

# Cracks in the Dam:

## The social and economic forces behind the placement of children into care

A report for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-Based Institutions

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### Authorial note

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Peer review of this report was provided by **Professor Tracey McIntosh** of Auckland University and **Dr Emily Keddell** of Otago University.

## INTRODUCTION

This report has been written for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-Based Institutions, established in 2018 by the New Zealand government. It is designed to help the Commissioners, and other readers, better understand the social and economic forces that lie behind the placement of children into care.

The focus of the Commissioners' work is the abuse of children that occurred between 1950 and 1999. The Commissioners are examining the physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect that took place in child welfare institutions, borstals, psychiatric hospitals and other institutions contracted out to non-governmental organisations. Their inquiry covers the effects of that abuse on victims and survivors and on their families, whānau and wider communities, especially among Māori.<sup>1</sup>

But to understand why that abuse occurred, we have to firstly understand why children were placed into care. Every placement into care is unique, an event specific to an individual child and their extended family or whānau. As the novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote, 'Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'<sup>2</sup> But these placements are also strongly influenced by wider forces. Social, cultural and economic structures exist outside individuals' direct control, and can greatly raise the risk that a child will be placed into care.

Some of these forces are *socio-economic*: broad social and economic factors that help determine "a person's or group's effective social situation".<sup>3</sup> Typically these factors include a family's income and wealth, employment, and education. This report focuses on those forces because their influence is often not well understood. There are also *socio-cultural* forces such as families, peer networks, media, religions, and high-level traditions and values. They influence individuals' beliefs, decisions and lives in various ways. But they are typically better understood and so are covered in less depth here.<sup>4</sup>

These forces do not completely determine people's lives: in most cases individuals and communities retain some control over their situation. This point must always be remembered, even in a report inevitably focused on negative outcomes. But socio-economic and socio-cultural factors are called forces for good reason. In some cases they may be virtually irresistible, or so strong that only a few can manage them. Or the struggle to resist them may prove exhausting. Or families may be affected by so many complex, overlapping forces that their resilience is stretched beyond its limits. So these forces have enormous influence over the functioning of families and whānau. Often they create tensions and stresses that are invisible to the outside observer, until a crisis point is reached. The title of this report compares this process to the way that cracks may build up in a dam without anyone's noticing, until the dam itself bursts.

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/inquiry-abuse-state-care>.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is from the opening line of *Anna Karenina*.

<sup>3</sup> The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>4</sup> For an accessible outline of the distinction, see: <https://www.pdhpe.net/better-health-for-individuals/what-influences-the-health-of-individuals/the-determinants-of-health/sociocultural-factors/>.

These forces have deep historical origins, and continue to operate in the present. So this report ranges more widely than the Inquiry itself, while remaining focused on explaining events that occurred between 1950 and 1999. It examines the effects of those forces on the whole population but with a strong focus on Māori. The latter have been disproportionately harmed by those forces. As a result, they are vastly overrepresented in care institutions: currently Māori children make up around two-thirds of all care placements.<sup>5</sup> In early 2019 there has been a surge of concern about social welfare officials attempting to ‘uplift’ Māori children, and even talk of a New Zealand equivalent of the ‘stolen generation’ experience of aboriginal Australians.<sup>6</sup> Discussions around these deeply distressing events are part of a wider concern for the well-being of all children placed into care.

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<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/20181008-Statistics-regarding-Maori-children-in-care2.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/113447270/yes-we-are-the-stolen-generations>.

## 1. FORCES AND FAMILIES: HOW ONE CAN AFFECT THE OTHER

Children are placed into care when, in general terms, the State believes that their family cannot offer them an appropriate environment in which to grow up. This may occur for several reasons. There may be concerning individual factors, such as the characteristics of the parents or caregivers. There may be family and whānau factors, including family disruptions, health and emotional difficulties, substance abuse and financial problems. There may be problematic neighbourhood and local conditions, such as beliefs about the appropriate treatment of children. Or the cause may lie with wider social and economic policy settings, including those leading to poverty.<sup>7</sup>

The issues to do with social structures, economic policies and poverty are the main focus for this report. Although children can experience neglect in families right across the socio-economic spectrum, they are most at risk in poorer households.<sup>8</sup> Families are poor when they lack the income and wealth needed to buy basic items and participate in the life of their community. This poverty is, in simple terms, the result of insufficient income from wages, salaries and benefits, when balanced with unavoidable costs such as housing. Where people can get jobs, they may be very badly paid. And when they cannot, unemployment benefits in New Zealand are generally far too low to keep people out of poverty.<sup>9</sup> Lack of jobs, low pay and inadequate benefits are themselves a reflection of wider inequality: as later chapters describe, political decisions in recent decades have caused the benefits of economic growth to go disproportionately to those who are already wealthy.

Poverty can lead to negative outcomes for children in various ways. In what is commonly known as the *Investment Pathway*, poorer parents may simply have less to spend on things vital to their children's well-being. This includes basic items like food and clothing, heating, decent housing and school equipment. Parents may struggle to find or afford high-quality childcare and early childhood education. Areas in which poorer households cluster may have lower social capital: that is, fewer of the positive bonds, ties and connections that help communities thrive. The effect of concentrations of poverty is easy to downplay when the focus is on individual or family-unit poverty and stress. Yet for many, poverty is a collective or even geographic experience. And families living under severe stress, surrounded by other families in similar hardship, may quite understandably struggle to forge strong social connections.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Bywaters, Lisa Bunting, Gavin Davidson, Jennifer Hanratty, Will Mason, Claire McCartan and Nicole Steils, *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, March 2016. Donna Wynd, *Child abuse: what role does poverty play?*, Child Poverty Action Group, Auckland, June 2013, p.12. Emily Keddell et al, 'Child protection inequalities in Aotearoa New Zealand: Social gradient and the "inverse intervention law"', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2019. Paul Bywaters et al, 'Child welfare inequalities: new evidence, further questions', *Child & Family Social Work*, 21 (3), pp.369 – 380.

<sup>8</sup> Wynd, *Child abuse*, p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Jobseeker Support, for instance, is worth approximately \$11,000 a year, well below 50% of median equivalised household income (one of the standard poverty lines), which in 2017 was approximately \$18,000 a year. A gap between the two remains even when one includes the other supports available to unemployed households. For benefit rates, see: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/benefit-rates/benefit-rates-april-2018.html#null>. For poverty rates, see: Bryan Perry, *Household incomes in New Zealand: Trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982 to 2016*, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington, July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Jess Berentson-Shaw and Gareth Morgan, *Pennies from Heaven: Why Cash Works Best to Ensure All Children Thrive*, Public Interest Publishing, Wellington, 2017, p.125. Kathryn Maguire-Jack and Sarah A. Font,

Second, under the *Family Stress Pathway*, the stress of living in poverty may increase parents' feelings of anxiety, depression and anger. It may also leave them with diminished patience, and less mental headspace to invest emotionally in their children. (In the *Toxic Stress Pathway*, this stress and anxiety is passed onto and absorbed by the children themselves.) These issues overlap with the family factors described above.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers have found that poverty can “sap parental energy, undermine parental sense of competence, and reduce parental sense of control”.<sup>12</sup> Stress can undermine parents' mental health and increase feelings of depression and lack of support. Poverty is often experienced as a constant struggle, and parents may have to withdraw attention from their children while trying to find a job or deal with the threat of eviction. Erratic or unsociable working hours, such as night shifts, may also make parenting difficult.<sup>13</sup>

The Auckland City Mission's 'Family 100' research project shows many poor households are dealing with multiple, overlapping problems related to work, housing, debt, justice and education. A solo mother, for instance, may be trying to pay off debts incurred in her name by an ex-partner, raise children in a house whose mould gives them respiratory diseases, and travel several hours a day to a low-paid, precarious job, all the while struggling to afford the basics and retain a sense of dignity. The 'Family 100' research also reveals that poor households have to deal with dozens of public (or semi-public) agencies on a monthly basis, forcing them to repeat their stories constantly and consuming much of their energy.<sup>14</sup> Each of these stress factors may be manageable on their own; taken together they often are not.

Many of these families' problems relate to *absolute poverty* – that is, a lack of basic material items. But their problems also relate to income inequality or *relative poverty*. This refers to the gap between poor households and more affluent ones, and the fact that the former cannot afford to take part in the life of their community. In societies with large income and wealth disparities, those at the poorer end are highly conscious of being at the bottom of a hierarchy. As a result they experience significant stigma and a condition known as psychosocial stress. The latter is created by feeling inferior to others and has been strongly linked to heart disease and other health conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Such societies are more materially competitive, so that those without 'the right things' are more conscious of what they lack. This can have direct impacts on children.<sup>16</sup> And as different social

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'Community and Individual Risk Factors for Physical Child Abuse and Child Neglect: Variations by Poverty Status', *Child Maltreatment*, August 2017, 22 (3), pp.215-226. Kathryn Maguire-Jack and Sarah A. Font, 'Intersections of individual and neighborhood disadvantage: Implications for child maltreatment', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 72, January 2017, pp.44-51.

<sup>11</sup> Wynd, *Child abuse*, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The Family 100 Project, *Demonstrating the complexities of being poor; an empathy tool*, Auckland City Mission, June 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, London, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> B. Featherstone, K. Morris, B. Daniel et al, 'Poverty, Inequality, Child Abuse and Neglect: Changing the Conversation across the UK in Child Protection?', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2017.

groups increasingly live apart from one another, a sense of common experience, empathy and social connectedness diminishes.<sup>17</sup> Society becomes more punitive: that is why, for instance, New Zealand's imprisonment rate has risen sharply even as crime has dropped.<sup>18</sup> The achievements and lifestyles of the wealthy or even the middle-class may seem increasingly out of reach for poorer households. And there is strong evidence that unequal societies have more health and social problems, such as worse school results, higher rates of teen pregnancy, and mass imprisonment.<sup>19</sup>

For all these reasons, it is no surprise that there is internationally a strong link between poverty and the mistreatment of children. The British academic Paul Bywaters notes that deprivation is “the largest factor explaining major differences between local authorities in key aspects of child welfare, such as the proportion of children entering the care system”.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, international research shows that raising the income of families in poverty has “a statistically significant impact” on reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect.<sup>21</sup>

New Zealand research echoes these arguments. Compared to children in the richest fifth of local areas, children in the poorest fifth areas have 13 times the rate of ‘substantiation’ (a finding by child protection officials that abuse has occurred). They are also six times more likely to be placed out of their family's care.<sup>22</sup>

These differences may reflect issues beyond those related to poverty. Officials may decide abuse has occurred because of bias against certain communities, or because those communities are under greater surveillance than others. Poorer areas may be less well supplied with services designed to improve family well-being.<sup>23</sup> Issues of ethnicity and poverty also intersect, as both Māori and Pacific families are over-represented in poorer areas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brid Featherstone, ‘Telling different stories about poverty, inequality, child abuse and neglect’, *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 5 (1), 2016, pp.147–53.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Workman and Tracey McIntosh, ‘Crime, Imprisonment and Poverty’, in Max Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality: A New Zealand Crisis*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2013, pp.120-133.

<sup>19</sup> Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level*.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Bywaters, ‘Inequalities in child welfare: towards a new policy, research and action agenda’, *British Journal of Social Work*, 45 (1), 2013, pp.6-23.

<sup>21</sup> Bywaters et al, *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect*, p.4. Pelton meanwhile notes: “There is also further evidence that decreases in child maltreatment follow increases in material supports.” Leroy H. Pelton, ‘The continuing role of material factors in child maltreatment and placement’, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 41, March 2015, pp.30-39. In addition, Raissian and Bullinger find: “A \$1 increase in the minimum wage implies a statistically significant 9.6% decline in neglect reports.” Kerri M. Raissian and Lindsey Rose Bullinger, ‘Money matters: Does the minimum wage affect child maltreatment rates?’, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 72, January 2017, pp.60-70.

<sup>22</sup> Emily Keddell, Gabrielle Davie and Dave Barson, ‘Child protection inequalities in Aotearoa New Zealand: Social gradient and the “inverse intervention law”’, *Children and Youth Services Review*, 104, September 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Emily Keddell and Gabrielle Davie, ‘Inequalities and Child Protection System Contact in Aotearoa New Zealand: Developing a Conceptual Framework and Research Agenda’, *Soc. Sci.* 7 (89), 2019.

<sup>24</sup> There is of course a vast literature on this complex topic, suggesting that the key structural drivers of child abuse and neglect in New Zealand are related to both poverty and ethnicity. This is true for both the actual incidence of abuse and the bias and institutional discrimination in the child protection system. For instance, researchers have found that amongst Maori who had spent at least four out of the last five years on a welfare benefit (as a proxy for poverty), the rate of substantiated child abuse findings was 156.38/1000 births, and the infant mortality rate was 6.17/1000. For Maori who had spent no time in the last five years in receipt of benefit, the rate of substantiation was 8.73/1000 births, and infant mortality 1.7/1000. For non-Maori, non-

In short, wide-ranging forces such as poverty can have very specific negative effects. As above, these forces are not irresistible: the vast majority of poor parents are able to ensure their children do not need to be placed in State care. But the wider forces do significantly *raise the risk* of placement. “While it can be argued that individuals choose to maltreat or neglect their children,” researcher Donna Wynd writes, “the environmental factors that contribute to family stress cannot be ignored. Focusing on individual behaviour will continue to put children at risk.”<sup>25</sup>

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Pacific the same rates were 119.06 (3.68) and 3.52 (0.91). This shows marked differences that relate not only to ethnicity but to the combination of ethnicity and deprivation. Keddell and Davie, ‘Inequalities and Child Protection System Contact’.

<sup>25</sup> Wynd, *Child abuse*, p.17.



## 2. COLONISATION: ECONOMICS AND ATTITUDES

To understand the present, one must begin in the past. The socio-economic forces detailed in this report trace their history at least as far back as the 1840 signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi. It supposedly guaranteed to Māori “te tino rangatiratanga o o ratou wenua o ratou kainga me o ratou taonga katoa” (in the te Reo Māori version), or “the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties which they may collectively or individually possess” (in the English version). But it in fact paved the way for the alienation of virtually all Māori land and related rights.<sup>26</sup> Some land was willingly sold, but most of it was either purchased dubiously by private means, bought by the Crown at a fraction of its true value, tied up in expensive legal proceedings, or outright confiscated. During the period 1845-72, the Crown used various false pretexts to launch wars against North Island iwi. One short-term result of these wars was the raupatu (confiscation) of millions of hectares of some of the country’s most productive land.<sup>27</sup> The long-term result of all this alienation was that by the twenty-first century, less than 5% of land remained in collective Māori ownership.<sup>28</sup>

This alienation of land served political purposes, enabling the establishment of a British colony. Māori were then largely denied a say in the country’s governing arrangements, notwithstanding minor concessions such as the Māori seats. A form of Māori self-government was envisaged under the 1852 Constitution Act but never implemented, and the later Kotahitanga and Kīngitanga movements were unable to effect such change.<sup>29</sup> As the scholar Moana Jackson notes, “The dominant Pākehā culture and its structures have excluded Māori institutions and values from the processes of social organisation and authority.”<sup>30</sup>

Alienation of Māori land also served economic purposes, providing a foundation from which settlers could produce goods and services and trade them both domestically and overseas.<sup>31</sup> For Māori, in contrast, not only was their land largely gone, they also found it hard to get loans and other forms of what might now be called start-up capital. This largely excluded Māori from ownership in the developing capitalist economy, even though they had initially been enthusiastic participants.<sup>32</sup> The effects of these historical forces can be seen today in many ways. Even the land that does remain in Māori ownership is often in very small parcels, including nearly 26,000 titles with an average size of 59 hectares. It also tends to be of poor quality, greatly hampering its owners’ attempts to generate income from it.<sup>33</sup> Traditional Māori forms of

<sup>26</sup> Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2011, pp.270-271.

<sup>27</sup> Vincent O’Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800-2000*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> “The cumulative effect of all the purchases, confiscations and acquisitions is that collectively owned Māori land now accounts for 4.8 per cent of New Zealand’s total land area.” Andy Fyers, ‘Treaty of Waitangi: What Was Lost’, *Stuff*, 2 August 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/104100739/treaty-of-waitangi-what-was-lost>.

<sup>29</sup> O’Malley, *The Great War*. See also: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/self-government-and-independence/page-2>.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Keri Lawson-Te Aho, *A review of evidence: A background document to support Kia Piki te Ora o te Taitamariki*, Te Puni Kokiri, Wellington, 1998, p.15.

<sup>31</sup> “Colonisation was driven by economic forces... [And] its implementation was underpinned by assumptions of cultural superiority.” Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, Penguin, Auckland, 2004, p.146.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, pp.99-101.

<sup>33</sup> Max Rashbrooke, *Wealth and New Zealand*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2015, p.20.



communal land ownership have also been largely overridden by a system of individualised land titles.

There are strong reasons, then, to be suspicious of the popular refrain of an 'egalitarian' New Zealand history. As the historian Melanie Nolan has argued, this image is at best "a rich amalgam of truth and myth".<sup>34</sup> In addition to the general usurpation of tino rangatiratanga described above, there are many specific instances of gains for Pākehā equality coming at the expense of Māori. The Liberal governments of the 1890s and 1900s, for instance, are often lauded for 'bursting up' huge estates to enable widespread land ownership. But they funded this expensive policy by buying several million acres of Māori land cheaply (using a controversial monopoly over such sales) and on-selling the land to Pākehā at many multiples of the original price.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, from the nineteenth century onwards, the use of te Reo Māori and tikanga was actively suppressed.<sup>36</sup> The result, in the words of the researcher Keri Lawson-Te Aho, is that Māori often struggled "to maintain an identity as Māori and to have access to the institutions of Māori culture which provide strength and a source of psychological, spiritual, cultural and physical well-being for themselves, their families, and the broader social networks of which they are an integral part".<sup>37</sup>

Even within Pākehā society, matters were less egalitarian than is often thought. At the time the Liberals began their 'bursting-up' policies, the wealthiest 1% of adults owned a startling 55-60% of all wealth.<sup>38</sup> (For comparison, the current figure is around 20%.<sup>39</sup>) The country even had less generous welfare arrangements than the nation from which many of its citizens had emigrated, the United Kingdom. Britain's Poor Laws, though much hated, did require local councils to support individuals if their family could not help them. New Zealand's nineteenth-century version included only the family support elements, ruling out the possibility of public funds.<sup>40</sup> This arrangement had many roots, one of which was a kind of tough, 'frontier' attitude, especially among men, which privileged individual hard work and self-reliance.<sup>41</sup> Although these attitudes were to be significantly softened in later decades, they re-emerged in the late twentieth century. And the dispossession of Māori in particular sowed the seeds for multigenerational marginalisation and poverty, trends that were to heavily influence the placement of children into care in later decades.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Max Rashbrooke, 'Inequality and New Zealand', in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, p.25.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Brooking, "'Bursting-Up' The Greatest Estate of All", in Judith Binney (ed.), *The Shaping of History: Essays from the New Zealand Journal of History*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001, pp.166-181.

<sup>36</sup> Walker notes, for instance, "a general prohibition of the Māori language within school precincts. For the next five decades [from 1905] the prohibition was in some instances enforced by corporal punishment." Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, p.147.

<sup>37</sup> Lawson-Te Aho, *A review of evidence*, p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Rashbrooke, *Wealth and New Zealand*, p.55.

<sup>39</sup> Catherine Hutton, 'Top 1% of NZers own 20% of wealth', *RNZ*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/322422/top-1-percent-of-nz-ers-own-20-percent-of-wealth>

<sup>40</sup> David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment*, Auckland University Press, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Jock Philips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*, Penguin, Auckland, 1996, pp.37-38.

### 3. THE UNEVEN GROWTH OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Despite this less than fully egalitarian past, as the decades wore on the state did more to soften the effect of economic forces on the individual. The Liberal governments of the 1890s, for instance, introduced a means-tested pension for those aged over 65. They also implemented a system of industrial conciliation and arbitration that strengthened the hand of ordinary workers. Similar initiatives developed in the early twentieth century, including small-scale state house-building and a gradual increase in public secondary education. In 1925 the Child Welfare Act, the first such comprehensive measure, created Children's Courts and empowered child welfare officers.

Following the widespread misery of the Great Depression, the first Labour government then laid the foundations of the modern welfare state. It implemented free comprehensive secondary education. It spectacularly increased state house numbers, between 1937 and 1944 financing the construction of over 15,000 high-quality homes. Most significantly, the Social Security Act of 1938 provided a wide range of benefits to those who, in the language of the time, "through various misfortunes of age, sickness, widowhood, orphanhood, unemployment, or other exceptional conditions came to want".<sup>42</sup> It also paved the way for a largely free and comprehensive healthcare system (although fierce lobbying by GPs ensured they retained the ability to charge for their services). Apart from a small universal payment for older citizens, most benefits were means-tested. However, a universal family benefit was introduced in 1946, and after 1958 its future stream of income could be rolled up and turned into a house deposit. Later governments introduced the Domestic Purposes Benefit for single parents (1973) and a generous and universal National Superannuation scheme (1976).

Exact data on poverty rates are scarce before the 1980s. But there is widespread agreement that the welfare state, allied to a booming post-war economy, substantially reduced poverty and the related social problems. It also clearly made for a more egalitarian society, in which a growing proportion of the benefits of economic growth went to low- and middle-income earners, not just the well-off. Tax return data shows that the richest 1%'s share of income fell from around 11% in the 1920s to 7% in the 1960s, reaching a low of around 5% in the mid-1980s, just before the sweeping economic changes introduced by the fourth Labour government.<sup>43</sup> Unemployment was exceptionally (and famously) low: on 31 March 1956, for instance, just five unemployment benefits were being paid.<sup>44</sup>

Yet none of this meant that poverty and social exclusion had been eliminated. In the mid-1970s, for instance, surveys showed that just under 5% of elderly people regularly cut back on meat in order to pay their bills, while 10% of Hamilton families had experienced a food shortage in the previous year.<sup>45</sup> The number of people probably living in poverty was, according to economist Brian Easton, in the "hundreds of thousands, not tens of thousands".<sup>46</sup> Pākehā made up the

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<sup>42</sup> W.H.Oliver, 'Social Policy in New Zealand: An Historical Overview', in *New Zealand Today: The Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy*, Wellington, April 1988, p.25.

<sup>43</sup> Rashbrooke, 'Inequality and New Zealand', p.26.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver, 'Social Policy', p.35.

<sup>45</sup> Brian Easton, *Wages and the Poor*, Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1986, pp.13-16.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

majority of those in poverty – but Māori were three times more likely than others to be poor. Many beneficiaries were poor, although most of those in poverty received the bulk of their income from wages.<sup>47</sup>

Welfare policies and attitudes were also biased in various complex ways. New Zealand's system was described by the academic Frank Castles as “a wage-earner's welfare state” – one based on the assumption of a male (and Pākehā) breadwinner. People in poverty were frequently, and inaccurately, divided into the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’. The latter were those who did not live according to standard middle-class social mores.<sup>48</sup> And compared with their counterparts in other developed countries, New Zealand women were less likely to earn an income of their own. Even if they did get paid work, they were often not considered to have ‘dependents’ and were therefore paid less than men.<sup>49</sup> State education, meanwhile, was, in the words of the historian W. H. Oliver, “a hegemonic system designed to secure the interests of a middle class, white, male establishment”.<sup>50</sup>

Welfare provision also discriminated, both intentionally and unintentionally, against Māori. Health services, being concentrated in urban areas, did little to help a Māori population that was predominantly rural before the urban migration of the 1950s. Other discrimination was explicit: Māori recipients of old age and widow's benefits received significantly less than their Pākehā counterparts, for instance.<sup>51</sup> This inequity was removed only with the passing of the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act (1945). This act also formalised a network of Māori committees that could have been the basis of a semi-autonomous form of indigenous social provision. But this network was later scaled back and eventually abolished. Meanwhile, Māori were initially excluded from many housing schemes and often forced to live in very poor quality homes. It was not until the mid-1950s that they could apply for subsidised State Advances mortgages, and even then only if they were considered to be “living in a European manner” and displaying “satisfactory” behaviour.<sup>52</sup>

Again, post-war initiatives eventually addressed some of these disparities, often via the Department of Māori Affairs housing programme. But on many measures, including home ownership, Māori continued to lag behind Pākehā. Throughout this period, they had worse health, lower school marks, lower income, higher unemployment and a (proportionally) much larger prison population. As later chapters show, Māori were the victim of discriminatory policing practices, and were disproportionately placed in the residential homes that opened from the 1950s onwards.

On some measures, the gap between Māori and the rest of the population did slowly close. Census data shows that between 1951 and 1986, average Māori income rose from 66.1% to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp.21-31.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance: Philippa Howden-Chapman, Sarah Bierre and Chris Cunningham, 'Building Inequality', in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, p.107. See also: Oliver, 'Social Policy', p.15.

<sup>49</sup> Rashbrooke, 'Inequality and New Zealand', p.25.

<sup>50</sup> Oliver, 'Social Policy', p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>52</sup> Howden Chapman et al., 'Building Inequality', p.109.

78.6% of non-Māori income.<sup>53</sup> But in other areas disparities persisted or even increased. As Māori came to enjoy more of the benefits of the welfare state, and moved into urban areas with better public services, their lifespans increased appreciably. But Pākehā health levels also improved rapidly, maintaining the gap between the two.<sup>54</sup> The end result was a stark difference in the public services available to different populations – a disparity that, in modified form, continues today.

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<sup>53</sup> John Gould, 'The Distribution of Personal Incomes 1951 to 2006; Māori and Non-Māori Compared', *New Zealand Population Review*, 33/34, pp.251-262.

<sup>54</sup> Oliver, 'Social Policy', p.25.

#### 4. URBAN AND OTHER MIGRATION

As the previous chapter noted, the gradual spread of the welfare state was far from equally enjoyed by all populations. Māori lives in particular were strongly influenced by the prevailing Pākehā ideology towards what was then known as race relations. In the late nineteenth century, the Pākehā view had been that Māori were gradually disappearing, and that the task remaining was, in Isaac Featherston's notorious phrase, "to smooth down ... [their] dying pillow". (An expression all the more ironic given that the decline of the Māori population was largely the result of infectious diseases, colonial war and land confiscation, all brought to these shores by Europeans.)

But the Māori population recovered from a low of 46,000 around the turn of the century to reach 82,000 by 1936.<sup>55</sup> The governing ideology in turn shifted to one of assimilation, later recast as integration. Māori were to prosper by becoming Pākehā. The goal was, in the words of the historian Melissa Matutina Williams, "equal Māori participation in a capitalist economy as individual citizens".<sup>56</sup> These political changes then combined with economic changes to drive a transformation in Māori life. As Williams notes, over the period of a century, Māori communities had "entered a capitalist economic framework from which there was no return".<sup>57</sup> But they were deprived of the land – and access to other economic resources – that could have been the basis of an ownership stake in this capitalist economy. Instead, they were largely reliant on wage labour to generate income – and therefore highly vulnerable to shifts in the location of such labour.<sup>58</sup>

The post-war years continued the long trend towards urbanisation in New Zealand, as elsewhere. Economic activity, once dominated by agriculture, became increasingly focused on manufacturing and service industries located in urban centres. And there was insufficient employment and income in rural areas to sustain the rapidly growing Māori population.<sup>59</sup> Government policy had previously seen Māori as having an essentially rural existence, but it underwent "a radical shift", as Williams puts it. Migration into urban centres was now encouraged.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the percentage of the Māori population living in urban areas rose from just 11.2% in 1936 to 25.7% in 1945 and, by 1996, over 81%.<sup>61</sup> Much of this migration was to Auckland, but also to other industrial centres such as Christchurch and Porirua. Most of the jobs that Māori took were semi-skilled or unskilled roles in manufacturing industries.

Williams warns against seeing this movement as solely one of dislocation or "detrribalisation", or one in which Māori lacked any control and consistently suffered a loss of identity. Some Māori successfully adapted, developing "new pan-tribal rules of engagement and cooperation". Māori re-established distinctively 'urban' forms of kinship networks, places for gathering and

<sup>55</sup> Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, p.172.

<sup>56</sup> Melissa Matutina Williams, *Panguru and the City*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2015, p.72.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.41-42

<sup>58</sup> Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith, 'Inequality and Māori', in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, p.148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> "The state's will to control the drift of Māori to the cities, and its economic and sociopolitical benefits, outweighed the potential problems." Williams, *Panguru*, p.70.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32. Walker also notes: "The universal culture of capitalism is what integrates Māori into the social mainstream of Pakeha society." Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, p.198.

protocols for interaction. When it came to urbanisation, Māori “engaged within it, adapted it and adapted to it”.<sup>62</sup> In addition, many Māori had mana whenua in urban areas, which were of course situated on Māori land, and in some cases marae were established for those who were outside their rohe.<sup>63</sup>

Nonetheless, urban migration was clearly motivated by considerations other than tikanga, and did not allow Māori to flourish fully as Māori. “Auckland city’s ‘Pākehā world’,” Williams writes, “became one in which ‘Others’ could exist and engage according to their economic and ideological usefulness, rather than their tribal sense of connectedness.”<sup>64</sup> Urban life did generate greater income and opportunities. But it continued to be shaped – and scarred – by discriminatory attitudes and complex economic forces. As the scholar Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith notes, Māori workers were concentrated in blue-collar sectors such as the freezing works, construction, the docks, coal mining and the railways. “These occupations,” he writes, “often had long hours, low pay, and difficult and unpleasant working conditions.”<sup>65</sup> Opportunities for advancement were limited by discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. Discrimination was “endemic in the social context of both town and country”, in the words of the scholar James Ritchie.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, living conditions for Māori families were frequently atrocious. Despite official government policy of ‘pepper potting’ Māori families into predominantly Pākehā areas, many ended up concentrated in poorer suburbs. The anthropologist Joan Metge described widespread overcrowding and inadequate sanitary arrangements that endangered households’ health and standards of living.<sup>67</sup> The 1961 Hunn report also highlighted a number of issues facing urban Māori. These included an acute housing shortage, overrepresentation in crime statistics, vulnerability to economic shocks due to a narrow range of job prospects, and a ‘statistical blackout’ in post-primary and secondary education.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, the Pacific population of New Zealand grew rapidly in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pacific peoples were encouraged to migrate to New Zealand and, like Māori, fill unskilled and low-skilled jobs in expanding manufacturing industries. These were jobs that, in the words of the writer Karlo Mila, Pākehā New Zealanders “no longer wished to do or had been educated beyond: shift work, factory work, assembly-line production, processing, cleaning, work involving long hours in unpleasant conditions”.<sup>69</sup>

These issues were heightened when the New Zealand economy, after booming throughout the 1950s and 1960s, entered a more difficult period in the 1970s. In particular, traditional markets like the UK began to take fewer of its exports. Māori and Pacific Island workers, many of them

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<sup>62</sup> Williams, *Panguru*, p.33.

<sup>63</sup> Our thanks to Tracey McIntosh for making this point.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>65</sup> Poata-Smith, ‘Inequality and Māori’, p.149.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.* Williams also notes that discriminatory practices “were found in the accessibility of employment, hotels and housing” and that some Pākehā openly refused, for instance, to serve Māori in pubs or have them as neighbours. Williams, *Panguru*, p.94.

<sup>67</sup> Howden-Chapman et al., ‘Building Inequality’, p.108.

<sup>68</sup> Jarrod Gilbert, *Patched: The History of Gangs in New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, 2013.

<sup>69</sup> Karlo Mila, ‘Only One Deck’, in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, p.95.

on temporary contracts, were, in Mila's words, "last on, first off...a disposable and politically expedient labour force now surplus to the requirements of a shrinking job market".<sup>70</sup> From the 1970s onwards, the cities that had once promised full employment were, as Williams puts it, "increasingly sites of Māori unemployment, welfare dependence and insecurity".<sup>71</sup> Pacific Island families were subjected to the notorious 'dawn raids' of the mid-1970s, and it became police practice to arrest anyone on the street who "did not look like a New Zealander".<sup>72</sup>

In this period, the ongoing impacts of colonisation ensured that Māori remained unable to live as Māori, the author Ranginui Walker argued in his book *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*. Walker also highlighted family breakdown and the loss of the traditional constraints imposed by tribal elders on younger people. This in turn produced low achievement at school, high rates of juvenile delinquency, and rising crime. Over 80% of young Māori left secondary school in the 1960s without any recognised qualifications, and their offending rates were many times those of their Pākehā contemporaries.<sup>73</sup>

This period also saw increased concern about families experiencing multiple, overlapping forms of deprivation and life struggles. These families might be described as socially excluded or 'hard to reach' – populations who pose difficulties to conventional ways of doing things. Their experiences are described in the next chapter.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>71</sup> Williams, *Panguru*, p.215.

<sup>72</sup> Mila, 'Only One Deck', p.96.

<sup>73</sup> Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, p.208.



## 5. HARD-TO-REACH FAMILIES

The previous chapters have outlined some of the historical and socio-economic forces that have given rise to inequities between Pākehā and other ethnic groups, including Māori and Pasifika. This chapter looks more deeply at a group of Māori households, whānau and communities who are sometimes described as ‘hard to reach’.

‘Hard to reach’ Māori whānau live in conditions of deprivation and scarcity. They have endured intergenerational disadvantage and, lacking access to public services, have lost trust in authority and become alienated from mainstream society. Their situation is often exacerbated by high levels of scrutiny and surveillance from state authorities, particularly the police. Their social exclusion has become entrenched over multiple generations, and their unresolved trauma can be passed down to tamariki and mokopuna, making the cycle increasingly difficult to break. Being ‘hard to reach’, however, is neither a homogenous category nor a static state. It is a complex process shaped by many forces, and can be broken.

‘Hard to reach’ is a contested term among researchers. It has no agreed definition, and some argue it focuses too much on deficits, implying that the families and communities themselves are the ‘problem’. But the situation of families being hard to reach can in fact be defined as ‘social exclusion by policy intent’. No-one, in other words, is hard to reach if those providing services really want to reach them.<sup>74</sup> In this way, the term inverts conventional understandings by highlighting the fact that a community’s ‘hard to reach’ status results from a two-way process.<sup>75</sup>

When it comes to service delivery, families and communities may be seen as ‘hard to reach’ because of barriers specific to their situation. This can include geographical isolation, low levels of literacy, poverty, mental health or addiction issues, a lack of awareness of services, gang membership, involvement in crime, or fear of state intervention.<sup>76</sup> Importantly, though, the term also recognises that services themselves may be designed and delivered in ways that make them inaccessible or hard to reach. They may be located far from the relevant community or open at inappropriate hours. They may display a lack of cultural responsiveness, cost too much or be overly bureaucratic. Or they may be run by service providers who have negative perceptions about, and struggle to engage, the very populations they are supposed to support. These barriers exclude ‘hard to reach’ whānau from using services that as citizens they have a right to enjoy, and consequently compound inequities and poor outcomes.

Socio-economic forces and processes have created – and are perpetuating – the conditions which give rise to ‘hard to reach’ whānau. This includes the continuing effects of the dispossession of Māori from their lands, resources, cultural knowledge and from exercising tino rangatiratanga. Dispossession occurred through colonisation and war, but also through processes such as urbanisation, which, as above, rapidly disrupted access to traditional Māori

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<sup>74</sup> See: [www.hard2reach.net](http://www.hard2reach.net)

<sup>75</sup> N. Cortis, I. Katz and R. Patulny, *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children: Stronger families and communities strategy 2004-2009*, National Evaluation Consortium, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Ministry of Justice, *Who is vulnerable or hard-to-reach in the provision of maternity, Well Child and early parenting support services? Addressing the Drivers of Crime: Maternity and Early Parenting Support*, 2010.

social, cultural and economic networks of support. The landmark 1988 report *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu* (Daybreak) found that New Zealand institutions had a monocultural bias. This could be observed across legislation, government, the professions, healthcare, land ownership, welfare practices, education, town planning, the police, finance, business and spoken language.<sup>77</sup> For example, institutional bias and discriminatory practices saw Māori being targeted by police and social services and punished harshly for minor infractions.<sup>78</sup>

'Hard to reach' whānau live what Sir Mason Durie has termed 'trapped lifestyles', which are the result of socio-economic forces, an inability to develop a secure cultural identity, and unequal access to power.<sup>79</sup> Trapped lifestyles are characterised by high levels of risk-taking, including lifestyle and behaviour risks such as smoking, drinking, gambling, violence, and dangerous driving.<sup>80</sup> This leads to a greater likelihood of offending, marginalisation, and poor health, including premature death.<sup>81</sup>

For 'hard to reach' whānau, the experiences of deprivation, trauma and marginalisation are intergenerational. It is this experience that sets 'hard to reach' whānau apart and manifests, for instance, in intergenerational joblessness, as distinct from unemployment. But these families are characterised above all – and most tragically – by an intergenerational lack of hope that their situation will change. This is compounded by the failure of public services to effectively engage these families and by social and economic policies and practices that disproportionately harm already vulnerable groups.

### **Gang communities**

Highly visible among the 'hard to reach' Māori population are New Zealand's indigenous ethnic gangs. Gangs are only one segment of this population. But their experiences are a microcosm of the ways that socio-economic forces drive the formation, proliferation and marginalisation of hard to reach families. For instance, New Zealand's largest indigenous ethnic gang, the Mongrel Mob, emerged in impoverished communities in the period following widespread urban migration. Its formation has been attributed to the brutal treatment of young boys at the hands of the authorities in welfare homes and borstals in the 1960s.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> The Māori Perspective Advisory Committee, *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (Daybreak): The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare*, Wellington, 1988.

<sup>78</sup> Action Station, *They're Our Whānau: A community-powered and collaborative research report on Māori perspectives of New Zealand's justice system*, Wellington, 2018. In 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention reported indications of bias at all levels of the criminal justice process in New Zealand. United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Addendum: Mission to New Zealand*, 6 July 2015, A/HRC/30/36/Add.2, pp. 20–21. See also: Human Rights Commission, *E Kore Ano: Never Again*, available at: [www.hrc.co.nz/news/e-kore-ano-never-again/](http://www.hrc.co.nz/news/e-kore-ano-never-again/).

<sup>79</sup> This is not always the case, and in addition there are examples of whānau and communities embracing traditional Māori practices such as mirimiri and romiromi as a means to support positive change. See, for example: [www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/396563/gang-turns-to-traditional-maori-practice-to-better-mental-health](http://www.rnz.co.nz/news/top/396563/gang-turns-to-traditional-maori-practice-to-better-mental-health). See also: Mason Durie, 'Imprisonment, Trapped Lifestyles and Strategies for Freedom', in *Ngā Kāhui Pou: Launching Māori Futures*, Huia, Wellington, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> It is important to note that the rich take high risks as well, including in motor sports, adventure tourism, and in taking great corporate risks, including environmental risks that can have widespread detrimental impacts.

<sup>81</sup> Durie, 'Imprisonment, Trapped Lifestyles and Strategies for Freedom'.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example: Tracey McIntosh and Stan Coster, 'Indigenous Insider Knowledge and Prisoner Identity', in *Counterfutures*, 2017 (3), pp.69-98. See also: [www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/324425/smashed-by-the-](http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/324425/smashed-by-the-)

Ethnic gangs more generally emerged amidst the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 70s. Among them were indigenous ethnic gangs such as Black Power, the Head Hunters and the Stormtroopers, and Pasifika-dominated gangs such as the Nigs and King Cobras.<sup>83</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, youth crews influenced by LA-style street gangs and hip-hop culture emerged in South Auckland. They included the Killer Beez, Bloods, Crips and the Bud Smoking Thugs.<sup>84</sup> As adult gangs have matured, subsequent generations of children and grandchildren have embraced the gang life. Wāhine Māori are not patched members but can also have strong gang whānau affiliations and a deep connection to gang identity. Some whānau now have three generations of patched members.<sup>85</sup>

Economic policies and conditions have also influenced the formation and proliferation of gangs. Indigenous ethnic gangs predominately formed in deprived neighbourhoods in the main urban centres, but also had high membership in smaller, relatively deprived towns and communities.<sup>86</sup> For instance, housing shortages and the rising costs of building materials in the 1950s resulted in the creation of new multi-unit housing estates in places like Otara and Porirua. Though built with good intentions, these estates ended up concentrating disadvantaged and dysfunctional households within neighbourhoods that lacked recreational facilities and resources.<sup>87</sup> For some young Māori and Pasifika growing up in these areas, gangs were a response to a lack of legitimate channels to success. They were also a way to gain a sense of pride, belonging and identity otherwise absent in families that were themselves experiencing extreme stress and marginalisation.<sup>88</sup>

Research shows that gang membership has traditionally been more likely to increase during periods of high unemployment, and to decline when members are provided with a regular income.<sup>89</sup> While employment levels were high in the 1960s, Māori were, as above, concentrated in unskilled and low-skilled jobs, earning less than their Pākehā counterparts and more vulnerable to sudden economic changes, such as the fall in wool prices in the late sixties and the

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[state-the-kids-from-kohitere](#) and [www.e-tangata.co.nz/korero/denis-oreilly-the-gangs-have-been-convenient-whipping-boys/](http://www.e-tangata.co.nz/korero/denis-oreilly-the-gangs-have-been-convenient-whipping-boys/).

<sup>83</sup> The Mongrel Mob began as a Pākehā dominated gang, but by the late sixties its membership was largely Māori. Black Power formed around the early seventies as a Māori dominated gang. K. Comber, *Report of the Committee on Gangs*, 1981. R. Taonui and G. Newbold, 'Māori Gangs', in T. McIntosh and M. Mulholland (eds.) *Māori and Social Issues*, Huia, Wellington, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Social Development, *Youth Gangs in Counties Manukau*, Centre for Social Research and Evaluation Te Pokapū Rangahau Arotake Hapori, 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Taonui and Newbold, 'Māori Gangs'.

<sup>86</sup> McIntosh and Coster, 'Indigenous Insider Knowledge and Prisoner Identity'.

<sup>87</sup> See: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/state-house-style>

<sup>88</sup> The 1981 Committee on Gangs report concluded: "Gang membership was related to urbanisation and the breakdown or lack of extended family care for children. Both parents are often working or there is a solo parent only, and the local community may lack adequate advisory and support services for families. The child senses that the values in society are ones that his parents haven't succeeded at, and often the child's family and neighbourhood background doesn't give access to legitimate channels of success, so that actual or anticipated failure in a conventionally valued area such as education leads to hostility to authority and control, potential for violence, and an exploitative attitude to social relations. A low educational and employment status will lead to low self-esteem."

<sup>89</sup> Comber, *Report of the Committee on Gangs*. Note that unemployment may not be as strong a factor in gang membership today as it once was, due to the intergenerational nature of contemporary gangs and strong associations as gang whānau.



weakening of unions from the 1980s on. In the 1980s and 1990s, gangs became more embedded in their communities – and increasingly involved in the drug trade as economic conditions worsened.<sup>90</sup> Gang membership grew most strongly in the late 1970s to early 1980s and in the late 1980s to early 1990s, both periods of economic recession.<sup>91</sup> Both the 1981 Committee on Gangs and the 1987 Inquiry into Violence identified unemployment as a key issue, both as a factor that might encourage people to join a gang and as a force that could influence gang conduct.<sup>92</sup>

As highlighted above, the institutionalisation of Māori is deeply connected with the formation and proliferation of gangs. The first residential homes opened in the 1950s, and by the late 1980s over 100,000 children had passed through them.<sup>93</sup> By the 1970s almost half of all the children in state care were Māori.<sup>94</sup> Boys' homes such as Kohitere, Hokio, Eponi and Owairaka have been credited with the emergence and consolidation of gangs, with more than 80 percent of children admitted to the latter in the 1980s having gang affiliations.<sup>95</sup> In the words of one of the Mongrel Mob's founding members, Pākehā man Gary Gerbes, the treatment many children received in state care encouraged the formation of gangs as a way to hit back at the system that had failed them:

A lot of these guys [early Mongrels] went through the same place —Levin Training Centre and Eponi Boys' Home .... It was pretty sad and pretty demoralising—there was sexual abuse by the people that ran the place [and] absolutely shocking violence ... Those places destroyed our fuckin' heads, man. [So we said] fuck the system. If that is the way they are going to treat us, then we will treat them the same way. We are going to give them what they gave us—and [via the Mongrel Mob] they got it alright.<sup>96</sup>

While the exact relationship between the institutionalisation of Māori and gang formation is unknown, research by Dr Elizabeth Stanley with 105 survivors of state abuse found that gang life followed institutional life for a third of the children in the study.<sup>97</sup> Gangs could offer young people in these institutes a form of protection or power, as well as a sense of belonging and refuge.<sup>98</sup>

Prisons are similarly a fertile ground for recruitment into gangs.<sup>99</sup> Children and young people

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<sup>90</sup> Gilbert, *Patched*.

<sup>91</sup> J. Carr and H. Tam, 'Changing the lens—positive developments from New Zealand', International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates, 2013. The increase in gang membership in times of economic stress is consistent with an observed relationship in international literature between economic crises and increases in some types of crime across a wide variety of countries. See, for example: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Monitoring the impact of economic crises on crime*, 2012; S. Raphael and R. Winter-Ebmer, *Identifying the Effect of Unemployment on Crime*, UCSD Economics Discussion Paper 98-19, 2000.

<sup>92</sup> Comber, *Report of the Committee on Gangs*. See also: C. Roper, *Report of Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence*, 1987.

<sup>93</sup> E. Stanley, 'From Care to Custody: Trajectories of Children in Post-War New Zealand', *Youth Justice* 2017, 17 (1), pp.57–72, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> See: [www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1703/S00024/aotearoa-lost-generation-maori-children-in-state-care.htm](http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1703/S00024/aotearoa-lost-generation-maori-children-in-state-care.htm)

<sup>95</sup> E. Stanley, *The Road to Hell: State Violence against Children in Postwar New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Gilbert, *Patched*.

<sup>97</sup> Stanley, *The Road to Hell*.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley, 'From Care to Custody', pp.57–72.

<sup>99</sup> Comber, *Report of the Committee on Gangs*.

with care and protection and youth justice records have a significantly higher risk of being imprisoned by aged 20 than those without.<sup>100</sup> In addition, Corrections research has found that most gang members have had a care and protection history and that almost half of prisoners aged 20 and under are gang members.<sup>101</sup> Between 1950 and 1970, the number of Māori inmates received into prisons, relative to all prisoners, doubled. Māori made up 25% of the prison population in 1960, 40% by 1971, and 50% in 1980.<sup>102</sup> Reoffending is argued to be higher amongst gang members and to be a significant driver of the disproportionate rate of Māori imprisonment.<sup>103</sup> The consequences of imprisonment now reach far beyond the prisoner, affecting their whānau and community across multiple generations.<sup>104</sup> A report on the children of prisoners found evidence for intergenerational reoffending: two-thirds of the Māori prisoner sample had seen someone they lived with go to prison.<sup>105</sup> Imprisonment also directly affects inmates' children's health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes, perpetuating the cycle.<sup>106</sup>

Dr Armon Tamatea has described how negative social attitudes and prejudices towards gang members have helped consolidate gangs' status as fringe communities, and served to further distance these groups from the mainstream. He attributes the isolation and stigmatisation of gang members to their 'triple minority' status, which includes: prejudice in the form of a public perception that gangs are intimidating; negative attitudes towards (ex)-offenders; and existing social prejudices towards ethnic minorities.<sup>107</sup> These attitudes and prejudices at the individual, community and social level can hinder attempts to deliver public services to gang whānau. This can be observed, for example, in stigmatisation, targeting and exclusion within education, policing, social welfare, child protection and health settings.

New Zealand governments have typically tried to suppress gangs using law enforcement policies that have been found to be largely ineffective.<sup>108</sup> A notable exception to this approach was the intervention drive of the mid-1970s to early 1980s, which included work cooperatives and training schemes for gang members.<sup>109</sup> The 1987 Committee of Inquiry into Violent

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<sup>100</sup> Compared to those without a CYF record, children and young people who have been placed into care and have a youth justice record are 15 times more likely to get a Corrections record by the age of 19/20, and are 107 times more likely to be imprisoned under age 20. Ministry of Social Development, *Crossover between child protection and youth justice*, Centre for Social Research and Evaluation Te Pokapū Rangahau Arotake Hapori. unpublished report, Wellington, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Gluckman, *It's never too early, never too late: A discussion paper on preventing youth offending in New Zealand*, Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Greg Newbold, *The Problem of Prisons: Corrections Reform in New Zealand since 1840*, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Tū Mai Te Rangi! Report on the Crown and Disproportionate Reoffending Rates*, WAI 2540, available at: [www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz](http://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz).

<sup>104</sup> Te Puni Kokiri, *A study of the children of prisoners: Findings from Maori data June 2011*, paper prepared for Te Puni Kokiri by Network Research, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> A. Tamatea, 'The last defence against gang crime: Exploring community approaches to gang member reintegration – part I', *Practice – The New Zealand Corrections Journal*, 5 (2), November 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Taonui and Newbold, 'Māori Gangs'.

<sup>109</sup> In the mid-1970s, work cooperatives were set up for adult gang members, and a detached youth worker programme for gangs was administered by the Ministry of Recreation and Sport.<sup>109</sup> In the early 1980s the Community Education Initiative Scheme (CEIS) and Group Employment Liaison Scheme (GELS) were established. CEIS used a 'community development' approach to reduce youth gang recruitment, responding positively to the needs of underachieving students who had difficulty making the transition from school to

Offending concluded: “Many of those schemes had positive results in reducing the offending and anti-social behavior of those who participated in them.”<sup>110</sup> However, negative publicity about the schemes led to their closure in 1987. Since the 1980s, there have been few if any targeted policies to provide social or economic support for gangs.

Importantly, however, hope can be rekindled; and where hope exists in ‘hard to reach’ communities, the cycle can be broken. The most successful cycle-breaking schemes work by enabling the leadership potential that exists within communities, recognising that there is good in all communities, and supporting the active participation of ‘hard to reach’ communities in designing, developing and delivering services and initiatives for themselves.<sup>111</sup> The ‘hard to reach’ definition ultimately challenges those in power to reach out, rather than to marginalise. No community is impossible to reach if decision-makers want to reach them. It is simply a question of whether they actually *do* want to reach them, and whether they are prepared to do things differently in order to make that connection.<sup>112</sup>

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employment. GELS built on the work of detached youth workers and sought to bring disadvantaged groups, including gangs, into government-funded training and employment programmes.

<sup>110</sup> Roper, *Report of Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Violence*.

<sup>111</sup> Carr and Tam, ‘Changing the lens – positive developments from New Zealand’.

<sup>112</sup> See: [www.hard2reach.net](http://www.hard2reach.net)

## 6. RENAISSANCE AND ROGERNOMICS

The growth of the hard-to-reach population has occurred against a backdrop of contrasting forces. Some of these forces have pushed back against disadvantage and marginalisation; others have reinforced those trends.

One of the most significant movements of recent decades has been the growing reassertion by Māori of their tino rangatiratanga. Long-simmering anger over the alienation of land and colonisation finally came to the boil in the 1970s. Notable events included the 1975 Land March led by Dame Whina Cooper and the occupation of Bastion Point in 1977-78 to protest against the eviction of Ngāti Whātua from their whenua. In 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal was established to hear Māori grievances. And in 1985 it was given the power to examine claims dating back to 1840, setting in train the settlement process that continues today.

Alongside these legislative events came broader social change, as the Māori Renaissance led to a resurgence of interest in traditional arts such as carving and weaving. It also included a greater prominence for Māori culture and practices in traditionally Pākehā-dominated spaces and media, increased action to support the use of te Reo Māori, and a very gradual incorporation of tikanga into official government practices.

But working in the opposite direction were the set of sweeping social and economic changes known informally as Rogernomics, after Roger Douglas, finance minister from 1984 to 1988. These reforms extended beyond Douglas's time in office and into the activities of the 1990-99 National governments. They were inspired by or directly modelled on similar 'Thatcherite' or 'Reaganomics' reforms in Britain and the US. In New Zealand, the reforms included the rapid removal of tariffs and subsidies that had protected many domestic industries from competition and provided widespread semi-skilled or unskilled work. The sale of many state-owned enterprises also led to the disappearance of numerous jobs. Social spending was cut in many areas, most notably in welfare. Meanwhile the top tax rate was halved from 66% to 33%, while the newly introduced GST took a much larger share of income from the poor than it did from the rich.

Other reforms included deregulation of much economic activity, and a weakening of the position of wage and salary earners. The removal of barriers to the flow of money and capital increased the power of business owners to move – or threaten to move – their companies offshore. Conversely, the 1991 Employment Contracts Act and other labour reforms drastically weakened the position of trade unions, and their coverage fell from roughly 70% to 20% of the workforce.<sup>113</sup> Regulations were also cut in many fields including health and safety. This enhanced corporate profits but at the expense of the working conditions of wage earners. The forestry industry, for instance, was broken up into a patchwork of contractors and sub-contractors, none of them well-regulated and all of them passing on responsibility for health and safety. The result was that forestry staff ended up working extremely long hours, suffering intense fatigue and operating in dangerous – and often fatal – conditions. Such issues became

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<sup>113</sup> Rashbrooke, 'Inequality and New Zealand', pp.26-31.



widespread in many relatively low-skilled industries and affected the lives of tens of thousands of workers.

The need for, and overall effect of, the Rogernomics reforms is still contested. But their immediate social impact is not. They led directly to a sharp increase in both poverty and inequality. The percentage of the population living in poverty, on one key measure, rose from 6% in 1982 to 14% in 2004, a level it has essentially maintained ever since.<sup>114</sup> The reforms were implicitly based on the idea that if those at the upper end were left free to ‘create wealth’, the benefits would trickle down to others. But between 1984 and 1999, incomes doubled for the richest New Zealanders but did not grow for the poorest half of the country.<sup>115</sup> In fact, if housing costs are taken into account, the poorest tenth of households have *less* disposable income now than they did in the early 1980s.<sup>116</sup> This increase in inequality, between the mid-1980s and the mid-2000s, was the greatest recorded anywhere in the developed world.<sup>117</sup> (International evidence suggests such increases in inequality are strongly linked to increased rates of child maltreatment.<sup>118</sup>)

Within this wider picture, a couple of trends are particularly worth highlighting. First, those who remained in work received a dwindling share of company revenue. In the 1980s, nearly 60% of revenue went to wage and salary earners (known technically as ‘labour’), the remainder going to company owners (known technically as ‘capital’). In the following years and decades those shares shifted radically to approach 50% each, thanks in large part to the change in workplace power balances described above. This meant that the average worker was by 2016 receiving \$11,500 a year less than they would have done if labour’s share of company revenue had stayed at 60%.<sup>119</sup> Second, for those out of work, incomes were sharply reduced by the 1991 ‘Mother of all Budgets’, which cut many benefits by around one-fifth. They were also hit by measures such as much higher rents for State house tenants, later reversed by the fifth Labour government.<sup>120</sup>

Māori and Pasifika were disproportionately affected by this increase in inequality, partly because their workers were concentrated in the relatively low-skilled occupations most directly affected by economic change. Tariffs and subsidies were being cut right around the world, but generally at a pace that allowed workers time to adapt. Most countries also provided significant public support for them to retrain and find jobs in new industries. In contrast, Douglas adopted a deliberate tactic of pushing through change quickly so that opposition did not have time to form.<sup>121</sup> The result was that tens of thousands of workers lost their jobs almost overnight. Local manufacturing was decimated when rapidly exposed to overseas competition, while layoffs in the railways, forestry and postal services affected thousands. Some regional centres such as

<sup>114</sup> Perry, *Household incomes in New Zealand*, p.117.

<sup>115</sup> Rashbrooke, ‘Inequality and New Zealand’, p.28, and Perry, *Household incomes in New Zealand*, p.252.

<sup>116</sup> Rashbrooke, ‘Inequality and New Zealand’, p.28.

<sup>117</sup> Max Rashbrooke, ‘Why Inequality Matters’, in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, p.1.

<sup>118</sup> John Eckenrode, Elliott G. Smith, Margaret E. McCarthy and Michael Dineen, ‘Income Inequality and Child Maltreatment in the United States’, *Pediatrics*, 133 (3), March 2014.

<sup>119</sup> See: <https://www.union.org.nz/workers-out-of-pocket-11500-a-year-as-a-result-of-decades-of-poor-government-policy/>.

<sup>120</sup> Rashbrooke, ‘Inequality and New Zealand’, p.29.

<sup>121</sup> Jane Kelsey, *Reclaiming the Future: New Zealand and the Global Economy*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1999, p.63, p.101.

Kawerau, Patea and Tokoroa lost their major employer or employers, with no immediate replacement – and in some cases no long-term one either. These towns typically had a significant Māori population. Many of their residents became trapped in the poverty cycles described above or attracted to gang membership.

Overall unemployment rose from less than 5% in the early 1980s to over 10% in 1992. And for some populations the effects were much greater. In the mid-1980s the Māori unemployment rate reached 24.6%, while for Pacific peoples it hit nearly 30% in 1992.<sup>122</sup> In the late 1980s, Pacific peoples were more likely than others to be participating in the labour market. But by the mid-1990s they were more likely to be unemployed – a situation that persists to this day.<sup>123</sup> Pacific peoples increased their skill levels: the percentage with a qualification rose from one-half in 1986 to two-thirds in 2001. But despite what Karlo Mila calls “this huge effort by a people to regroup, to find ways to achieve”, their unemployment rates today remain significantly higher than average, and their workforce is still concentrated in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs.<sup>124</sup> The above patterns also resurfaced in the 2000s. Low unemployment rates encouraged young Māori and Pacific peoples into work in urban settings rather than, say, the tertiary study that might have increased their long-term earnings potential. So in the wake of the global financial crisis, their unemployment rates once again soared.

Today, one in five Māori or Pacific Island families live in poverty, as opposed to half that rate – one in 10 – for Pākehā families.<sup>125</sup> The wealth of Māori and Pacific Island families is also vastly lower than that of the general population.<sup>126</sup> And although there have been various government initiatives to lift the income and wealth levels of Māori and Pacific peoples, they have generally been dwarfed by the forces unleashed by Rogernomics. The Treaty settlements process, for instance, has returned to Māori less than \$2 billion in total, a sum probably worth no more than 2% of the value of the land they originally possessed.<sup>127</sup> It is true that the Māori economy is estimated to be worth \$50 billion, and Ngai Tahu, for instance, owns assets worth over \$600 million.<sup>128</sup> However, there is substantial inequality even within Māori and Pacific Island communities: wealth is less equally distributed within those groups than it is across the population as a whole. For Māori, this suggests that, in the words of Evan Poata-Smith, only a minority of individuals – “those representing tribal corporations and commercial interests” – have benefited economically from the policies of recent decades.<sup>129</sup>

The health effects for Māori and Pacific Island families have been severe. In the twenty years between 1980 and 1999, mortality rates fell for non-Māori but remained static for Māori and Pacific peoples, thus widening the life-expectancy gap between Māori and non-Māori. This trend sharply altered a long-term picture of rising life expectancy for Māori up until the early

<sup>122</sup> Williams, *Panguru*, p.215, and Mila, ‘Only One Deck’, p.97.

<sup>123</sup> Mila, ‘Only One Deck’, p.96.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>125</sup> Rashbrooke, ‘Why Inequality Matters’, p.3.

<sup>126</sup> Geoff Rashbrooke, Max Rashbrooke and Wilma Molano, *Wealth Disparities in New Zealand: Preliminary Report Providing Updated Data from SOFIE*, IGPS Working Paper 15/02, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> Office of Treaty Settlements, personal communication to the author, 10 April 2013.

<sup>128</sup> No author, ‘The Maori economy continues to grow’, *Stuff*, 21 May 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/104060829/the-maori-economy-continues-to-grow>. See also: <https://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/investment/ngai-tahu-property/>.

<sup>129</sup> Poata-Smith, ‘Inequality and Māori’, pp.154-55.

1980s.<sup>130</sup> Researchers attribute these negative trends to the reforms described above, which saw a reduction in the resources going to Maori communities thanks to the ‘mainstreaming’ of Maori services in the 1990s. These reforms also widened inequalities between Māori and non-Māori in employment status, education and housing, all of which are key determinants of health.<sup>131</sup>

So the post-1980s economic story for ethnic minority populations has been significantly different to what one might call the cultural story surrounding the Māori Renaissance. The distinction is perhaps brought out most clearly when one considers figures for Māori income as a percentage of non-Māori income over time. As set out earlier, Census data shows that between 1951 and 1986, Māori income rose from 66.1% to 78.6% of non-Māori income. But as a result of the economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, that progress stalled and indeed went into reverse, as Māori income fell to 73.2% of non-Māori income in 2006.<sup>132</sup> (Regrettably, this analysis does not seem to have been carried out for subsequent Censuses.) As outlined above, many Māori families have continued to flourish. But such low income and wealth levels, combined with various forms of discrimination, remain a barrier to their aspirations. They also provide the context for the ongoing struggles of the hard-to-reach families described in the previous chapter.

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<sup>130</sup> S. Ajwani, T. Blakely, B. Robson, M. Tobias and M. Bonne, *Decades of Disparity: Ethnic mortality trends in New Zealand 1980-1999*, Ministry of Health and University of Otago, Wellington, 2003.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Gould, ‘The Distribution of Personal Incomes 1951 to 2006’, pp.251-262.

## 7. THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN

The previous chapters have taken a broadly chronological approach to the socio-economic factors that can lead to children being placed into care. This chapter concludes by drawing together threads and examining more closely the situation for children in New Zealand. It looks at detailed data on children's lives in the twenty-first century, the period for which we have the best information. This data reveals high and ongoing levels of poverty and ill-health, a source of concern for anyone looking into the placement of children into care. This chapter also relates current outcomes to past trends, in order to help explain events that occurred between 1950 and 1999, the focus of the Royal Commission's work.

In the last 30 years, the economic situation of families with children has worsened considerably. On some measures the number of children living in poverty has doubled.<sup>133</sup> Of course this is linked to the wider increase in poverty and inequality described above, but overall poverty rates can disguise significant variations. The number of people aged over 65 who are in material deprivation – that is, unable to do basic things like being able to heat their house or replace broken furniture – is just three percent. This is very low by international standards. In contrast, the number of children in families living in material deprivation is 18 percent. This is extremely high by developed country standards. New Zealand can boast a global success story in reducing pensioner poverty, but the converse when it comes child poverty.<sup>134</sup>

This poverty damages children's lives in specific ways, especially when it comes to health. Since the 1980s, New Zealand has experienced a very large rise in the number of children being admitted to hospital with preventable diseases. Many of these conditions, such as rheumatic fever, are widely regarded as diseases of poverty. They stem from factors such as damp and mouldy housing, and have essentially been eliminated in comparable countries.<sup>135</sup>

More generally, New Zealand children's lives are, on the whole, among the worst in the developed world, contrary to the widespread belief that it is a 'great' place to raise children. A 2011 report ranked New Zealand 28th out of 30 OECD countries in terms of children's outcomes.<sup>136</sup> This points to significant inequalities: while many children do well, very large numbers do not. New Zealand has, for instance, an increasingly segregated education system, with growing concentrations of better-off children in certain schools and worse-off children in others. Gaps in school results between rich and poor students are among the highest in the developed world. And the school system does a relatively poor job of pushing back against socio-economic inequality.<sup>137</sup>

Meanwhile, rich and poor households have very different levels of health. New Zealand has extremely high levels of 'unmet health needs' (people not being able to receive medical treatment) owing to poverty, something that acutely affects children.<sup>138</sup> New Zealand

<sup>133</sup> Perry, *Household incomes in New Zealand*, p.121.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.x.

<sup>135</sup> Innes Asher, 'Is This A Children's Budget?', presentation, Child Poverty Action Group, May 2019.

<sup>136</sup> See: <http://www.hauora.co.nz/assets/files/Children/1000-days-to-get-it-right-for-every-child.pdf>.

<sup>137</sup> Cathy Wylie, 'Schools and Inequality', in Rashbrooke (ed.), *Inequality*, pp.134-147.

<sup>138</sup> See: <https://www.asms.org.nz/news/asms-news/2017/03/24/new-research-findings-paint-damning-picture-unmet-health-need/>.



households are also violent places. The country has one of the world's highest rates of domestic violence; one in three women report physical or sexual intimate partner violence.<sup>139</sup> Rates of child abuse by family members are also high. And suicide rates for young people are again amongst the world's worst.<sup>140</sup> These negative outcomes affect all children, but Māori and Pacific Island children disproportionately.

These appalling statistics have a wide range of causes. A large volume of research, both internationally and in New Zealand, has found close links between poverty, deprivation, child maltreatment and neglect.<sup>141</sup> Hospital admissions for assault, neglect and maltreatment are much higher for the poorest fifth of the New Zealand population than for others.<sup>142</sup> Māori and Pacific children, who are twice as likely to be poor as Pākehā children, are respectively 3.2 and 2.3 times more likely to be admitted to hospital for intentional injuries. As outlined above, poor parents' stresses and sense of despair are often taken out on their children, as well as damaging the parents' own coping mechanisms and mental health.<sup>143</sup> And that poverty and marginalisation itself often results from the socio-economic factors described throughout this report.

Such outcomes are not, of course, inevitable. In many other countries, greater efforts would be made by government to reduce poverty and alleviate its effects on families. International research suggests that the single factor with the greatest influence over children's outcomes is, quite simply, government policy.<sup>144</sup> But New Zealand's record in this area is weak. In 2011 it had the fifth lowest level of early childhood spending in the OECD, and would have had to double its overall spending on children just to get up to the developed country average.<sup>145</sup>

This is all the more worrying given the very strong international evidence about the value of state support in a child's early years. The Nobel laureate James Heckman has shown that spending in the early years generates a greater 'return', in the sense of better lives and lower health costs, than spending later on.<sup>146</sup> For poor children, such support is essential if they are to have some of the opportunities to develop their ability that are enjoyed by middle-class children. Similar advice has been given to New Zealand politicians by figures including the former chief scientific advisor, Peter Gluckman. (Other research, however, questions whether the 'Heckman curve' holds strongly in New Zealand.<sup>147</sup>) Yet the lack of spending persists. And even when money *is* spent, it is not spent well: policies in this area are widely seen as complex

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<sup>139</sup> See: <https://nzfvc.org.nz/sites/nzfvc.org.nz/files/Data-summaries-snapshot-2017.pdf>. See also: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/101711501/tainted-love--a-look-into-nzs-homegrown-family-violence-epidemic>.

<sup>140</sup> See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40284130>.

<sup>141</sup> Wynd, *Child abuse*, p.3. Bywaters et al, *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect*.

<sup>142</sup> M. Duncanson, G. Oben, A. Wicken, G. Richardson, J. Adams, and M. Pierson, *Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report*, New Zealand Child and Youth Epidemiology Service, University of Otago, 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Wynd, *Child abuse*, p.3.

<sup>144</sup> Amanda D'Souza, 'Taking action for equity from the start in Aotearoa New Zealand', background paper prepared for the Public Health Association of New Zealand, August 2010.

<sup>145</sup> See: <http://www.hauora.co.nz/assets/files/Children/1000-days-to-get-it-right-for-every-child.pdf>. See also: D'Souza, 'Taking action for equity'.

<sup>146</sup> See: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>.

<sup>147</sup> David Rea and Tony Burton, 'Does an empirical Heckman curve exist?', IGPS Working Paper 18/3, 2018.

and fragmented.<sup>148</sup> Across a range of fields, New Zealand does far less to support children than, for instance, Australia.<sup>149</sup>

Given that public policies broadly reflect public opinion, this might suggest that supporting healthy and flourishing childhoods is less important to New Zealanders than it is to their developed country counterparts. New Zealand has, admittedly, ratified important international treaties to protect children, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. But international reviews have raised serious concerns about violations of children's rights, and urged immediate action to prevent violence and abuse.<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, childhood seems anecdotally to be regarded with the same reverence in New Zealand as in other nations. Evidence for this includes the frequent positive depictions of it in local media and art and the emotional power generated by child-centred campaigns.

A more compelling answer may be that the negative outcomes for some children simply reflect wider negative attitudes towards those in poverty. Despite its various social problems, New Zealand remains a good place for many children. It boasts a largely clean and inviting environment, good levels of public safety in many areas, and high overall living standards. Many New Zealanders are well-off and can take advantage of these good features. However, they may not feel that others deserve to enjoy them, or they may not understand the depth of poverty and marginalisation. Joint US-New Zealand research has shown that many wealthy people live surrounded by others of similar levels of wealth. Because they base their worldview on what they see around them, they severely underestimate levels of poverty and inequality. This leads them in turn to underestimate the need for action to tackle social problems.<sup>151</sup>

What's more, New Zealand's good features may be seen as individual achievements, things attained through a family's hard work and ability, rather than as collective achievements (which, as above, they substantially are). In this view, if some children do not enjoy a safe and fulfilling upbringing, it is because of failings by their parents. This argument is borne out by recent research showing that many New Zealanders believe child poverty is caused by parental inadequacy rather than an absence of collective support.<sup>152</sup> People holding these beliefs are unlikely to support the extra spending that would be needed to improve the lives of poor children. In other words, New Zealand's dismal outcomes for children may be a result of adults' attitudes towards other (poor) adults, rather than their attitudes towards children.

This stigma is particularly exacerbated for parents who are or have been in contact with the child protection system. In addition, the egregiously high poverty rates of Māori and Pacific Island families suggest that racism plays a part in these views, a theory supported by wider evidence of discriminatory attitudes among society as a whole.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> D'Souza, 'Taking action for equity', p.9.

<sup>149</sup> Yun So and Susan St. John, 'Supporting family incomes in New Zealand and Australia', a background paper for the Child Poverty Action Group, 2017.

<sup>150</sup> See, for instance: <https://nzfvc.org.nz/news/uncroc-publishes-concluding-observations-rights-child>.

<sup>151</sup> See: <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/having-wealthy-neighbors-may-skew-beliefs-about-overall-wealth-distribution.html>.

<sup>152</sup> MM Research, *New Zealanders' Attitudes to Child Poverty*, research report for the Child Poverty Action Group, July 2014.

<sup>153</sup> See, for instance: <https://givenothing.co.nz/about>.

Many New Zealanders also perpetuate the inaccurate and unhelpful distinction between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor. Examples of this have already been given. Historical instances also include the nineteenth-century distinction between ‘deserving’ working-class manual labourers, who stayed in one area and worked in gangs, and ‘undeserving’ working-class manual labourers, who drifted individually from town to town.<sup>154</sup> Today, public sympathy remains strong for those who are poor but in work. (They make up at least 40% of poor families.<sup>155</sup>) But beneficiaries, who are disproportionately likely to be poor, are regarded negatively by many. This effect is so strong that the Human Rights Commission has argued that beneficiaries may be the most discriminated-against group in New Zealand society.<sup>156</sup> The continued distinctions between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ groups can also be seen in the design of policies such as Working for Families. While some of its tax credits are available to all, beneficiary families are explicitly excluded from many of them.<sup>157</sup> To the extent that beneficiaries are disproportionately Māori and Pacific Islander, racism undoubtedly inflects these negative views.

Such attitudes towards people in poverty have intensified in recent decades. The ‘Rogernomics’ political reforms encouraged a more individualistic view of the world and drove increases in inequality that, as above, tended to render society more punitive. Survey data shows a reduction in the number of New Zealanders who believe it is government’s job to help people escape poverty.<sup>158</sup> But as can be seen from the examples above, negative attitudes towards some classes of poor families have always existed. The existence of non-negligible levels of poverty even in the early 1980s reinforces the point. Such attitudes provide the conditions in which severe poverty and terrible outcomes persist for many children.

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<sup>154</sup> Philips, *A Man’s Country?*, p.30.

<sup>155</sup> See: [https://www.victoria.ac.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1175151/StJohn\\_So.pdf](https://www.victoria.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1175151/StJohn_So.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> See: <https://www.cpag.org.nz/campaigns/cpag-in-the-court-of-appeal-4/>.

<sup>157</sup> Beneficiary families cannot, for instance, apply for the Parental Tax Credit or the In-Work Tax Credit.

<sup>158</sup> Max Rashbrooke, ‘What do we know about attitudes towards inequality/poverty in New Zealand? A brief research summary’, November 2016.



## CONCLUSION

When looking into the appalling treatment of children both inside and outside institutions, it is tempting to seek explanations within an individual family or whānau. People and their actions are both easy to perceive and grasp. And those actions are, of course, real. But as this report has set out, other factors, including social structures and economic policies, also play a huge role. These factors, though, are much harder to perceive: one cannot 'see' institutional racism, or rates of economic inequality. Even individual pieces of legislation have a more tangible form, a greater solidity, than these socio-economic forces. So the latter often remain invisible.

This report has attempted to render these invisible forces visible. It has tried to show that these forces act on families like the weight of water and gravity on a dam, creating cracks that build up over a long time but may not become visible until the last minute. This metaphor speaks to a worldview that sees actions as being the result of subtle, interconnected social forces. As the New Zealand academic Emily Keddell has written, "Human behaviour is shaped by subtle influences that emanate from both social contexts and individual responses". As a result, the neglect and abuse of children is all too predictable in "social environments riven with inequalities, low social cohesion, or lack of access to universal services for issues such as parental mental health".<sup>159</sup>

And although this report is not designed to produce recommendations, the implications for policy change are not hard to grasp. While there is no one policy that will prevent child abuse, social and economic forces at the highest level need to be redirected so as to reduce poverty, deprivation and discrimination. Social and economic settings also need to ensure families have affordable, stable housing, better medical services, and decent early childhood care and education. These services could help form what we might term a protective environment for all children, their families and their whānau in New Zealand.

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<sup>159</sup> Emily Keddell, *The Child Youth and Family Review: A Commentary on Prevention*, report prepared for the Policy Observatory, Auckland University of Technology, June 2017.