

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

**BRIDES OF THE STATE? CHANGE AND  
CONTINUITY IN INCOME SUPPORT POLICY  
FOR SOLO MOTHERS IN NEW ZEALAND**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in Social Policy at  
Massey University**

**REBECCA DREW**

**1998**

## ABSTRACT

In 1997 the domestic purposes benefit (DPB), formerly a caregivers benefit, became a work-tested benefit. Through the extension of the work-test policy makers claim to be promoting solo mother's economic independence from the state via paid work. However, it is my thesis that income support policy in New Zealand, as with other English speaking countries, has never promoted solo mother's economic independence<sup>1</sup> and that it continues to encourage their dependency on men.

For instance, although some groups of solo mothers had to seek paid work prior to the introduction of the DPB, this was more as a form of punishment for bearing children outside marriage than a measure to foster their economic independence. While the DPB did provide women with the means of becoming economically independent of men and marriage, it replicated family relationships and trapped many women in poverty. Similarly, although the Government expects solo mothers in the late 1990s to become self-reliant through paid work, it has not removed the barriers in the labour market that prevent many women from earning a 'living wage' and fails to provide adequate supports for working mothers such as affordable childcare. As a result, many solo mothers may be forced into low paid work and/or economic dependency on men in relationships.

This research has taken a desk-based<sup>2</sup>, policy oriented approach to explore the income support system's treatment of solo mothers and the impact of income support policies on their ability to raise their children independent of men. Both past and present income support policy is examined and compared within a wider policy context that looks at the economic and social position of women in society. Comparisons are made between past and present income support policy so that an assessment can be made as to whether the extension of the work-test to solo mothers will enable them to become economically independent, or whether it signals a return to the 'pre-DPB' days and greater pressure for solo mothers to remain in relationships with male wage-earners.

---

<sup>1</sup>In social policy, the term 'dependence' is narrowly used to refer to those people who rely on the state for an income. Thus, the term 'independence' is used to refer to those people who do not have to rely on the state for support. In this thesis, however, economic 'independence' refers to the situation of having sufficient resources to raise one's children and participate in society as full citizens with out having to rely on other adults for support.

<sup>2</sup>In contrast to fieldwork, desk-based research does not necessitate going out into the field to collect data. Instead, desk-based research may involve analysing data and literature that has already been collected. As Baxter, Hughes and Tight (1996:62) stated, "[desk-based research] consists, literally, of those things which can be one while sitting at a desk".

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I am grateful to my supervisors, Celia Briar and Martin Sullivan, who provided inspiration and guidance - a special thanks for your patience. The assistance and advice from staff at Massey University library was also appreciated.

I would like to thank my family, especially my mother Claire, and my friends for their unrelenting support and encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank Selwyn who was a constant source of strength and 'sanity' throughout the entire research project.

# CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>Introduction and Methodology</b>	<b>1</b>
Choosing a Topic and Research Question	4
Economic Independence/dependence	6
Methodology	8
- Approach Used	8
- Data Collection and Analysis	9
Outline of Thesis	10
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Income Support for Solo Mothers 1840 - 1973</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction	13
Women's Dependency on Men - An Historical Context	14
Widows and the Charitable Aid System	23
Widows and the Welfare State	25
Deserted and Divorced Wives and the Charitable Aid System	28
Deserted and Divorced Wives and the Welfare State	30
Unmarried Mothers and the Charitable Aid System	32
Unmarried Mothers and the Welfare State	33
Conclusion	36
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>The Domestic Purposes Benefit: Conditions of Eligibility and Level of Entitlement</b>	<b>39</b>
Introduction	39
Eligibility Criteria	39
The 'Cohabitation' Rule	41
- Defining 'in the nature of marriage'	41
- The impact of the cohabitation rule	46
- Why the cohabitation rule exists	47
The Child Support System	49
- Background	49
- The Child Support Act 1991	51
- Impact of the Child Support System on Solo Mother Beneficiaries	52
The Level of the DPB	56
- Poverty Prior to the 1991 Benefit Cuts	58
- The 1991 Benefit Cuts	59
- Impact of the Benefit Cuts on Solo Mothers	60

Conclusion	64
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>From Welfare to the Workforce: Towards 'Independence'?</b>	<b>66</b>
Introduction	66
From a Carer's Benefit to a 'Work' Tested Benefit	67
Independence' through Paid Work?	70
- A 'Living' Wage?	71
- The Costs and Insecurity of Employment	74
- Changes to the Benefit Abatement System	75
- Childcare	78
- Education and Training	80
Unpaid Work is not 'Real Work'	83
Mixed Messages about the Value of Parenting	88
Conclusion	91
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>From 'Dependent' Caregivers to 'Independent Workers':</b>	
<b>A Theoretical Discussion</b>	<b>93</b>
Introduction	93
Constructing Women as Men's Dependents: Public and	
Private Spheres	94
The Gendered Welfare State	98
The Domestic Purposes Benefit - Treating Solo Mothers as	
'Dependent' Caregivers	100
The Domestic Purposes Benefit - Treating Solo Mothers as	
'Independent Workers'	104
Why are Women Constructed as Men's Dependents? The	
Benefits to Men	106
Conclusion	109
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>111</b>
Introduction	111
Solo Mothers - Caregivers, 'Workers' or Men's Dependents?	111
Towards 'Real' Independence for Solo Mothers: Some Policy	
Solutions	117
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>137</b>