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families commission
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# review of the empirical literature assessing the impacts of government policies on family form

A REPORT FOR THE FAMILIES COMMISSION

**The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.**

**Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).**

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

> encourage and facilitate informed debate about families

> increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families

> encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families

> consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown

> stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research

> consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.


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# review of the empirical literature assessing the impacts of government policies on family form

A REPORT FOR THE FAMILIES COMMISSION

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# CONTENTS

# PREFACE

New Zealand, like most other industrialised countries, has seen major changes in patterns of family formation, size, dissolution and reconstitution since the 1960s and 1970s. Women are having fewer children and at older ages. Rates of cohabitation have increased as couples marry later or not at all. Partnerships are also more unstable, leading to higher levels of sole parenthood and the formation of more step or blended families. Individuals are now much more likely to experience a range of family forms at different points of the lifecycle.

The role that government has played in all of these changes is subject to intense debate. There is a wide variety of views about the role that government *should* play in supporting or discouraging particular family forms. There are also conflicting opinions on the extent to which specific government policies and services actually *do* influence family structure – and if so, in which ways.

Historically, the New Zealand Government has tended to take a neutral stance in relation to family form issues. For example, it recently removed discrimination on the basis of relationship status through the Relationship (Statutory References) Amendment Act. With the exception of interventions designed to reduce teen pregnancy, the New Zealand Government has rarely attempted to influence family form directly. Unlike many European countries, for example, New Zealand has not adopted an active 'pro-natalist' strategy intended to boost national fertility rates.[1] Instead, the primary focus of New Zealand family policy has been on issues such as family violence, child wellbeing and family living standards. However, regardless of policy intention, a wide range of New Zealand policies and services do have potential implications for family form.

The Families Commission's research programme is designed to help address data and research gaps in order to inform our advocacy for the interests of New Zealand families. This report makes an evidence-based contribution to debates about the impact of government policies on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements.

Synthesising what is a rather voluminous research literature is no easy task. Studies using different research designs, which examine similar policies in different countries and over varying time periods, often provide inconsistent results. Policies clearly interact, making it important to consider the exact policy mix in any given setting. Packages of reforms may also have more impact on families than the introduction of single policies. An ability to make well-informed judgements based on the quality of individual studies and overall weight of evidence is critical.

This report adopts a systematic review methodology to assess the New Zealand and international evidence on the impacts of government policies on family form. It considers the direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional consequences of government policies. In an area that has often been dominated by strong opinion and the selective presentation of research evidence, a systematic review methodology provides a rigorous and transparent approach to identifying and assessing relevant literature.

The report finds that the evidence base in this area is rather less clear-cut than is often acknowledged. While many of the key social and demographic trends have been

[1] See for example d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005:47) for a comparison of government policy approaches to fertility in a range of OECD countries.

accompanied by changes in government policy, determining cause is a significant challenge. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the report indicates that government plays a relatively minor role in influencing individuals' decisions to form couples, bear children or end relationships.

The report finds that the direct influence of individual government policies on fertility appears relatively limited. For example, there is some evidence that higher cash benefits for dependent children via either tax or social assistance systems have a small but positive effect on total fertility rates. Cross-country comparisons indicate that packages of 'family-friendly' reforms are likely to have more impact than single policies.

Any evaluation of policy impacts needs to consider both short- and longer-term impacts. The report presents evidence, for example, that the introduction of no-fault divorce in the United States (US) was associated with a short-term increase in divorce rates. However, the longer-term effects are less clear. It may also be that divorce legislation influences whether couples formalise the ending of a marriage, rather than whether or not such relationships break down in the first place.

The report also indicates that policies may have different impacts on different types of families. For example, in the US context, it finds that higher welfare benefits appear to foster greater relationship stability amongst de facto couples with a new baby. However, US data also indicates that, at an aggregate level, increases in benefit rates may slightly decrease the likelihood of marriage and increase rates of sole parenthood. The report finds mixed evidence on the impact of benefit levels on divorce.

Variation in patterns of partnering, relationship breakdown and childbearing across countries and between different ethnic groups within the same country, highlights the importance of social and cultural context. It also suggests that the applicability of international findings to the New Zealand setting may be limited. This report identifies a lack of high-quality New Zealand research in this area and concludes with specific recommendations for future research in the New Zealand context.

Rajen Prasad
Chief Commissioner

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the findings of a systematic review of empirical literature that considers the impact of government policies on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements. An extensive literature search was carried out for international and New Zealand-based research. Studies that met the criteria of reporting empirical research, published in English, covering the 1990-2005 period, judged to be relevant to New Zealand's social, economic and political context, and retrievable in the time frame of the review, were included. The report does not consider conceptual or theoretical literature, and was broad in scope. The majority of studies found were from the United States (US) with few from New Zealand.

No single research study is likely to be definitive. The evidence from a number of studies must be weighed up, along with individual study quality, before concluding as to the balance of the evidence for a policy impact. Given the report's breadth, it is perhaps not surprising that in many cases studies reported conflicting findings with regard to the impacts of similar policy. This ambiguity was exacerbated by issues of methodology, and of comparability across contexts, cultures and the differential impacts on sub-groups of the population.

Understanding of the drivers of individuals' decisions to bear children, form or dissolve relationships, is fairly limited. A range of factors is likely to interact in ways that make evaluation of policy impacts difficult. While robust outcome evaluations can provide good evidence of policy impact, often the causal mechanisms through which such outcomes are achieved remain open to question.

A further problem in identifying the true impacts of policies is the issue of time. An effect may or may not be detected in the short term, and may or may not have an impact in the long term. Where studies have limited follow-up periods it may be difficult to detect policy impacts, particularly as it may take time for knowledge of policy changes to disseminate to the population affected.

Given these difficulties in conducting research on government policy impacts, it is not surprising that most impacts identified were relatively small. For example, although one of the goals of US welfare reforms since the 1980s has been to encourage marriage and reduce sole parenthood, the evidence for these impacts is mixed. Even in an area where the evidence for policy impacts is more consistent, such as the finding that marriage penalties in the tax system reduce marriage rates, the findings reveal quite modest impacts.

Very few of the reviewed policies were intentionally directed at impacting on family form (eg fertility and the baby bonus), with most policy impacts being unintended (eg those resulting from marriage penalties in the tax system). The findings with regard to unintended policy impacts on family form will need to be considered alongside the other, intended, policy impacts (eg on child wellbeing, employment, income redistribution).

One example of government policy that impacts directly on aspects of family living arrangements is legislation regarding divorce, custody, child welfare and adoption. However, even in this area, quality studies that provide definitive evidence of causal policy impact are rare. Although there is evidence that no-fault divorce laws precede a rise in divorce rates, it is unclear whether these laws cause a rise in divorce levels, or whether more separations are formalised after the advent of no-fault divorce.

There is very little evidence regarding legislation relating to custody, child welfare and adoption, and the evidence is also conflicting.

The findings from this review indicate that government policy is not the main driver of the recent demographic changes that have occurred in many Western countries. It is likely that the broader social and economic context, and individual values, preferences and attitudes, may be more important influences on decisions regarding family form. These factors may also interact in complex ways with legislation and policy. Furthermore, it is possible for polices to interact with one another, as in the example of the marriage penalties and subsidies contained in both the tax and social assistance systems in the US.

It is also likely that many of the mixed findings are due to lack of precision in measuring policy. For example, in the US welfare reform research, the main policy variable in some of the analyses has been the presence or absence of state waivers from federal regulations. This approach serves to hide the variation in the exact nature of the policies and programmes developed under these waivers. However, details such as the absolute size of welfare benefits and their conditions of eligibility, the nature of progressive tax scales, and whether assessment is based around individuals or couples, are critical factors to consider when assessing and attempting to quantify policy impacts.

In many cases adequate empirical research examining the impact of government policy has not been done. This reflects the challenge of evaluating policy impacts on family form, with the need for quality time series data on the family form, accurate measures of policy variation across states or countries, and controls for possible confounding factors. Perhaps this explains why there is so little New Zealand research that addresses questions of policy and family formation. This review is valuable, then, in locating relevant research, identifying gaps in the literature and in suggesting areas where good evidence is needed.

Caution must be exercised, however, in attempting to generalise from studies carried out in other countries, to the New Zealand context. Cross-country comparisons of the impacts of policy on fertility show that impacts of the same type of policies can vary in different countries. For example, research conducted in the late 1990s indicated that New Zealand fertility rates were rather higher than expected given the tightly targeted nature of our family support system, and relatively low level of financial assistance provided to families with dependent children.

Finally, this report makes suggestions for future New Zealand research. Recent policy innovations are obvious subjects for evaluation, in terms of their impact on family forms. The Care of Children Act is one example. Other areas that might be examined for their impact on family formation in New Zealand are indicated in the review, and include the impact of child support legislation and enforcement, the *Working for Families* package, and the supply and cost of childcare.

# CHAPTER ONE
# introduction

This review considers New Zealand and international empirical research into the impacts of government policy and services on family form. To start with, it is important to emphasise four points regarding this review. Firstly, it is focused on identifying and reviewing empirical studies of the link between government policies and services, and family formation, size, dissolution, reconstitution and living arrangements. It does not review general theories regarding these links, nor does it examine the rationale for such policies or services.

Secondly, the review maintains a focus on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements. There are many ways in which government polices and services might impact on family wellbeing. For current purposes these impacts will only be relevant if they have been examined as mediators of the impact of policies or services on family form. For example, we will not include studies of the impacts of taxation schemes on family income, unless the study further investigates the link from family income to family form.

Thirdly, this review does not canvass the arguments for or against government attempts to influence family form. In the New Zealand context, family form has rarely been a direct focus of policy attention. However, regardless of intention, government policy or services may unintentionally impact on family structure. Furthermore, there are some areas where it is agreed that government does have to take a role, eg family law, where we need to know if a policy is having the intended impact, and whether there are unintended impacts of this government action. Finally, this report does not consider or make any judgements about the relative desirability of different types of family form.

The review was conducted using a systematic review methodology (Light & Pillemer 1984; Alderson, Green, Higgins 2004). Systematic reviews aim explicitly to adopt a rigorous methodology, based on the development of a review 'protocol'. The advantage of this approach is that "the use of explicit, systematic methods in reviews limits bias (systematic errors) and reduces chance effects, thus providing more reliable results upon which to draw conclusions and make decisions" (Alderson et al 2004:13). The researchers adopted a range of search methods in order to identify relevant literature, both published and unpublished. As well as conducting a systematic search of journal databases and library catalogues, contact was made with a range of informants (eg government policy-makers, academics and NGOs) in order to identify existing research.

The report begins with a chapter setting out the nature of the review. The goals of the review and a set of review questions are presented, followed by an outline of the adopted methodology. Then there is a brief discussion of the general demographic and policy context for the review, intended to assist with a better understanding of the reviewed literature. This is followed by a discussion of our general approach to weighting of the evidence, and the degree to which it is possible to establish causal relationships between government policy and family form. Chapter Three mentions some general issues that influenced the way the review was conducted. Chapters Four to Seven present the substantive findings of the review, and Chapter Eight concludes with a general discussion of the findings.

# CHAPTER TWO
## nature of the review

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

This review is concerned with finding out 'what is known' rather than exploring specific hypotheses (Light & Pillemer 1984). Nevertheless, the search for and selection of the literature was guided by the goals of the review and a set of research questions.

The objectives of the review were:

> to assess the New Zealand and international evidence base on the actual impacts of government policies on family formation, size, dissolution, reconstitution and living arrangements[2], irrespective of the legal status of the family

> to identify worthwhile areas for further empirical research on these issues in New Zealand

> to draw out implications for New Zealand policy.

The review aimed to address the following questions.

> What evidence is there on the key ways in which government legislation and policies influence private decisions over family formation, size, dissolution, reconstitution and living arrangements?

> What is the state of New Zealand evidence in this area? How transferable is the international evidence to New Zealand circumstances? What are the main knowledge gaps in New Zealand?

> To what extent is it possible to attribute impacts on family form to individual interventions or policy domains, as opposed to the combined effects of policies across multiple domains?

> What other key causal influences impacting on changes in family form are identified in the literature? Is there evidence of the broad relative orders of magnitude of impacts on family form arising from government policies compared to other factors?

> What evidence is there of the effects on family formation, size, dissolution, reconstitution and living arrangements arising from the legal framework regulating family relationships (eg different legal rules applying to marriage, divorce, child custody and child support). To what extent have changes in family law lagged, rather than led, changes in family structure?

> Is there any evidence of differential impacts of government policies and services on family formation, size, dissolution, reconstitution and living arrangements amongst indigenous people living as minorities in their own countries?

As can be seen from the objectives, this is a review of empirical research. It does not consider the voluminous literature discussing aspects of public and social policy on the family ('rhetorical-discursive' literature). However, where there were comprehensive reviews of empirical research in an area, these reviews have been used. Existing reviews were particularly useful in two areas where there was a large body of existing research – welfare reform in the US, and fertility policies in low-fertility countries.

This review is also restricted to:

> research published in English. Thus, if research is from a non-English speaking country but is published in English then it is included (eg Sweden, Norway etc)

> covering the 1990-2005 period with some 1980s research[3]

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[2] Living arrangements includes issues such as whether children live with both parents, with one parent only, or divide time in various proportions between the households of separated parents.

[3] The early 1990s literature usually covered research undertaken during the 1980s. Many of the papers included time series data extending into the 1970s, and where review papers were used they often included 1970s and 80s research. On occasion a widely cited paper published pre-1990 has been included.

- research judged to be relevant to New Zealand's social, economic and political context (eg China one child family or third world research on fertility would be excluded)
- literature that is retrievable in the time frame of the study.

## METHODOLOGY

It was decided to conduct a 'systematic' literature review, in order to identify, collate and synthesise the relevant literature. Systematic reviews aim explicitly to adopt a rigorous review methodology, based on the development of a review 'protocol'. Systematic review methods have been widely utilised in healthcare research (eg The Cochrane Collaboration and the Centre for Reviews & Dissemination, University of York). Systematic reviews are now also being conducted on social and behavioural interventions and public policy, including education, criminal justice and social welfare (see The Campbell Collaboration Initiative).

A systematic review is a method of comprehensively identifying, critically appraising, summarising and attempting to reconcile the research evidence on a specific question. The Cochrane Reviews have developed a standard format for conducting their reviews (Alderson et al 2004). In general, systematic reviews can be conceptualised as a series of steps, outlined in detail in a review protocol.

- **Scoping Phase**: Formulating the problem and the scope of the review, and developing the review protocol
- **Search Phase**: Locating and selecting studies according to the protocol
- **Review Phase**: Quality assessment of studies and their results
- **Analysis Phase**: Analysing the results of individual and groups of studies
- **Synthesis and Reporting Phase**: Interpreting the results

This review followed these general steps. An initial scoping was conducted to pilot the strategies for identifying the research literature and to estimate the likely quantity of such literature. A review protocol was developed as a result of the scoping. The review protocol, giving details of the steps taken to try to identify the relevant literature, is presented in Appendix One. The results of these searches are presented in Appendix Two and Appendix Three. As can be seen from these tables, a large number of publications were initially identified in our searches, but relatively few were eventually retained for inclusion in the review. The data in these tables indicate the scale and time-consuming nature of undertaking a systematic review. However the benefit of such an approach is that it 'casts a wide net', hopefully identifying most, if not all, of the relevant empirical literature.

While this review adopted a 'systematic' review methodology it did not attempt a 'meta-analysis' (ie the statistical analysis of effect sizes), as this was not requested or realistic, given the nature of the studies in this area. Meta-analyses are generally conducted to answer very specific questions in areas where there are a number of comparable studies assessing very similar policies or services. Restrictions are generally placed on study design (eg including only Randomised Controlled Trials), and results of studies must provide sufficient detail so that effect sizes can be calculated, aggregated/averaged and compared. This review addressed a broader set of questions, covering a range of policies and impacts that have been evaluated using a wide range of very different research designs. We do, however, provide a quantitative indication of impact, where authors have provided this.

## DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLICY CONTEXT

To provide some context to this review, this section will briefly consider the changing nature of family form in New Zealand and place these changes in an international context.[4] It is these changes in demographic behaviour that have led to an increasing focus on the role government actions may have played in contributing to these patterns. This section will then briefly consider the similarities and differences between New Zealand's social policy context and that of the main countries that provided research for this review.

Demographically, there have been a number of significant changes in family formation, childbearing and dissolution over the past 50 years[5] (see Dharmlingam, Pool, Sceats & MacKay (2004), for the results of a major New Zealand study on changes in women's demographic behaviours). These include the rising age at first marriage and the greater number of women remaining unmarried throughout their life. Cohabitation has become the major form of first union, although these unions are often a prelude to marriage. There has also been an increase in the number of unions women experience in their lifetime. Since the 1960s there has also been a significant increase in the dissolution of unions, although the rate of dissolution has stabilised since the 1990s. High rates of dissolution have increased the numbers of previously partnered single men and women who may then re-partner (a third of women re-partner within two years of separation).

Childbearing patterns have also changed over this period, with fertility declining to close to replacement levels. Women are having their first child at an older age than earlier cohorts, although it appears that in terms of total fertility they are catching up in their 30s. There has also been a significant increase in rates of childbearing outside marriage, although most of these mothers are in a relationship and many are cohabiting with the child's father. The growth in ex-nuptial births, along with the relatively high divorce rate has resulted in an increasing incidence of sole parenthood, although sole parenthood is usually a transient state.[6]

Demographic trends affecting family form have been accompanied by a number of other social, economic and cultural changes. Many of these are noted by Prasad (2005) when he comments:

> *…in the 1960s and 1970s, the introduction and easy availability of the contraceptive pill combined with the legalisation of abortion gave sexually active couples, particularly women, far more control over family planning. At the same time, the expansion of higher education and training, changing expectations regarding relationships and roles within families, and greater social and financial independence for women had a significant impact on subsequent fertility decisions (p 4).*

Recent changes to male patterns of education and employment also have implications for family formation and fertility decision-making. At a time in which educational attainment has played an increasing role in determining income and employment (OECD 2004), men's educational achievement relative to women's has fallen. In the New Zealand context, Callister (2001) argues that falling partnership rates of men on low incomes with low or no qualifications, are a consequence of the growing difficulty such men face in earning sufficient income to support a family. Such men appear to be

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4 This is of necessity a brief outline of some of the major demographic and policy changes. As such it does not consider the full complexity of these changes, for example differences in trends within population sub-groups.

5 Coontz (2005) provides an interesting discussion of changes in marriage over a rather longer time span, providing some perspective on the uniqueness or, more importantly, non-uniqueness of many of these changes.

6 While the term 'sole parent' is used throughout this report, we recognise that this terminology fails to reflect the reality of parenting arrangements for a significant proportion of children (Callister & Hill 2002).

increasingly unattractive in the 'marriage market', at a time in which women are more financially independent.

Many of these demographic and social trends are common across 'Western' countries, including New Zealand. However, international comparisons of demographic behaviour also suggest some significant differences between countries that might indicate the strong role of social and attitudinal factors. For example, Italy and Spain have comparatively low divorce rates and this has been attributed to the strength of Catholicism in these countries, as compared to most of the rest of Western Europe. A second, important international difference in this context is the relatively high rate of marriage breakdown and family reconstitution in the US, a country which produces a lot of the research reviewed here.

New Zealand shares a number of basic similarities with the US. By OECD standards, both countries have high rates of teen pregnancy and sole parenthood, a relatively young age structure, and comparatively high fertility rates. However, New Zealand has higher cohabitation and rather lower marriage rates than the US. New Zealand also has greater official recognition and tolerance of alternative living arrangements, as is evidenced by the recognition of same sex relationships in the Civil Union legislation, and the relative lack of distinction between de facto and married couples in government policy and practice.

A feature of New Zealand is its ethnic diversity, and in particular the existence of a relatively sizable indigenous population. In New Zealand there are a number of differences in demographic behaviour across ethnic groups. For example, Māori fertility rates are higher than those for New Zealand Europeans (2.6 children per Māori woman in 2003, compared to around 1.8 for New Zealander Europeans, with total fertility being 2.0) (Ministry of Social Development 2004). Data from 2003 also show that Māori have a lower median age at childbirth (26 years) than New Zealand Europeans (31 years) (Statistics New Zealand 2004). In addition, partnership patterns vary significantly by ethnic group, with much higher rates of sole parenthood among Māori women aged over 15 years (24 percent compared with 9 percent of New Zealand European women in 2001) (Statistics New Zealand 2005a). These patterns indicate that changes to specific policies may have a greater or lesser impact on different ethnic groups within New Zealand.

Since most of the research reviewed here comes from the US, it is useful to set the policy context by briefly describing US welfare reform in the 1980s and 90s. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) programme had been in operation since 1935. Initially, low-income married couples were not eligible for assistance under AFDC and it was restricted to sole parents (mainly mothers). Changes were made later to enable low-income couples to receive support (AFDC-UP). However, growing dissatisfaction with AFDC led to an increasing number of states seeking waivers from AFDC rules. Further reforms in the 1980s were focused on encouraging work, by providing opportunities for job training and placement. By 1996, 27 states had major state-wide waivers in order to make changes to their AFDC programmes. However, family formation was not a major focus of these 'waiver reforms' (Fein, London & Mauldon 2002).

Weil (2002) notes that while modest attempts had been made to reform welfare in the US, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) 1996 ushered in an era of substantial change. The goals of PRWORA were to:

> end dependence of needy parents upon government benefits, by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage

- aid needy families so that children may be cared for in their homes or those of relatives
- prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish goals for preventing and reducing their incidence, and
- encourage formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Schoeni & Blank 2000).

As part of this Act, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant was created. This removed almost all Federal eligibility and payment rules, giving states much greater discretion in designing their own programmes (Blank 2002). States were able to set their own maximum benefit levels (as was the case under AFDC) and the rate at which benefits were abated in line with additional income from paid work.

As stated above, one of the main goals of the PRWORA emphasised increasing self-sufficiency through work ('work first'). This was to be achieved by a combination of incentives and penalties. For example, attempts were made to alter the incentives to work by 'making work pay'. This was to be achieved by expanding earned income disregards, allowing welfare recipients to keep some of their cash benefit, even as they began to earn. At a Federal level this is termed the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Work support subsidies were also offered by some states; for example, help with work, transport or job search expenses.

Work requirements were also imposed. In 2002 at least 50 percent of all recipient families and 90 percent of two-parent families were required to be working, or in a work preparation programme. Sanctions such as reductions in benefit levels were imposed on those not meeting work requirements. The time period individuals could be exempt from these work requirements was also restricted. Limits were set on the total time individuals could receive TANF-funded aid (60 months, although states could fund it for longer from their own funds).

Three out of the four stated goals of the PRWORA involved reducing non-marital births and encouraging marriage, although "there was more rhetoric than program in the legislation in this area" (Blank 2002:1,106). States that reduced ex-nuptial births without raising abortion rates qualified for special bonuses. Some states required teenage mothers to reside with their parents. Others limited, or eliminated, the extra payments made to those having additional children, thereby offering a disincentive to additional childbearing by those on welfare. In addition, PRWORA made changes designed to encourage greater paternity establishment, and more payment of child support by non-resident parents.

PRWORA also imposed limits on eligibility for Food Stamps, and legal immigrants who arrived after 1996 were largely denied access to TANF. Other reforms reduced the link between being on welfare and eligibility for Medicaid, the publicly funded health-insurance programme for low-income people (Blank 2002). Changes were also made to childcare assistance, with expansions in the Child Care Tax Credit for lower-middle-income families.

Although these reforms were intended to reduce poverty and 'welfare dependency' by encouraging welfare recipients to enter paid work, proponents of these reforms also expected that they would help to stabilise partnerships and improve beneficiaries' chances of forming partnerships. Weil (2002) cites some of the limited efforts that were made by states to achieve the family structure goals of the welfare reform. For example, under TANF there was some attempt to deal with the disincentives to marriage that existed under AFDC (eg limited eligibility to benefits for married families). However,

in theory, most of the measures arising from welfare waivers and PRWORA may have had impacts on decisions regarding family formation and childbearing. The impacts of many of these and other policies are reviewed in the following chapters.

In 2002 the welfare legislation was due for renewal by Congress. President Bush proposed welfare reauthorisation that included funding for programmes to promote healthy marriages (Seefeldt & Smock 2004). This 'healthy marriages initiative' has the goal to "help couples who chose marriage for themselves develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages" (US Department of Health and Human Services, cited in Seefeldt & Smock 2004). Currently, some of these programmes are being developed and implemented, and will be subject to evaluations in the future.

The New Zealand policy context bears some similarity to that of the US, but also contains some important differences. In line with many other Western countries, New Zealand provides direct economic support to families with dependent children, through both the welfare and the tax systems. The tax system does, however, differ significantly from that of the US. Because the New Zealand tax system is based on individual assessment, tax payable is not influenced by relationship status. This means that tax penalties or subsidies do not operate here, unlike the US where a number of states have joint assessment. Any potential 'marriage penalties' in New Zealand occur through the social assistance system. In addition, in New Zealand such penalties affect de facto (including same-sex) couples, as well as married couples.

Prior to the introduction of the *Working for Families* (2004) reforms, New Zealand was unusual, due to the highly targeted nature of its assistance to families with dependent children (OECD 2004). Unlike many other OECD countries in 2004, most New Zealand families with dependent children did not qualify for assistance in the form of cash payments or tax relief, a similar situation to that existing in the US.

The recent *Working for Families* reforms increase the level of assistance available to families with dependent children, as well as the number of families that are eligible for assistance. Low-, and to an increasing extent, middle-income families are supported through a number of mechanisms, depending partly on whether or not they are in paid work. These reforms include Family Support, the Family Tax Credit, housing subsidies and childcare subsidies.[7] The explicit aim of these reforms was to reduce poverty and 'make work pay' by boosting the economic position of low- and middle-income working New Zealanders. Unlike the US context, influencing family formation was not an overt policy goal in New Zealand. Nor did the *Working for Families* reforms seek to reduce benefit entitlements for those reliant on welfare.

The main New Zealand benefit for sole parents is the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), which was introduced in 1973. The 1990s saw some reform in line with US changes. Prior to 1996, DPB recipients were not required to actively seek employment until their youngest child was aged 14 years. In 1996 the eligibility criteria were revised.[8] From this date, DPB recipients were required to be available for part-time work when their youngest child reached six years, and full-time work when the youngest child turned 14 years. In 2002 these specific work expectations were removed in favour of active case management. Today, all DPB recipients are required to agree to Personal Development and Employment Plans with their case managers.

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[7] Sanderson and Jacobsen (2003) list in the appendices to their report current New Zealand Government policies and services that are directed at families.

[8] By OECD standards New Zealand sole parents have relatively low rates of participation in employment (OECD 2004).

Beyond income support and tax, a range of government policies and practices has implications for family form. This includes wider macroeconomic policies influencing the living standards of the population, labour market and employment policies, health, education and housing policies and services, child support arrangements, and legislation concerning marriage, divorce and abortion. Where there is evidence linking government policies and practices to changes in partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, or family living arrangements, these impacts are discussed in the appropriate chapters.

## WHAT IS 'EVIDENCE'?

It is important, when reviewing research studies, to consider the varying 'strength' of the evidence of a link between government policy and family form, provided by each of these studies. The ability to make causal statements to the effect that 'Policy Y leads to a specified change Y in family form', is limited by factors such as the nature of the research methods and design. When reviewing the evidence it is necessary to weight each finding in terms of its 'strength' or 'robustness' (often expressed in terms of validity and reliability).

Besharov, Germanis & Rossi (1997) provide a succinct review of the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs for evaluating welfare reform (see also Moffitt 1998; Blank 2002). For Besharov et al, the key goal of these evaluations is "to isolate and measure the programme or policy's effects independent of other factors that might be at work" (p 41). In order to do this, researchers need to establish what would have happened to a similar group that was not subject to the programme or policy (the 'counterfactual') and to compare them to the programme group. The best designs for achieving this are experimental, involving random allocation to a control and programme/policy group. However, implementing these designs is not without its challenges (eg ethical issues and costs).

A second set of designs is generally labelled 'Quasi-Experimental'. The 'comparison' group in these designs is selected to be as close as possible to the programme/policy group, and may involve:

- comparing participants with non-participants
- comparing different sites (from other geographical areas where the policy is not implemented)
- comparing cohorts of similar individuals from different periods, pre and post a policy/programme intervention
- time series/cross-sectional studies, using aggregate data to compare outcomes whether across time or across states.

These various 'quasi-experimental' designs often suffer from a number of limitations that make it difficult to reach definitive conclusions, especially with regard to causality. The value of comparing participants with non-participants depends on the extent to which these groups are comparable on important variables, and the absence of selection effects.[9] Comparing different areas or countries is common, but can be complicated by unmeasured differences. For example, countries may adopt different policies because of different attitudes towards family formation (eg a more 'conservative' outlook). It may be these attitudinal differences that produce differences in the family formation 'outcome', rather than the presence or absence of certain policies. Charting trends over time in

[9] Selection effects occur when the group chosen for the programme differs from the control or comparison group, on factors related to the outcome.

aggregate measures provides very weak evidence of association, let alone causation. Using longitudinal individual data with pre- and post-policy/programme measures provides greater evidence of potential causation, particularly if other important variables are measured and taken into account.

For example, many of the studies we have reviewed employ time series designs, which look at trends in aggregate data over time, eg changes in divorce rates over time compared to legal changes over the same period. The problem with these designs is that they do not normally control for the possibility that other factors, eg changes in the 'value' attached to marriage, may be responsible for both the changes in divorce rates and the changes in laws. Similarly, the policy may simply be responding to the changes in relationship patterns, rather than leading to them. There is no guarantee that a correlation between trends proves cause and effect, nor does the absence of any relationship prove the absence of a causal connection, given the likelihood of intervening variables.

While qualitative studies are not able to provide a rigorous test of policy impacts, they do supply valuable information on possible links between government policy and services and family form. In particular they can provide detail of possible mechanisms by which policy might operate, detail that is often missing from quantitative research. In some policy areas, these studies were the only ones identified by our searches and have therefore been included as indicating the possibility of a link, but requiring further research evidence.

Studies also vary on a number of other dimensions that are relevant to the 'quality' of their findings. The size and nature of the sample has important implications for the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other populations or sub-groups. The availability and quality of the data can also place limitations on studies, particularly in cross-country comparisons, where missing data for specific countries may bias results. Having to use official data where there is known under-recording (eg number of abortions) can also introduce bias. The method of analysis may also influence the results. Choices as to which factors (variables) to include in statistical analyses, and the treatment of variables as endogenous or exogenous in econometric analyses, potentially impact on research findings (Jagannathan, Camassa, Killingsworth 2004).

Some systematic reviews (especially in the medical field) often confine themselves to Randomised Control Trials (Stagner, Ehrle, Reardon-Anderson, Kortenkamp 2003) or studies employing control groups. However, as Gauthier (2001:12) comments, a number of studies evaluating the impact of policies on demographic behaviour "are based on 'naturally occurring' experiments that exploit variations over time in the level of benefits (for example a sudden increase in benefits) or variations across countries or regions". Therefore, no initial constraint was placed on the design of studies to be initially assessed in this review. However, study design was evaluated as part of the analysis and synthesis in the review and the approach adopted here has been to rely mainly on the relatively more 'robust' studies. Studies noting trends over time (without controls) and small-scale qualitative studies are mentioned in the introduction to each chapter, but the empirical review section of the chapters focuses on the more robust studies that have some control for possible confounding factors. The exception to this is where there is a lack of quality research, but some that is suggestive of policy impacts, or links with more robust findings. Where there are limitations with a study we also note these.

# CHAPTER THREE

## understanding the impact of government policies on family form

This chapter considers the ways in which government policy and services have been linked to changes in family form. Although this review will not discuss in detail the various theoretical perspectives on family formation, dissolution and reconstitution[10], it is worth making a brief mention of these at this point since they have guided thinking on the policy-family form link. These theoretical approaches propose different models by which government actions impact on family form and give different weightings to various individual, social, cultural and economic factors. They also imply that the government should look to specific policy levers, if it wants to have a direct, or indirect, impact on family form.

Most of the research on the impact of welfare reform in the US is based on economic models of marriage and divorce (eg Becker 1973). These propose that individuals marry when the benefits minus costs of being married are higher than the net benefits of remaining single, with a similar mechanism applying to divorce. This is somewhat simplified and the model has been further refined since Becker first proposed it. However, for present purposes, such a model leads researchers to focus on certain economic factors in linking government policies and services to family form. The model is theoretically ambiguous on the net effects of welfare reform on marriage and divorce. Increases in women's income due to welfare reforms may make being single a more viable option for mothers, and discourage marriage for sole parents (the 'independence effect'). On the other hand, reforms that promote employment may have a 'stabilising effect' on unions by reducing financial stresses, thereby encouraging marriage and discouraging divorce. Welfare reform that results in more single mothers in paid employment may therefore have mixed effects, and this is supported by the empirical research reviewed in later chapters.

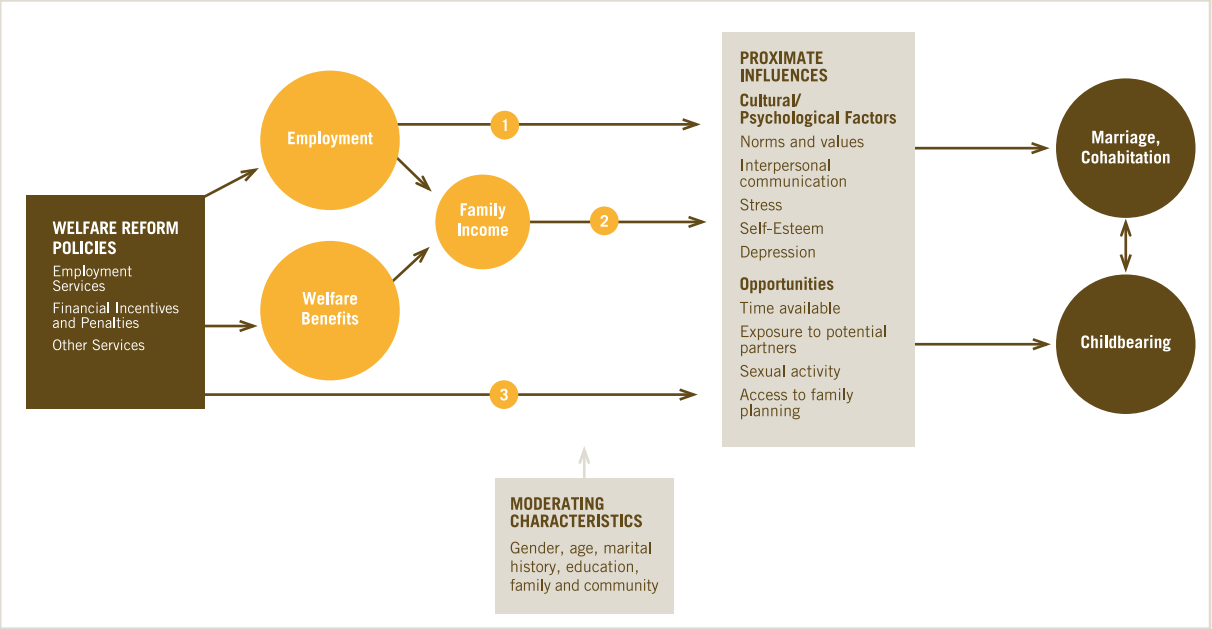
There is a range of other anthropological, sociological, biological and psychological theories of the family. Although many of these give some weight to economic considerations in the decision to form and dissolve relationships, and to have children, they also place emphasis on a range of other factors and propose different causal pathways. For example, psychological theories place importance on individual and relationship factors (eg attachment), and thus researchers attempt to assess how these factors are affected by government policies and services. Marriage education and couple counselling are therefore seen as potential policy responses to relationship dissolution.

Figure 1 presents a simple model of the ways in which welfare policies might impact on family formation (and dissolution). It is based on an economic perspective, but includes as proximate influences the cultural, sociological and psychological factors. As shown in pathway three, government policies and services can directly impact on these proximal factors, or the effects may be more indirect, mediated by employment (1) and/or family income (2).

[10] For a useful review, see 'Theories of the Family and Policy', New Zealand Treasury Working Paper 04/02, by Jacobsen, Fursman, Bryant, Claridge, Jensen (2004) available on the Treasury website (www.treasury.govt.nz). See also Luxton (2005).

**FIGURE 1 MODEL OF THE WAYS IN WHICH GOVERNMENT POLICY AND SERVICES MIGHT IMPACT ON FAMILY FORMATION DECISIONS**

**MAIN PATHWAYS OF EXPECTED INFLUENCE OF WELFARE REFORMS ON FAMILY FORMATION**




**From: Fein et al (2002)**

This review of theory highlights a number of important issues that had to be considered in selecting, analysing and synthesising the results of the research literature. Firstly, the review had to consider both the direct and indirect impacts of government policies. Policies whose primary aim is to impact directly on one area (eg housing affordability), may also have a more indirect impact (eg on the number of extended family households). Secondly, it was necessary to consider the unintended, and/or unanticipated, impacts of policies. That is, a policy may result in some change in family formation or structure that was not foreseen when the policy was proposed. These unintended consequences of policy may be very important for the evaluation of the overall impact of a policy.

It was also important to consider research on both the impact of single policies and the cumulative impact of a number of different policies on family formation. While one policy on its own may have no, or minimal impact, in combination with other policies it may lead to important changes in family living arrangements. On the other hand, a policy that may have had a significant impact on its own may appear to have had no measurable impact because it was counterbalanced by another policy.

These considerations indicate some of the main challenges faced by this review. The complexity of possible relationships between policy and impacts on family form made it unlikely that any single piece of research would provide definitive answers to the review questions. Thus the synthesis stage of the review was particularly important and required careful consideration and judgement.

Finally, it was important that the research was evaluated with reference to the New Zealand social, economic and cultural context. Although, as outlined above, there are many similarities in demographic behaviour, social trends and policy between countries, there may also be important differences in context that limit the applicability of overseas research to New Zealand.

A wide range of policy areas was covered by the review. The main types of government policy and services likely to impact on family form are shown in the following table.

| GENERAL CATEGORIES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY OR SERVICES |
|---|
| **Legislation:**<br>Marriage, covenant marriage, civil union<br>Inheritance<br>Adoption, child custody, guardianship<br>Separation and divorce<br>Human rights |
| **Social security and taxation:**<br>Tax and/or expenditure programmes<br>Income support<br>DPB<br>Pensions<br>Child support |
| **Education:**<br>Child care policies and programmes<br>Parenting support programmes<br>Education for teen parents<br>Marriage education/preparation programmes<br>Sex/relationship education programmes |
| **Health:**<br>Abortion<br>Sterilisation<br>Contraception<br>Assisted human reproduction |
| **Housing:**<br>Rent subsidies<br>Assistance with home ownership<br>Home improvement loans |
| **Social services:**<br>Care and protection: keep children living with their families, foster care<br>Youth justice: residential placements<br>CYF: relationship services, counselling and education courses<br>Early intervention programmes: Family Start, Youth at Risk |
| **Employment:**<br>Equal pay<br>Maternity leave, parental leave<br>Flexible working hours, family sick leave<br>Programmes to assist groups (eg sole parents) into employment |
| **Other:**<br>Influencing social attitudes through policy and advertising (eg family violence prevention campaign)<br>Immigration: extended family reunion<br>Transport<br>Armed services<br>Justice: Corrections counselling and education courses, Family Court counselling |

When considering areas of government policy and services an issue arises concerning programmes such as marriage education or couple counselling, that may be funded by government or provided by non-government agencies. Potentially any programme or service may be funded by government and therefore fall within the ambit of this review. However, to consider all these would have greatly increased the size and scope of this review. We have therefore confined ourselves to reviewing general programme categories that have been funded by government and where there has been research on the impact of these on family form.

The areas of impact on family form were clearly established by the review objectives, that is:

> Relationship formation – when couples begin living together, including whether to get married or cohabit.

> Family size – birth of first or subsequent child. May be aimed at increasing or reducing fertility.

> Dissolution – break up of a relationship. Focus is generally on those with children.

> Reconstitution – new relationship where at least one partner has had previous cohabiting relationship or has a child from a previous relationship (not necessarily cohabiting). Mainly concerns those with children.

> Living arrangements – where children live when couples separate, and extended family or multigenerational households.

An important consideration in this review is that a policy or service is likely to have an impact on more than one aspect of family form. For example, much of the research in the US has focused on families with 'female headship' (ie sole parent households). This research could be covered in the area of family formation or reconstitution, since it often attempts to encourage these women to form relationships. It could also be considered under dissolution, since it might aim to stop couples breaking up. It is also possible that such policy is aimed at reducing fertility by discouraging births to young mothers outside of cohabiting relationships. Where this research is covered will depend on the goal of the policy, ie whether it is aimed at encouraging sole mothers to form relationships or is designed to stop relationships dissolving.

In presenting the results and analysis we will structure the presentation in terms of the particular family impact, rather than the specific programme or policy or the family sub-group targeted. We do this because much of the welfare research assesses packages of programmes rather than individual programmes.

In each chapter of the report that follows, we outline in the introduction possible links between government policy and the specific aspect of family form examined (eg family formation, dissolution, family size and living arrangements). This will include both direct and indirect effects, and both intentional and unintentional policy impacts. We then review in detail the empirical evidence for these links, before summarising the balance of the evidence for policy impacts.

# CHAPTER FOUR
## partnership formation and reconstitution

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews aspects of government policy that have been found to be associated with the formation of cohabiting couple relationships. This relationship may be formalised through marriage (or civil union), and most of the research reviewed explores the factors associated with the decision to marry, rather than cohabit. Many of the factors contributing to the decision to form a couple relationship are likely to apply irrespective of whether the relationship is the first or subsequent relationship for one or both partners. However, there may also be factors unique to the 'reconstituted' family, particularly for those families with children, and these factors will be explored here. The number of couples forming reconstituted families will also be a function of the number of people who have experienced the dissolution of a previous relationship. It follows that partnership formation may be indirectly influenced by policies and services impacting on dissolution (reviewed in Chapter Six: Dissolution).

There are a number of possible direct and indirect linkages between government policy and partnership formation. For example, marriage laws may directly impact on the numbers who marry by making marriage easier or harder to enter into (eg enforced waiting periods, attendance at marriage preparation courses, and costs of a marriage licence). Laws also prescribe who is allowed to marry. In New Zealand the Civil Union legislation has provided an alternative way for some couples to formalise their relationship, particularly same-sex couples for whom marriage is not an option. Divorce, child custody, child support and matrimonial property laws may also have an impact on decisions to marry, with 'liberal' divorce laws lowering the cost of exiting a marriage. Research regarding the effect of marriage law on marriage rates is, however, exceptionally scant. Most of the literature we located during the course of our research was of a speculative nature; that is, not empirically based.[11]

Government legislation is perhaps most likely to impact directly on couples' decisions to marry, if there are important differences in the legal treatment of married compared with cohabiting couples. There is a large body of research based on an economic model, which focuses on government polices that alter the costs and benefits (or utility) of marriage or cohabitation, compared with living as a single person. In this model, welfare and taxation policies are two of the major government policy levers that influence partnership formation decisions.

As Alm, Dickert-Conlin and Whittington (1999:194) suggest:

> *a marriage 'penalty' or 'subsidy' occurs when a change in marital status generates a change, negative or positive, in disposable income. In general, any tax or transfer program can create a marriage penalty or subsidy if two conditions are satisfied: the program imposes taxes or gives subsidies that are based on household income or wealth; and the program imposes different marginal tax rates at different levels of income or wealth.*

A taxation system that pools married couples' incomes could result in a marriage 'penalty', or potentially a 'marriage bonus'. Similarly, welfare benefits (eg income support, health or housing subsidies) that are income tested on joint income may impact on relationship formation decisions. The general availability and level of benefits also

[11] The only empirical research we uncovered involved studies on a recent specific variant of marriage – covenant marriage. Covenant marriage allows couples the option of selecting a different set of legal requirements to govern their marriages. It requires some marriage preparation, full disclosure of all information that could affect the decision to marry, an oath of lifelong commitment to marriage, acceptance of limited grounds for divorce, and marital counselling if problems threaten the marriage. Already married couples may convert to a covenant marriage (Hawkins, Nock, Wilson, Sanchez, Wright 2002). The research on covenant marriage has, however, not examined its impact on marriage rates, but rather its effect on rates of marriage breakdown. This research will be dealt with in Chapter Six: Dissolution.

alter the relative costs and benefits of marriage, particularly for sole parents. However, whether individuals respond to such penalties or subsidies is an empirical question, since they may be ignorant of the details of the tax or transfer system or the value may be relatively small.[12] It is also unlikely that financial incentives are a leading factor in couples' decisions to cohabit or marry.

There is a large body of research investigating the effect of the welfare system on sole parenthood, marriage and divorce. Early research considered whether the financial support provided by the welfare system, largely to single mothers, produced falls in marriage and increases in dissolution as the relative costs and benefits of marriage were altered. Waivers instituted by states in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted the focus of research to the impacts of the widening of welfare support for couples and the various work requirements and programmes for beneficiaries. With the introduction of the PRWORA (and TANF) in 1996, with its explicit goals of reducing sole parenthood and promoting marriage, the research focus shifted to the different programmes developed by states under the freedom given to them by the new welfare reforms. The general expectation of the welfare waivers and the reforms was that by altering the relative cost of marriage versus remaining single, they would result in more marriage and fewer sole parents.

Child support may also alter the costs and benefits of marriage, but the effect is complex and may depend on the group being considered (eg unmarried sole mothers or divorced mothers, low-income beneficiaries or middle-income earners). For example, according to Carlson, McLanahan, England (2004b), the expected effects of child support enforcement on the union formation and dissolution of new unwed parents are uncertain. Enforcement reduces the incomes of non-resident parents (typically fathers), thereby increasing the relative attractiveness of marriage (or cohabitation) to them compared with separation. At the same time, enforcement increases the incomes of resident parents (typically mothers), thereby potentially decreasing the relative attractiveness of marriage (or cohabitation) to them.[13] The net effect is theoretically indeterminate. In terms of re-partnering, child support may provide sole parents caring for children with a greater level of economic independence, and thereby reduce their likelihood of entering future partnerships.

In terms of possible indirect impacts, there is a range of factors associated with relationship formation that may in turn be affected by government policy. For example, among US men, higher education and employment rates are associated with a greater likelihood of marriage (Carlson, McLanahan & England 2003; Mincy & Dupree 2001). This indicates that financially secure men are more attractive in the 'marriage market', and that financial insecurity may form a barrier to marriage for couples with low incomes. It is possible that government education and employment policy might, therefore, indirectly affect the formation of relationships by assisting individuals to improve their educational and employment prospects (Callister 2001).

The ratio of males to females in a given society may also impact on patterns of relationship formation (Guzzo 2005; Whittington & Alm 2003; Brien 1997). For example, in the US, Lane, Keefe, Rubinstein, Levandowski, Freedman, Rosenthal, Chula, Czerwinski (2004) studied the combined impact of the 'War on Drugs' and racial discrimination present in the American justice system, as factors in the rise of African American female-headed households. They concluded that the disproportionate

[12] Johnson (2005) discusses 'partnering penalties' associated with the New Zealand *Working for Families* package. However, his report contains no data on the behavioural impacts of these penalties.

[13] In the New Zealand context, sole parents receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit receive no direct benefit from Child Support payments, as these are retained by government to offset benefit payments.

incarceration experienced by African American men in America's 'War on Drugs' has resulted in a skewed sex ratio. Despite the promotion of marriage in social policy, this has meant that finding and keeping an African American partner is now more difficult for African American women. In New Zealand, Callister (2005) has pointed out that in 2001 there were 53,000 more women than men in the 20-49 age group, and that part of this imbalance may have been due to men residing overseas. The ability of New Zealand women to form relationships with men in this age bracket is, as a consequence, reduced. However, it is not clear what role government policy has, if any, in generating – or potentially addressing – this imbalance.

Researchers have reported qualitative interview data from sole parents who see the lack of a suitable partner as a major limitation on partnership formation. Part of the problem is the incidence of alcohol and drug problems and offending amongst potential partners. For example, Carlson et al (2003) suggest that fathers' physical violence is a significant deterrent to couples' romantic involvement, as are substance abuse problems. Government-funded programmes that impact on the incidence of family violence, alcohol and drug problems, and mental health problems, may therefore indirectly affect partnership formation rates.

General social, cultural and religious attitudes have also been linked to the propensity to marry. Another way in which government might affect rates of relationship formation and marriage is through influencing these attitudes, for example, through general advertising campaigns. A recent focus in the US has been on providing funding for programmes to promote "family formation and healthy marriage" (Haskins, McLanahan & Donahue 2005). Part of this programme would be a public advertising campaign on the importance of marriage and the skills needed to promote marital stability. However, Carlson et al (2003:3) note that the results of their study lead them to conclude that "programmes aimed at convincing them [a sample of unmarried parents] that marriage is desirable are unlikely to be effective since they appear already convinced." It is not the lack of willingness to marry, but rather factors limiting marriage opportunities, eg economic security, affordable housing, or inability to find a compatible partner. We were unable to find any empirical studies on the impact of advertising programmes which promote marriage.

With regard to the impact of government policy on the likelihood of remarriage, Fine (1997) and Mason & Mauldon (1996) reviewed stepfamilies from a policy perspective, and recommended a number of legal and policy changes to accommodate the situation of reconstituted families in the US. Although not examining research on the impact of government policies, Fine concluded that changes in the law that recognised and clarified stepparents' rights and responsibilities "may impact upon other important areas of family life, such as the remarriage rate and the role of the non-resident parent" (p 262). For example, laws regarding guardianship and child support, by including explicit consideration of stepfathers' responsibilities, may reduce 'role ambiguity' and thereby strengthen family relationships and reduce stepfamily relationship breakdown. He also indicates that such changes may serve an important role in signalling the social acceptability of reconstituted families, thus perhaps encouraging their formation. Mason & Mauldon (1996) note the inconsistency across US states in the treatment of reconstituted families, in terms of eligibility for ADFC benefits and other Federal benefits. It does need to be noted, however, that no empirical evidence of an impact of government policy on the likelihood of remarriage is cited in these papers.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Much of the research investigating partnership formation and reconstitution has focused on US welfare reforms of the last 20 years, raising questions about its applicability to the New Zealand context. Prior to the 1990s reforms the US welfare system was widely regarded as providing disincentives to marriage, because it allocated benefits primarily to single women with children. Many US studies have concluded that more generous welfare programmes are associated with higher rates of sole parenthood and lower rates of marriage (eg Grogger & Bronars 2001; Lichter, McLaughlin & Ribar 2002; Schultz 1994). However, Acs & Nelson (2001) note that there is no strong consensus on the size or importance of this correlation. For example, Moffitt (1998) comments that the more variables that are controlled for in the analysis (eg ethnicity, employment opportunities, age), the weaker the estimated effect of benefit level becomes. Bitler, Gelbach, Hoynes, Zavodny (2004) conclude that the effect of welfare on partnership formation is small in magnitude and cannot explain the decline in US marriage rates and rise in divorce rates since the 1960s, during which time welfare benefits fell in real terms.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF WELFARE BENEFIT LEVELS ON PARTNERSHIP FORMATION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dooley, Gascon, Lefebvre, Merrigan (2000) | National data | Canada | Sole parenthood | Welfare benefit | Welfare benefit levels were not associated with probability of sole parenthood. |
| Grogger & Bronars (2001) | Current Population Survey | United States | Marriage | AFDC benefit levels | Higher benefit levels are associated with delays in marriage for unwed mothers. |
| Hu (2003) | California state data | United States | Marriage | AFDC benefit levels and work incentives | Economic incentives and benefit levels had no significant effect on the marriage rates of single mothers. |
| Lichter et al (2002) | Current Population Survey and state data | United States | Marriage | AFDC, Medicaid and food stamp benefit levels | Higher benefit levels are associated with less marriage. The effect was more pronounced for African American women. |
| Mincy & Dupree (2001) | Data from 20 large US cities (Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study) | United States | Union formation among unwed mothers | Child support enforcement and benefit levels | Higher benefit levels increased likelihood that young unwed mothers would marry. Child support enforcement reduced the formation of family households (ie with a partner), but had no impact on marriage rates. |
| Moffitt (1998) | Review | United States | Marriage, divorce and fertility | Welfare reform and benefit levels | Higher welfare levels are associated with lower marriage rates, although the magnitude was small. |
| Schultz (1994) | Current Population Survey | United States | Marriage | AFDC and Medicaid benefit levels | Higher benefit levels are associated with fewer women being currently married. |

In contrast to the US, there has been very little research on the relationship between the Domestic Purposes Benefit[14] and the incidence of sole parenthood in New Zealand. Goodger (1998) provides a good summary of the historical changes in support provided to sole parent families in New Zealand. She documents the changes in incidence of sole parenthood, the use of benefits and the recent policy changes aimed at assisting sole parents into paid employment or training. However, while charting the changes in

[14] The Domestic Purposes Benefit provides the main source of welfare assistance to sole parents who are not in paid work in New Zealand.

sole parenthood, ex-nuptial birth and divorce, alongside changes in benefit provision and legislation, she does not try to establish causal links. In fact she cautions against simplistic interpretations, since benefit changes were often accompanied by related, and unrelated, legislative changes and other social, economic and technological changes (eg the contraceptive pill), complicating the analysis of simple trend data.

The Department of Social Welfare reported to the New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988:3), reviewing claims "that the [Domestic Purposes] benefit encourages women to leave their partners, that it provides an incentive for young single women to have and keep babies, that it discourages the re-establishment of old relationships or the formation of new ones." However, at the time of publication, the authors found no rigorous study of the effect of the DPB on partnership formation. They cited a qualitative study (Wylie 1980), which reported that most of the sole parents she interviewed did not plan to become pregnant, and where they did they were in a de facto or de-jure marriage. In reviewing international research the report found no evidence that the availability of a benefit influenced the decisions of teenagers to become pregnant, or those of pregnant women to keep a child rather than place it for adoption. The report did note, however, that in the 1960s most ex-nuptial children were placed for adoption, and that by 1982 the number placed for adoption was very low. This might suggest that the benefit enabled single mothers to keep their children, but this trend is complicated by an increase in de facto relationships. As a result, many so called ex-nuptial births are actually children born to cohabiting couples.

On the basis of the limited evidence available, the Department of Social Welfare (1988) review concluded that "while incentive effects do not show up as the only or even the most significant factor in the changes to parenting arrangements for ex-nuptial children which have occurred, they cannot be discounted on the basis of the evidence and trend data currently available" (p 25). Thus the New Zealand patterns suggested that "incentive effects might be significant in decisions about parenting arrangements, if not about choice to have a child", but that "without further research no more definitive statement [could] be made" (p 26).

It is important, given the lack of robust New Zealand studies, to turn to research evidence from the international literature. As mentioned earlier, the US reforms of the last 20 years aimed to reduce levels of sole parenthood and move sole parents off welfare and into paid work, by measures such as restricting access or reducing benefit levels ('sticks'), extending benefit eligibility to married couples, and increasing the financial wellbeing of those in paid work ('carrots'). The waiver and TANF reforms did, however, grant states discretion over the design and delivery of federally-funded welfare programmes, the result of which was that the nature and balance of carrots and sticks varied in different jurisdictions. Some of this research considers these policies as a package, while other studies manage to isolate the impact of specific policies.[15]

As Fein et al (2002) note, researchers evaluating the effect of these reforms have tended to focus on economic rather than demographic outcomes. Nonetheless, there have been a number of reviews of the welfare reform research literature, and some of these have examined the impact of the reforms on family structure (Moffitt 1998, Schoeni & Blank, 2000; Bitler et al 2004). We begin by considering these comprehensive reviews, following which we present in detail recent research examining the impacts of specific policies.

[15] Unfortunately many of these studies employ a simple yes/no variable to indicate the presence of a waiver in a state in a given year, a study design which hides a great deal of variation in the actual policies and programmes adopted by the states under the waiver and TANF provisions.

Firstly, it is important to note that findings of both the experimental and non-experimental research on US welfare reform and marriage is mixed, and that few studies have generated statistically significant findings (Bitler et al 2004). For example, Hu (2003) studied the link between economic incentives and the marriage rates of single mothers, using California State data over the period 1993-1996. Hu found "that a regime of lower benefits and stronger work incentives… has little effect on the probability that single-parent aid recipients marry" (Hu 2003:942; see also Dooley et al 2000, for similar findings in Canada).

Kaestner and Kaushal (2001) came to a similar conclusion, drawing on a more complex national sample. This study used a quasi-experimental design[16] to examine the impact of US federal welfare reform on the marriage rates of three groups of low-educated women aged between 18 and 44 years[17]; foreign-born citizens, foreign-born non-citizens and native-born citizens. The authors used US Current Population Survey data for the years 1994 to 1999, including individual information on 'nativity status, citizen status and recency of immigration', as well as information on important welfare-related outcomes, such as employment, hours of work and marital status, and welfare receipt. In addition, they obtained state-level data on policies related to welfare reform (TANF and AFDC waivers). Their results indicated that the TANF reforms, which were intended to make marriage more financially attractive and sole parenthood less attractive, had no effect on native and foreign-born citizens' marriage decisions.

A number of studies have examined the impact of the US welfare reforms on the incidence of sole parenthood. For example, Fitzgerald & Ribar (2001) assessed the impact of welfare reform waivers on the decision to become or remain an unmarried mother, while controlling for confounding local economic and social contextual conditions. They pooled data from the 1990, 1992 and 1993 panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), which spanned the time when many states began adopting welfare waivers. The authors estimated models for levels of sole parenthood, and proportional hazard models for entry and exit from sole parenthood, and used state fixed effects to control for unmeasured state influences. Based on data through 1995, they concluded that waivers that assisted people on a benefit to move into paid work were associated with lower levels of sole parent families. Waivers involving family caps, teenage co-residence requirements and termination limits had no such effect. However, a follow-up study, which included 1996 data, failed to find any relationship between the introduction of (any kind of) waivers and rates of sole parenthood (Fitzgerald & Ribar 2004).

Other studies have provided tentative evidence for a small but positive effect of the US welfare reforms on marriage rates. Acs & Nelson (2001) examined changes in living arrangements following the introduction of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) which, as mentioned earlier, had an explicit goal of encouraging marriage and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Using data from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), the authors found a decline in sole parenting that was more pronounced among groups likely to be affected by welfare reform. They also found some evidence for an increase in the proportion of children living with cohabiting parents, and, to a lesser extent, an increase in those living with married parents. They note that these changes appeared to have occurred mainly in the years following the PRWORA. This is, however, a fairly

[16] This study used a research design commonly referred to as a difference-in-differences (DD) analysis. The DD procedure compares the change over time in outcomes of a target group affected by welfare reform (eg poorly educated and unmarried mothers) to the change over time in outcomes of a comparison group that is unaffected by welfare reform (better educated married mothers).

[17] Very few US women over age 44 years are at risk of welfare receipt.

crude test of programme impact, since it is possible that a number of other changes may have been responsible for the observed changes in living arrangements (eg economic growth, changing attitudes).

In a follow-up paper, Acs & Nelson (2004) examined 1997 and 1998 data from the NSAF, which contained detailed information on household composition and the living arrangements of children, in 13 states. They focused on low-income families targeted by welfare policies, and examined the impact of various welfare policies (including child support) on living arrangements. Results from a multivariate difference-in-differences model suggested that more effective collections of child support and family cap policies[18] were correlated with declines in sole parenting and increases in dual-parenting. The researchers warn, however, that these findings are based on data collected only a short time after the 1996 US welfare reforms and that longer-term impacts remain in question.

Schoeni & Blank's (2000) qualitative synthesis of previous research concluded that the introduction of waivers might have raised the probability of marriage for recipients with low education. Schoeni & Blank (2000) then went on to analyse current population survey data over the period 1977 to 1999 for all women 16-54-years-old across US states. The authors tried to control for differences between waiver and non-waiver states (eg waiver states had a worse economic performance) and include controls for education, unemployment rates and employment growth rates. The study found that welfare reforms of the 1990s (waivers and the 1996 reform) were associated with reduced levels of sole parenthood, and increased marriage rates. They do, however, caution that the mechanism by which these impacts occurred was not clear, and could have been via changes in social attitudes. As they comment, "It is also possible that at least some of these effects occurred more indirectly, through behavioral shifts that were induced by the publicity and attention given to the fact that states were getting tough with welfare recipients" (p 26).

Bitler et al's (2004) study, also utilising Current Population Survey data, but with a focus on a later time period, reached a different conclusion. The authors examined data for 1989-2000 to estimate the impact of welfare reform and other state variables on flows into and out of marriage. In contrast to the above studies, they found that AFDC waivers and the implementation of TANF negatively affected transitions into marriage. The magnitude of these effects was, however, small, dependent on model specification, and not always statistically significant. The study also relied on a relatively short time period of implementation and lacked available comparison groups. These qualifications aside, the authors concluded that welfare reforms which boosted the labour market opportunities of women resulted in an 'independence' effect. The authors noted that women's husbands would have to be very low earning to be eligible for assistance under the TANF reforms, and such men may not be considered desirable spouses. As a consequence, despite the intention of these reforms, it appears that unmarried women faced little incentive to marry. The study found that, for unmarried women, more secure income from paid work actually resulted in a slightly lower likelihood of marriage.

A small number of studies have examined the impact of specific employment and welfare programmes on partnership formation. For example, Gennetian & Knox (2003) report on a meta-analysis of 14 random assignment studies of US initiatives designed to move welfare beneficiaries into employment. This study investigated the impact on single mothers' relationship status at follow-up (18-48 months after entering the programme). They conclude that for the overall sample of single mothers, these programmes did

[18] Some US states impose family caps on welfare benefits, in an effort to reduce fertility by means of financial penalties. If a mother on welfare has another child while on welfare, her family's benefits do not rise to reflect the increase in family size.

not affect marriage or cohabitation. Furthermore, the programmes rarely had effects on marriage or cohabitation for specific sub-groups of families. Few of the specific programme components, such as earnings disregards or benefit time limits, showed any effects.

A systematic review of mandatory work policies on family structure has also been undertaken by Stagner et al (2003) in the United States. The authors restricted their studies under review to randomised controlled trial evaluations. Their search produced nine studies that met the requirements, in terms of design and measurement, etc. These studies reported on marriage, and in some instances, on relationship dissolution. Using quantitative meta-analysis of effect sizes, the authors concluded that these experimental evaluations produced "no evidence that mandatory work welfare programmes have an overall effect on rates of marriage, cohabitation, divorce, separation, and widowhood" (p 9). They point out that some evaluation design features might have prevented the detection of impacts, or the complexity of indirect pathways could have resulted in positive and negative incentives neutralising each other. It is also possible that the relatively low remuneration and short-term nature of most of the jobs did not provide major incentive effects.

As many of the above findings show, the impact of specific polices may depend on the group being studied. For example, Moffitt's (1998) review of US studies examining benefit levels concluded that the impact of higher welfare levels in reducing marriage was greater for white women compared to non-white or black women. However, if studies of changes in benefit levels were considered then the effect for white women was weaker, while that for non-white was stronger. Recent research has also considered the impact of welfare policies and child support enforcement on couples who are unmarried at the time of their child's birth. Mincy & Dupree (2001) analysed preliminary data from a new longitudinal survey of unmarried couples who had just had children – the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Although limited by potential selection biases and the short time span considered, the results indicated that more generous welfare benefits increased the odds that young, unwed mothers would marry. Each additional dollar of benefits increased the odds that the mother would marry by 0.1 percent. However, welfare levels did not impact on the likelihood that the mother would form a household with the father of her children.

Mincy & Dupree (2001) found that child support enforcement[19] did not affect the likelihood that mothers would be married, but it did reduce the chances that she would form a household family. They explain these results by suggesting that they indicate that young, unwed, low-income mothers are more likely than mothers considering marital dissolution to be on good-to-romantic terms with the fathers of their children, when child support becomes a factor in their decision-making. They are also more likely than mothers considering divorce, to be receiving public benefits. In this case, the cost recovery feature of child support leaves little to underwrite the mother's economic independence. As a result, more aggressive child support enforcement is likely to place the relationship between the unwed parents under stress, thus reducing the prospects of family formation, as evidenced by the reduction in formation of households with increased child support collection.

[19] All the research reviewed here examined child support enforcement rather than levels of payment received by sole parents. As indicated earlier, those on a benefit are not likely to receive a direct financial advantage from child support where it is used by government to offset benefits (Beller & Graham 2003). In addition, although child support is often awarded in the US, not all sole parents receive it. This may explain why child support levels have not been examined in this context.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORMS ON PARTNERSHIP FORMATION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acs & Nelson (2001) | National Survey of American Families | United States | Living arrangements | 1990s welfare reform | PRWORA reforms associated with decline in single parenting, some rise in cohabitation, with less evidence of effect on marriage rates. |
| Acs & Nelson (2004) | National Survey of American Families | United States | Living arrangements | 1990s welfare reform | Family caps and child support enforcement associated with an increase in children living in married and unmarried two-parent families. |
| Bitler et al (2004) | Current Population Survey | United States | Flows into and out of marriage | AFDC waivers and TANF | Waivers that increased labour market opportunities for women associated with lower marriage rates. |
| Department of Social Welfare (1988) | Review | New Zealand | | Domestic Purposes Benefit | No definitive research examining the relationship between the DPB and incidence of sole parenthood. |
| Fitzgerald & Ribar (2001, 2004) | Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Sole parenthood | AFDC waivers | Inconsistent results; insignificant effect of waivers versus small effect of some waivers in reducing incidence of sole parenthood. |
| Gennetian & Knox (2003) | Meta-analysis | United States | Relationship status of single mothers | Welfare and employment programmes | Programmes had no significant (short-term) impact on likelihood of marriage or cohabitation. |
| Kaestner & Kaushal (2001) | Current Population Surveys | United States | Marriage | Welfare reforms of 1990s | Waivers and TANF reforms had no impact on marriage rates. |
| Schoeni & Blank (2000) | Current Population Survey | United States | Marriage | Welfare reforms of 1990s | Waivers and 1996 reforms reduced rates of sole parenthood and increased marriage rates. |
| Stagner et al (2003) | Meta-analysis | United States | Marriage | Mandatory work programmes | No evidence that mandatory work welfare programmes have a significant effect on rates of marriage, cohabitation, divorce, separation or widowhood. |

Most of the above research has focused on welfare recipients and those on low incomes. What about the impact of government policies on the employed? Alm et al (1999) propose that a marriage 'penalty' or 'subsidy' occurs when a change in marital status generates a change, negative or positive, in disposable income. In jurisdictions which tax couples as a joint unit, when people with similar earnings marry, their combined income pushes them into a higher tax bracket than they face as singles, and they pay correspondingly more tax with marriage. On the other hand, when two people with dissimilar incomes marry, the higher-earning person moves to a lower marginal tax bracket, thereby reducing the combined tax burden of the two parties. The magnitude of the effect depends on an array of specific tax features. Although variations in penalties across states are not great (Baker, Hanna & Kantarevic 2004) and may therefore limit effect sizes, an increased proportion of families in the US are facing a marriage penalty due to an increase in income equality between spouses (Alm et al 1999).

There is some evidence that marriage penalties do impact on rates of marriage. Alm and Whittington (1995) found that the aggregate marriage rate in the US fell as the average tax penalty increased, over the years 1947-88. This study was, however, limited to aggregate data, with limited control for possible confounding variables. These findings were reinforced by a follow-up study that used individual level longitudinal tax and income data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (Alm & Whittington 1999). In this study, the authors confirmed that the probability of marriage fell as the marriage

penalty increased, but found that this effect applied only to women and was relatively small. The authors calculate that a 10 percent rise in the average marriage penalty leads to a 2.3 percent reduction in the possibility of first marriage. Marriage penalties have also been shown to affect the timing of the marriage decision, although again the magnitude of effects is quite small (Alm & Whittington 1996). In this study, Alm and Whittington found that doubling the tax penalty increased the probability that a couple delayed their marriage until the next tax year by 1 percent.

Assessment of marriage penalties in the US is complicated, as those families paying the largest marriage penalties in the welfare system generally receive the largest marriage subsidies in the tax system (ie low-income families) (Alm et al 1999). This point is also made by Eissa & Hoynes (2000), who point out that evaluating the cost of the tax or transfer cost of marriage in isolation can be misleading, because the cost depends on both the income tax and welfare systems.

Eissa & Hoynes (2000) examined whether the propensity to marry rather than cohabit was affected by income tax and transfer penalties/subsidies, by using variations in the tax-cost of marriage over time and population survey data on married and cohabiting couples in the US, for the years 1985-1998. They found that there was a relationship between tax/transfer penalties and marriage rates, but that it was quite modest (a reduction in the marriage income tax penalty of $1,000 would raise the probability of marriage by 0.4 percent, while the addition of transfers increased marriage 'only slightly'). There was some variation in the effect across different ethnic and educational groups, with the marriage penalties having greatest effect on black women and the least educated. That is, black women and less well-educated women were less likely to marry if they were financially worse off by doing so. They also reported that the marriage behaviour of the young and childless was most responsive to the total tax-transfer cost.

At the lower end of the income scale the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is an important source of marriage non-neutrality in income tax in the US (Alm et al 1999). The EITC seeks to offer incentives to those on welfare to seek employment. Income from employment does not automatically reduce the amount of benefit received, making it worthwhile for those on welfare to increase their total income through work. However, as Ellwood (2000) points out, the EITC could potentially have both positive and negative impacts on marriage and dissolution, through the differential treatment of single vs. married individuals. For many working sole parents, the EITC creates marriage penalties by reducing credits as a result of combining couple incomes.

Ellwood (2000) examined the impact of the expansion of the EITC and welfare reform on labour supply, marriage and cohabitation. He used data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics for the years 1983 to 1991, examining marriages for 1,671 women in the sample. Estimates were then made of the tax penalties these women faced prior to marriage. He found that the "estimated impacts on marriage are small and ambiguous, though modest changes in cohabitation in the predicted direction suggest that the impact on family structure might become more apparent in the future" (p 1,063). That is, there was an increase in cohabitation that Ellwood attributed to the fact that these cohabiting couples faced a marriage penalty under the EITC. Unlike married couples, cohabiting couples are generally treated as single by the AFDC/TANF and tax system in the US. As the period studied did not include a short follow-up, Ellwood felt the changes in cohabitation might foreshadow longer-term changes in marriage.

Ellwood's (2000) findings suggest that although changes in the EITC sharply reduced marriage penalties, there was no dramatic increase in marriage rates or decrease in cohabitation rates among the lowest skilled single mothers. Consistent with Ellwood's

findings, Dickert-Conlin & Houser (2002) found no relationship between the EITC and marriage for unmarried women, leading them to conclude that the EITC expansions during the early- to mid-1990s had little or no effect on marriage decisions.

Researchers have also examined the relationship between sole parenthood and the introduction of work incentives through the tax/welfare system in Canada. Harknett & Gennetian (2003) conducted research on the effect of an earnings supplement on the union formation rates, both marriage and cohabitation, of single mothers. They analysed data for two provinces from an evaluation that employed a random allocation design. Their "findings showed that offering an earnings supplement to single mothers in place of welfare affected union formation, but that the direction of the effect varied by province" (p 474). For instance, in one province the supplement increased marriage rates and increased cohabitation rates slightly, while in another province the earnings supplement decreased marriage rates and had no effect on cohabitation. After discounting regional employment and income effects, and some individual characteristics, the researchers suggest that local contexts (eg culture and marital norms and the urbanisation of the two provinces) could be responsible for these differing results (Harknett & Gennetian 2003).

We found one non-US study of the impacts of tax penalties on marriage. Lopez-Laborda & Zarate-Marco (2004) recently examined the way in which the treatment of couples in the Spanish tax system impacted on the marriage rate. They examined changes in the tax system and in marriage rates across time series data from 1979-2001. They found, consistent with previous research, that the existence of an average marriage tax had reduced the marriage rate. Limitations of this study are the use of aggregate data, which hide variations in the size of marriage penalties and subsidies, and the relatively small number of observations in the analysis. However, the study controlled for a number of other factors, and was thus able to measure the relative effect of these factors in comparison with the tax effects. Overall, the authors concluded that tax does have an effect on decision to marry, "although the effect is highly reduced in comparison with the other variables" (p 120), such as unemployment and education levels.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF TAXATION POLICY ON PARTNERSHIP FORMATION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alm & Whittington (1995) | National data | United States | Marriage | Tax penalty | The aggregate marriage rate in the US fell as the average tax penalty increased. |
| Alm & Whittington (1999) | Panel Study of Income Dynamics | United States | Marriage | Tax penalty | Probability of marriage for women fell slightly as the marriage penalty increased. |
| Dickert-Conlin & Houser (2002) | Current Population Survey | United States | Marriage and cohabitation | EITC | EITC reforms which reduced marriage penalties had no impact on rates of marriage or cohabitation. |
| Eissa & Hoynes (2000) | Population survey data | United States | Marriage | Marriage income tax penalty | Reductions in marriage penalty resulted in a small increase in the probability of marriage. |
| Ellwood (2000) | Panel Study of Income Dynamics | United States | Marriage and cohabitation | EITC | EITC reforms which reduced marriage penalties were associated with a small rise in cohabitation levels. |
| Harknett & Gennetian (2003) | Provincial data | Canada | Union formation among single mothers | Earnings supplement | The earnings supplement had opposite effects on marriage rates in the two provinces studied. |
| Lopez-Laborda & Zarate-Marco (2004) | National data | Spain | Marriage | Tax marriage penalty | Existence of an average marriage tax associated with small reductions in marriage rates. |

The results of many of the above studies are likely to apply to those considering remarriage, or re-partnering. In fact many of the studies do not distinguish first from later marriages. However, there may be factors specific to those considering remarriage that mean government policies have different effects on this group.

The 1988 Department of Social Welfare review of research on the impact of the DPB in New Zealand concluded that, "We can say little on the effect of DPB provisions on decisions to remarry or enter a new relationship" (p 12). The review noted that many who took up the benefit quite quickly relinquished it in order to resume living with a former partner or establish a relationship with someone else, suggesting that the DPB did not strongly discourage reconstitution. The review concluded that the primary effect of welfare provisions on women as a whole was to reduce pressures to remarry in order to obtain financial support, rather than to provide incentives to separate. The review also cited US research by Rank (1987), who found no evidence that receiving a benefit discouraged remarriage.

The research reviewed above would suggest that tax and welfare policies may have an impact on remarriage decisions. However, empirical evidence in this area is highly limited. For example, Acs & Nelson (2001, 2003) examined changes in living arrangements using data from the National Survey of American Families for 1997-1999. They highlight the marriage incentive effects of the PRWORA reforms in those states where stepfathers' income and employment history are disregarded when determining mothers' eligibility for benefits. In these states mothers would not be penalised for marrying a new partner. They found that although the numbers of children living with a parent and their partner increased after the welfare reforms of 1996 (PRWORA), they could not attribute this to changes in eligibility rules for stepfamilies.

In a study examining the association between US welfare reforms and marriage, Cherlin and Fomby (2004) found that "going off TANF is associated with a higher probability of transitioning into marriage, relative to ending marriage" for the low-income people they surveyed (p 562). These transitions into marriage, for the most part, consisted of either marriage or cohabitation with a non-biological parent. However, the authors found that these unions were not that stable and approximately four in 10 had dissolved by the second wave of their study. The researchers could not determine the direction of causation between marriage and TANF receipt. Those marrying could decide to go off TANF in the expectation that their partner would support them, rather than leaving TANF increasing the probability of marriage.

In the US, marriage penalties also apply to those considering a remarriage. Brien, Dickert-Conlin, Weaver (2004) examined the remarriage decisions of older widows in response to a 1979 change in US pension entitlement law that effectively penalised those who remarried before turning 60. They found a drop in remarriage rates for those approaching 60, but an increased remarriage rate for those who had turned 60, suggesting that these women responded to economic incentives when considering the decision to remarry. Similarly, Baker et al (2004) examined the impact of reforms in the Canadian pension scheme on decisions to remarry. They examined remarriage rates after changes to the scheme, that allowed surviving spouses to keep their pensions when they remarried. The results showed a large and significant jump in remarriage rates of widows, that they attributed to the reforms. They also noted that these impacts were greater for those on higher incomes.[20]

[20] They also note that this may explain the limited impacts of marriage penalties found in previous research, as many of the studies have focused on low-income individuals.

In many countries (including New Zealand) non-resident parents are required to pay child support for their children. It has been suggested that this financial commitment may decrease the likelihood that these non-resident parents (usually men) re-partner. Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meyer, Seltzer (1998), in their review of US child support enforcement, concluded that increased child support enforcement did seem to reduce the likelihood of remarriage of non-resident fathers. Some further support for this conclusion comes from research by Bloom, Conrad, Miller (1996), using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, and Survey of Income and Program Participation. After controlling for individual and state-specific factors that might affect the probability of marriage, they examined the effect of child support enforcement and payment on the remarriage of low-income men. This study indicated that for low-income fathers, if child support enforcement increased by 10 percent, the annual possibility of remarriage decreased by up to 10 percent, thus supporting the hypothesis that child support obligations deter remarriage among low-income men.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACTS OF WELFARE, TAXATION AND CHILD SUPPORT POLICY ON RECONSTITUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acs & Nelson (2001, 2003) | National Survey of America's Families | United States | Living arrangements | Welfare reform of 1990s | Welfare reform did not explain increases in children living in stepfamilies. |
| Baker et al (2004) | National data | Canada | Remarriage | Marriage penalty in pension | Removal of marriage penalties in the Canadian pension scheme increased remarriage rates among widows. |
| Bloom et al (1996) | Survey of Income and Program Participation and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth | United States | Remarriage | Child support enforcement | Child support enforcement reduces the probability of remarriage for low-income men. |
| Brien et al (2004) | National statistics | United States | Remarriage | Pension entitlement | Economic disincentives in pension scheme influenced the timing of re-marriage among older widows. |
| Cherlin & Fomby (2004) | Survey data from Boston, Chicago and San Antonio | United States | Marriage | TANF | Marriage was associated with going off TANF but direction of causality unclear. |
| Department of Social Welfare (1988) | Review | | | DPB | No definitive research examining the relationship between the DPB and re-partnership. |
| Garfinkel et al (1998) | Review | United States | Remarriage | Child support | Child support seems to reduce the chance of remarriage of non-resident fathers. |

## SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the empirical evidence for the impact of government policies and services on partnership formation and reconstitution. It is clear, however, that the majority of research in this area has focused on married rather than cohabitating relationships.

In the US, welfare benefits have mainly been directed towards supporting sole parents with children. Research indicates that in this context, more generous welfare programmes are associated with higher rates of sole parenthood and lower marriage rates. There is, however, no consensus on the size of this association, and the magnitude of policy impact is estimated to be relatively small.

There have been a number of US studies investigating the impact of late 1980s state waivers and 1996 welfare reforms (TANF). These reforms, one of the goals of which was reducing sole parenthood and increasing marriage, produced mixed results. There is also evidence that effects varied across different population sub-groups. For sole parents already on the benefit, one study found the reforms actually decreased transitions into marriage, while other studies have found no significant impact on marriage rates.

In relation to specific aspects of the reforms, studies have found tentative evidence that reforms which assisted those on the benefit to move into paid work were associated with higher aggregate rates of marriage and a lower incidence of sole parenthood. However, evaluations of specific employment programmes and mandatory work policies have found no significant impacts on the marriage rates of participants. These findings indicate that the US welfare reforms may have influenced partnership formation primarily by discouraging pre-nuptial birth and fostering marriage among cohorts that had not yet entered the welfare system.

There is consistent evidence from the US that 'marriage penalties' in the tax and transfer system are associated with lower rates of marriage, although the magnitude is relatively small and may operate through changing the timing of marriage. Research has also examined the impact of changes to the Earned Income Tax Credit, which reduced marriage penalties for low-income couples in the US. The results of this research indicated little or no impact on marriage from these changes.

The results for the impact of child support policy on partnership formation and reconstitution are mixed. In addition, while child support levels may matter more than enforcement, the former have not been subject to robust evaluation. There is some evidence that stricter enforcement may discourage relationship formation amongst unwed mothers. Likewise, some research suggests that stronger child support enforcement may discourage remarriage for non-resident fathers.

There are very few high-quality studies that specifically examine the impacts of government policy on family reconstitution. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the relative scarcity of research on reconstituted families generally (at least until the last 10 years). However, some US and Canadian research indicates that economic disincentives and incentives within the social security system influence the timing and level of remarriage amongst widows.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# fertility decision-making and family size

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the issue of family size and the decision to have one or more children. The decision to have a child is a complex one, determined by a number of factors, some of which may be influenced by government policies and services. For example, fertility rates have been found to vary by factors such as income, cultural identity, age and marital status (Maynard, Boehnen, Corbett, Sandefer, Mosley 1998). The exact relationship between these factors and fertility is complex, and may vary over time and by country.

The wider economic environment appears to be one of the main determinants influencing the number of children people have, and the decision about whether or not to bear children at all. Fertility rates tend to rise in periods of poverty or war and decrease in times of abundance. Statistics New Zealand data indicate that this relationship explains a significant amount of twentieth-century fertility trends, including the post-depression baby boom and the more recent fall in fertility since the 1960s and 70s (Statistics New Zealand 2001).

The influence of economic conditions on fertility decision-making is borne out by a recent qualitative study conducted in Australia. The Australian Institute of Family Studies' Fertility Decision Making Project found that 'having kids' was still a priority for young Australians. However, individuals often wait until a number of 'preconditions' are met. These include having a suitable partner, and being in a secure financial position (Weston, Qu, Parker & Alexander 2004). The study concluded that the main way government influences fertility is through indirect means, such as helping to provide an economically secure environment.

Changes in fertility over the past century have generated a great deal of attention from demographers and social researchers. As McDonald (2005) recently stated, up until the 1950s the primary concern with population policy was the rapid growth in population. However, from the 1960s, attention has turned to low-fertilty rates, often below replacement, in many Western countries. With the lowering fertility rates in many Western countries during the 1970s-90s there has been growing interest in the role that government policy might play in increasing fertility, via what have been termed 'pro-natalist' policies.[21]

The literature in this area is very large, and so it was decided early on to use the comprehensive reviews already available, including those by Sleebos (2003); Grant, Hoorens, Sivadasan, van het Loo, Da Vanzo, Hale, Gibson, Butz (2004); and Gauthier (2001). Despite the quantity of research, there is, however, still disagreement between experts on the balance of the evidence, as is shown by the title of a session at a recent international population conference – "Debate: Will policies to raise fertility in low-fertility countries work?" (XXV Conference of International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 2005).

The issue of the link between government policies and fertility has received considerable attention in recent years; partly in response to the realisation that falling fertility has important implications for a country's future. For example, Sleebos (2003:11) notes that potential impacts include:

> lower growth in the working age population leading to reduced GDP

> declining income per capita

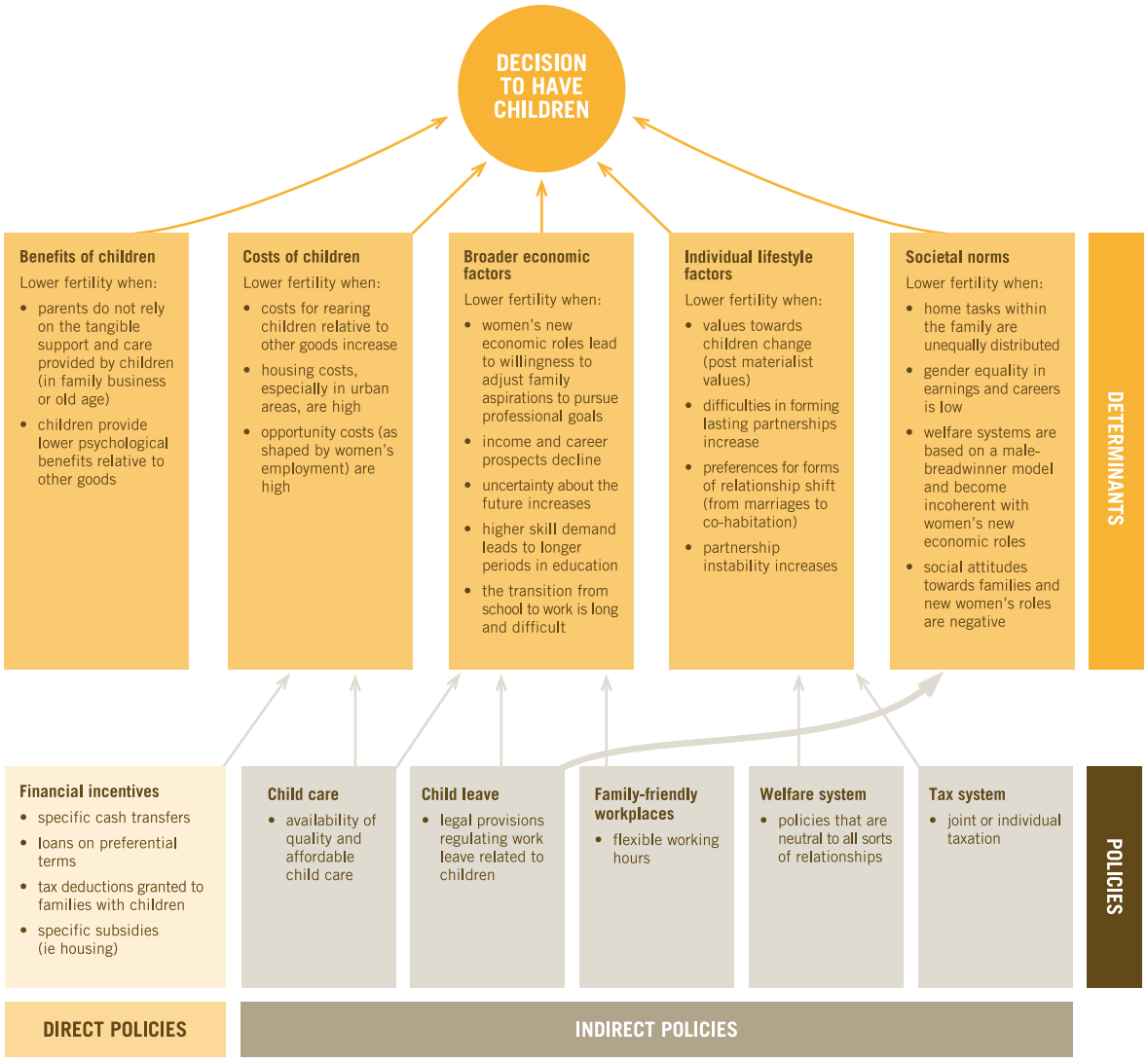
[21] Grant et al (2004) distinguish implicit policy measures from explicit population policy, the latter representing 'pro-natalist policy'. With relatively high fertility rates by OECD standards, New Zealand has not had an explicit 'pro-natalist' policy agenda.

> fewer workers supporting pensions for more older retirees
> lower domestic savings
> more people with no, or few, immediate family ties
> changes in intergenerational ties, with more grandparents and fewer grandchildren
> shift in political balance between older and younger generations.

There have been efforts to explain the demographic changes that have occurred in the last 30 years, including the decrease in fertility, and the role of government policies in these changes. Researchers have tried to capitalise on the fact that many of these demographic changes have occurred at different rates, and to varying degrees, amongst countries with differing policies and degrees of support for families. By examining, for example, fertility rates and governmental support for families across countries, researchers hope to isolate the role of policies in relation to these changes.

A model of the ways, both directly and indirectly, that government policies and services might impact on fertility decisions was developed by Sleebos (2003), and is presented in Figure 2. It contains elements of an economic model (eg Becker 1973), but also includes individual and social factors. A range of policies is proposed to have direct and indirect impacts on these determinants.

**FIGURE 2 MODEL OF REPRODUCTIVE DECISIONS: PROXIMATE DETERMINANTS AND POLICY MEASURES**




From: Sleebos (2003)

Much of the research on the link between government policy and fertility has been based on Becker's (1973) economic theory of the family, as outlined previously. According to Becker's theory, the demand for children is a function of individual preferences at a given income level, and of the costs of raising children. Parents are concerned with both the number of children they have and the 'quality' of their children (eg in terms of education and health). Thus, increasing income may lead to more children, but it may also result in parents substituting quality for quantity, resulting in falling fertility. The cost of raising children is also important in this model, particularly the opportunity cost of parental time, and most particularly in the opportunity cost of the mother's time. "Hence, as labour market opportunities expand for women during the process of economic development, the cost of raising children increases" (Grant et al 2004).

Government measures that lead to a reduction in the cost of children can therefore be expected to have a positive effect on fertility. Measures may be aimed at the direct cost of children (ie direct expenditure, eg on food and education) and/or the opportunity cost of children (ie foregone earnings incurred by the main caregiver withdrawing from the labour market). The direct effect of policies in areas such as taxation and social assistance, childcare and parental leave are, however, likely to vary across different family groups. For example, the unemployed may be particularly affected by welfare benefits, compared with the highly paid, who may be more affected by maternity leave entitlements.

One of the more direct methods by which government policy may potentially impact on family size is through the provision of family allowances, either as a universal payment or as part of the taxation system. These payments may also distinguish between a first child and subsequent children. Although their main purpose is to provide financial assistance to parents raising children, they have been used in some countries (eg France) in an explicit attempt to boost fertility. Research has also investigated the impact on fertility of benefits for sole parents, with some arguing that such benefits encourage ex-nuptial births (Morgan 2004). Child Support legislation and enforcement may also impact on the likelihood of having further children. For example, non-resident parents who are paying child support for their children may be less likely to feel they can financially support an additional child.

The impact of government financial support and taxation polices has been widely researched and this research is reviewed in detail in the next section. It should also be noted that, in addition to policies that directly influence the costs of raising children, other government policies and services, across a wide range of areas, have an indirect effect on the living standards of families with dependent children. These include education, medical and dental services, public transport and recreation services such as sporting, entertainment, leisure or artistic activities (Sleebos 2003).

Policies affecting the care and wellbeing of older people may also have an impact on fertility decisions (Sleebos 2003). While traditionally children were seen as having a role in providing support for their elderly parents, the introduction of comprehensive pension schemes and the expansion of government services to support older people may have diminished this as a factor in the decision to have children. For women, the extent to which employment interruptions impact on levels of pension entitlement may also influence their fertility decisions. Sleebos (2003) cites data that indicate a weak relationship between a country's relative income to the elderly (income of those 65 years plus relative to that of those aged 18-64) and total fertility for that country. This suggests that if pensions are a factor they are unlikely to be a strong one.

Policies that affect youth transitions into paid work, education or training may also have an indirect effect on fertility outcomes. A number of commentators have suggested that the difficulties youth face in their transition from school to work and to independent living may contribute to delayed fertility and family formation (Grant et al 2004; Sleebos 2003). Achieving financial independence generally relies on stable employment, and will be influenced by factors such as the cost of housing and accommodation. It follows that in countries with a severe housing shortage, giving priority to parents with children when allocating apartments could encourage further births. There has been some research that has linked the lack of suitable and affordable housing, particularly in urban areas, to the timing of couples' decisions to have children. For example Ermisch (1988) found that higher house prices resulted in women postponing starting a family, although they did not affect higher order births. However, there have been very few studies of the impact of policies such as these on fertility and such evidence is indicative only (Grant et al 2004).

There has been recent debate in New Zealand regarding the impact of the student loans scheme. The University Students Association Income and Expenditure Survey (2004) of 3,969 students in public tertiary institutions found that 60 percent of female respondents said that their student loan would have an impact on their decision to have children. Twenty-eight percent said that they would not have children until they were debt free. However, it needs to be noted that these surveys do not measure actual childbearing and family formation behaviours. Moreover, even if students' beliefs about the potential impact of student loans on their subsequent behaviours are borne out in practice, the overall impact may be more on the timing of childbearing rather than on completed fertility.

The relationship between women's educational attainment, labour market participation and fertility has been a focus of much attention. For example, McDonald (2005) notes the negative correlation between fertility and a woman's educational status. According to Grant et al (2004), "the main explanation for this is the effect that higher education has in increasing the value of women's time and their labour market opportunities, thereby increasing the opportunity costs of their time spent doing household activities and raising children" (p 22). Increasingly, women tend to delay childbearing until the completion of their education and full integration into the labour market (Sleebos 2003). Such patterns do vary, however, by population sub-group, with highly educated professional women tending to delay childbearing compared with the young relatively uneducated, who tend not to delay (Pool & Sceats 2003).

There is debate as to the extent to which these changes in labour force and education participation can explain changes in total fertility, as their impact may be more in terms of delaying childbirth. For example, Sleebos (2003) points to recent data that bring into question the role of education and employment in fertility decisions. While, in 1980, fertility was higher in countries where women's employment rate and educational attainment were lower, the same relations were reversed by 1999 (see also Apps & Rees 2004). Recent discussions (eg Castles 2003) have interpreted these findings as reflecting changing preferences. According to this interpretation, from the 1980s onwards, more women wished to combine paid work with raising children. It followed that countries with good work-life balance policies experienced both high labour-force participation among women, and increases in fertility. On the other hand, countries lacking these policies forced women to make choices between paid work and having children, with lower fertility – and lower labour market participation – as a result.

Since many more women are now in paid employment (including mothers of young children), the nature of the work environment is often considered a key influence on fertility rates (Rindfuss & Brewster 1996). Factors such as work hours, flexible work,

leave provisions, parental leave, and 'family-friendly' workplaces have been suggested as influencing fertility, and there is an increasing body of research on these various policies. Employment legislation that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender or family status may also have an impact on fertility, with greater security of employment potentially fostering to more childbearing.

Immigration policy is another area of government activity that is frequently mentioned as playing a role in influencing national fertility rates, due to the higher fertility levels of some immigrant groups (Sleebos 2003). However, fertility rates of immigrant groups tend to converge with those of the destination country within a few generations. In addition, any potential impact would depend on factors such as the size of the annual flows, the nationality of immigrants, and the labour force participation of their foreign-born spouses. With the current numbers of immigrants to New Zealand, the influence of immigration on fertility is likely to be very small.

Government legislation and funding for various birth control services, abortion, contraception and sterilisation all have a direct impact on women's ability to control their fertility with potential flow-on impacts for family size. Much research has focused on the impact of abortion laws on fertility outcomes, although it has to be acknowledged that there is a complex relationship between abortion and contraception, which makes accurate behavioural predications difficult.

Recent years have also seen a growth in the development and use of new birth technologies such as IVF. These can be very expensive procedures, and are in some cases subsidised by government (in New Zealand two cycles of treatment are funded by government for couples with a medically diagnosed reason for their infertility). In a small qualitative study of 11 couples undergoing medically assisted conception in New Zealand, Baker (2004) found that some couples discontinued treatment because they could not pay and were not eligible for further government funding. However, we have found no systematic study of the impact of government policy in this area, and the impact on overall fertility rates of IVF policy and practice is likely to be minimal.

There is a range of additional social and cultural factors that may impact on fertility. For example, the value placed on children by a society may be important, as may the degree to which a society places value on individualism and self-reliance, the extent of gender equity in a society, and levels of uncertainty in the labour market and in relationships (McDonald 2005). In particular, economic or relationship instability may lead to more cautious decision-making in relation to childbearing. Many of these factors may be difficult to change through direct or indirect government actions.

Finally, it also needs to be noted that most children are born to a couple relationship. Factors associated with relationship formation, dissolution and reconstitution will therefore indirectly impact on fertility and family size. To examine these impacts is particularly challenging, but indicates the complex ways in which policy may impact on one aspect of family form through its impact on other aspects.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

One way of exploring the impact of government policy on fertility decision-making and family size, has been to examine the levels of support for families with dependent children in different countries, and any association with fertility rates. Many of the studies in this area are weak, relying on associations or correlations between variables that leave open questions of causality and the direction of influence. In several cases the findings presented are less than definitive and should be considered as indicative

only. In presenting these studies we have placed greater emphasis on those with more robust controls for confounding variables, and which provide stronger evidence of causal policy impact.

Bradshaw and Finch's (2002) study of child benefit packages[22] in 22 countries found a positive relationship between fertility rates and the generosity of child benefit packages, in the majority of countries studied. They conclude that "it is generally the case that countries with more generous child benefit packages have higher fertility and those with little or no support for child-rearing costs have the lowest" (p 182). Interestingly, both New Zealand and the United States were outliers, with relatively poor child benefit packages and relatively high fertility rates. The authors explain this finding as due to the role of minority ethnic populations in pushing up the fertility rates in these two countries.[23] Bradshaw & Finch (2002:182) recognise, however, that their study "tells us nothing about the causal direction of this relationship". It is quite possible that countries introduce more generous benefit levels because they have high fertility rates. It is necessary, therefore, to consider well-designed studies that are able to provide a much greater degree of explanatory power.

One of the most direct paths by which government may influence fertility and family size is through financial assistance to parents of children, either in the form of lump sums or as a payment over time. Sleebos (2003) reports that across countries the level of these family cash benefits tends to be positively related to total fertility rates, but that this relationship is weak. An early study examining these impacts was that of Blanchet & Ekert-Jaffe (1994) who examined the relationship between an index of the generosity of family policies and fertility in 11 countries. They found that over the period 1970-83, family policies had a positive and significant effect on fertility (as, they cite, had Ekert (1986) using similar data and analysis methods on eight countries).

More robust analysis of the impact of cross-country variation in financial assistance to families with dependent children and fertility is contained in the widely cited study conducted by Gauthier & Hatzius (1997). Their regression analysis was based on differences and similarities across countries in the levels of government support for families, in 22 industrialised countries (including New Zealand) for the period 1970-90. They considered cash benefits (family allowances) and maternity leave (length and level) simultaneously, but omitted benefits related to childcare, housing, education, and health, low-income and lone parent benefits.[24] The study found that maternity pay had no apparent effect on fertility levels, but that the provision of higher cash benefits to families with dependent children had a positive and significant effect on fertility. Further, the effect of cash benefits was greater for the first child compared with the effect for subsequent children.

According to Gauthier & Hatzius (1997), the size of the effect of cash benefits on fertility was, however, very small. Based on international trends, they estimated that a 25 percent increase in cash benefits would increase fertility by 0.56 percent, or 0.1 children per woman in the short run, and 0.07 children in the long run. Interestingly, when they examined the effect of cash benefits for different groups of countries, the group including New Zealand was the one group where this relationship did not hold. Cash benefits had no effect on fertility in these countries, which Gauthier & Hatzius attribute

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22 The child benefit packages included in this analysis included income tax benefits, social security contributions, non-income-tested cash benefits, income-tested child cash benefit, rent benefits, local taxes, childcare costs, school costs/benefits and guaranteed child support in each of the countries considered.

23 In contrast, Pool (2005) suggests that ethnic differences in fertility do not contribute greatly to total fertility rates.

24 Included in the regression analysis was the monthly cash benefit amount received by a one-child, two-child and three-child family. These variables were divided by the average monthly men's wage in manufacturing in each country to obtain a relative benefit measure.

to the 'private responsibility' model of the family operating in these countries (ie state support for families in these countries is generally limited and targeted towards families in greater need).

Using panel data from 16 OECD countries, for the period 1980-99, d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005) examined the impact of a wide range of policy and demographic variables on changes in fertility rates. They found that "fertility rates increase with higher cash transfers to families, higher replacement wages during parental leave, higher female employment rates and higher shares of women working part-time" (d'Addio & d'Ercole 2005:63). They conclude that measures that reduce the direct cost of children and support mothers to better reconcile paid work and family life can help to remove obstacles to childbearing. However, the study also found that fertility rates "decline with higher unemployment rates and opportunity costs for mothers [male vs. female wage gap], and longer parental leave" (p 63). They interpret the results with regard to unemployment as indicating that the resulting income uncertainty is an important concern for those considering having a child.[25] The authors do, however, qualify all of these findings by noting that the study used aggregate data which may hide individual and population sub-group differences. In addition, d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005) recognise "the difficulty in considering the full range of factors that may contribute to cross-country differences in the levels and changes in fertility rates in OECD countries" (p 69).

**TABLE OF STUDIES – CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISONS OF THE IMPACT OF POLICY PACKAGES ON FERTILITY**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blanchet & Ekert-Jaffe (1994) | National data | Cross-country comparison | Fertility | Range of family policies | More generous policies for families with dependent children associated with slightly higher fertility rates. |
| Bradshaw & Finch (2002) | National data | Cross-country comparison | Fertility | Child benefit package | Countries with higher child benefit packages tend to have higher fertility rates. No controls for direction of causality. |
| d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005) | National data | Cross-country comparison – OECD | Fertility | Range of family policies | Higher cash transfers for families with dependent children and higher replacement wages during maternity leave foster slightly higher fertility rates. |
| Gauthier & Hatzius (1997) | National data | Cross-country comparison | Fertility | Cash benefits and maternity leave | Higher cash transfers for families with dependent children associated with small increases in fertility in most countries. New Zealand was an exception to the trend. |
| Gauthier (2001) | Review | International | Fertility | 'Pro-natalist' policies | More generous policies for families with dependent children associated with slightly higher fertility rates. Impact possibly on timing rather than total fertility. |
| Grant et al (2004) | Review | International | Fertility | Range of family policies | More generous policies for families with dependent children associated with slightly higher fertility rates. Packages of policies may have more impact than individual policies. |
| Sleebos (2003) | Review | International – OECD | Fertility | Generosity of family policies | Mixed findings. Small positive impact of more generous cash benefits on fertility. |

[25] Longer parental leave was associated with lower fertility and the authors are unsure why this should be so, although they note that previous research has not been consistent on its effect.

In addition to the above studies, which are based on international comparisons of policy settings and fertility rates, researchers have also investigated the relationship between specific changes to tax or social assistance policies and fertility trends at a national or regional level.

In Canada, Milligan (2005) examined the impact of the introduction in 1988, by the Quebec Government, of a non-taxable 'baby-bonus' of CA$375 for parents upon the birth of their first and second child, and CA$3,000 for the third and each subsequent child disbursed as an advance on income tax credits. Payments were made annually until the child began school. The programme was stopped in 1997. Milligan used vital statistics and micro-data from the census for the period 1980-97, enabling him to control for a number of state and individual characteristics. He used regression analysis to control for confounders and any existing trends in fertility. Fertility was found to increase as a result of the policy, with an estimated average increase in fertility of 12 percent. In order to reconcile these results with previous research on the impact of AFDC (reviewed later in this chapter), Milligan analysed the response of specific sub-groups. Groups similar to those used in previous research (ie young single mothers) were found to be unresponsive to the baby-bonus payments. On the other hand, those with higher incomes were most responsive to the bonuses. Mulligan noted that due to the time period of the policy implementation, it is not possible to determine if it led to a temporary shift in fertility, or to a real increase in total fertility.

In the United States, Whittington (1993) used data from the Panel Study on Income Dynamics to examine the relationship between the changing tax value of state and federal exemptions for dependents, and the fertility choices of 229 married couples. She found that the federal exemptions had a significant and positive impact on differential period fertility, but that the (much smaller) state income tax exemptions did not.[26] Whittington concluded that, depending on their size, income tax exemptions for dependants did play a role in the fertility decisions of couples. Her findings also indicated that the generosity of these exemptions is an important factor determining their level of impact.

This result is consistent with the aggregate findings of Whittington, Alm & Peters (1990) who found a significant positive relationship between the average tax value of the federal dependency exemption and the general fertility rate in the US for the period 1913-84. They are also consistent with Whittington's (1992) findings regarding a sample of 294 US families. She found that during the 1979-83 period there was a positive relationship between observed births and the level of federal tax exemptions. However, the mechanism through which tax exemptions influence fertility remains uncertain. Whittington (1993) concludes that tax exemptions may operate to influence the timing of births, with couples choosing the ideal year in which to have a child partially based on the size of the tax subsidy for that child, or they may lead to an actual increase in the number of children born.

The effect of tax-transfer policies on fertility in Canada was assessed by Zhang, Quan Van Meerbergen (1994) using a similar empirical model to Whittington et al (1990). They examined the impact of tax exemptions for children, child tax credits, family allowances and maternity leave, on fertility in Canada using time series data for the period 1921-88. As well as these policy variables they controlled for a number of other factors that might affect demand for and supply of children, such as immigration, wages, infant mortality, female education and the advent of widely available birth control (as also had Whittington et al 1990). They report that tax exemptions, child tax credits,

[26] The federal tax exemption was almost six times the value of state exemptions.

and family allowances each have a significant and positive effect on fertility, although the effects are small. The authors calculate that the family allowance benefit would have to increase from $389 to $1,982 (1988 value) to boost fertility to replacement levels (2.1 children per woman from 1.7). Further analysis indicates that it is the cumulative effect of these components on fertility that is particularly important, with "individuals concerned only with the cumulative value of programs" (p 197).

The above studies support Sleebos' (2003) review of international literature, which concluded that tax and social assistance policies that reduce the direct costs of children have a small but positive influence on the total fertility rate. In addition to direct financial assistance to families with dependent children, government policies may also influence fertility through alternative forms of support, for example, the provision of maternity, parental and childcare leave, childcare provision, or labour market policies (eg flexible working hours). Sleebos' (2003) review also reported a weak positive relationship between broad work and family reconciliation policies and fertility. However, as shown below, the results of various studies are often contradictory.

Gauthier and Hatzius (1997) found that neither the duration nor the benefits provided by maternity leave explained much of the variation in total fertility rates across OECD countries over the period 1970-90. In contrast, a later study examining trends over 1980-99 found that more generous parental leave payments were associated with increased fertility in a range of European countries, while the length of the parental leave was associated with a decline in fertility (d'Addio & d'Ercole 2005).[27] Buttner and Lutz (1990), using time series data, reported that maternity leave entitlements had a positive effect on fertility in the German Democratic Republic in the 1970s. In Sweden, Hoem (1993) examined whether birth rates were responsive to parental leave policies, and found that the introduction of more generous entitlements in the 1980s had a positive impact on the total fertility rate.

Canadian studies have generated mixed findings. Hyatt & Milne (1991) examined the impact of maternity benefits and family allowance/child tax credits on official fertility statistics in Canada, for the period 1948-86. Although they attempted to control for the labour market behaviour of women, their analysis is limited by the absence of control for potentially confounding variables, such as changing preferences. Their study concluded that government policies that reduced the cost of childbearing, including maternity benefits, had a small but significant effect on fertility. According to their data a 1 percent increase in maternity benefits would result in a 0.26 percent increase in fertility. In contrast, the study cited above by Zhang et al (1994) found that maternity benefits had no apparent effect on fertility in Canada over the period 1921-88. This finding may, however, relate to the relatively low level and take-up of this form of assistance. Uptake of these maternity benefits was estimated to be only 50 percent, and the benefit level limited to 60 percent of mothers' usual earnings for up to 15 weeks.

Childcare policies and services provide another mechanism through which government may influence fertility. By subsidising childcare costs and boosting childcare availability, it is possible to lower the costs of children and reduce the competing demands of childcare and employment. A number of studies have found a small, but positive, association between fertility rates and childcare provision, at both an international, national and regional level (eg Del Boca 2002; Sleebos 2003; Rindfuss & Brewster 1996; Kravdal 1996). For example, Castles' (2003) analysis of family-friendly policies in 21 OECD countries found that the average level of formal childcare provision[28] had

[27] They consider this last finding puzzling but believe it is a function of the availability of alternative childcare and that the length and payment level need to be considered together.

[28] Such provision is not necessarily publicly funded. Cost is clearly another important factor, but different funding mechanisms across OECD countries make this more difficult to assess in cross-country comparisons.

a significant and positive relationship with fertility rates, once a range of policy and confounding variables were considered. The correlation with family-friendly workplace policies was lower (eg flexible work hours), but still significant.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF SPECIFIC 'FAMILY-FRIENDLY' POLICIES ON FERTILITY**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buttner & Lutz (1990) | Official statistics | German Democratic Republic | Fertility | Policy changes including maternity leave, 1972 and 1976 | More generous maternity leave associated with rise in fertility. |
| Castles (2003) | National level | Cross-country comparison | Fertility | Formal childcare provision | Small but significant positive relationship between childcare provision and fertility. |
| d'Addio & d'Ercole (2005) | National data | Cross-country – OECD | Fertility | Paid parental leave | Higher replacement wages during maternity leave associated with higher fertility. Longer periods of maternity leave associated with slightly lower fertility. |
| Gauthier & Hatzius (1997) | National data | Cross-country – International | Fertility | Maternity pay | Maternity pay was not related to fertility. |
| Hoem (1993) | Official statistics | Sweden | Parity-specific birth rate | Parental leave policy | Positive impact of more generous parental leave provisions on fertility rate. |
| Hyatt & Milne (1991) | National data | Canada | Fertility | Maternity benefits | Maternity benefits had a small but significant positive effect on fertility. |
| Kravdal (1996) | Family and occupation survey | Norway | Probability of 1st, 2nd and 3rd birth | Daycare facilities | Provision of daycare facilities had weak positive effect on fertility. |
| Milligan (2005) | National data and micro-data | Quebec – Canada | Fertility | Cash payments for children | Fertility increased in response to a baby bonus payment in Quebec. |
| Rindfuss & Brewster (1996) | County level | North Carolina – US | Number of 1-2-year-olds in county | Daycare centres and homes | Limited evidence that childcare provision increased fertility. |
| Whittington et al (1990) | Official aggregate data | United States | Fertility | Tax exemption for dependants | Significant positive relationship between the average tax value of the federal dependency exemption and the general fertility rate. |
| Whittington (1992, 1993) | Panel Survey of Income Dynamics | United States | Fertility | Tax exemption for dependants | Higher tax exemption for dependants associated with increased fertility. |
| Zhang et al (1994) | National data | Canada | Fertility | Tax exemption, child tax credit, family allowances and maternity leave | Tax exemption, child tax credit and family allowances all had a small positive effect on fertility. Maternity leave was unrelated to fertility. |

There are a small number of studies that examine the relationship between child support enforcement and fertility in the United States. One such study, conducted by Aizer and McLanahan (2005) observed the effect of state child support enforcement spending on non-marital births, using national longitudinal data. Speaking to their results they state "[though] sample sizes prevent us from obtaining precise estimates, the hazard models do suggest that the probability that single women will have a child in a given year, conditional on not having had a child to date, is lower in states that spend more on child support enforcement" (Aizer & McLanahan 2005:9).

Garfinkel et al (2003) find similar results in their examination of the effects of child support on the non-marital birth rate. They look at child support in terms of three indicators: the average child support payment per mother; the rate of paternity

establishment; and the rate of collection. Their hypothesis, "that stricter child support lowers non-marital birthrates by raising the cost of fatherhood for men" was confirmed (Garfinkel et al 2003:67). However, while this study contained controls for state differences, the authors caution against an interpretation of definitive causation.

In terms of fertility after union separation, a study done by Bloom et al (1996) found that strict child support enforcement was negatively related to the probability of subsequent non-marital births for low-income fathers. This finding was reinforced by Garfinkel et al (1998) in their review of US child support enforcement. Bloom et al (1996) also found that strict child support enforcement appeared to lower remarriage rates among low-income men, but that did not appear to affect the subsequent fertility of fathers who did remarry.

**TABLE OF STUDIES: IMPACT OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ON FERTILITY**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aizer & McLanahan (2005) | National longitudinal data (Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study) | United States | Non-marital births | Child support enforcement | Higher state spending in child support enforcement lowers the chances of a single woman having a child. |
| Bloom et al (1996) | Survey of Income & Program Participation & National Longitudinal Survey of Youth | United States | Fertility | Child support enforcement | Child support enforcement reduces non-marital births for low-income fathers, but has no effect on subsequent fertility of fathers who remarry. |
| Garfinkel et al (2003) | Sample of 867 observations across 50 states | United States | Non-marital birth rate | Child support enforcement | Strict child support enforcement associated with lower non-marital birth rate. |

In addition to studies that assess the impact of general taxation and social assistance policies designed to support families with dependent children, there are a number of studies which investigate the relationship between welfare benefits and subsequent fertility levels of sole parents who are not in paid work. In the US, overt policy attention has been given to policies designed to reduce fertility amongst beneficiaries, through means such as family caps. Some states impose family caps on welfare benefits, in an effort to reduce fertility by means of financial penalties. If a mother on welfare has another child while on welfare, her family's benefits do not rise to reflect the increase in family size. The overall findings from these US studies assessing welfare benefit levels and family caps are mixed.

A number of studies have found no relationship between benefit level or receipt and fertility among existing sole parent beneficiaries. For example, Duncan & Hoffman (1990) found that the receipt of AFDC benefits was not associated with the probability of teenage ex-nuptial birth. In addition, several studies have concluded that AFDC benefit level changes did not impact on the likelihood that single mothers would have additional births (eg Acs 1996; Grogger & Bronars 2001; Fairlie & London 1997; Robins & Fronstin 1996). For example, Acs (1996) used data on young mothers (under 23 years old) from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-88). He concluded that variations in "welfare benefit levels and the incremental benefit had no statistically significant impacts on the subsequent childbearing decisions of young mothers" (Acs 1996:898).

Robins & Fronstin (1996) studied the association between levels of AFDC and family size using Current Population Survey data for the years 1980-88. They found that the basic benefit level positively influenced family size for white and Hispanic women, and high school drop-outs, but not for black women or high school graduates. In reviewing

this and other research Robins & Fronstin concluded that the "the results of previous studies have been mixed, but generally indicate no direct relationship between AFDC benefit levels (or differentials) and family size" (p 14). Levine (2002) also found mixed results regarding welfare benefit levels and fertility. Although his results indicated that more generous benefits were associated with increases in births, a detailed breakdown of the results did "not strongly support a causal interpretation".

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF WELFARE BENEFIT LEVELS ON FERTILITY OF BENEFICIARIES**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acs (1996) | National Longitudinal Survey of Youth | United States | Second births | Family caps and benefit levels | Welfare benefit levels and family caps had a negligible impact on fertility. |
| Duncan & Hoffman (1990) | National data | United States | Teenage ex-nuptial birth | Receipt of AFDC | Receipt of AFDC benefits not associated with probability of an ex-nuptial birth. |
| Levine (2002) | State-level data | United States | Birth and pregnancy outcomes | Benefit levels, including family caps, welfare waivers and abortion policy | More generous benefits associated with increases in births, but no strong causal connection. |
| Robins & Fronstin (1996) | Current Population Survey | United States | Non-marital births | Benefit levels and differentials for extra children | No direct relationship between welfare benefit and fertility. Higher benefit levels associated with slight increases in family size for high school drop-outs, white and hispanic women. |

The relationship between family caps and fertility patterns is less clear. Horvath-Rose and Peters (2001) used state-level administrative data for 1984-96 to compare non-marital and marital fertility across states with and without family caps. They controlled for a number of possible confounding variables (eg poverty rates, number of abortion providers, religious 'fundamentalism', urbanisation). They examined the impact of these factors on the ratio of marital to non-marital births in the state, both to teenagers (15-19-year-olds) and post-teens. They found that family caps dampened non-marital fertility, with an estimated 5 percent reduction in the ratio of marital to non-marital births for teens and a 3 percent reduction for post-teens.

The ratio of marital to non-marital births does not itself provide any indication of potential policy impact of family caps on levels of sole parent families, or of subsequent fertility rates among the existing beneficiary population. Studies examining the impact of family caps on the fertility of sole parents on benefit report mixed findings. For example, Dyer & Fairlie (2004) compared states with caps (Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, New Jersey and Virginia) with states without family caps, using population survey data from 1979-89. They found no evidence that family cap policies reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock births among single, less-educated women with children. According to Dyer and Fairlie, "the effects of family cap policies on fertility may be limited because incremental benefit levels are substantially lower than the estimated costs of raising a child, many welfare spells are short, the importance of non-pecuniary factors, the unanticipated nature of some pregnancies, and the partial offsetting of lost benefits from Food Stamp and Medicaid benefits" (p 470).

Experimental evaluations of family caps include Camasso, Harvey, Jagannathan, Killingsworth (1998) who found that the birth rate was lower among those subject to family caps in New Jersey. There is, however, some debate about the interpretation of these results. For example, Jagannathan et al (2004) note problems with control group contamination, differential attrition, compliance with experimental conditions

and interfering treatments, and biases due to randomisation and the omission of entry effects. On the other hand Fein (2001) found that the 'A Better Chance' programme in Delaware produced little effect on marriage or fertility, and Turturro, Benda & Turney (1997) found no impact of a family cap in Arkansas. These results also led Acs & Nelson (2001) to conclude that the empirical evidence of the effect of family cap policies on fertility is mixed.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF US FAMILY CAPS ON FERTILITY OF SOLE PARENTS ON BENEFIT**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Camasso et al (1998) | Experimental evaluation | New Jersey – United States | Birth rate | Family caps | Birth rate was significantly lower among those subject to family caps. |
| Dyer & Fairlie (2004) | Current Population Survey | United States | Non-marital fertility | Family caps | No evidence that family caps reduced the incidence of out-of-wedlock births among single, less-educated women with children. |
| Fairlie & London (1997) | Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Second births | Family caps and benefit levels | Family caps had negligible impact on fertility among sole mothers on benefit. |
| Fein (2001) | Experimental evaluation | Delaware – United States | Fertility | Family caps | No impact of family caps on fertility. |
| Horvath-Rose & Peters (2001) | State data | United States | Non-marital to marital fertility ratio | Family caps | Family caps associated with a decrease in the ratio of non-marital to marital fertility. |
| Turturro et al (1997) | Experimental evaluation | Arkansas – United States | Fertility | Family caps | No impact of family caps on fertility. |

Programmes and services have also been developed to reduce fertility amongst teenage and sole parent mothers. There have been a number of studies of the efficacy of these programmes, although many have focused on sexual behaviour rather than pregnancy, as their main outcome measure.

In a recent paper Kirby (2001) undertook a review of the empirical evaluative literature on primary teen pregnancy prevention programmes; that is, those programmes designed to deter a first pregnancy among teens. He reviewed 250 empirical evaluations on such programmes in Canada and the US, which met a number of criteria including the use of an experimental design and a sample size of 100 or more. The research he uncovered examined programmes falling into three main categories: "those that focus on sexual antecedents, those that focus on non-sexual antecedents, and those that do both" (p 6). Kirby found that all three programme types have the potential to reduce teen pregnancy and, based on his findings, recommends programmes that focus on both abstinence and contraception issues.

In keeping with the above, a recent comprehensive United Kingdom review of the research evidence on teenage pregnancy and parenthood (Swan, Bowe, McCormick & Kosmin 2003:3) concluded:

Good (strong evidence contained in category 1 or 2 reviews) evidence was found for the effectiveness of the following interventions aimed at preventing unintended teenage pregnancies:

- School-based sex education, particularly linked to contraceptive services (measured against knowledge, attitudes, delaying sexual activity and/or reducing pregnancy rates)
- Community based (eg family or youth centres) education, development and contraceptive services
- Youth development programmes: although the evidence base for this was small, reviews indicate that programmes focusing on personal development (programmes that support and teach confidence, self esteem, negotiation skills), education and vocational development may increase contraceptive use and reduce pregnancy rates
- Family outreach: some good evidence was found for the effectiveness of including teenagers' parents in information and prevention programmes.

Maynard et al (1998) reviewed a number of US programmes targeted at reducing fertility amongst teenage parents. These programmes often included a number of elements, eg employment training and health education, aimed at assisting young mothers to control their fertility. However, only two of the eight programmes reviewed were successful in reducing repeat pregnancy rates, with rates increasing in two other programmes. The successful programmes were health-focused and involved home visits by trained social workers. Some of the less successful programmes resulted in increased childbearing through the reduction in use of abortion, which the authors associated with the philosophies of programme staff (eg policy of not referring for abortion).

Loury (2000) also examined the impact of several programmes designed to reduce subsequent pregnancies for women on welfare. He found that home visitation by nurses was a successful measure in reducing subsequent pregnancies in two instances. The first programme evaluated was implemented in a semi-rural community in New York state and had 400 mothers enrolled. Eighty-five percent of the mothers were either low-income, unmarried or teenagers. After three years the women in this programme had 42 percent fewer births than those in the control group. Another, similar programme was started in Tennessee with similar results. Possible explanations for these results include the emphasis on family planning from the nurses involved in the programme, as well as the comfort with which the nurses were able to give explicit, frank advice about contraception (Loury 2000).

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF PREGNANCY PREVENTION PROGRAMMES ON FERTILITY**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kirby (2001) | Review | United States and Canada | Teen pregnancy | Education programmes | Programmes have the potential to reduce teen pregnancy. Recommends education on both abstinence and contraception. |
| Loury (2000) | Review | United States | Subsequent pregnancies for women on welfare | Nurse home visitation programme | Found home visitation programmes successful in lowering subsequent pregnancies. |
| Maynard et al (1998) | Review | United States | Repeat pregnancy among teenage mothers | Programmes to reduce repeat pregnancy | Mixed finding depending on the nature of the programme. Two programmes reduced teen pregnancy, in two they increased. |
| Swan et al (2003) | Review | International | Teen pregnancy | Programmes | Good evidence that programmes can reduce teen pregnancy. |

The above studies would indicate that the availability and cost of family planning services is of importance in limiting unwanted childbirth. Government could influence this by legislation facilitating or constraining access to services (such as abortion), and/or through the level of funding for family planning services and contraception. However,

there does not appear to be a simple relationship between particular policies or services and fertility, since these various methods of controlling fertility are to some extent interchangeable. In addition, cross-country comparisons indicate that the link between abortion laws and abortion levels[29] is not clear-cut.

Assessing the impact of changes in legislation and funding for abortion is particularly challenging due to the quality of data available. Klerman (1998) reviews the situation in the United States and finds that official data are inadequate, and that survey data are 'nearly useless' due to under-reporting. For example, Klerman's (1998) review indicated that there is some evidence that in the US a reduction in abortion funding (through Medicaid[30]) was associated with reductions in abortions. The nature of this relationship is, however, unclear and there is debate as to whether this finding demonstrates a causal relationship. Lichter, McLaughlin, Ribar (1998), who examined county-level data from the 1980 and 1990 US census, also conclude that, "cutbacks in access to abortion may have contributed modestly to the increase in the proportion of women heading households" (p 1). On the other hand, the relationship between funding of abortions and births is less clear, with some finding, against expectations, that more generous funding was associated with an increase in births.

Levine (2002) also examined the impact of various state restrictions placed on abortion in the US, for example mandatory waiting periods and parental involvement regulations. Previous research had indicated mixed results, possibly due to data and methodological differences. However, more recent research had suggested that, "changes in abortion access may affect women's sexual activity and/or contraceptive behaviour" (p 10). Levine found that parental involvement laws had led to an increase in contraceptive use among minors, leading to fewer pregnancies and therefore fewer abortions. The overall result of these behavioural responses was that there was no change in teenage births as a result of abortion law changes.

Those who have abortions cite a number of reasons for a termination of their pregnancy (Finer, Frohwirth, Dauphinne, Singh & Moore 2005). Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of the 1,160 women surveyed, indicated that they could not afford a baby now, with a similar proportion (74 percent) indicating that having a child would interfere with their education, work or ability to care for dependants. Such results would seem to indicate a possible indirect linkage between financial assistance to low-income parents, and the decision to have an abortion. However, as reviewed earlier, research on the relationship between welfare levels and fertility among beneficiaries is inconclusive.

There has been less research on the relationship between contraception funding and fertility. Forrest and Samara (1996) used data from the National Survey of Family Growth for 1988 to identify the number and characteristics of women using reversible contraceptives who had recently visited a publicly funded family planning service provider. They estimated that if Medicaid funding for contraceptive services was not available in the US, the number of abortions per year would rise 40 percent, and teenage births would increase by a quarter.

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[29] Abortion rates vary notably across OECD countries. Rates per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years are high in New Zealand (21) and Australia (19.7), and much lower in countries such as the Netherlands (8.6) and Germany (7.6) (Statistics New Zealand 2005b).

[30] Federal funding for abortions through Medicaid is limited to low-income women in cases of rape, incest and life endangerment. Some states also provide funding under wider circumstances, eg for health reasons.

| TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF US ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION POLICIES ON FERTILITY | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **AUTHORS (YEAR)** | **SAMPLE** | **COUNTRY** | **DEPENDENT VARIABLE** | **POLICY VARIABLE** | **RESULTS** |
| Forrest & Samara (1996) | National Survey of Family Growth | United States | Births | Medicaid contraceptive funding | Estimated that Medicaid funding of contraceptives reduces teen births. |
| Klerman (1998) | Review | United States | Abortions | Medicaid abortion funding | Reduced funding associated with reduced abortions. Debate about direction of causality. |
| Levine (2002) | State and micro-level | United States | Births | Abortion regulations | Parental involvement laws led to an increase in teenagers' use of contraception, resulting in fewer pregnancies and therefore fewer abortions. Overall no change in teenage births as a result of abortion law changes. |
| Lichter et al (1998) | County-level Census data | United States | Female-headed households | Access to abortion | Cutbacks in access to abortion associated with an increase in sole mother households. |

## SUMMARY

Compared with the other areas of family impact reviewed in this report, there has been a relatively large body of research on the impact of government policies and services on fertility and family size. This, in part, reflects the concern with the factors associated with recent demographic changes, especially the low rates of fertility in many Western countries. Unlike the other areas reviewed, the research on fertility comes from a wider range of countries, and is not as heavily reliant on studies from the US. Despite the quantity of research there is, however, still disagreement about the nature and strength of policy impacts on fertility decision-making.

A number of studies have explored cross-country differences in the levels of financial assistance provided to families with dependent children, and country fertility rates. These studies have consistently provided evidence of small positive effects, with more generous assistance to families being associated with higher fertility. However, there are real limitations with these studies (eg adequacy of data and limited controls for confounding variables) that limit their ability to provide causal evidence. Furthermore, in some cross-country comparison studies, New Zealand was an exception to the trends noted, with higher than expected fertility, given the highly targeted nature of our family assistance system.

Research from Canada provides some evidence that provision of cash payments to those having a child (a 'baby-bonus') results in slight increases to aggregate fertility rates, although the effect was not found for young single mothers. This later finding again indicates that policies may have differential impacts on specific sub-groups, with single parents being less responsive to cash bonuses[31] for childbearing than higher-income couples. Tax policies have also been shown to have an effect on fertility, with higher tax exemptions for dependants being associated with small increases in fertility in the US and Canada. The limited research on the impact of child support enforcement suggests that stricter enforcement reduces fertility, probably through increasing the potential cost of fatherhood for men.

The above results suggest that direct financial incentives do influence decisions to have children. It follows that other government policies such as maternity benefits, parental

[31] Conversely, welfare benefit levels or childcare subsidises may have much more significant impacts on fertility among sole parents.

leave and childcare provisions, may impact on fertility rates by reducing the cost of children and supporting parents to combine paid work and family caring responsibilities. However, studies in this area are relatively weak, and examining individual policies in isolation is difficult, as they are often introduced as part of a package of 'family-friendly' initiatives.

In relation to specific policies, there are mixed findings with respect to maternity benefits, with some studies finding no relationship between maternity benefit levels and fertility, while others find more generous maternity benefits are associated with small increases in fertility. There is also some evidence that childcare provision is associated with slightly higher fertility rates – although the complexity of funding arrangements in different jurisdictions means that studies have rarely incorporated any consideration of childcare cost.

There has been much debate about the impact of welfare benefits on fertility rates among sole parents. However, most of the research has found no clear relationship between benefit levels and the likelihood that sole mothers will have an additional birth. In the US there is also mixed evidence of the impact of limiting benefit increases for subsequent births to beneficiaries ('family caps'). Some experimental studies employing comparison groups show that in some states, the introduction of 'family caps' led to reductions in fertility, while other studies have found no significant effect.

Government may also impact on fertility through the funding of programmes directed at influencing fertility decision-making and the availability of birth control. Reviews of research on teenage pregnancy prevention suggest that there is good evidence that quality pregnancy prevention programmes can successfully reduce teenage pregnancies. The provision and funding of family planning services may also have an impact on the number of births, but the relationship between abortion, contraception and sterilisation is complex. Research in the US has found variable effects on birth rates, of restricting access to abortion, or of reduced funding for family planning services. In part this reflects the degree to which contraception use increases in response to restrictions on access to abortion.

Finally, it is important to note two points in regard to this research. Firstly, policies appear to have different impacts in different countries. This suggests that country differences in socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions may have a significant influence on how specific policies impact on fertility and family size. Secondly, policies may have differential impacts on different groups and on first births compared with subsequent births. For example, maternity leave policies will be most relevant for those women who are in paid work, compared with those whose income is derived from welfare benefits. Finally, studies that examine only short time periods may underestimate longer-term effects of policies on the timing of childbearing and total fertility rates.

# CHAPTER SIX
## dissolution

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the research on the impact of government policies and services on the chances that couples will end their relationship, usually marriage. The degree to which a distinction is made between cohabitation and marriage varies by country. New Zealand laws make little distinction between different types of partnership, while in the US there is much greater distinction. This will influence the extent to which US research in this area can be generalised to the New Zealand context.

There is a range of factors that has been found to be associated with divorce, including: demographic factors (eg age at marriage, premarital conceptions); socio-economic factors; individual characteristics (eg education, personality); relationship factors (eg sexual satisfaction); and attitudes (eg religious observance) (Clarke & Berrington 1999). Potentially, government policies and services may impact either directly or indirectly on many of these factors.

The most direct mechanism through which government influences partnership dissolution is via legislation. The endings of marriages, and of cohabiting relationships with children, are covered by a number of pieces of legislation. Divorce legislation providing the legal grounds for the formal ending of a marriage relationship is the most obvious example, although property, child custody and child support laws may also potentially impact on the decision to end a marriage. These laws may also influence the endings of cohabiting relationships with children, particularly as less distinction is being made between marriage and cohabitation on many custody and property matters. Divorce laws may also have an indirect impact by influencing perceptions of the nature and permanence of marriage, and the acceptability of divorce (discussed in Mansfield, Reynolds, Arai 1999), although we have found no studies that have examined this possible causal pathway.

The impact of social security and taxation on relationship formation and marriage decisions was extensively reviewed earlier. These studies often included measures of relationship dissolution, and the relevant studies are reviewed here.[32] Economic theory would hold that the provision of welfare benefits alters the utility of marriage compared with living as a sole parent, resulting in greater dissolution. For example, Rankin (1999) discusses the possible financial impacts of the New Zealand social security and tax system on New Zealand families. He suggests that it may contribute 'at the margin' to couples breaking up. That is, for those experiencing difficulties in their relationship, the provision of benefits (eg the DPB) to sole parents may tip them into a separation (see also Morgan 2004). However, other than discussing case studies, he produces no empirical evidence that the current system is operating in this way.

Although income tax is individually assessed in New Zealand, eligibility for a number of social security benefits is based on household income. This introduces the possibility that individuals may, in some circumstances, receive more income through the social assistance system as two individuals living apart than they would receive as a couple. For example, Johnson (2005) discusses the 'partnering penalties' implicit in the recent *Working for Families* package, and suggests the need for research on the behavioural impacts of such penalties. We have found sparse evidence of the impact of the New Zealand social security and taxation system on rates of dissolution, formation, reconstitution and living arrangements of families.

[32] Many of the studies mentioned below were covered in the previous chapters and, unless aspects of the study are important to mention with respect to dissolution, reference should be made to these previous chapters for more detail on the studies.

A methodological problem that has complicated much of the research in this area is the quality and completeness of data on relationship dissolution. Divorce statistics measure the formal ending of a marriage, but separation may have occurred many years previously. Thus, government policy may impact on divorce (formal registration of the end of the relationship), but have minimal or no impact on the rates of marriage breakdown (separations).

A number of education programmes have been developed for couples who are undergoing difficulties in their relationship. Some of these are aimed at couples prior to marriage (marriage preparation), while others are designed for couples experiencing relationship difficulties and possibly considering separation. Finally, there are programmes for those who have separated and need assistance in deciding on issues such as custody and access, or with parenting post-separation. In New Zealand the government, through the Family Court and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, funds some of these services.

Seefeldt & Smock (2004) also cite US community initiatives to support marriage publicly, such as a "Marriage awareness week" and formation of government and community coalitions. We have not come across any empirical research assessing the impact of these programmes on partnership formation or dissolution. There are currently no such initiatives underway in New Zealand, where less distinction is made between cohabitation and marriage.

Simons (1999b) suggests training health visitors to detect and respond to relationship and mental health problems that might put stress on relationships. This indirect link also applies to a range of government-funded programmes that target those at risk of family disruption; for example, parenting programmes for parents of young offenders or children who are in need of care and protection. In New Zealand the government has funded programmes aimed at assisting families who are perceived to be at risk due to their social, economic and family circumstances; the early intervention programme 'Family Start' and the 'Strengthening Families' programme. To date, evaluations of these programmes have not assessed their effectiveness in terms of changes in adult relationships. Again, we found no research that has examined the indirect impact of these programmes on dissolution rates.

As Bitler et al (2004) note, divorce rates have been found to be negatively associated with men's labour-market opportunities, with lower divorce as employment and average earnings increase. On the other hand, findings for women's labour market opportunities are more mixed (Ellwood & Jencks 2001). This indicates that one indirect way in which government policies might reduce dissolution rates could be via policies that boost the employment prospects of unskilled and low-income men. These indirect pathways are likely to be complex, and require high-quality research design and data to tease out the relationships between policy and rates of dissolution.

Finally, particular occupations (eg police and military) have been found to have higher rates of divorce compared with other occupational groups. Those occupations involving high levels of stress and shift work are particularly likely to place stress on relationships. In this respect, an interesting study that illustrates the ways in which government policies may unintentionally impact on family form is that of Angrist & Johnson (1998). They examined the effects of work-related absences on union disruption using the deployment of US soldiers to the Gulf War, as a natural experiment. Their results showed that the deployment of men did not have a demonstrable effect on divorce rates but the deployment of female soldiers increased the probability of divorce. A major caveat stated by the researchers involves the issue of causation, meaning that other factors, such as

Gulf War syndrome, could have contributed to the results (Angrist & Johnson 1998). It is likely that there are other unintended policy effects that have not been considered or investigated by researchers, and are therefore not covered by this review.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

As Mansfield et al (1999) point out, from the 1960s onwards there has been increasing pressure to "reform divorce laws throughout most western industrialised countries" (p 8). Most countries have moved to remove fault (eg adultery or unreasonable behaviour), and replaced them with 'incompatibility' or 'irreconcilable differences' as grounds for divorce (usually evidenced by a specified period of separation).[33] These changes have generated much debate and some research into the effects of this move to 'no-fault' divorce, on divorce rates.

The core argument here is whether divorce changes led or reflected social changes. Two early empirical analyses of this issue used cross-sectional data from the US Current Population Survey, providing marital history and demographic information on a sample of women. They analysed whether a change in relationship status for these women between 1975 and 1978 was associated with state divorce laws, controlling for relevant demographic characteristics. Peters (1986) used 1979 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Survey and Current Population Survey data. She found no role for divorce law changes in explaining the increases in divorce rates. Allen (1992) tried to replicate Peters' results with the same data, but obtained different results, finding no-fault laws had a significant impact by increasing divorce rates. He concluded that the contradictions in findings were due to differences in how they classified some of the states as fault or no-fault.

As shown by the above studies, most of the research on this issue has come from the US, and capitalised on the fact that different states adopted no-fault legislation at different times (or continued with fault-based laws). Nakonezny, Shull & Rodgers (1995) used a regression-discontinuity design to analyse data from 50 states, which included controls for a number of state measures (eg religiosity, family income and education). They concluded that the switch from fault to no-fault divorce led to a measurable increase in the divorce rate (0.8 divorces per year per 1,000 individuals). However, their results were critiqued by Glenn (1997), who criticised their analysis for confounding "the effects of other influences on divorce with any effects of the change to no-fault divorce" (p 1,023). Glenn (1997) used a different quasi-experimental design (non-equivalent control group) on the data from 43 states. He concluded that in the period 1965-77 no-fault divorce law changes resulted in a 1 percent increase in the divorce rate, once the general trend in divorce rates had been taken into account. He concluded that, "the adoption of no-fault divorce had little direct, immediate effect on divorce rates."[34]

Rodgers, Nakonezny, Shull (1997) reanalysed their data in light of Glenn's criticisms concerning the lack of control for pre-existing divorce trends, by statistically taking these trends into account. They concluded from the analysis of data from 50 states in the US, that approximately 30 percent of the observed increase in divorce could be attributed to no-fault legislation. The other 70 percent they credited to an already existing pattern of divorce. This translated into an extra 0.23 divorces per 1,000 individuals that could be attributed to the no-fault divorce laws, approximately double Glenn's estimate. This

[33] One critique of these studies has been the inaccurate classification of states' laws (Brining & Buckley 1998). For example, some states with no-fault divorce in fact introduce fault into the determination of the division of property.

[34] In their reply to Glenn's (1997) critique Rodgers et al (1997) pointed out that Glenn's results were similar to theirs, but the interpretation of the size and meaning of the effect was different.

study, however, looked ahead only three years from the implementation of no-fault divorce law, and the authors state that their "results suggest a net immediate effect of the laws, but whether there is a longer-term effect is not answered by this analysis" (Rodgers et al 1997:1,028). They also indicate that one explanation for this short-term increase might be a 'backlog' effect due to prior separations being formalised through the new divorce laws. They were unable to control for this possibility in their analysis.

The results of these studies have been further debated by Glenn (1999) and Rodgers, Nakonezny & Shull (1999), and additional analysis undertaken. These new analyses do not substantively change the above results, and some of the disagreement concerns the practical, rather than statistical, significance of the findings. However, Glenn (1999) makes the interesting observation that states that adopted no-fault laws relatively late (ie after other states) did not seem to experience increases due to the no-fault laws. He attributes this to the pre-law adjustment in legal practice, whereby legal practice was 'liberalised' in anticipation of the actual law changes. This observation, and the above debate, indicate that separating out the general trends in relationship formation and dissolution from the impacts of changes in legislation, can be very difficult, complicating the interpretation of any analysis.

By including better controls for state differences in propensity to divorce, and by considering in her analysis the impact of different classifications of no-fault laws, Friedberg (1998) was able to improve on these previous studies. She used a panel of state-level divorce data to examine state-level divorce rates over a 21-year period between 1968 and 1988. As she states, "with panel data, the role of cross-state heterogeneity in divorce behavior can be explored in more detail, without having to be specific about the sources of heterogeneity. State fixed effects control for unobserved influences on divorce that vary across states, so that the effect of the divorce law is identified from its variation with a state over time" (p 4). She estimated that the divorce rate would have been about 6 percent lower if states had not switched to unilateral divorce, accounting for 17 percent of the increase in the divorce rate during this period. She also found that the type of unilateral (no-fault) law mattered, with weaker 'no-fault' legislation[35] having weaker effects.

Wolfers (2003) examined the impact of unilateral divorce on divorce rates, by modifying Friedberg's (1998) approach to yield slightly different results. Wolfers' analysis separated out pre-existing trends in divorce across US states from the dynamic response to the policy change, whereas Friedberg had tended to confound the two. Wolfers found that the change to unilateral divorce contributed to the increase in divorce rates for approximately 10 years after its introduction, but that after that time its effect waned, and these laws may have in fact contributed to a decline in divorce.

Individual-level panel data can provide more robust results compared with the use of cross-sectional national statistics, since they examine individuals rather than aggregates. Weiss and Willis (1993, 1997) also found some evidence of a connection between divorce rates and laws regarding no-fault divorce and the division of property at divorce. Their study is one of the few also to examine explicitly the impact of property laws; other studies tend to include these within the categorisation of state's laws as 'fault' or 'no-fault'. They used panel data from the National Longitudinal Study of High School Class 1972, a cohort of those who graduated from high school in 1972 and were followed up until 1986. Weiss and Willis' (1993) analysis indicated law changes away from 'fault' were associated with more divorce, but the effect was statistically

[35] Weaker no-fault laws were those that required a period of separation and/or included fault considerations in its property law.

non-significant. In contrast, their 1997 analysis indicated that "in legal regimes with less emphasis on fault, either as a ground for divorce or in the division of property, divorce is more likely" (p S314). The size of this effect was, however, small and not consistent across statistical models.

While most of the above US studies find a small increase in divorce rates in the period following the introduction of 'no-fault' divorce laws, some studies have also examined longer-term effects of no-fault divorce laws on divorce rates. Gruber (2000), for example, undertook an examination of the impact of unilateral divorce legislation using US Census data (1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990) and exploiting differences in divorce laws over time and between states. His statistical models included controls for different state preferences for divorce, and changes in these propensities over time. His findings suggest that the presence of unilateral divorce increased the chance of divorce by 11.6 percent for both women and men. Gruber, however, also alludes to the issue of establishing the direction of causality discussed above, and although his study took measures designed to negate this potential effect, he states that "unilateral divorce may pass where divorce is rising, rather than the opposite causal interpretation" (2000:15).

Some research has also been conducted in other countries to examine the impact of divorce law changes. Binner & Dnes (2001) examined national statistics from England and Wales from 1948-96, to examine the effect of the liberalisation of divorce laws and socio-economic factors on the divorce rate. They found that the factors influential in explaining the growth in divorce rates are: female relative wages, the marriage rate, the introduction of legal aid in 1949, and the move to unilateral no-fault divorce in the early 1970s (Binner & Dnes 2001:304). They concluded that the law had increased divorce by making it easier to divorce, and that this was a permanent shift in levels and not just a clearing of a backlog. They estimate that the unilateral divorce laws raised the divorce rate by more than 0.8 divorces per thousand people, a substantial impact relative to the average divorce rate of 1.84 over the period studied. It should be noted, however, that in English law couples can still opt to use 'fault' grounds in order to obtain a speedier divorce, and many continue to do so.

In an interesting discussion of Irish divorce law, Burley & Regan (2002) found that the legalisation of divorce in 1997 has only resulted in a minimal short-term impact. Only a fraction of those eligible for divorce applied for one, a result that contrasts sharply with the predictions of the effects of the law. The authors attribute several factors to this result, including the success of a campaign of fear against divorce and the complexity of the law which, because it is not a 'clean-break', contains "a disincentive for couples to divorce if they have already been separated for a number of years" (Burley & Regan 2002:218). Likewise, in Sweden, Olah (2001) used "the method of intensity regression on a sample of 1,869 women to estimate the impact of various factors on the risk of dissolution of first-birth union" (p 121). In such families, with one or more child, she found that the 1974 elimination of all fault grounds in Swedish divorce law did not have a long-term effect on union disruption. This finding held true for three types of unions – consensual unions, marriages preceded by cohabitation and direct marriages. These examples demonstrate the difficulty of assuming that policy impacts in one jurisdiction will necessarily apply in another setting.

The interpretation of research in this area remains subject to some debate. For example, Peters (1992) found that US states with historically higher divorce rates were more likely to reform their divorce laws, suggesting that states are perhaps responding to, not responsible for, a change in divorce rates (although Rodgers et al (1997) doubt the strength of this effect based on the low correlation between year of law change and divorce rates preceding the change). Likewise, it is possible that both the law

changes and the increase in divorce are related to wider social, attitudinal and economic changes. Researchers are well aware of these issues, commenting on either the problem of causation (Gruber 2000), or the possibility that "other factors in addition to unilateral and no-fault divorce [have] a great deal to do with the increase in divorces" (Friedberg 1998:17; Mansfield et al 1999). While some attempts are made to control for confounding and the underlying trends in divorce, it is unclear how successfully this can be done with existing data.

The above studies also use data that describe the rate of legal divorce, and do not include information about those couples who choose to separate without going through legal channels, and have been separated for many years but have not divorced. As a result, a study, particularly a short-term one, which indicates an increase in the divorce rate after the introduction of a specific divorce law, could be merely witnessing, in part, the decision of couples to endorse legally their separation, after having already lived apart for a number of years. For evidence on this point Mansfield et al (1999) quote a study by Edgar (1992), who found that during the three years following the introduction of Australian no-fault divorce law, 58 percent of decrees were granted for marriages that had broken up prior to the new law. Unfortunately, there has been little research that adequately controls for this effect and so the true impact on relationship dissolution, as against formal marriage dissolution, is uncertain. The majority of studies conclude that introduction of unilateral divorce appears in the short term to increase divorce, but that the effect reduces over time, once the 'backlog' of pre 'no-fault' law separations is cleared.

As has been mentioned in the partnership formation chapter, covenant marriage is an option offered in some American states. Couples may choose to sign up to a more stringent marriage contract that, in the event of marital difficulties, makes divorce more difficult. Sanchez, Nock, Wright, Deines (2003), in their five-year preliminary study of Louisiana marriages, investigated the effects of covenant marriage on marriage and divorce. In their sample of 1,310 couples they found that "the covenant married have a marital disruption rate that is 45 percent that of the standard married" (Sanchez et al 2003:18) by year five of their marriages. However, very few couples (eg 2-3 percent in Louisiana) have opted for covenant marriage and selection effects raise serious questions about the direction of causality. That is, those choosing to enter into a covenant marriage may do so precisely because they hold views on marriage that make dissolution less likely (Hawkins et al 2002). The authors of the above study indicated that factors such as pre-existing religiosity, premarital counselling and lower rates of cohabitation, are likely to account for some, if not all, of this difference in dissolution rates.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF DIVORCE LEGISLATION ON MARITAL DISSOLUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Allen (1992) | Cross-state and national data | United States | Divorce rate | Unilateral divorce law | States with no-fault divorce have higher divorce rates. |
| Binner & Dnes (2001) | National statistics | England and Wales | Divorce rate | No-fault divorce | No-fault divorce laws were one factor among many that fostered higher divorce rates between 1948 and 1996. |
| Friedberg (1998) | Panel of state-level data | United States | Divorce rate | Unilateral divorce law | Unilateral divorce laws accounted for 17 percent of the observed increase in the divorce rate between 1968 and 1988. |
| Glenn (1997, 1999) | State-level data | United States | Divorce rate | No-fault divorce law | Increasing divorce rates due to an already existing trend, not the existence of no-fault divorce law. |
| Gruber (2000) | National Census data | United States | Divorce rate | Unilateral divorce law | Introduction of unilateral divorce law increased the rate of divorce, both for adults and future cohorts growing up with exposure to the law. |
| Olah (2001) | National sample | Sweden | Divorce rate | No-fault divorce law | No-fault divorce law had no long-term effect on dissolution of unions. |
| Peters (1992) | Cross-state and national data | United States | Divorce rate | Unilateral divorce law | Divorce rates were not affected by no-fault divorce legislation. |
| Rodgers et al (1997, 1999); Nakonenzy et al 1995 | State-level data | United States | Divorce rate | No-fault divorce | Approximately 30 percent of the change in divorce rates over a 3-year period was caused by the new no-fault law. |
| Sanchez et al (2003) | Louisiana state study | United States | Divorce | Covenant marriage | Covenant married experienced lower likelihood of divorce in the first five years than regular marriages, but causal relationship unlikely. |
| Weiss & Willis (1993, 1997) | National Longitudinal Study of High School Class | United States | Divorce | No-fault unilateral divorce law | Some evidence that no-fault divorce laws were associated with increase in divorce rate over a 17-month period. |
| Wolfers (2003) | State-level data in every state | United States | Divorce rate | No-fault unilateral divorce law | Divorce rates rose for 10 years following introduction of no-fault legislation, after which time the trend reversed. |

As mentioned in the introduction, the New Zealand Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) is one of the most widely debated elements of the welfare system, with suggestions from some that it encourages marital separation. Individuals might choose to separate, in part, because the benefit is available to support their living independently, or because they perceive there is a financial advantage to doing so. The Department of Social Welfare review (1988) for the Royal Commission on Social Policy was unable to find reliable evidence that addressed these issues. They did, however, report a qualitative study by Wylie (1980) that found financial decisions were not regarded by her sole parent informants as being a significant factor influencing their decision to separate.

While the DPB provides financial assistance to those caring for children after relationship breakdowns, it does not appear, from the limited research available, that parents' calculations of the costs or benefits of separation play a major role in their decision to separate. The Department of Social Welfare (1988) review found no study that focused directly on the effect of the DPB on the rate of partnership formation following ex-nuptial conceptions. There was no evidence that fathers felt less guilty about 'abandoning' their partners because of the DPB. Although there were probably fewer 'shot gun' marriages than in the past, there has also been an increase in cohabitation, which may have substituted for these marriages.

There is a small US literature that examines the relationship between welfare reform and partnership breakdown. However, high-quality studies examining the impact of benefit levels are rare, and any effects on dissolution appear to be either very small in magnitude or statistically non-significant. For example, Hoffman & Duncan (1995) found weak effects of AFDC benefit levels on remarriage and divorce. They used longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics in the US for marriages begun between 1967 and 1983. They were able to include a number of income-related variables in their analysis. They found some evidence for a small effect of higher benefits on increasing rates of divorce and separation. Their estimates suggest that a 25 percent increase in AFDC benefits would increase the annual divorce rate by a maximum of 0.24 percentage points (over one to three years). In comparison, they estimate that a 25 percent increase in women's average earnings would decrease divorce by 10 percent, and a similar increase in men's average earnings would lower divorce by 8 percent. As noted by Bitler et al (2004), these effects are significantly weaker than those concerned with the impact of benefit levels on the incidence of sole parenthood.

Another study examined US welfare benefit levels and divorce over a later time period and failed to find any evidence of policy impact. Blackburn (2003) examined the relationship between AFDC benefit levels and marital dissolution rates for a sample of married women with children. This study used data on individuals and their partners from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1979-93). State-level data on AFDC levels was used to examine whether these impacted on the likelihood that married women with children would divorce. Contrary to the previous research, his analysis found no supporting evidence that higher welfare benefits led to increased rates of marital dissolution among married women with children.

Welfare benefit levels may impact differentially on partnership patterns across population sub-groups. There is some evidence that more generous entitlements may help to support unmarried couples to remain together. Carlson, Garfinkel, McLanahan, Mincy & Primus (2004a) used data from the US Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (1998-2000) to examine how welfare benefit levels, child support policies, and local labour market conditions affected union formation among unmarried parents who had just had a child together. Only about a half of these couples were cohabiting at the time of the child's birth, although most of the remainder were in a 'visiting' relationship. They analysed data collected from a sample of unwed couples at the time of the birth of their child, and one year later, and used multinomial logistic regression to estimate the effects of the policy variables (along with economic, cultural/interpersonal and other factors), on whether (relative to being in a cohabiting relationship) parents were not romantically involved, romantically involved living apart, or married to each other, about one year after the child's birth. Their results indicated that higher state welfare benefit levels for a mother with two children discouraged couples from breaking up, but had no effect on the likelihood the couple would marry. That is, more generous welfare programmes seemed to support unwed couples to stay together, although not necessarily to cohabit or marry.

Wider welfare reforms also have potential implications for partnership dissolution. Bitler et al's (2004) research on the impact of state waivers and TANF found that these reforms led to a small but significant decrease in divorce over the period 1989-2000. They interpret their finding as indicating that the 'stabilisation' effect on marriages of these reforms dominated the 'independence effect' for married women. The mechanisms through which this occurred are unclear. It may be that by moving individuals off welfare and into paid work, families were under less financial stress. Conversely, extending welfare eligibility to married couples may have discouraged

divorces aimed at qualifying for welfare. Work expectations associated with these reforms may also have made sole parenthood a less attractive option.

A recent study by Gennetian and Knox (2004) reports on the results of the 1994 Minnesota Welfare Reform programme experimental (random assignment) evaluation. The reforms offered financial incentives, and streamlined eligibility rules specifically for two-parent families. Families were randomly assigned into the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) or the existing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) system. A six-year follow-up of the families indicated that there was no overall effect on marital stability, but that there were contrasting results for several sub-groups. Divorce rates were lowered amongst those already receiving welfare when they entered the study. On the other hand, those new to welfare, and the new programme, showed a trend towards increased divorce compared to the comparison group (AFDC recipients). The authors speculate that this may be because these families did not spend very long on welfare, and thus there was little time for the policies' incentive effects to have an impact. While employing a robust design, the weakness of this evaluation was its reliance on official records of marriage and divorce, possibly missing those separating and living apart, but not officially recorded as doing so.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF WELFARE POLICY ON PARTNERSHIP DISSOLUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bitler et al (2004) | National data | United States | Divorce | Waivers and TANF | Welfare reforms designed to 'make work pay' led to a small decrease in divorce. |
| Blackburn (2003) | Married women with children (NLSY) | United States | Marital dissolution | Level of AFDC benefits | No evidence that higher welfare benefits led to increased rates of marital dissolution among married women with children. |
| Carlson et al (2004a) | Fragile Families sample | United States | Union dissolution | State welfare programme generosity | Higher welfare benefits encouraged unwed couples to stay together, but not necessarily to cohabit or marry. |
| Ellwood & Bane (1985) | Survey of Income and Education | United States | Marital dissolution | Level of AFDC benefits | Weak finding that higher benefits were associated with more dissolution. |
| Gennetian & Knox (2004) | State experimental evaluation | United States – Minnesota | Divorce | Minnesota welfare reform programme | No overall effect of new welfare programme on divorce rates, compared to those on standard welfare programme. Some evidence of reduced divorce for those with history of welfare. |
| Hoffman & Duncan (1995) | Panel Study of Income Dynamics | United States | Marital dissolution | Level of AFDC benefits | Some evidence that higher benefits were associated with a small increase in divorce. |

The taxation system has been shown to have an impact on marriage rates through the 'marriage penalty/subsidy' (discussed in detail in: Partnership Formation and Reconstitution, Chapter Four). Whittington & Alm (1997) concluded that in the US there was evidence that the marriage penalty increased the probability of divorce, especially for women and low-income individuals. Dickert-Conlin (1999) also examined the effect of tax penalties in the US, but included the potential effect of transfer benefits, which might offset tax penalties for those on low incomes. That is, "the transfer system typically has large marriage disincentives, while the income tax system is likely to subsidize marriage for many low-income families. In other words, the tax system may offset an increase in transfer benefits associated with marital separation" (p 217). Using family-

level data from the 1990 Survey of Income and Program Participation, she examined the impact of transfers and taxation on a sample of first-married couples where the women were between 18-44, the age range when most marital status changes occur. She found that, after controlling for the effect of transfer penalties, lower tax liability outside of marriage was associated with an increase in separations. However, the effect relied on studying a small sample of married couples and examining them for a period of only 17 months. Dickert-Conlin concluded that her results "imply weak support that taxes affect the decision to separate".

Dickert-Conlin & Houser (2002) studied the impact of changes in the US Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on the likelihood that a sample of married women with children would separate. They also used a sample of 18-50-year-old women with children, from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (1990-93 panels). Because EITC increases over certain earnings ranges before phasing out, the expansion of the EITC in the 1990s could impact on families in two ways. For a single mother with earnings and who was eligible for EITC, marrying someone with earnings pushed their combined income beyond the phase-out range – a marriage penalty (encourages divorce). On the other hand, a single mother with no earnings who married a man with low earnings became eligible for EITC – a marriage subsidy (discourages divorce). Using individual-level data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation they found that the EITC discouraged divorce among married women, although the effect was 'economically insignificant'. These findings were also sensitive to the model they used in their analysis, with different models finding no association between the EITC and divorce. Dickert-Conlin & Houser (2002) conclude that an increase in the EITC of $100 (per year) increases the probability that married women will remain married by 0.2 percentage points.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF TAXATION POLICY ON DISSOLUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dickert-Conlin (1999) | Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Separation | Tax and transfer penalties | Controlling for transfer effects, lower tax liability outside of marriage is associated with increased dissolution. |
| Dickert-Conlin & Houser (2002) | Current Population Survey | United States | Union dissolution | Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) | EITC discouraged divorce amongst married women with children, although the impact was economically insignificant. |
| Whittington & Alm (1997) | Panel Study of Income Dynamics | United States | Divorce from first marriage | Tax penalties | Marriage penalties in the tax system result in a small increase in divorce. |

Child support policies may also potentially impact on dissolution decisions. Greater child support enforcement may discourage separation, as it increases the cost of divorce to men. Jagannathan (2004) studied the effect of state child support enforcement (CSE) on marital dissolution using a national survey sample of 79,729 US children (Survey of Income and Program Participation). She also obtained state indicators of child support enforcement (collection rate and expenditure on enforcement) and examined whether higher levels of child support enforcement increased the probability that a child lived with both parents. The results indicated that this was the case, with stronger child support enforcement lowering the probability that children lived in mother-only or neither parent households. While this effect applied to both whites and blacks, Jagannathan (2004) reports that "only in the case of black children is the effect substantively large".

Nixon's (1997) study used individual-level data from the 1988 and 1990 Current Population Survey to investigate variation in child support enforcement across US states, and divorce rates. He found that "stronger CSE had a small, yet statistically significant, negative effect on the probability of marital dissolution" (Nixon 1997:176), suggesting that a father's disincentive for child support outside of marriage is stronger than a mother's incentive for child support once separated. However, Heim (2003) ran a similar study examining the effect of child support enforcement on divorce rates from 1989-95 controlling for state fixed effects, something which Nixon (1997) did not do. Heim's study found that the effects of a "recent increase in child support enforcement efforts has had an insignificant effect on the divorce rate" (Heim 2003:787). Heim offers the lack of knowledge about child support enforcement changes and the complexity of the divorce decision for couples as possible explanations for this result.

Recent UK research has also explored this issue. Walker and Zhu (2004), using data from the British Household Panel Survey (1992-2001), model the impact of the Child Support laws, compared with the situation that would have existed if they were not in force. Using individual-level data they calculated the impacts of child support on the couple, should they divorce. Their results suggest that "the introduction of mandatory Child Support might have had an (unintended) impact on the divorce rate, potentially reducing the divorce probability by around 10 percent for a 20-year-old marriage if all child support liabilities are fully enforced" (p 24). In their estimation the divorce rate would have been 14.5 percent higher were it not for the introduction of a mandatory child support formula that effectively increased the cost of divorce for non-resident parents.

One of the few studies to find that child support is associated with increased union dissolution is Carlson et al (2004a). They examined the impact of child support enforcement on the living arrangements of 3,712 unmarried couples in the Fragile Families Study in the United States. They found that, controlling for a number of demographic factors, strong child support enforcement was linked to a greater likelihood of unwed parents breaking up within a year of the birth of their child. They comment that this finding is counter to other research. It also needs to be noted that this is a specific cohort of unmarried couples, although most were cohabiting at the time of the child's birth. The authors offer three possible mechanisms for how the child support effect (assuming it is a true effect) may be operating:

> *…first, the threat of child support may increase conflict among already precarious couples, leading them to break-up; second, potential (or actual) child support income may enable women to have the economic security to leave otherwise unsatisfying relationships (the so-called "women's independence effect"); or third, men in strong enforcement states may be more likely to have previous support obligations, thus decreasing their attractiveness (as a breadwinner) to the focal child's mother. Which (if any) of these mechanisms may be correct is a topic for future investigation* (p 539).

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ON DISSOLUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Carlson et al (2004a) | Fragile Families Sample | United States | Union dissolution | Child support enforcement | Stronger child support enforcement linked to greater likelihood of relationship break-up for unwed couples with a child. |
| Heim (2003) | Current Population Survey | United States | Divorce | Child support enforcement | Effect of child support enforcement on divorce rates was insignificant. |
| Jagannathan (2004) | Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Children's living arrangements | Child support enforcement | Strong child support enforcement lowered the likelihood of sole mother families. |
| Nixon (1997) | Current Population Survey | United States | Divorce | Child support enforcement | Stronger child support enforcement had a small negative impact on divorce rates. |
| Walker & Zhu (2004) | British Household Panel Survey | United Kingdom | Divorce | Child support laws | Child support laws contributed to a small reduction in the probability of divorce. |

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, government currently funds some programmes to assist couples undergoing relationship difficulties. There is also a range of programmes that have been developed in the US, directed at preparing couples for marriage. The goals of these programmes are to improve relationships and, if possible, reduce the rate of relationship breakdown. Perhaps the best way to consider programmes aimed at supporting marriage and preventing dissolution is to divide them into two groups:

> education programmes for couples considering marriage, or who are married and want to improve their relationship

> programmes designed to help couples experiencing difficulties and possibly considering separation.

For the first set of programmes, Simons (1999a) reviews research in the US and Europe on marriage preparation courses, some of which are directed at 'awareness raising' (about potentially contentious issues), and some of which are 'skills-based' (eg directed at teaching conflict management). The limited number of studies conducted up to the late 1990s showed that the programmes led to some improvements in couple relationship skills. However, major methodological problems occurred in these studies, namely bias in selection into treatment vs control groups, relatively short follow-up, and differential rates of dropout. Simons (1999a) concludes that "the evidence suggests that the specific effects of marriage preparation courses on [improving] the quality and stability of marriage are likely to be modest" (p iv) (see also the review by Christensen & Heavey 1999, which reaches the same conclusion). Simons suggests that the effect may depend on the characteristics of the couple, with courses being least likely to assist those most likely to divorce. On the other hand, those couples least likely to experience marital distress may benefit from such courses, which may improve the quality of their relationships.

Simons' conclusions are supported in a recent review by Haskins et al (2005) who point out that in the US there have been few rigorous evaluations of marriage education programmes. Some programmes have been evaluated and appear to improve couple communication and relationship satisfaction, although it is not clear if they reduce rates of dissolution (see also Carroll & Doherty 2003). Haskins et al (2005) note that, with the renewed public policy interest in these programmes, there are a number of new evaluations being conducted, many of which use random-assignment designs. Haskins

et al (2005) also highlight the problem of designing and delivering programmes to those most at risk of divorce.

In New Zealand, married and de facto couples with relationship difficulties can seek counselling through the Family Court under the Family Proceedings Act, 1980. The Department for Courts contracts counselling services from individuals and community agencies. The largest agency to be contracted is Relationship Services, which provides counselling services for approximately 15 percent of all referrals under section 9 of the Act (Request for counselling), and 50 percent of all referrals under section 10 (Counselling where proceedings commenced). Relationship Services also has contracts with the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, to provide relationship counselling and education programmes for people who refer themselves to Relationship Services, and with the Department of Corrections to deliver services within prisons and the community (Sanderson & Jacobsen 2003).

Although there has been some research on the impact of Family Court Counselling in New Zealand (Maxwell & Robertson 1993), this did not include an assessment of its impact on dissolution rates. International reviews, however, indicate that couple therapy for those experiencing relationship distress is effective in preventing distress or ameliorating it once it occurs (Christensen & Heavey 1999; Simons 1999b). Christensen and Heavey's review of couple therapy does not separate out effects on relationship quality from those on relationship stability or dissolution. They note that most studies use short-term follow-up and thus are unlikely to measure the eventual impact of therapy on the likelihood of relationship dissolution. Studies that do have reasonable follow-up periods indicate that many couples relapse, leading to the suggestion by some that booster sessions be offered. The authors also make an interesting observation that the ending of a relationship after couple therapy (either marriage preparation or for distressed couples) is not necessarily a negative outcome. If therapy leads to the ending of a highly conflicted relationship between unsuited partners, this must be seen as a positive outcome, especially given the damage it might do to children of the relationship.

Mediation services are also available in New Zealand for couples considering divorce. A review of research on mediation by Benjamin & Howard (1995) concluded that it produced favourable outcomes in terms of agreement on issues, although couples at this stage were not likely to reconcile, and the impacts were more in terms of agreement to post-divorce arrangements. It is also thought that mediation is not appropriate for all couples (eg in cases of domestic violence).

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF COUPLE THERAPY PROGRAMMES ON DISSOLUTION**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Benjamin & Howard (1995) | Review | United States – International | | Mediation | Helps couples reach agreements, but not likely to reduce dissolution. |
| Carroll & Doherty (2003) | Review | United States – International | | Premarital prevention programmes | Short- to mid-term positive impact on relationships, but lack of evidence examining impact on divorce rates. |
| Christensen & Heavey (1999) | Review | United States – International | | Couple therapy | Modest effects on relationship quality, but lack of evidence examining impacts on dissolution. |
| Haskins et al (2005) | Review | United States – International | | Marriage education programmes | Improves couple communication and relationship satisfaction, but lack of evidence examining impact on divorce rates. |
| Simons (1999a & b) | Reviews | International | | Premarital and relationship counselling | Modest effects on relationship quality, but lack of evidence examining impact on divorce rates. |

## SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the impact of government policies and services on partnership breakdown, mostly in terms of marriage dissolution. As with the other areas reviewed, the impacts detected have been relatively small. Most of the research in this area has focused on the direct impacts of divorce legislation, although a smaller group of studies has considered the indirect impacts of policies that affect the financial status of individuals and families.

One of the most debated aspects of government policy with regard to marital dissolution is the nature of divorce law, and in particular the introduction of no-fault divorce law. There is some evidence that the move to no-fault divorce in the US fostered an increase in divorce rates, at least in the short term. There is less evidence of longer-term impacts. The interpretation of this association is confounded by the fact that these studies have examined official divorce statistics, which do not provide an accurate measure of marriage breakdown as many couples separate, but delay seeking a divorce. As a result, at least part of this association may be due to an increase in formal marital dissolution, rather than an increase in actual partnership breakdowns. The problem of isolating the impacts of divorce law changes from the general upward trends in divorce rates, has also complicated interpretation of the results of various studies.

Compared with the large quantity of research examining welfare levels, marriage and sole parenthood, there is very little quality research on impacts of benefit levels on divorce. The limited research suggests that higher benefit levels may lead to increases in divorce. However, such effects are very small in magnitude, and other studies have failed to find any significant impacts. The impact of benefit levels may also depend on the group studied, with some US research finding that higher benefits support unwed parents to stay together, although not to marry.

Research on the impact of the wider US welfare reforms is also mixed. One study has found that state waivers and TANF reforms led to a small decrease in divorce rates, although the mechanism through which this was achieved is unclear. Another experimental study of state programmes found no overall impacts on divorce, although reforms did appear to lower divorce rates for existing beneficiaries compared with those new to welfare.

As with the research on tax and transfer penalties and marriage, there is evidence that the marriage penalty in the US tax system influences decisions about ending relationships. Lower tax liabilities outside marriage have been found to be weakly associated with an increase in the probability of divorce. While changes to the Earned Income Tax Credit in the US could, in theory, result in either an increase or decrease in dissolutions, the research indicates that the impact has been a small decrease in divorce, with EITC helping married couples to stay together.

Research in the US and UK provides evidence that stronger child support enforcement is linked to lower levels of divorce. However, once again, some studies have found no impact and possible differential impacts for certain sub-groups, with one study finding stronger child support enforcement was associated with more relationship breakdown amongst unwed parents. This review did not uncover any studies that examined the relationship between child support levels and partnership dissolution.

There is evidence that programmes for couples experiencing problems may improve relationships in the short term. There is, however, no evidence that they reduce the likelihood of divorce. Likewise there is no evidence that marriage preparation programmes reduce the chances of partnership dissolution, although they, too, may improve partnership quality.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# living arrangements

## INTRODUCTION

This section considers the impact of government policies and services on the living arrangements of children, and the likelihood of extended family members living together in the same household.

Government policies and services that may impact on the living arrangements of dependent children, include custody (or 'day-to-day care' under the new Care of Children Act 2004) and guardianship legislation, social services legislation and practice, social security and taxation. The primary reason for dependent children living in a household that does not contain both parents is parental separation and divorce. Additionally, there is a group of children living with one parent (usually their mother) who have never lived with their other parent.

Although the living arrangements of children post-separation and divorce can be affected by the existing family law regarding custody, it can be argued that such laws have minimal impact on the majority of families, since most couples do not require a court judgement to settle custody matters (Maxwell & Robertson 1993). There is little research on the actual impacts of various forms of child custody legislation on children's post-separation/divorce living arrangements. While there has been much debate over joint custody, we have not found any research that assessed the impact on actual living arrangements for children. To examine this issue adequately would require carefully designed studies, either comparing living arrangements pre and post a change in legislation or practice, or comparing impacts in two similar areas with different legislation. For example, what impact does the legal treatment of accusations of domestic violence in custody hearings have on the incidence of children being in joint custody? It is important to note that with regard to custody, the court's directions as to a child's living arrangements do not necessarily translate into actuality. Research would need to establish actual living arrangements, rather than those directed by the court.

The living arrangements of children are sometimes subject to direct intervention by government social services. Where there is concern for a child's wellbeing, children may be removed from their household for their protection. These children may be placed in family homes, in foster care or with extended family. In addition, if a child is committing serious offences he or she may be placed in out-of-home care, or, in serious cases, in a residence. Government support for kin and foster caregivers may also impact on the success of these placements, and thus the eventual living arrangements of some children (Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Charitable Trust 2005). Social services also play a role in adoption in New Zealand, and the nature of adoption law may affect the number of children living with biological versus adopted parents.

There are a number of other situations in which a parent is absent from the household, even though the parents have not separated. Parents may be absent while serving in the armed forces or serving time in prison. New Zealand is developing programmes to support prison inmates and their families (eg the NZ Reintegrative Support Services Pilot Programmes), and policy changes allow babies to stay with their mothers in prison up to age six months. There have been no evaluations to date that measure the differential impact of these programmes on family structure or living arrangements, although they do appear to have positive impacts of family functioning (Edgar 2005).

By 'extended families' we mean extension both across generations (multigenerational households, most commonly co-resident adult children and their parents), and within generations (eg families of adult siblings or cousins living in the same household). In New Zealand, extended family households are more common for specific cultural

groups. For example, according to 1996 Census data approximately 40 percent of Pacific and 20 percent of Māori people lived in extended family households, compared with 7 percent of New Zealand Europeans. Over half of these 'extended' families were composed of three or more generations, while most of the remainder were two-generation families (eg adult siblings and their families) (Statistics New Zealand, 2005a).

It is possible that a range of government policies affecting family living standards will impact on the likelihood that extended family members will choose to live in the same household. For example, the level of welfare benefits to sole parents is likely to influence their ability to live independently or not. Likewise the availability – and size – of public housing may have an impact on the ability of extended families to stay together. Child support regulations also potentially impact on the financial viability of living arrangements for both sole parent families and the non-resident parent. However, as sole parents who are reliant on welfare benefits in New Zealand (and in many states in the US) do not receive any direct benefit from child support (as it is collected to offset the benefit), its overall impact may be limited. For those in paid work, the extra income from child support may mean sole parents can live independently, rather than in an extended household.

The tendency for young adults to stay at home longer is associated with longer periods of participation in education and training and levels of youth unemployment. For example, Vogel (2003) conducted a comparison of several European countries, in terms of their welfare systems and several aspects of family form, one of which was the timing of youth leaving the home. He found that in countries with the best employment opportunities and most generous social assistance programmes, youth leave the parental home earliest. However, the relatively simple cross-country comparisons in this study do not provide evidence of causation. It is likely, for example, that youth welfare policies may simply reflect social and cultural norms regarding youth independence.

Very little empirical evidence documents the effects of public polices on grandparents' living situations. Perhaps this is because policies aimed directly at grandparents are also rare. The literature that does exist examines the situation in which the grandparent is either the primary caregiver or living as an extended family member in a household. The New Zealand Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust (2005) reported on a study of 323 families involved in kinship care. The grandparent caregivers were asked to list all the parental issues contributing to the need for care and most listed several contributing factors. Child neglect, cited in 46 percent of cases, drug abuse (40 percent), alcohol abuse (29 percent), child abuse (27 percent), mental illness (26 percent) and domestic violence (26 percent) were the most commonly mentioned triggers for grandparent care.

This example illustrates well the relationships, both direct and indirect, that exist between different factors that may influence certain family forms. A wide variety of reasons have been suggested for the rise in the US in grandparents' caring for grandchildren. These largely centre on issues of poverty, and include factors such as teen pregnancy, divorce, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, incarceration and sole parent families (Roe & Minkler 1999). Using the study described above, for instance, if 44 percent of the children's parents have relinquished the care of their children due to substance abuse problems, how would the implementation of a health policy directed at substance abusers change the incidence of this living arrangement? We were unable to find a study examining these indirect impacts on grandparent caregiving.

Immigration policy is an area of government activity that may have more direct impacts on the living arrangements of particular families. In particular, immigration policies regarding family reunification (ie allowing family to join those who have immigrated) are

likely to affect extended family living arrangements. A New Zealand qualitative study conducted for the Department of Labour (CM Research 1999) of those sponsoring immigration by a parent, found that most of the sponsors provided a home for their parents and some sponsors had a parent living with them permanently. In 1999 the Department of Labour increased the time a sponsor was required to provide accommodation and economic support to their family member(s) to 24 months. These policies are likely to impact on the number of immigrant extended families, although little research has been conducted on this potential impact.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE – LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF DEPENDENT CHILDREN

We found very little research that assessed the impacts of different custody laws on children's living arrangements. There are, however, a small number of US studies that examine the relationship between domestic violence legislation, child access and child custody.

In New Zealand legislation the interests and safety of children are a priority, and so accusations of domestic violence must be considered when deciding on custody (or day-to-day care). The empirical literature describing the effects of various domestic violence laws on the custody of children remains very scarce. The results of a small number of US studies indicate that in some cases child custody and access by the perpetrator seems to have decreased with the advent of various legal protections against domestic violence, while in other cases legislation appears to have had no effect on a perpetrator's child access or custody.

Of those studies that indicate that existing legislation may not protect children involved in child custody cases from someone with a history of domestic violence, Rosen and O'Sullivan (2005) investigated the relationship between an Order of Protection (OP) and a father's likelihood of custody or visitation. An OP is a court order, which is meant to protect an abused person from their abuser. However, as the researchers caution, the presence of an OP, their proxy for the presence of violence in a relationship, would not necessarily represent a history of violence in all cases. In their sample of 1,692 cases of New York Family Court petitions "the court never denied custody or visitation to a parent restrained by an OP" (Rosen & O'Sullivan 2005:1,070) and, in fact, fathers who had OPs were 64 percent more likely to obtain visitation orders than not (Rosen & O'Sullivan, 2005). The data for this study, however, could not specify the type of visitation granted, either supervised or unsupervised.

A study that suggested a mixed effect of domestic violence legislation on child custody cases involved the examination of the effect of the US Model Code on Domestic Violence. In 1994 the US National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges unrolled the Model Code on Domestic Violence, a code that strives to set out more effective ways to deal with domestic violence in child visitation and access cases. Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung, Smith (2005) investigated the effect of the Model Code in custody and visitation cases where the mother has experienced violence. They report that the "statutory presumption against custody to a perpetrator does appear to be effective in reducing orders that give legal custody to a father who had battered the mother. Nevertheless, even with the presumption, 40 percent of the fathers were given joint custody, in spite of the fact that all had been found to perpetrate family violence against the mother" (Morrill et al 2005:1,101). However, the existence of competing 'friendly parent'[36] and

[36] 'Friendly parent' provisions, in the best interests of the child, mandate friendly relations between the both parents.

joint custody presumptions in state provisions complicated the analysis and provides an example of the manner in which different pieces of legislation may interact to produce unexpected results.

Johnson, Saccuzzo, Koen (2005) studied the effects of mediation in child custody disputes involving victims of Domestic Violence (DV) in the San Diego Family Court jurisdiction, to find that the mediation process produced surprisingly little effect in terms of the association between DV and child access or custody. They observed that in over 50 percent of the DV cases mediators did not acknowledge or report DV. In addition, the "presence of DV does not increase protections for the victim, whether child or parent. In fact, at best, victims get a comparable level of protection; at worst they get less protection" (Johnson et al 2005:1,048). One example of this scenario came from their finding indicating that when custody was addressed, 90 percent of non-DV cases resulted in a recommendation of joint custody while 91.4 percent of DV cases resulted in such a recommendation.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF CUSTODY LAWS ON LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Johnson et al (2005) | Sample of Southern California Family Court mediation cases | United States | Child custody | Mediation for domestic violence | Mediation did not appear to improve the protection of victims in child custody cases where domestic violence was an issue. |
| Morrill et al (2005) | Court orders in six states | United States | Child custody | Model Code for dealing with domestic violence | When states adopted the Model Code it was less likely that fathers who battered the mother gained legal custody of a child. However, when states adopted 'friendly parent' provisions, fathers were more likely than battered mothers to gain custody. |
| Rosen & O'Sullivan (2005) | Sample of custody/ visitation petitions from New York City Family Courts | United States | Child custody | Order of Protection | Found that fathers who had Orders of Protection filed against them were 64 percent more likely to obtain visitation orders than not. |

The number and proportion of children living with adoptive parents has changed over the past 40 years. Goodger (1998) cites a rise in adoption in the 1950s with the introduction of closed adoption in 1955, suggesting that keeping the biological parent's identity from the adopted child encouraged them to place a child for adoption. However, this observation is based on correspondence in trends and does not allow for changing social attitudes as a possible confounding factor. Adoption began to fall in the late 1960s, and Goodger attributes much of the decline in adoption in New Zealand to the availability of income support for single mothers (citing Hall 1984 for evidence in international trends). The provision of financial support widened the options available to women to raise their children, and fewer chose adoption.

Some international research has been conducted on the impact of government policies on the use of adoption. Medoff (1993) examined US national Census figures, state data and adoption data in order to explore a number of factors thought to be associated with adoption. He found that women were less likely to offer a child for adoption when Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments were generous. Adoption was also less likely when a woman was employed, was married, was not of a fundamentalist religion, and had lower educational achievement. Medoff concludes that these empirical results suggest that changing gender roles and expectations, and the growing economic independence of women have caused adoption to be considered a less desirable option

than abortion or childrearing. Contrary to Goodger's (1998) linking of adoption laws to adoption numbers in the 1950s, Medoff found the state regulations on open or closed adoption did not have any impact on the adoption process. Furthermore, other aspects of state regulations (eg expense payments to mothers, variations in time to withdraw consent, and use of private adoption) did not impact on adoption rates.

Research has also been conducted on the impact of US welfare reforms on living arrangements of welfare recipients and their children. Brandon (2000) & Brandon & Fisher (2001) examined the claim that states' newfound autonomy to devise their own welfare systems led to more intergenerational family dissolution. Critics of welfare reform had argued that children residing in states with lower welfare benefits would be more at risk of living apart from parents, as some parents would lack sufficient income to raise their children. They used data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (1986-88) in the US to assess how the generosity of AFDC benefits across states affected children's living arrangements. Their findings suggested that the risk of children living apart from parents was lower in states offering higher welfare benefits. Their results also indicated that the children at greatest risk of living apart from parents were those who were either newborns or teenagers, were white, or had parents with disabilities. Their results have been questioned (Winkler 2001; Rodgers 2001) due to the nature of their limited data, the lack of control for some important correlates, and the inability to comment on the direction of causation. Using national data in the US, London (2000a) has also found that for single mothers, a decrease in welfare benefits was associated with a decrease in independent living and an increase in mothers living with their parents.

With regard to specific policies, Acs & Nelson's (2004) research, which has been described above, explored whether financial constraints resulting from family caps were associated with children's living arrangements. They examined data from a sample of low-income families from the National Survey of American Families (1997 and 1999). They expected family caps to result in more children living away from parents (eg with relatives), as parents had financial difficulty providing for them on the birth of an additional child. However, they concluded that, "family caps are not associated with higher probabilities of children living outside their parents' home. In fact, among low-income children, family caps are associated with lower probabilities of living outside their parents' home" (p 284). The authors caution that this finding was not consistent across statistical models used in their analysis.

The effect of child support enforcement has been examined by Acs & Nelson (2004), but the results were inconsistent in terms of their effect on the likelihood that children would be living away from their parents. Jagannathan et al (2004), also reviewed earlier, examined the impact of child support enforcement. They found that stronger child support enforcement by a state (through enhanced effort or a higher collection rate) significantly lowered the probability of the formation of mother-only families and families where children live with neither biological parent; however, only in the case of black children was the effect substantively large. The impact of child support enforcement was thought to be mainly indirect, through the reduction in separations and sole parents, who are more likely to have their children living with relatives.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF WELFARE POLICY AND CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ON LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acs & Nelson (2004) | National Survey of America's Families | United States | Children's living arrangements | Family caps | Family caps were not associated with higher probabilities of children living outside a parent's home. |
| Brandon (2000) | Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Children living apart from mothers | Level of welfare benefits | States with higher welfare benefits associated with more mothers and children living together. |
| Brandon & Fisher (2001) | Survey of Income and Program Participation | United States | Children living apart from parents | Level of welfare benefits | Lower benefit levels associated with more children living away from parents. |
| Jagannathan et al (2004) | National data | United States | Mother-only families and child living with neither biological parent | Child support enforcement | Strong CSE lowered the likelihood of children living away from parents, although the effect was not large. |
| London (2000a) | National data | United States | Mothers living with parents | Welfare benefits | Decrease in welfare benefits was associated with more single mothers living with their parents. |
| Medoff (1993) | Census and state data | United States | Adoption rates | AFDC | Higher AFDC payments were associated with lower adoption rates. |

The actions of child welfare agencies in removing children from their homes are guided by child welfare legislation, policy and practice. The 1989 New Zealand Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act called for a philosophical change in practice, with an emphasis on children being placed within extended family networks, rather than placed in residences or with non-family caregivers. There has been little research on the extent to which the Act has resulted in changes in living arrangements, primarily because adequate data have not been available. However, comparisons of what data are available on numbers in care prior to the 1989 Act, and figures post the Act, indicate a large change in practice regarding placement of children, and an impact of child welfare policy and practice on children's living arrangements (Swain 1995). Caution needs to be exercised in attributing all this change to legislation, as de-institutionalisation had begun prior to the Act and followed international trends in welfare practice (Connolly 2003).Changes in legislation were partly codifying changes in practice already underway.

## EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE – LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF EXTENDED FAMILIES

Studies in this area have focused on two separate areas of government policy: the first examine pension policy and the relationship between income adequacy and independent living among older people; the second focus on immigration policy and the living arrangements of new immigrant families.

Research suggests that the receipt of a pension increases grandparents' propensity to live independently. Costa (1997,1999), for instance, in her study of the living arrangements of the elderly in the US between 1940-50, attributed the increase in the numbers of elderly women living alone to the rise in Social Security and old age social assistance. Interestingly, she chose to use data from 1940-50 because after 1950 "Social Security Old Age Insurance became the dominant form of assistance to the elderly and variation in these benefits may be endogenous to the living arrangements decision" (Costa 1999:41). Between 1940 and 1950 these social security benefits

increased by 27 percent, and Costa attributed this rise to 80 percent of the decline in older single women living alone during this time period. She then used these results to estimate the impact of elderly social assistance from 1950-90, attributing over half of the decrease in the number of elderly women living alone to this variable (Costa 1999).

Similarly McGarry and Schoeni (2000) examined the living arrangements of widows 65 years of age and over, using 1940-90 Census data on living arrangements, and data on the level of social security payments to the elderly. They found that improved economic circumstances, partly through increased social security payments, were associated with more independent living amongst the elderly. Similar results have been obtained by Englehardt, Gruber and Perry (2002), who capitalised on the shifts in benefit generosity to study the impact of this change on the living arrangements of the elderly in the 1980s and 90s. In this period, benefits rose quickly due to double indexing of the benefit formula, and then fell dramatically, as this double indexing was corrected over a five-year period. They concluded that the living arrangements of widows were much more sensitive to Social Security income than implied by previous studies. The authors attribute this to their improved research design (eg the type of household studied, the estimator, data source, level of aggregation and the definition of the income variable), as well as more fluidity in living arrangements in more recent times. They also found that the living arrangements of divorcees, the fastest growing group of elderly, were even more sensitive to benefit levels. Their estimates imply that a 10 percent cut in Social Security benefits in the United States would lead more than 600,000 independent elderly households to move into shared living arrangements.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF SOCIAL SECURITY FOR THE ELDERLY AND EXTENDED FAMILY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Costa (1997, 1999) | State-level data | United States | Living arrangements of elderly women | Social Security and old age social assistance | The rise in social assistance to the elderly contributed to a large portion of the rise in independent living among elderly women. |
| Englehardt et al (2002) | Current Population Survey | United States | Living arrangements of elderly | Social Security | Increased Social Security benefits were associated with greater independent living. |
| McGarry & Schoeni (2000) | Census data | United States | Living arrangements of elderly women | Social Security Assistance and old age Assistance | Increased Social Security benefits were associated with greater independent living amongst the elderly. |

A second group of studies examines the role of immigration policy on the living arrangements of immigrant families. The OECD reported in 2000 that, "since restrictions were applied to immigration in several OECD countries in Europe, family reunion has become the main legal means of entering certain countries" (OECD 2000:105). Many of these laws require a sponsorship period, during which the sponsor family member must financially support his or her family member for a specified period of time. In 1998 family immigration comprised over 25 percent of all immigration in Australia and Canada, and over 65 percent of all immigration in the United States (OECD 2000). Family immigration, therefore, represents not only an important trend in immigration, but also, where sponsorship is concerned, an influential issue in the living arrangements of immigrants.

Most empirical research concerning family form involves the role of immigration policy on the living arrangements of older immigrants and the likelihood of older immigrants

living with other family members. For example, Wilmoth, DeJong, Himes (1997) used US national micro-data to compare the living arrangements between elderly immigrant and non-immigrant populations. They found that differences in living arrangements between the two groups were due to both immigration policies and cultural norms. In terms of policy, those policies "that give preference to family members and require sponsors to sign non-binding affidavits of support are mechanisms that discourage independent living arrangements among immigrant elderly" (Wilmoth et al 1997:73).

Angel, Angel, Markides (2000) further confirmed the increased propensity of older immigrants (over age 50) to live with family, in this case focusing on Mexican immigrants in the US. They cite stricter family reunification laws, and the inability for new immigrants to receive Supplementary Security Income for five years after immigrating, as possible reasons for these living patterns. In Canada too, Basavarajappa (1998) found the 10-year delay in receipt of Social Security benefits, for immigrants over the age of 55 years, was strongly associated with the likelihood of an older immigrant living in a three or more generation household.

**TABLE OF STUDIES – IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION POLICY ON EXTENDED FAMILY LIVING ARRANGEMENTS**

| AUTHORS (YEAR) | SAMPLE | COUNTRY | DEPENDENT VARIABLE | POLICY VARIABLE | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angel et al (2000) | Five-state longitudinal sample | United States | Mexican immigrant extended family living arrangements | Supplementary Security Income and family reunification laws | Family reunification laws and the inability for new immigrants to receive Supplementary Security Income for five years contributed to the increased likelihood that older Mexican immigrants lived with extended family members. |
| Basavarajappa (1998) | National Census data | Canada | Immigrants living in three-generation households | Social Security eligibility | Delayed eligibility for Social Security was associated with increases in living in three or more generation households. |
| Wilmoth et al (1997) | National Census data | United States | Elderly immigrants' extended family living arrangements | Immigration policy | Immigration policies which favour family members and require sponsorship support encourage extended family living arrangements by elderly. |

## SUMMARY

There are a number of areas in which legislation potentially impacts on the living arrangements of children, particularly when a child's parents separate or divorce, and they require court determination of custody. The court's decision is not always clearly a function of legislation however, as the conflicting results regarding domestic violence show. Perhaps this might be expected, as custody determinations are complex, and the range of other factors considered by judges may swamp an effect due to legislation. In addition, research in the US suggests that the interpretation of the legislation by judges may not always be as intended by legislators.

Child welfare legislation and practice is another area in which it might be expected that government policies would have a major impact on living arrangements for a small number of children. While there is some evidence that this is the case, the lack of quality studies makes it difficult to judge its impact. Adoption legislation might also be expected to have an impact on the number of children living with adoptive parents. However, the limited research indicates that the introduction of welfare benefits to sole parents – and the subsequent level of these benefits – had a greater impact on adoption numbers than legislative changes. There is also some evidence that higher welfare benefit levels make

it more likely that children will remain in the care of one or more parents, and that sole parents will live in an independent household.

We could find little research on the actual impacts of child custody and welfare legislation on living arrangements. The focus of research has understandably been on the more direct impacts of such policies, for example child wellbeing and family relationships. Furthermore, such research is difficult to undertake and requires quality longitudinal data to control for the range of alternative explanatory factors.

Extended families, particularly those in which the elderly live with their children, have been the subject of some research interest. Independent living by the elderly has been shown to depend on levels of income, including that from Social Security. Immigration policies that allow for family reunification have also been shown to contribute to greater numbers of extended families, if only amongst recent immigrants. With an ageing of the population, issues of extended family living arrangements are likely to receive greater research focus.

# CHAPTER EIGHT
## discussion and conclusions

## THE REVIEW

The goal of this review was to assess the New Zealand and international evidence base on the actual impacts of government policies on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements.[37] Arising from the results of this review, we also sought to identify worthwhile areas for further empirical research on these issues in New Zealand, and to draw out implications for New Zealand policy.

The review was designed to identify the intended and unintended, direct and indirect impacts of government policies across a wide range of areas of government activity. Our search and consultation strategy was designed to identify as much relevant research as possible, and we believe we have achieved a good coverage of the relevant research, particularly the higher-quality research studies. However, it is also possible there was research evidence that was not identified by our searches. Relevant results might have been mentioned in passing in a study directed at other outcomes, or the results might be included in 'grey' literature (eg unpublished government reports, conference papers). We endeavoured to find as much of this material as possible, however.

Given the wide range of conflicting opinion in this area, a systematic review provided a robust methodology for identifying all the research evidence. This approach was critical to avoid bias associated with the selective presentation and interpretation of research evidence. By being explicit about our search strategies, we have made the process of the review more transparent and open to inspection.

The search and consultation strategy produced a large number of potentially relevant papers. Initial examination of these papers reduced this number considerably, but still left many potential papers to review. A detailed study of these led to the elimination of some of this literature, mainly because it did not report empirical studies or was not broadly relevant to the New Zealand socio-economic and cultural context. The remaining studies were coded into a database and the results analysed for the review. In conducting the review we also considered critically the 'quality' of the research, particularly in terms of the degree to which it might indicate causal impacts.

The extent to which social research is ever able to establish causality definitively is contested. However, different studies provide stronger or weaker evidence of causal relationships. In this review, studies that employed robust research designs – controlled for confounding variables, had representative samples, used advanced analysis techniques, and relied on quality data – were given greater weight than those that lacked one or more of these features.

Despite our emphasis on giving stronger weighting to evidence provided by more robust studies, it seems that much of the research evidence reviewed here is relatively 'weak', in the sense that the designs employed fail to control for a wide range of confounding factors.

[37] There is clearly a wide range of other impacts from these policies, and in fact most are designed with other goals in mind, such as improving family living standards or child wellbeing. We have not evaluated these impacts.

## MAIN FINDINGS

Gauthier (2001), a leading researcher on the impacts of public policy on family form, cautions that 'well-accepted facts' concerning the impact of policies on fertility, for example, "often rely on relatively weak evidence, for which counter examples can be found" (p 12). We have examined the empirical evidence for some well- and not so well-accepted 'facts'. We were surprised to find that in some areas where we would expect an impact from government policy and services (eg child welfare legislation on living arrangements), we found little empirical research. Perhaps because the link was thought self-evident, no one had thought to test it out, preferring to concentrate research resources on more contentious or immediate areas of policy concern.

The main conclusions from the research reviewed are presented below. In summarising these findings it was important to weigh up the various studies, in order to determine the balance of the evidence for a policy impact. In several areas, studies report conflicting findings. Consideration of the quality of studies, including sample size, composition, study design and analysis, is therefore critical to drawing robust conclusions.

The review has found that government policies appear to have very limited direct influence on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements. Certainly, there is no evidence that government policies have been a primary driver of the major social and demographic changes affecting family form that have occurred over the past 40 years.

The provision of welfare has been the most researched policy instrument in terms of impacts of policy on family form. The evidence suggests that in the US context, higher benefit levels are associated with higher rates of sole parenthood and lower rates of marriage. However, there is no consensus about the size of this association, and the magnitude of policy impact is relatively small. It is also unclear how exactly this relationship operates. There is some evidence that higher welfare payments may lead to slightly higher rates of dissolution, although such effects are very small and not always statistically significant.

The impact of benefit levels may also depend on the group being studied, with some US research finding that higher benefit levels may encourage unwed parents to stay together. Among existing beneficiaries, most of the research has found no clear relationship between benefit levels and the likelihood that sole mothers will have an additional birth. In the US there is also mixed evidence of the impact of limiting benefit increases for subsequent births to beneficiaries ('family caps').

Together, this research indicates that benefit levels may influence partnership formation, primarily by affecting rates of ex-nuptial births or marriage among cohorts that have not yet entered the welfare system. The interpretation of this finding is open to question. Rates of sole parenthood increased in the United States over a period in which benefit levels fell in real terms. In addition, reviews of New Zealand research have found no evidence that the DPB actively encourages relationship breakdown among couples, or pregnancy among unpartnered women. It is likely, however, that the DPB allows unpartnered women to keep children who might in previous decades have been given up for adoption. The existence of the DPB may also mean that parents (usually mothers) no longer need to remain in marital relationships through financial necessity, or to form relationships in order to gain financial security.

With regard to living arrangements, there is some evidence that higher welfare benefit levels make it more likely that children will remain in the care of one or more parents (rather than with other kin or caregivers). Benefit levels for sole parents and social

security pensions for the elderly also impact on the ability of both groups to live independently.

The late 1980s' state waivers and 1996 welfare reforms (TANF) in the US have been the focus of a number of studies. Although one of the goals of these reforms was to reduce sole parenthood and increase marriage, the research produced mixed results. Again, there is also evidence that the effects of the reform varied across different population sub-groups. For sole parents already on the benefit, one study found the reforms actually decreased transitions into marriage, while other studies have found no significant impact on marriage rates. There is, however, some evidence that aspects of the waiver and TANF reforms influenced the behaviour of cohorts that had yet to enter the benefit system, leading to higher aggregate rates of marriage and lower incidence of sole parenthood. With regard to the impact of the welfare reforms on divorce, the studies are few and the findings mixed.

Research on marriage penalties in the taxation system consistently indicates that marriage penalties are associated with a reduction in marriage rates, although once again the effect is relatively modest. It is also important to consider combined marriage penalties and subsidies within both the tax and social assistance systems, as some families may face penalties under one system and subsidies under the other. An impact on the proportion of the married population may occur through changes in the timing of marriage, a real increase in the number of marriages, or via decreasing levels of marital dissolution. There is some evidence that reducing marriage penalties influences levels of marriage primarily by supporting married couples to stay together. For example, research on the Earned Income Tax Credit, which reduced marriage penalties for low-income couples in the US, found some evidence that the reforms helped couples to stay together. There is also some evidence that marriage penalties in the tax system may contribute to increased divorce rates, although again the effect is not large.

A number of studies have examined the impact of government policies on fertility rates. For example, higher tax exemptions for dependent children have been linked to small increases in fertility in the US and Canada. Some evidence for a positive impact on fertility, of cash payments on the birth of a child (the 'baby-bonus'), comes from Canada. More broadly, a number of cross-country comparisons indicate that higher levels of financial assistance to families with dependent children are associated with slight increases in fertility.

There is also some evidence that wider policies, which reduce the costs of children and support parents to reconcile paid work and family caring responsibilities, are associated with small increases in fertility. However, studies in this area are relatively weak, and examining individual policies in isolation is difficult, as they are often introduced as part of a package of 'family-friendly' initiatives. Many of these studies are limited in their ability to make causal attributions, due to their difficulty in controlling for confounding factors. In addition, New Zealand appears to be an exception to the cross-country trends noted, due to the highly targeted nature of our family support combined with relatively high fertility levels.

Results for the impact of child support policies on partnership formation, dissolution and fertility are mixed. This review did not find research examining the impact of child support levels on family form – although it is likely that levels may have as much if not more impact than child support enforcement. There is evidence that stricter child support enforcement decreases the likelihood of divorce among existing married couples, but may encourage partnership dissolution among unwed couples. Research also indicates that stricter enforcement may discourage remarriage among non-resident

fathers. The limited research on the impact of child support enforcement on fertility suggests that stricter enforcement reduces fertility, probably through increasing the potential cost of fatherhood for men.

Government formulation of laws is one of the direct paths by which government policies may impact on partnership formation and dissolution. This review has not identified quality research on the impact of variations in laws regarding marriage. However, with regard to dissolution, there is some evidence that the move to no-fault divorce legislation in the US has fostered an increase in divorce rates, at least in the short term. The interpretation of this association is confounded by the fact that these studies have examined divorce statistics, which do not provide an accurate measure of marriage breakdown, as many couples separate, but delay seeking a divorce. As a result this association may be due to the increase in the formalisation of the ending of marriages, rather than an increase in actual relationship breakdowns.

Custody legislation has obvious implications for the living arrangements of children. However courts' decisions are not always clearly a function of legislation, as the conflicting results regarding the treatment of domestic violence in custody determinations show. Child welfare legislation and practice is another area in which it might be expected that government policies would have a major impact on living arrangements for a small number of children. While there is some evidence that this is the case, the lack of data makes this difficult to confirm in the New Zealand context. The limited research available on adoption reforms indicates that the introduction of welfare benefits to sole parents and the subsequent level of these benefits has had a greater impact on adoption numbers than legislative changes. Finally, some research indicates that the nature of immigration policy (eg family reunification and benefit eligibility provisions) can impact on the likelihood of recent immigrants living in extended families.

Below we explore some of the methodological issues that arose out of the review. These go some way to explaining the diversity of results.

## INTERPRETATION ISSUES

Much of the variation in results may be due to the variation in the exact nature of the policy setting in question, and the mix of policies in operation at the time of the research. Mixed findings may reflect the difficulty in isolating the impacts of specific policies within this larger dynamic policy context. For example, using time series data to examine trends in divorce rates in reaction to changes in divorce laws, is complicated by the fact that other policy changes, such as in availability of legal aid, may also significantly impact on divorce rates. Unless the research can take into account these other policy influences, the power of the study to establish specific policy impacts is limited. Various policies may interact, either reinforcing or counteracting policy effects.

Furthermore, the categorisation of specific polices can be difficult, with variation in actual policy implementation being hidden by a general policy term, such as 'no-fault' divorce. For example, US welfare waivers are often coded as a binary variable (yes or no) in research, despite differences in nature of these waivers across different states and their likely impact (Acs & Nelson 2004; Bitler et al 2004). Many of the evaluations of US welfare reform 'packages' treat the reforms as a 'black box' despite significant changes in the policy mix of 'carrots' and 'sticks' in different states.

The details of particular policies or programmes are likely to determine their impact, if any, on family form. These include factors such as the absolute size of welfare benefits and their conditions of eligibility, and the nature of progressive tax scales and whether

assessment is based around individuals or couples. For example, the likely impact of the taxation system on marriage and divorce will depend on the particular design of the system and the levels of the penalties – or subsidies – for different family groups. Similarly, the impact of initiatives such as mandatory work programmes on family form is likely to depend on whether these programmes are successful in terms of improving long-term income and employment outcomes for their participants.

The above issues partly explain the findings with regard to the variation in the impact of policies in different countries. Studies employing cross-country comparisons suggest that what works in one country may not work in another, pointing to the importance of the differing policy contexts, as well as cultural and socio-political differences. This finding means that caution should be exercised when generalising from overseas research to New Zealand, with its own particular social, cultural and policy environment. A policy impact identified by US research will not necessarily be found in New Zealand. Within countries there is also evidence that policies may impact differentially on particular population sub-groups.

Light & Pillemer (1984) point out that most systematic reviews in the social sciences find small effects, due to low statistical power, unreliability of measurement and variations in programme implementation. They believe that research design is important, with better designs tending to find smaller effect sizes. Different types of study vary, in the degree to which they can control for confounding variables, the extent to which they examine individuals' decision-making, and the assumptions made about individual behaviour.

Much of the research reviewed here focuses on aggregate data, comparing either countries or areas within a country (eg states within the US). There are attempts to control for unmeasured differences between areas, but how the relationship between variables is modelled can often influence the results obtained. The most productive approach in New Zealand is likely to be in the study of individuals, preferably followed over time and with measurement of relevant confounding variables. There is no equivalent to state-level variation in policy in New Zealand, making aggregate studies difficult.

Results of studies also often vary according to the years when they were conducted. This suggests it is important to update findings from time to time as the policy, demographic, social, economic and cultural context change. It is also worth noting the change over time in the research concerns, mostly following changes in policy direction. For example, in the US the PRWORA reforms led to a research focus on employment amongst those on welfare, particularly sole mothers. The new 'healthy marriage' proposals will generate evaluations of marriage preparation programmes in the near future.

Another issue that has been mentioned in the review is the time period over which potential impacts are tracked. For example, research suggests that some policies may impact on the timing of births, rather than overall completed fertility. Looked at in the short term a policy may be assumed to have an impact on fertility, although when examined in the long term the impact on total fertility is negligible. Furthermore, it is likely that many policies will take time to have an impact. It is also possible for policy impacts to change and even reverse over time, as other factors (eg social and cultural norms, economic environment) also change and influence the setting in which a policy operates.

A final point to note, with regard to these results, is the inevitable bias built into this review, because most of the more robust research has been conducted in the US. The changes in welfare legislation in the late 1980s and 90s were accompanied by a significant research and evaluation programme. Thus a considerable body of research

literature exists for these programmes. Furthermore, because of the freedom of individual states to introduce their own innovative programmes, there was the possibility of comparing data from different states with and without specific policies/programmes. That most of the research comes from the US should not detract from the findings, but does need to be kept in mind when attempting to apply these findings to the New Zealand context.

## GAPS IN OUR KNOWLEDGE

It has to be concluded from this review that there are many areas where there are significant gaps in our knowledge. Very little is known about the differential impacts of government policy and services on reconstitution decisions. We know little about the differential impacts of welfare, taxation and legal provisions on those considering remarriage, compared with those marrying for the first time. Despite the quantity of research on fertility and the impacts of welfare policies, there are still many inconsistencies in the results of individual studies. Possible explanations for these mixed results need to be explored.

The contribution of government policies to family formation decisions does not on the whole appear to be great. Most researchers discuss the predominant role of 'cultural' and contextual factors, although measuring such concepts, and including them in studies, has yet to be reliably achieved. These terms are often used as proxies for everything unmeasured, which is not particularly helpful. It will be important to identify and measure these factors, and to examine how they interact with policies, to determine their eventual impacts.

It is important to recognise that a focus on direct policy influence may serve to underestimate the extent to which broader policy settings may influence family formation via more complex and indirect pathways. For example, research on fertility decision-making indicates that economic insecurity is a significant deterrent to childbearing. In turn, a wide range of government policies and services influence labour market outcomes and family living standards.

Some researchers have suggested that policy impacts are more likely to occur with certain mixes or combinations of policies, rather than with one individual policy (Grant et al 2004; Gauthier 2004). Policies may work to reinforce one another, or the effect of one may counteract the other. In this context, isolating individual policy impacts – or estimating the combined impact of particular mixes of policies – is exceedingly difficult.

## FURTHER RESEARCH IN NEW ZEALAND

We have found very little research on the impact of New Zealand government policies on family form. None is of sufficient quality to have confidence that there are causal links between these policies and the changes in family form that have been observed over the past 40 years.

Sanderson & Jacobsen (2003) suggest that the limited New Zealand findings on the impact of government policies on family formation and behaviour to a large extent mirror the results of overseas research, but they warn that "as the socio-economic environment has a huge influence on individual decisions, the value of overseas research in predicting the response to policy changes in New Zealand may be limited. The significant differences in family structures and behaviour between the Māori, Pacific Island and European population point to a need for further research specific

to the New Zealand situation" (p 32). In particular, there are a number of demographic, political, economic and socio-cultural differences between New Zealand and the US, from where most of the above reviewed research originates. These include: differences in the tendency to resort to legal solutions to resolve family issues, differing degrees of secularity and religiosity, and states versus a single national legislature.

There are a number of difficulties that will limit the nature of the research that can be conducted in New Zealand. Since most government policies and services apply nationwide there are no readily available comparison groups in different areas. In this context, pilot programmes with comprehensive outcome evaluation provide a useful way to measure impacts of government policy in New Zealand. For example, a recent New Zealand Restorative Justice pilot was conducted in a limited number of courts, allowing comparisons to be made with other courts and non-restorative cohorts.

As we have seen, international researchers have often had to rely on administrative time series data, which can be very limited in coverage and quality. In the New Zealand context, Callister (2001) comments on the need for better data, the linking of existing datasets, and the generation of longitudinal data, in order to facilitate research in this area. As an initial step, it would be worthwhile assessing existing national statistical and research datasets, with regard to the possibility of linkage and use for research on policy impacts on family form (eg for a similar project in the US see Burstein, Lindberg, Fein, Page, LaRock 2003).

New programmes are regularly being evaluated in New Zealand for programme effectiveness, but we are unaware of any that assess indirect impacts on family form. We would advise giving serious consideration to these possible impacts when evaluations are planned and designed. Where relevant (eg where previous research indicates a likelihood of impacts), consideration should be given to including changes in family form as an outcome measure. Although changes in family form may not be the goal of policy, this review highlights the possible unintended consequences of government policy and services. For instance, unless robust research is undertaken, we may be unaware of policy changes that might inadvertently discourage stable relationships or prevent individuals from being able to have children when they wish to.

Attitudes and values have been discussed as important determinants of family formation decisions, and one indirect path by which government policies may impact on these decisions. While there is limited New Zealand data on attitudes to marriage, divorce and childbearing, it may be worth considering the regular collection of such data nationally, with an eye to its use in future research on family form. For example, has civil union legislation resulted in changes in attitudes to cohabiting or same-sex relationships? We would encourage, then, regular assessment of social attitudes in New Zealand. Qualitative studies can also be useful in exploring and describing the life experiences of groups for whom government policies and services are likely to have significant impacts (eg Wylie 1980 on sole parents).

While research on the impacts of New Zealand government policy on family form is likely to be methodologically challenging, there are sound reasons for considering such impacts. Recent policy initiatives with major impacts on family wellbeing (*Working for Families*, Care of Children Act) deserve close inspection. For example, Johnson (2005) suggests the need to monitor carefully the impacts of the *Working for Families* package on two-parent families. There are, too, older policies that have been much debated in terms of their possible impacts on marriage, divorce and childbearing (eg Child Support and the Domestic Purposes Benefit). Research on these later policies might help resolve these debates. However, such research will be difficult to conduct, given the nationwide

implementation of such policies, the lack of comparison groups and the fact that they have been in operation for some time. Such research may have to take advantage of any major changes in these policies in order to assess before and after impacts.

As new policy initiatives are planned and implemented, these too might be evaluated for their impacts (intended or unintended) on family form using appropriate methodologies. Examples include the planned provision of parent education and mediation by the Ministry of Justice, for separating parents; policies that might be expected to have some impact on children's living arrangements, through reductions in conflict between separating parents and possible increases in co-parenting after separation. Likewise, initiatives to address work-family life balance issues, such as parental leave and child care provision, may impact on fertility outcomes. Findings arising from these evaluations would also provide policy-makers with sound empirical data on which to assess the impacts of these policies, and contribute to further refinement of policies if necessary.

Policy-makers need to consider these possible policy impacts when designing and implementing policies and services. A recent review by True (2005) provides a framework for analysing the impact of government policies on families. She proposes that ex ante assessments of the impact of policies include a consideration of possible "incentives or disincentives for family decisions to marry, divorce, separate, bear/adopt children etc" (p 59). Basing such ex ante assessments on firm evidence may, however, be difficult given the mixed findings regarding many of the policies reviewed in this report. In addition, European experience suggests that impacts can be different in different countries, and thus it cannot be assumed that policies adopted from overseas will work in the same way in New Zealand.

In conclusion, this review has identified a number of different ways in which government policies and services impact on partnership formation, dissolution and reconstitution, fertility decision-making and family size, and family living arrangements. Most of these impacts appear to be relatively small in magnitude. In part, these findings may reflect the limitations of research design and methodology, rather than the limited nature of the policy impacts. It is, however, more likely that they reflect the complexity of decision-making with respect to family form. Decisions about marriage, relationship dissolution and whether or not to have a child are a function of a number of factors, including individual personality, history and values. Main determinants may include cultural belief systems, and factors associated with the wider social and economic context. All of these factors are difficult to measure, and may be more influenced by government by indirect than direct means.

This review began by reviewing some of the major changes that have occurred in demographic behaviour in the last 40 years. Associated with these changes has been an increasing interest in the role that government polices play, intentionally or unintentionally, in driving these changes. As a result there has been much debate about proposed policy impacts. At times these debates have been highly selective in their use of the research literature. In this review we have adopted a systematic review methodology in order to widely canvass the research evidence. We then analysed this research in order to draw out a balanced picture of the state of the empirical literature. We hope that the information provided by this review will enable a more informed debate concerning the impact of government policies and services on family form. The report also highlights important research gaps in the New Zealand context, and it is hoped that this work will stimulate further research.

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# APPENDIX ONE

## REVIEW PROTOCOL

This section sets out in detail the specific review methodology.

### definitions

**Dissolution** – the end of a cohabiting or marital relationship, whether through temporary or permanent separation.

**Families** – as defined in the Families Commission Act 2003 'family' includes a group of people related by marriage, blood, or adoption, an extended family, two or more persons living together as a family, and a whānau or other culturally recognised family group.

**Family Formation** – the formation of a family unit.

**Family Size** – the number of children and adults in the family. This includes the decision whether or not to have a child, or additional children.

**Government** – refers to central, state and provincial government.

**Government Policies** – a broad range of government policies was considered, including legislation, regulations, Cabinet and Ministerial decisions, and government agency operational policies.

**Government Services** – including universal and targeted services and programmes, preventative and treatment services, and services delivered directly by government, as well as those funded by government but delivered by non-government providers.

**Impacts** – this includes all types of impacts, positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect.

**Literature** – refers to published and unpublished English language materials. Includes books, journal articles, conference presentations/proceedings, government reports, and web pages.

**Living Arrangements** – living arrangements includes issues such as whether children live with both parents, with one parent only, or divide time in various proportions between the households of separated parents. It also covers considerations of three plus generational households, eg whether grandparents reside with their children.

**Reconstitution** – the decision to form a 'new' family unit, either through marriage or cohabitation.

### sources searched

We used a range of sources for searching for relevant literature. Our preliminary searches indicated that as well as published journal articles, there were a number of important 'unpublished' reports available on the internet, eg conference presentations. Thus it was important to tap into a number of resources to identify relevant literature. At the same time we had to be careful not to double-count research that was published in a number of different formats (eg a research brief, a working paper and then a journal article).

### internet

We conducted specific searches of recommended websites – eg those referenced in key articles, links from other sites, those of identified research groups (websites searched are listed in Appendix Five) and individuals, and those obtained from key informants. We also conducted specific searches of relevant government websites in New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.

General searches – although we also used internet search engines to find specific articles and conferences eg Google (www.google.com), we did not use general web searches as they are time-consuming and less profitable than our other search techniques.

Websites were assessed and a decision made whether to include or exclude them. Those included were searched for relevant material. Website content was to be assessed on the following criteria:

> Who is responsible for the information? Do they state their credentials and contact details?

> Is it clear why the information has been put there?

> Are the sources of factual information referenced, and can the information be verified in another source?

> Is it clear when the web pages containing the information were written and last revised?

## journal databases

We tried to cover a range of disciplinary databases, as well as the more general social science databases. There was a degree of overlap between these databases and a stage of the search process involved identifying and deleting duplicates.

| DISCIPLINE | DATABASE |
|---|---|
| Psychology | Psychinfo |
| Sociology | Sociological Abstracts |
| General Social Science and Law | Proquest Social Science Journals |
| | Web of knowledge – includes Social Science Citation Index |
| | International Bibliography of the Social Sciences |
| Social Services | Social Services Abstracts |
| Economics | Econlit |
| Education | ERIC |

## hand searches of major journals

Initially it was intended to conduct hand searches of a number of journals. However, this proved to be too time-consuming, and a check of two journals (Family Relations and International Journal of Law Policy and the Family) indicated that it was unlikely to identify any relevant literature.

## reference lists

All reference lists in articles cited in this report were searched.

## Campbell database of systematic reviews

www.campbellcollaboration.org

## other possible databases

United Nations publications
OECD and European Union publications

## university library catalogues

An initial search of the Victoria University Library catalogue was conducted (http://library.victoria.ac.nz/). During the database searches the following catalogues were searched for identified material:

| | |
|---|---|
| Massey | www.library.massey.ac.nz/ |
| Auckland | www.library.auckland.ac.nz/ |
| Waikato | www.waikato.ac.nz/library/ |
| Canterbury | www.library.canterbury.ac.nz/ |
| Lincoln | www.lincoln.ac.nz/libr/ |
| Otago | www.library.otago.ac.nz/ |
| AUT | www.aut.ac.nz/library/ |

## key informants

In order to identify the most salient literature and to identify any relevant existing reviews, we approached a number of experts in New Zealand and internationally. To help identify New Zealand experts and literature we sent out letters to government departments, university departments, and so identified key informants.

## team consultants

Associate Professor Bob Stephens, School of Government, Commerce and Administration, Victoria University

Professor Maureen Baker, Sociology, Auckland University

Professor Ian Pool, Population Studies Centre, Waikato University

## government departments

We sent a letter to the following government departments, informing them of the project and asking them if they were aware of any New Zealand or international research on the topic of the review.

Ministry of Social Development/Work & Income
Department of Labour
Statistics New Zealand
Inland Revenue Department
Te Puni Kōkiri
Ministry of Women's Affairs
Ministry of Youth Development
Office of the Children's Commissioner
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Housing
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs
Department of Corrections
The Treasury
Retirement Commission
Department of Child, Youth & Family
Department of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Economic Development
Law Commission

## non-government organisations

We also contacted a limited number of non-government organisations to see if they were aware of any relevant research literature.

Barnardos
UNICEF New Zealand
Relationship Services
Plunket

## new zealand universities

We sent a general email to all New Zealand universities, asking if anyone could identify relevant research or key researchers (a list of those emailed is in Appendix Six).

## international experts

A number of key individual researchers were identified during our searches and consultations. We sent an email to the following individuals, with a general request for them to identify relevant literature and research. A number of these international experts replied with suggested literature.

Theodora Ooms
Linda Hantrais
Jonathan Bradshaw
Anne H Gautheir
Gregory Acs
Andrew Cherlin
Irwin Garfinkel
Lisa Gennetian
Hillary Hoynes
Daniel T Lichter
Sara McLanahan
Robert T Moffitt
Robert Schoeni
Rebecca Blank

## search terms and approach

After trialling various search strategies we decided to search for literature by combining the search term government* (and variants such as legislation, policy, and law), with each of the following terms and their synonyms (see Appendix Two for the details and results of specific searches).

| TERM | SEARCH TERM |
|---|---|
| Family | famil*, whānau, [household], stepfamil* |
| Formation | marriage, family formation, cohabitation, civil union, remarriage |
| Dissolution | dissolution, divorce*, relationship breakdown, marriage breakdown, family breakdown, marital separation |
| Size | family size, household size |
| Living arrangements | custody, shared care, extended famil*, multigenerational famil* |

## initial inclusion/exclusion criteria

Abstracts were checked for relevance, based on the following inclusion/exclusion criteria.

> Time period – published since 1990 (or earlier if it was judged to be an important publication, eg has been widely cited). We conducted initial searches for the period 1970-90 and when this identified significant new research the time period was extended to include this period.

> Language – published in English.

> The material described empirical research – thus it excluded general theoretical discussions. However, we made use of comprehensive reviews of existing research.

> The research and results were relevant to the review questions.

> The results were relevant to the New Zealand context – socio-economic and cultural context. For example, research on birth control in 'third world' African countries was not likely to be relevant to New Zealand.

> The literature was retrievable within the review timeframe.

## template for initial recording and rating of studies

The following information was recorded in an Endnote (version 8) database.

> Bibliographic details – title, authors, date, ISBN, ISSN

> Literature source – journal database, web address, article/book reference list, personal bibliography

> Setting of the study – country

> Initial rating of relevance – empirical literature or major review of research concerning policy and family form. The rating could be either 'Not relevant', 'Possibly relevant' (to be followed up further), and 'Relevant' (obtain a copy).

A sample of these decisions was cross-checked by a second researcher, in order to check reliability.

## process for obtaining and storing retrieved documents

Initially, articles identified as potentially relevant were entered into the Endnote database along with the article's abstract. On the basis of an initial review of the abstract a decision was made as to whether or not to obtain the publication. If a publication was selected for inclusion, the researchers attempted to obtain an electronic or paper copy of the publication. Most journal articles could be obtained electronically, but, if necessary, paper copies were obtained from the university library, or inter-loaned. Books were obtained from the local libraries, or purchased, if unavailable locally. Unpublished papers were often downloaded from the internet, and those that could not be downloaded were requested from the authors.

## template for detailed recording and rating of selected studies

Once a publication was selected for inclusion and a copy had been obtained, it was read and the following information extracted and entered onto the Endnote database.

> Policy and/or service type
> Policy/Programme name
> Impact type
> Family type
> Descriptors of study methodology (Quantitative and Qualitative)
> Study results – description of the relevant results of the research
> Explanations for the results – including alternative, non-policy explanations
> New Zealand policy relevance
> Who coded
> Completeness of information
> Confidence in coding
> Other notes

A second researcher independently coded a sample of these publications, in order to check reliability.

## analysis and synthesis

The results of the search and coding process are presented in Appendix Two. This contains details of the number of articles identified and the number selected for review, and the main reasons for exclusion. However, as this is an exploratory study and we therefore tried to identify as wide a range of possible polices and impacts as possible, some of the reviewed research is more suggestive of links rather than testing them.

Research findings were used to assess the extent to which government policy has an influence on decisions regarding family formation, dissolution and reconstitution, whether to have children (or more children), and what family living arrangements will be. The latter includes whether or not extended family members live in the same household.

In the following chapters the analysis is grouped around these key aspects of family form. The research evidence is summarised, and a judgement as to the weight of evidence made. In making this judgement, consideration was given to the quality of the research study, and in particular its external validity (eg the nature of the sample). It was also important to examine and discuss the extent to which government policies and services can be causally related to changes in family form and living arrangements.

In keeping with the suggestion of Salvin (1995) regarding Best Evidence Synthesis, where the research evidence is based on a number of high-quality studies and the findings are consistent, the reviewers did not attempt an exhaustive review of less robust research.

For each area investigated, the consistency of evidence was examined and any contrary evidence to the main conclusion was discussed. Where evidence was lacking or was too inconsistent to reach conclusions, this is stated. Suggestions for further research are also made.

Throughout the analysis and synthesis the reviewers were mindful of assessing the relevance of the findings to the New Zealand policy, socio-economic and cultural context.

# APPENDIX TWO

## RESULTS OF SEARCHES

**FIGURE 3 DIAGRAM OF THE PROCESS OF THE DATABASE SEARCH; NUMBER OF ARTICLES AT EACH STAGE**


Additional literature was identified through website searches, reference lists, recommended papers etc.

**RESULTS OF THE DATABASE SEARCH BY FAMILY FORM AREA**

| INITIAL RELEVANCE | INITIAL SEARCH RELEVANT | ASSESSED AS RELEVANT | PERCENTAGE RELEVANT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dissolution | 253 | 37 | 15 |
| Family formation | 428 | 65 | 15 |
| Reconstitution | 57 | 5 | 9 |
| Living arrangements | 26 | 13 | 50 |
| Family size | 48 | 6 | 13 |
| **Total** | **812** | **126** | **16** |

These figures need to be interpreted with caution. While the dissolution and family formation and reconstitution searches were conducted according to the review protocol, the search for family size (fertility) turned up a large number of articles. In the time available it was not possible to review all these articles, and thus we chose widely cited review articles as the basis for the report. The living arrangements search was conducted after the others and thus the initial selection process was far more stringent (having learned from the previous searches).

For family formation and dissolution, approximately one in seven of the articles selected as relevant from the initial database search were included in the final selection. The ratio of studies produced by the database search (prior to checking relevance and deleting duplicates) to finally included articles would be much higher. Previous reviews have found widely varying ratios of included to excluded studies. For example Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe (2004) report ratios from a number of studies included (ie that fulfil scientific selection criteria), relative to number of studies authors initially identified in their searches on the topic – 1:10 (Smith 1996), through 1:14 (Barlow 1999) to 1:121 (Woolfenden et al 2002).

# APPENDIX THREE

## INITIAL SEARCH

The table below presents the results of the initial database searches. Number retrieved indicates how many articles were identified by the search terms, and potentially relevant indicates how many of those retrieved were transferred to the database for further screening.

**PRELIMINARY SEARCH RESULTS** [38]

| | DATABASE: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Illumina** *(Includes ERIC, IBSS, PsychINFO, Social Services Abstract and Sociological Abstracts) (KW=) Journal Articles only* | | **Web of Knowledge** *(Doc Type= Article OR Abstract of Published Item OR Bibliography OR Biographical Item OR Book Review OR Chronology OR Database Review)* | | **Proquest Social Science Journals** *(Searching Citation and Abstract, Scholarly Journals, including Peer Reviewed)* | | **Econlit** *Advanced Search All Document Types* | |
| SEARCH TERMS: | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant |
| **Family size** | | | | | | | | |
| "Family size" and government* | 48 | 9 | 29 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 29 | 10 |
| "Family size" and (legislation or law) not government* | 12 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 3 |
| "Family size" and policy not government* | 113 | 17 | 64 | 11 | 7 | 1 | 44 | 16 |
| **Marriage** | | | | | | | | |
| Marriage and government | 347 | 64 | 108 | 16 | 77 | 22 | 239 | 84 |
| Marriage and legislation not government* | 156 | 32 | 39 | 12 | 49 (all dates= 117) | 21 | 30 | 11 |
| Marriage and law not government* | 755 | | 357 | | 257 | | 219 | |
| Marriage and policy not government | 607 | 97 | 296 | 49 | 247 | 44 | 350 | 113 |
| **Fertility and "birth rate"** | | | | | | | | |
| (Fertility or "birth rate" or "family formation") and (government* or policy or legislation) | 1096 | | | | | | 4920 | |
| (Fertility or "birth rate") and (government or policy) | | | | | | | | |
| (Fertility or "birth rate") and (law or legislation) | | | | | | | | |
| **Family formation** | | | | | | | | |
| "Family formation" and government | 25 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 5 |
| "Family formation" and (policy or legislation or law) not government* | 34 | 15 | 16 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 13 | 11 |
| **Cohabitation or Civil Union** | | | | | | | | |
| (Cohabitat* or "Civil Union") and (government* or policy or legislation) not marriage | 71 | 44 | 32 | 14 | 24 | 6 | 13 | 2 |

[38] Most searches conducted from 8-18 August 2005. Living Arrangements searches conducted 28 September 2005.

**PRELIMINARY SEARCH RESULTS**

| | DATABASE: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Illumina** *(Includes ERIC, IBSS, PsychINFO, Social Services Abstract and Sociological Abstracts) (KW=) Journal Articles only* | | **Web of Knowledge** *(Doc Type= Article OR Abstract of Published Item OR Bibliography OR Biographical Item OR Book Review OR Chronology OR Database Review)* | | **Proquest Social Science Journals** *(Searching Citation and Abstract, Scholarly Journals, including Peer Reviewed)* | | **Econlit** *Advanced Search All Document Types* | |
| SEARCH TERMS: | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant | Number Retrieved | Potentially Relevant |
| **Divorce*** | | | | | | | | |
| Divorce* and government | 185 | 39 | 47 | 8 | 29 | 6 | 47 | 11 |
| Divorce* and policy not government* | 480 | 96 | 159 | 39 | 121 | 30 | 84 | 33 |
| **Dissolution** | | | | | | | | |
| Dissolution and (government or legislation or policy) not divorc* | 137 | 17 | 132 | 14 | 50 | 2 | 520[39] 78 | 4 |
| (Breakdown or "family breakdown" or "marital separation") and (government* or policy or legislation) | 289 | 44 | 258 | 3 | 129 | 7 | 255 | 2 |
| **Stepfamil*** | | | | | | | | |
| Stepfamil* and government* | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| (Stepfamil* or remarriage) and (policy or law or legislation) not government* | 103 | 29 | 37 | 15 | 112 | 30 | 11 | 6 |
| **Remarriage** | | | | | | | | |
| Remarriage and government* | 9 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 3 |
| (Stepfamil* or remarriage) and (policy or law or legislation) not government* | 103 | 29 | 37 | 15 | 112 | 30 | 11 | 6 |
| **Living arrangements** | | | | | | | | |
| ("Living arrangements" or custody or "shared care") and (policy or government* or legislation) | 659 | 54 | | | | | | |
| ("extended famil*" or "mulitgenerational famil*") and (policy or government* or legislation) not ("Living arrangements" or custody or "shared care") | 161 | 11 | | | | | | |

[39] The terms 'Marriage' and 'Marital Dissolution' fall under the same descriptor in EconLit. In order to avoid duplicating the previous search under marriage, checking of these 520 was omitted and instead a new search was conducted which excluded these earlier publications. This resulted in 78 publications.

## REASONS FOR INITIAL EXCLUSION

The most common reasons for not including an article were one or more of the following:

- used the keyword in an irrelevant manner ex. 'the divorce of government and religion'
- discussed a developing country situation not relevant in the New Zealand context
- search term related to economic conditions (tax, poverty, welfare) but not directly related to family form ex. Justifications or proposed changes to taxing married couples
- relationship between certain family forms and child wellbeing
- not empirical
- did not appear to be a potentially good review on the subject
- economic implications of certain family forms with no reference to policy ex. Economic impact of divorce
- reviews the logistics of a new law but without any association to family form ex. Mediation in divorce law
- psychological information not related to policy or family form ex. Communication in stepfamilies.

# APPENDIX FOUR

## WEBSITES SEARCHED

*Searched from 30 August 2005 – 15 September 2005*

### australia

Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services
www.facs.gov.au/

Australian Institute of Family Studies
(including papers presented at the Family Research 1996-2005 Conferences)
www.aifs.gov.au/

### canada

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPNR)
www.cprn.org

Department of Justice Canada
www.canada.justice.gc.ca/en/

Government of Canada Publications
http://publications.gc.ca/control/publicHomePage?lang=English

Institute for Research on Public Policy
www.irpp.org

Policy Research Initiative of Canada
http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=root

Social Development Canada
www.sdc.gc.ca/en/home.shtml

Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
www.srdc.org/

Statistics Canada
www.statcan.ca/start.html

The Vanier Institute of the Family
www.vifamily.ca/about/about.html

Treasury Board of Canada
www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/index_e.asp

### new zealand

Brian Easton
www.eastonbh.ac.nz/article152.html

Child Poverty Action Group
www.cpag.org.nz/

Government departments

Paul Callister
www.callister.co.nz/

Relationship Services
www.relate.org.nz/index.asp

### uk

Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)
www.alspac.bris.ac.uk/welcome/index.shtml

Centre for Reviews and Dissemination
Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE)
www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/darehp.htm

European Research Centre Loughborough University
www.iprosec.org.uk/

National Evaluation of Sure Start
www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/

Research in Practice – Supporting Evidence-Informed Practice with Children and Families
www.rip.org.uk/rpu/rpu_current.asp

Social Policy Research Unit – York University
*www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/*

The ESRC United Kingdom Longitudinal Studies Centre
*www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/*

The National Information Centre on Relationships
www.oneplusone.org.uk/

What Works for Children
www.whatworksforchildren.org.uk/

## united states of america

Abt Associates Inc.
www.abtassociates.com/

Administration for Children & Families
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/

American Institutes for Research
www.air.org/

Center for Family and Demographic Research
www.bgsu.edu/organizations/cfdr/research/w_papers.html

Center for Law and Social Policy (CASP)
www.clasp.org

Fragile Families
www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu

Joint Center for Poverty Research
www.jcpr.org/

Maryland Population Research Center
www.popcenter.umd.edu/conferences/mifd/agenda.html

Mathematica Policy Research
www.mathematica-mpr.com/

MDRC
www.mdrc.org/

National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)
www.nber.com/

National Center of Children in Poverty
www.researchforum.org/

National Council on Family Relations
www.ncfr.org/Default.htm

RAND
www.rand.org/

The Clearinghouse on International Developments
in Child, Youth and Family Policies
www.childpolicyintl.org/

University of Minnesota – Minnesota's Children's
Summit 2005
www.childrenssummit.umn.edu/resources.html

Urban Institute
www.urban.org/

Welfare Reform Academy
www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/welfare/ewr/index.shtml

Yale Economic Growth center
www.econ.yale.edu

## other

European Union
http://europa.eu.int/index_en.htm
Searched http://bookshop.eu.int/ for Family or families
policy, family structure

Luxembourg Income Study
www.lisproject.org

Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research
www.demogr.mpg.de/general/structure/division2/lab-
ceffd/49.htm

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
www.oecd.org/publications/
Search for Family Policy

United Nations
Mainly UN proceedings etc.
www.un.org/Depts/dhl/

# APPENDIX FIVE

## CONTACTS IN UNIVERSITIES

A general information request was sent to the following:

### auckland university

Centre for Child and Family Policy Research

Centre for Pacific Studies
Dr Anae Melani (HOD)

Economics
Bryce Hool (HOD)

Psychology Department
Fred Seymour (HOD)

Māori Studies (Te Wananga o Waipapa)
Professor Margaret Mutu (HOD)

Sociology
Professor Peter Davis (HOD)

### aut

Children and Families
Institute of Public Policy
Dr Emma Davis, Programme Leader

School of Social Sciences
Professor Charles Crothers

### canterbury university

Department of Social Work
Sociology and Anthropology
Professor Jim Anglem, Head of Department

Economics
Professor John Gibson, HOD

Māori and Indigenous Studies
Rawiri Taonui, HOD

National Centre for Research on Europe
Professor Martin Holland

Pacific Studies
Professor Karen Nero
Director, McMillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies

Psychology
Associate Professor Rob Hughes, Head of Department

Social Science Research Centre
Professor David Thorns

### massey university

Centre for Public Policy Evaluation
Director, Mr Stuart Birks

College of Business/Centre for Applied Economics and Policy Studies
Professor Allan Rae

Māori Studies
Māori and Multicultural Education
Arohia Durie (HOD)

School of Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work
Professor Robyn Munford, Head of School

Social and Cultural Studies (Albany)
Associate Professor Mike O'Brien

Social and Cultural Studies (Albany)
Mervyl McPherson

### otago university

Children's Issues Centre
Professor A B Smith, Programme Director

School of Business
Stephen M Dobson, HOD

School of Social Science
Professor G W Kearsley
Acting Head, Department of Community & Family Studies

### waikato university

Economics
Professor Frank Scrimgeour

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
Dr Patrick Barrett

Demography/Population Studies
Professor Ian Pool

Director, Population Studies Centre
Professor Jacques Poot

School of Māori & Pacific Development
Dr Ngahuia Te Awekotuku

Social Policy/Sociology
Associate Professor David Swain

Social Policy/Sociology
Dr Jo Barnes

Social Policy/Sociology
Dr Maxine Campbell

# APPENDIX SIX

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr Jeremy Robertson** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families at Victoria University in Wellington. The centre aims to provide high-quality independent Aotearoa New Zealand-based research and information on families and whānau to assist lawmakers, inform policy decisions and educate communities and professionals. The centre supports and carries out interdisciplinary research with a focus on family formation and dynamics, parenting, and wellbeing in young people.

Jeremy received his PhD in Psychology from the University of London in 2004. He has extensive experience in conducting research and evaluations in New Zealand, particularly examining the impact of family structure and functioning on a range of individual and family outcomes.

**Vanessa Rogers** is now an assistant policy analyst with Housing New Zealand Corporation. She has an MA in Anthropology from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada.

**Associate Professor Jan Pryor** is Director of the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families at Victoria University. She has published widely on families and the impact of family transitions on children's wellbeing. She has co-authored, with Bryan Rodgers, a book entitled 'Children in Changing families; Life After Parental Separation', which reviews the international research on children's wellbeing after parental separation.

## Families Commission research reports

1/05 *Review of New Zealand longitudinal studies*, Michelle Poland and Jaimie Legge, May 2005.

2/05 *Review of parenting programmes*, Anne Kerslake Hendricks and Radha Balakrishnan, June 2005.

3/05 *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Key issues and future directions for family violence work in New Zealand*, Janet Fanslow, August 2005.

4/05 *Focus on families – reinforcing the importance of family*. Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes Project. Report on literature review and focus groups, Katie Stevens, Marny Dickson and Michelle Poland with Rajen Prasad, October 2005.

5/05 *Methodologies for analysing the impact of public policy on families, a conceptual review*, Jacqui True, October 2005.

1/06 *What makes your family tick?* Families with Dependent Children – Successful Outcomes Project. Report on public consultation, Robyn Seth-Purdie, Andrew Cameron and Francis Luketina, March 2006.

Reports are available on the Commission's website, www.nzfamilies.org.nz, or contact the Commission to request copies:

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