

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Returning to Paid Work:

Mothers and the Impact of Student Loan Debt.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Masters of Social Work

Massey University

Nicola Stanley-Clarke

2000

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that influence a mother's decision whether or not to return to the paid workforce and in particular to uncover the role that student loan debt plays in this process. This is undertaken through an exploration of the facets related to this decision including financial pressures, economic dependence, the availability of childcare, personal and societal expectations of motherhood, a mother's own desire to return to the paid workforce and the role that student loan debt plays within the family.

The study uses a feminist qualitative approach to enable participants to tell their stories in their own words. The use of this method enables an accurate depiction of the complexity of the participants' decisions without violating their integrity or minimising their experience.

This research uncovers that primarily factors affecting the participants' families such as their role within their family, childcare and the family's financial considerations are considered in their decision whether or not to return to the paid workforce. Student debt is seen by the mothers as their individual responsibility that they do not want to effect the income or financial well-being of their family. They feel that it is more important to give priority to family commitments and save towards family goals than repay their student debt.

The final section of this thesis provides a discussion of policy implications and presents a challenge to policy makers to redress the inequalities and inaccuracies of the current student loan scheme.

Acknowledgments

This thesis has been undertaken with the help and support of many people. In particular I wish to thank my supervisors Wendy Parker and Gwen Ellis, for their unfailing patience, advice and encouragement throughout this project.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the mothers who participated in this study for their time and for opening their lives.

I wish to acknowledge my husband, Karl: I am sure he knows more about feminist research principles than most; and Tasha Hill who had the arduous task of proof reading and checking my grammar and spelling. Also to my parents Jenny and Derek Stanley-Clarke thank you for your emotional support this year and I promise next time I'll just send out a survey.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS	III
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION	1
Why this topic?	2
Exploring the Question	4
Methodology	5
Thesis Structure	6
Conclusion	7
CHAPTER TWO – THE CONTEXT FOR WOMEN'S CHOICES	8
Introduction	8
Financial Considerations	8
The Impact of Government Policy	9
Economic Dependence	12
The Shape of the Paid Workforce	15
Personal Circumstances	20
Caring for Children	21
The Provision of Childcare	24
Conclusion	26
CHAPTER THREE – STUDENT LOANS, POLICY AND OPINIONS	27
Introduction	27
Policy Development	28
Opinions	32
Interest and Repayments	38
Developments and Reviews	40
Conclusion	43
CHAPTER FOUR – THE RESEARCH PROCESS	44
Introduction	44
Feminist Research: theory and application	44
Qualitative versus Quantitative Research	48
The Research Method	50

Ethical issues	52
Legal issues	55
Cultural concerns	55
Data Analysis	56
Participant profiles	57
Conclusion	60
CHAPTER FIVE – CONTEMPLATING PAID WORK	61
Introduction	61
Revisiting the Objectives	61
Timing	62
Family Pressures	65
Childcare	67
The Meaning of Motherhood	70
Enjoyment and Personal Fulfilment	72
Economic Factors – Champagne tastes on a beer budget	75
Another Student Loan?	78
Conclusion	78
CHAPTER SIX – TALKING ABOUT STUDENT LOAN DEBT	80
Introduction	80
Initial Assumptions	80
The Student Loan Scheme	85
The Reality	87
Daily Impact	88
Value for Money?	89
The Long-term Impact of Student Debt	90
Interest	93
Living Costs	96
Repayment	96
Children and Student Loans	99
Policy Advice	100
Conclusion	102
CHAPTER SEVEN – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	104
Introduction	104
Family	105
Motherhood	105
Childcare	107
Financial considerations	109

Student loans	112
Pressure created by student debt	113
Long term implications of student debt	114
Repayment of student debt	116
The reality of employment and the student loan system	119
The interest on student loans	121
Personal Motivation and Timing	123
Conclusion	124
CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	125
Introduction	125
Student Loan Debt and the Family	125
Student Loan Debt and the Decision whether or not to Return to the Paid Workforce	127
Student Loan Debt, Life Choices, Sacrifices and Consequences	128
The Skipped Generation	131
National Consequences of Unpaid Student Debt	132
Limitations of This Research	133
Is There an Answer to the Problems of Student Loan Debt?	134
Further research and policy implications	
Conclusion	137
The Challenge	138
REFERENCES	139
APPENDIX A	154
APPENDIX B	159
APPENDIX C	161
APPENDIX D	164
APPENDIX E	166
APPENDIX F	167
APPENDIX G	168