Silent voices, invisible violence: welfare to work and the exploitation of single mothers who have experienced domestic violence

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Southern Cross University
Silent Voices, Invisible Violence: Welfare to Work and the Exploitation of Single Mothers who have experienced Domestic Violence

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School of Arts and Social Sciences

Southern Cross University

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Declaration

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. I have acknowledged in relevant places the use of material from a published submission of my authorship, which was based on this research.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University.

Print Name...Myjenta Winter.................................................................

Signature.................................................................................................

Date....14 September 2015.................................................................
Abstract

In the last decade the Australian social security system has been transformed by neoliberal ideals and policies that enforce compulsory participation in welfare-to-work programs in exchange for income support. Introduced in 2006, the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Act 2005, specifically targeted single mothers on the premise of combating welfare dependency and other social problems, such as homelessness and even domestic violence. While Welfare to Work has been promoted as being a pathway from poverty to economic independence, there is little research that directly addresses how single mothers who have experienced domestic violence are affected by these reforms. Through adopting a feminist standpoint theory approach, the study reported on in this thesis examined how Welfare to Work impacts on the lives of single mothers who had experienced violence. The study involved an analysis of qualitative interviews with 23 single mothers, as well as interviews with eight women’s emergency service workers and three welfare system workers. Drawing on feminist theories on systemic violence and citizenship, the study examined how Welfare to Work impacts on mothers’ care responsibilities, labour skills and choices. The research found that single mothers were disadvantaged by institutions that failed to protect them by prioritising patriarchal rights. These institutions intersected with Welfare to Work and impacted on mothers’ ability to comply with the compulsory job seeking requirements. In the welfare system, mistakes made by Centrelink placed further stressors on the single mothers. They were denied information on exemption processes and treated the same as childless income support recipients, which in turn, benefited employment services. Welfare to Work did not support single mothers who had experienced violence to find sustainable employment. Instead the policy and employment service practices financially disadvantaged mothers, placing them at risk of being de-skilled. The welfare reform did not support mothers to gain skills and qualifications, however, despite disincentives those who were studying continued to do so, in a bid to improve their employability and be free of the constraints of the welfare system and poverty. The policy also did not support mothers in balancing child care responsibilities with employment. The findings of this research demonstrated that these welfare reforms restricted single mothers’ rights as citizens, exacerbated the risks that the policy claims to solve and rendered violence against women and children invisible.


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Publications

The following work was produced as a part of this research project.

Submissions

**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACOSS</td>
<td>Australian Council of Social Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ANAO</td>
<td>Australian National Audit Office</td>
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<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<td>ALRC</td>
<td>Australian Law Reform Commission</td>
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<td>AVO</td>
<td>Apprehended Violence Order (Protection Order)</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Carers Allowance</td>
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<td>CrP</td>
<td>Crisis payment</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Child Support Agency</td>
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<td>CSMC</td>
<td>Council of Single Mothers and their Children, (Victoria)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWCA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEWR</td>
<td>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
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<td>DOCS</td>
<td>Department of Children Services (Child Protection Agency)</td>
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<td>DSP</td>
<td>Disability Support Pension</td>
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<td>DV</td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVO</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Order (Protection Order)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>Employment Pathway Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTB</td>
<td>Family Tax Benefits</td>
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<td>FTB A</td>
<td>Family Tax Benefit Part A</td>
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<td>FTB B</td>
<td>Family Tax Benefit Part B</td>
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<tr>
<td>FVO</td>
<td>Family Violence Option</td>
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<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
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<td>IVAWS</td>
<td>International Violence Against Women Survey</td>
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<td>JCA</td>
<td>Job Capacity Assessor and Job Capacity Assessment</td>
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<td>JETCCFA</td>
<td>Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance</td>
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<td>JNW</td>
<td>Job Network provider</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Job Services Australia</td>
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<td>JS</td>
<td>Job Seeker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSCI</td>
<td>Job Seeker Classification Instrument</td>
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<td>JSKA</td>
<td>Job Seeker Account</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATSEM</td>
<td>National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>NESA</td>
<td>National Employment Services Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCSMC</td>
<td>National Council of Single Mothers and their Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSA</td>
<td>New Start Allowance, benefit for unemployed also known as ‘The Dole’</td>
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<td>NWRN</td>
<td>National Welfare Rights Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PES</td>
<td>Pensioner Education Supplement</td>
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<td>PCC</td>
<td>Pensioner Concession Card</td>
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<td>PP</td>
<td>Parenting Payment</td>
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<td>PPP</td>
<td>Parenting Payment Partnered</td>
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<td>PPS</td>
<td>Parenting Payment Single</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRWORA</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRC, NSW</td>
<td>Welfare Rights Centre, New South Wales</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

Declaration ........................................................................................................... 1
Abstract ................................................................................................................ 2
Publications .......................................................................................................... 3
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................ 4

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER ONE Women and the Welfare State
Introduction ......................................................................................................... 11
Keynesian welfare state ....................................................................................... 11
Women and citizenship ......................................................................................... 14
Neoliberal reformation ......................................................................................... 20
Welfare-to-work programs .................................................................................... 27
Welfare reform critique ......................................................................................... 33
  Poverty reduction or feminisation of poverty .................................................... 37
Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 44

CHAPTER TWO Domestic Violence and Welfare to Work
Introduction ......................................................................................................... 46
Theoretical and political background .................................................................... 47
The Australian response: Welfare to Work and domestic violence ..................... 60
  Employment and violence ................................................................................ 60
  Domestic violence exemption .......................................................................... 64
Participation requirements .................................................................................... 70
Surveillance .......................................................................................................... 78
Education and skills development ........................................................................ 83
  Employment services ...................................................................................... 83
  Payments ......................................................................................................... 86
Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 88

CHAPTER THREE Methodology
Introduction ......................................................................................................... 90
Research design .................................................................................................... 90
  Strength of qualitative research ..................................................................... 93
  Limits and strengths of insider research .......................................................... 94
Recruitment of participants and sample .............................................................. 96
  Single mother sample ..................................................................................... 96
  Women’s Emergency Services staff sample .................................................... 99
  Centrelink staff sample .................................................................................. 99
  Employment service staff sample ................................................................ 100
  Job capacity assessor sample ...................................................................... 100
Recruitment difficulties ....................................................................................... 100
  Single mother recruitment .......................................................................... 100
Recruitment difficulties with other stakeholders.................................................. 101
  Centrelink recruitment...................................................................................... 101
  Employment services recruitment.................................................................... 101
  Job capacity assessor recruitment .................................................................. 101
Value of interviewing.......................................................................................... 102
Interview data sources........................................................................................ 102
  Collecting data ................................................................................................ 104
  Data analysis .................................................................................................... 105
Trustworthiness of qualitative research ............................................................. 107
  Credibility ........................................................................................................ 108
  Transferability ................................................................................................. 109
  Dependability ................................................................................................. 109
  Confirmability ................................................................................................. 110
Ethical considerations......................................................................................... 110
Research Limitations ........................................................................................ 112
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 113

CHAPTER FOUR Mothers Experiences of Violence
Introduction........................................................................................................... 115
Experience of different forms of violence ......................................................... 116
Economic abuse prior to separation ................................................................. 118
Legal and child protection systems .................................................................. 122
Child contact and safety .................................................................................... 126
Property settlements ........................................................................................ 130
Child support and Family Tax Benefit .............................................................. 134
Employment and study sabotage ....................................................................... 138
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 141

CHAPTER FIVE Participation Exemptions
Introduction.......................................................................................................... 144
Single mothers’ experiences negotiating exemptions for domestic violence and in special circumstances .......................................................... 144
  Women’s emergency service workers .............................................................. 148
  Centrelink Officer’s interview ........................................................................ 150
  Discussion ........................................................................................................ 152
Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessments .................................................... 154
  Single mothers’ experiences of negotiating exemptions on grounds of incapacity .......................................................... 155
  Women’s emergency service worker’s interviews .......................................... 160
  Job Capacity Assessor interview .................................................................... 160
  Discussion ........................................................................................................ 163
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 165

CHAPTER SIX Employment, Education and Welfare to Work
Introduction.......................................................................................................... 167
Education and employment ............................................................................... 168
Centrelink: Misinformation, administration mistakes and barriers to compliance .................................................................................................. 170
  Work first career restrictions and compliance features .................................. 172
Child caring barriers ......................................................................................... 175
Surveillance ......................................................................................................... 177
Discussion .......................................................................................................... 179
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Single Mother Recruitment Sources...............................................................97
Table 3.2 Single Mother Participants and Australian State of Residency......................98
Table 3.3 Single Mother Participants’ Cultural Background...........................................98
Table 3.4 Single Mother Participant’s Family Sizes......................................................99
Table 4.1 Child Contact with Fathers........................................................................126
Table 4.2 Home Owner Status Prior to and Post Separation.................................132
Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century, neoliberal philosophy has made dramatic changes to the delivery of welfare services within Australia and other Liberal states. While originally income support was seen as a citizen’s right within the welfare state, neoliberal policy has replaced this entitlement with compulsory welfare-to-work programs, which has reduced eligibility for benefits and enforces job seeking activities in exchange for payments. To justify these welfare reforms, single mothers have been portrayed as welfare cheats and dependants, despite their labour force activity and care responsibilities. In Australia these reforms were introduced by the Howard Liberal/National Coalition as the Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Act 2005.1 The Howard Government and the successive Labor Governments claimed that Welfare to Work would combat welfare dependency, including intergenerational welfare dependency, as well as solve social problems, such as poverty, homelessness and domestic violence. However, these reforms have received numerous criticisms. One major criticism has been that welfare reform reduces labour protection to cut labour costs and increase profits for business. As women are a cheaper source of labour, single mothers have been the specific target of the welfare reforms.

Domestic violence is a major issue in Australia and a key factor in women having to enter the welfare system as single mothers. However, the assumption that employment will stop the problem does not recognise the complexities associated with post-separation violence. While policy makers promote Welfare to Work as being supportive and beneficial to single mothers and in the best interest of children,2 these women’s perspectives and experiences of domestic violence are missing from policy formulation. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research that examines how single mothers who have experienced domestic violence experience Welfare to Work. This research specifically focused upon single mothers who had experienced domestic violence and the impact Welfare to Work has on their lives. This research is relevant today as the Welfare to Work legislation is still current and continues to focus on employment as the best form of welfare.

1 Hereafter referred to as Welfare to Work.
Welfare to Work commenced on the 30 June 2006. Based on modelling ‘work first’ values of self-support, the intent of the policy is to move single mothers off benefits altogether. Under Welfare to Work, single parents (with less than four children under the age of 16 years) are transferred from Parenting Payment Single (PPS) when their youngest child turns eight years and onto the lower paying benefit of New Start Allowance (NSA), which is designed for the unemployed. Mandatory participation requirements, of 15 hours employment per week or job search activities, applied to new claimants of PPS (those who applied after 30 June 2006) once their youngest child turned six years of age. Those receiving PPS prior to 30 June 2006 (a group referred to as grandfathered) were allowed to remain on that payment until their youngest child turned 16 years, but they still had to comply with employment participation requirements once their youngest child turns seven years. The grandfathered status of single parents was abolished by the Gillard Labor Government (2010-2013). As of the 1 January 2013, all recipients of Parenting Payment (PP) are to commence participation requirements when their youngest child turns six years of age and all recipients with children eight years of age or over will lose PPS entitlement. A penalty system was introduced that suspended parents’ payments if they did not comply with participation activities. The Labor Government amended this system to a ‘No Show No Pay’ policy where job seekers would be docked one tenth of their fortnightly income support payment for non-compliance. With the defeat of the Howard Government in 2007, the Labor Government maintained Welfare to Work as a part of their social inclusion agenda.

Under the Abbott Liberal/National Coalition Government (2013) Welfare to Work remains in place. However, this government has proposed to further reduce eligibility for NSA, and

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payments for single parents. Although the Abbott Government has proposed to spend $25 million a year for four years on its domestic violence plan, it has simultaneously cut funding to programs, such as legal aid, refuges, homelessness services and housing rental schemes. While these amendments and budget cuts will affect women who need to escape violence, they will also financially disadvantage single mothers, particularly those who have to deal with post-separation violence.

Although the legislation and associated discourses use the gender neutral term single parents, the welfare reforms appear to specifically target single mothers. In 2006, 87 per cent of the single parent population were women and 83 per cent in 2010. The Australian ‘work first’ model of welfare reflects a roll back of welfare policy. Prior to the introduction of the Supporting Mother’s Benefit in 1973, single mothers caring for dependants were not recognised within the Social Security system and many were forced to give up their children or take menial low paid jobs and live in poverty. North American research in 2004 by Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe on welfare reform and single mothers, found that because of financial hardship, mothers are returning to unsafe relationships or being forced to relinquish their children to perpetrators or foster care or put them up for adoption. While domestic violence has been a major focus in North American research on welfare reform and mothers, this problem has received little attention in Australian research.

In Australia, there has only been a small body of research on Welfare to Work. The majority of these studies look at the general population of income support recipients including

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disability support pensioners, but mainly focus on the unemployed who do not have dependent children.\textsuperscript{17} The few studies on single mothers and \textit{Welfare to Work} have not focused on the problem of domestic violence.\textsuperscript{18} Studies on domestic violence that have incorporated \textit{Welfare to Work} have mainly focused on barriers to women’s financial security through employment and the legal systems.\textsuperscript{19} While these studies raised a few areas of concern, they did not specifically focus on single mothers, income support recipients, or give in-depth detail on how the welfare reform impacted on the participants’ lives. Only one small study focused on the impact that domestic violence had on the psychological well-being of single mothers who were trying to improve their skills through study while having to contend with the \textit{Welfare to Work} surveillance system. However, in this study Green focused more on workers’ perspectives than on single mothers.\textsuperscript{20}

This research examined single mothers who have experienced domestic violence and how they experience \textit{Welfare to Work}. Domestic violence is a major problem in Australia. However, in Australia and internationally, the true level of violence is unknown as many incidences are not reported.\textsuperscript{21} This makes it difficult to ascertain the extent of domestic

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{20} Betty Green, "Disturbances and Disruptions: Women's Experiences of Violence and its Impact on Women as Learners" (Honours thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2008).
\end{thebibliography}
violence as women are more likely to report an assault perpetrated by a stranger than by someone they know.\textsuperscript{22} In Australia less than 20 per cent of women who have experienced violence actually report the incident.\textsuperscript{23} However, what has been found is that women are more likely to be assaulted or killed by someone they know as opposed to a stranger; it is previous partners who pose the highest risk towards women.\textsuperscript{24}

The only extensive survey on violence against women in Australia was the 1996 Women’s Safety Survey.\textsuperscript{25} This survey found that 42 per cent of separated women experienced physical violence while 10 per cent experienced sexual violence, with nearly 50 per cent of assaults witnessed by children.\textsuperscript{26} The Australian Component of the International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS) in 2003 found that 34 per cent of women had experience domestic violence.\textsuperscript{27} While the 2005 Personal Safety Survey found that 44 per cent of physical assaults and 21 per cent of sexual assaults were perpetrated by ex-partners.

The Health Costs of Violence study by VicHealth in 2004, estimated the contribution domestic violence makes to illness, injury and premature death, focusing on physical and sexual violence alone.\textsuperscript{28} They found domestic violence to be a leading cause of ill-health and premature death amongst Victorian women under the age of 45, more than any other risk factor such as high blood pressure, obesity, and even smoking.\textsuperscript{29} In 2004, Access Economics estimated the total cost of domestic violence annually to the economy was $8.1 billion, with victims having to bear most of the costs ($4 billion) through pain, suffering and premature mortality.\textsuperscript{30} In 2009, the annual cost to the economy has been estimated to have increased to $13.6 billion per year.\textsuperscript{31} Along with disruptions to health and family life, domestic violence also impacts on women’s employment opportunities and in the long term may lead to

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{24}Mouzos and Makkai, "Women's Experiences of Male Violence," 64.
\textsuperscript{26}Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Women's Safety Australia. 11 December. Cat. No. 4128.0," (Canberra1996).
\textsuperscript{27}Mouzos and Makkai, "Women's Experiences of Male Violence.”
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31}The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, ”The Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children,” (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).
permanent loss of labour capacity. According to Access Economics, women who had experienced physical violence had 35 per cent more chance of having to rely on income support.

Despite the impact domestic violence has on women’s health and labour activity, employment has been promoted as providing single mothers with economic independence, which, in turn, it is purported, will solve violence. This notion is based on neoliberal ideals which construct women as to blame for their circumstances and presumes their dependence on men is due to intentional unemployment. This simplistic solution that employment will solve societal problems is the basis behind welfare reforms such as Welfare to Work and has also been incorporated into the Australian domestic violence policy, under the Labor Government’s social inclusion policy. While governments claim Welfare to Work is a poverty reduction measure, welfare policy analyses within political economy studies and gender studies argue that welfare-to-work policies do not acknowledge structural deficits in the labour market, created by neoliberal policies that promote a more flexible and cheaper labour source, which inhibit many people gaining economic security through employment. Furthermore, feminists argue women are further disadvantaged through the division of labour, gender inequalities and having caring responsibilities, which reinforces women’s

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33 Ibid., 5.18.
35 Gillard and Wong, "An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda".
dependency in the family, and hampers their ability to become independent wage earners.\textsuperscript{39} However, despite these issues and the problem of violence, \textit{Welfare to Work} reduces income support payments for single mothers who have to care for dependent children.

This study examines the lived experiences of single mothers who have experienced domestic violence and how \textit{Welfare to Work} impacts on them and their families. To accomplish this, a standpoint feminist approach was utilised to highlight these women’s experiences and perspectives, which have been largely absent from the welfare reform debate. The research also examines single mothers’ experiences of trying to negotiate specific job seeking participation exemptions in relation to experiencing domestic violence. This is another area which has been overlooked in Australian research. The study also incorporated the perspectives and experiences of Centrelink, employment services and women’s emergency service staff in dealing with single mothers who apply for participation exemptions.

The aims of the research were to investigate:

- single mothers’ experiences of negotiating with Centrelink and Job Network (JNW) agencies for participation exemptions,
- how single mothers who have left a relationship characterised by domestic violence survive and manage on the NSA and negotiate the participation requirements,
- Centrelink, Employment services and Women’s emergency service staff’s perceptions of and experiences in dealing with single mothers who apply for participation exemptions
- what aspects of \textit{Welfare to Work} are beneficial to single mothers experiencing domestic violence and what aspects need improving.

This study takes into account single mothers’ education and labour market history, and how domestic violence impacts on women’s financial status and general well-being, as well as their ability to care for children, while having to negotiate \textit{Welfare to Work} participation requirements.

Other research that has focused upon Centrelink recipients on low incomes have included single mothers living on NSA. Not surprisingly, there is no literature available on single mothers being placed onto Austudy, which is a payment originally designed for students with no dependants. However, this study incorporates the experiences of single mothers experiencing violence who were placed on Austudy. Although there is considerable literature about single mothers in welfare-to-work programs in North America who have experienced domestic violence, the majority of these studies focus on mothers with low education qualifications and employment skills. Little of that research looks at women from other socio-economic backgrounds and their employment history prior to becoming single mothers and entering the welfare system. This research differs as the single mother participants in this study overall had a high education level and employment skills. Although interviews were conducted for this research during 2009 to 2010, this study continues to be relevant at the time of writing, as the Abbott Liberal/National Coalition Government considers further cuts to the income support component of the welfare budget.

The thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter One discusses the underpinning arguments for welfare-to-work programs and how they are situated within the neoliberal context. Initially, the chapter briefly discusses the principle of Keynesianism, which was the

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underlying feature of the development of the modern welfare state before looking at women’s citizenship status within the welfare state. Next consideration is given to neoliberal principles and policies that have changed industrial relations, before outlining the welfare-to-work programs in the United States (US), Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). The debates to justify the introduction of welfare-to-work reforms are reviewed, which include criticism by feminists and welfare policy analysts. The chapter argues that neoliberal ideals are not in synchronicity with labour market realities and that neoliberal strategies have created further inequality and poverty through the pursuit of cheaper flexible markets.

In Chapter Two, the discussion centres on the theoretical and political approaches to domestic violence, drawing upon a feminist perspective and considering the reintroduction of an individualistic approach to domestic violence under neoliberalism. Also canvassed are other policies areas that intersect with domestic violence policy, such as family law, child protection and child support. The chapter discusses the problems with the neoliberal economic independence theory claim that employment will stop violence. Next there is a review of the literature on specific mechanisms within Welfare to Work and how these would impact on women with children fleeing violence.

Chapter Three explains the methodology, including the qualitative methods used for this research. This chapter outlines the design of the research, recruitment processes, difficulties, limitations and ethical considerations. This research was a conducted on a national level, across remote, rural and regional areas of Australia and involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 23 single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. In addition, eight women’s emergency service workers, a Centrelink officer, a Job Capacity Assessor (JCA) and an employment service worker were interviewed to gain their perceptions of Welfare to Work and experiences of dealing with single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. The research adopted a feminist standpoint approach to highlight and provide insights into the lived experiences of single mothers who have to deal with domestic violence and its ramifications, as well as with the Welfare to Work system.

In the first of the three findings chapters, Chapter Four, the focus is on single mothers’ experiences of violence and how these factors are influential in relation to poverty and homelessness. In neoliberal discourses governing welfare reforms, single mothers have been constructed both as dependent and as responsible for their circumstances. The chapter
explores the intersection of legal and child protection systems, child contact arrangements, property settlements and child support in the context of domestic violence and considers how influential they are on women’s and children’s safety and poverty. The discussion then moves to techniques used by perpetrators to sabotage the single mothers’ employment and ability to comply with Welfare to Work.

Chapter Five scrutinises the exemption processes that apply in relation to domestic violence, special circumstances and medical reasons within the Welfare to Work legislation. The experiences of the single mothers on receiving information and being granted exemptions on the above grounds are examined, including the experiences and perceptions of women’s emergency service workers, a Centrelink officer and a JCA. Attention is then given to the effectiveness of the Welfare to Work system to support victims of violence and the extent to which it took into account the ongoing ramifications of violence, including medical problems.

In Chapter Six, mothers’ education and employment histories are reviewed to facilitate a comparative analysis of the way single mothers have been constructed as dependants within the welfare reform debate. The chapter then examines the mothers’ experiences of complying with the job-seeking requirements and dealing with employment service providers. How employment services deal with victims of violence is also explored by drawing on findings from an interview with an employment service worker. The focus then shifts to the disincentives and incentives associated with trying to gain employment skills through study under Welfare to Work.

The concluding chapter summarises the key findings, identifies limitations in the study and makes recommendations for areas in need of further research. Recommendations are also proposed in regards to Welfare to Work in relation to what areas of the policy could be improved. We will now turn to Chapter One to consider the literature on the neoliberal reformation of the welfare state and how this affects single mothers’ citizenship status and their need for welfare assistance.
Chapter One
Women and the Welfare State

Introduction
This chapter reviews the debates to justify the introduction of welfare-to-work reforms, as well as the criticism of the reforms by feminists and welfare policy analysts. In this chapter, it is argued that neoliberal reforms perpetuate inequality and poverty, which impact on single mothers’ ability to care for their children. The chapter provides a feminist critique of the neoliberal reformation of the welfare state to illustrate the impact neoliberalism has had on those with less privilege, and more specifically the gendered implications. International research on single mothers' labour mobilisation is incorporated to illustrate that welfare-to-work policies have not led to the proposed claims of economic independence or poverty reduction in welfare states that have embraced neoliberal policies. The chapter argues that neoliberal welfare-to-work reforms do not improve single mothers' and their children's well-being but devalues mothering, erodes the citizenship status of women and contributes to the feminisation of poverty.

First the welfare state is defined in relation to the ideals of Keynesianism before turning to feminist critiques of women’s citizenship status in the welfare state. Next consideration is given to the rise of neoliberal policies and this theoretical background, before turning to the current welfare reform debate and its associated discourses of ‘welfare dependency’. This incorporates literature on Northern American, the UK, as well as Australian welfare-to-work reforms in relation to single mothers to provide an overview of what these reforms encompass.

Keynesian welfare state
The experiences of single mothers in relation to domestic violence and welfare-to-work are constructed, in part, by the nature of the contemporary welfare state. The term welfare state typically refers to those states within the Western industrialised world where social policy
provides a range of social welfare provisions, which are associated with Keynesianism.\(^1\) According to Fenna, the modern welfare state evolved after World War II and was based on the economic theory of John Maynard Keynes, who offered a solution to restore the economy.\(^2\) The Great Depression and mass unemployment during the interwar period and the end of World War II caused governments in the western industrial world to rethink economic policy, and prompted them to intervene in industrial regulation and public spending.\(^3\) Keynes’ principles were applied, after free market principles based on Adam Smith’s political philosophy of self-regulating markets had failed to produce economic growth, jobs or to emancipate the majority of the population from poverty.\(^4\) Keynes argued that governments needed to inject money into the economy to create demand. Two key principles of Keynes’ theory were to give money to those in need as they would be unable to save it and would spend it, thus stimulating the economy and that money spent would eventually come back to the government in the form of tax revenue.\(^5\)

Keynesian policy required a commitment to maintaining living standards through full employment, along with the creation of the major pillars of the welfare state (health, education, social services, social security, and pensions) and the nationalisation of industries essential for infrastructure in a capitalist industrial economy (public utilities, energy, transport and communication).\(^6\) Through the implementation of Keynesian principles, the welfare state was instituted as a protection mechanism for society from the ravages of the free market.\(^7\) The main feature of welfare states was an obligation to provide all citizens with a decent standard of living and to provide protection to those who could not derive an income of their own.\(^8\) The protection through welfare payments also signified the de-commodification of labour, which allowed workers not to be totally dependent on

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2. Fenna, *Introduction to Australian Public Policy*.
3. Ibid., 31, 146.
4. Ibid., 146.
5. Ibid., 146, 47.
employment and thus increased their bargaining power. Castles argues that employment and wages policy have historically been key features of the Australian welfare state and have been enacted, for example, through industry protection, controlled migration and wage arbitration. According to Fenna, prior to the development of the welfare state, those in hardship were required to turn to family, the community or charity for support. Charity and public assistance for the destitute was highly stigmatised and characterised by the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor discourse, which divided the poor into categories of those deserving of assistance or those seeking an easy way out. However, under the principles of Keynesianism welfare assistance has been perceived as a citizen’s right and entitlement.

While the term welfare state is mainly defined in relation to social provisions and associated with Keynesianism, it has also been defined in economic terms. Castles acknowledges that mainstream analysis typically identifies the point at which a society can qualify as a welfare state to be when spending on welfare exceeds that on other purposes. For example in the Australian 2014-15 budget, welfare services (health, education, public services, social security) exceeded that of defence and other fiscal policies. However, since the principles associated with the welfare state have shifted to neoliberalism, this does not mean that welfare expenditure is only funding public services as intended by the aims of Keynesianism. Instead private institutions and businesses are increasingly becoming beneficiaries of welfare expenditure, under health, education, employment and social security provisions, while spending on public institutions and income support has been severely cut. These factors and the rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state are discussed in further detail later. Because of neoliberal principles that underpin public policy, there is some debate

11 Fenna, *Introduction to Australian Public Policy*: 279.
12 Ibid.
about whether welfare states in western advanced economies still exist. Moreover, Jamrozik argues the welfare state has become more of a mechanism to control the labour force and reflect the needs of business, than a protection mechanism for citizens. Therefore, he proposes that the term post-welfare state should now be used instead. For further discussion on welfare state development and typologies see Castles and Mitchell, Esping-Anderson and Fenna.

Women and citizenship

A key feature of welfare state development was the extension of citizenship to the working class, in the form of industrial citizenship. Citizenship has been constructed as a universalistic ideal based on equality and solidarity as envisioned by T. H. Marshall and Titmus. According to Marshall, citizenship is “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community, who enjoy equal civil, political and social rights”. Marshall perceived the welfare state as the vehicle to establish equal social rights and rights to equal status in society. Although a prominent feature in liberal and neoliberal theory, this ideal of citizenship has been a contentious area and has been contested by feminists.

Feminists argue that the notion of a universal citizen fails to demonstrate the differences in political, civil and social rights on the basis of gender relations and disguises the gender differences in power...
divisions constructed historically and today.27 A key theme in feminist perspectives of citizenship is the public/private divide,28 whereby women have been excluded from the public arena, where decision making takes place. Women have been excluded as they have been historically constructed in all social relations as inferior because of their sex.29 As Lister points out, where women have gained civil and political rights, such as the vote, this still did not make them politically equal to men.30 Women were still socially constructed as inferior, dependants of men and therefore regulated to the private sphere of the family.31 Lister contends that feminist theorists have exposed the universalistic gender neutral citizen to be distinctly male.32 Whereas women’s claim to citizenship in the welfare state has been based on their attachment to men and traditional marriage.33

Citizenship was constructed on the assumption that only men were connected to the labour market. This supported the normative, conservative ideal of the traditional family with men as breadwinners and women as dependent spouses.34 Adult male wage rates were set at rates to support a family (regardless of his marital status) whereas women’s wages were determined on the presumption that a woman was single with no dependants.35 In Australia this ‘family wage’ was institutionalised through the 1907 Harvester Judgement.36 For women the principle was applied differently and wage fixing was set relatively lower on the assumption that women were not usually responsible for the maintenance of a family and had

30Lister, Citizenship: 70.
32Lister, Citizenship: 71.
no other responsibility besides supporting herself. This ignored that one in three women of working age were the family breadwinner, devaluing both unpaid care work and paid labour by single mothers. Women’s lower wages were seen to reinforce their dependency on men through encouraging marriage and contributed to poverty amongst those outside the confines of traditional marriage.

Welfare provision reflected the male breadwinner ideal. Although there are degrees of variation of this model within other welfare states, it was a prominent feature in Australia’s social security system. According to Bryson, welfare benefits were initially established on the assumption that men were economically independent due to their status as workers. Unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, invalid and age pensions, and workers’ compensation were all decommodified rights originally established for men. These provisions were not only distinctly gendered, they also excluded Indigenous people, racial minorities and single mothers, and maintained class, race and sex divisions.

State support for women legitimised their dependency on men and provided support for women through their status as wives, widows or mothers. The entitlement of rights and status as a citizen mother was also exclusive, and rested upon determining who was moral and deserving, by upholding traditional family values, as distinct from women who had left their husbands or had children out of wedlock. In Australia, this led to many single mothers being excluded from benefits until the Whitlam Labor government introduced the Single

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38 Hargreaves, Women at Work: 15,16.
41 Sainsbury, Gender, Equality, and Welfare States.
42 Bryson, “Two Welfare States.”
43 Ibid., 68.
44 Ibid.
46 Bryson, “Two Welfare States.”
Mother’s Benefit in 1973. 48 Previously, single mothers were expected to give up their children for adoption, or rely on charity, family or the labour market for support. All these options had negative implications. The decision to keep children led to ostracism, stigma, exploitation in the labour market and a life of poverty. 49 Single mothers constituted the majority of the poor. 50 Access to citizenship benefits and rights were finally extended to single mothers and minority groups in the latter part of the 20th century after extensive campaigning by feminist and civil rights groups throughout the 19th and 20th century. 51 However, in Australia single mothers were still coerced to give up their children beyond the 1970s, even though this policy was not an official one. 52

Different feminist approaches have highlighted different perspectives on women’s exclusion from citizenship, as well as theories on emancipating women or gaining equality. Radical feminist perspectives have focused on sexuality and violence, 53 men’s control over women’s bodies and reproduction, 54 which have been institutionalised within patriarchy. 55 Walby contends that while radical feminists focus little on paid employment, their contributions are important as they identify that sexual violence (a definition that includes sexual harassment) excludes women from the labour market and is used to exclude women from occupations traditionally undertaken by men. 56 Although radical feminist perspectives have been criticised as being essentialist, prone to implicit or explicit biological reductionism, and false universalism, 57 their focus on violence provides unique insights. Indeed, violence is a crucial factor that has been found to jeopardise women’s citizenship. 58

51 Mayer, "Crafting a New Conservative Consensus on Welfare Reform."; Walby, Patriarchy at Work.
55 Marilyn French, Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985); Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy.
56 Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy: 38, 39.
58 Lister, Citizenship: 73.
Liberal feminists within the second wave of feminism sought equality through employment as a means to emancipate women from the private sphere of the home and be free of traditional roles as mothers and carers.\(^{59}\) According to Eisenstein, the liberal feminist agenda to gain equal access to employment was class-based and meant removing the mechanisms that had protected working-class women, so that middle-class women could gain access to the most lucrative jobs.\(^{60}\) This resulted in the majority of women having to contend with low wages and dual roles of workers and mothers.\(^{61}\) Equality has been perceived as problematic because it has been associated with a ‘gender neutral’ model of citizenship and individualism, (which will be discussed further later) and does not acknowledge women’s traditional roles as child rearers.\(^{62}\)

Liberal feminists’ emphasis on labour as emancipating is based on the belief that this could be accomplished through the current modern capitalist system.\(^{63}\) According to Walby, this response does not take into account overall social structures of gender inequality and neglects patriarchal relations outside of the private sphere of the traditional family.\(^{64}\) Walby states that the exploitation of women as unpaid household labour serves the interests of capitalism, in the recruitment and exploitation of female labour, which is cheaper than men’s because of patriarchal structures of valuing work.\(^{65}\) The goal of equality through employment may have benefited privileged women,\(^{66}\) but, as Hays points out, still today the majority of working mothers continue to face ‘glass ceilings’, a sex segregated labour force, and the ‘mommy track’, plus still having to raise children.\(^{67}\) In today’s welfare reform debate, liberal feminists appear reluctant to support women’s traditional role as mothers, and fight against the reforms, favouring the notion that women should gain economic independence through employment.\(^{68}\)

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\(^{60}\) Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*: 53.


\(^{62}\) Klett-Davies, *Going it Alone*?: 138; Lister, *Citizenship*.

\(^{63}\) Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*: 57.

\(^{64}\) Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*: 5; See also Hunnicutt, "Varieties of Patriarchy and Violence Against Women.”

\(^{65}\) Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*: 171.

\(^{66}\) Bryson, *Welfare and the State*.


\(^{68}\) Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*: 126; Hays, *Flat Broke with Children*. 

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Feminists who oppose individualism (and welfare reform) argue for a gender differentiated citizenship model to be pursued.\(^{69}\) According to Lister, this perspective stems from a materialist politics, which focuses on improving the material conditions of women as mothers and enhancing their political position.\(^{70}\) This approach was initially taken by socialist feminists who argued to have women recognised as needing special treatment as mothers (citizen mothers) within the welfare state.\(^{71}\) Although single mothers in the US received this recognition through the Social Security Act of 1935, citizen mother’s rights were only extended to African American and non-white mothers in the 1960s\(^{72}\) and to Australian single mothers in 1973.\(^{73}\) While ‘equality’ and differentiated responses have been constructed as oppositional, Savarsky argues that these responses need to be synthesized within public policy.\(^{74}\) However, Lister points out that to do so has been problematic in practice as policies that promote differentiated or equality responses can still be discriminatory towards women.\(^{75}\) Held and Sevenhuijsen argue for an ethics of care approach to citizenship.\(^{76}\) Furthermore, those who want women’s care work to be seen as valuable and as necessary to the continuum of social and economic life, also argue for the recognition of interdependent relationships.\(^{77}\)

Dominant liberal feminist paradigms have also been criticised for essentialism and universalising the category of ‘women’.\(^{78}\) This was first identified by African American feminists and marginalised women’s groups as representing ideals of the white middle class.\(^{79}\) They argued that feminists needed to recognise that hierarchal structures of


\(^{70}\) Lister, *Citizenship*: 96, 97.


\(^{72}\) Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*; Mayer, "Crafting a New Conservative Consensus on Welfare Reform."

\(^{73}\) Cass, "Gender in Australia’s Restructuring Labor Market and Welfare State."

\(^{74}\) Sarvasy, "Beyond the Difference Versus Equality Policy Debate," 356.

\(^{75}\) Lister, *Citizenship*: 100.


\(^{78}\) Lister, *Citizenship*: 74.

\(^{79}\) Ibid.; Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced*: 68,73.
gender, race and class intersected in different ways for different groups.\textsuperscript{80} This was an important factor in the development of feminist standpoint theory,\textsuperscript{81} and for those who argue for a differential citizenship model, which recognises that women can have multiple identities yet share the commonality of being a woman.\textsuperscript{82} A feminist standpoint theory approach examines the lived experiences of women, which enables their differences to be acknowledged along with structures that subordinate them.\textsuperscript{83} This approach was pertinent to this research because policy makers categorise all single mothers as the same. Feminist standpoint theory is discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.

Neoliberal philosophy and policies (which are discussed in detail below) have further eroded minorities’ and women’s citizenship rights, particularly those of single mothers.\textsuperscript{84} Many feminists, such as Bussemaker and Voet, Lister and Sainsbury have argued that the reformation of welfare is based on notions of gender sameness, denying the gender division of labour and care work.\textsuperscript{85} As Yeatman states, neoliberalism promotes an ‘active’ citizenship model that demands the dismantling of the welfare system and economic independence to be derived from only the market.\textsuperscript{86} Despite the loss of decommodified rights for single mothers, feminists remain divided and either argue for economic independence or valorizing women’s care giving.\textsuperscript{87}

\textbf{Neoliberal reformation}

The introduction of welfare provision for single mothers coincided with the rise of the neoliberal movement, which influenced governments to dismantle the Keynesian welfare

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Lister, \textit{Citizenship}: 82, 84.
\textsuperscript{87} Hays, \textit{Flat Broke with Children}: 20.
state to create cheaper labour sources for market competition. Since the 1970s, one of the key agencies of the neoliberal movement, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has advocated for the disassembling of the Keynesian welfare state by promoting a number of crisis theories, from the ‘democratic overload crisis’, to crises due to globalisation, ageing populations, and the demise of the traditional family. Following the mid-1970s First Oil Shock, which resulted in economic slowdown, the OECD blamed the welfare state as a major contributor to economic slowdown and unemployment, claiming that income support discouraged labour market participation and encouraged welfare dependency.

Welfare states were encouraged to apply neoliberal strategies to compete within the global economy and to expand economic growth. These strategies included deregulation of the state’s financial systems through lifting restrictions on foreign exchange, investment and ownership, including restrictions on domestic investors in foreign exchange. This strategy facilitated the offshore movement of multi-national corporations in pursuit of more flexible, cheaper labour sources (generally women in third world countries), which Devine claims initiated the era of globalisation. Privatisation was pursued, where public services and utilities have been taken over by private operators in the belief that private sector delivery of these services will be more efficient and microeconomic reforms have been implemented that include reducing taxes for the rich and corporations to encourage investment and the abandonment of full employment policy goals in order to create a more flexible labour force. Although these neoliberal policies were initiated by the Hawke/Keating Labor government in Australia (1983-1996), they were accelerated by the Howard Liberal/National

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88 Eisenstein, Feminism Seduced.
92 Yeatman, "Women's Citizenship Claims, Labour Market Policy and Globalisation."
93 Devine, "The 1970s and After," 39; Globalisation is defined by Ethridge and Handelman as the spread of economic activity, political interactions, mass culture and ideas across national borders. Marcus E. Ethridge and Howard Handelman, Politics in a Changing World: A Comparative Introduction to Political Science, 5th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), 621.
94 Devine, "The 1970s and After," 44.
Coalition Government (1996-2007). Anti trade union legislation was also introduced to eliminate workers bargaining power, giving employers greater flexibility to make profits. This was a major aim of the Howard Government.

Part of the neoliberal strategy was to reduce the involvement of the state and the development of new models of governance, whereby administration was to be partially taken over by private enterprises and non-government organisations. In some aspects, such as network governance, this is supposed to place community actors on an equal playing field with other stakeholders. However, the government has the power not to renew contracts and cut funds to organisations. While the boundaries of the state may be blurred, Western Baxter, Pakulski, Tranter, Western, van Egmond, Chesters, Hosking, O'Flaherty and van Gellecum states it is a mistake to think that the state has withdrawn, as the state has been actively remaking the economy and social institutions to allow markets to flourish.

According to Western et al. the neoliberal transformation was underwritten by two principles:

- **liberalism** - the view that citizens are autonomous individual actors whose interests are best served when they are free from coercive government interventions into individual action; and marketisation - the belief that free markets are arenas which best enable individual autonomy and produce efficient economic outcomes. These principles define 'neoliberalism' or 'hard liberalism'.

Western et al. state neoliberalism promotes the view that market mechanisms eliminate disadvantages and inequalities associated with socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and class, as markets are portrayed as ‘blind’ to these differences. Labour markets and education are depicted as being merit based and any failure of the individual to advance from their disadvantaged status is perceived as their own deficit. Not recognising structural

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96 Nevile, "Economic Rationalism."
100 see Senate, "DEEWR Tender Process to Award Employment Services Contracts: Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Reference Committee," (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).
102 Ibid., 402.
103 Ibid., 404.
constraints positions the poor and disadvantaged as biologically deficient and unworthy of competing.

However, as political scientists have pointed out, there are numerous inconsistencies between the neoliberal rhetoric and its strategies, which have created structural restraints and disadvantages. In practice, neoliberal policies, such as privatisation, restrict access to citizenship and restrict equality and opportunity. Despite neoliberal claims of small government and the need to cut back on social spending, the state is heavily involved in the operations of the market and the economy. This has also been accompanied by an increase in social spending through contractual arrangements with private businesses and non-government organisations, which are heavily subsidised by the state, to deliver services. The Australian employment service model is a unique example of privatisation, where services for unemployed people that were previously provided by the government were shifted to private entrepreneurs and non-profit organisations. The cost of this service has been gradually increasing and cost $5.5 billion in 2011-12. However, according to Considine, the real costs of the employment service system are unknown due to lack of transparency. The US welfare-to-work schemes are another example, where these programs were introduced on the premise of reducing social spending but nonetheless were costed at $30 billion US per year. Bryson points out that while discourses on the welfare state focus narrowly on the poor, the larger proportion of welfare expenditure that benefits

105 Ibid.
106 Offe, "Ungovernability."
108 Western et al., "Neoliberalism, Inequality and Politics."; Standing, "Labor Recommodation in the Global Transformation."
110 Devine, "The 1970s and After."
113 Considine, "The Reform that Never Ends."
the wealthy is invisible.\textsuperscript{115} Those who need welfare the most are subject to social programs that limit their choices, despite claims that these programs increase choices and will reduce poverty.\textsuperscript{116} Although neoliberal discourse constructs all individuals as equal, those in need are constructed as undeserving and those who own capital as deserving.\textsuperscript{117}

Skill development and education are other areas affected by privatisation. As Mitchell contends, the downsizing of the public service and the private sector's unwillingness to spend money on training, has contributed to the emergence of skill shortages.\textsuperscript{118} Replacing free public education with a user pays policy restricts access to those mainly from upper or middle class backgrounds and causes disadvantage through forcing families to incur large debts. These factors, along with lost labour protections, including reducing the social security safety net to keep wages low, contribute to reduced class mobility, more inequality and poverty.\textsuperscript{119}

The promotion of ‘active’ citizenship where individuals must be self reliant through employment is inconsistent with the low wage economy created through neoliberal strategies.\textsuperscript{120} According to Devine, Nevile, and Mitchell, the abandonment of full employment policy goals and shifts to low paid, part-time and casual employment, has led to high unemployment in English speaking states that have embraced neoliberal policies.\textsuperscript{121} Fenna and Saunders argue that economic conditions promoted by the OECD increased the demands for welfare services.\textsuperscript{122} According to Stilwell the pursuit of more flexible markets to seek faster economic growth is presumed to eradicate the problem of poverty, through the

\textsuperscript{115}Bryson, Welfare and the State: 4,19,20.
\textsuperscript{116}Anna Yeatman et al., Individualization and the Delivery of Welfare Services: Contestation and Complexity (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
\textsuperscript{117}Miller, "The Political Economy of Social Problems."
\textsuperscript{119}Standing, "Labor Recommodification in the Global Transformation."; Western et al., "Neoliberalism, Inequality and Politics."
\textsuperscript{120}Yeatman, "Women's Citizenship Claims, Labour Market Policy and Globalisation."; Standing, "Labor Recommodification in the Global Transformation."
‘trickle down’ effect of an economy generating more income and wealth. However, Standing argues neoliberal ideals are based on full employment policies, which no longer exist. Although critics of neoliberalism agree that the reduction of the welfare safety net is another strategy to reduce to reduce labour protection and labour costs, only feminists have looked at the gendered implications this has had on women.

While neoliberalism constructs women as being able to compete equally with men, this ignores that women have been historically excluded from equal pay and the family wage. Eisenstein and Hays point out that due to flexible markets and the abandonment of the family wage in the US, families have had to become dual income earners in order to pay mortgages and living expenses, but they are financially worse off than their parents’ generation, despite working longer hours. The pattern is the same in other English speaking states, including Australia, where neoliberal strategies have been associated with widening the inequality gap and increasing poverty, particularly amongst women. According to Eisenstein, women have been the most disadvantaged as they are less likely to be organised into unions and have always been a cheaper source of labour. Eisenstein states that the feminist pursuit of equality came at a price as the influx of married women, including mothers, into the labour force assisted capital in keeping wages stagnant. Yeatman argues that within the global market society only high skilled professionals are able to gain the status of ‘active

125 Devine, "The 1970s and After."; Standing, "Labor Recommodification in the Global Transformation."; Western et al., "Neoliberalism, Inequality and Politics.”
127 Bryson, "Two Welfare States."; Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency.”
128 Eisenstein, Feminism Seduced; Hays, Flat Broke with Children.
131 Eisenstein, Feminism Seduced: 115.
132 Ibid., 117.
Subsequently only a minority of women who have sufficient income to employ the labour of other women to meet their domestic needs are able to gain active citizenship status. Walby argues the neoliberal pursuit of economic growth contributes to gender inequality and reduces women’s access to formal political power, as well as increasing their vulnerability to domestic violence.

While the ideals of the active citizenship model are inconsistent with the reality of the labour market, the classification of women as workers under the gender neutral model is also problematic. On an international level, women still do the majority of care and domestic work, with single mothers having to balance employment, domestic labour and care work alone. According to Rich, the move from citizen mother to citizen worker has not provided women with financial independence but with dual roles as mothers and workers. However, the role of mothering is ignored and often denigrated in the case of single mothers.

With casualisation, the standard working day is disappearing and is being replaced by non-standard employment, which falls outside the standard business days and hours. This is a particular issue in Australia where casualisation is high compared to other countries, with less than 30 per cent of workers in standard work. Flexible markets also promote the ideal of being family friendly and providing parents with more choice. However, Pocock states that non-standard employment hours intrude on weekends and time normally spent with family, placing more stress on parents, particularly mothers trying to balance care and

134 Ibid., 456.
136 Yeatman, "Women's Citizenship Claims, Labour Market Policy and Globalisation."
140 Ibid.
143 Burgess, Mitchell, and Preston, "The Australian Labour Market in 2002."
As Barns and Preston argue, reduction of labour protections leaves women with limited control over their working conditions and choices. Prioritising care can result in job loss or loss of career development opportunities. The stressors of employment and the high costs of childcare in Australia can outweigh the benefits of work and discourage women’s employment participation.

In summary, employment under neoliberal strategies have not been financially beneficial to women or provided them with the flexibility to balance paid work and family care. While low wages combined with gender disadvantages and non-standard employment are stressful for partnered mothers, single mothers are expected to compete in these conditions and achieve economic independence. The following section critiques welfare-to-work programs and how they have been introduced as a poverty measure and the implications they have on single mothers.

**Welfare-to-work programs**

According to advocates of neoliberalism, welfare provisions initiated under Keynesianism are seen to cause welfare dependency. They call for the reduction of welfare payment expenditure and the introduction of welfare-to-work programs. Under the principles of Keynesianism, the state and its society have a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens and to protect them from the risks of the market. In contrast, neoliberalism promotes an active citizenship model, whereby social support is no longer perceived as a social right based on entitlements of need, but conditional, where individuals of working age

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149 Klett-Davies, *Going it Alone?*
must be actively looking for employment, and linked to employment and training schemes. However, it is single mothers who are the primary target of the neoliberal welfare reforms.

To gain public support to introduce welfare-to-work programs, governments have deployed right wing think tank rhetoric to incite hostility towards single mothers by portraying them as living off state benefits without having paid their contributions to society. In the US, conservative political scientists, Mead and Murray, have been highly influential in the welfare reform debate with their opinions on single mothers and ‘passive welfare dependency’.

Mead and Murray have constructed all single mothers as moral hazards and as a pathological problem among the subset of poor and the cause of all social ills, including child abuse, delinquency and other criminal activity. Although women comprise 70 per cent of the world’s poor, with single mothers being the most vulnerable to poverty because of gendered inequalities, Mead claims that welfare benefits are too generous and encourage single mothers not to work and to have children outside the traditional family form. Mead advocates for a tougher approach to welfare, which forces single mothers into jobs or out of the welfare system; either way the aim is to get them off welfare. This includes denying mothers the opportunity to attain higher skills. Consistent with conservative ideals, Mead promotes discriminatory behaviours towards single mothers and proposes that punishment and treating them unfairly will serve as a family policy measure.

Conveying negative images of single mothers has also been adopted by sociologist and adviser to the UK Blair Labour government (1994-2007), Giddens, to promote his third way ideology, which idealises employment as the only way to develop social inclusion. Giddens also proposes that the welfare system be used to maintain the traditional fathers’ role

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158 Ibid., 49.
159 Ibid., 47, 54.
after relationships have dissolved. Moreover, the privileging of this role has become apparent in UK welfare reform legislation. These reforms may result in the fining or conviction of mothers who refuse to register the name of their child’s father, as a measure to ensure joint registration. Giddens argues that a paternalistic social security system, which attaches income support to labour market activities will rid the system of those who are a moral hazard and partake in risky behaviours such as welfare fraud, and welfare dependency, to avoid employment.

Both Mead and Giddens have been influential in Australia’s welfare reforms, Welfare to Work and its following amendments. UK sociologist Hakim, whose ‘preference theory’ was also adopted by the Howard Government, argues that when women gained rights to use contraception they acquired a genuine choice between career employment and motherhood. Hakim’s model places women’s lifestyle choices into three categories: home centred (20 per cent) women who prioritise children and family and prefer not to work; work-centred (20 per cent) women who are career orientated and generally childless; and adaptive (60 per cent) women who combine work and family, which includes ‘drifters’ and those who fall into unplanned careers.

Hakim’s preference theory has been criticised by numerous researchers for ignoring the reality that women do not make one life-time decision on balancing employment and family responsibilities, but rather make numerous decisions at different life stages. According to Cartwright, there are “varying degrees in which different groups of women are able to make ‘genuine choices’ about paid work and family”. Women’s choices are mainly constrained

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161 Ibid., 94, 97.
164 Giddens, The Third Way: 115-17.
167 Ibid., 138.
by factors such as: government policy; existing opportunities; access to and affordability of child care services; the division of labour; and their health and their child’s health. According to Brady, Hakim’s preference theory was used to change the identity of mothers in Australia from mothers to workers. Lewis has made a similar argument that welfare reform in general treats single mothers the same as men and not as mothers. Edgar argues that mothers, especially single mothers were expected to become adaptive part-time workers or work-centred full-time workers. This was problematic as the Howard Government’s ‘family policy’ agenda, which had cut funding and increased the expense of childcare, along with tax rebate reforms, made employment financially unbeneﬁcial for middle-and-low income families, and particularly single mothers. While the Howard Government drew on the ‘passive welfare dependency’ discourse to justify introducing Welfare to Work, the government’s ‘family policy’ agenda increased women’s economic dependence on their partners.

The US was the first nation to introduce welfare-to-work schemes in 1988, under the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Program of the Family Support Act of 1988. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program was introduced as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) 1996 by the Clinton Government, making employment requirements mandatory for all recipients, nationally. A time limit was also imposed on receipt of TANF of five years or less depending on particular states policies. Time limits and reducing qualifying income and asset tests were introduced

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to limit eligibility. These programs were promoted to save the government money and combat ‘passive welfare dependency’ amongst single mothers.179

Following the US example, the Howard Government introduced the Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Australians Working Together and other 2001 Budget Measures) Act 2003.180 Research conducted by Alexander, Baxter, Hughes and Renda for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) in 2005, to assess the Australians Working Together Act 2003, found further coercion was not needed, as the majority of recipients had taken up employment, before entering into the employment program.181 However, despite this finding, the Howard Government embarked on further reforms implementing the Welfare to Work Act 2005, which commenced on the 30 June 2006.182 As discussed in the introduction, Welfare to Work transfers single parents who apply for benefits after 30 June 2006 from PPS onto the lower unemployment payment, NSA when their youngest child turns eight years.183 Mandatory participation requirements activities commence for this group once their youngest child turned six years of age. Those receiving PPS prior to 30 June 2006 (grandfathered) were allowed to remain on that payment until their youngest child turns 16 years but they still had to comply with employment participation requirements once their youngest child turns seven years.184 These reforms were based on recommendations made by the McClure report to universalise income support payments for people of working age.185 However, the report did not recommend lowering payments.186 A new penalty system was introduced that suspended parents’ payments if they did not comply with participation activities.187 The primary objective of the policy was to move people off

179 Hamilton, "Moving People from Welfare to Work”.
181 Ibid.
182 Hereafter will be referred to as Welfare to Work.
186 Ibid.
income support\textsuperscript{188} but the target was single mothers. Although the Labor party had opposed 
\textit{Welfare to Work} when in opposition to the Howard Government,\textsuperscript{189} they continued to implement further reforms while in government to increase single mothers’ employment participation and exclude them from payment increments within the budget measures as part of Labor’s social inclusion agenda.\textsuperscript{190}

In the UK, the New Deal for Lone Parents was introduced in 1998 by the Blair Government, which was a voluntary program to encourage lone parents to gain economic independence through employment. Phasing out income support on the basis of caring for children was gradual and saw the qualifying age of the youngest dependent child drop from 16 to 12 years in 2008, down to seven years in 2010. Single parents with children over the age of seven are entitled to the Job Seekers Allowance but are subjected to the same conditional features as those who are unemployed without dependants, with the exception of having to find a minimum of 16 hours per week employment.\textsuperscript{191} The legislation reflects similarities to the Australian \textit{Welfare to Work} policy, which has been used to promote welfare reforms in the UK.\textsuperscript{192} The UK reforms were initiated as part of the Blair Government’s social inclusion/exclusion initiative which was based on the premise of eradicating child poverty in Britain by 2020.\textsuperscript{193}

States that have implemented welfare-to-work reforms claim these schemes will support single parents. In Australia despite single mothers already being active in employment and having care responsibilities, these families have been labelled as ‘jobless

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{193} Laura Adelman, Sue Middleton, and Karl Ashworth, \textit{Britain’s Poorest Children: Severe and Persistent Poverty and Social Exclusion} (London: Save the Children UK, 2003).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
households’ and ‘intergenerational welfare dependants’. This reflects Williams’ argument that those claiming welfare are seen as dependent no matter how engaged or responsible for others they may be. These ‘work first’ policies are claimed to combat poverty, homelessness and even stop violence against single mothers. However, Bourdieu and Wacquant, and Standing argue that welfare dependency discourses serve to shift the focus from oppressive policies that cause disadvantage and human misery and place blame onto the individual for their circumstances. The following section critiques the welfare-to-work reforms and discourses and examines some of these claims in relation to supporting mothers and their children.

**Welfare reform critique**

Feminists and social scientists have raised numerous concerns about welfare-to-work reforms, however feminists have concentrated on the impacts such reforms have on women, especially single mothers and their children. A primary concern is the deterioration of women’s status within the gender neutral active citizenship model that is based on the neoliberal ideal of economic independence through labour market activity. As noted earlier, this argument neglects gendered inequalities and structural disadvantages in the labour market, which have increased through neoliberal inspired policy that inhibits many women achieving such goals as economic independence and full citizenship status.

In the UK and Australia, the ‘active’ citizenship model has been used to promote employment as leading to social inclusion. However, Silver points out that initially, social inclusion and exclusion agendas were introduced in Europe and aimed at combating

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195 Williams, "Good-Enough Principles for Welfare," 676.
198 Sylvia Fuller, Paul Kershaw, and Jane Pulkingham, "Constructing 'Active' Citizenship: Single mothers, Welfare and the Logics of Voluntarism.,” Citizenship Studies 12, no. 2 (2008); Yeatman, "Mutual Obligation."
structural restraints and discrimination that caused disadvantage and at integrating disadvantaged groups into society as well as improving their wellbeing.\textsuperscript{200} In neoliberal states, Giddens’ ‘third way’ discourse promotes employment as the pillar of social inclusion\textsuperscript{201} ignoring how low pay and structural inequalities contribute to exclusion.\textsuperscript{202}

Within the welfare reform agenda, recipients have an obligation to the state and the community to seek work, which has been termed ‘mutual obligation’, yet Yeatman points out this is a one sided contract with the state and business community having no obligations in return.\textsuperscript{203} According to Standing, social inclusion is built on forms of unpaid work such as care [not gender specific], which is autonomous and involves networks and reciprocity.\textsuperscript{204} He points out in contrast, although neoliberalism promotes ideals of decommodification, independence, freedom, agency and autonomy as attributes of labour, labour is dependent on employers for employment and in practice employees in a capitalist system have little if any autonomy.\textsuperscript{205}

Justifications for welfare reforms have also centred on claims of supporting single mothers and providing them with more choice. However, as argued by Yeatman, these justifications to implement discriminatory paternalistic policies also construct welfare recipients as lacking the capacity to make responsible and rationally sensible decisions.\textsuperscript{206} Moreover, Lister argues the neoliberal welfare agenda has set up a false dichotomy between active and passive, positioning ‘active’ as empowering, which has resulted in the loss of autonomy and choice.\textsuperscript{207} As research in Australia by Cook, Ward, McKenzie, Noblet and Bodsworth found, welfare reforms force single mothers to give up active citizenship roles such as voluntary work, including involvement in their children’s education, to become passive consumers of a welfare policy, which dictates and manipulates them into taking jobs that are too often not

\textsuperscript{200}Silver, “Understanding Social Inclusion and its Meaning for Australia,” 186, 94-96.
\textsuperscript{201}Giddens, \textit{The Third Way}; 104, 05.
\textsuperscript{203}Yeatman, "Mutual Obligation."
\textsuperscript{204}Standing, "Labor Recommodification in the Global Transformation," 68-70, 77.
\textsuperscript{205}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{206}Yeatman, "Mutual Obligation," 48; Yeatman et al., \textit{Individualization and the Delivery of Welfare Services.}
\textsuperscript{207}Lister, "From Equality to Social Inclusion."
appropriate to their family circumstances. In reality, welfare reforms reduce single mothers’ citizenship participation and thus their status, as well as inhibiting activities that are identified as contributing to social inclusion.

Feminists also point out that the welfare dependency argument neglects the importance of interdependent relationships, primarily the necessary unpaid domestic work performed by women, which reproduces labour power on a daily and generational basis. This has been a central argument by feminists who take a differential approach to citizenship. According to Walby, neoliberal policies restrict the concept of the economy to marketised monetary activities, excluding economic activity such as unpaid domestic care work. Crittenden states that care work by women accounts for half of the nation’s economic production and without it, the whole social fabric and economic structures would collapse. Feminists argue that welfare is largely provided through women’s unpaid domestic care work, yet it is absent in the welfare debate.

While welfare dependency discourses and the idealisation of labour render care and voluntary work invisible, especially by single mothers, single mothers’ labour participation is also absent from the debate. In 2007 in Australia, one parent families constituted 22 per cent of families with children, with 87 per cent of one parent families being headed by mothers. In 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported 60 per cent of single parents were in the labour market, without the enforcement of Welfare to Work. A prominent characteristic of single parent families with no paid employment was having three or more children under 15 years of age or having children aged less than five years. According to Walter, half the single mothers not in the labour market have health conditions or care for

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209 Ibid.; Fuller, Kershaw, and Pulkingham, "Constructing 'Active' Citizenship."  
211 Fuller, Kershaw, and Pulkingham, "Constructing 'Active' Citizenship."  
216 Ibid.  
children with illnesses or disabilities. Similar to the US, Australian single mothers are constructed as ‘passive welfare dependants’ despite the fact they have high employment rates. Comparisons by ABS of labour force rates and education attainment between single mothers and married mothers have been used to construct single mothers as being welfare dependent. According to Blaxland and Williams mothers are dichotomised into categories of good (married dependants) and bad (single welfare dependant). These arguments were used in conjunction with Hakim’s preference theory to categorise single mothers as ‘adaptive’. Another problem with these comparisons of mothers, is that the welfare debate neglects the fact that single mother headed families have more difficulties in finding care by not having a partner to share the care responsibility or access to care provided by relatives. Moreover, economic independence is not achievable in the low wage casualised economy, where unlike married mothers who are a part of dual income unit, single mothers are the only income provider.

According to Dodson, neoliberal welfare reforms are based on the idea that if women are pushed and punished enough they will conform to the economic rational man model and place work before care. However, US research demonstrates that women are guided by moralistic values of care placing their child’s well being and safety first. Lister argues that women can at the same time be oppressed through hierarchical power relations and be agents in their own lives. Blaxland argues that Australian parents were already undertaking the kinds of activities that the welfare reforms made compulsory, but it did reduce their autonomy to decide on what activities to do when and to prioritise paid employment over their children’s needs.

219Lisa Dodson, "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy," Social Politics 14, no. 2 (2007); Blaxland, "Mothers and Mutual Obligation." 
221Blaxland, "Mothers and Mutual Obligation."; Williams, "Good-Enough Principles for Welfare." 
223Walter, "Exploring Mothers' Relationship to the Labour Market," 18, 19. 
224See Eisenstein, Feminism Seduced; Hays, Flat Broke with Children. 
225Dodson, "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy," 262. 
226Ibid.; Hays, Flat Broke with Children; Seccombe, James, and Battle Walters, "They Think You Ain't Much of Nothing." 
227Lister, Citizenship: 41. 
Feminists argue that welfare reforms are designed as a social control mechanism to reinforce patriarchal rights over women. According to Axinn and Hirsch, the neoliberal welfare reforms promote traditional marriage as the best antipoverty measure because male wages are assumed to be higher than women’s, and two wages are better than one. However, this approach neglects to acknowledge that it is not feasible, nor safe for many women and children to remain in such relationships. This is particularly concerning, considering the majority of women entering the welfare system in the US as single mothers, do so because of domestic violence. In Canada, Morrow, Hankivsky, and Varcoe found since funding cuts to welfare, women’s crisis services, housing and legal aid, women remained or returned to perpetrators because of extreme poverty and homelessness or relinquished children to extremely dangerous perpetrators after extensive months of fighting for custody to keep the child safe, because they were no longer able to afford food or clothing. Other US research has found similarities, where due to the inadequacy of wages and welfare, women felt compelled to stay with violent partners even if the women were employed.

**Poverty reduction or feminisation of poverty**

The claim that welfare-to-work initiatives are poverty reduction measures for women is also refuted by feminists. As pointed out previously and argued by Bryson the feminisation of poverty is not a new phenomenon as women have historically been denied property rights and

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excluded from better jobs, as well as equal pay.237 According to the National Foundation for Australian Women the gender wage gap in Australia in 2014 stands at 17 percent and is not decreasing.238 The majority of women are also employed in feminised industries that are lower paid. The responsibility of care for children and other family members also affect women’s earning and savings power.239 However, welfare reform targets women, increasing their vulnerability to poverty. As argued by Rich welfare reform and the ‘war on poverty’ has been a war against poor women and their children.240

In Australia the OECD, the government and welfare reformists promote the poverty reductions claim, in a bid to increase single mothers’ employment participation rates to those in social democratic states and the US.241 These claims are inconsistent with research on women’s labour market mobilisation and poverty reduction. Researchers have found that poverty reduction was highest in social democratic states that had the most generous welfare transfers and the highest provision of public childcare.242

Liberal states, that spend less on welfare provisions, lagged behind in poverty reduction. Despite the high employment rate amongst single mothers in the US, these mothers were more likely to be entrenched in deep poverty whether working or on welfare.243 US research indicates that there has been a significant increase in the number of single mothers and their children living in extreme poverty than before the reforms.244 Research in other countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK has found that the restructuring of the welfare systems has not improved single mothers’ income or employability but rather

239 Ibid.
contributed to further poverty for the low skilled.\textsuperscript{245} Since the introduction of welfare reforms in the USA, the number of welfare recipients, who are mainly single mothers, have been reduced by 50 per cent.\textsuperscript{246} Mullan Harris’s US research consisting of 591 women who had exited the welfare system, found that wages were below the poverty level and many re-entered the welfare system due to job instability.\textsuperscript{247} According to Hays, two thirds of welfare clients have some work, half of which are living in deep poverty and over one third of welfare clients do not have jobs or receive welfare; their fate is unknown.\textsuperscript{248}

In Australia the Welfare to Work Evaluation Report released in 2008 found the labour market participation rate of single parents was gradually increasing while income support for this group was declining before the legislation was introduced, indicating that the reforms were not needed to increase employment among this group.\textsuperscript{249} However the report also revealed that between 2006 and 2007 single parents with school age children commencing income support decreased by 51 per cent most possibly because of the lower NSA income test.\textsuperscript{250} Single parents with no income entering the system fell by 44 per cent,\textsuperscript{251} but the reason for this was not identified. It is also unknown how many women stay in violent relationships or returned because of these reforms. For many their fate is also unknown.

Furthermore, while welfare-to-work initiatives claim to reduce child poverty,\textsuperscript{252} feminists point out that reducing welfare qualification and provisions, reduces resources for their dependent children.\textsuperscript{253} Adelman, Middleton and Ashworth’s research in the UK found that children who are most likely to experience severe poverty are those living in households where parent(s) were on Job Seekers Allowance.\textsuperscript{254} Horgan argues that while governments fear that increasing benefits for those with no employment will decrease work incentives, the

\textsuperscript{246} Hamilton, “Moving People from Welfare to Work”; Hays, \textit{Flat Broke with Children}.
\textsuperscript{248} Hays, \textit{Flat Broke with Children}: 4.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{252} Finn and Gloster, “Lone Parent Obligations”.
\textsuperscript{254} Adelman, Middleton, and Ashworth, \textit{Britain’s Poorest Children}: 1.
hardship incurred by the welfare reforms, in turn, counteracts reducing child poverty. However, Horgan states “lone parents cannot win. They are blamed for ‘out-of-control’ children and yet pressurized to accept employment that will leave them little time to supervise their children’s behaviour”. US research by Gennetian Duncan, Knox, Vargus, Clark-Kauffman and London found that welfare reforms impeded on mothers’ supervisory roles, which resulted in detrimental effects on adolescents’ education. Gardner Neblett reported similar findings.

The discrepancies in the welfare dependency argument on improving children’s wellbeing are amplified by Hays who states that when US mothers’ welfare time limit ends, those who cannot find jobs and are unable to afford to look after their children will have to place them in foster care or give them up for adoption. Pearce concedes that welfare reform demonstrates an appalling lack of support for single mother families, when more generous payments are made to two parent foster families than to children living in their own single parent home. The US welfare system monitors the way women manage their money and their children, and can enforce sanctions through payment reductions and child protection notifications. Similar measures have been put in place in the UK and Australia, such as Income Management. These measures strongly imply that children are better off in institutional care than being cared for by their mothers. This has also been reflected in recommendations by the OECD that claim that children would be better off in child care and at the same time have advocated for the eligibility for social security to be reduced further to similar standards of the US system. This reflects Rich’s sentiments that single mothers are

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256 Mead, "From Welfare to Work."
260 Hays, Flat Broke with Children: 190.
261 Pearce, "Welfare is not for Women," 268.
262 Axinn and Hirsch, "Welfare and the "Reform" of Women."
264 Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, "Economic Survey of Australia".
subject to degradation and every kind of sanction, just for living outside the confines of the
traditional family.265

Australian research by Murphy, Murray, Chalmers, Martin and Marston of 150 people
between 2007 to 2009 receiving a Centrelink payment, (which included 37 single mothers)
found that the reduction of benefits through Welfare to Work placed single mothers further
below the Henderson poverty line, compromising their ability to maintain safe and adequate
housing for their families, when rising housing costs were already creating housing stress for
such families.266 Paying bills and buying food, clothing and being unable to afford children’s
school fees, excursions or social outings, as well as finding affordable and safe childcare have
also been reported as major problems since the introduction of the policy.267 Despite the
claims of economic independence, Harding, Ngu Vu, Percival and Beer state that single
mothers and their children are more likely to be living in increasing poverty and fall into the
‘working poor’ category, due to Welfare to Work,268 which would have an adverse impact on
children, while the government would gain from paying less in income support.269 Overall,
the literature demonstrates that welfare-to-work policies are contributing to the feminisation
of poverty.

Welfare to Work has done little to increase Australian single mothers’ labour market
participation, as Grahame and Marston’s research on 21 single mothers from Brisbane on
PPS found.270 Most of the mothers in their study had returned to employment before the

266 John Murphy et al., Half a Citizen: Life on a Low Income in Australia (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010).
Meyering, "Seeking Security: Promoting Women's Economic Wellbeing following Domestic Violence,”
Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse,2011,
et al., “Getting What We Need: Families' Experiences of Services,” Institute of Child Protection Studies-
Australian Catholic University. Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
Australian Government,2009,
268 Ann Harding et al., "The Distributional Impact of the Proposed Welfare-to-Work Reforms upon Single
Parents," National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling,2005,
269 Ann Harding et al., "Welfare-to-Work Reforms: Impact on Sole Parents,” Agenda 12, no. 3 (2005); Ann
Harding, Quoc Ngu Vu, and Richard Percival, "Options for Reducing the Adverse Impact of the Proposed
Welfare-to-Work Reforms upon People with Disabilities and Sole Parents," National Centre for Social sand
policy was implemented. Most had higher education qualifications, but were mainly employed in the low and semiskilled jobs. This study did not focus on mothers on NSA or explore training aspects of the policy or domestic violence. Bodsworth’s research for the Brotherhood of St Laurence consisting of 44 welfare recipients (21 single parents including five on NSA), examined ways in which the tax and transfer system has created barriers to labour market entry for unemployed people and single parents. Mothers on NSA were the most disadvantaged as the income thresholds made any employment over 30 hours per fortnight not worthwhile. These mothers experienced the most financial stress, as children got older, cost of providing for their needs increased. NSA was also associated with the risk of homelessness. This research also did not explore the impact of violence on single mothers in relation to the Welfare to Work.

A key assumption of welfare-to-work policies is that employment increases women’s confidence to oppose violence, through raising women’s income and their power in the relationship or by providing them with the finances to leave. This assumption also places the woman responsible for stopping the violence, absolving violent men and the state of any responsibility. The assumption that employment leads to economic independence becomes problematic when welfare-to-work programs cut benefits to single mother families and push them to work in the low pay sector. According to Costello, Chung and Carson, Australian research has clearly established the link between domestic violence homelessness and poverty and the relationship between employment and poverty, but has neglected to examine the connection between domestic violence and women’s employment. The impact of domestic violence on women’s employment in Australia has only recently received

271 Ibid.
272 Ibid., 79.
273 Bodsworth, "Making Work Pay and Making Income Support Work".
274 Ibid.
275 Hamilton, "Moving People from Welfare to Work"; Stephanie Riger and Susan L. Staggs, "Welfare Reform, Domestic Violence, and Employment: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?," Violence Against Women 10(2004); Staggs et al., "Intimate Partner Violence."
researchers’ attention.\textsuperscript{278} However, the impact \textit{Welfare to Work} would have on mothers who have experienced violence is still absent from research literature and policy formulation, although the assumption that employment will stop violence has permeated into Australian welfare and domestic violence policies as part of the social inclusion agenda.\textsuperscript{279}

In contrast this topic has received considerable attention in North America. North American research on single mothers and welfare reforms has found employment does not stop or decrease women’s experience of violence.\textsuperscript{280} Although more single mothers are employed in the welfare-to-work era, more live in extreme poverty than before the reforms.\textsuperscript{281} According to Hays, and Seccombe, James and Battle Walters, stigmatisation and hatred towards single mothers has increased since the introduction of the reforms indicating further marginalisation and exclusion.\textsuperscript{282} Furthermore, although employment amongst single mothers has increased so has the incidence of violence.\textsuperscript{283} However, how \textit{Welfare to Work} impacts on Australian single mothers who have experienced domestic violence has received little attention. While North American research has found that domestic violence is a major reason for single mothers to enter the welfare system and welfare reforms has caused many to return to

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{279} See The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, "Time for Action," (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009); Whiteford, "Family Joblessness in Australia''.
    \item \textsuperscript{281} Dodson, "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy."; Kershaw, Pulkingham, and Fuller, "Expanding the Subject."; Staggs et al., "Intimate Partner Violence."
    \item \textsuperscript{282} Hays, \textit{Flat Broke with Children}; Seccombe, James, and Battle Walters, "'They Think You Ain't Much of Nothing'."
    \item \textsuperscript{283} Staggs et al., "Intimate Partner Violence."
perpetrators, this topic in regards to *Welfare to Work* has not been broached within the Australian welfare reform debate. This area needs specific attention to examine the lived experiences of these women and how they and their families are affected by welfare reform.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the principal changes from the Keynesian welfare state to the neoliberal welfare model and the gendered implications of this for citizenship. Although welfare-to-work reforms have been promoted as a poverty reduction measure, neoliberal labour market strategies are not compatible with such claims. This chapter illustrated how these strategies have contributed to further gender inequality, poverty and to inhibiting social mobility through casualisation and privatisation. Welfare-to-work programs are designed to provide cheaper labour sources, through pushing wages further down and have contributed to increasing poverty. Casualisation cannot sustain economic independence nor is it compatible with mothers’ care responsibilities, particularly with the increase in non-standard working hours.

Furthermore, the welfare dependency argument renders single mothers’ caring responsibilities, community work and labour invisible and denies them agency over their own lives. In turn, neoliberalism encourages a false notion of active citizenship, which denies single mothers’ autonomy and independence, thus eroding their citizenship status. From a feminist perspective, welfare reform can be seen to have two purposes: to maintain women as dependent on men and to exploit them as a cheap labour source, as women have less industrial power and protection than men.284 Both these agendas maintain patriarchal power over women, through the state and the family.

Moreover, arguments to cut welfare spending are not plausible when welfare spending has increased to accommodate business and to develop new industries. This positions those with a heritage of capital as deserving of state assistance and citizen rights, while individuals who are disadvantaged are treated as non-deserving, thus preserving the status quo. While the welfare dependency discourse encourage hostility towards single mothers as a means to gain

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public support for these reforms, welfare spending on the business class and those who are not in need, are not spoken of in the debate. Under the ruse of social inclusion, single mother voices are absent from the debate and social policy formulation.

Neoliberal labour market strategies such as welfare-to-work schemes contribute to further gender inequality and structural disadvantages. These strategies deny barriers to employment, such as opportunities, cost of child care, children’s safety, care work, experiences of violence and health and wellbeing of both mothers and children. Overall, welfare reform denies mothers’ choices over employment, education and care for their children. We have also seen that the financial implications of welfare reforms for single mothers can lead to having to relinquish their children to the state or having children removed.

While this chapter has focused on theoretical and international arguments for and against welfare reforms, the following chapter examines policies that intersect with domestic violence policies. Australian research on *Welfare to Work* has mainly focused on low income earners and welfare recipients in general, which has incorporated single mothers but not specifically their experience of domestic violence and dealing with the reforms. This is the case even though North American research indicates that violence is the main contributor for women to turn to the welfare system. The simplicity of solving domestic violence through welfare reform does not consider the complexities of violence and other social policies that also impact on the lives of single mothers and their children. These aspects are invisible in the Australian *Welfare to Work* policy and need to be investigated to establish the complexities, apart from structural barriers, faced by mothers who want to be independent from violent men and to keep their children safe.
Chapter Two

Domestic Violence and Welfare to Work

Introduction

As previously argued in Chapter One, domestic violence is a major factor associated with entering single motherhood in the US.\(^1\) It is therefore possible that the experience of violence and having to care for children are some of the key reasons why single mothers access the welfare system in Australia. While the Australian *Welfare to Work* legislation has provisions for exemptions from participation requirements, it has been argued by advocates that these provisions are inadequate and do not acknowledge the extent of the ramifications of violence, including having to care for children who have witnessed or experienced violence.\(^2\) The aim of this chapter is to examine aspects relevant to domestic violence and single motherhood, that impact on mothers’ employability and their ability to comply with the welfare-to-work reforms.

From a feminist perspective, this chapter will first analyse the theoretical and political context of violence against women in relation to neoliberalism, using both Australian and international literature. This will include a brief overview of how domestic violence has been minimised as an individual problem in respect to family court matters, protection orders, the child protection system and child support in Australia and how these policy areas can compromise women’s and children’s safety. Although this study focuses on single mothers’ experiences of the *Welfare to Work* policy after leaving a domestically violent relationship, many women in this position are required to engage with legal systems in relation to safety, property settlement and child contact and may have contact with child protection agencies. These systems are relevant to women’s safety and financial outcomes and are influential in

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relation to mothers’ caring responsibilities and their ability to comply with Welfare to Work participation requirements. Finally, the chapter will examine key features of Welfare to Work and how these could impose problems for those dealing with post-separation violence and its ramifications.

**Theoretical and political background**

It was not until the 1970s that domestic violence gained political attention through the activism of the feminist movement. Freeing women from economic dependence on perpetrators was central to the feminist movement, which lobbied for women to have jobs that paid a family wage, access to child care, affordable housing and welfare entitlements to support single mothers. Feminists argued that, in this way, women would have the option to leave abusive relationships. Through volunteer work, fund raising and lobbying, women’s refuges and resources were set up, which later became reliant on government funding.

Dobash and Dobash argued that the three main aims of the women’s movement was to assist victims, challenge male violence and change women’s position in society. To do this required challenging the cultural beliefs around violence, which are constructed on class bias and individualistic notions that only a few individual males are violent; namely only working class or poor men are violent and women are blamed for provoking and liking violence.

Radical feminists have been the most prominent group to challenge these beliefs about violence against women, bringing attention to how patriarchy is institutionalised. They argue that patriarchy is reliant upon violence to maintain control and to exploit women economically and sexually. For radical feminists, violence is systemic as it is socially supported through key institutions such as the state, religion, media, education, the labour

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market and the family. Violence against women and children has historically been treated as a private matter because only men were regarded as citizens who had legal ownership of wives and children. Millet states this notion of male ownership has traditionally given men the power to physically abuse, murder and sell them. According to Skevik, in the liberal tradition of citizenship, the state was not to interfere in the private lives of citizens. This protected the private lives of men, while violence against women and children was hidden within the private sphere. While feminists gained legislative reforms, which enabled women to obtain protection orders against perpetrators, such orders have been limited and overridden by dominant beliefs associated with male property rights and mother-blaming.

In western countries, legislation to protect women from domestic violence involves civil laws, not criminal laws, and in this way still constructs the problem as a private matter.

This is also the case in Australia whereby breaching a protection order is regarded as an offence that carries penalties of fines and terms of imprisonment. However, research indicates that protection orders are ineffective in stopping violence, as police are more likely to identify with the perpetrator and fail to charge them for breaching orders. The ABS found that in 20 per cent of cases perpetrators ignored protection orders.

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10 Millet, Sexual Politics: 33.


12 Ibid.

13 Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy.


Walby argues that the facilitation of women into the public sphere did not improve their position. She claims that they have moved from a private form of patriarchy to a more public form through legal reforms and the welfare state. Moreover, she contends there has been a shift in the locus of control and legitimisation of violence rather than its elimination. Husbands are no longer the sole arbiter of the acceptable level of violence, because it is now regulated by the state. Further, the infrequency of state intervention and the humiliation meted out to those women who do seek help, deter other women from seeking intervention, which helps to maintain men’s control of women. Other feminist scholars have similarly argued that state legislation is used to socially control women and permits violence against women through protecting the privileges and prerogatives of violent men. Schneider gives the example of laws implemented to control women drinking during pregnancy but men who assault pregnant women do not get prosecuted. Violence reinforces patriarchal cultural values within the family and society, thus reproducing stereotypical sex roles that maintain the gendered division of labour. According to Walby, this is beneficial to the capitalist class system as it maintains women as a cheaper source of labour and the surplus value of their labour, renders higher profits. Millet also argues the complete economic independence of women is unlikely to happen as it would undermine the authority and financial structure of the patriarchal family.

On a global level, the home is the most unsafe place for women. However, violence against women outside the home, including sexual assault is highly prevalent worldwide and excludes women from physical spaces, as well as social, economic and political groups. Research by Braithwaite, Chapman and Kapuscinskion in Australia in 1992, found female workplace participation increased women’s vulnerability to criminal victimisation and harassment, with most sexual harassment and litigation arising from exploitation in the

18 Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy: 127, 35.
19 Ibid., 127,35.
20 Ibid., 149, 56.
23 Millet, Sexual Politics; Walby, Patriarchy at Work.
24 Walby, Patriarchy at Work: 57.
25 Millet, Sexual Politics: 62.
26 Marcus, "Reframing Domestic Violence."; Walby, Theorizing Patriarchy.
workplace. However, they also found that employed females were over represented as homicide victims and are at greater risk if their employment status exceeds their husbands. Although this research was conducted in 1992, later surveys have found that a high prevalence of violence towards women within the public domain and the home still persists. Since 1996 in Australia, there has been an increased number of women reporting physical and sexual assault by a previous partner to police, rising from 35 per cent in 1996 to 60 per cent in 2005. The Recorded Crime-Victim 2007 statistics reported that prior to 2004 family and domestic assault comprised approximately 25 per cent of all reported assaults; from 2004 to 2007 the proportion had risen and was consistently around 38 per cent of total reported assaults. Domestic violence accounted for 49 per cent of female homicide victims during 2003-04, with separation and child custody issues being prime motivators for perpetrators. The Australian component of the IVAWS 2004, which consisted of 6,677 women, found single women in general encountered higher levels of physical and sexual violence than those in a relationship. The IVAWS also reported that 34 per cent of Australian women had experience domestic violence. Furthermore, the 2006 ABS General Social Survey found that 25.2 per cent of persons living in a one parent household had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the past 12 months compared to 9.5 per cent in couple families with dependants. Given that the majority of single parent households are headed by women, single mothers are more at risk of violence in the community than their partnered counterparts. The threat and fear of violence reinforces the functionalist perspective of the family where women need to be subordinate to, and receive protection from, men within the confines of the family. Walby contends that violence against women serves to lock women

28Ibid., 13,14,15,17,30.
32Mouzos and Makkai, "Women's Experiences of Male Violence."
33Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Australian Bureau of Statistics, "General Social Survey: Summary Results. 22 May. Cat. No. 4159.0 " (Canberra2006).
into patriarchal relationships and forces women into dependence upon the men who most threaten them.\textsuperscript{38}

Although the state itself is complex and many different stakeholders play a part in policy decisions,\textsuperscript{39} neoliberal and conservative ideals dominate decisions and policy formulation.\textsuperscript{40} While the dominant view is that the state serves capitalist interests,\textsuperscript{41} Walby contends that the state is systemically structured to make it patriarchal as well as capitalist.\textsuperscript{42} This makes dealing with violence against women problematic when it is not in the interests of men or capitalists.\textsuperscript{43}

While the women’s movement succeeded in placing the problem of domestic violence onto the political agenda, and made a number of gains, including welfare entitlements for single mothers, Walby contends that these still do not provide adequate resources for women to be free of violence.\textsuperscript{44} Simultaneously, policy formulation around domestic violence at the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century started to reflect neoliberal philosophies, minimising the problem of violence as being an individual issue amongst the poor and unemployed.\textsuperscript{45} Brush claims that in the US, the topic of domestic violence has been diminished by conservatives, blaming women for lacking education, job experience and making bad choices of partners.\textsuperscript{46} In Australia, the Howard Government moved away from feminist associations of male violence by diffusing the matter as either family dysfunction or behaviour only happening after relationship breakdown. This government was promoting a conservative agenda to keep the family unit intact,\textsuperscript{47} despite violence and abuse being identified as prime factors for separation.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{38}Walby, \textit{Theorizing Patriarchy}: 65.
  \item \textsuperscript{39}Mark Considine and Jenny M. Lewis, "Bureaucracy, Network, or Enterprise? Comparing Models of Governance in Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, and New Zealand," \textit{Public Administration Review} 63, no. 2 (2003); Alan Fenna, \textit{Introduction to Australian Public Policy} (Frenchs Forest: Longman, 1998).
  \item \textsuperscript{41}Fenna, \textit{Introduction to Australian Public Policy}: 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{42}Walby, \textit{Theorizing Patriarchy}: 160.
  \item \textsuperscript{43}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{44}Ibid., 135, 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{45}Lisa. D. Brush, "Battering, Traumatic Stress, and Welfare-to-Work Transition," \textit{Violence Against Women} 6, no. 10 (2000); Walby, \textit{Theorizing Patriarchy}.
  \item \textsuperscript{46}Brush, "Battering, Traumatic Stress, and Welfare-to-Work Transition," 1042.
  \item \textsuperscript{47}Phillips, "Undoing an Activist Response."
  \item \textsuperscript{48}Bagshaw et al., "Family Violence and Family Law in Australia."); Belinda Fehlberg and Juliet Behrens, \textit{Australian Family Law: The Contemporary Context} (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008).
\end{itemize}
Fathers’ rights groups, throughout the US, UK and Australia were highly influential in changes to domestic violence policy models, particularly child custody and child support matters. In Australia these groups claimed that women were just as violent as men and even more so to children. They argued that the family court was biased against fathers and burdened men with the costs of child support. Mirroring Mead’s welfare dependency argument, Kaye and Tolmie state that fathers’ rights groups also blamed the welfare system for breaking up families by making it too easy for women to leave marriages. In keeping with James, Fehlberg and Behren contend there is no research evidence to support the fathers’ rights claims. Mothers are more likely to retain custody of children as a result of agreement between parents, in contrast to defended cases where outcomes were equal. Overwhelmingly domestic violence and child assault are core issues within defended cases, and statistics show men are predominately the perpetrators. Despite research and risks imposed on both women and children, the Howard Government embarked on reforming family law through the Family Law Act 2006, to enforce shared parenting on the basis that it is in the best interests of the child being able to have a relationship with both parents. This policy has been implemented as promoting equality, while reinforcing conservative views that the traditional role of fathers is necessary for the socialisation of children.

Furthermore, Parkinson proposes domestic violence protection orders have no evidential value in family law proceedings, as they are perceived by the court and legal workers as a


53 "Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law.

54 "James, "Winners and Losers," 231.

55 "Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law; James, "Winners and Losers."

56 "James, "Winners and Losers."; Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law.

tactic by women to try and deprive fathers of contact with children. Parkinson has recommended that domestic violence protection orders should be omitted from family law legislation altogether on the basis that they are obtained on false allegations. According to Behrens, lawyers discourage women from making allegations about violence as they are difficult to prove and also portray the mother as unco-operative, as well as increase the likelihood of a residence order being made in favour of the father. These problems have continued with the Family Law Act 2006. Bagshaw et al. study consisting of 1100 participants (90 per cent adults, 10 per cent children) found the ‘family friendly’ provision made in section 60CC(3)(c), of the Family Law Act 2006, was the cause of much controversy and deterred mothers from reporting violence in fear of being seen as an unfriendly parent and losing their children. One fifth of their female sample reported being forced or bullied into agreeing to equal share arrangements with the other parent because they feared they would lose the primary care of their children.

Research has found there are strong links between male perpetrators of domestic violence and child assault, especially child sexual assault. However, in western economies such as Australia, the US and UK, where the family court prioritises contact with fathers, the fact is ignored that men with a tendency to use violence, actually make poor or seriously dangerous parents. Foote’s 2006 research on family court cases in Australia involving child sexual assault, found allegations by children themselves were dismissed even where fathers had made partial admissions of the abuse, when there was verification and it could be positively identified that the father was a risk to the children. Bagshaw et al. found that 39 per cent of

60 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
65 Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law; Radford and Hester, Mothering through Domestic Violence.
the children in the children’s survey said they did not feel safe with their father after separation.\textsuperscript{67} In these cases, children’s concerns were ignored and the care decision was made by the courts.\textsuperscript{68}

Overall, mothers are often forced into unworkable and unsafe contact arrangements.\textsuperscript{69} Australian research by Bagshaw et al. in 2010 found violence and safety of women and children was not taken into consideration by agencies such as Family Relationships Australia, child protection agencies, lawyers and the courts.\textsuperscript{70} Even where violence, including sexual assaults could be substantiated, professionals were still disbelieving of these allegations, leaving children to continue contact with perpetrators.\textsuperscript{71} Child protection has been identified as taking a mother-blaming stance, placing the onus on mothers to stop the abuse and even placing children with fathers with histories of violence, which in some cases has resulted in death.\textsuperscript{72} The family court treats child protection notifications the same as protection orders. In this way, protection strategies or instruments make violence against women and children more irrelevant in such cases.\textsuperscript{73} According to Behrens, Smythe and Kaspiew, based on the presumption of shared care responsibility, the family court is more likely to oppose mothers’ applications to relocate, thus restricting women who are trying to escape from post-separation violence.\textsuperscript{74} Ignoring violence and prioritising child contact over safety remains a problem, and was a major issue leading up to the murder of 11 year old Luke Batty who was stabbed to death by his father in 2014.\textsuperscript{75}

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\textsuperscript{67} Bagshaw et al., "Family Violence and Family Law in Australia," 4.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.; Evans, "Battle-Scars."; Kaye, Stubbs, and Tolmie, "Negotiating Child Residence and Contact Arrangements Against a Background of Domestic Violence".
\textsuperscript{70} Bagshaw et al., "Family Violence and Family Law in Australia."
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Behrens, "Meeting the Needs of Victims of Domestic Violence with Family Law Issues."; Fehlberg and Behrens, \textit{Australian Family Law}.
\textsuperscript{75} Geoff Thompson and Lisa McGregor, "Rosie's Story," (Four Corners. Australian Broadcasting Commision, 2014).
Poverty and homelessness are major problems for women and children escaping domestic violence. In Australia, domestic violence remains the leading cause of homelessness for women and children with 50 per cent of women with children trying to access crisis accommodation services being turned away due to lack of availability. Although welfare-to-work policies have been introduced to combat poverty and homelessness, financial abuses and family law biases towards men are overlooked as problems. In Australia, a national survey by Sheehan and Smyth, conducted in 1998, consisting of 398 women and men, found women who had experienced severe violence were three times more likely, than women who had not reported physical abuse, to receive less than 40 per cent share of total assets. According to Graycar and Morgan, women’s financial and non-financial contribution, including labour, was undervalued in the family court. An ex-husband’s property share increases if he remains in the family home after separation, although women have primary care of the children. Although in a number of Australian states there are measures to remove the perpetrator from the family home, these have been described by the Australian Law Reform Commission as imposing “quite severe hardship” on perpetrators. According to McFerran, decisions to not remove perpetrators in the Magistrates Court were due to the belief that the decision would prejudice Family Court property settlements.

However, what is not considered are the costs, disruptions, loss of property, assets and

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82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.
possessions, safety, trauma and homelessness experienced by women and children. Nor is their future wellbeing taken into account despite the courts’ duty of care to children.

Throughout neoliberal states, funding has also been cut to areas that provide resources for women, such as welfare, women’s crisis services, housing and legal aid. This has made it even more difficult for women to get legal representation for domestic violence and family court matters, as well as trying to leave the relationship and keep themselves and their children safe. Although policies associated with family law matters have been based on the principles of equality, Walby points out that the introduction of neoliberal practices has seen a shift in patriarchal ideology from open exclusion of women to denying their disadvantage. When women leave a domestically violent relationship, ex-partners remain in control of finances and resources. This, in turn, disadvantages women from pursuing litigation, as their ex-partner has the resources to afford expensive lawyers and can maintain control of mediation processes by threatening to enter the court system if his terms are not met, whereas women can be limited to legal aid, which is poorly resourced and sometimes inadequate. Fear of the perpetrator and the attitudes of lawyers and judges deter women from pursuing litigation or pursuing property settlements. Women are unable to negotiate on equal grounds with men due to violence and family law determinations in property settlements, which also place women and children at risk of poverty and homelessness.

Child support is another area of contention. In Australia, the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989* was implemented on the premise that it helps alleviate poverty amongst single parents. However as Fehlberg and Maclean point out, the system was implemented not just to get non-

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custodial parents to support their children, but also to save on welfare dollars. Despite a high number of non-custodial parents not paying child support or paying meagre amounts, fathers’ rights groups claimed they were paying too much for children that mothers refused to allow them to see. Contrary to evidence, the Howard Government supported this view and introduced the *Child Support Legislation Amendment (Reform of the Child Support Scheme—New Formula and Other Measures) Act 2006*, in conjunction with the *Family Law Act 2006*.

Prior to the child support reforms, the House Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs in 2003 reported that 91 per cent of Child Support Agency (CSA) collect payee parents were mothers. Out of CSA collect payer parents (91 per cent male) 39.7 per cent were assessed to pay $5 or less per week and 56.2 per cent to pay $40 or less. However, 41 per cent of payee parents received no child support at all. Overall the majority of payer parents were not compliant and did not pay on time, paid the incorrect amount or did not pay at all. Since the introduction of the 2006 child support legislation, the CSA reported that debt (non-payment) had increased and reached over $1 billion in 2008 and increased further by another $74.9 million, in 2009. According to Summerfield, Young, Harman and Flatau, the new system has shifted the burden of the cost of raising children from the state and the non-resident parent directly onto the resident parent: the vast majority of whom are mothers. Shared care has reduced the non-resident parent’s child support liabilities, and increased the perpetrator’s ability to harass the primary carer but notably many do not exercise their contact rights.

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97 Branigan and Keebaugh, "A Feminist Agenda."
100 Ibid., 15, 127, 28.
102 Child Support Agency, "Facts and Figures 08-09".
104 Ibid.
105 Flood, "Backlash."; Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security".
Shared care also has other advantages for perpetrators. Flood contends that fathers' rights advocates are less interested in supporting children than they are in maintaining control of ex-partners and children. Braff and Barrett Meyering’s research in 2009 examined barriers to women’s financial security, pre-and post-relationship violence and consisted of 107 participants (50 women’s emergency service workers, 57 women domestic violence victims). Their research found that where more equal-time parenting arrangements had been determined by the court, women received less in terms of financial settlements, including child support and property settlements and that their ex-partners failed to meet their parenting obligations. These findings have been reflected in previous research, such as Evans’ study of 134 female domestic violence survivors. A salient factor in these studies was that perpetrators used the courts to have contact with the women and inflict further abuse, including assaulting them. Research by Patrick, Cook and Taket found that mothers were subjected to threats of family court and child protection if they pursued child support payments. Moreover, Braff and Barrett Meyering found that mothers in pursuit of child support were subject to fathers making allegations against them to Centrelink of welfare cheating.

Family law court decisions determine post-separation parenting arrangements and these, in turn, shape child support requirements, which are linked to the Centrelink payment, Family Tax Benefit Part B (FTB B). Child support is considered as income and affects Family Tax Benefit (FTB) payments. Summerfield et al. who simulated a tax benefit-child support model, found single mothers are worse off and receiving less child support under the Welfare to Work legislation. Mothers forced onto the lower unemployment payment NSA were more negatively affected due to earnings thresholds related to NSA. Summerfield et al. argue the combination of Welfare to Work, family law and child support reforms increase the extent

107 Braff and Barrett Meyering, “Seeking Security”.
108 Ibid., 8.
109 Evans, “Battle-Scars.”
112 Braff and Barrett Meyering, “Seeking Security”; see also Patrick, Cook, and Taket, “Multiple Barriers to Obtaining Child Support.”
114 Summerfield et al., “Child Support and Welfare to Work Reforms.”
of poverty in single parent households. Branigan argues that Centrelink and CSA function to keep single mother families impoverished and that this problem will be exacerbated through their placement onto NSA. With the 1 January 2013 amendments that abolished single parents’ grandfathered status, all single mothers will be equally disadvantaged once their youngest child turns eight years of age. NSA renders single mothers statistically invisible as they are then labelled unemployed instead of being recognised as having parenting responsibilities. This makes it much more difficult to identify their needs and to further analyse the effects of the reforms on these families.

While domestic violence is linked to poverty and homelessness of women and children, these problems are intensified by the family law and child support systems. These systems legalise the continuation of violence through maintaining male property rights including child contact, which is further compounded by the lack of support through legal systems and child safety agencies. The literature on the legal matters, family law, and child support systems in regards to domestic violence focused on Australia. However, studies in the UK, US and Europe have had similar findings whereby perpetrators use the family court system, child support and child protection agencies as a tactic to continue to control, abuse and disempower women, causing further psychological and financial stress, including preventing them from relocating. Miller and Smolter refer to this tactic as paper abuse whereby perpetrators can legally stalk their ex-partners. Furthermore, Australian research reveals mothers were at

115 Ibid.
118 Branigan, "Why Single Mothers Need to be Accountants: The 'Third Shift' of Bureaucratic Labour under Welfare Reform."
119 Costello, Chung, and Carson, "Exploring Alternative Pathways out of Poverty."; Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law; McFerran, "Taking Back the Castle".
120 Brown et al., "The Child Abuse and Divorce Myth."; Fehlberg and Behrens, Australian Family Law.
122 Miller and Smolter, "Paper Abuse."
severe risk due to contact orders and had sustained serious injuries during contact handovers.\textsuperscript{123}

So far this chapter has looked at the feminist perspective on domestic violence and the move towards the individualistic approach associated with neoliberalism. This has incorporated a review of literature to examine how domestic violence policy intersects with other policy areas associated with separation and children’s care arrangements. The literature reflects that legal and child protection systems fail to protect women and children, prioritising perpetrators’ housing needs and fathers’ rights to child contact. This maintains beliefs that women fabricate stories of violence to deprive fathers of contact with children and to financially gain in family law cases. This is also reflected in family court determinations where violence has been prevalent and the child support policy that has been implemented on the presumption of increasing equality. These assumptions distract attention from the violent men who use these systems, including the child support system, to make financial gains and to continue to financially abuse, harass and assault women and children legally. Moreover, the problem with financial abuse continues under the presumption of shared care, although many perpetrators fight for equal share for better financial outcomes, they do not fulfil their child contact obligations. For women the outcomes are financially damaging and result in homelessness and poverty while being the sole provider for children. Subsequently it can be seen that shared care enables perpetrators to continue to abuse when they want and places women and children at further risk and unable to escape from the violence. While violence is linked to poverty and homelessness these problems are compounded by intersection of the legal system, family law, child protection and even the welfare system. The following section examines the \textit{Welfare to Work} legislation and how it intersects with domestic violence.

\textbf{The Australian response: Welfare to Work and domestic violence}

\textbf{Employment and violence}

In Australia, \textit{Welfare to Work} was implemented by the Howard Government on the grounds that single parents would be financially better off under the policy and the system would help

\textsuperscript{123}Bagshaw et al., “Reshaping Responses to Domestic Violence.”; Evans, "Battle-Scars."; McInnes, "The Impact of Violence on Mothers' and Children's Needs."
them gain skills to find sustainable employment. The succeeding Labor Government has continued with the welfare policy promoting it as a social inclusion mechanism that proposes employment is a pathway out of domestic violence, poverty, and homelessness for women and children. According to Whiteford, employment will stop violence against single mothers. This assumption was reflected in the Time for Action community consultation, which was commissioned in 2009 to find solutions to address violence against women and children. It reported lack of economic independence is a major factor that can influence women to remain living in violent relationships, thus promoting employment as a solution to the problem. As argued in the previous chapter, the idealisation of employment as the solution to social problems constructs the individual as being at fault, which is consistent with neoliberal ideology.

Like family law, Australia’s domestic violence policy and welfare-to-work debates construct victims of violence as neither earners nor workers and responsible for stopping the violence and leaving the situation. While social policy and cultural values reinforce the assumption that women with young children are dependent on men, the impact domestic violence has on employment and financial security of educated or career women has not been acknowledged. Research from the US and Australia has found that regardless of employment level and educational background, many women who had solid lucrative careers were impoverished through economic abuses and had to turn to welfare when they left violent

126Whiteford, “Family Joblessness in Australia”.
128Ibid., 46, 47, 51.
131Mouzos and Makkai, "Women's Experiences of Male Violence."
relationships. According to Adams, Sullivan, Bybee and Greeson, economic abuse has received little attention from the research community. Their research conducted in 2008, consisting of 103 women who had experience physical, psychological and sexual abuse from partners found that 99 per cent of the sample had been subject to economic abuse. Adams et al. state that economic abuse is a common tactic used by abusive men to gain power and maintain control over women. Moreover, economic abuse and resource inequality remain hidden in relationships, leaving women susceptible to poverty particularly if their partner does not share their income or contribute to the costs of the children. Yet the welfare-to-work debate continues to address homelessness and poverty amongst women with children as being solved through employment. In this way, male violence against women and children remains unchallenged.

The Time for Action Report did not address the Welfare to Work legislation, its enforced job search requirements or its lower level of income support such as NSA, which may influence women to remain in domestically violent relationships. Furthermore, it failed to acknowledge that separated women are more likely to experience ex-partner abuse and are more at risk of being murdered by an ex-partner. As Evans states, the recent focus on domestic violence in policy formulation is only on the crisis point of separation, thus it is lacking acknowledgement of the longer-term effects, while assuming the person has resolved the issues and recovered. In Australia there has been a call to raise income support to help women escape domestic violence. However, employment continues to be promoted as the solution.

135 Ibid., 570, 80.
136 Ibid., 580.
139 Mouzos and Makkai, "Women's Experiences of Male Violence."
140 Evans, "Battle-Scars," 4.
According to Access Economics, which estimated the costs of domestic violence on the Australian economy, women who had experienced physical violence had 35 per cent more chance of having to rely on income support.\textsuperscript{142} Butterworth, whose analysis is based on data on 398 lone mothers within the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing conducted by the ABS in 1997, argues that domestic violence is a prime cause of mental disorders amongst 45 per cent of single mothers, which consequently led to reliance on welfare.\textsuperscript{143} However, Butterworth argues that mental health and social inclusion have been used as theoretical arguments for the welfare reforms but the argument is poorly developed, as so-called ‘welfare dependency’ for single parents results from violence and its implications not unemployment.\textsuperscript{144} He also points out that forcing people into low paying unstable jobs is not beneficial because those in low quality jobs have higher rates of depression than people who were unemployed.\textsuperscript{145} Other studies have found domestic violence, whether it had stopped or was continuing, was often the cause of mental and physical health problems and disabilities amongst women and associated with welfare receipt.\textsuperscript{146}

Promoting violence as a problem associated with unemployment portrays women in this situation as lacking work ethic and belonging to an underclass as defined by Mead as a collective of welfare dependants.\textsuperscript{147} However, this is not supported by research. For instance, research by Franzway, Zufferey and Chung in 2008, who interviewed 38 women (33 per cent were single mothers) whose employment had been affected by domestic violence, found that the majority of women (68 per cent) were in some form of employment.\textsuperscript{148} Most of the women were well educated and had not accessed welfare or support services, which indicates that domestic violence affects the whole community and women across a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Their research found women’s labour market and education status makes little difference to the experience of domestic

\textsuperscript{145}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147}See Mead, "Welfare Reform and the Family."
\textsuperscript{148}Franzway, Zufferey, and Chung, "Sustainable Economic Futures."
violence. Nor does it make it any easier for educated high income earning women to leave these fraught situations, where they are still subject to poverty, homelessness and further violence.\footnote{Ibid.; Moe and Bell, "Abject Economics."}  US research by Polit, Widom, Edin, Bowie, London, Scott and Valenzuela on 3900 single mothers in welfare-to-work programs found that those who had experienced domestic violence had the same employment rate as those who had not experienced violence.\footnote{Denise. F Polit et al., "Is Work Enough? The Experiences of Current and Former Welfare Mothers Who Work," Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation,2001, http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_410.pdf.} However, job stability depended on whether the perpetrator knew of the women’s whereabouts; women left or changed jobs to avoid abusive ex-partners.\footnote{Ibid., 62.} Women were also more prone to days off work because of injuries.\footnote{Ibid.} Other US research on single mothers experiencing domestic violence in welfare-to-work programs has come up with similar findings: that violence does not stop because of employment, but its decrease or increase varies simply depending on the perpetrator’s behaviour.\footnote{Christina. M. Gibson-Davis et al., "Employment and the Risk of Domestic Abuse Among Low-Income Women," \textit{Journal of Marriage and Family} 67(2005); Paul Kershaw, Jane Pulkingham, and Sylvia Fuller, "Expanding the Subject: Violence, Care and (In) Active Male Citizenship," \textit{Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society} 15, no. 2 (2008).}

This research was unable to locate any evidence within the literature to substantiate claims that the Australian \textit{Welfare to Work} system or employment will stop domestic violence. To date, there appears to be no substantive body of research on how \textit{Welfare to Work} supports single mothers experiencing domestic violence within the welfare system. This chapter now proceeds to examine the key features of \textit{Welfare to Work} that are argued to support single mothers, starting with the domestic violence screening and participation exemption process.

\textbf{Domestic violence exemption}

Within the \textit{Welfare to Work} policy, the experience of domestic violence amongst single parents is acknowledged through a 16 week exemption from the participation requirements.\footnote{Australia, \textit{"The Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Act 2005."} (2005); Australian Government, "3.5.1.280 Participation Requirements Exemption in Special Family Circumstances-Case-by-Case (PP)," Guide to Social Security Law,2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au.} Under the original legislation (2006-2010), only those who had ceased being in a relationship within a 26 week determination period were eligible for the
exemption. However, the application of this exemption has been problematic. When a single parent entering the welfare system comes under the employment participation requirements, they are screened through the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) to determine their level of disadvantage. However, according to the National Employment Services Association (NESA), domestic violence was not listed as a barrier on the JSCI. From the introduction of Welfare to Work, from 1 July 2006 to 27 February 2009, only 1,097 exemptions were granted due to domestic violence or stress as a result of a relationship breakdown. It is unknown how many of the 1,097 exemptions were for domestic violence alone or granted to recipients other than single mothers, but the average duration of all these exemptions was 9.05 weeks, which indicates lesser exemption periods than 16 weeks have been applied. Centrelink does not keep data on how many applications for exemptions were rejected.

The problem was identified in the Participation Review Taskforce Report (2008), which recommended that the 16 week case-by-case exemption for domestic violence be replaced by an automatic 12 month exemption. The recommendation was not adopted by the Labor Government. Under the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010, the 16 week exemption was extended to parents still in relationships and those experiencing post separation violence at any time after separation. The then Minister for Employment Participation, Brendan O’Connor, announced that the legislation would also make information more available on the exemption due to domestic violence and participation requirements.

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However, the problem in delivering information and not applying exemptions continued to exist after the amendments were introduced. In 2011, only 53 exemptions for domestic violence were granted, which is extremely low, compared to other reasons job seekers were granted exemptions.\textsuperscript{162} In 2011, the Welfare Rights Centre, New South Wales (WRC, NSW) reported that women were still not being informed of the exemption for domestic violence and that where exemptions had been applied, these were the personal crisis exemption (up to 13 weeks), which is usually granted for only two or four weeks.\textsuperscript{163} The WRC, NSW also found Job Services Australia (JSA) was poorly informed of exemptions for domestic violence and the high level of staff turnover in these agencies left people having to re-tell their trauma repeatedly without gaining appropriate assistance or support.\textsuperscript{164} In Braff and Barrett Meyering’s 2009 research, women’s service workers reported that finding out about exemptions and securing one, required vigorous advocacy.\textsuperscript{165} Women also reported not being believed and being threatened that they would lose their entitlements for inventing stories of abuse. Yet repeated false claims by ex-partners about women being welfare cheats were taken seriously and led to investigations and administrative errors by Centrelink.\textsuperscript{166} Similar problems have been identified in US research by Lindhorst, Meyers and Casey who analysed 782 interviews between welfare workers and TANF clients and found that workers negatives attitudes towards clients was the reason only a small proportion of cases (9.3 per cent) were screened for domestic violence.\textsuperscript{167} Their research and Hays’s study in 2003 found that screening for welfare fraud was a greater priority.\textsuperscript{168} Levin had similar findings where US welfare workers were overtly hostile towards clients and neglected to screen them for domestic violence and instead sent them to employment services.\textsuperscript{169}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security".
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 95, 98.
\textsuperscript{168} Hays, \textit{Flat Broke with Children}; Lindhorst, Meyers, and Casey, “Screening for Domestic Violence in Public Welfare Offices.”
\end{flushleft}
Although negative attitudes may be one reason why the domestic violence exemption is not being applied correctly in Australia, the literature also suggests that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)\textsuperscript{170} is not informing Centrelink or other agencies in the Welfare to Work system of the correct administration of the legislation. This also became apparent in the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) 2011 inquiry into the treatment of family violence in Commonwealth laws, whereby the ALRC stated that disclosure of family violence would automatically lead to a Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessment (CWCA).\textsuperscript{171} However, this is not the correct procedure. The guidelines stipulate that in such instances, principal parents must be referred to a social worker and must be granted the 16 week participation exemption.\textsuperscript{172}

In 2011, during the inquiry by the ALRC into the treatment of family violence in Commonwealth laws, other welfare system stakeholders again raised concerns that the 16 week exemption was inadequate when mothers had to relocate, find housing, new schools and deal with ongoing violence, legal matters, health issues, and care for children who had witnessed or experienced violence.\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, violence often escalates after separation and continues where there is ongoing contact with perpetrators due to child contact matters.\textsuperscript{174} The ALRC has stipulated that extending exemptions could isolate victims, and the current system re-engages customers with the system and offers opportunity to be referred to other support mechanisms.\textsuperscript{175} However, no evidence has emerged that the current exemption process or being referred to employment services has been beneficial to principal

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext[170]{The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) was renamed the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) by the Labor government in 2008.}
\footnotetext[174]{Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security"; Evans, "Battle-Scars."}
\end{footnotesize}
carers. Single parents engage with numerous services to re-establish themselves and recover, but the Welfare to Work system prioritises employment ahead of single parent families’ wellbeing.

The inquiry also illustrated there was an underlying belief by policy makers that women fabricate stories of domestic violence to avoid the participation requirements. A common practice by Centrelink is to request women to obtain verification of domestic violence if they are applying for a participation exemption, although this is not specified within the Social Security Guidelines. The ALRC stated that verification is needed to ensure the integrity of the system and fair distribution of social security need. While this assumes there will be a high level of welfare fraud related to domestic violence claims, it neglects that many women do not volunteer information on domestic violence due to shame, embarrassment, stigma or denial of the problem. Many women also do not have contact with women emergency services and violence is commonly hidden from those outside of the family unit, making verification complicated. Paradoxically, women require no verification to gain an exemption from pursuing child support due to violence.

Another problem is there is also no exemption for parents who have to care for a child who has experienced physical or sexual assault. The other case-by-case exemptions that apply

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177 Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security".


181 Franzway, Zufferey, and Chung, "Sustainable Economic Futures."

182 Welfare Rights Centre, "Submission Response to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s IP 39".


in special family circumstances are inadequate for these circumstances, and do not consider the needs of children who have experienced violence and trauma.\textsuperscript{185}

Literature on domestic violence reveals that many women survivors suffer from health disorders.\textsuperscript{186} For example, Evans’ research in 2005 consisting of 134 women who had endured psychological, physical and sexual abuse were found to be highly susceptible to developing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), eating disorders, depression, arthritis, early menopause and cancer.\textsuperscript{187} Where child contact had been determined by the family court, most of the women reported perpetrators continued violent behaviours, which contributed to ongoing health problems.\textsuperscript{188}

Although Welfare to Work provides exemption provisions for medical conditions, this is delivered through the CWCA system. The primary aim of this process is to reduce the number of people with disabilities and medical conditions applying for participation exemptions by prioritising job seeking and referring them to employment services.\textsuperscript{189} Assessors are able to override medical evidence in favour of their own opinion, even though they are not qualified to provide such opinions.\textsuperscript{190} According to the Commonwealth Ombudsman Report in 2008, this has resulted in people with terminal illnesses and permanent disabilities being assessed as temporary and has resulted in people not attaining benefits they need to get immediate medical care.\textsuperscript{191} This problem has been reflected in research on Welfare to Work.\textsuperscript{192} Connolly and Murphy’s semi-longitudinal study of 150 people between 2007 to 2009 receiving a Centrelink payment, which included 37 single mothers, reported Centrelink staff’s responses were unsympathetic to those with medical

\textsuperscript{185}Winter, "Submission into Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws".
\textsuperscript{187}Evans, "Battle-Scars," 7, 8.
\textsuperscript{188}Ibid., 15, 20.
\textsuperscript{191}Ibid.
conditions and tended to place further pressure to find a job irrespective of mothers’ health. A US survey by Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea, and Davis in 2002 of 1152 women who were screened for domestic violence at a health clinic, stated that abused women must be emotionally supported for there to be a positive impact on their mental health. Negative responses and stressors would only add to poor mental health outcomes. However, research into Welfare to Work has not examined the outcomes for single mothers who have medical conditions related to domestic violence and who have been treated through the CWCA system.

The literature reflects that information and the application of the participation exemption on the grounds of domestic violence are being withheld, indicating a preference to prioritise the job seeking component of the participation requirements. This can be perceived as minimising violence to a fabrication or an individual problem because of lack of employment, which is consistent with neoliberal perspectives. While single mothers are constructed as having nothing else to do, they have numerous matters to deal with in relocating, addressing legal matters and caring for themselves and traumatised children. The latter is totally invisible in the legislation. Alternatively employment has been promoted as improving health, while again ignoring the ramifications of violence. The following section examines the participation requirements and how they impact on financial outcomes and caring for children.

**Participation requirements**

A key aim of Welfare to Work is to force single mothers to comply with job seeking requirements in exchange for income support benefits. This ignores the high labour market participation rate of single mothers, which registers above other welfare recipient groups. It also ignores the ramifications of domestic violence, which is a major problem in women

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193 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
194 Ibid.
195 Coker et al., "Social Support Protects Against the Negetative Effects of Partner Violence on Mental Health."
managing to maintain employment. According to Blaxland, to justify pushing single mothers into employment programs, they were socially constructed as sexually deviant and dole bludgers needing paternalistic persuasion to find jobs, which, in turn, will provide a good role model to their children.

The participation requirements impose problems on single mothers in general, let alone those who have experienced violence. Under the legislation single mothers are to engage in part-time activities, which requires them to: enter an ‘activity agreement’ (renamed an Employment Pathway Plan by the Labor government), and seek 15 hours paid work per week by looking for six jobs per fortnight. Those not meeting the requirements are connected with an employment agency (originally called Job Network –JNW, now JSA) and have to undertake a ‘mutual obligation’ activity of 150 hours over six months in an ‘approved’ education or training program. Those deemed as non-compliant can be placed on Work for the Dole.

The reforms provide little choice or flexibility. Single mothers lose all autonomy under the legislation and have to accept any employment deemed suitable by Centrelink or the employment service. According to the Council of Single Mothers and their Children (CSMC, Victoria) the work-first policy works against career development through forcing those in well-paying jobs, to give up these jobs and take up lower paying jobs in order to meet the required number of hours. This reflected earlier concerns raised by Coad, Finlay, Raper, and Thomas that the policy also prioritises work over skill building, inhibiting single parents from escaping poverty, which will have negative repercussions for their children.

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198 Butterworth, "Fair Welfare".  
Murphy, Murray, Chalmers, Martin and Marston point out that the approach is based on the assumption that people on income support do not have any labour market attachment and do not want to work. \(^{205}\)

The *Welfare to Work* legislation was promoted as providing choice, support and the flexibility to prioritise children’s care needs. \(^{206}\) As stipulated by Greening:

*The Welfare to Work reforms... are designed to help single parents gain employment that suits their needs and allows them to balance paid work with their individual priorities, such as caring responsibilities. (Malcolm Greening, Assistant Secretary, Wages and Conditions Policy Branch DEWR)* \(^{207}\)

The 15 hour per week requirement was implemented on the presumption that principal carers were to only seek employment during children’s school hours. \(^{208}\) However, job search activities extend into school holiday periods. \(^{209}\) Although the Labor Government in 2010 exempted single parents from the activity test for a fortnight during the Christmas and New Year public holidays, \(^{210}\) they are still required to comply with the activity test throughout all other holidays, weekends and outside of school hours. \(^{211}\) This was based on recommendations made by the Participation Review Taskforce in 2008, which claimed that single parents could work in retail and hospitality industries. \(^{212}\) However, this did not take into account the fact that these industries mainly operate within non-standard job hours, nor the cost and availability of out-of-hours child care. According to Pocock while mothers tend to take casual jobs because of care responsibilities, although these positions do not

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\(^{205}\) John Murphy et al., *Half a Citizen: Life on a Low Income in Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 85.


\(^{208}\) Senate, "The Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005."


\(^{210}\) Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."; Australian Government, "Participation Review Taskforce Report."

\(^{211}\) Australian Government, "Participation Review Taskforce Report."

\(^{212}\) Ibid.
accommodate their family needs. Casual employment reduces unionisation and normally invokes low paid and low status positions offering no stability. Child care costs are specifically problematic for those on NSA, especially since *Welfare to Work* places restrictions on accessing the Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA). Moreover, the Abbott Government has proposed to cut the JETCCFA further and reduce the Child Care Rebate, which will increase fees for single mothers and drastically reduce any financial benefits of employment. However, *Welfare to Work* also ignores that single parents are the primary carers, and generally the only carer that children have.

Another problem that has not been considered by decision makers is that frontline services highly objectify women. According to Adkins’ research on the hospitality industry, women’s employability will be based on their age, race, body size and appearance and availability. May, Campbell and Burgess have also pointed out that these highly casualised industries pose a problem for mothers having to compete with younger and more available people looking for holiday work, who are also a cheaper source of labour.

In introducing the reforms, DEWR declared the parent alone makes the decision to find alternative care or not to accept the job offer. However, research on *Welfare to Work*, found single mothers were being denied autonomy on childcare decisions and were being

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218 Ibid., 161-63.
219 May, Campbell, and Burgess, "The Rise and Rise of Casual Work in Australia".
forced by Centrelink to leave children home alone.\textsuperscript{221} This contravenes the unsuitable work guidelines, which also covers specific travel time and costs and the $50 per fortnight test to determine if a job offer is unsuitable.\textsuperscript{222} These other components of the unsuitable work guidelines were also criticised by the then president of the National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN), Michael Raper in 2008 as disadvantaging single parents financially and for not being applied by Centrelink and employment services.\textsuperscript{223}

Essentially, \textit{Welfare to Work} prioritises job seeking over the needs of children,\textsuperscript{224} with no recognition that children may have experienced trauma or violence. While the participation requirements dismiss the importance of mothers’ caring responsibilities in general, for women with children who have witnessed or experienced violence, compliance is more problematic. Although numerous studies identify that children in this situation suffer a number of emotional, psychological and behavioural problems, such as regressive symptoms, anxiety, sleep disturbances, night terrors, separation anxiety from mothers and PTSD,\textsuperscript{225} the extra care responsibilities these entail for mothers are not considered.\textsuperscript{226} Mothers are expected to leave children in childcare, which is neither appropriate nor affordable and does not cater for the child’s special needs if they have been subjected to violence, or, alternatively, leave children home alone.\textsuperscript{227} The denial of post-separation violence and


\textsuperscript{224}Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."


\textsuperscript{226}Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."; Franzway, Zufferey, and Chung, "Sustainable Economic Futures."; McArthur et al., "Getting What We Need".

\textsuperscript{227}Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."; Cox and Priest, "Welfare to Work"; Franzway, Zufferey, and Chung, "Sustainable Economic Futures."; McArthur et al., "Getting What We Need".
violence towards children is also evident in the presumption by Carberry that shared care would help single mothers to engage in labour market activity while ex-partners had contact with the children.\textsuperscript{228}

In Australia, although there has been recent research interest on domestic violence and employment,\textsuperscript{229} there is a dearth of research literature on how single mothers who have experienced violence are able to comply with the participation requirements. This is particularly so since Australian research on domestic violence and employment has found that women are subjected to extreme forms of ex-partner violence, which impacts significantly on their ability to maintain employment.\textsuperscript{230} Furthermore, perpetrators purposely used violence to jeopardise women’s employment to inhibit them from gaining any form of economic and home stability.\textsuperscript{231} This was also a common problem found within North American research on single mothers in welfare-to-work programs, where ex-partners sabotaged mothers’ employment and financial stability to maintain control and power over women.\textsuperscript{232} Furthermore, ex-partner violence escalated when women started job seeking or began a job or training, while in a welfare-to-work program.\textsuperscript{233}

The majority of research on Welfare to Work has not focused on domestic violence. Braff and Barrett Meyering’s Australian study in 2009 included Welfare to Work, although it was not their specific focus.\textsuperscript{234} Their study explored barriers to women’s financial security within violent relationships and post separation, in order to gain insight into ways that may support

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\textsuperscript{229} Costello, Chung, and Carson, "Exploring Alternative Pathways out of Poverty."
\textsuperscript{232} Brush, "Battering, Traumatic Stress, and Welfare-to-Work Transition."; Kershaw, Pulkingham, and Fuller, "Expanding the Subject."; Moe and Bell, "Abject Economics."
\textsuperscript{233} Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security". 

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them to ‘break free’ of violence and to stay safe. Of the 107 participants only 22 of women were receiving some form of Centrelink benefit, but not all of the women were single mothers and it was not stipulated how many were actually affected by *Welfare to Work*, since most were unable to work because of disabilities. Although women in this research raised concerns about being able to comply with *Welfare to Work*, due to having to deal with ongoing legal and medical matters, the research did not specifically look at how single mothers managed or negotiated the participation requirements. Although research has identified that ex-partners were using *Welfare to Work* to harass mothers about the care of the children, through threat about family court and child protection interventions, this area needs a more thorough examination to ascertain the problems mothers contend with trying to comply with the requirements and deal with the ramifications of violence.

Moreover, the difficulties associated with gaining or maintaining employment due to the effects of violence and continued post-separation violence, in turn, affect ability to comply with the participation requirements and subsequently negatively affect mothers’ Centrelink payments. Under the original legislation (2006-2009), non-compliance activated a suspension of payments until the person complied and recorded a breach, regardless of whether there was a reasonable excuse. After three breaches in 12 months, an eight week no payment penalty was applied. Caring for children was not seen as a reasonable excuse.

In 2008, the NWRN reported that within the first two years of the *Welfare to Work*, 40,868 eight week no payment suspension penalties had been applied. According to the *Welfare to Work* Evaluation Report one third of recipients who were breached in 2008, were single

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235 Ibid.
236 Ibid., 95.
237 Ibid., 87,98.
239 Senate, "The Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005."
parents and Disability Support Pensioners. The NWRN stated that more than 30 per cent of people, who lost payments for eight weeks, also lost their accommodation. The Labor Government amended the penalty system in 2009, where recipients can lose one tenth of their fortnightly income support payment for non-compliance and after three breaches they are to be assessed to determine whether they have barriers to employment, before applying the eight week payment suspension. Between 2010 and 2011, 33,830 no show, no pay penalties were applied. As Centrelink recipients have all been classified as job seekers, the number of single parents who received a penalty cannot be identified, making financial hardship endured by these families invisible. The inadequacy of payments, particularly NSA has been identified as a problem for single mothers in research by Connelly and Murphy, and Murphy et al. and by welfare stakeholders, who have advocated for payments to be increased, particularly for single mothers who have experienced domestic violence. Loss of even one tenth of payment because of non-compliance related to domestic violence or its ramifications would put a single mother and her children at risk of homelessness and may encourage women to return to perpetrators as seen in the US.

Contrary to the rhetorical claims that Welfare to Work is a ‘caring’ policy and supports the needs of parents and children and provides them with more ‘choices’ in life, the reforms inhibit autonomy and have further devalued the care provided by single mothers. Furthermore, the participation requirements do not acknowledge the ramifications of domestic violence against women and children. While previous studies on Welfare to Work
have mainly focused on the unemployed and included single mothers, little is known of how single mothers who have experienced domestic violence comply with the participation requirement system.

**Surveillance**

Another key feature of *Welfare to Work* is its surveillance system, which monitors those deemed at high risk of welfare dependency and welfare fraud. Marston, Moss and Quiggin argue neoliberal and third way discourses have constructed unemployment as a harm to society, like drug use and other criminal behaviours, which has led to risk profiling and risk management. Those with irregular income and a history of casual earnings or not complying with the participation requirements have been targeted as potential frauds. According to Barns and Preston the problem with the welfare cheat profile is that it depicts casual workers, who are more likely to be women. Barns and Preston conclude that welfare cheat profiling will place many women under government investigation and that such pressure and added stressors will deter women from accessing income support and employment. Prenzler also states that the procedure stigmatises recipients and delays urgently needed benefits.

According to Gilliom welfare surveillance is state-centred, bureaucratic and rationalist, which reduces and simplifies the welfare subject to schematic categories, focusing on a limited set of factors, so the state can determine whether the poor are deserving, worthy or eligible for assistance. He states these “systems of surveillance are forms of domination, which overrun personal depiction, contextual variety and particularity”. He points out that at the centre of welfare thinking are the ideas of patriarchal individualism and the market, whereby it is believed that the normal state of affairs consists of male-headed, two-parent families.

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255 Ibid.
256 Barns and Preston, "Women, Work & Welfare.”
257 Ibid.
258 Prenzler, "Detecting and Preventing Welfare Fraud”.
259 Ibid., 41.
earning wages through the labour economy. In welfare programs that provide mothers’ benefits because the male has died or left, there is suspicion that all mothers could be independent from benefits through employment or a male wage earner. Therefore the state constantly searches for traces of resources, earnings or signs of a man in the house or a man in the nation. Although neoliberalism blames the individual’s behaviour for societal problems, single mothers are constructed as sharing negative stereotype traits and are depicted as an entire underclass, which is associated with unemployment, crime, drugs and welfare cheating. This was reflected in Cox and Priest’s study, which found that even single mothers who were employed and fulfilling the participation requirements were still being placed under surveillance. This indicates that all single mothers are possibly constructed as welfare cheats.

In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault argues that surveillance is used to police society and correct behaviour through instilling within the subject the belief that they are being constantly monitored for deviant behaviour in order that they will have to conform to socially prescribed desired behaviour. Foucault uses Jeremy Betham’s innovative prison design, the Panopticon, to illustrate the power of surveillance as a means to discipline and dominate the subject. Within the panopticon, prisoners are under the ever watchful eye of the prison guards, who can detect any deviate behaviour immediately. Constant surveillance and monitoring is a disciplining process whereby the prisoner loses their opportunity and capacity to deviate. While the subject knows he is being watched they do not know when they are being watched. Constant supervision and forced discipline are mechanisms designed to break the will of the subject and render them easier for those in authority to control. While the panopticon concept is a key characteristic in the design of society’s institutions, such as education and employment, its supervision and disciplinary measures externalise beyond the walls of institutions. This is a central feature of state institutions to extend their power of

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260 Ibid., 37.
261 Ibid., 27.
263 Cox and Priest, "Welfare to Work".
265 Ibid., 201.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid., 196, 266.
authority beyond their walls to gain information on people and to monitor them and coerce preferred behaviour.²⁶⁸ Foucault’s perspective reflects criticism of welfare reform made in the previous chapter by feminists, who have argued the reforms control and punish women for being outside the confines of the traditional family and are intent upon making them passive consumers of welfare or forcing them back to failed relationships.²⁶⁹ Parker and Fopp also argue the surveillance system reflects Foucault’s theories on technologies of discipline and power.²⁷⁰ Parker and Fopp argue welfare recipients have little choice but to accept activities that have been imposed on them to avoid surveillance and punishment, but both disciplinary techniques are used to move people off welfare.²⁷¹

Gilliom has expanded on the politics of surveillance by applying it to the welfare system, explaining that surveillance is both an expression and instrument of power and domination.²⁷² Gilliom states, surveillance is a means to control human behaviour, whether by limiting access to programs or institutions, monitoring and affecting behaviour within those arenas, or otherwise enforcing rules and norms by observing and recording acts of compliance and deviance.²⁷³ As a simple form of control, compliance is inspired through fear.²⁷⁴ While, information gathering and record keeping are part of large-scale public administration, Gilliom describes the welfare system as the most sophisticated information panopticons of modern governance.²⁷⁵

Gilliom explains that within the design of the examining eligibility for welfare assistance, is deterrence whereby applying or receiving aid is so demeaning, stigmatising and onerous that only the desperate would apply.²⁷⁶ This can include exhaustive investigations, such as means tests, labour tests, man-in-the-house-rules and scrutiny of visitors.²⁷⁷ Gilliom states that welfare programs with its emphasis on the individual need, frequent reporting, and ongoing

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 211.
²⁷¹ Ibid., 123.
²⁷² Gilliom, Overseers of the Poor: 2, 3.
²⁷³ Ibid., 3.
²⁷⁴ Ibid., 130.
²⁷⁵ Ibid., 27, 44.
²⁷⁶ Ibid., 23.
²⁷⁷ Ibid., 27.
determinations of worthiness are driven to engage in some of the most invasive forms of scrutiny imaginable. These invasive aspects, he adds, are also tied to the fact that they deal with those who are considered society’s least powerful; the poor, who are mainly minorities and are women and children. He stipulates that the system of welfare surveillance is specifically designed to prevent material improvements and eliminate personal control and autonomy, through its search for those that may be in violation of the regulations within the policy.

Gilliom’s US research, conducted in the 1990s focused on approximately 50 single mothers in the welfare system and found the surveillance system hindered these women’s ability to meet the needs of their families and their duty to care for their children. They were also subject to degradation, shame, stigma, humiliation and intimidation, despite the fact that these women were in desperate need of benefits, including those who had health issues. Gilliom focused also on how the women survived on insufficient welfare payment benefits, which involved activities that could not be detected by the surveillance system, such as trading food stamps and receiving gifts instead of cash to make ends meet. Gilliom relates these activities to the ‘politics of resistance’, which encompasses the everyday struggles of the powerless as they work with limited resources to fight the powerful as best as they can. Gilliom states that while the surveillance system is aimed at ferreting out and eliminating fraud in welfare programs, hungry children, needy families and those with unmet health needs are overlooked.

Financial disadvantages associated with the surveillance system can be seen as a form of punishment for being on income support and used to coerce people out of the system. For example Connelly and Murphy found that mothers were required to attend Centrelink interviews on days when they are working, jeopardising their current job position and suspending payments if they prioritise their job over the interview. McArthur, Thomson, Winkworth and Butler’s 2009 study, consisting of 80 parents (51 per cent single parents)

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278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid., 7, 120.
281 Ibid.
282 Ibid., 53,54, 65.
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid., 12.
285 Ibid., 128.
286 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
receiving Centrelink payments examined families with complex needs in a bid to develop a better understanding.\textsuperscript{287} They found mothers were cut off income support when Centrelink wanted them to provide information they had already, which tended to happen at critical times such as when rent and bills were due.\textsuperscript{288} The research literature on \textit{Welfare to Work} reflects that Centrelink and employment services used humiliation, intimidation and degradation tactics on single mothers as well as constant surveillance, leaving them feel stigmatised and demoralised.\textsuperscript{289}

Notably, fraud surveillance has a higher priority than ensuring people are receiving the correct entitlements. Baker’s analysis of the 2009 Australian Government’s Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Australia (HILDA) and ABS data estimated that 168,275 parents were not claiming payments, saving the government $623.8 million.\textsuperscript{290} Baker states this amount is one-and-a-half times the amount of ineligible or fraudulent payments identified by Centrelink in 2008–09. Overall a total of 1.3 million people were estimated to be missing out on payments worth $4.8 billion per year, indicating that Centrelink were not informing people of their entitlements.\textsuperscript{291} While the system places more emphasis on detecting fraud to reduce the numbers on income support, people in need miss out. Clearly this could be detrimental to a mother trying to leave a domestically violent relationship.

While the surveillance system monitors Centrelink recipients for welfare fraud, the literature suggests that all single mothers are constructed as welfare cheats. While the measure is stigmatising, prioritising surveillance interviews can lead to jeopardising mothers’ jobs. This can financially disadvantage them through loss of employment hours or their job, which can leave mothers having to be more reliant on Centrelink benefits. While the literature has incorporated single mothers’ experiences, it is unknown how those who experience domestic violence fare.

\textsuperscript{287} McArthur et al., "Getting What We Need".
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{289} Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."; Teresa Grahame and Greg Marston, "Welfare-to-Work Policies and the Experience of Employed Single Mothers on Income Support in Australia: Where are the Benefits," \textit{Australian Social Work} 65, no. 1 (2012); McArthur et al., "Getting What We Need".
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid., 14.
Education and skills development

When *Welfare to Work* was introduced concerns were raised about the effects the policy would have on disadvantaged groups that had low education attainment and limited employment skills, at a time when there was a recognised skill shortage in the labour market.²⁹² Both the Howard Government and the following Labor Government claimed that *Welfare to Work* would support single parents in gaining skills and finding sustainable employment.²⁹³ Education and skill development under *Welfare to Work* has two key features: the employment service model and the aligning of payments to the recipients’ activity. The following sections examine the literature first on the employment service system, and then how the lower payments, such as Austudy may impact on single mothers wanting to pursue further education.

Employment services

The JNW was developed in 1997 by the Howard Government. This quasi market model was seen as a means to reduce beurocracy and create greater flexibility and less regulation. This gave frontline workers greater discretion and power in delegating decisions.²⁹⁴ Under this privatised system, payments and incentives for JNW agencies focused on employment outcomes when clients exited the social security system, instead of skill development that could lead to an employment outcome.²⁹⁵ With the introduction of *Welfare to Work*, single mothers were brought into this system. Although the JNW model was fraught with problems, the Howard Government maintained the JNW would address education and skill needs of job

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²⁹⁴ Considine and Lewis, "Bureaucracy, Network, or Enterprise?.”
seekers, including providing support in updating skills and qualifications. Furthermore, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) found a high level of fraudulent practices within the JNW system, which included not validating activities that attracted service fees; misuse of wage subsidies; and misuse of the Job Seeker Account (JSKA-renamed an Employment Pathway Fund (EPF) by the Labor Government). The JSKA is an amount of money credited for each job seeker to use to pay for training courses, books and equipment needed for courses, clothing and transport assistance. Despite the high level of JSKA claims, research by Jordan and Horn found that many job seekers were not informed or given access to the JSKA. While JNW agencies made profits through these practices, jobseekers missed out.

The JNW came under major criticism for being profit driven instead of client focused. Both Considine and Murray argued that the system was delivering a ‘one-size-fits-all’ service, which did not respond to jobseekers’ individual needs. This led the Labor Government to reform the employment service model. The JNW was renamed the JSA, which Labor claimed as the gateway to training and skills development and argued would encourage clients into further education. The Labor Government also claimed that it would make the legislation more flexible by enabling principal carers to combine study with employment and voluntary work to make up the required 15 hours per week. However, it is up to the

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298 Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."  
299 The Auditor-General, "Administration of the Job Seeker Account."  
300 Ibid.  
301 Jordan and Horn, "Still Looking for a Break".  
302 The Auditor-General, "Administration of the Job Seeker Account," 146.  
employment services deliberation whether a person can study or combine activities.\footnote{306 Australian Government, "3.5.1.180 Approved Activity- Study (PP)," Guide to Social Security Law,2009, http://www.facsia.gov.au/Guides_Acts/ssg/ssguide-3/ssguide-3.5/ssguide-3.5.1/ssguide-3.5.1.180.html; Australian Government, "3.2.9.100 Suitable Activity- Study & Training," Guide to Social Security Law,2010, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Guides_Acts/ssg/ssguide-3/ssguide-3.2/ssguide-3.2.9/ssguide-3.2.9.100.html.} Furthermore, the guidelines make it difficult to do so, by prioritising employment first and applying a number of conditions before a person can participate in volunteer work.\footnote{307 See Australian Government, "3.2.9.130 Suitable Activity- Voluntary Work," Guide to Social Security Law,2010, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/guidesActs/ssg/ssguide-3/suide-3.2/ssguide-3.2.9/ssguide-3.2.9.130.html.} While job seekers can be denied the opportunity to gain qualifications and skills,\footnote{308 Australian Government, "3.2.9.100 Suitable Activity- Study & Training".} employment services can set up their own training courses, which attract government funding.\footnote{309 Australian Council of Social Service, "Towards More Efficient and Responsive Employment Services: Submission to APESAA," ACOSS Paper 184,2012, http://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS_submission_to_APESAA_Jan_2012.pdf; Bowman and Horn, "The Australian Experience of Employment Services: What Have We Learnt?", in \textit{Now Its Personal: Learning from Welfare-to-Work Approaches Around the World}, ed. Dalia Ben-Galim and Alice Sachrajda (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2010).} However, the CSMC Victoria, reported skilled mothers were being forced to attend courses designed for those with little or no workplace experience.\footnote{310 Murphy et al., \textit{Half a Citizen}.} Again this suggests that the system constructs single mothers as not having any employment history.\footnote{311 Dina Bowman and Michael Horn, "The Australian Experience of Employment Services: What Have We Learnt?", in \textit{Now Its Personal: Learning from Welfare-to-Work Approaches Around the World}, ed. Dalia Ben-Galim and Alice Sachrajda (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2010).} Furthermore, Bowman and Horn in 2010 found poor training of employment service staff and the focus on meeting financial targets led to barriers such as mental health and personal issues not being identified.\footnote{312 Australian Council of Single Mothers and their Children, "Submission to the Employment Services Review".} Moreover, Bowman and Horn, and Bowman and Lawlor in 2010 along with other research found that the most disadvantaged are still not receiving any help and the system still focuses on short-term employment outcomes incentives which are embedded in fee structure.\footnote{313 Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, "The Future of Employment Services in Australia."} Similarly the Welfare Rights Centre found that employment service workers were poorly informed of the participation exemptions in relation to domestic violence and hence those affected by this issue would not be receiving the appropriate assistance or exemptions.\footnote{314 Murphy et al., \textit{Half a Citizen}.}
The literature reflects that the employment service model is inflexible and does not support education or career development and is designed to give basic skills to people who have had no employment history. Mothers are also denied the choice of education, with the power of deliberation given to employment services. Furthermore, there is no literature on how this system impacts on single mothers who have experienced violence.

**Payments**

A major component of *Welfare to Work* is the transferring of single parents from PPS to lower payments such as NSA. Changes were also made to eligibility for the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES). Single parents have to get approval to study from either Centrelink or their employment service to qualify for PES. According to Evans, domestic violence survivors utilise income support at the time of vulnerability but given sufficient time to re-establish themselves gain qualifications and are able to re-enter the workforce. However, the National Welfare Rights argue the economic disincentives associated with *Welfare to Work* will restrict single mothers in terms of skill building to attain professional jobs and will deny career opportunities, particularly to those with low education levels. The outcome will inhibit them from escaping poverty. This was evident in research by Cox and Priest who found the economic disincentives forced women to give up study and destroyed the aspirations of women considering study.

However, government public announcements have neglected to mention that single parents can be placed on Austudy, which is a payment that was originally designed for students who do not have dependent children to support. There is also a dearth of literature on the impact that lower benefits such as Austudy have on single mothers who have experienced violence. Austudy is another economic disincentive for single mothers wanting to gain employment skills through education. Not only does Austudy pay a lower rate than NSA, but it renders mothers ineligible for the Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), which is a huge loss. The PCC entitles them to discounts on services such as public transport, rail services, council and water rates, utilities, motor vehicle registration, mail redirection, education, plus additional health.

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317 Michael Raper cited in Adele Horin, "Another Blow to Disabled, Sole Parents," *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 19, 2005; Coad et al., "Welfare to Work or Unworkable Welfare?".
318 Michael Raper cited in Horin, "Another Blow to Disabled, Sole Parents."; Coad et al., "Welfare to Work or Unworkable Welfare?".
319 Cox and Priest, "Welfare to Work".
and recreational concessions. Those on Austudy are also not entitled to the Job, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA), or the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES).

While single mothers are constructed as having low employment participation rates, research does not indicate single mothers’ lack employment ethic or motivation to improve their employability. Indeed, studies have found that most single mothers are employed, having a higher employment rate than other welfare recipient groups, and are more likely to be studying. According to the ABS in 2010, single mothers were twice as likely as partnered parents to be studying to attain qualifications (14 per cent compared to 7 per cent, respectively). Education was an important factor for women who had experienced domestic violence, particularly when ex-partners had previously restricted their employment participation, thus leaving them with a low income earning capacity when they separated. McInnes’s research in 1994 on 36 single mothers (62 per cent being domestic violence survivors) found mothers had a strong work ethic, with 50 per cent studying to update or improve their employment prospects after separation. Study gave mothers more flexibility to care for their children. Green’s study consisting of interviews and survey questions, examined the experiences of 12 single mothers in the context of Welfare to Work in an attempt to broaden the understanding of violence and to promote safe learning spaces. She found that mothers felt empowered through education, but having to care for traumatised children complicated their ability to study. However, Green’s study focused more on ways for women to feel safe in educational institutions and did not set out to examine single mothers’ perspectives of Welfare to Work.

322 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
323 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
324 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
325 McInnes, "Public Policy and Private Lives.", 302.
326 McInnes, "Public Policy and Private Lives.", 302.
327 McInnes, "Public Policy and Private Lives.", 302.
328 Ibid.
329 Ibid.
330 Ibid.
331 Ibid.
Overall lower paying benefits such as NSA and Austudy act as financial deterrents to study and again do not support education or career development. For women who have previously been inhibited by a violent partner, the opportunity to improve their skills is now inhibited by the welfare system and in the long term will prevent them from escaping poverty. These features of *Welfare to Work* deny single mothers’ citizens’ rights of choice and can be seen as contributing to the feminisation of poverty. Furthermore, the reduction in payments reflects Walby’s theory that the state is maintaining patriarchal rights through denying women alternative support from violent men.330

**Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the theoretical and political context of domestic violence, whereby feminist perspectives and initiatives to the problem have only entered the political arena in recent times and have been short lived due to the emergence of neoliberalism. Under the guise of equality, neoliberal initiatives within domestic violence policy and other intersecting policies, maintain dominant beliefs about violence being an individual problem associated with socio-economic status and unemployment. Along with mother-blaming and beliefs that women’s accounts of violence are fabricated, neoliberal initiatives help to support male property rights and perpetuates the invisibility of violence against women and children within all social institutions. In turn, this preserves male rights to continue violence, long after separation. Moreover, financial losses through domestic violence and family court determinations are contributing factors to women’s poverty, which is ignored within the *Welfare to Work* policy.

After reviewing literature on the *Welfare to Work* policy and examining the key features of the legislation, it was possible to consider how these may impact on single mothers who have experienced violence. Like the family law system, the welfare system constructs mothers as neither earners nor workers, reinforcing the perspective that poverty and homelessness is a woman’s problem, which can be solved through employment. However, these systems work against women’s financial independence by systematically placing mothers at risk and hiding the economic abuses and violence to which they are subjected within social systems. Furthermore, the impact of violence and family law matters on mothers’ ability to comply with welfare-to-work programs has not been considered by policy makers. Meanwhile

330 Walby, *Patriarchy at Work*: 64.
perpetrators use legal systems to continue to harass and stalk women. Subsequently, the welfare policy has reduced domestic violence to a minimalist view that such violence only occurs at separation, not accounting for post-separation violence nor the ongoing ramifications. Moreover, this view completely ignores violence against children. The preference not to apply the participation exemption because of domestic violence, suggests that violence is perceived as having little impact on women’s lives or is being used as an excuse to avoid the job search requirements.

While social inclusion measures promote employment as the best way to deal with domestic violence, loss of autonomy and financial disincentives associated with Welfare to Work impede education and career development and increase the risk of poverty and homelessness for single mothers. Although the literature reflected that there are a number of problems with Welfare to Work in relation to single mothers and their caring responsibilities, in general there is a lack of literature relating to those who have experienced domestic violence. The absence of these mothers’ voices perpetuates the problem of violence being invisible in society and within policy formulation. A more specific study is needed to evaluate the impact Welfare to Work has on single mothers and their children who have experienced domestic violence, so policy can be formulated specifically to support these women and their children. We turn now to examine the methodology employed in this study. The following chapter outlines the design of the research, recruitment processes, difficulties, limitations and ethical considerations.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction
One of the aims of this research was to situate domestic violence visibly within the Welfare to Work debate, as domestic violence is a major contributor to women entering single motherhood, poverty, homelessness and the welfare system.\(^1\) It is intended that this research will make recommendations for change to Australian welfare policy and inform policy makers and practitioners of the challenges facing those who have experienced violence.

This chapter discusses the methodology of this research, and includes the purpose of the research, the research orientation, methods, data collection, recruitment of participants and characteristics, data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations. The research was a national study and involved semi-structured interviews with single mothers, women’s emergency service workers, and staff employed within the welfare system, including a Centrelink staff member, an employment services worker, and a job capacity assessor.

Research design
This research adopts Harding’s and Smith’s feminist standpoint approach, to place single mothers’ voices at the forefront of the research, to generate knowledge from their experiences and to make visible the structures that serve to maintain women’s subordination.\(^2\) Deriving from the critical social science approach, feminist standpoint research examines gendered structured power relations within society with the aim of empowering those who are marginalised, as well as facilitating progressive social change.\(^3\) According to Harding, feminist standpoint theory evolved in the 1970’s and expanded on Marxian analysis of the

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‘standpoint of the proletariat’, to explain how the structural relationships between women and men had consequences for the production of knowledge.⁴

Feminist standpoint theory challenges conventional epistemologies that universalise human experiences through a genderless perspective of the world.⁵ While conventional epistemologies claim to be grounded scientifically, feminist standpoint theory asserts that all knowledge is socially constructed.⁶ The failure to acknowledge this can lead to the reproduction of dominant views of the world, which do not correspond with experiences of marginalised lives, and serves to legitimise oppressive polices.⁷

Standpoint, as the term suggests, situates the research from the position of the participants. Although feminist standpoint theory has been criticised for this point,⁸ Harding and Smith argue strongly that knowledge is socially organised and mediated to us by those from the top of the social hierarchy.⁹ Moreover, those at the top use knowledge to organise those on the bottom of the social hierarchy, ignoring their lived experience.¹⁰ Harding argues that starting from a woman’s standpoint “will generate questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives”.¹¹ Feminist standpoint theorists argue that women’s experiences are the best starting point to generate knowledge in order to examine how their lives are shaped by the dominant institutional beliefs and practices.¹² Therefore women’s lives, not the researchers’ or policy makers’ provide better grounds for generating knowledge through their experiences and activities.¹³ This research specifically set out to highlight the perspectives and experiences of the single mothers within the research sample, so that their lived experiences could be made visible.

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⁴ Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 54.
⁶ Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 54.
¹⁰ Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 54.
¹¹ Ibid., 56.
¹² Ibid., 68; See also Smith, "Women's Standpoint."
¹³ Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology."
This research used qualitative methods. Feminists are highly critical of positivism, which has been described by Smith and Harding as androcentric and perpetuating the invisibility of women’s experiences.\textsuperscript{14} According to Marsh and Furlong, positivists believe that knowledge of the real world can only be produced through scientific methods that use theory to test hypothesis, with the primary goal to generalise research findings to wider population.\textsuperscript{15} However, as Harding points out, these theories usually represent the dominant classes’ views and reproduce sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist perspectives views of the world.\textsuperscript{16} Smith argues that women’s experiences of giving birth, mothering, caring for others and domestic labour have been invisible in formulating knowledge, theory and policy, because they are not the experiences of men who occupy positions of dominance.\textsuperscript{17} She argues in this way, sociocultural perspectives are produced that represent the interests of one sex and one class; that is the male elite.\textsuperscript{18} Harding explains that while marginalised persons’ experiences are devalued or ignored as a source of objectivity, their experiences have also been shaped by the beliefs of those who make policies and engage in social practices.\textsuperscript{19}

These sentiments resonate within the welfare reform discourse where the voices of single mothers have been generally unheard. Throughout the reforms, single mothers have been constructed as unemployed workers who are passively welfare dependent, without acknowledging their care responsibilities, employment experiences and attachment to the labour market or volunteer work.\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, welfare reform policy does not give weight to gendered barriers to employment, such as the experience of domestic violence and other structural disadvantages within the labour market, exemplified by the gendered division of labour and lower wages for women.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.; Smith, "Women's Standpoint."
\textsuperscript{16} Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 60.
\textsuperscript{17} Smith, "Women's Standpoint," 179.
\textsuperscript{19} Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 54.
From a feminist standpoint approach, this research critically assesses the neoliberal philosophy underlying welfare reforms, and examines whether the policy promotes and maintains patriarchal interests, that may place single mothers at risk of poverty or further violence.\textsuperscript{21} The practice of feminist standpoint research not only encompasses revaluing women’s unpaid mothering activities, but also critiques male domination (patriarchy) and works towards ending male oppression.\textsuperscript{22}

**Strength of qualitative research**

Feminist standpoint methodology takes an inclusive approach in acknowledging the diversity of women’s lived experiences.\textsuperscript{23} Through qualitative methods, these differences can be explored and, as Letherby states, this allows women to speak for themselves, which is likely to produce work that can be used to challenge stereotypes.\textsuperscript{24} Qualitative methods can illustrate the complexities associated with domestic violence and the *Welfare to Work* policy. According to Neuman, a major problem with quantitative approaches is that they ignore socially structured disadvantages and power relations.\textsuperscript{25} Schwartz found this to be a problem with quantitative research on domestic violence, even though surveys had been the most common form of research method used in this field.\textsuperscript{26} He points out that these studies have limitations and tend not to capture the many different forms of violence and the differences in power relations between men and women.\textsuperscript{27}

Through qualitative methods, this thesis intends to examine the gendered and structural disadvantages that single mothers may face, as well as facilitate their voices. Some quantitative data, such as single mothers’ labour market participation rates and education levels, are presented to complement the qualitative data and to enable comparisons with government research findings and claims relating to *Welfare to Work*. However, to address the research question and to highlight the single mothers’ experiences, qualitative methods were deemed the best approach. This study did not set out to ascertain how many women who had experienced violence were in the welfare system or how many had the same

\textsuperscript{21}Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology.”; Smith, "Women's Standpoint.”
\textsuperscript{22}Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology.”
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.; Smith, "Women's Standpoint.”
\textsuperscript{25}Neuman, *Social Science Methods*.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
perspectives of the welfare system, which would have required a quantitative approach. The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of single mothers within the Welfare to Work system, who had experienced domestic violence. Therefore, a feminist standpoint approach, which is compatible with qualitative methods, was seen as the most appropriate method to use to examine the impact violence and the welfare legislation had on these women.

**Limits and strengths of insider research**

Prior to the introduction of the Welfare to Work reforms, the researcher was a single mother, raising a child alone, without the support of a partner or family. Although the researcher was mainly employed, as well as studying throughout those years, she recognised the negative single mother stereotype was applied to push her out of employment and education settings and as a way to devalue her opinions, ideas and achievements. This experience of stigmatisation led the researcher to investigate Welfare to Work and more broadly single mothers’ experiences of policy.

Although insider research has come under criticism for creating bias based on the researcher’s beliefs and connections to certain cultural groups, an insider perspective was seen more as a strength than a weakness in this study. As Macartney and Asselin point out, having a common bond is helpful to establish rapport and to build a researcher/participant relationship. This was also seen as a strength in applying a feminist approach as the method adheres to participants and researchers being treated as equals. Another strength of insider research is that the researcher is able to generate questions and theories that other researchers may not think of, particularly if they have no experience of a specific culture. For instance, due to the researcher’s experience she was also aware that single mothers were not a homogenous group, but belonged to a diverse number of cultural and socio-economic

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backgrounds. To garner these multiple experiences required attentive listening and cultural sensitivity. The researcher was able to anticipate that there would be different experiences and differing views on how single mothers perceived other single mothers.

Asselin states that a criticism of insider research has been that there is a tendency for the researcher to assume to know the culture, limiting the researcher to probe for deeper meaning. Lincoln and Guba also refer to this problem as ‘going native’ with prolonged engagement of subjects. However, in a number of cases the researcher did not share or relate to views or experiences of single mother participants. Despite differences or similarities in opinion, which were discussed in great detail with supervisors and in written notes, the researcher focused on what was relevant to the topic, as advised by Lincoln and Guber. The researcher was looking specifically at how the participants experienced the Welfare to Work system in relation to the legislations guidelines. While Harding argues no research is value free, the researcher employed a number of methods to counteract the possibility of bias. This was done through iterative questioning to clarify comments and ensure that the information was consistent. In situations where the participants assumed the researcher would know what they meant, the researcher asked the respondent to describe what they meant. The researcher made memos and looked for consistency of similarities in the data, between the different participant groups and other documented research. Prolonged engagement with the project enabled the researcher to consider carefully different issues that were raised and debriefed with peers on issues that had raised emotions. This helped to keep focus on the research question.

Asselin states that researchers need to be aware of their moods as this can influence what participants say or are willing to share. The researcher took great care in presenting herself as approachable and not responding emotionally when participants made comments that could incite a reaction. Instead the researcher asked the participant why they felt that way or

32 Asselin, "Insider Research," 100.
33 Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry: 304.
34 Ibid.
35 Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology."
37 Kanuha, "Being Native Versus Going Native."
39 Lincoln and Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry.
40 Asselin, "Insider Research," 102.
how they had come to that conclusion. Telephone interviewing was helpful in that participants could not see the researcher’s facial expressions and could not react to this.

Having been an advocate for women and children who had experienced domestic violence and sexual assault, also prepared the researcher to be mindful that participants may broach sensitive subjects that would require intense listening and empathy. While insider research has been criticised as distorting data analysis objectivity through emotional attachment, feminist approaches view emotional attachment as a learning experience for the researcher, to see the world through the perspective of the participant, as all knowledge claims are socially situated. Lincoln and Guba point out that essentially the data analysis process is to identify the key characteristics and elements that are most relevant to the research problem, regardless of the emotional attachment.

**Recruitment of participants and samples**

The method of sampling was purposive for each of the participant groups. Qualitative research usually depends on a small sample and purposive sampling allows the researcher to seek certain participants that fit the criteria in relation to the research project. This research project sought single mothers whose youngest dependent child was aged six years or more and who had left a violent or abusive partner and had experienced the *Welfare to Work* participation requirements. The project also sought women’s emergency service workers and employees from Centrelink and employment service agencies to gain their perspectives on how single mothers who had experienced domestic violence were dealt with within the welfare system.

**Single mother sample**

To recruit single mother participants, contact was made with numerous services (as detailed below in Table 3.1) that would have contact with single mothers, and with women fleeing domestic violence, and needing accommodation or support. These agencies are listed in Appendix A. Contact was made via email, telephone and in person. Coordinators and staff in Adelaide services gave permission for participation recruitment flyers to be placed on

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41 Ibid.; Kanuha, "Being Native Versus Going Native."
42 Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 54, 68.
notice boards, published in newsletters and circulated throughout their networks. The recruitment flyer was also placed on the websites of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children (NCSMC) and on the Solo others email list (see Appendix B).

Twenty five single mothers responded and twenty three participated in this study and received a $20 gift voucher as an appreciation of their valuable time. Table 3.1 below shows through which organisations the single mother participants had found out about the research.

Table 3.1 Single mother recruitment sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo mothers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients of women’s emergency services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers from women’s emergency services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community centres</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCSMC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The single mother sample consisted of 23 mothers. One of the mothers did have a child under the age of six years. The reason she was interviewed was because when she contacted the researcher she said that she had been informed by Centrelink that she was going to be placed on a different payment rate when her child turned six years. This did not correspond with the legislation, which stipulates principal carers qualify for PPS until their youngest child turns eight years.45

Single mother participants came from both rural and regional areas within five Australian states. The number of participants from each state is illustrated below in Table 3.2 below.

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Table 3.2 Single mother participants and Australian state of residency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian state</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Single mother participants came from a range of nine different cultural backgrounds but the majority were Australian as detailed in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Single mother participants’ cultural background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural background</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Celtic Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern Australian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The women’s ages ranged from 27 to 50 years with 42 years being both the median and mean age.

All mothers had school-aged children. The size of single mother families are detailed in Table 3.4 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children per family</th>
<th>Number of single mothers</th>
<th>Total number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where mothers had four children, they were still required to abide by the *Welfare to Work* participation requirements once their eldest child had turned 16 years of age, as they were then no longer classified as dependants, even when the child was still in education and dependent, and this was the case for two women. Of the 23 mothers, nine had primary school children only, two had high school children only and 12 had both primary and high school children.

**Women’s Emergency Services staff sample**

Women’s emergency service staff who made contact with the researcher regarding recruitment of single mother participants, were also invited to participate. Of the women emergency service workers who were interviewed, one from Adelaide, South Australia (SA), was interviewed face-to-face and another in Western Australia (WA) was interviewed by telephone. One Adelaide service arranged for a group interview of six of their workers at their workplace. In total eight women’s emergency service staff were interviewed. These interviews were mainly conducted during the beginning of the research stage, as they were first to respond to the participation invitation.

**Centrelink staff sample**

In 2009, 14 Centrelink offices in the Adelaide metropolitan area were contacted by letter inviting social workers and case workers to participate in the research (see Appendix C). The one Centrelink employee who did respond in 2010, heard about the research from associates in the women’s services sector and participated as a private citizen. The interview was conducted by telephone as the participant was interstate.
Employment service staff sample

Participation information letters were sent to 42 employment service agencies in the Adelaide metropolitan area. A director from a national social service agency circulated emails to their employment agencies, nationally. Two of the main national providers of employment services were contacted to recruit employment service staff and job capacity assessors. These services circulated an internal email with the research flyer to all their agencies informing them of the research. The employment service employee, who finally did respond, was recruited through the snowballing effect, where the individual had heard of the research through an associate of the researcher. The telephone interview took place in 2010.

Job capacity assessor sample

To recruit job capacity assessors, information about the research was circulated through employment services throughout Australia, as some of these organisations employ assessors. The researcher rang several agencies, before finding one assessor who agreed to be interviewed by telephone.

Recruitment difficulties

Single mother recruitment

While many community and women’s services circulated the research recruitment flyers, several did not want to inform women of the research, on the grounds that it would upset the women or that they did not see any benefits for women participating. At one community centre that had regular migrant female clients, the male coordinator stated that it was not in these women’s interests to be informed of the research or participate, on the grounds that the researcher would not pay him or the women a considerable sum of money. This was an example of where service staff, with the mandate to help and encourage the development and empowerment of women, removed women’s choices of making a decision for themselves. In this particular case, it was due to the male co-ordinator not being able to make a monetary gain. Paying a large sum of money was not seen as ethical and could have potentially compromised the integrity of the research project. As pointed out by Head, this could attract people who may try to falsely present as fitting the participant criteria, or tell the researcher

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what they think she wants to hear, instead of giving a genuine account of their experience.\textsuperscript{47} Cash payments to respondents would have also compromised the ethics approval of the study, which only endorsed giving single mother participants a $20 gift voucher.

\textbf{Recruitment difficulties with other stakeholders}

\textbf{Centrelink recruitment}

After contacting the Centrelink offices in Adelaide, the researcher was contacted by Centrelink and requested to enter into an agreement with them, which required the submission of any document produced from the research to be provided to Centrelink. The researcher was informed that the agreement would require that any research documentation and presentations must not pose a risk to Centrelink, which was explained as meaning Centrelink did not want any negative publicity. The researcher did not enter into this agreement. Removal of any criticisms that the research may reveal would not provide an accurate assessment of the impact the reforms on single mothers and their families. Therefore the researcher was unable to contact Centrelink staff and recruitment had to rely on staff hearing about the research.

\textbf{Employment services recruitment}

Of the 42 employment service agencies in Adelaide that were contacted only two agencies responded, one stipulated they did not have single mothers as clientele, the other agreed to staff being interviewed. An interview appointment was made at the agency’s office but the interviewee did not turn up. There was no response from the national social service agency; although they had circulated an email to all their employment agencies informing them of the research. After the 1 July 2009 changes to employment services, existing agencies connected to this service were telephoned on two occasions to invite them to participate, but there was still no response. There was also no response from the two of the main national providers of employment services, who circulated an internal email with the research flyer to all their agencies informing them of the research.

\textbf{Job capacity assessor recruitment}

Employment services were also asked if they could circulate the research flyer to their job capacity assessors. However, there was no response.

Value of interviewing

In accordance with a feminist standpoint approach, the major part of this research involved conducting interviews with single mothers who had experienced domestic violence in a bid to gain their perspectives and their experiences of the Welfare to Work reforms introduced in July 2006. While primacy was given to collecting the single mothers’ accounts, interviews were also conducted with women’s emergency agency workers, a Centrelink worker, an employment service worker and a job capacity assessor. These interviews were undertaken to gain background detail on agencies’ knowledge of the policy, its procedures and how it was being applied to women who have experienced domestic violence. These perspectives, particularly those of single mothers, are largely missing from the government’s community consultancy process and policy formulation. To gain these valuable insights into the lives of this cohort of women, interviews were semi-structured involving open-ended questions. This also gave the women the opportunity to relay their experience. Schwartz points out the advantages of this type of interview method is that it allows the respondent to come up with problems that may not have occurred to the researcher, giving the researcher an opportunity to explore these issues further. Furthermore, Schwartz states researchers can also probe to get a response from participants, where compared to a survey, if respondents leave blank answers these questions are not usable. Moreover, this qualitative method of interviewing is compatible with a feminist standpoint approach and enabled the researcher to explore single mothers’ perspectives and realities, in a bid to generate theory and further knowledge about the lives of these women, who have experienced domestic violence, and who are subjected to Welfare to Work policies.

Interview data sources

Interviews were conducted from April 2009 to August 2010. Interviews with 23 single mothers provided information on their experiences of the participation requirements with Centrelink and employment services, the administration of exemptions, as well as the impact that Welfare to Work and domestic violence has had on their lives (see interview schedule-Appendix D). The eight women’s emergency service staff were interviewed to gather data on what they identified as the needs of mothers and children, and what experiences they

50 Ibid., 827.
51 Oakley, "Interviewing Women."; Reinharz, Feminist Methods in Social Research.
encountered whilst working with mothers who are affected by the Welfare to Work policy. An additional three interviews were conducted with a Centrelink employee, an employment service employee and a job capacity assessor, to ascertain these workers’ perspectives on the Welfare to Work policy and on the delivery of programs and exemptions to single mothers who have experienced domestic violence.

Except for two single mother participants who were interviewed face-to-face, the remainder were telephone interviews. The Centrelink employee, employment service employee and job capacity assessor were interviewed by telephone due to their interstate location. Telephone interviewing proved to be the most convenient method as the study was conducted on a national level throughout Australia. Due to the geographical dispersion of participants, it would have not been possible to do face-to-face interviews with interstate participants or those living in remote areas. Telephone interviewing is also considered to have a higher response rate where topics approach sensitive areas, such as the experience of violence and stigmatisation, as the method offers participants more anonymity. This method was also considered a safer option for both the participant and the researcher as being stalked by ex-partners is common behaviour of domestic violence perpetrators. Currie and Maclean state that women have been placed at risk when interviewed in the home in face-to-face situations, but women can hang up during a telephone interview if they believe they have an intruder. According to Opdenakker, although telephone interviewing reduces social cues, such as body language, other social cues, such as tone of voice are enough to interpret the interviewees’ reactions. Feminist research methods emphasise the importance of listening and understanding women’s account of their experience, therefore changes in voice tone or pauses prompted the researcher to enquire whether the participant was alright or to explain the question if necessary.

53 Opdenakker, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques."
54 TK Logan and Robert Walker, "Partner Stalking: Psychological Dominance or "Business as Usual"?," *Trauma Violence & Abuse* 20, no. 10 (2009).
56 Opdenakker, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques," 5.
Participants within the Adelaide region could choose whether they preferred a face-to-face interview or a telephone interview. All except two chose to be interviewed via telephone, due to time constraints with caring for school age children, employment and training demands. One face-to-face interview took place within the vicinity of the university and the other, with the permission of the organisation, was conducted at a women’s emergency service. Times were allocated for interviews, which suited the women, when children were either at school or in bed, so the interview would not be disrupted or have children hearing the conversation. When participants had unexpected guests or a problem with their child, the interview was stopped and rescheduled for another time convenient for the participant. Several participants did not answer their telephone when it was time for their interview. Most of these participants later stated there had been unexpected circumstances and rescheduled for another interview time.

An Adelaide Women’s Emergency Service agreed to do a group interview at their job site. Group interviewing was not only helpful due to time restraints of the women, but also in helping stimulate participants’ recall by listening to other participants’ opinions and experiences. Frey and Fontana point out that inter-personal conflict and formed patterned relationships in group interviews may pressure others to conform to the group’s opinion, stifling individuals’ opinions and that this could create a level of false information or awareness of the research problem. This did not seem to be a problem in this situation, where the workers were forward in sharing their experiences of working with women in crisis who came under the Welfare to Work policy. In accordance with feminist methods, the group interview also enabled the researcher to share information on the Welfare to Work guidelines, with the intention that this would help workers when advocating for women.

### Collecting data

Basic demographic data were collected including: participants’ age, number of children, children’s ages, and ethnicity. Names were changed to ensure the participants privacy and anonymity. Questions were asked about:

- sources of income,

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59 Ibid., 185.
60 Oakley, "Interviewing Women."; Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. 
• transition to single motherhood,
• arrangements with property and children,
• experience of violence and safety issues,
• behaviours by ex-partners that sabotage work and study goals,
• experiences with women’s emergency services,
• education level and labour market experience and current status,
• experiences with Centrelink and employment services under the *Welfare to Work* policy.

Interviews, on average, took between 40 minutes to an hour.

Women’s emergency service workers were asked questions relating to:
• the impact *Welfare to Work* has on their clients,
• applying for participation requirement exemptions due to domestic violence,
• the effectiveness of exemptions and the policy—see interview schedule Appendix E.

The Centrelink workers, the employment service worker and the job capacity assessor were asked questions about:
• the number of single mothers they had had contact with, who had experienced domestic violence,
• the process of responding to domestic violence,
• exemption processes,
• training processes relating to domestic violence—see interview schedules Appendix F, G and H.

**Data analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded and participants chose a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were transcribed and all personal identifying information was removed from transcripts.\(^{61}\) In analysing the single mother participant transcripts NVivo was used to code and organise the data into thematic categories.\(^{62}\) The data were first coded into categories in NVivo that corresponded with the questionnaire. These categorical groups were: single mother data, abuse, labour force participation, mothering,

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\(^{61}\) Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*.

Welfare to Work, well-being, and experiences of women’s emergency services. The data were then analysed for patterns and themes. For each of the categorical groups, tree nodes were created so that when themes were identified, quotes could be cut out and sorted into sub-category nodes that corresponded with specific categorical groups that represented the research questions.63 These were descriptively coded. For instance, the abuse category incorporated sub-category nodes that were related to different themes linked to violence. These themes were economic abuse prior to separation, legal and child protection systems, child contact and safety, property settlements, child support and Family Tax Benefit, and employment and study sabotage. These themes reflected areas where women and children were susceptible to violence and economic abuses. Other codes were created when something different appeared within the data that was relevant to the research. The NVivo program was used because it facilitated the researcher to place data into several different categories and to access categories easily, saving time.64 Notes and memos were made by the researcher throughout the analysis process, although a formal reflective journal was not kept. These notes were reflected upon throughout the analysis and helped direct the research process.

A thematic analysis method was used and emerging patterns, themes and stories were identified. This method is compatible with a feminist standpoint approach as it allows the experiences of the participants to be reported and the narratives of their stories to be used to make points about issues that impact on their lives.65 Discerning themes was accomplished through analysing the data, while primarily focusing on the research questions and the theoretical framework of the research, as described by Braun and Clarke.66 This included identifying areas of the Welfare to Work policy that disadvantaged women because they experienced domestic violence and had caring responsibilities. The researcher also looked at how, in practice, issues of violence were identified by workers in the welfare system and what supports were offered. Attention was also given to how the policy impacted on single mothers and their children who have experienced violence. Patterns that resembled similar experiences by single mothers were then categorised into a theme.67

64 Bazeley, Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo.
67 Ibid.; Willis, “Analysing Qualitative Data.”
Comparisons were made with the themes that were found within the data with the expectations and proposed benefits of the *Welfare to Work Act*. In accordance with feminist approaches, the data were also examined for areas that may perpetuate gender, race and class inequalities, oppression and violence. Interview data are presented in thematic form, to provide a rich insight into daily lives of single mothers and their experiences of specific events in relation to domestic violence and the *Welfare to Work* system. Quotations were selected and are presented as examples and evidence for the arguments being made.

**Trustworthiness of qualitative research**

There has been much debate about the trustworthiness of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both methods differ considerably with quantitative research reliant upon statistical data, which measures the frequency of incidences within a social or political phenomenon to draw conclusions and test hypotheses. According to Devine, qualitative methods, in contrast, have a strong emphasis on gaining insights into the ways people live and how they behave in certain contexts. This method focuses on the perspectives of the interviewees, which then generates theory on social and political issues. While quantitative research commonly uses data to test a theory to explain behaviour, qualitative research examines peoples’ lives and behaviour in order to generate theory. While traditionally quantitative methods have been aligned with positivism, and qualitative methods are aligned with interpretive epistemology, Read and Marsh concede that this rigid division is eroding and that researchers are no longer restricted to methods that are not orientated with their epistemological position. Instead, the research method needs to be based on the best way to answer the research question. However, measuring trustworthiness is problematic for both research methods. As found by Schwartz, quantitative studies of domestic violence that have

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69 Neuman, *Social Science Methods*.
70 Bazeley, *Qualitative Data Analysis*; Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology."
75 Read and Marsh, "Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methods " 233.
76 John, "Quantitative Methods."; Read and Marsh, "Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methods ".

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claimed that their methods address the criteria for measuring trustworthiness, exhibit numerous discrepancies in the extent of violence against women.\footnote{Schwartz, "Methodological Issues in the Use of Survey Data."} In quantitative research the four criteria to measure trustworthiness are validity, generalisability, reliability and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba argue these criteria are inappropriate to apply to qualitative methods.\footnote{Lincoln and Guba, \textit{Naturalistic Inquiry}: 290, 95.} Instead, they have devised alternative criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability) to address the truth value of qualitative inquiry.\footnote{Ibid.} This research adopted these techniques to ensure trustworthiness.

**Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba suggest that to ensure credibility the researcher needs to demonstrate she has engaged in activities such as persistent observation and triangulation.\footnote{Ibid., 301.} In terms of triangulation of data sources, credibility was reflected through consistency of similarities in the information both workers and single mother participants disclosed, as well as through documentary research.\footnote{Barbour, "Checklists for Improving Rigour in Qualitative Research."; Frey and Fontana, "The Group Interview in Social Research."; Lincoln and Guba, \textit{Naturalistic Inquiry}.} For instance, the majority of the participants were not aware of exemption processes or the correct participation requirements, which reflected potential problems with the delivery of information of the \textit{Welfare to Work} policy and prompted further investigation. Credibility was enhanced when interviews conducted with those who worked in the welfare system provided similar stories to the other participant groups. Even where the welfare service workers opinions of the welfare system differed from the rest of the sample, these interviews reflected issues that had been raised by other participants. This study’s claim to credibility emerges through its intense focus on interview data.

Documentary research was used to help verify the participants’ reports and establish credibility. This included research literature on the US welfare reforms and \textit{Welfare to Work}; Australian and international research literature on domestic violence; Australian Government reports and inquiries; Hansard estimates; submissions from welfare lobby groups, such as the NWRN and CSMC, and data from the ABS on domestic violence, and labour market participation and education levels on single mothers. Lincoln and Guba also recommend testing for misinformation to establish credibility.\footnote{Lincoln and Guba, \textit{Naturalistic Inquiry}: 301.} This incorporated using iterative
questioning (probes) during interviews to clarify comments and elicit details from participants to ensure that information was consistent. Participants were also asked if they would like a copy of their transcript to review and ensure the transcription was correct. This gave participants an opportunity to correct any errors, as well as the opportunity to volunteer further information or give feedback.

**Transferability**

Since qualitative research deals with a small number of participants, Lincoln and Guba argue that generalisability of such projects is not possible. Instead they propose that the researcher can only provide a thick description of the research problem, how the research was conducted and the data collected to establish transferability in the population from which it was drawn. While this detail has been provided, the similarity in participants’ reports on *Welfare to Work* and the findings identified a number of patterns that make transferability possible. For instance, all of the single mother participants were not informed of exemption entitlements from the participation requirements. Their reports were corroborated by other participant groups in the study. It is possible then to make an inference that many other single mothers, who have experienced domestic violence, in the welfare system, have also been misinformed of their rights and entitlements and that this may be a recognisable pattern in the larger population.

**Dependability**

For positivists to address reliability they must show that if the research was replicated they would get similar results. However, as Lincoln and Guba point out qualitative researchers acknowledge that human experiences change and are not static; therefore a repeated project may not produce the same results. For instance the continual decrease in income support and other unexpected life circumstances may inhibit single mothers in making the same choices as those made by the mothers in this study. Instead Lincoln and Guba propose that the research project needs to exhibit dependability. This is similar to credibility and incorporates triangulation and supplying in-depth details of the research design and data

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84 Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*; Neuman, *Social Science Methods*.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Shenton, "Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthines."
90 Ibid., 316, 17.
findings. This research addressed the criteria of dependability through providing in-depth background to the topic and the operation of data gathering and research design and that the data support the findings and recommendations. This in turn allows future researchers not only to repeat a similar study but gives them insight into the problems faced by single mothers on income support and how the 2013 changes to the Australian welfare system may affect them.

**Confirmability**

In qualitative methods the corresponding concept to replace objectivity is confirmability. Lincoln and Guba state that positivists’ claim of objectivity relies on the inquiry and researcher being value-free to produce unbiased research with truth. However, as we have already ascertained, no research can be value-free. Harding states that “the more value-neutral a conceptual framework appears it is more likely to advantage the hegemonic interests of dominant groups, and less likely to detect actualities of social relations or social arrangements”. In this way, the lived experiences of those being researched are often invisible. This study has clearly stated the researcher’s background and her values and has provided a detailed account of conducting the study. Foremost, this study specifically sought to place the single mother participants’ voices in the forefront of this research as their experiences are largely missing from the government’s community consultancy process and policy formulation. Steps to ensure conformability again involved triangulation where participants’ interviews were compared with the Welfare to Work guidelines, reports, other research on Welfare to Work and similar programs in North America involving women whom had experienced domestic violence.

**Ethical considerations**

A major ethical consideration in conducting this research was to ensure the safety of both the participants and the researcher. As previously stipulated, telephone interviews were considered a safer option than conducting face-to-face interviews. This gave the participants the opportunity to hang up if they encountered any problems with ex-partners.

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90 Ibid., 318; Shenton, “Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness.”
93 Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology.”; Smith, “Sociology from Women's Experience.”
94 Silver, “Understanding Social Inclusion and its Meaning for Australia.”
95 Opdenakker, “Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques.”
turning up uninvited. Although two single mother participants did opt for face-to-face interviews, one took place within the vicinity of a university and the other was conducted at a women’s emergency service. Both of these places provided a high level of security and were considered safe.

Additionally, the participants’ psychological well-being needed to be considered and the topic needed to be broached in a caring and sensitive manner. According to Schwartz, the possibility of psychological harm is often overlooked in quantitative research on domestic violence. As argued by Coker et al., unsupportive and negative responses can have adverse effects on the mental health of women who have experienced violence. The researcher was aware of these issues through being an advocate and took the utmost care to minimise any possibility of harm. The researcher informed the participants that they could stop the interview at any time and took care to note any changes in the participants’ tone of voice that might signify any distress. The researcher often debriefed with single mother participants for up to an hour after the interview. The researcher also informed the participants they could call back anytime if they wanted to discuss any issues further.

Information on Welfare to Work, concerning entitlements and options, were discussed with single mother participants. This exchange of information is a recognised feminist research practice, as the aim is to increase the participants’ knowledge of the policy and hopefully empower them when dealing with Centrelink and employment services. For others, the time was spent making sure the participant had supports and service contacts and discussing anything they wanted to talk about. Several mothers contacted the researcher after the interviews with further questions about Welfare to Work. Those who had child support queries were referred to a contact with expertise in that area.

Another ethical consideration was confidentiality and privacy of the participants’ reports. Schwartz stipulates this could be problematic if the researcher and the participant are part of the same community. While one participant knew people in the same network as the

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96 Schwartz, “Methodological Issues in the Use of Survey Data.”
98 Oakley, “Interviewing Women.”
researcher, her anonymity was maintained and any personal information about her was not divulged to any other persons. No-one but the researcher had access to transcripts.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of South Australia. The researcher initially started the project at the University of South Australia and then transferred to Southern Cross University. All respondents received an information sheet (see Appendix I and J) and consent form (see Appendix K) but were also informed verbally that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time, whereby any information collected on them would be destroyed. Single mother participants were provided with a list of counselling services and welfare advocacy contacts (see Appendix L). The consent form was also read out to participants before the interview began, in which they were again informed that participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Participants were asked if they had any questions before the interview commenced. Consent forms, recordings and transcripts have been stored separately in a locked cabinet for five years in the researcher’s office in Queensland.

**Research Limitations**

Sample size within qualitative research is often perceived as a limitation.\(^{100}\) The key limitation in this study was the small sample size of those employed at Centrelink and employment services and as a job capacity assessor, which cannot be assumed to represent other staff perceptions. However, in light of the effort made by the researcher to inform staff, the lack of response may possibly indicate a lack of interest in the topic, lack of knowledge of the topic, management prohibitions on speaking to independent researchers, or a lack of time. Centrelink’s response also highlighted that the department was not prepared to be criticised, under any circumstances. Although the sample of welfare system workers was too small to draw inferences from, their interviews did provide background information on how the legislation was being applied. Despite these limitations the sample size of the single mothers was enough to satisfy the criteria for qualitative research methods.

Research funding constraints would not allow the cost of an interpreter. This restricted participants to those having reasonable English speaking skills. Thus, while there is some

\(^{100}\) Shenton, “Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness.”
cultural diversity, the sample is not representative of women from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not fluent in English.

Lack of resources, information, time and energy may be factors that impeded women in terms of responding to the study, while other women may not identify their experience with domestic violence or may not want to remember. According to Tually, Faulkner, Cutler, and Slatter, even during national surveys on domestic violence, not all women will admit to violence because of embarrassment, shame or because they do not want to relive the trauma. Bates, Hancock and Peterkin’s research found that women raised concerns about confidentiality when accessing services for domestic violence. These factors and victim blaming attitudes may have made women reluctant to respond to the study. However, it was also problematic trying to recruit participants through services as some did not want to inform their clients of the research.

Women who had only recently separated had little knowledge of Welfare to Work, compared to those who had been separated for some time. Internet access was also a factor associated with recruitment of single mothers, as the majority found out about the research through the internet. These women had re-established homes and possessed a home computer, whereas those who had recently fled the relationship or post-separation violence had lost most of their property and with little monetary resources did not own a computer. These participants mostly found out about the research through women’s emergency services.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the purpose of the research and the methodology. In Australia, single mothers who have experienced domestic violence and Welfare to Work are absent from the welfare reform debate. The aim of this research was to examine the lived


experiences of this cohort of women and highlight the issues they are confronted with having to deal with violence and Welfare to Work. Qualitative methods proved to be the most appropriate. Moreover, applying a feminist standpoint approach facilitated placing the women’s perspectives and experiences in the forefront of this research. Despite limitations, such as the sample size of the welfare system workers, it provides rich in-depth detail of the single mothers’ experiences. Qualitative research methods also made it possible for the researcher to explore the complexities associated with domestic violence and examine structural and gendered disadvantages experienced by the women.

The following chapters examine the participants’ experiences and perceptions of the Welfare to Work policy and how it is applied to single mothers experiencing domestic violence. The next chapter examines factors that impact on single mothers’ abilities to protect themselves and their children from further violence and how these factors are influential on poverty and homelessness.
Chapter Four
Mothers Experiences of Domestic Violence

Introduction
Chapters One and Two critiqued the arguments promoting Welfare to Work, which propose that this policy not only combats welfare dependency but also other social problems. This argument holds the individual as being responsible for these problems, and promotes employment as leading to economic independence and a pathway out of poverty, homelessness and domestic violence. Within the Welfare to Work policy, domestic violence is acknowledged, but the participation requirement exemption that can be granted implies that the problem is quickly resolved after separation. However, Chapter Two illustrated the complexities associated with domestic violence and the institutions that disadvantaged women through maintaining contact with perpetrators. Furthermore, the welfare dependency debate does not account for the impact of economic abuse on women living within domestically violent relationships, which leads to impoverishment within the relationship and when the relationship ends.

This research aimed to present single mothers’ experiences and perspectives of how they are affected by both Welfare to Work and domestic violence. The aim of this chapter is to examine single mothers’ experiences of domestic violence, which also impact on poverty and homelessness. This chapter presents the analysis of 23 interviews with single mothers across Australia who experienced domestic violence and had mandatory obligations under Welfare to Work. The chapter illustrates that the mothers in this study turned to welfare after separation, because of domestic violence and having to care for children. First, the forms of violence experienced by mothers and children are canvassed, then attention is given to economic abuses experienced by mothers, prior to separation. The chapter also examines mothers’ experiences of the legal and child protection systems, which are influential in family law determinations, before turning to issues relating to child contact, property settlements, child support and the Family Tax Benefit. The chapter then turns to techniques used by ex-
partners to sabotage mothers’ ability to maintain employment and comply with Welfare to Work participation requirements.

**Experience of different forms of violence**

Prior to separation, mothers in this study reported that they were subjected to physical, psychological, emotional, and verbal assaults. Most mothers reported being subjected to the same forms of violence by partners, post separation. Pam’s quote exemplifies this:

_I was married to a fellow who was a domestic violence perpetrator. He’s very much an emotional blackmailer. He intimidates...everything’s your fault...And because he’s a correctional services officer, he has this whole image that he portrays that he’s a toughie and that he’s got a badge and he drives a government car and he’s very important...He got worse and worse and then he assaulted Alex when he was seven years old, and was arrested, and I didn’t have him back after that... I’m scared of him...the kids are scared of him too...He has still been abusing them._ (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

Most mothers reported the violence escalated through death threats (including threats to murder children); trespassing on property and forcing entrance into the home; being tailgated and rammed whist driving; stalking; legal stalking, through the use of the court and legal systems and child protection system, as well as other agencies such as the RSPCA and Centrelink, to exert control and further economic abuse. As Simone stated:

_Almost weekly – it was like putting out fires constantly. I found myself with the RSPCA coming to investigate me on an allegation that I had been cruel to a pet and abandoned it, that was him... he got an order to have me psychiatrically assessed... I recorded 12 visits to my home by police to come and investigate me... he told police that I had stolen things from him and so my home was searched... he sent three of his male friends around to my house one night to try to talk to me about accepting his settlement._ (Simone, 47, children, 24, 22, 11)

In some cases ex-partners’ families, friends and new partners were also involved in perpetrating violence against the mothers, through stalking, making threats and verbal abuse:

_He’s re-partnered and both he and his new partner follow me around the town... His girlfriend is hostile towards me... My ex, when he has the boys, he comes back to my house regularly, without invitation._ (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

Some mothers reported children were subjected to further physical and sexual assaults during contact with their fathers:

_Last week only I contacted DOCS [Department of Children Services] because my_
child, the youngest, something happened. I didn’t want them to but the Children’s Court pushed them to the father for one night stay there. He asked and they gave him. My child didn’t wanted that, but something again happened. (Susheela 41, children, 10, 8, 6)

Most reported emotional and verbal abuse during father child contact as a major stress for children:

It’s more psychological, the harm he’s causing for my son. My son’s actually diagnosed with high anxiety...he has night terrors. He sleep walks. He comes out crying. (Erin, 31, children, 13, 6)

Other abuses reported were refusal to attend or financially contribute to any of the children’s activities or clothing; neglecting children’s hygiene; children being burnt and injured and not receiving medical attention and depriving children of food and water:

He [ex-partner] has just no regard for his wellbeing... Andy [son] has a congenital renal condition....they locked him out of the house all day, and left him outside, and gave him no food and no water, and when he brought him back Andy was so badly sunburnt, I had to take him to the doctor. (Carry, 41 child 14)

My youngest soils his pants when he stays over...His father sends him to school wearing the same soiled clothes. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

Most mothers reported children had been subjected to similar behaviours they had experienced by the child’s father including physical and sexual assaults, as well as fathers neglecting care responsibilities, activities, and financial needs. These matters have been reflected in other studies on domestic violence.

All mothers reported the prime reason for leaving their partners was because of domestically violent behaviours, including violence perpetrated against their children. Violence prior to and after separation, impacted on mothers’ and children’s physical and psychological well-being. Being forced into Welfare to Work was seen as an unnecessary stressor when mothers

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were overwhelmed with dealing with the impact and ramifications of violence, as well as having to care for children. As Renae stated:

>You’ve got this turkey threatening you, you’re too terrified to have your windows open in case they can see your shadow and take a head shot at you. Everything is really horrible and you’re under all this pressure to perform, and you’re in such a numb cocoon where you can’t function. And nobody seems to understand that you’re just hanging in there. How can you get up each day and iron clothes and pack kids’ bags, and get out and go to work each day? How can you function when you’ve got this type of crap hanging over your head? You can’t! (Renae, 42, children, 11, 8))

Although mothers left the relationship to protect themselves and their children, domestic violence continued and escalated in most cases. This chapter now turns to mothers’ experiences of economic abuse prior to separation, as this has a significant impact on women’s ability to be self-sufficient and leave domestically violent relationships. As seen in Chapter Two, economic abuse also contributes to women’s and children’s poverty within domestically violent relationships and the need to enter the welfare system when they leave the relationship.2

**Economic abuse prior to separation**

Employment has been promoted as a pathway out of domestic violence and as a means to also reduce the number of women entering the welfare system. Welfare reformists claim unemployment to be the cause of domestic violence, poverty and welfare dependency3, which directly places the blame for these problems onto single mothers.4 However, this assumption does not account for economic abuse experienced by women while in relationships. According to Adams, Sullivan, Bybee and Greeson, economic abuse involves behaviours that control a woman’s ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources, for the purpose of preventing women from being independent from the perpetrator and keeping them confined within the relationship.5 This research examined the economic abuses experienced

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5Adams et al., ”Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse,” 564, 68.
by the mothers when they were still partnered to ascertain the impact this had on their financial situation and them entering the welfare system.

_I started up a home business and it was extremely successful and he sabotaged it, I had to sell it and close it down. I set up an on-line store and whenever he used to get the poops with me which was two or three times a week, he would shut the internet connection down and no-one could access my store and place orders._ (Marnie 47, child 5)

_He made me get a factory job...He got all my money and gave me $10 a week pocket money...I was not allowed to go shopping... he took all my Centrelink payment for the children, Family Tax A and B. (Claudia 44, children 16, 14, twins 7)_

_I had paid for every single mortgage payment on this house. I had purchased, everything and the bills. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)_

Each of the mothers reported experiencing economic abuse when they were partnered. Their reports varied and included tactics such as sabotaging the home business; confiscating wages; not allowing the women any of their own money to spend; forcing women to pay debts incurred by the perpetrator; emptying the woman’s bank account on her pay day; and not contributing to the household costs such as rent or mortgages, utilities, bills, food, children’s activities, clothes and education. These findings were similar to Adams et al.’s research conducted in 2008.6

Of the 23 mothers, four mothers reported that they were the sole providers for the whole household when partnered, plus the sole care provider as their partners did not contribute financially or through any maintenance associated with the household, nor did they engage in any care duties or responsibilities. This finding was consistent with Kershaw, Pulkingham and Fuller’s research in 2008, and Moe and Bell’s 2004 research, which found violent partners neglected care and financial responsibilities, placing the burden of the family onto the women.7 These four mothers were employed full-time at the time as well doing mothering work. Their partners were also employed in high status and well paying jobs. All of the mothers in the sample reported their partners were employed or owned a business. None were unemployed. ‘Economic independence’ through employment did not help

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6Ibid.
mothers leave a domestically violent relationship as proposed by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and Children. Nor did it stop these women and their children experiencing poverty within the relationship or when they left, as Mary’s case reflects:

Whenever I’ve worked, he’s controlled the accounts, for example, I became a unilecturer...and was earning a really good salary, and I would only see, you know, $20 a pay from it, and he would just take the key card. I don’t know what he used to do with it. So even though I was earning good money, we were pretty destitute...Leaving abuse in 2003, meant that my career was totally ruined...I was in a wonderful job, and I could see myself there forever, but we left with nothing...Like the day I left I got paid and my husband had taken everything but $26 out of the bank, so we had no money, so we went to Centrelink. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

Most of the mothers were employed when partnered. However, even those who held high status positions did not benefit from employment because their wages either supported the household or was stolen by their partners. Some of the mothers and children experienced poverty within the relationship, while partners benefited from women’s employment by being able to maintain extravagant lifestyles for themselves:

He liked the fact that I earned a lot of money... he took control of the money to the point where he wouldn’t give me a dollar for a can of soft drink... I ended up with nothing, and he had a drug habit that cost a lot of money, which was like almost like a work-related drug habit in that he was addicted to speed, because it meant he could work longer hours non-stop, which they do, when he works out in the mines. (Carruy, 41, child, 14)

There were two lots of money coming in. All of mine would be used to pay the bills... the cheques would bounce because...the bank account was being absolutely syphoned...He’d be up the pub, he’d be buying drugs, he’d be gambling it away at the casino...He saw me as a cash cow. (Renae, 42, children, 11, 8)

Economic abuse permitted the abusive partner to maintain control over the woman and her movements. These women still had to turn to welfare when they left the relationship. These findings were similar to Moe and Bell’s in their 2004 research, which found that women with lucrative careers still had to turn to welfare when they left violent relationships. This was also reflected in Franzway, Zufferey and Chung’s research in 2008, who argued that domestic

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9 Moe and Bell, "Abject Economics."
violence does not discriminate but affects all types of women. For example, Carry was a corporate manager. When she left her job, her partner abandoned her, leaving her destitute:

\[\text{I became a single parent when Andy’s father left me when I was about eight months pregnant... I was homeless for a period of time. I was living in my car because I had given up my work already, because I worked in an environment that was putting strain on me and I actually had a threatened miscarriage. (Carry, 41, child, 14)}\]

The data indicate perpetrators mainly used women’s employment for their own financial gain. Many mothers reported having to hand over their earnings to partners and not being able to save money. As seen in Carry’s case having a high income did not protect her from becoming destitute when the relationship ended.

Of the 23 mothers, 21 had employment throughout the partnership (as discussed in Chapter Six), while two were forced to give up employment by their husbands. In these cases, perpetrators controlled the women through economic means by stopping them gaining or maintaining skills or employment:

\[\text{For six years I was working for him, but he didn’t pay me anything...I said that I’m just going for job interview, so he said ... “If you go and look for a job or go do some job I will kill you myself, kill you, kill our children, and kill myself”. It was horrible. (Susheela 41, children, 10, 8, 6)}\]

Although Susheela reported working for her husband, she was never paid and was denied access to any economic resources. The threat of homicide was used by her husband to prevent her from seeking an income outside the home.

In summary, all the mothers in this study reported investing their assets and wages into the partnership household. Although the majority of mothers in the sample had previously been employed, contrary to the economic independence debate, their employment did not enable them to achieve economic independence within the relationship or help them to escape, because of economic abuse. When the mothers in this study left the relationship they had to

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seek financial assistance from Centrelink. Contrary to the welfare dependency thesis\textsuperscript{12}, the findings reflect similarities to Butterworth’s argument that welfare receipt often results from violence not unemployment.\textsuperscript{13} This has also been seen to be the case in North America, as discussed in Chapter One. The research indicated that domestic violence experienced by these women was linked to poverty, as the perpetrators prevented women from gaining any benefit from employment through economic abuse. Due to economic abuse in domestically violent relationships, women’s choices are limited. This can place them at risk of poverty and homelessness, and having to turn to Centrelink, so they can provide for their children. Their other choice is to stay in the relationship and put up with the violence.

**Legal and child protection systems**

Most of the mothers reported that violence continued after separation. Some of the mothers had contact with the legal system and child protection system in an attempt to try to protect themselves and their children from further violence. However, the majority of mothers in this study reported that these systems were ineffective. Of the 23 mothers, 10 reported having protection orders against their ex-partners after separation. From these 10 mothers, eight reported that their ex-partner continued violent behaviours regardless of the protection order. Of the 13 mothers who did not apply for a protection order on their ex-partner, 12 reported continuous domestic violence behaviours. Those with protection orders found they were ineffective in stopping assaults and abusive behaviours by ex-partners. Mothers reported police showed little interest in charging ex-partners for breaching orders and were more likely to side with the perpetrator if they had made allegations against the woman:

_\textit{I would say 100 [breaches] but he's only ever been prosecuted once. I've given up on trying to breach him. I feel as if the police really don’t take it seriously there have been lots of times the police have not carried through with prosecution of the breach ...I find myself in a no win situation...He also had me arrested when he told the police that I made a death threat against him. (Simone, 47, children, 24, 22, 11)}_

At the time of interview, only five mothers (three with protection orders and two without) reported they were no longer experiencing violence only because they had relocated (mostly interstate) and the perpetrator was no longer aware of their whereabouts. As seen in

\textsuperscript{12}Mead, “Welfare Reform and the Family.”
Simone’s case, civil and legal measures including police responses were ineffective in protecting women and children. These findings were consistent with research by Bagshaw et al. in 2006, Evans in 2003, and Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie in 2003 that identified the ineffectiveness of protection orders was compounded by police misinforming women and failing to act when perpetrators breached the orders. Overall the findings indicate that the only way violence would stop was through relocation with perpetrators having no knowledge of the women’s whereabouts. However women’s ability to relocate away from their children’s father was subject to family law:

_I was also ordered by the court to remain within 25kms of the town where we lived at the time. Neither my former husband nor I were from this town but he’d decided he wanted to remain here, and so the court has ordered me that I am to remain in this town as well._ (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

In Shannon’s case, shared care is not practiced but the family court determination has left her isolated from family support and still accessible to her ex-partner to commit further violence against her and her children, which is ignored by police. This is similar to a finding in Behrens, Smythe and Kaspiew’s study in 2009 where conflict and violence continued in situations where the family court opposed relocation.

All mothers reported that where fathers had access to children this was a major factor in the continuation of abuse and violence after separation towards them and their children. The length of experiencing violence and abuse corresponded with the same time the mothers were separated, indicating perpetrators wanted to maintain control and power over women and children. For example, two mothers who had been separated for as long as 10 and 14 years were still experiencing violence because of father/child contact. Therefore mothers in this situation who were trying to protect children from further violence or abuse were unable to do so. As Pam’s case illustrates, her marriage ended after one of her children was assaulted by the father resulting in him being charged. However, legal professionals ignored the risks to the children, and police colluded with and protected the offender from further charges:

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I went to Legal Aid and they gave me a lawyer to represent me for the kids. We actually had to go to mediation, which was atrocious and I now find out, that we shouldn’t have been made to go... The children aren’t safe with him. There was one stage, just before his good behaviour bond lapsed, when he was actually reported by Families SA to the CIB here... and I was told by Families SA that because he’s broken his bail he will get arrested. But that didn’t happen. His mate at the CIB there let it go. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

The women in this study noted that legal services and mediation services prioritised father contact with their child instead of considering the child’s safety as the first priority. The police, child protection and the family law systems also failed to protect these mothers and their children, leaving many disillusioned about the whole system and feeling they are not believed.

Legal workers also prioritised the risk of ex-partners becoming homeless over the risk of women and children becoming homeless. As Jasmine’s case illustrates when she tried to get an order for her ex-partner to leave the family home after he had assaulted her:

I said “can you just check what that was?”, because that was standard orders plus this one for him to leave... and then ... the police prosecutor said “No the judge would never have said that he would have to move out of the house because he said he had nowhere to live, so I just negotiated with his solicitor beforehand, and we didn’t even put that in”. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)

The police had charged Jasmine’s ex-partner for assaulting her and she was granted a protection order, which did not stop the violence. However, the police prosecutor made the decision not to submit to the magistrate the application for orders for the ex-partner to leave the family home, leaving Jasmine and her children homeless. This determination also had an impact on Jasmine’s ability to receive a property settlement, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Jasmine’s situation is not an isolated case and reflects similarities to McFerran’s argument that judicial workers will support perpetrators to stay in the home, ignoring the hardship this incurs on women and children.16

The mothers felt that in dealing with child protection agencies fathers’ stories also held stronger weight than their own. Simone reported that her daughter was removed by the child protection agency and handed over to the perpetrator, when she reported sexual assault:

I gave him [doctor] the history of what had happened and he contacted DOCS himself then DOCS contacted the father and the father said to DOCS that I had already been under question by one psychiatrist about my mental health and that he was convinced that I was actually quite sick and that the evidence that I was mentally ill was the fact that I had raised this question of sexual abuse to another doctor. So DOCS took Lilly off me and put me under an assessment order for a month where they did an intense investigation of my mental health. They were having me have contact with our daughter supervised...and then after a month they said that everything came out well and returned her to me. But what they said was we can get an order out that if she comes up with any more problems you don’t take her to a doctor you call us and we’ll take over. (Simone, 47, children, 24, 22, 11)

The child protection agency did not investigate the sexual assault allegations. Instead Simone’s mental health was investigated to ascertain if she was a threat to the child’s safety. Simone’s case suggests that there is a possibility that mothers who make allegations of fathers sexually assaulting their children may be perceived as mentally unstable. In this case the child protection agency placed Simone’s daughter at further risk and did not want her to seek help outside of this agency, which enabled the perpetrator to continue abuse without scrutiny.

Shannon also reported that child protection and police failed to protect her children; indicating that some perpetrators are not subjected to the same scrutiny or assessed on their inability to be a safe, responsible parent even when they are the respondent of a domestic violence order or there has been notification of criminal behaviour against children.

They’ve told me of physical and verbal abuse, which I have reported to the Child Abuse Hotline... and no action, has been taken. I mean the school that my children attend have also reported him to the appropriate authorities. Our daughter had run away from his house, but the attitude currently of the law is that he’s to share a role in their parenting, and it seems to me regardless of how he treats the children. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

Other national and international research such as Bagshaw et al., Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie, Lapierre, and Radford and Hester had similar findings, to Shannon’s case, which is a clear indication of the breath of this systemic failure to protect women and children.

In summary, we have seen the inadequacy of the legal systems, including civil measures such

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as protection orders, and the child protection agency to stop violence and to protect women and children from further violence. The research indicated that some women’s and children’s experiences of violence were disbelieved or trivialised by legal and child protection workers through prioritising perpetrators’ well-being and father child contact over the safety of women and children. There were also indications that child protection workers colluded with perpetrators when violence against children was reported. The findings reflect feminist arguments that the state legitimises and permits violence against women through protecting the privileges and prerogatives of violent men.\textsuperscript{18} Due to these systems’ failure to protect women and children, violence continued, and impacted on family law determinations, such as child contact and property settlements, which will now be discussed.

\textbf{Child contact and safety}

As ascertained in Chapter Two, family law is a significant constraint on the lives of separated mothers and children, particularly in cases that involve domestic violence. The following Table 4.1 presents findings on the different father/child contact arrangements made through family court determinations, mediation and personal arrangements in relation to mothers having and not having protection orders.

\textbf{Table 4. 3 Child contact with fathers}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family court determination</th>
<th>No family court</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mediation arrangement</td>
<td>Personal arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers with protection orders</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers without Protection orders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 illustrates that 11 of the 23 mothers had family court determinations on father/child contact arrangements. In six instances, mothers had protection orders. These proceedings were mainly instigated by fathers. In these specific cases, mothers reported more severe forms of violence, such as physical assault and death threats against themselves and the

children. Apart from Pam whose ex-husband had been previously charged for criminal assault of one of her children, three other mothers out of these 11 cases reported there had been child sexual assault notifications and criminal investigation of the fathers. In all these cases, fathers were granted contact, placing the children at further risk. In another instance, the father was granted supervised contact on the condition he undergoes a psychiatric assessment, after he had planned to murder the family. He refused the assessment and the mother went into hiding. Of the remaining 12 mothers, one went through the mediation process to arrange child contact orders; seven made personal arrangements with fathers over child contact (one had a protection order in this instance); and four had no child contact arrangements with fathers (three had protection orders). Overall 10 mothers out of the 23 had protection orders.

The 11 mothers who had father/child contact determinations through the family court reported that they had notified respective agencies to try to protect themselves and their children. However, the findings reflect notifications, criminal investigations, criminal charges against fathers and protection orders were not considered in these instances. Claudia’s case provides an example. Her ex-husband was being investigated for child sexual assault of their eldest daughter, but is still able to have contact with the younger children.

*I’m very worried about their safety. He has been a predator to my oldest daughter, sexually, has molested her between the ages of five and ten. (Claudia 44, children 16, 14, twins 7)*

All of these mothers who had family court determinations expressed fears for their children’s safety as the assaults continued against the children during contact periods yet they were forced to hand children over to the perpetrator. These findings are similar to those by Bagshaw et al. in 2010, Evans in 2005, and Foote in 2006, who found the family court did not acknowledge violence towards women and children or the sexual assault of children even when it could be verified, placing women and children at further risk. Mothers in this study who had family court determinations were also placed at greater risk of violence, as perpetrators were more able to establish where women lived and were employed as a result of the continued involvement of the fathers with the children. The findings indicate that protection orders, sexual assault and child abuse charges, investigations and notifications

19 Bagshaw et al., "Family Violence and Family Law in Australia. "; Evans, "Battle-Scars. "; Foote, "Sexual Abuse Allegations in the Family Court."
were of little value to the participants of this study in the family law system. This reflects Parkinson’s views that protection orders are perceived by courts and legal workers as a tactic used by women to try and deprive fathers of contact with children.20

In Shannon’s case, she was ordered by the family court to remain within 25km of her ex-husband who lives in a small remote town. She cannot conceal her whereabouts from her ex-partner and police will not charge him for the assaults. While Shannon was the only mother in this situation, her case illustrates how the family court can place women and children at greater risk of violence:

*He’s often violent, verbally abusive towards me in public, which is nice in a country town, and he’s had the local police officer call and visit him to tell him to, about behaving himself. So it’s not fun... it’s like I can’t get away from the situation, and the children can’t, because of the way the current Family Law legislation is. It’s like being under siege for five years.* (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

Shannon’s ex-husband has remarried and continues to control Shannon’s life through legal entrapment and assaulting her and her children. Shannon is isolated from family and also isolated within the community she lives because of her ex-husband’s violence.

 Mothers also reported their children needed a lot more care and time because they had been assaulted, abused or witnessed violence and re-traumatised during contact with their fathers, which placed extra stress onto mothers:

*Domestic violence it's a really big picture, it will be going on until he’s 16 or 17 and this boy, my son, has gone through a lot with his dad. He needs a lot of care he needs lot of time ...and I don't have any choice. He has to see his father because the court said he has to, and I have to supply him.* (Rhoda, 49, children, 25, 11)

The seven mothers who had made personal arrangements in regards to child contact still had safety concerns for their children. One with a protection order has her parents do handovers to reduce risk to herself. Mothers in this situation reported ex-partner contact was not consistent and more sporadic. These mothers had agreed to allow ex-partners contact due to fear, threats of family court or being unaware that fathers may also be abusive to children.

Several mothers reported they had only recently become aware that their children were being abused and assaulted during contact, while two mothers reported their children had been exposed to controlling and manipulative behaviours.

The remaining four mothers, who had not gone through the family court system, had no contact with fathers due to safety concerns for both themselves and their children. Only five of the 23 mothers reported that their children were not being subjected to further abuse, because their whereabouts were unknown to the perpetrator. Mothers in this situation still had safety concerns and their responsibility for their children’s safety was heightened. This was especially evident when ex-partners had made death threats, which was a decisive factor in relocation:

*We’ve got to go home first, we can’t go to the shops in your school uniform, people will recognise what school you go to... because, it’s all about personal safety. You don’t let your kids go anywhere, you’re on top of them all the time. They miss out on doing things because, well they’re probably safer but, they don’t participate as much in things. If there’s a carnival on up at the park, you’re walking with them, they’re not running off and playing with their friends, everything is heightened all the time.*  
(Renée, 42, children, 11, 8)

Thus so far, the findings are consistent with other research which found women and children were placed at more risk of violence because domestic violence and its implications for women and children were not prioritised. These responses by legal workers, child safety and the family court prioritising child contact, allowed ex-partners to continue to abuse women and children without repercussions. This reflects radical feminists’ arguments that violence is systemic as it is supported through key legal institutions and the state and supports patriarchal rights. Some of the mothers reported that when they did not agree with their ex-partner’s terms or their children had refused to see their father, they would end back in court again. This form of legal violence continued for years.

Contrary to Carberry’s presumption in Chapter Two that shared care can be beneficial in

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helping single mothers to engage in labour market activity\textsuperscript{23}, mothers who had shared care arrangements had the extra stress of dealing with violence and caring for children who were re-traumatised during contact with their fathers. Mothers who were not in this situation still had to deal with the ramifications of violence towards themselves and their children and to ensure their safety. In all instances mothers had to consider the extra care needs of their children. Dealing with continuing abuses and violence and its ramifications placed extra pressure on mothers in this situation. Although employment has been promoted as stopping violence against single mothers,\textsuperscript{24} child contact was the nexus for violence to continue. As reflected in Shannon’s case, the Family Court decision means she cannot relocate to a place where she would be more likely to find employment than the remote community where she lives. Nor can she move to be near her family where she would have more support. Instead, Shannon and her children have been legally forced to stay close to her ex-husband where he can continue to subject them to his violence. These are issues that impact on women’s ability to comply with \textit{Welfare to Work} and maintain employment, which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Furthermore, shared care had an effect on property settlement negotiations, which we will now examine.

\textbf{Property settlements}

Ex-partners’ determination not to negotiate any property settlement was another form of economic abuse and a major contributor to the impoverishment of both mothers and children. This section examines mothers’ experiences of negotiating property settlements with ex-partners and the outcomes. Of the 23 mothers, 20 had to leave property and possessions to escape the domestically violent relationship and were subsequently placed at risk of homelessness. Negotiating property settlements was not possible for many of these mothers due to fear of violence or ex-partners threatening violence and homicide when the subject was broached. Some mothers in this study reported that ex-partners commonly used the family court to gain access to children and avoid or deny property settlement. The reality that mothers remained primary carers was not reflected in the decisions made by the courts nor did these decisions reflect concern for the children’s wellbeing or living standards.

\textsuperscript{24} Whiteford, "Family Joblessness in Australia".
The seven mothers who did access the family court reported their financial, labour and work contributions were not taken into account within the determinations. In this study, three of these cases were still proceeding at the time of interview, with the longest case going for three years. The ex-partners in these cases were denying the mothers any settlement and the ongoing situation was contributing to more mental and financial stress. Cases that had reached a determination favoured ex-partners. Two of the three mothers who had 50/50 shared care determinations received no property settlement. These mothers reported that shared care was being used by perpetrators and the family court to deny women settlement. This suggests that for these mothers there was no consideration of where children mainly reside and there was a presumption that shared care was being practiced. The third mother with a 50/50 shared care contact order was coerced into mediation to agree to this order; however property settlement was not mediated. She has not pursued property settlement in the family court due to lack of financial resources and the fear of violence. She has lost all her contributions to the family home.

Property settlements indicated that court determinations presumed men to be sole providers. Pam reported her husband did not have to provide proof of his contributions of property:

He claimed a whole heap of stuff that – he just lied, as far as property came. He asked me to prove all this stuff and I did...He made all these claims but when he was asked to prove it, he just threw in another bit of legal action. I mean I had proof that I had paid for every single mortgage payment on this house. I could prove, when my dad died we got $5,000 plus the share to the shack, and I could give proof that I had spent that entire amount on the house. When he was asked to prove any of his stuff, he didn’t have to, apparently because we’re married and it makes no difference. I think I was treated very unfairly. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

Pam claimed she was discriminated against in the proceedings for being a woman, when her husband had never made any contributions towards the property. To keep her home she had to pay him out. Continuous court proceedings were also used to exert control over mothers when they did not agree to ex-partners’ demands and to inflict psychological harm, which mothers found time consuming and exhausting. These findings were consistent with other research on separated mothers experiencing post-separation violence25 and Miller and

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25 Evans, "Battle-Scars.”; Kaye, Stubbs, and Tolmie, "Negotiating Child Residence and Contact Arrangements Against a Background of Domestic Violence”; Lapierre, "More Responsibilities, Less Control.”; Radford and Hester, Mothering through Domestic Violence.
Smolter’s research in 2011, which specifically examined legal stalking.\textsuperscript{26}

Some mothers did not realise the extent of economic abuse they were experiencing until they separated:

\begin{quote}
Well it was terrible to start with because no one could support me, and having a mortgage in my name, I couldn’t get any assistance. (Nina, 45, children, 14, 7)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I got enough to pay out the debts and update my car, and that was it. (Annabel, 42, children 22, 15, 13)
\end{quote}

Some mothers who had contributed to mortgages only discovered on separation their husbands had incurred debts and taken out loans without informing them. Staying in the property after separation restricted some mothers from accessing financial and legal assistance. Their homes had to be sold to pay their husbands debts. They lost everything they had worked for.

Table 4.2 illustrates home owner status prior to and post separation, indicating the disadvantage women experienced post separation.

\textbf{Table 4.4} Home owner status prior to and post separation

\begin{tabular}{llll}
\hline
 & Home owner & Private rent & Public housing & Total  \\
\hline
Prior separation & 17 & 6 & 0 & 23  \\
Post separation & 6 & 14 & 3 & 23  \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Among the 23 mothers interviewed, 17 claimed home owner status prior to separation with only six in the private rental market. After separation however, only six had managed to maintain or regain home ownership and only one of these women retained full home ownership status, while the other five were paying mortgages. Moreover the number of women in the private market more than doubled (14), while three had moved into public housing. The three public housing tenants paid 25 per cent of their income in rent. Rental payments and mortgage payments for the others ranged from $250 up to $420 per week. All the mothers reported financial stress; however those in the private rental market were particularly struggling with rising rents and accommodation shortages. While those who had

\textsuperscript{26} Susan L. Miller and Nicole L. Smolter, “”Paper Abuse”: When All Else Fails, Batterers Use Procedural Stalking,” \textit{Violence Against Women} 20, no. 10 (2011).
home owner status were able to retain something from their years of labour and work, the other 17 mothers had lost their contributions to the family home.

While it was difficult for mothers to obtain property settlements with or without family court intervention, the reduction of payments under Welfare to Work for single mothers, limited their resources further, placing them at further risk of homelessness. The majority of mothers reported they spent 50 per cent, and in some cases more, of their wages and income support on rent and mortgages. Those on PPS stated the payment was inadequate. However, those being moved onto NSA and Austudy were placed more at risk. As Erin remarked:

\[Last week I lost my house because my landlord increased the rent. Now I’m looking at moving back in with family because I just can’t afford to live in the private rental market. Come next year when I’m still full time at uni, even though it’s my last year, my payments will be reduced by $100. (Erin, 31, children, 13, 6)\]

All of the mothers had suffered some form of economic abuse prior to and after separation, but reduced payments because of Welfare to Work compounded the risk of homelessness. At some stage most of the single mothers who participated in this research will find themselves in a similar situation to Erin, when their payments are reduced when their youngest child turns eight years of age. This includes those with grandfathered status. This status was abolished in 2013 by the Gillard government, which removed PPS entitlement for all single parents once their youngest child turns eight years of age.\(^{27}\)

We can see that the findings are consistent with other research, where men retained family assets and resources through women having to flee from violence; they also maintained power and control throughout the property settlement process.\(^{28}\) Actual incidents or the threat of violence and the family court were used to continue the economic abuse of mothers and were causes of their impoverishment and homelessness. Controlling finances in the partnership and engaging in irresponsible financial decisions also contributed to the impoverishment of women. Moreover, as Braf and Barrett Meyering argue, family court determinations favoured men, with women in shared care situations receiving less in financial settlements.\(^{29}\) Women’s

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\(^{29}\) Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security".
contributions and care became entirely invisible where there had been 50/50 shared care determinations, resulting in women receiving no settlement at all, despite the fact that men did not practice their shared care obligations.

In summary, the findings suggest that for the women in this study, ex-partner violence and systemic violence were key contributors to poverty and homelessness of the single mothers and their children. Furthermore, the invisibility of violence and women’s financial, labour and care contributions, along with the reduction of income support payments could be seen as a means to stop women from leaving violent relationships, which had been the intention of the Howard Government to keep families together.

**Child support and Family Tax Benefit**

Furthermore, economic abuse was perpetuated through the child support system. As Pam reported, her ex-partner did not contribute to the care or parenting responsibilities of children while the relationship was intact, but wanted shared care of children after separation:

*He wanted 50/50 and it’s like...we were all still scared of him. I’ve basically raised all my children on my own. Their father just said, you know, its women’s work. He didn’t go to any of their sporting activities. He didn’t go to any of their school things. He never bothered to read their reports or anything like that, because that’s all women’s work. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)*

The majority of the mothers in this study reported similar experiences. However, where shared care had been determined or arranged, fathers were not meeting their care obligations. In these instances most mothers reported that fathers were being assessed to pay less child support while some were receiving partial FTB payments, which reduced mothers FTB payments because of the presumed shared care.

Only two of the 23 mothers did not have child support collected for them by the Child Support Agency (CSA) due to the domestic violence exemption. The remaining 21 had arrangements with the CSA. However, only five mothers of these 21 reported their ex-partners were actually paying child support and were not using this payment system as a means to financially abuse. The remaining 16 mothers were rarely paid or received no payments at all. These findings were consistent with the study by Braff and Barrett Meyering

in 2009, Evans in 2005, and Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie in 2003\textsuperscript{31} as well as Flood’s argument that shared care is used by ex-partners to reduce child support liabilities, and increase perpetrators’ ability to harass women.\textsuperscript{32}

Mothers reported ex-partners engaged in a number of tactics to prevent paying child support. Some ex-partners made death threats when mothers pursued child support and arrears:

_He told me that he had spoken to someone about how much it would cost to get a hit man to kill Andy, and he said, he figured out it would be cheaper than paying child support, (Carry, 41, child, 14)_

The majority of mothers reported that ex-partners lied about their income, claimed to be unemployed while working for cash-in-hand and still did not pay child support when contacted by the CSA:

_He [ex-partner] runs his own business, and he minimises his income, and when I realised with the shared care arrangement that I would be paying him child support if I were to go out to work... but it got to the point where I couldn’t afford not to [work]... Still I have to pay him child support. (Annabel, 42, children, 22, 15, 13)_

This finding is consistent with Patrick, Cook and Taket’s research.\textsuperscript{33} Economic abuse through child support is more financially damaging to mothers when shared cared contact orders are in place. For example in Annabel’s case, her ex-partner’s fraudulent income claim, combined with a 50/50 shared care claim that is not practiced, disadvantages Annabel and her children because she has to pay her ex-partner child support even though he rarely has contact with the children.

Shannon explained how difficult it was living in poverty, and how it was exacerbated by economic abuse perpetrated by her ex-partner:

_Every week is a struggle. I have mastered the art of grocery shopping cheap. I have no savings whatsoever. My former husband was fairly erratic with his_

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
child support payments…the children, both belong to the local swimming club, which he wanted them to join, but he needed to pay their registration fees. If they have a school camp he won’t even pay half of the cost for them to go on a camp…I ended up having to borrow the money from a family member and then pay him back so that she could go on this camp…The only brand new clothes that they have are their school uniforms. Everything else is either hand-me-downs from friends around town, or what I’ve managed to find in an op shop, or clothes that I make them myself. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

Shannon’s ex-husband did not abide by the 50/50 shared care order he had been granted. Shannon is the primary carer of the children but only received 50 per cent of the FTB and rarely receives child support. Shannon bore all the financial responsibility of raising the children including community and school activities and was left struggling to make ends meet. In contrast, her ex-husband was paid 50 per cent of the FTB payment and child support payments are reduced because of the presumed shared care.

Similarly, Simone had to supervise and organise her daughter’s activities during the time the child spends at her father’s, because he would not:

_I’ve got Lilly who’s on shared care that every week that she’s with her father he doesn’t want to drive her backwards and forwards to her after school activities so I still drive her from school pick her up and then take her to ballet and take her to gymnastics and things like that even on the weeks that he has her._ (Simone, 47, children, 24, 22, 11)

Chauffeuring her daughter to extracurricular activities impacts on Simone’s time and finances. Nonetheless she still receives less child support, and the FTB payments are split 50/50 due to the presumed shared care with her ex-partner.

Furthermore, mothers reported fathers’ claims for FTB payments based on shared care were not disputed by Centrelink, whereas women had to prove the claim false, which involved being investigated:

_He’s been trying to get the family payment forever and he’s threatened on a regular basis. When the shared care came in through the Family Court he’s rung up, and has told Centrelink lies and then I had to prove it and show evidence that he is not actually having all this contact. So that’s pretty humiliating that they seem to take his word for it._ (Rhoda, 49, children, 25, 11)

Centrelink assessed mothers as being paid child support and reduced their income support payments, although they did not receive the money and had to live on reduced benefits, thus
causing further financial difficulties.

_The Child Support Agency, they gave the figure to Centrelink that this lady should receive $13,000 per annum child support from the husband, so Centrelink has started giving me reduced payment even though I am not receiving any child support. A whole year I was like reduced payment from Centrelink, no child support, and I was running to community centre even for my bill payments. They back paid me, but those months I was suffering._

(Susheela, 41 children, 10, 8, 6)

For Susheela, reduced benefits made it even more difficult for her to find suitable accommodation and to pay her bills. Nina was in a similar situation and placed at risk of homelessness:

_My husband recently just got a new job and he also lied about his financial income for the last financial year, so he’s also having to pay me the amount owing. He underestimated his income by about $15,000-$16,000, so that plus what he is to pay me with his new income, is around $860 a month, but I haven’t seen it yet... so I was behind in my rent._

(Nina, 45, children, 14, 7)

All of the mothers who were supposed to receive child support reported that the Child Support Agency was ineffective in collecting payments and large debts owed to them. These mothers were placed under further financial hardship through Centrelink assessing them on the presumption they will receive owed child support payments sometime within the financial year. However, this was not the case. As illustrated in Chapter Two, child support debt was increasing but little seems to have been done to solve the problem.34 Financial hardship reported by mothers in this study on problems with child support payments in conjunction with Centrelink payments reflects Summerfield et al.’s argument that the CSA system has shifted the burden of the cost of raising children onto mothers.35

Here the research suggests the child support instrument and FTB measure had been inadequate to support children and was additional means by which ex-partners were legally permitted to financially abuse mothers and children. Moreover, the research suggests that in some instances fathers were able to commit fraud against Centrelink and the Child Support Agency without any repercussions, through neglecting their contact obligations but receive partial FTB payments and paying less or no child support at all on presumption they were

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practising shared care. Although previous research has found that fathers use shared care to reduce their child support payments and then neglect their contact arrangements\textsuperscript{36} the area requires more research in regards to these fathers collecting FTB. Another key finding was that when mothers notified Centrelink of ex-partners’ fraudulent behaviours, they had to prove their claims and were investigated, suggesting a gendered double standard that assumes men are caring for children, while women’s allegations are scrutinised as fabrications. The research also reflected that income support payments were inadequate to support living and accommodation needs of single mother families.

**Employment and study sabotage**

According to US researchers Adams et al., Brush, and Moe and Bell, perpetrators commonly engaged in behaviours to sabotage the women’s employment and study, to inhibit them from acquiring resources, in order to continue economic abuse and maintain control over women and children’s lives.\textsuperscript{37} This was also a key factor in this study. The ongoing violence and abuse documented in this chapter all impacted on the mothers’ employment and study, as well as their Welfare to Work obligations. In addition, participants were asked to describe particular behaviours their ex-partners engaged in to try to stop them gaining employment or study. The mothers in this study reported that ex-partners used numerous tactics not only to jeopardise their study and employment, but to also make it difficult for them to comply with their Welfare to Work obligations. Some mothers reported that ex-partners used financial abuse through refusing to pay child support in an attempt to try and stop them from studying:

*The harassment from him involved my study, yeah, because he obviously knew about the Welfare to Work requirements... When I said that I was going to go to university he said, “I’m going to make it as hard as possible for the Child Support Agency to get any money out of me as long as you’re doing this”. (Carry, 41, child, 14)*

Economic abuse by ex-partners created more stress for those that had been placed on Austudy because of the low level of this payment. The added financial stress of not receiving child support and trying to survive on this payment alone had a detrimental effect on Nicky’s study:

*When I initially started my studying I had difficulties with child support. It meant*

\textsuperscript{36} Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security"; Evans, "Battle-Scars."; Kaye, Stubbs, and Tolmie, "Negotiating Child Residence and Contact Arrangements Against a Background of Domestic Violence".

\textsuperscript{37} Adams et al., "Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse."; Brush, "Battering, Traumatic Stress, and Welfare-to-Work Transition."; Moe and Bell, "Abject Economics."
that it affected my study which has resulted in me having to repeat my entire year of study. (Nicky, 35, children, 15, 9)

Prior to studying, Nicky had to leave a well-paid job and relocate because of her ex-partner’s dangerous behaviour:

I was working at the time in a fulltime job and the behaviours that he did involved me in a car accident, ramming in my car, and that actually put me into such a state that I wasn’t able to work for probably a week or so. (Nicky, 35, children, 15, 9)

Some ex-partners located mothers’ employment places to harass them and to get them sacked:

When he knew where I was he was ringing and stand in the reception area screaming his head off where I was working, yep. Captured animal was how I felt...They said that they didn’t want that type of behaviour happening, didn’t want their clients to be witnessing that. Fair enough. (Renae, 42, children, 11, 8)

Employers were often not supportive of women and they were forced to leave their employment as a result of their ex-partners’ behaviour.

I was employed at a local hotel, I’d worked there for about two and a half years... and one night he and his now wife came in... and even though I didn’t serve them or wait on them, he complained to the management that I’d abused him. And he told a number of other people around town that I’d abused him, even though I hadn’t approached their table at all. I ended up leaving that place of employment. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

As well, shared care was used to sabotage mothers’ employment by not turning up for child contact, which was a finding reflected in international research. As Rhoda reported:

My ex-partner he tries to sabotage every job I've had... One job I had I worked specifically on Saturdays. As soon as he found out that I had a job and he was supposed to look after my son he wouldn't turn up. So I ended up losing the job...He interfered with my jobs, he would ring the job up, ringing up people, ringing me eight times a day, he is still interfering, here [current job]. I have to be careful, he's talking to my son and telling him “Mums got to give up her job” and trying to make it difficult. (Rhoda, 49, children, 25, 11)

Sabotage tactics were continuous with perpetrators using children to find out mothers employment. Some ex-partners kept mothers awake all night and in fear of their child’s

safety. These tactics were used to sabotage their jobs and study.

He started calling my mobile phone in the middle of the night, and at the time he actually had the care of our son, so I was really worried and he was making comments like, you know, good bye and this sort of stuff. And I started panicking...He was coming around my house late at night and bashing on windows and bashing on doors, and all this sort of stuff, which you know, how do you hold down a job if that sort of carry on is going on? (Erin, 31, children, 13, 6)

These findings are consistent with other research that found ex-partners engaged in behaviours to sabotage women’s employability and study opportunities.³⁹

Some mothers reported that their ex-partners had contacted Centrelink and made false allegations against them committing welfare fraud to get them suspended from payments, which was also found to be a problem in Braff and Barrett Meyering’s study.⁴⁰

The person who actually did the investigation...I actually had to report him in the end ... His comments were, I’m going to find you out... and he said, are you having sex with him?... and he said, I’ve got the legal rights to ask you that question. (Erin, 31, children 13, 6)

He had contacted Centrelink, without a doubt... I was being absolutely screwed over by Centrelink....what they did, they assessed me as receiving $200 a week, and they assessed $200 as an asset in the business, so they were assessing me at $400, and I couldn’t cope, and couldn’t get help anywhere. Well by July I’ve had a nervous breakdown. (Renae, 41, children, 11, 8).

In Erin’s case she was subjected to sexually discriminatory behaviours by Centrelink’s investigating officer, indicating severe misconduct. For Renae the investigations were compounded by mistakes made by Centrelink, which caused financial hardship and even more psychological stress. In all the cases where mothers had vexatious allegations made about them by ex-partners, investigations were continuous. However, Centrelink investigations were conducted without considering that the women were being harassed by domestically violent men.

⁴⁰ Braff and Barrett Meyering, "Seeking Security".
In summary, ex-partners used a range of violent behaviours, to maintain power and control over mothers, which in turn affected their employability and ultimately their financial situation. These findings challenge the notion that shared care can be beneficial for single mothers to engage in labour market activity while their ex-partners are ‘caring’ for the children. Mothers identified that the child support system was used as a form of economic abuse to jeopardise their study through imposing further financial stress on them. Where women were employed, this tactic pressured women to obtain more employment, while having to care and protect children from child abusers. This tactic was not instigated merely by the belief that mothers should get a job, as the intent of perpetrators was to sabotage women’s employment or anything that may improve women and children’s financial circumstances or their housing stability. Sabotaging behaviours also placed mothers at risk of non-compliance under *Welfare to Work*, and suggests that the policy can be used as a patriarchal tool of abuse.

**Conclusion**

Welfare and domestic violence policies promote employment as a pathway out of violence for women.41 This, in turn, portrays women who have experienced violence as having been solely financially dependent on men. However, this was found not to be the case for the women in this study. Prior to separation, the mothers in this study had contributed to the family home through domestic and care work, as dual income earners and in some cases, as sole providers of the home and care of the children. Yet their financial contributions, domestic and care work and paid labour were rendered invisible where mothers had gone through legal and family law procedures. The presumption that women are dependants of men hides the use of economic abuse, and domestically violent men’s dependency on women. Because of economic abuse, employment did not protect mothers from poverty within the relationship or when they decided to leave.

Overall there was a systemic failure throughout the judicial system and child protection agency to stop violence and protect these women and children from experiencing it in the future. Mothers in this research were not passive but pro-active in accessing authorities in a bid to protect themselves and their children, but in many cases their experiences of violence were minimised, treated with disbelief and even resulted in negative repercussions. Denials

41 The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, "Time for Action."; Whiteford, "Family Joblessness in Australia".
of abuse, woman-blaming and the threat of having children removed serve to maintain the silence of violence against women and children. Child contact was prioritised by legal workers and mediation services, placing women and children at risk of further violence. The findings indicate that civil and legal responses to violence and safety lack cohesion and are an inadequate means to ensure the safety of women and children. These factors reflect radical feminists’ theory on systemic violence because, as we saw, the privileges and prerogatives of violent men were prioritised, thus maintaining patriarchal rights. These factors contributed to the single mother participants entering the welfare system and being at risk of poverty, homelessness and further violence. Moreover, there seemed to be no consideration of children’s well-being and no attention given to the impact of trauma by judicial and child protection agents, through prioritising shared care.

Through prioritising shared care, violent men were able to gain in property settlements, had their child support liabilities reduced and were entitled to FTB payments, which in turn, reduced mothers’ FTB payments. This not only makes mothers’ financial and labour contributions within the relationship invisible, but also renders invisible their current work of mothering and being the primary financial and care provider. However, as has been demonstrated, prioritising shared care is also a legal means to financially abuse women. Women’s claims to property, child support and FTB were met with further threats of violence and legal action, where there seemed to be no recourse for perpetrators. Some mothers reported ex-partners were claiming FTB, but were not meeting their child contact obligations, which suggests welfare fraud. Still in all cases the financial burden of raising children was solely placed upon the mother, while most fathers neglected their duties despite their financial gains.

Subsequently, the research showed that mothers were subjected to further abuses to sabotage their employment and study opportunities. Again shared care factored into perpetrators’ abuse, either through economic means, stalking and harassment, neglecting care obligations or death threats. However, continual post-separation violence and having to care for children who are repeatedly traumatised and assaulted are not factored into the rationale behind the Welfare to Work legislation. A subsequent problem of this is that mothers’ compliance with the participation requirements is intentionally jeopardised by ex-partners who put them at risk of being suspended from payments. Only in cases where mothers’ and children’s whereabouts were unknown to the perpetrator, had the violence stopped. Furthermore, while
mothers were subjected to relentless forms of violence including economic abuse, the research reflected that Centrelink benefits for single mothers were too inadequate, leaving women struggling to pay rent and bills, buy food and necessities for their children.

Contrary to the welfare dependency theory, domestic violence and systemic violence placed single mothers at risk of poverty, homelessness and violence. Most problematic is that these systemic problems are absent in the welfare reform debate and that *Welfare to Work* can contribute to the existing problem. While this chapter has touched on some issues that make complying with the *Welfare to Work* participation requirements complicated for women who have experienced domestic violence, the following chapter examines single mothers’ experiences of negotiating participation exemptions with Centrelink.
Chapter Five
Participation Exemptions

Introduction

The previous chapter examined mothers’ experiences of violence prior to and post separation, as well as how domestically violent behaviours, legal systems and systems associated with family payments contributed to placing mothers and children at risk of poverty, homelessness and further violence. For the women who participated in this study, entering single motherhood and the welfare system was a result of leaving a violent domestic partner and having children to care for. As detailed in Chapter Two, provisions within the Welfare to Work system permit principal carers, who have experienced domestic violence, a 16 week exemption from the participation requirements. Furthermore, single mothers who have medical conditions can be granted an exemption through the CWCA program. These processes are applied if barriers to employment have been identified through the screening process.

This chapter examines the experiences of single mothers negotiating exemptions with Centrelink and within the CWCA program. The chapter presents the analysis of interviews with 23 single mother participants, as well as eight women’s emergency service workers, a Centrelink officer and a Job Capacity Assessor. Their experiences and perspectives on Welfare to Work’s exemption policies are examined to ascertain the efficiency of these processes and if they support mothers who have experienced violence and have medical conditions.

Single mothers’ experiences negotiating exemptions for domestic violence and in special circumstances

Of the 23 mothers, 15 had entered the welfare system prior to the commencement of the Welfare to Work Act. These ‘grandfathered’ mothers were not eligible for the 16 week exemption under the original legislation, but were still eligible for a lesser exemption which could extend to 16 weeks if they were experiencing high stress.
associated with a relationship breakdown.¹ The other eight mothers were new applicants, six of whom were entitled to the 16 week exemption when they entered the Welfare to Work system. One mother did not qualify as eligibility prior to 2010 was determined on the grounds of having ceased being in a relationship within a 26 week time period. The other mother did not qualify as she did not come under the mandatory participation requirements when she entered the welfare system. However, the legislation was amended through the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principle Carers Act 2010, which extended the 16 week exemption to parents still in relationships and to those experiencing post separation violence at any time after separation.² This section examines single mothers’ experiences of negotiating participation exemptions with Centrelink.

All the mothers who disclosed their experience of domestic violence to Centrelink reported that they were shown no compassion:

“I’d come from domestic violence. I’d explained that, I’d had a counsellor from there at Centrelink, and they gave me all this paperwork, wanting to know how much the value of the furniture was, and I had no idea, and I said “This is all overwhelming for me”. I burst out crying, and they just looked at me as if, you know, who cares, get over it, get on with it. (Claudia 44, children 16, 14, twins 7)”

Screening focused on determining eligibility to ensure mothers were not trying to cheat the system. According to participants, fraud and eligibility screening was given a higher priority than screening measures for violence. This practice was also reflected in US research by Hays in 2003, and Lindhorst, Meyers and Casey in 2008.³ Claudia was expected to estimate the value of assets of the family home she had left behind, even though she may not be able to have access to them again. Most of the mothers who had to leave their homes were in this situation. Claudia was accompanied by a women’s emergency service worker from the refuge where she was living, when she attended Centrelink to apply for income support. However, the presence of the worker did not

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lead to Centrelink acknowledging her situation. Like many of the other single mother participants, her disclosure of domestic violence was not treated in a professional or supportive manner. Instead her distress and disclosure was ignored and she was treated with contempt. She was also not informed of exemptions or the participation requirements.

Jasmine’s case illustrates a number of procedural failures and insensitivity to domestic violence by Centrelink:

I had the interim AVO [protection order]... I was at my parents, and we went to Centrelink to see what the story was... but I did have to prove I wasn’t living with him anymore, in order to claim Parenting Payment, so they had to get names of people that I knew and ring them, and of course those people didn’t know that (a) I’d left, and (b) I’d left because he was violent ...They gave me a 12-month exemption off child support...They didn’t offer me any crisis payment, they didn’t offer me an exemption for DV. They didn’t offer me a social worker. (Jasmine, 42, children 11, 8)

In accordance with the Social Security Guidelines, having a protection order was sufficient proof to verify that Jasmine had left a domestically violent relationship and did not need third party verification. However, more verification was requested from several third parties, which, was unnecessary. So although Jasmine’s parents were present, family were not used by Centrelink to verify domestic violence and separation unless they had been household members of Jasmine’s marital home. This is problematic as seen in this situation where the other people Jasmine knew had no idea of her circumstances, whereas family could verify her situation. These restrictions within the guidelines suggest that families of victims of violence are not considered trustworthy and may collude to falsely obtain welfare benefits. The findings also suggest there may be administration problems within Centrelink. Domestic violence was flagged on women’s Centrelink records through the exemption from pursuing child support, but the correct protocols in regards to a principal carer disclosing domestic violence were not followed. The women in this study were neither being informed of, nor granted exemptions and other entitlements for which they may have been eligible, such as the crisis payment. This suggests that Centrelink staff may not have knowledge of the correct


5 Ibid.
legislative procedures or they are unwilling to implement them.

The data suggest there may be a problem with the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) if both domestic violence and homelessness are not being recognised as barriers to seeking employment, as Fiona’s case illustrates:

*When I left I rang Centrelink and basically said look I’m now single looking for somewhere to live, I’m now homeless at the moment, but within days, before I even got my payment they were sending me letters about going to a job network place, which might be good for some people, but I was in the middle of – my head was nowhere, so I was trying to work out where we were going to live let alone going to a Centrelink meeting and going into their office and trying to find babysitters at seven o’clock in the morning and yeah…it was stuff that I didn’t need at the time.* (Fiona, 39, children 9, 6)

Fiona reported that she disclosed domestic violence and homelessness to four different workers within the welfare system and that each worker failed to inform her of the exemption. The call centre worker failed to identify domestic violence as a barrier through the JSCI and did not refer Fiona to the social worker. Instead she was referred to an employment service agency to start the participation requirements. Fiona sought the help of a Centrelink social worker for a crisis payment but the worker did not inform her about exemptions. The employment service then sent her for a CWCA, where she was classified as ‘job ready’. In each case the four workers involved failed to follow the correct protocols. Fiona and her children were traumatised and homeless, yet she was classified as job ready. Fiona’s case indicates that not being informed or granted the domestic violence exemption is not just a one off mistake, or a just a problem with the JSCI. This may suggest a whole system failure in delivery of information on the procedures in regards to domestic violence

Three mothers reported being suspended because they could not comply with reporting procedures due to issues directly related to domestic violence, but they were not offered an exemption.

*I just got a letter that… I have to participate in some sort of scheme...They immediately stopped my fortnight payment, but when I went there and showed them all my court papers and that I don’t have like a place to live and I am looking for the property, how can I do this, so I said that in special circumstances you do give some exemption, so I want that exemption, so they said no, no, and they say “You will have to come every fortnight and submit this letter”*. (Susheela
Susheela was suspended four times for non-compliance when family court appearances coincided with Centrelink appointments and employment service interviews. She was denied an exemption although she was eligible for a domestic violence exemption under the *Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010*. Along with family court matters and homelessness, Susheela’s children had been sexually assaulted by their father. With the combination of stressors associated with domestic violence and forced compliance, Susheela developed a serious health problem.

Of the 23 mothers in this study, 21 of them had no knowledge of the domestic violence exemption. One found out about the exemption from another source, and when she queried Centrelink, she was told she no longer qualified. However, she would still have been eligible for the lesser exemption. The research suggests that even after the introduction of the *Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010*, information and availability of exemptions were not being made more accessible.

**Women’s emergency service workers**

Women’s emergency service workers in SA identified that the participation exemption policy was not attuned to the realities of domestic violence, which escalates after separation and continues longer than 16 weeks:

> It’s highly unlikely that it’s going to be sorted in 12 weeks...But there’s not an understanding of what the reality is of domestic violence and they think that once the woman’s left that’s it, it’s over and there’s no acknowledgement or understanding of post separation violence, which of course, we all know that DV escalates after separation. But that’s not understood in Centrelink and how the policy is implemented. (Sharon, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

Women’s emergency service workers found Centrelink lacked cohesion within its own system:

What happens with DV most women the first time they make contact with Centrelink when they’ve experienced DV and left a relationship and have applied

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6Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."
7Ibid.
for crisis payment and that has to be approved by a Centrelink social worker so you’d expect that might facilitate a process were it worked into the exemption but it doesn’t. (Sally, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

According to these workers, domestic violence is flagged on the woman’s records yet they are not informed of the participation exemption nor is the exemption process facilitated. Instead if the woman finds out about the exemption, she is required to apply separately for a participation exemption on the same grounds. Ironically, women are expected to have knowledge of the domestic violence exemption and agency to negotiate exemptions with Centrelink, at a time when their ability to practice agency has been inhibited by domestic violence and Centrelink denies them information to do so. This problem was also reflected in Fiona’s case and in other cases where single mothers had been granted exemptions from pursuing child support.

Even with the advocacy of a worker, women were still receiving the incorrect exemption:

I could say that that we have succeeded in getting an exemption of sorts for at least a limited period of time but never without hassle. We go into Centrelink or we ring Centrelink I always try to talk to a social worker, which itself is quite a difficult process… So often you may get that exemption but often it isn’t for the full 16 weeks, you may get it for eight weeks and it’s up to the review of the Centrelink social worker. Often clients aren’t told the exemption exists and they only deal with the Centrelink officer. So it takes a great deal of intervention by the worker of the DV service so they can actually access the exemption. And sometimes at Centrelink they don’t seem to be aware that there is an actual DV exemption and it becomes special family circumstances which is a 13 week exemption, not a 16 week exemption. (Margot, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

Women need to have strong advocacy to get that exemption. (Sharon, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

Concerns were raised for women who do not access domestic violence services, as workers found women were not being informed of the exemption, which was difficult to attain even with advocacy:

I think the hard thing is, is that even with the intervention of a worker it’s a hard thing to get. The vast majority of women that experience DV don’t come anywhere near a service. So how they get the exemption I have no idea because they wouldn’t even know that it existed and I don’t think that it would be routinely offered to them by Centrelink. (Sally, Women’s emergency service worker SA)
The single mother findings reflected these concerns. However, although the majority did not have contact with domestic violence services, the two who did, were not informed by workers of exemptions. This suggests that not all women’s emergency workers are aware of the participation exemption for domestic violence.

A women’s emergency service worker in WA also reported that women were not receiving the correct legislated exemption. Lengths of exemptions were under the legislated 16 weeks protocol, and varied depending on the Centrelink social worker administering the process as the following excerpt from the transcript reveals:

*Teresa (Women’s emergency service worker WA): There are certain Centrelink people you get a rapport with and you will speak to them and they will be more accommodating in their length of time than others will be...A minimum of four weeks...And I’ve managed to get one up to three months...The time issue isn’t even an issue for us...the only concern would be for the women when they do leave the refuge and that time runs out.*

*Researcher: Say if somebody got a short exemption, how many times would they have to go through the exemption process?*

*Teresa (Women’s emergency service worker WA): I’m really am not too sure, I think we’ve only had to do it for one where I’ve had to extend it, usually the women are out [of the refuge] by the time the exemptions up.*

The scenario indicates women’s emergency service staff need to be informed of the correct legislative procedures, so that they can advocate for the correct exemption on the woman’s behalf. This would ensure that when women left the refuge after a short period of time they could focus on settling children into new homes and schools and other matters that may arise because of separation and violence. Women going through crisis would need more than four weeks. It is unknown if women are able to negotiate exemptions with Centrelink after they left the refuge.

**Centrelink Officer’s interview**

The interview with the Centrelink officer suggested that Centrelink workers were not informed of the domestic violence exemption.

*I’ve never seen the exemption based on domestic violence, for Welfare to Work, because Job Capacity Assessments are based on generally medical conditions...but domestic violence isn’t a reason but that doesn’t mean it wouldn’t get looked*
upon as something that couldn’t be taken into account, and so if someone was to say they were experiencing domestic violence and that’s the reason at this point they felt they couldn’t work...I would say “OK, go and speak to the Job Capacity Assessor”, but I can guarantee that the Job Capacity Assessor would probably send it back to us as someone experiencing depression and anxiety... I would suggest to that person that if they’re finding it very hard to cope in their life, that they may wish to speak to one of our social work team, but in terms of exempting them from the actual looking for work, it wouldn’t be the social worker’s delegation...but it would be the Job Capacity Assessor who would make that final determination in regards to those reasons...When we look at what’s called E-reference, which is our guide that we can look up to get assistance on legislation and on following particular work flows, so if we were to look that (domestic violence) up and say “OK, possible exemptions for participation in Welfare to Work …”, domestic violence is not on that list. (Centrelink officer)

The JSCI, which is used to screen for employment barriers, corresponds to the internal procedural guidelines that the Centrelink officer referred to as the E-reference. According to the Centrelink officer, domestic violence was not on the JSCI and there were no Guidelines to Social Security Law relating to exemptions for domestic violence and procedures on the internal procedural guidelines. The Centrelink officer in this case has tried to medicalise domestic violence by referring applicants for a CWCA. When the person should be referred to the Centrelink social worker and granted the 16 week domestic violence exemption.\(^9\) The absence of the domestic violence exemption from the internal procedural guidelines suggests an institutional failure whereby information is not made available to Centrelink staff and consequently not used to assist recipients.

Responding to the researcher’s question about Centrelink training in domestic violence, the worker described minimal training:

Well, (laughs) probably not as much as we should. In the three and a half years that I’ve been there I’ve had one hour of domestic violence training...one hour of suicide training, across the lifetime of your work, and even though I guess they’re very in-depth sessions, I personally would say it’s not sufficient, management might argue that it is, as long as someone’s had the training once, they might argue that it’s enough...I mean the thing is too like we get customer satisfaction training, and it’s the same thing every year...I could see there would be no reason why they can’t do the same sort of ... I mean we have to attend those types of training sessions every single year, and sometimes multiple times a year. I think it’s important to refresh people’s memory and skills regarding things like domestic violence, and also suicide...I’d say probably more the male Customer

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Service Officers might not be as empathetic, or maybe as attuned to some of the scenarios where women are going through these circumstances. (Centrelink officer)

Centrelink staff had to attend multiple training sessions throughout the year on ‘customer satisfaction’ training but only one training session on domestic violence and suicide was provided to staff during their employment. The research suggests that training on domestic violence was insufficient.

Discussion
The findings indicate that Centrelink staff, and those who work within the Welfare to Work system, lack knowledge of the correct procedures in regards to principal carers who have experienced domestic violence. A major problem seemed to be the absence of domestic violence being listed as a barrier to employment on the JSCI. The NESA drew attention to this problem in 2008. However, as the interviews were conducted with single mothers before, and after, the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010 was introduced, this suggests that the problem of delivering information on exemptions had persisted after the amendments. Subsequently the amendments also seemed to fail to make exemptions more accessible.

The Centrelink officer also reported there were no exemptions for domestic violence listed on the internal procedural guidelines. This may explain why single mothers in this research were not being informed or granted exemptions they qualified for or why they were not referred to the Centrelink social worker. The research suggests there is a systemic failure to provide welfare staff with correct protocols and processes, which led to women’s disclosure of violence being ignored or them being incorrectly referred for a CWCA. This offers some explanation of why domestic violence exemptions have rarely been granted.

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11 Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010.”
The findings of the single mother interviews corresponded with the women’s emergency service workers’ interviews, and suggest that women without advocacy do not ordinarily receive exemptions. However, women’s emergency service workers reported that Centrelink social workers were not granting the correct exemptions and were reluctant to administer exemptions even when women had an advocate with them. Being in a refuge or homeless did not seem to provide sufficient evidence that the woman was in crisis. The data also identified that there was a lack of cohesion within Centrelink, where mothers had to see a Centrelink social worker to be granted a crisis payment, but were not informed of exemptions. If the woman finds out about exemptions, she has to go through the whole verification process of telling her story again, and potentially reliving the trauma. This can be perceived as a means to deter women from asking for exemptions. Again this reflects a possible problem with training on the correct legislative procedures and domestic violence. The data cannot provide insight to why Centrelink social workers are reluctant to administer exemptions. However, this may also reflect neoliberal presumptions amongst Centrelink social workers, that employment is the solution to the problem of violence or women are to blame. Again where single mother participants were granted an exemption from pursuing child support, domestic violence would be flagged on their records, but information on exemptions were denied and the correct protocols not carried out, which also reflected a double standard.

Denial of exemptions and the dismissal of disclosures reflected insensitivity to domestic violence. Furthermore, screening focused on welfare fraud rather than supporting women in crisis. As Coker et al.’s US research in 2002 identified, negative responses by services and the general community towards disclosures of violence have an adverse impact on women’s mental health outcomes. This aspect needs serious consideration within the welfare system as all of the mothers in this research reported that dealing with Centrelink caused them stress, which impacted negatively on their mental and physical health. Moreover, the practice of denying exemptions suggests hostility towards single mothers, which Levin, and Lindhorst, Meyers and Casey believed to be the reason women were missing out on screening and exemptions in the US.

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All 23 single mothers were caring for children, who had either witnessed or experienced violence, yet none were offered or informed of any of the exemptions, which reflects similar findings to Australian research by Braff and Barrett Meyering and the Welfare Rights Centre in 2011. Jasmine’s case illustrated that a protection order was not acknowledged and she had to obtain further verification. Not allowing family to verify that a person has left their partner poses a problem for those women who have not told anyone outside the family about the violence. At this time, women’s coping abilities are stretched. Mothers also have to deal with ramifications of domestic violence such as homelessness, finding accommodation, resettling, legal matters, trauma and health issues and the extra care needs of children who have also been traumatised. The findings in this study echo Evan’s findings in 2007 in that there is a high expectation of woman having recovered and the violence having stopped immediately after separation. Hence the failure to correctly apply the domestic violence exemption reinforces the invisibility of domestic violence.

**Comprehensive Work Capacity Assessments**

The aim of the CWCA is to reduce the number of people with medical conditions applying for participation exemptions by assessing their capacity to job seek, prioritising job seeking and referring people to employment services. As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, many women who experience domestic violence are more susceptible to mental and physical health disorders. However, all mothers in this study reported that their stress levels had escalated since they were forced into the Welfare to Work regime. This is consistent with Connelly and

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16Evans, "Battle-Scars."


Murphy’s findings in 2009, on low income earners within the welfare system. Of the 23 mothers, 13 reported having health problems. The majority of those who reported physical ailments and serious illnesses, stated these either manifested, or were compounded, by the stress of having to comply with the participation requirements. Seven mothers were sent for a CWCA by Centrelink. This next section examines mothers’ experiences of the CWCA and women’s emergency service workers experiences in relation to domestic violence and the physical and mental health of mothers, before turning to the perspective of a job capacity assessor (JCA).

**Single mothers’ experiences of negotiating exemptions on grounds of incapacity**

Fiona was the participant in the previous section who was eligible for a 16 week participation exemption, but after disclosing to three different workers that she was homeless after leaving domestic violence, she was incorrectly sent for a CWCA.

> It was probably like first two weeks of all of this happening, I remember bawling my eyes out to her and her saying well, basically, physically you’re okay, mentally you’re okay, you’re upset but you’re okay to work. I didn’t even actually know what I was doing –I thought I was there for a physical I don’t know what I was there for...Unless I wanted to go to my GP or psychiatrist or psychologist and get a referral or whatever, she said basically – she said you’re upset and it’s all raw and I still had nowhere to live at that stage, that was what was upsetting more than anything, I had two kids, a car that was dying on me and nowhere to live. Apparently that was all fine. (Fiona 39, children, 9, 6)

Although the correct protocol for the JCA to follow would have been to send Fiona back to Centrelink and be referred to the social worker for an exemption, she was sent back to the employment service and classified as job ready. Not being given an explanation or information on the CWCA caused her further distress. Having just fled domestic violence and being emotionally and psychologically distressed, with two children to care for while homeless was not perceived by the JCA as being of any significance that would impact on her ability to comply with the participation requirements.

Having medical verification of the ramifications of domestic violence did not guarantee an exemption would be granted:

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19 Kate Connelly and John Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians: A Group Biography Over Time. Second Interim Report," (The Australian Centre School of Historical Studies: The University of Melbourne, 2009).
I went to one twice, and her assessment was, “Just go and find a job, a job, you know, it’s just a few hours work.” Yes, I did that twice, I think she was an occupational therapist. I had a breakdown, and part of it was the Centrelink stress of how they’d cut me off. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

Mary was diagnosed with PTSD after years of experiencing physical and psychological violence and she had medical certificates to verify her condition. However, on two occasions the JCA overrode the medical practitioner’s prognosis and assessed Mary as job ready. However, she was unable to comply because of her medical condition, which led to her being suspended numerous times and subjected to further financial hardship, which severely affected her mental health.

Other mothers with medical verification of mental health conditions related to experiencing domestic violence also reported being refused an exemption or any leniency from having to comply with the participation requirements by JCAs. These findings were also reflected in Jordan and Horn’s 2007 study, where those with barriers to employment and medical verification were still assessed as job ready.20 The research suggests that regardless of medical verification, JCAs may not have expertise or understanding of domestic violence and the impact it has on women’s mental and physical health. The Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Report in 2008 reflected similar findings, where JCAs were not qualified to make the assessment or lacked expertise concerning the person’s type of illness.21

Under the Welfare to Work guidelines, cancer is classified as a temporary illness until the person is diagnosed as terminal.22 As illustrated in Rhoda’s case, the seriousness of her illness was not acknowledged by Centrelink, but rather the institutional response was to enforce compliance until they received the results of her CWCA:

*It took forever to get the appointments with the social worker, and it was exhausting and a number of times I went to Centrelink during that time because they were stuffing everything up...cancer is apparently not recognized and I was in hospital a lot and really debilitated by the chemotherapy and radiotherapy and*

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several operations...I still would need to be looking for work until I did my JCA... but yeah it was a stress while I was having chemotherapy...at some stages I couldn't actually talk, and I felt so sick with explaining things so... but it took a long long time to get the information back. And they never told me what the result was, I ended up in tears and said look I need to know my future because at the moment I'm not well, and not knowing what my income is going to be, and what you've decided. They said, we don't normally give that information to you...Well, I had to dig to find that out, they gave it to me two years, so as long as my doctor kept giving me a medical certificate.(Rhoda, 49, children, 25, 11)

In Rhoda’s case the participation requirements were of greater priority than her recovery, trivialising the seriousness of cancer. Being pressured to continue participation requirements and Centrelink’s reluctance to inform her of the CWCA decision reflects scepticism towards serious illnesses, disregard for medical certificates, as well as a lack of empathy. This was also reflected in Connolly and Murphy’s 2009 study, which found Centrelink's staff responses were unsympathetic to mothers with medical conditions and placed more pressure on them to find jobs.23 This suggests that medical conditions are being treated with suspicion by Centrelink and perceived as fraudulent attempts to avoid the participation requirements. After Rhoda was granted an exemption, her payments were regularly suspended, which not only indicates Centrelink was repeatedly making mistakes but also suggests that she had been placed under surveillance. This reflects Gilliom’s argument that the least powerful are subjected to the most invasive forms of surveillance, which is specifically designed to deter recipients from staying on welfare.24 In Rhoda’s case, her illness made her even more vulnerable to being suspended from payments if she did not comply with Centrelink requests. No empathy was shown towards her condition. Rather Centrelink demanded that she attend in person to have the problem rectified.

Every two weeks then I wouldn’t get a payment, I would end back up in Centrelink. You know it was really hard you got to line up, and I could hardly stand up and then I had to have an appointment, could I do it on the phone it easier for me to talk at home and yet it's like err. (Rhoda, 49, children, 25, 11)

As persons who are ill are deemed at risk of welfare dependency, the aim of the CWCA program is to support them through connecting them to an employment service.25 Jasmine reported this was not helpful:

23 Connelly and Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians."
25 Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, "Job Capacity Assessment Review."
For the first six months of being on the Welfare to Work, I got two medical certificates, three months each, because I was really, really stressed about coping with the whole thing...The idea of dealing with Centrelink was mind numbing and since the police would do nothing then how could I expect Centrelink to understand or care...During this time I also had to undergo radioactive iodine therapy for thyroid cancer I'd had some 10 years previous...The procedure requires me to stop all thyroid hormone replacement, it results in me being quite ill...They [Centrelink] sent me to one of those people... he asked who I wanted to go to for job network. I said the [agency name], which there was an office in [name of residential town]... Next thing I knew I got a letter with a date for an appointment with the [agency name], in [capital city]. Which is an hour and a half away, so I had to hassle with them over that. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)

Jasmine was experiencing post-separation violence, a serious illness and had to care for two children with extra needs. However, the JCA must have felt that Jasmine was capable of doing partial participation requirements to connect her to an employment service. Extra stress was then placed on Jasmine, which was compounded more through the JCA making a mistake with the employment service referral.

The JCA in Georgia’s case showed more empathy and gave her time to recover:

They gave me a period, an exemption for looking for work for, I think it was six months... so to allow me to have the surgery and a recovery period from that. (Georgia, 50, children, 22, 19, 14)

In contrast to Jasmine, Georgia’s surgery did not encompass a life threatening situation and she was not connected to an employment service. This suggests that CWCA determinations are not strictly based on medical evidence but personal perspectives of the JCA staff. This also reflects similarities within the Ombudsman’s Report in 2008, which found that JCAs are able to override medical evidence in favour of their own opinion, even though they are not qualified to provide such opinions.26 Georgia also reported that she had not disclosed domestic violence to anyone within the welfare system. It may be possible that the disclosure of violence may have influenced the negative responses Rhoda and Jasmine received.

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26McMillan, "Implementation of Job Capacity Assessments for the Purposes of Welfare to Work Initiatives".
Fortnightly surveillance is enforced for those deemed as being at ‘high risk’ of not complying with the mandatory participation requirements.\textsuperscript{27} However, the Guide to Social Security Law stipulates a person who has a medical exemption is also exempt from personally lodging fortnightly forms and is not required to complete a job search diary.\textsuperscript{28} In both Rhoda’s and Jasmine’s case, this guideline was not applied by Centrelink, and they were both placed under the fortnightly surveillance system. As Jasmine stated:

\begin{quote}
It was like “Well you still need to keep coming in”. I said “Well what for? I’ll be giving you the same thing I gave you last fortnight...an empty diary”... I had to go to the hospital... I was supposed to take my activity diary to Centrelink...my mum went into Centrelink with the diary, and because I hadn’t given her a letter with my permission to lodge it, they told her that I would have to take the diary with me to the hospital and give it to a social worker who would contact them with the details... I just found that they absolutely hound you, it’s like you’re not, not entitled to heal or recover, or think, or clear your head, or get your kids sorted... as well as trying to find somewhere to live. I just don’t know how those people expect us to cope. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)
\end{quote}

In Jasmine’s and Rhoda’s cases, the enforcement of the fortnightly surveillance was discriminatory. Unwarranted surveillance placed extra stressors on these mothers, trivialising life threatening illnesses as merely a fraudulent means to avoid the participation requirements. Gilliom’s research on US welfare mothers, reflected similarities where women with chronic illnesses, who could not work at all, were still subject to surveillance measures and hostility from welfare workers.\textsuperscript{29} Placing mothers incorrectly under surveillance appeared to negatively impact on their ability to recover. If women are too ill to go to Centrelink with their empty job diary, their payments will be suspended. Jasmine’s case also illustrated the inappropriateness and the inconvenience of surveilling sick mothers. Jasmine’s family were not trusted to hand in an empty job diary to verify that she did not seek employment that fortnight because she was too ill and exempt from doing so. Gilliom’s research reflected similarities, whereby the welfare system is so intent on seeking out welfare cheats that it overlooks supporting those in need and those who have chronic health conditions.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28}Australian Government, "3.2.1.70 Notification & Recipient Obligations for NSA".
\textsuperscript{29}Gilliom, \textit{Overseers of the Poor}.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.
In comparison, Georgia did not experience the problems other women reported they had with CWCA exemption process. However, Georgia reported she had never informed Centrelink or any associated agencies that she had experienced domestic violence. From the data, it is not possible to ascertain if disclosure of domestic violence was associated with women having problems with exemptions on medical grounds, and thus there is a need for more research in this area.

**Women’s emergency service worker’s interviews**

Women’s emergency service workers, who had knowledge of the guidelines on exemptions, were frustrated with the Centrelink social workers not knowing the correct legislative procedure and applying incorrect procedures.

*I think this is the fault of Centrelink. They end up having to have a job capacity assessment. I’ve had one situation where the woman ended up, and it didn’t matter what I said or did with the Centrelink social worker she ended up having a job capacity assessment, which in my view wasn’t necessary under the legislation because she qualified for the exemption.* (Margot, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

JCAs were reported to lack knowledge of domestic violence or specialised services.

*She (client) was told she was going to this job capacity place...at my next visit she presented in front of me, a referral for a mental health plan ... to get her six sessions with a psychologist...with no acknowledgement that she was connected to a service...And when I actually spoke to the worker that had done it, she said “oh I didn’t realise that it was a service like yours that she was connected to”. I would think that people in these positions, surely would have the skill to do a proper assessment. But they clearly don’t...So, there’s actually three women I’ve been involved with that have been sent to a JCA...they end up with this case plan that was not achievable. Given that they’re in emergency accommodation.* (Fran, Women’s emergency service worker SA)

Women’s emergency service workers pointed out that the CWCA process did not support women who had experienced violence. Women were treated as job ready and expected to be able to comply with the participation requirements, without considering that they were in crisis or experiencing the ramifications of violence. This suggests that the attitude towards violence within the welfare system reflects the presumption that violence stops at separation and women and children recover immediately.

**Job Capacity Assessor interview**

According to the JCA interviewed as part of this research, she saw a number of recipients
each week who had been referred by Centrelink or an employment service for a CWCA because of domestic violence.

If I was to do a full week of those appointments, so 35 appointments, five people in a week maybe. (JCA)

Out of 35 people per week, approximately five had been referred because of domestic violence. These people would have qualified for a participation exemption; however, the JCA was unaware that principal carers were eligible for an exemption, so these clients were referred to an employment service agency.

People that come in for assessments can also be presenting just because of the social or personal problems that I guess they’ve been experiencing. We call them ... psychosocial barriers...Complete exemption based on violence alone, unfortunately, under legislation...it really does rely on medical conditions rather than personal factors, or those psychosocial factors, which is how, unfortunately, domestic violence is categorised. We will invite the person that’s attending us to seek medical support from their doctor, but if it is...if they’re in a refuge and there’s issues with accommodation, more than likely what we’ll do is trigger a referral to what’s Stream Four. (JCA)

Without medical verification, mothers who have experienced violence are assessed on their level of disadvantage. This determines the level of employment assistance for which parents are eligible and also the amount payable to an employment service. 31 The most disadvantaged are referred to Stream Four, which attracts the highest funding for employment services. 32

It’s more about linking them with community support services, or Centrelink-based support services, to assist them to move forward to work...The employment service providers are designed to be empowering. (JCA).

The CWCA system prioritised employment service programs for women disadvantaged by violence, which is seen to be the answer to all their problems. From a feminist standpoint perspective, prioritising employment service programs is another means of exploiting women who have experienced violence. Only the employment service provider benefits from this

process through receiving higher funding rates. The presumption that employment service programs are empowering dismisses women’s claims of violence as trivial or fabrications and does not challenge male violence against women or children.

Responding to the researcher’s question about training in domestic violence, the JCA conceded only one week of general training is provided, with no specific training on domestic violence or associated guidelines:

JCA:  DEEWR, yeah, establishes specific guidelines.
Researcher:  They would have a set of guidelines on actual domestic violence?
JCA:  To be honest I don’t even know.
Researcher:  Who provides the training? Is that your provider?
JCA:  Yeah, internal training...I believe you get a week in training of understanding (a) what a job capacity assessment is, (b) referral outcomes, and (c) how, I guess, to write what is essentially a medical legal document.
Researcher:  So does anything about domestic violence come within that training?
JCA:  Not specifically

The JCA did not recommend disability services for women who have been affected by domestic violence:

Researcher:  what other services do you refer besides the Stream 4 and the employment services?
JCA:  Stream 4 and employment services, and disability employment services streams as well, but that would be less appropriate for the clientele you’re describing. These are more perhaps people with learning disorders, muscular, skeletal injuries, etc.

The findings suggest the JCA was not specialised in domestic violence and had little awareness of the matter. This was indicated by the JCA not being able to associate the ramifications of domestic violence with disabilities. Issues such as mental health issues and complications from physical assault and injuries were seen to belong to another client group entirely.
Discussion

The accounts of all three participant groups reflected that mothers who had experienced violence were being incorrectly sent for a CWCA. DEEWR oversees the information delivery to Centrelink, employment services and JCA providers. However, these findings suggest that there is a major problem in this area. This was apparent in the ALRC inquiry in 2011 that was also incorrectly informed about the legislative procedures relating to domestic violence. Failure to deliver the correct information to organisations within the welfare system may be deliberate to push victims of violence into the CWCA system and deny them exemptions. From a feminist standpoint perspective this not only trivialises the ramifications of violence but also renders their children as being of no value by prioritising employment programs over care and recovery. This reflects Rich’s argument that mothering is seen as having no worth once women step outside of the patriarchal family. Prioritising the CWCA system over exemptions reinforces cultural beliefs that women are to blame for violence and that they fabricate stories to avoid job seeking activities, which was insinuated by the ALRC. Second wave and radical feminists have written a considerable amount on how violence is used to maintain control and to exploit women in the family and labour market. This in turn is beneficial for the capitalist class to gain higher profits. From a feminist standpoint view, the CWCA process can be seen as another means of exploiting women so employment services can increase their profit margins through receiving the highest level of funding for dealing with the most disadvantaged.

While the JCA claimed that referring women who had experienced violence to employment services would be empowering, this was not reflected in the other participants’ accounts. Single mother participants and women’s emergency service workers reported that the CWCA process was not supportive as it failed to recognise domestic violence, homelessness and having children to care for as significant barriers to employment. The research reflects that women may not be informed of what the CWCA entails or what relevant documents they

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need to take with them. As in Fiona’s case, she was not informed by Centrelink that she really needed medical verification to get an exemption. As we saw, not knowing what was happening to her caused further unnecessary stress.

The research reflected that JCAs lacked training and knowledge of domestic violence. Lack of expertise in this area may help support assumptions that employment is the best solution. This research data reflected that JCAs lacked understanding of physiological and physical health problems and disabilities associated with domestic violence, although there is a considerable amount of research that has linked domestic violence with health problems.\(^\text{38}\)

This was identified in all the participant groups. Women’s emergency workers identified case plans made by JCAs, which were not achievable and placed more stress and pressure on women in crisis. The JCA in this research did not associate domestic violence with physical and mental health problems. In one case where the mother had medical verification of PTSD, she was still classified as job ready. Being unable to comply with the requirements and the added stress led to her being suspended from payments and incredible hardship.

Even where single mothers had medical verification for serious illnesses, the research reflected that in several cases Centrelink was unsympathetic. In Rhoda’s case, she was forced to comply with participation requirements until she had the CWCA. Further mistakes were identified such as payment suspensions and surveillance monitoring, which were also found in Jasmine’s case, who was also referred to an employment service. Although this indicates that the system prioritises compliance over recovery, thus trivialising serious illnesses, it also suggests that these women were being surveilled as potential welfare frauds, which overlooked the seriousness of their illnesses. This reflects Gilliom’s argument that the characteristics of the welfare recipient have been reduced to that of a welfare cheat that the system fails to support those that are most in need of support and need proper health treatment.\(^\text{39}\)

Furthermore, the findings suggest that those with medical conditions who had also disclosed domestic violence were more likely than those who did not disclose violence, to be treated unsympathetically and endure problems with payments and the incorrect requirements. In this respect the disclosure of violence can lead to discriminatory


\(^{39}\) Gilliom, \textit{Overseers of the Poor}. 
behaviours, which constitutes systemic violence.  

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the experiences of single mothers negotiating exemptions on the grounds of domestic violence and medical conditions with Centrelink and through the CWCA program. This included examining women’s emergency service workers’, a Centrelink officer’s and a JCA’s experiences and perceptions of these processes. Overall the research reflected there was a systematic failure to provide all agencies information on the exemption protocols in regards to domestic violence. This, in turn, diverted mothers to the CWCA system, which was not supportive, and can be perceived as a means to prevent single mothers who have experienced domestic violence from accessing exemptions. The end results support employment service providers and provide them with higher funding rates.

Furthermore the research reflected that the *Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010* had failed in making information on the domestic violence exemption more assessable. While the Centrelink officer reported that Centrelink had a strong focus on customer satisfaction, the single mothers and women’s emergency service workers in this research were highly dissatisfied with the service they received, which suggests that there was a poor service delivery.

The research also reflected that the CWCA program was problematic in several cases where mothers had verifiable medical conditions. As Mary’s case illustrated, PTSD was not acknowledged. Mothers could still be referred to employment services and surveillance was implemented in two cases. While this again reflects problems within Centrelink of not following the correct protocols, it also suggests that in some cases those with medical conditions are treated as potential welfare frauds. Denial of exemptions on the grounds of domestic violence and medical conditions placed mothers at risk of further health problems, as well as being at risk of non-compliance and suspensions. Surveillance placed extra stressors on mothers with medical conditions and prioritised compliance over recovery. If mothers could not submit their fortnightly report, this would lead to their payment being suspended. Although *Welfare to Work* proposes to improve the wellbeing of children, suspension of payments would clearly have a detrimental impact on children. Overall the CWCA system was oppressive and constructed mothers and their children as having no

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41 Australia, "*Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010.*"
value, except to be exploited by employment services for profits.

Furthermore, the exclusion of child abuse and sexual assault from the legislation denies that these matters occur, forcing mothers to prioritise compliance over their children’s needs. This exclusion does not acknowledge the impact child abuse or witnessing violence has upon children’s lives and those who care for them. Denying exemptions for mothers and children who have experienced violence can be seen as maintaining silence of the problem and hiding the number of women entering the system because of violence. However, classifying single mothers who have experienced violence as job ready, also renders invisible homelessness and children’s needs. As we have seen, domestic violence held no weight as a barrier to employment, while compliance and surveillance measures were high priority. The welfare system’s responses trivialised the domestic violence problem and situated employment as the solution to women’s problems. In this sense, disclosures may be treated as fabrications in a bid to avoid participation requirements and mothers may be seen as needing coercion to find employment. Even if the 16 week exemption was correctly applied, it is still inadequate. Mothers still have to deal with safety, housing, children’s needs and family law issues. As seen in the previous chapter, violence can continue for years.

Moreover, the research reflected that single mothers cannot negotiate exemptions. Single mothers were denied their entitlements as citizens. Welfare to Work did not give mothers choice, nor did it support those who had experienced violence and increased stressors and health risks. In line with Rich’s theory of mothering, Welfare to Work’s response to domestic violence reflects a patriarchal response to single motherhood, which renders them worthless for being outside the confines of the patriarchal family.\textsuperscript{42} The following chapter examines the single mother participants’ employment and education histories and their experiences of the mandatory participation requirements.

\textsuperscript{42} Rich, Of Woman Born.
Chapter Six
Employment, Education and Welfare to Work

Introduction
The aim of the chapter is to present mothers’ and workers’ perspectives on Welfare to Work in regard to whether the policy supports single mothers who have experienced domestic violence, in relation to balancing their care responsibilities with sustainable employment. This chapter examines how the single mothers in this study negotiated the participation requirements that were set by Centrelink and employment services and investigates the impact on their employment and study activities. Under Welfare to Work, principal carer parents are to seek 15 hours paid employment per week by searching for six jobs a fortnight or to be engaged in approved study. Those who are not meeting the participation requirements are connected to employment services and placed under surveillance. Under the unsuitable work guidelines, parents do not have to accept jobs under the following conditions:

- if travel time exceeds 60 minutes,
- travel costs exceed 10 per cent of gross wages from that job,
- they are not $50 per fortnight better off,
- and there is no available childcare.¹

As the introduction of Welfare to Work was alleged to be about combating welfare dependency amongst single mothers, this chapter will first examine the labour market and educational attainment of the single mother participants prior to, and after entering, the welfare system. Next the mothers’ experiences of the participation requirements are investigated, before focusing upon their experiences with the JNW and JSA employment

service systems. The employment service worker’s perspective will then be integrated in relation to domestic violence. Finally the emphasis will be upon the single mothers’ experiences of Welfare to Work in terms of trying to gain qualifications through study.

**Education and employment**

The argument for Welfare to Work centres on children growing up in ‘jobless households’ where welfare dependent parents have no labour force experience and low education levels. Welfare to Work was deemed necessary to coerce parents into becoming self-reliant and to reduce intergenerational social and economic problems. However, contrary to the welfare dependency debate most of the single mothers in this study had a relatively high education level and employment rate prior to, and after separation. Prior to separation, five of the 23 single mothers had high school certificates and 18 had post-secondary training, including 11 with TAFE diplomas or certificates and seven with university degrees. In regards to labour market activity, 22 had consistent labour market engagement and were employed full-time prior to having children. Only one mother had no prior employment before motherhood as she had just left high school. Once having had children, all the women became the primary carer regardless of their previous employment status.

While approximately a quarter of the women were full-time mothers prior to separation, choices surrounding employment while mothers were partnered depended on a number of personal and structural factors. These included caring for children with medical conditions and disabilities, opportunities or deficits in the labour market, child care and support, financial reasons, traditional values of child rearing by both mothers and partners, and partners’ domestic violent behaviours. When they became single mothers, these factors continued to impact on the women’s employment and care decisions. These findings reflect arguments made by Brady in 2010, Cartwright in 2004, McDonald, Bradley and Guthrie in

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2006, and Pocock in 2003 that women’s choices are constrained by such factors.\textsuperscript{3} Labour market attachment continued after separation either through employment or education. Prior to separation 17 of the 23 mothers had some form of employment, while post separation 14 were employed. Mothers’ occupations varied greatly from cleaners, hospitality workers, childcare workers, hairdressers, employment service officer, artist, bank teller, administration personal, accountant, librarian, police officer, teachers, nurses, counsellor, researchers, lecturer, corporate manager, and an environmental scientist. Most of the mothers were employed in areas relevant to their qualifications after they separated, which reflected similarities to Connelly and Murphy’s research findings in 2009.\textsuperscript{4} At the time of interview, seven mothers were studying, five were employed and studying, nine were employed and two were neither employed nor studying (one had two children with disabilities to care for and the other had deferred from study due to medical problems). The findings reflect single mothers have strong attachments to the labour market, which is consistent with other research.\textsuperscript{5}

Moreover post separation, many of the mothers pursued further education and had enrolled in secondary courses, TAFE courses and university degrees. Some who were less skilled, as well as those who already had higher degree qualifications, wanted to change their occupation and were enrolled in courses such as study skills, counselling, teaching, social work, law, social science, and medicine. While some had to do courses to remain in the industries they worked in, all wanted to improve their financial status and employment prospects, as well as prioritise their care responsibilities.

Contrary to the justifications used to implement *Welfare to Work*,\textsuperscript{6} the mothers in this study


\textsuperscript{4} Kate Connelly and John Murphy, "150 Low-Income Australians: A Group Biography Over Time. Second Interim Report," (The Australian Centre School of Historical Studies: The University of Melbourne, 2009).


\textsuperscript{6} Senate, "The Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and Other Measures) Bill 2005."
had an overall high level of education attainment and a high labour activity rate, both prior- and post-separation. There was also no evidence of intergenerational welfare dependency as none of the mothers’ families had a history of being income support claimants. Entering the welfare system had resulted from leaving domestic violence and having child care responsibilities. The following section will examine the mothers’ experiences with the job search requirements and the compliance system to ascertain if the Welfare to Work policy supported single mothers to improve their employment skills and allowed them to balance care with work.

**Centrelink: Misinformation, administration mistakes and barriers to compliance**

The 15 hours paid employment per week rule and the job seeking participation requirements have been promoted as supporting mothers to enter the labour force and providing mothers with flexibility and choice to gain employment that they could balance with their caring responsibilities. However, most of the mothers reported not being given information on the participation requirements or being misinformed:

*There was no discussion, I’m not kidding you, no discussion about where I currently work, no discussion about Welfare to Work, no discussion about, you know, meeting X amount of hours, absolutely no discussion. (Nina, 45, children, 14, 7)*

*They wanted me to do 15 (hours) because my youngest is over six and apparently when he gets over eight I’ve got to do 30 hours a week they’ve told me. At first someone at Centrelink told me that I could work 10 hours a week and five volunteer hours, which I was doing, I was volunteering at the school and then they told me no you have to be over 55 to do that...I had this really gorgeous guy on the phone from Centrelink giving me all this great advice—he was the one that told me I had five hours extra volunteer work and lovely guy but full of shit (laughing). (Fiona, 39, children, 9, 6)*

According to the Social Security Guidelines, part-time requirements of searching for six jobs per fortnight and having 15 hours paid employment per week remains the same for single

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parents and does not change when the youngest child turns eight years old. However, the research indicates Centrelink was incorrectly administering the participation requirements by informing mothers to find full-time jobs, which can be seen as a way to get single mothers to exit the welfare system quicker. While Governments have stressed the point that income support recipients have obligations to the community, Fiona was forced to give up her volunteer work. This reflects arguments by Lister and Cook et al. that volunteer work is an ‘active’ citizen role and that welfare reform has really been implemented to enforce mothers to become ‘passive consumers of welfare policy’. Although the Labor Government announced the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010 would allow parents to combine part-time study, voluntary work and part-time paid work, the guidelines have a number of conditions attached, which restrict parents from doing so.

They’ve just made us one pack, there isn’t any sort of considerations or leniency for people that are already doing work and already attempting something. It’s just like we’ve all got to get a fulltime job. And they know that I work for five different companies, and they still don’t consider me as sort of a decent person, to lay off. Is that a person that’s not put an effort to look for work? I’m sick of them riding my back. (Ebony, 39, child, 9)

Misinformation and administration errors placed extra unnecessary stressors onto most mothers. Although the 2010 amendments were also supposed to make information on Welfare to Work more available, many of the mothers reported that they still were being told to find fulltime employment after these amendments were implemented. When Ebony was told by the researcher that she only had to do 15 hours per week to satisfy the participation requirements, she responded that was the amount of contact time she was required to spend with her employment service provider. The research suggests that even after the 2010

amendment, Centrelink and employment services were still misinforming mothers and placing unreasonable demands on them beyond the scope of the policy. Spending 15 hours with the employment service provider is not a requirement. The way the policy was applied by delegates created confusion and ignored the women’s child care responsibilities.

Shannon, who lived in a remote area, was also undertaking more than the required participation requirements. In addition, she also received further incorrect information on travelling time to employment:

_Centrelink told me that if there was work available for me in another town, which is an hour and a half away; I would be expected to take it. They make it hard because there doesn’t seem to be any consideration taken into the fact that I have children, the fact that I’m a single mother, and the fact that I live in a fairly small country town._ (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

Shannon’s case indicates that Centrelink did not apply the unsuitable work guidelines, whereby principal carer parents do not have to accept a job that involves more than 60 minutes travelling time. Only those who are unemployed with no dependants are expected to travel more than 60 minutes and up to 90 minutes. This suggests a ‘one size fits all’ approach that treats single parents as if they were unemployed and without dependants to care for.

**Work first career restrictions and compliance features**

Some of the single mothers reported that the 15 hour per week job requirement made it difficult for them to stay in occupations aligned with their qualifications.

_The Department of Education, they’re not ever going to give a casual teacher who walks out there and puts their name down for casual work, 15 hours…I wanted to get into the system and get asked to come, you know. Here’s a day, there’s a day, can you come next term? You’ve got to get your foot in the door. I could have scored a full year’s work, and I could have got another year’s work the following year but they [Centrelink] didn’t understand that._ (Jasmine, 42, children 11, 8)

Many mothers reported jobs were not aligned with the 15 hour rule. Jasmine was unable to pursue casual teaching as she was not automatically offered 15 hours per week. Thus there

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13 Australian Government, “3.2.8.30 Unsuitable Work”.
appears to be no understanding that employers determine employment hours based on their needs and increasing hours is a gradual process based on availability that could lead to long term employment.

For some participants, job readiness took precedence over qualifications to stay within a career area:

_I was told I shouldn’t be doing a PhD, that I had Masters degree, and I was more than well enough qualified to find a job. And then I was told by the manager at the Centrelink office I was dealing with that, I was quite intelligent and that I could, and should be, finding a job, and that I could work in a sandwich shop, and I found that really appalling._ (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

Mary’s usual occupation was lecturing at a university, for which she needed to complete her PhD in order to stay working in this area. However, the guidelines stipulate enrolment in a Masters or PhD courses should be discouraged. Mary’s study was not approved and her qualifications were seen as irrelevant. She was pressured to give up her career path, to look for low-paid, low-skilled jobs.

For other participants, the prescribed 15 hours per week employment rule financially disadvantaged them:

_Currently I’m working four days a week and I’m travelling, its 50km away where I work, so that’s becoming a huge issue for me, the travelling four days a week…I applied for a job closer to home recently, but it was only 14 hours so…I was really reluctant to even go there, even though it was a higher hourly rate…Centrelink might have said “No, you can’t take that job because it’s only 14 hours”, so that’s limiting my choices in that way._ (Annabel, 42, children, 22, 15, 13)

Annabel was not able to take a job that pays more and where she would be closer to home and to her teenage children who do not have childcare. Being one hour short of the 15 hour mandatory requirement, a parent would still have to make three job contacts a fortnight, reconnect with an employment service, and can be forced to take a much lower paying job if it offers 15 hours.16

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16Australian Government, "3.5.1.170 Approved Activity-Job Search PP".
Along with the lack of suitable child care, the lack of labour market opportunities was not being recognised as a barrier to complying with the participation requirements:

*I find it difficult to do... I’m working and that my situation is not ideal, we don’t have after school care, we don’t have all these things that you have in the city. There are only as many jobs as there are, and you can’t kind of miraculously make them appear, so you’ve just to wait for these people to either die off or retire.* (Fiona, 39, children, 9, 6)

Fiona was employed 10 hours per week but despite this, there were no changes to her job search obligations. She was still required to search for six jobs per fortnight, although there was no available employment or child care. Other mothers reported similar problems, living in regional and rural areas.

A common problem for most of the mothers was the fluctuation of hours with casual jobs.

*Because I was casual it fluctuated. And there was a time there when I didn’t get much work and I wasn’t doing my 15 hours. And then they said that they would like me to look for another job, and I said, well I’ve already got two, how many more do I need, and they said it didn’t matter how many jobs I had, so long as I got my 15 hours a week. And then I said, well you know, there are some times when I actually do 40 hours a week. But we don’t worry about that because we only worry about 15.* (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

The hours worked that exceeded the prescribed 15 hours were not counted by Centrelink. However, when employment went under 15 hours, mothers were reconnected to an employment service to do job search and had to look for another job even if they already had several and even when there was no available employment. In these situations, mothers were deemed as high risk and automatically placed under the surveillance system, having to report personally to Centrelink with a fortnightly job diary.¹⁷ Notably, no consideration was given that mothers had to juggle getting to and from several jobs, when they had caring responsibilities, as well as reporting obligations to Centrelink and employment services. Another problem was that mothers were not allowed to restrict their job search to their usual occupations, as this was and still is perceived as non-compliance and could lead to having

their payments suspended. This meant mothers like Pam, who has been a nurse for 28 years, were also expected to look for jobs in sandwich shops.

**Child caring barriers**

*Welfare to Work* has been promoted as supporting parents to access childcare. However, the single mothers in this study reported that a major barrier to employment was accessing childcare. Only five of the 23 mothers reported placing their younger children into childcare: three reported childcare was unavailable in rural areas; six in regional areas reported not being able to find safe or affordable care and two had childcare but found it expensive and difficult with other expenses associated with going to their jobs. Only one mother reported that she could afford child care and had accessed child care fee assistance. None of the other mothers reported being informed of fee assistance and none reported being helped to find childcare. *Welfare to Work* has also placed restrictions on the JETCCFA. The JETCCFA can only be granted once and parents are no longer eligible after they have reached 26 weeks in that employment activity. While *Welfare to Work* forces mothers to prioritise employment over care of their children, additional financial support for child care costs has been withdrawn. Although this places an extra financial burden on those on PPS, those who will be placed onto NSA will be even more financially disadvantaged. Furthermore, those on Austudy are not eligible for JETCCFA irrespective of their employment status.

Those with teenagers had no other option than to leave children home unsupervised. The mothers in this study were not informed by Centrelink of the unsuitable work guidelines in relation to not having access to suitable childcare, but were threatened with having their payments suspended if they did not comply with requirements. However, these guidelines are problematic in themselves, as they only apply to job offers, not job search activities. Finding appropriate childcare or supervision for children is part of the parent’s obligation and

21Ibid.
22Australian Government, "3.2.8.30 Unsuitable Work".
is included in their Activity Agreement. This area is problematic as mothers are still expected to search for jobs outside of school hours and during school holidays. Also 15 mothers reported having children with medical conditions or a disability or suffering from trauma as a result of experiencing or witnessing violence. However, none of these health issues were acknowledged by Centrelink.

The Participation Review Taskforce in 2008 stated that the holiday period would provide an excellent opportunity for single mothers to find jobs in the retail and hospitality industry. However, age and being a single mother was a barrier to employment in this area, as Erin reported:

> It was impossible...A recent job I applied for, asked straight out –”Are you a single mum? So, how are you going to manage being a single mum, working, and studying?” They’d rather employ someone younger...I just found most of the time they don’t want a 31 year old single mother. That things weren’t flexible, you couldn’t just come in a few hours notice. (Erin, 31, children 13, 6)

While employers expect flexibility, most retail and hospitality outlets operate outside of standard work hours and include night shifts. No consideration was given by the Participation Review Taskforce to the difficulty or cost for single mothers to find care for children, particularly nights and weekends, or that mothers then have to go home and take care of children between shifts. This reflects Lewis’s argument that the welfare reforms treats single mothers as men and not mothers. This gender same approach is applied within the ‘one size fits all’ model. Erin reported her age being a problem too, although she was only 31 years. Adkins’ research in the UK also found women are highly objectified in frontline service jobs where their employability was based on their age, race, body size, appearance and availability. This was also reflected in May, Campbell and Burgess, argument on casualisation, that mothers would be competing with younger and more

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23 Australian Government, "3.5.1.170 Approved Activity-Job Search PP".
24 Australian Government, "3.2.8.30 Unsuitable Work".
available people looking for holiday work, who are also a cheaper source labour. This calls into question the point in forcing mothers to search for jobs during these periods.

**Surveillance**

The surveillance system is a key feature of *Welfare to Work*. This system monitors welfare recipients who are not meeting the participation requirements for welfare fraud and this requires them to report personally every fortnight to Centrelink. However, many of the mothers complained that even when they were compliant with participation requirements, they were still forced to report personally to Centrelink because the online or telephone reporting system did not work or did not accommodate the number of jobs they were doing. This meant they had been placed under surveillance. For example, Ebony reported she had five jobs and was unable to report her fortnightly earnings over the telephone or online, because the system would only accommodate two jobs, forcing her to personally report:

> *I normally do 35 to 40 hours per week. Sometimes I leave home at 7.30 am and I don’t walk in the door until 10 that night. I can only report two jobs on the computerised telephone set up so I have to go in every time to report.* (Ebony 39, child, 9)

Those with irregular incomes, casual earnings and more than two jobs were placed under surveillance. These characteristics have been used to create a welfare fraud profile as constructed by the Howard Government when the policy was introduced. Moreover, Barns and Preston argue the surveillance system creates further stress for women to deter them from accessing income support. In this study, all the mothers described the participation requirements and the surveillance feature as discriminatory and adding further time pressures and stress, when they had to juggle employment, study and care commitments. Daria, who was fully compliant with the participation requirements, reported this incidence:

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29 Australian Government, "3.2.1.70 Notification & Recipient Obligations for NSA".
31 Barns and Preston, "Women, Work & Welfare."
I rocked up to an appointment with the kids, it was pouring with rain, I was two minutes late, if that...I said “I’m here for my appointment”. Fifteen minutes later I said “Look, I’ve been here for this long, what’s happening?” and they went and got the case manager and she absolutely refused to see me...the kids were sick...but they told me that if I didn’t go to my appointment my money would be cancelled, so I made the effort to go and then she refused to see me because two minutes, and she made me sit there the whole time as well and she didn’t have anyone else to see ... I felt really discriminated against but...I had to go back in another time. (Daria, 33, children, 8, 7)

The majority of mothers reported that the way they were treated was like they did not have employment, study or care commitments.

I just find it, just unfair. It’s like you get stigmatised and you’re getting punished for being single...just because you’re single with children you’re sort of getting singled out to be double checked up on. It’s like we’re bludgers and that we’ve all put ourselves in that position. (Pam, 47, children, 19, 16, 12, 11)

The entire process is demeaning. You are spoken down to constantly. I’m quite articulate, I’m reasonably quick on the uptake when there’s stuff happening, and because of that I must be milking the system and one of them actually said it to me. (Renae, 42, children, 11, 8)

The way the mothers were treated by Centrelink reflected that they had been stereotyped as welfare cheats and undeserving of welfare benefits. These negative stereotypes associated with the welfare dependency argument have been strongly promoted by Mead and Giddens, and used to justify discriminatory treatment of single mothers as a means to deter them claiming welfare benefits and to get them to exit the system. Mead particularly promoted welfare reform as a means to punish single mothers and to deter women from leaving relationships. As seen in Chapter One, feminists have also argued welfare reforms are social control mechanisms to control women and reinforce patriarchal rights. Primarily the surveillance features and welfare workers hostility towards single mothers signify systemic violence. As argued by Rich, single mothers are subject to degradation and every kind of

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33 Mead, "Welfare Reform and the Family."
sanction, just for living outside the confines of the traditional family.\textsuperscript{35}

In Simone’s case, contesting a Centrelink decision led to her being investigated and also resulted in her being sacked:

\textit{There was confusion with how much money I’d been paid...because my employer didn’t give the exact date to Centrelink...and Centrelink took $70...it didn’t matter how much I showed them the documentation I was still treated as if I was a guilty party...and when Centrelink went back to my employer and demanded the record of the past two years of all...their payments for me, my employer rather than bother with that...just fired me...so I lost my job over $70 ... it was just a complete botch up and they cost me a job. (Simone 47, children, 24, 22, 11)}

This scenario illustrates that the surveillance system can also financially disadvantage and jeopardise women’s employment, through Centrelink’s intervention with their employers. Again the intrusiveness of the surveillance system can be seen as another mechanism with which to discourage single mothers from claiming income support and as a form of punishment. Indeed, single mothers can only be free from the persistent surveillance and fraud monitoring if they exit the system. According to Parker and Fopp, having them exit is the whole point of the surveillance system.\textsuperscript{36} Of the 23 mothers, five reported having payments suspended several times because of Centrelink administrative errors, which then required them to personally present at Centrelink.

\textbf{Discussion}

So far we have seen that the mothers in this study found that \textit{Welfare to Work} was inflexible and did not support them to gain sustainable employment that would fit with their child caring responsibilities. Labour market fluctuations and instability, lack of good jobs with flexible hours that would accommodate child caring responsibilities, travelling expenses, lack of safe and affordable child care, as well as ageism and being the primary care provider were reported by the mothers as barriers to employment and compliance. However, these structural restraints have not been acknowledged in the formulation of \textit{Welfare to Work}. Although non-recognition of structural constraints was problematic, a major finding was the numerous administration mistakes made by Centrelink, in terms of applying the participation


requirements. Many of these mistakes ignored the guidelines for principal carers, and treated many of the mothers in this study as childless, enforcing the full time requirements of 30 hours per week paid employment, instead of 15 hours per week. Other mistakes, included connecting those who were already satisfying the 15 hour per week rule to employment services. In addition, the unsuitable work guidelines for principal parents were not applied in terms of travel times or unavailable childcare. The findings suggest that the $50 per fortnight better off rule and travel costs were also not being calculated for parents by Centrelink. This problem was also identified by Raper in 2008. This made it more stressful for the single mothers by having to prioritise the incorrect requirements and the added surveillance over the care needs of their children, or they would otherwise have their payments suspended. Although there is specific legislation for principal carers, it seems single mothers are being denied the rights attached to this status. DEEWR is responsible for delivering the Welfare to Work guidelines and regulations to Centrelink and other contracted agents within the welfare system. Considering DEEWR had misinformed the ALRC inquiry in 2011 about legislative procedures relating domestic violence, it is highly possible that they are not correctly informing Centrelink of the correct procedures as well. This could be seen as a deliberate tactic by DEEWR to push single mothers out of the welfare system faster.

The way the policy is administered reflects the gender same or gender neutral approach, which, within neoliberal logic, espouses people are to be treated equally. This ‘one size fits all approach’ treated mothers as unemployed without children and the same as men. This denies the gendered division of labour and care work, which has been a criticism of neoliberal welfare reform by many feminists, including Bussemaker and Voet, Lister, and Sainsbury.

Furthermore, even when the 15 hour per week paid employment guideline was applied correctly, care responsibilities of children were not considered. The single mothers in this study were expected to seek jobs with non-standard hours, although initially the Howard Government in 2005 stipulated that parents would only have to find jobs within children’s

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school hours. However, the Participation Review Taskforce recommended that single mothers should seek jobs in school holidays in industries that have nonstandard hours. This recommendation did not consider costs, childcare or the impact on parenting and children. Although amendments in 2009 by the Labor Government allowed principal carers not to have to meet the activity test requirements for eight weeks if their employer shuts down over the long school holiday break, this does not apply to those who are employed under casual contracts. The conditions attached eliminate the possibility of the guideline being applied in most cases. The single mothers in this study were either employed on casual contracts or in jobs that did not shut down for this period and still had to apply for more jobs if their employment hours reduced even by one hour. The unavailability of childcare was a major problem for most of the mothers. Only those employed in the primary and high school sectors, were able to gain employment within school hours, but meeting the 15 hour job requirement, could not always be guaranteed. Overall, the 15 hour job requirement was not a family friendly measure.

Regardless of whether the 15 hour job requirement or the ‘one size fits all’ approach was applied, both can be seen as financially disadvantaging single mothers through applying a work first policy that ignored mothers’ qualifications and was forcing them to apply for precarious low paid unskilled positions. This can be seen as a means to deskill women and maintain them as a cheap source of labour and this reflects arguments made by Eisenstein, Standing, Walby, and Yeatman that welfare reform has been implemented to reduce labour costs. Mothers can be forced to leave lucrative skilled positions and take a poorly paid unstable job to meet the participation requirements, if their employment hours go under 15 hours per week. Thus the policy perpetuates and maintains economic disadvantage amongst single mothers. This was highlighted in Mary’s case: a university lecturer, who was told to take a job in a sandwich shop.

41 Australian Government, “3.5.1.170 Approved Activity-Job Search PP”; O’Connor, “Improved Participation Requirements for Parents and Carers”.
Another issue identified in this research was that even where mothers were working long hours in several jobs, they were still not earning enough to exit the welfare system. This was clear in Ebony’s situation when she was still on PPS payments although she reported usually working 35 to 40 hours per week. This suggests that precarious jobs within the flexible labour market cannot provide economic independence for women. Moreover, this finding supports Standing’s and Yeatman’s argument criticising the ‘active’ citizenship model and claims of self-reliance through employment as not being achievable within the low wage economy. Similar arguments have been made by Mitchell and Devine. They are also supported by feminist scholars and researchers, cited in Chapter One, who have examined welfare reform and poverty reduction measures amongst women. As argued by Eisenstein, gender inequalities within the labour market, have not been accounted for in welfare reform.

However, the scenario is even worse for mothers who will be placed onto NSA, as they will exit the welfare system because of the lower earning threshold. Moreover, casualisation does not offer stability. This was a major finding in US research by Mullan-Harris, who argued the majority of women exiting the welfare system through employment remained in poverty, with two thirds having to return to the system because of job instability. However, as

46 Eisenstein, Feminism Seduced.
pointed out by political scientists and feminist scholars in Chapter One, structural constraints created through neoliberal practices are denied and instead welfare recipients are socially constructed as the problem.\(^{48}\)

Considering the main objective of the policy is to reduce the number of people claiming income support, the constant supervision, disciplinary measures, discrimination and the demands of the job seeking requirements, can be seen as ways to deter mothers from claiming income support and this could be detrimental to those needing to escape violence. This reflects feminists’ arguments against welfare reform that were presented in Chapter One.\(^{49}\)

For those within the system, the policy perpetuates poverty and maintains them as a cheaper labour source. This could also place single mothers at risk of returning to violent relationships, which was found to be a major problem in North American research.\(^{50}\) Again this is consistent with Walby’s argument that the exploitation of women serves the interests of capitalists, as well as serving to maintain patriarchal power over them.\(^{51}\) Thus the policy can be seen as keeping families together and punishing those who leave; this perspective is promoted by Mead.\(^{52}\)

The job seeking component, administrative errors, constant surveillance and disciplinary measures may, in accordance with Foucault’s theorising, break the will of the subject, so s/he will then be easier to control.\(^{53}\) Although the policy caused great stress to the mothers in this study, these women had to juggle employment, compliance and childcare. From first glance

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\(^{52}\) Mead, "Welfare Reform and the Family."

these mothers’ behaviours may be seen as fitting into the ‘adaptive’ category within Hakim’s ‘preference theory’. However, Hakim’s ‘preference theory’ is not applicable because women’s preferences are not involved. Not only were mothers’ decisions constrained by structural factors, their right to make a genuine choice relating to employment and to balancing care responsibilities was removed through Welfare to Work. These women had no choice but to abide by the requirements. Losing their income support would jeopardise their housing and ability to support their children.

In summary, so far, we have seen that the job seeking component of Welfare to Work was not designed to support single mothers into sustainable employment, but to maintain them as a cheap labour source and to reduce claimants on income support. Mothers were denied career employment choices and were financially disadvantaged, as well as being denied choices on caring for their children. A consequent problem is de-skilling. Furthermore, mothers could not negotiate and had to abide by Centrelink’s decision or risk losing payments. The problem of casual jobs and incorrect application of the job seeking requirements kept mothers attached to employment services. Surveillance, numerous errors and inconsistencies made by Centrelink increased mothers’ stressors, when they were already time poor. Moreover, mothering and children’s needs and care responsibilities are invisible within the policy. Overall the policy yielded few benefits to single mothers because it placed them at risk of losing skills, even further poverty, homelessness and violence. We move now to consider the mothers’ experiences with employment services.

**Employment services**

Both the JNW and JSA systems have been promoted as providing job seekers with skills to improve their job seeking and to address their education and employment skills, which it is also believed would address skill shortages in the labour market and lead to more sustainable employment outcomes. Of the 23 mothers, 14 were in paid employment, and 18 reported being forced to attend an employment service. This section examines these mothers’ experiences of the employment service system, and then takes into account, the perspective

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55 Hereafter the JNW and JSA systems will be referred to as employment services.

of the employment service worker in an attempt to ascertain if the system was beneficial to mothers and supported them in finding sustainable jobs.

**Single mothers’ negative experiences of employment services**

All 18 mothers who were required to attend an employment service reported the system was another unnecessary hindrance in their busy lives, especially for those who had relocated to get away from violent ex-partners and had to care for children with disabilities.

*I had one child with ADHD and another child with a congenital disease and I go back and forwards to the doctors and trying to get them settled down. And yeah it was really hard to turn up to these interviews and stuff to go looking for work. And they were just hounding me... and I had to go to [employment service name] a couple days a week and sometimes four days a week. I had to travel 40 minutes ...That went on for about six months. (Nadine, 27, children, 10, 11)*

Children’s health issues, disabilities or needs were not considered by employment services. Mothers reported having to comply and were expected to prioritise the services’ requirements over medical appointments or risk being reported as breaching their obligations. Nadine had made both Centrelink and the employment service aware of her situation but her children’s needs were not recognised and were secondary to compliance.

Typically, employment service appointments and courses did not fit within school hours nor did they acknowledge public transport problems and lack of childcare:

*Because I don’t drive I would not leave my daughter at school unattended, so I arrived late for that...at that time my daughter was only in year 2 or 3, and I thought she was too little to be left unsupervised. For me to get from the school to where the job search training was, took me about half an hour on my pushbike. If I had of gone on a bus it would have taken me over an hour...The requirements were to attend nine to two, and then you had to show proof that you’re spending an extra three hours a day looking for work, so it was basically a nine to five requirement for six weeks, and that was the expectation. The whole course was not geared for single mums. (River, 42, children, 17, 16, 10)*

As seen in the previous section, like Centrelink, employment services applied full-time hours and participation requirements to principal carers, not acknowledging their dependent children or other barriers that complicated their ability to comply. River reported she stopped going after she was intimidated by a staff member and was suspended from payments.

Mothers who attended employment services before and after the legislative changes in 2010
reported that they were forced to do the same job search requirements as a person with no dependants indicating the legislation is either being ignored or employment service staff are not appropriately trained.  

Negotiation or mutual agreement between employment services and mothers on activities was non-existent, which the Welfare Rights Centre also found. As Ebony reported:

\begin{quote}
I had to apply for 100 jobs...I had to apply for at least ten jobs a week, I had to, actually send my resume to...They just sent me a letter saying that I am required to do this, so do it, there’re different warnings...like your payment gets reduced by so much percent...If I refused to go or if I missed so many appointment they will cut me off for eight weeks and give me no money at all. So they do like tie your hands to having to do the course. (Ebony, 39, child, 9)
\end{quote}

Mothers were given no other choice but to comply with the services’ requests or lose their payments, which would incur further financial hardship on themselves and children. Single mothers can lose one tenth of their payments for every day they do not comply. After three breaches they are to be assessed before applying the eight week payment suspension.

Similar threats were applied to mothers in rural and remote areas, without considering the cost and long distances involved in going to appointments. For instance Shannon had to drive 45 minutes, each way, to go to Centrelink and the employment service appointments:

\begin{quote}
I would have appointments made for me to go to see them every week, and they didn’t understand that sometimes I really can’t afford to drive there every week for a 15, 30-minute appointment. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)
\end{quote}

Rural mothers reported employment services in their area were also applying incorrect participation requirements:

\begin{quote}
I remember seeing, there was a job for a sales assistant and I said “You know, I could do that”, and I was explaining how I’d worked in the hospitality industry, and she just wouldn’t refer me for jobs that I thought I was capable of doing.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."; Australian Government, "3.5.1.170 Approved Activity-Job Search PP".
\end{footnotes}
especially if it was a job that was part-time and the hours were just spot on... she said “Well if you’re not looking for fulltime work, you’re not helping yourself, and I can’t help you if you aren’t going to help yourself”. I mean I really don’t think she got it. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

Most mothers were not allowed to apply for jobs that met the participation requirements for principal carers. Instead mothers like Shannon were pressured to apply for full-time jobs and were expected to spend the same time travelling as people without dependants.60

Attitudes of staff towards single mothers were also reported to be discriminatory and unsupportive. As Shannon stated:

The woman that I saw just, was literally just wasn’t interested and didn’t care, and didn’t want to help me to find work...She was a young girl and I thought that she just wasn’t equipped to do the job that she was doing...it’s never a happy place to go to. It’s as if I’m in their hopeless cases pile. I have got really depressed in the past about not being able to find work, because I feel that I can’t support my children, because I’m welfare dependent. It’s a situation I’ve never been in before. It’s as if I’m seen as not trying hard enough to find work. (Shannon, 43, children, 13, 10)

All the mothers who were forced to attend employment services reported that the staff lacked communication skills, qualifications and job experience, which was similar to findings by Bowman and Horn in 2010.61 Negative attitudes and pressure to find full-time employment in localities where jobs were scarce had a detrimental impact on mothers’ self-esteem.

Only one mother was offered training, but this was not in the same area as her current position. It is noteworthy, the training was not beneficial to her, but to the employment service.

I’m working as a teacher’s aid at the school, but I’m untrained....I’ve let them know that’s what I want to do and that I can get more hours at another school if I was trained...For me to do the course it would be $2000 to $3000, so they’re [employment service] trying to do a little bit of admin course here and there. But the problem with that is that I’d have to take a day off of my job. I work five days a week and they want me to go in one day a week to do training and you know when it’s just like well what do I do? Give up your job? ...It [admin course]


wouldn’t give you anything at the end of it, you’d have to go and finish at TAFE.  
(Fiona, 39, children, 9, 6)

Previously Fiona reported that employment opportunities were non-existent where she lived and that she was lucky to be employed as a teacher’s aid, although her work hours did not meet the 15 hour per week requirement. Fiona’s employability would increase if she could get qualifications in this area. However, the employment service did not support this option. Providing Fiona with their training would not save on cost but rather would increase the agency’s profits through claiming government funds for providing a service that ultimately would not provide a qualification or lead to an employment outcome. Although the Guide to Social Security Law stipulates that training must fit in with a person’s employment, the service did not inform her of this and insisted that she attend. The outcome jeopardised her current job, which if she lost, there would be little prospect of finding another. Other mothers’ reports in this study reflected Fiona’s experience that employment services did not support their choices, as well as lacking knowledge of the local labour market deficits. Moreover, the data also suggest that these services are profit-driven and not focused on supporting mothers in gaining secure and sustainable employment or focused on their individual needs. This was also a major criticism of the system by Considine and Murray.

Some mothers reported that marketing ploys by employment services to try and persuade employers to increase their hours, jeopardised further job prospects:

My latest job; they said “What’s their problem? ...They’re calling up trying to offer us incentives to put you on more permanently”... I actually apologised to my boss for that. I shouldn’t have to apologise because my [employment service name] place is calling up and hassling them. I’m not going to get a permanent job from them if they’re getting hassled.  (Ebony, 39, child, 9)

Training and job search components provided by employment services were reported by all of the 18 mothers as being unhelpful:

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How to apply for jobs (laughs) and I used to be a HR manager, how to apply for jobs and how to write a resume. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

Give me five minutes and I’ll walk the street and I can tell you now, I’ll have a job quicker... and there was all these stupid things...This is just crazy, am I not seeming intelligent that I couldn’t get my own work? I said “Wouldn’t I be better off just doing my resume up, and I’ll look for some, as I have been”...but they were basically putting you into primitive boxes and saying “Well, you need training to be able to do a resume, and you need training to do an interview, and you need training to have self-esteem, to dress well”. Like you were brain dead, idiot that doesn’t know what to do. So regardless of whether I had any intelligence or not, I was still being cattle mustered with everybody else...That’s the part of it that I felt stunk. I’ve been talking to solicitors and working with professional people since I was 12. I had many opportunities to be in a totally different realm, but, the systems and stuff just create more boundaries, more restrictions. (Bonny, 43, children, 18, 9)

A ‘one size fits all’ model was applied based on the assumption that clients had no qualifications or experience of employment and lacked initiative. This was also found to be a problem by the CSMC, Victoria. There were no differences reported by mothers who were clients of the JNW system and those who had experienced the JSA system. Mothers reported the ‘one size fits all’ approach was demeaning, degrading and denied them making autonomous decisions. Fiona compared the system to being in an abusive relationship:

_It feels like being married again and having no control._ (Fiona, 39, children, 9, 6)

Employment services are supposed to assist parents in addressing self-esteem issues and improving interview techniques. However, mothers reported that instead of being assisted with confidence-building techniques, they were informed to market themselves, through advising potential employers of government paid subsidies if they hired them. As Ebony reported:

_They don’t help you with the interview part of it, which is where my problem has been. I’ve had to deal with that myself...they don’t help you with confidence to do the job interview...Yeah, mention that they can pay half your wages for a while. This [employment service provider] is saying to say that in the interview so it might encourage them more to employ you for half a wage than somebody for a full wage._ (Ebony, 39, child, 9)

Skilled mothers reported helping others who were not receiving support from employment

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65 Australian Government, “Welfare to Work Overview”.  

189
Yeah!!! (Laughs), it was really funny, they got a new manager and he offered me a job! But I was like “No, I’ve got to go and study”... I didn’t mind helping the people in the room, like I actually got something out of that, but that wasn’t my role, I was one of them. (Carry, 41, child, 14)

Like there was this one lady it was all too hard for her to write a job application. She just couldn’t get, because she was from Germany. So I used to help her make sense of it all for her. So I did that, because some people were getting a bit angry about it all. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

While mothers in this study reported the job search practices were of little value, several also reported that other clients with language barriers and very little literacy or computer skills were being ignored. This finding reflects broader research on the JSA model, which found that the most disadvantaged are not receiving support.66

Being listed for training courses did not mean these services were being delivered yet employment service providers could claim payments from DEEWR for such services. Carry reported that she turned up for training courses that she had been told she had to attend and then was told that she could go home:

One of the people there said “What you are is what we would call a tick and flick”. So that’s really why, I guess they didn’t do anything for me. Like Oh, you turned up, that’s OK, off you go!!... They were completely useless... I found out that they still had me on their books, so they were still getting paid for me to go there and I was really aghast about that, I thought “My God, they didn’t do anything for me when I was there”. (Carry, 41, child, 14)

According to the Guide to Social Security Law, principal parents who have entered into full-

time long duration study are deemed as meeting the participation requirements. Therefore they are no longer required to attend an employment service. However, several mothers reported the employment service continued to contact them, indicating the service still had them listed as clients and possibly still claiming services provided to them, which suggests the possibly of fraudulent practices. As a qualified teacher, Jasmine reported the employment service arranged for her to do resume training during her study semester break when she was exempt from any further participation requirements. This would have attracted training service fees for the provider:

You know how uni break goes from November to Feb...he had me all set up to spend every fortnight doing some sort of job...I remember saying to him “I’m starting uni, that’s like four weeks, and you’re wanting me to apply for a job in that four weeks and to spend days in here with you, learning how to write resumes”. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)

Jasmine reported that her employment service provider engaged in a number of behaviours for their own financial benefit that had economic disadvantages for her:

I worked consistently on a casual basis between 10-15 hours per week sometimes more, on a contract with a special needs child. Because he was unwell and in hospital on quite a few occasions, the hours sometimes were under 15, but above 10 most often. I was delighted to have this job as it was school hours and only 5 minutes from home and school. But I was constantly hassled about getting another job or more hours at the preschool. They even rang the director to ask her to put me on subsidised wages... I am a uni trained teacher and they were asking her to put me on for subsidised wages at untrained rates $13 per hour...I was being paid $28 per hour. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)

Although Jasmine’s hours fluctuated, it is clear that she was financially better off being paid $28 per hour based on her qualifications than being paid the minimum rate for 15 hours. This scenario illustrates the economic disadvantage of the 15 hour per week job requirement and that offering subsidies to employers does not help women gain sustainable employment. It also suggests the objective of some service providers is not client focused but geared to receiving service fees and outcome payments to stay a competitive business. These findings were also reflected in Considine’s, and Bowman and Lawlor’s criticism of the employment service model. Additionally, the offering of a wage subsidy to Jasmine’s employer,

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68 Bowman and Lawlor, “Evidence and Experience”; Considine, “The Reform that Never Ends.”
appeared to be fraudulent. Wage subsidies can only be offered to potential employers for persons classified as highly disadvantaged and as long term unemployed prior to or at the commencement of employment. Employment services are prohibited from offering wage subsidies for persons who are already employed or have found their own employment,\textsuperscript{69} as in Jasmine’s case.

Most mothers were not informed of the JSKA or given access to it:

\begin{quote}
I had an interview for a job and they said “Well if you need any help to buy any clothes let us know”, and I said “Well, OK, but the interview is tomorrow and I’ve just gone and bought a pair of shoes to wear to the interview”…His attitude was that he’d done something to support me and guide me along the way, to get this interview. I had just applied myself for this job…Yeah, what did you do to help? Nothing, didn’t even buy me a pair of shoes… and with the textbooks for uni. After I started, they said to me “Oh Jasmine, why didn’t you let us know that you’d started uni, because we could have given you some money for textbooks”, and I said “Well how about, can you give me money for textbooks now?” but there’s a timeframe again when you’re meant to let them know. (Jasmine, 42, children, 11, 8)
\end{quote}

Of the 18 mothers who were forced to go to an employment service, only one reported she had received some assistance for text books when she started her course.

\textit{Single mothers’ positive experiences of employment services}

Only one mother reported having had a positive experience with an employment service, but that was with a disability service and after two years of being in the general employment service system where her medical certificates were overridden by a JCA. Mary was unable to comply due to having PTSD, and was suspended numerous times. This led to her mental health deteriorating:

\begin{quote}
Somehow miraculously, and I don’t know how this occurred, in about 2008, they put me on to a disability network agency, and they helped me, and they said “Look, you have depression, you shouldn’t be having to find a job”, and that was my saviour actually. They took the pressure off me, recognising I had this disability…and that helped me the last year a bit to stay sane in all of it. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)
\end{quote}

The disability service was not job outcome focused but aimed at giving Mary personal support. This enabled Mary to resume her studies and find a professional job, which made it possible for her to exit the welfare system.

They’d come to my home and they came to uni... that was really good, and they were really helpful because they’re dealing with people who... well I had depression, and they’d give me some tips, how to develop a bit of a checklist of what you’re doing today or, really simple things, but they did it in such a way that wasn’t demeaning....She met me and we had a cup of coffee before I went to my job interview, and she just encouraged me, but that wasn’t anything to do with the system, that was just, they were awesome, and that might be a model that could help people, which is providing a specialised service, but that model might be useful for people who perhaps are single mums, maybe had sexual abuse, who were trying to get back to work. (Mary, 48, children, 14, 10)

In comparison to the ordinary employment service system, the disability employment service was compassionate and focused on Mary’s personal issues, without pressuring her to get a job and allowing her to pursue goals that had been destroyed by domestic violence and Welfare to Work. All the mothers in this study who had been forced to attend an employment service found employment themselves without the help of the agency. However, Mary was the only mother who reported receiving genuine personal support. The disability service worker also recognised Mary’s qualifications and encouraged her to find a sustainable job.

Only two other positive experiences of employment services were reported. One mother reported the employment service was more understanding than Centrelink in regard to the lack of employment availability in the rural area in which she lived. Another mother stated the most positive experience she had was when her employment service provider lost its tenure in 2009 and was closed down.

**Job Service Australia employee interview**

An employment service worker was interviewed to share her experience on how the employment agency responded to single mother clientele who had experienced domestic violence. As illustrated in Chapter Five, women who were eligible for a participation exemption due to domestic violence were more likely to be sent for a CWCA, where the JCA would determine which stream they would be placed in, when they entered the employment service system. Those classified as the most disadvantaged are placed into stream four,
which is supposed to support job seekers to work through their barriers. However, the goal of the agency is to have that person placed into a job, as Jessie explained:

> When you’re in stream four it’s basically really working through your barriers to employment first, so if that would be domestic violence you’d be making sure those sort of things were taken care of first, but it’s hard because our ultimate goal really, we are contracted to find this person a job and to help them find a job, so at the end of the day that really is the bottom line. (Jessie, JSA employee)

According to the employee, employment services were not equipped and lacked expertise to deal with clients who had experienced domestic violence:

> A lady who was in stream two...and she sort of disclosed she was going through that...and they’d separated, and she wasn’t in stable accommodation either. I found it really hard knowing what to do because I hadn’t received any training on it, so I had to seek advice from my colleagues, and basically I was just provided the number of the Women’s Health Line, which I gave to her and sat her in a private room, and provided her with a phone. It really frustrated me though that I didn’t have the training or the knowledge to know what exactly to do, or whether I could have done more, which I found really hard. (Jessie, JSA employee)

The employment service employee was asked if she had seen anything beneficial for women experiencing domestic violence, through being in the employment services, to which she responded:

> Not really. I mean no one really gives us any training or any information about it, which is really hard, and I’ve brought that up previously to my supervisors, but people just say you learn that as you go along, but I find it sort of a really important thing to have from the beginning to have those resources... I just think if job service providers, as well as Centrelink, if we were provided a bit more information, we all had more training on it, I think we could all sort of work it a lot better, and provide more tailored assistance to them because we’d have so much more understanding. (Jessie, JSA employee)

Jessie said that staff received no information or training nor were they provided with resources for clients to deal with domestic violence. The assumption by employment service providers that staff could learn on the job suggests that domestic violence is not seen as needing a specialist approach or having significance as a barrier to employment.

The employment service employee was asked if she thought it worthwhile for women to be

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70 Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, "The Future of Employment Services in Australia."
seeking employment, when they were experiencing or had just left a domestically violent relationship, to which she responded:

_No. I think that they definitely need an exemption for a suitable period of time, not just for, for example, a week or two weeks. I think it should be at least a few months, an exemption, until things get really sorted and each person feels comfortable actually feeling like that’s the next step that they’re ready to take._ (Jessie, JSA employee)

Placing domestic violence survivors into Stream four can place the person at risk of being ‘parked’ as Bowman and Horn warned,\(^71\) until their time is up, whereupon they ultimately are expected to have found a job.

This analysis of this employment service worker’s interview suggests that JSA staff were not informed of the domestic violence exemption, nor had they received training and were ill equipped to deal with the matter. Their lack of training and skills renders domestic violence as if it were a trivial matter that seemingly would have no impact on compliance or employability.

**Discussion**

Thus far, we have seen the experiences that 18 single mothers had in the employment service system, as well as one employment service worker’s experience of dealing with single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. Mothers in this research had experienced both the JNW and JSA systems and reported little difference between the two models. Their qualifications and career experience were invisible in both models. These mothers did not receive individualised tailored assistance, but experienced the ‘one size fits all’ approach. Regardless of the mother’s qualification or skill level, all reported that the job-seeking modules offered by the services were basic and a waste of time.

The research also indicated that the employment services used by the participants were not client orientated or focused on sustainable job outcomes. Rather the focus was on fees and profit, by offering employers incentives in a bid to try and gain quick outcomes fees. These incentives can be financially damaging as seen in Jasmine’s case, where the employment service provider offered her employer a subsidy that would reduce her paid hourly rate by 50

\(^71\)Bowman and Horn, "The Australian Experience of Employment Services."
It seems government funded subsidies were being used to market single mothers as a cheaper source of labour. This research did not find that the mothers were supported in developing skills or in pursuing further education as claimed by the Government. Fiona was the only participant who had been offered some form of vocational training by her employment service provider. However, the training would not have led to a qualification or a job, which was not beneficial to Fiona. Moreover, participating in training would have jeopardised her current job but would have attracted payments for the employment service.

A number of employment services’ practices were reported by mothers that suggest these agencies may be engaging in fraudulent behavior. Although this study cannot ascertain if these agencies were claiming fees for these practices: ringing clients; listing them for training (and not delivering it as in the ‘tick and flick’ incident involving Carry); and still having clients listed when they were fully meeting the requirements through study; notably these behaviours do attract funding and outcome fees. Furthermore, of the 18 mothers forced to attend services, 17 were not informed about having a JSKA or an EPF or were denied access to it. These findings are consistent with those of Jordon and Horn. Although welfare recipients are constantly monitored for fraud, there are still no checks and balances in place to distinguish if employment services are using the EPFs on job seekers or if the agency is making fraudulent claims as found by the Australian National Audit Office. This area needs further investigation. Overall, the mothers begrudged the system for treating them as welfare cheats when employment services were receiving payments from the welfare budget for bogus services and they had not received any support for training or finding jobs.

The views expressed in Chapter Five by the job capacity assessor, who perceived the employment service system as empowering, were not shared by the mothers and the employment service worker in this study. As we saw, the mothers in this study lost the right to exercise choice, autonomy and their initiative in getting work. The system obstructed them from finding lucrative jobs and was overall financially disadvantaging for them. They were

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74 The Auditor-General, "Administration of the Job Seeker Account."
treated as incompetent by staff who they reported as being unprofessional, unqualified and being less skilled than themselves. The employment service system has been promoted as having expertise on labour markets in their localities and supporting parents to access child care. However, many of the mothers reported their employment service provider did not acknowledge labour market deficiencies or other structural restraints such as lack of child care. This was a particular problem for those in rural and remote areas. Being profit driven, employment services neglected to recognise that increasing hours of employment can be a gradual process, based on employee reliability and employment availability, which could eventually lead to secure, sustainable employment and be more beneficial to women. This suggests that not all employment service staff have knowledge on local labour markets trends.

The findings indicate that employment services were also administering the incorrect protocols, which was also found to be a problem in the previous section with Centrelink. This again reflected there was major problem with providing information on the legislation. Overall the women’s identity as mothers was made invisible throughout *Welfare to Work*, thus constructing them as childless and unemployed. This reflects similarities to Brady’s criticism of Hakim’s preference theory on mothers’ identities being changed to workers and Lewis’s criticism of welfare reform in general. As we saw in River’s case, for over three years she had been constantly connected to an employment service that contacted her employers and forced her to do their training courses, because they had applied non-principal carer participation requirements. However, if the participation requirement was applied correctly, mothers could still be attached to employment services for years if their employment fluctuated below the prescribed 15 hours per week.

All mothers reported there was no consideration of child care responsibilities, nor was there any help to find child care or information on fee relief. Employment services did not factor into account children’s wellbeing. Attendance extended beyond school hours, indicating non-recognition of the single mothers’ child care responsibilities. However, treating single mothers as childless financially advantaged these agencies. Health issues, disabilities and transport problems were also not acknowledged. Negotiation or mutual agreement was non-

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75 Australian Government, "Welfare to Work Overview".  
76 Brady, "Understanding Single Mother's Choices Around Paid Work and Education."; Lewis, "Lone Mothers."  
existent; mothers had to comply with the demands of the services and were threatened with suspension of their payments if they did not. This reflects Yeatman’s argument that in the welfare reform era, mutual obligation is a one-sided contract.  

Contrary to claims by the ALRC that the employment service system offers support to victims of violence and can connect them with other support mechanisms, the majority of single mothers in this study who had made disclosures reported that their situation had been ignored. Although only one worker was interviewed, her account reflected a problem with information delivery on the legislation in regards to domestic violence and this also corresponded to single mothers’ reports in the previous chapter. The employment service worker was unaware of exemptions and had not received any training on domestic violence. Furthermore, she revealed that services were not specialised to deal with persons who had experienced violence. The perception that dealing with victims of violence could be learned on the job minimises the problem as trivial and reflects a lack of understanding of the ramifications, particularly trauma.

Connecting women who had experienced violence to employment services was not beneficial for them. However, this does benefit the provider with higher service and outcome payments. Bowman and Horn found a similar problem, where barriers such as personal issues and mental health were ignored, directly because of services being profit driven and staff being poorly trained. In this study, domestic violence was being ignored. Women still had to deal with finding accommodation and the ramifications of violence, without the support of the service and with the added pressure of finding a job. As we have seen, they also did this without support. Furthermore, the ‘work first’ approach reflects neoliberal philosophy that has been promoted by Whiteford and endorsed within the Time for Action plan that reiterates employment is the solution to violence.

In summary, the employment service system was not found to be equipped to support either

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78 Anna Yeatman, "Mutual Obligation: What Kind of Contract is This?" in Reforming the Australian welfare state, ed. Peter Saunders (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000).
80 Bowman and Horn, "The Australian Experience of Employment Services."
81 Whiteford, "Family Joblessness in Australia".
single mothers who had experienced violence or their children. Service staff also lacked training on the legislation and on labour markets. Contrary to the Howard and Labor Governments’ claims, the employment service system did not appear to encourage economic independence, help single mothers to gain skills in job seeking or find jobs, let alone search for sustainable employment, or upgrade their employment skills or partake in further education. Moreover, the system was focused on profits, which had financial benefits for the employment service and financial disadvantages for the mothers. These problems, along with applying the incorrect participation requirements and ignoring children, only increased stressors and had negative impacts on the health and well being of mothers and children. Furthermore, while women were being surveilled through this system for fraud, no-one apparently was monitoring employment services. We now examine the mothers’ experiences of upgrading their skills.

Further education and skill development

Welfare to Work has been instituted on the principle it would be financially beneficial to parents, as well as helping them to gain educational qualifications and skills to attain employment that potentially will lead to economic independence. Of the 23 mothers, 12 were currently studying, with five employed at the same time as studying. This section first examines disincentives within the Welfare to Work system for single mothers to pursue long duration study in an attempt to gain employment skills, before exploring factors that were incentives to study.

Disincentives for single mothers to study

Most mothers pursued study to improve their employment skills, with the aim of attaining sustainable employment. Those who were previously inhibited by their partners from participating in employment or education also pursued study after separation. However, economic disincentives and incorrect information were deterrents:

When I mentioned that I wanted to go back to studying, they advised me of the requirements and told me that my daughter was too old for me to receive Single Parenting Payment, which I later found to be incorrect. (Nicky, 35, children, 15, 9)

Nicky’s youngest child was five years at the time, which made her eligible for PPS. Incorrect

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information from Centrelink delayed her decision to study. This also deterred her from leaving her job and relocating from her ex-husband whose violence was life threatening. Her youngest child was aged seven years when she commenced study. However, Centrelink made another mistake and placed her on Austudy. Nicky was eligible for PPS until her daughter turned eight years, and then she should have been transferred to NSA. On NSA Nicky would still be eligible for concessions and supplements for principal parents. In contrast, Austudy is a lower payment and does not entitle mothers to PES or childcare fee relief or any benefits or concessions associated with principal carers. The financial stress of Austudy and the ramifications of domestic violence had a detrimental impact on Nicky’s medical studies:

It’s stressed me out to such a degree that I have to repeat an entire year. It’s actually put in jeopardy my eligibility for Austudy in my final year. The graduate degree I’m doing is four years…whereas now I’ll actually be asking for five years, and they’ve told me I won’t be eligible the last six months…So I’ll still be a single parent with no Austudy, and my requirement to get any sort of money would be to go to work and trying to finish off an intense final six months of my degree. And when I finish, I’m actually looking at working in a remote area because that’s where I’d love to work and that’s where they ask for doctors desperately in Australia. I’ve worked all my life and paid tax. Wasn’t there something that can accrue from my working career and all those taxes that I paid, to sort of get me across that line, and maybe bring me in line with the poverty line, if not above it, so that my kids and I can live decently?…And yeah, I might have to pull out of the last six months of my degree if they can’t pay me any money. (Nicky, 35, children, 15, 9)

At the time of the interview, Nicky had just attained three casual jobs because of the financial stress she was under on Austudy. Having three jobs would also impact on her ability to study and the time she can spend supervising her children. Low Austudy payments and not being eligible for concessions, supplements and allowances that are provided to parents on NSA and PPS, act as financial disincentives to study as parents will be forced to focus on seeking employment due to the financial hardship. Nicky pointed out that the Welfare to Work system does not acknowledge her previous tax contributions and situates her and her children as undeserving of support. Although Welfare to Work has been promoted to address skill

shortage, the financial disincentives of Austudy are severe. Arguably single mothers need more financial support if they are to gain skills to attain professional jobs and to escape poverty. This outcome would be more beneficial to the nation as well.

Prior to Welfare to Work, single mothers who had few employment skills could gradually develop qualifications to gain sustainable employment and escape poverty without experiencing any economic disincentives.

I’m doing Study Skills at the moment. I want to eventually be able to study so I can become a library assistant, and then work on from there if I want to become a librarian. I know that’s a university course, but I thought I’d just try this one first. (Claudia 44, children 16, 14, twins 7)

However, mothers like Claudia who want to develop careers are financially disadvantaged through reduction in income support when their youngest child turns eight years of age and will have to find employment to support their families. As well as having to deal with stressors associated with the ramifications of violence, family and criminal court matters, and caring for children who are traumatised or experienced sexual assault, this financial disincentive may also impede women’s ability to study and jeopardise their eligibility to study on NSA or Austudy, which have time limitations.

Other mothers also received incorrect information from Centrelink about their eligibility for PPS and transferral payments, which caused them to stress about their ability to study and to manage financially. Marnie said:

Do I know anything about it? No not really actually, she’s going to turn six in October and I don’t know where I’m going to stand with my payments, the guy said you can go on Austudy...so the whole point is that it’s never actually really still been explained, I’ve been in three times and I still don’t know exactly what’s going to happen to me in regards to my payments when she turns six. (Marnie, 47, child, 5)

Again, Marnie is eligible for PPS until her youngest child turns eight years and then should

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87 Australian Government, "3.5.1.15 Qualification for PP".
88 Australian Government, "3.2.9.100 Suitable Activity- Study & Training". 

201
be transferred onto NSA. As several other mothers reported similar problems, this suggests Centrelink’s mistakes in this area are not isolated incidents. This finding also reflects similarities to Baker’s research on income support eligibility, which found recipients were not receiving the correct information or benefits, saving the government $4.8 billion per year.

Another disincentive to study was through Centrelink placing further pressure on mothers through incorrectly applying the participation requirements and placing them under the surveillance system:

I’m now under an activity agreement. I’ve signed one with Centrelink...last year which is agreeing that I do 15 hours activity a week, which is okay with my university because, obviously if I’m studying, I’m always over the 15 hours. But during the Christmas breaks they expected me to take on 15 hours of work, or to look for work...Like now, I’ve just finished this semester, so for the next four weeks I’m supposed to take on 15 hours of activity, or be looking for six jobs a fortnight. (Erin, 31, children, 13, 6)

Erin had been studying full-time for two years before being forced to sign an activity agreement. Under the legislation, Erin’s study is an approved activity, which is indicated through her receiving PES. Erin fully met the participation requirements and was not required to do any further activities or report fortnightly. However, Centrelink’s decision to apply further activities and surveillance indicates a serious breach in complying with the Social Security Law.

Two other mothers reported similar situations where they were studying through distance education institutions because of their remote and rural locations. One of these mothers was Pam, a nurse for 28 years, who had to complete a course to continue in her occupational field. However, Centrelink was not acknowledging their approved study status at all and was enforcing job seeking requirements, which also encompassed being connected to an employment service and being placed under fortnightly surveillance.

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89 Australian Government, “3.5.1.15 Qualification for PP”.
91 Australian Government, "3.5.1.180 Approved Activity- Study (PP)".
92 Australian Government, "3.2.9.100 Suitable Activity- Study & Training".
The Social Security Amendment (Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers) Act 2010 was meant to improve the delivery of information on Welfare to Work, and give parents more flexibility in regards to participation requirements. However, Erin reported her situation as getting worse:

_Myself and a friend in the same situation, is having the same problem with Centrelink. We are getting told that legislation changed this year in July and now we have to be registered job seekers and look for full time work even though we are full time uni students._ (Erin, 31, children, 13, 6)

This demonstrates a serious failure within Centrelink to deliver correct information and administer the correct participation requirements. This also indicates Centrelink was breaching the law to pressure single mothers to give up their studies, as well as not recognising their status as principal carers. Full time job search requirements (10 jobs per fortnight) are for recipients whose study has not been approved and who do not have dependants to care for. Erin’s case was especially concerning as she reported having been repeatedly investigated by Centrelink because of vexatious allegations made by her ex-partner, repeatedly received incorrect information and was openly discriminated against.

Employed mothers who were fully meeting the participation requirements through their approved study, were also incorrectly placed under the surveillance system. Mothers perceived the surveillance as a form of disapproval of their study by Centrelink and as an impingement on their time. As Carry stated:

_My approved activity is my fulltime university study. No, I’m not required to do it [30 hours per fortnight requirement], but I’m required to report every fortnight... If I do work 30 hours, I’m allowed the privilege of reporting my earnings over the telephone in a convenient two-minute phone call. If I don’t make that 30 hours a fortnight, I have to drag myself into the Centrelink office and stand in line for over an hour, and hand in my form. It’s absurd, and I was so furious last week when it took me almost four hours for this process from start to finish, because I only worked 28 hours instead of 30 hours, ...I worked 28 hours, plus my 48 hour a week study commitment, plus my 5 hours volunteer work, plus my full parenting, a 100 per cent care and custody of Andy, and I earned over $700, and they made me line up._ (Carry, 41, child, 14)

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94Hereafter will be referred to by its short title. Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."
Carry’s case illustrates that many mothers are time poor with the numerous activities they have to juggle. However, these activities are not recognised by Centrelink, which suggests the system treats mothers as being idle. However, the research also suggests that the surveillance system is being used by Centrelink to undermine mothers’ autonomy and to get them to give up study in favour of employment. This factor was raised by Gilliom who stipulated the system of welfare surveillance is specifically designed to prevent material improvements and eliminate personal control and autonomy. 96 This reflects Foucault’s perspective that surveillance is used to enforce conformity. 97 While study could improve Carry’s future work opportunities, its importance is dismissed through Centrelink adding disincentives for being in the welfare system. However, to exit the system would compromise a mother’s ability to study. As seen in Carry’s case, she is stretched for time with all her activities, but her earnings would not be sufficient to pay for her family’s living expenses and she would have to prioritise employment.

**Job search requirements as a study incentive**

Despite economic disincentives and deterrents, mothers pursued study, being aware that taking any job would not alleviate poverty in the short term or provide them with a means to support themselves in the future:

They don’t really want me to do this thing [degree course]. What they really want me to do is work, but they can get stuffed because if I take a job now that’s all I’ll be earning for the rest of my life. I really need this degree so, I’m so over them that I just don’t let them bully me. (Carry, 41, child, 14)

Most of the mothers who were studying resisted pressure to give up their courses as they believed study would provide them with a pathway out of poverty and welfare. They found study to be a source of empowerment, a means to improve their future financial outcomes and this finding was also reflected in Green’s research. 98 This also reflects Gilliom’s take on the ‘politics of resistance’, where the powerless fight the powerful as best as they can, despite the limited resources they have to do so. 99

97 Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*.
99 Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor*: 12.
The inflexibility of the 15 hour per week job requirement and associated economic disincentives influenced some mothers to study despite deterrents:

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I \text{ wanted to do casual teaching...Centrelink wouldn’t allow me to do that, I had to do 15 hours...so I thought I would start a uni course, and I thought I could go to uni two days and work for three days that I was already working, so that’s what I started doing last year. (Jasmine, 42, children 11, 8)}
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Being forced to give up lucrative career prospects for poor paying jobs influenced Jasmine to take up study and pursue a different career goal. Jasmine was able to keep her job, as well as study.

As in McInnes’s research, study also gave mothers more flexibility to care for children:\footnote{McInnes, “Public Policy and Private Lives.”}:

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My \text{ decision for this year was to study and try and get them right, and get them settled, and I think, again, lots of people have to be in the same boat where they’re making a decision on meeting Centrelink’s rules or raising their family to be good people. (Renae 42, children, 11, 8)}
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In pursuing study, mothers could still prioritise and support their children whereas the 15 hour per week job requirements was forcing mothers to place employment over their children’s needs. This reflected similarities to US research by Dobson in 2007, Hays in 2003 and Seccombe, James and Battle Walters in 1998, which examined how mothers dealt with the forced work regime.\footnote{Dodson, "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy."; Hays, Flat Broke with Children; Karen Seccombe, Delores James, and Kimberly Battle Walters, “They Think You Ain’t Much of Nothing”: The Social Construction of the Welfare Mother,” Journal of Marriage and the Family 60, no. 4 (1998).} Although these mothers were not studying, their response was to place their children’s safety and wellbeing first, despite the threat of sanctions.\footnote{Dodson, "Wage-Poor Mothers and Moral Economy."; Hays, Flat Broke with Children; Seccombe, James, and Battle Walters, “They Think You Ain’t Much of Nothing.”}

Job search requirements throughout school vacation periods and no available childcare or vacation care were also incentives for mothers to study:

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The \text{ nearest childcare centre is actually quite some distance from where I live, and because I don’t drive it would create quite a handicap if I was working during school holidays...I’m sort of doing the course as a way of getting out into the world and being disciplined, doing something I enjoy, and then from there I’ve got a little bit more of a solid foundation as a person to be back in the workforce. (River, 42, children, 17, 16, 10)}
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While there was a deficit of childcare in both rural and regional areas, care for teenage children was non-existent across Australia. Of the 23 mothers, 12 had teenage children. As Carry states:

_There’s no way I could work in the school holidays anyway... I thought “I’m not going to leave him locked in the house all summer while I go and work, to satisfy some arbitrary kind of figure that somebody thought up, you know, 15 hours a week”...They [Centrelink] said, “We understand that there’s no care available for him, but there’s also no law to say that you can’t leave somebody his age at home by themselves”...so I thought “No, there’s absolutely no way that I’m going to do this”. (Carry, 41, child, 14)_

Supervision of teenage children, their safety and the potential dangers of being left alone was highly influential in many mothers’ study decisions. Mothers reported Centrelink officers had directly told them to leave their children at home alone in order to pursue employment, which is consistent with research findings of Cox and Priest, and McArthur et al.¹⁰³ Hence, we can see that the unsuitable work ruling was not being applied by Centrelink when there was no appropriate childcare available.¹⁰⁴

Only one mother reported her decision to study was through a positive encounter with a Centrelink officer.

_The Centrelink lady who I actually think is an exception to the people that I’ve met in Centrelink...asked me why are you in Family Court and I explained ...and so she was surprised that I had been self-represented for so long and she suggested to me that I should actually look at going to university and doing law. (Simone, 47, children, 24, 22, 11)_

The inflexibility and economic disincentives associated with the 15 hour per week job requirement and the employment service system was an incentive for mothers to study, despite further economic disincentives to do so. There were two primary reasons that mothers chose to study. First, to gain economically sustainable employment that would enable them to provide for their families and their future and second, to exit the welfare system and be more available for their children.


¹⁰⁴ Australian Government, "3.5.1.200 Suitable Work (PP)."
Discussion
All the mothers in this project, who were studying, were focused on long term outcomes and pursuing qualifications in areas that could lead to career options in highly skilled jobs. Their intention was to gain sustainable, stable employment so they could eventually support themselves and their children and not be subject to poverty on benefits, or in precarious jobs. Many of these mothers had decided to pursue study after they found the job seeking component of the participation requirements and employment services was financially disadvantaging them and removing their autonomy in decisions relating to career choices and care. Mothers did not want to place their children at risk by leaving them at home alone as expected by Centrelink. While some of these mothers opted for study to try and avoid the participation requirements, this did not mean they were avoiding employment. Instead they were trying to better balance their care work, and have more autonomy over job suitability, hours and their future employment options. This behaviour reflected Lister’s argument that at the same time women can be oppressed through hierarchical power relations (such as welfare reform) and still be agents in their own lives.105 This also reflects Gilliom’s argument on the ‘politics of resistance’, as the women in this research used study to place their children’s needs and their prerogatives first.106

However, trying to gain some autonomy by meeting the participation requirements through study was fraught with problems, due to incorrect information and administration of the requirements by Centrelink. Regardless of employment status, mothers fulfilling the participation requirements through study were still placed under surveillance. Again in some cases, approved study and principal carer status were not acknowledged. This was evident in Erin’s case where she was being pressured to do the full-time requirements of a non-principal carer, which would mean she would have to give up her university study. This reflects that amendments to Social Security legislation which were meant to provide information and more flexibility to principal carers had failed.107 Not only do these errors suggest lack of training, they also breach the Social Security Law. Reflecting on Foucault’s theory,108 persistent monitoring and other errors can be seen as a punishment for not conforming to the ‘work first’ model. Foucault argued that constant surveillance is designed to break the will of subjects, to make them easier to control and make them behave in the way that is deemed

105 Lister, Citizenship: 41.
106 Gilliom, Overseers of the Poor: 12.
107 Australia, "Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010."
108 Foucault, Discipline and Punishment.
Surveillance and errors made it more onerous for mothers trying study and comply with participation requirements, adding further stress, which can be seen as a means to stop mothers from studying and conform to pressures to take any job and exit the system quicker, which Gilliom points out is the desired behaviour. As argued by Gilliom’s, the welfare surveillance system is both an expression and instrument of power and domination specifically designed to prevent material improvements and eliminate personal control and autonomy. From a feminist standpoint perspective, this reflects an abuse of power on the Centrelink delegates’ part, which in turn can be seen as inhibiting single mothers from options to improve their chances of gaining economic independence. This emulates feminists’ arguments on systemic violence and that welfare reform serves to maintain women as subordinates.

Placing mothers onto the lower paying Austudy and NSA was found to be a deterrent for mothers pursuing long term study, professional qualifications and developing careers despite skill shortages in Australia. Neither of these payments was originally designed for persons with dependants, and they placed mothers and children at risk of poverty. While the lower payments act as an incentive to seek employment, employment demands compromise study and time to care and deal with children’s needs. Austudy payments are even more financially disadvantaging as single parents lose all entitlements associated with being a principal parent. Incorrect information and incorrect administration of payments can also be seen as deterrents to pursue long duration study. Even more disconcerting is that incorrect information can deter women from relocating from ex-partners, which can compromise their safety. Mothers experiencing post-separation violence who have their studies disrupted can lose eligibility for Austudy. Allowable time on Austudy can be extended if the person has failed a year or part of a year due to illness or circumstances beyond their control, which must

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109 Ibid., 196, 266.
110 Gilliom, Overseers of the Poor: 7.
111 Ibid., 2, 3, 7.
114 Australian Government, “3.3.3.40 Supplementary Benefits & Assistance for Austudy Recipients.”
be verifiable. However, considering Chapter Five’s findings where women were denied domestic violence exemptions, the problem may not have any weight in applying for an extension, which could also be denied. More research is needed in this area to ascertain the number of single mothers studying on Austudy or on NSA and examine financial impacts and rates of retention.

The findings demonstrated that where single mothers had been studying prior to the transferral point, Centrelink staff had not followed the correct guidelines. Some mothers had been placed onto Austudy prior to their youngest child turning eight years of age, when they were eligible for PPS. Others, who should have been transferred onto NSA, which has more benefits than Austudy, were transferred to Austudy. This reflects that Centrelink was not approving these mothers’ study activities. Furthermore, this indicated Centrelink was in breach of the legislation and that some single mothers are missing out on their entitlements and correct payments. This area requires further investigation. Despite these deterrents and economic disincentives, mothers resisted by continuing to study as they gave primacy to their and their children’s future prospects.

In summary we have seen that Welfare to Work did not support the single mothers in this study to develop skills or to pursue further education. Moreover, the policy is designed to deter parents through economic disincentives. For those on PPS, surveillance and applying the incorrect participation requirements was another form of deterrent. However, the mothers in this research resisted the pressure to give up study and to conform to the precarious work first approach, placing their children and future outcomes first.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined single mothers’ education and employment histories and their experiences of the participation requirements. This included their experiences of the employment service system and the impact that Welfare to Work had on acquiring employment skills. Proponents of Welfare to Work construct single mothers as entering the welfare system through having low education levels, not having an attachment to the labour

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force and as having no capacity to manage their own lives. However, as this chapter has illustrated, the mothers in this study had a strong attachment to the labour market prior to and post separation, with many having a high education level. The high work force and study participation rates amongst these single mothers was due to their ambition to improve their circumstances and be able to provide for themselves and their children, without relying on welfare or living in poverty. We saw that Welfare to Work failed to provide opportunities to do this, and seemed to consistently obstruct the mothers’ attempts to have sustainable jobs and gain skills.

A major finding in this study was the consistency of errors made by Centrelink and employment services in applying the participation requirements, which ignored the legislative guidelines for single parents, thus making the system more stressful and complicated for mothers to be compliant and placed them at risk of being suspended from payments. The incorrect requirements can keep mothers continually connected to employment services, which financially advantages these agencies. However, these inconsistencies and mistakes suggest a breach of the legislation, which require further investigation. Ironically the mothers in this study were placed under constant surveillance even when they were compliant, but there appeared to be no measures to monitor Centrelink or the employment services for breaching the legislation or enacting fraudulent behavior. The mothers in this study were interviewed before and after the introduction of the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010, which was supposed to ensure that the correct information on the participation requirements was delivered to parents on income support. This study found that misinformation or denial of information and the application of the incorrect requirements continued, indicating that the amendments were a failure. Errors also meant mothers had missed out on benefits, which saved money in welfare expenditure. Although this suggests a major problem with information delivery to these agencies, the problem may be deliberate to deter mothers from claiming income support. Moreover, the way Welfare to Work is administered reflects feminists’ arguments on systemic violence and means to control women.

Regardless of whether the requirements were applied correctly or not, *Welfare to Work* removed the mothers’ choices regarding care responsibilities, employment and career preferences, while imposing further financial disincentives, such as Austudy, for those wanting to pursue further education. The job seeking component of the participation requirements was financially disadvantageous and placed mothers at risk of deskilling and poverty through focusing on employment outcomes and ignoring mothers’ qualifications. As we have seen in this chapter, those with lucrative professional jobs were pressured to seek low paid unskilled positions to satisfy the participation requirements, even if their employment hours dropped by only one hour. Instead of supporting single mothers to find sustainable jobs as claimed by the Howard and Labor Governments, the policy results in them being as a cheap source of labour, which reflects Walby’s argument on patriarchy and work.\(^{119}\) We also saw that those employed for long hours or in more lucrative jobs were still not earning enough to exit the welfare system. This reflects similarities to arguments made by feminists and industrial relations experts that flexible markets cannot facilitate economic independence. However, moving single mothers onto NSA will not only place these women at further risk of poverty but will ensure quicker exits. Moreover, fluctuations in the labour market could mean single mothers will have to re-enter the welfare system.

Another major problem was that the legislation, as well as Centrelink and employment services, ignored children and placed them at risk by expecting mothers to leave children at home alone. No consideration was given to sick and traumatised children or teenagers. *Welfare to Work* placed restrictions on child care relief, hence making care more expensive but expecting mothers to work in low paid precarious jobs. Most of the single mothers in this study were denied rights and entitlements associated with their principal carer status. Instead a gender same ‘one size fits all’ approach was applied. Whether the participation requirements were being applied correctly or incorrectly, mothering and children were invisible. This factor and the combination of errors, stigma and surveillance, reflects Rich’s argument single mothers and their children have no worth once outside the confines of the patriarchal family and are vulnerable to the worst possible sanctions.\(^ {120}\)

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\(^{120}\) Rich, *Of Woman Born*: 110.
There are financial benefits for employment services to have single mothers in their system, but the process was not found to be at all beneficial to the single mothers in this study. Furthermore, employment services did not encourage further education. They lacked professionalism and expertise on labour markets and had no expertise or resources to deal with domestic violence. Moreover, it appears women who had experienced domestic violence were being exploited by the employment service system to increase their profit margins. This reflects similarities to Walby’s argument that violence against women serves the interests of capitalists.\textsuperscript{121} All the mothers in this study found their own jobs without the help of these services. This raises questions regarding the need for these services. Arguably, placing mothers who have experienced violence into employment services puts profits before women’s and children’s safety.

Overall there was nothing beneficial in any aspect of the \textit{Welfare to Work} participation requirements for the single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. While the mothers in this study were trying to care for and keep their children safe and juggle employment and study commitments, they had no choice but to comply with Centrelink’s and the employment services’ demands. Otherwise they risked losing their payments, which would have a detrimental impact on their accommodation and their ability to support their children. It appears perhaps that the main objective of the policy is to use single mothers as a cheap source of labour supply. The policy and its implementation renders the ramifications of violence, parental responsibilities and children invisible. It does not assist single mothers to be self reliant, rather the system perpetuates the problem of women being constructed as dependants and is geared to maintain this status, through mechanisms that increase poverty. In this study, while mothers and their children were already vulnerable to poverty and homelessness because of violence, \textit{Welfare to Work} increased their vulnerability.

\textsuperscript{121} Walby, \textit{Patriarchy at Work}: 57.
Conclusion

Welfare to Work was implemented on the claims that the policy would combat welfare dependency, poverty, homelessness and even domestic violence amongst the single mother population. Furthermore, the policy has been promoted to improve single mothers’ and their children’s wellbeing. Throughout this thesis it has been argued that this has not been the case. Indeed, this research has demonstrated that Welfare to Work has been of little benefit to the single mothers in this study and placed them at further risk of poverty and homelessness, as well as having a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing.

The aim of the research was to examine the impact Welfare to Work had on single mothers and their children who had experienced domestic violence. This included examining the impact violence had on single mothers’ lives and employment, as these factors are absent from the welfare dependency and welfare reform debate. The research aim was met through interviews and analysis of the data, which yielded rich findings. A standpoint feminist approach and qualitative methods were specifically utilised so that the single mothers’ experiences could be presented. These methods revealed valuable insights into the lives of single mothers who had experienced violence and the structural obstacles that hindered their ability to be safe and free from violence, as well as economically independent. This research is of considerable value as it illuminates an area that is absent from the literature on Welfare to Work. The research remains relevant in today’s welfare debate, as there have been no changes to this legislation that would help improve the circumstances of single mothers who are claiming income support. Furthermore, the importance of a more supportive welfare system remains absent within Australia’s domestic violence policy, particularly with the Abbott Coalition Government’s proposal to reduce welfare benefits and cut funds to refuges, housing programs, medical schemes and legal resources, which would aid women fleeing violence. This chapter first summarises the key findings, then discusses the strengths and limitations of this study, before turning to areas that need further research and finally recommendations for a more supportive welfare system.
Key findings

This research had six key findings, each of which is discussed in turn. The first major finding was the amount of mistakes, misinformation and incorrect application of the participation requirements, payments, surveillance, suspensions and exemptions that were experienced by the mothers, including denying them information on exemptions. This indicated a serious problem with information delivery between DEEWR, Centrelink and contracted agencies within the welfare system. While most of the interviews were conducted prior to the introduction of the Flexible Participation Requirements for Principal Carers Act 2010, some were conducted with individuals from different participant groups after the amendments commenced. These amendments were supposed to improve information delivery to principal carers on Welfare to Work participation requirements and exemption processes. However, it was found that these amendments had failed to fix the problems. In some cases problems increased, as seen in Erin’s case in Chapter Six, where she was informed that the legislation had changed and she had to give up her full-time study and seek full-time employment.

Other mothers also reported undertaking participation requirements that did not acknowledge their principal carer status, not being informed of correct requirements or exemption processes, and being placed under surveillance even when they were compliant. As Foucault points out, surveillance is a mechanism to induce conformity1 and we can see that it has been consistently used throughout the welfare system. In this study the combination of errors and surveillance could be seen as a form of punishment to make single mothers conform to the ‘work first’ approach and exit the welfare system as quickly as possible. This also reflects Mead’s influence in welfare reform, in promoting unfair and discriminatory treatment of single mothers to get them off welfare.2

Errors by Centrelink and employment services caused the single mothers in this study an extreme amount of stress, placing them and their families at risk of homelessness, poverty and health problems. This was evident in situations where mothers were placed on incorrect payments, had medical conditions, were suspended, or had to deal with family law matters and the ongoing ramifications of violence. Overall, most of the single mothers in this study were denied principal carer status and expected to meet the same requirements as recipients

with no dependants. This suggested that a ‘one size fits all’ gender neutral approach was being applied. However, even when the policy was applied correctly, there was still no recognition that these women were the sole parents of children. This treatment echoes arguments by Crittenden, Hays, Pearce, and Rich that under welfare reform, mothering by single women has been rendered as being of no value, and intentionally makes these women vulnerable to exploitation and every kind of sanction.\(^3\) Regardless of the way the policy was applied, its aim was to push single mothers into exiting the welfare system as quickly as possible. Notably, while mothers in this study were placed under extra stress because of errors, these mistakes had financial benefits for employment services.

There was also a problem with information delivery, in that single mothers were being denied information on exemptions that were specifically for those who had experienced domestic violence, as well as other exemption processes. None of the single mothers in this study were informed by Centrelink of exemptions, even when they disclosed violence and showed verification. The research identified there was a systematic failure in delivering the correct legislative guidelines to Centrelink and contracted agencies within the welfare system. This was evident in Fiona’s case (discussed in Chapter Five) who made disclosures to three different workers within the welfare system and still did not receive information on the domestic violence exemption. Although the women’s emergency service workers reported some Centrelink social workers were aware of exemptions, obtaining one was extremely difficult, and as we saw, if one was granted, it was incorrect and an exemption for non-principal carers. Other workers in the welfare system, who were interviewed, also had no knowledge of participation exemptions on the grounds of domestic violence. Instead women were incorrectly sent for a CWCA. However, the CWCA procedure’s primary aim is to stop people applying for participation exemptions and to connect them with employment services. This suggests that women in this study who experienced violence were being denied their rights and exploited within the welfare system. This reflects similarities to Walby’s argument that violence serves the interest of capitalists as employment services financially gain from the CWCA.\(^4\) Moreover, recipients who are categorised as having the highest disadvantage,


such as those who are homeless or have experienced violence, attract higher funding. While the problem with information delivery points to DEEWR, denying exemptions and applying the CWCA procedure serves to keep a flow of clients to employment service agencies and places business profits and prerogatives before women’s and children’s health and safety. While the CWCA procedure ignored the ramifications of domestic violence, we saw that those with illnesses and those who had disclosed violence were treated as frauds and as trying to avoid the participation requirements. This reflects conservative views that women fabricate allegations of violence for their own gain, which is similar to the way domestic violence is dealt with in family law and other judicial systems.\(^5\)

By prioritising employment and ignoring violence, welfare system agencies and the CWCA procedure placed women at risk of developing further health problems and being suspended from payments. Many of the mothers in this study reported their mental and physical health had deteriorated since entering the Welfare to Work system. Several were suspended from payments because issues directly related to domestic violence compromised their ability to comply with the participation requirements. This, in turn, had detrimental health effects on women as well as their children. Denying single mothers’ exemptions also placed them at risk of being suspended from payments if they prioritised children’s safety, over job seeking activities. Suspensions placed women at risk of homelessness, while neglecting court appearances, placed them at risk of losing their children and their children at risk of violence. In this instance, prioritising employment over safety can be seen as supporting patriarchal rights and also reflects radical feminists’ arguments on systemic violence. Furthermore, it was found that where mothers had shared care arrangements or ex-partners who knew of their whereabouts, violence had been a problem for years. This persistence of violent behaviours towards women and children suggests that even if the 16 week exemption was applied correctly, it would still be insufficient as mothers had to deal with safety, housing, children’s needs and family law issues, which seemed continuous. Welfare to Work or employment did not stop violence. Instead in many cases Welfare to Work and employment were other areas where perpetrators used to abuse women and children.

The second key finding was that economic abuse was a major problem for this cohort of women who were subsequently placed at risk of poverty and homelessness, as well as suspension from Centrelink payments. Although employment has been promoted as a pathway to economic independence and to prevent welfare dependency and other societal problems, this claim does not acknowledge the problems associated with economic abuse or the gendered division of labour and care. Regardless of job status when the mothers in this study became single, they still had to access income support. In Chapter Four we saw that the main reason for mothers in this study to have entered the welfare system was because they had left a domestically violent relationship and had children to care for. Most had to flee their homes, leaving their assets and jobs behind and all had experienced economic abuse, which included perpetrators sabotaging their employment. However, violence and economic abuse continued after separation. The primary reason for this was a systemic failure in the judicial system, family law and child protection systems to protect single mothers from violence. These systems compounded the problem of economic abuse and violence further, through placing fathers’ wellbeing first and prioritising shared care, which increased difficulty for women to negotiate property settlements. This reflects arguments by Marcus, Schneider, and Walby that the state is a public form of patriarchy and legitimises violence against women through legal reforms, by protecting the privileges of violent men. Violence and economic abuse was also a problem where shared care arrangements had been made even without the involvement of these systems. Shared care enabled perpetrators to continue to financially abuse mothers and children through Centrelink FTB payments and the child support system, even when care obligations were neglected.

Subsequently Welfare to Work compounded the problem of post-separation violence as perpetrators used the system to sabotage the single mothers’ employment and jeopardise their income support payments. The majority of the single mothers in this study reported being under financial stress due to the high costs of living. Those whose only income was PPS were more vulnerable to poverty than those on PPS with employment, while the most vulnerable were those on lower payments, such as Austudy. This suggests that income support payments (particularly Austudy) were insufficient to support single mother families.

However, economic abuse compounded the problem of financial stress, as perpetrators had the power to manipulate FTB and child support payments, and sabotage employment and study activities. This, in turn, increased the risk of poverty and homelessness amongst the single mothers in this study. Some reported being unable to pay the rent, living in dilapidated accommodation, or were considering moving in with family because of financial difficulties they were experiencing. While financial problems could result in women returning to perpetrators, the single mothers in this study at the time of interviews were determined to do whatever possible to stay independent from their ex-partners.

However, the findings suggest that domestic violence cannot be addressed as just an individual problem. Domestic violence policy needs to incorporate the intersection of other institutions including the welfare system and stop perpetrators from being able to legally financially abuse women and children, as well as committing other forms of violence against them. Employment did not stop violence but was another avenue for perpetrators to abuse women. Only those who had no shared care arrangements were free from violence but still lived in fear. However, these families were still financially disadvantaged because the institutions that were supposed to protect them, had failed to do so. Nonetheless, the problem of economic abuse has been and still is absent from the Australia’s welfare reform debate and domestic violence plan. The institutional failure to protect women and children financially and physically reflects feminists’ arguments on systemic violence. However, the added hardships and financial disadvantages incurred by Welfare to Work appear to be another form of economic abuse but one that is meted out by the state.

The third key finding in this study was that Welfare to Work and employment services did not support single mothers who had experienced domestic violence to find sustainable employment or provide them with more choices. All the mothers in this study who had been forced to attend an employment service had found their own employment, without the help of the agency. Overall the measures in the legislative guidelines and employment services’ practice were found to financially disadvantage single mothers and restricted them from seeking lucrative career options. This forced even skilled mothers to take low paid unskilled precarious jobs and pay cuts. These practices can lead to deskilling women and the chief beneficiaries were employment services who gained through outcome payments and business

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7 Marcus, "Reframing Domestic Violence."; Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd, 1971); Schneider, "The Violence of Privacy."
by providing cheaper labour with subsidies. This did not reflect the economic independence ethos but can be seen as maintaining women as dependants, which was the intention of the Howard Government under its family policy initiatives, and a primary aim of welfare reform as argued by Mead. Mothers were unable to negotiate exemptions or participation requirement activities within the welfare system. If they did not abide by the demands of Centrelink or employment services, they were suspended. This reflects arguments by Standing, Western et al. and Yeatman that neoliberal policies and the ‘active citizen’ model restrict access to citizenship, equality and opportunities. Forcing mothers to give up lucrative options in exchange for financially disadvantaging ones also reflects Lister’s argument of the false dichotomy within the welfare reforms, between active and passive participants in society.

The single mothers in this study had a strong labour market attachment prior to and post separation, as well as a high education attainment rate, which is consistent with other research on single mothers before the introduction of the reforms and brings into question the need for Welfare to Work. However, regardless of their skills, the single mothers were treated as not having any job experience or qualifications, even when women were working in professional areas. This reflected Williams’ argument that it did not matter how engaged mothers were with employment activities or caring responsibilities, they are still seen as dependent. Furthermore, the findings suggested that employment services were profit driven and not focused on individual needs. There was no evidence to support claims that employment services can benefit single mothers who have experienced violence or that they connect

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9 Mead, "Welfare Reform and the Family."
women to specific support mechanisms. Overall domestic violence was ignored and trivialised into a simplistic assumption that employment will emancipate women, without considering the ramifications of violence, structural deficits, gendered disadvantages or that the ‘work first’ system is designed to push single mothers into low paid precarious jobs.

The fourth key finding was that Welfare to Work did not support single mothers to gain skills and qualifications. Not only were the mothers pressured to give up study through the application of the incorrect participation requirements and surveillance measures, lower payments such as Austudy and NSA served as financial disincentives to pursue further education. In some cases, the wrong payment was being applied, such as placing mothers onto Austudy prior to the transferral point, which is when their youngest child turns eight years of age, when they were eligible for PPS. Another mother was incorrectly placed on Austudy after the transferral point when she qualified for NSA because she had been studying up until this time. Austudy was particularly deleterious financially because it did not entitle mothers to other payments and concessions associated with principal carers. These payments put single mother families at risk of homelessness and can be seen as an inducement to get mothers to conform to the ‘work first’ agenda and exit the welfare system. However, despite these disincentives many of the mothers were determined to continue to study as they wanted to be free of welfare and poverty. Although for some the oppressiveness of Welfare to Work was an incentive to study, decisions were largely based on being able to provide for themselves and their children in the future, which did not reflect welfare dependency mentality.

The fifth major finding was that the participation requirements did not support mothers in balancing child care responsibilities with employment. Instead the policy and welfare agencies placed children at risk, through rendering them invisible and expecting mothers to prioritise job seeking, even when there was no available care. The unsuitable work guidelines in regards to child care were not being followed by Centrelink or employment services. But even if they had been used, they would not have been effective, as they only applied to job offers and not job search activities. Teenagers were exceptionally vulnerable as mothers were expected to leave these children at home alone to satisfy the participation requirements. Many of the mothers reported their children had extra care needs and medical problems but these issues were not acknowledged within the welfare system. The responsibility of having to care for children who had also experienced violence and suffered
from trauma was absent in the policy and the ways in which it was administered, rendered these children as if they were worthless. Consistent with arguments on welfare reform, by feminists scholars, such as Bussemaker and Voet, Lister, and Sainsbury, *Welfare to Work* removes any status once associated with citizen mother and constructs mothers as workers, which denies the gendered division of labour and care.\(^{14}\) Despite the policy ignoring these issues, these women were determined to place their children first, while trying to comply with the participation requirements and improve their job skills. However, the policy exerted a tremendous amount of stress on these women, financially, physically and psychologically, placing them at risk of health problems and homelessness. If these women were unable to cope because of these stressors or further violence and could not comply with the demands of the policy, this could result in further risk of having their children relinquished to perpetrators, which has been seen to happen in the US.\(^{15}\)

Overall, this study found that *Welfare to Work* did not live up to its promise to support single mothers who had experienced domestic violence. The single mothers were not supported to balance family with employment or to gain skills. There was no consideration or acknowledgement in any aspect of the policy that the single mothers in this study had children to support. The correct information on the participation requirements or exemptions was not readily made available. In many areas mothers were denied legal rights even as welfare recipients. The policy severely limited mothers’ choices and was financially damaging for these women and their families. Furthermore, the policy had a negative impact on the single mothers’ health and wellbeing. It is possible to see how the system exploits single mothers as a cheap source of labour and to prop up employment service profits. Administration errors and the denial of rights and exemptions appeared to be primarily to the financial benefit of employment services. Moreover, *Welfare to Work* left these women vulnerable to the very problems that the policy claimed to solve. The financial disadvantages and the arbitrary participation requirements and surveillance can be seen as a means to control women and as a family policy measure to keep women economically dependent on


\(^{15}\) Hays, *Flat Broke with Children*. 
men and to remain or return to dangerous relationships, as seen in the US.\textsuperscript{16} This may be the reason the \textit{Welfare to Work} Evaluation Report found a major decline in women entering the welfare system as single mothers.\textsuperscript{17} The findings indicate that \textit{Welfare to Work} is not a pathway to economic independence but contributes to the feminisation of poverty and is another tool for perpetrators to continue their abuse. Reflecting on arguments by Millet and Walby, welfare reform does not support the economic independence of single mothers as this would undermine the authority and financial structure of the patriarchal family.\textsuperscript{18} Thus the policy serves to keep women as dependants, which also maintains them as a cheap source of labour, and in turn, benefits business interests.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Strengths and limitations}

The feminist standpoint approach was one of the major strengths of this research and has provided rich insights into the lives of single mothers and how they were treated within the \textit{Welfare to Work} system, while simultaneously having to deal with the ramifications of domestic violence. Using this approach made it possible to examine the realities of these women’s everyday lives. This made visible the numerous complexities these women had to deal with such as having to care for children who had experienced trauma and being vulnerable to further violence and economic abuse because of a systemic failure to protect them. It also illuminated how domestic violence had impacted on their employment, study and financial situation, as well as having to comply with the \textit{Welfare to Work} participation requirements. A feminist standpoint approach meant that the voices of these women were heard, which revealed the negative impacts \textit{Welfare to Work} had on them and their families, as well as upon how other intersecting policies such as shared care, increased vulnerability to economic abuse and violence. This approach has made domestic violence, caring for children and single mother’s employment activities visible, and these are factors that are absent from the welfare reform debate and the way \textit{Welfare to Work} has been administered.

\textsuperscript{18} Millet, \textit{Sexual Politics}; Walby, \textit{Theorizing Patriarchy}.
\textsuperscript{19} Walby, \textit{Theorizing Patriarchy}. 

222
Being a national study was also a strength, as participants came from different regions in Australia and were unknown to each other (apart from the group of women’s emergency support participants). However, their reports on the Welfare to Work system had many similarities and consistently corroborated other participants’ statements. It became clear that there was a systemic failure to administer the correct guidelines or to support single mothers who had left domestic violence. Previously, there was a lack of research which specifically focused on single mothers who had experienced violence. Hopefully, this research makes a modest contribution to the field. Unlike other research, this study also focused on specific guidelines and processes within the Welfare to Work legislation to examine the impact these had on single mothers in relation to domestic violence.

A limitation of this research was the size of the sample group of the welfare system workers, which was too small to be a representation of their group of workers or to draw inferences or do a comparative analysis on. However, their interviews did provide useful background information and showed that the legislation was not being applied correctly. Even in the cases where welfare system workers’ views did not agree with those of other participants’ perspectives, this highlighted a lack of knowledge on domestic violence and the administration of Welfare to Work. Despite these limitations, this research aimed and accomplished to specifically highlight the voices of single mothers as their experiences are absent from the welfare reform debate.

**Further research**

There are several areas that would benefit from further research. The problems with DEEWR delivering misinformation to Centrelink and contacted agencies within the welfare system needs further investigation as many of the reported behaviours contravened the legislation. More information is essential to ascertain the number of single mothers who have experienced violence and who are missing out on exemptions and benefits. As well, consideration needs to be given to how many women have had problems gaining exemptions on medical grounds because they disclosed they had experienced domestic violence. The number of women entering the Australian welfare system because of violence is a matter requiring examination. Employment service practices calls for further investigation as the data suggested the possibility of fraudulent conduct. However, these areas may be difficult to
research as Government agencies and the private agencies were reluctant to participate in this study.

More research is required to assess the number of single mothers studying on Austudy or NSA and to examine financial impacts and rates of retention. This area, particularly on Austudy, has been absent from the *Welfare to Work* debate. This is not surprising since these payments are not designed to support single mother families and the loss of benefits associated with Austudy provides an extra financial disincentive to pursue skills through education. While this area merits examination in general, specific attention needs to be paid to mothers who have experienced violence to evaluate how they manage and whether they move off benefits through employment and return to welfare or return to perpetrators.

Although this research did look at how single mothers were being subjected to economic abuse through the judicial and welfare systems, this area still requires further investigation. As we have seen economic abuse is concealed through neoliberal policies constructing women as dependants and men as providers. This notion needs to be challenged by highlighting not only the economic abuse perpetrated by violent men, but also the ways in which they are dependent on women, including financial dependency. These issues should be brought to the forefront of the welfare reform debate and domestic violence policy formulation, including the family law area. Also more research on fathers who receive FTB payments but neglect their shared care obligations, would give a broader perspective than currently available.

Assessing how single mother families who lost their ‘grandfathered’ status as of the 1st January 2013, as well as considering new applicants, also requires further investigation. Proposed changes by the Abbott Government do not look favourable towards single mothers and suggest that qualification for PPS may be reduced.\(^\text{20}\) This means that single mothers with children under the age of six years may face the same problems and hardships experienced by mothers in this study. This area needs to be spotlighted to convince policy makers that these reforms create a great deal of hardship for single mothers and their families and need to be abolished.

Recommendations

Throughout this research, the single mother participants reported that Welfare to Work had caused them financial hardship and had negative impacts on their health and ability to care for their children. Because of the harshness of this policy, they all wanted to see the policy abolished. This research and even previous research, such as Alexander et al., which was commissioned by the Howard Government in 2005, found that single mothers already have a high employment rate and that the policy was unnecessary. The policy creates extreme hardship for single mothers and their children so that the Government can provide businesses with a cheaper source of labour, while financially supporting private enterprises such as employment services with tax payers funds. Governments can save on spending by abolishing this system, and stop funding employment services and other contracted agents and subsidising businesses. Based on neoliberal ideals, private enterprise should be reliant on the market, not dependent on welfare dollars. However, these arbitrary welfare reforms will probably remain, particularly since the Abbott Government is planning to implement further amendments to reduce income support qualification. Taking these factors into account, the following recommendations are made.

The majority of the single mothers in this research were experiencing financial hardship. Reinstating PPS to all single parents within the welfare system and increasing payment rates would help alleviate the risk of poverty and homelessness for these families. This would also support those who need to escape domestic violence and those wanting to improve their employability through education. Placing single parents onto benefits associated with their activities was undertaken on the premise of universalising welfare payments, which has caused severe hardship. Placing single mothers on NSA or Austudy renders mothering and children invisible, even within Government statistical data, making it difficult to identify these families. Reinstating PPS would also simplify the system, as single parents would be clearly identified as principal carers and it would send a signal that there are different guidelines and requirements for this group. This may help combat some of the problems with information delivery.

21 Alexander et al., "Australians Working Together."
Considering the extent of domestic violence in Australia, all welfare recipients need to be screened for the problem. Information on all exemptions procedures should be made readily available to those who disclose violence. At the same time, victims of violence need to be informed of crisis payments and child support exemptions, which can then be activated immediately if need be. This would make the system more cohesive and sensitive to the needs of victims by decreasing stressors on those experiencing trauma. Victims of violence should also be referred immediately to a professional with specialised expertise in domestic violence and sexual assault. Centrelink staff and contracted agency staff would acquire a better understanding of domestic violence and sexual assault if training was conducted in the recruitment stage and every six months thereafter by a professional with specialised expertise. These sessions could also help remind welfare workers of legislative guidelines relating to domestic violence.

It would also be beneficial if women’s emergency service workers received training on *Welfare to Work* guidelines relating to participation requirements and exemptions. This would help them when advocating for women who have experienced violence and ensure that these women were receiving the correct entitlements.

The seriousness of violence against women and children and its ramifications need to be taken into account by making exemptions from job seeking activities more readily available and extending time periods. Single mothers and their children who have experienced violence should be given an automatic three year participation exemption, in order to give them time to heal from the experience. This needs to include mothers of children who have been sexually assaulted. If violence reoccurred or they have more dealings with the judicial system, exemptions should be extended from six to twelve months. These measures would also protect women from perpetrators who use *Welfare to Work* to financially abuse them. Disclosure by the victim or their parent should be sufficient verification as many women who experience violence do not have contact with services. Lengthy exemptions will support single mothers who are going through ongoing court processes and help in re-establishing their lives. Being granted an exemption does not mean women will be inactive. Prior to *Welfare to Work*, single mothers who have experienced domestic violence have not needed to be in compulsory employment programs to make them active in employment. For instance, McInnes’s 1994 study found that women who had experienced violence had a high
employment and study rate and a strong desire to improve their employment prospects.\(^{23}\) This was also found in this research. As argued by Blaxland all *Welfare to Work* has done is removed mothers’ autonomy and prioritised paid employment over their children’s needs.\(^{24}\) Therefore, increasing exemption time periods and making them more accessible should not decrease single mothers’ employment related activity but would rather offer them more choice in balancing their activities with care responsibilities and having to deal with domestic violence. Ideally, single mothers should be able to decide when they are ready to return to employment or other activities, based on the care needs of their children and their own wellbeing.

Guidelines regarding satisfying the activity test need to be changed. There should not be a specified number of paid employment hours. One job should be seen as sufficient, even if employment hours are lower than 15 hours per week. Mothers should be able to choose jobs, which are aligned with qualifications or field of study. Volunteer work on its own should satisfy the activity test without conditions applied. All study needs to be approved and supported regardless of part-time or full-time status or internal or external status.

In regards to the unsuitable work guidelines; a job should be deemed unsuitable if the single parents are not $500 per fortnight better off, after tax deductions, income support deductions, child care and travel expenses, and after increases in public housing rent. Travel time should be reduced (e.g. 20 minutes), including going to employment services. The guidelines need to be relaxed further for those entering into participation activities after an exemption period has expired and they need to consider the impact of violence on mothers’ ability to comply. Suitable jobs should be classified as employment only within school hours. Job seeking and other activities should also only be conducted within school hours. Single parents should also be exempt from job seeking and employment service activities all school holiday periods.

The suspension system caused extreme financial hardship not only for parents but also children, placing both at risk of homelessness and subsequently had negative impacts on health and wellbeing. Considering single parents are the carers of children this system should


\(^{24}\) Blaxland, "Welfare to Work Activity Agreement".
be abolished. Due to the inadequacies of payments, even the ‘no show, no pay’ policy should not be applied to single parents. Even losing one tenth of a payment would have a detrimental effect on families already struggling to survive.

Government agents such as DEEWR and Centrelink, as well as private contractors need to be monitored to ensure that the legislation is implemented correctly. Penalties and legal action need to be applied to these agencies if that is not the case. These agencies’ actions need to be made transparent to the public, including expenditure of tax payers’ money on employment services and CWCA procedures. Data need to be compiled on the number of single mother recipients in the welfare system who have experienced domestic violence.

In summary, although this research was conducted between 2008 and 2010, the findings are still highly relevant today. There have been no changes made to Welfare to Work that give single mothers relief from the financial disadvantages and disincentives or the arbitrary participation requirements. These factors make this research extremely valuable as it demonstrates how single mothers and their families are placed at risk of poverty, homelessness and decreased health through this policy and why this policy needs to be repealed. Welfare to Work is not a pathway to economic independence or a solution to domestic violence. The policy ignores violence against women and children and exploits women as a cheap source of labour, which produces higher profit margins for employment services. Because of the hardships incurred by Welfare to Work, the future for the single mothers in this study is uncertain as it is for other women with children who find themselves in the same predicament.
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Appendix A

List of Agencies Contacted for Participant Recruitment

- Centrelink
- 42 employment service providers (South Australia)
- 2 main national employment services contenders
- 3 national social services providers
- 15 women’s emergency services in South Australia
- 1 women’s emergency service (Western Australia)
- 1 women’s emergency service (Queensland)
- 6 women’s emergency services (New South Wales)
- 3 South Australian housing associations,
- 1 Queensland housing association
- WISN
- National Council of Single Mothers and their Children
- SPARK
- National Welfare Rights Centre (Adelaide)
- Working Women’s Centre (Adelaide)
- Women’s Information Service (Adelaide)
- Relationships Australia
- Family Services (Adelaide)
- 4 Community centres (Adelaide)
- 10 Community centres (New South Wales)
- 30 primary schools (Adelaide)
- Solomothers
- Domestic Violence Clearing House
Appendix B

Volunteers Required
Single Mother Participants Needed

Are you a single mother and your youngest child is 6 years or older and Centrelink has asked you to look for work or do more work?

My name is Myjenta Winter and I am a PhD student at the University of South Australia. I am researching how single mothers who have left abusive or domestically violent relationships have experienced Centrelink Welfare to Work requirements.

I am looking for single mums who are receiving or who have applied for Parenting Payment Single or New Start Allowance and who are subject to activity participation requirements.

Participation is voluntary and interviews will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and can be conducted by telephone for further confidentiality. Participants will receive a $20 gift voucher for contributing their time.

Interviews and all personal details will remain confidential.

For more information please contact me on 08 8302 4153 or email myjenta.winter@unisa.edu.au

Supervisors contact details:
Dr Elspeth McInnes 08 8302 4042  elspeth.mcinnes@unisa.edu.au
Dr Carole Zufferey 08 8302 4782  carole.zufferey@unisa.edu.au
4 November 2008

Dear Manager

My name is Myjenta Winter, I am a PhD student from the University of South Australia, School of Education. I am undertaking qualitative research for my post-graduate PhD degree on women who have become single mothers through leaving an abusive or domestically violent relationship and their experience with Centrelink and how they experience Welfare to Work. I will be interviewing Centrelink, Job Network and Women Services workers as well as single mothers.

I am currently recruiting participants for my research and am requesting your assistance in finding workers that would like to participate.

The selection criteria for participants includes:

- Social workers and case workers that have come in contact with women with dependent children who have left an abusive or domestically violent relationship and come under the protocols of activity participation requirements of the Welfare to Work Act 2005

Interviews will be conducted in the 2009 calendar year.
If any workers would like to participate in this research, their input would be much appreciated.
My supervisors and their contact details are:
Dr Elspeth McInnes 08 8302 4042 elspeth.mcinnes@unisa.edu.au
Dr Helen Cameron 08 8302 4380 helen.cameron@unisa.edu.au

I have attached a copy of my recruitment flyer and information sheet for your perusal. In compliance with ethics approval could you please send written confirmation to indicate that you support this research. Your assistance would be very much appreciated and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

Myjenta Winter
Appendix D

Single Mother Interview Schedule

**Basic Demographic Data**
What age are you? How many children do you have? Their age?
What cultural background do you identify with?
Number of people in household/ not related/extended family.
What are your sources of income (child support, income support, family tax benefit, rent relief, wages)? Main source of income?

**Single Parent Data**
How did you become a single parent and what year?
Did that involve leaving your residence? How is your accommodation situation now? How much rent do you pay?
What are the arrangements with regard to the children and property of the relationship? Are you currently involved in any family law proceedings?
Are there any ongoing concerns about your own and your children’s safety?
Does your ex-partner engage in behaviours that either stop you from working or doing education or training or makes it more difficult for you to do so?

**Contact with Women's Services**
Did you have any contact with women’s emergency services when you separated or since?
Which services and your experience?
Were they helpful with dealing with Welfare to Work?

**Labour Market Participation Data**
What year did you leave school and why? What are your education qualifications and paid work experience?
What is your usual occupation? Are you currently employed?
Have you experienced any discrimination in jobs or applying for jobs or in education/training courses?

**Centrelink & Employment Services**
Describe your experience in relation to entering the welfare system and negotiating participation activities and participation exemptions?
Did you disclose domestic violence to Centrelink or to employment services? What was their response?
Are you aware of the domestic violence participation exemption?
What agencies and/or assessment procedures were you referred to? Were these beneficial and how?
Did you have to see a Job Capacity Assessor?
What activities (courses or support programs) did you find beneficial?
How have the Welfare to Work participation requirements affected you?
Are there any areas within the welfare process that you think could be improved?
What sort of programs or assistance do you think could be implemented that would be beneficial for yourself and other survivors of domestic violence?
Have you experienced any difficulties in complying with Centrelink Welfare to Work requirements?
Appendix E

Women’s Services Workers Interview Schedule

What is your experience working with women escaping domestic violence who are subject to Welfare to Work Participation requirements?

In your experience, how are mothers affected by the Welfare to Work participation requirements?

Do you advise women to take any particular course of action in relation to their participation requirements?

Do many mothers attending the service apply for a participation exemption? How many of these are successful?

Does an exemption from participation requirements assist mothers who have left domestic violence? If so how?

Have you noticed any differences in working in Domestic Violence Services since Welfare to Work was implemented? If so what are they?

What areas of Welfare to Work do you observe have been beneficial to women? How?

What areas of Welfare to Work would you like to change? In what ways?
Appendix F

Centrelink Interview Schedule

Is training given to workers on how to respond to women that disclose domestic violence?

Are there many single mums affected by domestic violence that you have had contact with that would be under Welfare to Work?

Describe how you are placed in the process of responding to women who have disclosed domestic violence and who have applied for a domestic violence exemption.

How many single mothers would apply for a participation exemption?

What are the key issues to be examined in determining an application?

What circumstances would result in an application being approved/denied?

What factors determine the duration of an exemption?

What proportion of mothers apply for a second exemption?

What sorts of changes, if any would you recommend to the domestic violence exemption processes?

Are there circumstances where you think the exemption processes do not meet women’s needs?

What are the proportion of domestic violence cases that are referred back to Centrelink from other agencies? How do other agencies respond to domestic violence?

Do you think Welfare to Work is beneficial to single mums that have experienced domestic violence?

Are there areas that you think could be improved?

Have you witnessed or been made aware of responses from colleagues that you think could of been handled better?
Appendix G

Employment Service Workers Interview Schedule

Can you describe how you’re placed in the process of responding to women who have disclosed domestic violence?

Have you and your co-workers received any training in domestic violence?

What steps are taken, like if a woman discloses to you that she has domestic violence concerns?

Do you screen people to see if they have experienced domestic violence?

Do you screen for exemptions?

Do you refer anybody back to Centrelink, or just straight to the Job Capacity Assessor?

Have you seen anything that’s been beneficial with domestic violence and the employment services?
Appendix H

Job Capacity Assessor Interview Schedule

How many victims of domestic violence would you have seen?

How many would you say that have been referred from either Centrelink, or from employment services?

How do you assess victims of domestic violence?

How do you determine whether that person is suffering from post traumatic stress disorder or depression, when they may not acknowledge they have experienced these things.

Are you are aware of the domestic violence exemption?

Do you grant many exemptions for domestic violence?

What other services do you refer women whom have experienced violence to besides the Stream 4 and the employment services?

How do you think employment services would help a woman with domestic violence as an issue?

What about domestic violence services and the services they provide, do you refer to them?

Is there anything that should be changed, what would you change if you could?

Who provides the training? How much training do they actually give you, in relation to domestic violence?
Appendix I

Myjenta Winter, Bsoc. Sc (Hons Pl Sc)
myjenta.winter@unisa.edu.au
08 8302 4153

Information Sheet (single mother participants)

How do single mothers who have left domestically violent or abusive relationships, experience Welfare to Work activity participation requirements

My name is Myjenta Winter, I am a PhD student from the University of South Australia, School of Education. I am conducting research on how women with dependent children, who have left an abusive or domestically violent relationship, who are subject to activity participation requirements, experience dealing with Welfare to Work processes. I am interested in how the Welfare to Work participation requirements have affected you and your children. I would also like to know, how you feel about Welfare to Work. The purpose of the research is to investigate how Welfare to Work affects those that have experienced domestic violence in relation to the work requirements. The information I will obtain from your interview will be used for my PhD research.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you can terminate the interview at anytime. I will be asking questions in relation to your experience of being a single mum and working and what your experiences have been with Centrelink and Job Network agencies. Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed, the transcript will be returned to you to review. Audiotospes will be retained once they are transcribed. The audiotape and the transcript will be stored in a locked cabinet in my locked office at the University of South Australia. All interviews are confidential and all identifying details will be removed. All participants will be given a pseudonym. When the research is completed all transcripts will be kept in a locked storeroom at the University of South Australia, Magill campus for five years, in accordance with the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research. Summary of research findings will be published in journal articles and will be available to interested people. Participants will receive a $20 gift voucher for contributing their time.

Although the focus of this research is on your experience with Welfare to Work however if at any time you feel any discomfort, the interview will be discontinued and should you need help I have attached an information sheet of a list of support services you may consider contacting.

My supervisors and their contact details are:

Dr Elspeth McInnes 08 8302 4042 or elspeth.mcinnes@unisa.edu.au
Dr Carole Zufferey 08 8302 4782 or carole.zufferey@unisa.edu.au

This research forms part of a postgraduate PhD degree. This project has been approved by the University of South Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns, about this project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au. (P281/08)
Information Sheet  
(Social workers and case workers)

How do single mothers who have left domestically violent or abusive relationships, experience Welfare to Work activity participation requirements

My name is Myjenta Winter, I am a PhD student from the University of South Australia, School of Education. I am conducting research on how women with dependent children, who have left an abusive or domestically violent relationship, who are subject to activity participation requirements, experience dealing with Welfare to Work processes. I am interested in interviewing workers who have come across women in the above criteria and would like to know how you have dealt with clients in this situation and what outcomes have you witnessed. The purpose of the research is to evaluate how women with dependent children who have left a domestically violent or abusive relationship fare under the Welfare to Work system. The information I will obtain from your interview will be used for my PhD research. Participation in this research is voluntary, and you can terminate the interview at anytime. I will be asking questions in relation to your experience working with single mums and your perceptions of the Welfare to Work system.

Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed, the transcript will be returned to you to review. Audiotapes will be retained once they are transcribed. The audiotape and transcript will be stored in a locked cabinet in my locked office at the University of South Australia. All interviews are confidential and all identifying details will be removed. All participants will be given a pseudonym. When the research is completed all transcripts will kept in a locked storeroom at the University of South Australia, Magill campus for five years, in accordance with the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research. Summary of research findings will be published in journal articles and will be available to interested people.

My supervisors and their contact details are:
Dr Elspeth McInnes 08 8302 4042 elspeth.mcinnes@unisa.edu.au
Dr Carole Zufferey 08 8302 4782 carole.zufferey@unisa.edu.au

This research forms part of a postgraduate PhD degree. This project has been approved by the University of South Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns, about this project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au. (P281/08)
Appendix K

Myjenta Winter, Bsoc. Sc (Hons PI Sc)
School of Education
Division of Arts, Education and Social Sciences
myjenta.winter@unisa.edu.au
08 8302 4153
(P281/08)

CONSENT FORM

Project title  How do single mothers who have left relationships involving domestic violent relationships, experience the Participation Requirements of Welfare to Work
Researcher’s name  Myjenta Winter………………………………………………
Supervisor’s name…Dr Elspeth McInnes & Dr Carole Zufferey………………

- I confirm I am over the age of 18 years old.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may not directly benefit from the research.
- I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal details will remain confidential.
- I understand the interview will be audio-recorded.
- I understand the audio-tape will be stored in a locked cabinet and only the researcher will have access to the audio recording.

Participants under the age of 18 normally require parental consent to be involved in research. The consent form should allow for those under the age of 18 to agree to their involvement and for a parent to give consent.

Name of participant…………………………………………………………………………………..

Signed………………………………………………Date……………………..

I have provided information about the research to the research participant and believe that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher’s signature and date………………………………………………
Appendix L

**Domestic Violence Crisis Service**
Ph: 1300 782 200 (24 hours)
Crisis counselling, support, referral to safe accommodation

**Domestic Violence Help Line.**
Ph: 1800 800 098 24 hour Domestic Violence Help Line
Immediate counselling with option for ongoing contact. Assistance to leave unsafe location. Access to emergency accommodation, referral to shelter accommodation or outreach service. Advocacy, information and advice. Face to face counselling

**Crisis Care Unit**
Ph: 13 16 11
Counselling and practical help for individuals and families in any type of crisis. Available 4PM–9AM Monday to Friday and 24 hours on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays

**Lifeline**
Ph. 13 16 11
24 hour telephone counselling service on issues including child abuse, domestic violence, loss and grief, mental health, personal crisis, relationship problems and suicide. Provides information and referral.

**Living Hope** – (08) 8277 4033
Counselling for people with any type of crisis. Filipino, Greek and Italian interpreters can be arranged.

**Women's Community Centre SA Inc.**
Ph: (08) 8362 6571
Offers individual counselling, information, referral and support groups for women
Victims Support Service – Phone 8231 5626 country callers: 1800 182 368
Counselling and information for people who have been a victim of crime. 9AM–5PM Monday–Friday. Do not have to had reported crime for counselling

**Yarrow Place - Rape & Sexual Assault Service**
Ph: (08) 8226 8787 or 1800 817 421
Email: yarrowplc@mail.wch.sa.gov.au
A crisis counselling service for recent rape and sexual assault. Does provide counselling for families, friends, and other affected people.

**Migrant Women’s Support and Accommodation Service**
Ph. (08) 8346 9417 (After hours, 24-hour call Crisis Care on 13 16 11)
Support and emergency accommodation for migrant women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Service available 8.30AM–5.30PM Monday–Friday.

**Welfare Rights Centre.**
Ph: SA (08) 8226 4123 NSW 1800 226 028 VIC (03) 9481 0355; 1800 094 164
QLD 1800 358 511 WA (08) 9328 1751