Where has the advocacy gone? The impact of neoliberalism on community-based social workers' ethical responsibility in the age of risk and vulnerability

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Darren Renau

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Abstract

Advocacy is fundamental to social work and forms part of a social worker's ethical responsibilities. As part of these responsibilities, it is a requirement for social workers to understand structures and power bases which sustain social injustices. Over the past thirty years, neoliberalism has changed societal attitudes towards people in need of social support. The nature of social work practice has changed too, with advocacy primarily carried out at the micro level. This qualitative-exploratory study aimed to understand how neoliberalism impacted on the ability of social workers to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged people. It sought to understand community-based social workers' views about neoliberalism and their accounts of how it has changed their practice. Within this environment, the research explored social workers' understanding of advocacy and opportunities for how social workers might extend their advocacy in a neoliberal environment. Using thematic analysis with a social constructionist framework, the research found that social workers have limited understanding of neoliberalism; are placing themselves at risk of sustaining neoliberalism and engaging in 'othering' discourses towards their clients. While social workers are wanting to meet the needs of clients, they are working at an individual level in a way which reinforces neoliberal messaging of self-responsibility and personal initiative. Social workers identify change as possible within their local communities but require greater leadership to engage in this advocacy. Further research into social workers' understanding of neoliberalism and how this impacts their worldview would offer further insight about their capacity to engage in social change. Finally, research into the leadership of social work associations and their perceived value by social workers would help explore the potential of critical reflection and coalesced leadership around community-level social advocacy.

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Glossary

ACC: The Accident Compensation Corporation

ANZASW: Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

CYFS: Child, Youth and Family

GFC: Global financial crisis

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NPM: New Public Management

SWRB: Social Workers Registration Board

WWG: Welfare Working Group

Chapter One: Introduction

In New Zealand, community-based social workers working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide many of the social services for people in need. These NGOs work in a context that is increasingly neoliberal (Aimers, 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2013), which is an ideology that stresses individual freedom and the belief that personal initiative and engagement in work are the solution to disadvantage (Stanley-Clarke, 2016). While these service providers are not part of government, there has, nonetheless, been increasing pressures on social workers working in NGOs to prioritise achieving outcomes set by government in the most cost-effective way, rather than prioritising the needs of their local communities. There is now wide acceptance that targeting people for support as a way for governments to save money in the long term has stigmatised disadvantaged families, and the government contracts to provide services has made delivery of support increasingly challenging (Aimers, 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Sawyers, 2016). At the same time, within social work leadership there has been a call for social workers to advocate against these consequences (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; O'Brien, 2010). Neoliberalism provides the context for this research; however, it is the role of community-based social workers which is the focus of this research. Specifically, it explores how neoliberalism impacts on social workers' abilities within NGOs to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families.

This chapter discusses the rationale for this research and provides background on the political ideologies that shaped New Zealand's welfare state prior to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s. The chapter then outlines the study design, definitions of key terminology, and the structure of the report.

Rationale

Having worked as a social worker for more than 20 years, I have experienced working with families in impoverished situations, and have been frustrated at my inability to create any situational change. I have been uncomfortable with the prevalent approach of finding ways for families to be resilient rather than creating social change. My personal stance is that of a very strong proponent of social justice, which is a direct consequence of my values of fairness, equity of opportunity, and speaking truth to power. As I have gathered more experience in social work, these values have only grown stronger and have become priorities in my own practice. The origin of this study came from reading a journal article titled "Social justice: Alive and well (partly) in social work practice?" by O'Brien

(2010). O'Brien concluded that social justice advocacy is present in daily micro practice, but much less so at the macro level. While the article focused on social justice, it did not contextualise the issue within a neoliberal world. Keddell (2016) has written about social workers being situated within a neoliberal context and the challenges of this context for their social work practice. This research aims to discuss how neoliberalism impacts on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families, voicing to social workers about their experiences practicing in a neoliberal world.

Research Goals

The goals of the study were to:

1. Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability.[1]
2. Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice.
3. Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates.
4. Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

Study Design

The aim of this research is to explore how neoliberalism impacts on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. This research is a qualitative-exploratory study utilising semi-structured interviews to gather social worker narratives. Qualitative research provides an opportunity to situate people in their context and understand how they construct meaning to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The exploratory nature of this research provides a basis to develop ideas which emerge from the data (Stebbins, 2001). These, by nature, are subjective experiences from multiple sources, but nonetheless are legitimate sources of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A social constructionist lens, which seeks to understand human behaviour in the social world, frames this research. The methodology is set out in more detail in chapter four.

[1] Risk and vulnerability labels are practical applications of neoliberalism; this research uses them as proxies for the messaging of neoliberalism in general. These are defined in the definition of key terms section later in this chapter.

Background to the Topic

This section defines neoliberalism and advocacy after having contextualised the influences of liberalism and social democracy in the development of New Zealand's welfare state. These developments are critical to highlight given the social constructionist lens of this study and its requirement to understand cultural and historical contexts in which people assign meaning (Burr, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

New Zealand's Liberal Foundation

New Zealand's social policy began when British and other visitors began to interact with Māori living under a te ao Māori framework. This relationship was a beneficial one for all parties, with Māori being able to advance their interests and social wellbeing (Ruwhiu et al., 2016). The Treaty of Waitangi formally set in place the rights of settlers to begin a life in Aotearoa and guaranteed Māori the continued ability to maintain their own cultural, social, and economic practices (Durie, 1994). However, settlements increased to the point where Māori self-determination and autonomy became overwhelmed by landlessness and then dependency, culminating in unavoidable damage to the social wellbeing of Māori (Durie, 1994; Ruwhiu et al., 2016).

As the colonisation of Aotearoa increased, British settlers brought classical liberal values, arising from antipathy about the state welfare provision in Great Britain (Cheyne et al., 2005). New Zealand's welfare state was institutionalised around the end of the nineteenth century and was formed as a residual welfare system based on liberal principles of self-reliance, self-responsibility, and equality of opportunity (Esping-Andersen, 1997; Garlick, 2012). This system prioritised the individual above other social groups and encouraged individual citizens to make choices in their own self-interest, so long as they did not impinge on the freedom of others. Thus, New Zealand's early welfare state represented the liberal view of the importance of equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome (Heywood, 2002). One hundred years later, the emergence neoliberalism has brought back many (if not all) of these principles back into New Zealand society and is influencing the nature of social work.

By the start of the twentieth century the unionisation of the working class saw a demand for benefit provision, and the liberal New Zealand Government gradually increased its involvement in welfare provision (Castles & Mitchell, 1993). This increase in demand for security required the Government to move away from individual responsibility and local solutions towards a redistribution

approach through taxation. (Cheyne et al., 2005; Garlick, 2012). This represented a shift where the welfare state provided support until people could take responsibility for their own circumstances (Heywood, 2002).

Social Democracy

Beginning with a redistributive approach, the liberal foundations of New Zealand's welfare state was increasingly shaped through the twentieth century by the influence of social democracy. The social democracy perspective is a balance between liberalism and socialism. Social democratic parties position themselves at various places on this ideological spectrum. Regardless of specific positioning, there is an agreement that capitalism is necessary to generate wealth but there is a moral obligation to redistribute that wealth to achieve its egalitarian doctrine (Heywood, 2002). Social democrats support Keynesian economics as the approach to create a socially cohesive society. This approach requires the government to regulate the economy in the supply of goods and services as a means for the elimination of wealth inequality (Stanley-Clarke, 2016).

Historically, the New Zealand Labour Party's commitment to public ownership and control of the economy positioned it closer to the socialist end of the social democracy continuum (Miller, 2005). The Labour Party first came to power after the Great Depression and at a time when its social and economic consequences challenged values around what it meant to be deserving and non-deserving of social welfare. The First Labour Government responded with the Social Security Act 1938, and in doing so created the "cradle to the grave" benefit system and became the most comprehensive social welfare state in the world (Pierson, 2006). The welfare state was consolidated into the public psyche after the Second World War, and as basic needs were met, state assistance expanded into addressing broader social issues (Garlick, 2012; Pierson, 2006). Castles and Mitchell (1993) argue that even though the National Party was in power for long periods post-Second World War, New Zealand continued to have a generous welfare system. This was due to New Zealand having a strong unionisation history and a significant period of social democratic governance. Peet (2012) describes New Zealand governments in the post-Second World War period as adopting a Fabian socialist approach that increased regulation and redistribution.

Neoliberalism, the Individual, and the State

Having described how liberalism and social democracy each shaped the course of the welfare state through the twentieth century, this section describes the key concepts of neoliberalism. In doing

so, it reveals how neoliberalism is antithetical to the principles that shaped New Zealand's welfare system, society, and the social work profession.

Some authors (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005) suggest there is no clear definition of neoliberalism as it represents a wide range of economic, political, and social approaches. Swarts (2013) identifies neoliberalism as a varied multitude of policy programmes dependent on socio-cultural contexts to the extent that it is difficult to consider it a generalised model. That noted, additional to the core elements of liberalism (individualism, freedom, and equality), the common thread in discussions of neoliberalism is the state's role in promoting the supremacy of the market (via deregulation and liberalisation) and the fiscal restraint of the state in welfare expenditure (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016). Neoliberalism believes that the "trickle-down" effect can resolve inequality and injustice. This view argues that as individuals and businesses accumulate more wealth then there will also be greater incentive to increase productivity. The increase in productivity will them be associated with more benefits for the impoverished and society in general (Stanley-Clarke, 2016). However, it is important to note that some neoliberal writers (for example, see Fitzpatrick, 2011; Hayek, 2008; Miller, 2005) do not necessarily oppose a welfare state, noting a residual level of social security could be provided if such policies did not impede the functioning of a free market. Functionally, this sees the state moving its role from welfare provision to a contractor for welfare service provision via private and voluntary organisations (Ferguson et al., 2018).

Additional to the view that an unregulated market can deliver prosperity, individual freedom is another core concept (shared with liberalism, but strongly emphasised) in neoliberalism. Neoliberalism sees individual wellbeing as a relative notion, and it is not the role of the state to tell an individual that they should be unhappy with what they have (Rowley & Peacock, 1975). It is a choice for the individual as to whether they choose to improve their own living standards based on their own self-interest (Stanley-Clarke, 2016). Neoliberal advocates sought for an economic system that could provide for far greater individual welfare to replace a welfare state symbolic of an immature society and naïve thinking (Hayek, 2013). Neoliberalism became ascendant within the international community in the late 1970s and was consolidated through the 1980s with the global paradigm shift from social democratic progressive-liberal policies towards institutions and policies that promoted deregulation and liberalisation of the financial market to foster economic growth (Cahill & Konings, 2017).

Advocacy

Within hegemonic neoliberalism, the third and fourth research goals seek to explore community social worker's understanding of their roles as advocates, and to discuss opportunities for further advocacy. This section provides a definition of advocacy and outlines a practical view of the extent to which social workers can engage in advocacy.

There are multiple definitions of advocacy given the nature of advocacy is dependent on its purpose, the specific context, and the influence of historical factors (Wilks, 2012). There are some common elements across the multiple definitions: it features the pursuit of persuading power bases to change their policies towards a specific issue, and it is carried out in an empowering way for the community, group, or individual (Wilks, 2012). Suggesting an ongoing process, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) defines advocacy as a process which seeks to influence the policy of social, economic, and political systems and institutions (2017). Wilks (2012) recognises the individual and social aspects of advocacy, and notes that while addressing the wishes of clients, advocacy needs to also address the wider social injustices present in the community. New Zealand's Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) has competencies which provide further scope of advocacy in New Zealand. The competencies require social workers to advocate for social and economic justice, and in doing so need to understand the structural causes of injustice. Another competency requires social workers to promote social change (SWRB, 2020). For this to happen, the social worker must be able to critically analyse legislation, policies, structures, and systems which impact on people and combine this knowledge with an understanding of client rights (ANZASW, 2017; Bishop-Josef & Dodgen, 2000; SWRB, 2020).

Wilks (2012) argues that social workers should take a pragmatic approach and focus on realistic goals, with the view that small successes can ensure the movement towards social justice remains valid. Wilks notes that what might seem a small matter for the social worker may be of far greater significance for the clients. There are, of course, limits to advocacy when undertaken by a social worker. Lipsky (2010) contends that advocacy requires time and energy by the social worker, but large caseloads and the need to move clients through the bureaucratic process compromise this. Further research notes constraints to social worker agency as the social work role is often positioned at the bottom of workplace hierarchies (Musheno & Maynard-Moody, 2015). When advocacy is at odds with workplace goals, managers seek to limit resource allocation (be it financial or social worker time), which then requires social workers to find loopholes in workplace policies or go outside these to support their clients. Social Workers encounter further barriers when they seek more resources

than allocated in the budgeting process, or managers usually seek to ensure the pre-determined equal amount is received by all clients (Lipsky, 2010).

In a practical sense, these requirements for understanding structural causes of injustice mean social workers need to understand what neoliberalism is (alongside its management approach), and how it influences their work. Chapters five and six explore these issues in greater detail.

Definition of Key Terms

This section provides definitions for frequently used terms in this thesis or those which have significance for the study:

Advocacy: actions undertaken by an advocate that seek social change to achieve social justice. Advocacy can occur at the individual, group, and/or community level.

At-risk/risk: a term used for individuals identified as being at risk of experiencing adverse life outcomes. Its popular use came from the White Paper for Vulnerable Children and it became increasingly used alongside and interchangeable with "vulnerable children". The term is a practical application of neoliberal ideology and is used in this research as a proxy for the messaging of neoliberalism in general.

Community-based social worker: social workers who work within non-government organisations. For readability, this role is abbreviated as "social worker" in this report.

Non-government organisation (NGO): a non-profit social service organisation which is independent from the state but often contracted by the state to provide social services on its behalf.

Social justice: the goal of having a society that is fair and equitable for all members of society, rather than focusing on individuals, therefore it involves understanding how society interacts with itself. It relies on distributive justice to those that have been systematically disenfranchised.

Vulnerability: a term first used in this regard in the Green Paper for Vulnerable Children, released in 2011, and broadly defined the term as children who were at significant risk of harm to their wellbeing because of the environment they were raised. Popular use of vulnerability and "at risk" see them as essentially the same terminology and both refer to targeted people based on data prediction. Along with at risk, the term is a practical example of the insidious use of neoliberal terminology and is used as a proxy for the messaging of neoliberalism in general.

Structure of Report

The overall structure of the study takes the form of seven chapters, including this introductory chapter. The second chapter charts the changing course of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberalism in New Zealand. Chapter three explores how neoliberalism became embedded into New Zealand society, how it has changed the public conscience towards people living in impoverished circumstances, how it has affected community social service provision, and how it has changed social work practice. The fourth chapter is concerned with the methodology and method used for this study. It highlights the qualitative-exploratory nature of the study, sets out semi-structured interviews as the method using thematic analysis as the analytical tool, with a social constructionist lens to explore social workers accounts of their practice. Chapter five presents the results of the data collection, focusing on the four key themes that emerged from the data. Chapter six analyses the results in context of the goals of the research and identifies key issues around promoting advocacy for social workers. Finally, Chapter seven concludes the research, presenting the key findings, and recommendations.

Summary

This research will explore community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability, including gaining insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed practice. This research then seeks to discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to extend or consolidate their advocacy for disadvantaged families in a neoliberal society. This chapter identified macro social constructionism as the framework for the research and semi-structured interviews as the method used for this research. It outlined how liberalism and social democracy shaped the New Zealand welfare state. It described neoliberalism as the prevailing governing ideology in New Zealand. A brief discussion about social work advocacy also establishes a working understanding for this report. The next chapter discusses how neoliberalism has shaped the welfare state and New Zealand and confirms that New Zealand society is heavily individualistic.

Chapter Two: Neoliberalism in New Zealand

Chapter One explored neoliberalism as an ideology which has many definitions depending on socio-cultural contexts. A general theme is that it takes the core elements of liberalism (emphasising individual freedom) and prioritises a deregulated economic market to produce individual wealth. This chapter is the first of two literature review chapters about neoliberalism; they are separate to focus on specific aspects of neoliberalism. This chapter focusses on how successive New Zealand governments have applied neoliberalism in their programmes to demonstrate how left- and right-wing governments, while differing in certain aspects, have consolidated neoliberalism in New Zealand. It demonstrates that social workers will experience neoliberalism in their work, regardless of the government of the day.

Chapter Three discusses how these approaches have impacted on New Zealand society and social work practice. This was done to show that New Zealand society has largely accepted the neoliberal messaging of individual responsibility and personal initiative and the consequences that flow from this. As a result, social workers are working against neoliberalism in their practice with clients. Separating out this issues provides the opportunity to understand the structural and day-to-day issues social workers are navigating. It also provides an opportunity to focus on how the social work profession is responding to these challenges.

This chapter sets the stage for the thesis by reviewing how New Zealand's two main governing political parties have adopted neoliberalism as part of their political platform. It discusses how the "new right" and social development have shaped the contemporary welfare state. In doing so, it contextualises neoliberalism as the accepted economic ideology and confirms that individualism is a key part of New Zealand society. It seeks to define and discuss key terms, while situating them in a local context where appropriate.

New Zealand's Adoption of Neoliberalism

For the past 30 years, successive governments in New Zealand have embedded neoliberalism to the point that conservative and liberal governments have been functional equivalents, albeit with some separation around social policy goals (Montanari, 2001). Each government has viewed the free market, while differing on the methods used, as a tool for development. This positioning has received

institutional support too, with the Treasury most recently advising the Fifth National Government that economic growth was the desired strategy to reverse the ever-widening economic inequality, despite previous governments recognising the free market as having created that inequality (Dalziel & Saunders, 2018).

After winning the General Election in 1984, the Fourth Labour Government was significantly concerned about New Zealand's economic standing.[2] Within six years the Government turned New Zealand from one of the most centrally controlled western countries into one of the most liberalised economies, leading the United States of America and British new right approaches in its adherence to neoliberalism (Cheyne et al., 2005; Clark & Williams, 1995; Havermann, 1999). At the same time, while not in government, the National Party ideology had shifted from liberalism to neoliberalism (Miller, 2005). As part of these changes, New Zealand abandoned the redistributive welfare state in favour of the free market, despite the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy concluding that the Government should be concerned about the increasing poverty rates, polarisation of society, and the commodification of social welfare (Sharp, 1994). The conclusions for the Royal Commission where antithetical to a government which had begun to follow an ideology which emphasises individual freedom and prioritises the privatised economic market to produce individual wealth.

The first wave of neoliberal reforms included the elimination or reduction of trade tariffs, the introduction of economic regulations, and new foreign exchange measures by the Fourth Labour Government (Cheyne et al., 2005). The economic and social upheaval was such that former Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Cullen, has spoken of his regret about the pain experienced by New Zealand throughout the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s – 1990s (Milne, 2008).[3] The Fourth Labour Government reforms created labour market flexibility, which combined with wage deregulation measures resulted in mass unemployment. Continuing throughout the 1990s, many international companies closed or significantly restructured their New Zealand plants or closed because of tariff

[2] Policies that had sustained full employment, including Prime Minister Muldoon's Think Big programme and a highly regulated economy, had led to increasing government debt and a slowing economy. When it came into power, the Fourth Labour Government (1984 – 1990) began an approach that sought to rid the economy of the inefficiencies that caused the problematic economic position (Destremau & Wilson, 2017). For further information, refer to Sharp (1994).

[3] At the time Dr Cullen was the Associate Minister of Finance and Minister of Social Welfare in the 1987 – 1990 Government.

reductions or foreign investors refinancing their companies amidst the deregulated global trade (Pihama & Perana, 1999).

At the time, the Fourth Labour Government saw the social costs of rapidly increasing long-term unemployment as a necessary part of aligning with neoliberal values which required a free market; the 1990 – 1999 National Government also accepted the social costs as inevitable (Dalley & McLean, 2005). While some of the privatisation and liberalisation had a negotiated timetable, then-Finance Minister Ruth Richardson noted that "slowing down the reforms was imposing an unacceptable cost on the economy" (Clark, 2008, p. 31). As part of New Zealand's move to a highly commodified liberal welfare state, [4] the 1991 "Mother of all Budgets" significantly impacted redistributive social policies and the public also increasingly supported more targeted benefit expenditure (Deeming, 2013; 2017; Humpage, 2011; Starke, 2013). The expectation by both National and Labour governments that the market would secure social wellbeing resulted in the undermining of employee unions (Humpage, 2016). Between 1981 – 2001, relative median income fell for most family homes, accompanied with a slight increase in low-income homes; many families also experienced unemployment and had a family member working long hours compared to prior the neoliberal reforms (Cotterell et al., 2007).

Preceding these reforms, the impact of colonisation on Māori had already led to vast disproportionate reliance on the benefit system (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019).[5] With the neoliberalism reforms, Māori also experienced significant harm through the roll back of the welfare state in the 1990s. Māori unemployment rose from 8.5 percent in 1986 up to a high of 25 percent in 1992, while pākehā unemployment rose to 8 percent in 1992 (Ministry of Social Development, 2007). With its focus on the individual and the market, there was also a concerted effort to commodify Māori culture, including communal property rights (McCormack, 2011). Sharp (1994) details the New Zealand Treasury's efforts to redefine Māori rights to an incoming government, advising the Minister of Finance that Māori rights were personal, going so far as to say hapū and iwi were simply a collection

[4] Decommodification occurs when a person can maintain a socially accepted livelihood without reliance on being a productive member of the workforce. As part of this independence from the market, the welfare state must include social rights that are inalienable, with entitlement based on citizenship rather than need or worth. In liberal countries there is low decommodification along with a strong paradigm of self-reliance rather than state support. If there is a demonstrated need for assistance, it is a measure to re-engage the person with the market. Levels of decommodification vary depending on the factors impacting on the development of a particular welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

[5] For more information, refer to Ministry of Social Development (2018) where the Ministry provided an evidence brief to the Welfare Expert Advisory Group.

of distinct individuals (in contrast to te ao Māori views of collectivism) (Janiewski & Morris, 2005). Cheyne et al. (2005) note that hapū and iwi have been successful in maintaining their status (some hapū and iwi more so than others) around resisting the impact of neoliberal discourses of individualism, which is seen as much of a threat to Māori social wellbeing as the colonisation of Aotearoa in the 1800s.[6]

Social Development

The introductory chapter defined social democracy as a perspective which accepts capitalism as necessary to generate the wealth required for redistribution to achieve a just society (Heywood, 2002). This section evidences the social democratic evolution towards social development. It demonstrates how this move further entrenched the individualisation of society, despite it being a political ideology that promotes social justice.

Social development accepts that a socially cohesive and equitable society needs to have a strong economy, and thus a (somewhat regulated) free market is essential to achieve these goals (Maharey, 2001). This is a pragmatic response that reconciles the criticisms of social democracy and neoliberalism, seeking to avoid the weaknesses of each (Skilling, 2010; Stanley-Clarke, 2016). Nolan (2010, p. 4) notes that the pragmatic approach is a key aspect of social development, stating that social democracy policies required relationships with the private sector, "to promote market, private enterprise *and* the community, without automatically favouring market solutions. There was a role for the state to run some aspects of the state".

Where social democracy viewed economic security and wealth redistribution as crucial, and neoliberalism desired competition and wealth accumulation, social development favours a neoliberal approach along with state intervention to ensure individual wellbeing (Giddens, 2001). With other pragmatic considerations, social development legitimises the free market for revenue streams needed to fund the social welfare system (Stanley-Clarke, 2016). In doing do, social development facilitates the commodification of the individual as required in neoliberalism (Pierson, 2006). In addition to the social protections of the social democracy tradition, the social development approach seeks to invest in human capital so that people are ready to enter the marketplace (Lunt, 2009). It also organised the

[6] Cheyne et al. note that, while Māori have disproportionately suffered, there have also been positives of neoliberalism for Māori. As two examples, the authors point to the significant role Māori have in the fisheries industry and the advantages of iwi-designed social services that Māori have obtained via decentralised service delivery.

welfare state to compel people into work to achieve the best form of welfare. While citizens have a right to receive state welfare, individual responsibility accompanied that right to take opportunities to improve their employment prospects (Dwyer, 2010).

The 1999 – 2008 Labour-led Government (henceforth referred to as the Fifth Labour Government) approach contained the first iteration of a social investment approach in New Zealand. Social investment first emerged as a dominant perspective in Europe at the end of the twentieth century designed to achieve social cohesion and create sustainable economic growth (Morel et al., 2012). Soon after the Fifth Labour Government's election in 1999, the Ministry of Social Policy was reoriented towards achieving evidence-based long-term outcomes (Garlick, 2012). Early examples of a social development approach to social investment included a focus on human capital development policies and actualisation policies (for example: Working for Families, interest-free student loans, and 20 hours free early childhood education) (Lunt, 2009; Nikolai, 2012; Smith, 2006). This approach was akin to the United Kingdom's social investment model around its social policy platform.[7] The United Kingdom favoured a social investment approach that introduced responsibilities alongside citizen rights; one which New Zealand would mirror (Dwyer, 2010).

The New Zealand Labour Party became the first social democratic party to discard its nationalisation platform without collapsing as a party, and in 2001 became one of the first political parties to adopt the Third Way ideology (Garlick, 2012; Nolan, 2010).[8] In adopting the social development approach, the Fifth Labour Government entrenched the neoliberal reforms of the previous 15 years (Roper, 2011). In doing so, the Labour Party set aside its storied history and its cradle to the grave social democratic policies of the mid-twentieth century and set to developing a cradle to work policy platform (Lunt, 2009).

[7] Governments with differing ideologies follow the social investment approach, however they all recognise that children and full work participation required investment centred on themes of social protection, human capital investment, and actualisation (Lunt, 2009). As a result, three versions are in operation in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and continental Europe (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research [NZIER], 2016). The Scandinavian countries, with their social democratic perspective, had a strong belief in social support accompanying significant investment. The conservative governments in continental Europe differed by applying social investment with an adherence to the Keynesian perspective (Deeming & Smyth, 2015).

[8] Nationalisation is a common social democratic platform that entails state ownership of industry. The removal of nationalisation as a clause in its constitution signalled the formal acceptance of neoliberalism as the prevailing political paradigm.

The New Right

This section outlines the new right ideology and provides evidence that the National Party is following the new right ideology, and notes that this heavily influenced its comprehensive review of New Zealand's social welfare system. The consequence of this review was, in part, the creation of the Social Investment programme, which had a significant impact on community-based social work provision.

The new right is a hybrid of the liberal and conservative ideological families that advocates for a liberal market with a strong rule of law to ensure a competitive economy and social order (Cheyne et al., 2005). Stanley-Clarke (2016) notes neo-conservatism and liberal conservatism are terms interchangeable with the new right label. Cheyne et al. note that liberal conservatism is part of the new right continuum, and within that there are also varying forms of liberal conservatism. The authors note that the specific form of liberal conservatism is context-dependent, so history and cultural matters are influences. Regardless of the specific form, this ideology is strongly anti-collectivist, anti-unionist, anti-interventionist, and anti-welfare (Heywood, 2002; Miller, 2005). In a pragmatic sense, the new right accepts the need for a welfare state, with the supports targeted to improving wellbeing at a minimal cost to another citizen's freedom (Sample, 1998). The new right approach to inequality is to largely ignore it, requiring those in lower socioeconomic status to raise their own welfare, with natural order achieved through an assertion of personal initiative and effort (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Lister, 2013; Pierson, 2006). New right proponents favour a reduction in state welfare provision given the state has no way of understanding the varied individual needs and wants. In doing so, it avoids the government trying to satisfy demands from competing interest groups, and instead can focus on promoting the common good: found in the market and its rewarding of talent and effort (Dwyer, 2010).

In New Zealand, once elected to office in 2008, the Fifth National Government began a liberal conservative policy agenda under the new right umbrella (Cheyne et al., 2005; Roper, 2011). The Fifth National Government was concerned about economic growth as its overriding goal. Over the next several years the Government responded to the global financial crisis and Christchurch earthquakes with a tightening of public sector expenditure (Boston & Gill, 2017). In general, the Government implemented a conservative platform with respect to law and order issues and began a neoliberal approach to social welfare (Stanley-Clarke, 2016). This context saw the formation and commissioning of the Welfare Working Group (WWG) to provide recommendations about increasing employment rates and reducing social welfare benefit dependence (Garlick, 2012). The WWG report recommended

the welfare system needed to move from passive consumption to an active long-term investment approach (Baker & Cooper, 2018).[9]

The Global Financial Crisis

The global financial crisis (GFC) from 2007 through 2009 is an explicit example of how the deregulated global finance system impacted New Zealand's welfare state. This section illustrates one example of how the market did, and continues to, expose those in need (disproportionately Māori) regardless of the government of the day's ideology.

In broad terms, the GFC refers to the consequences of the illegal (made possible by heavy deregulation) fiscal lending practice of banks in the United States of America that caused a financial system-wide default crisis. With banks unable to repay the loans they had bought from other financial institutions, governments around the world had to provide bailouts to the banking system to avoid a collapse of global markets (Murphy, 2011). The GFC impacted different countries in varying ways, with New Zealand not as badly affected as many other countries due to its conservative banking practices (Starke, 2013). That is not to state that the impact was minimal, as New Zealand lost 2 percent of gross domestic product through the collapse of 52 finance companies (Islam & Yahanpath, 2015). The GFC also disproportionately affected Māori. Silbey et al. (2011) found that there was a widening gap about self-reported wellbeing between Māori and New Zealand Europeans. However, this gap became worse due to New Zealand Europeans having a material advantage that mitigates economic downturns, whereas an economic instability is more likely to disproportionately impact Māori.

The Fifth National Government began during the middle of the GFC and its initial response comprised significant Keynesian measures. While prudent fiscal management of New Zealand's banking system had cushioned the economy from the most damaging consequences, the Government implemented the third largest stimulus of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. As part of this stimulus, financial packages were available to small businesses, implementation of tax cuts, and there was significant investment into infrastructure (Bollard & Gaitonos, 2012; Pierson & Humpage, 2016). Ferguson et al. identify the GFC as beginning the second phase of neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state, with governments introducing austerity measures that became status quo policies (2018). The Fifth National Government used this period to

[9] A discussion about how these policy decisions reflect the values of the new right follows in the section about New Zealand's Social Investment approach.

introduce workfare policies, justified to alleviate future liabilities, but in doing so failed to resolve the reasons why people struggled to find meaningful long-term employment (Pierson & Humpage, 2016). It is common, in periods of economic crises, to use social welfare to ameliorate immediate concerns before ending these supports to cut back on budget costs (Starke, 2013). That was the experience here, with the Fifth National Government ending the Keynesian measures to begin a new period of fiscal restraint which saw broad-based financial cutbacks in public sector spending (Oram, 2015).

Neoliberalism was left unchallenged as the foundational ideology of the global economy, regardless of the GFC reinforcing many critics' view of the free market as being incapable of providing economic security (Small, 2011). The GFC did not provoke any significant political debate about the inherent good of neoliberalism in New Zealand, and New Zealand's adoption of neoliberalism continued unabated. Indeed, New Zealand society saw neoliberalism as "a common sense of the times" (Humpage, 2016, p. 97). The most obvious opportunity to challenge neoliberalism was during the 2008 New Zealand general election, which coincided with the beginning of the GFC. However, during the election campaign, the Labour Party campaigned on its stability and proven economic management and did not identify any significant policy differences from the National Party other than issues about progressive values (Edwards, 2009). This was a common issue internationally, with the social development approach accepting that economic growth was the primary government goal, it struggled to challenge the contradiction that social development parties rely on the free market to achieve social justice (Skilling, 2016).

The Fifth National Government social welfare reforms were another example of the Labour Party not challenging the approach. The Labour Party did express some small concern about the reforms for beneficiaries and the impoverished, however its focus was on improving New Zealand's working and middle class (Thornton, 2016). Thornton's research suggests that the main opposition party is cautious about how it frame its rhetoric about social welfare policies; and typically, the Labour Party tended to move its platform towards the ideological centre. The present reality is that the National Party and Labour Party occupy much of the same ideological space; the inevitable outcome of the parties claiming policy ground that has populist following (Miller, 2005).

New Zealand's Social Investment Approach

This section reviews the Fifth National Government's restructuring of New Zealand's welfare provision. It demonstrates how neoliberal views of self-responsibility and personal initiative have influenced the development of government programmes under the Social Investment programme.

The Fifth National Government implemented its Social Investment approach because of the WWG's 2011 recommendation to have an active long-term investment approach to social welfare (O'Brien, 2011). As part of recommending how to reduce benefit dependence, the WWG paid attention to those identified as the biggest drain on welfare expenditure. The group also assessed the financial management practices of the insurance industry and recent ACC reforms to determine what, if any, policies and practices the welfare system could be introduce (Garlick, 2012). In part, evaluations of workfare programmes in the United States of America and the United Kingdom that targeted long-term beneficiaries influenced the WWG (Mintrom, 2017). The WWG report isolated welfare dependency as problematic. The WWG's decision to frame dependency as a problem then constructed beneficiaries as the problem. In this construction, where it is the responsibility of the individual to obtain employment, the solution was to manage and control the behaviour of beneficiaries through sanctions and incentives (O'Brien, 2011; Roper, 2011).

In 2015, then-Minister of Finance, Sir Bill English, announced the Government's Social Investment programme, with Government expenditure predicated on investment rather than spending (Destremau & Wilson, 2017). These authors note that the goals of the programme were wide ranging, including neoliberal messages of smaller government and more freedom for beneficiaries to make choices, and more neo-conservative views about less people committing crime and less recidivism. While the international community recognised the Social Investment programme as being ambitiously experimental, it did not receive widespread endorsement (Baker & Cooper, 2018).

New Zealand's Social Investment programme differs significantly from the European models in place. The European versions aligned with New Zealand's social development approach and were primarily based on investment in human capital; seen via considerable investment in education and training to increase skills to address unemployment rates (Boston & Gill, 2017). New Zealand's Social Investment programme prioritised interventions for those who were the biggest drain on budgets as a way of reducing long-term fiscal liabilities (Mintrom, 2017). This saw the Government identifying welfare recipients predicted to be a future liability to public expenditure. In doing so, this began a campaign of targeting individuals who had been unemployed for long periods (Devereaux, 2016;

Mintrom, 2017). The next two sections discuss fiscal liability and targeted interventions, which are the economic and governing systems that provide the basis for the creation and targeting of at risk and vulnerable people.

Long-term Fiscal Liability

Moving to a highly targeted system was possible due to contemporary technological advancements that provided the Government with analytical tools to measure progress on achieving the outcomes of reducing long-term liability. A new data reservoir helped ministries to organise budgets to where it would most effectively reduce the financial liability (NZIER, 2016). Actuarial analysis was used to calculate liability; a common accounting method first promoted in the Fifth National Government's ACC review, and subsequently recommended by the WWG (James, 2016). However, the suitability of actuarial analysis raised concerns as it had not been previously used as a policy analysis tool other purchasing of pharmaceutical products (Mintron, 2017). Furthermore, rather than forecasting future liabilities, critics were concerned that actuarial analysis had been repurposed for the prediction of human behaviour and the calculation of associated social costs (Destremau & Wilson, 2017).

Despite the WWG's recommendation of actuarial analysis, there was no way to confidently measure whether people entering employment had gone on to experience better long-term life outcomes (Rosenberg, 2015). The 1999 – 2008 Labour-led Government had previously tried to implement such an approach via Jobs Jolt, a sanction-based employment scheme designed to compel long-term beneficiaries into work. Measuring the reduction of fiscal liability proved so difficult that the programme was eventually cancelled (Garlick, 2012).

Three Pillars of Social Investment

Under the Fifth National Government, Social Investment was organised into three pillars: client segmentation, innovative intervention, and governance (Destremau & Wilson, 2017). The success of the Social Investment approach was contingent on these very specific concepts interacting together and there was significant concern that success would be "undermined by institutional inertia" (Mintrom, 2017, p. 75). The governance pillar was, in part, managed through the Better Public Services strategy (launched in 2012). The strategy was to move government agencies from a silo approach to a cross-agency approach, with the goal of increased effectiveness, efficiency and to out-source, where financially viable, to the private sector (Rennie, 2012).

The privatisation of social outcomes was operationalised in the innovative intervention pillar. The approach was contingent on innovative interventions working with the welfare recipients to avoid the failures of the past by having targeted programmes addressing the specific needs of the individual. The Government's Investing in Services for Outcomes and then the Community Investment Strategy (launched in 2012 and 2015 respectively) were the frameworks to implement this intervention (NZIER, 2016). Community services now purchased outcomes rather than contracting for what the service provided. The Government also required community services to provide reliable evidence of the service effectiveness (Social Investment Agency, 2017). The outcomes-focused contracts meant that service providers raised uncertainty about the long-term planning for their service and workforce development. Furthermore, there was the risk to service providers that more effective service providers would be awarded contracts if the contracted outcomes were not delivered (Boston & Gill, 2017).

Client segmentation organised the collection and analysis of data to identify those specific individuals (including new-born babies) predicted to reduce long-term fiscal liability by moving them into employment (Baker & Cooper, 2018). O'Brien (2016) criticised this type of approach by suggesting that the Government was prepared to invest in people who would offer a sound financial return on investment, rather than increasing wellbeing. Even proponents of actuarial analysis had expressed concern that its use could create stigmatisation of individuals and families and argued against punitive intervention given the targeted individuals had not done anything wrong (Dare et al., 2014). There were also pragmatic concerns raised about efficiency and data reliability issues around identifying the right people. O'Brien (2016) notes that a quantitative approach to measuring the causality of outcomes is fundamentally flawed, arguing that this approach fails the basic statistical requirements to evidence causality. Cullen (2017) goes further in commenting that analysis had demonstrated that children with poor life outcomes but with none of the identified risk factors were more numerous than the children who had poor outcomes and the predetermined risk factors. In addition to this, data analysis has revealed that a third of those predicted to have adverse life outcomes do not experience any poor life outcomes (Deloitte & NZIER, 2016). As Pierson (2006) explains, the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state was primarily for cost containment, not for the state to improve outcomes through the welfare system.

Wellbeing Economics

Having discussed the new right approach, this section compares the literature about the social development approach to social investment. It reveals a limited return to the social democratic tradition of universalism and shows how wellbeing economics follow the customary Māori holistic wellbeing practices.

The 2017 – 2020 Labour-led Government came into power and announced its plan to adopt the wellbeing economics philosophy under the Investing for Social Wellbeing social policy agenda launched in 2018. This is an approach that supports individuals and families to live a lifestyle they value within an inclusive and equitable community (Office of the Minister for Social Development, 2018). As part of this approach, early in its term the Government announced that proportionate universalism would be the baseline principle for the new direction (Sepuloni, 2018). The Prime Minister specifically mentioned that proportionate universalism would see New Zealand return to the cradle to the grave protections of New Zealand's traditional welfare state (TVNZ, 2017). Where the targeted approach exacerbated social divisions, proportionate universalism is based on positive rights and implements universal policies that reduce inequality, with the level of disadvantage determining the nature and amount of support (Carey et al., 2015; Devereux, 2016).

Wellbeing economics is an approach that builds on the economic growth of the capitalist system, combined with a government approach for addressing poverty issues, social divisions, and other social injustices (Dalziel & Saunders, 2018). This approach required a reorganisation of the role of the market with respect to social wellbeing and followed the work Treasury has done with its Livings Standards Framework. This framework organises various wellbeing categories under human, social, financial/physical, and natural capitals. Within this framework, allocations of budget expenditure need to consider these capitals and how actions in one capital will affect the other three (Bloomfield, 2019). Under the wellbeing economics philosophy, a nation's economic performance is an indicator of increasing wellbeing, not the means to achieve wellbeing (Thibault, 2017). Over the past three decades New Zealand's gross domestic product has steadily increased, associated with significant income inequality (Dalziel & Saunders, 2018). Instead, there is a growing body of evidence that shows people are happier when they have significant connections and social relationships, rather than higher income, along with personal freedom and opportunities to develop (Gleisner et al., 2012).

The Treasury commented on this approach as "a bit of a leap of thinking" from the Labour-led Government, putting New Zealand in the vanguard of economic approach (Dann, 2018, para. 14). As

previously noted while discussing social development, this approach aligns with the general approach of European social investment. Dr Cullen (2017) commented this signalled a move from a welfare state to a wellbeing state, in which the government focuses on the needs of all citizens, but where the individual has agency. This approach recognises the importance of social cohesion, while the state will continue to act to recognise the individual's right to freedom.

The wellbeing approach also is compatible with the Treaty of Waitangi, in that it both recognises the ability of people to act in their best interests and of the benefits the government can add where needed for its citizens to succeed (Dalziel & Saunders, 2014). The authors also note the wellbeing economics requires iwi and hapū to be able to exercise kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of natural resources according to customary authority and practices. This model is also compatible with Māori health models, such as te whare tapa whā (Durie, 1998), which recognise the wider system. Te whare tapa whā recognises that wellbeing is interlinked with connection to the present, past, and future (taha wairua); bodily physical health (taha tinana); the connection with family as the primary support and therefore its health (taha whānau); and the mental wellbeing (taha hinengaro) of the person, including being connected to others. The four capitals of Investing for Social Wellbeing reflect this te ao Māori knowledge of wellbeing.

Due to several constraints there is uncertainty as to the extent to which this new approach can be successfully operationalised. The Finance Minister cautioned against high expectations early into the implementation of the wellbeing reforms (Mintrom, 2019). Further, the Budget Responsibility Rules the Labour Party adopted before the 2017 general election meant that 2017 – 2020 Labour-led Government's fiscal management was following the same guidelines as the fiscally conservative approach of the Fifth National Government (Marcetic, 2018). Those five rules required the Government to have sustainable surpluses, pay down crown debt, invest in the future to address long-term fiscal issues, phased expenditure targeted at specific issues, and that the taxation system is fair and simple (The Treasury, 2018).

The 2020 General Election saw a majority Labour Government elected which requires no coalition partners to govern. The Labour Party's 2020 Manifesto sets out its values, one of which is equity of outcome, which reflects a continuation of proportionate universalism. The manifesto also committed the Government to working towards implementing the recommendations of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (New Zealand Labour Party, 2020). Both the Prime Minister and Winston Peters (then Deputy Prime Minister) acknowledged that as coalition partner in the 2017 – 2020 Government,

New Zealand First had stopped Labour progressing some of its more progressive policies (Walls, 2020). Peters had described his party had "opposed woke pixie dust", that its role had at times been a "handbrake for bad [ideas]", and that "we've used common sense to hold Labour… to account" (Walls, 2020a, para. 2; para. 3; para. 10). The coalition agreement appeared to have stopped transformational government promised by the Prime Minister in 2017, but with a majority single party government, there lays open ground ahead for more progressive social policy as envisaged by the wellbeing economics approach.

Summary

This review of the literature indicates the entrenchment of neoliberalism as the dominant political ideology in New Zealand. Since the Fourth Labour Government, New Zealand has entrenched neoliberalism as the social and political ideology. The new right and social development political ideologies of the main parties now see the free market as critical to achieving social wellbeing. They also share the same beliefs around individual freedom, self-responsibility and personal agency as being the best way to secure individual wellbeing. This ideological shift has seen two different governments introduce three social investment programmes to facilitate people's entry into the marketplace. The 2017 – 2020 Labour-led Government moved somewhat to the left with respect to its use of wellbeing economics and proportionate universalism as part of the Investing in Social Wellbeing programme. However, the 2020 – 2023 Labour Government remains anchored to neoliberalism and its core concept of individual responsibility. This literature review confirms that social workers will continue to work in a neoliberal environment unless there is an unforeseen sea change in economic ideology by the government of the day. The following chapter moves on to consider how this individualism has impacted on social work practice within the community sector.

Chapter Three: Normalisation of Neoliberal Discourses in Social Work

This chapter establishes the context of social work in New Zealand after the previous chapter demonstrated that neoliberalism is consolidated into the two main political parties' approach and that New Zealand is an increasingly individualist society. This chapter reviews the literature related to how neoliberalism has impacted on societal views, how it has affected community social service provision, and how it has changed social work practice. It discusses how the promotion of the neoliberalism tenant of personal responsibility has changed the public opinion of those in impoverished circumstances. This includes the reframing of poverty as a personal failing rather than a systemic issue.

Othering of New Zealand Society

As noted in the first chapter, New Zealand's welfare state was based on rewarding moral worth coming from personal effort. At the beginning of the twentieth century this policy became inclusive of all New Zealanders to ensure they had an entitlement to have their wellbeing secured by the government, if necessary (Garlick, 2012). New Zealand's "cradle to the grave" welfare state ended when the neoliberal reforms began in 1984, and since then New Zealand's attitudes towards social support have regressed to the values of the residual welfare state of the late nineteenth century. There is now a significant proportion of society that views the social injustices impacting on individuals as being of their own making which the individual should resolve (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). Twice as many people now see laziness as the primary cause of poverty. Twenty-five percent less people now believe that the government has a clear responsibility to support people in need to have a decent standard of living. A two-fold increase in a general tolerance towards inequality accompanies these views, yet a third of New Zealand now accept the widening inequality as a simple matter of fact (Berentson-Shaw, 2018; Humpage, 2011). Concerningly, clients are now using neoliberal discourses in their language to present themselves as worthy people, which ultimately suppresses the ability to have their needs addressed (Woolford & Nelund, 2013).

In two quantitative studies, Humpage (2011; 2016) investigated the assumption that New Zealand's neoliberal approach had resulted in a reduction in support for social rights. The data was gathered from four databases which studied public opinion with regularity between 1987 – 2005 and public opinion post-global financial crisis in New Zealand and the United Kingdom from her 2016 research. Humpage (2011) found that while attitudes towards most areas of public policy have not

seen any significant paradigm shift, the area of social welfare had seen hardening of attitudes towards the less deserving with poverty and inequality arising from inadequacies of the individual. Crothers' (2016) own research into changing social attitudes supported Humpage's (2016) general contentions. Crothers' research found that poverty had become one of the most important issues for New Zealanders, although there has been an increase in the belief that those in need do not require income support.

In other helping professions, there is evidence that unconscious bias of midwives has seen the transmission and promotion of neoliberal ideology onto mothers of new-born babies (McCabe, 2016). Using practitioners' narratives, the research found that midwives rewarded mothers who demonstrated self-sufficiency and self-responsibility for their healthcare and marginalised those who did not, even if social injustices had compromised their ability to look after themselves. McCabe touches on the issue that the seemingly self-evident truth that freedom and agency are desirable traits, however in a neoliberal world these are appropriated for reasons to demand individual responsibility to change their own worlds.[10] The concept of a "paradigm of responsibility" illustrates this point, where women are encouraged to have autonomy of their individual birth plan and can "give birth" rather than have a baby "delivered". This appears to offer freedom and agency, however, in doing so, the mother takes on "managing one's own care and successfully assuming ownership over the uncertainty and riskiness of childbirth" (p. 181, 2016). While it remains difficult to understand whether this was a conscious absolution of a social responsibility, there are important questions raised about how social workers can advocate for change not necessarily welcomed by the majority in society (O'Brien, 2016; Stanley, 2007).

The ideological dominance of neoliberalism over the past thirty years has managed to change societal attitudes. Lukes' third face of power can explain this process (2005). Over the past thirty years, the general population has had its views and desires manipulated to believe in the self-evident good of neoliberalism, even though it is not in their self-interest to do so. The purpose of this third dimension of power is to control those who would otherwise pursue that which would be in their best interests (Lukes, 2005). Lukes' concept of insidious power and theories of hegemony are also evident in media narratives (2005). In New Zealand, media discourses have, in part, created the public opinion of the undeserving poor. In an analysis of media reports, it was concluded that the New Zealand

[10] The previous chapter discussed how neoliberalism sees individual self-interest as the necessary motivation to improve their own wellbeing, thus self-responsibility and initiative are desired personal characteristics to achieve a decent standard of living (see Fitzpatrick, 2011; Heywood, 2002; Stanley-Clarke, 2016).

media's reporting on child abuse contains significant levels of subversive messaging (Hackell, 2016).[11] Hackell's research contended that the Key Government used high profile child abuse deaths to further shape a moral condemnation of the poor as victims of their own behaviour. Hackell offered a critique of pervasive moral condemnation by the media which was shaping society to minimise social responsibility for those in need by casting them as victims of their own behaviour. Individuals who had not taken on responsibility for their situations and relied on government support were seen by the public as other people; seen as less than hard working New Zealanders, which has seen the ostracisation (othering) of people in poverty (Hyslop and Keddell, 2018).[12] This othering is conducted in four ways. First, to establish stereotypes, the objectification of marginalised people occurs by removing any individuality they have. The second requirement is to isolate their behaviour from any context, which then creates a narrative that their behaviour is irrational. Third, ignoring the life story of the individual creates the misunderstanding as to how the other came to be in their present situation. The last method is to establish a narrative which appears natural and factual. This replaces constructed scenarios which are open to selective interpretation by people. Thus, the powerful define the story of the individual rather than the general public (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

Some of these methods were evident when the Expert Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand's Children and their Families was published in 2016 (Rebstock et al., 2015). The Minister for Social Development established the Expert Panel in 2015 to determine how to address life outcomes for New Zealand's most vulnerable children. The Government had also started using at risk as part of the Social Investment narrative. These risk and vulnerability labels are not only neoliberal phrases, but Tascón and Ife (2020) note these are also Eurocentric phrases that indigenous peoples do not necessarily share. They argue that the most serious risks for indigenous cultures are ignored because concepts such as vulnerability, safety, risk, and protection are defined by power bases removed from the indigenous world views. For example, the conceptions of risk and vulnerability ought to reach beyond risk of child maltreatment, but also include considerations such as loss of whakapapa and whanaungatanga responsibilities of whānau, hapū, and iwi (Eruera & Ruwhiu, 2015). However, the

[11] For another example, see Phelan's (2009) study into the media's othering of Māori during New Zealand's foreshore and seabed issue in 2003. Further, Stuff have recently announced their journalism about child abuse has been systemically racist via a disproportionate focus on Māori children while minimising Pākehā perpetrators. In dealing with child deaths from maltreatment, Stuff noted, "this raises several uncomfortable questions for us as journalists: Why have we deemed some children more deserving of coverage than others? And why are those children disproportionately Māori"? (Mitchell, 2020, para. 100).

[12] The othering attitudes were impacting on other survey results too. In a national survey about child abuse, a minority of respondents viewed themselves as having any responsibility to support children they did not know. A majority believed that parents where responsible for the impoverishment of their families and should not depend on others to be supported and probably ought not to have children in their care (Nielsen, 2017).

application of labels is a necessary categorisation of the social world (Turner, 2002). Turner suggests that misuse, simplification, and permanence of labels are the greater concerns and recognises that meaning changes over time. As Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) note, labels can be: misused, applied to the whole person rather than a specific condition of the individual, create stigmatisation, or change over time to risk being distorted.

Poverty

This section reviews the literature about how poverty is a central issue in social work practice. It then situates poverty as an ideological issue within New Zealand. Within this context, there is a discussion about how neoliberalism has affected social workers' practice surrounding poverty.

There is a consensus in the literature that poverty is a significant issue encountered within social work practice (for example, Boston, 2017). Indeed, social work has a strong focus on the underprivileged, and thus poverty is a central element (Joseph, 2019). Dowling (2018) argues that the relationship between social work and poverty is subjective, context specific, and shaped by ideology. Therefore, poverty is that which society defines it as at any point in time. Dowling cautions social workers that they need to ensure that impoverished people are aware that social structures, rather than individual failings, can cause their situation.

Farrell et al. (2017) researched the relationship between impoverished American communities and child fatalities from abuse. The analysis suggests an underestimation of the number of child fatalities within impoverished communities, even though the number of fatalities were already disproportionately high. In researching poverty in family homes, Hearn Escaravage's (2014) data analysis concluded that an understanding of poverty within the family's community is essential. Both studies concluded that alleviation of poverty is the single most effective factor for the solution to child abuse (Farrell et al., 2017; Hearn Escaravage, 2014). New Zealand has similar issues with poverty and child maltreatment. While it might not have a causal relationship, there is clear and overwhelming evidence of the link between child maltreatment and poverty (Hyslop, 2018; Keddell, 2017; Wynd, 2013). Keddell et al. (2019) completed a database analysis and found that there is a significant relationship between communities in deprivation with reported child abuse. They also concluded that government policy centred on families living in poverty needs to lead the resolution of New Zealand's child abuse problem. Thus, the evidence compels social workers to have a clear understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty to advance the wellbeing of their clients.

Debate about the child poverty level in New Zealand played an important part of the Fifth National Government. The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor stated that poverty was a major factor in child maltreatment (Gluckman & Hayne, 2011). However, Sir John Key, was criticised for the minimisation of child poverty as a concern, as he exploited the lack of causal evidence between poverty and child abuse to justify the individualisation of the problem (Hyslop & Keddell, 2018). O'Brien (2013) sees the growth of child poverty as a direct result of the workfare policies of the previous 20 years, and a sign of the failure of the "responsibilities over rights" mindset. Despite ongoing advocacy, the Fifth National Government was able to avoid debate about neoliberalism causing child poverty. This was possible due to the acceptance of limited government public expenditure, the increasing view that poverty is a result of poor decisions, the greater acceptance on income inequality, and racism via the vast over-representation of Māori and Pasifika peoples in poverty statistics (Boston, 2014).

Alongside political discourse, social and cultural influences are shaping social worker responses to working with people in poverty. As a result, social workers often ignore poverty as a root cause of harm to children (Morris et al., 2018). These authors contend that social workers are wilfully ignoring poverty as a coping mechanism. Further, the intensity, frequency, and familiarity of poverty with families was such that their situations have been normalised, leading to a pathologising of parents in poverty. The authors found some social workers did recognise poverty as an issue but felt overwhelmed or denied the solvability of the issue at the individual level. This reflects the challenge raised by Hyslop (2016) in his criticism that the Government's focus on vulnerable families within a neoliberal context is a punishment of the other. The research argues that addressing the underlying factors (low education attainment, poor housing, low-income levels, and ill health) themselves are not the only solution, but that social workers must engage in critical self-reflection to unpack normative ideological worldviews. With evidence demonstrating that the alleviation of poverty is the most significant aspect of enhancing wellbeing (Hyslop, 2016), the issue that social workers are unable to do so is a central issue explored in this research.

Impact on Contracting

This section outlines how New Public Management (NPM) contracting has impacted non-government organisations' (NGO) practice. It highlights the increase of advocacy by NGOs now focused on securing ongoing funding for their own long-term viability. It notes that the need to secure government contracts has affected the advocacy of New Zealand NGOs. This ability of NGOs to

advocate for community interests has fluctuated when left- and right-wing governments have been in power. Finally, it argues that the data compliance requirements have increasingly supplanted social justice practices and devalued local community knowledge of the service providers.

There is numerous research which seeks to understand the advocacy of NGOs when engaged in contracting arrangements with government (for example, Mosley, 2012; 2013; Onyx et al., 2010). Rather than representing their clients' needs, the NGOs focussed on maintaining their contracts to secure ongoing finances. The nature of this advocacy was to foster beneficial relationships with the government and to minimise any conflictual issues that might threaten funding (discussed later in this section for a New Zealand context). Other research (Onyx et al., 2010) supports the view that NGOs repressed conspicuous adversarial political advocacy to facilitate relationships with government agencies to secure contracts and have input into decision making. In contrast, agencies that were self-sufficient of the government were more likely to spend more time focussed on the needs of their clients, rather than advocating for service provider self-interest (Mosley, 2012).

New Zealand's NGOs experienced different levels of oppression during left- and right-wing governments over the past twenty years. Levine (2009) conducted research into the ability of Barnardos New Zealand, under the social development Government, to provide support to clients.[13] Using interviews and focus groups with a wide range of Barnardos staff, the study concluded that a reorganisation of its services had left staff engaged and positive but had raised concerns about their work with clients. Reporting requirements of the Government meant the participants felt compromised in their advocacy for the communities they work in. Further research, using a survey of 153 community organisations in New Zealand, supported the concerns about undermined advocacy and neoliberal contracting (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015). These findings concluded that service provider dependence on government funding has largely silenced service provider advocacy. Interestingly, by comparing data between the social development and new right governments, the research found that community providers are more likely to feel pressure to remain silent under a National Government as opposed to a Labour Government, which conversely is more likely to encourage debate. Regardless of political ideology, the concerning conclusion is that the Government has co-opted service providers to fulfil its needs, rather than the needs of the community (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015). Other supporting research (Grey et al., 2015) found that there was widespread agreement that the Fifth National Government routinely ignored service providers and at the same time pushed accountability for social

[13] As discussed in Chapter Two, the 1999 – 2008 Labour-led Government governed from a social development perspective.

inequality onto the community provider sector. In concluding that the neoliberal contracting process had constrained their advocacy, Grey et al. (2015) described a relationship of increasing power and control by the Government, rather than partnership and engagement. This aligns with other literature that contends NGO dependence on state funding means the Government has vast influence over an NGO's operation to the extent that it can define the nature of NGO service provision (Lipsky & Smith, 1993). State control due to NPM has prompted Lipsky and Smith (1993) to redefine street-level bureaucrats to include social workers alongside public service workers.

Concerns have grown about a deterioration in service provision by NGOs as a result of government contract requirements. Research has suggested that the New Zealand government's Community Investment Strategy has challenged the nature NGO service provision,[14] with the need to provide results-based evidence turning the art of social work into a data gathering domain of practitioner research (Aimers, 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Lipsky & Smith, 1993; Sawyers, 2016). Contract compliance requires NGOs to focus on developing systems and policies to be more efficient around building their own service capacity. Another part of the contracting and capacity building was an emphasis on professionalisation of the community services (Döbl & Ross, 2013). The consequence of this was that academic knowledge became prioritised and valued over personal experiences of the communities, to which social workers belonged (Aimers, 2011). There is an increased risk that families increasingly view service providers and the state child protection service as essentially the same entity, with NGOs looking to address risk rather than provide needs-based supports, thus compromising the relationships between NGOs and clients. This arises from the standardisation of practice, rather than responding to individual needs as they arise within the communities that service providers support (Onyx et al., 2010; Sawyers, 2016). Lipsky (2010) suggests that the standardisation of practice arises from street-level bureaucrats defining individual needs into categories of action as a method of managing demand. Internationally, results-based frameworks have caused difficulty in applying local knowledge and practice in favour of contractual requirements.

There is also concern that system-wide fragmented service support also compromises the ability to ensure needs-based support. Managers now feel pressured into competing against strategically aligned NGOs for funding, which ultimately meant collaboration deteriorated and the exclusion of those in need from services due to a narrowly defined entry criterion (Döbl & Ross, 2013;

[14] Sawyers' research (2016) concluded that the Community Investment Strategy compels, not only that the individual to take personal responsibility for their situation, but that change will occur when the individual changes their own circumstances.

Onyx et al., 2010). Furthermore, the contracting of specific services meant that the reporting back on those contracts limited what advocacy there was to piecemeal efforts by the individual agencies, rather than a holistic approach that might advance their communities' interests (Levine, 2009). In total, NPM has affected the practices of social justice at the individual level (Benjamin, 2008; Keevers et al., 2012).

Neoliberalism's Impact on Social Work

This section narrows the focus from declining empathy of New Zealand society, and discusses the impact of neoliberalism on social workers' emotional wellbeing and their practice. Traditionally, social work has been situated as a liberal humanist paradigm which believes in redemption and hope (Hyslop, 2016). Hyslop warns of an existential crisis in social work and demands social workers begin thinking critically instead of unwittingly complying with a very damaging neoliberal dogma. This scenario raises the prospect that the goals of advocacy are simply the goals of neoliberalism rather than for social justice.

Empathetic Social Work Responses

Ericksson & Englander (2017) contend that empathy is essential to the provision of social work support. The social worker requires empathy to form interpersonal understanding of their client's situation and is the prerequisite to the necessary support and most appropriate interventions. Despite this, some authors (for example, Gerdes et al., 2011; Gair, 2013) suggest that there is no definitive single agreement about the role empathy plays in social work. Furthermore, Lynch et al. (2019) highlight the paucity of research regarding empathy as a social work skill. The study by Lynch et al. (2019) found that most of their participants did not have a high level of empathy in their social work practice. Where there was, social worker empathic practice sought to understand clients' difficult experiences, including in the emotional sphere. This aligns with Jensen and Pedersen (2017) who found that empathetic workers exercised high levels of discretion in implementing work requirements. However, workers with higher levels of empathy regressed to "by the book" behaviour when there were significant issues that required addressing.

Other research (Fenton, 2018; Gair, 2018; Layton, 2009) notes that neoliberalism has been the conventional and accepted ideology guiding social and political life for an ever-increasing number of social workers. In turn, this has led to a growing number of new social workers who are unable to understand the social injustices arising from neoliberalism, and thus have struggled to develop

empathetic responses for families they work with (Fenton, 2018; Gair, 2018; Layton, 2009). Several factors have been identified which curtail empathic responses by social workers. These included prejudices towards people who do not fit into the social worker's cultural group or when the social worker lacks understanding of their client's situation (Gair, 2017; Turnage et al., 2012).

In addition to their personal experiences, social workers with significant practice experience are also struggling to maintain empathetic practice due to neoliberalism pervading the practice environment (Lavee & Strier, 2018). This has included increases in demand, increased intensity of workloads, the loss of autonomy, more ethical challenges, as well as significantly more social workers feeling demoralised and reaching burnout (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010). This influence results in social workers having high emotional experiences in the course of their work, the development of various coping strategies to buffer their own personal situations against what they see in their client families, and the workplace making social workers feel like they are battling against their workplace (Lavee & Strier, 2018). Consequently, these factors lead to social workers losing compassion for their clients, creating a protective mechanism that sees social workers emotionally dissonant to client experiences; the othering of clients is seen in increasingly moralistic judgments by social workers when trying to provide support (Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010; Lavee & Strier, 2018). The consequences of this distress for social workers can include alienation from traditional social work practices and an unwillingness to continue their role (Oliver, 2013).

Moral Distress of Social Workers

There is wide recognition of moral distress, due to agency constraints, of social workers arising from being unable to act for social justice (Fantus et al., 2017; Lynch & Forde, 2016; Woods et al., 2015). Moral distress is a personal response to a situation that has compromised one's professional and personal values and ethics. If the underlying causes of moral distress remains unaddressed, moral distress persists and can accumulate (Fantus et al., 2017). While there are no readily available studies of social workers' moral distress in New Zealand, Woods et al. (2015) has researched the moral distress of nurses. Woods et al. (2015) found that neoliberal issues (management practices, budget constraints, and fractured community service provision) were the top reasons for moral distress. The authors also found that new graduates were more likely than experienced staff to leave nursing because of moral distress, even though they better understood institutional constraints due to recent tertiary education. Of interest, McCarten et al. (2018) found similar issues in the social worker experience and inexperience dichotomy. They noted that experienced social workers believe they

have the experience to link and understand social justice to their practice, whereas inexperienced social workers had a fatalistic attitude to effecting change. In their discussion of moral distress, Lynch and Forde (2016) explained that some social workers have readily adapted to neoliberal reforms in their places of employment while others in the same place have actively and passively resisted these challenges. This shows that social workers use their personal agency to either conform or resist neoliberalism as a root cause of moral distress.

A Shift in Social Change and Social Justice Goals

The foundational focus of social work centres on social change to achieve social justice at the individual and community level (Ferguson, 2008). Social change occurs in the place where the current concern exists and requires social workers to challenge structures which contribute to injustice or breach of human rights. Social justice is the goal of social work, which sees civil, political, and socio-economic rights (amongst others) in place for all (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

In the same way that neoliberalism has changed society's views about the disadvantaged, it has also changed the nature of social work practice. One theme has been the reorganisation of social justice away from the community towards individualised work (McCarten et at., 2018). This is enabled by social workers tending to approach social work based on the societal values that they live in, which is predominantly an increasingly individualistic society (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Davidson et al., 2017). Ferguson et al. (2018) describe this as an approach away from one which redefines people as impacted by social injustice towards seeing individuals who have made poor choices to make better choices. Hyslop (2017) contends that social work is now an evidence-based practice, clinical approach that requires dispassionate social workers. Within this paradigm, social workers ignore economic and social system root causes in favour of seeing families as damaged individuals needing treatment to achieve measurable outcomes. In New Zealand, the Modernising Child, Youth and Family Panel's 2015 report blamed family-centred practice, and social work in general, for the high levels of child abuse in New Zealand. Henceforth, up to 30,000 at risk children in New Zealand would be engaged within a child-centred and trauma-focused approach; a practice which ignores any recognition of economic disadvantage and poverty (Hyslop, 2017). In his research into social justice, O'Brien (2010) found that social justice was commonplace in social workers' practice. However, the practice of social justice was confined to the individual level, with the goal of achieving just outcomes within the clients' community.

The nature of the issue is further complicated by new social workers being unable to challenge neoliberalism because they have difficulty seeing past the subversive message of individual self-responsibility (Marston & McDonald, 2012). [15] Instead, social work is targeted at individual interventions, centred around what the client believes is the problem to be worked through (Pardeck et al., 1994). Other research also argues that due to a multitude of variables social workers are situated actors within agency policies embedded with neoliberal ideology driving the steady trend towards a risk assessment orientation (Keddell, 2016). Further research analysed social worker complicity into reproducing the stigmatisation of people living in poverty (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). The authors argued that social workers had knowledge gaps and lacked critical thinking due to an increasing number of their worldviews shaped by growing up under a neoliberal environment. There are opportunities in exploring how social work education can build social worker ability to deconstruct their ideological framing that underlays their experiences. Duarte (2017) argues that social work practice is a construction of values and principles gathered from historical and social expressions of ideology and to understand this is to understand their own practice. If social workers are to advocate for social justice, the social work tradition needs to be refocussed away from individuals who have made poor choices, back to advocating for structural change as the primary focus.

Social Work Critique of Neoliberalism

This section considers the ethical obligations of social workers. It critiques the trend of resilience as a response to neoliberalism before going on to discuss a growing range of ethical responses from the social work profession. Advocacy requires resistance to neoliberal hegemony, not a consolidation of resilience as a social work response. The review of literature reveals there are opportunities for social workers to advocate against the consequences of neoliberalism.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers' (ANZASW) Code of Ethics requires social workers to act courageously to engage in constructive work to transform social structures which give rise to injustice. The Code of Ethics also requires social workers to advocate for social justice (2019). As such, social workers have a requirement to challenge neoliberalism and its consequences. For this to occur, social workers must understand how neoliberalism impacts, not just on the clients, but on social workers' practice (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016). Social workers must find space to have the capability to resist neoliberalism and its teaching of resilience, and greater leadership is needed at the

[15] Refer to the previous section entitled The Othering of New Zealand Society for a discussion about neoliberalism and self-responsibility, and for further reading, see O'Brien (2013; 2016).

political level for social change (O'Brien, 2010).[16] It is also critically necessary to challenge othering and advocate for recognition about the impact of poverty, and for systemic changes to the economic and welfare systems (Joseph, 2019; McCarten et al., 2018).

Resilience as a Strategy to Neoliberalism

While noting that the ANZASW is voluntary, the ANZASW Code of Ethics (2019) requires social workers to act courageously in difficult situations.[17] Despite this, some authors argue that resistance could be set aside for acceptance of the political environment, and that social workers ought to find opportunities to work with others within the system to effect change (Marston & McDonald, 2012). There is an argument to be made that the promotion of such resilience strategies (for both the social worker and clients) is, in fact, good enough to meet ethical social work practice (Oliver, 2013). Spolander et al. (2016) argue that the fear of speaking out and the widespread inaction of the social work profession merely assists in the entrenchment of neoliberalism and the continued challenge to social work practice. Russell (2017) goes further and argues that this lack of speaking out about social injustice results in social workers who have become unchained from their code of ethics. The issue of resilience is also a contextual one. For Māori, Tascón and Ife (2020) argue that resilience might be a strength in the face of systemic oppression. The authors note, aligning with the social constructionist lens of this research, that it is critical to understand context to see the construction of language and what it means.

Empowerment and Social Advocacy

Joseph (2019) provides a way forward for social workers to practice in ethical ways. Social workers can make a difference via two pathways: empowerment practice and social advocacy. This dual approach is ethical if social justice principles guide the practice of the social worker (Boone et al., 2020; Staniforth et al., 2011). Empowerment practice requires the social workers not to cast blame on individuals if they fail. Empowerment explores the utilisation of principles of personal responsibility

[16] Within this neoliberal environment, social workers have increasingly replaced the social work tradition of resistance with resilience (Conneely & Grant, 2015). The move to the building of resilience sought to achieve social justice for families by making their lives "more bearable and more tolerable" (Conneely & Garrett, p. 138, 2015). This issue for social workers does have serious implications, however it is beyond that scope of this research to explore (for information about neoliberalism and resilience see Bottrell, 2013).

[17] The SWRB recognises that the ANZASW is the professional body of social workers in New Zealand and requires registered social workers to practice in accordance with the ANZASW Code of Ethics (SWRB, 2020).

and self-sufficiency (Payne, 2014).[18] It also requires social workers to support clients in understanding what social services are available. Therefore, social workers should understand social services and the social policies that underlie social service provision. Specifically, social workers must understand the flaws of the residual welfare system and its fragmentation of services (Joseph, 2019). In order to challenge existing narratives, social workers must also engage in a critical analysis of social norms, contexts, and conditions (Munford & Sanders, 2020).

Empowerment alone is an insufficient strategy to achieve social justice. There is a real risk that if there is a sole focus on developing client capacity, then the effects of neoliberalism remain, and the client faces addressing these social structures alone (Payne, 2014). Therefore, social advocacy is the other important aspect that needs to be employed. Social advocacy refers to the advocacy that seeks social change on behalf of interested groups of people (Joseph, 2019; Payne, 2014). Rather than implementing approaches social workers know to be ineffective, social advocacy around actual needs has the potential to recast social policy (McCarten et al., 2018). In practice there is a challenge, as research has shown that many social workers see the social advocacy dimension of social work as significantly less important than the individual reflexive-therapeutic approach to social work (Staniforth et al., 2011).[19] Other research (Taylor & Grey, 2014) has shown that the increase in New Zealand of identity politics has also changed the nature of social advocacy. Since the introduction of neoliberalism into New Zealand, redistributive social movements have increasingly ignored the neoliberal consequences in favour of advancing niche identity issues (for example, communist groups, students, or LGBTQ).[20]

Subversive Responses to Neoliberalism

There are a growing number of studies (Gupta et al., 2018: Schiettecat et al., 2018) that suggest there is an increase in challenges to neoliberalism. These studies conclude that social workers are reengaging in the social work helping practices after developing coping mechanisms by

[18] O'Brien (2013; 2016) criticises social work tradition as having too willingly and blindly embracing postmodernism, which, due to its focus on the individual, has an ideology which fails to challenge the subversive messaging of neoliberalism. Thus the principles that underlay empowerment can be at risk of social workers perpetuating neoliberalism's influence on social work, given it also prioritises self-responsibility and self-sufficiency.

[19] For some time the social work profession has debated about which is the best-placed of the three dominant social work discourses (reflexive-therapeutic, socialist-collectivist, and individualist-reformist) to create change (Payne, 2014; Staniforth et al., 2011). This debate is beyond the scope of this research.

[20] At the time of the research's publication, the authors defined LGBTQ as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer.

deconstructing, restructuring, and constructing supports to manage within neoliberal environments. Gupta et al. (2018) found that social workers understood that for them to treat families with recognition and respect, first they needed to view families as equals. Furthermore, the authors argued that the absence of empathy caused othering by social workers (not just the general population, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter) and an effective response to neoliberalism needs to include the restoration of empathetic responses. While social workers stated that challenging othering practices of families in poverty was vital, the authors did caution that social workers also needed to be open to understanding their own unconscious biases that promote or enable othering.

Schiettecat et al. (2018) conclude that social workers, out of a concern for their clients, have constructed subversive strategies to provide the necessary support to families. This political agency is alive and visible at the individual level. Social workers are doing what is possible and at the same time social workers are engaging in (sometimes concealed) small acts of non-compliance and resistance in their own work environments. One example was the actions of a social worker to protect their client by concealing the fact the client had missed three appointments which, if had been revealed, would have meant to withdrawal of financial support. Other authors argue that rather than a level of discretion commonly assumed, social workers have significant agency in their application of workplace requirements (Baldwin, 2000; Evans, 2016; Musheno & Maynard-Moody, 2015). Musheno and Maynard-Moody found that workers regularly engaged in normative judgments that favoured client narratives and worker morality above rules and legal requirements. A common approach saw social workers having attitudes of resistance in their work, particularly towards bureaucratic forms seen as promoting quantity and a block towards proper engagement and quality (Baldwin, 2000).

These ethical responses accompany a growing dissatisfaction and opposition to the impact of neoliberalism in social work (Ferguson, 2008; Hyslop, 2017). The contention is that the social work profession is readily identifying the link between child welfare and economic inequality. These authors see social workers managing to resist managerial demands and risk assessments and are proving to be resilient in the face of these demands. This resistance also sees a rise in advocacy for a return to the humanist values of traditional social work (Hyslop, 2017). Other research has found that social workers using family maintenance discourses have retained a level of commitment to the principles of child welfare practice in their decision-making (Keddell, 2011; 2016). That commitment exists within the wider social work field, too, as social workers continue to establish and maintain relationships with people in vulnerable and marginalised situations (Rankine et al., 2018). Lipsky (2010) also adds that

client focus needs to be a central orientation. This is done through managers who are committed to reform through an iterative process of critical reflection and appreciative inquiry.[21]

Summary

In summary, the literature shows that New Zealand society generally views disadvantaged people as responsible and to blame for being in that position. Furthermore, services prioritise contractual requirements centred on government requirements and disregard the needs of families the services work with. Interviews with people in senior leadership positions in NGOs show that advocacy remains in place (perhaps declining), but it is based on a pragmatic strategy born of self-interest to ensure continued funding streams, characterised as moving from activism to compromise and negotiation. Families are now reporting a deterioration in service provision, with social workers struggling to maintain empathetic responses to clients. Social workers have also recognised their worry about not fulfilling their ethical responsibilities has created their own growing moral distress. Indeed, some believe social workers are reinforcing blame and stigmatisation due to the questionable ability of social workers to understand the ideological impact of neoliberalism. The literature, however, also reveals there are growing pockets of social workers resisting the influence of neoliberalism in their practice.

One of the more significant implications to emerge from this review is that social work must relook at normative experiences of social workers, rather than just calling for advocacy around social justice. This research explores the views of social workers about how those discourses impact on their ability to provide support and advocacy among disadvantaged families. The next chapter discusses the methodology and methods of this research.

[21] Appreciative inquiry a process which constructs meaning to experiences and aspirations of participants. A central principle is that strengths, when focused on, become solutions and a focus on problems does not resolve them. Another principle is that the way questions are asked of a participant/group can influence how the participant/group engages in the process of meaning-making (Bellinger & Elliott, 2011).

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods used in this research. It establishes the legitimacy of qualitative research as a mode to give voice to social workers. It identifies the utility of social constructionism to understand social workers' rationale for advocacy work in a neoliberal environment. The discussion about researcher positioning identifies how subjectivity issues impacted the research, along with considerations of ethical issues. This chapter details the use of individual semi-structured interviews to collect the data. Finally, the chapter explores thematic analysis as the analytical strategy of the research.

Goals of the Study

This research explores how government ideology has impacted on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. The goals of the study are to:

1. Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability.[22]
2. Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice.
3. Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates.
4. Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

Qualitative Research

This research is qualitative, supporting the researcher to understand social workers in the context of their lives, and how they attach meaning to the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research needs to be able to create or motivate improvements in society, to have some connection to professional debate; without significance, the research simply becomes an information gathering exercise of little value (Carey, 2012). While it is important for participants to put forward what is important to them, ultimately the knowledge gathered needs to be of significance

[22] The definitions of risk and vulnerability, provided in the introductory chapter, explain the use of these terms as proxies for the messaging of neoliberalism in general.

for the people under study and for the intended audience (O'Leary, 2017). Therefore, this research aims to inspire social workers to engage further in advocacy and support to disadvantaged families.

This research was completed as a qualitative-exploratory study using thematic analysis, informed by social constructionism. Qualitative research allows for the interpretation of participants' experiences, opinions, and beliefs to understand how people make sense of the world around them. Therefore, qualitative research is an effective form of inquiry to understand the experiences of social workers and the choices they make about advocating for clients. Each of those stories is valid and it is the task of the researcher to explore any themes that are common across these experiences (Patton, 2015). A key thread within qualitative research is the acceptance that there can be multiple perspectives rather than a single truth. The knowledge gathered is also, by reason of significance to the participant, subjective expressions of experience (but nonetheless legitimate sources of data) (Ryan et al., 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As such, there is no research design that can claim to fully explain the study in question. However, the collection of experiences can produce a holistic account and useful knowledge of a complex situation (Levitt et al., 2018). Exploratory research is useful in this regard, as it looks to develop ideas or hypotheses that are produced from the inductive analysis of data (Stebbins, 2001). As Riessman (2011) and Polkinghorne (1995) advise, these aggregated general observations and concepts are a valid process in furtherance of advocacy and social justice matters. While the research will not produce definitive conclusions, exploratory research is appropriate to this study as it seeks to describe and understand beliefs and systems that influence those beliefs (Stebbins, 2001).

Social Constructionism

This section discusses the social constructionist framework used in this research. It situates social constructionism within the postmodern perspective, outlines the various strands of social constructionism, and then focuses on the realist derivative as the framework employed in this research. This research used social constructionism because it fits with the goals of the research, which are to explore social workers' understanding of risk, vulnerability, and general neoliberal discourses, and how those influence social workers' ability to act as advocates for disadvantaged families.

The postmodern perspective explains that beliefs and experiences of the social world forms what is seen as truth (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015). The postmodern tradition evolves into a range of perspectives and derivations, strengthened through the rigour of academic discussion,

but its core theme is that individuals and groups create and constantly refine the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2015). While postmodernism is a contested perspective (for example, see Elder-Vass, 2012) it nonetheless remains a valid foundation to conduct this research, which seeks to understand the existence of a multitude of realities and then report on the knowledge produced (Creswell, 2013).

Within the postmodern family, social constructionism is a perspective that views the world within a context observed through multiple lenses (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2015). Social constructionism's premise holds that cultural and linguistic norms within specific contexts mould the creation of phenomena (Patton, 2015). This then requires the gathering of complex, multiple, and diverse understandings of meaning and experiences. These subjective understandings are attempts to gain valid meanings through consensus with others, and social norms that influence an individual (Creswell, 2013). Social constructionism does not see richness in narrowly defined meanings of a single experience, but rather the synthesis of collected realities (Hibberd, 2005; Patton, 2015). Ultimately, as Lock and Strong (2010) explain, it is a philosophy that offers a way to understand human nature in a social world that is constantly changing. Therefore, a social constructionist approach to understanding the challenges to social work advocacy facilitates the unpacking of personal meanings of risk, vulnerability discourses, and the domination of neoliberal discourse which have resulted in the ostracisation of lower socio-economic families.

There are common threads found across many of the social constructionist perspectives. Social constructionists arrive at a consensus about what is accepted to be true by challenging the assumptions in the meaning-making process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Another common thread is the understanding that knowledge and meaning is connected to social norms and practices that have been created by cultural and historical events particular to that society (Burr, 2015). The third key thread is that social interactions between people constructs knowledge (Lock & Strong, 2010). The fourth thread is that social constructionism is concerned with exploring the creation of knowledge and its relationship with power (Burr, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). These threads supported the researcher to understand the unique views of each participant social worker, how they perceived the dominant discourses and either agreed, rejected, or permitted them, and their role as advocates. It provided for a construction of individual meaning of the social worker's role in social injustice and social change.

Two broad positions divide the range of social constructionism. Burr (2015) categorises the two forms as micro (relativist) and macro (realist) conceptions. The difference between these two

strands was significant for determining the course of this research. Micro constructionists see multiple truths that are all valid and that everything is constructed devoid of the need to situate these constructions within their social context (Best, 2019). With this view, anything is an issue worthy of discussion but largely a philosophical one. This strict relativist approach opens social constructionism up for significant criticism for its usefulness as a lens to see the world in order to understand social injustices (Best, 2019). Where the micro strand aligns closely with postmodern thought, the macro strand is more concerned with the creation and nature of knowledge within a world that is socially constructed (Elder-Vass, 2012). The macro approach recognises the importance of context so that social injustices can be analysed and challenged. However, because the concerns are situated in context, the agency of individuals to bring about change is recognised as reduced because the problem is real (Burr, 2015). This research used the macro perspective because the furtherance of social work advocacy is one of the research goals. The fourth goal of this research was to discuss opportunities for social workers to act as advocates, not simply to construct arguments about whether social injustice and structural oppression is real. The macro social constructionist approach recognises the individual accounts of social workers against those very real social injustices (Burr, 2015). That philosophical orientation brought the issue into a context where the problems are real but also created a hopefulness of bringing change, rather than keeping the issue in the abstract world.

Hibberd (2005) suggests that macro social constructionism views language as created within the interactions of social structures, cultural practices, and power bases. In turn, language creates the conception of the social world, defines how people behave, and has different meanings amongst different contexts. Burr (2015) argues that the relationship between language and power is important for social constructionists to understand, as there are real consequences from the dominant expressions of language. These different meanings are based on the views of those who hold power, and thus expressions of language service the interests of those in power, based on their assumptions and worldviews (Patton, 2015). This notion of language and power required the researcher to be careful in how knowledge is created, as it was inevitable that the experiences and knowledge of the researcher impacted on the interactions with the participant and the interpretation of the data (Spencer et al., 2014).

Epistemological and Ontological Positions

There is a range of approaches within social construction, varying in terms of their ontological and epistemological premises. One end of that range is primarily epistemological, and the other end

is strongly postmodernist and heavily ontological in nature (Best, 2019; Lock & Strong, 2010). Within that range, social constructionists look for accounts rather than explanations of what is real (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2015). While O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) note ontology is a critical position to establish, there is an established pragmatic view that argues social conceptions are real and can be identified, assessed, and analysed (Carter & Little, 2007). The epistemological approach is more significant to address as the research is being conducted within the realist social constructionist perspective, which makes no ontological assumption (Andrews, 2012). The epistemological assumption of social constructionism is that the transactional relationship of the researcher and participant creates truth (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Objectivity is not required as the subjective experiences of the researcher have created the very nature of the questions asked in the interviews. That is, the researcher is engaging in a process of social constructionism in the asking and probing of the interview (Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Researcher Positioning

Given that the researcher reports the research from their perspective, it is critical to understand the researcher's values and assumptions. The researcher is required to have a clear understanding of how their own worldview influences the research design, data collection, how the data is interpreted, and what motivates them to undertake the research (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Spencer et al., (2014) emphasise this view by arguing the futility of any attempt by the researcher to discard their values. It is commonplace for the researcher's use of self in their research, therefore there is a critical need for researcher reflexivity (Berger, 2015).

Reflexivity is the continuous reflection by the researcher to generate self-awareness about the impact of their own subjectivity across the whole methodological design and implementation (Bourke, 2014; Hickson, 2016). Consideration was given to this bias, and insights were explored during engagement with participants (Bourke, 2014). When exploring the ability and attitudes of social workers around advocacy, my position required constant reflexivity to safeguard against detrimental dynamics between researcher and the participants. The exploration of these assumptions strengthened the rigour of the methodological design and credibility of the research (Galletta, 2013).

Reflexivity also ensures proper interactions with the participants, particularly when the researcher and participant have a shared experience of the issue under study (as will be the case in this research). This dynamic introduces the existence of the researcher as an insider. Berger (2015)

cautions that the familiarity of shared experiences between the researcher and participant might appear quite beneficial in terms of facilitating the data collection, however a power relationship might exist that could give rise to competition and comparison about competence. O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) suggest consideration be given as to how these dynamics are incorporated into the research. As such, reflexivity was facilitated by writing down reflections and thoughts after each participant interview.

Participant Recruitment

The data collection and analysis methods are discussed through the rest of this chapter. The research employed purposive sampling for the participant selection. Purposive sampling is the deliberate sampling to ensure that the researcher gathers rich data from the participants due to them having the necessary subject experience and knowledge (Patton, 2015). The sample size was a small group of eight individuals which allowed the richness of data and situated descriptions of each unique experience to come forward (Levitt et al., 2018). The eight participants in this research constituted a valid sample for thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2017) advise that a wide sample size can be used, ranging from one participant in case study research through to 60 participants in large interview studies. Sim et al. (2018) conclude that a sample size is dependent on the context of the study and should be realised once saturation is known via an iterative process of researcher reflection.

The participants were community-based social workers with a social work qualification with at least five years of practice experience since 2009 in New Zealand. Five years of experience gave assurance that participants would have a broad range of accounts to draw on. Community-based social workers were chosen as they have experience in working with families in a supportive manner. Arguably, they also have more freedom to advocate against social injustices than statutory social workers. The sample purposefully excluded statutory child protection social workers, but given the contemporary media narratives, the ability of statutory child protection social workers to advocate for children and their families would have been of significant interest. However, Leece and Leece (2011) note that statutory organisations have enough institutional power that limits the ability of social workers to advocate for systemic social change. There was also the issue that the nature of employment agreements would have limited their ability to participate openly in the research.

Participants were volunteers recruited using the ANZASW's Research Participation Invitation system. The advertisement (Appendix A) was published on the ANZASW website and sent to ANZASW

members via the weekly e-newsletter. The advertisement included details of requirements for the participants. Interested participants then contacted the researcher via the supplied email address in the advertisement. An Information Sheet (Appendix B) and the Consent Form (Appendix C) were given to potential participants who responded to the advertisement. Agreement to conduct an interview (in person or via Zoom) was reached once the participants confirmed their willingness to proceed. The interviews started in February 2020 and ended at the beginning of March 2020. Recruitment continued until there were eight participants who met the criteria. Participants signed the Consent Form prior to the interview and decided upon a pseudonym for use in the research report. Participants had the ability to ask questions about the research prior to signing the consent form.

Semi-structured Interviews

The research data was collected via semi-structured interviews once participant recruitment ended. As Carey (2013) notes, interviews with participants are suitable when wanting to draw out lived experiences with significant amounts of detail to provide a richness of data. Zoom was used to conduct face to face interviews at a time chosen by each participant for their convenience. Online interviews are increasingly common, more inclusive, and are a viable alternative to conventional qualitative approaches (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Seymour, 2001). In person interviews were not conducted due to impractical driving distances. Prior to the start of an interview, the research purpose was discussed with the participant and there was confirmation that the signed consent had been received from the participant. Any questions that the participants had were answered. Each interview lasted between 1 – 1½ hours and the Zoom recording feature captured the interview audio.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to produce meaning and descriptions of experiences of the social world and were consistent with the exploratory approach methodology. Brinkmann (2014) notes that researchers should consider how they can best conduct the interview according to the experience and research issue. The researcher also should be comfortable with being able to lead the interview in a planned path, but also allow for contradictions and digressions to come forth. It is the contradictions and unplanned dialogue that can reveal the internal conflicts hitherto unrevealed by the participant. These contradictions and unforeseen opportunities were possible in part simply by the interviews being one-on-one, which created a sense of confidentiality, and an opportunity to develop a trusting relationship. In creating that positive engagement, the researcher was considerate of the power imbalance that may have been present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The semi-structured approach often reveals the motivation of the researcher and therefore the researcher required reflexivity to consider the inherent power and control issues (Brinkmann, 2014).[23]

The four goals of the study and the findings from the literature review guided the development of the interview schedule (Appendix D). Sandelowski (2000) suggests that semi-structured interviews provide enough guidance to ensure the topic under research is explored thoroughly by the researcher and provides the necessary flexibility for the participant to engage unrestricted in the storytelling process. Another advantage of the interview method is to enable a responsive and flexible dialogue with the participant, recognising they are the expert in the discussion. Patton (2015) notes that interviews should be designed from the belief that the participants have thoughts, feelings, and intentions arising from a perspective that can be difficult to observe. As such, the questions were a combination of experiential (to understand what a person does or has done) and opinion questions (to understand what the participant thinks about an issue or experience) (Patton, 2015). The questions were developed to be general enough to ensure that the participant had freedom to reveal meaning to their experiences. Neither should the researcher overcompensate for this by being too relaxed, risking the interview turning into a conversation, which would likely to produce little of value (Carey, 2012). While the questions were open-ended, there was still a need for the answers to be situated in context or time to allow for the participant to ascribe context to the meaning (Creswell, 2013). Given the nature of the research, it was necessary for the participants to describe their understanding of political ideologies. When included in open-ended question schedules, theory-based questions need to be explicitly tied to the research topic (Galletta, 2013).

Thematic Analysis

The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was thematically analysed. Thematic analysis is a term used to encompass a wide range of approaches that are dependent on the research paradigm (Clarke & Braun, 2018). With its focus on experiences and meanings of participants' experiences, the realist social constructionist approach of this research is a valid framework used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). Additionally, thematic analysis is consistent with the realist epistemological position (that meaning is created in the transactions between researcher and participant) and congruent with the inductive nature of exploratory research (Floersch et al., 2010; Galletta, 2013; Stebbins, 2001). Clarke and Braun (2017) note the inductive method of thematic analysis is preferable when the research is data centred while seeking to

[23] A practical example of reflexivity is discussed in the ethical considerations section later in this chapter.

understand the experiences of participants. In turn, the examination, construction, and refinement of themes in the middle phases of thematic analysis was an inductive process (Patton, 2015). This involves analysing the richness of data from the interviews to uncover patterns and relationships between individual narratives. While it can be used to describe and summarise experiences, the usefulness of thematic analysis is the development from a summary into an interpretation of what the data means. Furthermore, given this analytical strategy is compatible with macro social constructionism, thematic analysis was comfortably used as it builds on researcher subjectivity as a strength in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). [24]

Clarke and Braun (2017) classify the range of thematic strategies into three schools. The first is an approach that aligns with a realist orientation and has a structured approach to ensure coding has been accurately completed. The second approach has an organic development of codes and themes. The third approach is a combination of the first two, with the structured approach joining to the relativist orientation. This research followed the second school, with the researcher as an active participant. There are six phases within thematic analysis used (Braun & Clarke, 2006); (1) the researcher must become familiar with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) uncovering themes, (4) those themes are reviewed, (5) the themes are further defined and then named, (6) the report is then produced.

The first step saw the researcher becoming familiar with the data. This occurred in several ways. The researcher's reflections and initial thoughts of the interview were written down as field notes to provide context immediately after the interview of each participant. The researcher then transcribed the interview dialogue. The transcription of the interviews by the researcher was another opportunity to have knowledge of the data set. Once completed, the participants received the transcriptions for their review, and they recommended edits for accuracy of meaning and trustworthiness before progressing through to data analysis. The participants did not suggest any changes of significance.

The second phase created the initial codes obtained from the data. Clarke & Braun (2017) explain that the researcher's ability to observe interesting features within the data is important in generating the codes. However, at this stage is it very important to respect the stories of the participants rather than abruptly searching for codes and themes, as there is a concern that this could

[24] Whereby realist social constructionism acknowledges that language constructs knowledge and is subjective.

change the meaning of the experiences of the participants (Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019). This inductive process required the researcher to search the data for common words or phrases. In part, this process was aided by the interview questions being developed from the research aim and goals. The participants' views about social injustice, work experiences, and examples of advocacy brought forward the initial codes. Some examples of these codes were: (a) unfair society, (b) professional blaming, (c) empathetic attitudes, (d) rules were necessary, and (e) systemic advocacy.

The themes were uncovered and refined as an iterative process. Each theme had a unique concept that bound the codes, for example the theme of *concerns about labels* was developed from codes of (a) labels are from the government, (b) labels are opinions, (c) opinions are personal experiences and (d) decisions should not be based on opinions. The researcher was careful to ensure that the themes were not a collection of summaries to questions, commonly seen in reports that employ thematic analysis methods. Instead, themes formed from the researcher's understanding of emerging patterns within the data to understand structural issues and sociocultural situations that individuals bring forth in their story telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). Four main themes were identified within the data sets, which are: (a) stigma and impact of poverty, (b) culture of efficiency and risk management, (c) the role of advocacy, and (d) visions for the future.

The final stage of the analysis was the interpretation of the results in a report. Thematic analysis ensures the researcher can provide the reader with an accessible way to consider the findings. It can provide a summary for the identification of commonalities and differences across data sets and can produce thick description of that database (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Social constructionism aids this by emphasising perspectives and subjective meaning in the development of knowledge. This realist approach meant that the participants' experiences of power dynamics, and their personal meaning of discourses, were presented in the context of their work environment and wider New Zealand society. The themes and findings generated from the data are discussed in the following chapter.

Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the critical role of ethical practice across all stages of the research. The researcher read and considered how Massey University's Code of Ethical Conduct of Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (2017) ("the Code") would apply to this research. An application for ethical approval was made to the Massey University Human Ethics

Committee in October 2019, and subsequently approved by the Human Ethics Southern B Committee in November 2019 as Application 19/48 (a copy of the approval letter is attached as Appendix E). The ethical approval process ensured proper consideration about participant confidentiality and informed consent. More broadly, the Code sets out key ethical considerations that informed the adequacy of the research, and considerations of researcher values (for example, "titiro, whakarongo… korero", which speaks to the importance of observing and listening and then talking when needed) which fulfil the Treaty of Waitangi principles and obligations (Massey University, 2017). It also ensured the identification and engagement of an advisor who was competent to provide advice to assure the mana of Māori was respected.

Brinkmann (2014) cautions about the potential conceit that is part of qualitative research, where researchers see themselves as inherently good because of the empowerment of the participant in sharing their voice and accepting the subjective view as valid. This view can blind the researcher to ethical challenges that are inherent in qualitative research. Throughout the research process due consideration was taken to address confidentiality issues and the promotion of the participants' rights (including ensuring informed consent was provided). Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) encourage researchers to be vigilant when working within a social constructionist paradigm, which sees the researcher as being an active co-contributor in pursuit of an agenda. This reflexivity ensured the identification of ethical issues throughout the process and during the interviews. No issues arose that needed to be addressed.

At the time of the study, the researcher was employed in a senior role in Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children and thus there was potential for conflicts of interest. None of the potential participants were known to the researcher, however there were several occasions with two participants where there was conflict of interest. There were several moments when reflexivity was required when participants (who were unaware of my employment) were quite critical of the statutory child protection agency. As the role of researcher, it was important to allow these accounts to be expressed, and therefore it was important to be constantly mindful of role clarity. At no point did the researcher engage in any defence of the statutory child protection agency, but rather there was encouragement for the participants to recall their experiences. As a registered social worker and member of ANZASW the researcher also had respective code of conduct considerations around integrity and behaviour, including the requirement of behaving responsibly when conducting research

(Social Workers Registration Board, 2016), and to engage in manaakitanga is a safe way (ANZASW, 2019).[25]

The participants received a copy of the Information Sheet (Appendix B) which set out the research details and their rights. These included the rights to decline any question and to withdraw from the study up until the research report was submitted. It also detailed that all identifiable information was anonymised, and pseudonyms were used due to the small size of the social work community. Upon reading the Information Sheet, the participants advised of their agreement to engage in the interview and a signed Consent Form (Appendix C) was delivered (and reviewed once more, along with the purpose of the research) at the beginning of the interview. Given the nature of the research, there was very low risk of harm to the participants. The individual interviews and anonymisation of identities ensured no damage to reputation or relationships. A copy of the final research report was offered to each participant for their own information.

Limitations of the Study

This subject is worthy of study and of interest to others, given the need for social workers to meet their ethical obligations, nonetheless the methodological design of this study has several limitations. The small sample size limits generalisability, however replicating the study is possible even though the same findings across a different sample would be difficult given the subjective nature of the topic under study. Social constructionist research welcomes the subjective nature as a path to a richer understanding of the issue, and is not concerned with generalisability (Patton, 2015). That noted, external validity is possible as replication is achievable if the target population is similar to the study sample, and within similar context. This degree of similarity strengthens the claim of generalisability (Cor, 2016).

Focused engagement on the experiences most relevant to the study and spending the appropriate length of time with participants achieved trustworthiness of the data. In addition to establishing trustworthiness through observation and engagement, four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) strengthen the credibility of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Even a sample size of one can be transferable if the data analysis results in concepts or themes that have relevance to other contexts or shared experiences of social workers (Gioia et al.,

[25] Manaakitanga, as defined by the ANZASW as the process how social workers "act towards others with respect, kindness and compassion" (ANZASW, 2019, p. 11).

2012). Research credibility and dependability establishes the rigour of exploratory inquiry. Ensuring an accurate impression of the social workers' experiences strengthened the credibility and confirmability of the data. Ensuring that the research can be replicated to add to the emerging patterns brought forward increased the dependability of the research (Stebbins, 2001).

Summary

The research was completed within the macro school of social constructionism, which accepts that there is a general concept of reality. This version of social constructionism allows for social injustices to be analysed, but likewise there is a corresponding acceptance that the capacity of individuals to bring about change is limited. The exploratory approach values the opportunities to consider the subjective experiences that the researcher and participant bring. It is an approach that seeks to gain understanding of experiences and is very useful in complex situations, such as why social workers appear to not be fulfilling their ethical responsibilities around advocacy. This required reflexivity by the researcher, particularly so in this research where the researcher has a strong interest in advocacy and social injustice. This was done through the data collection process too, with interviews in a social constructionist conception producing co-constructed accounts of what is real. These accounts were analysed via thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's six-step method to form themes present across the database. Again, as was needed when considering the impact that social constructionism will have on this research, reflexivity was continually employed by the researcher to ensure data was not mismanaged in the development of themes in this inductive process. The research findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Results

This chapter presents the data from the semi-structured interviews. The social constructionism framework that guided this research recognised that participant narratives as experiences of real social injustices situating their experiences as social workers. Having implemented the data analysis methods described in the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into the themes that emerged from the data. The four main themes identified within the data sets compliment the four research objectives due to the construction of the semi-structured interview schedule alongside the goals of the research. The themes are: (a) stigma and impact of poverty, (b) culture of efficiency and risk management, (c) the role of advocacy, and (d) visions for the future. The goals of the study were to:

1. Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability.
2. Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice.
3. Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates.
4. Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

Participants

Eight participants were interviewed for this research. They lived in various cities and towns throughout New Zealand. The geographical variations and diverse experiences contributed a richness of perspectives:

1. Hinetau had been a social worker for the last ten years. She has worked primarily in the community setting providing support to children.
2. Anne worked as a social worker under a community care model. She had been a social worker for about 15 years and worked primarily within the community organising social supports.
3. Jodie worked as a social worker for children and families for more than seven years.
4. Helena had been a social worker for many years. She had worked as a social worker for foster parents, families having experienced harmful sexual behaviour, and the mental health sector.
5. Ida worked for a family support service, previously working in statutory child protection social work, and as a hospital social worker. She had been working as a social worker for 30 years.

6. Robyn had provided advocacy and support for over 15 years as a social worker in the disability sector.
7. Elizabeth had worked as a social worker for the past 30 years. She had experience working as a community, health, and mental health social worker.
8. Amy had been working as a social worker for the past 15 years, primarily in the family harm field.

Social Worker Awareness of Structural Injustice

Participants unanimously agreed that New Zealand was not a fair place to live. Jodie believed that those who did believe New Zealand was fair, "[must] have a nice, comfortable, white, middle-class lifestyle". Elizabeth situated these within the policy changes of the 1990s which reflected the neoliberal reforms:

> *A fair place to live? I think that disappeared, if it really existed, quite some time ago. I certainly saw a marked change across the 1990s after the Employment Contracts Act, and various other things that happened. Certainly, now there's such a marked gap between, in wealth, but also around people's accessibility around information and knowledge.*

Jodie and Helena also discussed the socio-economic disparities they have encountered. They noted issues such as racism, quality education, mental health issues, and economic opportunities.

Three participants specifically brought up access to social supports as a reason why New Zealand was not a fair place to live. Ida recalled that in her earlier years, "the community rallied around and looked after those [impoverished] families", so there was never any difference between the "haves" and "have-nots". Now, however, the services for families in need were inadequate. Jodie simply contended that, "the services that we've got provision for in [city] are rubbish". Robyn noted that the societal unfairness would continue because it was not, "an even playing field for all people. Because the people who are marginalised don't get the resources, for whatever reason they might be marginalised". These accounts demonstrate that the participants were aware of the need for social advocacy.

All participants were readily able to discuss the causes of poverty and how living in impoverished homes impacted on parents' abilities to care for their tamariki. Most participants talked

about intergenerational cycles of poverty and how it gave rise to the lack of educational, social, and employment opportunities, and the limit of human potential that poverty caused. Amy recalled her experiences of the overwhelming effects of poverty on the families she worked with, "they've had one shit thing after another shit thing happen to them and they can't find their feet". Robyn commented on the reality that, "some of it is luck how you were born. If you're born into an impoverished family, it's very difficult". Elizabeth unpacked what that meant:

> *A lot of families are locked into [poverty], because now it's several generations, so it's, "this is the way it is and there's nothing I can do about it, I'll get by and survive on the benefit or do some seasonal work".*

Anne agreed with Elizabeth, noting that the intergenerational nature of poverty meant that families could not imagine a life without poverty: "The life skills that you learn, and the modelling you have… with people who are very poor, you don't, they don't ever have those kinds of aspirations". Participants regularly talked about the emotional strain of living in an impoverished situation. Ida spoke of "a sense of hopelessness, a sense of discrimination, not being listened to, being judged". Amy talked about "the phenomenal emotional distress of, and the worry, and the mental anguish", with Elizabeth noting that, "people start to operate from a place of fear rather than a place of security".

Participants also talked about their own distress from working with impoverished clients. Jodie talked about the emotional difficulty she felt in trying to have families reconsider choices which would have compounded their situation. These concerns about impoverishment were also reflected at a personal level, too: "myself and my partner have fulltime work. We both get paid well. However, we haven't climbed the ladder, so how can people that get nothing step up a step?" (Hinetau). Most participants demonstrated various aspects of empathy. Anne and Jodie acknowledged that they had experienced times when they had made poor financial or behavioural choices. Amy offered insight into how families could make counterproductive choices:

> *I can do that [be relentless] on behalf of somebody else 'cause I have righteous anger behind me, but when it's for myself and I'm being told "no, you're not really worth it, nah, that was your own fault anyway", of course you get dejected and you give up.*

Robyn thought that people ought not to go into poverty, even if people "made foolish decisions and lost their wealth".

As has been shown, the participants could easily articulate their experiences of working in impoverished homes. They saw poverty as a largely faultless issue, and often one that families were born into, bred by despair and hopelessness.

Societal Stigma

Discussions about the role of society in supporting impoverished homes raised three perspectives. There are those in society who would, and have, supported impoverished homes. Secondly, there are those that simply do not care. Then, there are those that blame people for being in poverty. Given that participants are part of society they were asked to share views about how society perceives poverty. In doing so, they demonstrated how they also saw the issue of poverty. Ida provided an overview of this range of perspectives:

> *A lot of people just bury their head in the sand and just say they don't want to get involved… there's a section of society that would rather ignore it than do anything about it, and there's a section of society that doesn't believe it.*

Robyn explained that due to the fragmentation of communities into individual homes, "the whole fabric of New Zealand has changed over many years". She believed that New Zealand had suffered because there is now less tolerance of people and people had become quick to blame less fortunate people. Helena was concerned that general society view impoverished families as, "as not being worthy and they're being brushed with this idea that they're just not trying". Elizabeth shared Robyn's concerns that the societal changes towards those living in poverty had occurred at a fundamental level: "even in our conversations in the community. I think there's a really big conversation about blaming people who are poor, that it's their fault… someone always blames someone. Then none of that actually makes any difference, it's just people blaming people".

The propagation of the othering discourse in the media was raised by two of the participants. Elizabeth saw that "it's kind of rampant in the media, so there's that discourse out in our communities that people ought to blame". Robyn was also mindful of this unfairness:

> *There is a general dialogue about labelling people, like the way solo parents are labelled when things go wrong. Then beneficiaries are targeted. I think the media too should be held to account for the way they portray certain groups of people in the media.*

Several participants commented in general about their concern of the level of societal apathy. Amy offered the view that, "unless people who are okay, understand, have some kind of concept of the [dysfunction] of the system, they're not going to be able to see it". Ida cautioned that, due to a level of disinterest, "people do [discriminate]". Conversely, Jodie hoped that people would be more supportive of people in impoverished situations but was concerned this would not eventuate because of the popular view that "everyone in New Zealand is treated equal, we get all the same chances".

Societal stigmatisation occurs to such an extent that it even impacts on social worker practice. While this was not outwardly commented on by the participants their narratives displayed this issue. Elizabeth was the only participant who thought that the social work profession had an engrained blaming discourse:

> *I think people got really categorised and judged a lot, I'm going to say even by social workers… I certainly saw in practice, social workers judging families who were deemed at risk. Risk was sometimes based on poverty, rather than something in reality that was happening in the dynamic of that family.*

This view was seen in the comments of two other participants, whose comments reflected the view of some families as being responsible for their circumstances. Hinetau shared her thoughts about a challenging family she had worked with:

> *They cry poverty and yet when I do my investigations, they've been at the pub for three days, or a party for three days, and the kids haven't had lunch. That sort of thing pisses me off a little bit. Then they come along and, "oh, I'm broke, can you get me a food grant"? I get really angry… this PC [political correctness], I'm over it, I'd love to say, "actually no, you can go without"… mum's got a new pair of Nikes, and the kids are going to school with no shoes. That pisses me off.*

Accompanying the blame narratives within their responses, the participants noticed the presence of concerning attitudes and stigma prevalent in other helping professions. The provision of support appeared to be a common complaint by the participants. Anne spoke of her concerns when, "you have to listen to people saying, 'oh my god, why doesn't she just do some budgeting' or whatever it is. It's like [the cause of poverty], well beyond that". Several participants also recalled how professionals limited their efforts for undeserving families. Hinetau believed that the referral process,

where the professional sets out whānau needs without any of their input, helped to create judgement even before meeting clients. Helena noted that, "all those interagency type meetings… they described this family, 'haven't really worked hard enough, haven't tried hard enough to change their situation, and so don't put any time into that family. Don't bother meeting with that family'". Ida recounted, "they haven't really done anything for the family, other than they make judgements on them. They say, 'she's a useless mother, she's got an alcohol problem'". Poverty was raised as a specific reason for this: "there is blame of people who are poor… organisations just go, 'oh, it's them, they're the hard to reach, the 10% that no one can do anything about'" (Elizabeth). These accounts clearly establish that participants understood how their shared clients experienced othering from their professional colleagues.

This section set out the participants' experiences of othering in society. It provides accounts of empathic attitudes towards impoverished homes yet revealed othering attitudes by some social workers at the same time. Despite being largely unable to see it in themselves, the participants were able to reveal their concerns about othering behaviour by other professionals.

Social Worker Understanding of Ideology and Neoliberalism

Half of the participants believed that understanding ideology was necessary as part of their work. Robyn's view compared the nexus of the two: "it's essential. If you don't understand the structure of society and how people are affected by decisions, which are above us, how can you play the game"? Hinetau saw the importance but said, "however I personally have not got the time, I don't take the time to understand it". That noted, while Hinetau had this view, her general discourse demonstrated an analysis premised on ideological foundations. Elizabeth's position had changed over her career as a response to her experiences:

> *In my early years, that's very much where I came from. I suppose in my later years… it shifted for me, in terms of a practical day-to-day focus… because I had given up that anything is going to change enough politically that it's going to actually make a difference here. I don't think it's going to come through a political, a government, or anything. That's where I'd got to.*

The sense of disenfranchisement expressed by Elizabeth and Hinetau meant that only two of the participants expressed unambiguous value towards understanding ideology. The other half of the

participants expressed little value in understanding ideology. Each participant offered different rationales for their position. Ida stated that, "I don't like a term for something. It all becomes very fashionable. To me, just say how it is". Jodie thought, "they're [political ideologies] all pretty much the same if you ask me. I like to think they're different, but on the ground, I don't see it".

All the participants did acknowledge they had heard of neoliberalism as a governing ideology. Of the participants that made a link between the importance of understanding ideology and how it may influence their advocacy, very few were able to describe what neoliberalism was. Jodie, who was able to describe the basic tenants of neoliberalism, offered experience-based criticism of the usefulness in understanding it:

> *People may know neoliberalism and they think, "we don't want that so will vote Labour". But really, how are things different? You hear all those changes coming, then you hear how things are spent, and yet on the frontline nothing's changed.*

It was surprising that only one of the participants (Robyn) expressed value in understanding political ideologies as part of their work and could demonstrate a working knowledge of neoliberalism. That noted, all the participants expressed views that suggested they knew neoliberalism to be of concern.

As discussed in the literature review, neoliberalism gives priority to identifying people believed to be at risk or vulnerable as a way to ensure efficient fiscal management. When asked about risk and vulnerability labels, half of the participants expressed clear opinions against the usefulness or appropriateness of these terms. Anne preferred to ignore these labels and believed it was important that, "as a social worker you try not to imbue a judgement into that, and I much prefer a strengths and deficits kind of analysis". She noted that the notion of risk was, "a pervasive culture, the culture of risk… it's flowed on into social work". Other perspectives included a link back to societal blame:

> *It speaks of the other… We class somebody else who's not with us, as vulnerable or at risk. It makes us feel better. I'm not a fan of the term. It's comfortable for some people to think that people who are in poverty are there by their own fault, or their own misdeeds, or their own doings: "I'm up here doing well because I'm a hard worker, so I deserve to be here"… maybe it's just too confronting to think, "wow, could be me" (Jodie).*

Agreeing with Jodie, Elizabeth explained that for her:

> *Immediately it was like a labelling and I remember being really concerned about that as it arose in our systems. My concern was that people get labelled and then really stuck with that and blamed for the circumstances they were in (Elizabeth).*

Helena, talking about the subjective nature of what at risk and vulnerable meant (and touching on a social constructionist perspective), offered the following insight:

> *If you look at disability, say it's socially constructed. If the world was constructed for people who had no legs, what would the world be like? Door handles would be lower, and if we all agree that was okay, that would become the normal, wouldn't it? If you apply that to vulnerability and risk and families, if it was agreed that anyone had a tattoo was at risk of damaging the child or whatever… they would become the new normal.*

Two participants expressed that, while hearing at risk and vulnerable as classification terms, they had not considered what that might mean for their practice. Another two participants accepted that the terms were necessary. Ida noted that, "I don't like labels per se, but I think there are some very vulnerable families and very at-risk families". Hinetau accepted the labels and differentiated between the two: "there's a good percentage at risk. The vulnerability is a choice of the family. You're putting yourself or your kids in vulnerable situations. You know where you should and should not be".

The participants were able to recognise that these labels had changed the way support was offered to people in need. Several participants saw it as a bureaucratic organising tool. Hinetau and Anne each mentioned that risk had been used by the government to divide social work into different tiers of complexity and funding. Helena suggested it was a flawed bureaucratic process:

> *It's finding a way to be accountable for the strange work of the social worker, because we do strange work. It's very hard to say how much of it is going to go into helping a family. You can't just pinpoint it, it's not like making a bike… an accountant will say, "and this is how much we can add to it to make a profit". You can't do that with social work, you just can't do it.*

In summary participants' understandings of neoliberalism were instinctively cautious, and half of the participants could expand on this when discussing risk and vulnerability labels. The other half of the participants did not express any concern about these labels or the impact on their practice.

Culture of Efficiency and Risk Management

The literature review revealed that neoliberalism requires services to be operated as efficiently as possible, which in part has given rise to the labels of risk and vulnerability. This section explores participants' experiences of the culture of efficiency and risk within the context of their social work practice. These narratives highlight the creep of bureaucracy into social work, experiences of poor management, and how support managers were able to foster social work advocacy.

Bureaucracy in Social Work

All the participants believed that the nature of their practice had greater levels of bureaucratic requirements than at the start of their careers These issues included increased administrative work, a focus on contractual priorities, increased compliance, and more control by New Zealand's statutory child protection agency. Hinetau succinctly reflected her view that, "unfortunately paperwork has taken priority over people, so the [greater] percentage is behind the desk". Other participants raised issues about the contracting requirements now part of their daily work. Anne noted that:

> *The Ministry… set your priorities for what, how much funding goes to [programme]. So that dictates how many staff can be employed in that role. That dictates the kind of accountability that the [programme] people have. It also dictates, every single client gets asked, "so you need [programme] support?" It's really pervasive.*

Helena expressed frustration about the increased compliance issues with the contract requirements:

> *We're supposed to be getting people to engage, because if people don't engage, they're not going to change… getting them to tick boxes? I've never convinced a murderer to give up their murdering ways by getting them to tick boxes.*

With the increased bureaucracy some of the participants expressed concern about accountability. Helena reflected that, "it's very hard to argue against what's popular, because you

become that radical person". Amy acknowledged that she had performed actions that she did not necessarily believe in, "to protect my own ass". Hinetau had a similar view, commenting that, "this paper trail of nothing that takes the whole day… it's a matter of having to keep myself safe, rather than fighting against it". In contrast, Ida spoke of occasions where she refused to complete tasks that she did not think were right for her clients, and in one account this resulted in, "a supervisor actually chased me through the corridor saying, 'you come back here, and you do as you're told, I'm ordering you to do that!'".

This raised questions about how managers of these workplaces negotiated the efficiency and risk requirements while maintaining fidelity to the agency vision and goals, which will now be explored.

Impact of New Public Management on Social Work

When discussing how management could enhance their advocacy, there was a consensus that poor management could impact on this role. Anne raised her concerns that her managers were not, "willing to listen, they don't always understand… but I feel I've raised it". One participant recognised the importance of the social worker remaining vigilant about potential ethical concerns:

> *Some get absorbed in fighting against and advocating within the organisation… some give up, some get acculturated into the organisational and systemic values and principles. Some move on or move a lot to try and find that place where they can actually do the work, they really want to make the difference that they want to make (Elizabeth).*

While participants could easily speak of poor management experiences, all the participants were able to recall at least one instance of a supportive manager. In the same vein that poor management hindered their advocacy abilities, it was interesting to observe that supportive management encouraged advocacy. A shared experience was that of the workplace having the same outlook as the participant. Robyn considered that she was, "very fortunate, the mission and values of the organisation fit with mine, very well". Amy talked of, "a real culture of advocacy… it had that sort of slightly renegade 'two women in a truck and off you go'… incredible and it felt compatible with what I believed". Jodie spoke of a manager who, "experiences the same frustrations we do… she's going to try and advocate for us, advocating for our families". Helena recalled a manager that had shared values around working in the community to effect change: "She was unique, and I knew that

at the time and I always thought, 'take that', because it's not going to last forever". Hinetau reflected that, "I have a manager who is amazing. We have a Māori kaupapa, but he actually lives it: no worries, there's no feeling of guilt, there's no feeling of awkwardness". Elizabeth commented that the alignment of values was so important that she,

> *began to choose that organisation I worked with so that their values and principles of the organisation more aligned with mine… when I shifted to choosing who I'd work for, finding regional managers who are absolutely pragmatic… "what can we shift on our own culture to actually start to meet the needs of families more appropriately?"*

Participants also talked about the impact of external factors on their local workplaces which influenced their service's own agency to effect change. Hinetau raised the issue that the contracting of fixed-term agreements contributed to a sense that she could not build trust in relationships and programmes, as she was thinking that the contract would end and, "we're going to open it again in three years?". Jodie commented about the time her workplace made a submission during the Vulnerable Children Reforms. Within that submission, her workplace criticised the practices of Child, Youth and Family[26]: "Holy moly, the wrath of god fell down upon us! … It was all on. We need to be very mindful that a lot of our referrals come from them. They don't like it if we're getting toey with them… they have a big influence over our work". Two other participants provided comments suggesting that agency constraint is commonplace, and one resisted by social workers. Elizabeth talked about NGO managers openly talking about becoming disempowered from the contracting process, and thus not being able to assist their communities. Helena provided a stark example of this:

> *I had one manager who pulled me into her office, and she said, "You're not allowed to get any more of those families who have CYFS, Family Court, at all, you're not allowed them, they don't donate to our agency and therefore they're only a drain on it" (Helena)*.

From these results, management have often enabled or have been unable to address the culture of efficiency and risk management. This has placed social workers in situations that have conflicted with the social justice goal of social work. Overall, these results indicate that social workers have experienced an increasing drive for efficiency and mitigation of risk. There was also widespread

[26] Child, Youth and Family is former iteration of the statutory child protection agency now restructured and known as Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children.

experiences of supportive management that provided social workers with the space to work towards meeting the needs of their families.

The Role of Advocacy

This section presents the participants' views about New Zealand as a fair place to live, whether the participants worked outside of their agency guidelines if required to meet the needs of families, and narratives from participants' experiences advocating for their families. These results provide an opportunity to explore social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates, addressing the third goal of this study.

Willingness to Follow Agency Policies

Half of the participants recalled times when, to achieve a necessary outcome, they had actively breached workplace regulations. Three participants talked about manipulating funding requirements to achieve the desired outcome of better service support. They rationalised this behaviour as "not doing anything so terrible" (Amy), "innovative and taking initiative… nothing majorly illegal, just seeing a need" (Elizabeth), and "I would never do anything really wildly overt, but I'm a bit subversive at the edges" (Anne). Hinetau provided an example which was representative of many of the accounts: "I've actually removed myself from my role many a time… I've never met these whānau, I don't work with them, they've just come off the street, and they don't know what to do… I'll tell my boss later". Of these participants, none had suffered any consequences due to this behaviour. However, several participants did appreciate the risk involved in this behaviour. Amy noted, "I could get into all sorts of trouble, the way I break the rules sometimes, were I to get found out". Anne cautioned, "I wouldn't like anybody at work to know those things. I wouldn't be happy explicitly explaining those things".

The other half of the participants believed that following the rules was a necessary part of being safe. Ida thought that, "if the rules aren't working, then I'll point out that the rules aren't working, and that the rules need to change". Helena detailed a process where she would work through challenges with her external supervisor to ensure she maintained an ethical position while being able to work in an organisation. If that failed: "I'm there for a reason. I always say if it's easier, I'll just go back to flipping burgers. I would rather do that and sleep, than knowing I'm not working hard enough for a family. I mean that wholeheartedly".

The willingness to follow agency policies is a conscious choice for social workers. The accounts provided show that social workers understand that some agency policies so not align with their clients' best interests.

Advocacy

Participants described individual advocacy as a significant part of their social work experience. Ida was emphatic in saying, "you have to lobby, and you have to be heard". Robyn described it as a strength of hers, noting that even if, "I can't remove some barriers, what I can do is make sure that, if nothing else, I hear their voice. I'm acting on their voice, and I will stick up for their voice". There were numerous comments about the participants' individual advocacy. Hinetau talked about how often advocacy was about "those relationships with other social workers, counsellors… just greasing, heaps of greasing". Amy talked about "how many phone calls, how many letters, how many conversations with all these different supervisors and managers?". When asked questions around advocacy, a common response by participants focused on personal empowerment of families. Installing a sense of belief or hope was a common strategy. Hinetau noticed that in one case, "their self-confidence and self-worth started to grow… they started taking pride in themselves because they had a purpose". Robyn said that, "without hope, no one can move forward… if we can give hope and movement". Other participants commented: "the change needs to come from within. I think by encouraging them and highlighting the strengths that they've got… you support them in that, and you point them in the right direction" (Ida). For Elizabeth it was about, "their own kind of self-respect, self-esteem, and what was possible for them... so really changing their own view of their circumstance". Jodie expressed a similar view: "I communicated to her that I believed in her. Restoring some hope… finding ways for her to get herself out of this situation".

There were examples of advocacy for the rights of the client against the face of professional othering. Robyn noted that, "it's very interesting how you get in a room with some professionals and they know best and that imbalance of power, I think is where I can sit and stay true to this individual, whose voice should be paramount". Helena also provided an example of this advocacy, and suggested the reason for the problem:

> *I witnessed three agencies blaming family for the trouble they're having. For the life of me I couldn't understand what they were saying. I was saying, "As far as I can understand about this family, the trouble started 15 years ago, when dad had an injury at work and*

lost his job. So, I'm not quite sure how you can turn the victim into the problem, especially when it's not his fault". So that's certainly how the system sees it and the people who are quickly trying to get through their clients; "assess, treat, discharge fast, cause no trouble, don't notice anything".

Participants also commented about the utility of micro and macro advocacy.[27] Anne believed that, "it is the skill set of social workers to understand [micro and macro advocacy]. It is a responsibility of both ends of it". Jodie articulated a key principle of social work, "when you look at the situation, you assess it across the systems lens… who plays what role in where this person is". Amy reflected on the utility of social work advocacy at the micro and macro levels. For her, making change at an individual level was meaningful (but incomplete):

I went from being a grassroots activist shouting outside parliament, and locking myself to things, and having never seen anything change, and having everyone felt a bit like everyone hates you, because you're a pain in the ass. To being at [workplace] where I could see the change that I was making to that one family, one at a time... but nothing was going to change in the world, and all my energy was going to that. I don't know, they're both a bit shit. With the first one I had somewhere for the anger, but I never got a sense of anything changing. With this, I could see a whole lot of change, but I wasn't doing anything about the overall injustice.

Comments were routinely made about having to negotiate within the participants' own workplace. Elizabeth expressed frustration that, "so often it was advocating for communities, advocating for families, within your own organisation to access resources or to shift people's, other professionals, thinking around that family or around their interventions". That level of frustration, as described by Amy, was shared within other aspects of advocacy too. Hinetau spoke about having to spend time being creative in finding resources:

[27] Abramovitz & Sherraden (2016) define this split in social work advocacy as case (micro) and cause (macro) advocacy. Others (for example, Wilks, 2012) use different terminology to recognise this difference by referencing individual (micro) and social (macro) advocacy. Abramovitz and Serraden (2016) and Wilks (2012) each note that the wishes of clients need to be addressed at the same time as addressing the wider social injustice.

> *Then his volume [funding allocation] ran out. Where am I going to get the money to keep the mentor? Why isn't the service just there until they're ready to drop off? Why is everything limited to a time?... I'm counselling a child in the waiting time before she gets her counsellor! My job is done, but how can I walk away in the space of waiting? It's a waiting list, it's all about money!*

Two participants provided a warning to social workers about the challenge of being able to advocate for their clients:

> *the reality of stepping into a role in the organisation, the purpose of the organisation, the values and policies or organisation, don't actually call for working around social justice. They call for treating, treating families… it's about fixing them up because there's something wrong. A lot of social workers get so busy that they don't have that opportunity to step back and go, "oh, is my work actually making a difference in the bigger picture?" (Elizabeth).*

Where Elizabeth cautioned the need to find time for social workers to reflect on their level of advocacy, Helena believed advocacy was no longer a part of social work:

> *Advocacy for me seems to have disappeared off the shop floor. Which I find quite peculiar because I was attracted to social work from the beginning because of the ability to advocate and to teach self-advocacy to people, and now, here we are.*

The participants in this study all perceived themselves as agents of change and gave examples of their advocacy. Their experiences demonstrated that social workers need to be enabled by their workplace, and that this advocacy is common factor in working with other helping professions. Interestingly for participants the nature of the advocacy changes when working directly with families, with empowerment becoming a co-strategy. In summary, these results show that social workers readily identify advocacy as a significant aspect of the social work experience and provides insight into the role of advocacy in community-based social work.

A Vision for the Future

With respect to the last goal of this study, the participants were asked how their goals might address social injustice in New Zealand. The participants were prompted, using a "magic wand" scenario, to consider what they would like to see change in their practice or in New Zealand society. Reflecting the individual/social advocacy divide, half the participants raised systemic solutions and the other half focused on day-to-day issues. Despite the high level of concern about professional blaming, none of the participants discussed resolving that as an issue for their clients.

Several participants raised the issue of reconfiguring supports to be set at the community level rather than purchased from the government, for example Amy said: "I'd smash the state, and that's really clichéd and I don't even really know what that means… but I would like communities… where people don't drown, people don't go under". Other solutions offered were:

> *Local responses to housing so that somehow the government would empower local responses through local body and local government to provide social housing of a good standard that people could live in (Anne).*

> *Have transformative conversations with people. Because it's not about knowing more, or necessarily doing more, sometimes… if communities are resourced, they can make a massive difference. At the same time I'm saying that, government took funding out of a lot of services (Elizabeth).*

Participants thought that if the uninformed majority of New Zealand could understand poverty, then a more supportive society might emerge. Amy talked about people needing to have the opportunity to understand someone else's impoverishment. Elizabeth shared this view, "there is a lot more people who, if they did know, would want to make a difference and would contribute". Anne and Elizabeth each shared an example of how engaging local communities around poverty has created opportunities for community-based support:

> *It's been a real eye opener for those teams, they get as much out of it as the clients… they've often gone back and debriefed with the team leader and talked about how they hadn't realised what it was like for some people. They're always eager to get involved again… they're astonished to see how some of the other people live (Anne).*

I know that people have been sometimes shocked when I've shared things with them. They want to know, people fundamentally, actually want to make a difference for their people. People are in their worlds… people maybe don't want to know, but when they do know, they want to help, they want to have their communities work (Elizabeth).

While the "magic wand" scenario was used to imagine a solutions-focused answer, Amy felt concerned enough to offer a response that was couched in realism. Her response has been included as a grounding message, and one that reflects a deeper issue:

The only solutions involve completely burning ourselves out… it's individual rescuing behaviours or letting people drown… When we're too busy fighting for some kind of fairness in the day-to-day, we don't have time and energy to start the revolution, do we? Most of the people who'd like to be starting the revolution are just trying to pay their mortgage and keep their kids fed.

Another participant proposed that a centralised lobby group bear responsibility for systemic issues, and to provide support for the worry Amy expressed:

[we] should have members who keep them informed of what's going on, and they should lobby for change when they see things that are wrong… accountants do that, lawyers are supposed to do that, doctors are supposed to do that, why can't social workers do that? Architects do that, engineers do that, why aren't social workers doing that (Helena)?

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results from the participant interviews. The eight participants had consensus about poverty being a largely faultless concern, yet the wider society were blaming those in impoverished homes. Participants expressed concerns about the othering of clients by their professional colleagues, yet most participants were engaging (at various levels) in othering discourses too. In amongst the challenges of an increasingly bureaucratic environment, participants also told stories about clients being able to achieve successes arising from the participants' advocacy. In order to address structural inequality, most participants wanted decisions to be devolved to communities, and to instil hope and an attitude of self-reliance into clients. The next section presents a discussion of these findings and how they relate to the goals of the study.

Chapter Six: Opportunities for Social Worker Advocacy

This chapter explores how neoliberalism impacts social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. Using a social constructionist perspective, the chapter discusses how neoliberal social norms have influenced the participants' understanding of their role as advocates. It considers the consequences of the understanding social workers have of the subversive messaging of neoliberalism on their practice. An analysis then follows as to how social workers have engaged in othering practices and how othering practices have enveloped them from the wider social service sector. From there a discussion shows that social workers understand how compliance driven practice and management have restrained advocacy. Finally, this chapter presents a critique as to how the individualisation of social work practice has not diminished social workers' awareness of the need to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

Critical Insight Can Lead to Social Action

This section discusses the importance of social workers needing to understand neoliberalism to provide meaningful advocacy. It discusses the possibility that social workers did not express sufficient understanding of the invasive impacts of neoliberalism to such a degree that they can challenge the views of dominant interest groups. Secondly, this section identifies that for many social workers, while they can identify some issues with labelling, there is a need for ongoing reflexivity in terms of their own practice. Throughout the section it considers how insight can lead to social action.

There is a strong relationship between understanding neoliberalism and social action (Ferguson et al., 2018; Joseph, 2019; Payne, 2014; Russell, 2017; Spolander et al., 2016). Understanding ideology is important to inform practice, and understanding neoliberalism allows social workers to engage in social progress, if not social change (Payne, 2014). Social workers need to understand two aspects of social policy. First, a conceptual understanding of ideologies that form the basis of policies that direct social service provision. Secondly, social workers must understand the impact of neoliberalism on the welfare state (Joseph, 2019). There is also the concern that social workers are at risk of failing to fulfil their code of ethics by not publicly challenging and working against neoliberalism (Russell, 2017; Spolander et al., 2016). Social workers have the ability, by challenging injustice, to define whether they engage in social control or social care, and to work in a profession

that their clients deem worthy and relevant. Ferguson et al. go so far as to challenge social workers to decide, "which side are you on?" (2018, p. 158).

One unanticipated finding of this study was that only half of the participants saw utility in understanding the ideology of the government of the day. Some participants had difficulty in describing what the characteristics and impacts of neoliberalism might look like (though had previously articulated what consequences looked like when recalling experiences about working with impoverished families and noting that New Zealand was not a fair place to live for all). Some participants stated that differing ideologies were "all pretty much the same" (Jodie), or that differing ideologies were "fashionable" (Ida) without apparent meaning assigned to them, or that they needed to focus on "practical day-to-day" (Elizabeth) matters rather than believing ideologies affect community-level change. Only Elizabeth valued understanding ideology as a tool for social change, though this changed to favouring pragmatic and transactional advocacy (seen in her use of existing community relationships and resources to achieve realistic goals) as her experience increased. This social worker indifference or lack of value assigned to understanding neoliberalism can reinforce dominant social structures (Galbin, 2014). Duarte (2017) states that social workers must be capable of, and need to have the capacity, to reflect on their political ideology stance, and how it impacts their practice. With most of the participants unable to articulate the basic tenants of neoliberalism (and only half stated a view which valued the importance in understanding ideology as part of their work), the readiness of social workers to engage in Duarte's opinion would be of interest to further research.

Supporting a social constructionist view of the critical influence of context, neoliberalism has multiple definitions which cover a wide range of economic, political, and social approaches that are, to a certain extent, locally defined in its implementation (Eagleton-Pierce, 2016; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005; Swarts, 2013). In New Zealand, the Social Investment approach repackaged the practical application of neoliberalism.[28] Social service provision was reorganised to prioritise targeted support towards those predicted to be a future liability to public expenditure (Devereaux, 2016; Mintrom, 2017). Critics of this targeted approach towards those at risk and vulnerable argued that risk prediction was fundamentally flawed (Cullen, 2017; Deloitte & NZIER, 2016) and those identified people could be stigmatised as a result (Dare et al., 2014). At the same time as critics have raised concerns about the likelihood of stigmatisation, the use of at risk and vulnerable labels has had a

[28] As noted in the literature review on page 20, the National Party's adaptation of Social Investment is significantly different than the European models (specifically, the United Kingdom, Scandinavian, and continental Europe models). These versions align more similarly New Zealand's social development approach.

significant impact on social work practice. For social workers, the construction of language is context specific, therefore there is a significant need to understand what at risk and vulnerable labels mean in a neoliberal society (Burr, 2015).

Demonstrating some concern about neoliberalism, half of the participants believed that the use of at risk and vulnerable labels were inappropriate and saw them as a bureaucratic organising tool and as a contributor to the othering discourse. This finding aligns with Keddell's (2011; 2016) work which found social workers are resisting risk-based approaches and are continuing to apply child welfare principles to their practice decision-making. Helena was persuasive when contending that risk and vulnerability are not only subjective, but social constructs which are determined as harmful by those in power. Helena provided an apt anecdote to argue such a point by wondering what the world might look like if the world was built for people who had disabilities, rather than the able-bodied. In her view, risk and vulnerability were normal because society tells us that they are, which is a concern if the definition of risk is moveable. Here Helena illustrated a basic tenant of social constructionism about how language constructs, rather than describes the world around us (Galbin, 2014). Hence, as O'Brien (2010) calls for, there is a critical need for social workers to understand the genesis and rationale for the use of risk and vulnerable labels.

One of the issues that emerges from these findings is that social workers do have some level of knowledge to advocate against neoliberalism. As expressions of language define our world views and accounts, it is therefore a legitimate form of social action to challenge dominant language (Patton, 2015). As a starting point, social workers need to critically reflect on why the neoliberal labels hold so much more power in their everyday work than the language that participants used in their accounts of clients' experiences of poverty.[29] Such a position empowers social workers to engage in what Joseph (2019) and McCarten et al. (2018) describe as the critical need to challenge othering discourses in society (and within the helping professions) and to begin systemic change. As a result, recognising that half of the participants did not name neoliberal labels as priorities, there is an opportunity to increase levels of critical reflection so that social workers can head this call. Beddoe and Keddell (2016) argue for the deconstruction of social work students' belief systems as a result of them growing up in a neoliberal environment shaping their values and worldviews. Lukes (2005) discusses the insidious power that has entrenched neoliberalisation has also shaped many experienced social workers, not just students. It must stand, then, that experienced social workers also need to have their worldviews

[29] The next section discusses these participants' experiences.

deconstructed or have opportunities provided to reflect on their values. It is likely that other bodies (professional and education providers) and clinical/peer supervision will need to be used as mechanisms to challenge the subversive nature of neoliberalism.[30]

This section discussed how neoliberal discourses have affected social worker views about risk and vulnerability. While some social workers were able to recognise at risk and vulnerability labels as concerning, all but one was unable to locate these concerns within a conceptual understanding of neoliberalism. This creates concern about how meaningfully social workers are engaging in challenging the subversive messaging of neoliberalism. That noted, if social workers engage in enough supervision-led self-reflection, they have the agency to construct this meaning.

Social Worker and Societal Othering

Being necessary to contextualise the findings, it is important to note the participants had observed othering attitudes in the communities they work. This finding supports previous research into social attitudes which links othering discourses with social injustices (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018; Nielsen, 2017). All the participants said that the othering was inappropriate, however, much like the data within Humpage's (2011; 2018) research, there was divergence about the level of culpability New Zealanders ought to have for these views.[31] Some participants believed there was a level of callous apathy, and no level of education or awareness could shift the views of some community members. On the other hand, some participants were able to share remarkable stories of people becoming enlightened and wanting to help. These variations illustrate Galbin's (2014) description of how meaning-making occurs via sustained interactions that become habituated in relationships and ultimately institutionalised into society. The construction of new knowledge is only possible if people are willing to critique their habituated meanings.

The current study found that all participants demonstrated that they understood poverty to be a central part of their work and understood the connection between social injustices and structural causes. It is interesting to note that half of the participants in this study accepted the at risk and

[30] This is an important issue, and the concluding chapter discusses the implications.

[31] A reminder that othering is the result of what Lukes (2005) describes as the manipulation of the general population to ensure the continued neoliberal dominance as the governing ideology. As a result, a significant part of society views people living in impoverishment as less deserving than the "average" New Zealander, their situation being of their own making, and therefore they need to resolve these issues by themselves (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Hyslop & Keddell, 2018).

vulnerability labels as either necessary or had no cause for concern about these.[32] Turner (2002) states that there are several dangers with labels (albeit useful in organising the social world), including misuse and stigmatisation.[33] Thus, when the participants say they have no issue with these labels, they are engaging what Turner describes as dangerous social work. Turner argues that social workers have a responsibility to understand what the label means and determine the level, if any, that it applies to clients. Refusing or being unable to engage in this analysis can see social workers stereotyping clients based on labels premised on blame. That this study showed social workers accepted labelling of people as necessary was not necessarily unsurprising. This finding can have several explanations. It may simply be the product of Lukes' (2005) analysis of the third face of power, whereby the public understanding of issues has been manipulated to view people as stereotypes.[34] Another explanation could be that social workers are focused on micro level individual practice with the client in front of them, rather than considering wider implications (the challenge then shifts to education providers, professional associations, and supervisors to encourage greater reflection).

Social workers are citizens too, and they live within public opinion which is being subversively influenced by media discourses (Hackell, 2016). Social structures and power bases define the creation of language (in this case, labels) and are, done to act in the interests of those in power (Burr, 2015; Hibberd, 2005). The promotion of labels, thus removing individuality to create stereotypes, is a significant contributing factor in societal othering (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). This accords with Sawyers (2006), who states that the vulnerable and risk labels construct the individual as the problem, allowing the social and economic structures to be unchallenged. A consequence of the rise of othering discourses is that this discourse has influenced social workers. Even though the participants expressed empathetic responses to impoverished families, two of the participants' narratives demonstrated signs of othering discourses. For example, one participant expressed her frustrations at seeing parents putting themselves ahead of their children, and in expressing her (unmet) desire to refuse to help, she suggested that the rules requiring to support the parents were "politically correct". Elizabeth observed

[32] Here it is important to note that the Government defined at risk and vulnerable as circumstances that might impact on the wellbeing and safety of the individual. Tascón and Ife (2020) remind the reader that these definitions are Eurocentric constructs which deprioritise non-Western experiences and meanings around risk and vulnerability. It is beyond the scope of this research to analyse these issues, but it is important to be aware of this (and keeping in line with a social constructionist view of context, history, and social norms within the meaning-making process).

[33] Social constructionism notes the purposive use of labels to construct meaning, rather than a misappropriation of language (Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015), and that not critically assessing labels is dangerous in and of itself.

[34] Lukes' third face of power was discussed in the literature review on page 25.

othering discourses from social workers, confirming that othering by social workers is a widespread issue. Specifically, she spoke of seeing social workers assign a risk discourse on families due to being in impoverished homes, rather than any action or omission causing harm. The construction of impoverished families as being less deserving and to blame for their situation is a serious concern for social workers to resolve. That is difficult to do when what we understand to be true is based on societal influences, and interactions (Hibberd, 2005) in context where personal responsibility is a societal norm and othering is a part of that culture.

It was interesting to note that participants had experienced widespread othering of clients from professional colleagues in the course of their work. This supports the literature review which found that distress and othering behaviour by social workers mirrors other helping professions, including midwives, teachers, and nurses. Lipsky (2010) wrote about street-level bureaucrats preferring to work with some clients over others for three reasons: professional hostility, client worthiness, and likelihood of success.[35] All of these circumstances are present in the results of this research. When Helena recalled interagency meetings not bothering to support a family because they had not worked hard enough to change their situation, the professionals are displaying bias due to their own hostility. Biased behaviour is also present when professionals mirror societal othering, thus professionals make judgements about client worthiness to receive the support. Ida noted that professionals, "make all these judgements about the family", labelling the mother useless due to problematic alcohol use. Indeed, Lipsky noted that it was in the multi-agency setting which the moral worthiness of clients is determined. Which, as Ida noted was, "right the way through" the health system. The participants' accounts show that they understand how, from their relative positions of power, professionals construct their views of client worthiness, dignity, and utility. This is a critical matter for social workers, as social processes within their own networks are sustaining the language which reinforces othering discourses.

Neoliberalism has affected social workers, seen in the development of othering attitudes, and having to navigate the same attitudes during their work with other professionals. However, there are opportunities which arise from the participants' narratives. Their accounts of the causes of poverty and their experiences of working with impoverished situations demonstrated that social workers identify the structural causes of poverty, the loss of opportunities, and the lack of hope that can exist

[35] A reminder that Lipsky expanded his definition of street-level bureaucrats to include the staff of NGOs where "child protection policies of the state are represented to distraught parents by workers in private agencies" (Lipsky & Smith, 1993, p. 13).

in those homes. Within these accounts, the participants were able to demonstrate empathy about the devastating consequences of poverty and the emotional strain families endure. This recognition of the emotional impact included the participants recognising constant and phenomenal stress, mental anguish, hopelessness, and fear. This was expected, as it has been shown that experienced social workers are able to understand social justice issues in their practice (Lynch & Forde, 2016; McCarten et al., 2018).[36] This is further supported by research which found that prison staff with high levels of empathy focused on the client wellbeing and exercised greater discretion when applying organisational policies (Jensen & Pedersen, 2017).

The results show that social workers share an understanding of the experiences clients face. In part, despite the othering observed in the participants' own narratives, this understanding includes the experiences of othering engaged by other helping professions and society. This insight offers a way towards social action. Being mindful that we understand the world as a creation of the myriad of daily interactions with other people (Galbin, 2014), social workers have the capacity and opportunity to challenge this othering by their social service sector colleagues. Little change occurs when meaning is taken-for granted. These issues are deeply socialised, however a case-by-case approach, by challenging this interactive process, would still see a push back on this othering practice. This action is happening, as Elizabeth noted she advocated "to shift people's, other professionals, thinking around that family". Keddell (2016) has already highlighted the difficulty in this action. The author notes that seemingly rational actors have become situated actors within workplaces that enact neoliberal practices that are becoming increasingly focused on risk. Being critical of social norms and practices in the interagency meetings is where social work advocacy begins, at social work's own doorstep. This presents an opportunity to challenge social norms as part of a social worker's routine day, by engaging with their helping profession colleagues when they engage in othering behaviours.

The Impact of New Public Management on Social Work Advocacy

As mentioned in the literature review, a strong relationship exists between New Public Management (NPM) practices and increased compliance in the social service sector (Banks, 2011; Mitendorf & van Ewijk, 2019). Research has shown that this management approach prioritises obtaining measurable outcomes to achieve centrally set targets in the most cost-effective way possible (Aimers, 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Sawyers, 2016). In New Zealand, the Community Investment Strategy is the latest iteration of results-based contracts system that requires evidence

[36] Each participant was quite experienced, each having at least 15 years working in the social work field.

that services have achieved the Government's priorities.[37] Part of this approach included the controversial client segmentation and innovative intervention pillars within the Social Investment approach. Client segmentation was criticised for adding to the othering discourses, and the innovative intervention pillar further increased compliance (Dare et al., 2014; Destremau & Wilson, 2017). Overall, there have been several significant consequences of NPM, including the devaluing of local social justice goals with clients and the prioritisation of transactional work that collects the required data (Benjamin, 2008; Keevers et al., 2012). At the same time social work practice became increasingly transactional, NPM facilitated the introduction of risk-averse practice into social work (Oliver, 2013). Furthermore, this data collection work has the effect of social work practice becoming standardised in order to collect the required data, ultimately affecting the relationship between social workers and clients (Döbl & Ross, 2013; Onyx et al., 2010; Sawyers, 2016).

The results of the study show that social work is increasingly compliance driven, compelling the prioritisation of collecting data requirements, and a loss of control of local priorities. The participants' accounts about the move from local priorities to government goals corroborates the findings of Mosley (2012; 2013) and Levine (2009), which found a focus on maintaining contracts meant less representation of community interests. All the participants recognised that management and contract requirements had negatively impacted on their ability to advocate for their clients. This also accords with Levine's (2009) study which found social workers focused on reporting contract requirements at the expense of micro level social work advocacy. Several participants laughed in frustration at the ubiquitous term, 'data entry'. Helena's explanation of ticking boxes at the expense of engagement, or Anne noting the constant presence of needing to promote government-funded programmes to ensure continued funding of services, are real frustrations arising from compliance driven practice. The participant narratives demonstrate that, while each has their own lived experiences and perceptions, there is a level of critical awareness of the issues that Döbl & Ross (2013), Onyx et al. (2010), and Sawyers (2016) have found.

Some social workers were unable to resist these demands and felt it affected their engagement with clients, while others were able to consciously resist these demands (with greater or less success at times). Consistent with a social constructionist perspective Helena saw the need to

[37] The Ministry of Social Development implemented the Community Investment Strategy in 2015. The approach defined how social services contracted to deliver outcomes as set by the Government. The Government sought to avoid previous wasteful expenditure by using the targeted programmes to address specific needs, as enabled by the Social Investment approach (NZIER, 2016).

challenge existing norms that benefit the interests of those in power. She noted the power imbalance of contracts requiring social workers to fit their work with clients into predetermined contractual requirements for how many hours of engagement with a family was necessary to achieve the government's goal. However, Helena's personal account noted the complications of advocating against her observations: "it's very hard to argue against what's popular because you become the radical person. You become radicalised because you're not going with the group norm". This research revealed that critical awareness is, perhaps, at a level where social workers have enough awareness to challenge how the centralised, top-down, government goals are not the same goals as their clients. This study also found a time when the contracting process with the New Zealand statutory child protection agency produced coercive behaviour when social workers raised concerns about how the child protection agency engaged with shared clients. This was very clear in Jodie's narrative about working with the New Zealand statutory child protection agency. The coercion, from Jodie's perspective, was evident when she talked about needing to be careful about criticising their funding agency given the influence it had over her service's support. This finding further supports the position of Grey and Sedgwick (2015) and Grey et al. (2015), who conclude that NGOs felt silenced in their advocacy at the same time as being subject to increased regulation. Grey and Sedgwick and Grey et al. described the relationship between NGO and government as moving from engagement and partnership to increasing power and control. The literature review showed that NGO relationships with contracting mechanisms of the government focus on maintaining contracts and minimising any conflict to ensure continued funding (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Mosley, 2012; 2013, Onyx et al., 2010).

The results of this study illuminated that all individuals experienced serious concerns about compliance driven practice. There is a real opportunity for social workers to build upon this construction of knowledge and develop social action to serve the interests of clients, rather than those in power. Social worker accounts mirrored Keevers et al.'s concerns that these results-based contracts can be "overly simplistic, representational approaches to organizing that seek to make the world more controllable by taming the situated, emergent character of practicing social justice" (2012, p. 117). There is enough evidence from this study to suggest that there is potential, if these serious concerns of social workers are coalesced, for social workers to challenge the dominance of the social investment approach, or at least perhaps no longer willingly sustain it.[38] Above all else, the participants'

[38] The social investment approach (as opposed to the Social Investment programme) is now being operationalised by the new Labour Government under the Investing in Social Wellbeing banner (Office of the Minister for Social Development, 2018).

experiences reinforced other research (Ferguson, 2008; Hyslop, 2017) which points to increasing opposition and dissatisfaction with the increased compliance and its effect on social work advocacy.

In summary, the discussion above found that the compliance to meet government-oriented contracts has disempowered social workers to meet client needs. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the formation of a social action premised on the coalesced view that compliance-centred practice is negatively affecting clients.

Workplace Policies and Advocacy

A considerable number of studies have noted that increased workloads, loss of autonomy, fiscal disinvestment, and increasingly bureaucratic management practices in community and statutory settings have negatively affected social worker wellbeing (for example, Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2010; Lavee & Strier, 2018). Lavee and Strier note that institutional abuse was a significant factor which limits social workers' ability to have empathetic practice. Indeed, they found that the participants' daily struggle within their own workplaces was of more significance than difficulties arising from engagements with their clients. This institutional abuse was characterised by increasingly high caseloads with limited means, guidance, or emotional support from their workplaces.

In this study, there were accounts of negative experiences of poor management, consistent with the literature. There were various narratives of how participants managed these experiences. Several participants were satisfied they met their ethical requirements by raising issues and then moving on to other demands. Others spoke about the frustration about carrying out activities to protect themselves against bureaucratic consequences which did not fit comfortably with them (for example, where Hinetau's frustration in completing a "paper trail of nothing" that she saw as pointless but did so to avoid any employment issues. Amy, too, spoke of having to do things she saw little value in, but did if only "to protect my own ass"). The participants' limited discretion seems bound by what Musheno and Maynard-Moody (2015) describe as social workers' perception of duty to comply with their service regulations. Indeed, half of the participants worked within the rules and challenged them if they saw conflict, but then would continue their work. Only Helena expressed a clear view that she was prepared to "go back to flipping burgers" if she felt compromised with respect to her value base. Within this context, it is not surprising that social workers can often become fatalistic about their ability to effect change (McCarten et al., 2018). A social constructionist perspective argues that a fatalistic attitude arises from the unexplored opportunities about how the social worker can define

their situation. Thus, as has been noted previously, the importance of supervision comes to the fore as a way to reflect and challenge these negative perspectives.

As half of the social workers challenged agency policies, this implies that they can effect change. This then introduces the possibility that a lack of critical awareness and self-reflection could be a cause of fatalistic attitudes rather than the neoliberal environment social workers experience. On the question of exploring opportunities to act as advocates, social workers have agency to consciously decide how to implement their workplace practice requirements (Lipsky, 2010; Payne, 2002). Lipsky contends that social workers can shape policy by exercising discretion in how they enact service policies. Other authors complement this view by arguing that even in an environment where the allocation of resources is organised by the NGO manager for service efficiency, social workers are still capable of choice in how policies can be adapted or altered to suit their practice (Baldwin, 2000; Evans, 2016). Schiettecat et al. (2018) note that social workers have started constructing subversive strategies to meet clients' needs. The participants' accounts reflect Schiettecat et al.'s claim that this advocacy is very much present at the micro level.

This research found that half of the participants had willingly worked outside of their agency's guidelines for a perceived greater good. These activities included ensuring clients obtained the necessary service support. It was interesting to note that Elizabeth and Anne chose to define their actions in a positive frame, they chose to define (not describe) their behaviour as one which gives them power within their environment. Being innovative, taking initiative, and being subversive are all intentional actions that seek to challenge the accepted norms. From a social constructionist view, this use of language provides an opportunity for affirmative action, rather than simply describing their actions (Galbin, 2014).

Building on this opportunity, a finding of the current study was that positive experiences of management are common within a neoliberal environment. Payne (2002) argues that a supportive manager is one whom understands social structures and the need for relational engagement, rather than simply providing a service. All participants had experienced a supportive manager and described this as being someone that shared the same social justice outlook as themselves. Within this environment, the participants talked of a sense of freedom to collaborate in advocacy for their families. While social constructionism acknowledges the limited agency of social workers to effect change (Burr, 2015), this study shows that they do have supportive spaces which assist social workers to practice in creative ways.

In an environment where social workers are living and working in society and workplace which are sustaining neoliberal messages, they have opportunities to exert their agency when applying their workplace policies. In these spaces, the participants' accounts show they have had experiences that have boosted their sense of advocacy. However, the neoliberal trope of individual responsibility has had significant influence in social work practice, and this presents a significant challenge for social workers.

Individualisation of Social Work and Opportunities for Advocacy

There is a strong relationship between the entrenchment of neoliberalism and the retrenchment of liberal humanist social work practice (for example, Hyslop, 2016). This creates a challenge for the social work profession (statutory and NGO) and its goal of structural change to achieve social justice at the individual and community level. There is a growing amount of literature (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Davidson et al., 2017; McCarten et al., 2018) which supports the view that social work practice is increasingly disregarding community change in favour of an individual approach. Hyslop (2017) argues that social work is now evidence-based clinical practice which requires no empathetic practice when providing treatment for the damaged individual. Payne (2014) argues that the nature of empowerment practice requires a commitment towards client self-determination, which then sustains the individualism paradigm. There is a significant challenge to these views, however, with Marston & McDonald (2012) reminding us that the neoliberal self-responsibility trope is a significant challenge for social work, as low levels of understanding of neoliberalism means social workers see it as a positive character trait and behaviour. There is a school of thought that argues empowerment and personal advocacy are ineffective as they do not challenge structural causes of social injustice (Payne, 2014). However, within the NGO sector there is a growing amount of literature that suggests there is an increasing number of social workers who are resisting neoliberal discourses and are seeking to reclaim the humanist traditions of social work practice (Hyslop, 2017; Keddell, 2011; 2016; Rankine et al., 2018).

The results of this study confirm the findings within the literature, with the individualisation of social work dominating the participants' narratives. Elizabeth specifically talked about agency policies which require treatment of clients to have their faults fixed. The most interesting issue was a dichotomy between social workers' reported frustrations about social structures shaped by neoliberalism impacting on work, but then simply expected their clients to have hope and to be more resilient when encountering structural injustice. Amongst the participants, the most popular goal

when working with clients was to instil self-belief, personal initiative, or hope as a way in which clients could better manage their lives. This is reflective of the widespread increase in individual social work based on client-centred goals (Pardeck et al., 1994). Accompanying this is a growing trend, led from within the social work sector, for social workers to be intentionally promoting resilience strategies as part of accepting the political environment (Staniforth et al., 2011). Conneely and Garrett (2015) have suggested that making clients more comfortable in uncomfortable environments has replaced the social justice goals of social work. The danger in this (amongst a myriad of others), is that marginalised people frequently define their hopes and behaviour by societal values (Woolford & Nelund, 2013). As such, social workers need to be aware that clients might often express or act in ways based on the pervasive normalisation of those seemingly self-evident goods of individual responsibility and self-sufficiency. A social constructionist lens identifies these as the taken-for granted assumptions and socialised understandings which then sustain and reinforce dominant interests (Burr, 2015).

In reviewing the literature there was discussion about the need for social workers to inform society about othering, the impact of poverty, and other social injustices (Joseph, 2019; McCarten et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, some authors believe that social workers can work in ethical ways within the community while accepting that neoliberalism is the present political ideology (Marston & McDonald, 2012; Oliver, 2013). However, empowerment practice must be framed by social justice principles and have concurrent social advocacy if it is to be considered an ethical approach (Joseph, 2019; Staniforth et al., 2011). Such political agency is present in micro level social work and has potential for transference into community level social work (Schiettecat et al., 2018). An individualistic approach can form anti-oppressive practice if social workers make conscious decisions about how they enact their workplace policies. O'Brien (2010) supports this perspective, noting that social justice still is active within social work, albeit narrowly confined to the trend of individual work.

While there was a clear preference for individual empowerment, when pressed, most participants expressed clear opinions that they needed to consider the environment within which individuals live. The common view amongst the participants was that the solutions to social injustice were at community level by reorganising systems or utilising the inherent goodwill in local communities. There was a range of views, from Amy's revolutionary desire to "smash the State [to devolve services]", to Anne's more bureaucratic reorganisation so that, "the government would empower local response through local body and local government", and then Elizabeth's more nuanced desire to see, "transformative conversations with people". Jodie thought that changing systemic issues and connecting people to reconfigured supports was the most hopeful goal for clients.

These views reflect the conflicting goals of social work (social justice) and neoliberalism (equality of opportunity). It is possible to create social justice opportunities when individual empowerment joins with transformative goals within the communities that clients live in (Boone et al., 2020).

This provides an opportunity to explore this goodwill for greater awareness of the reality of the impoverished population. Opportunities arise when engaging in interactive meaning-making at individual and community levels which challenge othering discourses via the construction of new understandings and knowledge (Lock & Strong, 2010). Further, given the emphasis of context in social constructionism, local communities, as places of engagement, are necessary locations to challenge norms (Burr, 2015). In this study, participants believed potentiated communities were dormant, and more supportive communities would emerge as social workers utilised dormant goodwill. Amy and Elizabeth each spoke needing to engage with local communities to dispel preconceptions about living in poverty. Building on this, engaging with local communities about social justice is a realistic option for social advocacy. This does not necessarily mean a significant marketing campaign; this can be as simple as social workers engaging existing local resources (people and services). Anne and Elizabeth's experiences about engaging with local business to support impoverished homes are excellent examples of what can happen. These experiences for community members create opportunities to see beyond othering discourses. Munford and Sanders (2020) describe these opportunities as the challenging of dominant discourses which exist in local communities.[39] This, in turn, creating the potential of community values of social justice to emerge and challenge the individualised neoliberal discourses.

Social work is increasingly individual and evidence-based practice; however a resurgence of the traditional humanist paradigm is developing. Social workers are aware of the traditional goal of community-level work to effect social change, which does present a dichotomy with their personal involvement in othering discourses. This approach has created an opportunity for individual work aligned with social justice goals, informed by an understanding of neoliberalism, to be a realistic and valid choice for social workers as a mode of advocacy.

[39] The authors do caution that challenging narratives must first require social workers to engage in critical analysis of social norms, contexts, and conditions. This discussion has highlighted that this is not yet at a level enough to engage in. This might explain why participants engaged in unconscious othering practices, but also could discuss a primary concept in social work of community development/social change.

Summary

This chapter discusses how neoliberalism has constrained social worker advocacy, but social workers have potential to increase their advocacy. The difficulty in expressing a clear articulation of neoliberalism has restrained social workers' insight into how they were engaging in othering discourses, despite being able to observe this in other professionals they worked with. That noted, if social workers engage in enough supervision-led self-reflection, they have the agency to construct this meaning and engage in social action. The participants intuitively knew that the contracting system and neoliberalism discourses have impacted on their practice, limiting social workers' agency to meet client needs. When working with a manager who is aligned with their social justice values, social workers were able to find ways to meet client needs. At other times, when not having that support, social workers engaged in acts of non-compliance where they felt it was ethically responsible. When pressed about creating change, engagement in local communities was a common response. Given the role of local communities in institutionalising knowledge, the exploration of possible widespread dormant goodwill in local communities is a significant option for ethical practice. This can be as simple as creating opportunities for people to question their understanding of how they have come to see their world and to engage in further meaning making.

The final chapter concludes the research. It summarises the methodological approach of this research, presents the key findings, and makes recommendations for further research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This final chapter recalls this research was completed using a social constructionist framework to explore how neoliberalism impacts on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. Drawing from the discussion in the previous chapter, this chapter identifies the key findings of the research, and then discusses the implications of these findings on social worker advocacy. Reflecting on the findings, recommendations are identified which may enable social workers to challenge neoliberalism more effectively. The limitations of this research are also noted. Finally, the chapter provides a reminder and challenge to social workers that social work will continue to exist in a neoliberal context, but advocacy is a powerful tool for change.

Study Design

The aim of this research was to explore how neoliberalism has impacted on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. The goals of the study were to:

1. Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability.
2. Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice.
3. Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates.
4. Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

The goals of the research were achieved by completing a qualitative-exploratory study utilising semi-structured interviews within a social constructionist framework. This methodology ensured that the experiences of community-based social workers could be collected from the data to understand how neoliberalism impacts the choices social workers make (or do not make) advocating for disadvantaged families (Polkinghome, 1995; Riessman, 2011; Stebbins, 2001). Given the subjective experiences of the social workers, it was important to have a social constructionist framework to understand these views within New Zealand's history and the social interactions which influence their work and personal views (Burr, 2015; Lock & Strong, 2010).

Key Findings

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the experiences of the participants by uncovering patterns and relationships between each participant's narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2018). Following a social constructionist framework, the findings were discussed within the context of how neoliberalism has impacted on social work organisations and New Zealand society in general. The key findings are:

1. Participating social workers have an awareness of causes of injustice and societal blame, but social workers are engaging in unintentional othering.
2. Participating social workers are concerned about the increase of compliance driven practice.
3. Participating social workers, despite their understanding of structural causes of social injustice, have a focus on micro level advocacy and find opportunities to meet client needs. This places social workers at risk of reinforcing neoliberal messaging of worthiness, self-responsibility, and personal initiative.
4. Participating social workers, when envisaging an uninhibited future, see decision-making devolved to local communities and social worker engagement with local communities as a way to resolve social injustices.

Awareness of Causes of Injustice, Societal Blame, and Unintentional Social Worker Othering

The first goal in this study sought to understand participants' views about risk and vulnerability (as proxies for the consequences of neoliberalism in general). The results show that social workers identify structural causes of poverty (as one example of social injustice) and have routinely observed society blaming their clients for their situation. The participants also expressed empathetic narratives about their clients' experiences in poverty and expressed concern about othering attitudes in their local communities. The findings support the literature which discusses that the entrenchment of neoliberalism has changed societal attitudes. More people believe laziness causes poverty or is of their own making and the fewer people believe people in need should have access to welfare system support (Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Berentson-Shaw, 2018; Humpage, 2011). This change in societal attitudes has not been a natural progression but rather a consequence of power bases manipulating the general population (Lukes, 2005). Lukes' argument that people can be controlled to believe in something, even though it is against their best interests, can be seen in people living in impoverished situations. With the shift in societal attitudes to centre on self-responsibility, freedom, and personal initiative, clients are now using neoliberal messages to present themselves as worthy, but in doing so neglect their own needs (Woolford & Nelund, 2013). This othering (which, in a practical application of

Lukes' discourse) has been fuelled by the media and government messaging (Hackell, 2016; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012).

A second finding was that social workers did not assign value to understanding political ideology as part of their work, nor could they readily identify or explain neoliberalism as a significant source of the othering discourse. The participants expressed knowledge about neoliberalism and practical expressions of it, such as risk and vulnerability labels. Most participants had a sense that neoliberalism and labels were against social work values, however, do not have the critical thinking as demanded in the literature (for example, Beddoe & Keddell, 2016; Hyslop, 2016; Marston & McDonald, 2012). Of consequence, this research also found that some social workers occasionally engaged in othering of clients. The literature discusses that an increasing number of social workers engage in othering behaviour, with new social workers struggling to have critical views of neoliberalism (Marston & McDonald, 2012). It stands to reason, too, that as members of society, social workers have also increasingly accepted neoliberalism which shapes their social and political views, despite their knowledge that poverty is caused by structural issues (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Fenton, 2018; Gair, 2018; Layton, 2009).

Taken together, these results suggest that social workers need to make conscious efforts to critically appraise the effects of neoliberalism on their work. If this does not occur social workers potentially place themselves in positions where they risk sustaining neoliberalism in their communities and workplaces, and unwittingly engaging in the othering of their clients.

Increased Compliance Driven Practice

The second goal of the study was to gain insight into how neoliberal discourses have changed social workers' practice. The result from this study support the literature which shows social work has become increasingly compliance driven. Each participant expressed concerns about the creep of bureaucracy into social work, all had greater levels of administrative work, and a focus on contractual priorities. As an example, Hinetau spoke of her concerns that, "paperwork has taken priority over people". There was also a simple but stark account where one manager openly told the participant that she could not work with a family because "they're only a drain on it [because they did not fit into contract eligibility]" (Helena). This finding further supports the view of a move towards data entry, standardisation of practice, and an increase in risk assessment rather than needs-based support (Aimers, 2011; Benjamin, 2008; Döbl & Ross, 2013; Onyx et al., 2010; Sawyers, 2016). The literature

demonstrates a change in the contracting arrangement, whereby the contracting process has seen NGOs focus on maintaining contractual arrangements with the government rather than advocating for bottom-up priorities (Mosley, 2012; 2013; Onyx et al., 2010). Lipsky and Smith (1993) argue that the government compels any NGO contingent on government funding to align all its processes and policies to the government requirements. There is evidence to support this, research (Grey & Sedgwick, 2015; Grey et al., 2015) found that NGOs felt pressure to advocate less with the government, and were in an increasingly controlled relationship, particularly under the Fifth National Government. The Community Investment Strategy's reliance on results-based evidence to secure roll over of contracts meant NGOs focused on increased compliance and efficiency (Aimers, 2011; Döbl & Ross, 2012).

In general, therefore it seems that there is increased compliance for social workers and control of NGOs, as supported in the existing literature. As a result, this increased compliance has also introduced the risk that clients experience NGOs as essentially the same as if working for New Zealand's child protection agency (Lipsky & Smith, 1993; Onyx et al., 2019; Sawyers, 2016).

Micro Level Advocacy and Restraints on Advocacy

The third goal in this research was to explore social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates. All the participants saw advocacy as a core function of their work. The research found social workers had a general focus on micro level advocacy despite the awareness of structural causes of social injustice. This micro level advocacy was based around personal empowerment and giving people a sense of hope. These accounts were abundant with neoliberal messages about change needing to come from within, pointing people in the right direction, and finding their own means to change their situation. This research supports McCarten et al. (2018) and O'Brien's (2010) argument that the definition of the pursuit of social justice has moved away from community level work to the individual. Linking back to the changing nature of society, the participant accounts of individual work is unsurprising as it aligns with existing literature. Hyslop (2017) sees the individualisation of the work was towards evidence-based, clinical, dispassionate practice. Others raise concerns about the trend towards individualisation, with Pardeck et al. (1994) stating that the construction of social work practice is now based on what the individual client believes the problem to be.

The research also found that micro level advocacy was an enjoyable part of the social worker's practice when working with supportive managers. When enabled by their workplace, there were

accounts where the NGO and the social worker had the opportunities to advocate. There were also instances where the manager would advocate for the social workers to expand the scope of their advocacy. On the other hand, restrictive managers had impacted this advocacy, nonetheless there were activities of resistance expressed in social worker narratives. Hyslop (2018) and Mitendorf and van Ewijk (2019) note that social workers are speaking negatively about neoliberal management practices and are aware that it prioritises risk management and compliance ahead of client needs. Neoliberal discourses have influenced some social workers in their work, while others are resisting these through their personal agency (Lynch & Forde, 2016). Half of the participants talked about breaching workplace rules in the pursuit of advocacy. Anne talked about being, "a bit subversive at the edges", and Elizabeth seeing her behaviour as, "nothing majorly illegal, just seeing a need". Other participants saw the rules as establishing safety for the social worker. Though, two said that they would challenge those rules, and Helena that she would leave the workplace if she thought she was not working hard enough for her clients. Various literature argues that it is ethical to change and advocate from within (Marston & McDonald, 2012; Oliver, 2013) whereas Spolander et al. (2016) and Russell (2017) contend that the muting of social worker voices adds further challenge to social work practice.

These findings suggest that social workers continue to find opportunities to meet client needs in the face of contract priorities. A significant issue to emerge was the focus of working with individuals to empower them with client-directed goals without an accompanying social advocacy focus. There is evidence which contends clients now perceive the world from a neoliberal perspective. This perspective, accompanied by the argument that clients represent themselves so the public see them as being worthy (rather than being othered), suggests that individual work by the social worker can be reinforcing neoliberal messaging of worthiness, self-responsibility, and personal initiative. As a way forward, O'Brien (2010) has argued that professional bodies need to take leadership roles in supporting social workers to engage in social advocacy. Several of the participants supported this view; a view was expressed that any advocacy beyond "fighting for some kind of fairness in the day-to-day" would involve "completely burning ourselves out" (Amy). Helena suggested a centralised lobby group to lobby for systemic issues, which may be additional to, or an expansion of the ANZASW role. It may be that greater engagement by education bodies and professional associations needs to occur (to build on the micro advocacy) to create impetus and continued support to engage in social advocacy.

Micro and Macro Advocacy Opportunities

The final goal in this study was to discuss opportunities for social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families. When the participants were asked a hypothetical future and outside of their previous experiences, the research found that while some participants believed making change at an individual level is sufficient, more participants saw a need to expand into macro advocacy at the community level. That noted, the focus on micro practice rather than macro practice is simply what is meaningful to each social worker, as demonstrated in Amy's reflection, "[with macro work] I had somewhere for the anger, but I never got a sense of anything changing. With this, I could see a whole lot of change [with individual work], but I wasn't doing anything about the overall injustice".

Joseph (2019) argues there needs to be two concurrent paths social workers need to follow. Social justice principles can frame the present empowerment practice which will instil a commitment to social advocacy. If individual work is done alone, premised on personal responsibility and self-sufficiency for empowerment, then the oppressive nature of neoliberalism remains on the client to address (Payne, 2014). This social advocacy emergence needs to happen, as social workers are increasingly favouring the individual therapeutic approach (Staniforth et al., 2014). This critical aspect is seen in participants' responses with most participants wanting decisions to be devolved to communities. Participants talked about engaging and informing New Zealanders about structural causes of social injustices. Elizabeth and Anne each provided examples about community groups wanting to become more involved in social justice causes once engaged.

These findings, taken together, suggest that the consolidation of individualised micro advocacy does not necessarily mean the consolidation of neoliberalism. Social workers have the agency and willingness to work within their community for social justice. It seems that communities are willing to pursue social justice when given these opportunities. However, the fragmented approach means that there are competing interests, which is becoming more prevalent as identity issues are creating niche social movements rather than focusing on neoliberalism (Taylor & Grey, 2014). Social workers need more overt and cohesive leadership to ensure they do not feel alone and to provide greater leadership around the subversive messaging of neoliberalism.

Implications

This combination of findings has important implications for understanding social workers' views of the nature of social work advocacy. As a foundation, social workers must be able to clearly articulate what neoliberalism is if social workers are to resist the challenges to social work and to advocate for their clients. The results of this study show that social workers are doing enough to get through their working day, with limited understanding of how or why neoliberalism is impacting on their experiences and the nature of their work. Within this context, participants expressed the common approach of instilling hope and an attitude of self-reliance into clients. This approach, unless accompanied by a commitment to challenge structural causes of social injustice, does not align with ethical requirements of the social worker.

Greater ethical practice can be achieved by enhanced leadership by professional bodies and supervision. The increased use of informed supervisory practice would be of significant value as social workers navigate the day-to-day work. O'Donoghue and Tsui (2012) contend that competent supervision must be informed by knowledge of (amongst other knowledge) conceptual interpretive reasoning. This contributes an understanding of theories, frameworks, and principles which make sense of the social worker's experiences. One participant suggested that there should be a centralised social work representation to lobby about systemic issues, in the same way that other professional bodies have a central group to lobby for them. What comes to mind, of course, is the ANZASW.[40] That noted, none of the other participants commented about the role of the ANZASW in pursuing social justice goals. It may be that social workers should become more engaged in their professional association to coalesce around social work leadership (and take advantage of the professional development opportunities to reflect or deconstruct their worldviews, including enhancing supervision practice). Indeed, O'Brien has called for, due to social workers being overwhelmed by neoliberal discourses, greater social work leadership to affect social change (2010). This is an important consideration given Spolander et al.'s (2016) contention that the fear of speaking out and the widespread inaction of the social work profession simply consolidates the entrenchment of neoliberalism in social work practice. This also aligns with the social constructionist approach which recognises that the limited agency of individual social workers (Burr, 2015). Greater social work leadership would resolve Amy's frustration, "when we're too busy fighting for some kind of fairness

[40] The ANZASW describes one of its core functions as actively advocating government on a range of social justice issues and legislative changes, with and on behalf of its members and society (2020).

in the day-to-day, we don't have time and energy to start the revolution, do we? Most of the people who'd like to be starting the revolution are just trying to pay their mortgage and keep their kids fed".

Limitations

The findings in this report are subject to several limitations. There is limited generalisability of the results due to the small sample size of eight participants. The subjectivity of their accounts also limits generalisability. However, replicating the study is possible even if, given the subjectivity of the topic, the same findings may not emerge. Though, as noted in the methodology chapter the richness of information is preferred, therefore generalisability is not too significant an issue for this exploratory research. The participants may have been self-selected based on the advertisement (Appendix A), so people who participated may have felt they were advocates. It is possible that people might not have been drawn to the study if they did not see advocacy as important. Their views would have been valuable for a full discussion. Having said that, those that did participant provided a wide range of interesting accounts.

Recommendations

The social work education sector needs to reinforce social work's liberal humanist traditions and have the challenges of neoliberalism interwoven as a theme into all subjects taught through the degree. In light of social workers being influenced by neoliberalism and struggling to apply theory to practice, there needs to be further work to strengthen social workers' understanding of neoliberalism. Social work needs to be contextualised within a neoliberal environment, this creates neoliberalism as a real structural injustice, rather than an abstract concept or political theory.

Along the same vein, an issue that could be explored in further research is that the participants prioritised other issues ahead of expressing an interest in political ideology. Rosenwald and Hyde (2006) note that the preponderance of studies has confirmed most social workers have left-wing political views, but there are no readily available studies which consider the impact of social worker ideology on practice. This research did not collect evidence on the participants' political views. Given a social worker's political ideology is a critical part of forming their practice (Ferguson et al., 2018), this appears to be a gap in knowledge, considering a social worker's ideology can shape an understanding of the problem and its resolution. Given the enduring presence of neoliberalism as the normative ideology in New Zealand, this research should include new graduates to determine if they have a working knowledge of political ideologies, and neoliberalism specifically.

Reflective supervision should be a priority considering how social workers can sustain neoliberalism and how it is reflected in their practice. Based on the call to arms (as evidenced in the literature review) to fight against neoliberalism, there appears to be the assumption that social workers agree that neoliberalism is detrimental to the goals of social work. The assumption might well be true; however, othering attitudes appear to be plentiful amongst social workers and within the professionals they work alongside. That assumption should be explored in reflective supervision in an ongoing basis.

Further research into the role of the ANZASW in the successfulness of its advocacy programme, including social worker perception and engagement, might provide valuable insights to supplement the micro level advocacy that social workers carry out. Social workers have a good understanding of structural causes of social injustice but, for various reasons, did not engage in macro level advocacy to any significant degree (or at all). The ANZASW already has an active advocacy programme with respect to making policy and legislative issues. However, there was no readily available research into the efficacy of ANZASW's advocacy work.

This research found that social workers can engage in meaningful advocacy with clients if their manager places social justice ahead of neoliberal management practices. NGOs should consider the application of a client-oriented social justice principle across every policy and process. With a social justice mindset, advocacy and change is possible, even within a neoliberal environment, and an overt reminder of social worker's ethical responsibility to advocate for their client would be important. Such behaviour should be encouraged by their workplaces, rather than engaged in as quasi-rebellious actions.

Conclusion

Social workers are aware of the effects of neoliberalism in society and within their profession (and other professions), however social workers do not have a working knowledge of neoliberalism, and therefore may struggle to challenge these issues. It is critical that social workers understand what neoliberalism is and the consequences if social advocacy is to work. The dominance of micro advocacy does not necessarily mean the consolidation of neoliberalism. The research shows that social workers have the agency and willingness to work within their community for social justice. Their accounts reveal that communities are willing to pursue social justice when given these opportunities.

Neoliberalism has been, and looks to continue to be so, a part of any New Zealand government's approach. However, governments continue to vary its application since the Fourth Labour

Government's reforms first introduced neoliberalism to New Zealand. It is almost certain that neoliberalism's value will rise and fall over different periods, and social workers must take and create opportunities to challenge the influence of neoliberalism. This report concludes with imparted wisdom gained from a lifetime in social work. It reminds and comforts social workers that a social worker creates change, rather than waiting for change, and if that effort is made, then they will be supported to create change in people's lives, regardless of the size of the task:

> *If you put some time and effort into something you believe in, the rewards always exceed the effort… advocacy and networking are our most powerful and effective tools and need to be core competencies wherever we choose work. These set us apart from other professions… I challenge you to get involved and continue to believe in our profession, as it can and DOES make a difference (Baskerville-Davies, p.1-2, 2012).*

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Appendix A

Kia ora katou katoa,

My name is Darren Renau and I am a student completing my Master of Arts (Social Policy) at Massey University. I am interested in how New Zealand society has increasingly blamed parents for experiencing poverty and cast them as dangers towards their children. This has happened within an environment that has increasing pressures on social workers to meet management requirements. My research will explore views of social workers about how those discourses impact on their ability to provide support and advocacy among disadvantaged families.

I would be keen to interview you if you are a community-based social worker and you have had at least 5 years' practice experience since 2009 in Aotearoa New Zealand. The interview is anticipated to take 1–1 ½ hours. There is no need to have any understanding of the blaming and risk discourses, as these will be discussed as part of the interview. At the end of my research, I would be happy to provide an electronic copy of the findings.

This research has ethical approval from Massey University, and further information will be provided via an information sheet if interested.

Criteria

- a community-based social worker
- and have had at least 5 years' practice experience since 2009 in Aotearoa New Zealand
- have a social work qualification

If you are interested in participating, or have any questions, please contact me on:

Email: darrenrenau@hotmail.com

Phone: 027 9662441

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Appendix B

Where has the advocacy gone? An exploration of community-based social workers' ethical responsibilities in the age of risk and vulnerability

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Darren Renau, and I am completing this research as part of the requirements for the Master of Arts (Social Policy). I am a registered social worker with experience in child protection, youth justice, and adoptions social work since 1999.Over this period, inequality has widened, and poverty become more pronounced in New Zealand. At the same time, New Zealand society has increasingly viewed parents in impoverished home as being responsible for their situation, with structural causes being increasingly ignored. This has occurred within an environment that has increased demand on social workers to meet management requirements and lessened their ability to advocate for social change.

It is now accepted that an increasing number of New Zealanders see parents within disadvantaged families as not having done enough in order to make ends meet. Additionally, the requirements of community services to be efficient with their services has made delivery of support increasingly challenging. At the same time, within social work leadership there has been a call for social workers to advocate against these consequences. This research will explore how government ideology has impacted on social workers' abilities to provide support and advocacy to disadvantaged families. The goals of the study are to:

1. Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability
2. Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice
3. Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates
4. Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.

This research will hopefully give a voice to social workers about their experiences of working within an environment that prioritises social worker efficiency and which views impoverished families as having failed in life as the reason for experiencing poverty.

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I would like to invite you to participate in this research. If you agree to be interviewed as part of this research, it will involve participating in one interview for approximately 1-1½ hours. With your permission the interviews will be digitally recorded using an audio dictaphone. All information will be treated confidentially. Due to the small size of the social work community all identifiable information will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time until the research report has been submitted;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that all identifiable information will be anonymised;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about the research, please contact either of the following:

Researcher: Darren Renau, darrenrenau@hotmail.com, 027 9662441

Research Supervisor: Dr Nicky Stanley-Clarke, N.Stanley-Clarke@Massey.ac.nz, 06 3569099#83515

Research Supervisor: Dr Tracie Mafileo, T.A. Mafileo@massey.ac.nz, 06 3569099#85027

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 19/48. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

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Appendix C

Where has the advocacy gone? An exploration of community-based social workers' ethical responsibilities in the age of risk and vulnerability

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix D

Interview Schedule

Data to be collected via semi-structured interviews as commonly used in qualitative research, and this schedule will guide to researcher to ensure focus is kept on the topics to ensure the relevant stories are gathered

Introduction

1. Purpose of the research:
    - Understand community-based social workers' views about risk and vulnerability
    - Gain insight into how the focus on risk and vulnerability has changed community-based social workers' practice
    - Explore community-based social workers' understanding of their roles as advocates
    - Discuss opportunities for community-based social workers to act as advocates to enhance their services for disadvantaged families.
2. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:
    - decline to answer any question;
    - withdraw from the study at any point;
    - ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
    - provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
    - be given access to a summary of the research findings when it is concluded.
    - ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.
3. Length of interview:

    The interview is likely to last 1 – 1 ½ hours. Is there a time that you need to be finished by, or any other matters you'd like me to be aware of that could impact on the interview?

General information

4. Name?
5. Present and previous social work role?
6. Length of time in those roles?

7. What are the main tasks of your role?
8. What is the one thing you like the best about your role?

Poverty, risk, vulnerability discourses

9. Drawing from your experiences, what is your view when you hear people say that New Zealand is a fair place to live?
10. "Poverty", as an issue for children, has been discussed a lot in the public sphere. What does that term mean for you?
    - Can you describe some examples that you have seen in your practice with families?
11. What do you think are the causes of poverty?
    - Is anyone responsible for themselves being in poverty?
    - Have you witnessed anyone blaming impoverished families for their situation, and what do you think about that?
12. What has stood out to you as the main issues your families experience when living in impoverished homes?
13. Reflecting on your practice, what do you think of when you hear people talk about "at risk" or "vulnerable" families?
    - Do you agree that there are "at risk" or "vulnerable" families?
    - Are you comfortable with these labels? Why is that?
14. What are your thoughts about whether understanding political ideologies is important as part of your day-to-day practice?
    - If it is relevant, has there been a time when that has made a real difference in your practice?
    - Have you heard of the term "neoliberalism"? If so, what do you understand of that approach?
    - Thinking about wider perspectives in social work, outside of day-to-day practice, do you think it's important to understand these sorts of political ideologies?

Advocacy

15. Can you tell me about a case you're proud of, where you helped a disadvantaged family to get ahead?
    - What were your secrets of success?
    - Was it a change of circumstances or finding new ways of managing the situation?

16. Can you give me an example of how you've been frustrated about the limits of the support you've been able to provide?
    - What were the barriers in that situation?
    - Were you able to work around these or remove them?
17. Thinking about your practice, do you think it's best to support families to find ways to get ahead within the situation they are in, or is it better to try and change the reasons why they are in that situation? Or is the approach dependent on the situation?
    - Do you have any examples of your preference succeeding?
    - What is it that influences these decisions about which approach to use?
18. Can you think of a time where you've encountered what you thought was a real injustice for a family?
    - If you felt the problem was too big for you to solve, was there anything you tried before realising this, or did after realising this?
    - What sort of discussions did you have with the family around this?
    - What about injustices for families in general?
19. Has there been a time when you've found it necessary to "bend the rules" to break down injustices disadvantaged families have faced?
    - If so, were there any consequences for you?
    - If so, if in the same situation, would you do that again?
    - If not, was it because you haven't come across any social injustices that warranted that action, or was it because "rules are there for a reason", or something else?
20. How do you balance the goals of your organisation against the goals and priorities of families?
    - Have you ever felt pressured to do something you thought wasn't in a family's interests?
21. Thinking about your experiences, can you tell me about how responsive management (or head office) have been to challenges you face in working with disadvantaged families
    - Do you think they understand the issues you face in your practice?
    - How does that make you feel?
22. With respect to the experiences you've had from your practice, if you had a magic wand, what would you change, and why?

Conclusion

23. Thank you for meeting with me and freeing up the time to do that, and thank you for your answers
24. Discussion about the research process from here and possible outcomes
25. [Reminder]every attempt will be made to keep your identity anonymous, can you think of a name I could use if it is necessary to refer to you by name in the report?
26. Do you have any questions from me about the process?
27. Please contact me at any time if you want to discuss or change anything you've said or to withdraw from the research.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

Appendix E

Date: 04 November 2019

Dear Darren Renau

Re: Ethics Notification - **SOB 19/48 - Where has the advocacy gone? An exploration of community-based social workers' ethical responsibilities in the age of risk and vulnerability**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Human Ethics Southern B Committee at their meeting held on Monday, 4 November.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz W http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz