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**The Nature and Role of the Extended Family
in New Zealand,
and its Relationship with the State:
Based on a Study of a Provincial City**

A thesis
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ABSTRACT

In New Zealand there is a widespread perception that European/Pakeha do not have extended families in the way that Maori and Pacific Islands' cultures do. Yet in recent years social policy has been moving away from reliance on the state towards increasing reliance on one's self and one's family. This study uses survey research, a focus group, demographic analysis and policy analysis to investigate the nature of the extended family in predominantly European/Pakeha New Zealand, and perceptions of the respective roles of the family and the state. Discrepancies are identified between what families are doing, what people think they should be doing, and what policy assumes they will do. The key factors affecting the supply of and demand for extended family support are identified and the trends in these analysed. These issues are then integrated in order to assess the implications for policy and the impact of policies on families and the intergenerational social contract.

This thesis found that the predominantly European/Pakeha society of New Zealand does have extended families, in the modified sense rather than the classical sense, as categorised by Litwak (1965). That is, extended families which are based on egalitarianism and choice rather than power and control, and are characterised by a loose, informal set of kin relationships involving an interlocking set of nuclear families which may be geographically dispersed and economically independent, but are bound by a sense of obligation based on affective relationships and the exchange of mutual aid services. These family networks are not large, and little support extends to the wider family beyond parents, adult children and siblings. Also of concern for policymakers is that approximately a quarter to a third of participants in this study did not have extended family living close enough to provide any kind of practical support. This study also found that while people generally believe in helping family members, they believe this help should be given by choice, not obligation, and that nuclear family and labour force commitments take priority over commitments to the extended family.

A further finding is that in the future we will face increasing demand for support from both family and the state, and a declining supply of family support, especially if policies make it necessary for the young elderly to stay in the labour force. Families are unable and unlikely to do more than they are already doing, which is already the bulk of social support.

Theorists such as Thomson (1981) have proposed that there will be breakdown in the intergenerational social contract at the macro-level of the state as a result of neo-liberal policies of self-reliance, particularly for younger generations, and policies which have favoured the older generation at the expense of the young. It is concluded from this study that the balance of support towards the young rather than the old at the micro-level of the family is preventing this macro-level breakdown. But if more responsibility is put onto families, this will cause breakdown in the micro-level intergenerational contract and upset the balance. Thus there is a need for increased rather than decreased state support to complement what families are able to do and prevent breakdown in the intergenerational contract at both the micro-level of the family and the macro-level of society.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my own
HUNTER-MCPHERSON
extended family
- the inspiration for this work -

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