

# Te puna kōrero:

Understanding persistent disadvantage  
in Aotearoa New Zealand



August 2022

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### The New Zealand Productivity Commission Te Kōmihana Whai Hua o Aotearoa

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# Foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa,

There is a wealth of existing insights about what it feels like to live in persistent disadvantage that has been captured through previous engagement and research. Aotearoa New Zealand communities have invested significant time and energy into supporting government to understand their experience, triggers, and exacerbators of disadvantage and hardship. They have also identified how government can best support them.



This paper seeks to learn from some of the many reports that have captured the voices of people experiencing hardship. It recognises and respects these people's contributions, and summarises some of the recurring themes from these accounts.

I would like to acknowledge those people and communities who have contributed to the evidence base, especially where that contribution has involved reliving or re-experiencing trauma and talking to different parts of the system time and time again. Thank you for sharing your experiences and your journey.

I runga i tēnā whakaaro, ko tēnei te reo o mihi ki a koutou i whāngai kōrero mai. E whakamānawa atu ana ki a koutou katoa.

I would also like to thank our researchers Kohe Ruwhiu and John Sibanda for their work in reviewing reports, and drawing out the key themes and insights shared in this paper. Their work is a valuable resource for the Commission's *Fair chance for all* inquiry.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ganesh Nana'.

**Ganesh Nana**

Chair, New Zealand Productivity Commission Te Kōmihamana Whai Hua o Aotearoa

# 1 About this report

## 1.1 Fair chance for all inquiry

In June 2021, the Government asked the Productivity Commission to prepare the Terms of Reference to guide a new inquiry into the drivers of persistent disadvantage within people's lifetimes and intergenerationally. During July and August 2021, the Commission sought input from across Aotearoa New Zealand. A [summary of public feedback](#) is available on our website.

Some of the feedback emphasised the importance of drawing on the "lived experience" of people facing barriers to reaching their potential.

"To understand why the current system is not fit for purpose the inquiry will need to understand the life journeys of the most disadvantaged families and communities." (NZPC, 2021, p. 16)

The Commission used the feedback to help develop the [Terms of Reference](#) for the inquiry, which was approved by Cabinet on 20 December 2021. For example, the Terms of Reference acknowledges the significant existing evidence base, and directs the Commission to bring together and build on this previous work. It also directs us to draw on the lived experience of the diversity of people who are affected by, and have overcome, persistent disadvantage.

## 1.2 Purpose and scope

This paper aims to help the Commission better understand the experiences of people living in persistent disadvantage. It provides a high-level summary of the themes from a selection of existing research reports.

This document is not an exhaustive review of all relevant research. It also does not cover the perspectives and experiences of every culture, cohort or community in New Zealand. Where possible, we have signalled the experiences of different cohorts, as presented in the material we reviewed.

We have not attempted to draw inferences or analyse the reasons behind people's experiences. The wider inquiry will investigate the underlying drivers of persistent disadvantage, including what works to help people and whānau to thrive.

The term "persistent disadvantage" is not a term that people, families, or community use to describe their lives. This paper does not seek to define the term, but rather listen to and try to understand the experiences of people living in hardship, and the indicative impact on hauora and mauri. Throughout the public consultation process, most submitters mentioned poverty in some form, but many people also pointed out that persistent disadvantage is not just about low income or material hardship. The impacts of different facets of disadvantage are cumulative, and can result in toxic levels of stress for people, families and communities, and impact their mauri.

"Poverty, access to education, affordable housing, stable and quality income levels, community connection, level and quality of social supports in place (have someone I can count on), ability to be self (feel accepted and celebrated for being you), connection to nature and Whenua." (NZPC, 2021, p. 6)

## 1.3 Approach

We reviewed a selection of reports to identify common themes and experiences. Appendix A provides a list of the reports reviewed.

We focused on direct quotes from people about what hardship feels like, the barriers and challenges they face, and what helps them overcome these barriers.

## 1.4 Framework for organising themes and insights

This paper draws on the concepts of mauri noho and mauri ora as a way of thinking about people's experiences of persistent disadvantage.

Mauri can be impacted by various factors including an individual’s hauora, their family and community (the collective), and the wider environment (both natural and human-made).

**Box 1 Mauri and hauora**

**Mauri**

“Mauri is about the vitality, integrity, and energy within a person, and the nature of relationships in the wider environment. It is sometimes referred to as a life force” (Durie, 2001).

“Mauri is an inner human force that shapes the spirit, balances the mind, contextualises the body and is reflected in the ways individuals are perceived by themselves and others. Mauri is evident by the vitality, integrity, and energy within a person, and the establishment of positive relationships in the wider environment. It is sometimes referred to as a life force. The mauri is not located in a single organ, nor is it (yet) quantifiable” (Durie, 2017, p. 61).

**Hauora**

The Ministry of Health’s vision for Māori health uses the *Pae Ora framework*. Pae Ora is a holistic concept and includes three components:

- Mauri Ora – healthy individuals;
- Whānau Ora – healthy families; and
- Wai Ora – healthy environments.

All three elements of pae ora are interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Ministry of Health, 2015).

It is relatively easy to find insights that describe a state of mauri noho. Sources describing a state of mauri ora are more scarce, perhaps in part due to a prevalence of deficit thinking, rather than a focus on potential.<sup>1</sup>

Durie (2017) characterises mauri noho and mauri ora as follows.

**Table 1.1 Indicators of mauri noho and mauri ora**

Mauri noho (languishing)	Mauri ora (flourishing)
A loss of hope	Spiritually robust
A clouded mind	Culturally engaged
A tortured body, a lack of mental and physical energy	Emotional vitality
A set of relationships that are disempowering and humiliating	Positive thinking and optimism
Negative emotions (anger, mistrust, guilt, gloom, pessimism)	Vitality and energy
Cultural and spiritual alienation	Able to participate in activities and events
	Have stable and rewarding relationships, and a readiness to engage with others

Source: Durie (2017).

People experiencing hardship talk about being trapped in the “struggle”. Sir Mason Durie describes “trapped lifestyles” as having three main characteristics: firstly, they involve risk; secondly, they are likely to

<sup>1</sup> Deficit thinking focuses on weaknesses or gaps, and does not acknowledge the inherent strengths of a person, their family or their community. Designing policy to respond to a person or communities ‘deficits’ or weaknesses limits the realm of possible options and responses. This runs the risk that policy interventions only improve deficits, rather than improving and measuring wellbeing. Feedback collected through the public consultation process supports this - many people pointed out that continual use of ‘deficit framing’ damages the mana of those facing multiple barriers in reaching their potential. Deficit framing is pervasive because it can influence how we collect data and target public funding.

lead to marginalisation; thirdly, for many people there is no escape. Trapped lifestyles reflect a complex interaction of socio-economic circumstances, confused or partially-developed cultural identities, individual and collective journeys which have resulted in diminished self-respect, and a lack of voice (Durie, 2003).

“Across the range of conditions that determine health there needs to be synergy. No matter whether the focus is on the prevention of ill health, and the promotion of wellbeing, or on treatment and rehabilitation, progress depends on the dynamic interaction of people with each other as well as with wider cultural, social, economic, political and physical environments. Health is the outcome of all those variables acting together.” (Durie, 2001)

A well-documented causative relationship exists between well-being and socio-economic conditions (Ministry of Health Public Health Group, 1997). The following table sets out common factors present in a “trapped life” and by extension, a state of *mauri noho*.

**Table 1.2 Risk factors and associated factors indicative of a "trapped lifestyle"**

Risk factors	Associated factors
Alcohol misuse	Educational underachievement
Gambling	Low health status
Recreational drug use	Unemployment
Injury (motor vehicle accidents, sports injuries, workplace injuries and through violent crime)	Societal marginalisation
Domestic violence, abuse	Cultural alienation
	Visibility of role models
	Peer culture
	Public policy
	Ghetto housing
	International fashions

Source: Durie (2003).

## 2 Economic resilience, opportunity and financial independence

### Key points

- Economic resilience and financial independence is not just about having enough money or the latest gadgets. It includes access to the resources, opportunities, and knowledge that people, families and communities need to flourish.
- Low economic resilience and a lack of financial independence has far-reaching effects. Families, and children who experience hardship carry significant stress and anxiety about securing work, making ends meet, asking for help, and reducing their reliance on welfare support. As a result, these people are often astute budgeters – they use their money and resources efficiently and make “every cent count”.
- These families and children may not have access to opportunities, especially where the “battle for survival” means children drop out of school or sacrifice future opportunities to financially support their families. This stress can be a very heavy burden to carry, and these people often have to make “impossible choices”. These impossible choices often involve weighing up which choice will have the least negative impact on hauora, wellbeing, and, by extension, mauri.

### 2.1 People experiencing hardship struggle to meet day-to-day costs

People and families experiencing disadvantage often do not have enough money or resources to pay for the basics. Expenses regularly exceed income and healthy options are often out of reach.

“I receive \$386 per week. The rent itself is \$380. The simple fact is when the expenditure exceeds the income, I’m in trouble. That is basically why I am reliant on charity.” – Helen (Garden et al., 2014, p. 4)

When you have limited resources, every cent is accounted for, and you take every opportunity to minimise costs and make resources stretch further. It can be difficult to pay for big ticket items, and irregular or unexpected expenses eg, house bonds, school uniforms, car repairs, kids camps or sports, and injuries.

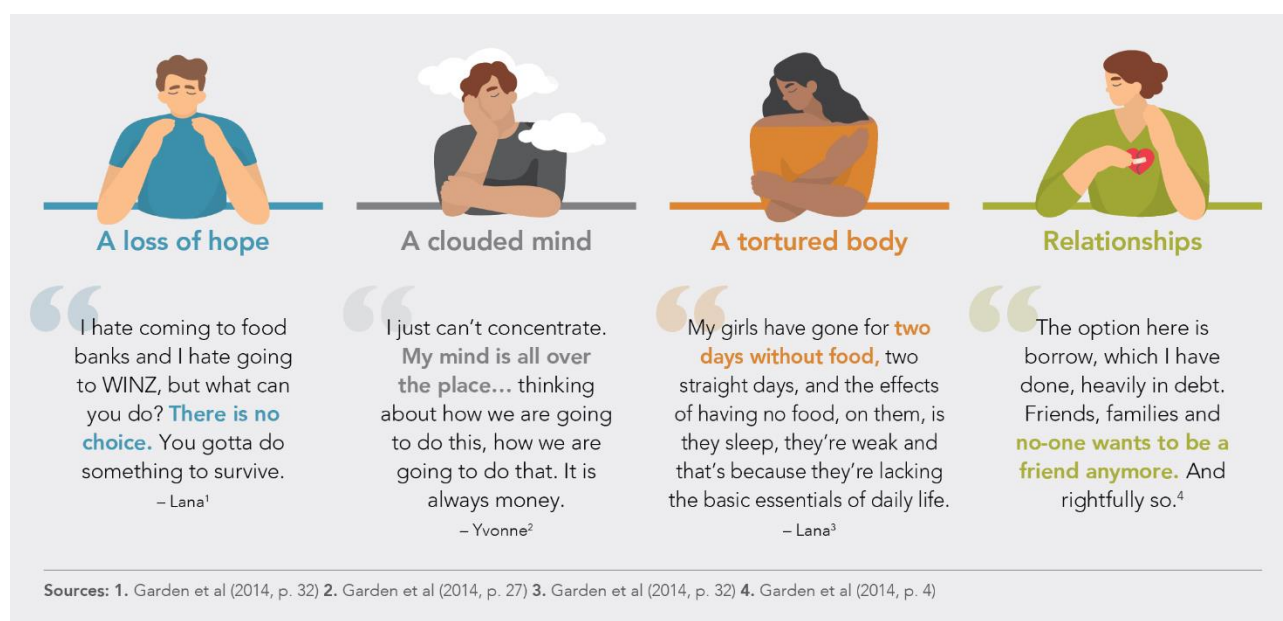
Without sufficient income, people are unable to pay down debt or clear previous fines, and they may have to take on additional debt to pay for living expenses.

“Debt causes debt. The worst thing about having debt is when you really need something you have to use the most expensive options such as the mobile trucks.” – Helen (Garden et al., 2014, p. 4)

“He [her partner] has been to so many job interviews and he just keeps getting shot down...nobody will even give him a chance... he can’t apply for a clean slate until he’s paid his fines and he’s still paying those off and it’s gonna take him forever to pay...but it’s just that, what’s he supposed to do in the meantime?” – Fiona (Garden et al., 2014, p. 14)

When people reach out to government agencies for help, their spending and living expenses are often forensically investigated. Often, support offered by government agencies does not help people and families meet day-to-day living expenses, or does not take into account the reality of their situation.

“To the point of knowing where your last cent went and why did you need to get this and that... I felt quite degraded... I walked out with nothing.” – Charlotte (Hodgetts et al., 2014, p. 2045)

**Figure 2.1 Struggling to meet day-to-day costs - indicative impact on mauri**

## 2.2 People want to work and improve their circumstances but face barriers in doing so

“...the main goal is for me to come off the benefit so that I can provide for my own kids and take them out and can afford to”. – Hanna (Garden et al., 2014, p. 22)

People coming off social welfare support are penalised for taking on extra work – their benefits are reduced and often have to pay for childcare. The net impact often leaves people worse off than if they were not working.

“They don't give me much to start with as far as Work and Income goes, but if I earn over certain amount then all of a sudden, they get my pay cheque. After 20 hours, they take 80 cents to the dollar. What's the point of going to work? I still do it, but I've just gotta work that little bit harder and, because I'm only casual, I haven't got [security].” – Will (Garden et al., 2014, p. 22)

When you are focussed on survival, it can be hard to take advantage of opportunities that could help you escape the cycle of disadvantage, eg, further education. On the job training and education can require significant investment, and does not always lead to career progression or a pay increase.

“You pay an arm and a leg to go on a course and get a qualification and end up in a cleaning job”. – Marama (Garden et al., 2014, p. 42)

It is difficult to get a job, especially without previous experience or if you have a previous conviction. Entry level jobs are often a minimum wage job or casual employment. And lower paid and/or casual jobs are not as flexible or compatible with childcare commitments.

## 2.3 Low economic resilience and limited financial independence can lead to “impossible choices”

A lack of opportunities and not having enough money for day-to-day living can lead to impossible choices, for example:

- Parents sacrificing their health and wellbeing to protect or provide for their children.
- Parents keeping their children at home if there is no food to send to school with them; in other circumstances they drop out to financially support their family.

“My medicine is still sitting at the chemist's cos I don't have the money...and it's stuff that I need.” – Amelia (Garden et al., 2014, p. 27)



"...If there's not enough money for lunches for school the next day we keep them home, we don't send them to school with no lunches." – Tina (Garden et al., 2014, p. 32)

**Figure 2.2 Barriers and "impossible choices" - indicative impact on mauri**



## 3 The relationship between hauora, mauri and living environments

### Key points

- The environment can have a significant impact on hauora and mauri – Māori believe that the health of the natural environment and the health of the person or collective is interconnected. Some studies claim that the environment impacts health and wellbeing outcomes by 20% (DHHS Public Health Service, 1980). Research has also found that socio-economic circumstances account for between 20-50% impact on health and wellbeing outcomes (Health Affairs, 2014).
- This section summarises insights relating to:
  - Housing and living environments – the material we reviewed speaks to the need for healthy, warm, dry, and safe homes, and ensuring children are raised in loving and safe environments.
  - The experience of people and families interacting with the system – the system needs to be responsive, respectful and focus on the people it is serving. Interactions with the state should be mana enhancing and result in practical, timely, and relevant support.

### 3.1 State housing may not be safe, warm or healthy

People and families living in state housing spoke of cold, damp, damaged, old and insect-infected houses with little heating and limited access to blankets. This often led to illness and health problems.

“I try to get blankets and that, put it all over each other. I get all my kids together, even my eight month old baby, and put her in the middle and put my son on the other side and my daughter on the other side, even though he bed wets and that, but I don’t want him to be cold, so I just sit on top of their mattress. I just watch TV. Then I just doze off. Sometimes we use our clothes to put underneath the door, just to keep the cold out of there sometimes.” – Tara (Garden et al., 2014, p. 27)

“The kids suffer from asthma and because it’s quite cold and it’s damp, they get sick quite regularly during the winter.” – Autumn (Garden et al., 2014, p. 17)

Often the houses people live in are not big enough to accommodate the size of their families, resulting in overcrowded housing. Some people also spoke about not feeling safe in their houses, or the houses being in unsafe areas.

“Playgrounds being used by drunks, alcoholics, drug use – kids can’t play in them.” - Tamariki from South Auckland (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 35)

Some people noted that when there was a problem with the house, it took a long time to get hold of Housing New Zealand. Getting someone to repair the problem also required them to follow up multiple times. It is difficult for families to find alternative accommodation – one family was on the wait list for 13 years.

“I took them in the letters from the doctors, the hospital, the health nurse that come into the home – took them copies of everything and what they said they’d try to find us a home. We’re still waiting for that home. It’s been 13 years since we’ve been in that same home. We’re still waiting for a larger, healthy home for us.” - Tina (Garden et al., 2014, p. 27)

**Figure 3.1 Poor housing - indicative impact on mauri**



### 3.2 Children need supportive, stable and loving environments

People spoke about the need for a child to be supported, in a stable environment and experience unconditional love.

“Support, stability and to be loved unconditionally. When a child is supported and feels the love they are capable of anything.” – Young person from Christchurch (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019b, p. 16)

People described experiencing physical, emotional and sexual abuse during their childhood. These experiences often affected the child’s hauora and wellbeing, and often impacted their behaviour. Children did not necessarily feel that they could talk to people at school about their home lives.

“When I go home I’m getting ready to battle the devil.” – Young girl from South Auckland (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 35)

Where a child is placed into state care, they do not have a lot of power or agency. It was not uncommon for them to experience sexual or other abuse. When there is violence, the family violence and sexual violence system does not always provide timely or appropriate help to those that need it eg, mothers experiencing violence in the home.

### 3.3 The system does not treat people with dignity, care and respect

Asking for help is hard, especially when you are not treated with dignity, respect or kindness.

“I’ve never come across anyone who’s tried to get to know me as a person.” – Rāhera (Rua et al., 2019, p. 7)

People often feel humiliated, degraded, stripped of dignity, accused and looked down upon. They often have to repeat their stories and relive traumatic moments in their lives, usually in open environments with little to no privacy.

“Do you know how it feels to repeat that I’m on anti-depressants? How many times have I repeated that, yes. I tried committing suicide. ‘Yes, I was raped by my father’. It’s pathetic and it makes me hate them.” – Michelle (Hodgetts et al., 2014, pp. 2047–2048)

“WINZ I avoid now because I’m sick of repeating my life to them. Housing New Zealand I avoid at the fact that no one’s listening... Just a couple of days ago I rung up Housing again, ‘Please send the manager over,’ because the call centre was saying, ‘Which window is it?’ It’s the same window I rung up about a year ago.” –Tiare (Garden et al., 2014, p. 37)

People experiencing hardship value case managers and social workers they had good relationships with ie, they treated people with respect, were trustworthy, respected their clients' privacy and situation, and listened to their story. Clients were more likely to tell these case workers what was going on.

"Vulnerable women appreciated people in health and social services who took time to listen and engage with them, who were willing to walk alongside them without judgement and recognise and build on their strengths." (Ministry for Women, 2018a, p. 20)

People said they could not access the services they needed, when they needed it. When people were able to access support, some support was not tailored to the circumstances or need. Services tend to be "delivered in response to a discrete issue" rather than "support to stay well", and do not always involve follow up support or measures to check it was safe for the client to return home.

People generally do not see their culture or identity reflected in the services they receive.

The system either does not give people a clean slate or can struggle to recognise the progress made and effort to change.

**Figure 3.2 Not supported or respected by the system - indicative impact on mauri**



### 3.4 Accessing government services is time consuming and difficult

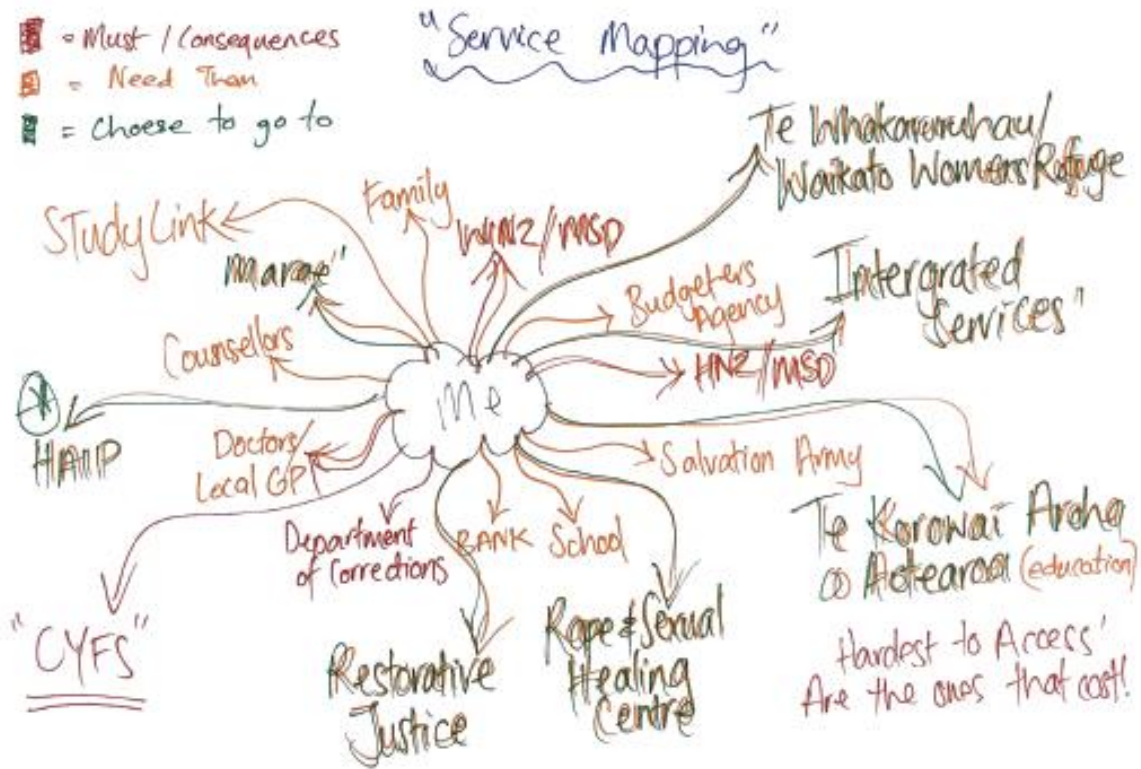
Accessing state support and services is time consuming and can be difficult to navigate. In addition, services or appointments often run late resulting in lengthy wait times.

The following diagram illustrates the state agencies and NGOs Miriama, a precariat<sup>2</sup> whānau member, interacts with on a fortnightly basis (Rua et al., 2019). These services are broken into three categories:

1. Must go – the services that Miriama must interact with (eg, Work and Income, Oranga Tamariki and Housing New Zealand). Non-attendance and non-compliance with these services often have consequences.
2. Need to go – the services that Miriama should interact with to meet her needs eg, budgeting and health services. Non-attendance and non-compliance with these services is not penalised.
3. Choose to go - services that Miriama can choose to attend.

<sup>2</sup> Precariat Māori households today defines the precariat as follows: 'Uncertainty, dependence, powerless, perilousness and insecurity characterise the lives of the precariat. This refers to citizens who find themselves in and out of secure work, unable to make ends meet and constrained by aspects of welfare. The precariat is a structural feature globally and has three key dimensions: 1) Employment insecurity; 2) Income insecurity; 3) Rights insecurity.

**Figure 3.3 Miriama's service map**



Source: Rua et al (2019), p. 5.

Miriama engaged with over 19 different services and support agencies. Each of these services required different paperwork and has different eligibility requirements. Navigating all these systems and services, often with limited visibility or transparency regarding entitlements and decision making processes, can be equivalent to a part time job. This effort consumes half of every day, resulting in significant lost productive time. It must all also be organised around the needs of her children. Miriama does not have access to a vehicle, therefore any disruptions to timing eg, a bus running late, sick children, or running out of phone credit can have "severe consequences" including benefit sanctions (Rua et al., 2019).

**Box 3.1 Tara's experience**

"Tara has multiple health issues, and recently escaped an abusive relationship. Consequently, Tara is currently engaged with multiple government and social service agencies including WINZ, HNZ, Women's Refuge and both primary and secondary health services. Threatened by her ex-partner, Tara abandoned her HNZ house and moved to a Women's Refuge shelter. Although Tara was about to give birth and was also caring for her other two children, HNZ would not give her another house because she already held a tenancy. Making matters even more desperate, WINZ declined to help Tara cover the cost of staying at the refuge. This meant Tara was homeless when she gave birth prematurely and had no option but to live in a car with her new-born and two other children. Eventually a WINZ officer helped Tara to move into a private rental. Although she now has a roof over her head, the house is very cold and damp and it's made Tara's asthma worse."

Source: Garden et al (2014), p. 24.

These insights tell us that interactions with the state and its agents need to be mana-enhancing and respectful. They also need to result in tailored, practical and holistic support.

## 4 Racism, prejudice and discrimination

### Key points

- A person's mauri can be affected by the nature of their relationships with others, especially where these relationships are coloured by racism, prejudice and discrimination. There is already a significant body of academic literature and lived experience focussed on these topics. The following summary should therefore be seen as a starting point.
- The material we reviewed showed that people and families experience racism, discrimination and prejudice when accessing services. These experiences can put people off seeking the help they need.

Young mothers, especially if they are Māori, reported significant problems with health professionals. Young mothers often felt like they were not taken seriously, judged or not given all the information. In some cases this led to mothers choosing not to engage with services and going through pregnancy and birth alone.

"When I was leaving hospital with my son, he was only three days old ... a couple of nurses had been quite abusive towards me while I was in labour and when we left the hospital they said to me, 'You know what, you're actually not as bad a mother as we thought you'd be, you're doing all right.'" – Young mother (McArthur & Barry, 2013, p. 3)

"I never had a midwife, due to when I did have a midwife she was very judgemental because of my age being pregnant young ... I felt uncomfortable so I just basically looked after myself through the whole 9 months and gave birth in my own bath tub. I didn't go to the hospital ... I just did it on my own." – Young mother (Pacific Perspectives Ltd, 2013, p. 53)

People reported being treated differently because of their appearance or race – both by people in the community, and state actors, eg, Police and Work and Income New Zealand.

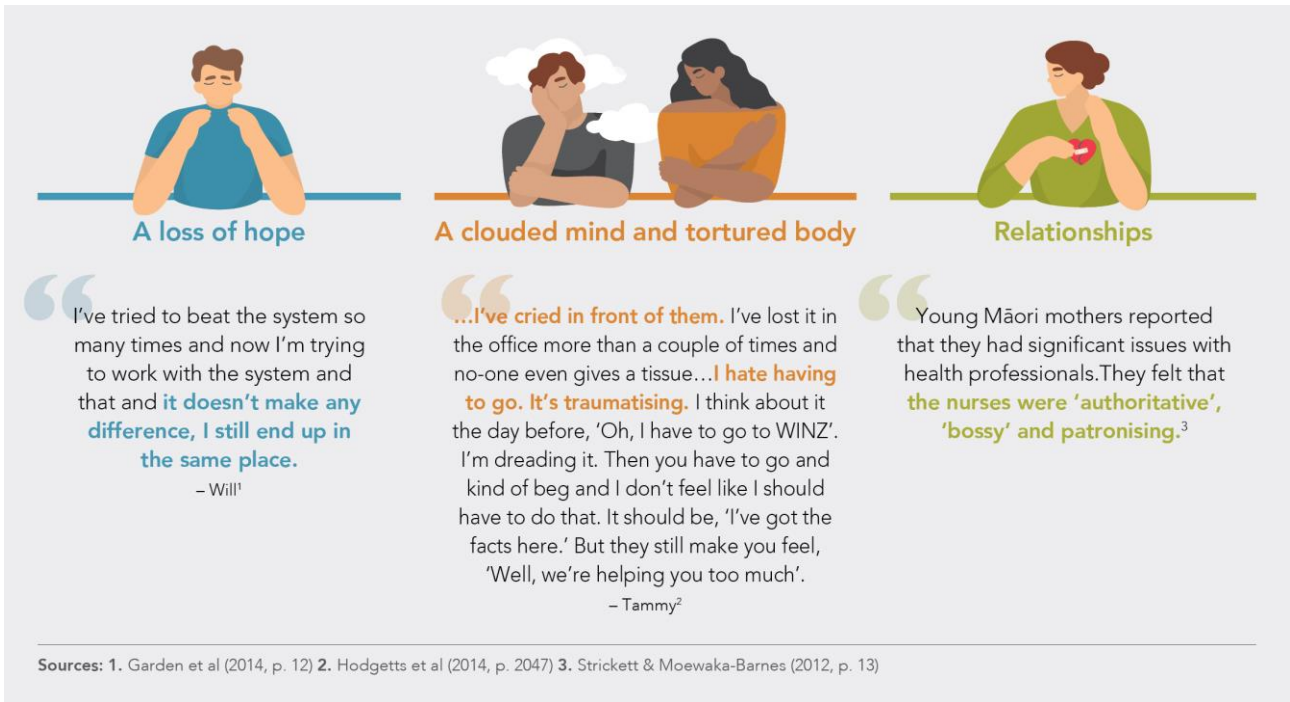
"At our school people find mocking Māori culture to be a joke. 'Māoris go to prison or Māoris do drugs.'" – Rangatahi from Auckland (Office of the Children's Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 6)

"They arrest us for nothing. They pull up with millions of cop cars and there's only one of us they have a warrant for but they come up, straight up and smashed me. Kneeing me, telling me to put my hands towards my back but I couldn't because he had my hand. They are racist as." – Young mother (Office of the Children's Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 36)

The system often holds all the power and information. People and families are not empowered with information about their entitlements, or other information to inform decision making eg, healthcare.

People felt that the system does not always appropriately recognise the efforts they had taken to better themselves or their situation. They felt it was hard to move on from previous mistakes or criminal convictions.

**Figure 4.1 Racism, discrimination and prejudice - indicative impact on mauri**



## 5 Stress, pressure and coping mechanisms

### Key points

- Being under constant stress and pressure – whether that be financial, or guilt and worry from being unable to provide for your children – can take a toll on a person’s mental health and wellbeing.
- Many of those sharing their experiences talked about resorting to self-harm as a coping mechanism or escape route. This could be either temporary (alcohol, drugs and some physical self-harm), or permanent self-harm. This, combined with unrecognised and/or unmet mental health and trauma related need, has a significant impact on hauora and mauri.

Facing a daily “struggle” can limit a person’s space and capacity to dream and look to the future.

“[W]hen you’re in a low socio sort of environment, your head’s not looking up and looking at what the future looks like for you next year. Or what your dreams and aspirations are looking over there or what I wanna do.” – Tahu (Rua et al., 2019, p. 7)

Many people do not have healthy mechanisms and tools to care for their mental health or cope with stress and trauma. This can lead to unhealthy behaviours including self-harm, substance abuse, behavioural problems or violence.

Drugs and alcohol are often coping mechanisms – people turn to substances to help them forget, escape their lives, and relieve stress.

“...drinking ‘takes me away so I no longer have to care about anything’.” – Hazel (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2018, p. 6)

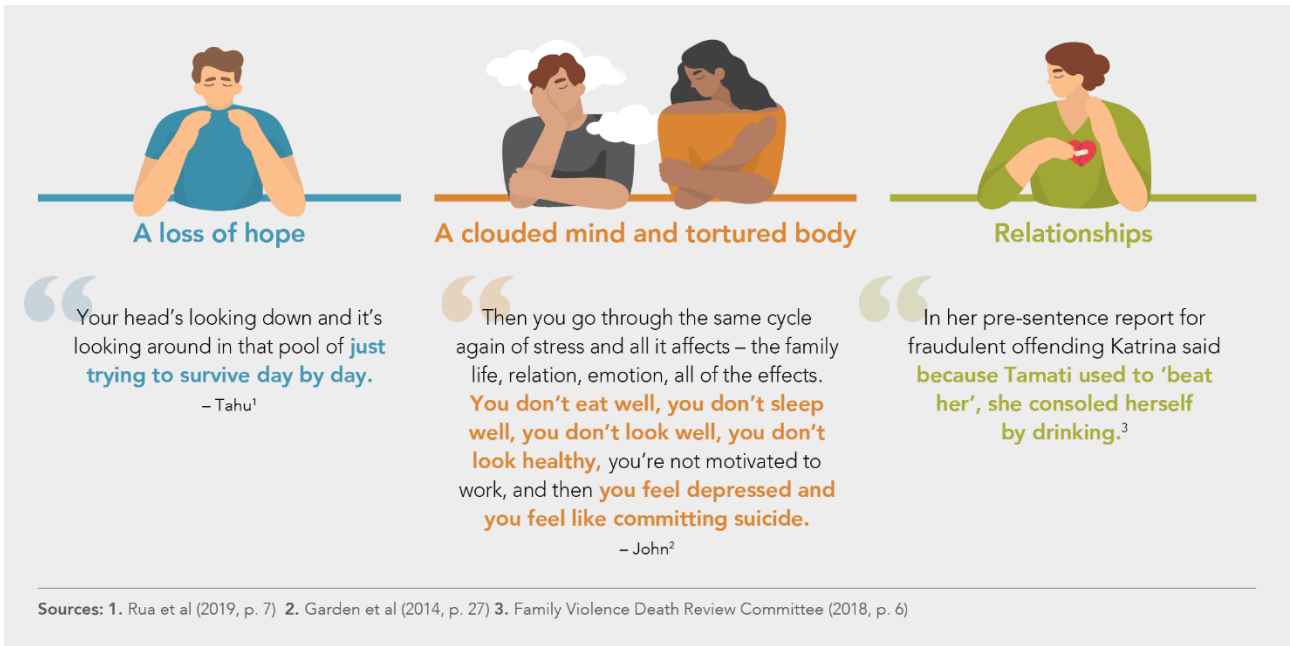
“The drugs help me deal with depressions, helps me forget about it, escape, get away”. – Rangatahi male from Auckland (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 36)

The LGBTQI+ community also spoke about additional factors that contribute to the high incidence of self-harm, depression, and suicide. These included discrimination and homophobia, not feeling like they belonged, not having a support system, and mental health challenges. These stressors and factors compounded to be “too much for one person to deal with”.

“People self-harm because of not feeling like they belong. Pretty much everyone I’ve spoken to about why - it’s been some degree of not fitting in, not belonging, not having a support system and even before I had any idea of sexuality stuff when I was 11, it was still felt, I felt singled out.” – Charlie (Fedchuk, 2017, p. 77)



**Figure 5.1 The chronic stress of hardship - indicative impact on mauri**



## 6 Transitioning to mauri ora

### Key points

- Mauri noho also represents untapped and unrealised potential. A state of mauri noho can be difficult to escape, especially when the systems, processes and supports do not fully address need, or enable aspirations or the realisation of potential.
- Despite the challenges faced, people spoke about their strong desire to better themselves, their family or their situation through employment and training, their resourcefulness, and their ability to collectivise and work together to support one another.

### 6.1 People described a strong desire to better their situation

"[T]he main goal is for me to come off the benefit so that I can provide for my own kids and take them out and can afford to." – Hanna (Garden et al., 2014, p. 22)

"Having ... her changed me, I had to sort out my life for her." – Mother (Ministry for Women, 2018b, p. 7)

### 6.2 People see education as a way of escaping the cycle...

People see education as a pathway out of hardship – a "ticket out". Parents want to access education opportunities, both for their own development and to role model success for their children.

"It's the only ticket out of the hell that we live in! It's the only ticket out of the hardship." - Mavis (Garden et al., 2014, p. 42)

"I want to say that education, higher education, for me as a Māori woman, throughout this journey has been absolutely crucial to survival and higher level of resilience. Because it has enabled me to role model success and achievement to my children at all costs. So that's important to me as a Māori woman." - Single Mother (Waiti, 2014, p. 186)

Education is not just school – it also includes on the job training, vocational education, and building capacity in communities.

### 6.3 ... but there are barriers to participation

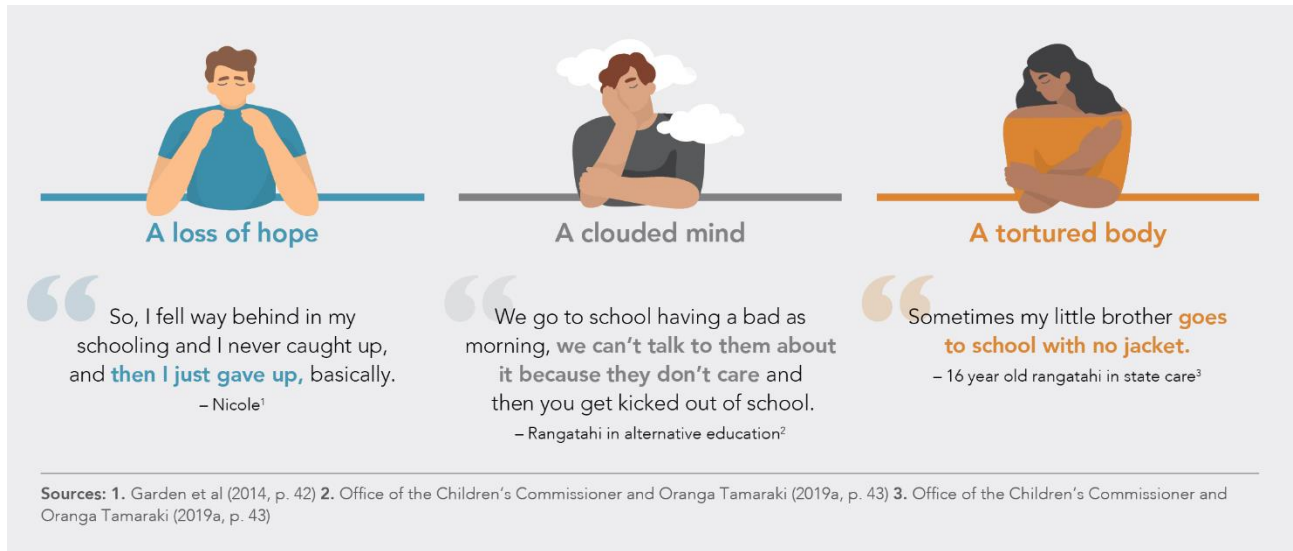
Education cannot be viewed on its own – student experience and engagement is affected by the wider environment. Students may also need pastoral support to help them work through things that are going on at home.

Sending your kids to school can be expensive and put additional financial pressures on families eg, buying the right school lunches, camps and sports.

If a family cannot afford extra-curricular activities, students miss out on opportunities for learning, development and can be socially excluded. Students who move around a lot are more likely to fall behind at school.

"In my primary years I think I went to about five different primary schools. Each year we pretty much moved to a different place and had to go to a different primary school, which got me way behind...it was quite hard. I remember the schooling was very hard. You're learning different things at different times and just not being able to get settled." – Nicole (Garden et al., 2014, p. 42)

**Figure 6.1 Barriers to education - indicative impact on mauri**



## 6.4 Strong relationships are a protective factor

Strong and healthy relationships are a protective factor against the effects of hardship and persistent disadvantage. Positive inter-personal relationships, strong friendships and family who genuinely cared about them are critical to having a good life. People experiencing hardship are extremely resourceful and pooled money and resources to help each other survive.

“So most of our resilience would be in our Māori friends and personal friends. That’s been the crux of our support, is our own friends.” - Single Parent Household (Waiti, 2014, p. 129)

Children need to be supported, have stability, be loved unconditionally and feel like they have “people in their corner”. Where there was an interruption or breakdown in children’s relationship with a parent figure, this often impacted their behaviour or decreased their wellbeing.

“Support, stability and to be loved unconditionally. When a child is supported and feels the love they are capable of anything.” - Young person from Christchurch (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019b, p. 16)

“Having a good life isn’t necessarily about the materialistic things. I think having strong friendships/relationships with people who genuinely care about you contributes better to a good life.” - Rangatahi from Taumaranui (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 7)

Agencies and/or providers who formed relationships characterised by trust, respect, listening and going the extra mile were more successful in supporting people and families experiencing hardship.

## 6.5 Identity builds strength and confidence

Knowing who you are, your family and where you come from builds confidence and strength. Both Māori and Pacific peoples spoke about the importance of being culturally connected and grounded, others respecting and embracing their culture and having a strong sense of identity. This included connection to traditional practices and games, language, faith, landscapes, and interpersonal connections (whānau, aiga, hapū and iwi).

“Whānau and Whakapapa. knowing where you come from builds confidence.”- Kōtiro Māori, Rangatahi (Office of the Children’s Commissioner & Oranga Tamariki, 2019a, p. 19)

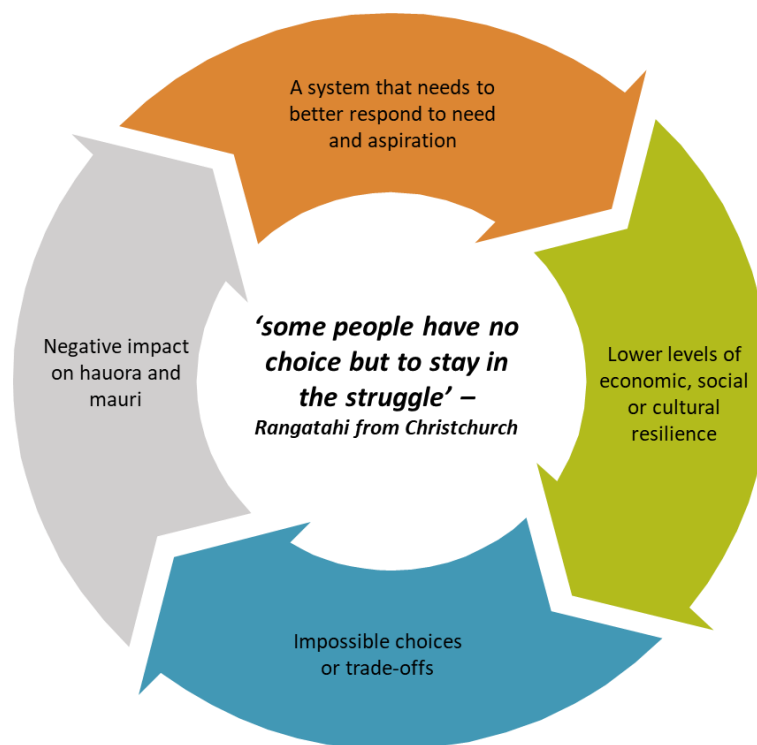
# 7 What we can learn from people's experiences

## 7.1 A system that imposes "impossible choices"

Overall, the material we reviewed points to a system that is unresponsive to the needs and aspirations of people, is overly complex to navigate and does not treat people with dignity, care and respect. Pairing this with low levels of economic, social and cultural resiliency, and poor-quality housing, can lead to people and families being faced with "impossible choices". These impossible choices often involve trade-offs – and these trade-offs frequently involve weighing up which option has the least negative impact on the hauora or mauri of a person and their family.

In this context, the system refers to the overlapping government systems (eg, housing, health, and social welfare), and the lack of resilient community systems and connections. These factors are all relevant and complicit in the picture presented in this paper (Figure 7.1, below).

**Figure 7.1** "Impossible choices"



## 7.2 Implications for the *Fair chance for all* inquiry

Durie advocates that ultimately every intervention is an opportunity to shift a mauri that is languishing to a mauri that is flourishing. However, this requires a set of interventions that go beyond addressing the immediate need or crisis, addresses risk factors, and enables people, families, and communities to realise their potential.

"Services need to be able to support us to stay well and that means supporting us to parent well too, rather than just waiting until there is a crisis to intervene..." (Durie, 2001).

The Commission's recommendations for the *Fair chance for all* inquiry will need to be grounded in the context and reality of people and families experiencing hardship, take a strengths-based approach, and co-develop recommendations alongside families and communities. These recommendations should recognise and leverage the following protective factors.

1. People see **education and training** as the “ticket out” of hardship and into future employment. Education and training requires significant financial or time investment and needs to be closely tied to employment and career progression pathways to produce meaningful outcomes.
2. People experiencing hardship often have **strong interpersonal relationships** and leverage the strength of the collective to survive. This was especially apparent where they lack economic resources and families pool resources to make their money stretch further.
3. The ability and **space to dream and look to the future**.
4. The **strength and confidence you can draw from being culturally grounded** and knowing who you are.

The Commission’s final report and recommendations for the *Fair chance for all* inquiry will be presented to Government in March 2023 and made available at [www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all](http://www.productivity.govt.nz/inquiries/a-fair-chance-for-all)

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