The Impact of Social Welfare Reform and Workfare on Lone-Parent Female Headed Households in the Niagara Region

by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

MA Program in Social Justice and Equity Studies Brock University St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of recent social welfare reforms on the lives of social assistance recipients. The focus is on single mothers who are dependent on social assistance in a small city in southern Ontario. This detailed examination is complemented with existing case studies in Canada, the United States and New Zealand, as well as aggregate data on poverty in Canada. Participants for the research study were recruited by flyer distribution and referral. Following recruitment, selected participants were scheduled for a tape-recorded interview. The final sample population consists of eight single mothers on social assistance and/or workfare participants. This information is supplemented with interviews from two Ontario Works caseworkers and two Women’s Advocates from a local crisis housing organization. This research project is guided by a socialist feminist framework.

Evidence from interview participants suggest that single mothers continue to struggle in terms of meeting basic needs, such as food, clothing and medications. Housing for low-income families is a concern expressed by the participants as well as by Women’s Advocates who operate within the region. In addition, subsidized housing continues to be problematic in terms of both safety and availability. Recent social welfare reforms (reductions in welfare income and introduction of workfare features) have intensified the economic and social marginalization of these women. Participants, for example, voice concerns about valuing self-evaluation in their Ontario Works and workfare activities. Considerable evidence from interview participants suggest that single mothers remain economically marginalized.
Acknowledgments

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Dedicated to Single Mothers on Social Assistance
The Impact of Social Welfare Reform and Workfare on Lone-Parent Female Parent Households in the Niagara Region
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CHAPTER ONE

The Problem

1:1 Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to review the contemporary evolution and enactment of social welfare reform and workfare legislation and explore the impact of these developments on the lives of women dependent on social assistance. The specific frame of reference for the historical review of materials is from 1994 to 2003. This period was chosen due to the many social welfare reforms legislated as a result of changing political agendas in Ontario. Against the backdrop of this review of government policies, I research the actual life experiences of 8 single mothers employing qualitative data-collecting methods. The research results focus on the ways social welfare reform and workfare participation have affected the lives of single-parent, female headed households in the Niagara Region. Furthermore, to complement the interview data, I incorporate in-depth interviews with 2 Ontario Works caseworkers and 2 women's advocates employed at a local crisis housing shelter.

1:2 Background of the Problem

documents the negative repercussions of social welfare reforms and workfare policies that have been imposed on families in Ontario. Its most recent studies examine the pros and cons of workfare. Research on whether or not workfare and Ontario Works have benefitted participants has been conducted by various individuals and organizations. These studies consider the impact that recent social welfare reforms have on individuals and explore specific target groups, notably single mothers. Evidence suggests that legislation has perpetuated the marginalization of single mothers. The research record suggests that loss of dignity and self-esteem are typical experiences within the Ontario Works program.

Noted social analysts, Ernie Lightman (1997) and Mauve Quaid (2002), provide an extensive critique of social welfare reforms and workfare. The first and foremost problematic area of SARA is that this policy has directly targeted single mothers and their children as a result of major changes in social assistance eligibility and amounts of payments (Lightman, 1997; Quaid, 2002). Under the new legislation single mothers face mandatory employment requirements as a condition for eligibility for social assistance payments. As a result, the underlying social protection and economic security implied by the notion of a

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Keynesian welfare state pause is slowly being eroded. The brunt of this erosion is experienced by single mothers who are active participants in the Ontario Works program. Loss of adequate income has had a severe impact on their ability to meet the daily requirements of nutrition. Further, inadequate funding has also directly caused restrictions in attaining suitable housing, clothing, and so forth.

1:2(a) Social Assistance Reform Act

The Social Assistance Reform Act (SARA) was initiated on January 1, 1998. SARA has and continues to target single mothers.

For the first time in Ontario since the introduction of the Ontario Mothers Allowance Program in 1920, single mothers will face mandatory employment requirements as a condition of receiving financial assistance. [...] women in Ontario—many of whom face major dislocations at some time in their lives due to marriage breakdown, domestic violence, job loss—are losing social protections and a form of economic security that they may never have known they possessed. (Ontario Social Safety Network Backgrounder, 1998:1)

The paper on "Welfare Reform and Single Mothers" documents that nearly 200,000 mothers and their children will be directly affected by social welfare reforms (Ontario Social Safety Network Backgrounder, 1998:1). Social assistance payments to single mothers and their children have been cut by 21 per cent. As a result of the social assistance cuts, "Low-income, female lone-parent

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families remain [...] $8,600 below the poverty line [...] this amount has widened [...] to almost $10,500 by 2000" (Campaign 2000, 2000). Table 1.1 provides an example of before and after social assistance rates.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Type</th>
<th>Former Basic Allowance</th>
<th>Former Max. Shelter Allowance</th>
<th>Former Max. Total</th>
<th>New Basic Allowance</th>
<th>New Max. Shelter Allowance</th>
<th>New Max. Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>$249</td>
<td>$414</td>
<td>$663</td>
<td>$195</td>
<td>$325</td>
<td>$520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent 1 child</td>
<td>$569</td>
<td>$652</td>
<td>$1221</td>
<td>$446</td>
<td>$511</td>
<td>$957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent 2 child</td>
<td>$730</td>
<td>$707</td>
<td>$1437</td>
<td>$572</td>
<td>$554</td>
<td>$1126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Income Security Advocacy Centre, 2004:1

In addition to monetary cuts, eligibility requirements have drastically changed. Criticisms of the Ontario Works Act and mandatory employment programs are expressed by academics, anti-poverty organizations, organized labour and by the individuals participating in the program itself. The Ontario Works employment placement policy is failing at finding suitable, adequate paying employment for single mothers. In Welfare Reform and the Labour Market: Are There Enough Jobs, the Ontario Social Safety Network reports,

If we assume that there is at least one other job available for every job actually recorded by HRDC, and further assume only the number of job seekers now actively looking for work, it means that there are three job
seekers for every job available [...] the number of active job seekers may grow with welfare reform [...] the jobs registered with HRDC tend towards lower pay and less skilled requirements and may better reflect the kinds of jobs most social assistance recipients will be competing for [...] there may be seven or more job seekers for every job available to most social assistance recipients [...] between 1997 and 1999 the Ontario economy will generate approximately 200,000 to 300,000 new jobs [...] barely enough to absorb new entrants to the labour market, never mind the 250,000 to 300,000 people who will have Ontario Works requirements (1998:3).

At the same time as the government has failed to adequately target the problems of economic and demographic changes amongst Canadians, the recipients of social assistance have been blamed for their own predicament. For example, individual unemployment is not being viewed as the result of government policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the lack of adequate wage labour. However individual unemployment, the lack of resources to find affordable housing and changes in family structure have been directly blamed on the individual.

Statistics Canada (2003) reports that in 2002, 20 per cent of recorded families with children were single parent families. This is roughly around 954,700 Canadians. A staggering 82 per cent of these single parent families are headed by women. Ontario itself recorded the greatest concentration of lone parent families in Canada with 486,105 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Of those lone parent families

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in Canada cited, 401,240 (or 82 per cent) are headed by women (Statistics Canada, 2003). Over 400,000 children or 40 per cent, are social assistance beneficiaries and contrary to public opinion, 93 per cent of those children were born before their mothers had to turn to the system to provide financial aid (Statistics Canada, 2003).

1:3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how the social welfare reforms of the mid 1990's have affected the lives of single mothers in a small urban area in Southern Ontario. The information gathered in this study lead to the following conclusions:

1. Social welfare reforms continue to negatively affect single mothers.
2. The lack of suitable housing in terms of affordability, availability and safety remain a problematic issue.
3. The lack of adequate funds to meet basic needs, including nutrition, is an everyday lived experience for single mothers.
4. Low self-esteem and self-worth among single mothers are perpetuated through life experiences as social assistance recipients and workfare participants.
Research Questions

This qualitative key informant study describes and documents the struggles that single mothers on social assistance face on a day-to-day basis. The participants all reside in a small urban area in Southern Ontario. Several questions became significant during the interview process:

1. What is the lived experience for single mothers living on social assistance in this specific context?
2. What specific concerns are emphasized in their discourse?
3. What specific solutions are advocated by these women vis-à-vis social welfare issues?

This study also offers an overview of the Ontario Works workfare program and its objectives from the perspectives of local social service workers and women’s rights advocates. Questions about the workfare program posed to this groups of participants generate discussions of how the system attempts to motivate individuals. In addition, crisis housing workers confirm the finding that social assistance recipients struggle to maintain an adequate living existence. Questions posed to this group of participants generated discussions concerning housing and adequate living conditions within the Niagara Region.

Rationale

Poverty and social inequities remain central issues and potential sources of
conflict in Canadian society. As extensively documented in social research on Canada, the poor are very much with us. National, provincial and local low-income statistics document the parameters of the problem and are frequently reported in the scholars literature as well as the media. The personal experiences of recipients of social assistance, in contrast, are relatively poorly documented. As a result much of our understanding of this central social issue relies on gross statistics rather than the personal comments of the poor themselves.

On these grounds alone - the relative significance and inadequate research record - an explanation of the lived experiences of single mothers on social assistance in a smaller urban region is warranted. Recent changes in social welfare legislation further underline the timeliness of this line of research. As the neo-liberal political agenda becomes further entrenched it is crucial to explore the lived implications for the most vulnerable Canadians.

In addition, poverty is not evenly distributed across the nation. Certain provinces and municipalities are particularly vulnerable to economic marginalization. Unfortunately it is these areas - especially those outside the major urban centers - which have received relatively little research attention.

1:6 Theoretical Framework: Socialist Feminist Perspective

A feminist approach to research is particularly relevant in this thesis as it seeks to understand and analyze the social conditions experienced by women.
Feminist research, here, is understood to encompass both quantitative and qualitative data collecting methods. The feminist researcher strives to "capture women's lived experiences [...] that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge (Campbell & Wasco, 2000:783). This reflects the concrete methodological goals of this thesis.

Particular attention to the intersection of women's economic arena is the focus of socialist feminists. According to Patricia Elliot and Nancy Mandell (1995), socialist feminists pay close attention to the "network of concrete social and economic relationships" that foster inequality (9). These inequalities are perpetuated and maintained within capitalist society through exploitative processes ranging from the feminization of poverty and women's role in domestic labour to the gender wage gap and occupational segregation (Elliot & Mandell, 1995).

With social class as the main category of analysis, socialist feminists focus on the social and economic organization of work in capitalist systems, on the relations between paid and unpaid labour, and the interconnection between production and reproduction, the private and the public (Elliot & Mandell, 1995:9).

In particular, socialist feminism provides a useful perspective from which to assess the impact of social welfare reforms on single mothers because of its attention to class distinctions in addition to race and gender divisions. The current system of social organization is revealed as problematic when women's oppression is addressed. In the social organization of today's society, women's role in unpaid
domestic work as well as a pool of surplus labour have been reinforced by the specific policies of contemporary welfare systems (Abramovitz, 1989).

Female lone-parent families on social assistance are often categorized as unproductive. The ideology of the family ethic (women’s role in unpaid domestic work) is woven into social welfare policy and results in the advocacy for a neoliberal approach to remedy the increasing number of single-parent families. Women’s poverty is blamed on the very existence of single-parent families (Miller, 1992). The solution, according to many modern day policy-makers requires the restoration of the nuclear family which will prevent welfare dependency (Miller, 1992). This policy approach ignores the contributing factors that lead to poverty in a capitalist economic system which are identified by socialist feminists in terms of low wages, welfare payment cuts, unemployment, lack of child support and the bureaucracy of the welfare state itself (Miller, 1992).

Socialist feminists suggest that social welfare serves to fuel the capitalist economy by maintaining “welfare benefits low enough so as not to hamper incentives to work and to ensure that a pool of low wage labour is available when needed” (Miller, 1992:3). The family ethic ideology then justifies women’s entry into low-paid, service sector occupations where a subordinate role is held (Abramovitz, 1989). The subordination in the workplace then reflects and reinforces subordination in the home as well as in society (Abramovitz, 1989).

In short, a socialist feminist perspective is vital to the present research
since it draws attention not only to the oppression of women as a gender but also the ways in which the economic order exploits and perpetuates this oppression.

Further, it approaches the economic order in terms of its direct (non-participation in paid employment) as well as indirect (reproductive work in the home, social welfare policies) manifestations.

1:7 Definition of Key Terms

Child Tax Benefit: refers to money provided from the federal government to families with children as a supplement to yearly earnings. Allocation of funds depends on household income, number of children and ages of children. Social assistance recipients in Ontario have this supplemental income deducted from monthly assistance funds dollar for dollar.

Poverty: The National Council of Welfare (2001) defines poverty as relative and the rates of poverty vary according to government policy and priority. Poverty then is usually measured by income. (See below)

Poverty Line: is often defined in terms of the Low Income Cut Offs (LICO’s) established by Statistics Canada. LICO’s are characterized by “approximate levels of gross income where people are forced to spend much of their income on food, shelter and clothing” (NCWC, 2003:25). The 2002 poverty line in Ontario for a
single parent with one child is measured at $24,069. Total welfare income for this individual is $13,871 (NCWC, 2003). The difference between these two amounts is referred to as the poverty gap. In this case the poverty gap is calculated at -$10,198 or 58 per cent.

**Social Assistance:** refers to the “income program of last resort in Canada” (NCWC, 2003:1). This income program, which is provincially administered, provides money to individuals who cannot adequately meet their own needs or the needs of their families.

**Subsidized Housing:** refers to specific housing units designated for low-income individuals. These housing units are either constructed or purchased by the provincial government.

**Workfare:** current programs in Ontario that select social assistance recipients must engage in to be eligible to collect benefits - programs range from educational upgrading, parenting classes, searching for jobs (job search) to volunteer placement work and job placement.

1:8 **Importance of the Study**

Canadian politics, as well as global political trends, are shifting to a neo-
liberal approach in attempts to sustain a secure economic climate which in turn fuel a global capitalist agenda. This neo-liberal shift typically entails some dismantling of the welfare state while safeguarding a free market. Yusuf Progl er eloquently states that a free market is, “free of government regulation, labour unions, social welfare, environmental laws and ethical imperatives - [and is presented] as the best way to secure human prosperity, health and happiness” (2000:1). In short, in the neo-liberal vision, the rich get richer and the poor become poorer.

The brunt of this political restructuring is experienced by the impoverished individuals in Canadian society. These individuals include, but are not limited to, the working classes, the working poor, the unemployed, social assistance recipients, the homeless and so forth. Amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged are single mothers on social assistance.

Single mothers engulfed in poverty typically lack access to resources, health care, affordable housing, education and their children often lack the self-esteem to develop a positive self-image or supportive social relationships (NCW, 2001; Thomas, 1997). Of particular importance, is the number of women and children involved in poverty, the depth of poverty, and the long-term implications of poverty.
1:9 Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter 2 of this thesis presents a review of related literature that reveals the problems in Canadian society that have been a direct result of social welfare reforms. Reviewed literature includes discussions of workfare and its implementation and Canadian social policy. In addition, case studies of workfare programs in New York City, New Zealand and Australia are reviewed to emphasize the similarities of the treatment of the poor in the wider global context.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology developed for this qualitative research study that sought to provide an active forum for single mothers on social assistance to voice their concerns and share their lived experiences in face-to-face interviews. The research process, participant recruitment and ethical concerns are documented in detail. The interviews are the central element in a multi-prong methodology. Multiple data collections include tape-recorded interviews, reviews of documented statistics, field notes documenting housing conditions, and reviews of previously documented studies. Interviews with women’s advocates provide rich discussions of the economic impact of social welfare reforms and single mothers. Furthermore, Ontario Works caseworkers provide insight into the deployment of workfare and its ramifications on the recipient population.

In Chapter 4, the experiences of single mothers on social assistance are explored. In the section “A Walk Into Poverty”, subsidized housing and low rent housing is described in detail. Evidence suggests that social welfare reforms have
resulted in further impoverishing already marginalized families. Concerns such as not having enough funds for food, housing, medication costs and self-representation are at the forefront of critical issues identified.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, explores policy alternatives. Emphasis is directed toward a more humanist and just approach to the treatment of the impoverished. Consideration is given to a more enhanced collective approach involving not only the state, but community members as well.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

 [...] the poor are often considered less than human, as this makes it easier to exploit them. In Canada, a moral panic was created around the issue of workfare, based on hatred of the undeserving poor. (Sorenson, 2003:113)

2:1 Introduction

Poverty is not, of course, randomly distributed through the population. Certain segments of society are particularly vulnerable. Women, especially single mothers, are at peril. Poverty also permeates the lives of Aboriginal people, the disabled and visible minorities, many of whom also number amongst single parents (NCW,4 2001; Thomas, 1997).

The impact of poverty is life-long and extensive. Life expectancy for children born into impoverished social conditions are two to five and a half years shorter when compared with children born into more affluent social conditions (NCW, 2001). Furthermore, the rate of childhood disability is over “twice as high for children from poor families” compared with children of rich families (NCW, 2001:8). These factors have led anti-poverty groups to launch challenges in terms of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the grounds that progressive

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4 NCW will be used to cite material from the National Council of Welfare for the remainder of this paper; NCWC will be used to cite material from the National Council of Welfare Canada for the remainder of this paper. These are one in the same organization, however, cited differently in researched literature material. Further reference may be obtained in the reference section.
rights also include the rights to education and a reasonable standard of living (NCW, 2000).

Female headed households are particularly vulnerable to increases in inflation and high rates of unemployment. Despite recent increases in the minimum wage, minimum wages are clearly inadequate and make it difficult to provide an adequate life style for a family. The National Council of Welfare 2000 Report states the following,

To reach poverty line in 1998, a worker with one child to support would have to work 58 hours a week [at minimum wage] in Vancouver[...]103 hours a week in Winnipeg[...]a couple with two children 113 hours a week in P.E.I. and 151 hours a week in Winnipeg (2000:17).

Although the minimum wage in Ontario was raised in February, 2004 to $7.15 an hour, it doesn’t lift families out of poverty (NCW, 2004)\(^5\). Table 2.1 demonstrates the inadequacy of minimum wage take home pay.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gross Pay</th>
<th>Take-Home Pay</th>
<th>%Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Employable</td>
<td>$14,248</td>
<td>$12,518</td>
<td>-12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Disabled</td>
<td>$14,248</td>
<td>$13,676</td>
<td>-4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent, One Child</td>
<td>$14,248</td>
<td>$17,536</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple, Two Children</td>
<td>$28,496</td>
<td>$27,237</td>
<td>-4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Evidence suggests that an inadequate living wage results in poor health which in turn leads to poor academic achievements (NCW Autumn, 1999; 2001; Spring, 2002; 2003). Attaining higher education to find suitable employment may be unattainable as a direct result of poverty. In addition, stress caused by socio-economic status compounds health issues since it “is a predominant factor in health status” (NCW, 2001:6). Socio-economic status also influences parenting skills in that stress due to unemployment, low paying jobs, poor housing and dangerous neighborhoods affects the capacity to provide adequate and appropriate discipline (NCW, 2001; Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2002). In short, the literature on poverty documents the complex interplay of negative outcomes which arise from living in poverty.

2:2 Workfare: A Critical Review of an Inadequate Policy

Workfare is demonstrated as a central plank in the neo-liberal social welfare agenda. The notion that social welfare recipients should be required to “work” in some sense for their state funded support occupies centre stage in current social welfare debates.

“Workfare” derives from the phrase “work for welfare” (Evans, 1993 as cited in Snyder, 2003:108). Snyder eloquently defines workfare as having “arisen from a neo-conservative ideology that reformulates welfare assistance as a disincentive to employment” (2003:108). According to Snyder, this ideology is a
crucial element in the state’s efforts to shirk its responsibilities in providing people basic needs (2003).

The notion of workfare has been around for a while in different forms and has different meanings for different groups (Quaid, 2002). Sherri Torjman⁶ refers to workfare as “the new weapon” legislated to eliminate the state’s burden for being responsible for the poor (1997:2).

Mauve Quaid asks “What is Workfare? Something, Nothing, or Anything and Everything?” and outlines the definition of workfare as follows,

Workfare defies any precise definition[...]it is a rallying cry for reform. It provides for a socially acceptable way of attacking “welfare bums” and “cheats”[...]depending on one’s point of view workfare can be seen either as something, nothing, or anything and everything (2002:19).

The first point made by Quaid (2002), in examining “workfare as something”, refers to a definition that varies amongst public groups. These groups consist of government officials, welfare workers, welfare recipients and labor activists. Welfare workers, case workers, case work managers, family support workers and so forth argue that workfare tactics will enable the recipient to acquire a positive identity with an increase in self-esteem when given the opportunity to earn money through work (Quaid, 2002) In contrast, many labor activists, including but not limited to organized labor, have mixed feelings about

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⁶ Sherri Torjman (1996, 1997), in collaboration with the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, has given considerable attention to the Ontario Works program. Torjman has examined social welfare reforms in terms of eligibility, recent legislative changes, appeal processes and so forth. Her works include an extensive overview of the recent Harris government and the implementation of Bill 142. Full bibliographic details in the reference section.
the implementation of workfare. For example, the loss of union jobs to non-union "welfare" workers has become a concern for organized labor groups. In the current globalizing economic market, union jobs and subsequent union dues are on the decline. Labor activists and advocates for fair labor practices are appalled by the very notion of workfare equating it to slave labor and/or the creation of a surplus army of cheap labor (Halton Social Planning Council & Volunteer Centre, 2003; Sorenson, 2003; Torjman, 1997; Quaid, 2002).

Workfare programs are congruent with the logic of production-for-profit. In fact, they lower wage costs and boost profits in the short run by channeling the poor into low-wage labor markets, where the increased supply of labor makes it more difficult for workers to demand higher wages and better working conditions (Rose, 1995:14 as cited in Snyder, 2003:123).

The "mandatory" nature of workfare as the basis for social assistance benefits; that is, the notion that non-cooperation with the program results in the elimination of social support payments, has been seen by some analysts as particularly problematic (Torjman, 1997; Quaid, 2002). This requirement has been noted to be a key element in the execution of workfare social policy. The term "mandatory" in itself has negative implications not only for welfare recipients but for the providers of workfare programs.

The mandatory approach appears to be extending beyond welfare recipients. To facilitate the implementation of workfare by December 1997, Ontario had offered some transition funds to municipalities[...]. August 1997, the province notified local governments that they must have their respective workfare programs in place by October 1997 - or risk losing all their transition monies [previously] there never had been any mention of penalty for late start-up (Torjman, 1997:10).
Government agencies require mandatory participation in workfare programs and must stipulate compliant behavior from social assistance recipients in such programs (Torjman, 1997).

It should be pointed out that government agencies have neglected to impose mandatory employer responsibilities in the use of recipients in any given work related program. An example of some employers’ irresponsible behavior while participating in workfare programs is evident from workfare cases in Quebec. Employers were granted ‘free’ labor for a period of six months on the preconceived notion that the employer would then hopefully hire the participants to do the work for pay. Instead, the workfare recipients were routinely dismissed after a six month work program and new recipients were quickly hired. Needless to say the inefficiencies of this program as a solution to welfare led to its demise (Sorenson, 2003).

The second point made by Quaid (2002), “workfare as nothing” means exactly what it implies. Quaid refers to this as “a relabeling of the same old employment support” programs that governments have been attempting to initiate for generations (Halton Social Planning Council & Volunteer Centre, 2003; Lightman, 2003 Snyder, 2003; Struthers, 2000; Quaid, 2002:20). Training and retraining programs have been around for years. There is little evidence that welfare recipients benefit from re-training programs in that the skills acquired are often
irrelevant or inadequate to the labour market at the time.\textsuperscript{7}

A growing body of research shows most government training schemes fail to improve either the earnings or the employment prospects of their clients...results of various broadly based training programs for unemployed adults, even the training friendly OECD concluded in 1994 that there is remarkably little support for the hypothesis that such programs are effective (Quaid, 2002:22).

**Workfare as nothing** then, is equated with training and more training.

Unfortunately, the integration of unemployed workers into the labour market requires jobs to make it a success and sufficient jobs are not available in the labor market.

Finally, Quaid discusses **workfare as anything and everything**. Here, Quaid includes present-day legislative proposals ranging from mandatory participation in community service programs to educational workshops on how to build an effective resume. Straying away from the punitive approach, outlined by some new workfare schemes take into account liberal and conservative notions of breaking the cycle of dependency. According to Quaid (2002) these new schemes mean nothing for the welfare recipient. The tactic is intended to satisfy the voters that there is a strategy in place for controlling those who supposedly “live off” federal and provincial tax monies. These strategies include a focus on moving

\textsuperscript{7} In the period during the 1970's re-training programs at local colleges were sponsored by the Unemployment Insurance Commission as it was then referred to, and Social Assistance Agencies. As an example of these programs' legitimacy, an individual would engage in an upgrading program from grades nine to twelve to earn a high school diploma that would accommodate future employment. These programs allowed the individual to collect benefits while attending school, however, the District Board of Education did not acknowledge this upgrading. As a result an Ontario Secondary School Diploma could not be acquired. Courses were offered in bookkeeping, stenography and so forth, but what comes to mind now is the welding course - a welders ticket was acquired but, the individual could not work unsupervised. The limitations of such a program are obvious.
"able-bodied welfare recipients ...from reliance on welfare to economic independence" (Quaid, 2002:23). Workfare as anything and everything encompasses a vast array of elements. For example, workfare legislation can encompass the provision of daycare, retraining courses, job search seminars, work placement facilities, and so on. For this reason workfare strategies may be shaped in a myriad of ways to suit individual community interests as well as the political concerns of the day.

2:3 Workfare and Implementation

Quaid's (2002) last definition of workfare as anything and everything provides a particularly realistic explanation of the true essence of workfare. As Quaid (2002) points out education and training, alcohol counseling, drug counseling, transportation and child care are all incorporated into planning for a feasible solution to "re-citizenize" those who remain outside the productive regime.

Along with Quaid, the Canadian Council of Social Development - CCSD - (2000) has extensively researched the particular facets of workfare. The CCSD identifies three major areas of workfare implementation. These areas are 1) employment support, 2) community participation and 3) employment placement (Snyder, 2003; Quaid, 2002). Social assistance recipients in Ontario must participate in at least one of the following areas to qualify for welfare benefits.
• Programs providing upgrading skills, job search skills, and so forth.
• Programs for working for no pay in community based organizations in an attempt to provide the individual with acquired skills that may later be used for gainful employment.
• Programs involving regular employment as available through agencies.8

To be eligible for social assistance benefits, all Ontario Works recipients must be involved in at least one or all of the programs mentioned. Involvement in the participation programs is guaranteed because “failure to sign an Ontario Works participation agreement” or “failure to comply with the participation agreement result in sanctions”, the most drastic of which is the revoking of social assistance payments (Halton Social Planning Council & Volunteer Centre, 2003:1).

Workfare schemes are described and defined differently among Canadian provinces and territories. Table 2.2 (pages 25-27), provides a description of current welfare reform programs by region throughout Canada. Despite alternate wording, the implications for welfare recipients remain much the same. The stereotype of persons on social assistance not wanting to work allows governments to sanction the poor on behalf of the taxpayers and to put an end to this “frivolous lifestyle”. As John Sorenson points out,

Workfare remedies the situation by punishing the poor, shifting focus from structural factors to lazy people. For those who have jobs, joblessness typically is seen as a test of moral character. Many think

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8 For example, the Job Gym in St. Catharines will refer certain individuals for certain jobs directly to the prospective employer.
welfare recipients should be forced to take any kind of job for low pay. The suspicion is that they are, somehow, secretly enjoying themselves on the meager relief they receive (2003:118).

In particular, workfare policies blur the role of the national debt. Both Liberal and Conservative governments have rationalized economic restructuring and plans to reduce federal and provincial debt loads through social program reforms. Generous social programs legislated in the 1960's and 1970's, according to Neo-Liberal and Conservative re-structurers, have been responsible for a rising national deficit (Baker & Tippin, 1999). These economic restructuring strategies ignore the impact of a growing global economic market on various classes of the population. Negatively affected by social program reforms, initiated by the re-structurers of Canadian economic interests, are single mothers on social assistance (Baker & Tippin, 1999).

Snyder (2003) suggests that workfare implementation strategies are basically in tune with a neo-liberal political philosophy. Individual responsibility and not government responsibility eliminate governmental accountability for poverty and destitution that affects marginalized groups within society. In addition, too generous a social assistance plan will deter individuals from seeking gainful employment (Peck, 2001; Snyder, 2003; Quaid, 2002). Economic and structural changes have led to the punishment of particular groups within society in terms of unemployment, the nature of work and so forth (Snyder, 2003).

Social policy revisionists introduce workfare as the end of the Keynesian
welfare state. Shragge mentions that workfare is "contingent on a type of work that is paid at a rate far below the social norms" (1997:17). In addition, able-bodied persons required to perform mandatory workfare obligations do not include single-parent welfare recipients with children under school age (Shragge:1997). However, changes in legislation in 1999, forces sixteen and seventeen year old mothers to "attend school without regard for the age of their children" (Snyder, 2003:117). This requirement is characteristic of the LEAP (Learning, Earning, and Parenting) program which is one of the components of the workfare program.

Table 2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province/Territory</th>
<th>Title of Program</th>
<th>Program Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>Supports to Employment Program, 1996</td>
<td>Continuum of services. Incentives, rather than requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>Employment Support Services, 1997</td>
<td>Array of services, including work placement. Participation mandatory or benefits discontinued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Program Details</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>Employment First, 1996</td>
<td>Variety of training and employment programs. Mandatory participation by employable people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>Supports for Independence, 1990 Welfare Reform, 1993</td>
<td>Employable people must seek or prepare for work. Refusal may result in loss or reduction of benefits. Initial applications “diverted”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>Productive Choices, 1997</td>
<td>Participation required. Self-employment and volunteerism accepted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Snyder, 2003:116.

2:4 Social Policy

The obsession with reducing state spending is a central manifestation of these [social policy] changes, with a particular emphasis on cutting social programs.../corporate restructuring has generated massive unemployment and increased poverty and with the cutbacks in social programs, left a variety of social needs unmet (Shragge, 1997:24).

Ernie Lightman (2003) provides a very helpful approach to social policy in Canada. He suggests that economic policy is a subset of social policy. Social policy has various meanings depending on the context; for example, it may advocate for anyone from the impoverished to those who succeed in the economic arena (Lightman, 2003). Although Lightman (2003) suggests social policy should entail a common meaning - community members helping the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, and so forth, this is often not the case. When social and economic policy considerations merge conflict, the less affluent members of society may not receive attention, thus further, marginalization occurs:

Was the decision of the Harris government in Ontario to cut welfare rates by 22 per cent in 1996 an act of economic policy (to cut government spending and reduce the deficit) or a manifestation of social policy to punish those dependent on the state (Lightman, 2003:37).
In the attempt to develop a viable definition of social policy, Lightman (2003) uses three approaches. Lightman refers to Richard Titmuss' use of the analogy of an "iceberg" to draw a comparison between social policy and social welfare (as cited in Lightman, 2003:38). According to Titmuss, social welfare spending is indicative of the tip of the iceberg with other forms of social policy as the foundation or base. This analogy demonstrates that the submerged parts of the iceberg, "occupational welfare and fiscal welfare are much larger and less visible than the tip" (Lightman, 2003:38).

The second approach to social policy is referred to as the public burden model. From this perspective, Lightman suggests that "anything that interferes with this [economic] growth - specifically, welfare spending - must be firmly restrained" (2003:39). This approach may be a more commonplace idea given governments reaction and receptivity to the plight of the poor in Canadian society. Based on capitalist and individualist ideologies, the absence of provisions for the poor or non-productive members of society is evident.

The third approach is the handmaiden model or investment in human capital. In this approach social policy and economic policy merge with decision making processes. The investment in human capital in the form of education, job training and so forth, is a necessary component for maintaining a skilled and productive workforce. This approach was first acknowledged in a review of social assistance in Ontario.
Transitions (Ontario, 1988) the only comprehensive review of social assistance conducted in Ontario, argued the case for higher welfare spending almost entirely in terms of investment. Rather than seeing welfare as supporting recipients in lives of dependence, Transitions viewed spending as investment, giving recipients the resources and skills to graduate from social assistance to lives of independence and autonomy. These ideas became grotesquely distorted in later workfare programs in which recipients had to participate in meaningless make-work activities. The potential long-term benefits to individuals and to society from investment in education and training were lost in what became highly politicized programs to blame the poor (Lightman, 2003:40).

These approaches to defining social policy can be useful given specific areas of concern. However, Lightman (2003) finds Richard Titmuss’ simple definition of the term most helpful. Titmuss’ suggests that “policy implies choice” and this entails “decision-making within a range of feasible alternatives” (Lightman, 2003:41). The ability to make choices to improve certain social conditions or not to improve social conditions is what social policy is all about. However, there are clear differences of opinion in terms of basic elements here and what constitutes improvement.

2:5 Bill 142

The Harris government began the process of dismantling of all aspects of the welfare state with the implementation of Bill 142 which cut welfare in 1995 by 21.6 percent (Lightman, 2003; Shragge, 1997; Torjman, 1997; Quaid, 2002). Figure 2(a) highlight social assistance cuts to both couples with two children
compared with single parents with one child in Ontario.

In a much-quoted comment, the Minister of Community and Social Services “advised welfare recipients to cope with this...by buying 69 cent tins of tuna to cut food costs” (Torjman, 1997:1). In other words, the current state expenditure on social welfare is a drain on the system, hence a drain on taxpayers. These monies could perhaps be better allocated in areas that prove more profitable.

Figure 2(a)\(^9\)

Social Assistance Cuts - Couples, 2 Children; Single Parent, 1 Child

\(^9\) The amounts on the left of the table indicate Canadian Dollars - the numbers at the bottom of the table indicate the specific year.

Bill 142 advocated one of the most significant social welfare reform tactics in Ontario - the introduction of the workfare program. Using the American model of workfare, social welfare recipients are required to participate in the workfare program to enhance their working skills and hopefully, to increase the prospects of future employment.

What can Canada learn from the United States about welfare and its reform...not much. For them, our more generous social programs fundamentally differentiate the two countries and make Canada’s public policy...superior to that of the United States...Probably our more generous social policies explain, in part, the absence in Canadian cities of large districts with the level of violent crime and social distress that exist in US urban ghettos. But comparisons such as these are dangerous. Their effect is to lull Canadians into parochial smugness. How many Canadians are aware that unemployment among aboriginals in western Canadian cities is as widespread as among urban blacks in the US and that the proportion of Canadian aboriginals living in cities has tripled over the past three decades. If Canadians want better policy to address aboriginal poverty, they are foolish to ignore the history, the failure of the US policies that have addressed similar problems of urban unemployment (Richards & Vining, 1995 as cited in Peck, 2001:216).

Harris did not acknowledge the impact that economic restructuring had on the labor market (Shragge, 1997). Instead of connecting the loss of jobs with increased welfare rates, Harris blamed the increase in welfare expenditures on too generous and under-regulated social assistance benefits (Struthers, 2000). Ontario’s welfare caseload had increased from 4 percent to 12 percent between the years of 1981 and 1994 resulting in an increased of welfare expenditure costing the state from 2 billion dollars to 6.2 billion dollars for the same time frame (Struthers, 2000).
Alberta

In Canada workfare was first implemented in Alberta and Quebec as "pseudoworkfare schemes" (Peck, 2001:215; Shragge, 1997; Sorenson, 2003). The deployment of mandatory workfare programs in Canada was considered illegal by the Supreme Court of Canada and was halted by the Federal government up until 1996. The illegality of mandatory work programs in Ontario was abolished in 1996 shortly after the Klein government of Alberta cut social assistance subsidies by 20 percent as a method of providing incentives to work. The Alberta social services minister is quoted as stating, "Albertans can no longer afford social service programs which provide welfare recipients with a higher standard of living than that of working Albertans...his purpose is not to make welfare unbearable...but it has to be uncomfortable enough that people will try find an alternative way of living" (Peck, 2002:218; Shragge, 1997). The ideas expressed here correlate with the myth of welfare dependencies; that is, that many welfare recipients are taking advantage of societal largesse and would not do so if welfare was not so easy to obtain and benefits were not so generous. Social policy makers, may "act to exclude the poor from broader social life and political processes" to punish them for their reliance on the state (Shragge, 1997:31). During this period of social policy revamping in Alberta, the provincial minimum wage in Alberta was 60 percent higher than the benefit levels. In addition, following subsidy cuts, the minimum wage rose an astronomical 90 percent higher
than current benefit levels. The message was clear - employment was the only viable avenue for Albertans’ economic survival.

Alberta’s workfare model and its government cost-cutting agenda was quickly adopted by other Canadian provinces in an attempt to attract political support. Workfare has demonstrated to be profitable for some businesses in Quebec as the program provided a cheap and abundant supply of labor.

The next section of this chapter examines similar social welfare reform programs in the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Case studies of Canadian workfare participants and the impact that social welfare reform and workfare programs has had on social assistance recipients follows this discussion.

Case Studies of Workfare Programs

2:7 New York City

The work of Mauve Quaid (2002) provides insight into the implementation of workfare in New York State. The Work Experience Program (WEP), one of the most extensive programs documented, was instituted in New York City in 1995. This program concentrated on developing public sector jobs as well as accommodating manual and menial jobs. This program, which is similar to that of workfare in Ontario, has a participant involvement of over one hundred thousand individuals. Mayor Rudolph Guiliani set goals for the program and advocated on the programs behalf at the state legislature in Albany. Government officials
the century completely” (as cited in Quaid, 2002:98). Over one million New Yorkers were involved in the WEP program including over one-half of a million children.

In documented statistics published by the Human Resources Administration in 1997, social assistance programs costs the state two hundred million dollars a year to administer the program and two billion dollars a year directly related to social assistance programs. An initiative aimed at massive welfare recipient cuts in costs became the mandate for state administration officials (Quaid, 2002).

The ultimate effectiveness of the program was not a major concern in legislative terms. Instead, the marketing of the program for political platform purposes took precedence. This was apparent when the program was in its implementation stages. Participants’ former skills and education had no bearing on what sort of job was considered to best suit them. Each social assistance recipient was treated the same regardless of work history, educational background, male, female and so forth. To begin with participants were placed in a public or non-profit work site and must work to earn their benefits. The hours of work “are calculated by dividing their benefit level by the minimum wage” (Quaid, 2002:101). Of particular interest in this program are the conditions set out for employers that participate in the WEP. According to Quaid, “agencies are penalized if participation percentages do not meet quotas...for government and
calculated by dividing their benefit level by the minimum wage” (Quaid, 2002:101). Of particular interest in this program are the conditions set out for employers that participate in the WEP. According to Quaid, “agencies are penalized if participation percentages do not meet quotas...for government and not-for-profit-agencies” (2002:101).

Participation in the WEP is mandatory for all social assistance recipients. Participants who are non-compliant are punished by the withholding of benefits, food stamps and medicare. Single mothers with pre-schoolers are not exempt from the program. Suitable day care accommodations must be made by the individual and not left to be made by the state. Finding suitable daycare are in some instances problematic. For example, the lack of suitable daycare resulted in tragedy for a social assistance recipient participating in the WEP program:

A 17-year-old Pittsburgh-area mother on welfare, Tiffany Bennett, left her infant son at home alone to attend a job-training program. Bennett “felt she could not miss attending”. The child was ill due to an ear infection, and therefore would not be taken by his regular childcare facility. Left home alone that day, a fire in the apartment killed the 11 month old boy (Ontario Social Safety Network, 1999:2).

Not only is the lack of adequate child care an issue here, but in addition, fear of social assistance sanctions resulted in the death of child. Failure to comply results in the same penalties aforementioned for any social assistance recipient. Lloyd Fineburg, the director of WEP, states the following,

The aim of New York City’s workfare is to try to fill up the week with some kind of activity. Work experience is the biggest part, but we also have other departments that assist with job search and
training[...] the city’s mandate is 35 hours a week of activity (as cited in Quaid, 2002:104).

In 1999, Mayor Guiliani extended the WEP to include the homeless. This mandatory participation involved 4,600 families along with 7,000 single adults. Failure to comply with the program resulted in homeless individuals not being able to turn to shelters and soup kitchens for immediate aid. The program also imposed guidelines on the shelters. The impositions “required the city’s homeless shelters to use the same system of rules, work requirements and sanctions that it [the city] employed[...].” (Quaid, 2002:104). It is this involvement of the homeless that renders Fineburg’s following statement moot:

The program has great value. It gets you out of the house. If you work in the welfare area long enough, you realize that you need something other than a cheque. We’re breaking down a long tradition of dependency[...] it may be hard, but in the long run I believe we are doing the right thing (Quaid, 2002:104).

However, the WEP program was viewed unfavorably by members of organized labor. The program resulted in antagonistic relationships between unionized workers and workfare participants. Unlike Ontario’s program, the WEP replaced unionized jobs with forced labor. This circumstance led to complaints from workfare participants that rather being placed “in supportive positions, line workers report that they are placed in adversarial [positions]” (Quaid, 2002:109).

2:8 Aotearoa, New Zealand

New Zealand policy makers, once advocates of a cradle-to-grave welfare
state, have similarly taken drastic measures to curtail expenditures from the governmental purse. These measures are part and parcel of state welfare legislation restructuring. New Zealand politicians, as American politicians, have committed themselves to ridding the state of "parasitic behaviour" (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001:712). Parasitic behaviour is the term used to describe welfare dependency. The following discussion focuses on how the New Zealand government has targeted single mothers in an attempt to revamp its social assistance program.

Although alternate ways of dealing with the impoverished were advocated in the past, New Zealand has now adopted some of the legislative strategies to "tighten eligibility requirements and institutionalizing workfare" - a scheme popular in the United States and Canada (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001:712). The following quotes are indicative of how the American and New Zealand governments view the state of social assistance recipients:


At a certain point an overly generous welfare system will make it more worthwhile for whole categories of people to rely on the State rather than their own initiative (National Party of New Zealand 1993:15 as cited in Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001:712).

The purpose of the program in Aotearoa sought to create an autonomous individual rather than an individual that is dependent upon the system (Baker &
Implicitly, poverty was blamed on the individual and not social and economic conditions or structures (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Green, 2002; Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001).

Catherine Kingfisher and Michael Goldsmith (2001) employ qualitative methods in an attempt to explain the effects of social welfare reform and workfare in the United States and New Zealand. The use of focus groups and in-depth interviews provides a comprehensive study of the similarities of the impact of welfare reforms on the two participating populations. Both studies focus on single mothers.

Social welfare reforms were instituted by drastic cuts in welfare benefits, mandatory participation in programs aimed at the reformation of individuals and the revamping of eligibility requirements (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001). Furthermore, the government imposed sanctions in terms of welfare benefit cuts on any single mother who gave birth to an out-of-wedlock child while being a recipient of social welfare benefits. As is the case in Ontario and New York City, workfare programs involved menial labor usually at minimum wage. Single mothers were required to arrange for adequate daycare for pre-school children, which was later reimbursed or in some cases funds for daycare were forwarded on the condition that the mother was involved in workfare participation.

Two phases of welfare reform in New Zealand took place (Baker, 2002; Baker & Tippin, 1999; Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001). The first came in 1991
with the election of the National government. At this point welfare benefits were rerouted based on target groups rather than historical universal provisions. Justification for this shift was made on the basis of absolute poverty rather than relative poverty. The second phase in 1996 was introduced with the Tax Reduction and Social Policy Bill. Changes to the Domestic Purposes Benefit are as follows:

1. All welfare recipients with children between the ages of 7 and 13 were required to attend a yearly interview with Income Support Services. These interviews were structured to encourage the individual to take steps toward future independence and autonomy, specifically in terms of entering the labor market.

2. Welfare recipients whose youngest child was 14 years of age were required to take aptitude tests for proposed work assignments, to be actively seeking employment, to be involved in any offered training or educational programs. (Baker & Tippin, 1999).

Similar to the programs in Ontario and New York City, failure to comply with these regulations resulted in punitive measures, basically benefit reductions. To fit the description of its new goals the welfare department renamed itself Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). As noted by Kingfisher and Goldsmith “the relabeling exercise did not separate the two key nouns” (2001:719).

Although social policy legislators are taking steps to shape the workfare
program to model workfare in the United States and Canada, recent legislation by the Labor coalition government, as discussed by Baker (2002), may impede the process. Proposed legislation will make work testing more flexible and the program not as restrictive in terms of childrens' ages. This condition will enable some mothers to remain at home. However, policy may still require women with pre-school children to actively seek employment (Baker, 2002). At present mothers with pre-school aged children are not required to work outside the home due to the lack of childcare resources. For those women who do work, subsidized daycare is not an option (Baker, 2002). Most employed mothers seek daycare among friends or family.

2:9 Australia

As discussed below, John Burgess, William Mitchell, Duncan O’Brien and Martin Watts (2000) research the effects of workfare and social policy in Australia. Their methodology is a policy analysis of the Australian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In addition, their analysis considers the possible benefits of workfare for capitalism, in terms of sustaining a reservoir of surplus labor as opposed to providing employable skills for participants.

In 1994, the Australian Labor government introduced welfare reforms in a published White Paper (Burgess, Mitchell, O’Brien & Watts, 2000). The legislation in the White Paper included the development of Job Compact. The
reform outlined provisions of entitlement on the basis of individuals being actively engaged in employment activities. This nullified the exclusive right to social benefits under the Human Rights Code (Burgess et al., 2000). Between 1996 and 1999 further revamping of the system was initiated by the conservative Coalition Government. The restructuring of the social benefit system mainly focused on unemployed individuals collecting unemployment benefits. However, similarities to restructured programs for social assistance recipients in other countries exist, Australia's named its workfare program "Work for the Dole" or "The Social Security Amendment Act" (Burgess, et al, 2000; Green, 2002).

Work-for-Dole requires that all early school leavers and unemployed young people [...] work 12-15 hours per week for a six month period [...] government intentions are to develop similar social contracts with other unemployed populations...imposes obligations on young unemployed people which presuppose that it is their personal characteristics, rather than general labor market imbalances, that are the source of the continuing unemployment problem (Stilwell, 2000:24 as cited in Green, 2002:20).

Once again the responsibility for unemployment or poverty is shifted toward the individual, rendering the state and its economic policies unaccountable for the impoverished population.

Green notes that "the new paternalism is a middle ground between the welfare state and neo-liberalism" (2002:23). This paternalism focuses on a remedy to intervene and restructure the behavior of the poor and deviant. In particular, the notion of 'mutual obligation' reflects the new paternalism (Yeatman, 2000 as cited in Green, 2002). "Mutual obligation" means that an
individual should make an active contribution to society in terms of work rather than taking a passive role in being welfare dependent (Green, 2002). For example, an active contribution to society may involve community service. Community service participation is legislated as a Work-for Dole area. Similar to New York City and Ontario, community service has become a common recipient of welfare recipients labor. However, the stigma associated with community services is often negative since the criminal justice system also prescribes community service work as a mandatory condition of sentencing. The following section on current research focuses on the effects of workfare programs on individuals in Canada and elsewhere.

2:10 Social Welfare Reform Ontario - Previous Research Studies

The Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre (HSPCVC)\(^{10}\) has conducted various studies on the impact of social welfare reform and workfare utilizing information gathered by Statistics Canada. This organization has outlined three major problems in the way Ontario Works has serviced its recipients:

1. Domestic abuse of women on social assistance;
2. Domestic abuse and issues of employability. For example, women in abusive relationships experience lack of opportunities in terms of attaining meaningful and economically sound employment; and
3. Increased depth of poverty and poor health amongst children of social assistance recipients (HSPCVC, 2003, Section 5:1).

The HSPCVC suggests that the Ontario Works program has neglected these issues

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\(^{10}\) The Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Centre (HSPCVC) is a non-profit organization that utilizes community members as well as city officials to conduct various studies concerning social issues.
from 14.5 per cent or 934,000 children to 21 per cent or 1,472,000 in 1995. Many of these children are in families depending on social assistance. If parents on social assistance receive an allowance that does not allow them to provide for their family the necessary food, clothing and housing, this may have severe consequences on their children. Unhealthy children make for unhealthy families, which makes for an unhealthy society (HSPCVC, 2003, Section 5:1).

An investigation into the problematic areas of childcare for parent(s) participating in the workfare program also suggests negative implications.

Ontario already has a serious shortage of quality regulated child care, and there are enormous waiting lists due to cut backs. In 1997 in Toronto the waiting list for subsidized child care stands at 18,000 families. If a parent refuses to take part in a Ontario Works mandatory activity...because it does not accommodate parental duties, the person will be in violation of the Ontario Works participation agreement and face sanctions. In this case, the parent is being put into a situation in which he/she might have to neglect his/her child in order to receive assistance (HSPCVC, 2003, Section 5:2).

The study also reveals that there is no provision in current legislation to provide child care for those social assistance recipients who participate in workfare programs. Inadequate child care places children at risk and may lead to a lone parent being labeled neglectful. Inadequate child care arrangements may even instigate removal of a child from a particular household by Family and Children’s Services.

2:10(a) Perpetuation of Dependency in Abusive Relationships

A 1996 survey by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses revealed that workfare could perpetuate and/or increase domestic violence.
2:10(a)  **Perpetuation of Dependency in Abusive Relationships**

A 1996 survey by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses revealed that workfare could perpetuate and/or increase domestic violence.

The findings reveal that:

In 63 per cent of women’s shelters in Ontario, women pointed to cuts in social assistance as the deciding factor in choosing to return to an abusive partner. In 66 per cent of women’s shelters, women cited that the cuts in social assistance were deciding factors in staying with an abusive partner (HSPCVC, 2003, Section 5:3).

The consequences of staying in the midst of abuse have long-term implications.

Studies show that children in abusive family relationships that were direct witnesses of family violence had lower academic achievements. Furthermore, children who witness family violence are more likely to be involved in violent relationships later in life (HSPCVC, 2003, Section 5).

2:10(b)  **Poor Connection to Paid Work and Re-Training**

An in-depth study of workfare participants conducted by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto was published in April, 1999 (Holloway, 1999). The report is titled *Broken Promises: Welfare Reform in Ontario*. The methodological protocol included interviews and focus group discussions with hundreds of workfare participants in Toronto, Peterborough, Guelph, Niagara...
Region, Sudbury, Durham Region, Thunder Bay, London and Windsor (Holloway, 1999; Workfare Watch Program: Interim Report, 1999). The following is an excerpt from an interview with Linda Walsh, former workfare participant and executive director of “Low Income Families Together”:

It’s not as easy as ‘get yourself a job’. You’re stressed out because you’ve gotta jump through all these hoops, and that come across in an interview. People on assistance don’t have enough money to buy food, clothing, grooming supplies, etc. (Holloway, 1999:1).

Jenny, a workfare participant in Hastings County is quoted as saying:

I thought I could learn some new skills, and especially computer stuff. But I am just there to do a job and get a cheque. Some of the things they get me to do is ridiculous like make coffee for the Executive Director and cut out shapes on paper. Jobs no one else wants they give me to do (Holloway, 1999:3).

Furthermore, these studies documented by the Social Planning Council of Toronto 1999, suggest that workfare programs do not enhance participants skills and prepare them for meaningful work. Rather, the program seems to restrain social assistance recipients by not allowing them to attain necessary education and training for future prospects of gainful employment (Holloway, 1999; Welfare Watch Interim Report, 1999). Such is the case with Linda Walsh who commented on the volunteer work that she was required to perform. She comments, “I felt it was demeaning[...] wasted my time when I could have been looking for work” (Holloway, 1999:4).

Andy Mitchell, one of the co-ordinators for the 1999 report, conducted focus group interviews and stated that “there were a handful of people who had a
positive experience... compared to overwhelmingly negative reports (Holloway, 1999:4).

"I don't know what they expect from people," said Walsh. She lives in the Beaches, and couldn't always afford transportation into the city. Eventually, Ontario Works gave her some money for clothes and transportation, but not while she was looking for a job and truly needed it (Holloway, 1999:5).

In addition, the hopes of attaining gainful employment quickly vanished. For example, an interview with a job placement participant in Peterborough revealed that "Rather than getting the skills training she needs, she is being told to keep volunteering. Her assessment? It's not working for me" (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:11). In addition, participants placed in volunteer organizations were said to be treated differently since they were on workfare and were assumed to be in the organization for a short period.

2:10(c) Confusion

Andrew Mitchell's research report also indicates the confusion among participants regarding their involvement with workfare (Workfare Watch: Interim Report, 1999). Some workfare participants thought that they would be given the chance to upgrade education, while some had high hopes of actually attaining gainful employment (Workfare Watch: Interim Report, 1999). It appears the program is plagued by lack of information and participants are not informed of "expectations, the employment alternatives, or the supports that could be made available" (Welfare Watch: Interim Report, 1999:4). However, all participants
were clear on the punitive measures which would be imposed when they did not participate in the program. This confusion permeates research results.

2:10(d) Unreasonable Expectations and Inadequate Supports

Evidence suggest that most participants understood the workfare program as being more or less an intensified job search. The major themes that emerged from discussions about the job search were “matter-of-fact statements of their Ontario Works program, discussions of excessive and unreasonable requirements sometimes imposes; and the lack of supports available” (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:7).

Jon, in Toronto, felt that the requirement that he make ten job contacts every day as unrealistic, especially given that unemployment is still high by historical standards. In the Niagara region several participants talked about the difficulty of job searching in that region without assistance with transportation, with several communities spread out over the region (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:7).

The unreasonablebleness of the job search program is also demonstrated in the case of a participant living in Peterborough who was required to continue the job search by telephone while being hospitalized (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999). Supports such as child care costs, transportation costs, clothing and grooming allowances were common grievances and concerns among the majority of participants (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999). In addition, according to this report, a pregnant woman in Toronto was required to continue the job search program. Although Ontario Works Program specifically excuses
programs.

The education component of the workfare program resulted in some participants looking forward to enhancing their educational skills. While some participants were successful in the educational endeavors, others experiences were less promising:

Even when education is offered it appears with threats and risks attached. Rita, in Niagara was offered the opportunity to complete her high school education, but was refused child care for her 18 month-old child and was told if she left the course or ‘didn’t make it’ she would be cut off assistance. Jackie in Thunder Bay also understood that the opportunity to return to school carried a threat: do so or be cut off, and they have to do so when their child reaches six months of age (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:13).

This 1999 land-mark examination of workfare in Ontario has documented with in-depth interviews the inefficiencies and problems of the workfare program. The researchers have concluded that life on welfare is not easy and participation in workfare programs has more negative implications than positive. In addition, “Ontario Works is reducing many people’s chances of getting a job” (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:1).
2:11 Ontario Works Service Delivery Model

As previously mentioned, issues such as confusion, frustration, inadequate supports, and so forth, are basically the result of the revamping of social assistance programs. A study by Dean Herd and Andrew Mitchell, Discouraged, diverted and disentitled - Ontario Works New Service Delivery Model (2002), describes the inadequacies of the new system.

In 1997, the Ontario government embarked upon a pioneering joint business venture with Andersen Consulting (now known as Accenture) to redesign the delivery system for social assistance. The 'Business Transformation Project' substantially altered the nature of public/private partnerships in the province, allowing the private sector to become more deeply entangled in what were previously deemed to be core government functions. (Herd & Mitchell, 2002:5).

The research study documents interview results from seven focus groups in 2001. Participants were recruited from the following Ontario cities - Brampton, London, Peterborough, Sault St. Marie, Scarborough, St. Catharines and Toronto. Evidence suggests that the new service delivery models' main objective is to reduce costs by mainly discouraging applications due to the complexity of the application process. According to the city of Ottawa study, evidence suggests that the new program is more interested with “surveillance and deterrence, than it is with assisting people to find employment” (Herd & Mitchell, 2002:8). The application process itself requires endless requests for documentation such as rent receipts, employment records, utility expenses, and so forth. Further, caseworker/client relationships are deterred by the constant rotating of caseworkers with various clients. This rotation
results in repeated requests for information from the client by the newly assigned caseworker.

The new service delivery model is an impersonal and detached system of assisting persons in need. As one participant responded,

We’re having a hard time, and [...] they make it harder for us. We’re going through a hard time, that’s why we are on the system. Because we’re all going through a hard time and life is not perfect. Life is life. Sometimes some people are lucky, more lucky than others. But some people are not, and we’re not. Help us instead of degrading us (B. Sault Ste. Marie as cited in Herd & Mitchell, 2002:1).

2:12 Conclusion

The research record suggests that neo-liberal and conservative economic restructuring has resulted in multiplied difficulties for unemployed individuals, single mothers, along with any person in need of social assistance. Social policy makers targeted the poor as the major cause of the national deficit and created social policy legislation that curtails social programs, specifically income support programs. Resulting social welfare reform regimes in New York City, New Zealand and Australia emphasize neo-liberal and conservative rationalization of economic restructuring without taking into account the impact of the global economic climate. It appears that globally, the attack on single mothers is part and parcel of a growing neoliberal approach to the political economy.

Canadian social policy makers are also participating in a trend setting marginalization of social assistance recipients. Social welfare reform in Canada,
particularly Ontario, has had a drastic impact on single mothers. Research studies have demonstrated that workfare does not work. Emerging themes that arise from these studies are as follows:

1. **Perpetuation of dependency in abusive relationships** - studies show that social welfare cuts and/or workfare programs have resulted in inadequate social assistance payments to individuals and/or families. The lack of a living wage to adequately feed, clothe and house an individual and their children may result in an individual remaining in an abusive relationship.

2. **Poor connection to paid work and re-training** - studies show that re-training programs are inadequate therefore gainful employment is hindered.

3. **Confusion** - evidence suggests that a vast amount of confusion exists among social assistance recipients concerning workfare. This state of confusion is mainly due to the program’s objectives not clearly defined. Furthermore, social welfare caseworkers do not follow similar agendas. This may also lead to confusion of definition. The expectations of participating in workfare programs and the penalties for non-compliance are more clearly defined, therefore more clearly understood.

4. **Unreasonable expectations and inadequate supports** - studies highlight examples of social assistance recipients having to participate in workfare programs while hospitalized or incapacitated. In addition, to further create barriers to gainful employment issues such as transportation costs and
daycare have not been adequately addressed.

The treatment of targeted and marginalized groups such as single mothers in New Zealand, the homeless and so called able-bodied in New York, the unemployed individuals in Australia and single mothers in Ontario are characteristic of neoliberal capitalism in its clearest form. It can be distinguished by the uncaring or irresponsible attitude of government toward people in need. Furthermore, without adequate income support programs in place, poverty and despair are inevitable.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3:1 Introduction

Canadian political scientist, Naomi Black, states that “feminist research insists on the value of subjectivity and personal experience” (as cited in Reinharz, 1992:3). This methodological perspective informs the current research. Here, the focus is on the lived experiences of the respondents.

In-depth interviews are employed as a method here on a number of grounds. The population to be studied was not easily accessible and not necessarily amenable to questionnaires or other social research methods. Problematic areas include issues of literacy, access to telephones (in the case of telephone interviews), language barriers and so on. In-depth interviews benefit the research by providing a sense of the personal experience, feelings, motivations as framed and articulated by the respondents themselves. In addition, observation of the social environment (neighborhood and home) provide a sense of how the research population - single mothers - perceive their direct social location. Valuable insight into the lived experiences of respondents are also attained through their presentation of self in terms of attire, hairstyle, home decorating and so forth. Conversely, since the researcher wanted a partially focused approach,

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Language barriers are an obstacle due to the high numbers of immigrants on social assistance and residing in subsidized housing. In addition the lack of education (ie English language competence) may prevent respondents from participating. Individuals suffering from mental illness may experience difficulties answering questions over the phone or completing questionnaires.
which specifically explored the impact of workfare, semi-structured interviews face-to-face appear to offer the best overall approach. The reasons for a partially focused approach as opposed to a rigid structured approach is based on establishing a comfortable and trustworthy environment in which respondents are aware of their freedom to establish their own agenda and to express a variety of emotional and personal responses. The following section provides a detailed account of some of the research difficulties encountered during the recruitment process.

3:2 Research Difficulties

Respondents for this study were recruited through an informal process. Contacts were made through personal recommendations and by flyer distribution. One hundred flyers were distributed in mailboxes at Ontario Housing complexes (low-cost housing with a high percentage of welfare recipients) in addition to handing the flyers out at local job recruitment organization (see Appendix H). Responses generated by the flyer distribution were revealing. A majority of the respondents were not quite sure of what workfare actually was. Replying to the flyer distribution, potential respondents were clearly confused and posed questions such as the following:

1. “What is this workfare all about - do you have jobs that we can choose?”
2. “Is this something like career day in high school?”
3. “Do I have to work to get the 20 bucks?”
4. “What kind of jobs do you have for me?”

Upon further discussion, it became clear that many respondents did not meet the criteria
outlined for this study (ie: that they were participants in the workfare program). A second set of one hundred flyers was then distributed in the same locations, however the flyers were reworded as to clarify the nature of the project (see Appendix I). A more positive response to the second set of flyer distributions resulted in the recruitment of potential participants.

Not only was there general confusion about the meaning of workfare, there was evidence of hostility to intruders and researchers. During my flyer distribution, one of the residents of this particular Ontario Housing complex, asked what I was depositing in the mailboxes. Noting an air of hostility, I introduced myself. I hesitantly informed her as to the nature of the recruitment process in hopes of recruiting participants for interview discussion for my particular project. Following a brief explanation of my project, she sharply replied, “Just because this is a low income area, do you think we are all on welfare here? Some of us have jobs and it’s those that don’t that give us a bad name and bring people like you around to nose into our business”. Although I did not feel that she fully understood the nature of my project, her tone of voice and forward stance projected outright resistance to anything that I would have to say. Clearly a sense of social stigmatization made her suspicious of any foreign interventions.

An interview previously conducted with Ontario Works caseworkers revealed that some neighborhoods that I was intending to visit were dangerous and I should not attempt to distribute flyers alone. This voiced precaution is typical of the perception that low-income housing areas are particularly difficult to research due to the high-crime rates and dangers to unaccompanied women.
3:3 Recruitment Process

Following the second set of flyer distribution, thirty individuals were recruited who were participating in the Ontario Works program. Potential participants were given a "Letter of Information" (see Appendix B) by the researcher or a second party and were instructed to telephone the researcher if they were interested in participating. Following preliminary interviews, with all thirty individuals, ten individuals were selected for in-depth interviews. The purpose of conducting preliminary interviews was to confirm and verify eligibility in terms of meeting specific criteria. The parameters of research population are as follows:

1. Participants for in-depth interviews must reside in the Niagara region,
2. are in receipt of Ontario Works subsidies,
3. are actively or have previously participated in the workfare program,
4. are between the ages of 25-50,
5. are single mothers with a child(ren) in the home.

Once a decision had been reached by the researcher, in terms of a particular respondents' eligible criteria status, the researcher met with the potential participant and answered any questions. At the time of the interview, the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D) was explained, signed and copies provided. Following a second introductory interview with the ten respondents associated with Ontario Works - eight participants proved eligible for the research study. Two respondents were disqualified for various reasons - 1) were not currently in receipt of social assistance but working in low-paying as an alternative to collecting social welfare benefits which they had done in
the past, 2) were presently engaged in a common-law relationship, and 3) were in current receipt of Disability Pension.

Four additional interviews were scheduled with members of local social assistance organizations and/or advocates on behalf of homeless women. The reasons for choosing to interview Ontario Works employees are listed below:

1. To gain insight into the regions’ mandate on workfare,
2. to explore issues such as housing and daycare, and
3. to attempt to analyze attitudes toward social assistance recipients.

Similarly, women’s advocates on behalf of homeless women were chosen to be interviewed because of their involvement with the poor in the Niagara Region. Homeless women, as has been proven by the interviews conducted, are over-represented by single mothers. This homeless shelter in particular frequently provides emergency shelter for single mothers and their children. The majority of these single mothers are in receipt of social assistance benefits but have not been able to maintain adequate living conditions for themselves or their families. Their homelessness is mostly the result of evictions.

The Ontario Works caseworkers and women’s advocates were contacted directly by the researcher. These respondents are informal acquaintances of the researcher and were recruited online at their respective places of employment. The reason for recruiting online is to maintain a level of formality. The researcher did not intend for an informal conversation, but a semi-structured interview that would generate useful information (see Appendix G). A “Letter of Information” (see Appendix B) was sent via e-mail outlining research objectives and nature of the interview questions. Before commencement of
interviewing, an "Informed Letter of Consent" (see Appendix D) had been explained, signed and copies provided.

3:4 The Interview Process

There are numerous variations on the interview process such as oral histories, ethnographic interviews, group interviews and focus group interviews. For the purposes of data collection here, I employed active interviews on a one-to-one basis. They are described as active insofar as the interviews are an exchange, a conversation, in which the content is actually framed by both interviewer and interviewee. The interviews are semi-structured in design to allow flexibility in phrasing of specific questions, as well as individual follow-up questions, to various individuals. For example, interviews conducted with members of a visible minority group might include some conversation referring to racism and/or discrimination. However, at the same time the same major themes were addressed in each instance.

The interviews were taped, with permission of respondents, and later transcribed by the researcher. One respondent was uncomfortable with being tape-recorded and did not give written consent for the recording. This respondent appeared particularly anxious about the whole interview. After extensively reassuring that her comments would not be used to incriminate her in any way, the interview commenced and the researcher relied on note-taking. In addition, field notes were generated immediately after each interview as well as in the course of data analysis.

As noted in many methods texts, tape recording an interview is invaluable in that
no information from the respondent is lost. In addition, voice recordings convey emotions. When interviewing research respondents about experiences of discrimination or frustration with the welfare system, the respondents' tone of voice is significant. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in that they generate responses which are more likely to disclose true feelings and emotions. While structured interviews require specific answers to specific questions, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the nature of questioning. This flexibility allows the researcher to address each respondent in a particular way depending on individual living or economic conditions.

Numerical identification of interview tapes, transcripts and notes ensured confidentiality. Ontario Works caseworkers were given the option for their name to be used in the transcription by a signature endorsing their consent. This additional signature was incorporated in the original "Informed Letter of Consent - Ontario Works". All correspondence and research materials such as signed consent forms and tape cassettes were stored in a private, locked filing cabinet.

Interview discussions were held at an agreed upon location. Two Ontario Works respondents chose Brock University as an appropriate location for interviewing. Although the interviews for these two respondents were held at Brock University, the researcher provided transportation to Brock University from their homes. This allowed a glimpse of the two respondents living conditions. The remaining four Ontario Works respondents chose their homes as the interview site. Ontario Works caseworkers chose their place of employment as an appropriate interview site. Similarly, women's
advocates also chose their place of employment. Ontario Works Participants were
compensated for childcare and/or transportation costs to a maximum of twenty dollars.
Conditions for compensation are outlined in the respective “Letters of Information”.
Respondents signed a notice of receipt of compensation at the conclusion of the
interview (see Appendix F).

3:5 Examination of Research Base

Policy review is also an intrinsic aspect of the research method employed here.
Ontario Works legislation is reviewed for this project as well as welfare legislation in
New York City, New Zealand and Australia (see Chapter 2). Previous information
pertaining to this subject has been gathered from sources such as the National Council of
Welfare Canada, Status of Women Canada, Workfare Watch and so forth. An
examination of published research on social welfare reform and workfare provides the
basis for establishing the credibility of the current research and an opportunity for
comparisons. Of significance to this project is published documentation of similar
studies of Ontario Works and workfare using focus groups and interview methodology.

3:6 Ethics

This research is clearly rife with ethical concerns. The first ethical issue which
emerged in the research process involved contacting potential participants and outlining
in detail the research and its ethical guidelines. As noted above there were three research
populations: Ontario Works caseworkers, women’s advocates and individuals actively
participating in Ontario Works programs. All three research populations were concerned with confidentiality.

The Ontario Works caseworkers required a signed statement guaranteeing anonymity as an assurance of confidentiality. Concerns of anonymity are mainly due to the content of responses to interview questions. These respondents represent the social welfare system in the Niagara Region and if responses are to be taken out of context, supervisory reprimands may occur.

Similarly, women’s advocate also required a signed statement guaranteeing anonymity of themselves and the organization that they are affiliated with. Confidentiality here guarantees the anonymity of the clients that are served by the shelter as well. Following strict guidelines concerning the confidentiality of clients, these women’s advocates were not able to elaborate on the clientele. However, they provided insight into the problems that single mothers face in terms of housing in the Niagara Region.

Ontario Works respondents and the issue of confidentiality led to an array of concerns. The main concern for these individuals is the fear of retribution from government officials. Discussing problems with individual case workers and the reprisal that might ensue worried some of the respondents. One respondent was concerned with the fear of public disclosure and the consequent stigmatizing identity of being a welfare recipient participating in the workfare program. Reassurance was given by the researcher that their answers to interview questions, their place of residence, and their present occupation will not be associated with their names. As noted above, numerical
coding allows for complete anonymity guaranteeing confidentiality. In addition, confidentiality was assured in terms of the following. There was no identification of respondents on research documents and no identifying materials included in published analyses of results. Access to the research materials is restricted to the researcher and her supervisor. Finally, all research materials once the research was completed and evaluated, are to be shredded or otherwise destroyed.

The discussion of personal poverty and the frustrations surrounding the efforts to introduce social change may instigate anger and resistance. Given the nature of the topic, sensitive personal issues might arise and emotional upset was a concern. As an interviewer, I have extensive experience as a counselor. Having worked for 18 years with the mentally ill, persons affected with psychological problems and dementia in an institutional setting, skills have been developed over an extensive period of time with educational workshops as well as on-the-job experiences. Furthermore, as a health care provider in the Niagara region, I am fully informed of the crisis network resources available in the region.

As indicated in the attached documents, respondents were assured of not only their right to confidentiality, but their right to withdraw at any time without penalty or to direct the discussion in a different direction if, for example, they felt emotionally overwhelmed. The various provisions outlined in the ethics application satisfied the concerns of the Brock University Research Ethics Board and formal approval was granted March 8, 2003 (refer to approval form Appendix A).
CHAPTER FOUR
Data Analysis

4:1 Introduction

Despite the fact that Canada is a signatory to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights\textsuperscript{12}, all Canadians do not fully enjoy the right to food, clothing, and housing. As revealed by the respondents interviewed here, the poor often must juggle competing needs for food, shelter and resources. In many instances, shelter is acquired that does not adequately meet the individual’s needs for a safe, healthy, clean environment or these needs are met (albeit in part) at the expense of an adequate supply of food. The following chapter details the struggles experienced by contemporary Ontario Works recipients as revealed through the present research.

The interviews revealed several prominent themes, 1) housing issues, 2) basic nutrition, 3) self-representation, 4) daycare, 5) transportation, 6) confusion about the program, and 7) frustration with Ontario Works in general. Housing issues include concerns about affordability, availability, location and neighborhood environment. Crisis housing is also discussed here highlighting the problems surrounding availability of affordable housing in this particular region. Basic nutrition is a focus of concern as a

\textsuperscript{12} Article 25 of the Human Rights Declaration Act states that 1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [himself] and [his family], including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [his] control and 2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection (Ontario Social Safety Network, 2003:3)
result of social assistance cuts that on occasion force single mothers to supplement rental fees with the allowances received for basic needs, in other words, food. Inadequate provisions of daycare or government subsidization of daycare, provide another obstacle for welfare recipients trying to enter and remain in the labour market. The lack of support for daycare functions to keep employable women in an impoverished state. Finally, subjective experiences while participating in the workfare program highlight the negative aspects of the program itself and how this negativity is embodied by each individual. Each of these themes is discussed in detail below.

4:2 Research Respondents

Interview respondents are grouped into three categories: single mothers on social assistance (R1-8), Ontario Works caseworkers (CW1-2), and women’s advocates employed at crisis housing units (WA1-2). Below is a brief description of the Ontario Works recipients interviewed for this project.

Respondents 1, 2 and 3 (R1, R2, R3) are single mothers with one child. Respondent 5 (R5) is a single mother with four children. Respondents 4, 6, and 7 (R4, R6, R7) are single mothers with two children. Respondent 8 (R8) is a single mother with three children. Respondents 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 reside in subsidized housing units. Respondents 1, 2 and 5 reside in non-subsidized rental apartments. Both women’s advocate workers (WA 1-2), are employed at a local crisis housing shelter in St. Catharines. The non-profit organization that the women’s advocates are affiliated with provides various services including access to housing for women and children in crisis.
situations, emergency housing to street youth, emergency shelter for other female homeless persons and provide assistance in the application process for Ontario Works.

4:3  **Housing - Affordability, Location and Social Atmosphere**

Adequate housing is considered one of the fundamental necessities of life according to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Article 25 Section 1 (Ontario Social Safety Network, 2003:3). Housing issues confronted by social assistance recipients and low income earners include affordability, quality of housing, availability and location. The lack of adequate and stable housing often results in shelter use and even homelessness. In addition, with the lack of affordable housing, people are thrown into sub-standard, ghetto-like areas that, in turn, affect their health, self-esteem and their ability to create a stable home environment for their families.

Being a welfare recipient often means living in low-cost housing. This physical environment contains and reflects their daily struggles. Although housing problems were a consistent theme, the nature and degree varied from one site to another. Below, I will discuss each of the sites in turn, describing the physical layout and the specific issues.

4:4  **A Walk Into Poverty**

As discussed in the methodology chapter, initial efforts to locate respondents involved visits to several subsidized housing complexes. Site number one is exclusively designated for social assistance recipients. This was the first site for both flyer distribution as well as interviews with participating social assistance recipients.
Distributing flyers in each unit mailbox provoked interest among the complex's younger residents. A few children followed me from unit to unit, not speaking, only observing. Children were shabbily dressed and some rode bicycles that were rusty and in ill repair. Although I felt no threat from these children following me, I had been advised by local caseworkers not to visit this complex alone due to the reputation of the residents. As one interviewed case worker informed me:

_We never go in there alone. Always go by two, have someone with you. These people are unpredictable. Never go in the dark, the area is not well lit. You are obviously not going to fit in and people will recognize and become suspicious of your presence. This may provoke an assault. (CW1)_

Even though these words were in the back of my mind when I arrived at the complex, the distressing nature of the complex itself overwhelmed me so intensely that the forewarning escaped my train of thought.

The housing complex is situated at the end of a working/middle class neighborhood, surrounded by a rusty, steel fence. Parking lots, three in total, with faintly outlined parking spaces and pitted with potholes, provided access to the entrance of each complex. Each parking lot is accented with a large, city garbage bin and there are few parking spaces for visitors. The contrast from one side to the other is marked. While manicured lawns, well-kept residences and multi-vehicle driveways line one side of the street, broken screen doors, drives riddled with asphalt craters, clumps of grass and dirt in what might have been a small front yard, line the other side of the street. Two different worlds face one another.

The two story townhouses in this housing complex present an imposing,
windowless block. Each of the 160 units has an entrance way which is accessible by entering a hall-like passage about six feet in length. These passages are dark and gloomy and one might be hesitant to enter since the front door is not readily visible. There are no front and side windows in the building. The back of the unit has two windows, one for the kitchen and one for the upstairs bedroom. This absence of windows adds to the institutional feel of the complex itself. Most of the front screen doors are either rusted apart, have screens that need to be replaced or broken door windows.

The physical layout of the units is confusing. The unit numbers run from one to fifteen and the next cluster from forty-five to sixty. Units number sixteen to forty-four are on the other side of the complex making it difficult to find a specific unit without having to look at each unit number.

Oddly, front yards and back yards alternate with each unit. The back of each unit reveals a dining room window and back door. The alternate placement of yards and front entrances clearly impacts on the privacy of residents. Individuals can readily be seen either entering a unit or engaging in activities in their backyard unlike any other housing complex the researcher is familiar with. There is an apparent lack of concern with providing a private space.

Later, when I returned to conduct interviews, I became privy to the interior of the complex. Each unit is just as drab on the inside as the outside. Immediately upon entering the front door, a large staircase accessing the upstairs is evident. The staircase is enclosed with a wall creating a claustrophobic effect. Off the main hallway is the front room with no window, then walls on both sides of the narrow hallway lead to the kitchen.
The kitchen is about ten feet by ten feet, accommodating a table and four chairs in the middle, a stove and a fridge. There is one window in the kitchen that overlooks a small backyard that is surrounded with a wooden fence. In addition, a back door provides access to the backyard. The interview participant led me to the second floor of the unit where I counted three bedrooms and a washroom. The two small bedrooms in the front of the unit are without windows while the third bedroom slightly larger than the other two has one window. The view from this bedroom window is not appealing. The back of strip malls, a gas station and a manufacturing plant are the highlights. There is no window in the bathroom. A loud fan in the ceiling provides ventilation. The anonymous and institutional atmosphere in the apartment is oppressive. The respondent explained,

*I know this place may seem boring to you, but we are not allowed to hang any pictures, or paint or stuff like that - they [the region] don't want us to damage the walls or have to pay to get wallpaper or dark paint off.* (R6)

The refusal of the Ministry to allow residents to create a homelike atmosphere that reflects their identity and promotes a sense of belonging reveals the complex interplay between respondentivity, shelter and hope.

The lack of alternative housing provokes a sense of powerlessness. The sense of powerlessness became clear from our discussions concerning social assistance benefit cuts and living expenses. Financing affordable shelter is a central concern, but it is the neighborhood environment of subsidized housing which is at the forefront of discussion. A discussion inquiring about why respondents continue to reside in subsidized, sub-standard housing, prompted these remarks from two single mothers,

*I get $605 a month. My rent is $222 a month. My hydro is maybe $70 a
In other words, with limited income, chances for alternative housing are not promising. Although the rent in government subsidized housing is cheap at $222 a month, added costs such as hydro and/or phone bills leave single mothers no hope of saving any money to relocate. Another single mother with two children refered to living in government subsidized housing as being 'stuck' in an undesirable situation. She commented,

That's why we are stuck in here getting $600 a month for a three bedroom with no other allowances to help us get out - I am stuck in here. (R7)

Ghettoization and stigmatization of the area interplays with increased rates of social problems. One parent expressed her concerns not only for the physical but also the social atmosphere,

I am stuck in here too - I can't find a job and I have to get out because of my son. He's not in trouble yet but you have to be tough in here. A lot of things are happening here. It's a very bad environment and I can't get out. (R8)

Prior to going to site number two, I was also warned by area caseworkers as to the dangers of entering the area alone.

You will be taking a risk to enter the complex unit alone. The incidents of crime there is astronomical. They even assault and rob their own people. (CW1)

If I were you I would perhaps stay away from that area. The street has been renamed due to the adoption of the original street name to gangs. We don't go in there alone, it's too much of a risk. (CW2)

While I walked through the complex and deposited flyers in mailboxes, I was
assailed by a few negative remarks asking why I am at a particular tenants’ mailbox and stating that I have no business canvassing here. These encounters did not heighten my feelings of risk but in contrast, created an awareness that my presence in this neighborhood was unsettling for some residents and that perhaps they are the ones that felt at risk. In addition, I am struck by the sense of community and willingness to protect one another from intrusions for the outside world. I questioned myself at this point as to the obvious outsider status that I represented and the threat that I appeared to pose to the residents of the complex with my presence.

Site number two is a geared-to-income townhouse complex which houses mainly social assistance recipients but also accommodates residents in low income brackets who are not in receipt of assistance but can demonstrate financial need. This particular information is obtained by discussing features and characteristics of subsidized housing in the Niagara region with local crisis housing workers.

Situated in the midst of a mixed business/high rise area of the city, this housing complex is comparable to site number one in terms of the dilapidated condition of certain units. Units are clustered row houses with fifteen units to each row. The entrance ways are similar to site number one, a six foot, cement passageway leads to the front door. Each passageway is typically cluttered with toys, recycling boxes, papers and flyers. The units’ appearance are not as institutional as site number one in that all front doors and back entrances face the same way. The front of the units also have windows, one for the family room and two smaller ones for the upstairs’ bedrooms. The back of the units have windows for the eating area and one for an additional bedroom upstairs.
Uneven and broken patio stones create a walkway through the complex and up to each entrance. A small patch of grass provides a front lawn and some residents have attempted to make small flower gardens at their entrance way. However, due to the location of each front yard, sunshine is typically blocked by the adjacent units, as well as the overshadowing high rise apartment buildings. A parking lot is located across the street, similar to site number one, riddled with potholes and accented by a large battered city garbage bin.

Although the recruitment process did not generate any respondents from this site, the quality of the housing as observed from the exterior appearance is relevant in terms of similar characteristics of sub-standard housing provided for the poor. Furthermore, the physical environment of subsidized housing substantiates comments made by respondents that reside in low-income areas.

Site number three is a co-operative housing complex, with some residents on social assistance, some residents with full-time or part-time jobs, and some residents collecting disability allowances. These two story townhouse units are geared to income and government subsidized housing. This housing unit is situated at the end of working/middle class neighborhood streets. The main access welcomes visitors with a large city garbage bin along with a pothole-riddled car park. The entire complex is surrounded by a large steel fence in addition to a six foot wooden fence. Two alternate accesses to the complex are at the end of neighborhood streets with the same characteristics as the main entrance. These units are not as dilapidated as the units in the first two sites. Aluminum siding and stucco provide a well kept appearance. A small
walkway and three step concrete porch lead to the entrance ways. Yards are grass covered and walkways consist of leveled patio blocks. The distance between the rows of units appeared much wider than at site number two allowing for an uncluttered and enclosed environment. Each backyard is sectioned off with a wooden fence, some in ill repair, but the majority in adequate condition. This complex did not appear as gloomy as the other two research sites. Some residents were drinking coffee outside and conversing with neighbors, others were walking their dogs or baby strollers. The laughter of children in the playground was a bit refreshing in comparison with the uncomfortable quiet at the other two sites.

Similar to site number two, the recruitment process failed to generate respondents from this complex. Of particular interest is that although this is also a government subsidized housing complex, the units are not as dilapidated as the former two housing complexes canvassed. Reasons for this are unknown at this time, but I attribute more concern given to the physical appearance of each unit due to the co-operative nature of the housing complex. The presence of working class tenants and disabled individuals, along with social assistance recipients may have some effect on the way the housing complex is maintained by the regional government.

The final site is a run down portion of the central area of the city which accommodates individuals with low incomes or individuals on social assistance. A women’s advocate comments on the location of cheap housing during a discussion of housing issues for single mothers.

*Cheaper housing tends to be in more run down areas of the city.*
downtown core or central St. Catharines is a haven for addicts. Areas such as Division St., Page St., Ida St., Queenston St. and St. Paul St. are known for their cheaper rents, yet sub-standard dwellings. (WAI)

This research site was not initially canvassed, however, a number of potential respondents recruited from secondary sources reside here. Situated in the central area of the city, surrounded by deteriorating hotels, boarded up buildings and open dilapidated lots, detached homes have been converted into apartments. The roadway accessing this area is potholed and narrow. This area is also a well known prostitution district of St. Catharines. A few homeless individuals hovered under a cheap sleeping bag while another homeless woman walked down the street with her shopping cart filled with her possessions.

The particular house that I visited to interview a potential participant has four apartments, two on the second floor, one on the main floor and one basement apartment. Garbage is strewn on the front lawn, porch and driveway. The unkempt condition characterizes the other houses on this street. At this particular residence, the upstairs windows are covered in black plastic similar to garbage bags - presumably as a cheap means of insulating the room. My interview was scheduled with the resident of the basement apartment with the access door at the side of the building. The screen door itself nearly came off of its hinges when I opened it.

The respondent interviewed is a single mother on social assistance with one teenage child. Upon entering the basement apartment, the resident was noted to be sitting in the dark. She asked if there is enough light to conduct the interview. The lighting was insufficient since only a small basement window allowed minimal sunlight
and she turned on the light. I was immediately made aware of the residents’ embarrassment at the condition of the apartment. The walls and floor were characteristic of an unfinished basement, basically concrete. Some nature posters are taped onto the walls and scraps of carpet attempted to cover the crude floor. Visible signs of mold are apparent on some parts of the wall itself. The dampness along with the mold emits an odor that was noticeable upon entering the apartment. Lighting is poor due to the lack of light fixtures. In the room where the interview was conducted, one open light socket on a steel bracket hangs from the ceiling. The electric socket accommodates one bulb.

I questioned the resident as to why the owner of the building has not engaged in proper building maintenance. She replied,

You know I complained a few times about the dampness and mold. Some times water comes in from the floor. He [landlord] told me that there are lots of people looking for cheap rent, if I don’t like it find somewhere else. With the money I get to spend on rent I don’t have much choice. (RI)

In addition to this reply I am equally shocked to find out that this place of residence costs seven hundred and fifty dollars a month.

When the [social welfare] cuts were made I was getting $1283 a month. I was knocked down to $936 a month. When your rent is $750 a month you don’t have enough money for anything else. (RI)

This respondent informed me that the tenant that resides on the ground floor apartment would also like to be interviewed. Her case is similar, on social assistance, a single mother with two school-aged children, unable to find suitable employment due to lack of education and paying an unreasonable amount of rent in a dilapidated residence. The front door of the apartment looks like it had been hacked away at with an axe or
sharp object of some kind. The tenant opened the door after a few minutes and I walked inside. The apartment itself is neatly arranged with 1950's style furniture. The walls are cracked, the ceiling has cracked areas and the windows are covered with garbage bags. The floor is covered with linoleum that is cracked and peeling in some areas. I noticed that the tenant is packing and inquire about her impending move. She replied,

I was receiving about $1600 a month when all 4 children were here. With the [social welfare] cuts it went down to $1250 a month. The oldest couldn't stand this place anymore, that is why she moved out and started new somewhere else. The second oldest would rather mope around with his father than do anything else. Because of that [children moving out or not attending school] my benefits were cut to $1100 dollars a month with the two kids left in school. This hardly left me enough to pay the rent and buy food. The rent here is 800 a month. When they [the two children still at home] decided to quit school at 16 my benefits were cut to $520 a month. I am going to try to get a hotel room or something uptown. Will probably have to start hooking again if I don't want to end up on the street. I've already gone that route and don't want to go there again. (R5)

Although this particular participant still has two children living at home, because they are not in school she is not able to collect social assistance benefits for them but is only able to collect social assistance benefits for herself as a single person. She can no longer feed her children or house them, therefore they must be sent on their own separate ways. When I asked about the welfare of her two remaining children she replied,

There is nothing I can do. They are allowed to quit school. I can't force them to stay in school. They will stay at friends houses and collect welfare there. Maybe they will be forced to look for work. I can't make them work. Maybe they [social service workers] can. I have to think of myself right now I won't be able to afford much else than a shack on $520 a month. Maybe I will go to a shelter. (R5)

In the same neighborhood, a few houses down the street I interviewed a single
mother with one child who is forced to live with her mother. This woman is in no position to support her daughter and granddaughter with her low paying job as a Personal Support Worker. The structure of the house appeared well maintained with a few flowers along the cracked cement porch. It is a small residence with two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom. The respondent and her baby occupy the small bedroom directly adjacent to the living room. Unlike the other residences, this home has plenty of windows, is in good internal repair and generally felt comfortable. This respondent cannot find any other suitable and affordable accommodation. The stresses of living with her mother create feelings of frustration and depression.

_I live with my mom and pay $250 a month for rent. That is how much they [Social Services] are allowing me for shelter and because my mom is so honest I have to give her that. When I first saw my cheque I thought it was a joke. They said if I was living on my own they would allow me $511 a month for rent. Because I refuse to live in the crack areas of St. Catharines or someplace that is unlivable, I will have to stick it out until I find a job or something else comes up. Living in some of those areas will put my baby at risk. I would rather starve than do that._ (R2)

Single mothers have difficulty in locating safe areas to reside in due to lack of income, availability of housing and affordability of adequate housing. During a discussion of the location of low rent housing and the social environment that encompasses the area one women’s advocate commented,

_Most of OW [Ontario Works] respondent are renting apartments with more people than bedrooms. Personal space is compromised as well as people forced to dwell with room mates that may be addicts, abusers, mentally ill or youth. Due to limited source of income, respondent on assistance are confined to living with poor conditions and potentially dangerous situations, simply because they cannot afford to live in areas of the city that tend to be less threatening._ (WA2)
Affordable, adequate and safe housing was a common concern among respondents. Low income housing, whether government subsidized or privately rented apartments, tend to be in the least desirable parts of the city. Landlords, as well as, regional government, appear to escape responsibility in maintaining clean and safe rental units. Social welfare housing allowances are inadequate and low-cost housing is not a government priority. In discussing the problems associated with housing, a women’s advocate affiliated with a crisis housing shelter explained,

*Availability of cheap housing is also few and far between. There appears to be limited affordable housing within the city, and what is affordable is unsafe and unfit. Landlords tend to charge market value rent or just slightly higher than what is acceptable for OW [Ontario Works] respondent. The wait list to get into subsidized housing within the Niagara Region is 6-8 years. (WA1)*

The three low-income rental complexes that I visited during the recruitment process fall under the jurisdiction of the Regional Niagara Government. The following comment made by a women’s advocate reflects on the lack of responsibility in terms of creating a safe neighborhood for social assistance recipients in government subsidized housing:

*Although Niagara Housing [NH] offers subsidized housing to those with low sources of income, the geographical locations are far from fit. These areas are notorious for their gang related activity, drug dealing, and abuse. These areas confine people within their misshaped buildings giving the effect of a prison like atmosphere. The areas for NH are untidy, rundown, old housing and extremely crowed with limited areas for nature, grass or parks. (WA2)*

The region’s failure to ensure a safe, affordable and comfortable living environment for the residents of low-income, townhouse complexes is disturbing and remains a contributing factor in the ghettoization of the poor. Lacking sufficient funds
to escape ghetto-like conditions, single-parent families are rendered helpless. Further, supplementing rent payments with basic needs allowances compromises adequate funds for daily food requirements.

4:5 Food - Never Enough

The provision of food and adequate nutrition for their children is a basic concern for the women interviewed for this research project. All interview respondents voiced that shelter allowances do not meet current housing costs which then results in using basic needs allowances for food. A single mother with one child commented,

After paying rent I have about $200 left for groceries for the month. That's not enough money. When they are in their teens they raid the fridge - their appetite goes up. (RI)

In Ontario, shelter allowances for a lone parent family with two children is $554 a month in addition to basic needs allowance of $535 a month (Campaign 2000, Section 3, 2003:1). According to average provincial rates for housing, a two bedroom apartment costs $883 a month, which results in $200 left over each month for food, clothing and additional expenses (Campaign 2000, Section 3, 2003:1). Figure 4(a) provides an example of allocated shelter allowances and average rent rates for major cities in Ontario.
Figure 4(a)

Average Rents vs Shelter Allowances in Ontario, 2002 for Lone Parent, 2 Children

A - Hamilton
B - Kingston
C - Kitchener
D - London
E - Oshawa
F - Ottawa
G - St. Catharines/Niagara
H - Sudbury
I - Thunder Bay
J - Toronto
K - Windsor
L - Ontario Average


Statistics Canada shows average monthly rent payments for the city of St. Catharines at $630 and for the Niagara Region at $632 while the maximum shelter allowance for social assistance recipients is $554 (2004:2). As is evident, the shelter allowances in Table 4.1 are dramatically below this figure except for two-parent, two-child households.

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The top graph number indicates the average rent for that city - the smaller graph rated at $554 indicates the maximum amount of shelter allowance allocated to social assistance recipients. All amounts are in Canadian funds.
Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Ontario Median Rent</th>
<th>Maximum Shelter Allowance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single person</td>
<td>$595 (1 bedroom apt)</td>
<td>$325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent (1 child)</td>
<td>$696 (2 bedroom apt)</td>
<td>$511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two parent (2 child)</td>
<td>$771 (3 bedroom apt)</td>
<td>$602</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The dilemma of being forced to choose either to pay rent or buy food confronts many single mothers. Evidence of choosing rent over food is suggested by increases in food bank use. Social assistance benefit cuts have forced single mothers to supplement rent and utility bills with funds allocated for food. The following discussion hints at the extent to which this is occurring,

*I think the [social welfare] cuts have made a big difference, for example, I have never had to go to a food bank. Now I do, because I am using my grocery money to pay for hydro and a phone. They [caseworkers] say I don’t need a phone, but I am looking for work. How will anyone contact me? (R6)*

*I have gone to food banks a couple of times. Once every two months is allowed. How it was explained to me is that food banks are supposed to be used as an emergency base only. (R2)*

*Once every two months you can only go to the food banks because there is that many people that need it. I hear the news that our kids are getting food and I get really upset. These politicians have got the money obviously. They don’t have that problem and I don’t think they ever had. (R1)*

*I think the [social welfare] cuts of made a big difference. For example, I have never had to go to a food bank. Now I do. Every few months I go because you are only allowed to go every two months. (R3)*

Of particular interest is the number of times a needy individual is allowed to visit food
banks. As it stands now, food bank use in St. Catharines and the Niagara Region is limited to once every two months. Individual visits to food banks are monitored by information entered into a central computer system.

The inability to maintain healthy diets and the provide nutritional food for their families is a major concern for the research respondent.

There is no way I could buy good food, nutritious food. I didn’t want to go to the food bank. The food bank only gives you tinned spaghetti. (R1)

You might get lucky and get a bag of milk or a thing of butter. It [meaning food bank supplies] depends on the generosity of the community. (R2)

My daughter has lacked from nutritious food. That is the reason she has so many health problems. She is a diabetic and I can’t afford to give her the right foods for her diet. Food bank stuff is usually canned and has a lot of salt and junk in it. (R1)

Welfare Watch Toronto (2004) reports that there are over 270 food banks in Ontario alone. Social assistance payments are the main source of income for 54 per cent of food bank users (Welfare Watch Toronto, 2004:7).

Nearly two-thirds of food bank recipients on social assistance report going without food at least one day per month. Most of these people go without food one day per week or more. Food bank use rose by 35 per cent after the rate cuts. (Workfare Watch Project: Interim Report, 1999:5).

One of the respondent talked about the quality and type of food provided by food banks. The description of the type of food is consistent with community food bank drives that canvas for non-perishable food items such as pasta, canned spaghetti sauce and canned beans.

I went there [food bank] for the last week in the month. About two months ago I picked up three cans of beans, two packages of pasta or macaroni, some cans of tuna and canned spaghetti sauce. No meat or
anything but that doesn't matter, we are not used to eating meat anyway, too expensive. What got me so upset was that when I cooked the macaroni little bugs came floating up in the water. Is that all my family is worth? You tell me? What are we supposed to do? (R4)

Coping with the lack of nutritious food requires ingenuity and self-sacrifice: For example,

I usually use some of my grocery money for rent. That leaves me with about $50 a week for food. I only have one child so I let her eat. (R3)

I would play waitress in a restaurant and serve the kids - pretending - this way they wouldn't notice that I didn't eat. (R4)

My cheque is $222 a month but on the 20th I get $222 for child tax credit. That leaves me about $50 a week for some extra groceries and stuff like diapers that the baby needs. (R2)

All interview respondents voiced concerns regarding the clawback of the Canada Child Tax Benefit. The National Child Tax Benefit is specifically allocated to low-income families, however, the Ontario government claws back on this benefit from social assistance recipients and reallocates the money to employed low-income working families (Campaign 2000, Section 3, 2003:2).

The Harris [social welfare] cuts have made a big difference. They [social services] take half of the child tax credit money. I was using that money for groceries. (R1)

Welfare Watch Toronto (2003) confirms this discussion of the clawback of child benefit allowances from families on social assistance. A report regarding the allocation of funds reveals that “in 2001, $183 million in federal payments were deducted from families on social assistance” (Campaign 2000, Section 3, 2003:2). Further the clawback resulted in the loss of approximately $940 a year for each child on social assistance.
4:6 Other Basic Needs - Medication

The inability to provide adequate and consistent nutrition is complexly interwoven with the inability to cover medical expenses. Unable to afford prescription and non-prescription drugs leaves low-income single mothers and their children vulnerable to a wide variety of illnesses. The lack of funds required to respond to specific needs is another area of concern amongst single mothers on social assistance. A single mother with a two year old child explained that the drug benefit card that is issued on a monthly basis to eligible families is not adequate. This mother commented on the inadequacies of the drug benefit allowance and emphasized two major concerns: 1) not all drugs are covered under this drug plan and 2) the dispensing fee that is charged by pharmacies to dispense the medication prescribed. She explained,

*I get my drug card [each month] and each prescription, if it is covered [some prescriptions are not covered under the drug plan] is $2 [referring to the dispensing fee]. When my daughter got sick she was on three inhalers, antibiotics and other stuff. There were five things for her plus my stuff for my asthma and my stomach. Regular monthly things, about four prescriptions a month. Plus her Tylenol and her cold medicine. Like $2 is $2, when you times that by eight or nine it adds up. (R3)*

Similar comments are expressed from a single mother with a diabetic child. The lack of money to provide adequate and appropriate food for herself and her daughter has resulted in health problems that then require medications she simply cannot afford. This mother commented,

*My daughter is diabetic and she had the flu. This [the illness] is due to lack of nutritious food. I believe that. She is not eating properly because she wants me to eat. She tells me she eats, but I believe she hasn’t. I do*
the same thing to her. Right now it is the middle of the month and I have nothing in my fridge except ketchup, two yogurts, mustard and garlic. My freezer keeps full with ice cubes. My cupboard has got three boxes of crackers and two tins of green beans. My daughter can’t live off of crackers. She is growing, not healthy, not good. (R1)

This respondent goes on to talk about certain medications that she needs to purchase for herself but cannot afford. The crisis situation that this mother faces month after month has created medical problems. She explained,

I am breaking out in sores because my stress level is too high. I have taken certain prescriptions (Valium and Amitryptiline) since I was twelve years old but now I cannot afford them. I can’t get my Premarin which is my hormone estrogen, which I have to take because my cancer treatments depleted my hormones. I can’t get it because I can’t afford it. I cry all the time. I don’t let my daughter see it. I cry alone. The only one who sees it is my cat. (R1)

It is clear that inadequate social assistance can compound and intensify serious health problems. When basic needs monies are used to supplement housing costs, a wide variety of other problems may emerge. According to the report on Ontario Works recipients, “Recipients are finding it increasingly hard to maintain decent housing, feed and clothe themselves. For many people the result is an increasingly unstable marginal existence, deteriorating physical and mental health” (Workfare Watch Toronto, 2004:1). Shame and embarrassment are noted in the comments made by several single mothers in regards to the quality of their clothing. These comments arose during discussions of looking for gainful employment. A single mother voiced her embarrassment,

Look at my clothes. Would you go anywhere? (R5)

Table 4.2 outlines dollar amounts left over from social assistance payments for other needs. As indicated a single mother/parent with one child is left with $2.24 to
provide clothing for themselves and their children, medications not covered by the drug card, special diets such as those diets required for diabetics, utilities such as hydro/phone in some residences and transportation costs. When discussing the limited amount of funds allocated to single mothers by the state, a women’s advocate commented,

*It is also extremely difficult for single mothers to decently raise children on such a limited budget, thus not all the basic needs are met for example, nutrition, clothing and necessities.* (WA2)

### Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>single person</th>
<th>single parent, 1 child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rent</strong></td>
<td>$449</td>
<td>$628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food</strong></td>
<td>$167</td>
<td>$188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>$616</td>
<td>$816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum monthly income</strong></td>
<td>$569</td>
<td>$1,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum shelter allowance</strong></td>
<td>$325</td>
<td>$511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount diverted from basic needs to maintain shelter</strong></td>
<td>$124</td>
<td>$117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount available for other needs, per person, once rent and food are paid</strong></td>
<td>$-0</td>
<td>$2.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the Workfare Watch Program: Interim Report,

Poverty can affect health in a number of ways. Income provides the prerequisites for health such as shelter, food, warmth and the ability to participate in society; living in poverty can cause stress and anxiety which can damage people’s health; and low income limits peoples’ choices and
militates against desirable changes in behaviour (Welfare Watch Toronto, 2004:8)

Figure 4(b) illustrates the competing demands on inadequate resources.

Figure 4(b)

Figure 4(b) provides a visual account of the complex web of impoverishment which traps social assistance recipients. As indicated the core problematic area remains with lack of sufficient funds for housing costs. Inadequate shelter allowances result in monies used from all other cost of living expenses. These expenses range from medication costs, food costs, clothing costs, and so forth. Reduced employability is the end result.
Workfare and the Research Respondent

*I was working making good money, because I love to work. I do not want to be in the system. I want to work. That's me! I've worked for over thirty years...*(R1)

In this section a variety of problem areas are voiced by respondents. Themes revealed during discussions of workfare include 1) problems with adequate and affordable daycare, 2) issues of negative self-representation related to participating in workfare programs, 3) transportation as a barrier to attain gainful employment or education, and 4) how workfare has affected the respondents in terms of confusion, frustration and hopelessness.

The Ontario Works workfare program’s stated objective is to provide training, education and skills to assist welfare recipients in getting out of the system and becoming independent, productive members of society. The program consists of three separate components - job search, learning, education and parenting (LEAP) and job placement. However, workfare does not find people jobs, especially if there are no adequate jobs to be found. Unfortunately, what the program does do is often humiliate, belittle and exploit a vulnerable population. This is evident in the comments of the single mothers interviewed here,

*It doesn’t matter if there are no jobs out there, as long as you get people to sign on there [the required information slip provided] that you showed up there. You are supposed to go in [to a prospective place of employment], you have your sheet, in its chart form. People use them for toilet paper, The date and time where you drop off a resume, who you handed it to and their initial or their whatever, proof that you just didn’t write it in, well anybody can do that [referring to what is required on the information slip].* *(R2)*
It's disgusting really and so I get along with my business and go hi, can I get you to sign for this crappy job that I really don't want. Could you sign my paper? Hi I'm on welfare. I'm a big loser. Can you sign my paper? They don't go over interview skills with you. I have worked before so I am not worried about that for myself, but other people. (R2)

I had to do this job search thing, where you go places with your paper and make them sign it to prove that you were looking for work there, but I couldn't take it. I felt like an asshole. Hi there I am a welfare case will you sign my paper? (R5)

They [social service workers] wanted me to do this thirty job searches in so many days or whatever. If you are looking for a job it should be a full-time job so go and look for a job. (R3)

Employers are not even going to look at you because of the stigma of people on welfare, that's what it is. It's all f— political crap. It's all about how everything looks on paper. (R6)

A single mother with one child commented on the treatment that social assistance recipients receive in her particular workplace. She attained this position, at a local linen service company, through the job search program but comes to the conclusion that the group of workers from social assistance were highly expendable. She stated,

I got this job through the job search program. There are a lot of welfare people there. We are never going to get out of this mess. They hire and fire you as if it were nothing. Then it is all our fault all the time. We have no protection from jobs like these. (R1)

I informed one of the caseworkers that I was interviewing that respondents felt exploited, humiliated and belittled. The caseworker commented,

I think that there are pros and cons to workfare and I think if it is handled properly and not vindictively that it can be a very beneficial program to a lot of people who are on assistance, provide good work experience, good to have in terms of connections for jobs and also good to have as
something to put on a reference. I think there is really good things to be had from workfare, although I hate that name, from on the job experience. A very Americanized system. I think its part and parcel of a neanderthal consulting and it is the American way of doing welfare and that they are trying to make the same thing work for Canada, that is unfortunate. I know a lot of unions and social welfare groups have taken a position against workfare. I think it is more so because of the way it was presented that they have taken that position. I don't think anybody would argue that if there was somebody on the welfare system who is capable of working, or perhaps just needed to brush up their skills, need some job experience, in that regard it is no different than a co-op school, and if it is approached that way I think it can be a real plus for the client as well as the system. (CW1)

From the caseworker's viewpoint, the program can benefit single mothers and reduce welfare costs,

*It fosters more independence from the system, the more income the client has from another source, the less the province has to supplement. (CW1)*

I asked this particular informant whether the workfare program's primary objective was to assist social assistance recipients in finding jobs and creating independency or to save the province money. The caseworker declined to answer.

Both of the caseworkers interviewed believe that there exists a cycle of poverty and a resultant "welfare mentality". Some Canadians, it seems, learn to enjoy living off the state and lack the will as well as the skills to extricate themselves. In this context, the workfare program is seen as crucial to breaking this "welfare mentality".

*It could be seen as slave labour if that is the way it is operated [referring to the workfare program]. Our department doing welfare does not operate that way. We approach it as a practicum to a course. When you do a lot of courses in your co-op you have to get practical work experience, on the job experience, and that's where you would get practical knowledge of what it was like to work. A lot of our respondent you must understand come from a welfare mentality. They have been raised on welfare. They didn't have good role models. They don't know what it is like to get up in the morning early*
and get the kids off to school and get yourself off to work and then work all day and then come home. Now if I was raised seeing that, I would know that is the norm for me and I would know what to expect out of myself. It’s a second nature. If you were raised by somebody on social assistance all their life, you haven’t got that kind of role model, so getting up for work, holding down a full time job may be perhaps a bit of a frightening sensation for you. It’s a bit of the unknown, so if you get someone involved in workfare then they can experience getting up for work, experience doing a job, experience doing something new and there are a lot of positive things to be had from that. (CW2)

I think in some ways our system fosters people to be dependent on the system, but I think something like workfare can help to break that cycle, and we also have a LEAP program that we introduced a couple of years ago. Learning, education and parenting, and the goal of that system is to get in with the young, usually single mothers, and intervene and help them get their grade 12, and daycare. We have to do a lot of work in breaking that cycle of the welfare mentality. Legislation dictates that as soon as children are in school full-time, people should be out working or at least looking for work. That is why the LEAP program is working so well. Getting them [referring to social assistance recipients] their grade 12 and then getting them out into the workforce and also subsidized child care. (CW1)

This popular notion of the “welfare mentality” is, of course, flawed since considerable research indicates welfare dependency is typically short-lived and not generational. Being a single mother, being disabled, being poorly educated are more important precursors of welfare dependency than poor role models. The respondents interviewed for this study were raised in families where both parents were employed full-time. Respondents here were adamant in their desire to get off welfare.

I don’t want a handout. I don’t want to sit on my rear end and collect disability or welfare. No! I want to work because as long as I am moving I am alive. The moment I sit down and take it easy and live off the government, I’m afraid I am going to die. What am I proving to my daughter, it’s easy, you can live off the government. You can do whatever you want, you don’t have to lift a finger! No! I want my daughter to be a productive girl. I want her to work. I want her to know what it’s like to earn
what you can and not have things given to you. These are my morals that my parents, my adoptive parents taught me. Not once did my mother sit on her lowers. She is a lot of things but I will giver her that. She went to work everyday, she put up with crap everyday and she worked for the government. (R1)

I couldn’t make it on welfare. I was hungry. My sons were hungry. I couldn’t find a cheaper place to live because I signed a lease. No one in my family has ever been on welfare. My parents both have really good jobs. I was too ashamed and too embarrassed. My family lives out west and I didn’t tell them about it. We live in a big house in a nice neighborhood. What could possibly go wrong? I hear them talking about women on welfare. I didn’t want to be the centre of their conversations. (R4)

My mom and dad always worked hard, every day. I don’t know how I got into this situation in the first place. (R2)

My parents always worked but my dad died and my mother has Alzheimer’s. I would ask her to help but not in her condition. (R3)

I didn’t know my dad much but my mom worked in a bar every night. We helped her around the house as much as we could. We were pretty young. (R6)

My dad always worked. Mom was always at home though. Do you think that is why I can’t work because my Mom stayed home to look after us? (R5)

I want to set an example for my daughter that nothing good comes from sitting on your rear end and sponging off the government. (R1)

The obstacles to employment appear to have more to do with inadequate support - especially daycare - than the so-called cycle of poverty or “welfare mentality”.

Respondents voiced concerns regarding daycare and the inadequate services for their children. A single mother explained her situation when confronted by her caseworker about taking classes in Welland.
She stated,

*When we start talking about the PSW\textsuperscript{14} program, the welfare worker gave me a book and in the book it had a PSW course. Now it was offered in Welland from eight thirty till four or five. I live in St. Catharines, and I don’t drive, and I don’t have a vehicle and the bus that I would have to catch leaves St. Catharines bus terminal at quarter after seven to Brock. You shuttle over to Welland then still its at Father Fogerty school in Welland which is not very close to the Welland campus at Niagara College which is where the shuttle-bus goes and it is still a fifteen or twenty minute drive from there. How the hell am I supposed to get there for eight o’clock? It’s not going to happen - five days a week and then I have to leave my daughter from six thirty in the morning when I start my little venture and then not get home till almost six at night! I don’t think so!* (R2)

Similarly, this single mother of two, actively participating in the job search program, was concerned to hear that her daycare funding was being revoked,

*Job search money is like looking for a job, say if I go out today for about 3 hours to the unemployment help centre, the job bank, hand in cover letters, call a few employers, that’s job search. Since February they have been giving me cheques to pay for this [daycare and transportation expenses] and all of a sudden they are stopping and say I have to pay ahead of time. I don’t have the money if I am only making $90 a week, but at first they told me here is $250, keep it for when you work and we will send you a cheque for the job search. I just talked to my worker yesterday and he said no. He said that I am doing too much. It’s costing too much money for day care for me to look for work. He said that there is about $240 for me for daycare, to look for work, and that I am doing something wrong, and he said let’s see what you are not doing. Well he said last week my daycare costs $72. I did about 30 or 35 hours a week in job search. He said usually people go out for 2 or 3 hours, that’s it. So I called his supervisor and talked, and if they don’t let me do my 25 or 30 hours then I will be going to my MP. I am serious about job search. I am not a person that, I want to get off of this [social assistance].* (R4)

In the midst of the interview the respondent received a phone call informing of the final

\textsuperscript{14}PSW is the abbreviated form of Personal Support Worker. The jobs available to PSW’s are mainly in the service sector providing healthcare to mostly elderly patients in nursing homes. Nursing home jobs are becoming more unionized and wages are adequate yet are still being investigated in terms of pay equity legislation. Jobs at home care providers are also available, however, wages are low.
decision to deny daycare funds. She put the conversation with the caseworker on speaker phone so I could hear. The respondent questioned this decision and explained to the caseworker that she is not able to go out and work if this funding is not available. The worker stated that she did not have to shout over the phone. The respondent was not at all shouting and stated this to the caseworker. The caseworker replied by saying yes, you are shouting at me. The respondent informed the caseworker that, "It was a good thing that someone from Brock University was here interviewing me and is a witness to whether or not I am yelling". The caseworker quickly ends the conversation and hangs up.

Of particular interest is that some respondents are not aware of what workfare is in the first place. The respondents are confronted by an unclear and complex program which leaves them feeling confused and frustrated.

*I thought workfare was a kind of program that you went to volunteer at places that you wanted to.* (R3)

*I think it [volunteer work] is ok, but it depends on the circumstances, if the person has little children, if they are not in school, I don't think that they should have to. It depends if they [social assistance] are going to pay transportation and day care.* (R3)

*You know I heard that none of them [volunteers] get a real job.* (R3)

The lack of information about the Ontario Works program itself and the implementation of the program by different caseworkers creates confusion among some of the respondents. For example, one caseworker explained,

*Some [children in day care] are 3 or 4 years old. The child has to be in school full time.* (CW1)
Further to the confusion, one caseworker states that a child is required to be in school all day before the mother is required to participate in any workfare program, while a different caseworker mentions that children should be three or four years old before the mother is required to participate in a workfare program. It is unlikely that a child of three or four will be in school all day. A second caseworker informed one of the respondents that she has to go to work when her baby is only two months old, while a third caseworker stated that the child should be five or six before the mother is asked to participate in any workfare program. A single mother with one child commented,

*I'm sure you know how the interview process works - the phone interview - then a group information session. It's just a big waste of time. They [caseworkers] sat in there and they start going on about how you have to go to work after three months. They tried to tell me that I had to go to work, but the baby was really small. She was only two months old, and I said I'm not leaving her. I am breastfeeding.* (R2)

*At the information session that is what the woman said there. Now my worker, when I was assigned a worker, she told me that wasn't the way it had to be, but in the information session that is what I was led to believe.* (R2)

*During the information session she [caseworker] said that if you were at home with your child you had until the child was five or six years old [before participation in the workfare program is mandatory]. She said that later on in the information session, after she specifically pointed me out and said ya you will have to go to work.* (R2)

The inconsistency among caseworkers implementing the program is a significant problem. Some respondents are allowed to continue education, some are not. In addition to inconsistency, confusing expectations are also imposed on single mothers. For example, a single mother of one child, who fled an abusive home environment
expresses her frustration because of her caseworker’s unclear directives. She explained,

   After I had been on welfare for a few months, she wanted to know my plan. I asked what do you mean by plan? If you don’t come back in with some kind of plan like education or work or whatever, some kind of future plan, then I would be cut off social assistance. (R2)

Demanding that this respondent return to the welfare office with a plan is somewhat confusing due to the nature of the situation. This is a single mother with a two month old baby. Following a lengthy discussion concerning the respondent’s current situation the caseworker continued to ask for a future plan. The respondent replied,

   I said my plan is to make sure my child is healthy. That’s my plan. (R2)

   I don’t know what kind of plan you want from me, I’m still breast feeding my child. I told her about my nursing background, that I hadn’t finished the program. She said we do offer training courses. That’s when we started talking about the PSW course, and there was one starting next September and there was one starting in February. My daughter was still really small, so I inquired about the one starting in February. I went back to my worker in three months in around September and I told her that I looked into some PSW programs. That’s how we set up for me to finish the course. (R2)

Following a discussion on the proposed plan, the respondent emphasized that the caseworkers’ primary objective is to have something on paper, regardless of whether or not the plan is feasible and regardless of whether or not child care arrangements could be made. The respondent stated,

   She [the caseworker] was all for that. She said ‘I have to tell my supervisor what your plan is’. I was doing her protocol. As long as I had a plan, whatever the baby had to go through didn’t matter. (R2)

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15 This participant agreed to a follow-up interview to demonstrate whether or not the PSW course enabled her to attain full employment. She ended up working at Tim Horton’s for a period of time and then returned to the abusive relationship because she lacked the means to support herself and her child. She has presently fled this relationship again and is staying in a shelter in Kingston.
A single mother of four children commented on what she gained from a “volunteer” position. When discussing the volunteer position that Ontario Works assigned to her she stated,

First they stuck me in this volunteer position, answering the phone for this communications company. I did this for free. I stayed there for a couple of months and then the guy told my worker that he didn’t like my telephone voice and they let me go. (R5)

She [caseworker] said that I should try to be more pleasant. I told her I can only be who I am. I feel like an idiot there. Other people coming in all dressed up, hair done nice, makeup, and there I am looking like a bag lady. How can I be more pleasant when I feel like shit every time I walk through the door. (R5)

Statements such as feeling like an idiot are a common topic among these single mothers. Comments from respondents suggest that the Ontario Works program and its advocates actively foster feelings of humiliation and belittlement which result in respondent’s low self-esteem and self-worth.

What’s the use. She [the caseworker] thinks I’m a loser anyway. You know, I finally got that through my head. I am a loser and that’s all there is to it. (R5)

It seems that they [social services] just want to keep people down. (R3)

So they are saying that there is something wrong with me, not that there are not enough jobs for people, something is wrong with me. (R3)

You walk in with a different identity. I am what is considered a punk, that’s the way I look, my lifestyle, whatever. I have face piercings, whatever you want to call them. There is a stigma for being on welfare but there is also a stigma for people who look different and people who look different on welfare is a completely different issue. Even when you walk in to meet you welfare worker—my welfare worker here is pretty good—she doesn’t care, but she also works in Niagara Falls with street youth. She comes from a different background than other people. Now you walk in and wear a bandana, they look at you as if you are in a gang, you’re on drugs, you’re smoking drugs. Well we don’t care
about you because your whole cheque is just going into your arm, or up your nose or however your drug of choice is taken. And it's true. You're on welfare so you must be an alcoholic, but I don't reek of booze so it can't be that. I'm not all strung out so it can't be from heroin cause I can have a conversation, but maybe I am doing speed because I am so energetic, or maybe I am doing meth, or maybe I am doing something else. (R2)

Government agencies look at me as somebody who is taking off them when I am fully capable of working, and yes I am fully capable of working but what are you doing to help me? (R1)

They [caseworkers] told me that I should control myself and not have sex so I wouldn't have anymore children. What do they think I am! I had my three children with my husband who took off. I know this is not my fault but they make me feel so cheap. (R8)

When you are living on the street it is harder. Your welfare worker looks at you different so they give you different expectations. They make you go out and look for jobs but they really don't think you will come back with one because they don't expect that I will even show up there with my torn pants - with my patches all over them. (R2)

The negative attitude experienced by single mothers is embedded in the way they view themselves and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A single mother of four commented,

I had stuff [clothes] but without drugs I put on weight and now nothing fits me. Anyway with the constant cut backs, I would only sink deeper and deeper. What's the use anyway. If I get something [a job] I will only lose it anyway. (R5)

Another single mother of three expressed similar sentiments.

What's the point of looking for a job. I can't do anything. I don't have anything to wear. My teeth are falling out. I am a mess. If they cut me off who cares. My in-laws want custody of the kids anyway. (R8)

The feeling that nobody cares about these women and their children is a common theme among several respondents. The negative self-perception of respondents' is reflected in a general hostility to the system which appears to treat them with such disdain. In
particular, caseworkers are seen as simply self-involved bureaucrats who have no real understanding of the realities of economic marginalization. The following statements are testimony that these single mothers are all too familiar with the social welfare system and how it operates especially in terms of social relations.

She [caseworker] is a moron, they [caseworkers] don't get paid to think. They don't have to worry about who is taking care of their kids. They don't have to worry about going hungry. They get their f— pay cheques. Why should she care about me and my baby. She is just worried about what she has to relate to her supervisor. What the f— does she care what happens to me. (R2)

I've got x amount of clients and more than three quarters of my x amount of clients are all going to school. They all have good goals. They have work plans. I can go home and I can sleep tight. That’s all it’s about. (R7)

People go in to become social workers and go hi can I help somebody today. They sit in a chair and they say you are nothing - you are worth nothing - you will always be worth nothing but thanks for coming on in. (R2)

They [caseworkers] say, it costs ME [the caseworker] a lot of money. Is it coming out of their pockets? It's all about how it looks on paper, and so if you have so many welfare people, living in shelters, well, why are they in shelter? This looks bad for the worker. (R8)

It's all about what society wants. How you look for society and how it looks for your worker. It all works out into the same f—political crap. When I first went in to see my worker, I have a background in the food industry - like a waitress or a hostess. At first she wasn't looking at me and seeing a health care worker, let's put it that way. She didn't look at me and say, oh well why don’t you take this PSW course. I had to tell her that I had a background in health care too. She started with, oh you can do job searches at Tim Horton’s. (R2)

The perceived lack of concern for these women is also apparent with the Ontario Works job placement program. The jobs recommended to respondents are often marginal and low-paid. Employment at Tim Horton’s donut franchises or involvement in
the Personal Support Worker program, are popular recommendations which guarantee low-income and lack of advancement positions. Of particular interest is the fact that social service workers continually recommend Tim Horton’s as the occupation of choice. The following two discussions are concerning employment at Tim Horton’s. A single mother of four stated,

*I continued with the job search thing, my worker told me that Tim Horton’s usually hires us, [social assistance recipients] so this I tried. I have never been a waitress before. I can’t even read properly. I didn’t go to school much.* (R5)

She continues the discussion with an elaboration of her experience at this particular job site.

*I was so nervous there I start freaking out. I dropped some stuff and everyone freaked out on me - called me names. You’re better off on welfare chick said one of the workers. I don’t think you can make it here, and not only that, where it [Tim Horton’s] was located. I met up with a lot of street people I used to hang around with when I was strung out and that was no good either. They wanted me to give them stuff for free and kept bugging me to come and do a hit. I couldn’t take it. I freaked out and I quit.* (R5)

*All this talk about the new system trying to get people straight and help them get a job. I want to tell you that it is all bull shit.* (R5)

Another respondent, a single mother of three children, described a good friends’ situation. Again this involves employment at Tim Horton’s as opposed to finishing the Personal Support Worker Program. This individual was able to attain employment at Tim Horton’s through participating in the job search program. Even though social services financially assisted this individual for a college certificate, the struggles of waitress work, family obligations and school, appeared overwhelming. She stated,
My friend she was taking the PSW course. She was in there doing the course. She had to work 30 hours a week. She had a job but she wanted to work towards this thing [PSW]. They paid her way ok and it was too much. She couldn’t study, like she didn’t have enough time to study. They said you better keep your job. They wasted over $2000 on that course and she had to quit. (R8)

She would be off welfare now, but she is making $6.85 an hour and they said you have to keep that job, never mind going to school. (R8)

This respondent uses a friends’ situation to emphasize that social service programs are not always what they appear to be. In this case, her friend participated in two workfare programs - working at Tim Horton’s and going to school. Attaining a higher education would have allowed this individual to support her family without social assistance. However, without funding and the directive to continue employment at Tim Horton’s, this single mother had to withdraw from the college program. Ontario Works legislation stipulates that if any individual quits a job attained through the job search program, future social assistance benefits will be cut.

That is wrong - absolutely wrong. Now she is working at Tim Horton’s. She was going to school and working part time and they [social services] were giving her $300 a month. She could be done the course right now and be off welfare altogether. They don’t want us to get anywhere. (R8)

I think welfare wants most women to stay home and look after their children. My worker told me that. It is cheaper for us [social services] if you stay at home. (R8)

Minimum wage work at Tim Horton’s does not provide an adequate income for single mothers to adequately provide for their families. Although this respondent is not employed at Tim Horton’s she is employed in the service sector by a linen service company that directly services hotels. The barrier that several respondents face is lack of
adequate and affordable transportation, hence, hindering opportunities for gainful employment and education. These single mothers explained,

You don't have enough money to get to and from a job because you have to fight for your bus pass, if and when they give you a bus pass. (R1)

You're not giving me bus fare to get there. When I do get a job they cut my bus fare off and tell me to take it off of my paycheque. I was only making seven dollars an hour - it sounds funny but I was making more on welfare than at my job. (R1)

I have been unemployed since January [2002]. I have two college diplomas. I am having a hard time finding work. I did work but I did get fired for a real dumb reason. If I had a job right now, how would I get there? It takes a while before I will make enough to buy a car or something. Frankly, I can't afford to go to work but if I don't I may get punished. (R3)

Despite all the obstacles and frustrations that the single mothers for this research project face every day, they continue to strive to achieve a better life for themselves and their children. Evidence suggests that the welfare system has attempted to de-spirit these women at best. However, interview discussions reveal that within a frame of stigmatization and hopelessness, these women will seek a way out of the system, against all odds.

4:8 Concluding Remarks - Research Base and Interviews

The majority of the jobs geared toward single mothers are basically low pay, minimum wage, low skill, service sector jobs. Campaign 2000 (2003), reports that minimum wage had been frozen at $6.85 for at least seven years while the inflation rate has increased by 15%. Only recently, February 2004, has the minimum wage been raised
to $7.15 an hour. These statistics demonstrate that single mothers will experience more
difficulties in housing, feeding and clothing themselves as well as their children.
Inadequate income and low paying jobs remain problematic for lone parent female
headed households. The following discussion briefly outlines the general areas of
concern.

Respondents' interview responses to issues surrounding adequate funds for
nutritious food demonstrate that inadequate social assistance funds result in poor
nutrition. Evidence suggests that single mothers on social assistance are unable to
provide adequate food, let alone nutritious food, for themselves or their children. Food
bank use is inadequate for two reasons - 1) food bank supplies are limited in content as
well as quality of food and 2) social assistance recipients can only utilize food banks
once every two months.

Food bank use is not an adequate resource for maintaining healthy nutritional
levels for single mothers and their children. A University of Toronto Faculty of
Medicine Study reported that 70 per cent of their female lone parent sample were
moderately to severely deprived of food in the past year, 43 per cent had reported hunger
with no available means to attain food, and over 60 per cent reported curtailing their own
food intake to supplement lack of food for their children (Welfare Watch Toronto,
2003:6). In addition to these results is that 28 per cent of the women reported that they
had to cut the size of their children's meals due to the inadequate supply of food

High rent rates for single mothers and children result in using part of the basic
to cover food, clothing and additional expenses. In addition to basic needs, other costs such as those incurred by prescription drugs and the lack of funds to cover these drugs further jeopardize the health and welfare of single mothers and their children.

Following the Social Assistance Reform Act, single mothers and their children struggle to make ends meet. To further compound hardship, the National Child Benefit allowance is being deducted from social assistance payments dollar for dollar (Campaign 2000, 2003). Furthermore, Campaign 2000 reports that, “In 2001, $183 million in federal payments were deducted from families on social assistance and reallocated in cash benefits for working families - that is approximately $940/year per child on social assistance which is lost” (2003:4). Research respondents agreed that this money lost usually covered food costs. Section 1, Article 3 of the Ontario Works Act states that one of the Act’s “purposes is to effectively serve people needing assistance” (Welfare Watch Toronto, 1998:2). Evidence presented in this research study demonstrates that people needing assistance are not recognized in the first place.

Housing issues remain a general concern of anti-poverty advocates, women’s advocates and single mothers with children. Campaign 2000 (2003), reports that in 1995 all new social housing projects were cancelled. Figure 4(c) provides a visual example of social housing units built from 1998 - 2002. The notion that social housing units have not been constructed since 1996 reveals that future plans of housing the poor are non-existent. Furthermore, current subsidized housing complexes are in ill-repair and dilapidated. Plans for future investment either in the construction of subsidized housing or the repair of existing subsidized housing are not at the forefront of political
or the repair of existing subsidized housing are not at the forefront of political discussions.

Figure 4(c)

Social Housing Units Built Annually in Ontario 1988 -2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>5000</td>
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<td>1992</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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Source: Campaign 2000, 2003:6

Evidence from interview respondents as well as from researcher observation suggest that there is a definite housing crisis in regards to affordability in the Niagara Area. Ontario Works respondents are also subjected to poor quality housing in addition to unsafe and unfit locations within the St. Catharines area. Single mothers on social assistance are concentrated in undesirable areas of the city which render them, as well as their children, to a negative social environment. This negativity is demonstrated by the conditions of housing, the location of housing and the availability of affordable housing. Campaign 2000 (2003) reports that waiting lists for municipal social housing are long, some clients are informed that there is a ten year waiting list. In addition, in the Toronto
area there are more than 40,000 children that await affordable housing.

The lack of adequate funds to acquire suitable housing in safe and fit areas of the city is highlighted by the need to supplement rent payments with basic needs allowances, even though the rent payments are for sub-standard housing. High rents are largely due to social policymakers removing rent controls from the Tenant Protection Act in 1998 (Campaign 2000, 2003). The supplementing of rent payments with basic needs allowances poses another problematic situation in regards to having adequate funds to provide basic needs for family members.

Social welfare reforms consequently lead to deteriorating living conditions for the single mothers who have participated in this research study. Inadequate funding to cover shelter, basic needs and other necessities render these families vulnerable to a number of problems. In addition, the demeaning nature of workfare in itself has negative connotations in terms of self-representation and self-worth.

4:9 Connections with Research Record

The research record in Chapter 2, suggests that neo-liberal and conservative economic restructuring has resulted in multiplied difficulties for unemployed individuals, single mothers, along with any person in need of social assistance. The evidence from this research study echoes a similar scenario. Evidence from this research study in connection with documented evidence from previous case studies in Chapter 2, suggest that the attack on single mothers is part and parcel of a growing neoliberal approach to the political economy.
The research respondents from this research study have demonstrated that single mothers are particularly vulnerable to negative economic conditions. For example, the research record highlights the inadequacies of minimum wage work in Ontario. Documented evidence from the National Council of Welfare has provided statistics for issues concerning the poverty gap and the poverty line. Minimum wage work does not adequately provide enough financial gain. Respondents for this study voiced similar sentiments when confronted with discussion about minimum wage work. For example, working at Tim Hortons or a community linen service, both acquired through workfare programs, simply does not adequately compensate to meet the needs of a family.

Workfare in itself, has had negative implications for the respondents of this study, similar to case studies in New York City, New Zealand and Australia. Low self-esteem, low self-worth, confusion and frustration are some of the commonalities expressed among the research populations when confronted with questions concerning their experiences with workfare. Evidence confirming this has been documented through case studies by Catherine Kingfisher and Michael Goldsmith (2001) in New Zealand; Maureen Baker and David Tippin (1999) in Australia; Mauve Quaid (2002) in New York City. In addition, a host of studies conducted in Ontario by the National Council of Welfare, Workfare Watch Toronto, the C.D Howe Institute and the Canadian Council of Social Development, to name but a few, provide evidence that supports the findings of this research study. Further, the inconsistencies of demands from the social welfare system are experienced by social assistance recipients from all case studies. The inconsistencies range from unreasonable expectations and inadequate supports to the
workfare program itself not being clearly defined. Mauve Quaid (2002) and Ernie Lightman (2003), stress the notion that workfare does not benefit the social assistant recipient. This notion has also been demonstrated with previous case studies discussed in Chapter 2 and has been echoed with the respondents’ responses in this research study.

In conclusion the research record and data generated from this research study suggest that poverty and despair are inevitable for those persons on any form of government assistance. Workfare does not work. Workfare policy remains to be used as a means to attain popularity among politicians - to fuel their political agenda and appease an uncaring society. Australian, New Zealand, American and Canadian governments are continually failing the needs of the poor. This continuum perpetuates and maintains the marginalization of impoverished groups within any given society.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

5:1 Introduction

In many respects, this research documents the failure of social welfare policies. The failures are multiple and range from concrete inadequacies in terms of housing and food allowances to more opaque problems in terms of feelings of frustration and powerlessness. In addition workfare's role in channeling poorer women into the service sector, particularly into low-paying jobs, intensifies the marginalization of this segment of the population.

5:2 The Problems with the Social Assistance Reform Act

Although operating as a facet of an ideology which prioritizes individual responsibility, the Ontario Works program neglects to acknowledge the individual and, often, summary generalizations are already in place before an individual walks through the door. Summary generalizations are reinforced by caseworkers when they refer to a "welfare mentality" and the need for the system to "break the cycle of dependency." Further, the current research as well as other investigations suggest that Ontario Works program advocates do not recognize single mothers' individual responsibility to their children. For example, this lack of recognition is demonstrated by frequent disregard to the individual responsibilities of nursing mothers as well as mothers of preschool children.

Promoting self-reliance through employment is also controversial. Considering
the job placements that this particular sample population often has access to, (Tim Horton's, call centres and so on), self-reliance is not attained through paid employment. The pursuit of self-reliance is also compromised by not providing adequate funds for suitable clothing or housing. Attending a job interview with dated, ill fitting or damaged attire does not leave desirable first impressions with potential employers. In addition, once employment is attained, clothing costs, transportation costs and day care remain critical obstacles to maintaining employment.

In sum, the present research suggests that workfare programs fail their participants. Evidence from similar research projects also indicates that the program is failing the majority of social assistance recipients. Shelter allowance versus basic needs allowance issues are at the forefront of these problems. For example, inadequate funds to cover high rents and the lack of affordable housing result in social assistance recipients diverting monies allocated for food, clothing, medication and so forth. Also, the inconsistency of caseworker decision-making amplifies the issues confronted by social assistance recipients. These apparently arbitrary decisions result in confusion, frustration and a sense of powerlessness.

The ultimate source of these problems is often embedded in the policies themselves as well as their faulty implementation. The restrictions imposed by social welfare programs as well as the unequal distribution of benefits tend to compromise the original intention of the social welfare system. For example, a 1988 Transitions report, formulated by the provincial government states,

All people in Ontario are entitled to an equal assurance of life opportunities
in a society based on fairness, shared responsibility, and personal dignity for all. The objective of social assistance therefore must be to ensure that individuals are able to make the transition for dependency to autonomy, and from the exclusion on the margins of society to integration within the mainstream of community life (Ontario Social Safety Network, 2003:1).

This report’s objective is formidable but its implementation has been flawed. Interview respondents for this research project have indicated exclusion from fair treatment and from participation in any ‘shared responsibility’ with the state. In addition, personal dignity seems to have been shelved. The problematic areas of exclusion and marginalization persist and are particularly damaging for single mothers on social assistance.

5:3 Recommendations

(a) Addressing Income Inadequacies

The first and foremost issue involves inadequate income. Inadequate income results in problems involving housing, nutrition, health, self-worth, daycare, transportation, employability, and so forth. Policymakers must make an effort to legislate fair and equal social policy that will halt the economic polarization in Ontario. The parameters for such a policy are detailed below.

An adequate living wage legislated by the Ministry of Labour would allow individuals to adequately support themselves and their children. An individual working full-time (approximately 50 weeks annually) in Ontario, for minimum wages ($7.15\textsuperscript{16} an

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\textsuperscript{16} According to the National Council of Welfare Income Reports 2004, the minimum wage in Ontario was “stagnated” at $6.85 an hour until it was raised to $7.15 an hour in February 2004.
hour), earns $14,248 annually before taxes. A comparison with annual welfare incomes for Ontario demonstrates how the poor remain poor even when a full-time minimum-wage job has been attained. Individuals seeking to get out of the “system” are faced with little financial incentive. In addition, benefits such as prescription drugs and dental coverage, which are services provided for social assistance recipients and their families, are not available with most minimum wage jobs.

Table 5.1 highlights the gross annual income for social assistance recipients by family type.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated 2002 Annual Welfare Income by Type of Household - Ontario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Social Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent, 1 Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple, 2 Children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The current research as well as other studies, indicates that social assistance income as well as minimum wage income are not adequate to house, clothe, feed and maintain decent living conditions for any individual and/or families. The Canadian Council of Social Development (2003) reports that income polarization in Canada is a growing
concern. This is particularly ironic in light of previous government commitments to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. The report, Census Analysis: Census Shows Growing Polarization of Income in Canada sums up the current pattern;

[...] we have been unable as a nation to tackle poverty in any meaningful way. The economic boom of the last part of the decade has clearly not benefitted most Canadians, and it has failed to put any real dent in Canadian child poverty (2003:1).

(b) Responding to Housing Issues

Secondly, inadequate income results in sub-standard housing. Housing issues among the poor remain unresolved and contribute to further problems. For example, high rents usually involve diverting monies allocated for basic needs (food, clothing, medication, transportation, daycare). Housing which in inadequately heated or cooled leads to health issues. The problem of inadequate housing not only applies to social assistance recipients, but also includes low-wage earners. Yet it is low wage employment which is typically the net result of workfare programs.

Adequate, affordable and safe housing for individuals on limited income could be attained in each community by establishing collective responsibility among community members. These conditions of responsibility include, but are not limited to, rent controls, the close monitoring of structural conditions (for example public housing units), the desegregation of the poor and the promotion of co-operative housing options. The segregation of the poor, in terms of public housing units and low rent housing, contributes to patterns of hopelessness, frustration and powerlessness. Strategies to invest in low-income, suitable and safe housing should be at the forefront of discussions
at local council meetings.

(c) **Collective Community Responsibility**

To date there are various organizations, such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), that advocate for the poor. However, nonprofit organizations’ such as OCAP are in dire need of funding and the lack of funding hinder the organization’s objectives.

We need to be harnessing all of our collective efforts and energies towards turning the tide. Let’s move beyond federal/provincial jurisdictional battles, let’s recognize the role of cities and communities in strengthening our social fabric, and let’s support our voluntary sector across the country so that we can truly begin to address the issues that the recent Census has made so evident (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2003:1)

Communities need to shift toward a more basic humanist and collective approach in order to address the issues of poverty. This humanist shift will only be made possible if popularized amongst the general population.

Today’s government fails to address the needs of the poor and collective community action has been frowned upon. For example, Michael Rouse of London, Ontario, a retired teacher and volunteer working with New Canadians, inquired about setting up a Registered Educational Savings Plan (RESP) for a very promising student whose parents were collecting social assistance benefits. His proposal was rejected. Since all income must be declared, by social assistance recipients, the RESP monies would have negative consequences on the family’s net income. In Michael Rouses’ opinion, “Government regulations perpetuate poverty [...] government regulations
discourage this kind of community support” (Michael Rouse, 2004).

The Toronto Star circulated an article, Government fails Kimberly Rogers again (2004), which in turn evoked responses from the public. The general response to the Kimberley Rogers case suggests the potential for community protests and action. Kimberley Rogers died in the summer of 2000 of dehydration while under house arrest for ‘welfare fraud’. Her death triggered considerable public outrage. The response rate and content of the responses, suggest that public awareness of issues concerning social welfare do indeed attract public attention.

The inquest into the tragic death of Kimberly Rogers resulted in fourteen recommendations to government. It is clear from these recommendations, that the jurors’ sympathies rested with Ms. Rogers.

The McGuinty government accepted the jury’s recommendation that it eliminate the ban on receiving social assistance when someone is convicted of welfare fraud. It deserves credit for taking that step (Smith & Chic, 2004)17.

Further recommendations included an increase in social assistance rates to meet the costs of actual housing and basic needs. However, this resulted in a mere 3 per cent increase which is still not being issued to clients due to computer problems (Smith & Chic, 2004).

In a discussion concerning the 3 per cent increase in social welfare rates, a resident from Tweed, Ontario commented,

This is spoken of with pride by the lawmakers and yet the least aware of readers cannot avoid seeing that it’s nothing else than a slap in the face to every person struggling to survive - a slap delivered by people whose daily

17. Jane Smith and Jacquie Chic refer to Rogers as living in desperate poverty. Jane Smith was a juror in the Kimberly Rogers inquest and Jacquie Chic is the director of advocacy and legal services at the Income Security Advocacy Centre, which represented two groups at the inquest.
meal allowance surpasses the monthly raise being given to those whose income is acknowledged to be barely enough for mere survival (Larry Weissman, 2004).

In closing, Smith and Chic’s commented to The Toronto Star, August 3, 2004, "Individuals don’t choose poverty. Governments do.”

Public protestations through the media, the education system, the workplace and other public forums, may be the only avenue left to advocate for change for the poor. Collective action and community involvement with anti-poverty groups may be the best hope for an overhaul to the present ideological mind-set of Canadian government. As Larry Weismann (2004), a Canadian citizen writing a letter to the editor of The Toronto Star, eloquently stated,

But, while I’ve written of this as seeming to be the fault of politicians, the Ontario government is no more responsive to the overall set of values held by society at large and any improvements can only come with a wider public commitment to our humanity, by each one of us.

5:4 Final Remarks

Canadian policymakers routinely neglect to address real-life problems of single mothers on social assistance for a variety of reasons. The neglectful attitude of Canadian government is supported by, “attitudes, ideologies, social policies, and social constructions which lead ordinary people to believe that the economically disadvantaged are inferior, and that their misery is all a fault of their own” (Blackwell, 2003:107). Without the support from the general population, what support do the impoverished individuals of society have?

Individual, materialistic interests within a capitalist economic system have often
pre-empted concerns for the impoverished. Humanism is increasingly replaced by consumerism and self-absorption. As Ralph Nader\(^\text{18}\) said recently, "civic values have been steadily displaced by economic preoccupations". As a result - neoliberalism has embedded an *us and them* dichotomy within the wider society. John Sorenson eloquently describes the role of neoliberalism and the consequent depiction of the poor.

It is not only the privileged elites who hold such images of the poor. The working class also hate the poor; they imagine themselves to be the victims of the poor [...] Neo-liberal ideology plays on these fears, claiming that taxes from the working classes go mainly to social programs to aid the poor. On the other hand, organizations such as the National Council of Welfare Canada point out that it is more a question of priorities: the amount needed to cover costs of daycare for those who need it is approximately equal to what corporations receive in tax write-offs for entertainment expenses. Public debt is blamed mainly on the poor, elderly and welfare mothers rather than on the rich who benefit from such tax breaks (2003:114).

Along with misconceptions about the poor contributing to the national deficit, the definition of welfare in itself has been lost in translation. Social welfare policies were legislated for a specific purpose—to assist people in need. There was a recognition that bad luck, misfortune, illness or injury could reduce any Canadian to poverty and all Canadians were deemed worthy of a helping hand. Contrary to this perspective, people needing social welfare today are marginalized, stereotyped and exploited.

The negative attributes associated with the poor have been popularized and sensationalized. The media and its influence on public discourse, along with political parties and their political agendas, have significantly influenced public opinion. As Lightman points out, "...much of the media, several provincial governments, and

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\(^{18}\)Ralph Nader voiced this concern at a speech presented at the University of Toronto, Spring 2004.
opposition parties in Ottawa argued strongly in favour of individualism and self-interest and against collective responsibility” (2003:19). In the present climate of unemployment, high cost of living, inadequate wages and generalized economic anxiety, the need for a strong social welfare policy which advocates to meet the needs of the impoverished should be the concern of every Canadian.
REFERENCES


Burstyn, Varda; Dorothy E. Smith & Roxanna Ng. (1985) *Women, class, family and the state*. Toronto: Garamond Press.


Research and Demonstration Corporation.


Http://www.ncwcnbes.net/htmldocument/reportcost poverty/Costpoverty.html retrieved 1/26/03.


Appendix A

From: Deborah Van Oosten <deborah@vanoosten@brocku.ca>
To: aduffy@brocku.ca <aduffy@brocku.ca; tcecckin@sprint.ca <tcecckin@sprint.ca>
Cc: engemann@ed.Brocku.ca <engemann@ed.Brocku.ca>
Date: Saturday, March 08, 2003 10:55 AM
Subject: REB 02-191, Cecckin - Approved

Senate Research Ethics Board   Extensions 3943/3035, room AS 302

DATE: March 08, 2003
FROM: Joe Engemann, Chair - Senate Research Ethics Board (REB)
TO: Ann Duffy, Sociology
    Brigitte Cecckin
FILE: 02-191, Cecckin
TITLE: Social Welfare Reform: Reform & Workfare: Niagara

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified. However, please note the following two points.

1. Please change the confidentiality agreement so that participants each sign a separate agreement. Individualize the form rather than provide one form for all to sign.

2. The revised information letter was not provided in your response to the Research Ethics Board. Please ensure that the length of the focus groups session is added to the Letter of Information. Please forward a copy to our office for filing.

This project has been approved for the period of March 08, 2003 to September 30, 2003 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board’s next scheduled meeting. The approval may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. The Board must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to www.BrockU.CA/research services/forms.html to complete the appropriate form REB-03 (2001) Request for Clearance of a Revision of Modification.
to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council, Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final report is required for all projects, with the exception of undergraduate projects, upon completion of the project. Researcher with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research services will contact you when this form *REB-02 (2001) Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number an all future correspondence.
Appendix B

LETTER OF INFORMATION

I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study titled “Social Welfare Reform: Reform and Workfare in the Niagara Region”. This study is conducted by myself, Brigitte Cecckin BA, under the guidance of thesis advisor Ann Duffy PHD, Brock University.

This research study is a component for a Masters Degree in Social Justice and Equity Studies, Brock University. The purpose of this study is to examine the actual experience of workfare participants. Of particular interest are the details regarding the program and its day-to-day implementation. In addition, opposition to workfare policies will also be explored through members of local anti-poverty groups and social justice groups such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. The intent of the study is to document the lived consequence of social welfare reform and to evaluate the effectiveness of current efforts to resist and counter workfare.

Participants will be asked a variety of questions regarding the Ontario Works program. The method used for this project is in-depth interviewing. Individual interviews with Ontario Works recipients will be asked similar discussion questions. Questions concerning recommendations to the program will be asked. Recorded and documented data will be seen only by myself and the thesis advisor Prof. Ann Duffy.

To guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, assurance is given that the names of the respondents will not be recorded. Any comments which are quoted in the thesis will not identify the source, unless the source has completed a consent form indicating willingness to be quoted by name. The results of this research are confidential. As a participant you will be provided with an executive summary.

Although I am appreciative of the time you share, only Ontario Works participants will receive compensation for day-care and transportation. You have the right to decline to answer or participate at any time without penalty. You have the right to decline answering any questions or withdrawing without any negative consequences. The interviews will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place at Brock University and/or at an agreed upon, private location. The interviews and focus group discussions will be approximately one and a half hour or however long the group decides to discuss issues.

This project has been approved by the Brock University Ethics Committee (File #02-191). Further information or clarification may be obtained by contacting the researcher at tceccckin@sprint.ca or 905-646-3573, or Professor Ann Duffy at aduffy@paradigm.soci.BrockU.ca.
Appendix C

BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES
ONTARIO WORKS RESPONDENTS

In-depth Interview Outline

- Introduction of the study. What is the study trying to prove?
- Suggest what role the respondent plays in this study; the value of information.
- Discuss the cuts to social assistance.
- Discuss the coping mechanism to these cuts.
- How do benefits affect household and parenting?
- How does the respondent manage?
- What are the effects on the children?
- How does the respondent cope with this?
- Discuss issues concerning workfare participation.
- Does the respondent feel that their needs are being met by the Ministry of Social Services?
- Discussion of problems encountered while on social assistance.
- Do they feel targeted as opposed to other groups?
- How would they like to see their issues being addressed by local or provincial government?
Appendix D

BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES
INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Date: ____________________________
Title of Study: Social Welfare Reform: Welfare Reform in the Niagara Region
Researchers: Brigitte Cecckin BA; Ann Duffy PHD/
Name of Respondent (Please Print): ____________________________________________

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve a tape-
recorded in-depth interview. I understand that I will be asked a series of questions, any
of which I may decline to answer. I understand that there is a minimal risk to
participation in this study in terms of the emotional content of the discussion.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from
the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.

I understand that there will be no compensation for my participation in this research
study.

I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question/participate in any aspect
of this project that I consider invasive, offensive or inappropriate.

I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that all
information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers. I
understand that if I wish my name to be associated with my answers a separate signature
is required (SEE BELOW). I understand that only the researchers named above will have
access to the data.

I understand that any identifying information such as a place of birth, ethnic background,
age or name will be eliminated from research reports so that my identity cannot be
associated with my answers.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Brock Research Ethics Board. (File
#02-191).

Feedback in the form of an executive summary will be available during the month of

Respondent Signature: ________________________________________________________
Researcher Signature: ________________________________________________________
Respondent Consent for Use of Name: ___________________________________________
Appendix E

BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES
ONTARIO WORKS RESPONDENTS
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Date: ____________________________
Title of Study: Social Welfare Reform: Welfare Reform in the Niagara Region
Researchers: Brigitte Cecchin BA; Ann Duffy PHD/
Name of Respondent (Please Print): ____________________________

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve a tape-
recorded in-depth interview. I understand that I will be asked a series of questions, any
of which I may decline to answer. I understand that there is a minimal risk to
participation in this study in terms of the emotional content of the discussion.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from
the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.

I understand that there will be compensation for transportation and/or day-care costs to a
maximum of $20.

I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question/participate in any aspect
of this project that I consider invasive, offensive or inappropriate.

I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that all
information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers. I
understand that only the researchers named above will have access to the data.

I understand that any identifying information such as a place of birth, ethnic background,
age or name will be eliminated from research reports so that my identity cannot be
associated with my answers.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Brock Research Ethics Board. (File
#02-191).

Feedback in the form of an executive summary will be available during the month of

Respondent Signature: ____________________________________________

Researcher Signature: ____________________________________________
Appendix F

BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES

ONTARIO WORKS INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Date: _______________________________________
Title of Study: Social Welfare Reform: Welfare Reform in the Niagara Region
Researchers: Brigitte Cecckin BA; Ann Duffy PHD/

This declaration is to acknowledge receipt of monies paid for transportation and/or day-care costs in the amount of twenty dollars paid to the undersigned participant.

This statement is understood to be used as proof of payment as a condition of monies forwarded by the Brock University Graduate Studies Department.

This research study has been approved by the Brock University REB - File #02-191.

Researcher Signature: _______________________________________________________

Respondent Signature: _______________________________________________________


Appendix G

BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES

In-depth Interview Questions

Ontario Works Caseworkers

• How does the workfare program benefit social assistance recipients?

• What is the general sense of welfare dependency?

• What in particular does the Ontario Works mandate advocate?

Womens' Advocates

• What is the current state of affordable housing in the Niagara Region?

• How have social assistance cuts affected single mothers?

• Are social assistance benefits adequate to provide shelter and basic needs for single mothers and their families?
LET YOUR VOICES BE HEARD

Brock University's Social Justice and Equity Program invites you to discuss issues concerning workfare in one hour interviews.

The project intends on investigating the injustices toward workfare participants. This is an opportunity to express your views and concerns regarding you and your family!

Interested individuals contact Brigitte @ 905-688-5550 ext. 3447 to schedule an interview.

This project is a collaborative research effort involving sociology, economics, and political science.

Please contact the program coordinator for more information.

Let your voices be heard!
LET YOUR VOICES BE HEARD

IF YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN A $20 ONE HOUR INTERVIEW TO DISCUSS ISSUES ABOUT ONTARIO WORKS & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE CONTACT
BRIGITTE C. @ 905-933-7273 TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE

THIS IS A BROCK UNIVERSITY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES RESEARCH PROJECT INVESTIGATING THE INJUSTICES TOWARD ONTARIO WORKS PARTICIPANTS

THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS AND CONCERNS REGARDING YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!