-time work in Britain is predominantly in the lower paid jobs at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. The following section demonstrates that this situation is also common in the New Zealand context and analyses the typically feminised employment experiences of the women in this study.

5.1.2 *Part-Time Work*

The restructuring of New Zealand's economy since the 1980s has had a major impact on the number of part-time jobs available (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). The majority of those entering part-time work have been women, who are three times more likely than employed men to be working part time (ibid). Furthermore, the vast majority of part-time workers are women with young children. The current study reinforces these data. Of the fourteen women who were in paid work at the time of the interview, eleven were working part-time.⁸ The increasing number of women in part time work has initiated extensive debate about the benefits of this type of work for women. Critics of part-time work argue that it reinforces gender segregation, as part time work is available only in a limited range of jobs, which are generally low paid and of low status. In addition, it is argued that the feminisation of part-time work avoids any reorganisation of gender roles within the household, and the role of employers and the states in providing childcare (Davidson and Bray, 1994). Those who support the existence of part-time work believe it provides a way for women to balance work and family commitments. Indeed, this was the motive for many of the women in this study to work part time, as this comment by Sarah illustrated:

I could have worked full time but at that time it was good because it gave me a bit more time with the wee fellow because he had just started kindly and I could take him and pick him up.

However, for many women, part-time employment was not an option, highlighting the ways in which part-time work is limited to a range of jobs. Research demonstrates that the growth of part time work has been in the secondary sector, such as clerical, sales and service occupations, which have traditionally been dominated by women (Davidson and Bray, 1994). This was certainly the case for many of the women. Following the birth of her second child, Sarah, a teacher, had to rely on a series of non-permanent positions. For her, this meant having to work full-time when she would have preferred part-time work:

If a part time job had come up I would've been much happier with that but the only job that was going was full time and you can't afford to say no... I found that really hard again that year, that was the year that Daniel started school at the end of the year and I felt that quite hard to juggle full-time. It's not so much teaching but it's all the extra bits, all the teams and the practices and the staff meetings and you seem to find you are away from home a lot. That's what got to me whereas last year I had a lot more time

⁸ Defined as working from between 1 and 30 hours per week (Department of Statistics, 1999).

to pick up the kids from school and drop them off and spend more time with them.

Because part-time work is concentrated in a small number of industries and occupations, women seeking part-time work are constrained in their employment choices. Davidson and Bray (1994) argue that in practice, this means women seeking part-time work are generally channelled toward the low status and traditionally female dominated sectors of the labour market. An example of this can be seen with Karen, who prior to having children, was employed in the male dominated profession of computer programming. However, following the birth of her child she took up a part time position in a school library:

Yes, since Caitlin was born that has been a motivating factor. That has been why the library jobs and certainly why the job at [school library] was, because school holidays were available and I finished work just after three.

The lack of part time working opportunities is not limited to male dominated professions, as Anne, a Karitane nurse experienced. Following the birth of her child, Anne left her job rather than returning to full-time employment: “because I left on full-time they only offered full-time”. She undertook home-based childcare instead, a traditionally low paid and low status occupation.

Overall, the women in this study consciously chose to work part-time if they could, and generally spoke of the positive aspects of part-time work. However, as Davidson and Bray (1994) maintain, while many women may consciously choose to work part-time, they clearly do not choose the employment conditions that often accompany part-time work. These include low pay, the hours of work, few promotions or career opportunities, low job security, and the temporary nature of employment (Davidson and Bray, 1994). These more negative elements of part-time work were also evident in the working lives of the women in this study.

5.1.3 Casualisation

Another labour market phenomenon that has occurred in New Zealand over the past decade or so is the temporary and insecure nature of employment, often termed the ‘casualisation’ of the labour force (Else, 1996). While casualisation is often associated with part-time work (Davidson and Bray, 1994), this is not always the case. In some industries, such as horticulture and service industries, the employment of casual staff is common policy. The women in this study had a high representation in both of these industries, perhaps a reflection of the Hawkes Bay labour market, where the majority of work is in the agriculture and horticulture sector (Maori Employment and Training Commission, 2000). As a result, the level of casual and temporary work amongst the women was high, with a quarter of the women participating in this type of employment at the time of interview. Of these women, two were employed in the service industry, two in the horticultural industry, and one in social services. Moreover, several women who were not in casual work at the time of the interview had been at some stage during the ten year period.

The casual work undertaken by the women took many forms. First, is the

stereotypical form of the seasonal orchard work that the Hawkes Bay labour market is renowned for. Josephine and her husband were required by the then Department of Work and Income to engage in this type of employment for ten years, and in between the fruit-picking season, were on the unemployment benefit:

Regardless of whether you like it or not if they say you've got to go and pick fruit, you've got to go and pick fruit.

It had also become common practice for employees to be appointed on a casual or temporary basis in positions that were once long term, such as teaching and within government departments. Tania, who had worked within the same government department since leaving school, after taking time off to have children, had a series of short-term temporary positions before being made permanent:

It took me a really long time to get a permanent position. There was a lot of temporary work around but to get a permanent job was really hard where I was working... I was looking for fulltime work and they approached me with a position and I took it on a temporary basis at first and then I was made a permanent I mean I started on a 6 week contract and it got extended on a temporary basis for over a year, and then I just got made a permanent.

Dowdeswell (1998) attributes the motive of 'choice' to whether casual work has positive or negative effects on women's lives. If women chose casual work because of the flexibility and the ability it gives to combine work and family, and they weren't dependent on the income, they generally spoke of the positive aspects of casual work. The overall finding of Dowdeswell's study, however, was that casual work had a negative impact on the lives of women, particularly those who had dependent children. The issue of choice is important in the context of the present study also. None of the women chose to work on a casual basis and many spoke explicitly of the lack of alternative choices. This comment by Josephine, referring to orchard work, aptly illustrated this point:

Here in the Hawkes Bay it's the only thing you can do. Nothing else. You just have to take what's there.

5.1.4 Voluntary Work

Almost all of the women interviewed had, at some stage, undertaken some form of voluntary work. This ranged from assisting in the school, kindergarten, or kohanga reo that their child attended, to working in the CAB, Women's Centres, and La Leche League. There were various reasons given for doing voluntary work. For Karen, it gave her a step in the door to paid employment:

I started off at the [Library] doing voluntary work but then they said they would pay me. I went in off the street and said I want something to do and ended up being paid for it. The intention was to be voluntary.

The dominant reason for performing voluntary work however, was motivated by their children. For Roberta, doing voluntary work at her children's school gave her the opportunity to spend time with, and assist her children with their learning:

Just to be involved I suppose and to support the kids. Sometimes I think I should be spending a whole afternoon down there, helping the class, when I could use that two hours to do work at home, and spend that two hours with my two children, I think they get enough anyway. And it's getting to know their environment and how it works down there.

Research conducted in Canada highlighted the high proportion of women in voluntary work; an average of 70 per cent of volunteers were women, and two-thirds of the adult female population volunteered on an informal basis (Prentice and Ferguson, 2000). New Zealand research paints a similar picture, with 60 per cent of women aged 35-39 years involved in unpaid work outside the home, and 56 per cent of all volunteers being women. Women are also likely to spend more hours per week doing voluntary work than men (Statistics New Zealand, 1998). Prentice and Ferguson suggest that mothers' volunteer participation is not freely chosen as has been traditionally assumed. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the social expectation that mothers at all times ought to make their children their first priority, so that their participation in voluntary activities is subtly coerced. The second is the fragile nature of the welfare state, meaning parental voluntarism cannot be withdrawn without jeopardising badly needed services. These factors intersect to ensure that, in many respects, maternal voluntarism cannot be considered a free choice. The high level of voluntarism in the pre-schools and primary schools of the women in the current study indicates the likelihood of the imposition of voluntary work is prevalent in New Zealand also.

5.2 Workplace Provision

Traditionally work and family are conceptualised as comprising separate and distinct spheres (Shirley and Lovelock, 1996). However, the greater proportion of dual-income families and women with children in the paid workforce, illustrates that the interaction of family and work life is inescapable. Despite the existence of this changed workforce, the majority of work patterns, time commitments and expectations of employees are based on the assumption that there is someone at home to take care of domestic responsibilities (McAulay, 1999). For an increasing number of households, this assumption is untrue, and subsequently employees (particularly women) struggle to meet the demands of work and family. As a consequence of women's increased participation in paid work, increasing employee expectations, and threats to organisational competitiveness and viability, it is suggested by American authors Friedman and Galinsky (1992) that organisations address the work and family concerns of their employees. Work arrangements that make it easier for people to manage the competing areas of work and family have been proposed as solutions to the conflict organisations and individuals experience (McAulay, 1999). Termed 'family friendly' policies, these work arrangements refer to a wide range of practices, including flexi-time, part-time employment, job sharing, facilities for the care of

children, parental leave allowances, adequate annual leave and sick leave, and in general a workplace that is responsive to family demands (Shirley and Lovelock, 1996).

New Zealand research suggests that relatively few employers have implemented 'family' related policies, and when they have, they are concentrated on low cost policies such as part-time work (Else, 1996; Tudhope, 1994; Shirley and Lovelock, 1996). According to Goulter, cited in Else (1996:140), a union representative for the finance sector union:

It's when we get to the higher-cost items that we see the barriers go up. We have already seen this with paid parental leave. Also there is a deafening silence on the provision of childcare. In our experience childcare is the issue. Typically however, it is not regarded as the employer's problem.

In the current study, few women had the advantage of working in workplaces that provided 'family friendly' policies, apart from part-time work, which has been adopted under the guise of 'flexibility'. However, it is important to recognise that employers also have an interest in providing part-time work. Changes to the industrial relations legislation have enabled employers to maximise benefits from a deregulated economy and a restructured state through employment practices such as casual and part-time work. As discussed in the previous section, this has often had serious implications for the working lives of many part time workers. Bearing this in mind, the employers of the women in this study have done very little in accommodating the needs of women in paid work who have children.

What was apparent though, was the positive effect workplace flexibility had on the women and their families, often impacting on the choice women make regarding their employment. Sandra stated that workplace flexibility had a bearing on the job she did, choosing to give up a restaurant manager's position:

Because I didn't see my children... I was making a fairly good income but I never had the chance to spend quality time with the kids.... I mean seeing them to pick them up and drop them off at the babysitters, grab them from school, throw them to the babysitter, you don't see them until the next morning and by that time you're haggard, you're rushing them off to school.... It just doesn't work.

However, while there were a few positive experiences of flexible and accommodating workplaces, many women spoke of the reverse, where workplaces had expectations that did not account for the women's role as a mother, as this comment by Kim illustrated:

It was pretty high-pressured at times and they weren't really [sympathetic of my single parent role]. I think because I'd worked for them before I'd had a child and I'd worked really long hours and had a very stressful job before, so they just thought, 'Well she can do it because she did it

before'.... They didn't really take into account that I had a child, because I kept my home life and my work life quite separate.

It was clear from the women's comments that their employers' attitudes were crucial to the success of being able to combine work and domestic roles. Indeed, it appeared that in the absence of any pragmatic workplace policies, employer and colleague attitude are what defined the workplace as family friendly.

Despite the claims of financial benefits to employers of initiating family friendly initiatives, there has been very little evidence that conclusively shows the benefits to employers (or indeed employees). What little research there is points to short term solutions to the problems of combining work and family (Tudhope, 1994). Tudhope suggests that the major obstacle to the implementation of family friendly policies are societal, attitudinal and structural. Without doubt, in New Zealand, employers are required to do very little to respond to the needs of parents, apart from providing the statutory minimum leave entitlements and minimum wages. According to Rubery (1998: 17), who compiled a report for the OECD on women's equality in the labour market:

... it is essential that employers are required to recognise and facilitate the domestic responsibilities of their workforces. Yet this has been in an era in which the policies of governments have been to reduce rather than to increase the 'constraints' on employers to take social responsibility and to contribute to the sustainability of the communities from which they draw their labour forces. Unless governments and pan-national institutions are willing to act to require employers to recognise these responsibilities, there seems little prospect of any gradual evolution towards a society in which work and family responsibilities are given equal priority.

5.3 Government Provision

This section considers the role of the government in the provision of policies to reconcile parenting with paid work. While they are discussed individually, it is apparent that the policies to encourage parent's employment need to be viewed as a package.

5.3.1 Minimum Employment Conditions

In New Zealand, paid workers are protected by general statutory minimum rights that govern their entitlement to holidays, leave and wage protection. In 1995/6 when the interviews were conducted these rights were:

Holidays: Following a year of employment with the same employer, employees are entitled to three weeks annual leave on full pay.

Sick Leave: Employees are entitled to five days paid leave a year (after six months with the same employer). This leave can be used when they or their children are sick, or for bereavement.

Minimum Wage: The Minimum Wage Act sets a minimum wage entitlement for paid workers over the age of 20. In 1995 and 1996 when the interviews were conducted, this was set at \$6.15 an hour.

Parental Leave: The Parental Leave and Employment Act (1997) entitles paid workers, who have been working for the same employer for one year, to 52 weeks

unpaid leave. During this time, the employer has to ensure the job is available for the employee on their return, or offer them an equivalent position (Summarised from Davidson and Bray, 1994).

Paid Parental Leave (to be introduced): Eligibility is for those in paid employment with a single employer for 10 or more hours per week for a year before due birth or adoption (EEO Trust, November, 2001).

Some of these employment conditions have been criticised as being insufficient for workers who have the responsibility of caring for children. For parents of school age children for example, three weeks paid leave is insufficient to cover a year of school holidays. Similarly, five days sick leave does not allow for the sickness of one or more children. Roberta cited this latter reason for her not working full-time:

It's sort of hard with a husband doing shift work. Because if I got a job in the evenings there is only one week out of three when he is here and if I got a job during the day, if one of the kids got sick at school - what happens to them?

5.3.2 *Maternity/Parental Leave*

Parental leave policies can have a significant impact on a woman's employment patterns, particularly in the first weeks or months following the birth of a child. A comparative analysis conducted by the New Zealand Ministry of Women's Affairs (1995) showed a distinct connection between parental leave provisions and women's participation in paid work. In New Zealand, one years unpaid parental leave is available for either partner provided employees have worked for their employer for one year. The Paid Parental Leave Scheme is to be introduced for those in paid employment who have been with a single employer for 10 or more hours a week for a year before the birth or adoption of a child. Many women in this study were precluded from receiving any leave due to the insecure nature of the work they performed. They would also be precluded from the paid parental leave scheme as the 'one-size-fits-all' policy does not take into account the growing number of people in non-standard employment. Clare lost her job when having her first child because the company had not been formed for long:

They weren't prepared to give maternity leave or anything like that, I think that was because they were newly established and they didn't have any contracts or anything like that.

Fewer than half of the women whose work histories were analysed received any parental leave, that is, returned to the same workplace following a period of unpaid leave. Moreover, the circumstances under which the women took parental leave were not always straightforward, or beneficial for the woman. Denise, for example, returned to a position a step down from the one she had before her baby was born because she wanted to work part-time:

When I came back they couldn't offer me that particular job part time, but they offered me one grade down part time.

Issues around the provision of parental leave, and the costs and benefits to employers, parents and children, are extremely complex. They include gender equity issues both in and outside of the home; policies and legislation protecting the health of women and their children (particularly in relation to breastfeeding); and determining the appropriate responsibilities of the State, employers and parents with regard to the care of children (Galtry and Callister, 1995). The circumstances and employment patterns of the women in this study who did receive leave upon the birth of a child illustrated the inadequacy of the current policy in New Zealand. Moreover, there were twelve women who did not have any maternity leave, mainly because they did not return to the position they left. One reason for this was the high level of casual paid work, as stated earlier. Another consideration was that the women chose not to go back to paid employment while their children were young, as Emma expressed:

I just couldn't have somebody else looking after my baby. I couldn't have coped keeping a house, looking after a baby and working, I realised once it had happened. Before it happened I was full of what I was going to do. When it happens it's different.

The Parental Tax Credit (popularly known as the 'baby payment') was introduced as part of the 1999 budget. It is available to qualifying families who do not receive any income support or ACC, and provides up to \$300 per fortnight per child for eight weeks after the birth of a child or children. However, Nikki and her family were ineligible for this financial assistance because her partner was a recipient of ACC. Other families who are not eligible include those who receive the domestic purposes benefit.

5.3.3 Domestic Purposes Benefit

A government benefit that has a significant bearing on the employment situation of women who are single parents is the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). Of the twenty women involved in this study, five were single parents: Kim, Sandra, Clare, Julia, and Anita. All women had, at some stage, received the DPB, although only four were recipients at the time of the interview. New Zealand research highlights the incremental barriers and constraints preventing single mothers from moving into employment, over and above those faced by their partnered counterparts (Levine, Wyn and Asiaga, 1993; Morris, 1999). Furthermore, comparative research conducted in the United Kingdom suggests that government and workplace provision were instrumental factors in whether lone parents were in employment or not (Bradshaw et. al., 1996). While all of the policies presented in this and the previous section impact on the employment of single mothers (perhaps even more so than partnered mothers), the DPB is a policy that affects single parents only, and the conditions of its administration obviously influence single parent's paid workforce participation.

According to the study conducted by Bradshaw et al (1996), the participation of lone mothers in the paid workforce in New Zealand (36 per cent) differs markedly from that of partnered mothers (58 per cent). More recent statistics demonstrate that while the proportion of partnered mothers in employment increased to 65 per cent, the corresponding rate for single mothers was static (Statistics New Zealand, 1999). One

reason for this disparity is that single mothers in paid work need to have a secure, well-paid job so that they can raise their family on one income (Morris, 1999). The casualisation of employment, combined with the gender wage gap, and compounded by the absence of employable qualifications held by many single mothers made this an impossible target for the majority of women. As Kim stated:

I would like to get off that [the DPB] but it is really hard, you have to find enough. You have to find a job that pays enough to pay your mortgage and all that sort of thing, it is a really big risk. In the workforce you do not really know if your job is secure and the thing is it is very hard to find a job that works within the school hours.

The Statistics New Zealand (1999) figures show that employed single mothers are much more likely to be in full-time employment than part-time. Julia, the only single mother in this study who was in permanent paid employment, attributed this to the actions of the Department of Work and Income:

I let them know I was working. And because I was working over the amount you were allowed to they cut it. And they cut it that much that it wasn't really worth me working and that made me more determined and I went out and got another part time job. And I went from there to full time work, because you couldn't survive on the way they cut it.

New Zealand has a low rate of part-time paid work participation for single mothers compared to other OECD countries, which according to Morris (1999) is likely to be influenced by the high abatement rates referred to by Julia. Other women in the study also referred to the difficulty working part-time, not only because of the financial issues involved but also because single mothers relied much more heavily on the wider family and social environment to provide support and direct childcare. Kim summed this up well in this comment:

It is really frustrating when you want to get on and do things with your life but when your kids are little you just can't because those times you have to be there at 3 pm. I've got no one else to do that, like a partner to fall back on... Sole responsibility for everything falls on your shoulders

Kim also studied while on the DPB. For her, it was a desire to return to a management position similar to the one she had prior to having children that was the motivating factor behind her decision to study:

I really like that sort of job, I loved it and I thought I had to get some skills to get back into the workforce because everything has changed so much these days and I am not getting any younger. It was basically out of just pure wanting to update my business skills and management skills.

Because three out of five of the single mothers were involved in training of some sort, compared to just one of the partnered mothers, it is likely that the availability of the

Training Incentive Allowance (TIA) was a motivating factor for the DPB recipients to study. The TIA allowance provides financial assistance to certain beneficiaries, including DPB recipients, to undergo employment related training, and addresses one of the main barriers to work for single mothers, the lack of qualifications. Indeed, research suggests that the TIA does increase the likelihood of a beneficiary moving into employment (Morris, 1999). To the three women in this study, it provided a viable way of combining the sole responsibility of child rearing and the home, with the eventual outcome of achieving a secure, reasonably paid job.

5.3.4 Childcare Provision

Childcare is cited as a major obstacle to the employment participation of women with children. Therefore any provision to address this barrier would greatly increase the opportunity for maternal employment. In New Zealand, the childcare benefits available to working parents include a childcare tax rebate of up to \$310 per year, and the childcare subsidy. The childcare subsidy is a heavily means tested provision to subsidise childcare for families where both parents (or one in single parent families) are either in paid employment or studying. The maximum payment is \$69 per child per week and is only payable for up to 30 hours per week. With the average childcare centre costing \$150 a week, women who are unable to make up the shortfall are precluded from benefiting from the provision (Morris, 1999). Furthermore, the subsidy is only available for those children in registered home based services or childcare centres and is paid directly to the centre, so does not include informal care arrangements. In this study, Nikki was the only women who had received any childcare subsidy, probably a reflection of the low level of formal childcare arrangements used.

As well as the childcare subsidy to parents, the Ministry of Education provides a grant to Registered Early Childhood Education Centres, and capital contributions through the Discretionary Grants Scheme. It has been argued that this assistance is insufficient and results in the centres having to charge high fees to parents (Morris, 1999). Aside from public kindergartens,⁹ which offer a part-time educational setting for three and four year old children, childcare centres in New Zealand are mostly privately provided.

5.3.5 Employment Contracts Act

Another Government policy that influenced the employment conditions and participation of women with children was the Employment Contracts Act. The Employment Contracts Act was introduced in 1991, four years prior to the LMD research from which the data for this study came. The Act abandoned compulsory unionism and pay award coverage in favour of individual employment contracts, in order to force wages down and to break the unions (Kelsey, 1997). Penal rates and special allowances were cut, which had the effect of reducing average weekly earnings by \$15 a week. This meant that part-time workers, and hence many of the women in this study, were particularly affected by the wage drop. The Employment Contracts Act also allowed employers more flexible employment measures, meaning that

⁹ Kindergartens offer a limited opening regime and follow school holidays, so cannot realistically be classified as childcare centres. The Childcare, Families and Work survey (DOL, NACEW, 1999) found that only one third of parents of children at kindergarten were employed.

employers could employ casual staff more readily, and also adjust and vary the hours and timing of work within the existing workforce (Davidson and Bray, 1994). Furthermore, with unemployment at over 11 per cent when the Act was introduced, workers felt they needed to accept the conditions if they wanted to keep their jobs. As Roberta said:

It doesn't matter where you work. They expect much more from you now than they did ten years ago. If you want the job you have to do it. Ten years ago you could go to a job and say if that truck doesn't go down the road, I don't go down the road, and now you have to say, I'll drive that truck, or that digger or I'll drive whatever you want, I will do it.

The Act had particular consequences for casual workers and part time workers who could now no longer rely on regular and consistent hours of hours. This put them at the mercy of their employers, as Sandra illustrates:

If you offered them work and they turned it down you were within your rights to withhold work from them and it was written in the contract, so it's basically saying that if you don't jump when we say jump don't expect to jump ever again and I think that's rather bad.

Research shows that men have fared better than women from the impacts of the Employment Contracts Act. The pay gap has widened in the aftermath of the Act, with men's wages increasing at over twice the rate of women's (Davidson and Bray, 1994). Moreover, while it was women working in the type of employment and industries that were notably penalised by the changes introduced in the Employment Contracts Act, they lost out further with the demise of many of the unions and subsequent employment protection. Kelsey (1997) reports that some unions supposedly stopped servicing workplaces with fewer than ten employees, where women, especially clerical, service and shop workers, predominated. This meant that many women in small workplaces did not have union support to strengthen their bargaining position for pay or conditions.

5.3.6 Summary

This section has raised several crucial issues about the relationship between institutional forces and the paid employment of women with children. It is clear that workplace and governmental policies have a significant bearing on the paid employment experiences of the women in this study, and influence the 'choices' women make regarding their labour market participation. What emerges though is that the women's ability to make choices in the labour market is constrained by the effects of the nature of paid work, directed as it is by the workplace and state employment policies, and the conditions and nature of work women with children are channelled into, because of their child rearing responsibilities. Analysis of the work histories of the twenty women in this study exposes the reality of paid work for these women as low paid, unskilled, insecure and highly segregated work, with little mobility up the employment scale. Part-time work, often lauded as a perfect solution for women seeking to balance work and family commitments, has created more opportunity for gender segregation and differentiation. Part-time work has had the

perverse effect of reinforcing the negative elements of the women's paid employment conditions. It has been suggested that compatibility between part-time work and gender equality are only likely to be achieved if men engage in part-time work at the same rate of women (Rubery, 1998).

What has also been highlighted is that women's increased involvement in the labour market has happened against a backdrop of limited government policies to facilitate this participation. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that very few women have made use of governmental provision of policies and programmes designed to reconcile reproductive work with paid work. Maternity leave and childcare provision are essential components of a support system to enable women to combine reproductive work with paid work. Yet in New Zealand, financial support in these areas is limited. Certainly, the women in this study reported low coverage of both provisions, reflecting the failure of the policies to adequately support women for their reproductive work.

6. The Individual and Family Context

This section considers the ways in which factors at the individual and family level influenced the employment of the twenty women whose paid work histories were analysed. Within this micro context, three main issues were evident from the interview data as impacting significantly on the women's experiences of paid work. The first was the women's individual motives for working, and the data demonstrated that the family was highly influential in shaping individuals' choices and motives in the labour market. The second issue is concerned with the raft of obstacles women encountered at the family level, to their full and equal engagement in the workplace. Included within this latter theme is the low level of confidence of many women on returning to work, excluding them from opportunities within the paid workforce, and the unequal domestic loads that constrain women's participation. The third factor, and final part of this section, is concerned with one of the most prominent topics in New Zealand when considering the relationship between mothers and paid work, the issue of childcare.

6.1 Motives for Working

There has been a major social change over the past 50 years in the working lives of women. The balance has shifted away from women being full-time housewives and carers, towards a more decisive attachment to paid work (Pascall, 1994). Women in general, and women with children in particular, are moving into the paid working population in ever increasing numbers. The numerous reasons given for this increased activity include: the family's level of income adequacy; the rise of consumerism (Wells, 1998); the attitude that work is the defining characteristic of social worth (Franks, 1999); the increased demand for labour; and the position that workplace involvement is a natural progression of the feminist movement.

An important issue then, when considering the labour force participation of women with children, is what forces might lead women to move into the labour market. Inquiring as to the research participants' motives for working was one of the items on the interview schedule of the LMD study, and therefore provided salient information concerning the women's individual motives for participating in paid employment. Analysis of the interviews with the twenty women in this study suggested that there were two general motives for working: economic necessity and personal fulfilment. However, the ideal of the stereotypical family form was an underlying friction implicit in the responses of many women.

6.2 Job versus Career

Dex (1987), in her analysis of Work Survey data in the United Kingdom found that only five per cent of women gave 'following their career' as their main reason for working. She suggests that these results could indicate that women are uninterested in a career as the stereotypical view leads us to believe. However, Dex maintains that these figures are more likely to reflect the woman's realistic views of their limited job

opportunities, constraints of child care responsibilities, and their broken work patterns, particularly for those in part-time work. Garey (1999) adds to this line of research by suggesting that women distance themselves from the concept of a career to reconcile the conflicts involved with being a worker and a mother. She argues that the perception of 'career' suggests a demanding rigorous work pattern incompatible with the demands of a family.

Whether or not careers are, in practice, incompatible with family life is a matter beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the women in this study agreed with the common assumption that career and family are seen as being in opposition. This conceptualisation allowed Denise to emphasise her commitment to her family by expressing a rejection of her career once her child was born:

I've found that my career drive isn't as strong since I've become [a mother], but that's a personal thing I think. I mean before I would have said I want to go as far as I can, whereas now I sort of think he's more important than a career.

Furthermore, in order to stress their commitment to their family, many of the women understated the importance of their paid employment, often calling it a 'little job' as Emma's comment indicates

I mean I didn't really consider my little job at the [place of work] employment, as it was only very part time. I mean I only made about \$50 pocket money.

In addition to explicit remarks from the women (the women used phrases like: "just a part-time job", "little bit extra", "pocket money", "I don't think any man would want it", to describe their paid employment), the general tone of the interview transcripts implied that women's paid employment does not have the same meaning as men's. It does not bring the same status within the home and also has lower status within hierarchies in the workplace. Certainly, the underlying attitude of the women, men, and even the interviewers¹⁰ involved in this study was that women had 'jobs' and their husbands had 'careers'.

Many feminist writers have argued that career is a gendered concept, whereby the typical men's career pattern of continuous service and regular promotion is considered the norm (Evetts, 1994). The fact that most women's employment does not fit this model due to their broken or interrupted work pattern, and continued family obligation, excludes women from the notion. Furthermore, the models of career focus exclusively on achievements and promotions in the paid work sphere. Therefore activities other than paid work, such as unpaid work in the home, and voluntary work, do not contribute to promotional skills or entitlements. The consequences of this neglect have obvious implications for women returning to the work force and unmistakably contribute to both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation,

¹⁰ This assumption was reflected in the overwhelmingly longer interviews with the male respondents than the females. On average, an interview with a male/ female couple generated seven more pages from the male than the female. This does not include the participants of the original study whose work and life history analyses were discarded for the purposes of this study due to them focussing very little on the women's work.

Moreover, the interview data analysed in this study highlighted the ways in which these factors intersect to influence the difficulties women themselves have with the concept of career and motherhood.

6.2.1 Financial Necessity

By giving financial necessity as a reason for working, women with children are able to see themselves as ‘providers’ and thus employment can be conceived as being a necessary part of being a good mother, just as it is of being a good father. In other words, financial necessity legitimises women’s decision to work. Of all the motives given for participating in paid work, financial necessity was the most common. Kim put it down to the changing economic climate, where wages had not increased in line with rising prices:

These days for people to actually survive women have to work even if they have pre-schoolers. So many women work now... I think it is from economic factors. There is a lot of pressure on the men in their jobs and to get a good salary they have to work incredibly hard, so for them to have a good lifestyle, to ease it would help them if the women worked as well so that there is a double income coming into the house and the burden is not solely on his shoulders. I think it has a lot to do with economics because the cost of things are so expensive, electricity and everything is so high. It’s a huge burden on people.

The conflict between employment and motherhood was apparent when the women spoke about their motives for working. Many women stressed the importance of being at home with children, with their economic roles clearly secondary, as Emma illustrated:

Probably as the children get older I think I have needed [to go back to work]. They’re costing more, you do probably need - well not need, we would always manage I think - but life is much easier to have that extra, that icing on the cake. But I would have sacrificed things to stay home with the children.

Those who spoke of the financial motives for working were dichotomously categorised into those who had to work because of economic necessity, and those who chose to work. Karen, who fitted into the latter category, appreciated the economic rewards, but also clearly enjoyed the non-economic return:

However the money was not the only motivation, and getting into the library was an especially good way for me to get out and about and reach people.

The women who were forced to work for reasons of financial necessity, however, described a different reality. Sarah recounted the difficulties she faced when she returned to work when she was not ready to leave her children:

...It was a question of money. We wanted to move and if I didn’t go back to work we just didn’t have a chance of moving. It was a financial thing really. I found that year really tough. It was awful.

What was also evident in the women's comments was the demise of the notion associated with the ideology of the family, that of the 'family wage'. The family wage is defined as a sufficient wage to enable a man to support a wife and two or three children (Shirley, Koopman-Boyden, Pool and St. John, 1997). Shirley et al. (1997), suggest that the decline in the value of the family wage in the 1960s and 1970s was a primary factor in the increase in women's employment participation. It is clear from the comments of the women participating in this study that on the whole, the men's wages could not sustain the household, and that the wages from the women's (usually part-time) employment were essential in supporting the family. Nevertheless, it was common for the women to talk of their jobs as providing 'pocket money', or 'a little bit extra'. The women's remarks suggested that while the family wage was something of a myth, their role in contributing to the household income was still only secondary. The ideology of the family and its corollary, the family wage, have been central in ensuring the secondary nature of women's employment. However, despite the apparent collapse of the value of the family wage, the concept still exists to influence the employment status of women to be subordinate to that of their male counterparts.

6.2.2 *Non-Economic Rewards*

The women in this study overwhelming spoke of the positive characteristics of being in employment. While historically, working mothers may have been seen as ignoring the family, Sandra believed this was no longer the case:

And women are actually quite happy to go back into the workforce now without the big guilt trip of you're not staying home being a good mother. Granted there are probably children who are looking after themselves more. It's just a sign of the times especially in single parent families where you have to, but otherwise I can't see anything else.

Indeed, Kim thought that people's attitudes had changed so much that the reverse was now true:

When Hannah was a pre-schooler one of the mothers said to me that she felt really bad about herself because she didn't work, and she wanted to be a stay at home Mum with two pre-schoolers. She felt bad about herself because she was the only woman in her whole coffee group that didn't work. That is a change in expectations. If you are not going to be a stay at home Mum - and if you are a stay at home Mum then there is something wrong with you, that you are not contributing in an equal way to the family.

The comments relating to the personal fulfilment of paid employment were not associated with the type of jobs women did, education, marital status or social class. The only variable that categorized the statements women made regarding work enjoyment was whether work was undertaken due to economic necessity.

6.3 **Obstacles to Equal Participation in Employment**

Many women made comments about the difficulty of re-entering the workforce after having children. The perceived obstacles to returning to work were attributed to several factors, including the lack of suitable childcare, and the changing nature of

employment, both within the workplace (particularly in those positions requiring technical experience), and within the wider labour market. Two further issues that affected the equal participation of women in the workplace could be identified in the interviews of the women: their lack of confidence following a period out of the workforce; and their roles within the household.

6.3.1 Confidence

Lack of confidence is clearly a barrier to workforce participation of many women returning to work after having children, although one that has not received much attention in the literature. The development of confidence has been recognized as an essential issue to address by women returning to work, even for those women who are highly qualified (Jackson, 1991). Rees (1992), through her research on training choices of women returning to work in England and Wales, believes that lack of confidence is probably one of the reasons many women are willing to accept demotion on their return to work, the tendency to opt for typically female dominated professions, and the choice of part-time instead of full-time work (although she also sees domestic responsibilities as pivotal). Certainly, the length of time women had been out of the workforce represented a considerable hurdle for many of the women in the current study. As Roberta said:

You think where do I begin. I've got references from my old jobs but that is 8 years ago. There's a lot of water gone under the bridge since then.

It was common for the women in this study to cite a lack of confidence as an obstacle in returning to work. For Clare, for example, a diminished sense of self-esteem was a major consideration upon returning to paid work:

It was quite hard [returning to work]. Sort of not too sure about myself and wondering if I could still do it, and wondering if I was doing things right. But once I got back into it I was alright.

6.3.2 Gender Roles within the Household

The facts about the gendered division of labour within the home, particularly the double burden of employed women, have been repeated with monotonous regularity over the past twenty years, both in New Zealand (Gill, 1998; Novitz, 1987; Waring, 1986), and overseas (Hoschchild, 1989; MaMahon, 1999; Wells, 1998). When women enter the labour market, rarely do their husbands make significant additional contributions to unpaid work within the house. In fact, research suggests that there is little correlation between the hours the male partner contributes to housework and the woman's employment status (Layte, 1999). While it was not an explicit aim of the LMD study to investigate the division of household labour, the inequality of household work consistently permeated the interview data. Furthermore, the division of labour within the home was clearly connected to the support of the 'male breadwinner' model, and in turn, strongly linked to the notion of the family wage, whereby men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and women are either supported at home, or only secondary labour market participants (Cass, cited in Barrett, 2000).

Margaret and her husband Steve provided an example that illustrates the ways in which families manage household labour. Margaret worked on a casual basis in a restaurant, and then a cafe, for up to 56 hours a week. As with most jobs within this type of industry, the hours were variable and mostly outside of the usual daytime hours. While working at the restaurant Margaret worked evenings, and Steve looked after the children. Before she went to work however, Margaret prepared the family's dinner. Furthermore, in the cafe, Margaret started work at four in the morning and she got up at 2am so that could organise the children's provisions and make their lunches. In response to the interviewer's question, "Do you make their tea?", Steve had this to say:

It is usually done for us. She's good like that. In the mornings if she has to go to work early, most of the time Tom's stuff is ready to go around to the day carer.

This arrangement was a common one. Emma too prepared the dinner before leaving for her evening job. As she pointed out:

By going to work I was getting a break really, but it just meant my afternoons were [busy]. I always had my meals and everything ready before I left.

These comments reinforce the research that suggests the 'revolving door model', which assumes that as women take on more paid work, men will compensate by taking on more unpaid work, is an optimistic illusion (MaMahon, 1999). Nikki, who worked full-time while her husband was not employed, still did most of the housework, as she explained:

Peter gets quite shitty with me and he plays sport on the weekends and when he's out I go out and mow the lawns. But yes I normally do most of it. He has pulled his weight probably in the last year and done more than what he used to.

The single exception to the unequal distribution of household labour was Fiona, whose husband's contribution to the household tasks attributed to the success of her ability to combine work, study and family life:

I think the distribution of household tasks is important because I don't think I would've been able to work part-time if he had not taken a really active role in household tasks, so that has been a contributing factor to my being able to work and study.

6.4 Childcare

Childcare is often cited as a major barrier to the employment participation of women with children in New Zealand (Wylie et al., 1997), and overseas (Kember, 1997). Certainly the Childcare, Families and Work survey, commissioned by the New Zealand Department of Labour and National Advisory Council for the Employment of Women (1999), found that 22 per cent of women cited problems accessing childcare as a barrier to employment, compared with only five per cent of men citing it as a

barrier. Furthermore, more than 30 per cent of mothers with pre-school children were dissatisfied with their childcare arrangements, and wanted changes, such as increased or altered hours, or a different type of care. The findings of the survey were consistent with other New Zealand research (for example Podmore, 1994; Podmore and Sawicka, 1995) and international studies (for example Bradshaw et al., 1996), that indicate that while there are a number of factors that influence mothers' labour market participation, access to affordable, quality childcare is a key issue. Indeed, it has been suggested by researchers in the United Kingdom that inadequate childcare provision is the major reason for women's relatively low participation rates, and that if satisfactory childcare facilities were available, many economically inactive women would return to work immediately (Rees, 1992). Certainly, the high employment rate of Swedish mothers of pre-school children (over 80 per cent) where childcare provision is comprehensive (Wylie et al., 1997) supports this argument.

The Childcare, Families and Work Survey (1999) identified three core elements of childcare that influenced the decisions parents make about undertaking paid work; cost, accessibility and quality. In addition, they found that many parents were opting to use informal childcare, and were altering their paid work arrangements in order to care for their children themselves. These features also characterised the childcare experiences of the women in this study and will be discussed in this section. Furthermore, the type of childcare used was liable to change, and, as a result, many children experienced a number of changes in their childcare arrangements while their mothers worked.

6.4.1 Childcare as a Barrier to Employment

There were three childcare issues that emerged from the interview data as affecting the work situation of the women that are discussed here; cost, access and quality. Many women were explicit in stating these as obstacles to their participation in paid employment. However, there was a wide acceptance among the women that childcare difficulties were an inherent component of paid work. Therefore, while cost, accessibility and quality of childcare were seen as barriers to employment for some women, for others they simply had to be overcome to enable them to participate in employment. This often meant that their childcare arrangements were patchy and did not respond to their or their children's needs.

Affordability of childcare has been stated as a common obstacle to the employment of women with children. The National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (1990) argue that the cost of childcare inhibits the workforce participation of women who cannot earn enough to meet the costs of childcare. Thus, only women who can expect to earn high incomes are likely to have the financial inducement to enter paid work. The Childcare Survey results demonstrated that the cost of childcare was a barrier experienced by many of those who already face other obstacles to participating in the labour market, particularly Maori, lower income and single parents. Single mothers were particularly affected by problems accessing childcare, with 30 per cent citing it as a barrier to employment, compared with 20 per cent of all mothers. Of the five single parents in this study, Julia was the only one in paid work at the time of the interview. Despite her son being at school, she found the costs of after school care too prohibitive to enable her to work full-time:

Well there's always the [after school] care programme but once again you are turning around and having to pay a lot of money and it doesn't weigh out having to pay, and he didn't really like it either.

Research suggests that the majority of lone parents tend to only have access to low paid jobs, many of which are part time (Combat Poverty Agency, 1998; Morris, 1999). Therefore the incentive for such women to return to work is limited and childcare costs pose a considerable, if not unbearable, burden. The other single mothers had all been employed at some stage and all had relied on unpaid informal childcare arrangements through friends and relatives. The ad hoc nature of such informal arrangements may have contributed to the women's patchy labour market participation patterns.

Concurring with the Childcare Survey findings, cost was also an obstacle experienced by those who face other barriers to participating in employment, such as low income families, and Maori and Pacific Island families. For example, Josephine, a Maori mother of six children with an unemployed husband, found the cost of childcare precluded her from continuing with her regular seasonal orchard job. When her family was unable to look after her six children, childcare and therefore working was an expensive exercise:

Our niece from Rotorua came up and stayed for about six months, and we had them. The next year, 94, the 94 year she couldn't come and I had an outside sitter that I used to pay. Drop the kids off to her, pick them up after work... but that was working out too expensive.

A further barrier to participating in paid employment is access to good quality, suitable childcare. The Childcare, Families and Work survey found that after cost, access to childcare was the next most significant barrier to employment. This includes lack of appropriate informal care, lack of suitable or flexible hours, absence of quality services, transport difficulties, or a long waiting list at the preferred service. As Kim indicated, lack of after school care facilities in the Hawkes Bay presented a problem for parents of school aged children:

There is no such thing as after school care in Hastings, there is in Napier but not here. The actual schools, after school they have an after school care, only at a minimal amount like a dollar an hour or something, but they don't in Hastings. I even find it difficult to get to school by 3 o'clock sometimes, she has a couple of friends she can go home with. I have a friend [who] is a high school teacher and her boy starts school next week and she's in a quandary because she doesn't know what to do before and after school because she starts work at 8.30 am and doesn't get out of school until 4pm. What to do, but she needs that salary but it isn't easy.

For working mothers, there is often a tension between working and caring for children (Daniels and Ivatts, 1998). The quality of the childcare received has obvious implications for the working situation of mothers, with many women commenting on the importance of high quality care for their children. Indeed, the child's happiness strongly correlated with their mother's enjoyment of their employment. Clare said she found it difficult leaving her child when she returned to work. However, knowing she was settled with someone she knew made the situation easier for her:

It was quite hard at first [returning to work]. She was only a few months old I think. Being the first time I had left her with anyone. My sister said she was really quite good, so that helped a lot knowing that she was with somebody I knew and trusted.

The quest for good quality childcare was a major reason for parents opting for informal care arrangements, particularly by close family members. However, not all women had access to this type of arrangement, and for them the quality of the childcare service is a key factor in their employment position. As Julia illustrated, the lack of proper supervision for her son meant she was unable to work full-time:

There was not the proper supervision, that's what I found. But now I work my job around him. I've found that's what I've always had to do. Especially with no Mum and Dad around here.

To overcome the problems associated with the costs, access and quality of childcare, many parents opted to use informal care arrangements, or to modify their paid working arrangements to ensure that one parent is available for childcare. These aspects of childcare are discussed next.

6.4.2 Arranging Work Around Childcare Responsibilities

Arranging their work around their childcare responsibilities was a common occurrence with the participants in this research, mainly because of the prohibitive cost of childcare combined with the low wages of many of the women. This occurred in two ways; parents taking their children with them to work; and parents arranging their working hours so that they could care for their children themselves.

Five of the women had taken their children to work with them as a regular childcare arrangement. For these women, and the women who juggled their working arrangements with their childcare responsibilities, it required a great deal of flexibility and negotiation. Emma described the bargaining process she had to go through to accommodate the needs of her children, one of whom was at school and the other at kindergarten:

Oliver was at school so it wasn't going to affect him at all. I mean the hours they offered initially were one to five, so I thought no it was out of school. Then they offered nine to three but I thought no. In the end we got down to nine to one. Gemma was starting at morning kindy, so it involved someone picking her up for an hour, but again I had my mother and mother-in-law and I kept thinking "no I won't go back to work yet", but it was only a year's time and they seemed really accommodating and so I went ahead. Then Gemma will be at school in June and it's not going to affect either of them... much. Until school holidays and then I think well school holidays are going to be a problem for the next ten years and I didn't feel I could sit at home while the children are at school for the next ten years.

6.4.3 *Informal Care*

Research suggests that in the absence of a national system of childcare, and due to the cost of formal childcare arrangements, many parents develop strategies that involve informal childcare arrangements. Such arrangements typically involve a range of family members, friends and neighbours who provide childcare on an unpaid or low paid basis. The Childcare, Families and Work Survey (1999) found twenty seven per cent of the children receiving childcare did so on an informal basis. Informal care arrangements were more common amongst the women in this study, with 60 per cent of pre school children and 57 per cent of school aged children being cared for using paid or unpaid informal care arrangements. Many women explicitly stated they would not have returned to work had informal care not been available, particularly those whose childcare was provided by a close family member. For Emma, having her mother and mother-in-law caring for her child was the next best thing to doing it herself:

I know everybody's different but I just couldn't... I'm so lucky to have a mother and mother-in-law to be helping out, and only too keen to. I just wouldn't have gone back to work otherwise. There's no way. I didn't have to. It is just something extra for me. But no, I could never have left the children in a Day Care Centre or with someone I didn't know. So that's the only reason I have taken on this little job because I had help.

In the Childcare, Families and Work Survey, lack of informal care by someone known and trusted was cited as a common reason for not using childcare and thus being unable to participate in work. Certainly for the women in this study, leaving their children in the care of someone they knew was stated as the most common reason for using informal care. As Emma said, she would not have returned to work if her mother and mother-in-law were not able to provide childcare. It was this reason that prevented Sandra from returning to work:

I had intended being back to work by now but I'm very reluctant to leave this one. I'm not too keen on day care centres and I don't know of any family members that I'd really like to leave her with.

A number of women indicated that support from friends and family (usually other women) was important in allowing them to work. Indeed, the value of such support could not be underestimated in facilitating participation in employment, education and training for many women. The situation was described well by Julia:

I had my Mum around for a little while and she was able to go pick him up. Otherwise I just used to tie in with other Mums from school, and they'd say, oh I'll pick him up today and would you work on such and such a day, so it would work out like that. I have a couple of girl friends whose children go to the same school, so we would work in like that. Phone calls going between work, different ones ringing up during the week "Julia you working late tonight, no. Well pick my boy up because I've got to work late" and she does the same thing so it works out quite well actually.

Relying on informal support for childcare to enable participation in the workforce presented a number of problems. Such provision required the women to be very flexible in their own arrangements and required a large degree of reciprocity. Furthermore, informal arrangements for such support were not always granted or welcomed, as Lorraine illustrated:

Jim's Mum was the one that looked after the children mainly... I think I was probably asking a bit much of her. She never said anything to me, but I heard through the grapevine that she wasn't that overly thrilled about it, but she never said anything to me, so I was none the wiser.

However, because Lorraine relied on her mother-in-law to provide childcare for the continuation of her employment, she did not want to confront the issue of her not being happy to do so. Finch and Mason (1993), through their work in England on negotiating family responsibilities, suggest that family negotiations for support, such as childcare, only work when people freely *choose* to offer support. Furthermore, the corollary of offering assistance is the right to claim reciprocal support. These expectations have implications for many women like Lorraine, whose work is casual and income too low to use formal childcare arrangements, by ensuring that paid employment can only ever be of a haphazard, precarious nature. While women have to rely on such arrangements to enable them to participate in the labour market, paid employment will always have a subordinate status to that of men.

Moreover, the informal support previously described by Julia went beyond simply facilitating employment. The broad-based support of family and friends was an important foundation for family life. Finch and Mason (1993) suggest that women have more extensive reciprocal arrangements than men because they *need* them. Women bear the major responsibility for the care of children and the home, which are areas where it is difficult to get assistance from other sources. For Ruth, the pursuit and nurturing of the relationships to maintain mutual support networks took precedence over the continuation of her employment. As she illustrated:

I guess I made quite a deliberate choice, came to an understanding that part of my role was in developing relationships with other people, other women particularly, and then form a basic network of support for us a family and also it's mutual, it's reciprocal as far as they are concerned. To me I see that as a really valuable role of a lot of women, and for me personally, a network like that or in forming relationships and friendships that often, perhaps Rob doesn't have the same time or inclination to do, where then it connects our family. So it forms a support basis for our whole family, it's not just - let's have coffee together and this is a nice thing to do, I feel that they are a valuable part of my role.

In the absence of a sufficient national state support system for families where both parents are participating in the labour market the informal and social support of friends and family is increasingly important. Paradoxically however, the network of support Ruth developed and which she saw as a vital component of her role as a mother, consumed time and energy that she had available in the absence of a paid job. Therefore, for many working mothers, particularly those who take short periods of

maternity leave and return to work, and do not have the natural support system of an extended family, the network for providing this broad-based reciprocal support is much more difficult to formulate.

While the reciprocal commitments women have with one another are valuable and have an important role in society, in terms of facilitating employment for women, they should not be seen as a substitute for government policy. One of the important messages from Finch and Mason's research is that the responsibilities which people acknowledge are variable and do not flow straightforwardly from particular relationships. Therefore, it makes no sense to build policies that assume assistance will be given automatically. As the childcare experiences of the women in this study demonstrate, informal assistance varies from one family to another. Furthermore, as Lorraine's situation highlights, people do not want to have to rely on their relatives or friends for extensive help. However, in New Zealand, the childcare support for working parents is confined to the childcare subsidy, which does not meet the childcare needs of a proportion of the women in this study. Furthermore, most women's wages are too low to make childcare a viable option, ensuring women have restricted access to the labour market. For as long as the employment situation of women with children relies on the ad hoc nature of informal care, women's employment will also remain an ad hoc, hit and miss affair, dependent upon the goodwill of families and friends.

7. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study has demonstrated that the factors influencing the employment of women with children need to be seen within a context that includes the micro, institutional and macro level structures. As factors and constraints influencing women's decisions and experiences in combining parenting and paid work operate at these three levels, measures to improve women's position must also be undertaken at these levels. Traditionally, recommendations to improve the situation for women in the labour market are limited to the provision of policies, such as childcare, parental leave, family friendly workplaces, and mechanisms to improve women's conditions of paid employment. (An example is The Ministry of Women's Affairs *Briefing for the Incoming Minister*, 1999). While there is no doubt that these policy provisions are crucial, they do not address the underlying structures that maintain the male breadwinner/ female homemaker model.

Nancy Fraser (1995) argues that in order to redress gender injustice we need to change both the political economy and culture, so as to undo the vicious cycle of economic and cultural subordination. She suggests that the changes can take two forms, affirmation or transformation. The attempts by governments in New Zealand to facilitate the employment of women with children can be categorised into what Fraser terms 'affirmative redistribution'. Women are treated exactly the same as men in the labour market. There is a law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and family status, and limited support for policies that recognise the economic importance of social reproduction. Affirmative redistribution fails to challenge the level at which the political economy and society is gendered. It does not attack the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour, or the gendered division of occupations within paid labour. Fraser suggests that leaving intact the deep structures that generate gender disadvantage mean surface reallocations must be made again and again. The result is that gender difference is highlighted, and women are marked as deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more (Fraser, 1995: 89). 'Transformative solutions' on the other hand aim to deconstruct the gender difference by dismantling androcentrism, and gender dichotomies are replaced by networks of multiple, intersecting differences that are shifting.

While Fraser's framework presents a theoretical utopia, it highlights some important issues in thinking about the place of women with children in the labour market. It is apparent that policy provision on its own does not redress the issue of the unequal labour market status of women. Nor does it redress the division of labour in the home. Moreover, the project of transforming the deep structures of political economy and society needs to be taken up in the three contexts referred to in this thesis, beginning with the state and society.

The typology of the state is instrumental in influencing society's behaviour and attitude towards work and family. The male breadwinner model allegedly underlies the regime of the New Zealand state. However, this model is coming under increasing criticism. It no longer represents 'the ideal family', as families are less conventional and more diverse. The 'family wage' upon which the male breadwinner model is predicated is no longer empirically or normatively tenable. The male breadwinner

model then is premised on assumptions about gender that are out of phase with many people's lives.

Two different feminist state ideologies have emerged that attempt to alter gender inequalities; the universal breadwinner model, which promotes women's employment equity by the provision of employment enabling services such as daycare and parental leave; and the caregiver parity model, that aims to promote gender equity mainly by supporting informal care-work (Fraser, 1996). The universal caregiver model is based on making women's current life patterns the norm for everyone.

As women often combine breadwinning and caregiving, usually with great difficulty and strain, the state should assume that men do the same, while redesigning institutions to eliminate the difficulty and strain. This position is encapsulated in the caregiver parity model.

Within this model, the key is to develop policies that do not exacerbate or reinforce the traditional gender division of labour, yet at the same time recognise that women do bear the burden of providing family care, and therefore need resources to provide that care, in order that they are not financially penalised for their attention to reproduction (Macdonald, 1998:14). These policies must meet women's practical needs as well as their strategic interests, which creates a precarious balance. Many policies that claim to improve women's welfare often emphasise women's motherhood roles. On the other hand, the trend to assume that all women should be earners does not value the reproductive work of women. Macdonald suggests that the ideal components of a state programme that serves the strategic needs of women, as well as their practical needs, should include:

Financial support for dependent children...; comprehensive coverage for unemployment insurance, maternity benefits and pensions so that women's jobs are insured (including a universal component which recognises the value of reproductive labour); maternity leave, parental leave and childcare provisions designed to promote equal opportunity for women as income earners, and increased responsibility of men (and society in general) for reproductive work. Finally, these programs must be complemented by measures to improve women's labor market position (p. 20).

A system such as the one Macdonald suggests would be a departure from the male breadwinner model that implicitly underlies the New Zealand political economy and society and moves us further to the universal caregiver model proposed by Fraser (1996). While this vision may seem beyond the reach of New Zealand society, policies consistent with it must be designed if we are to achieve a society where women are able to combine caring and providing without difficulty and strain.

8. References

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