

**What We Value: Single-parent Families and a ‘Wellbeing Approach’
to Public Policy and Expenditure in New Zealand**

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Abstract

This research uses mixed methods to test whether and how a ‘wellbeing approach’ to public policy and budgeting represents progress for the material outcomes of single-parent families in New Zealand. The research synthesises single-parent families’ lived experience literature concerning the impact of ‘liberal welfare state’ and neoliberal policy-making conditions on family and welfare policy and material outcomes from the last two decades, and compares this with the ideas underpinning the implementation of a ‘wellbeing approach’ by the New Zealand government and Treasury, brought forth in a critical discourse analysis of budget documentation. The analysis reflects how the principles and intentions underpinning the objectives of the ‘wellbeing approach’ present many opportunities to enhance single-parent family material outcomes. At the same time, the comparison exposes how the implementation fails to overcome many of the ideas and developments evident in New Zealand welfare and family policy lineage that limit recognition of and responses to the realities and challenges single-parent families face in the wake of historical-institutional neoliberal policy influences and ‘liberal welfare state’ policy practices. Furthermore, several aspects of the New Zealand government's ‘wellbeing approach’ are found to reinforce ideological expectations linked to neoliberal policy-making that have typically compromised single-parent family material outcomes and reproduced negative social stigma that worsens these outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Throughout this thesis, many people interested in the work have shared their stories with me. They shared stories about being raised by a single parent, the impact of their parents splitting up, or whether they would keep the child they were pregnant with out of the fear of the stigma and financial challenges that many perceive accompany single parenthood. These stories have motivated this research; to ask more questions of the statistics, narratives and public policies concerning single-parents families. I chose not to draw on those personal stories as a method in this research. Nevertheless, they informed my perspective as a researcher, and I thank those who did share with me.

Completing this project, I would like to thank my friends and family who have supported me through it, presented questions and ideas I might have struggled to arrive at myself, and without whom, I simply would not have been able to complete this process. Thank you to Jennifer Curtin, my patient and generous research supervisor whose public policy scholarship has drawn me further into social policy in New Zealand. I would also like to acknowledge my partner, Max Harris, who has been an enormous intellectual and emotional support throughout this thesis.

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Introduction: Single-parent Families and a ‘Wellbeing Approach’ to Public Policy and Expenditure in New Zealand

The New Zealand government has two ambitions linked to the material outcomes of single-parent families. After legislating the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2017, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has stated repeatedly the aim to ensure New Zealand is the “best place in the world to be a child” (Ardern, 2021). Since 2017, the government states progress on this objective has been made, with a decrease of 43,000 children living in poverty and 18,000 in material deprivation between 2020-2021, deemed “one of the largest policy-driven falls in measured child poverty in decades” (New Zealand Government, 2021a, p. 26).

The other related ambition is to embed a ‘wellbeing approach’ into public policy and budget-making (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c). This goal is not only a technical one, but a lever that can raise living standards for all, including families and children experiencing poverty and material deprivation. This goal has been prioritised in collaboration with Treasury since the government’s arrival, highlighted in the ‘100 Day Plan and Beyond’ announcement where Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern spoke to the ambition to launch “a tool and framework that will make the wellbeing of our people a measure of economic success” (Ardern, 2018).

The goal to maintain a reduction in poverty is significant considering the material outcomes of many New Zealand families. Across the years 2007-2019, 30 per cent of the child population lived in households experiencing income poverty, equating to over 300,000 children for each year between 2015-2020 (Statistics New Zealand, 2021d).¹ Measures of inequality further

¹ Calculated using 60 per cent relative equivalised income after housing costs (AHC) measure of poverty.

emphasise this, with after housing cost (AHC) income gaps measured by the Gini coefficient continuing to rise in recent years (Perry, 2019, p. 18). While relative income and material deprivation are not always linked, examining these indicators shows they overlap considerably in New Zealand, with those living in severe material hardship belonging to the lowest income quartile (Statistics New Zealand, 2020b). Further, the cost of living for low-income families has contributed to consistently lower reductions in inequality than OECD averages and outgoing to income ratios increasing by 30 per cent since the mid-nineties for around one in four households (OECD, 2021a; Perry, 2019, p. 25).

Across the OECD, single-parent families experience poverty at consistently higher rates than partnered-parent families, regardless of variation in individual characteristics, including educational levels and age (Brady & Burroway, 2012, p. 729; Cantillon et al., 2018; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2020; Misra et al., 2007, p. 818; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). These variations in disposable income and incidence of poverty can be associated with household structure over time (Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015; OECD, 2018).

In New Zealand, while many single-parent households receive adequate incomes and maintain excellent wellbeing, multiple material disadvantages and low income are closely associated with single-parent households (Krassoi Peach, 2018; Perry, 2009, 2016, 2019; Superu, 2018). The median equivalised disposable income for single-parent households is 23 per cent lower than the median for all other household types (Statistics New Zealand, 2021d). Between 2008 and 2022, single-parent households were very likely to sit in the lowest income quintile compared to two-parent households (Statistics New Zealand, 2022a).² These disparities are further highlighted by comparisons of family tax credits receipted following family separation

² Using equivalised disposable AHC income measures.

(Fletcher et al., 2020) and statistical calculations of welfare and income provisions available to single-parent families against their living costs (Fairer Future, 2022; Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021; Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, pp. 79-81).

Further, families headed by single parents are more likely to experience poverty or material deprivation, and at far higher rates than other OECD countries (Ministry of Social Development, 2018; OECD, 2016; Statistics New Zealand, 2018g). While the number of households below the income poverty threshold in New Zealand sits within 0.1 per cent of the OECD average, 46.1 per cent of single-parent households experience poverty, 14.2 per cent above the OECD average (OECD, 2019, p. 3). At six times that of partnered parents, this equates to the sixth highest disparity between these two household types across forty-four OECD countries.

This research begins by asking how public policy recognises and responds to single-parent family material outcomes in New Zealand. To investigate influences on single-parent families' material outcomes over time, the gap in acknowledging changing family structures, labour market conditions, and how family and welfare policies have responded are highlighted and discussed (Boston, 2019; Kelsey, 1997; St John & Cotterell, 2019; St John & Dale, 2012).

Further, without some definitive departure from the problem definitions policy has emphasised over the last several decades, it appears unlikely that policy outcomes will recognise some of the challenges faced by single-parent families in (post-)neoliberal conditions. This research, therefore, seeks to identifying how policy framing of this problem has compromised single-parent families' material outcomes, asking: how does the welfare and family policy lineage represent single-parent family material outcomes as a policy problem?

A ‘wellbeing approach’ to public policy and expenditure responds to the limits of fiscal and economic indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) and consumer price or wage indices, looking to other measurement concepts that capture how different groups can live healthy and fulfilling lives (Dalziel, 2018; OECD, 2013, 2020c, 2021b; Sen, 1984; Stiglitz et al., 2009). The indicators designed to interpret these give policy actors the opportunity to embark on analytical procedures prompting insights beyond economic prosperity, asking “How can policies improve our lives? Are we measuring the right things?” and “Are our lives getting better?” (OECD, 2022; Statistics New Zealand, 2021a).

As the budget policy documents analysed in this research demonstrate, the goal to invest in a ‘wellbeing approach’ for the New Zealand government has entailed a range of work towards answering these questions. Introducing the prioritisation of budgeting around a set of ‘wellbeing priorities,’ the Sixth Labour Government has sought to establish procedures that take the innovations developed by the OECD and the New Zealand Treasury to “anchor” public policy and budgeting in a wellbeing framework (New Zealand Government, 2017, p. 9; Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018a).

The progress in implementing this approach demonstrates the potential for improving single-parent families’ lives and material outcomes (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 1). While women lead most single-parent families in New Zealand, this group intersects with various backgrounds across ages and ethnicities. By employing measures and analytical procedures that illuminate how material outcomes might link to other life factors and experiences, a ‘wellbeing approach’ to policy examines how the heterogenous factors coinciding with single parenthood can impact material outcomes across the life course. In countries like New Zealand, where poverty and inequality have persisted over decades, policy and budget-makers have increasingly aimed to target the complexity of understanding policy

intervention for improved material outcomes by introducing a ‘wellbeing approach’ (OECD, 2021b; Smith, 2018; Treasury, 2011, 2013a, 2021b).

Interpreting policy problems in broader and interconnected contexts, the ‘wellbeing approach’ represents a way to reconcile public policy and budgeting for complex and intergenerational policy problems that typically interact with a range of social and economic conditions (Treasury, 2021b). Concerning this opportunity, this research finally asks: to what extent can a ‘wellbeing approach’ contribute to improved material wellbeing outcomes for single-parent families in New Zealand?

For public policy and budget decision making, what is measured matters, for more than one reason. While associations between material conditions and subsequent outcomes, such as the health risks or learning outcomes, can be drawn, there is no single, comprehensive way to record how ‘well off’ a household is (Nolan & Whelan, 2010; Perry, 2019; Whelan et al., 2004). As an approach that proceeds by accounting for social and non-monetised wellbeing impacts alongside economic ones, the ‘wellbeing approach’ provides methods that can capture a broader range of outcomes and link these with a wider range of life experiences and realities that impact material outcomes.

Drawing together a range of measures, ‘wellbeing frameworks’ increase the opportunity to strengthen evidence-informed policy for improved material outcomes for many groups (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018b, p. 4; Treasury, 2018a, p. 6; 2021b, p. 8). At the same time, the emphasis on evidence-informed policy linked to a ‘wellbeing approach’ underscores how the prevalence of measurement and analytical procedures derived through Euro-normative, and often hetero and gender-normative methodologies can reinforce deficit narratives and outcomes

(Du Bois et al., 2018; Kukutai et al., 2020; Kukutai & Walter, 2015; Saltelli & Giampietro, 2017).

Despite efforts to ensure policy is evidence-informed, measurement method selection remains political (Cairney, 2015, 2018; Deeming, 2013; Mauron, 2014; Weijers & Morrison, 2018, p. 4). Statistical methods and measurement approaches, therefore, continue to be shaped by political environments, motivations and priorities (Cairney, 2018; Howard, 2021; Nutley et al., 2019; Stewart & Roberts, 2018). Examining the extent to which the ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand captures how policy can positively influence the heterogeneous factors and realities that shape single-parent families’ material outcomes is therefore important.

Policy research in a settler-state

New Zealand is headed by the British Crown, signatories to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, agreed upon with Māori rangatira in 1840). The Treaty of Waitangi is a constitutional document designed to dictate the distribution of power in New Zealand and protect the rights of Māori as tangata whenua (the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand) (Godfery, 2016; Jackson & Mutu, 2016; Tawhai et al., 2011).³ Obligations to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi stipulate that the interests and protection of Māori as Indigenous peoples are used to inform law and public policy (Cabinet Office, 2019). Despite this and critical work towards governance arrangements that honour rights to self-determination and Māori sovereignty under He Whakaputanga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations

³ The te reo Māori and English texts of the Treaty give effect to different definitions and rights of Māori and the Crown.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, processes to uphold these remain politically and legally contested (Charters, 2015; Palmer & Smith, 2017).

For Indigenous peoples, colonisation “actively produces dispossession, marginalisation and cultural dislocation” (Cunneen, 2016, p. 56). The dispossession of land, resources and taonga, such as data,⁴ and the policies upholding this, are directly linked to present-day structural inequities and experiences of poverty or material deprivation (Borell et al., 2018; McIntosh & Mulholland, 2013; Poata-Smith, 2013; Walker, 1990). Further, Pākehā systems that privilege Euro-normative values over te ao Māori reinforce systemic racism and other discriminatory biases at various points in Māori families’ lives (Borell et al., 2018; Kukutai & Walter, 2019; Sporle et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2020).

As a Pākehā researcher in a settler colony, I deem it necessary and important to employ methods that ensure spaces of policy-making are examined in light of the politics of Indigenous rights to self-determination and to centre methods that highlight how this compromises those acting on behalf of Crown agencies (Charters, 2015). Employing methods that seek to acknowledge the impacts of colonisation and the denial rights to self-determination continue to have on the lives of Māori, I use strength-based approaches to enable critical analysis of this policy problem and the capacity a ‘wellbeing approach’ holds for transformative policy (Bargh & Otter, 2009; Came et al., 2020; O’Sullivan et al., 2021).

Using this critical background, the first chapter of this thesis explores demographic data concerning single-parent families in New Zealand which conveys the heterogeneous

⁴ Meaning possessions or effects, and often, items of significant cultural and social value. See also: Te Mana Raraunga. (2016). *Māori Data Sovereignty Network Charter*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58e9b10f9de4bb8d1fb5ebbc/t/5913020d15cf7dde1df34482/1494417935052/Te+Mana+Raraunga+Charter+%28Final+%26+Approved%29.pdf>

characteristics of this population, and provides a background to the social-structural contexts linked to material outcomes in New Zealand. It then introduces the concept of a ‘wellbeing approach’ and how it might develop policy that improves single-parent families’ material outcomes. The second chapter then examines New Zealand family and welfare policy from the last two decades in relation to similar welfare states, to identify how prevalent policy framing used over this period has compromised single-parent families’ material outcomes.

The third chapter of this thesis synthesises single-parent families’ lived experience literature, providing an alternative set of data that reflects affirmative and challenging realities faced by single-parent families, while highlighting policy conditions that have exacerbated these. The fourth chapter comprises a critical discourse analysis of key policy discourse materials gathered from budgets 2018 to 2022, producing an account of how a ‘wellbeing approach’ characterises ideas related to policy for single-parent family material outcomes, and the extent to which this represents a ideational shift that would enable improved outcomes for this group.

The thesis concludes by discussing how the ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand appears to break with or reinforce some of the ideological beliefs that impact policy for single-parent families, and consequently, their material outcomes. Drawing on the critical discourse analysis and the material implications presented by the ‘approach’, I conclude that the ‘wellbeing approach’ reflects ideas and developments evident in the welfare and family policy-making lineage that limit recognition of and responses to the realities and challenges single-parent families present in the experiential findings. Further, I argue the critical discourse analysis reveals how the political motivations and ideological underpinnings of ‘inclusive liberalism’ undermine aims that would realise transformative policy and improved outcomes for single-parent families.

Examining the recent developments concerning the implementation of a ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand public policy, in relation to the persistence of disparities in material outcomes for single-parent families, this research contributes to research in ways so far unexplored in the public policy literature. Further, the selection of methods designed to highlight the relationships between ideas, policy discourse and material outcomes, produces distinct findings that deepen understandings of the extent to which public policy impacts single-parent families’ lives.

Chapter One: Single-parent Families in New Zealand

Demographic data shows that the size of the single-parent family population makes up a well-established proportion of the family population in New Zealand. Data also shows extensive ethnic diversity within that population and that more single-parent families are headed by Māori and Pacific peoples than Pākehā and other ethnicities (Statistics New Zealand, 2018g; Superu, 2016). Illustrating these heterogeneous characteristics and how the ‘wellbeing approach’ could respond to this, establishes the prospects of how the ‘approach’ could improve material wellbeing for single-parent families.

This chapter draws on official statistics on single-parent families in New Zealand and key trends related to material wellbeing for this group to establish the significance of single-parent family population characteristics and the potential for a ‘wellbeing approach’ to improve these outcomes. While the data focuses on New Zealand single-parent families, studies from other states with high rates of single parenthood are also drawn on.

Single-parent family demographics

Single parenthood and growing up with a single parent at one or more life stages is a common experience in New Zealand. In part, the relatively significant proportion of single-parent families can be linked to important social and demographic changes in New Zealand over the last several decades, including the women’s rights movement and social turns since the nineteen-seventies, ensuring women's expanded participation in the labour force and greater levels of financial and social independence (Baker, 2000, 2006; Lunt et al., 2008; O'Brien, 2012; Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019). This common trend of single-parent families as

a significant proportion of the family population has steadied over the last two decades, shifting between 27.9 and 30.2 per cent between 2000-2018 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018e). Currently, 24 per cent of families are headed by a single parent, equating to 27.9 per cent of the child population (Ministry of Social Development, 2018; OECD, 2016; Statistics New Zealand, 2018g).

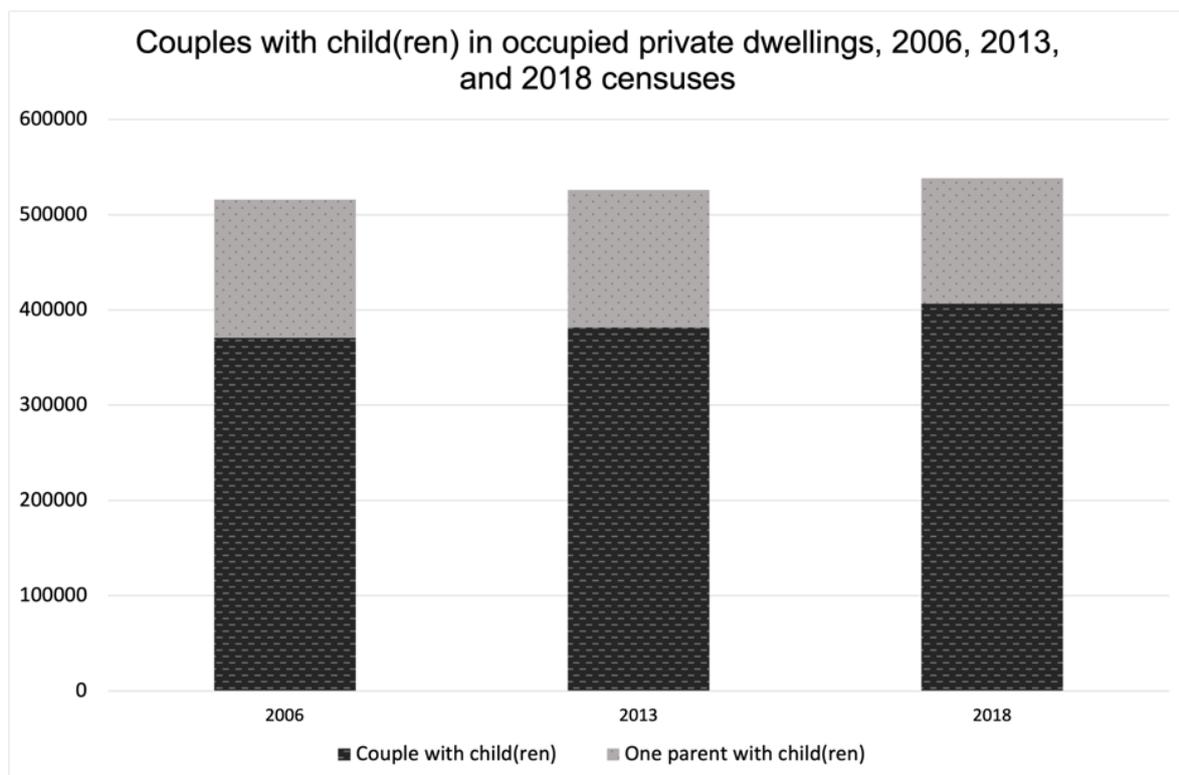


Figure 1: Statistics New Zealand. (2018e). Number of dependent children and total number of children in occupied private dwellings, 2006, 2013, and 2018 censuses.

Indigenous perspectives can emphasise how single parenthood is understood from a different perspective. Te ao Māori emphasises all parenting and raising of tamariki as a strengthening linkages across whakapapa, ancestral and intergenerational knowledge, and present or future

whānau (Metge, 1990; Pihama, 2012; Ware et al., 2018).⁵ ‘Whānau’, commonly understood as a family or extended family unit, also translates as ‘to give birth’ or ‘to be born’, underscoring how birth and children strengthen the interconnectedness of whakapapa and whānau wellbeing (Lawson-Te Aho, 2010).

These cultural factors and the importance of whakapapa sets single parenthood apart from social trends occurring for other ethnic groups and the Euro-normative cultural attitudes that often deem single parenthood a detrimental circumstance (Cram et al., 2021; Ware, 2014). It also means extended family members often act as close reciprocal supports to single parents and their children, which can also become a contributing factor in deciding to parent alone more frequently for Māori than Pākehā (Kukutai, 2013; Kukutai & Walter, 2019; Smith, 1999; Taylor & Kukutai, 2016; Walter et al., 2020). Tamariki Māori wellbeing are more likely to be shaped by household characteristics, including maternal age and educational attainment, rather than household structure (Kukutai et al., 2020). These factors are important concerning the limitations of some public policies to recognise contextual information vital to the wellbeing of Māori families (Pihama, 2012; Waldegrave et al., 2016; Ware et al., 2018).

Typical within many OECD countries, the majority of single parents in New Zealand are women, at four times that of fathers (OECD, 2020b; Statistics New Zealand, 2021a). Yet, single parents range significantly in age and other demographic characteristics. The graph below shows the range of ages of single parents by gender (limited to binary gender identities), with single mothers most likely to be between thirty-five and forty-four years old, and single fathers aged forty-five to fifty-four years old (Statistics New Zealand, 2021a).

⁵ Whakapapa is the te reo Māori term used for genealogy, ancestral links or descent in a broad sense. See also: Lawson-Te Aho, K. (2010). *Definitions of Whānau: A review of selected literature*.

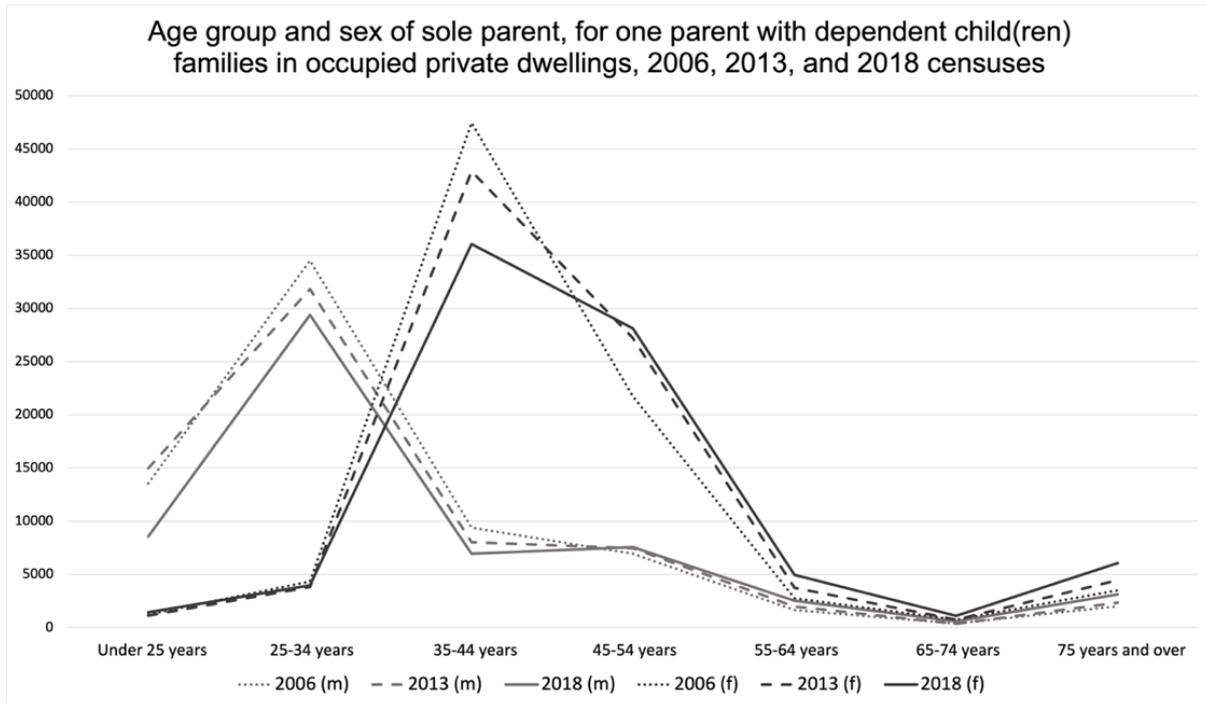


Figure 2: Age group and sex of sole parent, for one parent with dependent child(ren) families in occupied private dwellings, 2006, 2013, and 2018 censuses. Source: Statistics New Zealand (2021a).

Research has shown that negative associations in material outcomes can be shaped by the age and gender of parents, combined with the age at which they had their first child, and the age of their youngest child (Ballantyne, 2004; Krassoi Peach, 2018; Treanor, 2018). Younger single parents are less likely to attain higher levels of education or training prior to the birth of their first child which can often result in lower socioeconomic status or fewer resources to draw on as parents (Härkönen, 2017; Misra et al., 2011).

Differences in children's ages can also contribute to material outcomes (Krassoi Peach, 2018; Thévenon & Luci, 2012; Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). As the graph below shows, age groups of the youngest children living with a single parent in New Zealand range considerably. Most single parents have one child (38.1 per cent), while 34.4 per cent have two, and 27.5 per cent have three or more (Statistics New Zealand, 2018g; Superu, 2018). Of the total child population

fifteen years old or under, 14.5% live in a single-parent household, while around 17% per cent of 10-14-year-olds living in single-parent households (Statistics New Zealand, 2021c).

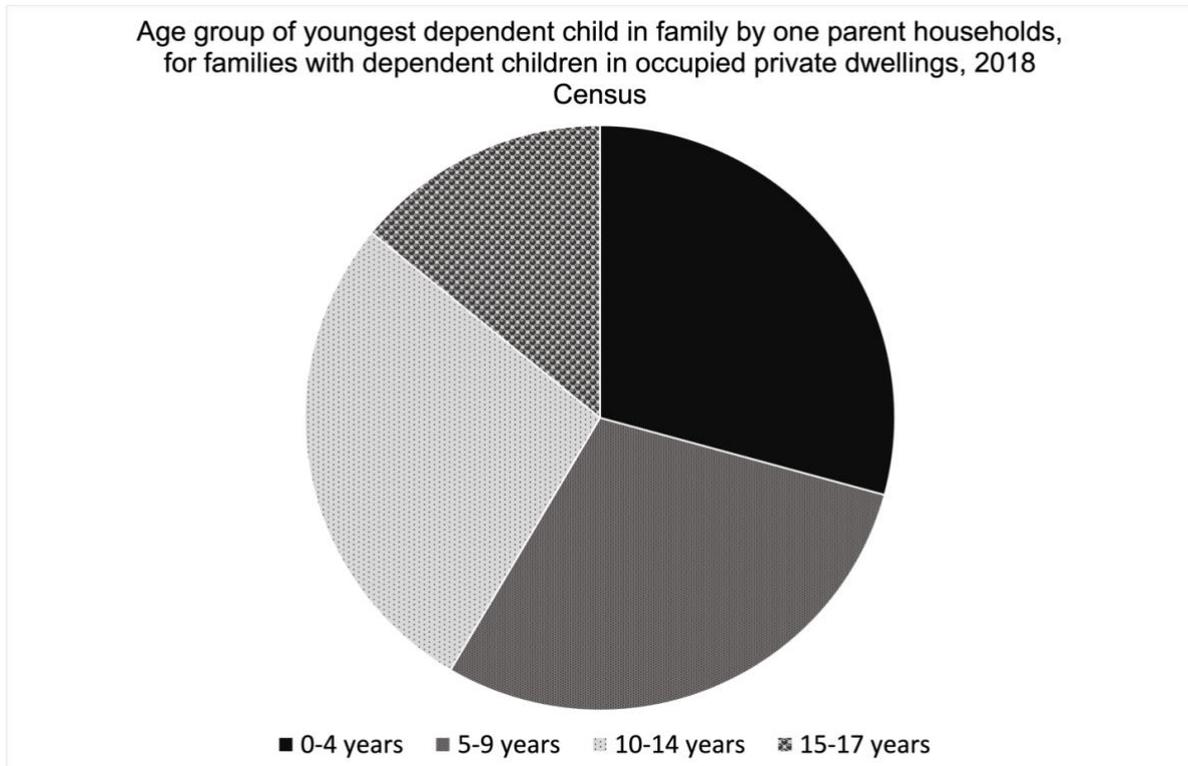


Figure 3: Age group of youngest dependent child in family by family type, for families with dependent children in occupied private dwellings, 2018 Census. Source: Statistics New Zealand (2018c).

Ethnic diversity of single-parent families is another feature of the population. The proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples families headed by single parents is far higher than that of other ethnicities (Superu, 2015). Further, the Māori child population is growing at three times the rest of the child population, with children aged 9 to 18 growing by between 5 and 15 per cent as a proportion of the Māori child population over the last five years (Kukutai, 2013; Statistics New Zealand, 2018f, 2020a). This younger demographic has created a population boom, expected to expand until at least 2043 (Jackson, 2011; Kukutai, 2013). Additionally, the young demographic profile of Pacific peoples' families sees one in four children born of Pacific Island

ethnicity, and 43.8 per cent of the Pacific ethnicity population 18 years old or under (Statistics New Zealand, 2018a, 2018b).

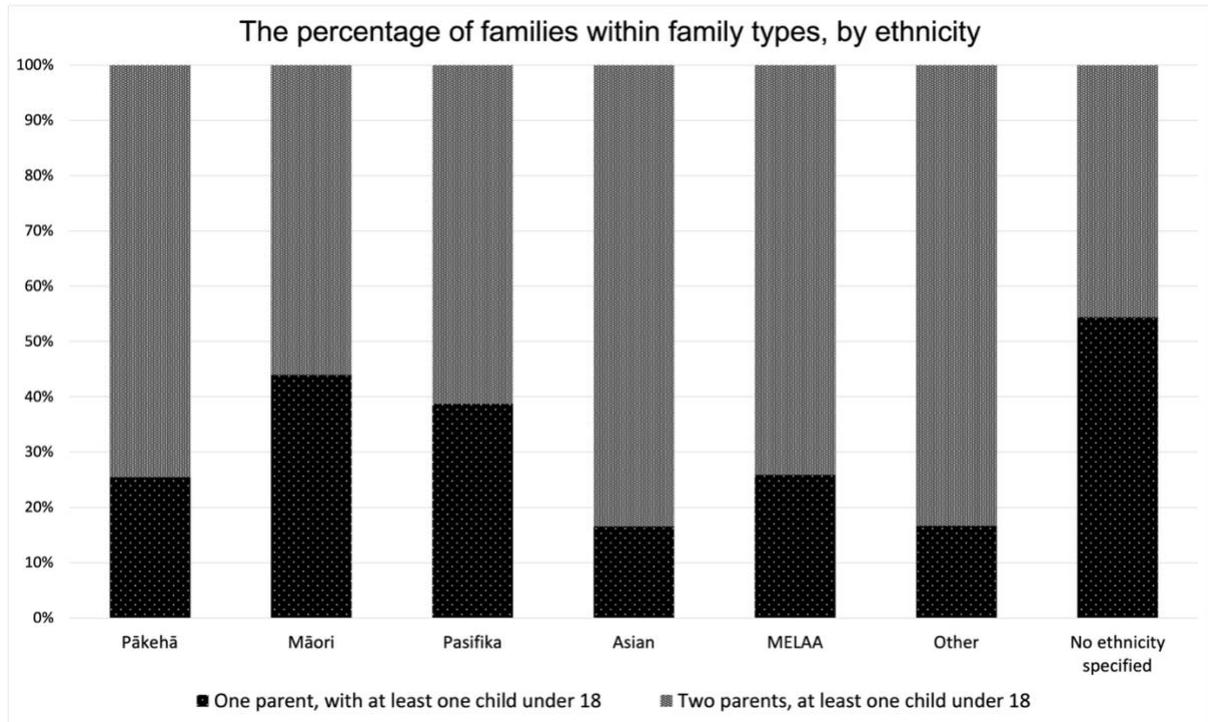


Figure 4: Percentage of families within each family type, by ethnicity, 2013 census of populations and dwellings. Source: Superu, *Demographic overview of families in New Zealand*, (2016, p. 30).

The ethnic heterogeneity coinciding with single parenthood signifies the potential variation in material outcomes across the life course at stages and accumulatively. In New Zealand, Māori women earn an average of 11.7 per cent less than Pākehā women, while for Pasifika women this is 14.76 per cent (Cochrane et al., 2022, p. 10). Further, this disparity has been a persistent and increasing trend over decades (Treasury, 2018c).

Single-parent families and the life course

Negative associations in material outcomes can be dependent on the age and gender of parents, combined with the age at which they had their first child and the age of their youngest child (Ballantyne, 2004; Krassoi Peach, 2018; Treanor, 2018). Younger parents have sometimes been less likely to have higher levels of education or training prior to the birth of their first child and less likely to have material resources to draw on (Misra et al., 2011). Ensuring policies provide opportunities for single parents to return to work, where they have had their child at a young age – whether they remain single or not – can prevent experiences of severe material deprivation (Cram et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2019).

However, detrimental impacts on material outcomes appear to occur for many single parents at almost any life stage (Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). While single parents over forty are more likely to experience adversities gaining secure housing and from their health, those between 30-39 are more disadvantaged by their income (Krassoi Peach, 2018, p. 29). Differences in work intensity, income stability and level of material deprivation and poverty have also been associated with comparatively higher and accumulative detrimental impacts to material wellbeing across time (Treanor, 2018, p. 93).

The size of the population of single parent families reported in the census data, combined with the fact that half of New Zealand mothers experience single-parenthood before turning 50, highlights how single-parenthood is, for many, transitional rather than permanent (Hapori, 2010; Hutt, 2012). This is supported by studies that show changing relationship status involving children is common (Fletcher et al., 2020; Hutt, 2012; Krassoi Peach, 2018). Furthermore the Growing Up in New Zealand study (GUINZ) reports that in 2010, only 4.8 per cent of mothers described themselves as not in a relationship at the birth of their child while only three years

later, the 2013 census shows that 33.9 per cent of single parents had a child between 0 and 4 years old (Morton et al., 2015; Statistics New Zealand, 2018e).

The impact of flux in family material circumstances on children when relationships change reflects the importance of recognising single-parent family material outcomes as a transgenerational policy problem. Policies supporting single parents more generously and over extended periods, from when children are very young to 18 years old, mitigate multiple impacts on material outcomes and have a greater chance of lowering poverty rates for transitions through single parenthood (Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). Children in single-parent families are also more likely to have lower incomes and wealth and educational attainment entering adulthood, tied to their household income growing up rather than the household structure itself (Bernardi et al., 2019, p. 241; Lerman et al., 2017, p. 752; Millar & Ridge, 2018).

These studies emphasise how the bind between ‘productive’ labour intensity, raising children and family or welfare policies create various outcomes at different life stages, but generally combine in ways that impact material outcomes at adversely across several stages or in accumulative ways (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). Reflecting on the proportion of the population led by single parents and the range of experiences represented in the demography, how policy recognises these is important for policy to “improve the wellbeing and living standards of all New Zealanders across multiple dimensions” (Treasury, 2017, p. 7).

A ‘wellbeing approach’ to public policy and expenditure

The ‘wellbeing approach’ establishes objectives to better understand material wellbeing as an interconnected outcome for public policy, and accepts that social and economic outcomes are often interwoven and inter-reliant (Treasury, 2021b, p. 8). This is reflected in the recent

developments built into the Living Standards Framework (LSF) and He Ara Waiora (a wellbeing framework employing a Māori perspective on wellbeing) recognising the interrelated nature of cultural factors towards wellbeing (Treasury, 2021b, pp. 8-9). Further, the New Zealand government perceives prioritising wellbeing as a way to “emphasise the range of factors that lead us to live fulfilling lives” (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 2).

GDP and related economic indicators have been recognised as unsatisfactory measures of national progress since their post-industrial adoption (see Kuznets, 1946; Smith, 1776). In the twentieth century, economists emphasised how tying policy indicators of ‘the good life’ to market performance indicators restricts the different values people attach to prosperous lives, and distorts the value activities based outside economic definitions of production, such as child-rearing and domestic care (Nordhaus, 1971; Nussbaum et al., 1993; Sen, 1984; Waring, 1988, 1989).

Instead, a ‘wellbeing approach’ emphasises a range of outcomes, aimed at enabling broader understandings of the impact areas public policy and expenditure can target to help more people flourish (Dalziel, 2018; OECD, 2013, 2020c, 2021b; Sen, 1984; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Measures of wellbeing vary according to design and population data available, but usually include a range of material, health, education, employment and self-perceived safety or happiness outcomes (Durand, 2015; OECD, 2014, 2020c, 2022; Wagle, 2014). Across OECD countries, this has led to various comparative national, cross-national and inter-temporal analytic capabilities towards measuring wellbeing (King et al., 2018).

A range of developments have supported the proliferation of wellbeing measurements and frameworks in OECD countries. While many OECD countries had incorporated social impact measures into budget processes prior to these developments, the ‘Commission on the

Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress' report for the OECD detailed the criticality of expanding beyond these for public policy, advocating for broader population measures (Stiglitz et al., 2009; Weijers & Morrison, 2018). The OECD's 'Better Life Index' and 'How's Life' report, also promoted wellbeing measures as a central component of future public policy, and the United Kingdom Germany, Wales and the United Arab Emirates all took steps to incorporate wellbeing into policy between 2014 and 2017 (Allin & Hand, 2017, p. 8; Gorecki & Kelly, 2012; OECD, 2011b, 2014).

As state governments have increased data gathering capabilities, a 'wellbeing approach' has been enabled (Oman, 2021). To create efficient wellbeing frameworks providing insightful data for policy insights and prioritisation, population data using various statistical outcomes are required (OECD, 2020). Even where a living standards framework is expressed as a tool to support policy prioritisation, rather than to 'replace' other kinds of sector-based knowledge and evidence, as it is in New Zealand, a wellbeing framework requires ongoing data collection to sustain 'reliable' insights (Treasury, 2015b, 2018b). The OECD emphasises the benefits of this for policy, encouraging state capacity-building for evidence-informed policy-making and stating its crucial role in "fostering good public governance to achieve broad societal goals, such as promoting sustainable development or improving well-being" (OECD, 2020a, p. 2).

The use of such evidence for policy has helped develop increasingly nuanced and detailed insights for policy-makers (Nutley et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the continued emphasis on wellbeing outcomes and evidence-based policy-making, primarily resourced by state governments, means evidence can be used for politicising policy problems and politically motivated values claims to be placed ahead of other interests (Baekgaard et al., 2019; Cairney, 2015). This ensures that even where a 'wellbeing approach' seeks to incorporate a range of

data sources it remains open to deficit interpretations for political justifications of social expenditure reductions or other policy directions that disadvantage some families over others.

These interpretations are important for single-parent families, who are often linked to deficit narratives through focuses on data or ‘evidence’ associating unemployment and welfare assistance to this family type (O'Brien, 2016, 2019). In ‘liberal welfare states’ including New Zealand and the United Kingdom, governments have used data to highlight unemployment rates of single parents to justify conditions that narrowed welfare assistance and introduced the prevalent use of active employment policies and conditionality of welfare receipt to reinforce these (Cairney, 2018; Gray, 2019). These policies and their impact on single-parent families are explored in chapters two and three. Here, though, it is worth noting that emphasis on evidence does not always bode well for these families.

The ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand

The adoption of a ‘wellbeing approach’ has taken on several specific innovations relevant to the material outcomes of single-parent families in a New Zealand. As a way to focus on wellbeing measures throughout policy analysis and budget initiative development, a whole-of-government implementation of a ‘wellbeing approach’ has been a procedural focus of the last four budgets (New Zealand Government, 2022a; Treasury, 2018a, 2019a, 2020b). However, the ‘wellbeing approach’ reaches beyond the LSF dashboard itself concerning policy and budgeting in New Zealand. The Sixth Labour Government, elected in October 2017, has described ‘wellbeing’ as a priority, benchmark, a goal and a measure in both political and policy discourse since this government’s earliest communications (Ardern, 2018; Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c).

During his first question time as Minister of Finance, the Minister stated success would be measured by combining fiscal indicators and measures of “how we improve the well-being of New Zealanders, how we reduce the rates of child poverty, and how we improve sustainability” (Robertson, 2017). The Budget 2018 Policy Statement then indicated that wellbeing measures were to become a feature of budget-making, while the government accelerated the development of the LSF dashboard as a means to analyse wellbeing indicators (New Zealand Government, 2017, p. 9).

Goals to embed a ‘wellbeing approach’ are supported and informed by several long-term developments fostered by the New Zealand Treasury and Statistics New Zealand over the last 30 years (Au & Karacaoglu, 2015; Karacaoglu, 2015; Treasury, 2011, 2013b, 2015a; Weijers & Morrison, 2018, p. 5). Treasury incorporated measures of wellbeing for policy and budget-making in the 1990s, drawing on Statistics New Zealand’s ‘Monitoring Progress Towards a Sustainable New Zealand’ while the Ministry of Social Policy’s ‘Social Report’ encouraged the used of social impact measures (Ministry of Social Policy, 2001; Statistics New Zealand, 2002). Responding to the OECD’s Better Life Index and national consultation, a suite of wellbeing measures was incorporated into Treasury’s budget analyses using the Living Standards Framework (LSF) in 2011 (Treasury, 2011, p. 14).

The LSF has since been built upon and ‘refined’ for policy and budget prioritisation and guidance (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c; Treasury, 2018d). Modelling overlapping wellbeing measurements so these can be viewed in relation to each other, the LSF is organised by four ‘capitals’ based on the OECD’s ‘Better Life Initiative’ domains of wellbeing: financial and physical, human, social and natural (Treasury, 2011, p. 14). The ‘capitals’ are used to interpret how wellbeing now (‘how much social connectedness is in stock presently?’) will impact groups into the future (‘what does that mean for these children as they grow up?’)

(Smith, 2018; Treasury, 2021a, p. 14). Treasury and the New Zealand Government use the LSF to support policy-making and budget decisions, drawing on the wellbeing measures reflected on the LSF dashboard as a “means to improving the quality of policy advice”, complementing, rather than replacing, other sector and agency-based evidence and advice (Smith, 2018, p. 6).

The continued development of the Living Standards Framework is designed to focus alignment of expenditure with those areas where wellbeing is seen to suffer, while two other distinct developments support the ‘wellbeing approach’ to budgeting and policy. First, the inclusion of ‘wellbeing analysis’ into the CBAX process, has created a cost-benefit analysis tool designed to measure social impacts and now ‘wellbeing impacts’ (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c; Treasury, 2018d). ‘Wellbeing impacts’ are used as values in cost benefit assessment for budget initiative development to “ensure that robust wellbeing and value for money assessment is applied to investment and budget decisions” (Treasury, 2021a, p. 2).

Secondly, political concepts used to frame these procedures can also be understood as part of the ‘approach’. The political terminology used to announce the Labour budgets as ‘wellbeing budgets’, is an example of how improving wellbeing has become a political idea to frame and guide the current government’s policy direction (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c). The structuring of the budget around a selection of three to five ‘wellbeing priorities’ is another example of this (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018a).

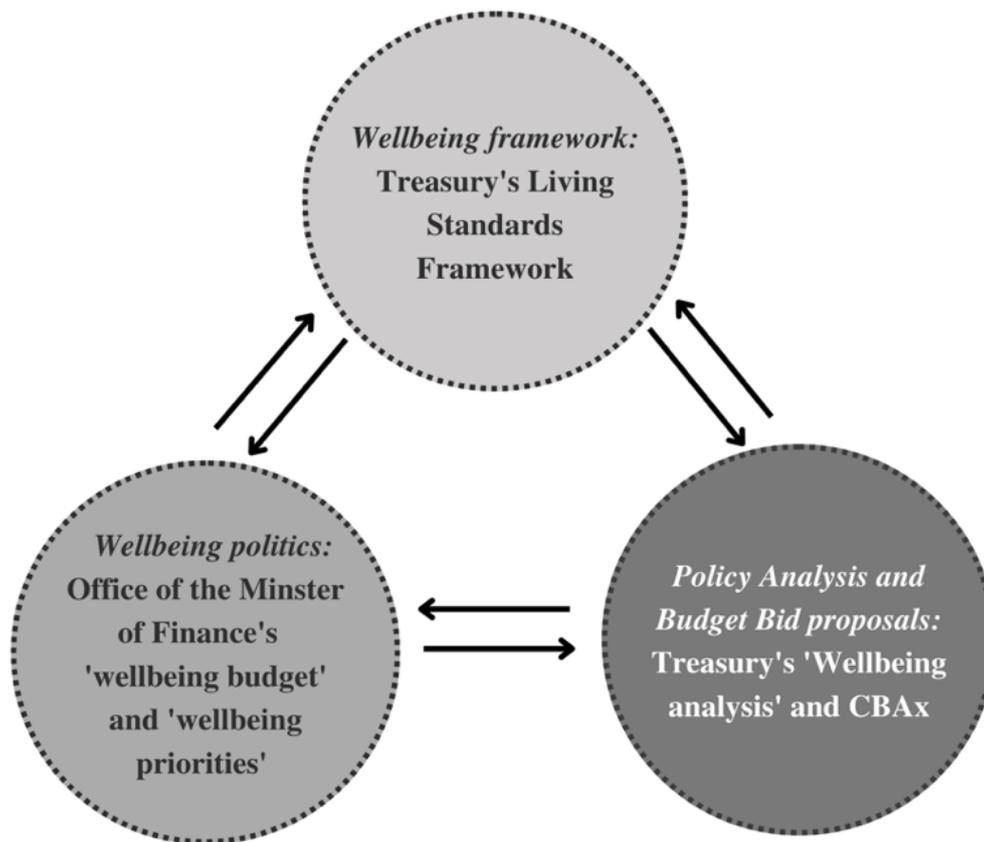


Figure 5: Components of the 'wellbeing approach' in New Zealand

As explored further in the critical discourse analysis in Chapter Four, these components become a way to claim political commitment to wellbeing. Understanding the ‘approach’ as more than a conceptual and economic tool by which to analyse and prioritise budget expenditure, I argue that a ‘wellbeing approach’ is an idea that goes beyond the implementation of wellbeing measures and frameworks. In this way, the ‘approach’ is used to situate policy problems in a progressive liberal framing, to promote ideas of ‘wellbeing’, inclusivity and the better future the government wishes to align itself with that are not necessarily reflected in the budget policy discourse (Bacchi, 2009; Fairclough, 2010; Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, 2020; Treasury, 2019b).

This does not mean that the ‘wellbeing approach’ excludes the potential for real material benefits to single-parent families. Rather, understanding the ‘wellbeing approach’ as a framework, process, and political tool highlights how policy concepts are frequently constructed out of political motivations, and social and cultural ideas that shape the interpretation of policy problems, and the extent to which these are responded to in ways that recognise and respond to the material circumstances of single-parent families (Bacchi, 2016; Béland & Petersen, 2014; Humpage & Craig, 2008; Mahon, 2016). In this research, concepts relating to the ‘wellbeing approach’ are used to examine the significations of budget policy discourse and the extent to which these might establish improved policy outcomes.

Chapter Two: The (Neo)liberal Welfare State

Welfare and family policies are integral to leveraging better material outcomes for single-parent families (Bradshaw, 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018; Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). To examine how different family and welfare policies have approached material wellbeing, this chapter draws on the well-documented but contested concept of a ‘liberal welfare state.’ This concept is used to explore the ideas and beliefs often associated with single-parent families’ material outcomes in a neoliberal policy-making context in New Zealand over the last two decades, and how these have shaped the policy mechanisms used and those outcomes. To do so, policy mechanisms and how these have been associated with single-parent family outcomes are examined, placing New Zealand family and welfare policy into a comparative context, and creating a framework for the in-depth account of single-parent families’ experiences and material outcomes in a ‘liberal welfare state’ in the next chapter.

A ‘wellbeing approach’ to policy and budget-making could establish several benefits for the multifaceted nature of single-parent family material wellbeing in New Zealand. Insofar as single-parent families represent a heterogenous population, whose material outcomes are influenced by diverse circumstances over the life course, the ‘wellbeing approach’ presents an opportunity to respond to this and positively enhance public policy for this group. The second half of this chapter introduces aspects of a ‘wellbeing approach’ that hold potential for enhancing public policy for improved material outcomes for single-parents, and the factors that might limit the ‘approach’ from doing so. The analysis focuses on how the ‘wellbeing approach’ might provide procedures and analyses that recognise and respond to some of the challenges single-parent families often face that previous policies have been unable to alleviate or in some instances, have reinforced.

Family policy and a ‘liberal welfare state’

New Zealand welfare policy is created in a unique ethnographic and socio-cultural demographic context. While family and welfare policy concepts are closely linked to the material outcomes of families in New Zealand through the empirical findings presented in this chapter, two other countries are drawn on here for several reasons. Australia and the United Kingdom are similar politically, as Westminster Parliamentary systems and Commonwealth countries. Welfare or family policy comparative studies often group these countries together, as they have shared and transferred policy knowledge over these decades, resulting in similar designs, approaches and sometimes spending levels (Brady, 2021; Cho, 2017; Russell & Masselot, 2020; Skinner et al., 2017).

They are also connected through the dominance of Euro-normative beliefs concerning the family, parenthood, care and gender. The dominance of Euro-normative familial constructs produced in the United Kingdom and transferred to the settler colonies carry an element of heteronormative, Christian and nuclear family model legacy policy (Daly, 2020; Daly & Lewis, 2000; Kukutai et al., 2020; Kukutai et al., 2016). Such ideas and beliefs are an important influence on family and welfare policy (Béland & Petersen, 2014; Lunt, 2014).

Socially constructed and culturally embedded interpretations of ‘family’ inform and shape how family and welfare policy is produced, forming representations of how a policy problem is perceived and acted upon (Bacchi, 2009; Foucault, 1988; Kukutai et al., 2020; Mortelmans et al., 2016; Sigle, 2016). The ideas that emerge reflecting recent developments in family and welfare policy in New Zealand and similar states highlight how implicit social and public perceptions of single parenthood contribute to policy approaches and trends. In this way, the

ideas and beliefs elevated in Pākehā, tauīwi or Euro-normative institutional settings and the policies they produce, are linked to material outcomes of families in New Zealand.

English-speaking, affluent OECD countries, including Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, converge concerning a number of twentieth-century social phenomena (Haux, 2013; OECD, 2019).⁶ Following changes spurred on by the female liberation movement in the mid-twentieth century, views on contraception and marriage altered dramatically and single parenthood formed a more prevalent and relatively socially accepted part of society (Bakker et al., 2003; Daly, 2020). This ‘new social risk’ required significant revision across public policy domains, with special attention to how welfare policy would ensure the material wellbeing of families and children (Bonoli, 2005, 2007, 2013; Fagnani, 2011; OECD, 2011a).

Increasing significantly between the 1970s-2000, a high proportion of the population belonging to this family type was established in these countries compared to other OECD countries. Since then, single-parent families have represented a proportionately significant and steady part of the family population in these countries (OECD, 2020b). Tracing the convergence of policies responding to this shared demographic trend grounds single-parent family material outcomes in a comparative framework, to identify the potential impact of cultural, political and ideological factors on family and welfare policy (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Further, these countries have often transferred welfare and family policy, resulting in many overlaps to the policy programme mix or ‘welfare state regime.’ Welfare regime types aim to classify states according to the direction of welfare provisions and policies, helping to compare

⁶ Canada is excluded from the discussion here, due to the many differences across provincial political systems and subsequent family or welfare policies.

the relationship between welfare policy, the conditions in which they are implemented and their outcomes (Castles, 1985; Castles & Mitchell, 1992; Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Welfare regime typologies have often focused on how social policy portfolio expenditure was directed (Castles, 1985; Castles & Mitchell, 1992; Scruggs & Allan, 2008). According to this logic, ‘liberal welfare states’ rely on modest state intervention, providing limited, means-tested social assistance to incentivise participation in a ‘productive’ economy (Castles, 1985; Castles & Mitchell, 1992; Esping-Andersen, 1990). Noting critiques of this classification and that “not all spending counts the same”, welfare regime ‘types’ must encapsulate more than social expenditure level and look to the policy programme mix, settings and delivery to understand an overall impact on family outcomes (Castles, 2009, p. 46; Cho, 2017; Misra et al., 2007; Thévenon & Luci, 2012).

Even when disaggregated at the programme level, however, other perspectives that would highlight structural power relations on policy and the extent of ‘defamiliarisation’ in the ‘liberal welfare states’ over time may be excluded (Daly & Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Giullari, 2005; Liu, 2020; Misra et al., 2007; Orloff, 1993, 2009). Attitudes towards gender, the family and single parenthood as socially and historically constructed subjects, and the political or institutional factors that uphold ideas challenging better outcomes for single-parents, are therefore a central consideration for this research.

In this way, the New Zealand welfare state is understood as an idea constructed through its political and historical-institutional arrangements, and the socio-cultural and ideological significations produced from these, including racism, sexism, colonisation and attitudes to inequality (Baker & Cooper, 2018; Lunt, 2014, pp. 250-251; Ware et al., 2017). Frequently elaborated in how a policy programme defines and frames a problem, the following

examination situates New Zealand family and welfare policy and the local demographic context introduced in Chapter One, in relation to the other ‘liberal welfare states’ to draw focus to the both the shared and specific ideas concerning single-parent families’ material outcomes and recent policy.

Neoliberalism and the welfare state

Neoliberal policy-making in New Zealand has shaped welfare and family policies and many families’ material outcomes profoundly. Premised on economic responses to the globalised marketplace and theoretical assumptions that deregulated marketplaces provide optimum economic growth and opportunity, social and welfare policy objectives have shifted to align with the individual and market-oriented rationale over the last several decades (Deeming, 2014). A globalised neoliberal marketplace ensures local political economies are continually shaped by attempts to reward the privatised economy and productive individuals, and that welfare policy is subject to multiple economic and ideological influences that often subsume the interests of families and children (Baker & Cooper, 2018; Brodie, 2010).

In these settings, generous or universal welfare programmes relying on income and business taxes are frequently positioned as fiscally unsustainable, welfare eligibility is narrowed and policy mechanisms incentivising paid work participation for all working age adults are employed (Edmiston, 2017; Jenson, 2020; Lunt, 2014). Mechanisms include strict controls and conditions for receiving welfare benefits, programmes that require workforce participation, and minimal assistance to low-income families, and a shift away from state-assured social safety nets and towards individual responsibility for welfare (Brewer et al., 2002; Patrick, 2014b, 2017; Skinner et al., 2017; Starke, 2008).

Welfare policy changes following neoliberal reform in New Zealand have presented real contradictions for families and mothers. Removing the comprehensive social protection model during policy reform in the 1980s following concerns that the status quo fiscal management was no longer fit to compete in a globalised marketplace, prompted cuts to social expenditure that undermined secure and accessible support for families (Boston, 1993; Cheyne, 2000; Lunt et al., 2008; O'Brien, 2008). Reducing access to transitional support and removing protection against income inadequacy while the labour market was undergoing significant deregulation and reconfiguration created increased exposure to unemployment risks, while establishing new levels of precarity for families (Kelsey, 1993, pp. 77-80; O'Brien, 2008).

The combined economic, policy and labour force changes impacted families with children more than other groups, increasing poverty and widening inequality (Boston, 1993; Perry, 2019). As unprecedented numbers of women and mothers entered the labour force, policy reforms simultaneously denied families basic social and economic safeguards (Boston, 2014; Lunt et al., 2008; O'Brien, 2011; Starke, 2008). Reconfiguring the job market to demand flexible and full-time workers with adaptable and specialised skills, placed many single parents at a disadvantage in securing decent work, underscored by the income losses at higher rates for low-skill workers and women across this period (Card & Hyslop, 2021).

Ongoing preferences for neoliberal prioritisation may have also normalised public attitudes towards narrowed-down social assistance and reciprocal obligations for welfare, even if empathy for families living in poverty was maintained (Humpage, 2014, p. 142; Humpage, 2015, pp. 89-90). For example, neoliberal institutional preferences supported throughout much of the last two decades are linked to challenges in poverty reduction (Boston, 2013; Rashbrooke, 2021b). This has included 'third way' policy approaches, which assert that welfare policy reform can lead to broader efficiency and reduced externalities for policy problems like

family poverty. These policies have ensured neoliberal economic policy has been able to further confine the generosity of welfare policy (Brewer et al., 2002; Hills & Waldfogel, 2004).

Welfare programme retrenchment has also extended conditions tied to welfare receipt, fostering 'neo-paternalist' attitudes to family policy (Humpage, 2014). This can be seen in versions of 'third way' programmes such as 'social investment' policies emphasised as a tool to target the outcomes of those 'vulnerable', emphasising the role of individual responsibility and 'deservingness' concerning poverty or material hardship (Gray, 2019; O'Brien, 2016; St John & Cotterell, 2019).

Further, the structural asymmetry established by neoliberal policy-making has enabled businesses and the private sector to dictate job supply and the nature of the work supplied, sweeping aside opportunities for single-parents to match paid work and qualifications to their child rearing responsibilities (O'Brien, 2012, 2016; St John, 2013; St John & Dale, 2012). Many recent welfare policy amendments continue to hone in on individual responsibility, rather than acknowledging the structural economic and labour market forces that challenge families (Cram et al., 2021; O'Brien, 2019; Ware et al., 2017). Amidst all of this, neoliberal rationalisation of policy has maintained the arbitrary boundaries of production generated by the neoclassical economic rules ensuring one of the largest contributions to the economy, the unpaid labour of all parents, remains unpaid (Roper, 2011; Waring, 2018).

These policies have established norms that frequently challenge single-parent families' circumstances and realities and directly impact material outcomes. This is highlighted through tangible outcomes directly linked to policy mechanisms and other, implicit material factors. These include the anxiety induced through welfare sanctions, increased stress due to the competing demands of parenting and finding suitable income, and instances of ill health and

absence from paid work as a result of this stress or anxiety. While policies in these countries are often designed to offer single parents agency around parenting and income, numerous contradictions arise concerning the limitations and penalties policies in these states create for single parents.

Contemporary 'liberal welfare' policies

Increased obligations towards workforce participation for parents receiving social assistance, also called active employment or 'activation' policies, highlight a range of incompatible conditions created for single parents (Hills & Waldfogel, 2004; Millar, 2019; Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018; O'Brien, 2012). Requiring flexible or part-time work as children transition in age, active employment policies that incentivise or require labour market preparedness or participation, have demonstrated limited benefits for single parents (Ghysels & Van Lancker, 2011; Millar, 2019; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018). In many instances, these policies reward parents who prioritise paid work over parenting, normalising this as a cultural standard for single parents in similar ways to the norms expected of coupled parents (Brady, 2021, p. 309).

Further, policies emphasising paid work participation in the 'liberal welfare states' take place in post-neoliberal labour conditions that have removed many of the protections that enabled adequate flexibility and stability for workers (Jaehrling, 2015; Mahon, 2011; O'Brien, 2011). Even where work is celebrated as a source of self-esteem, role modelling, intellectual engagement or life-fulfilment, limited labour market offerings can undermine the material benefits available or force single parents to defend scenarios where stable hours and adequately paid work have been unavailable (Baker & Davis, 2018; Gray, 2017; O'Brien, 2011; St John, 2014).

A range of contradictions and inconsistencies emerge from the reciprocal obligations to the state parents are required to complete for benefit receipt (Cotterell et al., 2017; Gray, 2019; O'Brien, 2012, 2016). Despite recommendations that work readiness obligations should not be expected until a parent's youngest child six, parents currently receiving Sole Parent Support with children under three remain obliged to engage in steps to "prepare" for paid work, and a range of obligations remain in place for those with children over between three and six (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 90; Work and Income New Zealand, 2022).

Numerous examples highlight the contradictions involved in these conditions and the obligation to document paid work preparedness. Despite claims that increases in childcare accompanying policies that limit access to welfare support and require workforce participation, means-testing and inadequate coverage within childcare systems often undermine these benefits (Ball & Vincent, 2005; Dalgety, 2010, p. 20). In some instances, single parents are expected to work and leave their children in childcare, even when the quality of their time and income is compromised by the nature of the paid work (Gray, 2017). Ultimately these scenarios increase experiences of surveillance, diminish the agency and freedoms available to parents, and undermine the level of dignity associated with seeking social assistance (Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019; O'Brien, 2019; Thompson, 2015; Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019).

Reduced accessibility to social assistance through strict eligibility conditions is typical across the 'liberal welfare states'. The steady reduction of the age of a single parent's youngest child for benefit receipt has narrowed access to entitlements (Andersen, 2020; Haux, 2013; O'Brien, 2013, 2019; Wright & Patrick, 2019). This is despite evidence that a universal social assistance floor, or combined universal payment with additional targeting, ensures adequate incomes for single-parent families and protects against the risk of poverty (Bradshaw, 2018; Cantillon et al., 2018; Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2020; Olivier & Alain, 2021; Van Lancker, 2018; Van

Lancker et al., 2015). Such policies offer benefits to single parents by assuring a minimal level of protection for those transitioning through separation or new directions in paid work or training.

This is further emphasised by the inadequate income available from social assistance payments in New Zealand. Single parents receiving Sole Parent Support, renting with one child under two and receiving a benefit is in a deficit of \$100, which increases to \$250 for three children (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, p. 97). This rate was instated on 1 April 2022, but is outdone by the increases in the cost of living and economic conditions (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022; CPAG, 2022). After the April 2022 benefit increases, single-parent families renting with one child will only meet living costs if they are sharing their rental and their child is under three (Fairer Fairer Future, 2022, p. 5). All other single parents with one child had a deficit of between 44.00 and 88.00 a week to meet living costs.

Contradictions are further evident through childcare provisions and policy. High-quality and affordable childcare is crucial for meeting the needs of single-parent families and providing opportunities to pursue training and employment. Cross-country studies show that increased expenditure ensuring accessible, affordable, and quality childcare delivery is associated with a significant poverty reduction and is, in some instances, a more protective measure than increases in parental leave and cash benefits (Misra et al., 2007; Thévenon, 2011). Income and socio-economic levels have a strong association with barriers to childcare access, as does being unpartnered antenatally, which increases barriers to access from 7 to 11 per cent when compared with those partnered antenatally, measured 9 months after birth (Sin, 2021, p. 11). Superior income increases for single-parent families are also evident where universal social services, including quality childcare, are available (Boston & Gill, 2017; Daly & Yeates, 2003; Humpage & Craig, 2008).

Childcare in the ‘liberal welfare states’ does not necessarily enable single-parents to engage in paid work or parenting responsibilities in the same way as partnered parents. Single-parents’ work capacity is directly impacted by transitional changes at their children grow up (Brady, 2016; Brady & Perales, 2016; Millar, 2019). Means-tested childcare subsidies and privatised outsourcing of day-care facilities has resulted in a lack of access to affordable, quality childcare for many families (Liu, 2020; McDowell, 2005; Sin, 2021).

New Zealand childcare policies offer a minimal universally subsidised base of 20 hours for all 3-5 year olds, while further subsidies are available for low income families against a means-tested, manual system. For many parents, this system has erected a barrier to accessing childcare and to engaging in increased paid work participation (Cotterell et al., 2017). For single parents, accessing suitable childcare coverage presents twice the level of difficulty as it does for partnered parents, resulting in an increased rate of work passed up compared to those partnered (Statistics New Zealand, 2018d).

The way childcare and other family or welfare policies interact in New Zealand reinforces a minimal level of support for single-parent households. In some cases working more than 20 hours a week results in no increase in household income from Working for Families (WFF) tax credits (St John, 2022). Combining WFF tax credits, Sole Parent Support, and childcare subsidies, single parents can care for their child full-time without an income loss between 0-1 years after childbirth, while between 1 and 3, and thereafter, incomes are steadily reduced compared to their pre-birth earnings, without engaging in paid work, drawing on savings, assets or other support (Liu, 2020, pp. 108-109).

The WFF tax credit package further demonstrates the failure to honour benefits for single parents who participate in paid work. Introduced between 2004-2007, the package has

established none of the benefits promoted for working single parents, including lifting family incomes, incentivising paid work or reducing child poverty (Neuwelt-Kearns & Asher, 2020; Perry, 2019; St John, 2022). Many single parent households receive the Minimum Tax Credit (MTC) and Best Start payment, but substantial income gains are only earned through the In Work Tax Credit (IWTC), denied to those unable to incorporate 20 hours of paid work a week. The Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) have recommended the replacement of the IWTC and the MTC with an Earned Income Tax Credit that increases income for all single parents regardless of the paid work hours reached (Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019, pp. 100-107).⁷ Meanwhile, several other options would create increased benefits for single parent households, including phased or transitional payment regimes, increases in benefits and changes to labour market regulation (St John & Dale, 2012, p. 43).

Paid-parental leave has progressed at variable rates over the last two decades concerning weeks of entitlement across these states. Across OECD countries, ideal paid parental leave policies are considered those that achieve a balance between income adequacy and family wellbeing, and generous leave policies are generally associated with improved health and income outcomes (Nandi et al., 2018, p. 459). The most recent increases to paid parental leave in New Zealand have responded to international evidence that increased parental leave benefits the health of mothers and children (McAllister, 2021; WHO & UNICEF, 2019). For single parents, longer paid parental leave is generally associated with improved material and non-material wellbeing.

While New Zealand sits in the top quartile of OECD entitlements for single-parents, material outcomes are impacted by several factors over the life course and increases in paid parental

⁷ The WFF package is currently under review with the Ministry of Social Development.

leave demonstrate minimal overall impact on material wellbeing over time (OECD, 2021c, p. 3; Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). This is underscored by the fact that there are no additional entitlements for single parents across the OECD (Jou et al., 2020; OECD, 2021c, p. 3). Furthermore, entitlements are based on consistent tenure, failing to recognise some of the precarious characteristics of the contemporary work-force which impacts on many parents long term work commitments and means eligibility is not always accrued (McAllister, 2021).

Income interactions concerning child support highlight the potential for policy to improve material outcomes for single parent. Child support policies often adjust the amount of income support that is received by the 'resident' single parent. When child support is 'passed through' to resident parents, child support payments are received in addition to receipt of a main benefit. This mechanism is associated with poverty reduction for single parents in Australia and the United Kingdom (Cook et al., 2015; Skinner et al., 2017, pp. 508-509). In New Zealand, changes to the 'pass through' mechanism were recommended by WEAG in 2019, and announced in Budget 2022, to be implemented from July 2023. Despite this, additional supplementary welfare benefits received will still be included as part of income-based means testing, despite the evidence that excluding these creates far greater benefits these for single parents (Cancian & Meyer, 2018).

Sanctions are commonly applied to welfare recipients for single parents in the 'liberal welfare states' despite the range of negative impacts evidenced. Exclusion and stigma effects are unjustifiably increased through sanctions and are unlikely to improve compliance (Molander & Torsvik, 2022). They can also increase stress, anxiety, and mental ill-health (Williams, 2021). Furthermore, leniency in conditionality increases trust and civic engagement, empowering welfare recipients towards more positive outcomes (Bugge, 2021). Over the last decade, fraud and debt recovery policies frequently penalised the failure to report changes in

relationship status, work hours or living arrangements or ensuring 'spouses' incomes were reported (Cotterell et al., 2017, p. 19). A phased 'strike' system saw over 100,000 benefit deductions and almost 50,000 cancellations or suspensions incurred between 2013 and 2016 (Sherman, 2016).

Sanction legislation has since changed, yet levels of conditionality attached to benefit receipt and the use of sanctions to enforce those remain in place (Baker & Davis, 2018; Cook, 2015; Cotterell et al., 2017; O'Brien, 2019). Further, while sanction levels have fallen since the change in government in 2017, debt levels amongst benefit recipients remain high. Debt burdens are usually the result of overpayment or failure to report income correctly. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) reported that individuals owing a debt to MSD increased by 19 per cent between 2019 and 2021, while the median debt owed increased by 24 per cent (Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021, p. 18).

These policies demonstrate that even though family and welfare policies in these states aim to recognise single parents as subject to responsibilities unlike other parents, a range of disadvantages and discriminatory outcomes is created. The shifts towards family policies that assume increased obligations towards workforce participation and minimal welfare provisions are beneficial for single parents, reflect a welfare model that fails to recognise the variation in circumstances for single-parent families, and the range of social-structural and cultural circumstances tied up with material wellbeing. For example, while the gradual lowering of children's ages as the trigger towards employment activation may not mean single-parents are always perceived as obligated to work, it does suggest the complexity of factors around paid work engagement and single parenthood are often discounted (Brady, 2021; Haux, 2012; Knijn et al., 2007).

In New Zealand, the labour force and economic conditions created in the decades after neoliberal policy reform appear to now maintain adverse conditions, while public attitudes seem no longer likely to recognise the difference that policy changes will have for single-parent families' lives. In turn, there is complacency towards how these conditions impact groups unable to conform to the liberal paid work mould and options for change are overlooked. Failing to fully account for the diverse needs of single-parent families as children and parents transition in age or through the life course, the combined challenges many of these policies produce combine to create deeper material deprivation and poverty for single-parent families in the 'liberal welfare states' (Kukutai et al., 2020; Lerman et al., 2017; Treanor, 2018; Zigel & Hübgen, 2018).

These policies reflect the consistent prioritisation of fiscal prudence and economic growth ahead of improved material wellbeing for single-parent families, despite the premise of models based on inclusive growth. Establishing policies that are both inflexible and unrewarding for single parents who cannot maintain productivity in the same ways as partnered parents and that create increased benefits for those who can, these models prioritise growth through market productivity and maintain a neoclassical economic ethos concerning how wellbeing is achieved for families.

A 'wellbeing approach' for single-parent families in New Zealand

A 'wellbeing approach' could represent an opportunity to establish transformative progress in complex and persistent policy problems, including poverty reduction and improved material outcomes. The government also describes its approach to wellbeing for policy as "enabling people to have the capabilities they need to live lives of purpose, balance, and meaning for them" (Treasury, 2021a). Closely resembling Sen's capability approach, where people should

“live the lives they value and have reason to value”, this idea highlights how the LSF and ‘wellbeing analysis’ aims to identify the relationships between indicators that help people flourish and to overcome the links that prevent this (Dalziel, 2018; Hall, 2019; Sen, 1984).

It also priorities areas that have key overlaps with single-parent family material outcomes. As discussed, the ‘wellbeing approach’ is designed to target transgenerational benefits, meaning it looks across life course factors crucial to single-parent family outcomes (Smith, 2018; Treasury, 2021a, p. 14). Further, core objectives of the approach are aimed at inclusive and sustainable economic growth through ‘suitable employment’ and targeting Pasifika and Māori families’ education, groups with significant numbers of single-parent families (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018b; Treasury, 2018a, 2019b). These intentions intersect positively with large proportions of Māori and Pasifika families, and with supporting families in ways that create intergenerational material wellbeing benefits.

The ‘approach’ could also respond to the multiple adversities that sometimes intersect with material wellbeing for single-parent families at different stages. Single parent material outcomes are linked to different life stages and family events (Kukutai et al., 2020; Lerman et al., 2017; Treanor, 2018; Zagel & Hübgen, 2018). Frameworks aiding in the identification of these, such as the LSF, measure ways a proposed policy intervention can impact specific domains boosting wellbeing ‘stocks,’ to establish policies that prevent detrimental material impacts across various stages (Treasury, 2021a).

The commitment to a ‘wellbeing approach’ prompts a level of increased engagement from policy actors, and improved levels of analytical insight into complex policy problems (Grimes, 2015). The use of social impacts and ‘wellbeing analyses’ aims to encourage robust engagement with the LSF alongside sector-based evidence during the budget bid process,

increasing expectations concerning the appropriateness of evidence used and transparency around the evidence used for budget prioritisation and initiative development (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 2; Treasury, 2019d, p. 1). These factors associate the ‘wellbeing approach’ with greater accountability to updating and improving data drawn on, that goes beyond deficit narratives and uncovers greater complexity concerning policy problems.

However, methods for operationalising wellbeing measurements into policy frameworks that ensure accurate indicators are complex and contested (Michalos, 2011; Weijers & Morrison, 2018). Effective operationalisation of a wellbeing approach should respond to population characteristics and the cultural dimensions of wellbeing focused on people’s or household’s relational experiences, instead of and ahead of the economy (Durand, 2015; Durand & Exton, 2019; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Meanwhile, a range of methods and analytical approaches emphasise how variation in operationalising different values and capabilities has led to varying comprehensiveness in the insights provided (Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2014; Comim et al., 2018).

The New Zealand Treasury and government have highlighted this throughout the development of the LSF and ‘wellbeing analysis’ procedures, and the goal to embed a ‘wellbeing approach’ into budgeting (New Zealand Government, 2022a; Treasury, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b). Hence, the aim has been to increase levels of textural detail capturing the various aspects that enrich people’s lives, but to “balance the greater richness this complexity can bring to our policy advice with the pragmatism that too much complexity could limit its use by ‘time-poor’ policy analysts” (Treasury, 2021b, p. 9).

One response to ensuring that variation in values is captured is to incorporate ‘subjective wellbeing’ measures into wellbeing frameworks (Durand, 2015). To reflect “the range of

factors that lead us to live fulfilling lives”, understanding around what is fulfilling for different people should be established (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 2). Introducing this concept to CBAx analyses, the New Zealand Treasury notes the limitations of ‘subjective wellbeing’ measures, emphasising how they cannot capture “real-world trade-offs”, subjects’ biases or a dramatic ongoing change in state that alters people’s wellbeing (Treasury, 2021a, p. 10). To this end, subjective wellbeing only reflects one part of improved wellbeing, of value in and of itself only. In keeping with OECD recommendations, this ensures ‘subjective wellbeing’ remains one indicator within analyses, rather than an overarching reflection of wellbeing status (Durand, 2015).

The work involved in attempting to overcome these complexities, and deliver a framework and set of tools that enable policy actors to honour the richness and relativities of people’s experiences, should not be understated. Without adequate care, resources or oversight, the level of complexity involved in incorporating wellbeing in analysis and decision-making increases risks around how wellbeing data is used (Chiappero-Martinetti et al., 2014; Comim et al., 2018). Without careful attention to contextual data selection determinants, focus on one wellbeing area can detract from other domains, groups or households needs at unknown costs (Saltelli & Giampietro, 2017; Waring, 2018). While ongoing developments recognise this, efforts to overcome this can remain hindered by time-poor policy analysts and decision-makers (Treasury, 2021a, p. 9).

Potential limitations are underscored by the nature of the survey datasets incorporated in the LSF, which are used to prioritise and complement ‘wellbeing analyses’. The size and methods of the household studies employed ensures broader relationships between policy contexts and outcomes can be confirmed, but this is often at the cost of the greater contextual nuance available through other types of analyses (Lim, 2010; Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Treasury

encourages the supplementation of other data and evidence during analysis, yet the large population data trends available in the LSF are a distinct part of the prioritisation process (New Zealand Government, 2018, p. 8). These can be incredibly limited sources from which to convey complex social problems for public policy, particularly when ‘real world’ contextual information is omitted from collection, interpretation or presentation (Deeming, 2013; Hanna, 2017; Moore, 2019; Staines et al., 2021). Contextual consideration of how this data is incorporated into analyses is crucial to creating reliable or transformative wellbeing policy (Cairney, 2015; Gulliver et al., 2018; Sporle et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2020).

Measurement methods and data included in ‘wellbeing analyses’ can create further deterministic problems. While measures related to the environment, self-perceived safety, or subjective wellbeing are included, a range of core concepts anchor the ‘approach’ to neoclassical economic concepts (Murray, 2015; Waring, 2018). Time-use has been built into the LSF updates, but this data has not been updated since 2010 (Treasury, 2021b, 2022a). Meanwhile, volunteering, another activity frequently undertaken by parents, has minimal data collected (see Statistics New Zealand, 2022b). Further specific disaggregation of time spent in care roles, including child care or the domestic work related to raising children, reveals these measures discriminate against parents (Waring, 2018).

The lag in realising the importance of this data underscores how unpaid care labour, primarily carried out by women, contributes to the social wellbeing and the economy yet remains undervalued (Baird et al., 2017; Glavin & Peters, 2014; Klein, 2021; Olivier & Alain, 2021). Further, this exclusion ensures policy analyses omit the gendered asymmetry of this work, perpetuating gender inequalities and discriminatory policies (Curtin, 2014; Curtin, 2021; Peetz & Murray, 2021; Waring, 2018). Ultimately, such lags are a factor in policy that undermines the labour of single parents, enabling material disparities to accumulate.

The goal to establish wellbeing measures that reflect Māori values systems and worldviews led to the launch of He Ara Waiora in 2021, a dashboard derived from mātauranga Māori concepts including waiora or hauora, similar to wellbeing and health (Treasury, 2021b). While there is in-principle support for ‘He Ara Waiora’ from some Māori groups and researchers, employing tikanga and mātauranga Māori principles in the framework risks the co-option or subordination of these when applied to policy by analysts unfamiliar with their significance. (O’Connell et al., 2018, p. 48).

Ensuring policy tools like these make meaningful contributions requires ongoing, in-depth development with Māori experts, leaders and governance (O’Connell et al., 2018; Scobie & Rakeiora Love, 2019). Even where a range of cultural perspectives, including those of Māori research leads, may be present during the formulation of population studies or investigations, evidence-based policy often remains informed by or derived from Pākehā or Euro-normative concepts, risking manifold biases concerning Māori perspectives and policy outcomes (Kukutai et al., 2021; Smith, 1999). Ultimately, these factors can further obscure the issues of complexity surrounding policy problems involving intersectional and Māori population groups, including as single-parent families, heightening the risk of reinforcing social stigma or deficit framing of Māori (Gulliver et al., 2018; Kukutai & Walter, 2019; Moore, 2019; Staines et al., 2021).

These issues highlight the importance of policy practices that elevate Kaupapa Māori research inquiries and Māori data sovereignty. Basic awareness of Māori data as taonga and what this means for public policy has taken decades to establish at an agency level, despite extensive awareness around the obligation to do so (Sporle et al., 2020, pp. 69-75). Increased partnerships

with Māori in the statistical sphere and resources directed across government in coordination with various Māori governing bodies are critical to ensuring compatibility between Indigenous statistics and official statistics, and enhancing policy procedures that honour various Māori wellbeing needs (Cormack, 2019; Kukutai & Walter, 2015; Kukutai & Walter, 2019; Walter et al., 2020).

If overcoming the complexities of measuring and incorporating the experiences of different families' lives is the focus of the 'wellbeing approach', the extent to which it helps reflect people's interests who throughout many budgets have been overlooked, will be a measure of its success. The single-parent family demography highlights that, while these families' experiences are diverse and likely shaped by different factors across the life course, there are several groups within this population, including women, tangata Māori and Pacific peoples whose material outcomes are already shaped by structural factors. Looking at the 'wellbeing approach' there are several features that represent opportunities to highlight those factors and leverage better material wellbeing for these families, while others pose risks of reinforcing detrimental factors.

Chapter Three: The Lived Experiences of Single-parent Families

This chapter presents a meta-synthesis of lived experience literature from a selection of ‘liberal welfare states’, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The synthesis gathers forty qualitative studies to draw on this literature’s direct accounts of single-parent families’ challenging and affirmative experiences. Following a thematic qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, themes from lived experience accounts of single-parent families across these states over the last two decades are developed.

The meta-synthesis of the lived experience literature is used to identify and analyse single-parent family material wellbeing beyond the official statistics, while providing a narrative that responds to ‘liberal welfare state’ influences on single-parent family material outcomes identified in the welfare policy literature. Employing an inductive approach and a meta-synthesis methodology, the original studies’ analytical characteristics are retained while establishing a set of high-level themes related to ‘liberal welfare state’ policies derived from the primary data (Birnbaum & Saini, 2015; Noblit & Hare, 1999). The meta-synthesis highlights these trends in relation to how ‘liberal welfare state’ and neoliberal policy-making conditions have exacerbated challenges for single-parent families, and how these often link to compromised material outcomes.

Having established some of the risks involved in official statistical measures for single-parent families, including the politicisation of evidence and the deficit narratives often created from these, this chapter introduces a comprehensive and alternative set of data reflecting single-parent families’ material wellbeing outcomes. Highlighting concepts and critiques through the structural constraints single-parent families express in the qualitative literature, the data

produced in this meta-synthesis extends beyond ideas and trends highlighted by the policies examined in chapter two, to create a fuller account of the impact of these policies and conditions have on single-parent families' lived and material outcomes.

Further, by providing greater insight into the complexities of the challenges faced by single-parent families in these conditions, the alternative set of data establishes the scale of the challenges that a 'wellbeing approach' must respond to in order to improve material outcomes for these families. This provides the benchmark and a more informed framework from which to ask how a 'wellbeing approach' to public policy and expenditure can contribute to improved material outcomes for single-parent families in New Zealand in Chapter Four.

Lived experiences as qualitative data

As discussed, representations of material wellbeing provided in official statistics, reports and descriptive literature, can omit much of the complexity involved in the lived experiences of single-parent families, who exist across several different social, economic and cultural boundaries. Relying exclusively on official representations of single-parent family experiences enables structural, political, and economic factors critical to single-parent households and their material wellbeing to be undermined (Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2014; Deacon, 2004; Wright, 2016). Given the limitations of what statistical information might convey about the material lives and experiences of specific groups, and the assumptions often established in gathering data on these for public policy, the themes presented via the lived experience literature are vital to this research.

A thematic meta-synthesis is used to examine the lived experience literature. The data analysed are the primary accounts or direct references from 40 journal articles and book chapters located

by keyword searches. Keyword terms used were ‘sole parent’, ‘single parent’, ‘parent’, ‘welfare’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘qualitative’, ‘lived experience’ and ‘study.’ Articles or chapters using qualitative analyses from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia from 2005 to now are drawn on, alongside New Zealand lived experience literature. Search terms systematically included ‘New Zealand’, ‘Māori’ and ‘whānau’ to maximise the number of New Zealand qualitative surveys and studies directly engaging with Māori families.

Study location	Quantity
New Zealand	14
Australia	10
Canada	4
United Kingdom	12
	40

Following Braun, Clarke, Hayfield and Terry (2019), an inductive thematic process is employed to identify the latent themes for single parents and their children in the literature. Inductive thematic analysis ensures all themes are captured and analysed to develop the overarching thematic concepts that emerge during this process. The emerging themes can be categorised into either ‘challenging’ or ‘affirming’ experiences concerning single-parent family lived realities (some are accounts from children).

Challenging experiences are those that are reflected by the families in the literature as generally adverse or negative concerning material outcomes, while affirmative experiences are those reflecting how single-parenthood has been validating or positively reinforcing in ways that supports their material outcomes. All the themes emerging from this process are incorporated into the final thematic meta-synthesis that follows, with the most frequent themes presented visually.

Forming a meta-synthesis of the narratives across the lived experience literature enables the most significant and relevant occurrences impacting single-parent families' lives and material outcomes to be located. Detailing how single-parent families' capabilities are enhanced or constrained, those aspects of policy-making that overlook or undermine opportunities for improved material outcomes are brought forth. The common experiences are identified using the accumulative overlaps occurring in the literature, in relation to the developments in 'liberal welfare state' policy across this period. This process is used as it highlights the key capabilities accessed or denied to single-parent families. These capabilities, or lack thereof, provide a framework for this research concerning wellbeing policy-making processes undertaken by the Treasury and the New Zealand government.

Synthesising the lived experience literature raises up the various voices drawn on in qualitative material (Birnbaum & Saini, 2015; Hannes, 2020). This is important for this research as single parents are less likely to maintain dominant or cohesive social or political positions in a 'liberal welfare state' or neoliberal policy regimes (Bakker et al., 2003; Gray, 2019; O'Brien, 2019). The structural conditions in such regimes ensure that single parents are less likely to be able to respond to assumptions concerning their lives, decisions or circumstances. This synthesis brings these families' voices and realities into the research. Doing so highlights how factors related to the neo-liberal and, in many cases, neo-colonial policy settings reproduce conditions that create further challenges for the material wellbeing of these families.

This method also underscores how statistical accounts omit narratives central to single-parent families' realities that reinforce assumptions that hinder the progress of policy addressing material outcomes for this group. Presenting a range of perspectives specific to single-parent families forms a counter-narrative in response to the structural forces that can quickly dilute or erase much of the complexity of these experiences. Doing so enables this analysis to resist

deficit narratives and problematise the often misplaced assumptions about relationships in official data concerning single parenthood (Cram et al., 2021; Walter et al., 2020; Wright & Patrick, 2019).

Affirmative experiences of single-parent families

The affirmative experiences reflected by single parents and their children frequently convey a sense of balanced reflection towards their circumstances and lifestyles. As the themes emphasise, single parenthood is a heterogeneous experience that also changes over time. For many, it is a role that brings about deep joy, particularly in the bonds and relationships built between parents and children, but also through the satisfaction gained through paid and unpaid labour carried out together by the household. The analysis also reveals that positive affirmations are often linked to the level of support that families can access, either through the state and family or social networks. Otherwise, they are often linked to a certain level of emotional 'resilience' maintained by individuals or the family collectively or to the class a family belongs to, affording social support and financial capital. Presenting the affirmative themes, these links will be drawn on and discussed.

Many single parents express positive associations with raising their children alone and that these outweigh the material compromises foregone by the dual earner-carer model. In one study, all the parents interviewed stated they were seeking ways to cut back on work to increase time with their children. One father highlighted how he recognised that immaterial needs were more important than anything else (Nockolds, 2017, p. 240). Spending time with children, and accountability and care for them, was a recurring priority or regarded as paramount compared to other commitments (Baker, 2010; Cole et al., 2016; Gray, 2017). These relationships were emotionally significant, giving parents energy and hope, and helping them rise above the

material downsides (Millar & Ridge, 2013). Studies showed that most single parents prioritised time with their children over time for themselves, including time for self-care or exercise (Nockolds, 2016; Waldegrave et al., 2016).

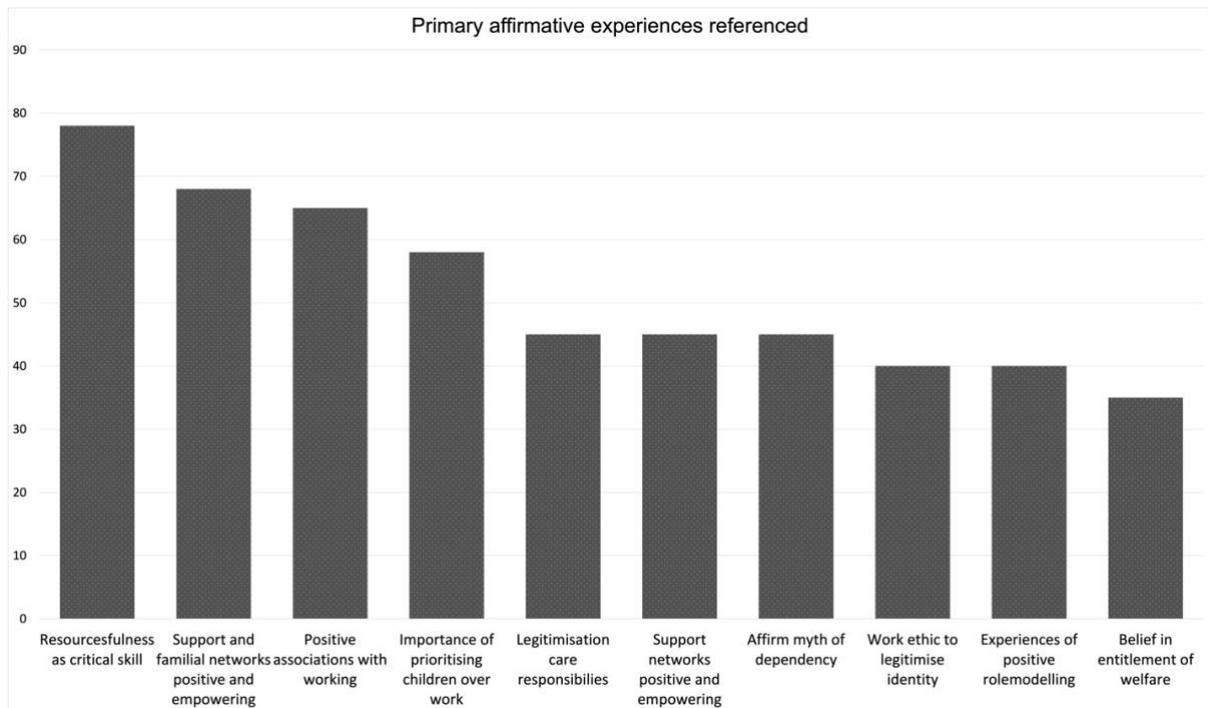


Figure 6: Affirmative experiences by highest references in the literature.

Family as flexible caregivers ensured single-parent family stability and opportunities to pursue paid work (Stewart-Withers et al., 2010; Waldegrave et al., 2016). In these cases, extended family were drawn on because it ensured increased hours and access to higher wages over and above what childcare enrolment did. Drawing on social networks for childcare was enhanced by social capital related to race and class (Cook, 2012b; Millar & Ridge, 2018). For these parents, this ensured access to flexible childcare and, therefore, wider work opportunities.

For Māori whānau, this care ethic was underscored through a broader relational network of care and responsibility. Understood in te ao Māori as whānaunataga, the importance of care responsibilities was linked to the many positive cultural associations connected with childbearing and mokopuna (children). This concept is highlighted elsewhere as integral to whakapapa, to connections and lineage beyond the present, and to extending intergenerational knowledge (Cram et al., 2021; Pihama, 2012; Waiti & Kingi, 2014).

Waldegrave et al. (2016) found that compared to the European and Pasifika families engaged in their study, Māori single parents were more likely to share resources with their whānau and to rely on them for assistance, before turning to external help or agencies. The idea of a larger family with more mokopuna was expressly celebrated and embraced by parents and whānau, who would commonly provide and share with single parents and their children (Pihama et al., 2014; Ware et al., 2018). Whānaunatanga was practised in all the studies, highlighted as both key to raising children and a positive for the child in the single parents' circumstances (Waiti & Kingi, 2014). The parents in these studies also emphasised the role of whānau in emotional support and decision-making that would help them to manage resources, income and caring responsibilities successfully.

Studies conducted with Tongan and Samoan families also expressed positive experiences towards the relational capacity for raising their children with a wider group of family and friends. Samoan parents referred to the values exchanged through the cultural experiences connected to family support as critical to raising their children and reinforcing positive directions (Stewart-Withers et al., 2010; Waldegrave et al., 2016). Household management, decision-making and resource-sharing were all highlighted as essential supports for many Pasifika single parents (ethnicities not always specified) in these studies.

Extended family support for Pasifika single parents was identified as fluid. Various family members would step in or maintain availability to ensure ongoing support for the parents and children. This was highlighted as crucial to parents engaging in work or study and, for this reason, an immensely positive aspect. At the same time, roles and decision-making for some parents were clearly defined by family members, which was also helpful in managing resources (Stewart-Withers et al., 2010).

Single parents reflected strong self-esteem from their experiences of single parenthood. Those who could achieve a satisfactory balance as single parents often expressed confidence stemming from their experiences as parents that motivated them to pursue goals and outcomes that would improve their material outcomes. Those reflecting on the breakdown of their relationships often felt that moving on from it had helped them grow and move on to build autonomous paths they were proud of (Gray, 2017; Millar & Ridge, 2018). Some single parents highlighted ambitions to pursue new careers, build on paid work skills, or re-enter paid work (Carroll, 2018; Waldegrave et al., 2016). Some asserted that a sense of positive autonomy and affirmation of their values emerging while raising their children, motivated them to avoid toxic, abusive relationships or family members (Cole et al., 2016; Elizabeth et al., 2013; Hook, 2020). Others were motivated in their full-time care roles and empowered to affirm an entitlement to welfare support from the state (Gray, 2017; Holdsworth, 2017).

Strong work ethic and attitudes to gaining work that would benefit themselves and their children are present throughout the studies. This is highlighted through the value placed on work in a material sense when parents acknowledge the ease of finances when they can engage in paid work (Cole et al., 2016; Cram et al., 2021; Millar & Ridge, 2013). It is also highlighted in the level of self-esteem and independence that single-parents gain from paid work, or when acknowledging the importance of paid work as a source of stability and status throughout their

lives or prior to parenting (Millar & Ridge, 2018; Smith et al., 2008). Positive role-modelling through paid work engagement and a parent's attitude to paid work, is emphasised as a key reason that work ethic is vital as a single parent (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Carroll, 2018; Waiti & Kingi, 2014).

Relatedly, the value of unpaid care is underscored by parents as a way to legitimise and defend their entitlement to welfare. Parents frequently countered claims that they would prefer not to be working or are not hardworking (when unemployed) and affirmed that the decision should be theirs to make (Cram et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2016; Wright & Patrick, 2019). Many parents articulate explicit beliefs about the right to adequate social support through the value of quality time spent supporting their children, their education and their interests (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017). Volunteering for education and sporting pursuits are also emphasised as legitimate contributions to their children's welfare and communities at large (Good Gingrich, 2010; McArthur et al., 2013; Nockolds, 2017). These perspectives were frequently founded in response to stigma and delegitimisation of time spent not in paid work, underscoring the devaluing of care and unpaid labour involved in raising healthy children.

Paid work or higher education is also frequently presented as a way to legitimise single parents' identity. Studies demonstrated the extent to which single mothers are conditioned to legitimise aspects of their self-identification via paid work participation (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017). Higher education that ensured greater stability for single parents was also expressed as a legitimisation of single parenthood's personal identity (Waiti & Kingi, 2014; Waldegrave et al., 2016). While such ambition is clearly commendable, the pursuit of maximising 'productive' paid work or striving to gain better-paid work opportunities over care responsibilities in these cases is presupposed and affirmed by single parents as a natural fact (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Patrick, 2017).

Children associate paid work with benefits to the household in a material and non-material sense. While many children lament the lack of leisure time with their parents when they engage in paid work more, they equally reflect on this as a compromise towards ensuring that they can participate in other things that their parents can subsequently afford (Millar & Ridge, 2009, 2013; Waldegrave et al., 2016). In one study, children between 9 to 15 years old reflected a level of pragmatism and maturity fostered by witnessing parents happier and having access adequate resources when parents in paid work (Millar & Ridge, 2018).

Similarly, many accounts present the importance of children's roles for maintaining the household and paid work engagement for the benefit of income stability. Reliance on children, especially older children, to maintain roles of responsibility is highlighted (Millar & Ridge, 2009, 2013, 2018; Waldegrave et al., 2016). This is underscored in the decades-long study of the 'family-work project' undertaken by Millar and Ridge, which describes a commonly observed practice in single-parent households where children are "actively involved" in maintaining the household (2018, p. 5).

The concept of honing organisational planning skills is prevalent throughout the studies, highlighting the resourcefulness required by single parents and their children. While these skills are not unique to single-parent households, the extent to which this is necessitated and the difference it can make to the family's overall wellbeing is stressed in this literature (Millar & Ridge, 2018). Time as a finite and critical resource is frequently highlighted as lacking, with parents running to plans "like clockwork" to maintain basic routines (Nockolds, 2017, p. 237). Single parents with disabled children express time management as their best asset (Cole et al., 2016).

Positive relationships with ex-partners also enhance the material wellbeing of single-parent families in the literature. While frequent examples of difficult relationships and no child support receipt were common, those able to maintain good relationships with ex-partners could draw on them for custody and other support (Cole et al., 2016; Nockolds, 2017). In some instances, this enabled self-administered child support to be completed regularly or without fail, allowing parents to avoid clawback from state child support systems, increasing the families' net income (Cook et al., 2015).

Challenging experiences of single-parent families

A range of serious issues emerged from single parents and their children in the accounts, even where strength-based methods or research questions were applied. While the range of issues convey the heterogenous characteristics of single-parent families in these countries, the prevalence of overlapping themes highlights distinctly some relationships between the neoliberal welfare policies developed in these countries and their impacts on single-parent families material outcomes.

The difficulty of finding paid work suitable for single parenthood is a distinct theme throughout the literature. Single parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds recounted job-seeking unsuccessfully or changing jobs to maintain adequate care responsibilities. Changes to the families' routines as children transitioned through different schooling or commitments were a key challenge (CPAG, 2015; Gray, 2017). The casualisation of major portions of the workforce negatively impacted job security for many single parents who needed part-time or flexible work, resulting in multiple or frequent job changes (Andersen, 2020; Breitzkreuz et al., 2010; Carroll, 2018; Millar & Ridge, 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Waiti & Kingi, 2014). While some parents living in financially secure scenarios could maintain well-paid, full-time work, this was

emphasised as a result of class and accumulation of assets which had created significant buffers (Carroll, 2018). Still, others in similar class or wealth positions found it challenging to maintain their roles, resulting in career changes, pay cuts or stepping down into more flexible roles to maintain parenting responsibilities (Nockolds, 2017).

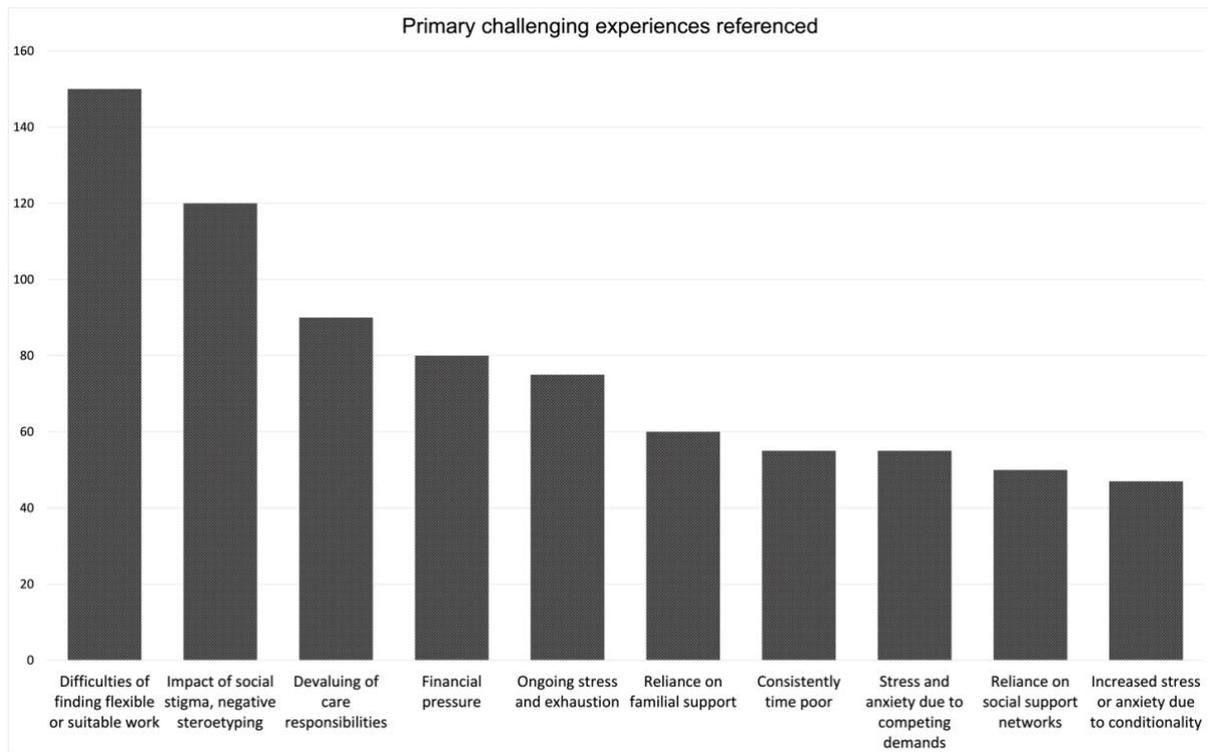


Figure 7: Challenging experiences by highest references in the literature.

The devaluing of parenting and care responsibilities due to changes in social assistance and increased focus on paid work participation is a strong theme. Single parents frequently report how the increased emphasis on paid work due to shifts in family policies reflects profound misjudgement around the value of child care and parenting responsibilities that the parents would carry out alongside paid work (Andersen, 2020; McArthur et al., 2013; Millar & Ridge, 2013). Parents spoke outright of the fact that there was “no value given to the job you’re doing with your own kids” and the level of contradiction generated out of this sentiment, spurred on

by the difficulties obtaining a benefit or social assistance (Gray, 2017, p. 150). Welfare programmes that recognise single parent's willingness to work did not acknowledge the extent of care responsibilities that the parents would carry out alongside paid work (Andersen, 2020; McArthur et al., 2013).

Furthermore, many parents seeking social assistance and subject to work-readiness obligations believe the demanding extent of these compromised their caring responsibilities. In some instances, parents admit they had to deprioritise the care of their children to meet social assistance conditions and ensure this income was maintained (Andersen, 2020; Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016; Wright & Patrick, 2019). Criteria in some social assistance work programmes require parents to spend hours job seeking and produce documentation of this even where jobs suited to their carer responsibilities were unavailable (Carroll, 2018). The ongoing requirement to document job seeking, medical conditions and 'mutual obligations' was described as time-consuming and ensured that other commitments such as voluntary work with schools or other organisations, were compromised (Andersen, 2020; Holdsworth, 2017).

Single parents expressed frustration and challenges when receiving welfare support. Many referred to the lack of agency they felt when receiving a benefit or support payment, either because of how the agencies treated them or by general perceptions of social stigma attached to welfare assistance (Andersen, 2020; Carroll, 2018; Cook, 2012a; Wright, 2016). The feeling of being "beholden to the state" is an example of how political and cultural attitudes of the neoliberal welfare state have affected single parents' perceptions of receiving state assistance (Carroll, 2018, p. 51; Gray, 2017; Holdsworth, 2017). Rather than acting on the belief that this was a necessary entitlement, some viewed it as a form of social control, limiting the agency and freedom they believed they should have (Holdsworth, 2017).

The literature explores the complexity of social stigma and its impact on single parents. The ongoing tension experienced by single parents navigating parenthood, paid work and the social attitudes towards their decisions around these is a recurring theme (Baker & Tippin, 2004; Gray, 2017; Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019; Stewart-Withers et al., 2010). Single mothers of various socio-economic and parenting backgrounds related to single parent identity as delegitimised through various cultural attitudes, messages and interactions (Carroll, 2018; Cram et al., 2021; Gray, 2017). Single parents reported that paid work was one way to shift their self-perceived status and feelings of multi-layered failure to validate their roles and avoid discrimination (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017; Millar, 2019). The notable stigma reported by single-parent families indicates this can compound adverse wellbeing outcomes. Such social stigma can lead to stress or depression in single-parent families, lowering levels of confidence and agency that assist in the complexities of managing the balance of paid work and parenting (Brady, 2015; Cook, 2012a; Cram et al., 2021).

Overt discrimination toward those caring for children while not in paid work was prominent (Gray, 2017; Haux, 2013; O'Brien, 2013, 2019; Patrick, 2014a; St John & Cotterell, 2019). In New Zealand, single parents have some of the highest rates of experiencing discrimination in response to their single-parent status (Statistics New Zealand, 2021b). Pressure stemming from discriminatory attitudes is expressed as added pressure on the decision to take paid work even where work hours are unsuitable (Gray, 2017; Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016). Discrimination via welfare assistance inconsistencies or misinformation was commonly reported (CPAG, 2015; Cram et al., 2021; Ware et al., 2017, 2018). Social stigma toward those who do not meet normative social and political paid work expectations further emphasises how neoliberal welfare states functions to devalue parenting.

This literature conveys the complexity of intersecting attitudes towards single-parenthood and race, class and age. Experiences of being denied assistance, refused suitable work or other issues linked to displays of racism and discrimination are highlighted (Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019; Smith et al., 2008). Paid work conditions attached to welfare programmes highlighted racist disparities in the overall benefits available (Smith et al., 2008). In New Zealand, young Māori mothers report reluctance to engage with welfare services as they experienced racism and judgment from agency workers as young, single, Māori mothers (Cram et al., 2021, p. 549; Gray & Crichton-Hill, 2019). Kaupapa Māori research highlighted how social attitudes and conditionality generated by welfare policies in the neoliberal and neo-colonial state have produced punitive, racist and discriminatory functions (Cram et al., 2021; Ware et al., 2017, 2018). These studies underscored how systems responding to young Māori parents' cultural values and aspirations would empower Māori whānau.

The lived experience literature qualifies the multi-layered health and emotional impacts of single-parenthood. Aware of expectations to engage in paid work, single mothers report committing to this to gain social capital and legitimacy, despite finding combined workloads resulted in stress, anxiety or physical health problems (CPAG, 2015, p. 26; 2018, p. 12; Gray, 2017, p. 149; Welfare Expert Advisory Group, 2019) The literature also demonstrates how children reciprocate practical and emotional support with their parents, deferring their emotional needs to offset their parent's anxiety or that they often worry about their parent's stress levels (Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018; Waldegrave et al., 2016).

Where childcare subsidies made childcare more affordable than private care, many parents experienced difficulty obtaining this. In most instances, subsidies would not cover most of the cost of childcare, especially when parents decided to take on more hours or full-time paid work (Cook, 2012a; Good Gingrich, 2010; Waldegrave et al., 2016). Obtaining affordable quality

childcare was challenging for many (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Carroll, 2018). Others reflected on how the lack of quality childcare accessible left them in compromising situations where inappropriate childcare was sought, for example, with sick relatives (Cook, 2012a; Smith et al., 2008). Children who reached ages where they could manage independently were regularly left to care for themselves where parents had early work starts or late finishes (Carroll, 2018; Millar & Ridge, 2009, 2013, 2018).

Many parents felt deprived of quality time with their children. While this is not exclusive to single parenthood, the demands on time compromising single parents' opportunities to spend time with their children were frequently reported (Millar & Ridge, 2013; Nockolds, 2017). Parents felt the time they did have was often less enjoyable than it would be if they were not working as much (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017; Millar & Ridge, 2018). Parents with well-paid jobs also reported how 'parenting intensiveness' or the extent to which they could actively involve themselves in positively reinforcing behaviours or habits was compromised as single parents compared to when they had been coupled (Nockolds, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2010).

Children similarly expressed the desire to spend more time with their parents and feeling constantly rushed (Millar & Ridge, 2013; Waldegrave et al., 2016). In some accounts, teenage children were revealed to compromise their leisure time and educational commitments. For eldest sibling's, parenting intensiveness (the extent to which their parents actively reinforce positive parenting practices) was often compromised, due to their role in the household which they maintain financial independence and help support the family materially and emotionally (Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018).

Children from financially strained households presented instances where they were deprived of basic necessities, including enough food or warm clothing (Baker, 2010; Millar & Ridge, 2013; Waldegrave et al., 2016). In many instances, these children were excluded from opportunities such as school trips and sporting events. The children were highly cognisant of their parents' compromises to ensure some of these needs were met. Such exclusion impacted their emotional wellbeing and confidence, especially over time (Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018).

Emphasising the link between economic factors and health outcomes, stress and anxiety over meeting basic needs was a recurring theme. In New Zealand, this is commonly prompted by constraints in providing basic needs for their children, such as a warm, dry house, in the absence of adequate and suitable paid work or social assistance (Cram et al., 2021; Waldegrave et al., 2016). In affluent and low-income scenarios alike, ongoing stress and constant exhaustion while juggling single-parent roles are reported, with leisure time severely restricted (Carroll, 2018; Millar & Ridge, 2008). Single-mothers expressed anxiety over the tensions associated with the needs of their families, including scarcity of time to spend with their children and the precarity of paid work as a consequence of labour supply conditions that deny sufficient levels of flexibility (Cook, 2012a, 2012b; Gray, 2017; Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018). Low wages, debt and increased levels of deprivation were also common sources of stress (Millar, 2011; Thompson, 2015).

Experiences of severe anxiety or depression due to competing demands or the financial pressures of single parenthood were described. The impact these had on many parents' capacity to engage in paid work was highlighted (Baker, 2010; Cole et al., 2016; Cook, 2012b; Millar & Ridge, 2018; Wright, 2016). Severe fatigue related to stress and competing demands were frequently conveyed (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017). Parents were candid about how this impacted their parenting capabilities and made them feel isolated and as if they wanted to 'give up'

(Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Patrick, 2017). Conditionality, narrowed eligibility for welfare assistance, and increased sanctions for single parents unable to find suitable work were a source of tension or anxiety that underscore the depth of impact these policies have on this group (Cook, 2012a; Wright & Patrick, 2019).

Many single parents had faced numerous difficulties during separation that influenced their lives and material outcomes. Several studies highlighted the impact of intimate partner violence prior to separation because single mothers could not obtain financial support from ex-partners (Cook et al., 2015; Hook, 2020; Stewart-Withers et al., 2010; Waiti & Kingi, 2014). In New Zealand, over a third of women report experiences of intimate partner violence, including during pregnancy (Bird et al., 2021; NZFVCH, 2017). Child support was sometimes challenging to obtain due to tension with ex-partners and ongoing issues of debt. This, combined with the clawback deductions resulting from state-collected child support payments, meant that this form of income was not worthwhile collecting for some single mothers. (Cook et al., 2008; Cook et al., 2015; Elizabeth et al., 2013). Other support from ex-partners, including child care, was frequently not an option for many single mothers (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017; Millar & Ridge, 2013, 2018; Pihama, 2012).

Single parents experiencing financial pressure spoke to reliance on support networks, family members and third-party charitable assistance as critical to managing the household's wellbeing and material outcomes. As discussed, many single parents acknowledged the benefits of relational reciprocity. However, others reflect a level of dependence that is disempowering and compromising their desired outcomes (Millar & Ridge, 2018; Stewart-Withers et al., 2010). While expressing thanks, these single parents worried about what would happen if this assistance fell through (Carroll, 2018; Cram et al., 2021). Others expressed stress

over having to regularly rely on and pursue charity or emergency assistance (Cook, 2012a; Holdsworth, 2017; Wright, 2016).

Welfare policies failing to recognise the realities between parenting responsibilities and welfare conditions reflect a profound gap in understanding single-parent families' realities. In many instances, single parents highlighted the contradictions present in some competing expectations of how changes to social support accessibility have shaped their lives (Carroll, 2018; Cram et al., 2021; Gray, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016; Wright & Patrick, 2019). These barriers to accessibility frequently resulted in frustration and bewilderment from families doing everything they could to manage resources. Parents were vocal regarding the level of scrutiny and expectations placed on them as single parents and that this did not compare to coupled parents, and believed this double-standard was reflected in family policies and social and cultural attitudes towards them (Breitkreuz et al., 2010; Carroll, 2018; Millar & Ridge, 2013; Patrick, 2017).

Constituting single-parent families lived experiences for public policy

This chapter has highlighted a range of ways in which the 'liberal welfare states' family and welfare policies have overlooked, ignored, or worsened the challenges faced by single-parent families, while the neoliberal political economy has hindered capacities in which these policies might improve material outcomes. Single-parent families clearly do not have a single set of experiences, or ways of caring or maintaining the family life that feels important to them. Yet, in the conditions presented by the contemporary 'liberal welfare state', many of the families face similar challenges related to single parenthood and material wellbeing.

Detrimental impacts on both non-material and material levels were witnessed and felt by both parents and children. While the New Zealand studies highlighted the variation in care arrangements by ethnicity that increased levels of ‘relational resilience’, particularly concerning Māori and Pasifika families, a range of persistent challenges around competing demands were evident. In many cases the delivery of policies, especially welfare assistance services, were the source of stress and anxiety, guilt, or shame, constituting material and physical stress that often compounded to create deepening financial challenges or ongoing compromised material outcomes.

Ultimately, these findings underscore how the contemporary ‘liberal welfare state’ excludes and devalues care-based labour, despite the criticality of this to the economy (Roper, 2011; Waring, 2018). Both the children’s and parents’ accounts underscored how the challenges faced when parents split their time across unpaid labour and paid labour compromises the quality of experience towards both commitments. This compromise is a function of the neoliberal regime, enabled and encouraged by the ‘liberal welfare state’ model that devalues the care and work required of parents, but mainly women, and discounts the idea that many parents, families and mothers cannot or will not engage in the earner-carer model (Cook, 2012a; O’Brien, 2013; Wright, 2016).

These findings demonstrate that the policy problem has been focused on prioritising income-earning by way of the market, and that the market has failed to provide for single parents in several different ways. While the policy lineage emphasises how a liberal welfare orientation has produced many of the challenges that linger in the welfare and families’ policies employed today, the single-parent families lived experiences illustrate the extent to which neoliberal economic policies continue to limit the capacity to overcome challenges faced by single-parent families.

The meta-synthesis demonstrates that the policy problem in the (neo)liberal welfare state is represented as: ‘how can single-parents earn an adequate market income to ensure they and their children feel safe, healthy, and happy?’ Yet, they very rarely are able to achieve one without deeply compromising the other, and the variation to which they can is heavily mediated by class, race, gender and even small changes in policy programme delivery.

Highlighting how material wellbeing is oriented around income from labour-force participation, the policy lineage and experiential data confirm how norms concerning paid work in a neoliberal marketplace both discriminate against and affect single-parents, even when they aspire to engage in paid work or to work more. This has seen single parents, and mostly mothers, deemed failures by themselves and the public when they do engage in paid work, and when they do not.

The ‘wellbeing approach’ seeks to identify the policy levers that can be pulled to overcome income adequacy that do not come at the cost of happiness or good health. The next chapter takes the experiential findings synthesised here, and the problem that is deemed as solved via the market, as a point from which understand the extent to which the ‘wellbeing approach’ could deviate from neoliberal policy prioritisations and the ‘liberal welfare state’ model that have together overlooked so many of the problems created for many single parent families.

Chapter Four: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the ‘Wellbeing Budget’ Policy Discourse

This chapter uses a critical discourse analysis methodology (CDA) to examine the budget policy discourses of the ‘wellbeing approach’, revealing the extent to which rationalisations for material shifts concerning single-parent family outcomes are maintained. Policy programmes and the problem definitions used to develop these are influenced by, and also represent, different social, political and cultural ideas and beliefs (Bacchi, 2009, 2016; Béland, 2016; Béland et al., 2016; Foucault, 1984, 1988). In this way, policy programmes and the procedural discourses used to enact and rationalise them, are central to the production of social and economic conditions, and the material outcomes these conditions enable (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2).

The budget policy discourse concerning a ‘wellbeing approach’ signals the capacity for shifts in how public policy approaches and acts on single-parent material outcomes as a policy problem. Policy discourse scholarship demonstrates that public policy change can be measured by the ideas policy actors present in these discourse or texts (Bacchi, 2009; Dean, 2004; Dean, 1991; Fairclough, 2003, 2015; Waugh et al., 2015). This thinking asserts that changes in policy direction and problem definition are linked to broader ideational shifts (Baumgartner, 2014; Béland & Cox, 2011; Blyth, 2013; Wincott, 2011). By examining the ideas represented in the budget policy discourses, the ways in which a ‘wellbeing approach’ supports material relations and enables improved outcomes for single-parent families are measured (Fairclough, 2010, p. 316).

Families and public policy discourse

Several aspects of this research link together how policy procedures and discourse in a ‘wellbeing approach’ uncover important ideas concerning single-parent family material outcomes. Welfare and family policies are particularly rich in ideas because the ‘family’ is a social and historical construct (Béland & Petersen, 2014; Beutler & Fenech, 2018; Brady, 2021; Lunt, 2014; Mahon, 2016). The relationship between the state and family welfare is subject to a range of interpretations depending on the ideas a society and state associate with family as a social unit or household structure.

Shifts in these interpretations are explicit in cultural assumptions about the social role of women, reproductive rights, and care responsibilities that continue to shape policy decisions profoundly. Broad examples include Ireland’s Catholic institutional influences creating a lag in policies supporting mothers to enter the workforce (Millar & Crosse, 2017), and the United States ‘Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Protection Act 2003’ to promote and prioritise “healthy marriages” (Callister & Sigley, 2003, p. 136).

There are a range of prevalent examples where shifts in the ideas and beliefs linked to New Zealand family and welfare policies are reflected in policy discourse (Cotterell et al., 2017; Humpage & Craig, 2008; Lunt, 2014). For example, the shift from welfare policy as social security towards an emphasis on individual labour participation is highlighted in the change in the agency name to ‘Work and Income New Zealand’ in the nineties (O’Brien, 2015, p. 6). Similarly, the arrival of National’s ‘Welfare that Works’ (1991) and Labour’s ‘Jobs Jolt’ (2003) programmes signal the increased focus on paid work participation as a condition for individual or family wellbeing (Humpage & Craig, 2008; Lunt, 2006).

Welfare and family policy discourse from the last several decades reflects the importance of discourse as a vehicle of social and economic change for families. As discussed in chapter two, the focus on neoliberal rationalisation in New Zealand fiscal and economic public policy in the late eighties brought about individualistic attitudes and rationalisations that de-emphasised the role of the state in families' material wellbeing. These shifts are reflected in how the term 'welfare' became contained and neutralised in Treasury discourse (Humpage, 2014; Lunt, 2014). "Drained of interests or values", this shift in textual application equated 'welfare' to a unit of commodification measured in stocks, rather than the experiences of prosperity and service originally imbued in its use (Lunt, 2014, p. 251).

Following the consolidated emphasis on individual responsibility bound up in the neoliberal welfare state, discourse has discouraged reliance on the state for assistance or increases in universal public funding (O'Brien, 2016, 2019; Stuart, 2019). This idea is reinforced explicitly by the negative connotations conjured in discourse describing 'welfare dependence.' This term shifted 'welfare' out of the context where it was considered neutral or a label for the delivery of public services and provisions to which everyone is entitled. Combining this with the term, and idea, of "dependence" shifts the signification of the welfare so the policy problem becomes people needing or relying on public funds for income (O'Brien, 2012, 2016, 2019; St John & Cotterell, 2019).

The negative connotations generated around welfare policy during neoliberal reform and consolidation illustrates how policy discourse has been used to promote ideation aligned with rational economic perspectives that emphasise individual choices and responsibility (Bakker, 2003; Jenson, 2010). Further, the discourse enables the production of ideas that deem this undesirable from a societal and fiscal perspective, justifying policies that narrow social

expenditure and welfare eligibility, while increasing conditions, penalties and reciprocal obligations for single parents requiring welfare assistance.

These are the lived and material effects of public policy emphasised by policy discourse scholars (Bacchi, 2009, p. 18; Fairclough, 2010, p. 316). As much as discourse can merely trace or reflect the ideas bound up in a public policy, they also represent how the policy problem is interpreted, acted upon, and lived out. The tools and methods used to communicate policy, therefore, do not only communicate a problem in a particular way politically, but generate material effects tied to that framing in both implicit and explicit ways.

These examples make clear that the repetition and contextual occurrence of ideas, whether based on myth or fact, conjure up attitudes and beliefs in the public (Béland et al., 2016; Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016; Oman, 2021). The social stigma experienced by single parents, apparent in the lived experience analysis, demonstrates the persistence of moral overtones concerning single parents' responsibilities. Social stigma shapes the ideas and beliefs that follow this ideology, even in the view of single parents themselves (Carroll, 2018; Gray, 2017). The extent to which such beliefs continue to contribute to challenges in maintaining adequate material outcomes for single-parent families is critical to understanding how the 'wellbeing approach' so far honours the inclusive and socially cohesive values it is deemed to promote.

As Dale points out, a string of myths built up through public policy changes and state rhetoric toward welfare, work and family responsibilities continues to harm many single-parent families' opportunities and lives (Dale, 2013, p. 3). In this way, a combination of ideas and beliefs, political ideology, and the contribution these make to narratives in public policy procedures or decision-making, shape the material outcomes of single-parent families. This dynamic is an example of Bacchi's "implicit problem representations"- embedded in the latent

interactions between the policy priorities and the settings and ideological motivations underpinning policy directions concerning family welfare, paid work and other related policies (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2).

The latent quality of the many of the ideas linked to families and material wellbeing demands a methodological enquiry that can uncover the ideological significations woven through the ‘wellbeing policy’ procedural documentation or discourse. Through the presumption that discourse signifies the ideological functions of power, social relations and the struggles that shift these, CDA is a way to uncover the intertextual and contextual significance of these discourses, and how these are used to maintain material relations.

Critical Discourse Analysis theory

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) draws on the interactions between discourse, social relations and the operationalisation of discourse in different settings. In institutional and political settings, CDA helps uncover the capacity discourse has to produce or prevent change or action towards change (Fairclough et al., 2007, pp. 26-27). Norman Fairclough, a founder of critical discourse analysis who has contributed significantly to the development of the method, describes the interactions within different political and policy discourses as “cultural political economy” (Fairclough et al., 2007, p. 28). By bringing forth issues and tensions otherwise inaccessible in the budget policy discourse, CDA highlights the importance of the ideological and structural contributions to material outcomes rationalised and enabled by those discourses (Fairclough, 2010, p. 316).

CDA recognises that policies are elaborated in discourse signifiers that project value and beliefs concerning the policy subject, serving to maintain social relations and material conditions

(Fairclough, 1999, 2003, 2010; Waugh et al., 2015). By highlighting the ideas and beliefs signified in the budget policy discourse, CDA distinguishes the ways that a ‘wellbeing approach’ represents this policy problem. In doing so, the extent to which the ‘wellbeing approach’ can create policy problem definitions that move beyond the recent-historical neoliberal framing, and towards definitions that recognise single-parent families’ lived realities, can be tested.

The CDA reveals a range of ideational significations in the budget policy discourse and findings are organised around the most prevalent and recurring ideas established. As single-parents are rarely directly referred to in the discourse, and to avoid selection bias in the discourse, the documents were analysed in their entirety to determine the latent discourse devices. By examining the various tools used and the ideas they produce, the CDA presents a range of ideas that link to the problem definition and framing of the policy problem that is single-parent material outcomes.

Data selection

The analysis reviews procedural documents and initiative titles from Budgets 2018 to 2022, a rich source of discourse concerning the in-situ development of a ‘Wellbeing Budget.’ These documents provide primary data on the precise shape and application of the ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand policy-making, providing insights beyond the scholarly literature on a ‘wellbeing approach’ or policy directions concerning the impact of a ‘wellbeing approach’ on family material outcomes.

Document selection took place through an extensive online search and inductive review process. While the first ‘Wellbeing Budget’ was launched in 2019, there is evidence of

processes related to a ‘wellbeing approach’ included in the Budget 2018 strategy and preparation and documentation of this are included in the analysis.

While a request under the Official Information Act was submitted to Treasury to obtain all procedural documentation from Budget 2018 (and granted), the bulk of critical documentation and procedural guidance on all subsequent budgets was available online on the Treasury’s ‘Past and Current Budgets’ page.⁸

The budget policy process materials are extensive and voluminous, covering many months of government-wide work, technical application, and bureaucratic documentation. The selection process used involved close reviews of documents pertaining to the budget process, strategy, and budget guidance. After reviewing hundreds of budget documents, including cabinet minutes, budget policy statements, cabinet papers, technical financial recommendations, Treasury reports, aide memoires and supplementary materials, an inductive criteria were formed to select the relevant documents. The document selection criteria was that documents selected include:

- References to a ‘wellbeing approach’ to budgeting, budget initiatives and decision-making
- Processes or outcomes proposing or justifying initiative expenditure concerning a ‘wellbeing approach’ or analysis
- How prioritisation around ‘wellbeing policy’ and budget initiative objectives is carried out

Budget initiative titles and descriptions were also filtered to include all initiatives that contained key words associated with the wellbeing economics literature and the lived experience thematic

⁸ The ‘Past and Current Budgets’ page is located at: <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/budgets/current-and-past-budgets>.

analysis from this thesis. The keyword search terms used were: ‘parent’, ‘sole parent’, ‘single parent’, ‘children’, ‘women’, ‘gender’, ‘mother’, ‘welfare’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘income’, ‘Māori’, ‘Pacific peoples’ and ‘Pasifika’.

The breadth of the budget process and the need to capture an overarching narrative and theory led me to focus on two key stages of the budget initiative development process. The two stages capture both procedural and substantive aspects of a ‘wellbeing approach’ in New Zealand.

First, the budget process documentation including guidance for agencies and departments, and fiscal strategy and budget package proposals were selected for analysis. The second focus is on the budget initiative titles and descriptions related to single-parent family material outcomes, available in the Budget Initiative Summaries.

Budget guidance documents issued by the Treasury are the “first point of call” for agencies and departments seeking funding (Treasury, 2019a, p. 3). These documents outline the expectations and steps ensuring budget bids are oriented towards the Government's objectives, while streamlining the process to assist budget Vote Teams, analysts and portfolio Ministers in ‘wellbeing-informed’ decision-making (Treasury, 2019c, p. 2).

Budget initiative titles and descriptions are essential to communicating the intentions behind a new initiative. As agencies and departments formulate their bids, the Treasury and the Office of the Minister of Finance require a “meaningful title and description, that is outcomes-focused” that conveys clearly the key purpose of the initiative to policymakers and the public (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 14). As discussed, titles of policy programmes have been important in signalling the direction and intentions behind government priorities

(Béland & Petersen, 2014; Humpage & Craig, 2008; Lunt, 2006; Mahon, 2016). The consistent function required for the titles and description of initiatives means they provide traceable documentation of a policy direction. In this way, this discourse helps to identify the ideological positions and perspectives on specific policy priorities.

Table 1: Budget process documentation for the Wellbeing Budgets 2018-2021

Documents	
Budget 2018	References
A wellbeing approach to cost benefit analysis (memo)	25
Budget Package	534
Fiscal Strategy (Cabinet paper)	536
Guidance for agencies preparing manifesto and cost pressure budget initiatives	443
Budget 2019	
Budget Package- The Wellbeing Budget	799
Explanatory note - Wellbeing analysis informing Budget decision making	95
Guidance for agencies	684
Strategy for Budget 2019 The Wellbeing Budget	619
Budget 2020	
Budget Package	418
Covid-19 Response and Recovery Fund Foundational Package	669
Fiscal strategy for the Budget Policy Statement	205
Guide for agencies	534
Budget 2021	
Budget Package	589
Strategy and Design	222
Guidance for Departments	465
Aide Memoire: Value for Money Analysis including wellbeing assessment	39
CBAX Guides (Treasury)	
CBAX Tool User Guidance Guide for departments and agencies using Treasury' s CBAX tool for cost benefit analysis (2021)	1217
Guide to Social Cost Benefit Analysis (2015)	778

Table 2: Budget initiative titles and descriptions Budgets 2018-2021

Document Title	Initiatives analysed
Summary of Initiatives in Budget 2018	36
Summary of Initiatives in Budget 2019	119
The Wellbeing Budget 2020 – Rebuilding Together (pp. 48-87 contain budget initiatives)	36
The Wellbeing 2021 – Securing our Recovery (pp. 53-108 contain budget initiatives)	83
Summary of Initiatives in Budget 2022 – A Secure Future	94

The collection of discourse data from these documents was undertaken using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Using the qualitative software allowed data to be captured and stored according to thematic codes across the documents. The software capabilities enable a systematic and inductive collation of the discourse for the CDA. Following the selection of key terms and phrases throughout the documents, a comprehensive review of the discourse was employed using CDA tools outlined below.

Budget policy discourse and the critical discourse analysis findings

Constituting families and parents

References to families and parents in the discourse demonstrate how subjecthood and social citizenship are constructed and understood in the liberal, settler state, in a way that de-emphasises the structural contributors to material outcomes experienced by single parents. Using CDA to interrogate the “social work of construction of the pre-constructed object”, the following section draws on how the budget discourse situates families and parents concerning

the liberal ideological constructions of citizenship (Bourdieu and Wacquant in: Fairclough, 2010, p. 413). In doing so, the ways that the ‘wellbeing budget’ discourse limits these subjects and their improved material outcomes are highlighted (Bacchi, 2009, p. 35).

In the budget policy discourse parents are largely passive, homogenous and de-gendered subjects. The lived experience analysis highlighted the very different experiences of parents concerning relationship status, gender, ethnicity and class. Yet, the budget discourse constructs parents primarily as market-driven individuals incentivised to do paid work as a way to provide for their children. For example, families receiving welfare assistance with children under 3 are distinguished in the discourse, through the repeated focus on funding towards the Best Start tax credit or Early Childhood Education (ECE) subsidies (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018a, 2020; Treasury, 2020a). Supports are highlighted as based on a child’s age, maintaining a targeted approach (Minister of Finance, 2018, p. 57).

Maternity, birthing and healthcare for women is increasingly discussed as the budgets progress, ensuring that gender and parenting are considered in tandem with the development of the ‘wellbeing approach’ and the use of gender analysis is promoted. The discourse that increasingly acknowledges gender pay parity in the budget initiatives, signals recognition of gender bias and sexism that often impacts single-parent families outcomes. Gender pay parity is included as an objective in budget initiatives from 2019 onwards. Initiatives include ‘Continuing Funding for the Gender Pay Taskforce’ for the Ministry for Women (New Zealand Government, 2021b, p. 104), and funding for the Ministry for Women to support policy capabilities in response to Covid-19 (New Zealand Government, 2022b, p. 156).

Further, the budget initiative descriptions communicate engagement not only with equity as sameness but equity as difference: “... aims to ensure women receive the same pay as men for

doing the same work and also for doing work that is different but of equal value” (New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 71). This discourse highlights how gender discrimination influences how value is perceived in the workplace. By acknowledging the biases built into many labour systems and exchanges and underscoring gender as a factor intrinsically linked to material outcomes, this discourse indicates steps in the ‘wellbeing approach’ that will contribute to improved outcomes for single mothers engaging in paid work.

However, the budget discourse makes minimal reference to gender related to parenthood, care or families. While the discourse notably introduces maternity, gender equity and transgender health topics as the budget discourse progresses over time, structural layers tied to many families outcomes when led by women, non-binary or gender non-conforming identities is excluded from the policy discourse. Further, gender diverse and takatāpui identities are largely ignored, with transgender people referred to in the discourse once (New Zealand Government, 2022b, p. 121). For example, the ‘Bringing Gender In’ tool, designed to encourage reflection and participation from policy analysts in a seven-step guide concerning the complete policy cycle, is mentioned twice in the discourse (Treasury, 2021a, pp. 14, 47). Such exclusion signifies the limited understanding of the importance of gender analytical tools in budgeting, despite the introduction of a ‘wellbeing approach’ (Curtin, 2021).

Further, the budget policy discourse illustrates how methods that honour Māori rights for improving outcomes for single-parent families are dismissed. While Māori values have been incorporated into a ‘wellbeing approach’, consideration and awareness of Indigenous data sovereignty and data as Māori taonga are omitted entirely from the budget guidance, strategy and resulting initiatives. As discussed, data as Māori taonga requires recognition of Māori data sovereignty around collection and analysis. This omission undermines the significance of the work progressed to incorporate Māori values and worldviews into frameworks and processes

and, ultimately, how the ‘approach’ contributes to the outcomes of Māori single-parent families.

The needs of single-parent families across the life course that that impact material outcomes are unaddressed in the discourse. Instead, the status quo idea that young children require increased funding is maintained, with little acknowledgement of other family transitions. Reaffirming the targeted approach in the budget policy discourse, the ‘wellbeing approach’ remains consistent with the ‘liberal welfare state’ policy directions of previous decades that maintain confined in their social support for families with children (Haux, 2013; O'Brien, 2019). The emphasis on the age of children also aligns closely with the previous government’s ‘social investment approach’ where targeted expenditure was rationalised with reference to the benefits of investing at specific age groups concerning cognitive capacity, health and wellbeing (Mintrom, 2011).

The technologisation of ‘wellbeing’

The budget discourse integrates a range of technical uses for the term ‘wellbeing’ in the budget discourse. Combining the term with a range of economic or budgeting-specific terms throughout the texts establishes a set of new phrases that shift meanings understood around ‘wellbeing’ and, in turn, what the term comes to represent for public policy and budgeting (Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough et al., 2007). These phrases include ‘wellbeing capitals’, ‘wellbeing costs’, and ‘wellbeing stock’ or ‘wellbeing outlook’ (Treasury, 2018a, p. 25).

Tracing ‘wellbeing’ as a word in the budget policy discourse reveals ideas and intentions associated with the term (Fairclough, 2010, p. 385). The graph below demonstrates the prevalent use of these and other collocations in the discourse and the number of technical terms

wellbeing is frequently paired with. The repeated use of ‘wellbeing’ with the technical term decontextualises the meaning often intuitively understood concerning ‘wellbeing’, imposing a new technical and specialised communication function (Fairclough, 1996).

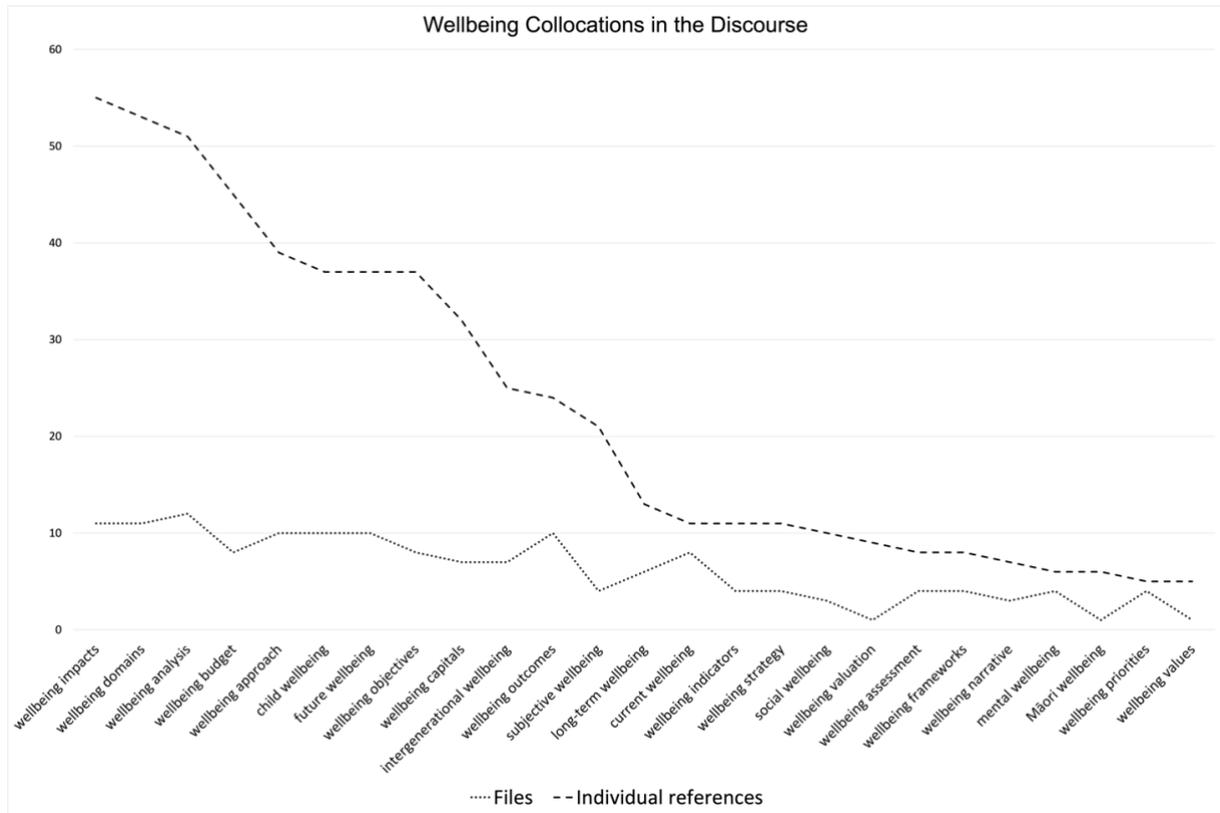


Figure 8: Wellbeing collocations in the budget discourse. ‘References’ are the number of times this phrase is used. ‘Files’ are the number of documents in which the collocation appears.

The merging of ‘wellbeing’ into specialised budget terms is increasingly relied on as the budgets are developed, shifting the term away from an experiential context into a technical one. In some instances, ‘wellbeing’ is related to people's experiences and lives in the discourse. These occurrences reflect how the common definition of ‘wellbeing’, what one might consider a person's overall state of being, is still used in the discourse. For example, the budget guidance for agencies and departments states, “This Budget will confirm the Government's commitment of putting child wellbeing at the heart of what they do, which will lift the wellbeing of all New

Zealanders” (Treasury, 2017, p. 4). Additionally: “The overall objective is that we will be a compassionate Government that measures itself by how well it improves the wellbeing of its people” (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018c, p. 3).

However, the frequent collocations of ‘wellbeing’ with technical terms compose a vocabulary emblematic of the technical nature of a ‘wellbeing approach’ employed here. While the term ‘wellbeing’ is used over 700 times in the budget documents, the graph charting these uses demonstrates how the majority of these occurrences envelope the term in phrases related to specific budget measures, frameworks and procedures. The range of technical collocations and the extent to which they are employed, shifts the principal emphasis of a ‘wellbeing approach’ away from the those subjects’ experiences referred to the discourse, and into the technical procedural language.

In the budget discourse, integrating the term into the economic and budget-making toolkit, using phrases like ‘wellbeing stock’, equates wellbeing with a commodity that can be bought and sold, rather than a human condition. The concept of ‘wellbeing’ is no longer attached to the human values it usually linked to, and the principles that underpin the concept of this approach to budgeting. Rather, economic values are imposed, arrogating the term and its meaning into the budget vocabulary (Waring, 2018, p. 43). Decontextualising the term repeatedly in this way, a new ‘wellbeing’ takes on new and exclusionary meanings, primarily used and understood by the experts who have co-opted the term (Fairclough, 2010, p. 137).

The lived experiences of single-parent families demonstrated how the gap between family and welfare policies and their lived realities contribute to increased challenges and compromises for wellbeing and material outcomes. Removing ‘wellbeing’ from its experiential significance, the lived realities of various wellbeing outcomes are less likely to be represented. For single-

parent families, whose experiences have frequently been overlooked in policy and budget procedures, the technologisation of wellbeing represents a likely continuation of the gaps between considering those lived experiences and the policies produced that might realise improved material outcomes.

Promoting a ‘wellbeing approach’ through the ‘budget priorities’

Promotional language devices which recontextualise discourse genres are used throughout the budget discourse. Employing promotional language is a discursive tool that entails borrowing from corporate marketing discourse to communicate ideas (Fairclough, 2010, p. 99; 2015; Foucault, 1984). Using tools that reflect corporate modes of communications shifts the budget discourse towards language that prioritises efficiency and productivity. This language aligns with the liberal pragmatism common to ‘progressive neoliberal’ spaces and policy-making, and undermines some of the opportunities to engage readers with the nuance and complexity that a ‘wellbeing approach’ seeks to advance.

The budget discourse, and the budget procedures, are streamlined around a selection of 3-5 ‘wellbeing priorities’ (Treasury, 2019a). As a device designed to highlight key messages and simplify communications for efficiency, the priorities align the budget discourse with corporatised texts that enact and require productive activity. Using promotional language in the budget policy discourse ensures the ‘order of discourse’ remains within liberal progressive analytic models where productivity is prudent, and distanced from the aim to invite analysts to engage in the complexity and possibilities a the ‘wellbeing approach’ can offer (Fairclough, 2010, p. 99; 2015; Foucault, 1984).

In the budget policy discourse, procedural language becomes a means to highlight efforts towards ‘progressive’ policy-making. Echoing the term ‘wellbeing priorities’ throughout the

texts is a device that functions to align the ‘wellbeing approach’ with progress on issues important to Labour Party values such as equal access to economic prosperity and social inclusivity (New Zealand Labour Party, 2022). For example, the discourse refers to ensuring training and resources are provided to increase access to paid work for different groups, including young people (‘under 24s’), Māori and Pacific peoples (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018b; Treasury, 2019a, 2020b).

Table 3: The Wellbeing Budget Priorities 2019-2021

2019	<i>Creating opportunities</i>	<i>Supporting a thriving nation</i>	<i>Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes</i>	<i>Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing</i>	<i>Supporting mental wellbeing</i>
2020⁹	<i>Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, skills, and opportunities</i>	<i>Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing</i>	<i>Supporting improved health outcomes for all New Zealanders</i>	<i>Supporting improved health outcomes for all New Zealanders</i>	
2021	<i>Continuing to keep New Zealanders safe from COVID-19</i>	<i>Accelerating the recovery and rebuild from the impacts of COVID-19</i>	<i>Laying the foundations for the future</i>		

At the same time, the discursive tools used to deliver the wellbeing priorities link to promotional language that elevate an image of pragmatism and efficiency typical of liberal or neoliberal government orientation. Active vocabulary such as ‘accelerating’, ‘supporting’, ‘reducing’ and ‘lifting’ are repeated prefixes throughout the budget priority discourse, acting to establish a logical implication that the government’s ‘wellbeing priorities’ have pragmatic

⁹ These priorities were revised following the impact of Covid-19 by the arrival of ‘Budget 2020’

intentions (Fairclough, 2003, p. 60). The repetition of the priorities as phrases throughout the discourse act as a type of mission statement commonly used in corporate enterprise language, to emphasise efficiency and establish buy-in and to confirm that the authors intend to ‘get the job done.’

The inclusive and progressive discourse is followed up with terms that frame the budget as enabling and inclusive, even where the progress made are relatively established public provisions or where it is making up for past underfunding. For example, access to resources for health and education for children is highlighted in the discourse as key support to parents, while statements including how an initiative allows “families to get ahead” highlights the idea of a generous and inclusive government (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2017, p. 3; Treasury, 2017, p. 7).

Further, the discourse describes how parents’ are “supported through” and relieved of the “pressures” of parenthood, which are GP fees and school fee subsidies (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018b, p. 14). This framing aligns the spending of these critical provisions as a form of relief for families. In doing so, the discourse aligns with the neoliberal idea that maintaining basic public services, such as health and education, are not the responsibility of the state (Brown, 2003; Humpage, 2014). Again, the discourse performs in way that frames the budget as generous for the sake of improved wellbeing, while in these instances minimal social provisions are, in fact, extended.

The ideas implied by these discursive tools are strikingly similar to the inclusive pragmatism underpinning previous Labour governments in the ‘liberal welfare states’ (Lister, 2001; Lunt, 2014; Mahon, 2011). This discourse highlights pragmatic action as the path to social and economic prosperity, typical of the inclusive liberal vision promoted in earlier neoliberal

policy-making (Dean, 2004; Dean, 2014; Humpage & Craig, 2008; Mahon, 2011). These are the same policy ideas and directions that maintained a narrowing down of rights to social citizenship, emphasised individual responsibility for social and material wellbeing, and frequently placed labels of risk on single-parent families, despite the challenging conditions neoliberal policy-making has created for them (Bothfeld & Betzelt, 2011; Dwyer & Wright, 2014; Patrick, 2017; Skevik, 2005; Wright, 2011; Wright & Patrick, 2019).

Consistencies with the 'inclusive neoliberal state' are also evident in aspects of the 'wellbeing priorities' discourse that promote individual responsibility and align prosperity with people's individual choices. For example, the budget strategy discourse states that "Budget 2018 will continue this momentum to ensure that all New Zealanders have equality of opportunity and have the resources they need to deliver on their potential, wherever they live" (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2017, p. 2). While the phrase "all New Zealanders" indicates the intention to achieve equal outcomes for the various groups that make up society, "equality of opportunity" promotes prosperity as viable via the actions and decisions made by individuals specifically (Lister, 2001). This statement reinforces the individual responsibility to navigate opportunities in the conditions of scarcity produced by the economic system and the liberal attitudes adopted to maintain it (Deacon, 2013; Ko & Cho, 2017; Wilson et al., 2013).

The budget policy discourse also reinforces the promotion of self-responsibility through other phrases that situate individual attainment of material wellbeing as the key avenue towards prosperity. While the discourse attempts to elevate concepts like accessibility through "quality public services", a number of statements also indicate the approach is designed to help families "get ahead" (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2017, p. 2) and create a "level playing field" (Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018a, p. 15). These metaphorical terms hint at a game or competition in which there are figurative winners and losers. These phrases assume that all

families are inclined to participate in a system that requires individuals to compete for resources, in order to gain economic or material prosperity.

Finally, the promotional culture discursive tools establish an overarching ambiguity around political ideology and democratic values. The transference of marketing genres and language onto various other discourses abstracts the political intention of the authors. This is again typical of an inclusive neoliberal state, where concepts oscillating between discursive functions ambiguate and promote liberal policies to a range of audiences are relied on to abdicate state responsibility for welfare and social prosperity (Jenson, 2010).

The representation of poverty and material outcomes

The ways in which the budget policy discourse frames concepts relating to material wellbeing reveals how the ‘wellbeing approach’ interprets this policy problem and aims to address it for different families. In all discourse, how material conditions are framed will imply ideological beliefs around responsibility for addressing those conditions (Dean, 1991; Lister, 2004). For example, the term ‘poverty’ produces various connotations depending on the compositional phrasing or context, commonly understood as undesirable and morally unacceptable, which often leads to ethically-motivated responses and measures (Perry, 2019, p. 29; Piachaud, 1987, p. 161).

Implicit language devices are used to frame material conditions throughout the budget discourse. Namely, discursive tools that minimise the structural significance of undesirable material conditions such as poverty are frequently employed. Implicit propositions in the discourse include goals towards “raising living standards” (NZ Office of the Minister of Finance, 2018b, p. 1), stating that funding programmes will bring “material assistance to

vulnerable children” (Minister of Minister of Finance, 2018, p. 44) or that an initiative is established to help “those in need” (NZ Treasury, 2020c, p. 1).

These devices act to minimise the issues of material deprivation impacting many families and the need for action or urgent policy responses. Using ‘implicit propositions’ to frame material outcomes ensures the discourse suggests the presences of undesirable outcomes while evading the outright naming of conditions of deprivation or poverty. This discursive tool relies on the assumption that the reader knows and understands what these phrases signify and that idea of poverty and material deprivation are ‘common knowledge’ (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 34-35). Assuming the reader understands the context and significance of the language used without acknowledging this in explicitly material terms, implicit propositions reduce the moral imperative attached to conditions of poverty or material deprivation.

This is further demonstrated through the prolific application of the phrase ‘child poverty’ throughout the budget discourse. While the term ‘poverty’ itself is used in several instances, as the figure 9 demonstrates, ‘child poverty’ is used at a significantly higher rate across all the budget documents than any other term to describe material conditions. Presenting conditions of poverty in association with children has significant implications for how the connection between poverty and the structural issues known to impact material outcomes, as highlighted by the lived experience literature and other analytical evidence.

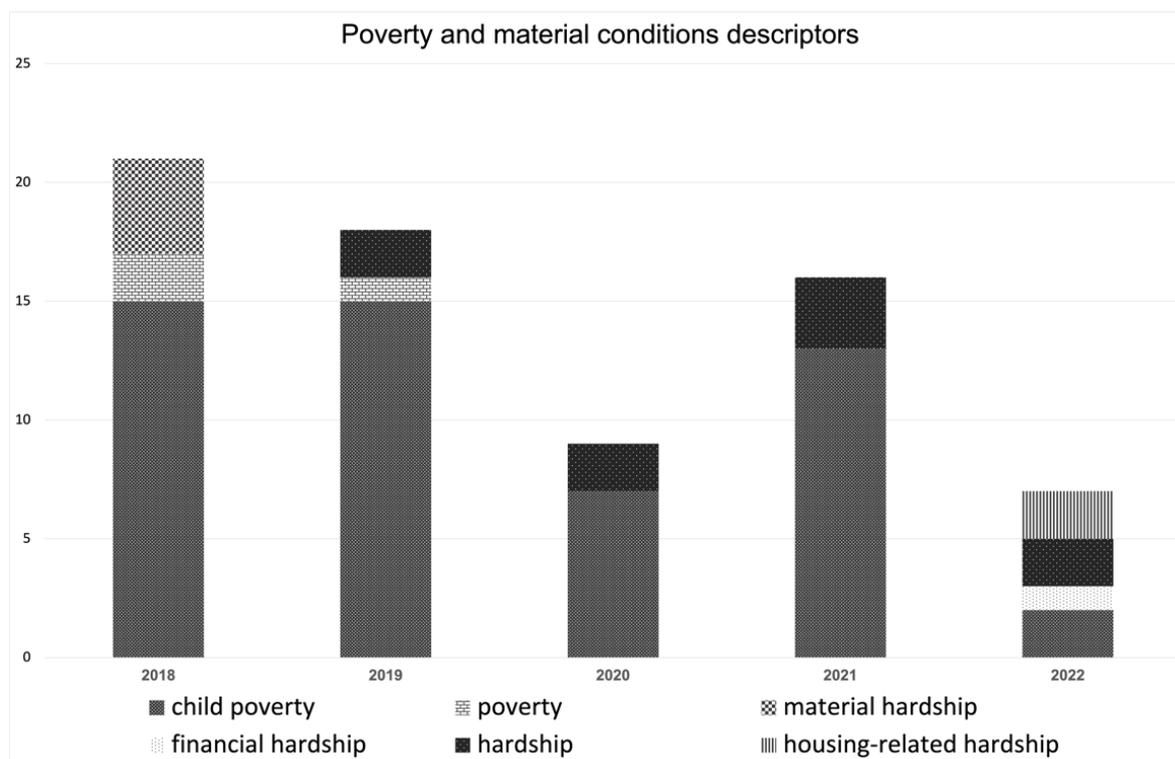


Figure 9: Terms used to describe poverty in the budget policy discourse.

Several issues are highlighted through the frequent usage of the phrase ‘child poverty’ concerning the direction of public policy and budgeting for single-parent families. For many single-parent families facing challenges that lead to material deprivation and poverty, this discourse de-emphasises the social-structural character of those challenges. The increased use of the term ‘child poverty’ in the ‘liberal welfare state’ discourse often directs empathy towards children, who are distinctly passive actors in the equation. Empathy is de-contextualised, ensuring the structural roots of these material outcomes are less visible or easily ignored (Lister, 2015; Wiegers, 2002).

Highlighting impacts on children over parents separates material outcomes from the value of unpaid labour carried out by parents and omits the impact that the financial costs of care and parenting have on these outcomes (Lister, 2006, p. 328). In this way, the ‘naturalisation’ of

poverty in the discourse de-genders the policy responses to poverty or inequality. Similarly, racism or the ongoing material impacts of colonisation are avoided. As such, these examples tend to present problematic material conditions free from the ideological signification that would deem them unacceptable and instead a “natural” occurrence (Fairclough, 2010, p. 30). In turn, status quo or minimal policy and budget-making responses are also deemed acceptable.

Furthermore, ‘child poverty’ evokes an independent image of children, and the material inadequacy they are subject to, as an individualised issue. Again, this has the effect of decontextualising structural causes of poverty that impact families, by obscuring the income earners (parents) from the phrase and discourse (Lister, 2015; Wiegers, 2002). Concerning single parents, the link between income inadequacy and policies to help them lift incomes is omitted from the phrase ‘child poverty’, isolating this issue as a phenomenon outside of the state’s control or reign of responsibility.

The very few examples separating ‘poverty’ from ‘child poverty’ represent further consistencies between the ‘wellbeing approach’, the ‘liberal welfare state’ and ‘inclusive neoliberal’ policy-making. While this discourse using the phrase ‘child poverty’ highlights a level of moral obligation and motivation behind this policy direction, it also requires that resolutions toward improving material outcomes are mediated through a individualistic, neoclassical economic rationale (Hamilton, 2014; Jenson, 2010) This highlights how the ‘wellbeing approach’ continues policy directions based on means that rarely enable collective notions of responsibility for material outcomes beyond a market-liberal rational and status quo policy-making of the ‘liberal welfare state’ (Dean, 2019; McGann et al., 2019).

The risk of compromising the extent of social-structural problems linked to poverty through the use of this phrase has been highlighted in other states during neoliberal reform. The Status

of Women Canada highlights how the extent to which the phrase ‘child poverty’, employed during Canadian federal policy reform at the turn of the millennium was instrumental towards “narrowing the definition of poverty as a social problem which thereby reduces expectations of the state” (Wiegers, 2002, p. 7). This is also linked distinctly to the increased emphasis on ‘liberal welfare state’ policy orientation, where the primary goal of economic growth displaces the perimeters of claims to social citizenship (Brodie, 2010, p. 1579). Additionally, the phrase was a prolific feature of the United Kingdom’s New Labour ‘third-way’ welfare programme reforms. New Labour’s discourse framed policy objectives around children deserving of better material outcomes, shaming parents’ efforts and enhancing the stigma attached to material deprivation, while shifting focus away from the racism, systemic and social-structural problems that contribute to poverty in the UK (Dean, 2004; Goldson, 2002; Smith et al., 2008).

The shift away from structural issues that produce and often reproduce poverty created via this discourse in budget discourse underscores a significant gap in how the ‘wellbeing approach’ aims to close in on the complexity of analysing policy for groups like single-parent families. The instances where poverty, material deprivation and related issues are named outright suggest a shift away from this orientation to some extent. However, the frequency of the term ‘child poverty’ and the central significance this phrase takes in the ‘wellbeing priorities’ and budget strategy overall continue to obscure more explicit contributors of poverty, maintaining ‘liberal welfare state’ and settler-state status quo approaches to public policy.

Textual omissions concerning welfare policy and expenditure

The budget discourse reveals the reliance on relative factors of ‘progressiveness’ to present welfare policy and expenditure. This is typically evident through the use of active propositions, used to convey socially progressive welfare assistance. For example, deductions are

“removed”, abatement thresholds “changed” and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) staff “increased” (New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 44). One initiative description states that it “discontinues compulsory Work for You seminars, which people are currently required to attend as part of their pre-benefit activities, as they are of questionable value to clients” (New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 96).

Additionally, increases to welfare access are compared to previous decades where benefits were narrowed in eligibility and neglected from the budget entirely: “The government has also provided the first across the board welfare increase for nearly fifty years, together with a temporary doubling of the Winter Energy Payment. This should support the lowest paid and most vulnerable New Zealanders, including Superannuitants” (NZ Treasury, 2020c, p. 13).

These propositions are used to promote the idea that changes made are motivated by progressive political values that seek transformation in material wellbeing and equality. While the intentions behind the initiatives may be ultimately progressive ones, it is crucial to note that these changes are limited in that they are reversing changes made by the previous governments. By using propositions that imply steps forward towards increased welfare assistance levels, the discourse promotes the idea that the ‘wellbeing approach’ acknowledges wellbeing is supported through material security and stability.

Nevertheless, there is no communication referring to the proportionate impact these changes are making in the context of increases in inequality and poverty that have occurred in recent decades. In line with a range of criticisms from welfare commentators and advocates, the discourse omits how welfare policy changes remain relatively static in light of the conservative levels of assistance provided by the previous government, combined with the severity of increases in cost of living discussed in chapter one (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022; CPAG,

2022; McAllister et al., 2021; Rashbrooke, 2021a, 2021b). This is underscored by the infrequent use of the word ‘welfare’ in the budget documents, illustrated in figure 10. As of November 2021, approximately 16 per cent (20 of 126) of the detailed recommendations made by WEAG in 2019 had been partially or fully implemented (Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021).

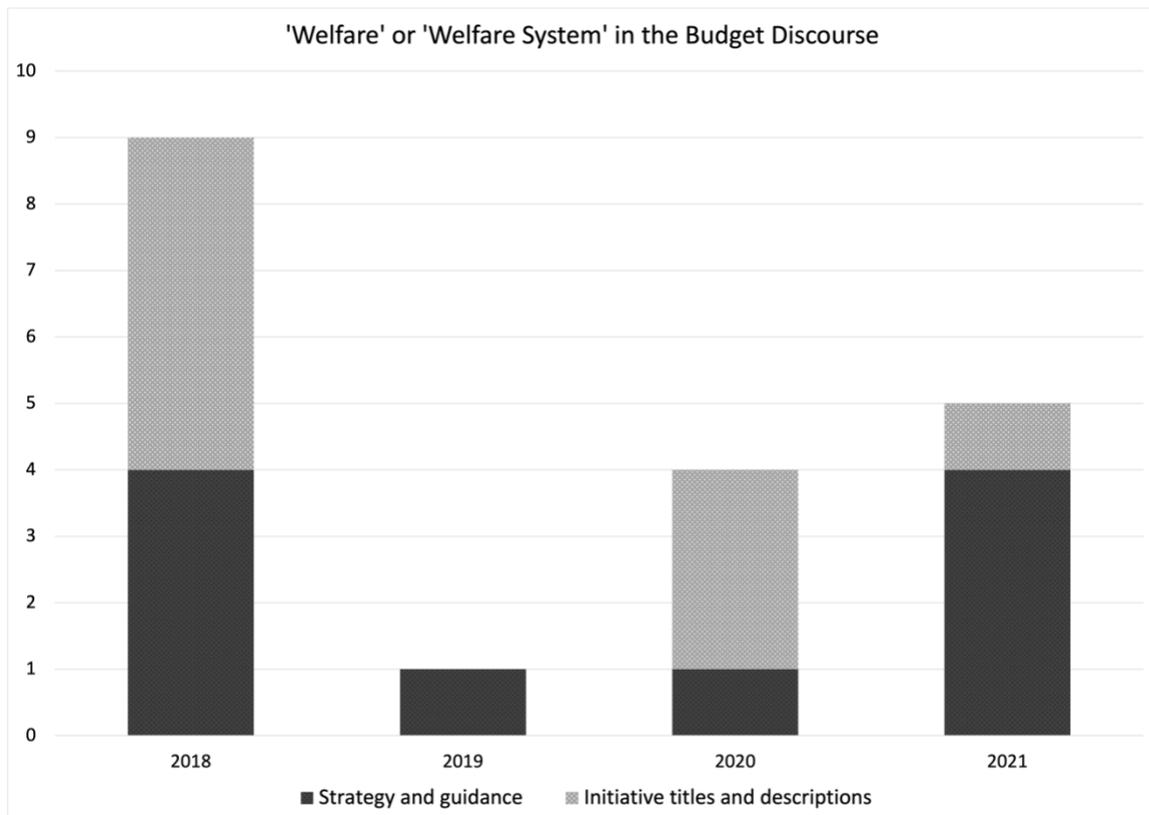


Figure 10: 'Welfare' or 'welfare system' in the budget discourse. Budget 2022 is excluded as only budget initiative titles and descriptions were available.

Welfare policy and expenditure under a ‘wellbeing approach’ are presented as ‘moving forward’ to assist in improved material outcomes, while limited progress in acknowledging the link between material deprivation, poverty and overall wellbeing has, in fact, been enacted. This is reinforced when the discourse reflects a continued focus on fiscal prudence concerning welfare expenditure, including similarities to the social investment concept designed to target and lower expenditure. For example, one initiative is described as aiming to: "reduce waiting

lists for Early Intervention, improving children's education and life outcomes, with education, justice, and health and welfare savings" (Minister of Minister of Finance, 2018, p. 44). Further, after the announcement to appoint the Welfare Expert Advisory Group in 2018, the term 'welfare system' or synonymous terms seldom features in the budget discourse, including the contents of budget initiative titles and descriptions.

Conclusion: Constituting a ‘wellbeing approach’ for single-parent family material outcomes

This research has used different methods to uncover how public policies represent single-parent families material outcomes as a policy problem and how these ideas shape those outcomes. Situating single-parent families’ lived experiences in a welfare state framework designed to highlight the ideas that frame policy related to single-parent family material outcomes, the significant gaps created in the formulation of this policy problem and the policy programmes delivered in response have been highlighted. Using methods that acknowledge and question the continued use of data, Euro-normative perspectives and outdated presumptions concerning labour, gender and household structure towards family and welfare policy interventions, the research emphasises the relationship between the ideas embedded in those policies and their lived effects (Bacchi, 2009, p. 10).

In the experiential data, single parents describe extreme conditions of scarcity, frequently overcome by resourcefulness and the social capital accumulated that varies by race and class, rather than the market-economy or state conditions. The persistence of this in the lived experience synthesis demonstrates that there are multiple links between presumptions made in the (neo)liberal public policies and the lived, material effects of problem representations produced out of these presumptions. The extent to which the discourse represents considerations of these links provides a measure from which to confirm how ‘wellbeing policies’ will produce a shift in lived effects for single-parent families.

The level of presumption around what the market economy will provide for single-parent families in the budget policy discourse is one consistency with the policy problem

representations that have come before. Centring the productive economy as the distributor of prosperity, while confining productivity to status quo and outdated measures of labour, the discourse reinforces the discriminatory effects (neo)liberal policy-making establishes for single-parent families. Without shifting these boundaries, or accounting for them in policy, the ‘wellbeing approach’ ensures family and welfare policy, or the employment regulations corresponding to these, continue to reproduce a structural configuration between policy, the market and families’ labour capacities that increases the chances of single parent families living with inadequate incomes (Cantillon et al., 2018).

The extent to which the budget policy discourse represents parents as degendered, individualised, and static citizens for much of their lives underscores how the ‘wellbeing approach’ could fail to account for single-parent families’ material outcomes. The demographic data demonstrated that single-parent families are a diverse and often unique policy subject, requiring dynamic policy framing. Further, the lived experience data highlighted how a ‘liberal welfare state’ framing of the policy problem discounts the realities of how these factors might interact. In the budget discourse, families and parents remain relatively homogenous subjects, even where references to whānau, Māori or Pacific families are named in budget initiatives or priorities. Excluding the term whānau, a common term used to refer to ‘family’ for Māori, ideas related to variations in family structure are entirely omitted.

The discourse generates extensive promotional messaging around how the concept of a ‘wellbeing approach’ is being used to target cultural and political values of an inclusive liberal society. The nature of this promotional discourse and the extent to which it is employed throughout the discourse is consistent with the political marketisation of other ‘progressive’ policy ideas that have focused on targeted or narrowed expenditure towards family and welfare policies. The marketisation of liberal and inclusive values is highlighted by the promotional

discourse of budget initiatives and priorities that express expenditure as significant despite acknowledging the extent of underspending in family and welfare policy initiatives and operating costs taking place across a decade.

While the Treasury and the New Zealand government maintain a clear commitment to implementing the ‘wellbeing approach’ in the discourse, the nature of the promotional discourse verges on a political marketing tool designed to make ambiguous the material impact the policies will have (Jenson, 2010). This has the effect of obscuring the overarching objectives of policies made under via the ‘wellbeing approach’, ensuring the responsibility of the state versus the individual is unclear. For single-parents, who in New Zealand are typically expected to maintain individual responsibility for income adequacy, whether through maintaining conditions of benefit receipt or engaging in paid work, devices that remove state accountability represent a continuation of a liberal and neoliberal policy-making conditions.

The technologisation of the term ‘wellbeing’ is a macro-conceptual approach to interpreting the discourse. This makes it no less important in understanding the problem representation of single-parent family material outcomes. Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi states that as language has been technologised, discourse once used to understand and communicate social relations is more likely to be emptied of its material meaning and consequences (Berardi, 2019). Much like the ways that the CDA in this research suggests, Berardi dwells on how technologisation of discourse can render political action and accountability incapable of achieving equitable material outcomes and lives.

The ‘wellbeing approach’ presents a way to ask what the policy problem is when it comes to single-parent families now, in the wake of (neo)liberal policy conditions, and with extensive access to evidence concerning persistence of compromised material wellbeing for single-parent

families and the principles of wellbeing economics with which to re-interpret the problem. While the intention to seek out new ways to understand this problem are mentioned in numerous political claims, the ideas that emerge in the budget policy discourse suggest a range of further and, indeed, transformative steps must be taken to if single-parent families are to be included in the aim to ‘improve the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.’

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